

Rethinking the “Core” of the Core Curriculum: The Freshman Program and the Academy of Liberal Arts


The renewed focus on the core curriculum at AUC arose largely out of recommendations made in the 2008 AUC Self-Study Report for institutional reaccreditation, in which faculty reported a perception that students’ English-language and critical thinking skills had declined, and reiterated concerns that AUC’s commitment to LAE was not well understood or appreciated by many stakeholders. In fall 2011, Provost Medhat Haroun established a Task Force on the Core Curriculum and Freshman Year, with the mandate to develop ways to improve first-year students’ liberal arts knowledge, English communication skills, and related skills in areas such as reading and critical thinking.

During its first year, the task force developed mission and vision statements, core values, and strategic goals. Based on these, AUC developed six first-year learning outcomes aligned with the mission of the university, drawing in part on the work of AAC&U’s VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics (2018). These outcomes included critical reading, written communication, oral skills, critical thinking, information literacy, and working in groups. AUC also studied how high-impact practices, such as first-year seminars, learning communities, and writing-intensive courses, could be applied in the AUC environment (Kuh 2008; Albertine and McNair 2012). In its second year, the task force worked with school councils and other academic leaders to create concrete curricular proposals, in line with the program needs of the various majors.

This unified set of learning outcomes was of particular importance in creating a shared understanding of the overall goals of the Freshman Program. At the heart of the new Freshman Program lie the first-semester “tandem” courses; groups of about fifteen students take two connected courses (freshman seminar and freshman writing) together as a group—a practice that encourages students to build close relationships within their cohort and emphasizes that skills and knowledge acquired in one class should be applied in another. All six of the freshman learning outcomes are intentionally incorporated in the two tandem courses, which together examine multidisciplinary issues focused on “big questions” using a variety of genres and media. In their second semester, Freshman Program students take a course in research writing, concurrently with the program’s required course in Information Literacy. This reconfiguration of the original nine writing credits allows students to develop and apply the appropriate language and critical thinking skills across courses at a critical time in students’ transition to the demands of university-level work. Writing and research learning outcomes are realized in a way that better emphasizes relevance and coherence in the context of local, regional, and global conversations.

Another curricular change in the new design was a rebranding of course categories at the freshman level to emphasize the interconnectedness of learning. The requirement to take a course emphasizing the sciences and mathematics from a list of options was rebranded Pathways 1: Scientific Encounters, while the humanities and social science options were renamed Pathways 2: Cultural Explorations. To accompany the new pathways approach, the task force encouraged AUC to develop new interdisciplinary Pathways courses, incorporating the new learning outcomes. Alongside the development of interdisciplinary courses on topics such as identity development, Mellon grant funding promoted the development of Cairo in the Curriculum courses in the core curriculum to capitalize on the unique context of AUC.

To support faculty in the development of new Freshman Program courses, the task force developed course design guidelines, which included curriculum maps, recommended pedagogical approaches, and sample syllabi. The AUC president and provost provided funding for course



development. Among the many interdisciplinary tandem courses developed, some—such as Creative Expressions of Resistance and Imagining Exile—took as their themes the recent revolution in Egypt or regional migration trends. Whatever the theme, courses incorporated pedagogies such as response journals, ePortfolios, debates, and relevant essay topics to encourage students to connect knowledge they acquired in their readings and class discussions to their lives and current issues in Cairo, in Egypt, and in the region.

This period coincided with a further important development: in 2013, AUC established the Academy of Liberal Arts (ALA) under the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. Faculty and programs focused on language and communication skills development, i.e., the Department of Rhetoric and Composition, the Department of English Language Instruction (ELI), and the Department of Arabic Language Instruction (ALI) were relocated from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS) to the ALA. This allowed for closer alignment of learning outcomes between the noncredit English-language feeder program in the ELI and the new Freshman Program, as both underwent curricular changes. It also greatly facilitated the coherence and logistical planning involved in launching the Freshman Program, which, by 2014, also included two new cocurricular programs: the Common Reading Experience and the Peer Advising Leaders (PAL) Program. Both programs are designed to support the transition of students to the higher education environment and to make this transition intellectually and socially stimulating.

