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Building a Holistic International Educational Partnership: Collaboration Between The University of Georgia and the Tunisian Higher Education System

Takoi K. Hamrita

Abstract

This article reports on a capacity building partnership between The University of Georgia and the higher education system of Tunisia that has been ongoing since 2002. The article discusses important aspects of the program, highlights the conceptual framework and underlying principles that have guided and shaped its design, and gives a comprehensive overview of its overall objectives, concrete actions, and outcomes. Our team's response to Tunisia's most urgent development needs; integrating institutional and national resources; building networks of decision makers, administrators, faculty, and students across disciplinary and institutional boundaries; and facilitating the development of indigenous expertise were among the attributes leading to the program's selection for the Andrew Heiskel Award for Innovation in International Education.

Background

Human capital is fast becoming the key ingredient to the success of all nations. How to effectively develop this critical resource is a concern of higher education systems around the world. Developing countries in particular, with limited means and expertise, face significant challenges as they prepare their citizenry to meet the new demands of a rapidly changing knowledge-based global economy. For higher education institutions around the developed world, building institutional capacity to cooperate with developing nations and their higher education systems has become a priority as the world faces complex environmental, social, political, and security challenges.

In fall 2002, The University of Georgia (UGA), my home institution, entered into an educational partnership with the higher education system of Tunisia, my home country. The goal of this partnership was to support Tunisia's higher education reform while providing UGA with a global education and outreach opportunity in an Arab Muslim African country. As the United States strives to strengthen relations with Africa and the Arab world, building a partnership between UGA and Tunisia is of strategic importance.

I cannot delve into the partnership without getting personal. I am the product of international education and development. I grew up in Tunisia and came to the United States 26 years ago to study electrical engineering at Georgia Tech with the support of a national merit scholarship, co-funded by the Tunisian and U.S. governments. When I left Tunisia, it was with a mix of exhilaration, fear, hope, and admiration for my parents, who let me

go to a part of the world they knew almost nothing about. At the time, I was one of only a handful of Tunisian women who went overseas for education. As I took the leap, my subconscious wrestled with a fear I never articulated at the time: That someday I might lose touch with my home country Tunisia. Stepping out of traditional boundaries in my role as engineering professor to create a linkage with Tunisia had been a dream brewing in my mind for a long time, but it became more pertinent as developments in the geopolitical arena made building a bridge between two countries I love one of the most important things I could do, not only with my career but also with my life.

The convergence of several important factors enabled this dream to materialize. First, I am fortunate to be a member of the faculty at The University of Georgia. My university's strategic plan places globalization among its top three priorities. Because of this emphasis on globalization, our campus is buzzing with international projects and activities, creating a supportive environment for international cooperation. Second, I am fortunate to be an engineer at The University of Georgia. Our university is leading the way in promoting a new kind of engineering anchored in a liberal arts environment, making it possible for me to work outside of traditional engineering boundaries. Third, my university is a pioneer in promoting a new kind of scholarship—the scholarship of engagement—making it possible for me to engage outside the lab and the classroom to pursue projects that benefit society and humanity. Fourth, I am fortunate to be Tunisian because Tunisia is unique in its efforts to harness the potential of its

diaspora, thereby creating a very welcoming and supportive climate. Finally, this partnership would not have materialized were it not for the financial support of the U.S. State Department.

It is well-known that partnerships between developed countries and African countries are not always successful. Easterly (2006) noted that the West has spent \$2.3 trillion on foreign aid over the past five decades; yet, even the most basic of needs remain unmet in many of the receiving nations (p. 4).

Bingyavanga Wainaina (2009), an award-winning Kenyan author, in a radio broadcast, said:

A lot of people arrive in Africa to assume that it's a blank empty space and their goodwill and desire and guilt will fix it. And that to me is not any different from the first people who arrived and colonized us. This power, this power to help, is just about as dangerous as hard power, because very often it arrives with a kind of zeal that is assuming "I will do it. I will solve it for you. I will fix it for you."

University partnerships in particular are not always successful, as Holm and Malete (2010) concluded:

When representatives of universities from developed countries come to Africa to set up partnerships, the chances of success are very low. Even when agreements are signed, little happens (p. 2).

