

## ***On Teaching***

# **American Studies in Jordan and the UNC/UJ Partnership Program**

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American studies in Jordan and in the Middle East is relatively new. The oldest programs of American studies in the region were first established in Turkey, such as the one in Baskent University, Ankara, which was established after the 1950s. The other programs in Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Bahrain, Iran, and Lebanon are more recent, and the earliest in Egypt dates back to the 1990s while the other ones all have been founded after the turn of the century. These programs differ in their nature and structure from one country to another. They vary in their levels, credit hour requirements, affiliation (the faculties or departments responsible for offering them), as well as in their status (degree-granting programs, undergraduate course-offering programs, or research centers), etc.

In Jordan, American studies is offered in the University of Jordan and at the postgraduate level. This program (begun in 2000) and the program offered at Al-Quds University (established in 2002) are the only two graduate programs in the Middle East that offer MA degrees in American studies. American studies is also taught at the Hashemite University as part of their undergraduate program in English and cultural studies. In Egypt, American studies is taught in one way or another at the American University in Cairo (AUC) where the School of Humanities and Social Sciences offers, through the American Studies and Research Center, a minor in American studies in an interdisciplinary program in which students take a minimum of five courses (15 credits among specified

offerings involving the study of the history and culture of the United States). By contrast, American studies at Baskent University, Ankara, Turkey, is offered by the Department of American Culture and Literature. Here, faculty are drawn from various disciplines such as history, law, politics, American literature, sociology, comparative literature, cultural and critical studies, etc. The program also includes introductory courses in American studies, American literature, and several courses drawn from a wide-ranging selection from the social sciences and other relevant subjects from the humanities such as Orientalism, modernism, postmodernism, globalization, gender studies, women's studies, and the like. The Turkish case is actually comparable to the situation in the United States where American studies is often offered as a self-contained discipline, a major (usually 9 three-credit-hour courses), or a minor (usually 5 three-credit-hour courses), with different academic perspectives such as history, literature, philosophy, fine arts, and comparative studies.

American studies in the Middle East is also offered in different forms. For example in Bahrain, the University of Bahrain has its American Studies Center whose main objective is academic research. And in Beirut, Lebanon, the American University of Beirut (AUB) has its own American center under the name of The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR). Currently CASAR offers only undergraduate courses. Actually, the center offers more than 10 courses, some of which are innovative ones as they have been taught there for the first time. The center is also planning to expand the undergraduate program to develop into an MA program (personal correspondence with the center's director). In Palestine, Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, has the American Studies Institute which also offers courses in American studies. They have an MA program in American studies from which more than 40 students have graduated since its establishment in 2002. The program also has two tracks: a comprehensive exam track and a thesis track, which is more desired by students. Until recently applicants had to have a good command of English, but this requirement has been waived to allow into the program applicants whose English language is not up to the required standard. Though the language of teaching is basically English, Arabic can be used as well. The thesis can be written in either Arabic or in English (personal correspondence with the center's director).

Whether located in centers or in programs, American studies in the Middle East faces a host of problems and challenges that can be categorized under the headings listed below. In the following categorization of the problems I am indebted to the follow-up report issued on the internet by the Center for American Studies and Research of the AUB (CASAR) (<http://www.lb.aub.edu.lb/~webcasar/Conference/AMSTreport.html>).

As part of its First International Conference on American Studies in the Middle East, the conference held a workshop on the problems facing American studies in the Middle East. According to the report, the first area covered

problems related to access to books and other research materials, faculty expertise and training, employment prospects for students, and collaboration with the region and beyond. The second area covered such questions as the main pressures affecting the academic freedom of American studies scholars and programs in the Middle East, the balancing between the need for resources and academic integrity, and defining missions and their implementation. The third area was concerned with prospects for distinctive contributions by American studies programs and research centers, and how to cope with problems and limitations and eventually create distinctive prospects. The fourth area considered dealt with strategies for collaboration: how might colleagues maintain contact with each other and colleagues outside the region, and whether or not it is appropriate to establish a Middle East American Studies Association.

The follow-up report tried to provide answers to many of the problems raised during the workshop. Its recommendations may be summarized as follows: regarding the first category of problems, the participants saw a problem lying in the availability of books and other written materials particularly for introductory courses. Also there was a problem with curriculum and teaching interdisciplinary courses. Finding appropriate employment for those trained in American studies is another problem.

