A Tribute to Dean Alonso
At his retirement, looking back—and ahead
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Daniel R. Alonso, M.D.
Dean
Havva S. Idriss
Vice Dean for Administration

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Michael Vertigans
Director of Public Affairs
Articles by Chris Gibbons
with additional reporting by
Millie Hyde-Smith
and Nora Minor
David Carlson
Design & Production
Martin Marion
Photography

Additional images from: Faisal Abdullah,
Khaled Al Marzouqi, Janet Charles, Kodak,
MSEC-Q, Fouad Otaki, Qatar Today,
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Tony Terrot, and WCMC.

On the cover: Dr. Daniel R. Alonso,
outgoing Dean of Weill Cornell Medical
College in Qatar.

At right: All smiles at the Pre-medical
orientation: entering students and their
orientation “buddies”, upperclassmen
wearing red sashes.

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Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar was jointly established by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development and Cornell University
If the results of WCMC-Q’s first Annual High School Essay Contest are any indication, the next generation of doctors in Qatar is well on its way. The contest’s inaugural theme, “Healing Hands: being a doctor in Qatar”, elicited a wealth of thoughtful responses from high school students, many already active in local hospitals.

Answering the call

This spring, WCMC-Q issued the challenge to all high school students throughout the country: tell us what you believe it means to be a doctor in Qatar. The theme encouraged students to share their thoughts on the need for doctors in Qatar, the issues they might face in their practice, and their own aspirations of becoming a doctor.

“The topic helps raise awareness in high school students of the role of medicine in the development of Qatar and in their own lives,” notes Dr. Maya Hammoud, Senior Associate Dean for Education at WCMC-Q. “There are valuable lessons, even for those not considering healthcare as a profession.”

20 finalists were selected from more than 100 submissions. The essays addressed a wide range of viewpoints, including comparisons of Qatari and US healthcare systems, and the concept of medicine as a service profession involving personal sacrifice. A common thread through many entries was an appreciation for the increasing local opportunities in medicine made possible by the support of the Qatari leadership.

The Medical College hosted a special ceremony recognizing the top 20 essays and announcing the two winners. For equally outstanding essays, Mohammad Hajji from Middle-East International School and Alaa Al-Na’ama from Al Bayan Secondary School for Girls were selected.

Both received the Doctor of the Future Summer Scholarship: a fully funded, two-week experience at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City generously sponsored by Dr. Ronald G. Crystal, professor and Chairman of the Department of Genetic Medicine at WCMC-NY. The scholarship included airfare and accommodation for the winners and one guardian each, as well as a $1000 stipend.

“All the entries were excellent, and it was interesting to see how doctors are perceived by high school students,” Dr. Crystal commented on a recorded video message from New York. “I congratulate you all on the effort you put into this and look forward to welcoming the winners to our research labs in New York City.”

The trip of a lifetime

The winners flew to New York on July 21 where they received an intensive introduction to Dr. Crystal’s laboratories and NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital. Their itinerary included an orientation and tour of the facilities with Dr. Crystal and Tim O’Connor, PhD, Vice Chairman of the Department of Genetic Medicine.

The next two weeks were jam-packed with lectures, personalized meetings, Grand Rounds, lab work, and meetings with patients, all designed to expose them to the biomedical research field. The students particularly enjoyed experiments in pulmonary function, and giving a presentation about Qatar to the department.

Al-Na’ama and Hajji also met Sumeja Zahirovic and Karima Beceti, WCWC-Q students between their first and second years of the Medical Program conducting their summer research in Dr. Crystal’s lab.

“They both showed a lot of enthusiasm and a surprising skill in the lab,” Zahirovic said, “both when...
dealing with bench work as well as preparing for the weekly meetings. Everyone in the lab enjoyed their presence very much.”

There was also time to explore New York City in the evenings and weekends. Hajji visited Times Square, took a boat trip, and even caught a couple of movies. Al-Na’ama toured Central Park, did some shopping downtown, and saw the Brooklyn Bridge with some of the WCMC-Q students.

On their last day at WCMC-NY, Mohammed and Alaa gave a presentation entitled *Introduction to Biomedical Research: Dr. Crystal’s Laboratory*, which detailed their findings from the lab to the Genetic Therapies department.

**Homeward bound**

The students returned to Qatar on August 2nd, but the impression they left on Dr. Crystal’s laboratory in New York lingers. “We found them intelligent, and quick to pick up the concepts” Dr. Crystal said. “Considering that they are high school students put in a highly active, clinical/laboratory setting with sophisticated concepts in a “foreign” culture, we were very impressed with their ability to fit in and with their ability to present to the Department their summary.”