U.S. university and African partnerships are often one sided. The rhetoric of mutual benefit is often overwhelmed by the one-sidedness of partnerships in practice (Samoff & Carrol, 2002, p. 82). Partnerships are typically initiated by individuals or small groups of faculty from the developed country, often responding to a grant opportunity. Generally having similar interests and working within departmental boundaries, these faculty conduct projects that fit their own interests and intellectual pursuits. Such partnerships are limited in time and scale by the funding agency, and generally follow an agenda agreed upon, in most cases, before the partners ever meet.

These partnerships are often limited in scope, and formed on an ad hoc basis between individual researchers or departments. One reason is that foreign financial support for development projects is often small, short term, and from disparate sources (Fischer & Lindow, 2008).

This transaction-based approach derives from educational systems that lack the type of structured multi-disciplinary institutional process necessary to face complex issues, have a short-term and limited impact on both partners, do not lead to local ownership of the initiatives, and certainly do not succeed in creating grassroots involvement and sustainable development.

Short-term efforts also may not have lasting effects because they do not respond to African universities' most pressing needs, but rather reflect limits set out by donors or American researchers' priorities (Fischer & Lindow, 2008).

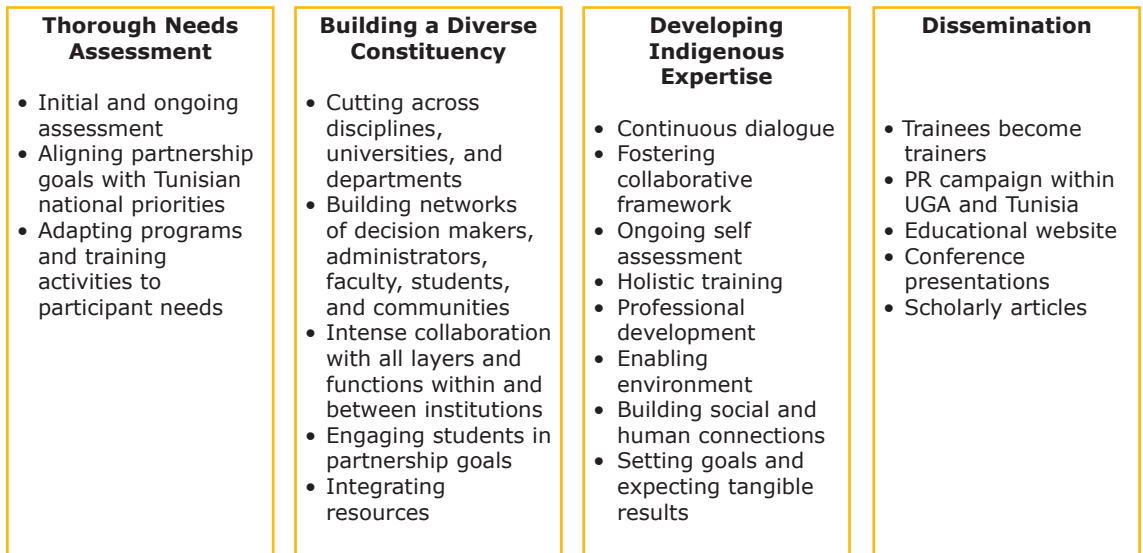
In designing and developing the UGA-Tunisia educational partnership, I set out to reverse this deeply rooted asymmetrical collaboration process. I wanted to build a long-term strategic and holistic collaboration that enabled us to place Tunisia's important reform goals and priorities at the center of our partnership. I wanted to ensure that through professional development and the creation of an enabling environment, our Tunisian colleagues were mobilized and empowered to take charge of Tunisia's development needs and take ownership of and play a pivotal role in the programs and initiatives on which we collaborated. As stated by Durning (1989):

Real development is the process whereby individuals and societies build the capacity to meet their own needs and improve the quality of their own lives (p. 1).

This type of collaboration required profound changes in thinking, expectations, and collaboration structure on both sides. It required resource integration and looking beyond personal interests to meet institutional and national goals. It required reaching out and crossing traditional boundaries to put forth a concerted, coherent, and integrated effort by a wide ranging constituency. Throughout the document I will use multiple data sources to illustrate the partnership process and the resulting outcomes; these include excerpts from participant reflections as well as letters I received from various program stakeholders. Figure 1 shows an overview of the partnership process.