With regard to the second category, there was a divergence of opinion regarding pressures from beyond the university. Some participants found it essential to maintain clear independence from the U.S. government and its embassy in order to overcome the suspicion that an American studies program was somehow part of diplomatic efforts to create support for U.S. policies. For other participants, it was necessary to work closely with their local U.S. embassy as the viability of some programs depended on the resources embassies provide, particularly through the Fulbright Program. Some saw in the exchange with overseas universities an opportunity for providing connections with more flexibility. Some also believed that donors might also pressure a program to move in certain directions.

With regard to the third category of problems, it was felt that the American studies scholar was torn between two extremes of a double vision represented by the United States as a global power and the less advantaged countries of the Middle East with their different ideologies. The participants saw that this consciousness "makes it clear that America can only be understood via attention to global issues of power and culture. They also agreed that collaboration within Middle Eastern American studies scholars was one way to further develop distinctive perspectives on American studies" (Report). Furthermore, there was a problem connected with the students' perspectives. It was seen that although public U.S. diplomacy has been trying to present a multicultural image of the country, white men have historically dominated the American scene. As a consequence of this situation young students in the Middle East would denounce the Americans as "racist," forgetting about the multicultural nature of America

with its African-American, Arab-American, Latin-American, and Asian-American groups. Perhaps the situation can be best understood by relating the subject to the local situation: “Teaching American studies in the Middle East—like teaching Middle East studies in the US—always involves a reflexive examination of the local context that can be pedagogically fruitful” (Report).

Regarding the fourth category of problems, it was noticed there was currently very little collaboration or connection among American studies centers/programs or among scholars in the region. Individual programs or centers have developed overseas links, particularly with American institutions and universities. The University of Jordan, for example, has a strong connection with the Fulbright Program and has developed an exchange program with the University of North Carolina. (This subject will be developed below). Moreover, the American Studies and Research Center at Al-Quds University (Palestine) has an MA program in American studies that has a strong connection with the Fulbright Program and maintains strong links with the Arab-American Center in Dearborn, Michigan. Furthermore, the American Studies Association (based in the United States) “has a program to link US programs with overseas counterparts” (Report). Apart from this, several American scholars from the Middle East have participated in the International American Studies Association which has as one of its main objectives creating interaction among scholars outside the United States. As interest in American studies is growing in the Middle East, it was felt there was an increasing need for collaboration among the newly-established centers/programs (like those in Jordan, Bahrain, Palestine, Iran, and Lebanon) and to coordinate their efforts and research work. Some of the means to achieve such objectives include exchanges and visits of faculty and perhaps students, video-conferencing, and so forth. Finally, such collaboration and coordination can be enhanced by forming a Middle East American Studies Association. Though the question of founding an association was raised with great enthusiasm at the American Studies Conference held in Cairo (Egypt) in 2004, this time it was deemed that this idea “was premature” (Report), and there were several obstacles to overcome before this objective could be realized.

The MA program in American studies at the University of Jordan was first launched in 2000 as a result of concerted cooperation between the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Jordan and the Fulbright Bureau in Amman. Since then, more than fifty students have graduated with MA degrees. To discuss this program, we shall first deal with the courses offered by the program. The study plan of the program is divided into two tracks: non-thesis /comprehensive exam track and thesis track. Every student has to pass 33 credit hours as follows: the thesis track consists of 33 credit hours divided into six three-credit hour obligatory courses (18 credits) and two three-credit hour elective courses (6 credits) in addition to 9 thesis credit hours. Below is a list of courses comprising the study plan:

1. Obligatory courses (18 credit hours)

- History of the United States
- American Culture
- The American Political System
- The American Economic System
- America and the Arabs
- Research Methods

2. Elective Courses (6 credit hours from the following)

- American Social System
- Race and Ethnicity in America
- The American Educational System
- American Human Geography
- The American Legal System
- Religion in America
- Special Subject

The non-thesis track includes two additional obligatory courses—“American Foreign Policy” and “American Literature”—plus one elective course.

The courses in the program include a wide range of subjects focusing on history, culture, religion, and life in the United States and courses on Arab-American relations, research methods, and a special subject. By contrast, American studies is offered at some universities around the globe at either the undergraduate or the graduate level or at both levels. With the recent upsurge of globalization and Americanization around the world, these programs focus on issues related to American life and culture, film and TV, popular culture, music, African-American culture, American media, history, politics, education, economics, and many other similar subjects dealing with the United States, such as religion, race and ethnicity, geography, and the American legal system.

