

# The PFDP News

Palestinian Faculty Development Program

April 2010 No. 4

## What's New at PFDP?

A number of significant events have happened since our last newsletter. The first was the third annual Academic Colloquium held in Nablus in late July. The call for papers was circulated in early March for this year's conference to be held in Ramallah on July 31st and August 1st. Watch for the announcement. During the 2009 Colloquium, awards for the Teaching Excellence Awards were made, honoring teaching excellence in the West Bank and Gaza. We have profiled the winners in this edition of the news. The announcement for applications for this year's awards was circulated in March.

A significant event for the PFDP in September was the granting of a major expansion by USAID to the program, adding a number of new elements. One of these was support for the Al Quds-Bard Master of Arts in Teaching program, a joint program in support of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's National Teacher Education Strategy (NTES). Also in support of the NTES is a new scholarship program for MOEHE staff to attend Masters programs at US universities over the next two years. Other significant new program components are local scholarships for students to attend Al Azhar University in Gaza and the provision of English for Academics training for faculty in both the West Bank and Gaza.

We are pleased to announce that PFDP PhD Fellows are continuing to return from their programs in the US with Dr Mohammed Zayyad returning from Boston College in January. A number of Short-Term Fellows from both Gaza and West Bank completed

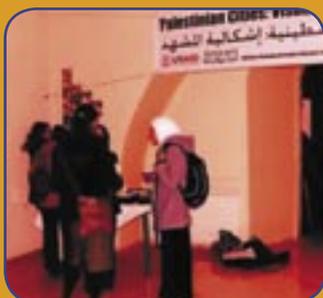
one-term visits to the US over the past six months. Our partner in PFDP, the Open Society Institute, continues to provide support for all of our US-based Fellows and hosted the annual Fellows Conference in March in Austin Texas.

The Central European University continued to provide support for faculty development by training participants in the Seminar for Excellence in Teaching in Jericho in June and January and continuing to train a group of Palestinian Master Trainers who will deliver the program in coming years. CEU's campus in Budapest was the venue for hosting the first of this year's Administrative Seminars focusing on Quality in Higher Education in February. A number of university administrators attended this seminar along with colleagues from the former Soviet Union countries.

The adjudication process for PFDP Faculty Grants was concluded in March and we will profile the winners in the next edition of the newsletter. This year we funded two new Collaborative Projects in Teaching, one in blended learning in English for Specific Purposes and another in Special Needs Education.

Another major change to PFDP is in staffing. We are pleased to announce the hiring of new staff members who will manage the various new and continuing components of the program.

I welcome your comments and suggestions.  
Chief of Party, John FitzGibbon [jfitzgibbon@amideast.org](mailto:jfitzgibbon@amideast.org)



# National Study of Undergraduate Teaching Practices in Palestine

Despite the rapid and continued growth of Palestine's universities, almost no information exists on the quality of teaching practices and its link to learner outcomes in higher education. To address this issue, PFDP recently completed the National Study of Undergraduate Teaching Practices in Palestine. The research team was led by Dr. Louis Cristillo of Columbia University Teachers College and Dr. Amaney Jamal of Princeton University working with a group of distinguished Palestinian scholars. The national study provides the higher education community in Palestine with baseline information on matters relating to the quality of teaching practices and their implications for learning outcomes in institutions of higher education.

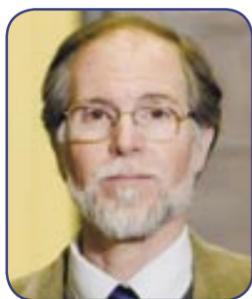
The study identifies the practices and processes that comprise undergraduate teaching in Palestine today. The study notes that one of the strongest predictors of excellence in teaching practices is the extent to which new teachers are provided with effective in-service training and professional support during their first year of service. The study also reveals huge discrepancies

in how teachers and students perceive the quality of teaching and learning practices. With regards to the needs of Palestinian students, the study concludes that, rather than acquiring knowledge through traditional lectures and homework, students seek to acquire more skills development, research, database, analytical and academic writing skills, as well as effective communication. Furthermore, the study notes the failure of the existing scope of teaching-learning practices in developing skills that are crucial for advanced studies or integration into the local or global labor force. Although many teachers have noticed an improvement in the teaching conditions of Palestinian universities, Palestinian students still complain of the limited accessibility to on-campus learning facilities such as libraries, media services, computers and science labs, and teachers' office hours.

