Graduation 2008
Inaugural class makes history
On the cover: President Skorton confers the Cornell University M.D. degree on Ibrahim Sultan.

At right: Where cultures connect – The Coffee House held in March brought together student and faculty performances in both song and dance with proceeds going to charity.
Highlights of this issue

6
WCMC-Q’s Inaugural Class graduated in May, with ceremonies in Doha followed by Commencement in Carnegie Hall, New York – a historic moment for Cornell University, for Qatar and for global medical education.

14
Spectacular match: As they heard about their remarkable success in obtaining residency training posts, the Class of 2008 had lots to celebrate.

19
From ancient Egyptian medicine to James Joyce’s Dublin, English faculty ranged far and wide in April’s Literary Lectures series.

20
In a series of initiatives, WCMC-Q recently redoubled its effort to reach out to the community, with local high schools the focus of its activities.

22
As Qatar Foundation announced the construction of new student residence complexes in Education City, Qatar Chronicle took a peek at the plans to discover the shape of things to come.
Great teachers” and “humble experts”: Students vote in Faculty Awards

Dr. Syed Naqi, professor of microbiology and immunology teaching in both the Pre-medical and Medical Programs, carried off two awards at the 2008 Annual Faculty Teaching Awards Ceremony, May 15.

“The nicest, most approachable person on campus,” said one student’s testimonial. “A great teacher who can stimulate my interest even on a Thursday afternoon,” said another.

Altogether, 18 faculty members were recognized for their contribution to the learning experience of WCMC-Q’s students, from the Foundation Program to the Clinical Clerkships in the third and fourth years of the Medical Program.

In addition, both Dr. Estomih Mtui, associate professor of clinical anatomy in neurology and neuroscience, and Dr. Mark Pochapin, associate professor of clinical medicine, won the awards for visiting faculty for the second year running. They were presented with their certificates at a similar ceremony for faculty of Weill Cornell in New York, held June 12.

This is the second year that WCMC-Q has organized the ceremony. Now, there are plans to keep a record of the awards in the Teaching Hall of Fame to be established at the Medical College.

In new developments this year, student votes were collected by email ballot and the participants were invited to submit comments in support of their vote.

A selection of messages was displayed on-screen during the event. Many paid tribute to faculty’s dedication, expertise, and willingness to provide support and reassurance.

“You can learn a lot from simply talking to him,” said one student of Dr. Mohamud Verjee, assistant professor of family medicine and Course Director for MPS II. “Very reassuring and pro-students,” stated another.

And of Dr. Marco Ameduri, senior lecturer in physics and Assistant Dean for Pre-medical Education, a pre-med wrote: “Best teacher and personality...Simply a humble expert.”

Full list of awards:

**Foundation Program:**
- Dr. Imad Makki
- Dr. Renee Richer

**Pre-medical Program:**
- Dr. Marco Ameduri
- Dr. Syed Naqi
- Dr. Rodney Sharkey
- Dr. Kevin Smith

**Medical Program – basic sciences:**
- Dr. Gerardo Guiter
- Dr. Lars Hedin
- Dr. Khaled Machaca
- Dr. Syed Naqi
- Dr. Leopold Streletz

**Medical Program – clinical:**
- Dr. Ziad Kronfol
- Dr. Ravinder Mamtani
- Dr. Nady Mohamed
- Dr. Bakr Nour
- Dr. Mohamud Verjee

**Visiting faculty:**
- Dr. Estomih Mtui
- Dr. Mark Pochapin
Dr. Javaid I. Sheikh appointed Deputy Dean

Dr. Javaid I. Sheikh was appointed to the newly created position of Deputy Dean of WCMC-Q in May.

Tenured professor of psychiatry and Vice Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College and Vice Dean for Research at WCMC-Q, Dr. Sheikh’s duties now include stepping in on behalf of the Dean of the Medical College in Qatar, as requested, in addition to overseeing both the research and clinical missions.

As visiting professor and special consultant, Dr. Sheikh contributed to the development of WCMC-Q on a part-time basis from early 2006. He joined the administration full-time in April 2007 as Vice Dean for Research, and has spearheaded the efforts to initiate development of the research infrastructure and recruitment of world-class researchers, as well as building relations with local partners in research.

Before coming to WCMC-Q, Dr. Sheikh had a distinguished career in clinical care, research, teaching and medical administration at Stanford University School of Medicine, where he was professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, and chief of the medical staff at the Stanford-affiliated VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

Students become published authors

Foundation students achieved a major success with the publication in May of Qatar Narratives, a dual-language anthology of essays by women living in Qatar that includes contributions from five of the class.

Essays by Nadya Al Awainati, Sara Al Khawaga, Aljazy Al Maraghi, Kholoud Saleh and Zahra Makki were selected, along with others written by first-year pre-med Khawla Ali and lecturer in English Autumn Watts.

Funded by the U.S. State Department’s Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the book comprises the winning entries in a competition, Qatar Narratives: Women Write, which followed a writing workshop series led at Qatar University by visiting writer Carol Henderson and project coordinator, Mohana Rajkumar.

The students covered a wide diversity of subject matter, from obesity to the tension between tradition and modernity in Qatar.

Assistant professor of English, Dr. Marina Dodigovic, who coached the foundation students in preparation for the contest, said there had been “a tremendous surge of creativity” among them. “It’s important not just for their professional education, but for their general education – broadening their views, exposing them to new things.”

Al Khawaga, who read an excerpt from her essay at the launch, found the competition liberating: “It inspired me to write more creatively and come up with new ideas. I feel proud and happy to know my writing was accepted.”

While the essays were written in English, the contributors had the novel experience of having their work translated into Arabic. “I’ve never had my work translated before,” said Watts. “As I can’t read the translation, I don’t know what’s gained, what’s lost, how it has been changed. It’s an incentive to learn.”

With additional reporting by Autumn Watts.

“It inspired me to write more creatively and come up with new ideas. I feel proud and happy to know my writing was accepted.”

