Building Peace

BRANDEIS–AL–QUDS UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP
A Jewish-sponsored university in the United States. An Arab university in Jerusalem. What can they achieve together?

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Creating a Partnership

When Al-Quds University and Brandeis University formed a partnership in 2003, the institutions sought to build understanding between two very different schools and cultures. Just as important, the universities came together to share expertise that would inform the work and studies of faculty, students, and staff. Still growing, the partnership has helped shape two young universities—one in the Middle East and one in the United States.
Brandeis University president Jehuda Reinharz and Al-Quds University president Sari Nusseibeh have profoundly different understandings of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet they strongly agree on the desirability of building cooperation and understanding between the sides.

Their common interests inspired a partnership between their universities—proof that even deeply divided people can collaborate for mutual good.

The idea of a partnership dates to the earliest days of Brandeis’s International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life, which in 1997 invited Nusseibeh, a professor of philosophy, to travel from his own university in Jerusalem to Brandeis’s Waltham, Massachusetts, campus for a week of lectures, class visits, and meetings.

That week not only set an enduring tone for the Ethics Center, where Nusseibeh remains an advisory board member, but also laid the groundwork for the partnership between Brandeis and Al-Quds that was formally launched six years later. It was in that week that the two university presidents, previously only passing acquaintances, got to know one another. The two leaders found that they shared both a commitment to excellence in scholarship and a conviction that higher education is a fundamental building block of progressive social change.

Reinharz and Nusseibeh laid down clear principles and parameters for the partnership. Cooperation would be built on a foundation of mutual respect, with both institutions benefiting equally from exchanges and projects. Faculty, students, and administrators would develop relationships built on shared intellectual and practical concerns. And the partnership would be designed to educate the universities’ broader communities about the possibilities and advantages of building bridges across historic divides.

“It is a very good working relationship,” said Israeli-born Reinharz. “It’s all about trying to break down barriers between people. That’s the bottom line.”

Added Nusseibeh, “Brandeis, especially for its Jewish as well as its progressive history, struck me as an eminently suitable place for Al-Quds University to forge a relationship within the United States.”

Daniel Terris, the Brandeis campus leader of the partnership and the director of the Ethics Center, said that from the beginning the two presidents “shared some common perspectives as intellectuals with international interests, as men born in the Middle East who carried on their intellectual education in various parts of the world, and as leaders of relatively young universities that are intellectually ambitious and see themselves as important symbols in their communities.”
Both men have been willing to say to their own communities that conversation, negotiation, and exchange are crucial to the future of Israeli–Palestinian relations and the future of the Middle East. Both are impatient with people who dig too deeply into ideological positions.

Reinharz said that he and Nusseibeh do not agree on everything when it comes to the politics and history of the region. But reaching complete agreement is not the point. “Looking to the future, rather than to the past—that’s what it’s all about,” he noted.

“Politics, to my mind, is in any case about the present and the future,” added Nusseibeh. “The past is already history.”

The two presidents hope for further expansion of faculty, student, and staff exchanges, if sufficient support is found. Amid the swirl of the events in the Middle East, these two leaders hold firm to their conviction that shared commitments to scholarship and learning can transcend divisions of politics and history.

As Khuloud Khayyat Dajani, who is a specialist in community medicine, the special assistant to the president of Al-Quds for international cooperation, and Al-Quds’s leader of the partnership since 1997, put it, “It is our duty as scholars to influence our communities, the situation, and universal values that we all share as people. Coming together is the beginning. Being together is progress. And working together is success. Our universities have moved forward together for more than a decade—and there is still a lot to be done.”

PLANTING SEEDS: 1997–2004

SEPTEMBER 1997
Al-Quds University president Sari Nusseibeh visits Brandeis University for a week of lectures and meetings. His visit sparks interest in a collaborative project between Al-Quds and Brandeis.

JANUARY 2003
Brandeis University president Jehuda Reinharz meets with President Nusseibeh in Jerusalem to formalize a university partnership, focusing on long-term objectives.

