FP Jareeda

In this Issue

The Ongoing Transition to Distance Learning

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

Welcome to issue 19 of the Foundation Program's quarterly newsletter, FP Jareeda.

Currently, the Foundation Program is continuing to transition to a distance learning environment.

Jeffrey Maggard's article provides an overview of this transition as well as exploring the challenges ahead.

Unsurprisingly, issue 19 contains several articles which exemplify our ongoing adaptation to distance learning. For example, Raed Marabeh's article titled *Instilling Intrinsic Motivation When Teaching Math* highlights how the Foundation Program Department of Math (FPDM) has been able to continue to meet the needs of our students.

I hope that you enjoy reading issue 19.

James Scotland: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

137 High School Students Participate in FP Al Qabas Virtual Program 2020

Hayat El Samad, Assistant Director for Student Affairs, Foundation Program; and Sara Salmeh, Engagement and Communications Specialist, Foundation Program

The Qatar University Foundation Program (FP), under the Deanship of General Studies, and in collaboration with the Office of the Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOE), launched the Al-Qabas Virtual Program 2020 from June 7th to June 11th.

The session was held online using the Blackboard Collaborate Ultra (BBCU) platform, as per instructions issued by the Qatari government and Qatar University during the mandatory quarantine period to limit the spread of COVID19 (Covid-19). 137 female high school students from 30 different schools participated in the program.

Under the theme *For a Successful University Experience*, this program aims to inform high school students in grades 10 and 11 about the study skills required to succeed in their university studies and offers advice on how to improve

their English and math skills for successful admission in STEM (Science Technology Engineering Medicine) programs offered at Qatar University. The program also provided information about QU admission requirements, QU student services, and test-taking strategies for those who wish to take international standardized tests.

In the first online session, Dr. Hezam Al-Awah, Director of the Foundation Program, welcomed the participating students and the presenters and urged them to make the most of the sessions.

"This program enhances the chances of success in future university life and paves the way for those wishing to join scientific (STEM) and health and medical majors that Qatar needs. These majors are considered as pillars for building a knowledge-based economy, which promotes innovation and increases productivity required to build the country. We hope that you graduate from high school and join the university, and that Qatar University will be your first choice. I also thank the Ministry of Education and Higher Education for the effective cooperation and communication with schools and female students during these circumstances, to ensure that students participate and benefit from the program."

Fawzeya Al-Malki, Academic and Career Counseling Specialist from the Education Supervision Department at the Office of the Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Affairs in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, also welcomed the high school students and explained the importance of participating in the Al-Qabas Program.

She encouraged students to make the most of the program and be aware of the admission requirements at the university as well as the test-taking strategies needed to do the placement exams and international tests in order to gain successful admission to their selected colleges. She concluded by advising the participating students to be proactive and engaged in the sessions to achieve the maximum benefit from the program.

The Al-Qabas Virtual Program consisted of two virtual sessions per day for one week. Fifteen FP faculty and staff members helped organize and deliver the program. There was an over 100% increase in student participation from the previous 2019 Al-Qabas Program. In total, 63 students attended all of the sessions. This year's sessions included a variety of interactive activities to improve math and English language skills. During the sessions, students solved various math problems using critical thinking and study strategies to help develop their math skills. Similarly, sessions
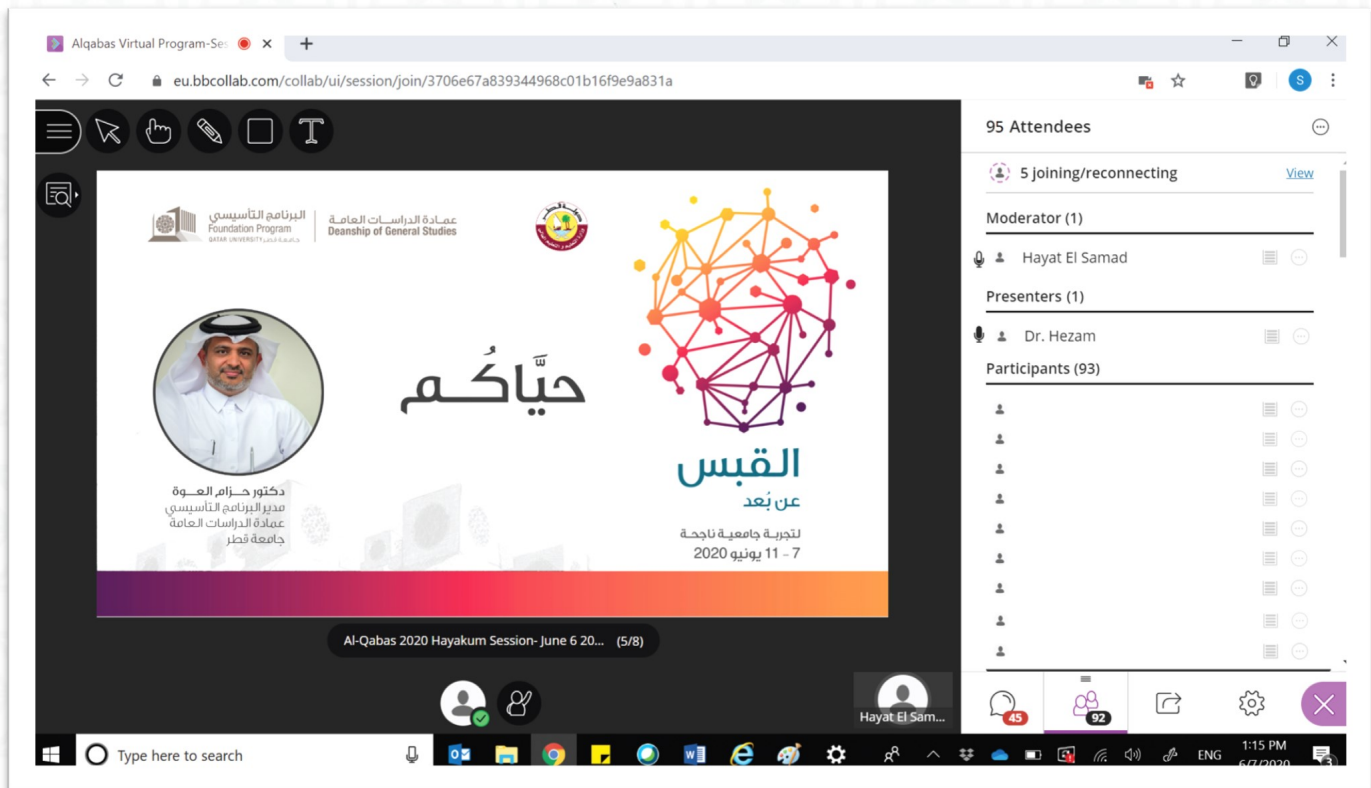
Dr. Hezam Al-Awah giving the welcoming speech at the Al-Qabas Virtual Program 2020: Visual courtesy of Sara Salmeh

targeting English skills, provided opportunities for students to learn reading skills, vocabulary from context strategies, and writing skills. Various online platforms such as like Brainiac Live, Quizlet, Kahoot, and EdPuzzle were used to engage students.

In addition, students benefited from two test-taking strategy sessions targeting skills required to be successful in international standardized language tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and standardized math tests, such as ACT (American College Test) and SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test).

