

**Brandeis University
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Israel/Palestine
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Project Proposal: Al Quds University Student Dialogue Initiative

Abstract:

The project will create a framework for long-term student dialogue between Brandeis University and Al Quds University. Brandeis students will meet Al Quds students and gain insight into their daily lives through a structured and intentional five-day trip in Jerusalem and the West Bank and post-trip weekly discussion meetings. This will serve as a starting point for continued student communication and exchange.

Background:

Brandeis University has had an academic partnership with Al Quds University since 2003 that is currently under suspension. In November 2013, an Al Quds University student group held a demonstration that appeared to many at Brandeis to be an anti-Semitic rally. Al Quds President Sari Nusseibeh issued a statement in response to the rally, referring to media coverage of the rally as a part of a "vilification campaign by Jewish extremists." The statement also encouraged students at Al Quds to promote freedom and respect. The demonstration was troubling to us, as were parts of Nusseibeh's statement. However, we realized that this was the kind of moment for which the partnership existed, a moment that could have resulted in learning and growth for both institutions. Unfortunately, the partnership was suspended by the Brandeis administration as a response to the statement. The reaction at Brandeis lacked appreciation for Nusseibeh's desire to uphold the values of free speech and respect, as well as for the realities of life in the West Bank.

In the past, the Brandeis/Al-Quds partnership included student exchanges, but these have not occurred for several years. We believe that the response on campus to the November 2013 events would have been more nuanced had current Brandeis students encountered peers from Al Quds, and that students should take the initiative to create dialogue between our campuses. Putting a face and listening to one another allows us to work together in times of tension, rather than letting tension push us apart. Student collaboration will give students on both campuses a stake in the success and continuation of a relationship between our universities. We believe that only through mutual understanding on an individual level can we change policies on a larger scale, and thus that meaningful dialogue between students from a Jewish-sponsored university and students from a Palestinian university is an important step – both practically and symbolically – in shaping a more peaceful future between Jews and Palestinians.

Description of Program:

The project's core will be a five-day intensive trip in Israel/Palestine with a goal of creating relationships between Brandeis and Al Quds students to implement a culture meaningful dialogue between both schools.

Spring of 2014: We will advertise the program on campus, and review applications from Brandeis students who will be in Israel at the time of the program through their own means. After finalizing a list of eight participants, we will familiarize them with the itinerary, expectations, and core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and meet the Al Quds student partners through teleconferences. To facilitate this process, we will work with the Brandeis professors who have previously led the partnership.

Trip, June 2014: We will arrive in advance of the five-day program in order to finalize trip logistics.

Day 1: We will hold an evening orientation in Jerusalem for the Brandeis participants, explaining the goals and plan of the program, and prepare for Encounter's tour the next day.

Day 2: Encounter will run a tour of a Palestinian city for Brandeis participants, which will provide an opportunity for them to visualize and understand life in the West Bank. This understanding is crucial in order for the Brandeis students to develop a deeper sense of the Al Quds' students' lives. Encounter will facilitate a debriefing of the experience over dinner in Jerusalem.

Day 3: The day will be spent at Al Quds University, and will include introductions between Brandeis and Al Quds participants, a tour of the campus, and lectures from Al Quds professors. This will create a starting point of shared learning, and begin conversations of what each campus would gain from the relationship. An alum of Brandeis' Heller School Graduate Program in Coexistence and Conflict, along with Al Quds staff, will facilitate this part of the program. Participants will agree to safe space guidelines in order to promote effective dialogue.

Day 4: The morning and afternoon will be spent at Al Quds, and will include further lectures and discussions facilitated by program staff, as well as working sessions to begin drafting a framework for the student dialogue initiative. In the evening, Encounter will lead a tour of East Jerusalem for Brandeis participants.

Day 5: Participants will have a working session at Al Quds University to finalize the framework for continued student dialogue and communication, including for the rest of the summer. Participants will create a written proposal. The day will end with a dinner and closing ceremony.

Weekly Meetings: Following the trip, the Brandeis participants will travel to the Al Quds campus once a week for four weeks to meet with Al Quds students. These meetings will be peer-led group discussions, topics to be determined together, in order to continue building relationships between participants from both schools.

Objectives:

The success of the project will be based on the achievement of these objectives:

- The commitment of 6-8 Brandeis students as the core team of Brandeis partners;
- The creation of a meaningful relationship with a core team of Al Quds partners;
- A written framework for a lasting and vibrant student dialogue;
- In depth student exploration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its different narratives;
- The creation of a model for student dialogue that can be emulated by other universities.

Partnerships:

This project is made possible by cooperation with several individuals and institutions:

Encounter is an American organization "dedicated to strengthening the capacity of the Jewish people to be constructive agents of change in transforming the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." Encounter runs trips to Palestinian cities and facilitates discussions. Tours on the trip will be led by Encounter, drawing on their vast network of Palestinian partners and years of experience.

Brandeis professors Susan Lanser, Daniel Terris and Daniel Kryder are among the leaders of the official Brandeis University-Al Quds University partnership and have traveled extensively to Al Quds University. Their relationships with Al Quds administrators, faculty, and students are crucial for the success of this project. Programming during the Spring and Fall semesters will be implemented with consultation from the professors, utilizing productive methods adopted in past exchanges.

Sameh Arekat is Coordinator of Student Activities in the Al Quds University Department of Student Affairs and is our main contact from Al Quds. In conjunction with the Head of Student Services, he is assembling a group of Al Quds students who will be student participants in the program. He will work with the project organizers and meeting facilitator to help create a program for the sessions on the Al Quds campus.