A Thorough Needs Assessment: Aligning Partnership Goals with National Priorities

During initial phases of the partnership, I spent several weeks in Tunisia over multiple visits, conducting needs assessment through a series of national-level consultations with Tunisia's Minister

Figure 1. The UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership: A Holistic Approach

of Higher Education and his cabinet members, university presidents and administrators, as well as faculty and students. During these consultations, which involved over 100 individuals and over 100 contact hours, I received invaluable input about reform efforts in Tunisia and became aware of existing national initiatives and action plans. Out of these discussions several major and complex priority areas for Tunisia emerged, centering around increasing quality and access to higher education. The partnership was, therefore, designed to address some of these areas. As the program developed, the needs assessment and tweaking of objectives and methods of meeting them remained key. Prof. Lazhar Bououny, Tunisia's former minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Technology, remarked on the importance of our work in these words:

The main objectives of Dr. Hamrita's project are of strategic significance not only to my department, but also to the country's development as a whole.

Building a Large and Diverse Constituency

Typically, international partnerships involving institutions of higher education are the work of a few dedicated individuals, and this work is often fragmented and marginalized (Marlin, 2007). By definition, international work requires going beyond established boundaries, and in order for scholars to be effective in reaching across international boundaries, they will also need to reach beyond boundaries within their own institutions. Departmental, discipline,

infrastructure, and traditional role boundaries must all be overcome if we are to be effective as faculty in our campus' internationalization efforts. But going beyond institutional boundaries is a challenge, as Kezar (2006) stated:

In general, institutions are not structured to support collaborative approaches to learning, research, and organizational functioning. Such collaborations struggle, at times, to become institutionalized because higher education institutions work in departmental silos and within bureaucratic/hierarchical administrative structures.

When we talk about international work, we often talk about building bridges. By definition, bridges are structures designed and built by some so that others can pass through, hence the altruistic nature of international work. Herein lies one of the challenges of international programs in academic settings: As faculty, we have been trained to singularly pull resources and attention to ourselves—our disciplines, our areas of research, our unit, our turf—instead of integrating resources for a greater common good. The most effective international linkages, regardless of their size, scope, goals, and context, begin with people who put the common good before their own and cut across barriers to pull together whatever it takes to form that bridge.

In order to capitalize on the expertise and intellectual capacity needed for this project, I went about building the partnership program through intense collaborations with several different levels

TABLE 1. Partnership Participant Demographics

	From UGA	From Tunisia
Total Number of Participants	150	360
Number of Participants who Traveled to Partner Country	37	66
Female Participants	71	163
Male Participants	79	197
Faculty	41	200
Senior Administrators	7	7
Administrators	28	17
UGA Public Service and Outreach Participants	18	n/a
Graduate Students	18	40
Undergraduate Students	8	0
High School Students	0	14
Elementary School Students	0	16
Staff	15	10
Government	7	10
Community	0	60

TABLE 2. Tunisian Universities Involved

	Faculty
University Ez-Zitouna	3
University of Tunis	8
University of El Manar	7
University of November	73
University of Manouba	12
University of Jendouba	12
University of Sousse	71
University of Monastir	4
University of Kairouan	6
University of Sfax	56
University of Gafsa	3
University of Gabes	4
Virtual University of Tunis	11

simultaneously, engaging all layers and functions of the institution. Table 1 shows partnership demographics and reflects the many levels of participation and diversity of participants from both sides of the partnership. Over 150 UGA faculty, administrators, staff, and students from over 50 academic departments and administrative units, as well as eight experts from the University System of Georgia, had the opportunity to participate in the program; 37 of these had the chance to travel to Tunisia. Tables 2 and 3 show the diversity of backgrounds among UGA partnership participants. So far, 600 professional development hours have been delivered by this network on a number of important topics. Similarly, I sought to engage the entire Tunisian higher education system, first by engaging the Ministry of Higher Education and then by gradually engaging each of 12 Tunisian

