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Dr. Bernard L. Madison
Dean
Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences
University of Arkansas
Old Main 525
Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701

Dear Dean Madison:

It was a great experience for me to visit at the University of Arkansas as a member of the Middle East Advisory Panel and to become somewhat acquainted at first hand with the King Fahd Middle East Studies Program. I know that the other panel members and I who visited appreciated very much the fact that our schedule enabled us to meet a number of people and learn about many facts of the Program. I also wish to thank you for the hospitality of the university and the helpfulness of many people, especially Mark Cory, Adnan Haydar, and Mounir Farah, and, of course, yourself.

As a person involved with international, area, and foreign language studies for some time, it is exciting to see a new area/language study program so recently launched and with such support. The program apparently can point to two kinds of support: that of HRH King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the support of the University of Arkansas and its wider community. Both are important.

My fellow Advisory Panel members may have already informed you that rather than sending you a joint report, we are each writing to you individually and at the same time sending each other copies of what we send you. Among the three of us, there appeared to be sufficient difference and convergence of interests and expertise so that we are not likely to duplicate or contradict each other.

In your letter to me of September 21, you refer to "our stated goals" for MESP. I do not think that the Advisory Panel received copies of papers that set forth these goals. My comments therefore do not comment on the stage at which the program finds itself in relation to goals but more in relation to itself. I hope that the fact that a precise blueprint for MESP apparently may not yet exist both gives the program and yourself as dean an important degree of flexibility and also affirms that the Advisory Panel has an important role to play.

Before presenting my observations and recommendations, I want to congratulate the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences, yourself as Dean of the College, Professor Mark Cory, Chair of the MEST

Faculty Steering Committee, and Professor Adnan Haydar, Director of the program, for its impressive accomplishments as of our visit.

-- In little over one year the program has put in place a full range of courses in Arabic, elementary, intermediate, and advanced, and during the current year is offering 35 courses on a variety of subjects, comprising an undergraduate minor program, soon probably to be a major.

-- The student attrition rate in the language courses is extraordinarily low, while, according to my Advisory Panel colleagues after sitting in on a language class, the quality of instruction, at least in that class was very high, combining oral practice with attention to grammatical structures.

-- The four new faculty hired last year for the program appear to be outstanding, as my inquiries at UAF and elsewhere affirmed.

-- The appointment of Dr. Mounir A. Farah as Associate Director for the External Relations of the MEST Program and with the Fulbright Institute of International Relations brings important strengths to the program and to the university. His contacts in the Middle East, especially Jordan, and his extensive experience in encouraging and developing international studies curricula for the high school level, including authoring the world history textbook most widely used in American high schools, make Dr. Farah eminently qualified to develop outreach for the MEST Program, not only in Arkansas but also involving the Middle East. We learned that Dr. Farah's outreach activities for the MEST Program so far have met with vary favorable results.

-- For the MEST Program to receive broad support across the University, it is important that faculty members from a variety of disciplines be familiar with the program and supportive of it. The trips to Jordan and Saudi Arabia in the summers of 1994 and 1995 of groups of faculty led by Dr. Haydar generated this kind of support. The inclusion in the second trip of faculty from other UA campuses represented an excellent approach to international professional development, especially appropriate because three other UA campuses are also benefitting from the Saudi support for Middle East studies.

-- Whether the MEST Program's experience in supporting three study abroad initiatives in summer 1995 in cooperation with Yarmouk University was strongly positive should be reviewed. I would need more information on the programs to evaluate them. If, as I heard from a student who was in the intensive Arabic program at Yarmouk, the American students are considerably isolated from local students and the Jordanian culture and society, efforts should be made to change this or a more propitious site for summer language study selected. If study abroad related to the MEST Program could take place during the academic year rather than summer, the American students could undoubtedly interact more with local students as well as need less scholarship support. I realize that the program will expand and strengthen its study abroad and exchange options for students when feasible. Again, in this area it is impressive how much has already been achieved.

