the Hollings Center
for international dialogue

INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITIES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD: A NEW APPROACH, PART II

CONFERENCE REPORT

Organized by the Hollings Center for International Dialogue

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Center has organized two conferences focusing on independent, or private, colleges and universities, a sector in which international cooperation is especially under-developed. While such institutions represent the oldest part of the American higher education system, their widespread emergence is a more recent phenomenon in many Muslim-majority countries where higher education typically has been under central government control. Independent universities are changing the character of higher education in Muslim-majority countries. They also provide a new means for increasing international dialogue through educational exchange.

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The Hollings Center plans to organize future conferences on topics that sparked particular interest among participants and on themes that will highlight common ground while promoting an appreciation of the wide diversity among universities.

INTRODUCTION

Universities have a unique role to play as bridges of understanding between the United States and other nations. Although relatively few partnerships exist between U.S. universities and their counterparts in Muslim-majority countries, interest has grown in recent years. To encourage the expansion of such ties, in 2005 the Hollings Center for International Dialogue launched a conference series for senior university officials in Muslim-majority countries and the United States.

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To encourage a frank and open discussion, the conference was held on a not-for-attribution basis; therefore, this report does not identify speakers.

INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITIES IN MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES: COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The category of "independent" or "private" universities refers to institutions that operate with some degree of autonomy from official state systems. In the conference's opening session,

[1] See http://www.hollingscenter.org/reports.html for the conference report.

participants described the range of characteristics associated with independent universities in the fourteen distinct Muslim-majority countries represented, pointing out commonalities as well as differences.

Growing demographic pressure, a general trend toward privatization, and the weaknesses of public education systems all have contributed to the emergence of independent universities in many countries where higher education previously was under central government control. Many state-run universities struggle with overcrowding, decaying physical plants, underpaid faculty and outdated curricula. They face difficulty in accommodating all aspiring students and in providing a high-quality education to those who enroll. Higher education is not always a funding priority for governments, and the funds allocated are not always spent wisely. Funding shortfalls are not simply a matter of inadequate resources. They also reflect the state's determination to keep universities on a short leash by using tight budgets to assert bureaucratic control over university administrators. This intent is clear in many public university charters, which emphasize the subservience of universities to education ministries or other government agencies.

The independent universities represented at the conference described themselves as aiming to provide a different, and higher-quality, education than that often offered by state-run institutions. They consciously position themselves to prepare students for participation in a globalized economy—professionally, culturally and intellectually—and encourage them to become active citizens and future leaders. Their approach includes incorporation of new technologies, liberal arts or critical-thinking based curricula and especially English-language instruction, as English fluency has become a precondition for success in the globalized marketplace.

Independent universities have been created by business groups, by religious and civic associations and even through governmental initiatives. Some universities received their initial financing from their country's government (in the form of land or cash). Some were established to offer parents an alternative to sending their children abroad for an American-style education, thus achieving a high-quality education for their children at a lower cost while avoiding the perceived threats to chastity and sobriety the children might face while overseas. Others were created to accommodate groups, such as expatriate communities, excluded from by state universities.

Independent universities may be run on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis. They differ widely in legal status and autonomy. In some countries, private universities operate under the guidance of their country's Ministry of Education or Higher Education Council and must follow public university procedures for faculty recruitment and promotions. Others are subjected to special regulations such as having an endowment or maintaining a relationship with a state university.

Several conference participants made the following brief presentations on their universities:

Koç University, Turkey

For-profit private universities were first founded in Turkey in the 1970s, but they were not successful and the experiment was suspended. Since the mid-1980s, however, non-profit

regulated private universities have been allowed due to the inability of state universities to accommodate the growing student population. Of the 93 universities in Turkey, 15 are private, but all are subject to the authority of the Higher Education Council (YÖK). Private universities must be founded with an endowment and be non-profit. They must maintain a relationship with a state university in case of financial default. Ten percent of students must be on full scholarship. Formally part of the national system, private universities use public university procedures for faculty recruitment and promotions.