TABLE 3. UGA Administrative Units Involved

	People Involved	Traveled
Office of the President	2	1
Office of the Provost	5	3
Office of the VP for Instruction	1	0
Office of the VP for Public Service and Outreach	3	1
Office of the VP for Research	2	1
Office of the Dean, Terry College of Business	2	1
Office of International Public Service and Outreach	1	0
Office of Global Programs	1	1
Office of Public Affairs	1	0
Office of Service-Learning	1	1
Division of Academic Assistance	1	0
Carl Vinson Institute of Government	3	0
Center for International Trade and Security	1	0
Center for Teaching and Learning	7	0
Student Learning Center	3	0
The Georgia Center for Continuing Education	2	1
JW Fanning Institute for Leadership	3	1
Enterprise Information Technology Services	4	0
Office of Security & Emergency Preparedness	1	0
Small Business Development Center	1	0
Georgia 4-H	2	1

TABLE 4. UGA Academic Units Involved

	Number	Traveled
College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences	19	4
College of Family and Consumer Sciences	7	3
College of Education	21	4
Franklin College of Arts and Sciences	8	3
School of Environmental Design	3	3
Grady College	3	1
College of Public Health	1	1
Terry College of Business	3	2
School of Law	1	0
Odum School of Ecology	1	1
Institute of Higher Education	12	1

universities. At least 300 administrators, faculty, and students from these universities have been involved in our partnership, 66 of whom traveled to UGA. Table 4 shows the various Tunisian universities involved in the program.

Of high importance to the partnership has been the buy-in, direct involvement, and support provided by higher education leaders from both sides. The program has engaged the participation of a number of UGA administrators, including the president, several vice presidents, and the provost, all of whom have traveled to Tunisia and participated in relationship building and discussions that shaped the program. President Michael Adams reflected on the importance of the program to UGA:

The UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership is exactly the kind of international collaboration that UGA must be involved in if it is to be a true 21st century university. I am particularly pleased for UGA to have such a presence in Africa, a critically important region of the world that simply has not had enough attention paid to it by American higher education.

Similarly, Tunisian higher education leaders at all levels, including the Minister of Higher Education, cabinet members, and university presidents, have been heavily invested in the program.

The success of the UGA Tunisia educational partnership is to a great extent due to its expansion beyond departmental boundaries and engagement with a wide ranging constituency. The culmination of efforts of this alliance of change agents and their communal investment of energy and dedication is what enabled the program to flourish.

The benefits of this holistic multidisciplinary approach to international cooperation are readily observed through the comments and reflections

of the partnership constituency. Philip Breeden, former public affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia, offered this reflection:

Dr. Hamrita provided the kind of clear-eyed inspirational energy that convinced me this project had the chance to do that rare thing in international exchanges: create a fusion between two systems that improved them both. I was not disappointed. Today The University of Georgia-Tunisia Educational Partnership remains distinctive in its holistic approach to international cooperation and exchange.

Brad Cahoon, associate director at UGA's Center for Continuing Education and a long-time participant in the UGA Tunisia partnership, added:

The UGA-Tunisia Partnership appears to be far more productive than many international exchange programs. ...I believe there are several reasons why this is the case. First, it has always been conceived as more than a simple exchange program, engaging a much broader range of participants and topics than do many such programs. The scale and diversity of participation and the inclusion of representatives from many disciplines have led to unexpected discoveries and synergies. The partnership has also been successful in negotiating the sometimes difficult process of aligning state, institutional, and personal agendas. The significant financial support...from both the Tunisian and United States governments reflects its relevance to national goals. Yet the program has also demonstrated openness and flexibility in responding to the needs of individual participants. Rather than attempting to impose pre-defined,

one-size-fits-all solutions, it has encouraged all of its stakeholders to articulate their concerns and work together to construct solutions to shared problems. In this respect, the project exemplifies the best of modern university extension and outreach. Creating an educational partnership of this scope requires someone who can imagine the previously impossible and persuade others that it is not only possible but necessary. This requires a strong personality and an ability to help others see past the particulars of their immediate environment to the shared aspirations that underlie higher education in all societies.

Holistic Training with Focus on Sustainability

Multiple guiding principles informed our capacity building programs and ensured impact and sustainability. These principles included: (1) Training to ensure a continuous dialogue and self assessment of Tunisians' needs. On many occasions we had to modify the content of a session in real-time based on participant feedback. (2) Emphasizing a holistic approach to cover the entire picture and not just certain aspects of the addressed expertise. (3) Fostering a collaborative framework among presenters and workshop participants to avoid a mere transfer of knowledge. (5) Providing leadership opportunities for trainees. (6) Building in mechanisms for self reflection, evaluation, and quality. (7) Enforcing the expectation of tangible results and dissemination to others. (8) Building social and human connections among partnership participants to ensure their involvement beyond the project years.

