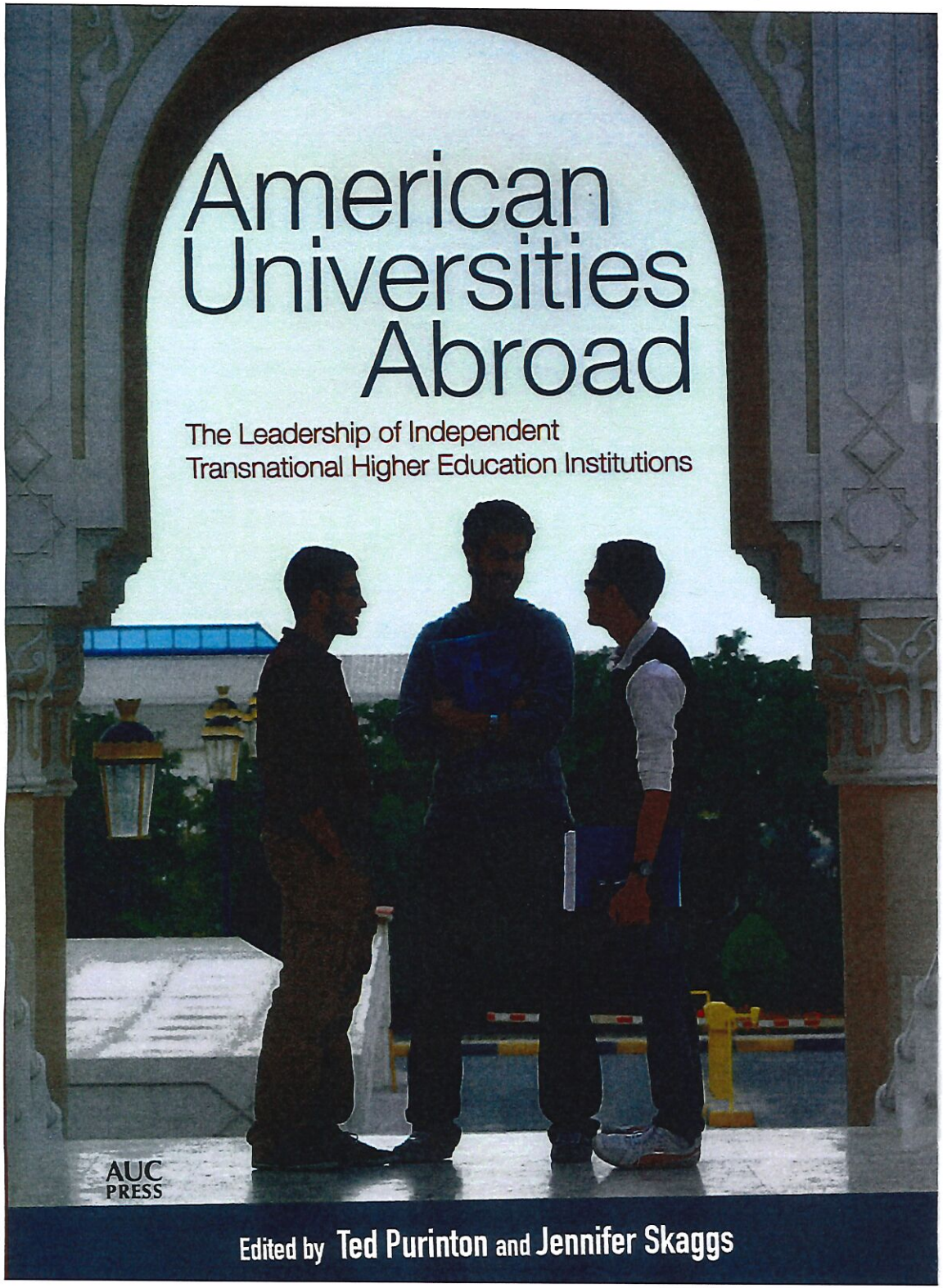

American Universities Abroad

The Leadership of Independent Transnational Higher Education Institutions

Edited by
Ted Purinton and Jennifer Skaggs

The American University in Cairo Press
Cairo New York

Dar el Kutub No. 26097/16
ISBN 978 977 416 840 6

Dar el Kutub Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Purinton, Ted
American Universities Abroad: The Leadership of Independent Transnational Higher Education Institutions / Ted Purinton, Jennifer Skaggs.—Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2017.
p. cm.
ISBN: 978 977 416 840 6
1. American universities and colleges
2. Skaggs, Jennifer (jt. auth.)
378.73

1 2 3 4 5 21 20 19 18 17

Designed by Adam el-Sehemy
Printed in the United States of America

19

Adapting Liberal Arts and Sciences as a System of Education

Jonathan Becker and Susan H. Gillespie

For nearly two decades, Bard College has been engaged in the creation of accredited liberal arts and sciences education programs internationally. Through a series of partnerships, Bard has helped build dual bachelor's and master's degree programs with St. Petersburg State University in Russia (Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Smolny College), Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem (Al-Quds Bard College for Arts and Sciences [AQB]), and American University of Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan (AUCA). Bard helped transform the former European College of Liberal Arts, in Berlin, into Bard College Berlin, which offers dual American and German BA degrees. We have worked with other institutions in Burma, Lithuania, Russia, and South Africa.