Koç's 3,000 undergraduate and 500 graduate students are chosen on the basis of the national entrance examination results. One-third of students are on full scholarship. Koç's endowment was funded by industrial conglomerates and successful businessmen. The Koç family donated approximately $200 million to campus construction and $100 million to the university's endowment. Fortunately for Koç and other private Turkish universities, Turkish law provides tax incentives for charitable donations to universities.

Philadelphia University, Jordan

Jordan has 1.56 million residents and more than 30 universities. Jordan became a pioneer in private higher education in the Middle East following the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which led millions of refugees to flood into Jordan. To handle the surge in population, six university licenses were issued in just a few years. Today there are 22 private universities. They lack full autonomy, as the Ministry of Higher Education controls educational and accreditation policy. Private universities generally are owned by for-profit private companies, though some non-profit organizations also sponsor universities. Jordanian law requires that the management of the university be kept separate from its sponsoring company's management to discourage direct corporate interference.

Philadelphia University, with 7,500 students and 300 staff, has an average faculty-student ratio of 1:25. By Jordanian law, this ratio must be 1:30 in the humanities and 1:20 in the sciences, although there is less pressure on public universities to conform. Philadelphia University teaches the humanities in Arabic and the sciences in English. Its average tuition cost is $4,000 a year. Like other private universities in Jordan, Philadelphia University has a limited endowment and is heavily dependent on student tuition to operate. The University has won the King Hussein Prize for its Information Technology and Law programs. It has established five annual national awards.

Independent University, Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a population of 140 million within just 52,000 square miles; the approximately one million students in higher education constitute only 4.5 percent of Bangladeshis aged 18-24. Eighty-five percent of these students are in unregulated community colleges; the remaining fifteen percent are in the formal university system. The system was entirely public until 1993, when private institutions were created in response to rising student demand. Today, 60,000 attend some 55 private institutions, whose average size is 4,000 students.

Bangladeshi university education is generally in English. Because public university administrators

are selected by government officials, they are often replaced when a new government takes power; for this and other reasons of political instability, a four-year degree often takes eight years to complete. In the private universities, student politics are banned, schedules and plans are more frequently respected and hiring and promotions are more frequently based on merit than on personal ties. The public university system uses the British system of annual exams with a final exam after three years of study, while the private university system follows the more flexible four-year American model. Private universities also offer salaries several times higher than public institutions and can attract expatriate faculty.

Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) has 3,500 students and 150 faculty members, 35 percent of whom have doctorates from North American universities. The university is totally dependent on student tuition. It offers primarily market-driven degrees, such as in Business Administration or Computer Science, though the hope is for the range of subjects taught to broaden in the future.

Effat College, Saudi Arabia

Effat College, located in Jeddah, is the first private women's college in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The booming Saudi population along with expatriate pressure inspired its founding. Effat was established thanks to the philanthropic generosity of Saudi Queen Effat. Thirty-seven percent of Effat's students are non-Saudi residents of Jeddah.

Enrollment at Effat is limited because Saudi law prohibits women from attending classes except in the presence of their legal male guardian. Effat created a pre-college "foundation year" for admitted students designed to teach discipline and self-confidence. Effat students are the best Saudi Arabia has to offer. They have won prizes from Procter and Gamble and the Smithsonian Institution.

American University of Kuwait (AUK)

Kuwaiti students are drawn to AUK's promise to provide American-style higher education, although some are disappointed to find that Kuwaiti gender segregation laws apply to private universities as well as to public ones.

AUK owes its existence to demographic pressure, to expatriate children who are denied access to the Kuwaiti higher educational system, and to Kuwaiti parents who want to provide their children with a high-quality Western education without having to send them overseas. As many parents want their children to study business, the most popular majors at AUK are Communications, Journalism, Advertising/Public Relations, Graphic Design and Computer Science.