In addition, the QU Enrollment Outreach and Engagement Department had a session about admission requirements, dates and program policies for QU and various university colleges. The Career Development Center also presented a session on exploring hobbies and selecting future occupations. It also provided communication channels for more information about the Qatari labor market. Both sessions included a Q&A component to answer all student queries. The final Al-Qabas Virtual Program session, *Succeeding in University Studies*, outlined the importance of study skills and life skills, such as time management and prioritization.

Student feedback was very positive with comments on how engaging and informative the Al-Qabas Virtual Program 2020 sessions were. Al-Qabas is a very nice program. We have benefited a lot as grade 11 students, as there are not many institutes and centers to go to during this crisis. Thank you for organizing Al-Qabas Program 2020, which allowed us to attend remotely from home, learn, and understand strategies to sit for international tests such as the IELTS, ACT and SAT. I learned how to solve math problems quickly in different ways, how to improve my reading skills in English, and many other things. Thanks to Al-Qabas 2020 program. I advise female students to register for Al-Qabas program 2021."

Another student wrote, "This experience was one of the nicest experiences that I benefited from during the summer vacation during Covid-19 crisis. This program opened many horizons for us and made us realize many things that we did not care about before. I hope Qatar University to continue offering these effective programs to the community."

All in all, student survey results showed high satisfaction rate regarding how much they had benefited from the sessions and how much they had learned from the Al-Qabas Program about the different skills needed to be a successful university student.
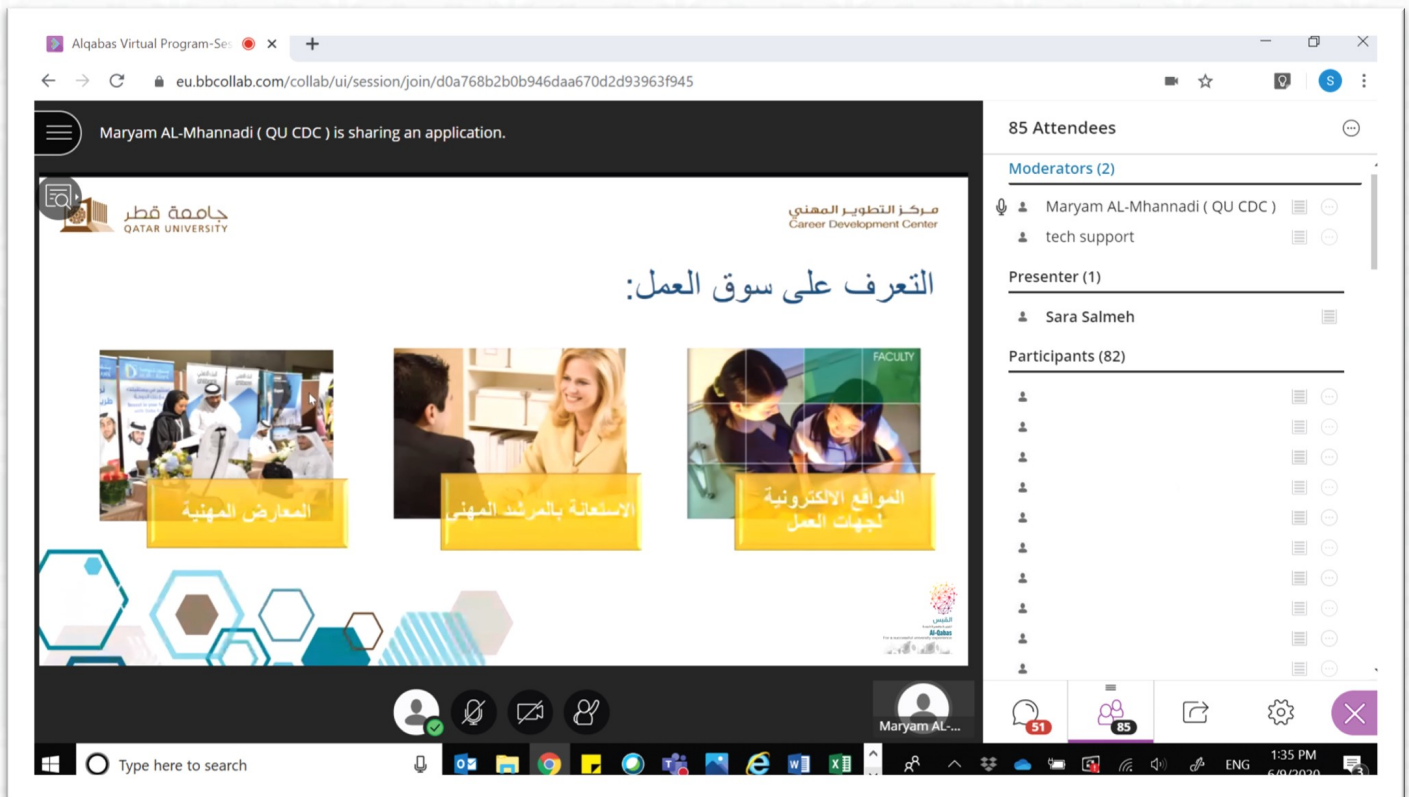
Introducing the QU Services Career Development Center: Visual courtesy of Sara Salmeh

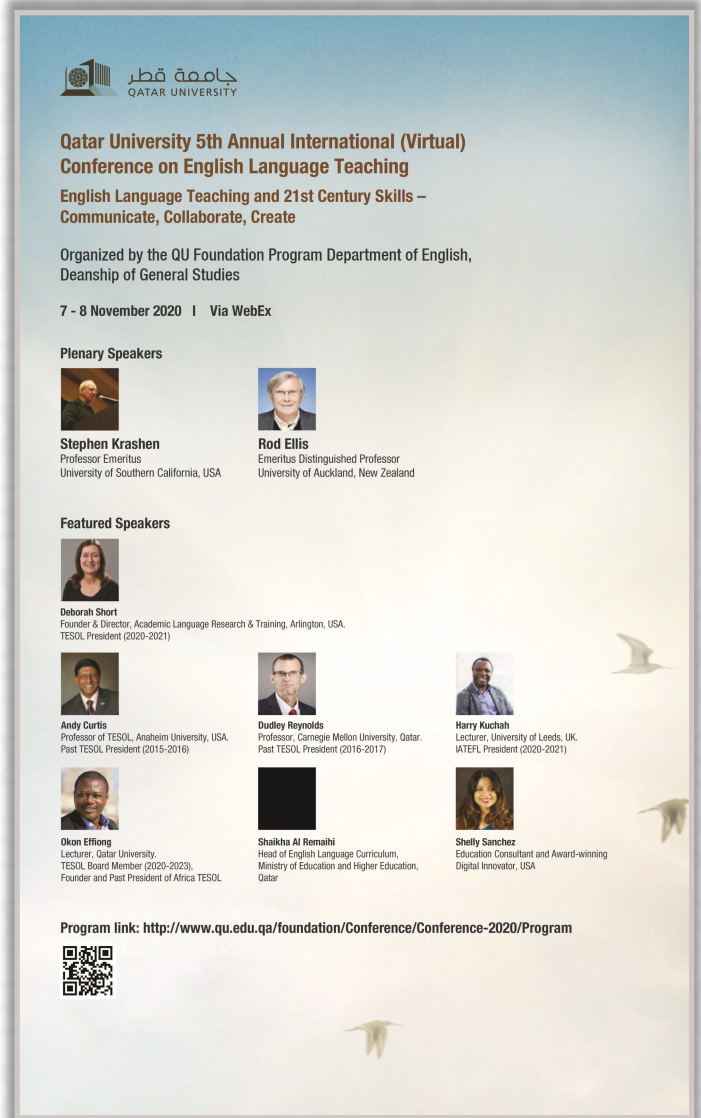# QU 5th Annual International (Virtual) Conference on ELT

Dr. Okon Effiong, Chair of FPDE Conference Committee, Foundation Program Mohammed Chadi, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Qatar University's Foundation Program Department of English (FPDE) will host its 5th annual international conference on the 7th and 8th of November, 2020. This year's theme is *English Language Teaching and 21st Century Skills: Communicate, Collaborate, Create*. Over the years, our conference has continued to gain regional and international recognition for its provision of professional development opportunities for English language teachers. This year's conference will be virtual.