This chapter seeks to answer the question, What are the main challenges in adapting liberal arts and sciences (LAS) education to new environments like these? A secondary question is, How can institutions seeking to promote liberal arts and sciences education respond to the unique challenges that arise in countries where there is little or no tradition of liberal education, and where daunting political and bureaucratic obstacles can arise? The answers to these questions should illuminate the specific impacts that partnerships, particularly dual degree partnerships, have on program development and the partner institutions.

Liberal Arts and Sciences as a System of Education

For the purposes of this chapter, we will rely on the following definition of liberal arts and sciences education, which is taken from Jonathan Becker's essay "What a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education is . . . and is Not":

> Modern liberal arts and sciences education is a system of higher education designed to foster in students the desire and capacity to learn, think critically and openly and communicate proficiently, and to prepare them to function as engaged citizens. It is distinguished by a flexible curriculum that demands breadth as well as depth of study, encourages inter-disciplinarity and enables student choice. It is realized through a student-centered pedagogy that is interactive and requires students to engage directly with texts within and outside of the classroom.[1]

An important element of this definition is that it identifies LAS as a *system* of education, defined as "an ensemble of patterns" that determines the educational process, including the curriculum and pedagogy.[2] Characterizing liberal education as a system is important for two reasons. First, it contradicts the assumption that LAS education is no more than the set of disciplines associated with liberal arts (often emphasizing humanities), which are present in most universities. This assumption is doubly misleading, since, as the abovementioned essay points out, modern LAS systems not only include the humanities, arts, and social sciences, but also natural sciences, mathematics, and computing. Second, the emphasis on the 'systems' nature of LAS speaks to a comprehensive approach to education that often entails a significant break from commonly existing approaches in the countries in which we work. There may be elements of LAS education in the educational environments where we operate, and in the larger institutions in which some of our programs are embedded. Indeed, it is worth pointing out that even the Soviet system of higher education, which was not without considerable achievement, had elements of breadth of study associated with the LAS system and some elements of student-centered teaching. However, while individual building blocks of the system defined above can be found to a greater or lesser extent in most higher education institutions and systems, they usually operate in isolation and are missing essential components of the more "comprehensive package" that constitutes LAS as a system of education.[3]

Finally, it should be noted that in order to work properly, the ensemble of elements constituting the system must be "institutionalized," this is to say, "habitually known, practiced and accepted by most, if not all" of the relevant actors, including faculty, students, administrators, governing bodies and accreditors.[4] In other words, the vast majority of participants in a system of LAS education must be knowledgeable of, and willing to conform to, the expectations and requirements of that system.[5] It is important to acknowledge and draw on similarities where

they exist, although as will be discussed below, this does not mean that conflicts and misunderstandings will not also result.

Partnerships

Before elaborating on some of the challenges of adapting liberal arts and sciences education, it is worth highlighting the philosophical approach with which Bard has chosen to approach its 'deep partnerships.' As Susan H. Gillespie, Bard vice president for Special Global Initiatives and founding director of the college's Institute for International Liberal Education, has insisted, to be effective, such partnerships must be based on principles of mutuality and equality. Deep partnerships mean that "we make a conscious attempt to listen, to be aware of the needs, goals, feelings and ideas of our overseas colleagues" and that "we consciously seek to work in ways that serve not only our own personal or institutional or national ends (though these are all important), but those of our partners as well." Such partnerships involve reciprocity, tolerance, and respect, and "challenge and enable us to be more effective in learning with and from, not just about people in other countries."[6] The institutions we partner with have an enormous depth of scholarly and local knowledge, and they offer new perspectives that can challenge received wisdom or stereotypes in valuable ways. Lessons learned from our partners have impacted faculty research, course readings and assignments, teaching methods, and even the general education curriculum. The resulting practice diverges sharply from other models offering an 'American product,' which are typically in the form of university subsidiaries or franchises funded by wealthy states and bearing the 'brand' of leading US educational institutions.

Dual degree partnerships have a number of advantages over other forms of institutional collaboration. First, dual degree partnerships promote comprehensive cooperation at all levels of the educational process. These include curricular structure, teaching methods, administration, and accreditation, as well as student recruitment, faculty development, fundraising, and sustainability. This leads the partner institutions and Bard to value and encourage joint course development, 'virtual' classes, lectures, and special events that unite students and faculty across the globe, share and exchange research, and create joint civic engagement projects that build lasting bonds. Second, because of the tremendous investment of the partners in these relationships, particularly the academic degree programs, dual degree partnerships tend to be especially enduring and thus are able to weather political and economic difficulties that would compromise more shallow partnerships.