Now, back home and more enthusiastic than ever, Al-Na’ama has created a presentation about the trip for her fellow students. “I wish that future doctors—I mean who are my age—in Qatar would have this chance to do what I did there,” she said. “It was really a fantastic, wonderful and useful trip.” Hajji is equally inspired: “I feel that this trip gave me a greater passion and increased my interest to become a doctor.”

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**What I learned on my summer vacation: Summer Enrichment Programs**

Summer in Qatar often means vacation, time off from school or work, and travelling to escape the summer heat. But this year, WCMC-Q’s Summer Enrichment Programs brought three industrious groups of young students a unique chance to challenge themselves intellectually, and have fun in the process.

The programs, free to students in grades 7 through 12, were directed by recent WCMC-Q graduates Drs. Osama Alsaied and Jehan Al-Rayahi, and instructed by members of the WCMC-Q Pre-medical and Medical Faculty.

“Our graduates have created three excellent programs that encourage young students in Qatar to not only..."
**NEWS FROM WCMC-Q**

“Our graduates have created three excellent programs that encourage young students in Qatar to not only enjoy learning and develop life-long learning habits, but also to form an early interest in college and the university setting.”

— Dr. Maya Hammoud, Senior Associate Dean for Education

The skills to succeed: the programs use hands-on activities to stimulate students’ interest in learning, and help them practice skills like interviewing for college admission.

The following week saw the start of the Qatar Future Doctors program, an intensive course demonstrating what it is like to be a practicing doctor, with a focus on the worldwide public health issues of diabetes and obesity.

“The course was designed to mimic the curriculum of WCMC-Q,” Alsaied explained, “but at a level that is both challenging yet feasible to a student going into the 10-12th grade.”

The young students worked in teams in mock medical exercises, and used the heart sounds tutorial mannequin “Harvey” in WCMC-Q’s Clinical Skills Center. The program included a full day of training at the Hamad International Training Center where each student earned a Basic Life Support certificate.

Alsaied found the participants “very intelligent, most of them dreaming of coming to WCMC-Q for a medical degree. In short, they are the future doctors.”

The third and final installment in the catalog was the two-week Pre-College Enrichment Program beginning July 13. The program introduced prospective university students to what college life is all about through presentations from the various Education City institutions, and workshops on career counselling, personal development, lab safety and the use of e-libraries.

One highlight was an exercise where participants took mock interviews to gain first-hand experience of a college admission interview. Many students said they felt genuinely nervous before the simulation. After receiving constructive feedback from the interviewers, however, they displayed confidence that when the real time came, they would know what to expect.

The programs came to a successful close on July 24, with both organizers and participants excited about the experience.

“My impression from the students was that they had a fun and educational time at WCMC-Q”, said Alsaied. “I had great time planning the curriculum and teaching it to a wonderful bunch of young minds.”

“It was also a great opportunity to meet people with similar interests,” said Q-SMARTS participant Hussam Chadid, a student from Doha College. “I would definitely take the program next year.”

enjoy learning and develop life-long learning habits, but also to form an early interest in college and the university setting.” said Senior Associate Dean for Education, Dr. Maya Hammoud.

“Response to the programs was incredible,” said Donney Moroney, WCMC-Q Student Academic Services Manager. “Within one week of the announcement—just on our website and word of mouth—we had over 50 applicants for the three different courses.”

Each of the programs was designed to engage participants in learning through interactive presentations, discussions and activities that both challenge and make learning fun.

The Qatar Summer Math & Reading Talent Scholars (Q-SMARTS) program began on June 29 and ran for a week of interactive educational activities that advanced students’ skills in the core areas of math, reading, and writing.

Participants took part in writing competitions, solved mathematical brainteasers, and experimented using scientific methodology. Part of the program prepared students for the Pre-SAT and gave practice tests to apply those new skills.
Bringing new life to the college
2008 Pre-medical Opening Exercises

Look at these wonderful people. They are excellent, they are very accomplished, and they are here eager and ready—eager and ready to start their path to becoming doctors."

With those words spoken at this year’s Opening Exercises, Dean Alonso introduced the 60 Pre-medical and 20 Foundation Program students to the WCMC-Q community. The evening formally celebrated the new arrivals before an audience of the students’ proud families and friends, and members of the WCMC-Q staff and faculty.

Dean Alonso’s welcome address underscored the character of the entering class—their diversity, high level of accomplishment, and interest in volunteerism, the arts, debating, and the environment. This entering group boasts a large number of students from Qatar, as well as representation from 17 other nations.

