

Brandeis/Al-Quds Partnership
Third Effective Teaching Visit to Al-Quds University
May 3-May 10, 2008

Background

The Effective Teaching component of the Brandeis/Al-Quds Partnership was inaugurated in May 2006 when Dean Elaine Wong and Professor Sue Lanser spent a week at Al-Quds in order to identify aspects of our respective educational missions that might be improved through academic exchanges, infrastructural support, and the sharing of resources and expertise. In October 2006, six faculty members from Al-Quds—Dr. Najah Manasra (Public Health) on an individual visit, followed by a team visit from Dr. Labib Arafeh (Academic Affairs), Dr. Omar Abu-Humos (English), Dr. Musa Abu-Tier (Physics), Dr. Omar Dhaher (Computer Science), and Dr. Motasem Hamdan (Public Health) came to Brandeis for a week of meetings, classroom visitations, and discussions with colleagues in their respective fields. A visit to Brandeis in May 2007 by Dr. Said Zeedani, Al-Quds University's Vice-President for Academic Affairs, provided further opportunity to explore ways in which our academic programs could provide mutual benefit. In October 2007, Elaine Wong, Sue Lanser, Marya Levenson and Robert Lange visited Al-Quds to meet with colleagues in their respective fields and to offer an all-day workshop on effective teaching that took place in Ramallah on October 4, 2007.

Each of these exchanges inaugurated new possibilities for collaboration around teaching and research in fields ranging from physics to English to computer science to health. Each visit also expanded the number of faculty participating in the partnership, and each one provided new ideas for improving the administrative systems that support the academic enterprise and foster the improvement of teaching and learning. Areas identified as particularly important to Al-Quds included course design, assessment of learning, evaluation of teaching, junior faculty mentoring, interactive pedagogies, English language instruction, and the establishment of a standing committee for the support of teaching.

In 2007-2008, Al-Quds established its permanent Committee for the Support of Teaching under the leadership of Dr. Saker Darwish. Under the auspices of this committee, Brandeis faculty were asked to return to Al-Quds to participate in a two-day workshop led primarily by Al-Quds faculty on the assessment of learning and to continue dialogue on other aspects of the partnership. In May, 2008, Elaine Wong and Sue Lanser, together with Professor Derek Isaacowitz (Psychology) and Professor Dan Kryder (Politics) spent a week at Al-Quds forging new connections and following up on earlier initiatives. We were joined for one day by Professor Vardit Ringvald, who heads the Hebrew and Arabic Languages Program at Brandeis.

Our activities during this visit were directed toward four ends:

- to establish new and advance existing connections between the departments, programs, and research initiatives of our visiting team and counterpart programs and colleagues at Al-Quds;
- to contribute the perspectives of Brandeis practices to the two-day workshop on assessment of learning in graduate and undergraduate education;

- to discuss ways in which the partnership can further the development of structures, practices, and materials for the improvement of teaching and learning;
- to consider next steps for the Teaching Effectiveness component of the project.

Programmatic Connections

The participation of Professors Isaacowitz and Kryder provided an opportunity to develop new relationships between Brandeis and Al-Quds faculty in the social, behavioral, and political sciences with faculty at the main campus in Abu Dis, at Hind Al-Husseini College in East Jerusalem, and at the Beit Hanina campus. **Professor Isaacowitz** met with many faculty from different schools, including the Education and Psychology programs in the Faculty of Arts and the Public Health and Community Mental Health programs in the School of Public Health. He also visited the Child Institute at Beit Hanina and spent time with psychologists at the Hind al-Husseini campus in East Jerusalem.

These discussions focused on the strengths and challenges of psychological training, especially on applied psychology and clinical intervention for trauma-related pathologies; on the structural relationship between the education and psychology programs at Al-Quds; and on the possibility of hands-on undergraduate research experience as a way to increase students' opportunities for graduate study abroad. A particularly strong potential for long-term collaboration developed between Professor Isaacowitz and Dr. Taisser Abdallah, who is heading a research project at the Child Institute concerning learning disabilities in Palestinian populations within Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Data from this project would provide a fruitful basis for joint research by Al-Quds and Brandeis faculty and students.