The Department of Rhetoric and Composition, in addition to handling the transition to the newly formed ALA, played a lead role in implementing the new Freshman Program. Their efforts included developing new courses, coordinating sustained training and orientation sessions for faculty, assessing the new courses with both faculty and student input during the first two semesters, and following up over several years, with an assessment committee evaluating student essays to ensure that students achieved the essential learning outcomes in written communication by the end of the newly configured courses. The new tandem course model proved popular with students, who were able to select a theme that interested them, form long-lasting relationships in their learning communities, and have their communications skills reinforced in both courses.

In addition to the new tandem courses, the fact that the new Pathways 1 and 2 courses that incorporate Freshman Program learning outcomes have been developed by enterprising full-time faculty has resulted in more full-time faculty teaching in the core curriculum. This has reduced reliance on adjuncts teaching core courses, which was one of the task force's original goals. In addition, well-established courses such as Scientific Thinking, now an integral part of the Freshman Program, developed revised learning outcomes that align with those of the Freshman Program overall.

Overall, the new Freshman Program has strengthened the core curriculum through intentional design of a curriculum based on a unified approach and shared learning outcomes. The fact that many stakeholders, including students, helped shape a vision and goals aligned with the mission of the university has resulted in a model that better meets the needs of students whose English-language skills, particularly in critical reading linked to writing, need extra support at an English-language university in the MENA region. In keeping with the liberal arts goal of promoting multiple perspectives on issues, AUC has identified critical thinking as a clear learning outcome, helping to ensure that higher-order thinking skills, in addition to knowledge outcomes, are incorporated into Freshman Program courses.

Moving Forward

As the previous section makes clear, AUC has increasingly come to recognize that at the center of a university's mission is a commitment to a culture of learning in which students are empowered and equipped to see connections across disciplinary boundaries, to unify the specialized knowledge and skills they acquire with broader social and intellectual perspectives, and to “own” the unified, coherent achievement of learning outcomes over their years of undergraduate study. However, to effectively integrate these holistic learning outcomes across the curriculum, a university needs institutionally backed support at multiple levels: faculty buy-in, redesign of current curricula and assessment practices, and programs for ongoing professional development. Such a radical paradigm shift will require major planning and effort. AUC has already implemented the following steps toward this end:

- creating a Freshman Program that intentionally enhances natural connections between major and core courses, develops cognitive and communication learning outcomes, and immerses students in their practice throughout the first year
- rearticulating the core curriculum learning outcomes at all levels of study, using language that captures the holistic, cognitive skills orientation targeted in these courses
- promoting (throughout the core curriculum) high-impact, student-centered teaching and learning practices, such as assignments that require deep inquiry, critical reading, intensive writing and research, the examination of multiple perspectives, the use of ePortfolios, and community-based and experiential learning pedagogies
- founding a small group of faculty that plan to raise awareness across campus on the virtues of integrative learning and integrative assessment


However, much work remains to be done to bring about a cultural change that values the integration of the core learning outcomes. At this stage, change is slow and is based on persuading faculty of the virtues of an integrative ecology where all areas support one another and learning is reinforced and connected in meaningful ways. Only when a critical mass of participation is achieved will this initiative start to break down the silos that separate departments and build a healthy ecosystem of cooperation and communication.

High-Impact Practices in the Core Curriculum

The Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, which administers the core curriculum, also houses many of the academic support programs driving high-impact practices, including undergraduate research, community-based learning, course-based internships, capstone courses, and the use of ePortfolios.