The FPDE continues to partner with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) Qatar to ensure that high school teachers in Qatar benefit from the event. Thus, we will be awarding credit hours to participating public school teachers. This year, the conference committee has received proposals from 40 countries and has also secured several world renowned keynote speakers.

Our plenary speakers are Stephen Krashen and Rod Ellis. Among the featured speakers are Shaikha Alremaihi, MOEHE, Qatar, Harry Kuchah, IATEFL President, Deborah Short, TESOL President, Dudley Reynolds, TESOL Past President, Andy Curtis, TESOL Past President, Shelley Terrell, Award-winning digital innovator, and the chair of the FPDE Conference Committee, Okon Effiong, TESOL Board Member and Founder of Africa TESOL.

The 5th edition will be inaugurated by Dr. Hassan Rashid Al-Derham, President of Qatar University. Dr. Al-Derham is expected to deliver an opening speech to welcome the participants and attendees from the four corners of the world. Dr. Al-Derham is expected to also highlight Qatar University's (QU) commitment to quality education through its continuous support of high caliber professional development events.

جامعة قطر
QATAR UNIVERSITY

Qatar University 5th Annual International (Virtual) Conference on English Language Teaching

English Language Teaching and 21st Century Skills – Communicate, Collaborate, Create

Organized by the QU Foundation Program Department of English, Deanship of General Studies

7 - 8 November 2020 | Via WebEx

Plenary Speakers

Stephen Krashen
Professor Emeritus
University of Southern California, USA

Rod Ellis
Emeritus Distinguished Professor
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Featured Speakers

Deborah Short
Founder & Director, Academic Language Research & Training, Arlington, USA.
TESOL President (2020-2021)

Andy Curtis
Professor of TESOL, Anaheim University, USA.
Past TESOL President (2015-2016)

Dudley Reynolds
Professor, Carnegie Mellon University, Qatar.
Past TESOL President (2016-2017)

Harry Kuchah
Lecturer, University of Leeds, UK.
IATEFL President (2020-2021)

Okon Effiong
Lecturer, Qatar University.
TESOL Board Member (2020-2023),
Founder and Past President of Africa TESOL

Shaikha Al Remaihi
Head of English Language Curriculum,
Ministry of Education and Higher Education,
Qatar

Shelly Sanchez
Education Consultant and Award-winning
Digital Innovator, USA

Program link: http://www.qu.edu.qa/foundation/Conference/Conference-2020/Program

QU Hosts a Webinar Titled Language Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Sara Salmeh, Engagement and Communications Specialist, Foundation Program

Qatar University's (QU) Foundation Program (FP) and Deanship of General Studies, in collaboration with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), organized a webinar under the title *Language Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic* via WebEx on the 5th of July 2020.

Language experts from Qatar, Canada, and the USA ran the discussion. The webinar brought together over 150 faculty from universities and language centers around the world. This webinar aimed to exchange experiences between educational programs in language teaching and to highlight the challenges facing language education in light of the outbreak of COVID-19. The effects of these challenges, contemporary solutions, and insights for future language education across the globe were discussed during the session.

The Director of the FP, Dr.

Hezam Al-Awah, said, "We are keen to provide insights from language programs and discuss the initiatives taken and the strategies employed by the language teachers, course leads and program administrators to develop contingency plans to address the challenges posed by the pandemic. This webinar is important as it addresses the challenges that affect our students in terms of language acquisition and the use of language in relation to academic performance." Dr. Al-Awah thanked the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for their collaboration in organizing this event.

The director of the CETL, Dr. Husam Aldamen, said, "CETL is pleased to forge this important partnership with the Deanship for General Studies, via the FP, which is known for its exemplary quality of teaching and learning. This event takes on a special significance as it deals with language edu-

cation, which is a field that often requires constant contact and engagement. The expert panelists' reflection on their experience will be beneficial to language educators and others from various disciplines at Qatar University and other educational institutions worldwide."

The head of the Foundation Program Department of English (FPDE), Dr. Mohamed Manasreh, said, "Such webinars enrich the faculty knowledge and help to know the strengths as well as the areas that must be improved. This includes QU curriculum and the professional development of faculty. Such events provide knowledge of capabilities in these challenging circumstances."

The webinar panelists were: Mr. Kashif Raza, lecturer in English at the Foundation Program at Qatar University, Dr. Mick King, the Chair of Foundation English at the Commu-

nity College of Qatar, Dr. Dudley Reynolds, Teaching Professor of English at the Carnegie Mellon University Qatar and, Dr. Shahid Abrar-ul-Hassan, Professor and Course Lead at the Yorkville University, Canada. The panelists discussed the following questions:

- What challenges did the pandemic pose for language education?

- What strategies were/are employed to address these challenges?

- What are the future implications of current online education at classroom, program, and field levels?

The webinar concluded with a question and answer session in which the panelists answered attendees' questions and shared their final thoughts.

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in collaboration with the Foundation Program, Deanship of General Studies cordially invite you to attend webinar on:

Language Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Sunday, 5 July, 2020
5:30 pm (Qatar Time)
Via WebEx Application
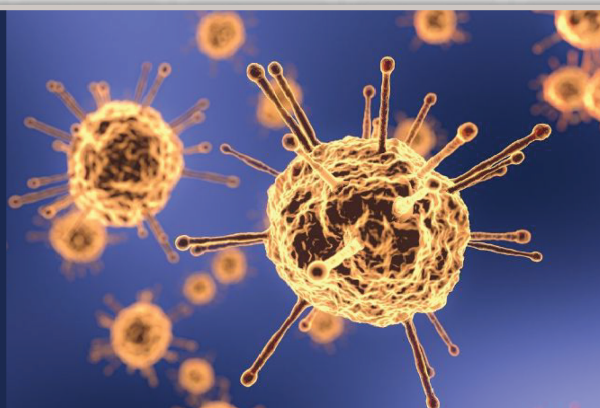
Transitioning to Distance Learning

Jeffrey Maggard, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

When the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated home quarantine measures, the Foundation Program (FP) proved it was equipped to teach all courses online. It also demonstrated leadership in developing communities of knowledge, facilitating the acquisition of best practices for online learning, and enhancing technical skills to ensure students met learning objectives at Qatar University.

Last March, FP administrators, faculty and staff took swift action to equip all faculty with the tools necessary to maximize online teaching and learning efficacy. In one semester, the FP Academic Excellence and Professional Development Committee (AE&PDC) shared more than 50 webinars, organized ten professional development workshops and presented in-house demonstration lessons. Additionally, the Academic Excellence Committee held a virtual professional development event in which more than four thousand professional educators from 31 countries attended, with eighty-five percent of the participants coming from schools in Qatar.