— Sara Al Khawaga
Building strong foundations

With the majority of students already admitted into the Pre-medical Program, there was a heady sense of achievement and excitement in the air at the Foundation Program Completion Ceremony, May 1.

The foundation class – 18-strong and predominantly Qatari – received certificates of completion, and went on to thank the faculty, as well as leaders of the program and Medical College.

Describing them as “a marvelous group of young men and women,” Dean Alonso commended their hard work and commitment to life outside the classroom, from environmental action to cultural activities.

Senior lecturer in physics and program Director, Dr. Imad Makki, was all praise for the class. “They are very talented and energetic, and they are extremely committed. Somehow, through all the hard work, they have managed to have a good time and enjoy themselves,” he said afterwards.

Besides taking courses in the sciences, math and English, the students worked hard during the year to perfect their study, test taking and interview skills. They were encouraged to move away from memorizing information and to build their critical thinking abilities – while also learning to tackle science at the bench and write up laboratory reports.

Steadily strengthening their language skills, several students achieved success in debating and writing outside the classroom. They joined in regular debates with colleagues in Education City’s Academic Bridge Program, and no fewer than five had essays published in an anthology (see: Students become published authors page 3).

In addition, career seminars by medical faculty and visits to Hamad Hospital introduced them to the reality of the profession.

“Many people have an idea of what they might specialize in, from the seminars,” Amna Al Khuzai said. “At the hospital, we visited departments, met doctors and saw how they manage their lives, combining their busy schedules with being parents, for example. This gave us a picture of ourselves in the future.”

The next step for the students was a six-week intensive at the Summer College on Cornell’s Ithaca campus, before returning to WCMC-Q for pre-med studies. Al Khuzai was upbeat: “The best part is that we are prepared. At this point, we know the pre-med faculty, so we know the people who’ll teach us,” she said.
Pre-meds mark completion of program
Class is “a very diverse family”

The class of 2012 marked the end of their pre-medical education in notably festive mood just a few days after WCMC-Q’s inaugural graduation celebrations.

Along with certificates of completion for the 35 students, and plaques for faculty and leaders in recognition of their contributions, there were tributes to former Associate Dean for Pre-medical Education, Dr. David Robertshaw, who retired at the end of the academic year.

“I’d like to formally congratulate and thank him for the many contributions he has made to the program, and to the life of the medical school in general,” Dean Alonso said during the completion ceremony, May 14.

Dr. Alonso outlined the development of the Medical College to date, and looked ahead to the future academic medical center in Education City, to be formed by an affiliation between WCMC-Q and Qatar Foundation’s Sidra Medical and Research Center. “You have much to look forward to,” he told the students.

Senior Associate Dean for Education, Dr. Maya Hammoud, reminded the class that she had also joined the Medical College in 2006. “We started together – I interviewed just as you did…and we all learned along the way,” she quipped. “I watched you grow: Your class has character.”

The best part of the pre-med experience, Dwaa Osman said afterwards, was “the maturity level that we’ve reached here. We came as high school kids and I’ve achieved things I never thought I would.”

Bassem Zaki added: “Communicating with different cultures, meeting different types of people and making new, close friends...that’s what helped us come through.”

Professor of physics, Dr. Roger Hinchliffs, who retired from WCMC-Q in June, said he felt particularly close to the class. “They mean a lot to me – they are very good academically, but they are also a very diverse family, from a lot of different backgrounds. I think they’ve come to realize they are a team, each one with different strengths.”

This was also the message of student speaker Petro Kostandy. The gains in knowledge and skills were to be expected, he told the assembly; it was the other gains, of personal growth and “kinship,” that made the experience special.
They entered the Ritz-Carlton Doha as medical students, and they left as doctors. The 15 young men and women of the Class of 2008 were welcomed into the Weill Cornell Medical College family, May 8 – a historic day for the State of Qatar, for Cornell University and for medical education.

The first graduates to receive the MD degree of an American University outside the United States, they are pioneers of medical education in Qatar.
“Your Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser, On this occasion, I offer my gratitude to Your Highness, and to His Highness, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and to the people of Qatar, and I congratulate the graduates on this special day.”

With these words delivered in Arabic, Cornell President, Dr. David J. Skorton, delighted the assembly.

Dr. Skorton congratulated the graduates, highlighted their achievements and reflected on his first meeting with them. He charged them to continue to have the courage to lead the way throughout their careers and to risk breaking new ground for the greater and personal good.

And he urged them to act as “true partners” with their patients. “Accept your responsibility as physicians… always to comfort, always to empathize with the patient and the family, always to remain humble and grateful,” he said.

The graduation ceremony took place in the presence of leaders of Cornell University and Weill Cornell in New York, Qatar Foundation, the National Health Authority and Hamad Medical Corporation.

Guest of honor, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah, joined the leadership on the dais. As the ceremony came to a close, Dean of the Medical College in New York, Dr. Antonio Gotto, and two graduates, presented her with a proclamation from Cornell University in appreciation of her support, and with a doctor’s white coat and bag.

Family, friends and WCMC-Q med and pre-med students joined the throng in the Wosail Ballroom to applaud and cheer – almost raising the roof as the newly minted doctors recessed out at the close of the ceremony.
Senior Honors Convocation: achievements, contributions recognized

Sharon King and Rana Biary collected a total of ten awards for academic and clinical excellence at the Senior Honors Convocation, May 7, while Jehan Al Rayahi was recognized for her leadership and her dedication to community service.

Seven members of the WCMC-Q faculty were recognized for excellence in teaching (see photograph), as were Dr. Estomih Mtui and Dr. Mark Pochapin of Weill Cornell in New York, and Dr. Abdallah Khairi and Dr. Mohamed Asif of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC).

In special presentations to president Skorton and Dean Alonso, Chairperson of HMC’s Board Dr. Latifa Al Houty thanked them for their support in building the partnership between the two institutions, and presented them with gifts to mark “this great and historic moment.”