Undergraduate Research

Following the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR), AUC defines undergraduate research as “original intellectual or creative contributions to a discipline” (2018b). While the university does not mandate that all undergraduate students engage in primary disciplinary research, many departments integrate some type of complex, research-based project in their curricula. Almost all the science and engineering departments, as well as the history and political science honors programs, require a senior thesis. Some departments offer a research methods course, and others embed research within the coursework as a form of learning and assessment. Many such courses are part of the three-tier core curriculum at the freshman, secondary, and capstone levels.



To enhance standards of student inquiry and engagement in hands-on primary research activities, AUC established the Office of Undergraduate Research in fall 2012 with a mission to “institutionalize, support, and expand opportunities for undergraduate student research and creative achievement [and] nurture, across the disciplines, a culture of research and development” (2018b).

The Office of Undergraduate Research administers multiple activities to provide opportunities for students to publish and present research, including offering a series of workshops and online resources on the research process, and organizing the annual conference for Excellence in Undergraduate Research, Entrepreneurship, and Creative Achievement (EURECA). The conference includes First Year Research Experience (FYRE) panels and the one-day fine arts showcase, *Creatopia*. Over two hundred students participate in EURECA each year, presenting a wide range of research and creative work to a public, multidisciplinary audience, defending their arguments and productions and positioning their contributions within the literature and disciplinary contexts. As a result of its success, EURECA is now part of a larger event, the annual AUC Research and Creativity Convention, which showcases and awards original contributions to knowledge by undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty.


Another platform for publicly sharing the fruits of undergraduate research is the *Undergraduate Research Journal (URJe)*, a multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed online publication. Published on Open Journals Systems, *URJe* solicits undergraduate works in a variety of genres—mainly research articles, essays, and reviews, but also creative writing, documentaries, business proposals, and audiovisual recordings.

Most importantly, the Office of Undergraduate Research offers partial financial support for students with work accepted at international conferences, research-based competitions, creative writers’ conferences, and art exhibitions. The Research Internship Grant provides support for students hosted by a professor or a research center abroad (including, thus far, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Italy, and India). Most recently, the office introduced a Community-Based Research and Innovation Grant.

Although the grants can only offer partial funding, they provide incentives and previously unavailable opportunities for many students. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis, and awardees are required to submit a report, providing evidence of expenditure and details of learning. They are also expected to participate in the following year’s EURECA conference and publish their papers in the *URJe*. Because of this rigor, the program has helped raise undergraduate research standards and expand interest in inquiry-based learning and knowledge-sharing among both undergraduate students and faculty. Students take greater ownership of the learning process as knowledge producers and experience firsthand the intellectual, managerial, and ethical challenges of responsible research. Spurred by student interest, many faculty members have altered their course designs, highlighting research as a key learning outcome.

Community-Based Learning

Academic credit-based civic engagement is another high-impact practice that the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies supports. AUC opted for the title Community-Based Learning (CBL) to describe courses that intentionally align their articulated learning outcomes to an engaged service within a partner community; this can include discipline-based service learning, service internships, community-based research, and problem-based service learning. Among its principal elements, the program stresses alignment between service and academic outcomes; strong community involvement in planning, decision-making, and evaluation; an emphasis on reciprocal benefits; and critical and constructive reflection opportunities for both students and community partners.



Now part of Academic Community Engagement Program, the CBL mission, since 2008, has been to foster the creation of “community-engaging learning environments across the disciplines—environments which facilitate student academic excellence, personal growth, and civic engagement, and help build sustainable community capital” (American University in Cairo 2018a). This mission is in line with the university’s overall strategic vision, which stresses education for citizenship and service as an institutional priority. Hence, as a strategic institutional goal, civic and community engagement is intentionally embedded in coursework, cocurricular work, faculty development institutes, research, and outreach efforts.


AUC faculty employ CBL as a pedagogical tool within courses in both the core curriculum and the majors. Over the years, given the recent political upheavals in Egypt and the region, the number of CBL courses has fluctuated. In the spring of 2011, when the Egyptian Revolution took place, almost no courses that engaged with off-campus communities were offered because of parental and senior administration concern for student safety. In the fall semester immediately following, the number of such courses on offer rose to sixty-eight, up from a previous maximum of forty-six. The increase reflected faculty’s and students’ eagerness both to engage with the community during those times of transition and to play a role in creating positive community change.

