

**Concurrent Working Sessions
November 8, 2008**

Building Partnerships in/with

The Middle East

Facilitators:

Lee Blank

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Dean Emeritus, American University of Sharjah, UAE
Visiting Professor, Texas A&M University at Qatar, Spring 2009

Patti Urbina

Director, Qatar Support Office
Texas A&M University

Attendance: About 16 universities and organizations represented

Introductory Presentation

Lee Blank and Patti Urbina started the session with an overview of three significantly different university partnerships in the Middle East. They are:

- American University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE
- Texas A&M University at Qatar, Doha, Qatar
- Alfaisal University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

A list of potential topics was presented by the facilitators as possible topics for the audience. The PowerPoint slides detailing this presentation accompany this summary of discussion topics.

KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology)

Dan Pattarini, Institute of International Education, presented a summary of this newly opened graduate institution with a focus on the scholarships program. He answered several questions about the areas of graduate research that KAUST has planned, as well as detailing some of the strategic reasons for the involvement of US universities in this new venture in Saudi Arabia.

Significant Topics and Findings

Faculty-related topics

- **Permanent v. temporary faculty on-site** -- Middle East (ME) located campuses that are partnering with US institutions greatly value the presence of faculty who stay at the ME institution for some time, not simply a few weeks or a semester.
- **Language training at home campus** -- Administrations and faculty at US universities who offer frequent courses in basic language skills (usually Arabic, in this case) can expect better student response to opportunities to study or visit Middle East institutions.

Student-related topics

- **Changes in students' interests once back at home campus** -- Students who have studied, or simply visited, the Middle East do show some changes in their interest when they return to their home campuses. Course choices, attitudes toward other nationalities, involvement in international activities, etc. occur more frequently and easily once some international experience is complete. This seems to be especially true for students who participate in Middle East programs.
- **Need for 1-on-1 interfaces** – ME students in the US greatly benefit by some 1-on-1 time with faculty. The cultural exchange, as well as the orientation and intellectual gains, offer excellent long-term advantages to the relationships between the individuals involved, and work to further the connections between the universities involved in the exchange.
- **Obtaining scholarships from US side** -- Funding for study abroad, international visit programs, etc. is always difficult to find. Programs that offer tuition reciprocity at both institutions offer a real cost advantage, especially if housing on campus is provided for free at the host institutions.
- **Interest/readiness of ME institutions for US students** -- The level of interest at ME universities to have US students study on their campuses varies considerably by country, and even university. A persistent attitude on the part of the US university is often necessary to encourage the ME university to 'make the sincere commitment'. However, once made, it seems that the relation can be a long-lasting one, provided there are students from both sides available.
- **Conducting events at US and ME sites** -- Care must be taken when organizing and conducting student and university events (cultural, culinary, etc.) that honor and display a particular country or have representation from several nationalities. A strategic key is the involvement of interested parties (student groups) well prior to the event, during the early planning phase. Usually, a very positive attitude is

forthcoming from students, since disagreements and conflicts on home ground are not transported to the campus environment in another country. However, the success potential of the event is greatly enhanced when up-front involvement is open and transparent.

- **Language training at ME institutions** -- Programs in the ME that are engineering focused have coursework taught in English. Nonetheless, it was the consensus of the participants that exposure to Arabic in some form of language training for the US students while at the ME institution would enhance the meaningfulness of the cultural and educational experience.

Institution-level topics

- **Long-term commitment to ME presence** -- Again, the commitment to a presence in the ME, and a commitment to the host university, are very important to administrators and Middle East persons of position. This is true for international partnering universities and corporations.
- **Home campus support for ME presence** -- Reactions to ME partnerships by US institutions are watched carefully by ME individuals who have approved the partnerships. Publicity that the US faculty, students, etc. are in disagreement with the decision to partner often means that the ME institution will pull out of the arrangement quite rapidly.