All these factors are reflected in the study plan of the program. Through this variety of courses various concepts, ideas, ideologies, and philosophies such as democracy, individualism, transcendentalism, romanticism, colonialism, capitalism, modernism, postmodernism, feminism, and globalization are introduced. In addition, such courses focus not only on mainstream American culture but also on the culture of minorities such as the Native Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Latin-Americans.

The program also responds to students’ specific needs. Taking the program has improved their knowledge and skills. It has also changed their way of thinking and their ability to cope with solving problems as it has opened them to new horizons and new opportunities. Most of the students have expressed the views that the program is very informative and educational. As a general rule, such courses are informative and comparative. They are informative in the sense of

helping students take a closer look into the United States' political, economic, social, and educational systems and the like. The comparative element adds another dimension of interest as it links the American elements to the Arabic ones. Moreover, students are introduced, perhaps for the first time, to Arab-Americans, Arab-American writers, and the Arab community in the United States. Similarly, the course on American legal system makes students more aware of their rights and obligations.

Teachers in this program are drawn from various disciplines and faculties including departments of English, geography, history, political science, and economics as well as faculties of education, law, and religion. In addition, Fulbright scholars and academics as well as some part-timers from outside the university participate. This situation, however, is by no means perfect. Sometimes, it is not easy to find qualified specialists and, if found, one cannot be sure of their language competence. Occasionally an instructor teaches a course he or she has never studied or taught and has to depend on individual preparation. This reflects badly on the students in that they find themselves memorizing rather than analyzing the material, thus making the focus on achieving a high mark rather than absorbing what is studied.

Before 2000, the study of the United States in Jordan was mainly conducted in some universities through the history and English departments, but there were few professors whose research or teaching was mainly devoted to the study of the United States. The main impetus for the development of a broader and deeper study of American life and culture originated in the Faculty of Graduate studies at the University of Jordan in 2000. Actually, the spread of the American influence in the Middle East after the two Gulf wars, enhanced by the growing process of globalization, created a greater interest in American studies around the globe on both the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels. In the early stages of its establishment, American studies in Jordan had to depend on the efforts of some Fulbright scholars who were specialists in American studies and could teach a wide variety of courses. This process was eased by the cooperation of the University of Jordan with the Fulbright Program in Amman which provided such scholars on an annual and almost continuous basis. Initially, most Jordanian professors in the English department, including those who taught American literature, were not trained to teach American studies courses. At the same time, there was great difficulty in attracting instructors from other faculties, such as the social sciences, because their English was often not up to the required standard.

Like other programs offered at the University of Jordan, American studies is basically funded by the university itself. However, in the case of this program there is special collaboration with the Fulbright program in Amman. This offers support through some Fulbright scholars on an annual or semester basis. An American Fulbrighter or two (occasionally three) may come to the University and teach a few courses in the program, especially specializations outside the

English department. However, this collaboration has been limited to instructors; it has not yet developed to include scholars from both sides working on joint projects. Collaborative projects have been limited because many scholars devote only a limited time to the study of the United States entirely or mainly or include the United States in broader comparative studies. Another barrier is that local scholars find their interests and areas of concern diverge from those of their American counterparts. A third factor is the multiplicity of courses, specializations, and disciplines, which makes it difficult for instructors' interests to converge. Other reasons include heavy teaching loads, which leaves little time to conduct serious and fruitful research or be present at regional and international conferences. Another factor is that many Fulbrighters come for only one semester. Consequently, research teams may appear and soon disappear because of the arrival of new colleagues and the departure of old colleagues.

American studies at the University of Jordan aims at teaching American studies as an academic discipline per se. It also aspires to develop a deep understanding of the various aspects of American culture and life in addition to collaborating with other similar programs in the region and around the world. Moreover, it aims at graduating students who can serve their country's needs and interests. Furthermore, it tries to build a serious public interest in American life and culture and to help create a common dialogue among people from different countries and disciplines.

Students enroll in American studies for various reasons. Some of them choose to join the program for general knowledge or because they have limited choices and American studies seems to be the best choice. Many students realize the importance of such study in increasing their political awareness, especially in a region where everybody seems to be talking politics and where the United States is playing a rapidly increasing political, economic, and cultural role. In other words, to a Middle Easterner, American studies not only involves studying politics but also achieving a better understanding of American life. In all these courses there is ample room for comparison and contrast. Thus students become better able to distinguish between individualism and tribalism, federalism and state systems as well as the difference between various political systems. Graduates of the program find employment in different fields including communication and media, government institutes, and journalism as well as school and college teaching. Some graduates are also pursuing further graduate study in the States and elsewhere. Looking at the program from the students' perspective, it is noticeable that most of them have found that the program has enriched their knowledge and improved their powers of interpretation and analysis and improved their ways of thinking.

