

FP Jareeda

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Welcome Back

James Scotland, Chair of the Foundation Program's Newsletter Committee, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Welcome to the latest edition of the Foundation Program's quarterly newsletter, FP Jareeda.

The ongoing COVID 19 pandemic has affected and continues to affect us all. David Pearson's article about the recently held Academic Excellence Days provides a strong example of how the Foundation Program (FP) is adapting to an online environment.

This issue also highlights the important work of a valued member of the FP, Dr. Enita Barrett. Dr. Barrett is the current chair of the FP's Special Needs Committee. As well as an interview with Dr. Barrett, there is also an article which outlines the FP's recently produced Manual of Procedures and Policies for Inclusive Education.



James Scotland: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

The ENGL 252 Entrepreneurial Project

Mhammed Chadi, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

The ENGL 252 Entrepreneurial Project is a team project that aims at helping students acquire 21st century skills. It comprises of a set of tasks and activities that focus primarily on developing students' communication skills and unlocking their entrepreneurial potential. In the Fall 2019 semester, Mashael Al-Kuwari's business idea, Ahmad's Bakery, won the second prize at the Final Presentations Event organized

by the Foundation Program in collaboration with The Center for Entrepreneurship (CFE), College of Economics and Business. Because of her innate entrepreneurial talent, Mashael decided to pursue her business idea and turn it into a real business. In this article, she has shared with us the story behind her business idea and her entrepreneurial thoughts and aspirations.



Mhammed Chadi: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

Ahmad's Bakery

by Mashael Al-Kuwari

I came up with my business idea because of my 5-year-old son, Ahmad. Two years ago, Ahmad was diagnosed with gluten intolerance. This disease is called celiac disease and it currently has no cure. For those with celiac disease, following a strict gluten free diet is the only way to avoid damage to their intestines and body immunity. Because of the scarcity of fresh gluten free bakery products in Doha, I started thinking of starting my own business, Ahmad's Bakery, a bakery specializing in gluten free products.

The research I have conducted to form a more accurate idea about the market needs led me to find out that the number of people diagnosed with gluten sensitivity is increasing rapidly, but the market in Doha for gluten free bakery products is not keeping pace with the growing demand. This has ignited my entrepreneurial spirit and consolidated my passion to start my own business.

My short term goal is to build a customer base. This cannot be realized without creating customer awareness of Ahmad's Bakery as a new brand. My plan is to mount an effective marketing campaign based on four principles: product, price, place and promotion. Research findings have proved that a significant number of startups undermine the importance of marketing; they think that the success of their businesses is determined by the quality of their products or services. Being aware of the pivotal role of marketing in business environment, I will outsource marketing to a professional agency. Though I have quite good marketing skills, I don't want to overburden myself as I want to focus on the bigger picture. However, I will make sure that my marketing campaign is built on low-budget marketing strategies such as referrals, press releases and news features, content marketing, social media and search engine optimization.

As a startup, priority will be given in the first year to ensure that Ahmad's Bakery products are of high quality and are affordable, particularly to low income segment. To achieve this, I need to work out a business model that strikes balance between quality and price. I will adopt a lean production system which is based on the principle of eliminating non-value added activities from the production system. The implementation of the lean manufacturing techniques will allow me to reduce waste, decrease production expenses, cut down labor costs, and consequently increase profits.

In a nutshell, I am fully aware of the challenges associated with starting a business, but with the support and professional guidance I am getting from the Centre for Entrepreneurship (CFE) at the College of Economics and Business, Ahmad's Bakery will come true soon inshallah.



Mashael and her team's stand at the Entrepreneurial Showcase Event: Photograph courtesy of Ali Mohamed Salim

The Academic Excellence Days - Spring 2020

David Pearson, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

The Foundation Program (FP) of Qatar University (QU), which is under the Deanship of General Studies, held its annual Academic Excellence Days from May 11th - 14th. This year's event was held online, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although moving the event online posed a number of unprecedented challenges, it also presented opportunities. Participation was higher than in previous events with 5,932 attendees. Approximately 85% of the participants were from Qatar, and an additional 15% were from 31 countries on five different continents.

The success of the event lay largely in realization that in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity. The FP Academic Excellence Committee understood that due to COVID-19, many experts who would ordinarily not have time to attend an in-person event, would be available to present online. As a result, the committee was able to secure plenary speakers from countries as diverse as the United States, the UK, the Netherlands, Canada, and Malaysia.

Well-known speakers included Scott Thornbury of The New School in New York, author of award-winning books for teachers on language and methodology, and Judy Thompson, an internationally



Professional Development Team Lead Ahmad Hazratzad: Photograph courtesy of Ali El Hussein

recognized TEDx speaker, author and teacher whose ground-breaking system for teaching speaking has been incorporated into the English curricula in more than 60 countries. Other speakers included London-based psychotherapist, cultural theorist, and author Dr. Aaron Balick, as well as Professor Madhubala Bava Harji, winner of the Gold Medal Award for Teaching and The British High Commissioner's Award.

Day one of the event focused on the stressful effects of switching to online teaching.

Two talks in particular addressed this issue: Chris Stryker's presentation, *Best-Practice Approaches for Teaching Online While Preserving Mental Health*, and Aaron Balick's session, *Staying Grounded in Difficult Times: A Psychologically Intelligent Guide to Keeping Calm*.

Day two of the event focused on the practice of online teaching. Three sessions addressed this issue: Naima Sarfraz's session, *Making the Most of Online Teaching*, Madhubala Bava Harji's session, *Perceived Levels of Criti-*

cal Thinking Competence and Preference of Learning Platforms, and Alaeddin Halwani's session, *Five Digital Classroom Tools for Innovative Teachers*. Naima Sarfraz and Alaeddin Halwani are both experienced English instructors in the Foundation Program Department of English (FPDE). Madhubala Bava Harji has more than 20 years' experience in various senior management and administrative positions and is currently a panel member of the Malaysian Qualification Agency.