SEPTEMBER 2004
As the partnership is formally announced, a delegation of ten Al-Quds University leaders spends a week at Brandeis engaged in discussions across campus.
Voices for Equality
(Left to right) Professor Khuloud Khayyat Dajani, Brandeis vice president for global affairs Daniel Terris, and Al-Quds president Sari Nusseibeh. Dajani is Al-Quds’s campus leader for the partnership. Her commitment to educational excellence, gender equality, and peace-building has shaped the partnership’s goals and impact.
Building Capacity

“In planning boldly for the future, Al-Quds University has been undergoing tremendous growth under very difficult circumstances,” said its president, Sari Nusseibeh. As part of that process, Al-Quds has worked with Brandeis, through administrative exchanges and relationships between staff and leaders, to grow wisely and operate soundly. In turn, Brandeis has explored its own practices and learned from an outside perspective. For each university, a strong foundation will lead to success for its students and, ultimately, for society.
Most institutions around the world plan budgets. But they don’t all do it in the same way. So when Imad Abu Kishek, vice president for administrative and financial affairs at Al-Quds University, spent time in the Brandeis Office of Budget and Planning, he found inspiration for a new budget process. It was just one example of how his time at Brandeis paid big dividends—for Abu Kishek and for the people who met him.

Born in the West Bank City of Tulkarem and an alumnus of Al-Quds University, Abu Kishek had a long history as an administrator at the university and as an activist, working closely with Sari Nusseibeh’s campaigns for peace. At Al-Quds, he was in charge of the complex administration of a university of 8,000 students (now closer to 11,000), and the challenges were immense: an institution very reliant on an uncertain flow of tuition and scholarship support, rapid growth in the size of the student body, underdeveloped information technology platforms, and a complex administrative structure.

Thanks to the Al-Quds–Brandeis partnership, Abu Kishek spent two years observing and participating in the administrative life of Brandeis. He traveled from office to office—budget and finance, facilities, the registrar, and human resources, among others—speaking to Brandeis administrators and learning how they did business, including how they used information-technology systems. At the same time, he enrolled in courses at Brandeis’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management, where he studied strategic management, program evaluation, leadership, and organizational behavior.

“What I received from Brandeis goes beyond any monetary value,” said Abu Kishek. “You cannot even attempt to put a number on it.”

In addition to developing ideas for a new budget process at Al-Quds University, Abu Kishek learned about things like the difference between a “personnel” department (which just bureaucratically tracks hiring and employees) and a “human resources” department, which takes a more strategic approach to the development of an institution’s workforce. He learned about how Brandeis undertakes long-term planning. He understood, of course, that there are huge differences in the circumstances of the two universities—a major gulf in terms of available resources, among other things—but Brandeis, too, has had to reform its administrative structures over the past fifteen years, and Abu Kishek was able to get a firsthand look at how this was done.

The culmination of Abu Kishek’s two years at Brandeis was the formation of a strategic plan for the modernization of administration at Al-Quds University in collaboration with President Nusseibeh and other members of the university’s leadership team. Seven of
Abu Kishek’s key managers visited Brandeis for ten days during his stay at the university, where they, too, had a chance to talk with their Brandeis counterparts, exchanging ideas and information.

For the Brandeis community, the project was a rare opportunity for administrative managers to participate in a cross-cultural exchange. In addition to work-related issues, administrators in departments such as budget and planning, human resources, and facilities management had a chance to learn from Abu Kishek and his team about the differences between life in the West Bank and in the United States.

Now back at Al-Quds University, Abu Kishek is implementing his strategic plan, and he remains in touch with his Brandeis counterparts. Al-Quds has a new budget process and new job descriptions for administrators, and it has eliminated duplication of effort across the campus.

“We’re trying to create one vision for the university,” Abu Kishek said. “Before, everyone interpreted policies differently, and everyone had discretion over how implementation would work. Now there will be clear policies and standards for the university.”

Through the work of Abu Kishek, the policies and leadership of Nusseibeh, and dedicated managers at both universities, the partnership is contributing to strengthening a crucial building block of Palestinian society.

“At-Quds will be a model for Palestinian universities and a model in the Middle East if we succeed,” said Abu Kishek. “This is my dream.”

**STRATEGIC THINKING: 2005–2009**

**JUNE 2005–2007**

**JULY 2007–2008**
Abu Kishek completes a final Al-Quds University strategic plan based on his years at Brandeis. He begins implementation by reinvigorating personnel and service departments.

