

Description and Evaluation Report
of the first
Nablus Summer Session (NSA)
held at An-Najah National University
from 5 to 16 July 2009

30 July 2009

A Joint Project of
An-Najah National University and SPARK

Funding provided by NDC and SPARK

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1. Introduction

The Nablus Summer Session, or NSA, was the first such project undertaken by the Faculty of Law at An-Najah National University (NNU). It ran from 5 July to 16 July 2009 and attracted 22 students, including five from abroad. As it was held during the regular NNU summer semester, the level of attendance by NNU students was somewhat lower than expected.

Overall the project may be deemed a good first step towards providing students education on international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law from a variety of expert perspectives.

This pilot project also provided an opportunity for the Faculty of Law and the participants to review the potential for further such projects.

In addition to this Description and Evaluation Report, the Dean of the Faculty of Law, Dr. Akram Daoud, and the cooperating-implementing partner SPARK, will discuss the project and develop a proposal for future projects.

a. Goal of Project

The goal of NSA was to provide for a unique learning experience for students and staff. It also aimed to familiarize visiting academics and students with the situation in Palestine.

To accomplish these goals a small group of foreign and local students and professors were brought together for two weeks of intensive classes and activities.

b. Donors

The main project funder was the NGO Development Center (NDC), which is based in Ramallah, Palestine. Up until this time, the NDC has provided \$15,712 of the pledged amount of \$35,276.

SPARK, a Dutch NGO with over 15 years of educational enhancement experience and based in the Netherlands, provided more than 10,000 USD of in-kind (5000 USD) and monetary (5,600 USD) support.

NNU also provided in-kind support in the form of agreed tuition waivers, recruited students and staff to participate, and provided the infrastructure and institutional base for the project.

Given the resource constraints faced by universities in illegally occupied Palestine, this project could not have taken place without the assistance of foreign donors.

c. Implementing Institution

The project was implemented by the Faculty of Law at An-Najah National University. In addition, staff dedicated to the administration and technical implementation of the project, were employed from the project funds. The project administrative staff are described below.

Professors from NNU participated in the project without pay, receiving only a stipend.

An-Najah National University also provided the logistics support for the bookkeeping and account of the project.

2. Description of Project

a. Courses & Activities

The NSA consisted of three courses: Public International Law, International Human Rights Law, and International Humanitarian Law. In addition to the time the students spent in the course(s), they were also expected to prepare written papers and/or oral presentations on a topic pertaining to the respective course.

The teaching consisted of two weeks of intensive interaction in the classroom using teaching techniques such as participatory exercises, cases studies, presentation, oral arguments, oral presentations, written papers, and evaluative examinations.

There were small opening and closing ceremonies followed by small receptions in both cases on 5 July and 16 July 2009 respectively. There were also two dinners for the professors on 8 and 15 July respectively.

There was an excursion to the historical city of Sebastia, which is in close proximity to Nablus. The professors and the students were invited to come to learn about the city.

There was a film night on 14 July 2009 when the film "Hotel Rwanda" was shown. In some of the classes audio visual presentations were made by students or professors or films were shown.

b. Local Professors

Local professors were recruited based on the recommendations of the Faculty of Law. All the professors held Ph.D.'s in their respective fields of expertise. Two of the three local professors spoke very little English. While the local professors were experts in their fields, the lack of adequate research facilities in Palestine has handicapped their ability to engage in research and writing to the same extent as the visiting professors.

The local professors are also generally more comfortable lecturing to students and only infrequently engaging them in discussion in class. The local professors were, however, more inclined to engage the students in dialogue and participatory discussion when teaching with their visiting colleagues.

Professors at NNU generally used photocopied materials, because of the difficulty of acquiring books from outside Palestine and the limited opportunities for them to publish their own work. Two of the three courses relied on photocopied materials, which were provided to students free of charge. One course provided students a published course book free of charge.