As lessons moved online, student support services seamlessly adapted as well. The FP Student Affairs Office ensured that the FP Success Zone continued to provide the same level and range of English and math tutoring services. The FP Special Needs Committee initiated online support for special needs students, and all FP faculty held office hours remotely. In short, the FP successfully transitioned to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Ongoing Challenges

At present, the FP is as strong as ever; yet a few technological challenges exist for some of its students. For instance, insufficient bandwidth or the possessing power of an outdated digital device are challenges that will not be resolved in the near future.

Among the most significant non-technological challenges the FP faces with regard to online learning is the continuing lack of human interaction. Because students no longer have face-to-face contact, some might not develop a strong sense of trust in their classmates and/or teachers. Students generally like to be around other students and their teachers. If a student becomes disengaged in a lesson, they only have to look into the palms of their hands, or at their fingertips, to access the largest source of distraction ever created, their smartphone.

A key challenge for the FP, therefore, is to train faculty to develop their students' sense of trust and keep them engaged. Knowing a person's name and using it frequently is not old school; it is essential to fostering productive, supportive, digital learning environments that have a human touch. The best way to increase motivation is through continuous use of classroom assessment techniques. This means, at the very least, faculty should be continuously asking students for feedback via the polling feature and/or calling students by name to request input or feedback every 10 minutes.

Future Challenges

It is abundantly clear that the Foundation Program is highly equipped to teach online as effectively as face-to-face courses. It is also important to recognize that motivation and engagement issues are not unique to online teaching environments. The challenge for the FP with regard to online learning is the same as with face to face instruction: there is an ongoing need to identify the reasons for lack of engagement or motivation and to offer solutions that inspire all to learn.

Visual courtesy of Rawpixel

Faculty Focus: Dr. Rhouma, Department Head of Math, Foundation Program

Jerry Brewington, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Interviewer: Dr. Mohamed Ben Haj Rhouma, the Department Head of the Foundation Program Department of Math (FPDM) at Qatar University (QU), thank you for speaking with us today. Can you tell us a little bit about your professional background and your journey to QU's Foundation Program?

Dr. Rhouma: Absolutely. I obtained my Ph.D from the University of Missouri Columbia in 1999 and subsequently held a post-doctoral position at Georgia Institute of Technology in the United States. I worked at the University of Missouri for a couple of years, and then I worked for about 10 years at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. I am in my seventh year at QU. When I first came here, I joined the Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Physics in the College of Arts and Science. I have been the head of the FPDM for the last three years.

Interviewer: Very impressive, Dr. Rhouma. I want to ask you, generally speaking, about the difficulties that QU students face when they enter the FP wanting a specific university major that requires advanced Mathematics.

Dr. Rhouma: What we do in the FP, both in English and math, is sharpen student skills. In the FPDM, we dot the i's of the concepts, and we work on critical thinking and advanced calculations to bring students up to a level where they can take a series of calculus courses. I also would add that our advanced math courses are mostly offered in English.

Interviewer: I see. I imagine these calculus courses can be challenging.

Dr. Rhouma: Many undergraduate science majors require a strong knowledge of calculus. For example, engineering students must take a series of four calculus courses to complete their degrees.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about the course and student learning objectives in the FPDM?

Dr. Rhouma: Sure. The main goals are to enable students to manipulate algebraic expressions properly and to use critical thinking. This involves learning the language of mathematics in order to solve problems within, and outside of, their major course of study.

Interviewer: For students to problem solve in mathematics, do they need to have the right tools?

Dr. Rhouma: That's right. Any field of study, or job if you will, requires having the right tools and knowing how to use them. As mentioned before, problem solving, critical thinking, and an ability to learn the language of mathematics.

Dr. Rhouma: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

Interviewer: Does the FPDM have a specific support program for students, or is it in tandem with the Foundation Program Success Zone (FPSZ)?

Dr. Rhouma: Historically, there used to be a separate support program, but now it's part of the FPSZ. The FPDM has a team of five teaching assistants and one lab specialist whose job is mainly to help students and give them enough support outside of class. Students get help, ask questions, and review what they learned in class. Additionally, students receive in-class support from teaching assistants during class lectures. The teaching assistants transition from one individual or group to the next, in order to assist students with worksheets and activities.

Interviewer: That's excellent. To what extent does your department utilize technology, specifically in terms of mathematics?

Dr. Rhouma: Technology in education is becoming so ubiquitous these days. We use calculation apps and graphing apps as well as on-line activities. We are also planning to move into more technological applications for students in and out of the classroom. For our most recent conference, Qatar Math Day, we invited technology company representatives and trainers that we felt might be valuable for our students. We will continue to do so in the future.

Interviewer: That's great. Finally Dr. Rhouma, is there a message that you have for new students who are intimidated by mathematics when they arrive at Qatar University Foundation Program (QUFP)?

Dr. Rhouma: It's hard to believe but mathematics is like human language. The goal is to express yourself, or solve a problem, in a concise, elegant manner. The more we do that, the better we become at it. Practice! Practice! Practice!

Interviewer: Beautifully put! Dr. Rhouma, on behalf of FP Jareeda and myself, many thanks for your time, your team, and your leadership, and letting us get to know how the FPDM meets the needs of our students.

Dr. Rhouma: You are very welcome, anytime.

Dr. Rhouma: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

FP Faculty Volunteering in Qatar

Tiffany Tillman, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Donating your time for the benefit of others impacts the community positively and can change the way you see and experience the world. Several Foundation Program (FP) faculty and staff spend their time outside of work giving back to the greater Qatari community by volunteering for causes that are dear to them. This article highlights the work of one such faculty, Andrew Imrie.

Andrew Imrie

Andrew Imrie, his wife and two children volunteer with the Doha Environmental Actions Project, a group focused on beach and sand dune cleanup. The aim of the project is to restore the natural beauty of the beaches and sand dunes in Qatar. Every week they organize trips to beaches in Qatar where volunteers roam the beaches with trash bags and pick up plastic and other debris left behind. The group has done over 170 beach cleanups and removed thousands of tons of rubbish from the beaches and dunes of Qatar.

Andrew was drawn to this organization because he feels that Qatar has beautiful beaches and sand dunes, but they are often spoiled by rubbish left by visitors or washed up from the sea.

When asked to reflect on his volunteering experience, Andrew stated, "It has been a very rewarding experience. I do it together with my family, so it is a way of spending time together, doing something useful, and hopefully my children are learning more about Qatar and the environment."