Although AUK is the second private university in Kuwait, it is the country's first and only liberal arts-based private university. AUK offers ten full scholarships each year as well as many partial scholarships. This aid is based both on need and merit. AUK also offers advising and tutoring to new students. Every semester, two interns visit AUK from Dartmouth College, and Fulbright award recipients have also spent time on campus.

Atma Jaya University, Indonesia

Indonesian private universities were first founded in the 1960s to meet growing student demand. At Atma Jaya University, 40 percent of the students are Catholics, with Muslims, Hindus, and other Christian denominations making up the remainder. Most of its students are middle-class. The university emphasizes philosophy, logic and ethics, and does not teach Christian theology. The school is strong in medicine, psychology and business. Atma Jaya University has 13,000 students, about half of them women, divided into colleges of medicine, law, psychology and education, among other subjects.

Arab American University, Palestine

The first Palestinian universities were founded in 1976 and were subject to Israeli controls and regulation. Private universities were established under the Palestinian Authority in 1996, following signing of the Oslo Accords, with the goal of developing Palestinian society and promoting under-studied subjects. Arab American University began classes in September 2000, just one day before the second *Intifada* began. In 2007, it had 3,200 enrolled students. Most of the 120,000 students in Palestine attend inexpensive "open universities."

American University of Afghanistan

Kabul University is almost 70 years old, and in the 1960s, it was one of the best in the region for engineering and medicine, with English as the language of instruction. During the 1970s, the university became politicized, and by 1976 it was impossible to teach non-technical subjects freely. During the war against the Soviets, Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran founded their own informal higher educational institutions so that people could be trained without Communist indoctrination. In the aftermath of that war and during the Taliban's rule private higher education was forbidden in Afghanistan.

Following the U.S. invasion and toppling of the Taliban in 2001, universities were re-established. As part of a push toward a gender balance in education, all girls who had graduated from high school in Afghanistan were allowed to enroll in higher education institutions without taking the entrance examination.

The American University of Afghanistan was founded in Kabul in 2003 as Afghanistan's first private, co-educational and not-for-profit university. Classes began in March 2006. The Afghan government provided land (valued at $28 million) for the university's campus. At present, there are 60 students in the undergraduate program. About 30 percent of the students are female, and classes are mixed. Tuition is approximately $5,000 per year for undergraduates, but 80 percent of students receive tuition assistance. The university is trying to raise funds for more scholarships. The university also hosts a professional development institute to attract students and revenue from government ministries and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

In addition to specialized professional training, many independent colleges and universities in

Muslim-majority countries provide the breadth of study and emphasis on critical thinking associated with the American liberal arts approach. This is a challenge, however, in light of perceptions that a liberal arts education does not lead to a good job, or that liberal arts is an inherently Western concept that cannot or should not be transplanted to Muslim countries.

The Evolution of Higher Education and Liberal Arts Education in the United States

Participants reviewed the history of higher education, from Plato's Academy and early Chinese scholars, through medieval monasteries and mosques, to the founding of the first formal universities in Morocco and Egypt around 800 AD, followed by European universities some three hundred years later. Most of these institutions emphasized religious studies. Translated Islamic scholarship, especially in algebra and astronomy, led Europeans to develop the scientific method and helped bring about the Enlightenment.

The earliest American universities had as their goal making students rational and civically engaged. In early 19th century America, the purpose of higher education was to train Protestant Christian theologians and ministers. Study of the classics, Latin and Greek was considered a mainstay of such a religious education. In the late 19th century, the German-style research university, which emphasized professional and technical education, was imported to the United States, along with the concept of a "discipline" or "major." There was great resistance to adding science programs to a liberal arts school; as a compromise, Yale University created the Bachelor's of Science degree as an inferior version of the established Bachelor's of Arts degree.

