

# FOUNDATION PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

An academic endeavor towards quality education



## TOGETHER WE SUCCEED

### VISION

The Foundation Program aspires to occupy a distinctive position amongst the Sultanate's GFPs by imparting quality education.

### MISSION

The Foundation Program strives to equip students with quality, outcome-based education in a rich teacher-learner environment conducive to academic excellence and life-long learning.

### VALUES

- Academic excellence
- Individual responsibility
- Life-long learning
- Quality education
- Continuous improvement



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# DIRECTOR'S LETTER



"This year marks a new chapter in the life of FP – a chapter characterized by a strong commitment to not just meet the requirements, but to exceed expectations."

## NEW YEAR, NEW FOCUS

FAIÇAL BEN KHALIFA

Dear readers,

I am pleased to present our bi-annual e-newsletter to keep you in the loop with our latest developments. During the 2014-19 Operational Plan, the Foundation Program (FP) aimed at meeting the minimum requirements as stipulated by the Oman Academic Standards for GFPs. This year marks a new chapter in the life of FP – a chapter characterized by a strong commitment to not just meet the requirements, but to exceed expectations. To do so, FP worked on a strategy with a three-pronged approach, targeting program, students and staff.

Starting this year, FP set out to overhaul its English, math and computing curricula to bring them up to speed with the latest developments in the field of education. This was done in consultation with the college dean and corresponding departments' representatives to ensure exiting students satisfy college requirements. The English curricula, for instance, scrapped the A1 to B1 program and adopted an A2 to B2 program. A new IELTS-based course will soon be introduced to increase the linguistic proficiency of students and familiarize them with the English language international testing system. Math and IT also followed suit in terms of restructuring their programs, making it three solid levels in Math and an IC3-based program in IT. Math and IT quizzes and exams are now run online on a Moodle-based server, saving tons of paper and aligning FP with the Digital Age.

FP also worked on students' mindset and attitude by fleshing out the portion of Study Skills in the in-class, co-curricular portfolios. To push towards learner autonomy, FP launched CLMS – an online platform run by Cambridge University Press. Moreover, a Muraje'a Centre was opened in Block D, replacing the stigmatized remedial sessions and inviting all students regardless of their abilities to do revision in English and math with the help of a senior student leader. To consolidate the Virtual Learning Environment, FP is planning to videotape lessons to build online audio-visual resources up for grabs for students.

As to faculty, FP sought to encourage action research among teachers by concentrating on research-focused in-house CPDs, either through the FP Professional Development Committee or via CTL. FP also continued developing the skills of its teachers by inviting Cambridge University Press certified trainers. FP teachers teamed up to work on research whose findings are going to be presented in international conferences or else sent for publication in refereed journals.

So, I encourage you to spare a moment to go through the newsletter to gain deeper insights on the latest developments. 

### EDITORIAL TEAM:

*Carmel Hankins, Erica Bailey, Steven Sampliner*

# EVENTS & NEWS

## FOUNDATION PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS TEACHER'S DAY



The Recreation Committee organized International Teachers Day for FP teachers. The program included a welcome speech, games and the sharing of teaching experiences (even the Director shared one of his anecdotes!). Snacks and cake were served at the end. A small gift was given to the luckiest person of the day and teachers picked an inspiring quote to encourage them.

## CAMBRIDGE CLASSROOM TRAINING



David Williams led faculty through the Cambridge material on some of the reasons why and how to use the mobile phone app in class. Along with presenting material from the screen, there were printed screenshots of various app screens which faculty analyzed and discussed in groups.

## RISK AWARENESS LECTURE

This term, the Risk Management Committee conducted a risk awareness session for teachers on 23 October in the multipurpose room. It was conducted by Thangadurai K. After the session, teachers discussed in groups and noted down some of the potential risks in the Foundation Program.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### February

**2 February**

**Start of Spring Semester  
for Colleges**

### March

**10 March**

**End of FP Term 2**

**22 March**

**Al-Isra'a Wal Miraj  
(tentative)**

**23 March**

**Start of FP Term 3**

**31 March - 2 April**

**Cultural Week**

### April

**31 March - 2 April**

**Cultural Week**

### May

**24 - 27 May**

**Eid al Fitr (tentative)**

### June

**25 June**

**End of Academic Year**

### July - August

**Summer Break**

### September

**1 September**

**Start of FP Term 1**

# COMMITTEE FOCUS



## Foundation Program Academic Council (FPAC)

The Foundation Program Academic Council (FPAC) is the program's main decision-making body, meeting to discuss and decide upon key or urgent issues. Highlights of the committee's activities this term include: Finding a workaround for a supplier shortfall in the new *Unlock* 2nd edition textbooks; Establishing the Evening Student Support subcommittee, which ensures that evening students have access to the

same level of support as other students; Overseeing a massive program restructuring in which A2 content was frontloaded to Level 1, thereby opening up Level 3 to the IELTS-specific *Mindset* textbook so that all students exit the FP at IELTS Band 5.0 or higher; Reviewing progress on addressing OAAA affirmations and recommendations; and Founding the new Muraje'a Centre.