--Still other notable accomplishments which merit mention which are included in your September 1995 Progress Report are the library acquisitions (boxed away from the Advisory Panel's view), the MEST Program-sponsored translation competition, the launching in fall 1995 of the first Middle East Colloquium, and various special events that highlight the Middle East, such as the Middle East focus of the April 1995 Annual Fulbright Institute Symposium and special guest lectures.

Turning to aspects of area and international studies programs that more relate to my professional experience than does Middle East Studies per se, I comment below on some organizational concerns.

Structure and Decision-making

While a number of very important decisions have already been made on the MEST Program, many more will have to be made down the road, especially in the next year or two. What should the program look like as it nears maturity? What disciplines should be included and at what stages of program development? The fact that Economics may not be seen as something to include in the near future, partly apparently because Economics is in the College of Business Administration, not in the J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences, underscores the unavoidably political context of academic decision-making from which the MEST Program is not immune.

Decisions relating to the MEST Program seem to be made, as at most universities, by a combination of individual lobbying, review and recommendations by various formal bodies, wide consultation by deans and chairs, and encouragement of individuals initiatives and, perhaps even more, of collaborative efforts.

I believe that UAF should have an agreed, relatively "transparent" decision-making system for the MEST Program so that persons wanting to offer input know the procedures for doing this. While the present system, if not clear to all interested parties, appears quite democratic and widely responsive, more effort to communicate this would be a service to the Program. Some aspects should, however, be clarified.

-- The role of relevant department heads in decision-making on the MEST Program is not clear;

-- The role of the Faculty Steering Committee also seems unclear. Some committee members did not seem to know on what basis they were asked to join it or what their term of office or expectations of involvement should be. Members expressed surprise that so far the Steering Committee has not met (in an E-mail age, why does it need to?).

-- The relationship of the Fulbright Institute and of the Fulbright college to the MEST Program might also benefit from clarification.

-- Lest the foregoing convey negative reactions towards the current restructuring of decision-making and Structure.

It would be understandable, however, if at this early stage in the program's development, decision-making procedures are deliberately kept flexible and not spelled out in order not to limit UAF's responsiveness to emerging needs and opportunities in building the program.

Also relevant to structure, the establishment of the MEST Program at UAF may make it timely to seek more coordination and cross-campus linkages for international activities and programs generally at the University. A degree of coordination need not mean difficult directives from a central international office, but could be useful in tapping into or mobilizing other programs in support of or relevant to the MEST Program. For example, a coordinating office if it included foreign student affairs could work with the MEST

Programs to help it accomplish its goals in international education.


Similarly, if the study abroad office, now located in the Fulbright Institute, became part of a coordinating effort, the resulting closer linkage could better serve the MEST Program's commitment to international exchanges. It seems particularly appropriate that the U.S. university which is so closely identified with the J. William Fulbright College as well as the broader "Fulbright legacy" should maximize its contributions to international studies through drawing together its international involvements, as is the trend nationally in the U.S.

Other Concerns

A fellow Advisory Panel member suggested during our visit at UAF that the MEST Program could benefit greatly and in a variety of ways by having a MEST office. I fully agree. This would greatly enhance the program's identity, offer a place where persons involved with or interested in the program could gather or share their interests, and support its needs, and articulate their support for the program. All such communication will continue to be very important.

In addition I would urge the MEST invite Dr. Ann I. Schneider, only retired from the Center for International Education, U.S. Department of Education in October. She has enormous experience with international and area studies in American higher education. She can well advise on organizational structures, outreach, collaborative management. Dr. Schneider is strongly committed to international education as well as informed on its funding, U.S. government and other sources. Enclosed is a copy of a letter from her announcing that she will now be working as an independent consultant.

Sincerely yours,



Barbara B. Burn
Associate Provost

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cc: Dr. Saud Shawaff
Dr. Ernest N. McCarus