The study will be distributed to all universities in the West Bank and Gaza and will be available on the PFDP website. PFDP also plans to host targeted focus groups to discuss the implications of the study.

managed to establish very high quality in spite of the political and economic instability of the past 3 or 4 decades. They have managed to provide an education that is recognized as one of a fairly high caliber. With that being said, there are things that need to be addressed. One of the main findings in the report show that the areas that need to be addressed are in the area of teacher quality. There are structural issues and constraints in terms of budgetary issues and overcrowded classrooms, etc. There are problems in terms of the infrastructure required to support educational technology, the media, and the training of people who manage these issues as well as getting teachers trained on their use. Aside from the budgetary issues, which are serious, I think the quality of teaching needs to be addressed. We found out that there is very little pre-service training of any sort for teachers and very little monitoring for new teachers as well in that critical first or second year of their teaching experiences.

## One on one with Dr. Lou



### What is the main problem in Palestinian higher education?

If you were to look at the West Bank and Gaza as Palestine and compare it to other developing countries in the region or south Asia or Africa for that matter, the 12 or so universities have a lot to be proud of. Virtually they have established world class institutions largely due to the efforts of their own diaspora communities and intellectual capital. These institutions have

### What are the immediate steps to be taken towards solving the problems in Palestinian higher education? Who needs to be involved in this process?

It will require the cooperation of all major institutions including the Ministry and Council of Higher Education, the efforts of university presidents and their respective departments. A major constraint is funding and sustainability. Even if there is internal funding or international funding from multilateral agencies, the issue is sustainability. How is change sustained when the funding ends? It is critical that the larger political actors play a role. One of the findings from the study was that faculty and students generally have very high confidence in their institutions to find solutions for their problems. They have a lot of respect for their university leaders, presidents and deans and their senior faculty to work towards improving the quality of education. However, that same level of confidence and trust is missing in terms of overall political leadership. What faculty and students and general public want to see is that the Authority puts higher education top on its priority of national issues. In terms of national security, national development, and the future of the Palestinian state, when it fully emerges, higher education institutions are going to be at the forefront and the Palestinian political leadership needs to not only talk the talk but walk the walk as we say.

### What suggestions and recommendations would you give to those eager to improve and develop the Palestinian higher education system?

I think that in the report we identified a number of recommendations that need to be addressed; the need to prioritize quality of education and teaching is key. Institutions will need to develop a structured program of what we call excellence in teaching which is basically about pre-service and in-service training for the first two years of a new appointee, where new faculty members would go through a series of graduated workshops and seminars built around enhancing their ability to teach effectively and to transform their classrooms into learner-centered classrooms. The quality assurance unit that most universities have should be a key player to help organize this and monitor and evaluate it.

The idea is that to supply the new cohort of teachers with incentives and rewards to motivate them to participate and take seriously the seminars and workshops on teaching methods. This is where the funding and budgetary issues come in.

In higher education, you are not only a teacher, you are a producer of knowledge. You have a specific field with its theories and methods and you are expected not only to reproduce those theories and methods but to explore, innovate, and contribute to research and knowledge in your field.

All the things we have talked about are interconnected; inter-university cooperation, conference seminars, workshops, rewards and incentives for teachers doing research, mentoring, and pre-service training in the critical first three years of teaching. These things are linked, and if you get these three components working together, this new generation of faculty who will be filling in the position of soon-to-be-retired faculty, you will have a very well-qualified and engaged cohort of faculty to develop teaching and learning in their institutions.

## Faculty Grants:

### Innovative workshops with Dr. Yazid and Dr. Maher

In an effort to support the scholarship and best practices of teaching and learning within Palestinian universities and colleges, PFDP awarded Palestinian university faculty with over \$80,000 in grants in support of innovative projects that provide university professors with an opportunity to develop a variety of projects related to teaching and learning in their disciplines. Since its inception, PFDP has awarded a total of five grants to various Palestinian professors.

Two grant recipients recently completed their grant activities.

#### Dr. Yazid Anani

Dr. Yazid Anani from Birzeit University developed a two-week student workshop in his Advanced Urban Design course. The Photographic Perception of Urban Spaces workshop aimed at using photography as a means of evaluating physical, social, and economic processes of urban spaces. It introduced photography as a means and method of assessing spatial issues with the same effect as qualitative interviews and other classical empirical methodologies. It also introduced participatory photography as a decentralized empirical methodology for urban planning and design. The project ended with a photo exhibition at the Ottoman Courthouse in Ramallah and distribution of a 2010 photo calendar.



#### Dr. Maher Hashweh

Dr. Maher Hashweh is a renowned professor at Birzeit University. He has taught for over 25 years and approached PFDP with an innovative idea for a case-based approach to learning. The course included many social constructivist approaches, and encouraged students to make practical use of the knowledge they learn in class. Dr. Hashweh assisted students in their utilization of the knowledge gained. His course included an online system where students received and submitted their homework online, and gave them an opportunity to expand their level of thinking as well as expose them to new teaching techniques.

As part of the grant, Dr. Hashweh organized three workshops in order to transfer his experience to other professors and ministry officials.