**APRIL 2008 AND APRIL 2009**
Perry Hanson, Brandeis vice president for libraries and information technology, visits Al-Quds in consecutive years to further help implement the strategic plan and technology infrastructure.
BRASS TACKS

In May 2006, key personnel from the division of administration and finance at Al-Quds University (above) shared best practices with their counterparts at Brandeis. Below, Imad Abu Kishek (left) with Perry Hanson, vice president for libraries and information technology at Brandeis.
Deepening Understanding

In a world rife with division, Al-Quds and Brandeis universities have brought people closer. Students, faculty, and staff from both institutions, separated by distance and culture, have met on campuses in Jerusalem and Waltham and in classrooms in Turkey. They have exchanged ideas and engaged with their counterparts, revealing their concerns and hopes for their institutions and for their own lives. They have learned that the “other” has a name and a voice eager to be heard.
More than once, Alwina Bennett mentioned an old saying: “We see things not as they are but as we are.” It was a reminder to students from Brandeis University and Al-Quds University that their perspective is shaped by their upbringing, education, and experiences. Her words also underscored the rare chance these students had to understand the world through the eyes of people who might see it very differently.

Bennett, assistant provost for graduate student affairs at Brandeis, joined separate groups of students from both universities over two sessions of the Brandeis/Al-Quds Summer Institute in Istanbul, Turkey. There, the students studied works of philosophy and fiction and discussed what makes a good society—an idea spawned by Al-Quds president Sari Nusseibeh, himself a philosopher. They were taught in each session by faculty members from both institutions, including Said Zeedani and Basem Ra’ad from Al-Quds and Robin Feuer Miller and Michaele Whelan from Brandeis.

While the institute was filled with discussions of great literary works, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians was an inevitable backdrop. Though many participants shared strong opinions both inside the classroom and out, they never allowed the conflict to overcome their shared purpose of understanding, according to Bennett.

“People disagreed. They said hard things to one another, but they did it with civility and respect,” she said.

They also bonded in a way they never could have imagined. Brandeis students Danielle Shmuely ’10 and Gabriela Lupatkin ’09 acknowledged nervousness before embarking on the trip to Istanbul. But they became close with their Al-Quds roommates, despite contrasting religious and cultural backgrounds.

“You realize you’re not so different,” said Lupatkin, now a Brandeis alumna. “We can disagree about one thing, but on everything else we don’t have to.” Raised an Orthodox Jew with many family members living in Israel, Shmuely said the institute was an opportunity for her to hear a different perspective on the country. The classroom setting provided a healthy forum to discuss issues, she said, including how the Palestinian students are impacted by the conflict.

“It affected me so much because it wasn’t just something you read in newspapers. It was a personal stake,” she said. “It was about realizing that both sides are victims.”

For Al-Quds student Ban Muwaswas, an advanced student in dentistry, the institute offered a chance to show Brandeis students “the reality as I see it, as Palestinian people live it.” He added, “I’m sure that we did show them a new perspective. And I learned a lot…"
about how they live and think, about their experiences and lifestyle, and I also learned a lot about English literature.” Added Al-Quds student Mohammad Abu-Qabita, a medical imaging student, “We had enthusiasm to learn from each other. We felt, all of us, the same as brothers, and that made the communication channels more open.”

Brandeis student Saghi Sofinzon ’11, who has lived in France and Israel, recalled spending five hours straight one day talking politics with the Palestinian students. “On days like that, you learn not only about the conflict or differences or universal truths, but you also learn all about yourself,” he said. “At the end of the day, in order to find solutions, in order to gain common ground, you need trust, to respect the other, and to understand the other.”

Sofinzon said that literature provided a good means to facilitate communication. He noted in particular the poem “Mending Wall,” by Robert Frost, which led Palestinian students to talk about their experiences with the wall built by Israel.

Miller, the Brandeis professor who taught at the second institute, also witnessed the power of literature—and not just in class. Arriving to breakfast one day, she noticed a group of students from Brandeis and Al-Quds talking about a subject of shared interest, one fraught with moral complexity and ambiguity. They were discussing a story by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

“I think the institute was one of the great highlights of my teaching career,” she said. “It so validated for me the importance and necessity of reading great texts with students and talking about them.”