Since the end of World War II, the United States has attained a dominant role in the Middle East. Now the American cultural edge is second-to-none in all fields of life. Any country that wishes to develop itself has to lean heavily on American technology and culture. The American studies program can perform

a role in this regard by producing new intellectuals with a solid basis of knowledge about American life and culture. Indeed, this kind of study can be further enhanced by having reciprocal programs of Arabic studies in some American universities and research centers. This could lead to student exchange and consequently to further cooperation and greater understanding.

It is noticeable that the courses become more interesting when they focus on the modern period of American life, culture, and history, when they are supplemented by films and documentaries, and when they are dealing with matters of immediate concern such as Arab-American relations and American policy in the Middle East. Talking about U.S. relations with Iran, Israel, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf region and having expatriate Arabs talk about their life in the new homeland often make the courses more appealing. Moreover, courses become more interesting for other factors. For example, a comparative approach enables students to get a better understanding of the subject especially when applied to such courses as the American social, educational, and economic systems, religion, race and ethnicity, and the like.

Actually, teaching/learning is not always confined to traditional methods and techniques. Lectures by visiting scholars or guest speakers, using video films, slides, and video-conferencing technology are just some of the new techniques used in the program. Occasionally students are given take-home exams and are allowed to send their papers after completion via e-mail at a set date. Such methods have proved fruitful and encouraging for further application. Teaching is also enhanced by making use of the modest resources of the documentary film library available at what is called the American Corner (a special section in one of the language buildings in the university which contains a good collection on American studies donated in the main by the American embassy in Amman and some personal donations by Fulbrighters). At the moment, each student in every course is required to write at least one term paper (this may go up to two or three in some courses) and to do a presentation in addition to taking an active role in class discussion. By and large, the teaching/learning system follows the interactive learning technique rather than the traditional methods. All such classes and methods of learning/teaching help improve the students' analytical and comparative skills.

Nonetheless, the American studies program at the University of Jordan still faces problems. Some of these problems include the scarcity of resources and the irregular availability of specialized instructors. However, the curriculum is constantly revised and updated and new courses are often added and old courses removed. For example, in the new study plan, a course on research methods and another one on a special subject have been introduced. Other courses may also be added including a course on language variation in American English and on American art with emphasis on films and television serials because of the great role they play in spreading American culture and values worldwide. Another course that may be added could cover famous Americans who have made notable



contributions to their country and the world. A short biography for each figure coupled with explanatory films and pictures/slides or photographs could be very helpful in introducing these legendary figures to foreign students. Furthermore, a course on America and the Middle East would also be an interesting addition. Finally courses on feminism, globalization, and women's studies could be introduced as well.

American studies at the University of Jordan can be further developed. As mentioned earlier, one way of achieving that objective is to introduce new courses especially those dealing with American media and film studies. Scholars and specialists can help students develop a greater interest in American cinematography and write theses on movies and film techniques. Further cooperation and coordination with the Fulbright Program can help provide specialized instructors for the courses taught. Joint research work including Fulbrighters and Jordanian scholars can also contribute to improving and revitalizing the Jordanian instructors' abilities and interests. Improving the teaching methods and providing the library with basic resources can also contribute to better learning and more effective teaching. Finally, establishing outside links with other universities particularly in the United States can further boost the program and enhance the teaching of American studies in the country.

The program has been boosted by a partnership program between the University of Jordan and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). Since 2003 the two universities have been implementing a two-year (now extended to three years) partnership program sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This partnership aims to support the development of American studies at the University of Jordan by (1) offering faculty development opportunities for the University of Jordan in the Department of English; (2) connecting the University of Jordan faculty to American studies colleagues at UNC and other similar institutions across the globe; and (3) providing opportunities for students of American studies at the University of Jordan to interact with students at UNC. In addition, UNC and UJ hope to link their American studies faculties and to establish permanent institutional ties with each other.