The venue at the Diplomatic Club also echoed with laughter, as the audience enjoyed Al Rayahi’s tongue-in-cheek video tribute to her colleagues – highlighting their foibles as well as their talents, with input from faculty members. To end the event, president of the Weill Cornell Alumni Association, Dr. Gene Resnick ’74, welcomed the Class of 2008 to the fold.

For a full list of awards, visit www.qatar-med.cornell.edu

In brief…

“I met these young people six years ago, right when they were starting. I remember telling them the future was in their hands: If they did well, it would be so much easier for future generations. That holds true today” – Sanford I. Weill

“Not only do we have a class of wonderful, newly minted M.Ds. as of this week, but the results of the Match were spectacularly positive” – President Skorton

“There’s a great sense of accomplishment…We can say we have set a very strong pillar in education” – Dean Alonso

“They have been more than students: They are friends, colleagues, siblings of mine” – Dr. Nounou Taleghani

“We are very proud of what they’ve accomplished. They are terrific young men and women, and they are very motivated” – Dr. Fabrizio Michelassi

“You are poised to make a great difference to global medical education” – Dean Gotto to WCMC-Q’s first M.Ds.

“I am proud to tell you that I chose to stay right here in Qatar, my home country, with my family and friends… I am also proud to say that most of my colleagues expressed their desire to return to Qatar” – Jehan Al Rayahi ’08, in her Commencement speech

“The biggest adventure was starting as a member of a new class that didn’t have any classes ahead of it – and seeing how successful it would be” – Subhi Al Aref ’08

“I’ve discovered I’m much stronger than I thought I was” – Rana Biary ’08

“I have 15 great classmates and colleagues who I’ll be friends with for life – that’s what’s so special” – Ayobami Omosola ’08
“It was an honor to be asked to do this” – Dr. Nounou Taleghani puts the hood on Jehan Al Rayahi.

As the ceremony comes to a close, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah dons the doctor’s white coat and carries the bag presented to her by the Class of 2008.

Getting together to celebrate: (l to r) Aisha Yousuf, Rana Biary, Ayobami Omosola, Jehan Al Rayahi, Sharon King and Vildana Omerovic.

Waiting in the wings – members of the Class of ’08 waiting in anticipation as their names are roll called to collect their M.D. degrees.

Dr. Maya Hammoud congratulates Khalid Al Khelaifi.

Joan and Sanford I. Weill
President Skorton: Courageous vision and tenacity have brought success

In terms of cultural interchange, I think higher education is one of the great diplomatic assets that the developed and developing worlds can share in common.”

For Cornell’s president, Dr. David J. Skorton, WCMC-Q is an exemplar of how the University is promoting understanding and building human capacity in a country far from the home campus.

The Class of 2008 – with 15 students from seven countries – were “making a positive statement about intercultural understanding that is fitting with Cornell tradition,” he added.

As a land-grant institution, Cornell was tasked with promoting education in the practical arts from its foundation in 1865. “Cornellians have chosen to interpret the educational and research mission (of the Morrill Act) more broadly, as including direct action to improve the lives of people overseas. In that sense, I do believe Cornell is the land-grant university to the world and this is a fabulous, innovative twist on that theme,” Dr. Skorton explained.

Behind this successful transplantation of an American medical education to another country and another culture, the product of a groundbreaking partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation, lie extraordinary vision and a “long list of heroes,” he said.

Dr. Skorton paid tribute to the leaders of Weill Cornell Medical College in New York and Qatar; His Highness the Emir and Her Highness Sheikha Mozah; and Qatar Foundation’s president, Dr. Mohammad Fathy Saoud, and vice president for education, Dr. Abdullah Al-Thani.

“Theyir vision was first of all courageous and very forward-looking; secondly, they had the tenacity to see the project through,” he said.

He also thanked faculty and staff of WCMC-Q for their contributions, and expressed great admiration for the pioneering students who took a risk back in 2002 by enrolling in a new and as yet unproven medical school.

“More than anything, I want to salute the students who had the courage to apply and stay with something even though there was no path trod before they went through it.”

Looking ahead, he said the University would continue to promote a vibrant culture of biomedical research in Qatar along with a habit of conducting research for its own sake – key building blocks of a strong academic medical center and health care system for the long term.

Essential to this effort is the partnership between WCMC-Q, Qatar Foundation and Hamad Medical Corporation: “Interactions with the leaders have been hugely heartening to me,” Dr. Skorton said. “They understand, in a visionary way, the importance of investigation and inquiry in the quality of medical care and of life in general in Qatar.”

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— Dr. David J. Skorton
The future for our graduates is bright,” said Dean Alonso (third left) at the press conference, May 7.

Our commitment is getting “deeper, broader and bigger” — Sanford I. Weill

Meeting the press a day ahead of the graduation ceremony, leaders of Cornell and Weill Cornell said the partnership with Qatar Foundation was growing stronger year on year.

“This is a commitment to long-term involvement,” said Dean Gotto. “We are not planning to be in and out.”

Pointing out that he is on the Board of the Foundation’s recently established U.S. branch, Sanford Weill said he and Dean Gotto also are on the Board of Sidra Medical and Research Center. “Our commitment is getting deeper, broader and bigger – we’ll be here to take care of all of you as you get older!” he quipped.

President Skorton drew attention to the larger vision. Leaders of the universities with branches in Education City had met the day before to form “an even stronger partnership among themselves,” he said. One goal was to support the drive to change the nature of education in the country and create a knowledge-based economy.

Her Highness is in a leadership role throughout the Gulf in establishing education as the basis of diversification for the future, putting Qatar at the forefront of innovation in the region, Dr. Skorton said.

Asked about the future for WCMC-Q, Dean Alonso said the Medical College will continue to mature, developing its missions in patient care and research, while also enhancing its commitment to community service. And he predicted a bright future for its graduates: “We are going to do everything possible to bring them back to Qatar after postgraduate training.”

