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Management of Research in Palestinian Universities

I would like to start by thanking the organizers of this workshop for all the time and effort they have put in preparing for today as I would want to thank An-Najah University represented by its president Prof Rami Hamdallah for providing the venue and for hosting us on their campus. I would like to express my appreciation for the PEACE program, in particular our European partners for this forward looking initiative to expand their cooperation to support research development in Palestine.

Introduction:

By its very nature, a university must play a significant role as an initiator in the creation, advancement and dissemination of knowledge. This takes place through the research activity of its faculty and staff as well as its taught programs and other services that it provides to the community. Our universities hence see their mission as threefold: teaching, research and community service.

The Palestinian universities were founded to meet the higher education needs of the Palestinian societies. All Palestinian universities were established within the past 35 years under the most severe conditions. At the founding stages of the universities the major concern was on providing academic and professional programs that would meet the immediate needs of the Palestinian society and hence the emphasis on teaching and the delivery of curricula of the highest quality.

We, in Palestinian Universities, have to continue in our threefold mission, with each university having the liberty to strike its own balance between the three in accordance with its mission. Each university should be able to set its own research priorities in taking into account national priorities to guide its policies and decisions. There will continue to be a focus on teaching. Teaching and research are complimentary rather than competitive activities. Although some might even claim that research; especially pure research is a luxury that we cannot afford under our present conditions. But research is vital to providing a stimulating learning environment to students. Education in a research-oriented environment is crucial to ensure the characteristics with which we aspire to equip our graduates for them to be critical and independent thinkers, problem solvers, decision makers and responsible citizens ready to take initiatives. A curriculum that is delivered by a research active faculty is both up to date and relevant. It makes a world of difference in their educational experience when students interact with faculty that are at the forefront of knowledge and abreast with the latest developments in their subjects. I do not think that we can disagree with this as the guiding principle of our educational mission. Being clear about the mission and priorities is vital to the development of curricula, teaching and learning policies as well as research policies and for setting in place administrative structures to ensure their implementation and the fulfillment of the mission. But a word of caution is called for here. It is not enough to pay lip service to this but it should be translated and reflected in our practices and decisions. Moreover, and I should be quick in pointing this out early in this presentation that significant and important quality research is being undertaken at our universities and other institutions in Palestine. These active researchers are the real driving force behind creating awareness for the need for their universities to place more emphasis in setting up management structures as well as policies and strategies to encourage, support, recognize and award research. All our universities can boast a number of centers where cutting edge research is being undertaken.

Management Structures

The universities have developed research policies and regulations to organize and facilitate research activity. The status given to the management structure of research is indicative of the importance that a university gives to research. The more elaborate and sophisticated the structure the more confidence and appreciation that creates in the research outcome. It ensures that the research undertaken is of highest quality and meets internationally recognized standards. Although lack of such structures might not pose an impediment to the active researcher but it sure sends a message about the seriousness of the institution in the promotion of research which might frustrate the active researcher and while encourage complacency and an excuse for inactivity for others.

Unto this end, universities have instated structures to manage research activity:

The majority of the universities have given it the status of deanship: Deanship of Research (Al Najah, Al-Quds, Polytechnic, Hebron, the Islamic University, Arab American), Deanship of Graduate Studies and Research . I believe Al Najah started with a joint deanship but has two separate ones for research and graduate studies. Moreover those deanships are accompanied by Research Councils or Research Committees with representatives from the different faculties.

Coordinator: Around the year 2000, BU we have introduced the position of Research Coordinator. Although it was an important move towards promoting research, it was not sufficient because it was not supported by clear policies, principles and procedures. The university is now considering a deanship for research and graduate studies

Birzeit has also introduced the Office of Grants and Contracts: (Birzeit)

In the absence of a university research council or committee the management of the research is done at the office of the Academic Vice President and VP for Finances.

Role and responsibility of the Managing Bodies

- The managing body's task hence is to support, encourage, coordinate and record all research activities across the university.
- Have in place a policy on research and a code of practice that are published and easily accessible by the university community and to ensure that all research activity complies with the code. The presence of such a code gives research credibility and international recognition. Examples of issues that the code of practice should tackle:
 - ✓ a clearly articulated code of research ethics that the university complies with especially when dealing with human subjects;
 - ✓ confidentiality of records; data protection and privacy
 - ✓ conflict of interest
 - ✓ policy on intellectual property to safeguard the rights of the researcher and the university.
 - ✓ Policies and procedures to deal with research misconduct: plagiarism, fake data, etc.
- Providing information on all aspects of the research policy and ensuring its implementation across the university.
- It acts as a liaison with external agencies and provides advice, guidance and information in support of research.
- Because of the nature of the funding of research in Palestine, which depends heavily on external sources, then considerable amount of the energy in management will necessarily have to be devoted to helping identify funding resources such as compiling a database of the organizations that can be tapped for funding. They must have at hand as much information as possible about each organization: its funding cycle, its areas of interest and funding priorities, to who it answers, the conditions for applying, how complicated is the application procedure and when should one start with preparing an application document. There is no need for each university to be doing this. Why duplicate the effort. Universities can collaborate on

this. This is useful information to have at hand readily available for the researchers. Each university can then compare its own priorities with those of the organizations and hopefully find a best fit. It is important that universities be prepared with this kind of information rather than wait until there is a call for applications.

- Training in writing proposals for the different organizations.
- Having in place at each university principles and procedures for applying, for evaluating applications to ensure that they comply with conditions of the funding agency, the university's policies and priorities.
- External Funding Policy, Research Grant Spending Regulation to govern financial compensations, release time from teaching, incentives and ensure fairness and transparency.
- Administering the university research funds and monitoring internally funded research.
- Monitoring the activities of the university's research centers. Research management should give support the university's research centers and encourage to become centers of excellence.
- Managing bodies are responsible for the revision of all policies related to research in view of changing needs.

In conclusion I wish to make a few recommendations:

The partnership that Palestinian universities enjoy in the PEACE program can be further expanded to profit from the experience of the European universities not only allow joint research between the faculties but can also be extended to research management. There are many common principles and there is no need to re-invent the wheel. Well established universities have policies and codes of practice, procedures and principles that were laboriously developed by generations of researchers. We do not have to re-invent the wheel. By exposing ourselves to their systems we can ensure that the standards that we develop are of internationally accepted quality.

The same holds true for collaboration among Palestinian university. As a unified body university managing bodies can have a more active participation in setting policies, identifying priority and strategies for research at the national level. They can urge the authorities to secure the necessary funding and to make the support of research and higher education in general a national priority.