Agreeing to give a dual degree ensures that both institutions have a serious reputational investment in the program. Both partners stake their academic reputation on it. Both also accept formal responsibility for achieving a standard of quality that allows them to maintain their accreditation. Thus, with the dual degree, the responsibility for ensuring high standards of success falls on both partners. Additionally, in Bard's partnerships with much larger institutions, the dual degree has proven to be a very useful, and sometimes essential, negotiating tool, when we find it necessary to insist on meeting core academic expectations and requirements, as one example. The dual degree provides leverage in arguing for specific and necessary aspects of the new program's curricular structure, for instance, the inclusion of the performing or practicing arts, which in other education systems are often relegated to conservatories or separate institutions that have more in common with technical than with classical universities. The dual degree also proves helpful in negotiating issues like credit hours, class size, and expectations that faculty will provide detailed syllabi, or will spend time mentoring and assisting individual students.

The dual degree can also help with internal quality control, as faculty members learn and adapt to new educational practices. In our experience, it is normally the case that local faculty attracted to our joint programs are interested in developing student-centered teaching methods and other pedagogical tools that are typical of LAS. Yet, local academic administrators sometimes find it helpful to be able to invoke US accreditors' interest in syllabi, for example, if individual faculty members are slow to adapt. Perhaps more importantly, the 'deep' partnership includes long-term mechanisms for trainings and exchanges to help faculty adapt and embrace new systems and teaching approaches, thus forging relationships that build trust and pave the way for mutual learning.

Another practical advantage of the dual degree applies to students. LAS is a new form of education in the places where our programs are situated. It is not preprofessional (although we make what we think are compelling arguments about its value in the contemporary marketplace),[7] and students and their parents are legitimately uncertain about what graduates will do with their degrees and how successful they will be. In this context, the knowledge that students will receive an accredited degree from an American institution with a strong reputation can help alleviate student and, not to be underestimated, parental concerns, particularly at the early stage of the program's development. The American degree can help graduates of partner institutions as they apply to graduate school, lend them important international credibility, and enhance

their chances of success. The LAS educational experience also prepares students to succeed in graduate school, as they are no strangers to the rigors of long reading lists and multiple writing assignments.

Finally, dual degree partnerships can have practical advantages when it comes to partner institutions conducting ministerial negotiations in countries where LAS education is new. One partner (in our case Bard) can provide accreditation while the other institution is negotiating with education officials and ministries, thus giving that institution a running start. For example, Smolny College was able to offer a Bard degree before the Russian Ministry of Education approved the first Russian BA degree in arts and humanities, which eventually set the countrywide Russian standard for LAS.

Most people who have spent significant time in the sphere of international education have a series of moribund Memoranda of Understanding sitting in their file cabinets. Such inconsequential and never fully realized relationships are the antithesis of dual degree partnership. Collaborations based on a single grant or a narrow set of priorities come and go. Dual degree partnerships build a series of overlapping relationships among individuals including faculty, administrators, and students, as well as institutional structures. The result is a multifaceted root system that enhances vitality and longevity. Or, to vary the metaphor, the dual degree partnership is like a marriage. As with a marriage, divorce is possible, but painful, and with the dual degree both sides have so much invested in the relationship that their willingness to absorb challenges without walking away is very high.

The dual degree frameworks and accreditation breakthroughs that Bard has achieved together with its partners have been complex and labor intensive. But their benefits have also been significant not only for those involved in them, but for partnerships in other places as well. It makes a difference when a university official seeking ministerial recognition of new curricular approaches can cite examples outside of the United States, and look to a Kyrgyz or Palestinian ministry official or the Russian standard for precedents. This also applies to Bard's newest dual degree program in Berlin, where the Berlin Senate, acting as the equivalent of an education ministry, has proven remarkably open and flexible in naming this small liberal arts college, Bard College Berlin, a 'university' despite its lack of affiliation with a larger institution.

Over the past four to five years, Bard has been placing an increasing emphasis on strengthening links among the institutions with which we have forged partnerships. This has produced a flourishing of cross-institutional innovations, sometimes involving Bard and sometimes not.

They include everything from preparatory programs for students with weak English, to innovations in core curricula, to the development of structures to support student civic engagement projects. These growing cross-network connections have also helped to promote shared values and develop new partnerships. For example, faculty and administrators from Smolny College have worked with administrators from AUCA on accreditation strategy; faculty from Smolny College have worked with faculty from European Humanities University in Vilnius, and several Russian universities, to develop innovative teaching practices, including our signature Language and Thinking Program, and general education curricula; and faculty from Al-Quds Bard have done the same with Mandalay University and the University of Yangon in Burma.