## Teacher Excellence Awards

Under our third objective of promoting an institutional culture of teaching and learning, PFDP continues to award exceptional faculty with the Teaching Excellence Award. Launched in 2007, the award highlights the importance of teaching in higher education through inspiring teachers within academia by recognizing their success. Last year, the award was granted to five exceptional teachers who have shown their dedication to their students as well as their outstanding commitment to innovative teaching techniques.

Below is a glimpse of the educational lives led by the five winners of the Teaching Excellence Award for 2009



#### Dr. Islah Jad – Birzeit University

Dr. Jad's life-long commitment to academia is evident through her numerous teaching experiences. Her educational journey began in Cairo, where she obtained a BA in political science. In 1979, she

pursued a Masters degree from the University of Paris, and finally received a PhD in development studies from the University of London in 2004.

For Dr. Jad, the most important element in teaching is having faith in the students: "If you invest in your students you will get rewarded but if you lose faith in your students, they will lose faith in you. Students are very clever, they feel when you are committed to them and when you are not. This is number one, having faith in their abilities."



#### Dr. Raja Osaily AlQuds Open University

Dr. Osaily has been a teacher at Al Quds Open University in Jerusalem since 2000. As a specialist in educational administration, she is one of only eight

others in the entire West Bank who is teaching using an e-learning program. Over the years Dr. Osaily has learned that the most effective way to deal with students is to communicate with them and become interested in their character and their future. "The biggest transformation in my teaching is e-learning and blended learning." All the students were required to learn how to submit their homework online and this has proven to be a useful experience for the entire university. Through this program, Dr. Osaily has transformed the traditional classroom into a more interactive venue.



#### Dr. Fadi Kattan- Bethlehem University

An MA graduate from the Christian Brothers School in Chicago, and a PhD holder from Bradford University in England, Dr. Kattan is a highly acknowledged intellectual who has been teaching accounting at Bethlehem University for over 19 years. With regards to his teaching practices, Dr. Kattan stresses that he never stopped learning, "that is the only thing that added value and developed me into what I am right now," His teaching experience is an accumulation

of hard work, research, and cooperation with fellow teachers in order to exchange notes, give feedback, and produce a well-rounded curriculum for the students.

Dr. Kattan will pursue his teaching career at Bethlehem University and hopes that the Palestinian education system will improve in order to recruit more dedicated and talented individuals into the world of teaching.



#### Dr. Ahmed Dahlan – Al Azhar University – Gaza

Dr. Dahlan began his teaching career in 1991 in population studies and population geography. He graduated with a PhD from Durham University in the United

Kingdom. While in the UK, Dr. Dahlan developed his teaching skills while working as a teaching assistant for undergraduate studies. Over the years, Dr. Dahlan has incorporated new teaching methodologies into his techniques. He finds that discussions and problem solving supported by fieldwork are highly effective in allowing the students to understand the material and relate it to real life scenarios. Dr. Dahlan will continue to mold the minds of Palestinian youth in Gaza in order to help them learn all that they need to succeed.



#### Dr. Riyadh Abdel Karim – An Najah National University

Upon graduating with a Master's Degree in structural engineering in 1984, Dr. Abdel Karim received his PhD from Penn State University. Following his studies, Dr. Abdel

Karim returned to Palestine and was appointed head of the Engineering Department at An Najah University. Over the years, Dr. Abdel Karim attributes his greatest change in teaching methods to the development in use of technology. At his suggestion, An Najah University now offers a one-month orientation workshop for new instructors given by a number of experienced teachers in order to help adapt the newcomers to the University's system. Dr. Abdel Karim will continue to teach at An Najah University and will attempt to build strong bridges of cooperation between the various universities in Palestine.

## Academic Colloquium 2009: Teaching Practice in Palestinian Tertiary Education July 23-24, 2009 An Najah University, Nablus

Continuing its promotion of new learning techniques in Palestinian Universities, PFDP held its third Academic Colloquium between July 23-24, 2009 at An Najah National University in Nablus. The conference addressed Teaching Practice in Palestinian Tertiary Education and involved ten presentations, including two separate hour-long breakout sessions that encouraged smaller group discussion. The event was launched by the Minister of Education, Ms. Lamis Alami, and USAID's Education Office Director, Mr. Thomas Johnson, Professor Rami Hamdallah President of An Najah National University, and Dr. Joseph Clicksberg, Program Manager, Network Scholarships Program at the Open Society Institute. The conference gathered over 200 faculty members representing all West Bank Palestinian universities, and was also connected via digital videoconferencing with approximately 40 faculty attending a parallel event in Gaza City at Al Aqsa University.