Andrew's efforts to help support the community we all live in are commendable. It is inspiring to see our faculty taking a bit of time from their hectic lives to create positive changes here in Qatar.
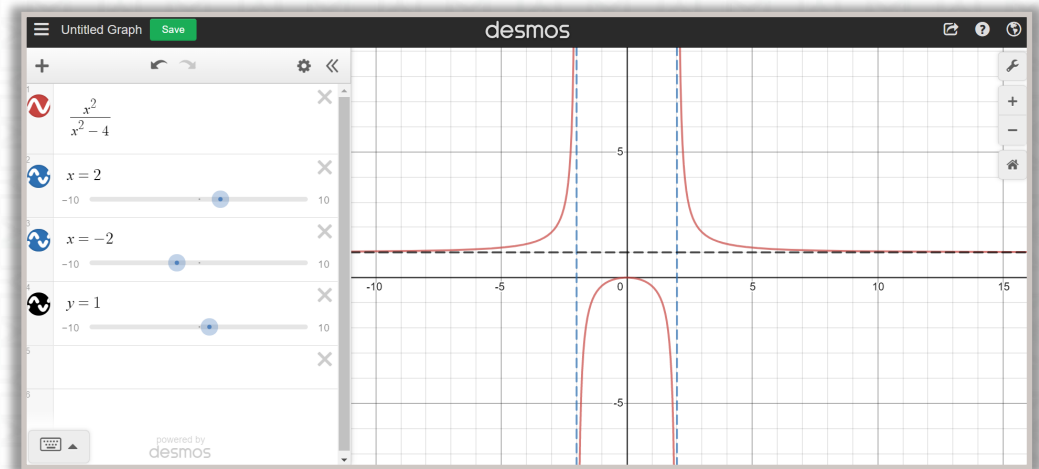

Andrew Imrie and son cleaning up the beaches: Photograph courtesy of Andrew Imrie

Instilling Intrinsic Motivation When Teaching Math

Raed Marabeh, Teaching Assistant of Math, Foundation Program

Teachers in Foundation Program Department of Math (FPDM) strongly believe that motivation plays a vital role in every student's learning and development journey. Sometimes, inspiring students is not an easy task. Encouraging them to become autonomous learners, seek knowledge, acquire understanding, and develop and utilize what they have learned, is an important goal for each teacher in the FPDM.

Using Desmos in graphing a rational function: Visual courtesy of Raed Marabeh

It is important to deliver content in a way that grabs students' attention and fully engages them in their learning experience. FPDM teachers exert a lot of energy and effort to determine each student's abilities and competencies as well as their challenges. Once this has been established, teachers select the best teaching/learning method to match each student's individual ability and then apply appropriate strategies to intrinsically engage and motivate them. In order to ensure success, instill motivation, and give learners multiple opportunities for self-expression, a wide variety of educational techniques are employed by FPDM teachers; these have had a major impact on students and improved their engagement, participation and results.

In math classes, intrinsic motivation is cultivated in several ways. The FPDM uses software programs such as Desmos, that graphs hard functions and helps to make them comprehensible. Students enjoy using Desmos because it enables them to graph their own functions without having to ask their teacher for help. Another strategy, used by math teachers to increase intrinsic motivation in math class, is to assign students a variety of activities through differentiation, for example, giving students writing tasks related to the environment and to what is happening in the classroom, and then linking these observations to real life experiences. Such tasks empower students to be more curious and experiment more. In addition, intrinsic motivation in math classes is cultivated by providing precise and authentic feedback. One effective strategy used by the FPDM is to show cause and effect relationships between what is done in class and things that may occur in their future careers.

Intrinsic motivation in math classes is an essential element in the student learning cycle. Passionate and dedicated teachers who promote self-esteem and encourage independent learning can motivate students to improve and perform better. A successful learning experience results in a sense of achievement and pride for both the instructor and the student.

Visual courtesy of Pexels

Screencast-O-Matic for Writing Assignments

Dr. Abir Ahmed, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Writing instructors make comments and use error codes to achieve the ultimate goal of helping their students write better papers. Yet, many students are unable to understand these comments or address them (Cranny, 2016; Thompson & Lee, 2012). Using Screencast-O-Matic to provide feedback can help to address this issue.

Screencast-O-Matic is one of the most popular screencast tools. A screencast is a digital and audio recording that captures a presenter's screen. Screencast-O-Matic has free and premium versions. The latter can be downloaded from https://screencast-o-matic.com/, and a user can record up to 15 minutes of content. Adopting Screencast-O-Matic in writing classes is in line with the mission of the Foundation Program. Among the key skills identified in the mission statement are the development of language and critical thinking. Thanks to Screencast-O-Matic, language instructors will be better able to foster these skills. In this article, I will share how Screencast-O-Matic can add much-added clarity to the written feedback process with students with high and low proficiency in English.

Screencast-O-Matic helps writing instructors give suggestions, comments, or highlight content-related problems. These can include gaps in logic, repetitive content, or weak arguments. Comments such as 'weak argument', or 'irrelevant idea' can be baffling to students. In the screencast feedback, the instructor reads aloud the sentence in question and poses several questions for the student to think about. Hence, it is more likely for students to act on these comments and incorporate them into their future drafts and assignments.

Screencast-O-Matic is also beneficial in addressing grammatical errors. The instructor can focus on subject-verb agreement, for instance. The instructor can ask a student who wrote 'many students struggles with writing' several questions. '"What is the subject in this sentence?", or "what does adding an –s to the verb indicate?" These questions might be easier for the student to understand than the code SVA (Subject Verb Agreement).

Screencast-O-Matic is a tool that can make the writing feedback process much more effective and efficient. Its uses are endless.

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Visual courtesy of Pixabay

Using M-Reader as an Extensive Reading Assessment Tool

Glenn Stevens, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Extensive reading, or reading for pleasure rather than as a lesson activity, has often been lauded as an effective and motivational way of improving learners' proficiency in a foreign language. This is because students choose their own materials to gain more exposure to the target language (Chien & Yu, 2013). Not only does extensive reading greatly broaden their vocabulary, but it also helps learners to become more autonomous (Donaghy, 2016). As influential author and former managing director of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at Cambridge Assessment English, Christine Nuttall once said "[t]he best way to improve one's knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it" (Nuttall, 1982, p.168). Therefore, with the aim of encouraging extensive reading, in both the elementary (R001) and intermediate (R002) Reading Workshop courses offered by the Foundation Program Department of English, students check out a series of graded reader books from Qatar University's library before taking corresponding quizzes using a website called M-Reader.

M-Reader is a free online program that helps institutes implement extensive reading into their courses and assess it effectively. It contains around 8,000 quizzes covering some of the most popular graded readers available and is used by over 100,000 students in around 350 schools worldwide (Nation & Waring, 2019). A standard quiz contains 10 randomly selected questions from a bank of about 30-40 items per book. Questions are predominantly multiple choice with the occasional ordering-of-events item thrown in.

There are different ways to apply M-Reader into an extensive reading program. For instance, teachers can require students to reach specific book levels, fulfill a total goal of words read, or simply monitor the number of quizzes passed. In the Reading Workshop courses, we use a points-per-book method following the Kyoto scale that is based on a book's headword count (Nation & Waring, 2019). Students in R001 are encouraged to select books from the first three levels before tackling level four and above in R002. After selecting their books, students take the corresponding M-Reader quiz under the teacher's supervision. When a student scores 60% or above on a quiz, they are awarded the same number of points as the book's level, thus motivating them to try higher-level books in order to gain more points. Recent studies have shown that Mreader has had a significant impact on motivating students to read more (Damen, 2018).

In conclusion, M-Reader is a user-friendly assessment tool that helps teachers verify whether students have read a graded reader or not (Milliner, 2014). M-Reader has made assessing the extensive reading component of the Foundation Program of English's (FPDE) Reading Workshop courses faster and easier for both students and teachers.