Finally, it is important to point out that dual degree partnerships are mutually enriching. Adaptation of LAS education is not a one-way process. The bonds between faculty, students, and administrators benefit both institutions and can lead to joint research as well as numerous opportunities for special events drawing on insider knowledge and experience that transcend national and cultural borders. Curricular and pedagogical insights accrued through the process of adaptation and through local innovations benefit the more experienced partners, too, in helping them to reshape curricula and approaches to teaching. Last but not least, seeing the excitement and enthusiasm of faculty and students who are experiencing LAS education for the first time can reinspire our 'own' faculty members and administrators and remind us why this kind of education is so valuable and important.

Challenges of Implementing Liberal Arts and Sciences Education

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the challenges of adapting LAS education to new environments. These observations will be based on nearly fifty years of working in international education, with a particular emphasis on Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and especially on experiences gained from Bard's dual degree partnerships.

One point worth mentioning is that the challenges depend in many ways on the structure of the institution. Private institutions, such as the American University of Central Asia or Bard College Berlin, are typically smaller and have more internal flexibility than state institutions. State institutions, such as St. Petersburg State University or Al-Quds University, with their tens of thousands of students, may have more clout with the ministry, but internal university regulations and politics can pose complicated challenges. In Russia, the joint program has taken

the form of a "Faculty" (often translated as "department," but in reality something bigger), while in East Jerusalem it is called a "College for Arts and Sciences." In each case, the liberal arts and sciences program is embedded within a larger university, in much the same way that an honors college may be located within a large American university.

The specific areas we will explore include the following:

- State officials and education ministries
- Administrators and university bodies
- Faculty
- Students
- Financing
- Enabling environments—politics and the unpredictable.

State officials and Education Ministries

The need for aspiring LAS institutions to gain approval from state or ministry officials in order to operate legally or to accredit a new educational program arises in several areas, the most important of which are curricula and curricular structures, admission requirements, credits, and teaching qualifications.

Curricular challenges come in several forms. Ministries typically operate off of approved lists of academic programs (or majors), each of which has an individual set of requirements. LAS curricula often do not fit neatly with these lists. To address these difficulties, new institutions can offer a series of majors corresponding to current standards and try to build in opportunities for breadth (as we have done with Al-Quds). Or, more innovatively, they can create a new state standard, as the St. Petersburg State University did for Smolny College's program in Arts and Humanities, which includes a set of programs or concentrations that function as majors.

In Russia, for example, initial conversations with the ministry had suggested that within the new multidisciplinary liberal arts program each subject or 'specialty' would have to rely on attestation by other, disciplinary departments for its accreditation, and even for the graduation of students. Fortunately, Rector Liudmilla Verbitskaya and Smolny College colleagues succeeded in persuading ministerial officials that liberal arts was itself a new specialty. Bard gladly accepted this somewhat paradoxical formulation, since it allowed not just St. Petersburg State University, but also any other university in Russia to offer the new BA degree.[8]

The challenge of trying to build a liberal arts system out of individually approved disciplinary programs was glaringly evident at AUCA,

until the ministry changed its requirements for majors a few years ago. Before that, existing academic programs were structured to include so many detailed requirements and such enormous course loads (eight or more courses per semester) that opportunities for breadth and depth were limited and students were stuck in the classroom or lecture hall, with no time for the independent reading and writing that distinguishes LAS education. (Not incidentally, this is precisely the system that also existed in Russia prior to our partnership with St. Petersburg State University and still exists for many majors outside the partnership, some of which require upwards of ten courses per semester.)

The narrow disciplinary focus of traditional majors, as represented in individual state standards in some of the countries in which we work, has been another serious problem. In addition to the difficulty, mentioned above, of including performing or studio arts without a newly created standard, there is the difficulty of introducing the innovative interdisciplinary majors that are at the cutting edge of LAS education. These majors include subjects such as urban studies, media studies, or human rights. All such programs are frozen out because there are no existing state standards, or else they are locked into more rigid, narrower existing disciplinary structures such as viewing human rights through an exclusively legal frame. In Smolny College, the solution, as stated above, was to build a new state standard (Arts and Humanities), which serves as an umbrella 'major' for the entire curriculum. This allows students' academic foci to be realized through 'concentrations' (or "profiles," as they are known in Russian), several of which are interdisciplinary. In Palestine, we received ministerial approval for new majors in human rights, urban studies, and media studies, which complemented more traditional majors that already had been recognized and which we simply adapted.

Achieving a new state standard for LAS, as occurred in Russia, proved to be a critical precondition for the dual degree program. It had an additional appeal to students, in that one of the great attractions of LAS education is the ability for students to wait to choose a major until after they have entered university. Many students and their parents understand that seventeen- or eighteen-year-olds do not necessarily want to limit themselves to one subject upon entry to university, and may not know what studying a subject like anthropology or media means. Without a new state standard, students would effectively be forced to select a major (constituted by a narrowly defined state standard, usually representing a traditional academic discipline) before they were ever admitted. While they might be able to transfer to a new major

(or state standard), the lack of a broad, open intellectual agenda prior to selection of a major program would diminish one of the core elements of student choice associated with LAS systems.[9]

Of course, having a new state standard does not necessarily alleviate all curricular dilemmas. On the faculty side, the capacity to develop certain programs, particularly in the arts and media, may be constrained by ministerial requirements that faculty, particularly those in key positions, must have certain types of terminal degrees (doctorates or *Kandidatskayas*, which are interpreted as doctorates in the former Soviet space). This poses challenges for the arts and media, where some of the best teachers are practitioners who do not have such degrees. Bard College, known for its programs in the arts, has numerous phenomenal faculty who might not qualify to teach or serve as program heads at some of our partner campuses.