Despite the heavier workload and commitment required by CBL classes, students recognize the value of CBL in advancing their learning in down-to-earth, life-engaged ways. Working with their community partners, students engage in various real-world activities such as conducting needs assessments; writing grant proposals and strategic plans; teaching literacy, art, and computer classes; training teachers; composing and publishing children’s books; raising awareness of water scarcity, dyslexia, hepatitis C, and nutrition; giving voice to refugees; building biogas units; and installing rooftop gardens for various beneficiaries. Perhaps more importantly, students have also encountered people from very different socioeconomic backgrounds. For many students, the impact has been deeply transformational, breaking the barriers that separate them from the rest of Cairo.

AUC has also participated in outreach and training activities with some institutions on a regional level, through the Ma’an Arab University Alliance for Civic Engagement. As the secretariat of the alliance, AUC has offered its model of Academic Community Engagement as an example of a successful initiative that can be customized and developed to fit the contexts of other universities with similar cultures and challenges. AUC holds an annual Civic Engagement Institute, in addition to an occasional regional competition of engaged campuses. In partnership with the American University of Beirut (AUB), the university also cosponsors an annual conference in Beirut, where students showcase their CBL projects.

Course-Based Internships

Cocurricular internship experiences abound at AUC, and the experiential learning benefit is well documented and appreciated by students. One example in the core curriculum is the senior-level research and writing internship, which provides students with an applied, real-world writing experience that helps them transition smoothly from academic writing to workplace writing, in preparation for the job market. During a typical week, students attend one class session and spend eight to twelve hours working with a partnering organization—a business, nonprofit agency, cultural organization, literary agency, magazine or publishing house, university office, or student organization. Support class sessions bring students together periodically to discuss professional writing theory; reflect on job-related experiences, challenges, and problem-solving strategies; and provide feedback to one another. Students produce a variety of writing and editing work: manuals and tutorials, news articles, grant applications, reports, letters, policy documents, promotional



brochures, creative works, book reviews, or other materials as required by the internship. Course feedback demonstrates the strong impact this course has on student career preparation and soft skills, including research, technical writing, oral and visual presentation, persuasion, interpersonal communication, audience sensitivity, and learning autonomy.

Capstones

Forming the third tier of courses within the core curriculum (following the freshman and secondary courses), capstone courses at AUC strengthen integrative skills and offer a culminating learning experience. The aim is to foster more intensive reading, writing, oral communication, and complex critical thinking and problem-solving, within a multidisciplinary orientation. Students are expected to complete two capstone courses before they graduate—one within their fields of major and one within the core curriculum. As they are currently being reenvisioned, core capstone courses will increasingly include signature work (e.g., a multidimensional group project, substantive paper or thesis, or thematic portfolio) that addresses a complex problem or issue in their community or across disciplines.

ePortfolios

In order to provide more support for students' language and critical thinking skills beyond the Freshman Program, instructors are increasingly incorporating high-impact practices into other courses they teach, both in the core curriculum and in students' majors. One way to do this is through the use of ePortfolios. In fact, many see ePortfolios as the “High-Impact Practice (HIP) to rule them all” (Hubert, Pickavance, and Hyberger 2015), as ePortfolios provide the means for students to deepen their learning by writing reflectively about it, critically evaluating their work in a variety of courses, and demonstrating how, as individuals, they have uniquely met learning outcomes in both their majors and the GE program. They do this by writing brief reflective narratives about each artifact selected. Artifacts may include essays, audio and video files, photographs showing completed group projects or products described in an accompanying narrative, or online presentations (Penny Light, Chen, and Ittelson 2012; Albertine and McNair 2012; Ring and Ramirez 2012; Tubaishat, Lansari, and Al-Rawi 2009). ePortfolios may serve a variety of purposes, from being a personal, organizational tool to a means of course-based or program-based assessment.