In the past three years, the two partners have made significant progress toward achieving their goals through such means as faculty exchanges, student linkages, and e-mail communication. Both partners have produced new scholarship, lectured to students in Jordan and the United States, linked their courses through videoconferencing, exchanged ideas through informal meetings and formal colloquia, and developed collegial relationships with one another. Moreover, a new course on introducing American studies is already added to the English majors' study plan at the University of Jordan. Furthermore, the two partners have taken positive steps in internationalizing American studies by having links with other programs in and outside the region. We now have links with the various American studies programs and American studies research

centers in the region such as those in Lebanon, Bahrain, Palestine, Egypt, and elsewhere. We also have links with the American Studies Association in Germany whose international conference in May 2005 was attended by four faculty members from both UNC and UJ.

To implement the above mentioned objectives, the two partners have carried out various activities. At the beginning, and in attempt to initiate the partnership, two faculty members from the University of North Carolina came to Jordan, met with some UJ administrators to discuss the overall plan for the partnership program and coordinate the implementation of activities. As a result, the coordinator of the American studies program at UJ visited UNC and spent a one-month faculty development residency during which he prepared a syllabus to teach at UJ to American studies students. During the same period, the Head of the English Department and the Dean of Arts visited UNC where they met with UNC faculty and students, gave lectures, and reviewed plans and objectives. The second year of the partnership witnessed another faculty development residency by another UJ American studies scholar who did research on "Arab feminism and its affiliation with American feminism." Moreover, two more faculty development residency visits have been scheduled for the third year after the partnership was extended for one more year. During these two visits, two scholars are expected each to prepare a syllabus to be taught at UJ, gather research and pedagogical resources, and attend courses, workshops, and seminars. And from the American side, there was a faculty residency for a UNC faculty at University of Jordan. In addition, a three-member team of American studies specialists visited the University of Jordan. During their visit they gave presentations, visited classes, and discussed collaborative activities with UJ faculty, students, and administrators. They also visited some historic sites and had many informal conversations with colleagues and local Jordanians.

The faculty development residency part of the partnership has been our principal objective. By and large, this objective has been achieved with great success. At the beginning, there were hardly any qualified faculty to teach in the program except those who could teach American literature. Now several faculty members have been trained to teach other courses outside their original specialization. Such courses as American history, American culture, American educational system, Arab-American relations, race and ethnicity, and special subjects can now be easily taught by instructors from the English Department where the program of American studies is now affiliated. As a result of this training and thanks to the coordination and collaboration with the Fulbright Program in Jordan, the problem of staffing the courses has almost been resolved. However, it should be emphasized that this faculty development project has in no way negatively impacted the cooperative relationship with the Fulbright program. Whenever qualified Fulbrighters come to the university, they are given priority in teaching and Jordanian scholars teach other courses without causing them any inconvenience.

Another side of the partnership program deals with attendance at conferences and academic meetings by faculty members. To realize this objective, various activities have been implemented. Scholars from both sides have been given the opportunity to attend and actively participate in various regional and international conferences. For instance, during the first year of the partnership, the two coordinators of the program attended the Annual International ALO (Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation in Development) conference in Washington where they participated in the conference activities and gave a short presentation about American studies with specific reference to the partnership. And in the second year of the partnership, a joint delegation consisting of two members each from the Jordanian and the American side attended the annual conference of the German Association for American Studies which was held in Frankfurt. The four-man team also visited the University of Bonn and held discussions with the director of the American studies program there and took part in class discussions and seminars on American studies. Moreover, one staff member from the UJ attended sessions of the UNC's national conference on the global American South which explored the changing face of the American South in today's transient world. The partnership coordinator from the Jordanian side has coordinated with some members from the English Department, particularly those interested in American studies, to attend local and regional conferences on American studies. Two Fulbrighters who were teaching in the American studies program went to the conference on American studies in Cairo (2004) and met with other scholars of American studies in and outside the region. Furthermore several staff members attended the AUB First International Conference on American Studies held by CASAR in 2005. In addition, some staff members attended conferences on American studies held in Turkey. Apart from encouraging and arranging for some staff members to attend conferences by providing moral and material support, the partnership program has in one way or another enabled the American studies program in the University of Jordan to take an active role in holding a local conference on American studies. With the help of the Faculty of Arts, the program was able to organize a symposium on American studies which was held in the University of Jordan, Amman, in May 2005 under the patronage of the President of the University of Jordan and was attended by a representative of the Minister of Higher Education in Jordan and the representative of the American embassy, the Fulbright commission in Amman, and delegates from various universities and institutes in Jordan. The symposium welcomed both undergraduate and graduate students of American studies. The symposium was a success and it gave a boost to the program and the students, a good number of whom took an active role in the presentations and the discussions of the symposium. Hopefully, the symposium will lead to an international conference on this theme.