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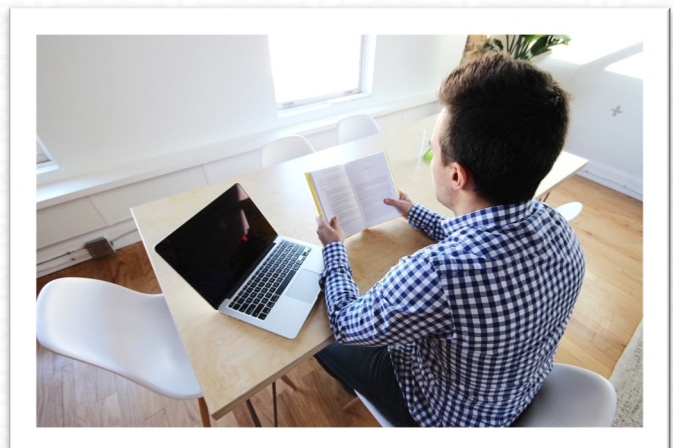
Visual courtesy of Pixabay

The Foundation Program Excellence in Teaching Award

David Pearson, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

The Foundation Program Excellence in Teaching Award is awarded annually and is designed to recognize faculty members for their outstanding efforts at fulfilling the mission of the program. The award further aims to celebrate effective, creative, and innovative teaching practices which can be shared among the faculty.

The winners for the academic year 2019-2020, are Dr. Mohamed Chabi in the Foundation Program Department of Math (FPDM), as well as Dr. Abir Ahmed and Mr. Alaeddin Halwani in the Foundation Program Department of English (FPDE).

This year's winners share a number of exemplary teaching practices, including their efforts to motivate students.

Dr. Abir Ahmed remarked, "It is of paramount importance to me to help my students have a passion for the subject they are learning. If they are passionate, motivation and engagement will follow and learning will take place." Mr. Alaeddin Halwani echoed this sentiment, commenting that he strives to use unique approaches to motivate his students by "creating authentic learning experiences grounded in core academic content." Dr. Mohamed Chabi added that the most rewarding aspect of teaching is seeing his students challenge themselves while also connecting "math concepts to real life applications."

This year's winners also stressed the importance of providing students with skills applicable outside the classroom.

Mr. Alaeddin Halwani stated one of his most rewarding experiences is "giving students the language skills they need to go out into the world and succeed." Dr. Mohamed Chabi commented, "The most important skill I teach my students is the ability to think critically. That way I can assure that my students are long term learners and can use their skills beyond the classroom." Dr. Abir Ahmed added, "Critical thinking and life-long learning are also important for academic success. Thus, they are emphasized and reinforced in my classes."

The Foundation Program is pleased to celebrate the success of our distinguished colleagues and to share their best practices with faculty.

Dr. Mohamed Chabi: Photograph courtesy of Dr. Mohamed Chabi

Dr. Abir Ahmed: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

Alaeddin Halwani: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

The Foundation Program's E-learning Committee: An Interview with Sarah Hwa

Sara Salmeh, Engagement and Communications Specialist, Foundation Program

Sarah Hwa: Photograph courtesy of Ahmad Hazratzad

Interviewer: Mrs. Sarah, as the chair of the Foundation Program's (FP) E-learning Committee, how have you dealt with the new teaching and learning transition to on-line platforms?

Mrs. Hwa: When the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOE) in Qatar announced that all students should not go to Qatar University campus classes until further notice, the FP E-Learning Committee ensured a smooth transition of teachers and students' learning online.

To provide training to our faculty, we collaborated with the FP Academic Excellence Committee. Training was conducted via webinar using different platforms such as Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, Microsoft Teams, Webex, and Zoom. Moreover, an online helpdesk was set up with dedicated hours for everyone to efficiently troubleshoot and resolve any issues that may arise. The E-learning Committee members also engaged in providing assistance to faculty on using the various online platforms.

Interviewer: I imagine you and your team have been putting in long hours.

Mrs. Hwa: All team members are available to all faculty for questions or problems that they encounter, even outside of the dedicated online helpdesk hours.

Interviewer: What kind of support have you been providing to FP faculty?

Mrs. Hwa: Prior to the lockdown, our team members had dedicated face to face hours for faculty to approach them for any IT related issues. At the beginning of the transition to distance learning, we extended these hours and switched to video-conferencing and email. Our support initially focused on helping faculty to use the various online platforms such as Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. Our support later focused on teaching delivery and online assessment.

Interviewer: What plan might you implement in the future in order to enhance student learning outcomes or faculty experience?

Mrs. Hwa: We plan to equip teachers with in-demand and updated e-learning resources, video recorded lectures, and online courses. Continuous training will be provided to faculty. We also plan to create online materials either for tutorials or as supplementary materials for students to refer to.

Interviewer: Is there any other information you would like to add?

Mrs. Hwa: I wish to thank QU's IT department as it has always provided the FP with support and technical advice, assisted with resolving issues related to Foundation's missions and goals as well as providing us with alternative solutions.

Interviewer: Thanks Sarah to you and to your team for all your effort.

Faculty Focus: Mr. Salim Salim, Math Lecturer in the Mathematics Program Department of Math

Raed Marabeh, Teaching Assistant of Math, Foundation Program

Interviewer: Please tell me about yourself.

Mr. Salim: With pleasure, I am Iraqi, I was born in Baghdad and did both my Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Master of Science (MSc) in Mathematics at Baghdad University. I graduated in 1989.

Interviewer: Let's move on to your teaching career. When did you start teaching?

Mr. Salim: In 1988, I started my first university teaching position while I was still studying for my MSc and I have been teaching mathematics ever since.

Interviewer: When did you start teaching at Qatar University (QU)?

Mr. Salim: I began teaching at QU in September 2000 at the College of Technology in Madina Khalifa North. I taught there until August 2004 when the college closed. I then joined the Foundation Unit, as it was called then, in September 2004.

Interviewer: What do you do as a math lecturer?

Mr. Salim: I teach both Math 021 (Elementary Algebra) and Math P100 (Pre-Calculus) to undergraduate first year students who are required to take math foundation courses.

Interviewer: What has been the most challenging aspect of teaching math?

Mr. Salim: For me, it has been finding the best teaching methods both in and out of the class to ensure student engagement. I try to encourage students to build self-confidence and learner independence to ensure a better understanding of the subject matter, so they can use it not only in class but also in daily life. I do my best to help them become autonomous learners, good critical thinkers, and decision-makers.

Interviewer: What have been some of your best moments as a teacher?

Mr. Salim: For me, it is the look of comprehension and then the smile on students' faces when they truly understand what they have been taught. I also appreciate the moments of gratitude when they thank me and appreciate what I have been trying to do and why I've done it.

Interviewer: In light of the coronavirus pandemic, QU has switched to remote instruction. Tell us about your experience teaching online.

Mr. Salim: I am sure that every instructor has his or her own story. In the FPDM, we mainly use two online learning platforms: Blackboard Collaborate Ultra (BBCU) and Microsoft Teams (MT). In the FPDM, we work together to choose the best methods for teaching online classes, monitoring student achievement as well as following up student assignments, quizzes and tests. Our primary objective is to be fair yet also ensure maximum security.

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for your colleagues?

Mr. Salim: Essentially, what all instructors know well: good time management skills, clear objectives for both the teacher and students, and a ready plan B just in case something happens. You need to keep at least two or three steps ahead and being prepared will help you to do this.

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for students?

Mr. Salim: As with teachers, good time management is important. Students need to do their assignments on time, if not before the due date. It is also helpful to take notes, and mark important dates for assignments, quizzes, and tests. Students need to manage their time accordingly. In this way, they can become part of the QU success story.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Mr. Salim, for sharing your experiences with us.