Although the use of ePortfolios is currently in a piloting stage among some teachers in the Freshman Program and has not been widely adopted throughout the university, an ePortfolio working group at AUC is evaluating the process with student surveys and input sessions with faculty.

In these courses, students use outcomes-based ePortfolios to demonstrate how they have met shared learning outcomes. In their ePortfolios, students select and reflect on artifacts from a variety of core curriculum courses in their first two semesters. One result is that students have a deeper understanding of skills-based outcomes and how they are reflected in more than one course. They have also increased their digital literacy and written communication skills through the reflective writing, as each author uniquely selects, displays, and describes his or her artifacts.

When students continue to develop their ePortfolios for several semesters, adding artifacts from courses as they develop new dimensions to their knowledge and skills, they have a chance to display a process as well as final products. Ultimately, these student narratives will culminate in the core capstone courses, where ePortfolios will allow a reflective, integrative overview of the core curriculum.

Assessment of the Core Curriculum

One strategy for integrating the core curriculum and the majors is to develop an integrative assessment plan, where core learning outcomes are assessed across the majors, yielding data on how well students and the institution are achieving them. The assessment plan at AUC began with establishing shared learning outcomes at each level of the core curriculum, connected to the mission of the university. During 2016, a delegation of faculty attended an AAC&U institute, where they consulted with other faculty and experts on strategies to assess the core curriculum. These faculty members, together with the core curriculum office, developed an assessment plan, modeled on the assessment system of St. Olaf College in the United States.

The plan asks faculty to identify one of the core learning outcomes in each of their courses and select an assignment where students demonstrate this learning outcome. For each student, faculty members are asked to rate the level of achievement of this learning outcome as shown in this particular assignment, using a simple scale: Exemplary, Satisfactory, Emerging, and Not Demonstrated. Each faculty member decides what these descriptors mean and how they can be applied to their assignment. Based on this information, faculty develop plans for curricular improvement and design. The plan is still in the pilot phase; efforts are underway to widen participation and raise awareness of the use of this assessment.

Other measures for assessment at AUC include the increasing use of ePortfolios as a vehicle for student reflection on integrative learning, enhancing understanding of shared learning outcomes among students and faculty, and documenting the achievement of those outcomes in more detail. In addition, as indicated above, AUC plans to require signature work in core capstone courses to allow students to demonstrate and reflect on their learning across courses and experiences, in work that critically explores questions that are important to them and to the world.


Challenges to the Core Curriculum

In the context of Egypt and the MENA region generally, liberal arts is too often perceived as foreign, to the point that Arabic does not have a term that captures its meaning. Given that Egyptian universities do not require students to complete courses outside their major, it is no surprise that the very idea of GE seems “outlandish.” As a result, many AUC students, despite having been duly introduced to the many virtues of the core curriculum during orientation and the Freshman Program, treat it as an imposition that they must tolerate rather than as a valuable educational opportunity. It is often only after graduating, and having experienced the personal and intellectual growth GE helps to foster, that students begin to see the many merits of the core curriculum.

Another challenge facing the core curriculum arises from its history and structure. As a program of study, equivalent to a second major, it has often been driven more by the needs of departments to fill their classes than by intentional educational design. In addition, it has not been accorded due respect as an integrated aspect of an AUC education but seen as a separate program that students must complete alongside, but with little relevance to, their concentrated work in the major.

Future Directions

The current core curriculum structure ensures that students select courses of diverse subject matter to acquire a broad basis of knowledge and learning outcomes. The three-tier developmental curriculum takes the student through a coherent and integrated spectrum of courses in the liberal arts and sciences. For many students (particularly in engineering) it is their only exposure to courses outside their majors. New plans for the development of the core curriculum include a Core 2.0



Thematic Cluster track, offering a core honors program and the introduction of writing-intensive and research-intensive courses. These new ideas build on the current benefits of the core curriculum while taking the learning multiple steps beyond it.