Attending these conferences has been fruitful in various ways. Participation involved preparing a paper, giving a presentation, and taking part in the

discussions, and the other activities associated with conferences in general. More specifically, the attending scholars were able to take part in workshops on American studies and learn from the experience of other colleagues in the field. They also were encouraged to do further research on American studies and in this way improve their teaching skills.

Another activity of the partnership targeted the students in the program. This objective was achieved mainly through videoconferencing. Actually, more than four such conferences were held between UNC and UJ students to discuss various issues such as "Islam and Muslims in the U.S.," "Women's status in Jordan and in the U.S.," and "race and ethnicity in the United States." A good number of students as well as staff took part in these videoconferences. Above all, a videoconference on pedagogy focusing on active learning techniques and critical thinking was given by the Director of UNC's Center for Teaching and Learning. This lecture provided a useful workshop on recent teaching methods and an opportunity for faculty interaction. The lecture was attended by both program students and English faculty. Our emphasis now is on critical thinking, not rote memorization, addressing a problem that often persists with the students after their leaving high school.

Apart from this, the curriculum in all classes has an international/multicultural focus because we feel it is imperative for students to develop an awareness of, and a sensitivity to, the diverse people with whom they come in contact. We also believe that all students of the programs should be aware of the issues associated with cultural diversity and how they should deal with such issues if they intend to be successful in society. Teachers are also attuned that they should encourage the students to think critically. Acquiring this skill has afforded the students the ability to question and not just blindly accept the world around them. It has enabled them to weigh evidence and make rational decisions.

The students have also benefited from the partnership in other ways. One of the main successes of the partnership has been the appointment of a research assistant in the Department of English who has been sent on a scholarship to the United States to get her PhD in American studies and later to come back and teach in the American studies program. This would contribute to the continuity of the program by putting it on solid academic basis and opening the way for other appointments in the future. Another success in this regard has been the adding of an introductory course on American studies to the undergraduate study plan to pave the way for the postgraduate study in the future, and in this way establish closer links between undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

Moreover, the partnership has played an important role in strengthening the postgraduate program by adding some courses to the study plan to meet the aims of the program and partnership particularly those related to local development needs. These courses include the emphasis on Arab-American relations and questions of ethnicity, gender, religion, language, and culture, which in some sense have a direct bearing on the Jordanian scene and the social

development of the country. Furthermore, students are familiarized with the kind of jobs and opportunities available in the country or abroad. Many students have benefited from this kind of orientation and have found jobs in various fields including civil service, teaching, the media, travel agencies, etc., as mentioned earlier.

Apart from this, the two sides have developed internal and international faculty linkages about American studies resources and opened contacts with other American studies centers and associations as has been previously mentioned. They have set up faculty and student e-mail listservs to promote a sense of community between partners and to stimulate intellectual dialogue on the study of the United States. (For more information, click on the button "What's New," then click on "Further collaboration between UJ and UNC," website: <http://ju.edu.jo>). The two sides are also hoping to establish permanent ties between their two universities. A long-term UNC summer project is now underway through which some 15 students are brought over to Jordan and receive lectures on the UJ campus and are given an opportunity to meet and converse with Jordanians. The project also includes some site visits to different relevant tourist and historic sites in Jordan. As a result of this partnership, UNC will initiate its own regular undergraduate study abroad program in Amman hosted by the University of Jordan. In other words, the partnership has enhanced the gradually growing interest of both partners to further internationalize their curriculum. Both universities are now concerned with developing Middle East studies programs and scholarly networks as part of this internationalization effort. Now there are programs at UNC which are fostering greater interest in the Middle East among students and instructors and there are programs at the University of Jordan to respond to such needs.

Part of the partnership resources has been devoted to acquiring books and teaching/learning materials. A good number of books have been purchased to enrich the library resources on American studies in addition to book donations by faculty of American studies at UNC. Films, standard textbooks, and video material are now available for use in teaching the various courses of the program.