Today, two major educational models—the German research university and the Enlightenment liberal arts university—co-exist uneasily in the United States. The liberal arts model is far from ubiquitous. Only 100 of the 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States follow it. Most higher education institutions focus on practical training, although many universities, even professionally-oriented ones, have a liberal arts core. A widespread tension exists between general, liberal arts education and specialized, first-job-oriented training, especially in an era of mass higher education. Pedagogical trends toward "active" and "experiential" learning and faculty-student research have revived interest in some liberal arts. Even some of the sciences have incorporated elements of the liberal arts.

One advantage of a liberal arts education, a participant remarked, is that it gives students time for self-discovery, rather than forcing them to make life-determining decisions about professional specialization at an early age. Participants noted that it is hard to develop into a "well-rounded citizen" while focusing on the requirements of a professional degree.

Because most liberal arts institutions are expensive, many students are obliged to take out loans, sometimes accumulating $50,000 in debt even with financial aid. Students feel great pressure to get a high-paying job immediately after graduation to start repaying their loans. This can be a strong incentive for students to pursue professional rather than liberal arts degrees, which are sometimes viewed as less immediately practical. It was noted, however, that in the United States the average family income for students in private institutions, particularly liberal arts institutions, is lower than the average family income for students in public institutions. In essence, philanthropy subsidizes these less well-off students.

At elite institutions, one participant commented, "students can major in any subject" and still be successful. But while a degree from an elite institution may help a student get a first job, it does not guarantee future success. Statistics suggest that students from non-elite backgrounds in non-elite institutions have the greatest long-term success when they study within a liberal arts model. Moreover, scientists and engineers in the United States disproportionately graduate from liberal arts colleges.

Liberal Arts Education in Predominantly Muslim Countries

A pure liberal arts education is a "tough sell" in Muslim-majority countries. With pressures for a university degree to lead directly to gainful employment, the most popular undergraduate degrees are pre-professional in fields such as Business Administration, Computer Science or Information Technology. Some participants contended that a "practical" and a liberal arts education can be provided simultaneously, if done carefully and explained properly to students and parents. A liberal arts education is, in fact, the best preparation for a career, one person argued. As globalization has undermined job security, students need the flexibility taught in a liberal arts approach. Employers in Morocco, for instance, praise liberal arts-trained students for having "a better sense of initiative, superior adaptability and a more critical mind." Liberal arts education is eminently practical, one participant stated, because it focuses on enduring principles rather than on ephemeral trends. Another participant pointed out that perceptions of the liberal arts as impractical can change because society's perceptions of practicality always evolve over time. In ancient Greece, for example, grammar, rhetoric and logic were viewed in the way that medicine and engineering are today; in medieval Europe, this list expanded to include arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music.

While universities in Muslim countries need not imitate the full American liberal arts model or strive to teach a particular set of courses, they might consider emulating certain American educational principles, which, some participants argued, are universal and can be adapted to local contexts. Many participants agreed that the core such principle is a pedagogical process revolving around critical thinking. In the Arab world and elsewhere, the focus is on rote memorization and the pedagogical style typically involves "preaching, not teaching." Critical thinking cannot be taught in an atmosphere in which students are discouraged from asking questions. Instead, students should be educated ways that encourage creativity, initiative and problem-solving. They should be encouraged to ask questions about culture, society, human rights, the fine arts, political theory, the scientific method, civic responsibility and the values of their society. Islamic history can be taught immediately following Greek and Roman history so that students do not make distinctions between "Islamic" and "non-Islamic" history. The great Islamic philosopher Ibn Khaldoun can be studied "as part of the human story; his cultural background is important, but his humanity is more important." The student who understands this "will learn to ask good questions." The critical-thinking approach promotes the diversity and openness that are sources of strength in the West. It is possible "to be a critical thinker without becoming American," a participant asserted.

The American University of Kuwait takes perhaps the most direct approach of the universities represented at the conference. It employs the term "liberal arts" in its mission statement and has named a campus facility the Liberal Arts Building. Professors mention "liberal arts" at

meetings with parents and in external speaking engagements, explaining that liberal arts are unrelated to political or social liberalism and instead refer to "a broad education, a questioning attitude and the ability to communicate one's knowledge." Still, the idea does not translate easily—the university's first president had to use the local Arabic dialect to explain the concept of liberal arts to skeptical parents.