Mr. Salim Salim: Photograph courtesy of Mr. Salim Salim

Faculty Profile: Indrit Bulku

Elisabeth Szewczyk-Méziane, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Indrit Bulku, our current FPDE (Foundation Program Department of English) Curriculum Lead, is a multi-faceted educator who speaks three languages: Albanian, Turkish, and English. Not only is he an experienced and respected pedagogue, textbook author, and award-winning scholar, Indrit is also a talented concert violinist. In 1995, he graduated with a degree in music from a prestigious music academy in Tirana, his native city. Invited to Italy to continue his musical education at the Music Academy of Bologna, Indrit made a life-changing and pragmatic decision to follow another career path, that of an English language teacher.

In order to do this, Indrit moved to Turkey where he specialized in English-language studies at Marmara University, Istanbul. After graduation, his first teaching position was Yeditepe University, a private foundation university. His outstanding abilities as a teacher were soon noted and he was appointed assistant co-ordinator of Reading and Writing skills. During this time, he also published a book designed for these courses. Indrit then decided to complete his master's degree at Yeditepe University. Ever innovative and motivated, he published another book for the reading and writing courses at the university.

In 2010, Indrit joined the FPDE and was quickly assigned to the curriculum committee where he once again showed his remarkable penchant for curriculum design and mentoring. During the massive Foundation Program (FP) 2011 restructuring, which introduced a series of 8 week modular courses, Indrit was appointed assistant co-ordinator of the modular reading courses. However, the FP then decided to go back to regular full semester courses after Qatar University's 2012 decision to offer Arabic-medium instruction for several colleges. Students in the colleges were still required to take English language courses, so the FP then introduced four credit-courses (Embedded) for these colleges. Indrit was appointed the testing co-ordinator (liaison) to ensure fair and balanced assessment for the new courses.

The Embedded program, since its inception, has undergone a number of changes. Indrit's next hat was as the Course Lead for English for Communication courses (ENGL 250, 251, 252 and 253). As lead, he has made an extraordinary effort to consolidate and improve these courses. It was noted that the Embedded

Indrit Bulku: Photograph courtesy of Indrit Bulku

courses needed better alignment, so Indrit was then appointed the Embedded program consultant and helped design a more cohesive and consolidated series of courses. One major recent achievement has been the introduction of assessment maps, which allow for content and skill progression during the two years that students take these courses. To help achieve these goals, Indrit and his team have embarked upon a collaboration with Garnet Publishing to produce a series of four integrated skills coursebooks for the Embedded classes; these will be aligned with the PLOs (Program Learning Outcomes) and SLOs (Student Learning Outcomes) of the Core Curriculum credit courses. The series

will begin with a preparatory book with a wide variety of activities to consolidate language skills and has the flexibility to be regularly adapted and improved for each edition.

Currently Indrit is working on his doctorate degree on the authenticity of ESP (English for Special Purposes) assessments in language tests. In 2019, he won the prestigious BALEAP (The British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes) Award and has been invited to present at the next BALEAP conference. Hats off to our extraordinary Curriculum Lead, Indrit Bulku, an educator who wears many hats indeed.

Five ways to Increase Learner Participation in Online Classrooms

Tiffany Tillman, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Universities around the world have been challenged to transition courses to an online format due to COVID-19. This has been challenging at times, but one result has been an increased understanding of what it takes to make effective online classes that are rich with student participation. Here are a few tips for increasing learner participation in online classrooms.

Familiarize yourself with your learning management system (LMS)

Getting used to any new software takes time, and when that is accompanied by the stress of trying to learn new information and earn good marks, it can be overwhelming for students. Instructors can mitigate this by having strong knowledge of the LMS being used. Explore the system from both the administrative and end-user side, and remember that administration features are usually more complex, and often have a different screen than the students. If you only know the back end of a system, your directions may not be helpful to the student.

Model engagement yourself

Instructors need to show that they know what is happening in the classroom by paying attention and reaching out to students before they ask for it. Using the chat box regularly for quick comprehension checks is something that can easily be viewed by the instructor to see which students are consistently not participating and follow up to check on the student. Following up helps the instructor address problems early on and provide additional resources if needed.

Do not force students to figure out lesson material and complicated software in every class

Any system which requires a struggle to perform simple tasks, such as contacting the instructor, locating lessons, quizzes, assignments, and tests, or sending an email could discourage even the most eager student. Students should not spend their time learning how to navigate an unfamiliar platform or application.

Set consistent expectations and regular, predictable activities

Simple, clear, consistent requirements will not only help to alleviate confusion, it will increase comfort in the classroom and the ease with which students can participate. Complex instructions and unpredictable lessons can increase the cognitive load for students.

Create spaces to participate both inside and outside of class time

Cultivate collaboration, engagement and discussion by using technology to foster both synchronistic and asynchronistic online discussions. Require small group discussions during class and discussion boards for outside class where students who are quieter or need more time are able to post their responses.

While engaging students can be difficult in the virtual classroom, adherence to these five suggestions can aid in increasing and fostering learner participation online.

Visual courtesy of iStock

The History of the Foundation Program of English - Part 6: 2004 – 2005

Elisabeth Szewczyk-Méziane, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

The Qatar University Foundation Unit was officially inaugurated in Fall 2004 in the new Women's Foundation Building (WFB) just opposite the College of Sharia car-park. Dr. Khalid Al Ali, Professor of Human Genetics, and the former Vice-Dean of Science and Head of Health Sciences (Biomedical Sciences and Nursing) was appointed Director. The United States Embassy provided a professional educational consultant, Dr. Greg Freeman, to advise Dr. Khalid on staff evaluation and performance. The WFB, equipped with a fully functioning fountain on the ground floor, consisted of six faculty common rooms, a cafeteria, two prayer spaces, and administrative and faculty offices for the three new Foundation Unit departments: English, Mathematics, and Computer Science. All teachers were provided with a desk, cupboard, and a desktop computer. Everyone had to share an office; however, due to the shortage of staff offices in the WFB, some teachers were assigned shared offices in the new purpose-built Women's Engineering Building. Men's offices were still in the old ELTU office in the Men's Main Building.

Shaika Amna Al Thani continued as Head of the English Department, which had over sixty full-time instructors and several part-time teachers, either seconded from the Ministry of Education or employed as contract teachers. Two students who had graduated from the Department of English Literature and Linguistics were hired as teacher-tutors while they completed their MA degree. Dr. Madani Osman, Foundation Program Level 2 coordinator, stated that the aim of the new English Foundation Department was to raise "the students' proficiency and communicative skills to a level that would help them function adequately in most common communicative contexts". The English Foundation Program offered a two-year integrated skills program with twenty contact hours per week, consisting of four non-credit sequential courses: Level 1 Reading/Writing, Level 1 Listening/Speaking, coordinated by Dr. Muawia Al Othman, and Level 2 Reading/Writing and Level 2 Listening/Speaking. Each level component required ten contact hours per week. These courses emphasized developing critical thinking, study skills, note-taking skills, and learning strategies in addition to language skills.

The university had mandated to make the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) a prerequisite for entering specialist programs or majors. Students were required to score 450 on the TOEFL test to exit the foundation program. Those who took the TOEFL test and scored above 500 were exempted from foundation courses and were admitted to the two Post-foundation English for Academic Purposes (EAP) credit-courses. These were helmed by Dr. Mohammed Fawzi. Mrs. Bino Sarah Paul was assigned to administer the TOEFL testing program for students who wished to take the TOEFL exam. Existing students from the Colleges of Education, Sharia, and Arts were required to take two specially designed courses run by the English Department. There were also four English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses for existing Humanities students: two Information Science courses and two courses offered to students in Mass Communications. These, which would later be discontinued once the students had graduated, were coordinated by Mrs. Fatma Alyan. All intake students had to take the requisite Foundation Program courses.