We now come to the future of American studies in Jordan and the prospects for the UNC/UJ partnership program. In my opinion, American studies has a bright future in Jordan as well as in other countries of the Middle East. This optimistic view is further enhanced by the ongoing processes of globalization and Americanization (Renwick 2001, 64). There is no doubt that as long as the United States is maintaining a dominant role in world affairs, American influence on other countries will be very great and American studies as an academic discipline will be more desired and taught around the world, particularly in the Middle Eastern region which has a pivotal role in modern U.S. foreign politics and economic policy. Now, the American studies which started in the 1930s as an expression of national objectives (Mergen, 304), has become part of a large process of internationalization and Americanization (Horwitz, 4). As the process

of American-based capitalism has spread worldwide, and as the process of globalization has brought elements of American culture to different parts of the world, the emergence of an international American studies has become more relevant than ever before.

Actually, the American studies programs in the region are very crucial now because they come at a time when the misunderstanding between the Middle East and America is increasing. Moreover, such programs are helpful in creating a more rational atmosphere in the region as they offer academic and intellectual methods to increase the understanding between the Middle Eastern countries and the United States. Though the American studies program in Jordan is relatively new, it has proved itself and has managed to achieve its main objectives and to prove its efficiency and usefulness to those who doubted its ability to survive. Its main strength lies in that it is an academic program not a project designed to promote foreign ideas or to attack them. This kind of impartiality which has distinguished the program is actually what the whole region really needs to create a better understanding between its peoples.

By and large, the UNC/UJ partnership program has been a real success. Although some problems occurred during the implementation of the program, they were eventually overcome. One of the most serious challenges has been the difficulty of keeping up with the timing of the scheduled activities. Sometimes, certain activities had to be rescheduled to a later date and occasionally some activities like attendance at an American studies conference in Atlanta in 2004 had to be cancelled because of the failure to get visas in time for travel to the United States. Similarly, attending the 2005 ALO conference in Washington was cancelled because of emergency circumstances that prevented travel in time to attend the conference. However, such cancellations or omissions did not pose a serious problem and were easily passed over. On the whole, the visa problems constituted one of the most serious snags in the implementation of the scheduled activities. Obviously, this problem was beyond the control of partners and the USAID officials could neither facilitate nor expedite the process. Apart from this inconvenience, there were no serious problems to speak of.

To achieve a greater degree of success in Jordan and in other neighboring countries in the region, American studies needs to be taught on both the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels. At the moment, departments of English literature are the main competitors of American studies. To overcome this obstacle, American studies can be combined with cultural studies before it can be taught on the undergraduate level with a reasonable degree of success and local appeal. Until now, none of this has been done with the exception of the modest attempts to introduce some form of American studies at the Hashemite University in Jordan. But this attempt is only the beginning and it needs further efforts and greater consolidation before the full-fledged programs of American and cultural studies can be installed at universities in Jordan and the other countries of the region on the undergraduate level.

On the whole, it is possible to say that the partnership has achieved its main objectives. We have succeeded in establishing good relations with other similar programs and centers and coordinated with other universities inside and outside Jordan to promote their American studies programs and to establish long-term cooperation. The partnership has encouraged and indeed enabled us to get in touch with other educational institutions in the country and in the region and to coordinate with them and discuss the proposed curricula for the program. Besides, one of the main successes has been the strengthening of our program by updating the level of teaching and the quality of student intake. All this would not have happened without the full cooperation of the UNC/UJ partners and USAID officials. Even though the American partners had occasionally to play the leading role, they never gave the impression that they were monolithic or chauvinist. Indeed, their attitude of cooperation and objectivity has been one of the main reasons behind the success of our partnership. In short, American studies in Jordan and in the Middle East can be strengthened through not only conferences, associations, and library resources but also equitable and dynamic partnerships.

In conclusion, American studies in Jordan is a unique and new discipline that has been recently introduced to Jordan as it has actually been introduced to the Middle East region as a whole. American studies at the University of Jordan has achieved various successes and the partnership program between the UNC and the UJ is one of the main factors that have contributed to that success. Both program and partnership should be encouraged and fostered in order to diversify current academic programs as well as methods of teaching, and consequently attempt achieving greater cultural variety and more understanding between peoples in the Middle East and between the peoples of the region and the outside world. The courses taught in the program help, in one way or another, overcome the sense of fear and apprehension that seems to be prevalent in the region. By asking the kind of questions that are asked in such courses, by focusing on cultural multiplicity, and by raising the question of identity and the like, it is possible to sort out the causes of mistrust and fear between “us” and “them” and in this way further global thinking and cross-cultural understanding.

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