Partnership Initiatives: Developing Indigenous Expertise

Although our efforts over the past eight years have touched on a broad range of critical topics, the thrust of our work has been focused in two major areas:

(1) Building the e-Learning Capacity of the Tunisian Higher Education Community

A steady increase in the number of students seeking higher education in Tunisia has caused a great deal of strain on the higher education system. Within the span of 10 years, the number of college students in the system increased from 300,000 to 500,000. In January 2002, Tunisia established the Virtual University of Tunis (UVT) to increase access to higher education through the use of information and communication technology and

distance learning. One of the highest priorities of our partnership so far has been to support the efforts of UVT by engaging faculty throughout the country in its mission, providing a forum for Tunisian faculty and administrators to brainstorm and discuss strategies for reaching national goals, building networks, and contributing to the development of courses and degree programs for Tunisian students.

There are many ways in which developed countries enter into e-learning partnerships with developing ones. Many of these partnerships focus on transfer of courses and material to the developing country, infrastructure building, or joint development of teaching programs. Our strategic focus has been to invest in human resource development and the creation of indigenous expertise and material in Tunisia. We used a competitive and transparent national selection process to identify and involve the greatest number of Tunisian faculty and e-learning professionals from most disciplines and all universities around the country who have the most potential for providing local e-learning leadership.

The program consisted of multiple needs assessment and relationship building visits; development of training curricula; multiple week training workshops held at UGA and in Tunisia for national groups of professors, administrators, and IT professionals; pre- and post-workshop activities, assessment, and evaluation of training programs and their outcomes; and follow up and coaching visits to ensure dissemination and sustainability. The workshops covered a wide and comprehensive range of pedagogical, administrative, and technological topics in e-learning and emphasized the development of indigenous expertise. Throughout the program, ongoing feedback and modifications were used to adapt to evolving participant needs. A great deal of time and effort were allocated to building interdisciplinary networks of e-learning experts within and between home institutions.

In three successive stages, the program allowed the creation of a core national group of individuals from various specialties. This group acquired a coherent vision of the virtual educational system's tools, challenges, and pedagogic and technical opportunities. A sizable group was thus formed and this group developed a large number of online degree programs, courses, and modules developed by Tunisian professors for Tunisian students. Eventually, this group formed a new national e-learning association for the promotion of e-learning education and research—



Tunisian partners engage in discussion at a Universities Without Borders Workshop in Sousse, Tunisia, in January 2010.

Association pour la Promotion de la Recherche et l'Enseignement Virtuel (APREV).

APREV was officially established in February 2007 to capitalize on the expertise acquired through our capacity building program and create an official mechanism for our program alumni to remain active as a group and continue supporting the promotion and development of e-learning in Tunisia. Since then, APREV has been providing national training and development and has instituted three significant annual events: a national colloquium on best practices in e-learning; a national prize for innovative e-learning projects; and an international conference on e-learning research.

Lotfi Bouzaine, professor of economics and president of APREV, reflected on the impact and qualities of the program:

Today, at UVT, every time we are assessing our partnership with other international universities, we conclude that the UGA-UVT partnership had the deepest impact on faculty. The flexibility of the program, the high level of qualification of the contributors, and the way the director seeks out our needs before setting actions are among the ingredients of success.

Michele Johnson from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. State Department reflected on the impact of the program:

One of the guiding beliefs of our program is that through providing enough individuals with a common experience we can create and sustain institutional change. Too often scholarship and exchange programs support only a single individual who returns from an experience inspired to do something new, but just can't budge the system acting alone. I think your project here demonstrates this nicely, and shows that by inspiring many people in a group over time, you can create

momentum to have an impact.

(2) Meeting Development Needs through Stronger University-Community Cooperation

Service to the community is a pillar of democracy and one of the most fundamental and essential aspects of developed societies around the world. University service is a process by which faculty and students engage in projects and activities that meet community needs. When integrated into the curriculum, these activities give faculty and students the opportunity to apply academic work to real-life situations, thereby becoming active agents of change and contributing to the alleviation of pressing social and economic issues.