Other, more technical issues can arise from ministerial requirements. Bard has found that the intervention and local knowledge of our partners are essential in working through the complexities of clashing academic cultures in order to arrive at a workable LAS program. One of the most challenging issues is the different value placed on contact hours versus student reading and writing. As mentioned above, requirements for majors can be enormous, limiting the scope for general education and breadth requirements. More difficult yet are narrow definitions of the requirements for course credits. Successful LAS pedagogy requires students to do reading, writing, and other coursework outside of the classroom, and faculty to provide feedback on submitted work. Ministerial credit standards often focus almost exclusively on contact hours within the classroom. They may also create such high expectations in terms of course loads as to limit the potential for innovative teaching. There also may be requirements for physical education, premilitary service, or courses that reflect a nation's history or culture. Language requirements can create their own challenges, particularly if institutions wish to attract foreign students. Finally, many countries have technical issues related to things like number of square meters of space per student.

Bard's secret weapon in meeting these challenges is simple. We rely on the desire, local knowledge, and hard work of colleagues at the partner institution. Valery Monakhov, who cofounded and directed Smolny College and helped it surmount many obstacles, including those described above, once likened the administrative complexity of his job to a Rubik's cube. Bard's role has been threefold: (1) be clear about our own standards, the nonnegotiable components of LAS as we

conceive it; (2) be open to innovative approaches to implementing or adapting these necessary components and maintain perspective on the long process necessary to fully achieve our lofty ambitions. We try not to let setbacks overwhelm us or to let the perfect be the enemy of the good; (3) support our colleagues with information, experience, training (when necessary), friendship, moral support, and the time needed to forge understanding.

Administrators and university bodies

Obtaining accreditation and resolving the issues mentioned above depends vitally on the active and creative participation of colleagues at the partner institutions. Where the partnerships involve large universities, it is also crucial to have the formal agreement and support of the various university bodies. The fact that a partner institution possesses or practices some of the elements involved in LAS education can be a double-edged sword. Introducing a multidisciplinary liberal arts program in the midst of a typically siloed disciplinary environment may arouse jealousy or stir competitive spirits among faculty elsewhere in the university. Bard has found that long and patient discussions, combined with the involvement of faculty members from different departments as teachers in our seminar-style classes, are important means to overcome this obstacle. It also provides the additional benefit of demonstrating the pedagogical advantage of small classes and interactive teaching.

At the highest level, active support (such as that of Rector Verbitskaya at the beginning of the Smolny partnership or President Sari Nusseibeh at Al-Quds) is desirable; permission or toleration, backed by formal Memoranda of Agreement, are the minimum requirements. It would be difficult to get a dual degree program off the ground without active support at the very top, but once the degree program is in place, anchored in proper legal agreements, it enjoys a significant amount of staying power. This is partly for the reasons of reputational investment mentioned above, partly for legal reasons, and partly due to human factors including the loyalty of the students, faculty, and administrators whose lives are linked with the institution in meaningful ways.

Faculty

For LAS education to succeed, it is essential that faculty adopt student-centered learning approaches and be prepared to do the challenging work inside and outside of the classroom that makes LAS education possible and successful. While teachers in many parts of

the world rely on lectures and impose a strict hierarchy within the classroom, the LAS approach requires greater interactivity and give-and-take, and a willingness on the part of teachers to give up some of their authority.

Some institutions attempting to offer LAS education internationally rely extensively on American, or in some cases European, faculty to serve as the core of the teaching staff. This is not Bard's approach. For one thing, bringing in US faculty is expensive and not likely to be financially sustainable. More importantly, however, our programs are created to serve students of the countries where they are located,[10] so it is natural and desirable to recruit faculty primarily from those countries. This was particularly true at Smolny College, where most of the teaching is done in Russian. The more integrative approach also reflects Bard's ambition to see LAS education become a popularly accepted, integral part of the educational landscape, while understanding it may never become the norm, but may represent one option among several. Relying on US faculty would limit the extent to which LAS programs can have a systemic impact both on the host institutions and on the educational system as a whole. For this reason, Bard's partnerships generally rely on a strong cohort of locally based faculty combined with some international faculty, often for core general education courses, although even here it is important not to assume that just because a faculty member is international, or from the United States, he or she is adept at LAS teaching. Over time, we hope the local faculty grow in strength and numbers and form the core of the program.