This year's event was itself an excellent example of distance learning. The FP Academic Excellence Committee determined that Zoom would be the most convenient and user-friendly platform on which to hold this year's event. To familiarize committee members with the new Zoom platform, committee meetings were held on Zoom as practice webinars, including two professional development sessions. Committee members noted that Zoom's Question & Answer Box feature encouraged event attendees to ask many questions for the speakers, something which does not always happen at in-person events.

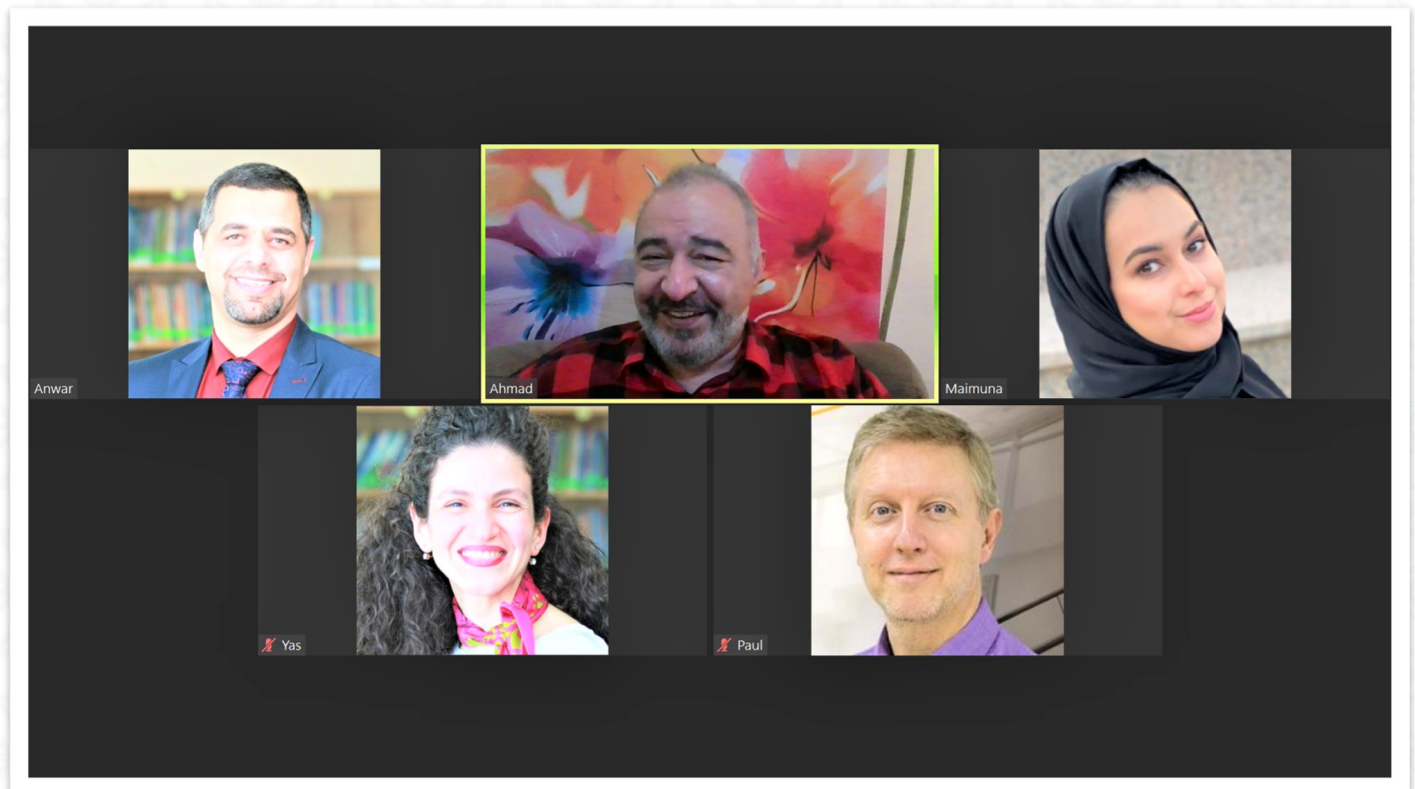
The final day of the event was dedicated to the Foundation Math Department. Dr. Ryad Ghanam, of Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, gave a presentation on math games in the classroom. Dr. Diana Reyos-Malabanana, a lecturer in the QU Foundation Program Department of Math, presented on the metacognitive approach to teaching mathematics and how it can improve classroom instruction. Dr. Houssein Ayoub, an Assistant Professor of Mathematics in the Department of Mathematics, Statistics, and Physics at Qatar University, presented his modeling of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, a subject of interest to all at-

tendees.

The Academic Excellence Days Event 2020 was organized by the Professional Development Team of the FP Academic Excellence Committee: Ahmad Hazratzad, Anwar Ghanim Al-Fetlawi, Paul Anthony Ames, Yasaman Amiri Aghdam, and Maimuna Aghliw. Furthermore, the PD Team of the FP Academic Excellence Committee sent out approximately 6000 certificates to the participants of the event.

The event could not have happened without the full support of the university management and Foundation Program, and the full support, guidance and

supervision of Naima Sarfraz, the Chair of the Academic Excellence and Professional Development Committee, Mohammad Manasreh, Head of Foundation Program Department of English, and Mohamed Ben Haj Rhouma, Head of Foundation Program Department of Math. Special thanks also go to Sara Salmeh, Engagement and Communications Specialist, and Sarah Hwa, E-Learning Specialist, for their invaluable contributions. All in all, the Academic Excellence Days 2020 was a resounding success.



The Academic Excellence Committee Professional Development Team, consisting of Ahmad Hazratzad, Anwar Al-Fetlawi, Paul Ames, Yasaman Aghdam, and Maimuna Aghliw: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

The Fourth Annual QU Math Championship

David Pearson, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Qatar University (QU) held its Fourth Annual QU Math Championship on February 5th and February 10th, 2020. More than 400 students from Qatar University, Carnegie Mellon University, and Hamad bin Khalifa University attended the event. This year's championship was organized by the Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Physics in the College of Arts and Sciences and by the Foundation Program Department of Math, which is under the Deanship of General Studies. The event was also held in collaboration with the Student Learning Support Center (SLSC).

