

Al-Quds & Brandeis Partnership Effective Teaching Exchange

Report: Susan Lanser and Elaine Wong's Visit to Al-Quds University

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Executive Summary

In late May 2006, Elaine Wong, Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences, and Sue Lanser, Professor of English and Comparative Literature and Chair of the Women's and Gender Studies Program visited Al-Quds University to initiate the "Effective Teaching" component of the Al-Quds/Brandeis partnership. We were able to visit five of the six Al-Quds campuses, to meet with faculty and administrators from nearly all of the university's twelve schools and some of the centers as well as with senior university officials and some graduate students, and to discuss a wide range of issues related to pedagogy, curriculum, faculty development, research, evaluation, and academic support services. Our visit was coordinated by Dr. Said Zeedani, assistant to the president for Academic Affairs, and by Dr. Khuloud Dajani, Dean of Public Health, and co-director with Dan Terris of the partnership.

Our schedule for each day included a visit to one or more campuses or centers, meetings with faculty and staff members, a focused discussion of a particular aspect of teaching effectiveness, and informal dinners with faculty administrators and other key participants. This range of opportunities allowed us the benefits at once of exposure to the spectrum of campuses and programs, of open-ended conversations, and of structured discussions aimed at sharing our respective experiences about such issues as junior faculty mentoring, experiential learning, and instructional technologies. Our visit began with a tour of the main campus at Abu-Dis, by far the university's largest especially since the relocation of some programs after the construction of the separation wall. At Abu-Dis we were able to gain a good sense of classroom and support facilities for faculties ranging from law to dentistry to science and technology. One highlight of the tour was a visit to the new science museum, a large room designed to teach scientific principles to school children through hands-on experiments.

On subsequent days, we toured the facilities at Beit Hanina, the campus near Jerusalem that is home to the business faculty, the library operations, the President's offices, and a new teaching and research center that will serve Palestinian women and children; the Community Action Center in the Old City, which helps Jerusalem residents with legal and economic concerns; Hind Al-Husseini, the women's college in East Jerusalem, which houses the departments of Social Work, English, and Education; the Department of Strategic Studies at Ramallah, where interdisciplinary graduate programs in American Studies, Israeli Studies, and Arab Studies reside; and the Institute of Islamic Archaeology at Al-Bireh. These visits gave us a good sense not only of the facilities, character, and mission of each campus but of the challenges of

communication, access, and provision of services across multiple campuses, all of which are complicated by travel restrictions and checkpoints. During these visits we were also able to learn about some of the specific problems and potentials of each campus and to explore ways in which the Brandeis/Al-Quds partnership might address them. This exposure to the breadth of the Al-Quds mission also helped us to understand some of the larger infrastructural and financial needs facing the university, needs that the project cannot immediately address but about which Brandeis or other organizations might, in the future, be of assistance.

In a series of focused meetings held once or twice each day, we were able to exchange ideas with Al-Quds academic administrators and faculty about topics that included the evaluation of teaching, curricular development and program review, mentoring of junior faculty, library facilities, databases, and technological services, internships and other forms of experiential learning, the use of web-based technologies such as Moodle (comparable to our WebCT) to augment courses, incentives for faculty research, improving English language instruction, pedagogical alternatives to lectures and exams, and possibilities for collaborative learning between Al-Quds and Brandeis students and faculty. Additional topics and ideas emerged from informal conversations with administrators and faculty, with the end result that our visit offered a global sense of the educational challenges faced by Al-Quds and some possible ways of addressing them through our partnership.

Follow-up Possibilities

Toward the end of our visit, we worked with Dr. Dajani, Dr. Zeedani, Al-Quds President Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, and several deans of faculties toward a list of projects that might begin within or grow out of our partnership. We divided these into three groups: projects that could be initiated with little or no funding; projects that we could achieve during the course of the Ford grant, and longer-term projects for which we would seek additional funding. We agreed that creating collaborative relations between pairs of faculty with shared teaching and/or research interests and to provide educational opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students would be among the most valuable and cost-effective ways to build lasting relationships between our universities.

Among projects that we agreed could be initiated immediately and with little funding are faculty partnerships that could be effected through email and that would focus on curriculum, pedagogy, research, and/or the sharing of intellectual information and resources; the sharing of materials and practices by our respective centers and committees for the support of teaching. We hope that Brandeis faculty will be willing to participate in such partnerships beginning in the 2006-2007 academic year. We may also wish to explore some ways in which our community could help Al-Quds to augment its library resources, which are seriously impaired by the absence of a central library facility, an inadequate library budget, and limited electronic access.

Under the auspices of the Ford Foundation grant, we plan to initiate five partnerships between Al-Quds and Brandeis faculty that will allow faculty members to collaborate in person through visits to one another's universities and that will help to enhance each university's curriculum by sharing our respective areas of strength. We are planning as well to offer teacher-effectiveness workshops at Al-Quds that will be co-led by Brandeis faculty. Dr. Said Zeedani will visit Brandeis along with the faculty members in order both to educate our campus about higher

education in Palestine and to discuss topics of mutual interest with senior academic administrators here. We are working on the possibility of bringing a group of Al-Quds students to Brandeis this year, and we are considering ways to provide modest research assistance to graduate students and faculty at Al-Quds. In the long run, we imagine sabbatical exchanges, study abroad programs, and projects in which Brandeis students and faculty might teach English or other subjects at Al-Quds. And we are beginning to discuss publications that could make the challenges and successes of Palestinian higher education more visible in the United States and other English-speaking countries.

Our visit to Al-Quds was illuminating, inspiring, and informative and our hosts exceedingly gracious. We left Jerusalem with a much sharper sense of the effects on the university of the larger political, physical and economic conditions of the occupied territories and with a great admiration both for what the university has been able to accomplish under severe constraints, for the democratic principles by which Al-Quds is governed (important student elections took place during our visit), and for the university's deep commitment to improving the lives of Palestinians through education, service, and the strengthening of civil society. We believe that the partnership between Al-Quds and Brandeis is an ideal means for helping both universities further our shared goals of justice and excellence.