The first day included a series of speeches and presentation of the preliminary results of the national study, and ended with a gala dinner where the 2009 Teaching Excellence Award winners were congratulated and presented with their certificates.

The second day of the conference opened with a presentation by a panel lead by Dr. Maher Hashweh from Birzeit University titled: "Developing an Education Diploma Program at Birzeit University." The panel reviewed BZU's project to develop the teaching of Educational Psychology in order to use promising methods in teacher education to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Dr. Qustandi Shomali from Bethlehem University presented a paper on "Blended Learning" examining the importance of using digital and instructional tools in classrooms. Dr. Shomali's presentation was followed by a break out session where attendees divided into small groups and



discussed institutionalizing teaching quality. PFDP PhD grantee Ms. Kefah Barham reported in her presentation titled: "Teachers Using Computers in U.S Classrooms" on a small qualitative research study exploring how teachers use computers in U.S classrooms. The second day concluded with a presentation titled "Proposed standards and Performance Indicators for Lecturers in Palestinian Tertiary Education" by Dr. Muneer Karamah from the UNRWA Department of Education. During his presentation, Dr. Karamah demonstrated a scientific tool which can be used before, during, and after practice by lecturers to review and support them in an accountable manner.

The fourth Academic Colloquium in the West Bank will take place in July 2010 and will revolve around building partnerships in Teaching Excellence. To submit a presentation abstract or for more information, please contact [hkhairi@amideast.org](mailto:hkhairi@amideast.org)

## Snapshots of Success



**Ahmed Al Noubani** was raised in a rural West Bank village among a family that highly values education. Six of eight of his siblings have also graduated from university. Ahmed is expanding upon his Masters of Science degree from the University of Aberdeen in the UK by pursuing a Ph.D. in Urban Design and Planning from the University of Washington in Seattle, which he will receive upon defending his dissertation in the fall of 2010. Ahmad successfully completed his coursework and comprehensive exams, and is currently preparing to defend his dissertation on land use and land cover dynamics, using Palestine as a case study.



**Ahmed Abu Awad** is from Hebron and has taught courses in linguistics and discourse analysis at Birzeit University for the last three years. He is now a doctoral student in the Comparative and International Education and Anthropology program at Teachers College, Columbia University. He received accolades from various faculty familiar with his work. Dr. Cathy O'Connor, his academic advisor at Boston University, writes, "Ahmed is intellectually one of the strongest students I have encountered in my 18 years of university teaching. He is insightful, thoughtful, and intellectually mature." Ahmed is currently preparing a dissertation titled "Genres of Governmentality: The Role of the Intifada Appeals in the Palestinian National Imaginary"; which he plans to defend in 2012.



**Abeer Shaheen** was one of the first female faculty members in Birzeit University's Political Science Department. Abeer plans to complete her Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia University on the neoliberal politics of Iraq after Saddam. She feels that her study will have key policy implications for how democratic transitions within the Arab world can be managed in ways that lead to positive political change. Abeer also notes, "I will be able to teach courses in international relations theory, comparative foreign policy, regional conflicts, area studies, and other relevant courses." Abeer plans to defend her dissertation in 2011.



**Sahera Bleibleh** has a master's degree from Al-Najah National University in Urban and Regional Planning. She is currently enrolled at the University of Washington, Seattle, Department of Urban Design and Planning, where she is developing a dissertation on spatial oppression under the Israeli occupation, which she will defend in 2011. Sahera looks forward to exploring the best practices of international approaches which could be tailored and brought back to Palestine. Sahera is enthusiastic about expanding her acquired practical and theoretical experience. She wishes to contribute to local planning practices and curriculum within the local universities and organizations, so as to improve living standards and to create a better environment for local communities.

## Upcoming PFDP events:

- Teaching Excellence Awards: Do you know a great university teacher? Nominate them now! Visit our website for more information on the guidelines. The deadline for submission is May 30.
- Academic Colloquium July 31-August 1, 2010: The fourth West Bank Academic Colloquium will correspond with one of the core objectives of the Palestinian Faculty Development Program, which is enhancing teaching and learning practices among local faculty and institutions. As a result, conference presentations will identify issues of reform in teaching and learning practices or recommend approaches toward strengthening best practices and fostering innovative change to discipline-specific pedagogies. The deadline for submitting presentation abstracts is April 30, 2010. Abstracts and conference papers will be reviewed by a faculty committee and the final conference papers will be collected, printed, and distributed by PFDP. Please provide your contact details and the Abstract to AMIDEAST via email: [hkhairi@amideast.org](mailto:hkhairi@amideast.org).
- Seminar for Excellence in Teaching 2010: visit our website for an application. The deadline for submission is April 30, 2010
- Stay tuned for our upcoming newsletter which will feature some of our returning PhD fellows and the various activities they plan to implement in Palestine.

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