The competition was open to all students; the contestants represented a broad range of academic disciplines, including many from the QU Foundation Elementary Algebra and

Pre-Calculus courses. Contestants were divided into two groups. The first included students in the Foundation Program and literary specialties at QU, while the second was composed of science majors from all three universities. Dr. Mohamed Ben Haj Rhouma, Head of the Foundation Program Department of Math, explained that the aim of the two competitions was to emphasize that mathematics is not exclusive to the scientific disciplines and that rules and equations can be used in our everyday lives.

Female winners from Qatar University included Marwa Mallouhi in first place, majoring in law, and Abu Ghazaleh in second place, majoring in early childhood primary education. The third place winner was Isra Al Hamli, majoring in

law.

Male winners from Qatar University included Shaharata Kumar in first place, majoring in accounting, and Ayman Saad Begg in second place, majoring in sports sciences. The third place winner was Syed Hamad Abbas, majoring in public administration.

Female winners among science majors were in first place, Mathayel Rashid Al-Nuaimi from Qatar University, majoring in mathematics, and in second place, Fango Aksu from Carnegie Mellon University, majoring in computer science, and in third place Youssef Helmy from Qatar University, majoring in computer engineering.

Male winners among science majors were Igly Maluga from Carnegie Mellon University majoring in computer science, and in second place, Kevin Isovoage from Carnegie Mellon University majoring in computer science, and in third place Swapendo Sanil of Carnegie Mellon University, majoring in computer science.

The award ceremony was held during the opening ceremony of the 2nd Qatar Math Day Conference, which itself was held on 16th February, 2020.

During the Presentation Ceremony, Nour Elnakhalah, Senior Mathematics Specialist in the Student Learning Support Center, explained that the goals of competition were to open the door for creative students in the field of mathematics in order to give them the opportunity to showcase their creativity, as well as to motivate them to think creatively when faced with future challenges. She praised the cooperation of all involved in organizing this year's Qatar University Math Championship.

Dr. Temadher Khalifa Al-Assiry, Head of the Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Physics at the QU College of Arts and Sciences, expressed pride in the participants.

Dr. Temadher stated that students should be very satisfied with their diligence and desire to challenge themselves. Dr. Yasser Hussain, Director of Qatar University's Student Learning Support Center, stressed the importance of this tournament in terms of promoting students' autonomy as well as providing an opportunity for students to apply their existing skills.



First place winner for the Men: Photograph courtesy of Ali El Hussein

Student and Teacher Voices: Reflections on Moving to the Virtual Classroom

Tiffany Tillman, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

In Spring 2020, Qatar University pivoted from teaching in the traditional classroom to teaching in the virtual classroom within a very short period of time. How did the faculty and students of the Foundation Program Department of English (FPDE) fare? Several students and faculty share their experiences.

What did we miss the most?

Each other! Both groups reported they missed spending time face-to-face, feeling the spirit of the class and watching the classroom dynamic grow and change over the term. Instructors specifically felt that the inability to read their students' body language or facial expressions added an element of challenge to online

teaching. On the other hand, students reported missing personal contact with friends and the instantaneous response from teachers in the physical classroom.

How did we feel about moving to the virtual classroom?

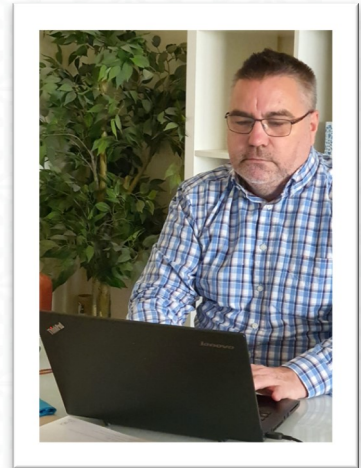
The initial weeks of the online classes were filled with more than a bit of nervous energy as faculty and students adjusted to a completely new platform. The good news is that nearly all students and instructors reported ending the term on a positive note. Both groups cited the rapid adaptation to the online platforms as a surprise and an achievement that was a great source of pride.

What were our biggest challenges?

Connectivity and other IT issues topped the list for everyone. From inability to access a site, to screens freezing, to audio that occasionally sounded like it was being transmitted from under water, technological glitches were a source of frustration for everyone. To this, instructors added difficulty engaging students to participate in classroom activities and ensuring assessment security. Many students remarked that larger workloads and having to pay more attention to deadlines in order to ensure they completed tasks on time were amongst the major challenges.

What were the benefits of this experience?

The vast majority of both groups commented that improving their IT skills was the most beneficial result of going online. While instructors mentioned better planning, focus-to-detail and patience as areas which they honed in the virtual classes, students reported better preparedness, increased self-reliance and improved time management. It was also agreed that a virtual class was more manageable for students with families or for those who live far away. Additionally, almost all agreed that



Lecturer Chris Jones in his virtual classroom: Photo courtesy of Chris Jones

the virtual classroom was generally more comfortable, convenient and timesaving than the physical classroom.

This event began with both instructors and students facing many challenges and expressing feelings of uncertainty, but it appears as if we have faced these head on and come out on the other side having gained improved IT capabilities and, hopefully, a sense of accomplishment and pride at what can be achieved when we work together.



Visual courtesy of Shutterstock

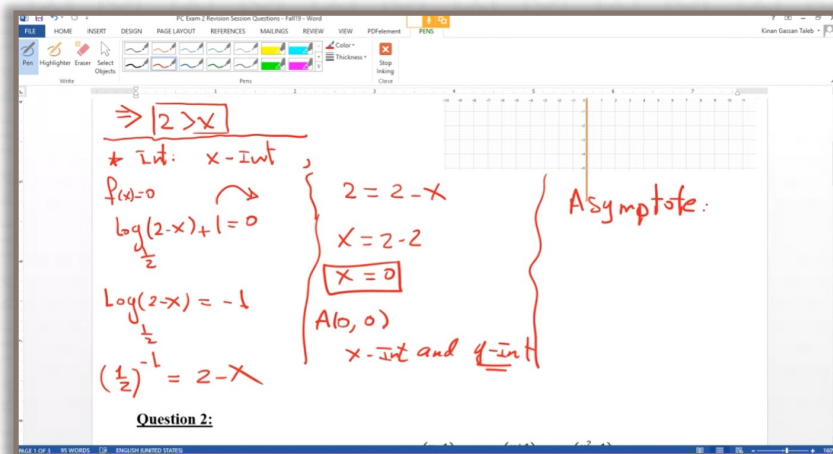
Approaches to Distance Learning in the Foundation Program Department of Math