Like a second spring, the arrival of the Pre-medical class brings a sense of renewal for the Medical College. The educational cycle, so recently completed, begins again. As Dean Alonso expressed it: “New students, who we have not known before, join us and they bring new blood and new life to the college.”

But the students’ introduction to the college is far from all pomp and circumstance. By the time they heard the Dean’s words of welcome, the 7th Pre-medical class and 3rd Foundation class had already taken their first steps along that path towards being doctors during orientation activities earlier that day. There, various presentations familiarized them with the storied history of the Medical College, and the day-to-day workings of life as a “doctor in training”.

Interspersed between the curriculum overview, the review of the grading policies, and the other academic and administrative details the students will need to know in order to thrive over the next six years, were activities—at once instructive, illuminating, and sometimes even downright silly—designed to help them get to know their fellows.

During a roll call, each was asked to introduce the person next to them by sharing their partner’s name and something unique about that person—a favorite sports team, the different languages they speak, maybe even just how shy they felt at that moment.

The next exercise tested students’ memory of all the new names: a curtain is raised, new students are placed on either side, then the curtain falls and the students identify the person facing them. Usually.

And if the first night of Orientation Week was a formal occasion, the second was anything but. The new students traveled en masse to a local mall for an evening of bowling, air hockey and other games.

Of course, there is a serious purpose behind the fun and games. In addition to being classmates, these students will be great sources of support to each other over the next six years. The advice may start with how to handle a seven/ten split on the bowling lanes, but will soon develop into preparing for an upcoming quiz, collaborations on research projects, and ultimately into patient consultations.

Everything begins somewhere. Here begins the next generation of WCMC-Q doctors.
WCMC-Q and Qatar Foundation recently announced plans to establish a world-class biomedical research program in Qatar, a project with great significance for both the Medical College and the country. For WCMC-Q, the importance is in research as the second leg of a three-part mission.

WCMC-Q has set itself five years to realize this ambition and establish a critical mass working in biomedical research, and having completed the planning stage is now actively implementing this strategy using a research advance from Qatar Foundation to set up the core labs.

An early decision was that WCMC-Q’s research will address two broad themes: genetic and molecular medicine, and women’s and children’s health. The Genetic and Molecular Medicine program will focus on personalized medicine (based on genetic profiling), gene therapy for cancer, and stem cell research. These routes will target disease areas all too common in the Gulf region: diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

The focus within the Women’s and Children’s Health research program will be on neurogenetic disorders of newborns, maternal fetal medicine and breast cancer. These areas were carefully chosen by comparing the needs of Qatar with Weill Cornell’s strengths, as Dr. Javaid Sheikh, Deputy Dean of WCMC-Q, comments: “Ultimately the goal is to make Qatar into a center of excellence for biomedical research. We believe that Weill Cornell can play a very significant role in this.”

The benefits to Qatar of pursuing a biomedical research program are many, and touch all aspects of society. In the area of public health, the goal is not only the identification of new treatments for prevalent diseases; such research will also attract high caliber health professionals.

The economic impact of research is attractive to Qatar as it diversifies from oil and gas and moves towards a ‘knowledge-based economy’. The country believes investing 2.8% of GDP (roughly $1.5 billion per year) will actually boost income.

Through focused efforts to build a sustainable economy Qatar hopes to create new jobs and grow private sector investment. This kind of enterprise culture encourages start-ups, allows entrepreneurs to flourish and fosters the commercialization of intellectual property that creates further new businesses and economies.

Creating a critical mass of researchers is essential to the success of both the five-year program and the long-term future of research for WCMC-Q and its partners. Building a rich research environment also enables a future generation of Qatari scientists to be trained. Given Qatar’s current small population, this research program must, for the foreseeable future, recruit scientists from abroad whilst simultaneously nurturing young talent.

WCMC-Q students have been engaging in biomedical research since 2003. A growing number of WCMC-Q students each year compete for summer research fellowships to spend up to ten weeks in the labs of Cornell University’s main campus in Ithaca and Weill Cornell.
Medical College in New York City, working with teams led by some of the university’s most acclaimed researchers. Since 2005, and with the recruitment of leading researchers to the Qatar faculty, students have also been able to conduct Doha-based projects.

The summer research program exposes students to a dynamic lab environment and ignites their interest in the field. Working with leading researchers, the students gain a deeper understanding of how scientific knowledge is created and learn laboratory methodologies. They benefit from the opportunity to take part in lab team activities and educational programs, some carry out independent research, and a lucky few have papers published and take part in international conferences.