The text was pretext, allowing students an opportunity to listen and be heard, to learn lessons that will stay with them as they make their way into a complex world.
In March 2006, an exhibition of photographs and other materials from Al-Quds University in the atrium of the Shapiro Campus Center (below) introduced the Brandeis community to the look, feel, and culture of its partner institution.
Sharing Knowledge

Faculty members are associated with their home academic institutions, but they also belong to a wider community of scholars. That was reinforced when faculty from Al-Quds and Brandeis universities gathered for workshops to discuss effective teaching, in many cases rethinking how and what they are teaching. They also explored collaborations that would broaden the understanding of their fields. The connections fostered by the partnership enrich scholars’ work as well as their institutions.
A professor of English and comparative literature and of women’s and gender studies at Brandeis, Susan Lanser was instrumental in planning and implementing the Brandeis–Al-Quds teacher exchange and other academic initiatives linking the universities. Here she reflects on her two visits to Al-Quds and the benefits of the collaboration.

Al-Quds and Brandeis share a dream: to foster knowledge, innovation, and service for a just and inclusive society. That’s a taller order at Al-Quds, where faculty members face twice our teaching load, much larger classes, unpredictable conditions, and far fewer opportunities for professional development. Yet Al-Quds addresses these obstacles with persistence, faith, and creativity.

This academic exchange, through its emphasis on effective teaching, capacity building, and curricular collaboration, opens opportunities at both universities. In 2006 and 2007, Al-Quds faculty members visited classes and workshops at Brandeis. They taught us about their lives and began promising collaborations with professors in various disciplines.

Faculty teams from Brandeis traveled to Al-Quds in 2006 and 2007 to meet with faculty and to offer a workshop on teaching. In 2008, a two-day workshop on student learning was the focal point for a visit. Later, two Brandeis PhD students spent five weeks teaching English to Al-Quds staff. In 2009, several Brandeis faculty members taught at Al-Quds, and we are planning for a visit from their faculty here this fall. Our teams have worked together on faculty mentoring, curricular evaluation, course design, and an international conference on women and leadership held in May 2009.

Each visit has fostered new ties. Each has expanded the number of faculty, students, and staff touched by the partnership. And each has suggested new ideas (sabbatical exchanges, videoconferenced classes) that exceed the scope of this project but point toward future possibilities.

In this partnership everyone benefits. Brandeis faculty members who have had even modest contact with a visiting Al-Quds professor or a returning Brandeis one become eager to participate. Brandeis students ask to visit Al-Quds when they’re in Jerusalem. We’ve all learned to think in new ways about our classrooms and curriculum. I’ve read Palestinian novels, learned some Arabic, and come to understand different cultures’ learning styles. I’ve seen my own country and my own privilege reflected back to me in unexpected ways. Nowhere on the planet have I felt more warmly welcomed than at Al-Quds. Most importantly, I know that Al-Quds and Brandeis are doing work that measures up to our aspirations for a more just and peaceful world.

—Susan Lanser
Saker Darwish, associate professor of physics and a senior administrator in the division of academic affairs at Al-Quds University, has been instrumental in founding the Palestinian university’s Committee for the Support of Teaching, following conversations with Brandeis colleagues.

My colleagues believe that the partnership is a real benefit to them. It’s important to hear about teaching from people who care about it. We are establishing benchmarks, and without the two workshops it would have been very hard to convince people to accept changes.

The workshops were also important because of what we learned about Brandeis and its people and values. I remember, for example, when Bob Lange (physics) came, and we just sat in a group and talked; he asked some questions and listened to us. And it allowed us to listen to ourselves, too, and realize that we were teaching too many courses, and our outcomes were not as good because we were overwhelmed. That kind of interaction is very useful.

It was also beneficial during the workshops when Susan Lanser and Dan Kryder (politics) said, “Look, we have the same problem at Brandeis. We’re looking at other options, and we’re trying to improve, too.” Teaching isn’t an exact science. You need to work on it by talking with others.

We’re working together to improve each of our universities. This is very important for Al-Quds—and not just for Palestinians. If you have well-educated Palestinians, it’s good for everyone. It’s very simple: education and stability help people grow.

And the collaboration with Brandeis is so important for this goal. Having the Brandeis teams come here is a true gift to us.