Raed Marabeh, Teaching Assistant of Math, Foundation Program

Instructors in the Foundation Program Department of Math (FPDM) realize that teaching during the Covid-19 self-isolation period is difficult for students and instructors alike. As educators, we all believe that learning and sharing knowledge is what connects us, and during this time of uncertainty and isolation, connectivity and learning have become more important than ever. To enable students to continue their studies, Qatar University offered online classes for the Spring 2020 semester. In order to facilitate this, instructors have been using various virtual and distance learning platforms like Blackboard Collaborative Ultra, WebEx, Zoom, and Microsoft

Teams. A successful online classroom learning experience must consider factors such as content delivery, student engagement, student retention, and a variety of assessment options. This new remote teaching and learning experience is an exciting opportunity for instructors to become more innovative and creative.

Teaching math during this crisis is not easy, especially instructing those students who constantly need one-to-one, face-to-face instruction. One of the main challenges of online-teaching classes has been maintaining student engagement as FPDM students are not used to learning online. Subdued participation



An online tutoring session: Visual courtesy of Raed Marabeh

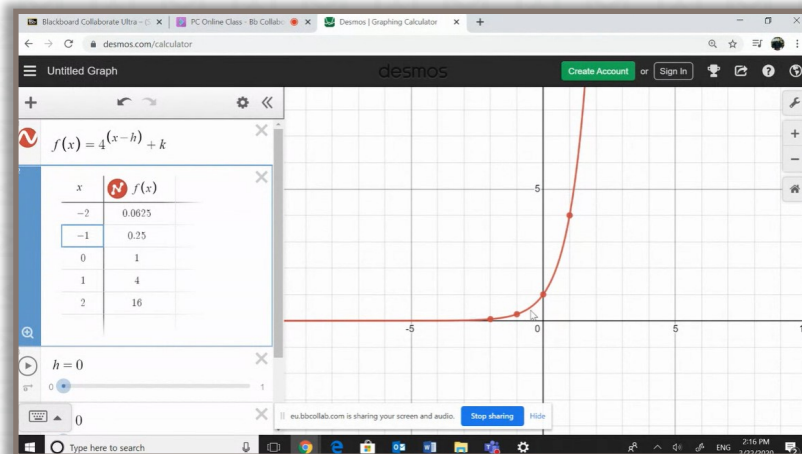
and involvement by some students can make it more challenging for instructors to effectively monitor student progress.

The faculty members of the FPDM and the FP Math Success Zone have devised various schemes to enhance online teaching and

overcome the challenges of distance learning. In order to increase the availability of lesson content, the FP Math Success Zone has uploaded tutorial videos as well as pre-recorded instructional videos prepared by FPDM instructors. Furthermore, the FP Math Success Zone also offers regular online revision sessions and online tutorial services.

These initiatives are intended to engage students and offer them more opportunities for practice and revision than their regular classes. Additionally, student performance is being tracked and assessed via Mylabsplus software.

The Mylabsplus software shows that these various teaching aids and techniques are proving to be effective and useful for students. Although teaching and learning online can be challenging, by utilizing the tools that online platforms have to offer, teachers can still make the learning process engaging and enjoyable, while at the same time, monitor their students' progress and development. All in all, through online-learning, both students and teachers are learning to approach learning in an engaging new way.



An online precalculus class: Visual courtesy of Raed Marabeh

Online Learning: Best Practices

Jeffrey Maggard, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

On 10th March, 2020 Qatar University switched to distance learning. Accordingly, all faculty in the Foundation Program (FP) started to teach online. Learning online can be challenging at times; however, FP faculty have been immersing themselves in the practicalities of delivering online instruction effectively. In the last few months, FP faculty have participated in more than 40 online presentations and workshops. This includes the FP's recent Academic Excellence Days, which were held from May 11th - 14th. Below is a useful summary of how FP faculty are helping their students to be as successful as possible when learning online.

Online Orientation

- Students learn how to use Blackboard Collaborate.
- Teachers provide a thorough explanation of the course.
- Students demonstrate a clear understanding of the syllabus and agree to its expectations of their performance.
- Teachers demonstrate frequently used websites, apps and tools.
- Students understand "academic integrity" in online learning.
- Teachers inform students how to access technological support.
- Teachers explain how to get additional support from the FP Success Zone.
- Teachers show students how to submit assignments online.

Participation and Feedback

- Students are aware that attending class requires participation.
- Teachers give (multiple) achievable

tasks to complete during each class.

- Teachers give timely feedback to assignments and tests.
- Students understand where to ask the teacher questions and are aware of the teacher's working hours (as well as non-working hours).

Time Management

- Teachers email students a detailed lesson plan each day with detailed instructions as well as links to all resources used.
- Teachers send frequent reminders about graded assignments and quizzes to students via email and post them on Blackboard Announcements.
- A calendar with test dates is on Blackboard at all times.

Tone and Appearance

- Teachers and students are always respectful, patient, and friendly.

- Mistakes are accepted.

- Students know that they can always communicate with the teacher by email to solve problems privately.

Student Engagement

- Students are expected to do exercises by themselves, with one other student, or in small groups.
- Teachers set up learning cycles that have structured sets of activities that they repeat each week with students.
- Teachers use online games to motivate students.
- Students do assignments independently. Students must complete their homework before each online class meeting.

Knowing these (five) best practices will help FP students to prepare for the online courses that they are currently taking as well as the online courses that they will take in the future.



Visual courtesy of Pexels

Qatar University Foundation Program Manual of Procedures and Policies for Inclusive Education

Elisabeth Szewczyk-Méziane, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Dr. Enita Barrett, Foundation Program Special Needs Liaison, has recently produced an informative, comprehensive and user-friendly manual to help teachers, tutors and student-helpers deal with special needs (SNs) students. It begins with a 'General Information' section which describes several types of disability such as mobility disability, sensory disability etc. It also lists the most common types of disability found among Foundation Program (FP) students; these include dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and mobility disorders.