Recruiting local faculty who are prepared to adapt to a LAS system can prove challenging. Some faculty continue to believe that hyperspecialization is necessary for a serious course of study. Their opposition to the LAS emphasis on development of the whole person may serve as a barrier to curricular change. More challenging, often, is the unwillingness of some faculty to adapt to more student-centered pedagogies. Some are attracted to LAS education more for the innovative curricular elements of LAS education. They are particularly drawn to interdisciplinary programs and the introduction of the arts into the curriculum, but do not understand the rationale for new teaching methods. Some find it difficult to accept the apparent loss of authority that student-centered learning entails. Some faculty also find the time needed to prepare classes and comment on extensive student work too taxing.

We have addressed these challenges in two ways. The first has been to recruit local faculty who have had exposure to LAS education. This group has played a transformational role. The second has been to

attempt to overcome concerns by providing training in LAS teaching pedagogies to local faculty, often through Bard's Institute for Writing and Thinking (IWT), which for the past thirty years has been working with US and international high school and university teachers. IWT runs a series of seminars on issues ranging from syllabus development, to writing across the curriculum, to providing feedback on student work. The trainings, which sometimes involve faculty from multiple institutions, include explicit and thoughtful discussions of why and how different methods are used. We have found overwhelmingly that once faculty understand the new approaches and feel equipped to use new teaching methodologies, they adapt effectively and embrace the livelier classroom and the responsibility that goes with assigning and evaluating work done outside the classroom. Some will not, but for that we have evaluation processes and a recognition that even at the most selective liberal arts colleges there are faculty who may have less student-centered teaching approaches.

In the case of LAS programs embedded within larger institutions, such as Smolny and AQB, the same teacher often offers courses both in the LAS program and in their traditional department or faculty. The hope is that the teaching methods they use in one will radiate out into their other teaching activities, resulting in a wider institutional impact.

Students

Student-centered approaches to learning can face challenges even from students themselves. Our partnerships have witnessed challenges associated with students in a number of ways. The first challenge has been student recruitment. Students are, naturally, unfamiliar with the precepts of LAS education and are unsure whether our approach will satisfy their career desires or those of their parents, who are often highly involved in decision-making about their children's education. They often think that admission is rigged or corrupt, as it has been in so many other institutions in their home countries. They can also be scared away by tuition rates, even when there is significant financial aid available. These challenges require multiple responses. We have held days of 'open doors' to explain to students and their parents why we conduct education the way we do, and to describe the benefits and outcomes of LAS education for students who have graduated elsewhere. We have used social media and alumni, and attempted to win over school counselors. In Russia, the state's shift to standardized tests, something we would reject in the United States, has helped make the process more transparent and contributed to the geographic breadth of

the student body. In order to highlight access, particularly to students from underserved communities who might have neither the money nor the English language skills to proceed directly to full-time university education, AUCA and Al-Quds have created special preparatory programs to prepare students for the linguistic and academic challenges they will face when they enter the regular academic program.

Even students who come to us with values characteristic of LAS education, meaning those who have multiple interests, are internationally aware, and think of themselves as somehow different from the norm, are not always prepared to engage in the classroom from the start. Many come from educational environments in which rote learning is the norm and they are expected to repeat (verbatim) what teachers and professors say. It is for this reason that every partner institution has adapted Bard's signature program of Language and Thinking, which all Bard students take in August, at the start of their first year, and which all first-year students at our partner institutions also take either as part of their orientation or during their first semester. Language and Thinking is an intensive program involving careful reading of texts, and it emphasizes several creative writing approaches that underline the iterative process between thought and the written word. It empowers students, encourages expression, and serves as the antidote to rote learning. It forms an excellent and necessary introduction to LAS education.

Some challenges we have faced reflect the special nature of LAS education. Some students take our emphasis on student choice and the term *liberal* too literally. They believe there should be no rules whatsoever. Some complain about breadth requirements that have them taking courses outside of their chosen disciplines. Some are simply confused by the array of requirements. Most of this can be addressed through effective academic advising. A more vexing problem is plagiarism, which may be more easily tolerated in cultures of sharing and can prove very tempting for students for whom English is a second language and the Internet proves simply too convenient. There is no single solution to this problem, but a combination of repeatedly teaching the rules of citation, enforcement (sometimes with the benefit of antiplagiarism software), and encouraging a culture of original ideas can help combat this. IWT's work with the partner institutions includes not only discussion of plagiarism, but also extensive work on the design of assignments and process writing to try to ameliorate these problems.

Students may not be immune to the cultural habits that are in tension with LAS, but they are enthusiastic about their unique academic

experience. They speak repeatedly and with pride about how differently they are treated from friends at other, more traditional institutions, particularly when it comes to the greater choice of courses, the atmosphere of openness, and the intellectual exchanges and more informal personal interaction they enjoy with faculty members. They understand that LAS education offers something special and their active participation is an essential part of the learning process.