Core 2.0

Core 2.0, now in development, will be a specialized track within the core curriculum, enabling students to focus on a selected theme in three of their secondary and capstone core requirements without additional credit requirements. All themes will be interdisciplinary and guided by an overarching vision of global citizenship. A thematic cluster of three courses will be recognized on student transcripts. The new curriculum will support students in developing a deeper level of awareness, building both personal and civic skills through collaboration with others, and sustaining involvement with pressing global or community issues. At the capstone level, students will be expected to submit a reflective essay (signature work) that demonstrates thoughtful growth and learning agency.

Core 2.0 enables the student to move from a focus on developing a breadth of knowledge and a repertoire of transferable, career-preparation skills to one that includes interdisciplinarity and civic commitment. Students' intentional decisions will thread through courses at the secondary and capstone levels of the core curriculum to create a thematic specialization. Example themes include Sustainable Development, Responsible Science, Public Health and Well-Being, Peace and Social Justice, Diversity, Human Rights, and Equity and the Human Condition. Those who complete a thematic cluster will submit a project or essay (signature work) that makes connections across the various courses, demonstrating integrative reasoning, critical awareness of social complexities, an understanding and respect for diversity and difference in opinion, and an articulated ownership of students' roles as global, responsible change agents. The proposal for Core 2.0 is still under construction; plans to develop the initiative into a full-fledged core honors program are also currently being considered.

Writing-Intensive and Research-Intensive Courses

In response to concerns about declining levels of student writing and research proficiency, the core curriculum program is seeking to intensify writing and research requirements in various courses. One attempt is to introduce writing-intensive (WI) and research-intensive (RI) courses. In line with practices at multiple US institutions, WI and RI courses are defined as courses in the disciplines where students have opportunities to advance their learning through intentionally constructed and organically integrated writing and research activities. Such courses center on research relevant to the theme of the course, which occupies a substantial amount of time. Students will follow the research process, developing research questions that seek original knowledge and presenting their conclusions to their classes. Instructors will give substantial feedback on writing and research, and multiple drafts will be required. AUC is currently developing a full proposal for introducing intensive research courses in the disciplines, requiring at least one WI- or RI-designated course in the core curriculum, and another in the major.

Conclusion

Taken together, AUC's efforts to shape its core curriculum over the past quarter-century represent a concerted effort to put the student at the center of the educational experience. AUC aims to give students opportunities to make connections and apply acquired knowledge, skills, and habits of mind to real-life problems and contexts, in a way that can transform not just the student's view



of the world but, in time, the world itself. Despite a challenging educational environment amid a difficult economic and political landscape, AUC's core curriculum has acquired an increasingly solid grounding and a sense of purpose, integrating American liberal arts values with Egyptian and MENA-region themes to shape a GE curriculum specific to both AUC and the region. Efforts to bring about closer integration of the core curriculum with the majors continue to gain momentum. It is the synergistic interplay of the two—the focused specialization in the major, set against the vibrant background of a broad GE curriculum—that distinguishes AUC graduates. As AUC nears its centennial anniversary, it is renewing its commitment to the liberal arts as the key feature defining its unique position among institutions of higher education in the MENA region.

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CHAPTER IV

General Education at Effat University: A Value-Based Liberal Arts Teaching Model

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Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has responded well to the impact of educational reforms in the wake of globalization. Over the last few decades, the higher education sector in the KSA has witnessed a surge of intellectual pursuits into developing broad and globalized educational frameworks using international standards. Despite the abundance of such frameworks, questions remain about their authenticity, sustainability, and, most importantly, contextual viability. It is in this context that Effat University, a leading contemporary university in the KSA, takes it as its prerogative to formulate a distinct teaching model drawing upon what can be called an indigenized philosophy of liberal arts. This philosophy is well founded upon the conventions of international standards but is ethico-religious in its essence and hence socially relevant to students in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

At the core of this teaching model lies a fully dedicated program consciously called the General Education Program (GEP). The technical and social feasibility of GEP, as well as its inherent regard for diversity, are evident in its gradual but persistent transformation from merely a set of core and preparatory courses to the largest study program of its kind in the entire KSA. GEP not only represents an effective value-based teaching model of international repute but also affords many possibilities for future customizations, thanks to its intrinsically adaptable course offerings, teaching methods, and assessment mechanisms.