Qatar Foundation “the best investment for the future”

Earlier, president of Qatar Foundation, Dr. Mohammad Fathy Saoud, told a press conference at the organization’s headquarters that the presence of top-class universities in Education City has a wider influence on society, citing the collaboration between WCMC-Q and Hamad Medical Corporation in the field of health care.

He underlined the country’s commitment to Qatar Foundation, which encompasses education from pre-school to postgraduate level, as well as Qatar Science and Technology Park. “We believe Qatar Foundation and Education City are the best investment for the future,” he said.

Dr. Saoud emphasized that the quality of education, and of students in the universities, is identical between home and Qatar campuses. Students on the Qatar side have opportunities to go study or do research on the main campuses – and they do just as well, he noted.

“I couldn’t have asked for a better experience,” says U.S. graduate

Asked about her decision to leave the U.S. and travel to Qatar to take her M.D. degree, Sharon King ’08 was wholly positive.

“It was wonderful – I couldn’t have asked for a better experience!” she responded. “I thought the opportunity to study in a culture different from my own would help me to grow as a person, open my mind to new ways of thinking and make me a better doctor; I think it has.”

Alongside King at the press conference, May 7, were Qataris Jehan Al Rayahi ’08 and Khalid Al Khelaifi ’08, and Jordanian Subhi Al Aref ’08. Al Rayahi said any early anxieties about the academic challenges and coeducational setting were quickly dispelled once she enrolled in WCMC-Q: “I felt very at ease, very comfortable. My colleagues are from so many countries, and they are very respectful.”

Al Khelaifi paid tribute to his classmates and thanked all those who had made real the vision to establish WCMC-Q. “I am so happy to accomplish and finish six years of hard work,” he said, expressing pride at being part of Education City and readiness to contribute to Qatar’s future.
Unique ceremony in New York

Taking the Hippocratic Oath in New York’s Carnegie Hall, May 29, were all but one of WCMC-Q’s 15 graduates, together with the 96 men and women graduating from Weill Cornell’s Manhattan campus this year.

For the Qatar graduates, this second round of Commencement festivities began the day before with an evening dinner cruise around Manhattan, accompanied by their families. “It’s a very nice way of ending our eventful journey,” said new physician Ibrahim Sultan. “It’s been the best six years of my life.” Also on board the Duchess were Joan and Sanford Weill and New York campus Dean Antonio Gotto and his wife, Anita; guests from the Qatar branch included Dean Alonso, Havva Idriss, and Dr. Maya Hammoud.

The following day, the WCMC-Q group joined their colleagues from Weill Cornell in New York in the world-famous concert hall, to form a unified Class of 2008 for the Commencement. More than 50 others, who had earned PhDs and master’s of science degrees from Weill Cornell Graduate School of Medical Sciences, also took part in the ceremony.

With reporting by Beth Saulnier

Gala celebration in Education City

Earlier in May, WCMC-Q’s Class of 2008 took part in Qatar Foundation’s Inaugural Senior Convocation, along with the first graduates of Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar and Texas A&M University at Qatar, and the seventh class to graduate from Virginia Commonwealth School of the Arts in Qatar.

The event, held May 6, began with a formal procession of deans and faculty and ended on a high note with a gala concert by Italian opera star Andrea Bocelli and Iraqi heart throb Kathem Al Saher, accompanied by musicians of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

President of Qatar Foundation, Dr. Mohammad Fathy Saoud presented gifts to the graduating students: watches for the men and diamond rings for the women.

Then, representatives from each class placed mementos inside a time capsule. Stepping forward for WCMC-Q, Khalid Al Khelaifi, Jehan Al Rayahi and Kunali Dalal deposited a class photograph, a DVD of happy memories and a white coat signed by the whole class as tokens of their dedication to Education City.

In his address, HH the Emir reaffirmed Qatar’s commitment to sustainable human development, and underlined the central role of education in building a modern society. He praised Education City for welcoming talented students of diverse backgrounds, making the campus “a meeting place for different civilizations to converge.”

With reporting by Beth Saulnier
Med students experience “the humanity of family practice”

The six-week long Primary Care Clerkship, an integral part of the Weill Cornell curriculum, introduces medical students to a different kind of health care from their previous clerkship experiences.

In Qatar, it is divided between attachments to primary care centers, and Hamad Medical Corporation’s (HMC) internal medicine department and emergency room. The clerks experience a wide cross-section of patient care – from acute presentations of systemic illnesses by ambulatory patients, geriatrics, childhood screening, prenatal care, preventive care (e.g. vaccinations) and management of chronic diseases, to triaging more urgent presentations.

For the Class of 2008, who completed the Primary Care Clerkship during their final year, it was also a way to gauge how well prepared they were to move out of medical school and into full-time patient care.

“Since primary care covers all the fields, it’s an opportunity to find out if you are ready: to sink or swim,” said Sharon King, who did the clerkship in fall 2007. “I realized throughout the rotation that I felt ready for my internship year. It gave me the realization: ‘I’m going to be okay next year’.”

Family physicians who supervised WCMC-Q’s young doctors-in-training in Doha’s Airport and West Bay Health Centers recognized their readiness. Consultant in family medicine and Director of West Bay Health Center, Dr. Zeleikha Al Bashwar, said they had made impressive progress since their first and second year preceptorships in the Medicine, Patients and Society courses.

“There’s a big change. At the beginning, we used to teach them simple things like how to take a patient’s history. Now, they are very good in clinical practice, seeing the patients and examining them,” she commented.

From Pap smears to triage

Dr. Mohamud Verjee, assistant professor of family medicine and Director of the clerkship, explained its rationale: “It is an opportunity for students to see life, health and illness at the presenting stage rather than the severe, intense stage. It is extremely relevant to the overall health of any community or nation.”

A significant advantage of working in the health centers is that there is both time and office space for the young doctors-in-training to investigate cases thoroughly, run tests where relevant and follow the patients up.