—Saker Darwish
NEW HORIZONS

Political scientists Amneh Badran (Al-Quds University, above left) and Daniel Kryder (Brandeis University) are one of the newest faculty exchange pairs. Below, Al-Quds American studies graduate student Zeina Barakat (second from right) visits a class at Brandeis.
The Brandeis—Al-Quds University Partnership at a Glance

MISSION AND GOALS
In 2003, Al-Quds University and Brandeis University formed a unique intercultural partnership that links an Arab institution in Jerusalem and a Jewish-sponsored institution in the United States. Unlike traditional academic exchange programs that focus exclusively on student and faculty exchanges, the Al-Quds—Brandeis relationship has three holistic goals:

> Improve the administrative and infrastructure capacities of Al-Quds, one of Palestine’s nascent civic institutions;
> Strengthen academics and offer opportunities for faculty, staff, and students at both institutions;
> Educate the campuses about the advantages of cooperation, goodwill, and understanding.

LEADERSHIP
Success of the partnership has come from the pioneering leadership of Khuloud Khayyat Dajani, professor in the Schools of Public Health and Medicine, vice president to the board of trustees/president’s office, and founding chair of the Child Institute for Health and Learning at Al-Quds University; and Daniel Terris, vice president for global affairs and director of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life at Brandeis University.

Dajani and Terris have worked through numerous challenges to mobilize resources and to implement the vision shared by the presidents and the two institutions.

A steering committee comprising faculty members and senior administrators at both institutions provides additional oversight. Faculty and staff teams from both universities also manage partnership components.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT
The multiyear partnership has been generously supported with nearly $1 million in initial funding from the Ford Foundation. The current grant cycle concludes in December 2009.
**Participants**
The partnership has directly engaged more than 200 faculty members, students, and administrators from both universities, including strong participation by women, and countless more have attended workshops, meetings, and events. These participants have contributed substantial time to hosting visitors, sharing expertise, and developing relationships.

**Ongoing Projects**
Exchanges and visits at both universities are at the heart of the partnership. Since 2003, more than twenty-five exchanges have occurred, supporting the projects as well as partnership planning.

**Administrative exchanges** contribute to building higher education capacity and have included more than fifteen exchange visits and consultations focusing on:

- Administrative and financial systems
- Communications/public relations
- Continuing education

**Academic exchanges** contribute to the growth and learning of students at both universities. These exchanges have taken several forms, including:

- Undergraduate Summer Institutes in Istanbul
- American studies, public health, and science education exchanges
- Faculty exchanges on effective teaching
- An academic conference (2009)

**Reports, Workshops, and Events**
The two universities have hosted workshops for faculty on effective teaching and assessment, as well as cultural and learning events at both campuses. More than fifteen reports, curriculum guides, and resources have been produced for the partnership.

**Media Attention**
The partnership has received media coverage from the *New York Times*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, National Public Radio, and the *Jerusalem Post*. 
**Organization Information**

**AL-QUDS UNIVERSITY**

Al-Quds University (AQU), the only Arab university in Jerusalem, was founded in 1984 and unified in 1995 by merging four independent colleges. More than 1,000 faculty members and staff serve more than 12,000 undergraduate and graduate students in fifteen faculties and thirty-three specialized institutions and centers. AQU provides educational opportunities and advanced professional training while promoting research and professional excellence and engaging men and women in a lasting commitment to learning, leadership, peace, and democratic values. Proactively addressing the needs of the Palestinian community and promoting an environment free of want and injustice, AQU aims to develop a creative, cooperative, multicultural mindset and scholarship for society.

**BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY**

Brandeis University, based in Waltham, Massachusetts, is a nonsectarian university with a student body of about 5,000 students. It was founded in 1948 by members of the American Jewish community. Brandeis combines the faculty and resources of a world-class research institution with the intimacy and personal attention of a small liberal arts college. The mission of Brandeis is to bring to higher education a unique perspective reflecting Jewish traditions of scholarship, community service, and social justice.

**THE FORD FOUNDATION**

The Al-Quds University–Brandeis University Partnership has been generously supported in its initial stages by the Ford Foundation. Since its inception in 1936, the Ford Foundation has provided more than $12 billion for grants, projects, and loans to create political, economic, and social systems that promote peace, human welfare, and the sustainability of the environment.
THE NEW SAID KHOURY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AT AL-QUDS UNIVERSITY’S MAIN CAMPUS.

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY AND AL-QUDS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN CONVERSATION AT AL-QUDS.
For more information, please visit www.brandeis.edu/aqu.