Through his meetings with faculty in political science and associated fields, **Professor Kryder** identified three programs that lend themselves to further cooperation between Brandeis and Al-Quds: the planned M.A. in political science, the further development of the graduate program in American Studies, and a new initiative for a master's in European Studies. In his meetings with Dr. Munther Dajani, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and a professor of political science, and Dr. Mohammed Dajani, Director of the American Studies Institute, Professor Kryder explored the critical value of studying U.S. and European political systems during this period of nation-building in Palestine. To this end, Professor Kryder suggested the development of course in such topics as political behavior, constitutional design and development, and political economic and national economic regulation and encouraged the study of statistical studies, qualitative case studies, and rational choice approaches. Because the Political Science department is not now positively oriented toward American academic influences, Professor Kryder believes that a European Studies program would provide a less charged "third way" to help mediate intellectual and political conversations between students engaged in American/Israel Studies and Arab/Palestinian Studies. Within this context, Professor Kryder met as well with Dr. Anthony David, whom President Nusseibeh has asked to help create the European Studies graduate program, and with Dr. Amneh Badran, a member of the Political Science Department who studies social movements. Finally, Professor Kryder met with Dr. Samira Barghouthi, Dean of Scientific Research, to discuss problems and opportunities for Al-Quds graduates and faculty to pursue further education abroad.

These several conversations have led Professor Kryder to identify several ways in which he and his colleagues at Brandeis might work with Al-Quds faculty on program design, might help Al-Quds faculty to attend academic conferences in the United States; visiting lectureships in both directions were discussed as well as possibilities for Al-Quds students to serve as research assistants for Brandeis and other American faculty and the possibility of sending a small number of Al-Quds M.A. students to study at Brandeis.

Professor Lanser and **Dean Wong** renewed previous connections with several Al-Quds programs. Professor Lanser met with Dr. Fadwa Labadi, Chair of the Insan Center for Women's and Gender Studies to discuss further ways in which the Brandeis and Al-Quds programs in this field might cooperate. Among suggestions for further consideration were a joint conference on women and leadership, a curriculum transformation workshop for faculty interested in integrating gender into existing courses as well as the need for new courses in gender studies, the possibility of fostering more extensive translation into Arabic of English-language materials suitable for classroom use, and ways of fostering women's participation in university leadership. Dean Wong and Professor Lanser spent considerable time with Dr. Rania AlMukhtadi, head of the program in second language teaching (especially the teaching of English); with Dr. Omar Abu-Humos, Chair of the English Department, and with Dr. Mohammed Khawa, director of the master's program in translation. We were joined in our conversations with Dr. Rania by Professor Vardit Ringvald, who heads the Brandeis Hebrew and Arabic Language Program and is an expert in second language acquisition. Professor Ringvald has recommended that Dr. Rania have access to training programs in the latest methodologies for second language teaching. We also discussed arrangements for two English Ph.D. students to come to Al-Quds during the summer to teach English language courses; possible modifications to the English major that would combine language and literature study in a "cultural studies" approach; and ways in which Brandeis students might collaborate on projects undertaken by graduate students in the translation program.

A group visit to the Hind Al-Husseini campus, the women's college of Al-Quds located in East Jerusalem, included meetings with its dean, Dr. Mary Chayo, about the ways in which the particular programs at Hind Al-Husseini might be a site of collaboration. We also discussed library and information technology resources and the urgent need across Al-Quds University to strengthen library holdings, create a central library facility at Abu-Dis, catalogue materials, and acquire fuller database access and additional computers for student and faculty use. Access to information and research materials remains a major challenge for Al-Quds. Professor Lanser additionally met with Dr. Fadwa Allabadi, head of the Insan Center, to discuss curricular development in gender studies, while Dean Wong met with staff and students involved in the Al-Quds/Brandeis undergraduate seminar that took place in Istanbul in August 2007 and August 2008. We also met briefly with the head of the Jerusalem Studies program and talked of ways in which our students and faculty might participate.