The manual explains how the Qatar government and Ministry of Education have been encouraging more social awareness of people who have disabilities and the inclusion of such students in the educational system at all levels. This policy has resulted in more differently-abled students opting to study at tertiary educational institutions. Many have chosen to study at Qatar University because they know about the services offered to accommodate their individual needs and disabilities. The manual also describes the

Qatar University Policy on Special Education and the role of the Inclusion and Special Needs Support Center (ISNSC) as well as the activities of the Foundation Program Special Needs Support Services.

The new manual provides a great deal of useful information and tips. It contains a section devoted to the various terms used by the ISNSC, such as scribe, accommodation letter, etc. Section 8 lists various guidelines to help teachers initiate contact with ISNSC as well as a sample student information form. Section 9 illustrates the Special Needs Assessment Procedures and requirements that the department must adhere to in order to accommodate such students for formal assessments such as midterm exams and final exams. Additionally, it includes exam information duties for scribes and invigilators.

The manual also covers the services that are offered by the FP and lists the duties of helpers, scribes, tutors, and mentors. Another informative section is Section 11, which explains how tests should be formatted for assistive devices such as the braille sensor,



Dr. Enita Barrett: Photograph courtesy of Dr. Enita Barrett

audio devices, and Vizio Book. A contact list of the names and telephone numbers of those who offer special needs services, either in the FP or the ISNSC, is also provided. The appendices are another useful component of the manual; these include samples of various documents and forms.

The special needs services provided by Dr. Barrett and her dedicated team of volunteers are much appreciated by students and staff. Many thanks are owed to Dr. Barrett for compiling this practical and easy to use procedures and policies manual.

Faculty Focus: Dr. Enita Barrett, Special Needs Support Committee Lead

Elisabeth Szewczyk-Méziane, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Interviewer: Tell me about yourself.

Enita: I was born in Belize but moved to the United States when I was a teenager. I did my Bachelor of Arts in Jamaica, at the University of West Indies. I have a Masters of Education in Instructional Leadership, a Masters of Education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and a Doctorate of Education in Leadership from the University of North Florida.

Interviewer: Why did you become an English as a Second Language teacher?

Enita: As a high school teacher in Florida, I noticed some African-American students had unequal educational access. They were failing or not graduating because they couldn't pass English-language requirements; additionally, some clever students were being assigned to special needs (SNs) classes. I proposed such students be given language accommodation instead. This influenced me to become a teacher and an advocate for students with special needs or learning disabilities. I later taught 'Introduction to TESOL' to student-teachers at the University of North Florida. I then worked in Malaysia as a TESOL teacher-trainer and an English-Language Consultant. My first job at Qatar University was as Task-force Liaison between the Foundation Program (FP) and the Vice President and Chief Academic Officer (VPCAO) to oversee restructuring changes. The university was changing the Foundation Program from a two-year program to a one-year program and had mandated that Arabic would replace English as the language of instruction in some colleges. Then, in Fall 2012, as my

task-force duties had ended, I joined the FP.

Interviewer: How did you get involved in special needs at Qatar University?

Enita: When I worked with the Foundation Restructuring Task-force, I was a volunteer-tutor with the Office of Special Needs. After joining the FP, I continued my volunteer work with these students. As the numbers and types of such problems increased in FP, Dr. Manasreh, the head of the Foundation Program Department of English, wanted to provide better services for such students. As a result of this initiative, in 2015 I was appointed to the newly-created position of Special Needs Liaison.

Interviewer: What does your role entail?

Enita: As per the inclusion policy of Qatar University, accommodation and additional support are needed to address the difficulties SNs students face. Teachers also need support to deal with these differently-abled students. I liaise with the Inclusion and Special Needs Support Center (ISNSC), leads, and faculty who have SNs students in their classes to help them with the appropriate procedures for dealing with such students; we follow-up all referrals. I also regularly provide workshops to inform and update faculty about our activities. Under the supervision of FP Student Affairs office, we have a super Special Needs Support Committee of dedicated teachers and volunteers who offer additional learning support and mentoring. Mustapha Chebbak, Lecturer of English at the FP, is also a great help as he organizes exam rooms and invigilators for these students. We also ensure that student helpers are assigned to



Dr Enita Barrett: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

exams where students may need a scribe or a reader.

Interviewer: What has been your most memorable experience in FP?

Enita: One was listening to a student give a PowerPoint presentation in front of her class. This student had previously been exempted from speaking tests due to a severe speech impediment. Secondly, two Teacher Appreciation events were organized by our SNs students to show their gratitude for what they term "Bright Star" teachers; they even designed and wrote the programs! It is very gratifying to see how much our SNs students appreciate teachers' efforts to support them in their endeavors to do well at university. They are truly an amazing group of young people who fully deserve our understanding and support.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing your experiences.

Changing Perspectives: A Special Need Is No Hurdle

Mohammad Hosam Alnahas, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

As educators, our perception of students' competence, colored by our expectations, can dramatically impact their achievement. According to Kelly (1963, p.15), "[a] person's processes are psychologically channelized by the way in which he anticipates events". Therefore, our thinking and subsequent actions may be greatly influenced by our expectations. It might sound rather trite, but to what extent do we perceive our students as capable individuals with the potential to grow and succeed?

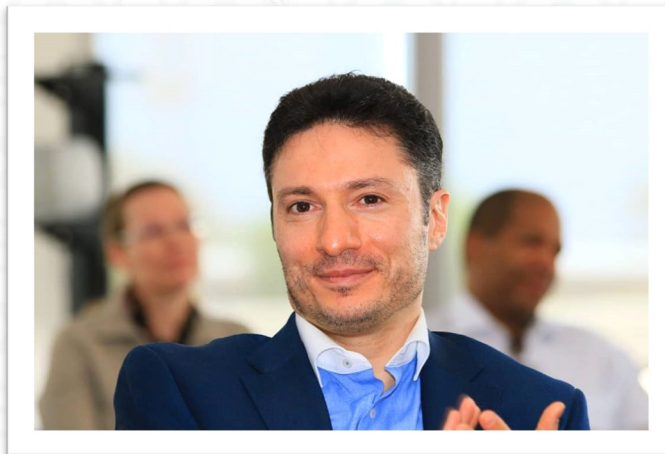
Areej, a special needs student, sought my assistance with a project that she had been assigned to complete on her own, due to her disability issues. Later, I also learned that she had been exempted from delivering presentations on the course for these reasons.