Over the last few decades, the KSA has undergone a wide array of social developments, during which the Kingdom's education system has significantly evolved. It has not only incorporated but also improvised on elements of Western educational philosophies, with liberal arts education (LAE) at the forefront. The dynamics between the modern Western education and the Islamic heritage of the Saudi society has given rise to ethico-Islamic models of teaching and learning, one of which is espoused in this paper. The impetus for this transformation is also strongly connected to women's role in education, patronized by the late Queen Effat Al-Thunayyan. The late Queen established the KSA's first women-only higher education institution in 1999, Effat College of Jeddah, which received a Royal decree to become a university in 2007. The university has benchmarked its study programs with some of the best liberal arts colleges of North America. However, the late Queen's vision of educating young Saudi women by combining Islamic morality and Western academic advancements has inspired the university to endeavor, quite strenuously, to strike such a balance. Islamic morality stems from values such as faith, trust, righteousness, and solidarity (Al-Attar 2010).

Very much in line with its public counterparts, Effat University had essentially embraced the spirit of LAE under the garb of general education (GE) but it managed to advance the idea of establishing a formal department dedicated to GE. Most public and mainstream universities in the



KSA employed processes and pedagogies that constituted obstacles to the implementation of the true LAE approach. Most of these institutions subscribed to the traditional approaches that encouraged students to memorize and repeat information. Effat University found these attitudes to be extremely problematic, both on technical and philosophical grounds, because they undermined the extensive interaction with students that LAE demands. Hence, this approach fails to invoke students' creative judgment of morality, which the university emphasized in its very mission and vision.

This article offers a comprehensive discussion of Effat University's teaching model as profoundly manifested in its GEP. We demonstrate here that although the university is well grounded in the tradition of LAE, it is equally rooted in Islamic morality. In the conclusion of this article, we indicate certain crucial challenges that face the university and particularly GEP and offer some suggestions and future research directions to remedy them.

The Value-Based Teaching Model of Effat University

In order to be entirely faithful to LAE while sticking to the Islamic/moral aspect of education, Effat University developed a teaching model, reflected in its overall academic endeavors but exemplified explicitly in its independent and specialized study program, GEP.

Below, we discuss how Effat University has interpreted LAE in the context of its value-based teaching model. We first attempt to conceptualize the need for such a teaching model and discuss its academic significance. Then we systematically explain its technical nuances while emphasizing the characteristics that set it apart from its counterparts. We also pose some practical issues requiring further examination.

Effat University adopts an overarching value-based system, IQRA, that guides all the functions of the university, including its teaching methods. The IQRA values are *Ibhath* (lifelong research); *Qiyam* (strong ethical, social, and educational values); *Riyada* (responsible and creative leadership); and *Adab al-Tawasul* (effective communication and outreach). The acronym IQRA bears all the more significance here because in the Islamic tradition, it is considered the first revealed expression of the Quran as the command to "read." IQRA is a comprehensive, institution-wide system that aims to develop Effat University graduates into Effat Ambassadors who uphold Islamic moral values in addition to all the personal, social, and professional characteristics of global citizens. This model helps the university to maintain its Islamic and traditional roots and yet be acknowledged as a contemporary leading educational institution. Because this model is inherently dynamic, it can be employed across the different disciplines offered at the university. The Effat University teaching and learning model is henceforth referred to as the IQRA Model (Effat University 2016).

Why a Teaching Model?