“We ask them to try and see ten to twelve patients in one session from about 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.,” Dr. Verjee said. “We encourage them to see the patients on their own, (Continued on page 23)
March 20 – match day – saw history in the making at WCMC-Q, as the Class of 2008 successfully matched to residencies in their chosen specialties.

They are the first home-grown medical students in Qatar to go through the ‘match’, the highly competitive process by which all med school fourth years and graduates aiming to do residencies in the U.S. secure places in residency programs.

Their reactions? “I’m ecstatic,” said Mashael Al Khulaifi, who matched to an anesthesiology residency at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center. “I’m glad I got my first choice – Cornell. It’s all good.”

As it was too for Rana Biary, Subhi Al Aref and Kunali Dalal, all of whom will be joining Al Khulaifi next year at Weill Cornell. And for their classmates, who matched to residencies at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore; Rush University Medical Center in Chicago; and the University of Minnesota, among others.

Three class members have chosen to do residencies at Hamad Medical Corporation in Qatar: Khalid Al Khelaifi and Osama Alsaied opted for surgery, while Jehan Al Rayahi is pursuing her dream of becoming a radiologist.

Meanwhile, Aisha Yousuf is to conduct research in obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Michigan, rather than enter a residency program next year.

The newly matched students chose diverse specialties including family medicine, internal medicine, surgery, radiology, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine, neurosurgery and anesthesiology.

Dean of WCMC-Q, Dr. Daniel Alonso sent his congratulations from New York, where he was on a business trip. “Your credentials, commitment, motivation, and perseverance have resulted in extraordinary success,” he told

“You deserve a lot of credit for embarking on this great adventure. There were a lot of challenges, like with any new program . . . You all did amazingly well in your matches, and we are very proud of you.”

— Dr. Maya Hammoud, Senior Associate Dean for Education at WCMC-Q
the students. “Yours is a very impressive achievement, one that is admired by all of us at WCMC-Q, at Weill Cornell Medical College and at Cornell University.”

During a reception held in their honor at the Medical College, Dr. Maya Hammoud, Senior Associate Dean for Education at WCMC-Q, added her congratulations to the students – and the faculty and staff who supported them over the last six years: “This is all teamwork. We all have to work together to accomplish what we accomplished today.”

Dr. Hammoud told the class: “You deserve a lot of credit for embarking on this great adventure. There were a lot of challenges, like with any new program . . . You all did amazingly well in your matches, and we are very proud of you.”

With the elation came relief: Match day is an anxiety-fraught day for all med students, not least the WCMC-Q Inaugural Class, the first to graduate from a program located outside the U.S.

So theirs was an historic achievement, and one that added to the sense of history being made at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York, where Dr. Carol Storey-Johnson, Senior Associate Dean for Education, told the 96 students in the Class of 2008 that they had achieved Weill Cornell’s best ever match.

Professor of physiology at WCMC-Q, Dr. David Robertshaw, was thrilled by his students’ success, but he wasn’t surprised. “To see them match so well – I knew they would,” he said. “They are all very strong individuals. I’m very pleased.”

Underclassmen also came to the reception to support their friends and mentors.

“It’s definitely an inspiration,” said second-year pre-med Pankit Vachhani. “We look forward to continuing to meet the goals they have set – maybe even to going beyond them.”

With reporting by Lauren Gold, Cornell University science writer.
Dr. Imad Makki appointed Assistant Dean for Research Administration

Dr. Imad Makki has been appointed to the position of Assistant Dean for Research Administration. Senior lecturer in physics and Director of the Foundation Program since he joined WCMC-Q in 2006, Dr. Makki will continue with these responsibilities while also organizing and administering the program of summer research fellowships for WCMC-Q students in Qatar and the U.S. that was established in 2004. Developing a program he initiated in the spring semester, he will introduce research training for high school students as a way to motivate them for careers in medicine and biomedical research. Finally, he will coordinate competitive external research funding from national and international sources and administer the process of internal review of planned research applications by faculty and students.

Dr. Makki brings a wealth of experience to his new post. He worked for the Ford Motor Company Research Laboratory in the U.S. for 15 years, where he initiated, funded and managed multiple research collaboration programs with several universities, generating numerous patents, and journal and conference papers, and winning a number of awards for his work. He has taught at a number of universities in the U.S. and has been actively engaged in graduate education at both MS and PhD levels.

(For more, see Qatar Chronicle no: 6, page 17).

Appointments to the faculty

Ravinder Mamtani, MBBS, MD, MSc, has been appointed professor of public health. After receiving his MBBS and MD degrees from the M.A. Medical College of the University of Delhi, India, Dr. Mamtani pursued postgraduate training in the U.K. and U.S.A., earning a MSc degree in community medicine from the University of Manchester Medical School, U.K.

On moving to the U.S. in 1984, he was appointed assistant professor of community and preventive medicine at New York Medical College, Valhalla, NY, and rose through the ranks to become professor of clinical community and preventive medicine, associate professor of clinical medicine, and adjunct professor of clinical public health.

A Diplomate of the American Board of Preventive Medicine in general preventive medicine and public health, and occupational medicine, Dr. Mamtani was an attending in occupational medicine at the Westchester Medical Center before joining WCMC-Q.

Dr. Mamtani’s research interests are in infectious and occupational diseases, cancer, complementary medicine and medical education. As a principal investigator of a National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute grant (1991-95) he developed and taught a new course on nutrition and cancer prevention for medical students at New York Medical College. He has written numerous articles in the fields of public health, and preventive and integrative medicine, for peer reviewed journals.

In the health care and educational spheres, his interests are in developing innovative medical education programs, an evidence based approach to patient and chronic disease management, occupational health, global health and emerging health care trends.
J. Michael Conlon, DPhil, has joined WCMC-Q as professor of biochemistry. After earning a D.Phil. degree in organic chemistry at Sussex University, U.K., Dr. Conlon was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship at University College Dublin, Eire, followed by a further fellowship at Queen’s University Belfast, N. Ireland, U.K. Thereafter, he was a Medical Research Council Travelling Fellow at Southwestern Medical School, Dallas in the U.S. state of Texas, and then a senior research fellow at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, U.K.