Finances

Financing is naturally a sensitive topic, particularly in the case of the large universities with which Bard partners. On the one hand, big state-supported universities have relatively reliable sources of funding, often linked to the numbers of enrolled students. They have teaching facilities and may offer dormitory housing, and they provide many of the services students need, for example libraries. Yet, the quality or availability of these things may not meet our standards or may not be sufficient for LAS. This is especially evident as funding is typically tied to student numbers and does not anticipate or respond to the more intensive student engagement and small classes we offer. The ability to come up with private funding or earned income is therefore an enormous advantage. In Russia, the economic crisis following the end of the Soviet Union forced universities to introduce tuition[11] and they began to seek outside funding. This opened up the state system to donor-funded projects, such as faculty exchange and development, and became a crisis that created opportunities for engagement and change. More recently, Russian universities have begun to build endowments, and the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Smolny College) has established the largest endowment of any faculty at St. Petersburg State. This is a welcome stabilizing factor. Al-Quds University accepts private and US government funding, which has been crucial in building the joint Master of Arts in Teaching program that has become the largest teacher training institution on the West Bank.

Freestanding partner institutions with dual degree programs have their own set of financial challenges, as they must rely on a combination of tuition income and philanthropy, much like our own liberal arts colleges. The important difference is that they offer a kind of education that is not yet well known and must compete with state-funded universities that are free or very low cost. Philanthropy is essential here. AUCA, for example, has enjoyed the generous support of the Open Society Foundations (OSF), and Al-Quds Bard has received significant support from OSF and USAID.

However, this also points to some of the challenges. Politics and international conflicts can have an immense impact on funding streams. Significant OSF funding for Smolny College ceased a few years ago, but even limited support for conferences and scholarships ended in the fall of 2015, when OSF was banned from operating in Russia under the country's new 'undesirables' law. US government allocations for programs on the West Bank, which embody many cherished American values and beliefs, are routinely delayed in the US Congress and risk being jeopardized by unforeseeable events. In this environment, sustainability is greatly enhanced by having a variety of funders, along with varied sources of earned income. Bard has found it extremely useful to be able to rely on a certain amount of earned income, derived from tuition and the creation, with our partners, of highly competitive study abroad programs.

Most important, from our perspective, is a belief that absolute financial certainty should not be a prerequisite for beginning a project in challenging environments where our programs can have an impact. Risk avoidance seems to take the form of three main strategies: either to avoid deep partnerships entirely, pursue limited and far less impactful exchanges, or follow the 'American product' model, which is often more about making money than disseminating knowledge. We would rather face financial uncertainty than succumb to what our friend and colleague AUCA president Andrew Wachtel calls "Louis Vuitton" versions of US universities abroad, setting up in Paris, Dubai, and Shanghai.

Enabling environments—politics and the unpredictable

Bard's dual degree LAS programs have proven remarkably durable, given their locations in places where the democratic aspirations that inspired them have not been sustained and political conflicts abound. It is easy to be critical, from the safety of American academia, of programs that encounter oppression or may find their freedom of expression constrained by bureaucratic or political forces. International cooperation and partnership are not immune to larger political forces, be they geopolitical tensions or the internal politics in the countries where we operate, which can themselves redound internationally.

International conflicts can test partnerships. In our work with Smolny College, we have seen chills emerge after the NATO bombing of Serbia and the Russian annexation of Crimea. Sometimes the tension is palpable. The partnership with Al-Quds has created numerous challenges as violence has broken out on the West Bank, leading to the

killing of Israelis and Palestinians and destruction at Al-Quds's main campus in Abu Dis. We have been called out publicly for allegedly supporting terrorists and at the same time for being insufficiently denunciatory of the occupiers. Our response is to ask these critics whether they believe the causes of peace/nonviolence/security would be enhanced were our programs to cease, and then to focus tenaciously on our primary mission: education.

It is also worth noting that we have shared genuine moments of transformative human understanding as we have collectively responded to tragedy, such as 9/11 or the bombing of the Metrojet plane flying from Sinai to St. Petersburg in October 2015. 9/11 was particularly poignant. While a planned visit to Smolny College by Bard's board of trustees was canceled, a smaller group which did visit just a week later, including Bard president Leon Botstein, was greeted with an outpouring of friendship and understanding of the kind that transcends political posturing. Moments like these help nurture and transform genuine collaboration.

More challenging are issues related to academic freedom. Justified concerns are often raised about the capacity to teach and speak freely in countries with restrictive laws or policies. Freedom of speech is a foundational principle that must be safeguarded in LAS programs. Without it, teaching and learning cannot proceed. Bard is committed to protecting and defending the space for open discourse and honest talk in our joint classrooms. But we are not naïve, and we are prepared to make certain accommodations in order to protect our programs and colleagues. In this context, we must understand that certain terms and phrases might contextually have negative or politicized connotations inhibiting program development. The most obvious is the term *liberal* in liberal arts and sciences education. In Russia we and our colleagues in St. Petersburg use the Russian term *svobodniy iskuustva* (literally 'free arts') or the Latin *artes liberales* instead of *liberal education*, because the word *liberal* has a very specific connotation in the current political context. We also realize that in certain contexts it is better to focus on some themes (and not others) in order to promote effective learning outcomes. At Al-Quds, we encouraged students running the region's first-ever university-level Palestinian Model United Nations to avoid the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in deciding the themes of their committees. The goal of Model UN is to teach research and verbal skills, diplomacy and empathy and, in this context, we thought it better to discuss Arctic drilling or the challenges of North Korea rather than focus on the one issue people cannot stop thinking of, which is so emotional that it is unlikely to yield good