Having known Areej for a few years, as a community service tutor (Areej had never been a registered student in any of my classes), I was fully confident that she could succeed, despite her health condition. I would type out my instructions and she would whisper her response in my ear. Meanwhile, when the planned student presentations were mentioned, Areej would smile broadly, showing great excitement. Therefore, I decided to intervene in order to ensure her involvement alongside everyone else.

At the time, I was teaching a course which contained a Showcase Event. During the event, students were expected to present their business ideas. In preparation for this event, Areej and I began designing her project poster. I contacted her mother to keep her updated and was deeply touched to hear that this was Areej's first opportunity to give a presentation. On the day of the event, I can vividly recall seeing her coming through the door of the venue, almost running ahead of her mother and sister on her walker. She was clearly overjoyed to participate.

Using the microphone that was bought for her, Areej presented the theme of her project to the audience of students at the three-hour event. I remember the attention she received afterwards from other students at her stand. Some took photographs of themselves with her, inspired by her words and ideas.

Areej's participation had clearly boosted her self-confidence dramatically, transforming her perception of what she could achieve. Three weeks later, she decided to participate in the Foundation Program's Special Needs Debate and won third place. Moreover, last semester, Areej gave an account of these experiences in a Foundation Program TED talk event, where she was a significant source of inspiration to all who attended and won fourth place.



Mohammad Hosam Alnahas: Photograph courtesy of Mohammad Hosam Alnahas

Reflecting on her experiences, Areej explained how she came to participate in the Showcase Event, even though she was told that she did not need to. She described her excitement about delivering her presentation, and the encouragement she received from her family and me. She added that she had won a prize for the 'Most Stunning Poster', which left her feeling elated, ending with the thought: "If there's a will there's a way. Never give up on what you really want. I strongly believe that we all have a bright future. One day you will be able to say, 'I made it'".

Areej's story is a perfect example of how our perceptions, whether positive or negative, can impact on our students' achievements and motivation. It shows that the educator's role also means walking the extra mile and encouraging students to leave their 'comfort zone', so that they can realize their aspirations. It is very humbling to think that as teachers, we can instill confidence and develop our students' self-belief.

Areej has been an inspiration to her fellow students and to me, her community tutor. The experience has consolidated my own belief that our expectations affect our dispositions, and our positive expectations of results affect our attitudes and decisions, which inevitably bear fruit in our students.

References

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A version of this article was first published with IATEFL.

Focus on Former Students of the Foundation Program Department of English

Tiffany Tillman, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Qatar University (QU) graduates were contacted to see where they are now, what they are doing, and what is the lasting impact the Foundation Program Department of English has had in their lives. The following gives a brief glance into the lives of two former students and what they are doing after graduation.



Mohammed Al-Hajri speaking at QU Law and Tourism event: Photograph courtesy of Mohammed Al-Hajri

Sarah Al-Sulaiti

Sarah Al-Sulaiti graduated from QU in Fall 2017 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and is now a psychologist at Al Shafallah Center. She would like to work as a clinical psychologist in private practice.

Sarah remembers looking forward to attending her English classes because she felt they were bright, interesting, and always entertaining with interactive tasks and a wide variety of fun and useful readings. She noted that the topics covered not only helped her learn English, but also helped her gain knowledge on different subjects that were not necessarily related to her major. This has ultimately helped her in her workplace by allowing her to effectively communicate with non-Arabic speakers on topics in and outside of her profession. Moreover, it has expanded her learning process in the field of psychology, by allowing her to read the latest English articles and research papers on her areas of interest.

Mohammed Metab Al-Hajri

Mohammed Metab Al-Hajri graduated with first class honors from QU in Spring 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts in Law and is now an officer in the Emiri Guard. He is currently working towards his Doctor of Philosophy in the specialty of Private Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science in England.

Mohammed feels that his QU English classes played a big role in the development of his general English language abilities, which is essential now that he is living outside Qatar. He believes that the many legal terms covered in English Communication for Law (ENGL 253) and the methods his teachers employed to deliver instruction have been highly effective. Specifically, he credits ENGL 253, his first experience studying law in a language other than Arabic, as a course which prepared him well and set him apart from other international students at his current university.

ReadTheory: A Multilevel Online Educational Tool

Glenn Stevens, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Finding appropriate materials for classes with mixed-ability students is a challenge for all teachers. One free online tool that is helping teachers to fulfill this need is ReadTheory. Originally developed at the University of North Carolina, ReadTheory is a website that offers extensive reading to students of mixed abilities and ages. It is completely free, user-friendly, caters to individual students' reading levels, and provides teachers with valuable data on their students' progress. The program is used by institutions worldwide and contains numerous reading passages and quizzes on a variety of topics.

One of ReadTheory's strengths is its accessibility and ease-of-use. Teachers simply create an account, set up a class, and then add students. When a student first accesses their account, they are taken to a mandatory diagnostic quiz containing several reading comprehension sets that assess their reading grade and lexical level. After completing the diagnostic test, students are presented a reading passage and quiz at their appropriate grade level. Students move up and down levels based on how they score on each reading quiz. Students who score above 90% move up to the next level, 70-90% are given a follow

up quiz at the same level, and those who score less than 70 are moved down to an easier reading level.

Adhering to the American Common Core State Standard, ReadTheory contains over 1,000 passages with activities containing mostly multiple-choice questions on key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge. (Hock, Plant-Kropp, & Romeo, 2016) Not only does ReadTheory serve as a diagnostic tool to assess students' reading level, it allows teachers to monitor their students' progress throughout the semester. Learners are given



Visual courtesy of Pixabay

feedback on their performance after each quiz, and ReadTheory provides data on how students are performing on each question type.