Others contended that the term "liberal arts" is far too controversial to use in Muslim-majority countries because the word "liberal" has negative political and cultural connotations in conservative societies. They suggested that liberal arts should be taught under different names, such as "general education," "communication and critical thinking," or "arts and science education." One person pointed out that it is difficult to provide a liberal arts education when some of its central elements, such as student residential life, are not widespread in Muslim-majority countries.

Still others felt strongly that the issue is not terminology or practicality but the irrelevance of the entire concept of liberal arts education to Muslim societies. Cultural and contextual differences may doom the liberal arts model to failure in many of these societies. The main role of universities is to help students acquire concrete professional skills and knowledge, not to slavishly follow the American liberal arts model. Education does not take place in a vacuum and educators cannot simply implant Western curricula and pedagogy without regard for their societies. Instead, universities should identify and bring forward virtuous qualities in their own societies' educational and philosophical systems. One participant stated that secular and liberal philosophies are un-Islamic, while another warned that an excessive focus on critical thinking can turn students into cynics and skeptics.

PHILANTHROPY AND INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITIES

In the United States most donations to higher education come from individuals, with education being second only to religion in individual philanthropic contributions. Americans usually donate to colleges and universities because they (1) have a personal connection to the institution, (2) have a special interest they wish to nurture in an academic setting, or (3) want to make an investment in the future of education for political or ideological reasons. The American fund-raising model works best with established, mature institutions, particularly with respect to alumni donations.

There is a great need for independent colleges and universities in Muslim-majority countries to increase philanthropic contributions. Even the few fortunate enough to have endowments still depend heavily on student tuition to operate and thus are financially vulnerable.

In most Muslim countries private philanthropy takes place in the context of *zakat* (alms) to Islamic charities and other religious organizations. Corporate giving is limited since most governments do not offer tax breaks or incentives for corporate philanthropy. The idea that corporations should be "socially responsible" by supporting education is not widespread. Businesspeople often prefer to donate to government projects in the hope that doing so will win them political influence.

A university's legal structure influences its philanthropic strategy. For example, a corporate-owned university will have difficulty attracting philanthropic donations. It was generally agreed that governments should give incentives to encourage private philanthropy beyond *zakat*. Because religious philanthropy is dominant in many Muslim-majority countries, one participant asked, is it possible to portray educational philanthropy as a religious good?

Private universities need to establish a reputation for quality before they can expect to receive private donations. Alumni need to be courted to create scholarships, but many independent universities in Muslim-majority countries are relatively young institutions whose alumni are not yet wealthy or prepared to donate.

Most private universities, even those that have hired professional fund-raisers, have found it difficult to raise private donations. Balamand University in Lebanon was one of the few institutions represented at the conference that has succeeded in raising money throughout its existence. Universities with "American" in their name may be (incorrectly) perceived as wealthy or as funded by the United States, making it difficult to attract support. Donors must be persuaded that their contributions will directly aid students. It is necessary to have an "emotional hook" to appeal to the broader public.

Securing private philanthropy is complicated, and it takes time and energy to cultivate donors. Institutions need to share their success stories. While U.S. universities have been successful with private philanthropy, their approaches may not transfer to Muslim-majority countries.

FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS

It is increasingly common for institutions to use financial aid and scholarships to attract students who might otherwise not enroll due to their lack of ability to pay or to recognize special talents or attributes. Aid is especially important for independent universities in light of the high cost of tuition. To avoid becoming bastions of the elite, independent colleges and universities in Muslim-majority countries should strive to attract the best students, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Yet because many are too new to have endowments and government financial aid is relatively uncommon, they face challenges in providing financial aid to students who need it.