Following a period as Director of the Clinical Research Group for Gastrointestinal Endocrinology at the Max Planck Society, University of Gottingen, Germany, Dr. Conlon was appointed professor of biochemistry at Creighton University Medical School, Omaha, Nebraska, U.S. In 2002, he moved to the Arabian Gulf region, to take up the post of professor and Chairman of Biochemistry in the faculty of medicine, United Arab Emirates University, Al-Ain, UAE.

Dr. Conlon’s research has focused on three areas: gastrointestinal endocrinology, comparative endocrinology, and antimicrobial and anticancer peptides. He has published over 440 articles in peer-reviewed journals and has authored 44 books, book chapters and reviews. Part of his work at WCMC-Q will be in the development of the research mission.

With considerable experience of teaching at undergraduate and graduate level as a lecturer and problem-based learning tutor, Dr. Conlon’s teaching commitments at WCMC-Q are in both pre-medical and medical programs.

Huseyin Refik Burgut, MS, PhD, is visiting professor of biostatistics in the Department of Public Health.

After pursuing undergraduate education in Turkey, Dr. Burgut moved to the United States, where he earned a MS degree in biostatistics from Case Western Reserve University followed by a PhD, also in biostatistics, from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health.

On returning to Turkey in 1983, Dr. Burgut was appointed assistant professor in the Department of Public Health, Cukurova University School of Medicine in Adana. He rose through the ranks to become professor, as well as Chairman of the Department of Biostatistics – an appointment he has held on three separate occasions.

Dr. Burgut’s recent research has included quality of life studies in breast cancer patients, biomarkers in the diagnosis and prognosis of cancers, a number of studies of cancers such as those related to smoking, and the design and analysis of clinical studies. He has published a number of papers in peer-reviewed journals. He has also served on the editorial board of university medical journals, on a publications committee and on the executive committee of the Health Sciences Institute of Cukurova University.

With experience of teaching at both undergraduate and graduate level, Dr. Burgut has taught courses in epidemiology, biostatistics, statistical methods and sampling methods. He has also been advisor or co-advisor to graduate students in biostatistics and public health, in MS and residency programs.
New Associate Dean for pre-med brings international perspective to the post

Michael Johnson, PhD, was appointed Associate Dean for Pre-medical Education in January, in succession to David Robertshaw, PhD, professor of physiology, who held the position for six years from the inception of WCMC-Q.

Dr. Johnson earned his doctoral degree in physiology from the University of Michigan and had a distinguished career at West Virginia University (WVU) School of Medicine, attaining the rank of professor of physiology in 1988.

Unusually, Dr. Johnson came to WCMC-Q with recent experience of a start-up medical school in the region. From 2001-2006, he was founding Dean of the Oman Medical College, a new private medical school in the Sultanate of Oman, in which WVU had an advisory role.

So his move to WCMC-Q was informed both by a deep understanding of medical education, and by recent experience of its international dimension.

“One of the reasons I’m here is because I firmly believe that what Cornell, and a few others, are doing are some of the greatest educational experiments of our generation,” he explained. “How they turn out is going to have a major effect, not only on education across these cultures, but on how the cultures view each other. I think it’s terribly important – it goes way beyond education.”

He noted that WCMC-Q is unique among these new ventures: “No other U.S. medical school is doing what Weill Cornell is doing. This is the only place that a student outside the U.S. can earn a U.S. medical degree without going there.”

Dr. Johnson’s first impression of WCMC-Q’s students was wholly positive. “The ones I have met are very bright, inquisitive and motivated – and extremely grateful for the opportunity they have been given.”

Reforming the program, reaching the community

Among early tasks, the Associate Dean is working on plans already under development to extend WCMC-Q’s Pre-medical Program from two to three years’ duration, and to increase opportunities for students to be engaged in research.

“This would decompress the pre-med years, and it would allow the students to take some electives, social sciences and humanities that they don’t now get a chance to take,” Dr. Johnson said.

“We believe these opportunities will produce more well-rounded doctors who will provide the best patient care, while getting involved themselves and keeping up-to-date with the latest discoveries in medicine.” At the same time, WCMC-Q may extend its already thriving community outreach activities to assist young people in making informed career decisions. “We need to better educate the community on what it takes, and means, to go to medical school,” he commented.

Education for life

A seasoned medical educator, Dr. Johnson has been recommended for appointment as professor of physiology, and is a problem-based learning (PBL) tutor to first year medical students.

While at WVU, he was a faculty leader in the process of curriculum modernization common to most U.S. medical schools in the early 1990s, moving away from teaching blocks of information-heavy material towards system-based courses that developed students’ skills for lifelong learning.

He also became interested in how biology was taught at the undergraduate level. Convinced that information-overload was “turning students off” – particularly the non-science majors – he argued for building a conceptual framework that showed how biology is connected to people’s lives and to the world around them. That conviction led him to write an undergraduate biology textbook for non-science majors, Human Biology: Concepts and Current Issues, now in its fourth edition.

Looking back over his time in medical education, Dr. Johnson said the relationship between students and faculty has changed for the better. “The mentor, or advisor, models good behavior, takes the student under his or her wing, and treats them like they are joining the fraternity.” And it is a model he has found working well at WCMC-Q.
Setting the mind free

*English faculty deliver sparkling literary lectures series*

Throughout April, members of the English faculty brought their creative and research talents to an audience from within and outside WCMC-Q in a second annual literary lectures series as remarkable for its diversity as it was entertaining and informative.

Senior lecturer Peter Fortunato invited his audience to let their minds range “unrestricted and free” and proceeded, with neat irony, to hold them spellbound as he wove a magical tapestry of images in some 20 poems. With grace and wit, Fortunato conjured a satirical take on expat life; reflections on mortality; and a notable portrait of Florence in *I walked along the Arno*. He highlighted the personal transformation that comes from moving beyond custom or received wisdom, noting: “It takes courage to break with traditional roles.” In *Vicit instans* Fortunato reflected on the poet’s preoccupation with impermanence, referencing the sixteenth century philosopher and iconoclast Giordano Bruno. “Eternity hangs in the poet’s effort to capture the moment,” he said.