In conclusion, while ReadTheory should not replace the textbooks and outcome-based materials we currently use, it is an excellent resource for providing

extensive supplementary reading practice to our students. It promotes autonomous learning, gamification, and can be accessed from almost any electronic device. ReadTheory is also a learning tool which students can use long after your course is over, so why not introduce them to it?

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Visual courtesy of Shutterstock

The History of the Foundation Program - Part 5: 2001 - 2004

Elisabeth Szewczyk-Méziane, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Fall 2001 began with a new English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) Director, Sheika Amna Saud Al-Thani, who had been one of the first students to graduate from the Department of English and Modern Languages. She did her MA in English at the University of Portland, Oregon. After returning to Qatar in 1987, she taught in the ELTU until her appointment in 2001 as the ELTU Director with a staff of over 35 full-time instructors and ten or so part-time teachers.

Many changes took place during the years in which Sheika Amna helmed the ELTU. The focus on English for Specific Purposes continued as these courses were seen as essential stepping-stones to language competency in the programs taught in English such as Nursing, Engineering, and Science. The biggest change, in Spring 2002, was the closure of the College of Technology in Medina Khalifa South as a New-foundland government college, under the sponsorship of the Qatar government, was to open a branch polytechnic, the College of the North Atlantic-Qatar (CNA-Q). Teachers from the College of Technology were transferred to the main campus and reassigned to teach English for Business and Administration, Science, or English for Humanities, which

also included Shari'a and Islamic Studies. In addition, the Nursing English programme of four compulsory credit-courses was phased out although extant students continued to take classes until fall 2003.

One major triumph in 2002 was the long-awaited pay equity. Teachers hired from 1999 onwards received a higher salary, so this discrepancy needed to be addressed. In autumn 2002, thanks to Sheika Amna's untiring efforts, all ELTU teachers started to receive the same pay. The ELTU also sponsored the first English language-teaching society in Qatar, Q-TEN (Qatar-Teachers of English Network). Inaugurated in early 2003, it was open to all English language teachers in Qatar. Core ELTU founders included the late Marcia Hijab, Dr. Abdulhalim Abu-Jalalah, Dr. Muawia Abdulmajid, and Dr. Madani Osman.

In early 2004, a major change was announced by university officials. Concerned about new English language and math requirements introduced in government schools by the Supreme Council of Education (SEC) and taking note of the global and regional trend of having preparatory-year programs for first-year students, the Qatar University administration decided to create a two-year compulsory founda-

tion program which included English language, maths, and computer courses.

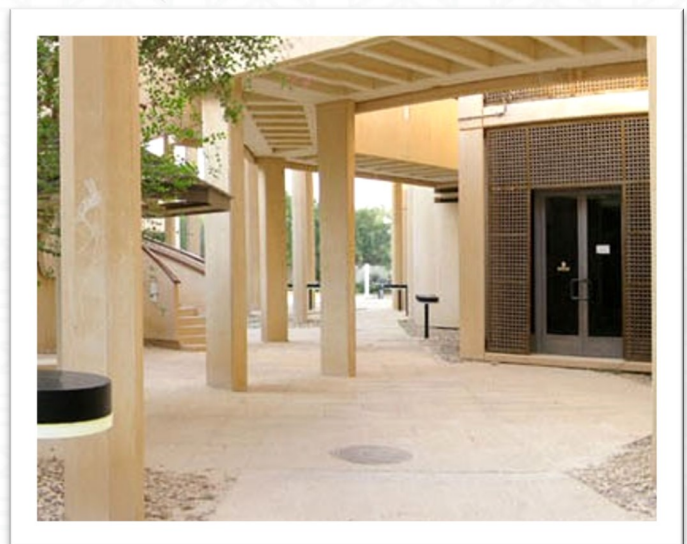
In March, 2004 all ELTU teachers were invited to a focus-group meeting; the newly appointed Director of Foundation, Dr. Khalid Al Ali, explained the university's plans and the acquisition of a new building which would house the offices of the new Foundation Program. In order to meet the deadline for the new program, Sheika Amna oversaw the establishment of course-teams to devise new syllabi and materials in addition to the recruitment of over thirty new instructors. There was a great deal of work to be accomplished, so everyone pulled together with less than three months to prepare for the Fall 2004 inauguration of the Foundation Pro-

gram.

An emotional end-of-term appreciation party was hosted by Shaika Amna to acknowledge not only the contributions of faculty and staff in having made the eighteen years of ELTU (1986-2004) a great success, but also to applaud the extraordinary efforts of staff members in having completed all preparations for the new English language foundation courses. An era of exceptional teaching success had come to an end, and a new one was about to begin.

Acknowledgements

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College of Engineering: Photograph courtesy of Mike Richards

Qatar University ELTU: A Regional English Language Symposium, 1991

Elisabeth Szewczyk-Méziane, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

After the success of the first English language symposium in 1987, sponsored by Qatar University (QU) and the English Language Unit (ELTU), the university administration had mandated to sponsor a regional event. However, this took some time due to the expansion of the unit, changes in management, and the development of new English for Special Purposes (ESP) programmes as well as increased course offerings. Nevertheless, with great pride, in December 1991, QU and ELTU hosted the Second English Language Symposium and the very first Gulf region international gathering of English language instructors. The symposium entitled 'Recent Developments in E.F.L. Classroom Applications in the Gulf', was the culmination of over a year of collaboration between QU, ELTU and various Gulf universities. Speakers and delegates came from Hong Kong, Mexico, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK, and the USA.

In the proceedings' foreword written by Paul Glanfield and William Hewett, the 1991 symposium, held in the Educational Technology Centre, aspired to "... relate the latest thinking in E.F.L. to the practicalities of effective language teaching in the classroom" (Glanfield & Hewett, 1991, p.3). In his

opening address, the president, Dr. Abdulla Al Kubaisi (1991), stated that "[a]t Qatar University, we always welcome critical thinking and encourage creative ideas. Through creativity and innovation, the past and the present are brought together to shape a better future. Knowledge and technology are being developed with increasing speed" (pp.11-12). He then added "[t]he Symposium emphasizes the importance of seeking new developments in the teaching of English which deal with objectives, methodologies, teaching materials, teaching aids, teacher performance appraisal, testing and materials evaluation. ... It is also hoped that these programs will enable learners to study independently and to contribute to shaping the future of our community" (pp.11-12). It is important to note that these educational goals have not changed: today language instructors are, more than ever, committed to fostering independent student-centered learning and critical thinking skills.