Overview of the American Financial Aid System

In 1642 Harvard University gave the first scholarship to a student, courtesy of a private donor. The 1944 GI Bill ("Servicemen's Readjustment Act") provided the United States with its first real student financial aid program by offering to pay tuition costs for all American World War II veterans at any college or university they chose to attend.

Today, the United States has two main strategies for providing financial aid to students: one based upon student financial need and the other upon student achievements and talents. For every dollar spent on financial aid programs at U.S. colleges, 70 cents go to need-based programs and 30 cents go to merit-based programs. The U.S. government has structured a financial aid system that includes government-backed loans and grants for need-based

scholarships. At many Ivy League schools, there is a "firewall" between admissions and financial aid, making student admissions "need-moot." Schools admit students based on their abilities and only then consider their financial needs. The conference representative from Dartmouth explained that yearly tuition and board cost more than $43,000, but 57 percent of students receive some form of financial aid, either directly from Dartmouth's endowments or from outside scholarships.

The recent Spellings Commission Report[2] identified high cost, lack of affordability for many students, limited access and the complexity of the financial aid system as significant problems with the current U.S. undergraduate education system. College degrees have become more important as more higher-paying jobs require degrees and other countries are graduating more students in key areas. At the same time, the cost of education has gone up, with the price of a college education increasing faster than inflation, causing students to take on loans and incur a high level of debt.

The need-moot student financial aid model found at Dartmouth is only possible at schools with large endowments. Less wealthy schools use a "Robin Hood" model, through which they add a surcharge to the tuition "to rob from the rich and give to the poor." Those who can afford the inflated tuition pay it; those who cannot are given a "discount" and only made to pay the actual tuition.

Financial Aid in Muslim-Majority Countries

The type and amount of student financial aid available vary widely in the Muslim-majority countries represented at the conference. In Morocco, the government heavily subsidized student housing, food and books for several decades. But as university attendance increased, the government's financial aid budget did not. Today, student scholarships are limited and selective, albeit more generous than the general subsidies of the past. Morocco's Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane has work-study programs in addition to need- and merit-based financial aid. Twelve percent of the university's 2,000 students receive financial aid. Some grants impose such stringent requirements on students that turn them down. Still, because the cost of living in Morocco is substantially lower than that in most Western countries, Al-Akhawayn continues to attract Moroccan elites even though its tuition costs are similar to that of institutions in Australia, New Zealand or Canada.

Despite having the word "American" in its name, the American University of Kuwait receives no financial assistance from the United States. Sixty percent of the university's revenue comes from student tuition (about $10,000 per year), with Kuwaiti philanthropists and bank loans making up the remaining 40 percent. Some of the university's most dynamic students are non-Kuwaiti residents who do not have access to the state university system or who attended private high schools where English was the language of instruction and thus lack the ability to perform

[2] At the request of President George W. Bush, in 2005 U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings formed the Commission on the Future of Higher Education to investigate the state of U.S. higher education and ensure that it meets the nation's needs for an educated and competitive workforce in the 21st century. The "Spelling Commission Report," issued in 2006, is the result of the commission's work.

academically in Arabic. The university offers 200 scholarships for disabled students.

In many Middle Eastern countries, one participant contended, a tribal mentality prevails and formal procedures are often ignored, with the result that financial aid goes to students with the right family connections rather than to those who are needy or talented. Political parties sometimes manipulate the distribution of financial aid to students.

Student financial aid in the form of bank loans is rare, for a variety of reasons. Only a student's parents may negotiate loans and banks must be satisfied that there is sufficient collateral to guarantee eventual payment (meaning that loans are denied to those who need them most). The Islamic prohibition on interest is another limitation. Some loans are possible through "Islamic banks" and banking practices, which charge lump sums rather than applying interest (the sums tend to approximate the amount that would have been charged if interest had been applied). One participant noted the importance of justifying such actions with quotations from the Qur'an and *hadith*. Donated scholarships tend to be personalized and short-term, given to individual students rather than to the university. And, as noted earlier, most Muslim philanthropists are more eager to fund a mosque or a charity than a liberal arts university, and governments in most Muslim-majority countries (with the exception of Turkey) do not give businesses tax incentives for donating to educational projects, making philanthropy for student financial aid a challenge.

