

# Northwestern

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## December Newsletter

2 messages

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## SPOT December 2019 Newsletter

Dear SPOT members,

We have had a fantastic fall with programming and are excited to share future events! If you would like to contact us for any of our initiatives or want to get more involved, please email us at [spotforcenu@gmail.com](mailto:spotforcenu@gmail.com).

### Get Involved with SPOT!

- We are looking for more ideas for programming for Science with Seniors. If you have an idea of a topic you would like to present on, please let us know!
- **Our next lunch discussion will be this Friday, December 13th** at noon in Ryan 4003. We will be discussing recycling and sustainability of plastics in policy decisions. RSPV [here](#) for pizza. We hope to see you there!

### Recent SPOT Activities

- Several SPOT members attended the NSPN Conference in Madison, including a workshop from Engineers and Scientists Acting Locally ([esal](#)).



### SPOTlight: Science Diplomacy in the Middle East

On November 4, 2019, SPOT hosted a panel discussion in Annenberg Hall on “Science Diplomacy in the Middle East” featuring distinguished speakers Prof. Zafra Lerman, Prof. Omar Farha, and Dr. Suleiman Halasah. Prof. Lerman was born and raised in Israel and received her PhD in chemistry from the Weizmann Institute of Science. She is the founder and President of the Malta Conferences Foundation, a non-profit organization that uses science diplomacy as a bridge to

peace in the Middle East. Prof. Farha was born and raised in the West Bank and is a professor of chemistry at Northwestern. He is the President of NuMat Technologies and a member of the Board of the Malta Conferences Foundation. We were also very lucky to have Dr. Suleiman Halasah who was visiting Chicago from Jordan and was able to participate in the event. Dr. Halasah is a Jordanian scientist, founder and co-director of the Jordan-Israel Center for Community, Environment and Research at the Arava Institute for Environmental Sciences in Israel.



Prof. Lerman started the event by introducing the Malta Conferences which have been ongoing since 2003. The Malta Conferences are the only platform in the world where scientists from 15 Middle East countries can meet face-to-face with Nobel Laureate for five days in a neutral location, develop friendships, and collaborations. Prof. Farha described how his childhood growing up in the West Bank motivated his involvement with science diplomacy. He talked about how the common language of science and his research at Northwestern University on Metal-Organic Frameworks (MOFs) can be used to address many of the issues affecting the region, including water scarcity, air pollution, environmental degradation, and toxic chemicals. Dr. Halasah described an ongoing project of the Arava Institute for Environmental Science which aimed to explore solutions to water challenges in the Jordan Valley, where water degradation is a serious issue, affecting the West Bank and Israel. The project brought together Palestinian, Jordanian, Israeli, and UK students to work together on off-grid desalination technology as a possible solution to the problem.

In response to a question about the challenges science diplomacy activities such as the Malta Conferences face, Prof. Lerman described the difficulties related to funding and finding a country in the world which is willing to provide visas to these scientists from all the Middle East countries - not an easy task in our fractured world. However, in her words, "*science diplomacy can overcome cultural, religious, and political barriers where other forms of diplomacy have failed*".

The event was attended by students and faculty from Northwestern as well as members of the community. You can view a recording of the event at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dAd9fQRdso&t=2s>.

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