The traditional model of development aid within the international community is one in which efforts are often initiated and led by organizations, universities, and people from developed countries. It has been one of the guiding principles of the UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership that development leadership must be put in the hands of the local people and local universities. Faculty and student engagement within the local, national, and international community is nearly standard practice at universities in the United States. As such, this model may serve as a practical framework for universities in Tunisia to mobilize their resources for the good of surrounding communities and provide a vehicle for social and economic advancement.

Through a series of professional development workshops geared to sensitize Tunisian universities to the model and benefits of university-community outreach, a pilot collaboration with the University of Sousse aimed at demonstrating the feasibility and potential of university-secondary-elementary cooperation, and a great deal of advocacy, we have succeeded in jump-starting university-community outreach in Tunisia. Tunisian administrators, professors, and students from the universities of Sousse, Sfax, and Jendouba have conceptualized and designed a range of very interesting and pertinent projects for implementation within

their local communities. The projects include using technology to assist in the care of patients with cerebral palsy, creating a culture of entrepreneurship, revitalizing abandoned parks, and reaching out to elementary and secondary students to promote leadership skills.

In November 2009, in order to sustain and build on these pilot efforts, we founded a nonprofit organization, Universities without Borders, to promote and facilitate grassroots community engagement within Tunisian universities, provide national and international advocacy, and create an international network and an online community of academics, students, and professionals who can support these efforts. The buy-in, enthusiasm, and energy with which administrators, faculty, and students in Tunisia have adopted the concept of a “university without borders,” and the depth and relevance of the projects they have developed, are encouraging. In the following words Prof. Hamed Ben Dhia, president of the University of Sfax, expressed his university’s commitment to community engagement:

In a time of change, the University of Sfax is willing to strengthen the role of its cooperatives within civil society. Deeply convinced by the “universities without borders” concept, our role is to help professors and students to make their skills useful in civil society.

Ultimately this grassroots effort will lead to a better education for Tunisian students and contribute to social and economic development in Tunisia. It will also provide innovative and meaningful frameworks for UGA and Tunisia to collaborate on locally conceptualized projects. UGA students collaborating with Tunisian students on these projects will benefit from a deeper and more authentic international engagement opportunity than the usual study abroad experience. Michael Thomas, a UGA graduate student involved in the program, commented:

Universities Without Borders provides ...knowledge and expertise, and then challenges local university faculty and students to design their own outreach projects using these resources. The resulting projects are of an inherently grassroots nature, because of the necessary local conceptualization and implementation. This approach essentially reverses the traditional dynamic of international aid and educational partnerships.

(For more on Universities without Borders, see www.universitieswithoutborders.org.)

Partnership’s Impact on Graduate and Undergraduate Students

Since its inception, the UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership has elicited contributions from students from a wide range of disciplines, both at UGA and in Tunisia. These students have become involved with the partnership in a variety of ways. Several graduate assistants have helped run the partnership, by organizing events, for example. Graduate assistants have come to the partnership from disciplines such as organizational development, instructional technology, and social foundations of education. Both at UGA and in Tunisia, students have made presentations, provided technical support at partnership-organized workshops, participated in service-learning projects, and served as hosts for delegations. Student presentations from many disciplines and perspectives were included in nearly the full range of partnership-sponsored workshops. Finally, for their contributions to the partnership, students have received course credit in a range of disciplines, from educational television to instructional design. Through the program, 24 students from 13 different disciplines received credit for 12 different graduate and undergraduate courses at UGA.

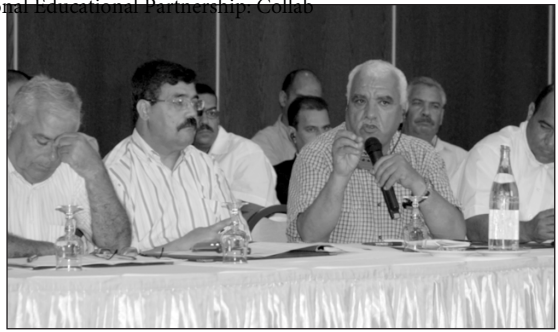
Some of the students’ feedback gives insight into the philosophy and holistic approach of the program. Amanda Parnell, a UGA undergraduate student in entomology, reflected on the two-sided nature of the program:

When learning about the project, I thought that we were going to be improving and helping the Tunisians. What I have learned since then is that the partnership is not one sided; we both have tremendous amounts to learn from each other.