Educationalists and psychologists engaged in goal-oriented and pedagogical discussions have always aimed to find reliable and practical responses to two universal educational questions: "How can we enhance teaching and maximize learning?" and "Why do some students learn while others do not?" In an effort to answer these questions, these scholars have often constructed teaching models that guide teachers' classroom practices and behaviors. For Ellis (1979), a teaching model is a strategy based on educational theories pertinent to how individuals learn. Educationalists have mostly drawn upon the development and learning theories of Vygotsky and Piaget (Ormrod 2007) and many others to construct theoretical frameworks for their teaching models. However, Effat University believes that such theoretical frameworks may not be sufficient to act as the sole basis for a sound teaching model. Although these frameworks denote how individuals generally learn, they do not

address the needs of specific groups of students, faculty, and communities. These specific conditions and variables need to be addressed to promote effective student learning and achievement.

The ultimate aim of a teaching model is to help teachers adopt appropriate and effective teaching strategies that can enrich the learning experience of their students and in turn develop in them the characteristics and behaviors expected from students and graduates. (Joyce and Weil 1996).

Why a Value-Based Teaching and Learning Model?

Put simply, the IQRA Model is a direct response to today’s technical and social influences. It meticulously draws upon educational theories from the works of great Islamic scholars such as al-Farabi, who believed that education is actually the “acquisition of values, knowledge, and practical skills” (Al-Talbi 1993, 355), and great educationalists such as Vygotsky, for whom education is more about productivity than anything else (Bodrova and Leong 1996).

Table 1 illustrates the characteristics that Effat students, as well as faculty, should model. These characteristics are aligned to IQRA values and the overarching Effat characteristics.

TABLE 1: IQRA values in correspondence with characteristics of Effat graduates and faculty

IQRA Values	Effat Characteristics	Characteristics of Effat Graduates	Characteristics of Effat Faculty
Ibath (Lifelong Research)	Itqan (Perfection in the Work)	I1: Has the required knowledge in her field of specialization	I1: Reviews and updates course content on a regular basis
		I2: Possesses critical and creative thinking skills	I2: Is innovative in preparing and presenting lessons
		I3: Possesses problem-solving skills	I3: Is conscious of time as a valuable and limited asset
		I4: Has information literacy and research skills	I4: Promotes precision, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills
		I5: Possesses interdisciplinary and integrative learning skills	I5: Encourages an interdisciplinary approach to learning
Qiyam (Strong Ethical, Social, and Educational Values)	Ihsan (High Ethical Values)	Q1: Has high integrity and ethical values	Q1: Has a high level of integrity and self-respect
		Q2: Has self-respect and respect for others	Q2: Is emotionally passionate to serve the academic profession
		Q3: Has pride in cultural heritage and tradition	Q3: Has a positive attitude toward life and people
		Q4: Is committed to health and well-being	Q4: Is highly considerate of the students’ needs and circumstances
			Q5: Is sensitive to traditions and cultural concerns
Riyada (Responsible and Creative Leadership)	Stewardship	R1: Possesses independent and lifelong learning skills	R1: Possesses a high degree of accountability
		R2: Shows enthusiasm, self-confidence, and desire to excel	R2: Is enthusiastic, self-confident, and zealous to succeed
		R3: Is engaged with the community	R3: Has a clear vision and achievable goals
		R4: Possesses responsible and reflective leadership skills	R4: Leads by example
			R5: Embraces fairness in all personal and professional spheres of life
Adab al-Tawasul (Effective Communication and Outreach)	Ambassador	A1: Has cooperation and teamwork skills	A1: Demonstrates cooperation and teamwork skills
		A2: Demonstrates effective communication skills	A2: Is eloquent in speech and mannerism
		A3: Reaches out to others	A3: Actively contributes to society in a meaningful way
		A4: Has global awareness	A4: Is constantly aware of global trends and issues
		A5: Shows emotional intelligence	A5: Promotes a sense of citizenship