The history of women in medicine and medical education – the subject of a presentation by assistant professor, Dr. Alan Weber – was a sobering account of two steps forward and one step back. While female practitioners were recorded in ancient Egypt and Greece, and are known to have practiced and taught in Europe’s religious houses in the Middle Ages, they were virtually excluded from the profession from the Renaissance period. In the nineteenth century, women struggled to qualify and practice as physicians in the United States and Britain, only to suffer a backlash in the U.S. from 1910 to 1935. The Flexner Report (1910), which sharply criticized the female-only medical colleges, “was devastating to women’s medical education,” Dr. Weber noted; not until the 1970s did the situation improve significantly.

Natural and unnatural histories, communities on the edge, and distance – geographic, social, economic: The threads running through a mixed media presentation by lecturer Autumn Watts created memorable photographic and verbal images of Nevada. Peeling back the layers to examine her home state, she revealed mountains and vast dry lake beds; a culture shaped by a passion for horses; and the glitz of Las Vegas versus the poverty of the rural desert. Watts traced parallel shapes in marine life and the terrifying clouds of atomic explosions over the Yucca Flat Test Site. “To Nevadans, the atomic tests are only one more superlative in a State endowed with already spectacular history and scenery” declared National Geographic Magazine writer Samuel W. Matthews in 1953; “life only grows sadder by increments,” observed Watts in 2008.

Finally, assistant professor Dr. Rodney Sharkey brought the series to a rousing conclusion with a provocative exploration of James Joyce’s resolute effort to break free from the colonial past of his homeland – Ireland. Striving to go “au bout de l’anglais,” Joyce sought to move beyond the constraints of an imposed language and culture, he argued. Impassioned and witty, a master of poetry and anecdote, Dr. Sharkey addressed the topic through the prism of nationalism rather than with reference to the artistic milieu in which Joyce lived and wrote. Joyce set his readers free by inviting them to interpret his creative and subversive writing in their own way, he said. Arguably, this was at the risk of veering from parody into surrealism, but the last word goes to the last image: James Joyce, elegant as ever, standing opposite his American patron and publisher, Sylvia Beach – in the doorway of Shakespeare & Co., Paris.
Getting the message across: Evolving

The spring semester saw increasing involvement by foundation and pre-medical faculty in outreach activities with local schools.

For the first time, seven1 pre-med faculty members took part in a science and math Olympiad, hosted by Doha Independent Secondary School for Boys, March 23-27. They assisted with preparing test questions, and were present to monitor proceedings and announce the winners.

Teams of students from six schools in Qatar competed in Internet-based, timed tests, a format developed by the school with support from ictQATAR2.

Commenting on the positive and friendly atmosphere, Dr. Marco Ameduri, senior lecturer in physics and Assistant Dean for Pre-medical Education, said the event allowed students to experience how scientists work.

“I think it’s important to instill in students both a sense of competitiveness and a sense of achieving a goal through collaboration. Science is a collaborative effort, and it’s also competitive – doing this kind of activity in groups captures that.”

Dr. Michael Smith, professor of biology, said he was pleased to have an opportunity to get out into schools and “see how students perform.”

And he highlighted the benefits of the inter-school exchange: “To bring them together is a healthy thing and a good, productive, educational experience, even if they only have a few minutes to chat to each other.”

The school also hosted a career exhibition, including booths set up by WCMC-Q and Hamad Medical Corporation – bringing home the message that Qatar offers growing opportunities in medical education and health care.

“We want the students to have a window to see their future after graduation from secondary school,” said science and professional development coordinator at the school, Azzam Abu Hanieh. “The career fair helps our students understand their choices for the future.”

WCMC-Q Associate Dean for Pre-medical Education, Dr. Michael Johnson, said this was an important part of WCMC-Q’s outreach.

“We are not just promoting ‘why come to Cornell?’ We have to talk about ‘why become a doctor?’ The students now have opportunities they did not previously have, and they are choosing their careers so much younger (than in the U.S.), which makes it more difficult for them.”

In February, WCMC-Q hosted visits by students from Al Bayan Scientific School, and Omar Bin Al-Khattab Educational Complex for Boys, two of the main feeder institutions for the Medical College – again, reaching out to young people considering a career in medicine. Almost all the visitors were Qatari nationals.

They spent several hours meeting faculty members and students in the Foundation and Pre-medical Programs, finding out about the reality of studying at WCMC-Q and trying their hand at experiments in the physics lab.

“What we want them to take away from events like this is that, once they enter Weill Cornell, we will give them all the support we can to help them succeed,” said Dr. Imad Makki, senior lecturer in physics and Director of the Foundation Program. “The field of medicine is not easy, and this is their biggest concern. We want to prove to them that they can do it.”

In the field of teachers’ professional development, faculty gave presentations in the third Annual Symposium on Science Teaching and Learning, held at Qatar University (QU) in February. Organizing the event on the WCMC-Q

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1 Faculty participating were: Dr. Michael Johnson, Dr. Marco Ameduri, Dr. Kevin Smith, Dr. Michael Pungente, Dr. Michael Smith and Dr. Chris Ogden. In addition, Dr. Terrance Murphy joined with Dr. Gary Warnock of CMU-Q in presenting a science show demonstrating the composition of atoms and molecules.

2 ictQATAR: the Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology.
“What we want them to take away from events like this is that, once they enter Weill Cornell, we will give them all the support we can to help them succeed.”

— Dr. Imad Makki, senior lecturer in physics and Director of the Foundation Program

This meant surveying and visiting schools across the country, observing classroom teaching, and meeting with senior administrators and teachers, said Dr. Rishel, an experienced teacher and teacher trainer at tertiary level, who also collaborated with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics while at the Mathematical Association in Washington, D.C.