Conference sponsors included the British Council, the Ministry of Education, the Military Language School, and the Police School. The 2nd symposium also held an exhibition of books and materials in the Exhibitions Hall sponsored by the British Council, the Ameri-

can Cultural Centre, and various publishing companies and bookshops. Presentations included the following:

- Concordancing in the Classroom by Philip King
- Student-generated Exercises – Death of the Worksheet? by Susan Swales
- Some Principles of Cross-Cultural Research in EFL by Roger Nunn
- Attacking the Spelling Problem by Fouad Khalil
- Bridging the Gap Between Secondary and Tertiary Education: A Case Study in English Language Teaching Programme Design by Elizabeth Howell
- The Overstuffed Armchair: Enthusiasm, Reading, and Qatar by John Paul Rich
- English as a Global Language by Alvaro Romo

In her closing speech, the ELTU director, Sheika Muneera Al Thani (1991), noted the conference had provided enriching and resourceful discussions of significant issues as well as opportunities to confer with distinguished specialists in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). She added, "[s]uch symposia are meant to keep momentum with recent research and develop-

ments in the field ..." (p.197). And this momentum has certainly continued today, as Qatar University and the Foundation Program Department of English host annual international language conferences that provide educators with an interactive platform to share their research, ideas and practices, thus motivating English language instructors to confer, connect, and collaborate in an ongoing effort to promote best teaching practices.

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Technology Enhances Social Distancing in FPDE

Elisabeth Szewczyk-Méziane, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

During these troubling times of closed borders, lockdown, quarantine, self-isolation, many Foundation Program Department of English (FPDE) instructors, staff, and tutors are finding a sense of community within the FPDE Family WhatsApp group. This online group was started by Clint Mitchell in October, 2018 for a small group of faculty. However, Clint soon noticed that some of the participants were also including personal messages about themselves, various issues, or work-related topics while others were asking for advice or information. Feeling instructors needed an accessible platform to express themselves and voice their concerns, Clint

started a dedicated WhatsApp group.

Currently, there are over ninety participants; the platform is now a very pro-active, lively collaborative support group. Clint notes it is “a great place to chat, share videos, pictures or photos, discuss current events, and offer advice and support for work-related issues”. Nowadays, posts are often related to the current situation of the global Covid-19 pandemic. This includes Ministry of Health bulletins and updates, video-clips, self-isolation advice, newspaper or journal articles, and even video-clips about how people are coping with confinement around the world. There are

also personal exchanges about what faculty are doing; they upload things such as recipes, photos of activities, or tips on stress-relievers, etc. For many participants, the FPDE WhatsApp group has provided a welcome distraction as colleagues banter, comment, and upload articles they think will inform, amuse, or interest their colleagues. Shamsa Al Rushaidi, a group administrator, feels the FPDE Family WhatsApp group brings people together. “It’s a great platform to share experiences and feelings. Participants can have fun and express their sense of humor; the posts show a different side of people’s personality.”

Like Clint, she feels the plat-

form is an alternative way to offer practical information and views, particularly these days where many people often feel isolated and disconnected. The platform enables faculty members to better support their colleagues; everyone appreciates the information and ideas shared in the group. Most importantly, participants and even some course-facilitators, provide much-needed advice, suggestions, and information on remote teaching that help group-members resolve online-teaching and administrative issues. Faculty members who wish to join can contact the administration team with their WhatsApp number.



Foundation Program Department of English: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad (The photograph was taken before the outbreak of COVID-19)

Easton and Georgina Phidd: A Teaching Couple

David Pearson, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

What is it like to be part of a teaching couple at Qatar University? That is a question that Easton Phidd can answer well. He and his wife, Georgina Phidd, both work in the English Foundation Department of English. Easton is the course lead for the intensive Post Foundation 202 writing course.

Easton is originally from Ottawa, Canada. Before coming to Qatar, he and Georgina worked together in Canada and in Saudi

Arabia. Although they taught on different campuses in Saudi Arabia, they followed the same curriculum and participated together often in video conferences. Therefore, they have many years of experience working as a teaching couple.

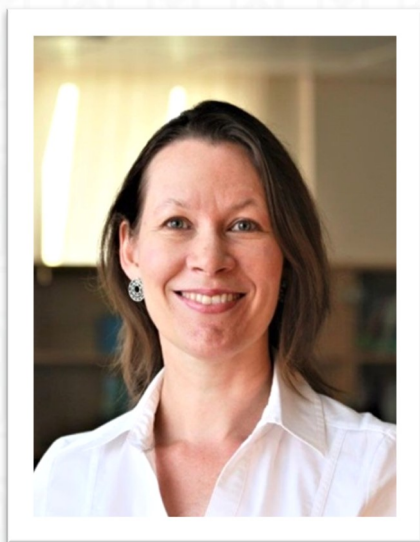
Some people might assume that working together could be a challenging experience because the stresses of work would inevitably be added to the stresses of family. However, Easton says that is not, in fact, the case.

First of all, he says, “We don’t actually see each other that much. We may arrive together and leave together, but we’re in our respective classes.” Teaching at the same university is very different than working in the same office in other businesses. It is normal to work an entire day without seeing one other.

Additionally, there are number of advantages to working in the same institution. When work is stressful, they have built-in support. Their spouse can empathize and understand their issues and anxieties. They can help solve each other’s problems. Likewise when work is rewarding and exciting, that is also something they can share.

“That’s the main thing,” says Easton, “since we are doing similar things. It’s actually amazing. Not only can we support each other emotionally, but occupationally we can help each other complete tasks.”

Rather than being a hindrance, says Easton, working together actually makes them more productive.



Georgina Phidd: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad



Easton Phidd: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

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Photograph courtesy of David Bartsch