MODELS OF GOVERNANCE

Every independent college and university operates under a combination of some form of government oversight and its own institutional authority, with powers delegated to a board of trustees, a president or an administration. Many formulas exist for appointing the members of a university's board of trustees. In some cases external governing bodies make the decisions, and in others national laws dictate the selection process. There is always debate about a board's ideal size and composition. Board size varies and not all board members are necessarily engaged in the decision-making process to the same degree.

For-profit and non-profit universities have different models of governance and different ways of making financial, personnel and other strategic decisions. "Shared faculty governance" was suggested as a good decision-making model, with the key to success being an effective partnership between a university's board of trustees, administrators and faculty members.

Kuwait's Council of Private Universities (which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Higher Education) supervises the American University of Kuwait, but does not play a significant role in the hiring of administrators or faculty members. Each university's board of trustees selects the institution's president.

In Egypt, a Supreme Council of University Presidents sets certain aspects of educational policy, such as the number of students who may attend a given institution. The Ministry of Higher Education must approve candidates for university presidents, and a president can be removed from his position only with government permission. Any faculty member's promotion at both public and private institutions is subject to approval by a General Committee, whose purpose is

to limit any inappropriate profit-making motives of the businessmen who own most private universities.

By contrast, in American universities the board of trustees appoints the president and then allows him or her to govern. The U.S. government plays a smaller regulatory role in higher education, although recent legislation has broadened federal powers. It was noted that in the United States academic governance structures have evolved over time, as they will in Muslim-majority countries.

ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Maintaining high standards of quality is central to the mission of most independent colleges and universities. In the United States, accreditation is one way of measuring quality and being accredited is the precondition for institutional legitimacy.

Accreditation originated in 1885 in New England, stemming from the American tradition of voluntary association and decentralized civic life. It ensures that the institution deserves the public trust and is eligible for federal financial aid, government grants and private funding. An accredited university also can transfer student academic credits and participate in athletic conferences. The foundation of the American accreditation process is a set of standards articulated by the higher education community—not by the government—of what a college or university must do in order to deserve the public trust. Its hallmarks are self-evaluation, peer-review and reliance on measurement and evidence.

The United States has three accreditation systems: regional, national (including vocational, religious and distance learning-based institutions) and professional (such as law, medicine and teacher education). Recently, pressure has developed to centralize the now highly-decentralized accreditation system. Specifically, the Spellings Commission Report recommended more accountability in the U.S. undergraduate education system by, among other measures, requiring institutions to assess student learning against a standard, national set of criteria and to report this data to the federal government. Many universities worry that these changes would undermine their autonomy. They fear that standardization will mean "one size fits all," with institutions judged (and funded) on the basis of generic standards, thus harming a system that they believe generally works well.

Because American higher education is widely admired around the world, many universities outside the United States have obtained or seek to obtain American accreditation. Foreign institutions generally want American accreditation when the local alternatives for quality measurement have a poor international reputation. American accreditation is seen as quality branding. While the American system works for the United States it is not the only way to ensure excellence in education and is not necessarily the best system overall. Among other things, it is complex, time-consuming and very expensive. American accreditation is most appropriate for independent institutions offering American-style degrees and having sufficient autonomy, resources and a clear need to legitimize the institution as American-style. It is inappropriate for government-run universities or those operating in extremely different cultural contexts and where the cost in time, money and opportunity outweighs the expected benefit.

Some universities in Muslim-majority countries have trouble maintaining high standards of quality because faculty accountability is weak, research is not valued, there is heavy reliance on part-time faculty members borrowed from public universities and the student-faculty ratio is huge. Caution should be used, however, when comparing the developing and developed worlds, since the roles of government, laws and accreditation bodies in each are very different. American educators often hold universities in other countries to unreasonable standards.