“It’s a random sample of schools, so we have a fair-sized impression of what’s going on in the independent sector,” he commented.

And the outcome? After visiting 10 schools, Dr. Rishel said good progress was being made in delivering the math curriculum in English, and attention was likely to focus on the need to provide more opportunities for teacher training.

Clearly, faculty members’ engagement in outreach is growing, and likely to evolve further. As Dr. Ameduri explained: “It’s a work-in-progress, and it will remain so. It’s always important to understand what the needs are – and the needs may change; what the situation on the ground is – and that changes rapidly. We have to be flexible in the type of things we do.”

1 Independent schools were set up following a study of Qatar’s education system by RAND Corporation. They are government-funded and supervised by the SEC, under the chairmanship of the Heir Apparent, H.H. Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani. Following major reform of the K-12 curricula, the SEC is supervising the schools’ compliance with the standards laid down for Arabic, English, math and science.
Taking a first step in one of the most exciting developments on the Education City campus to date, Qatar Foundation will this summer break ground on new student residence complexes.

Within about eighteen months, the campus should see completion of two clusters, totalling 12 buildings. The projects, supervised by the Foundation’s Office of Capital Projects and by Qatar Petroleum, will pave the way towards transforming residents’ lives by placing unprecedented emphasis on sustainability.

Designed by U.S.-based Burns & McDonnell Engineering Company and their consultant Treanor Architects, a practice specializing in student life facilities, the residential complexes will enable students to have a truly rounded educational experience, stated Kevin Konecny, Director of Campus and Residence Life.

“The design makes a statement. These are buildings where, in addition to learning in the classroom, students will be learning about sustainability because they’ll be living it,” he said. “We hope to help university students develop green lifestyle practices that will last a lifetime.”

Qatar Foundation aims to achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), of which it is a member. If granted, this would be the largest group of Platinum buildings in the world to receive the Council’s top accolade.

The first cluster of buildings, for women, is under construction near Al Jazeera Children’s Channel studios, with completion envisaged in summer 2009. Male students will be accommodated in a second complex to the southeast, on land that will be brought within the campus boundaries this summer.
buildings – focuses on areas such as site development, sustainable use of materials, water and energy efficiency, and the quality of the indoor environment.

The architects have oriented the buildings, and used external screens and overhangs to minimize heat-load from the sun. Another feature is a high performance ‘building envelope’ on the exterior walls of each structure to provide significant insulation. In addition, a proportion of the construction materials has been sourced regionally to reduce the buildings’ carbon footprint.

“Wastewater will be filtered, using a biomass wall among other technologies, and the gray water used for irrigating the grounds. Renewable energy sources, including solar panels, photovoltaic cells and wind turbines, are set to meet part of each community’s energy requirements.

The “first truly green buildings in Education City,” the new residence complexes may yet become a center of attention, not only as the home of the international and highly diverse communities typical of the campus, but as groundbreaking sustainable developments in their own right.”

“Great learning experiences

Most memorable for King, who was raised in eastern Oregon and has chosen a career in rural family medicine, was the chance to participate in health screening.

“I did a well woman clinic once or twice a week, and that was the best gynecological experience I’ve had – it was amazing! The physicians allowed me to be part of all of it: the breast exam, Pap smear, pelvic exam. It was a great learning experience.”

Set on different career paths, her classmates identified other strengths in the clerkship, from Omerovic’s observation that this is where they focus on the basis of medicine in an otherwise high-tech age, to Terzic’s encounters with potential neurosurgery patients.

“It’s useful to see the cases at primary care level, because in the setting of neurosurgery, you see patients who have already been worked up and diagnosed,” said Terzic, who is pursuing a career in the subspecialty.

“I never previously got to see the trials of pain medication and physiotherapy done before that stage. Now I’ve seen how people are referred to physio, and how they’ve tried one pain medication or another, and it brings more meaning to the cases.”

What they did not quite agree on was when best to do the clerkship. Surgeon-to-be Omerovic said it would work very well early in the third year, as a “gradual introduction” to clinical practice.

But King thought otherwise. “The clerkship is a wonderful chance to pull together all the fields you have been to. For me, the best thing was being able to apply my knowledge and almost take on the role of the physician.”

In the attractive surroundings of West Bay’s Education Center, which opened in November 2007, Dr. Al Bashwar was looking ahead, and ready to welcome any of them back: “I’d love to have a Weill Cornell graduate here as a resident. We saw them from the beginning and we know how good they are.”
The annual Employee Appreciation Event brought together the WCMC-Q community on a fine spring evening in April – with plenty of fun and games for the children, a barbecue, raffle, music and dance.

Care in the community: Adam Khader ’10 was one of more than 30 WCMC-Q faculty and students who stepped up to help at a medical camp for low-income workers organized by the Indian Medical Association Qatar Chapter and the Indian Islamic Association Qatar, April 25.

First held in fall 2004, WCMC-Q’s coffee houses have gone from strength to strength. Showcasing the many and varied talents of the community – not only at the Medical College, but across the Education City campus – the spring ’08 coffee house featured music, dance and comedy.

Qatar Foundation Distinguished Lecture Series, 2008: Nobel Laureate Professor Ferid Murad, from the Institute of Molecular Medicine, University of Texas at Houston Health Science Center, delivered a lecture on the Discovery of nitric oxide and cyclic GMP in cell signaling and their role in drug development at WCMC-Q on May 4.

Another annual event, the international night organized by MSEC-Q on April 17, attracted an enthusiastic crowd to the student lounge. In the program: A wide variety of cultural traditions, dress, cuisine and humor, all reflecting the international flavor of the WCMC-Q community.

“We helped make it happen!” Dean Alonso, Rana Biary ’08, Sharon King ’08 and Vice Dean Idriss cut the celebration cake for faculty and staff on Graduation Day, May 8.
Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar was jointly established by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development and Cornell University