## Health & Safety

The Health & Safety (H&S) Committee has a chair and two other members. Our mission is to instill and maintain a culture of H&S awareness and practice among all General Foundation Program stakeholders through activities and workshops, in order to promote a healthy workplace and to minimize H&S incidents on site. Our goal is to implement Dhofar University's Health & Safety Policy. We conducted a Blood

Drive with the collaboration of Sultan Qaboos Hospital and the partnership of the College of Commerce and Business Administration, College of Arts and Applied Sciences, and College of Engineering on 30 October. This term, we are planning to do an awareness campaign about Diabetes - Prevention and Care by inviting a guest speaker to give a speech about this current health issue.



## Risk Management

The mission of the Risk Management Committee is to assess and foster awareness of risks faced by the Foundation Program in order to minimize the risks and strengthen the Risk Management System in the Foundation Program. The committee organizes awareness activities for two stakeholders: faculty and students. Faculty awareness events are held

once a year, whereas student awareness activities are each term and piggyback Class Representative meetings. The committee reviews feedback from each term to incorporate into subsequent awareness events and updates the Risk register and Risk forms. The updated Risk register and forms are delivered to individual risk owners.

# COMMITTEE FOCUS

## Student Affairs

The main function of the FP Student Affairs Committee (SAC) is to discuss and recommend decisions on student-related issues, including student academic misconduct cases. The SAC consists of four faculty members, a University Student Affairs representative and a student representative from the Foundation Program. All members take part in discussions and have the right to vote.

SAC holds meetings after every mid-term, final, make-up and re-sit test in order to look into misconduct reports. Committee members discuss the cases in question and vote to make the final decisions. There must be sufficient evidence to consider any misconduct during the exams. Decisions are made by majority and concerned students are notified promptly.



## Faculty Support

The Faculty Support Committee (FSC) includes three working groups: Research, Professional Development (PD), Community Service (CSC) and Recreation (RC). It aims at promoting research activities, professional development, community service and other events for the faculty. The committee conducted nine events last term: two FPRC events in October and November; five PD workshops, including

one Cambridge University Press, one Math, three English on 31 October, 19 and 24 November; one CSC event with Dhofar University on 13 November; and one RC event on 7 October. This term the FSC has already started with an array of events like the PD workshops on 31 December and 2 January, the CLMS training on 26 December, and a beach cleaning day, which is being planned, that is sure to be a highlight.

## Student Support

The Student Support Committee led three outings on October 26 and November 9 and 16 for hostel students to Saadah Park for a picnic lunch and games. This was followed by an alumna-led tour of Al Baleed Archaeological Site, where the students engaged with local history and foreign tourists, all in English, as a way to encourage their speaking skills.

The outings are one of the Foundation Programs's most popular activities of the year. On campus, the committee organized a movie noon on November 12. Sixty-one students attended, laughed at the right parts, and took part in a game of *Kahoot!* afterward. Like the Al Baleed outings, another movie noon will definitely be on the program for next term.



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



"Students are not the same from year to year, as they have different needs to be satisfied."

Amal Hassan Mursi Essa  
FP ENGLISH TEACHER

## GOOD TEACHER, GOOD LEARNER

### *Sharing tips for classroom management*

BY AMAL HASSAN MURSI ESSA

Teaching is a never-ending process. Satisfaction with being "just a teacher" with many years of experience should not be any teacher's career goal. We always hear the magic words: "do not stop" and "do not be fossilized." Stepping away from phony words and pedagogical concepts, it's important to share our learning and teaching experiences. This is where the role of professional development comes in my life and how I made use of class management in running a successful learning environment.