Erica Wilson, a UGA graduate student in child and family development, reflected on the multidisciplinary of the program and her own difficulty in allowing Tunisian students to take charge of a service-learning project:

Giving up control is very difficult for me so I had a tough time allowing people with less experience to take charge of the project. ...We have established a relationship with the Tunisian students that goes well beyond major and specialization to a deep

respect for each others work and a shared commitment to service and outreach. So often, especially in graduate school, you become submersed in your own field and surrounded by people just like yourself. You all think similarly and share the same body of knowledge. This experience has allowed me to interact with others from many different disciplines and open up to various ways of thinking about issues.



Our Tunisian partners were avid participants in this workshop held in 2008

Honors and Awards

In 2008, our program received the Andrew Heiskell Award for Innovation in International Education from the Institute of International Education. The annual award honors innovative new models in internationalization. It recognizes programs' success in removing institutional barriers to international study and broadening the base of participation in the international elements of teaching and learning on campus. As part of the award, our program was featured in the institute's magazine the *IIE Networker* and showcased as a best practice resource in international exchange partnerships on the institute's website, www.iienetwork.org.

In 2007, nearly 100 Tunisians from throughout the United States gathered on the UGA campus to celebrate and honor the UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership for receiving the Ibn Khaldoun Award for Excellence in Community Service. In 2009, our program was also honored by the President of Tunisia with the National Medal of Merit in Science and Education. Additionally, our program was selected by the U.N.'s Global University Network for Innovation as a best practice.

Program Publicity and Dissemination

The UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership has been widely publicized. So far, we have had 5 UGA and 10 Tunisian national press releases, 17 feature articles, and 5 Tunisian National TV appearances. There have been 10 references to our program on other university websites, and we were featured on the America.gov website. We have developed a website that publicizes our program and supports and facilitates project management, collaboration, and network building, providing a venue for program dissemination. The website receives thousands of hits, and we are often contacted by other universities who saw our website and were inspired by the program. Bryan McAllister-Grande, assistant director for the Office of Global Affairs at Brandeis University and coordinator for the Brandeis-Al-Quds University Partnership, in a

personal email communication, wrote:

In our research and outreach, we have been very impressed and interested in the UGA-Tunisia partnership, with its emphasis on holistic engagement and educational development. I've looked over your website and publications many times [and it is] truly a model for the field.

Developing Cultural Understanding

Cultural exchange has been a deliberate and integral part of the program. The UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership is responsible for a great deal of interest in Tunisia that developed at UGA and in Athens, Georgia. With different cultural events, and the several exchanges that have been hosted, the partnership has supplied an important cultural crossroads.

The mayor of Athens, Heidi Davison, reflected on the program:

In the midst of the tensions within current social and political climates, the partnership has promoted a sense of understanding and appreciation between the United States and Tunisia, both at UGA and in Tunisia. Opportunities such as these created by Dr. Hamrita are laying the foundation for understanding very different cultures while leading us along the path to peace.

Conclusion

Through sustained efforts spanning a period of eight years, we have created a strategic, significant, and sustainable link between The University of Georgia and Tunisia while pioneering a paradigm shift in international education and development through holistic, integrated, substantive, and symmetrical international cooperation. By building our partnership around Tunisia's priorities and creating an enabling environment through continuous dialogue, ongoing self assessment,

holistic professional development, and restoring a collaborative framework, our Tunisian colleagues were mobilized and empowered to take ownership of and play a pivotal role in the programs and initiatives on which we collaborated. By integrating resources and engaging a critical mass of people of diverse backgrounds from both countries, we were able to make significant impact in two major areas critical to Tunisia's development. In my own efforts conceptualizing and building this partnership, I hoped to demonstrate community leadership by example. For more information about the UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership, visit: www.Tunisia.UGA.edu.

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About the Author

Takoi K. Hamrita is a professor of electrical engineering at The University of Georgia and is the founding director of the UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership and Universities without Borders. She has received many national and international honors and awards for the partnership program, including the Andrew Heiskell Award for Innovation in International Education, the Tunisian National Medal of Merit for Science and Education, and the Ibn Khaldoun Excellence in Community Service Award.