Plans were made to accommodate all students in language labs in one building, the newly constructed Al Bida'a Building. These were run by Ramesh Khatwani who had been in charge of Qatar University Audio-Visual labs for over 15 years. Lab sessions included pre-installed interactive software packages: Focus on Grammar (FOG) and Planet English. Each foundation course had one two-hour language lab session each week. Ra'ed Jaber was appointed as the English Department representative for the Continuing Education Unit under whose auspices the department offered TOEFL and SAT training courses.

One of the highlights of the first semester was the English Department's contribution to the Q-TEN (Qatar English Teachers Network) first international conference, Practical Ideas for the EFL Classroom, held at the College of the North Atlantic (CNA-Q) on 2nd October 2004. Another highlight was the publication of the English Department's first two newsletters. Abdul Moneim Hussein was chosen as Editor-in-Chief while Mrs. Bino Paul was appointed Vice-Editor. The newsletters provided a wide variety of information including English Department events, student events, student and faculty contributions, messages from the Department Head, and personal news

about faculty members. They were very popular and much appreciated as opportunities for faculty to publish commentaries, and literary or academic articles as well as encourage student writers.

One extraordinary event that transpired was the 2004 Emiri degree granting Qatar University *University Autonomous Status*, so it was no longer under the administration of the Supreme Education Council (SEC). This enabled the university to have full jurisdiction over its financial status and budget as well as administrative independence. The decree was to prove

very favorable to the status of English language teachers at the university. By the end of the academic year, one of Dr. Al Ali's major achievements, an initiative started by Shaika Amna Al Thani, was to get language teachers, designated for years as quasi-professionals (mudharis kharij al-haya) more appropriately reassigned as language instructors. A decision was taken to have annual staff increments based on performance.

Shaika Amna hosted a fun-filled end-of-term appreciation party with games and prizes. She referred to what she termed a

hectic and fruitful year, and proudly lauded everyone for their cooperation, commitment, and high level of professionalism and patience. Sadly, a few days later, she took the momentous decision to resign for personal reasons. This news was greeted with much chagrin. And so, once again, a caring, dedicated, supportive and highly efficient leader's departure heralded the coming of more changes.

Acknowledgements

New Faculty: Introducing Bryoney Hayes

Bryoney Hayes, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Bryoney Hayes: Photograph courtesy of Bryoney Hayes

and evolution in language, especially in African American Vernacular English.

In the classroom, Bryoney seeks to motivate students by emphasizing the importance of language-learning as a means of accessing information and connecting with different people and ideas. Bryoney sees herself as a facilitator who guides students to make connections, express themselves, and cheer them toward successfully reaching their goals. She tries to cultivate a learner-centered classroom environment that is based on cooperation, mutual respect, transparency and mutual accountability.

She first taught in South Korea, where she taught all ages, from kindergarten to adults. In 2015,

she moved to Doha, Qatar. Over time, Bryoney has cultivated her interests in mindfulness and yoga, and brought them into her classroom. She believes that the lessons from yoga are a strong positive influence on students' affective experiences in the language learning classroom. Bryoney hopes to conduct more research on this link in order to help students and teachers experience a safe and positive learning environment. In her free time, she likes to swim, ride a bicycle, and do yoga of course. Bryoney does not have any human children, but she has one cat who behaves like a toddler.

Bryoney graduated in 2012 with a Master of Arts (M.A.) in Applied Linguistics with a specialization in teaching English

to speakers of other languages (TESOL). In her Master's program, Bryoney was particularly interested in linguistic diversity

Active Learning

Charles Fullerton, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

Confucius said, "I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand." This is the very definition of active learning, or learning in which students actively participate in the learning process, rather than taking in information passively. In this article, active learning is further defined as a learning which involves some type of physical activity. Dornhecker et al. (2015) and an ever increasing number of educators believe that a kinesthetic classroom, one in which learning is carried out through activities and movement rather than by sitting and listening to lectures, to be the best setting for learners.

Health benefits

It is clear that standing, as opposed to sitting at a desk, has significant health benefits. Standing, like any physical activity, increases energy and blood flow, burns extra calories, tones muscles, improves posture, and ramps up metabolism. Benden (2011) found that standing classrooms help reduce obesity. Students at standing desks burn 15% more calories than students seated at traditional desks. This number jumps to 25% for the obese children who need it most. According to standupkids.org, student attitudes and mood also improve. For teachers, Starrett (2015) calculates that using a standing desk 8 hours a day, 5 days a week for 52 weeks a year, burns an additional 95,000 calories a year. That is the equivalent of running 33 marathons! Lessons designed to get students moving, and not just standing, can further enhance these benefits.

Pedagogical Benefits

Active learning has a long history in the English as a Second Language (ESL) field. Dr. James Asher (1969) introduced Total Physical Response (TPR), a way of teaching language through the use of physical movement, in 1966 to get students up and moving. More recently, Braunstein (2006, p.7) has found, student attitudes, even adult ESL student attitudes, to kinesthetic classes to be "overwhelmingly positive".

According to Benden et al. (2011), we think better on our feet than in our seat. Physical movement makes our heart pump faster which circulates more blood to our organs, including our brain, which can lead to better learning. Both memory and attention improve. To date, the majority of the evidence for including standing activities in class is anecdotal. Educator Katie Caritey introduced them in her classroom and calls them "fabulous tools" and dreams of having more (Korbey, 2014). In one of the few controlled studies to date, Dornhecker et al. (2015) found a 12% greater on-task engagement in classrooms with standing desks, that is an additional seven minutes on task every hour. Kozol (2014), whose subjects included 11 second grade students receiving ESL services, also found "students who receive movement incorporated into their instruction perform better" (p.14).

In conclusion, active learning has the potential to improve student's health and learning outcomes and should therefore be used more regularly in our classrooms.

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On-line Health Tips

Keith Drummond, Lecturer of English, Foundation Program

I recently discovered some really good online health information for desk bound teachers and learners. Talking to colleagues, it seems that this is relevant to many who are noting, for the first time, IT-related discomfort around their hands.

The little pains we're getting around hands and wrists after diligent on-line instruction is apparently a symptom of repetitive stress injury (RSI). Indeed, this can turn into something debilitating, called carpal tunnel syndrome.

More advanced symptoms of the ailment are numbness in your thumb and next two fingers, and cold, stiff hands. After this, the median nerve in your arm, as it passes through the carpal tunnel in your wrist, becomes seriously damaged. The frightening consequence of full blown carpal tunnel syndrome is painful surgery.

One simply maintains the correct position with a straight arm-wrist-hand connection when working on the keyboard. A gel wrist rest comes highly recommended by IT experts. It acts as a guide, facilitating the correct position, and also a visual and physical reminder. An added benefit of the rest is the sensual feeling of gel under your wrists.

A further pointer is to use a quality office chair. We're also advised to consider blue-blocking spectacle lenses. These do not prevent feelings of depression related to isolation, rather, they block types of artificial light thought to disrupt a good night's sleep.

Full online health advice for the

Visual courtesy of Stockvault

prevention of RSI is available on the Blackboard platform for the QU Faculty Community via the Delivering Online Teaching and Learning link, in the second excellent Essential Educational Technologies segment provided by Dr Chris Stryker.

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Photograph courtesy of David Bartsch