The local professors were not able to maintain adequate contacts with the visiting professors prior to the courses for a variety of reasons including their engagement with their own work, their lack of ability to communicate by email, and the new nature of the course with which they were not familiar.

c. Visiting Professors

The visiting professors were recruited from the SPARK database, an open call for applications posted to the SPARK website, or by NNU. All the visiting professors had Ph.D.'s. in relevant fields. Two were from the United States and one from South Africa. One of the visiting professors spoke fluent Arabic, one spoke a little Arabic, and one spoke no Arabic. They were selected with the requirements of being Ph.D. holders in the relevant fields, their level of expertise in the field, and having adequate teaching experience.

The visiting professors generally planned the courses and choose the texts, some of which were supplemented by the local professors at the star of the course.

Several of the visiting professors complained about lack of joint planning of the courses. One visiting professor lamented the lack of adequate coordination stating there “needed [to be] more cooperation among professors.” Another wrote in his evaluation that he saw a “need for an enhanced communication channel between visiting lectures and [local] co-lectures.” He noted that these communications need to be facilitated “well in advance.”

All the visiting professors expressed appreciation for the visits and activities that were organized and one requested that more activities be organized so as to allow the students to have more contacts with their professors and the visiting professors to enhance their academic experience.

d. Students

In total twenty-two students participated, some taking more than one class. The total number of class attendance was twenty-seven students. Five students took International Human Rights Law. Seven students took Public International Law. Fourteen students took International Humanitarian Law.

The lower number of students was due to (a) late and insufficiently clear publicity, (b) lack of encouragement from local professors, and (c) a lack of understanding regarding the accreditation of the courses and (d) the fact that regular NNU courses were being given in the summer semester.

Five overseas students participated. Four students from Nablus but outside the university participated. And fourteen NNU students participated, although the minority was from the Faculty of Law.

The level of English among the local students was generally low and the students were heavily reliant on the translators for the Arabic translations. In some cases the local professors taught in Arabic without translation, although this practice was discouraged.

e. Project Administration

The project was administered by staff employed by the project using the funds provided by donors. The project administrator was employed as a Project Assistant. The Dean of the Faculty of Law and the Academic Coordinator of the Project also contributed to the project implementation through supervision and facilitation.

Some problems of preparation arose when neither the Dean of the Faculty of Law and the Academic Coordinator of the Project were present to assist the Project Assistant in the three weeks leading up to the project due to last minute obligations. Most of these problems were resolved by the Administrative Assistant and Academic Coordinator who arrived four days before the project was to begin.

i. Administrative Staff

One Administrative Assistant (a Swiss national visiting NNU) was hired from 1 April 2009 to 31 July 2009. The decision to hire expatriate staff was made based on the late notice that funding had been approved for the NSA 2009. SPARK provided the administrative assistant with technical assistance and planning, but there was insufficient logistical and administrative planning with NNU before the program began.

ii. Translators

Three translators were hired from among local students and graduated students. One was a trained translator, one was studying to be a translator, and the third was a good English speaker who aspires to study English.

Translation was provided for all courses. In some cases the local professor taught some classes only in Arabic as all the students in the class spoke Arabic. No translation was undertaken in those classes. The majority of classes were taught in both English and Arabic with consecutive translation.

The translators were recruited very late in the project and received no special training, although all of them had some experience. The lack of any preparation mean that in some cases the translators were not able to quickly assimilate within the project and to understand what was expected of them.

iii. Budget

The project budget was prepared in the Fall of 2008 and submitted to potential funders in early December 2008. An initial budget of US\$75,010 was submitted for funding. As the support for a project with this budget was not forthcoming, the implementing partner revised the budget on the basis of donor's commitments to US\$56,075. The funding approved by the primary donor NDC was approximately 75% of the originally requested budget. The original budget was then revised to conform with the available funding. One agreed enhancement to the budget was subsequently approved (\$3851 USD for the visiting professor's airfares) and is reflected in the final budget that is attached.

Of this budget approximately 55% percent of was actually spent. This was due in part to the lower than expected number of students who enrolled, the late announcement about the NSA, and savings on several budget items.

The official bookkeeping and accounts for the project were kept by the Finance Department of NNU. The project, however, also maintained its own bookkeeping in the form of copies of receipts, income and expenditure sheets, a petty cash sheet, a budget and a summary sheet. These were reconciled with the NNU Finance Department's books on 27 and 28 July 2009.