Most countries represented at the conference have some form of compulsory government-provided accreditation. This can lead to over-regulation of universities, eroding their unique character and stifling innovation. Governments also can politicize education by discriminating against certain institutions in the accreditation process.

Designated accreditation bodies exist in Muslim-majority countries, but they tend to be obligatory, imposing their standards on institutions with little or no opportunity for feedback. Some nominally independent accreditation bodies receive their funding from higher education ministries or other governmental agencies. These bodies generally do not rely on independent peer review and function to license schools rather than to accredit them. In some countries, annual inspections focus on ensuring that the university is non-profit, rather than on measuring how effectively students are being taught. When private universities were first established in Jordan, for example, there was a strong interest in establishing a set of common educational standards that would be subject to external evaluation. But this sort of quality assurance, it was soon discovered, required data that involved a large investment of time and money to collect. It was suggested that a more efficient approach would be to work closely with Jordanian and international companies to establish internships and solicit feedback regarding the preparedness and quality of recent graduates.

It is a significant challenge to combine local, national and international standards. Quality is an ambiguous concept, often depending on "the eye of the beholder" and reflecting the demands placed on universities by their societies. In some Muslim-majority countries that were colonized by Britain, quality is closely associated with the British higher education system. Some educators believe that universities should have social relevance and pragmatic utility and that if graduates are produced "at the right time to perform the right jobs," then the university is satisfying social needs. But accreditation is important because potential students and faculty members will not take a non-accredited institution seriously. Some participants pointed out that quality assurance may be more important than accreditation *per se*.

One potential pitfall of quality assurance processes is that they may focus on "inputs more than outputs," emphasizing formal curricular and organizational structures rather than assessing more subjective factors such as the quality of a university's graduates. It is important to devise ways of measuring quality that focus on students. Higher education can be seen as a business investment in which students pay a university to make them more valuable to future employers. The "most valuable" graduates need to have initiative, computer skills, broad background knowledge, communication skills, analytical ability and the capacity to work independently as well to as cooperate with others.

Participants suggested that American universities might be able to help foreign institutions improve their academic, financial and organizational quality.

PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

In the closing session, participants emphasized their belief that universities are among the most important channels for cross-cultural understanding and made recommendations for collaborative international programs to advance such understanding. Suggestions included the following:

- Designing a flexible liberal arts curriculum for use in non-American settings, with a first step of holding a workshop on curricular approaches and pedagogical techniques for arts and science education.
- Exploring best practices in fund-raising and philanthropy, with a first step of holding workshops on fundraising involving one member of each university's Board of Trustees and at least one fund-raising professional.
- Creating a peer association of independent university personnel in Muslim-majority countries that could become an accreditation body.
- Sponsoring training and exchanges for faculty members and administrators, with a first step of developing a working group to address how to expand student and faculty exchange.
- Creating structures through which senior university administrators and faculty members could share ideas, with a first step of consulting visits (both in-person and long distance via technology).

The Hollings Center proposed to work with conference participants to transform their brainstorming ideas into programs. The Center will provide seed funding through a small grants program for some of the most promising activities.

The conference organizers thanked the participants for their engagement and passion. Participants strongly recommended future meetings of the group.

ABOUT THE HOLLINGS CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE

The Hollings Center promotes dialogue between the United States and predominantly Muslim countries, opens channels of communication, deepens understanding, expands people-to-people contacts, and generates new thinking on important international issues. The Center was established as an NGO through legislation enacted in 2004 and 2005 by the U.S. Congress, particularly through the efforts of Senator Ernest F. Hollings (ret.); its official name is the International Center for Middle Eastern-Western Dialogue. The Center convenes conferences, typically in Istanbul, on a wide range of contemporary issues involving opinion leaders and experts in a variety of fields, and provides small grants and fellowships to selected program participants for collaborative projects that build on conference recommendations. For more information, please see www.hollingscenter.org.