Workshop on Teaching Assessment

All four members of this visiting team participated in two days of workshops on the topic of

“Assessment of Student Performance.” These workshops were designed to identify current methods of assessment at Al-Quds, explore alternative modes of assessment and their applicability to the Al-Quds context, and identify recommendations for improving assessment practices. Although the workshops were the central occasion for our visit, unlike the October 2007 workshop these were organized by the Al-Quds University Committee for the Support of Teaching and involved some forty Al-Quds professors as presenters in addition to the Brandeis team. This shift clearly helps to build both capacity and broad conversation among Al-Quds faculty.

The first day of the workshop (May 7) focused on undergraduate education and featured two separate sessions, one for the humanities and social sciences and another for the health and natural sciences. Professors Kryder and Lanser took part in the first, Professor Isaacowitz and Dean Wong in the second. On the second day (May 8), faculties came together for a day of presentation and discussion focused on graduate education. For both sessions, the Brandeis participants prepared power-point presentations and also took part in the informal discussions. (The sessions benefited greatly from the provision of simultaneous translation in both directions.) Print materials about assessment and examples of assignments used in Brandeis and Al-Quds courses were distributed to all participants. Both sessions (and particularly the first day) were well attended and well received.

Suggested Next Steps

Our visit concluded with wrap-up meetings that considered the impact of the teaching effectiveness partnership thus far and discussed next steps. Since our first teaching effectiveness visit in 2006, Al-Quds has created an electronic system for course evaluation that strengthens its capacity to conduct and benefit from evaluations; has established a ten-member standing faculty committee for the support of teaching that meets approximately every two weeks; has begun planning for a mentoring program for junior faculty and orientations for new faculty; and has initiated conversations about syllabus design in the wake of our October 2007 workshop.

We consider the establishment of a standing committee on teaching to be a major benefit of the partnership; now that the committee is in place, a range of ongoing projects and new initiatives will be possible. These might include peer visitation of classes, workshops within specific faculties or departments, the distribution of print or electronic resources for effective teaching (including a website for teaching effectiveness), an orientation handbook, and midterm course assessment. The committee is also considering ways to address the problem of high teaching loads for faculty and students; one effort will be to reduce contact hours in some courses. It will be important for the committee to have vigorous and uninterrupted leadership; staggered terms for members might be useful.

We also recommend the following specific exchanges and collaborations in addition to the English language exchange planned for the summer and other initiatives already under way:

1. A visit to Brandeis by Dr. Taisser Abdallah to explore teaching practices and to launch with Derek Isaacowitz a collaborative project in which Al-Quds and Brandeis faculty and graduate

students would work together to analyze data gleaned from the Child Institute research and would develop conceptually-driven research questions that could turn into publishable empirical papers.

2. Collaboration between the Brandeis Politics Department and the political science, American studies, urban studies/geography, and (planned) European Studies faculties that could involve sharing syllabi, discussing program and course design, and perhaps future visits in either direction.
3. Joint work between Brandeis faculty or students and the students in the Al-Quds translation program to benefit from native speakers on both sides.
4. Opportunities for ACTFL training of teachers of second languages and for the director of the language program, possibly involving a visit of Dr. Rania to Brandeis.
5. Renewal of collaborative projects begun or discussed between AQ and Brandeis departments of physics, computer science, and health policy.
6. Continued conversation about the structure and content of the English major, including the possibility of English majors serving as peer assistants in the mandatory English language classes.
7. A conference on women and leadership to be sponsored jointly by Al-Quds and Brandeis.

The Brandeis team continues to recommend that additional avenues for funding be explored for other initiatives that would greatly benefit both Al-Quds and Brandeis students and faculty but that cannot be pursued within the framework of the current grant. These include:

- a. Expansion of AQ library and information resources, including a central library, full cataloguing of materials received, wider access to databases (off-campus as well as on-campus)
- b. Increase in technological hardware (from laptops and desktops to Ipods and electronically up-to-date classrooms) to enhance student learning and foster effective teaching
- c. Opportunities for extended research or teaching exchanges between Brandeis and Al-Quds faculty and graduate students
- d. Exchanges for undergraduates, including the possibility of a transitional year or semester program at Brandeis for AQ seniors or graduates who are interested in pursuing master's degrees in the United States