The accounts and the project were audited on 29 July 2009 by an external auditor applying common accounting standards.

iv. Material

In most cases, materials were distributed by the professors based on photocopied handouts.

Some visiting professors brought teaching materials with them and copies made for the students. In one course, the professor's own English language course book was used.

The local professors generally taught from Arabic textbooks. Some English language supplementary materials were provided. Some Arabic supplementary materials were also provided.

3. Evaluation

Evaluations were conducted by questionnaires to professors and students. The three local visiting and three visiting professors were given questionnaires. Unfortunately due to administrative failure not all of the questionnaires were circulated in the International Humanitarian Law class. An effort to redress these failures was made by contacting the professors and students who did not complete questionnaires.

General lessons to be learned from the evaluations are discussed in the Conclusions below.

a. Students

Few of the students were law students and student recruitment within the law faculty was very poor and needs to be improved.

About two-third of the students were from NNU, mainly from the natural sciences.

According to the evaluations, many students felt that they did not have sufficient background knowledge to participate in the courses, but they enjoyed going to class and felt that they gained new knowledge and skills.

Most students valued the experience as a "first" and welcomed the opportunity to interact with foreign students and professors.

b. Professors

The local professors were recruited by the Faculty of Law. While they contributed adequately to the project they were in most cases not enthusiastic, unprepared, and did not appear to fully understand the project or the concept of co-teaching a course. While they had been briefed by the Dean of the Faculty of Law and the NSA Administrative Assistant, it appears that the nature of the project was not understood well enough to enable them to maximize the value of their participation and especially their cooperation with foreign professors.

The local professors stated in their evaluations that they enjoyed having the experience of working with visiting professors and also teaching students from

outside of their faculty and foreign students as well. Two out of the three local professors felt that the course was too intensive in too short of an amount of time.

c. External Auditors

The Palestinian auditing firm, BDO National Brothers, was hired to audit the project and the books that were kept both by the project and by NNU. The audit took place on 29 July 2009. This firm was recommended by the Financial Department at NNU and conducted the audit in accordance with recognized international accounting standards. The auditing firm has not financial interest in the project or any formal relationship with NNU or SPARK, the project implementing partners, or with NDC, the main donor.

4. Conclusions

a. Evaluation

1. As an initial project this was a good step forward in that it proved that such projects can be carried out.
2. Project approval and funding was provided very late and was a major hindrance to the implementation of the project. This was unfortunate as the proposal had been provided in December 2008, the proposal was similar to one submitted for the past two years, and the Dutch government had promised to make an expedient decision.
3. Better pre-planning could ensure that students have more timely and more accurate information.

b. Recommendations

1. The NSA was a good first step and should be continued in the future as it makes a contribution to both exposing NNU professors and students to colleagues from outside Palestine; and it provides professors and students from outside Palestine a glimpse of the situation in Palestine. It also contributes to enhancing higher education at NNU and in Palestine by bringing in outside expertise.
2. Consideration should be given to holding the NSA during the regular NNU summer semester as a module in courses that are scheduled to be taught in the field of international law, international relations, and perhaps public health. NNU courses that are part of the NSA could then be offered for one extra credit for NNU students and two credits for foreign students seeking only a certificate for the English/Arabic module.

3. Consideration should be given to inviting the local professors to visit the universities of the foreign professors for one week during the spring semester so as to be able to observe teaching and research facilities at a foreign university.
4. Better preparation should be made by the hiring of a full-time local Project Administrator for six months from 15 January 2010 to 15 July 2101. Having a full-time Project Administrator starting in mid-January, will undoubtedly facilitate better planning and preparation of the NSA.
5. Publicity should be done in a more timely manner so as to inform students of the option and encourage their participation from both inside and outside Palestine.
7. A more advanced effort should be made to recruit translators and provide them a one-day briefing before the NSA so that they understand their responsibilities and how consecutive translation works.
8. Recruitment of a local Administrative Assistant with familiarity of NNU could have better facilitated cooperation with NNU and integration of the project into the NNU community.

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