

Draft 1 (inspired by Edy and Manuel, August 14, 2004)
Searching for Common Ground at the University of Maryland: Towards an Israeli/Palestinian student leadership dialogue

The main objectives of this program are:

- a) To stimulate a further development of the paradigm shift at the University of Maryland moving away from “importing” the Israel/Arab conflict to College Park to “exporting” the Canadian traditions of pluralism, tolerance and nonviolence to the troubled Middle East.
- b) To help transforming the current impasse and rupture of relations between Palestinian and Israeli student leadership into a fruitful dialogue conducive to action for justice and peace.

This proposal suggest turning the dynamics that the confrontation between pro-Arab and pro-Jewish groups at Concordia University in the past years into a constructive force that could bring together their peers in Palestinian and Israeli Universities into a renewed dialogue for peace and justice. Conceived as a two-year process of building blocs- each in itself a positive effort- the conceptualization includes steps aimed at a participatory transformation that leads incrementally into a sustained cooperative venture. Moving through a joint planning and funding effort; a mainly lecture/dialogue series at College Park towards the understanding the roots of the current conflict; a facilitated weekend retreat for team building and brainstorming in the preparation of a joint plan of action; a College Park study mission visiting Jerusalem and the West Bank universities including a weekend long workshop with Palestinian and Israeli students and a parallel training in “citizens diplomacy”; a visit of the Middle East members of their respective academic communities to UMCP to foster dialogue among themselves and with the university and the community at large in Greater Washington DC, to end in drafting an action plan for sustained trilateral cooperation. A successful similar program conducted at the University of Maryland – College Park between the years 1992-4 evaluated in Appendix I, inspires this proposal. The draft of this project has been preliminarily discussed with students and faculty at Concordia and improved incorporating their initial comments, a commitment towards active participation and initial testing of the grounds for the suggested course of action.

STAGES

Stage 1: Name

Look for appealing name, building a shared initiative

This initial stage has included already included discussions among faculty and students, consultation with the Center for International Development and Conflict Management of the UMCP, invitation of Profs. Manuel Hassassian (executive Vice-President at the University of Maryland) and Edy Kaufman (Executive Director, H. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to a presentation about “Team-Teaching our Israeli/Palestinian Conflict”. Upon receipt of the grant, a continuous and systematic dialogue is to take place to include all existing and potential stakeholders at UMCP. The discussion of the proposal is to be expanded and amended as a result of one-to-one interviews, focus groups. At the end of this stage a comprehensive advisory board will be formed and vision statement for dialogues at Concordia University is to be worked out

Stage 2: Broadening our horizons with understanding

A of dialogue/lecture series at UMCP on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, with a representation of a pluralistic and multidisciplinary point of views and in a dialogue format. This for a is to at times with open sessions to the general public, facilitated and prepare towards understanding the different positions as well as searching for common ground in the resolution of the main conflicting issues (Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water, borders, security) as well as an analysis of universities and student life in Palestinian and Israeli universities. To be conducted over a semester for a core of regular participants and a periphery of invited guests, to be facilitated with ground rules encouraging non-adversarial dialogue.

Most lectures will be provided by local experts, and a special weeklong workshop, to be conducted by Profs. Hassassian and Kaufman on “Consensus building on the role of religion in peacebuilding”

Stage 3: Team-building for peace

A two day retreat to take place in an isolated and inspiring place, to include 30 students, faculty and administrators facilitated with the aim of team building towards the next stages. The program will focus on a) what are the current cleavages in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, b) peace plans and common ground civil societies initiatives, and c) the prospects of the UMCP university community in contributing towards b), mainly through providing an environment conducive to Palestinian/Israeli dialogue for the advancement of peace and justice. The vision statement is to be revisited and a brainstorming session about stages 4 and 5 is to conclude the retreat.

Stage 4: Coming to the Holy land and engaging new partners for dialogue

Depending on budgetary limits, a 2-4 delegation to come for a two week to be organized by Prof. Hassassian and Kaufman.

Stage 5: Sharing the Canadian experience of tolerance and diversity

A specially designed Conflict transformation program in College Park is organized for 12-15 Muslim, Jewish and Christian students and four faculty and administrators, respectively from Bethlehem and Hebrew University. The workshop is to be designed by the Concordia University Conflict Resolution Program as a problem-solving workshop (with stages of trust-building, skills building, consensus building and re-entry- and involve local students and faculty in the formal and informal activities, including housing the visiting students in local diverse homes. The last part of the workshop will focus on the re-entry and prepare a work plan for trilateral Canadian/Israeli/Palestinian academic cooperation.

Stage 1 - TITLE two months

Stage 2 - “ six months (semester)

Stage 3 - “ two months

Stage four “ six months (semester)

Stage five “ six months (semester)

Final evaluation two months

Total two years