After spending 25 years teaching different students, I discovered that I'm still learning. Students are not the same from year to year, as they have different needs to be satisfied. Thus, the first thing I learnt from the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) course was: "Know your students." From the first day in class, you should try to understand your students; ask them about their fears, needs and expectations; build a rapport; melt the ice and be one of them. Moreover, I learnt the importance of my tone of voice. You have to know

when to be soft and when to be loud. Knowing how to observe students during their learning is another vital skill. It's necessary to know how to go around the room to check student understanding and how to choose someone to share the answer with the class. It's never a good idea to choose the weakest student. Otherwise, you might embarrass them. Only call a student out if you are sure that their answer is correct to encourage them to share again. It is very important for building self-esteem.

In classroom management, keeping students fully engaged can be a challenge. Never teach important things at the end of the class and try to create new things to keep your students attentive from beginning until the end, which is very difficult.

Finally, the key to being a good teacher is to be a good learner. If the teacher really knows their students and tries hard to cope with students' needs, then a teacher will never stop learning. 

# STAFF PROFILE



## Lauren Mertens

My name is Lauren Mertens. I'm from Atlanta, Georgia, USA, where I completed a Masters in Applied Linguistics at Georgia State University. From 2006 to 2010, I taught English to students in Ankara, Turkey. Before moving to Salalah, I worked at the International Rescue Committee of Atlanta as the Literacy and Civics Coordinator. In my free time, I enjoy practicing yoga, playing with my dog, and watching nature documentaries and comedy specials on Netflix.

## Debra Ritter

My name is Debra Ritter. I'm from St. Louis, Missouri, USA. Before coming to Dhofar University, I worked as an instructor for an ESL program at Troy University in Alabama. It was there that I received my Master's in Applied Linguistics. Second language instruction, sociolinguistics, and French are some of my academic interests. I love spending time with my family, I enjoy watching true crime documentaries, and from a young age, I knew I wanted to travel and live abroad.



## Steven Sampliner

My name is Steven Sampliner. I grew up in Tucson, Arizona, USA, so I love warm desert climates. I have completed two BAs: one in Classics at the University of Arizona, and another in English Language and Literature at Southern New Hampshire University. I received my M.Ed. in ELL from the American College of Education. I began my teaching journey in 2005. Since then, I have taught in Italy, China, Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Oman. Photography is one of my main interests and fortunately Oman is abundant in spectacular natural beauty.

# DEPARTMENT UPDATES



## MATH

A restructuring process of math courses was started in December in order to exceed the minimum requirements of OAAA, and to be sure that our FP students are fully equipped to complete their math studies in the college. Phase one for the Level 1 course is finished and the second phase for Level 2 is in progress, to be applied in March.

## IT

For the Fall term, the Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC3) curriculum was introduced into the IT unit, restructuring Level 1 and Level 2. Along with this, assessment methods have been modified and are now Moodle-based. Keyboard training and additional resources have been implemented to give extra support.



## ENGLISH

In September, the English unit implemented a brand-new curriculum, moving A2 content to Level 1 and ramping up to B1 in Level 2. Cambridge University's IELTS-specific *Mindset* textbook will also be implemented in Level 3 to ensure that all students are at an IELTS Band 5.0 level or better.

# FP AT NIGHT



## BALANCING ACT

*Striving for success at work and university*

BY ERICA BAILEY

The Foundation Program (FP) has taken great strides in shaping a comprehensive program that prepares students for academic study at Dhofar University. These students attend classes, engage in the learning process in and out of the classroom, and aim to transition into their colleges once they have successfully completed the program. While the majority of students are following this “traditional” path, the FP has also opened their doors to adults who are looking for a chance to pursue their own educational and personal goals. By offering classes in the evening hours, working adults can gain the same benefits as more traditional students.

Evening students who are working full-time do have some unique challenges. Many of these students leave work and come directly to campus, staying until 10:00 p.m., with little time to do homework or study. Finding balance can often be very stressful for these students. In order to better address the needs of these students, the Evening Student Support Subcommittee was

created. “We needed a way to ensure that evening students receive the same opportunities afforded to our morning students,” said Nathaniel Lotze, Deputy Director of the FP. Allowing for separate Class Representative meetings and additional Muraje’a Centre sessions also add more support.

Additionally, classroom teachers are playing an important role in working with these students. “Group work and regular feedback, with short chunks of work for practice helps them to stay focused,” Suchi Gopalan, FP English instructor, states. “It is quite easy to establish rapport with the students for most of them are mature, which goes a long way in achieving the desirable results.”

The FP continues to find ways to improve the classroom experience for these unique students. Working with staff, committee members and students are crucial. In the end, the right combination of motivation and student support will only benefit these hard-working students. 

***“Group work and regular feedback, with short chunks of work for practice helps [students] to stay focused.”***

**Suchi Gopalan  
FP ENGLISH TEACHER**