Overview
Our project will work with students already participating in one of several East Jerusalem extra-curricular initiatives that work for youth mentorship and college prep, and partner with a dance company based in Palestine to create quality theater programs for these students to inform self-exploration during their college application process. In collaboration with these programs, we will supplement the programming of these youth-based initiatives with theater and dance workshops that have multiple goals:

1) Helping high school aged students think of ideas for their college application essays (in collaboration with Horizons’ mission and programming)
2) Giving these students a platform for creativity and community-building through theater

While the goal of these theater workshops will be identity exploration in the pre-writing stages of their college applications and aid students in the college application process in a creative way, our hope is that these workshops will also boost the confidence of these high school students through a creative outlet. This project promotes “peace” by increasing access to higher education amongst Palestinian youth through encouraging youth throughout the college application process, and also promotes peace through community-building exercises amongst youth living in a tumultuous geopolitical area.

Research/Demonstrated Need
In the Palestinian Territories/West Bank, access to the higher education system is profoundly limited by a variety of factors, including restrictions on movement amid inadequate secondary education and youth mentorship programs in many areas. This project seeks to address the obstacle of youth mentorship through working alongside existing mentorship programs in East Jerusalem and expanding their scope. The few organizations that currently exist to offer youth theater experiences, including ASHTAR Theater in Ramallah and Al Rowwad Cultural and Theater Training Center in Bethlehem “offer young people a safe space to directly engage in community building as a means of creative resistance to the occupation, not to mention job and skills training.” Iman Aoun, one of the co-founders of ASHTAR, states that Palestine’s formal education system has “little space for teaching people to think, criticize, discover, negate, and question” and ASHTAR works hard to try to impart that knowledge into the young artists’ lives. Furthermore, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, youth in the age group of 15 to 29 comprises 30% of the total population. Thus, it is evident that youth programming would benefit a significant component of the population, and is especially needed.

This project follows a long legacy of similar efforts of using theater to engender peace in diverse societies. Our methods are firmly rooted in tried and true approaches exemplified by Dr. Ananda Breed’s UNICEF-supported 2012 project “Strengthening Peace and Tolerance in Kyrgyzstan” and OWEN and Peace Dialogue’s October 2014 project in Armenia. The report produced after the Armenian project, titled “Perspectives of Using Theater and Art in Peace-Work,” notes that “theatrical techniques are active and interesting and with their help it is possible to touch upon, visualize and raise taboo themes...[and] they reduce the risk of aggressive reaction from the state, which unfortunately is actually possible in this political context”. Furthermore, the report continues to note, “the theatrical techniques also help to overcome language barriers in case of work with multinational and multicultural groups”. Finally, this project seeks to employ Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed approach, “an arsenal of theater techniques and games that seeks to motivate people, restore true dialogue, and create a space for participants to rehearse taking action”.

Implementation Strategy
We plan to collaborate with the community partners to put on a series of three 3-Day Theater of the Oppressed training workshops, in East Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. Each workshop will follow a curriculum closely following that pioneered by Dr. Breed in Kyrgyzstan. We will complement these workshops with support and supplementary sessions with the cohort of students attending Horizons Summer Camp, taking place in August 2020.

**Preparation and Qualifications**

We are both board members of Page One Literacy Project on Middlebury College’s campus, an organization that works to promote literacy in the local county’s public schools. Through this work, we have been trained in the transferable skills of engaged- and experiential-learning through theater. We were inspired to create this project because of Page One’s model of providing quality college-aged mentors to community youth. We both carry a passion for working with high school students in a creative setting through theater, movement, and creative arts. We both have worked at Arabic language programs aimed at high school aged youth the respective summers after our freshman and sophomore years, which have equipped us with knowledge of high school youth mentorship and language teaching, and we have experience working with students this age in Arabic. We hold advanced proficiency in the Levantine dialect of Arabic and thus have the language skills to implement this program. Mari is an Arabic tutor and a peer writing tutor at the Middlebury Center for Teaching, Learning and Research and is equipped with skills in tutoring essay writing. Jack lived in East Jerusalem and was employed by Horizons summer camp during Summer 2019. He has an innate familiarity with East Jerusalem organizations and has resilient social networks in the city and region. Because of our respective study abroad experiences in Amman, Jordan and in Jerusalem, we have extensive networks of contacts within Jerusalem. Furthermore, as individuals with United States’ passports, we have the freedom to easily traverse borders in Israel-Palestine that a Palestinian endeavoring to conduct the same work would not experience. We plan to mitigate our potential appearance as outsiders by partnering with local stakeholders and community leaders in each site we work.

**Assessment and Reflection**

In conclusion, our project benefits the pursuit of peace in East Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories by supporting and providing access to quality mentorship for youth that will support their post-secondary education in the midst of a politically-tense geographic area. In addition to the tangible successes of the high school students we will mentor through these programs, through implementing a model of how these youth mentorship programs can be expanded in timing and in scope, we know that this project will have sustainable results as a program in East Jerusalem. The life-long skills we teach and in the workshops we facilitate will be transferable to other aspects of life, especially daily instances of conflict resolution. Attendees will have the tools and skill sets to produce future workshops and productions especially after sessions including “Understanding Conflict Theater Methodology,” “Facilitation,” and “Group Dynamics.”