learning outcomes. We also have had to consider programming to make sure our emphasis on critical thinking does not morph into being perceived as an un-self-critical American critique of the rest of the world. We need to be willing to be critical of ourselves (including our own issues with freedom of expression on university campuses) and to be prepared to identify topics for public events and international conferences that can be more universal in character and substance.

Of course, we do not avoid controversial issues. We encourage debate programs, courses that address big questions, and innovative interdisciplinary courses precisely for this reason. But we understand that we operate in specific political and social contexts; the most important issue is that the classroom must be educational, open, and lively. Also, if and when challenges emerge, our partnership needs to be strong enough to have a healthy exchange of opinions, so that our occasional disagreement does not define our program.

Perhaps the nature of struggles over these issues can be best elucidated by conceiving of Bard's dual degree programs as institutional actors within their respective contexts, just as Bard portrays itself as a self-conscious actor on the American education scene: a private college in the public interest. There could come a time when Bard is forced to abandon one of its dual degree partnerships, leaving their leadership to our colleagues there. In the meanwhile, we will extend all efforts to protect and support them and their students as they respond to challenges in often creative and inspiring ways.

In effect, the principles and liberating potential of LAS operating in the college's network of dual degree programs are not that dissimilar to the ideals reflected in the establishment of the well-known Bard Prison Initiative. Awarding AA and BA degrees in maximum security prisons means adapting to a highly restrictive environment, but the rewards, measured not only in fiscal savings (the terms in which the program's success tends to be expressed), but in human excellence and growth, are truly inspiring, and ultimately also measurable. The recidivism rate is 4 percent for released inmates who have participated in the program and 2.5 percent for those who earned degrees in prison, versus an average of more than 40 percent nationwide in the United States who return to prison within three years.[12]

The success of Bard's dual degree partnerships is, of course, measured in other terms. These include the existence of four new institutions devoted to LAS education, and numerous other institutions that have been impacted by our shared principles;[13] also, the lessons learned by everyone and the bonds among faculty and administrators forged over

the years. But most of all, success is realized in the more than 2,000 students who have graduated with dual degrees from our partnerships in Russia, Palestine, Central Asia, and Germany, who will continue to make contributions to their countries and the world.

Notes

1 Becker J. (2014). 'What a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education is... and is Not,' http://artesliberales.spbu.ru/about-en/liberal.
2 Schmitter P.C., Karl T.L. (1991). 'What Democracy is... and is Not,' *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3: 75–88.
3 Becker J. (2014). "What a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education is... and is Not," http://artesliberales.spbu.ru/about-en/liberal.
4 Schmitter P.C., Karl T.L. (1991). "What Democracy is... and is Not," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3: 75–88.
5 Becker J. (2014). "What a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education is... and is Not," http://artesliberales.spbu.ru/about-en/liberal.
6 Gillespie, S. (2009). "Creating 'Deep Partnerships' with Institutions Abroad. Bard College as Global Citizen." In *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher Education and the Quest for Global Citizenship*, edited by R. Lewin, 506–26. New York and London: Routledge.
7 Becker J. (2014). "What a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education is... and is Not," http://artesliberales.spbu.ru/about-en/liberal.
8 We were fortunate, as well, that our efforts coincided with important reforms within the Russian system of higher education. In tandem with EU reforms resulting in the so-called Bologna Process, Russia introduced credit hours in place of a system built on specific course requirements. This made the Russian system vastly more flexible, enabled more student choice, and produced credits that were translatable into the US system. This was essential in order for Bard to be able to award its degree and also for expanding international student exchange. Russia formally joined the Bologna Process in 2003. Already in 1994 it had introduced BA and master's degrees based loosely on the Anglo-American system.
9 This has an effect on recruitment and admission, since one of the great benefits of LAS education is student choice.
10 Bard College Berlin is an exception in this respect. For historical reasons, including the generosity of the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation during the period of its ownership, BCB's student body is among the most internationally diverse anywhere in the world: ca. 210 students from fifty-four countries.

11 Russian universities have a dual system under which "budgetary" students, representing those who score highest on the national qualifying exam, attend free, while other students must pay tuition.
12 *New York Times*, "Free Prisoners, A Path to Society," August 1, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/01/opinion/for-prisoners-a-path-to-society.html.
13 A perhaps surprising number of leaders in Russian education and society actively support pedagogical and educational reform as it is embodied by Smolny College and is increasingly being adapted by other Russian educational institutions.