Much of the focus of the students’ activity has been on topics within the themes of the five-year research program, including stem cells, cardiovascular disease, breast cancer and fetal health. Zahrae Sandouk, class of 2011, traveled to New York to work in the labs of the neurodevelopment department.

“My project was trying to understand how exactly folic acid acts on neural cells to prevent neural tube defects,” she explains. “The fact that folic acid prevents the incidence of neural tube defects in infants has been known since the 70s, but no one knows the exact mechanism of action.”

Sandouk intends to pursue a research career, and is keen to be involved in establishing something similar to the WCMC-NY laboratories in Doha: “I believe that taking part in building such an institution in Qatar is something very rewarding. Besides, people are very enthusiastic about starting good scientific projects here.”

This highlights a critical success factor for the program. Exposing students to the world of research and training them in the practical methodologies is just one aspect of...
the establishment of a viable research culture.

Over the course of the five years, WCMC-Q will recruit 120 people to the program, including principal investigators, post docs, technicians, clinical and translational investigators, and support staff. The 40,000 sq. ft. of labs containing the latest equipment and the availability of funding in Qatar are strong incentives in attracting research scientists.

The researchers will be mentors and teachers to WCMC-Q students, and provide inspirational role models, but Dr. Sheikh believes a crucial characteristic is initiative: “We require people who get excited about creating something which will sustain itself long after they have gone.”

Creating intellectual property rights by translating lab based research into clinical applications is complex, requiring expert assistance in clinical trials, pharmacology, manufacturing and patent law. In this, WCMC-Q will have the benefit of collaborators. Already a research partner, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) will be joining a training program, provided by Weill Cornell, leading to them conducting clinical trials. Sidra Medical and Research Center will play a vital role too, both as a research partner and by providing the biomedical informatics; the data infrastructure that their digital environment and advanced information technology will enable. QSTP provides a conduit for the commercialization of technology and will deal with patents. Looking ahead, if there are breakthroughs, WCMC-Q will partner with HMC to conduct clinical trials, work with Sidra to manage and analyze the clinical data, and then with QSTP to patent and

Qatar Chronicle recently sat down with Dr. Javaid Sheikh, WCMC-Q Deputy Dean and Vice Dean for Research, to learn more about the Medical College’s developing research program.

Qatar Chronicle: What stage is the five-year research program currently at?

Dr. Javaid Sheikh: Our genetics and microscopy cores, and the regular basic lab are all ready to go. We are working on building a vivarium and have just signed an agreement for our biostatistics core. So we have started on our journey.

QC: Where do you see WCMC-Q’s research facility and its output going, and how does this fit with Qatar’s national vision?

Dr. Sheikh: Ultimately the goal is to make Qatar into a center of excellence for biomedical research. We believe that Weill Cornell can play a very significant role in this. Qatar Foundation is talking to several other partners, and Sidra will be coming on board, each with substantial research budgets. We are setting up our program with all of those potential partners in view.

Looking at the larger picture, we will focus on diabetes, cardiovascular disorders and cancer, and women’s and children’s health. Those are areas where I see us developing real, deep expertise.

QC: What recruitment efforts are underway, and what sort of people are you looking to join the team?

Dr. Sheikh: We are looking for professional research assistants, people who have a college degree, with or without experience in the labs – we can train them. We have already recruited five. We will be appointing academics for the faculty positions, and will advertise in all the relevant professional journals. We will also contact chairs of departments all over the world to let everyone know that we are looking for those kinds of people.

QC: What special opportunities does Qatar offer, and what sort of people will this attract?

Dr. Sheikh: The availability of research funding is very tight all over the world at this time, except in Qatar, and I think it will stay that way for the foreseeable future. That is one key opportunity – the timing is perfect for us to bring in some world famous people.

It will attract people who want to get involved in something as exciting as this, when there is nothing on the ground.
commercialize the discovery.

Such a scenario is still some years away, but Qatar Foundation and WCMC-Q are confidently working towards building a sustainable biomedical research community. Motivation and incentive are vital ingredients, not only from the Medical College and Qatar Foundation, but also on the part of the staff that will participate in this groundbreaking project, as Dr. Sheikh summarizes: “I want to convey the enthusiasm and excitement overall, which sometimes doesn’t come across when you are looking at the details. This is something unique, a historical experiment. People that come here will be pioneers.”

We believe that people coming here need to be a little more patient and recognise that they are building a system which needs to be standing long after all of us are gone.

QC: Is the chance to observe a small, homogenous population like that in Qatar also an attraction?

Dr. Sheikh: Yes, it is quite homogeneous and certain genetic abnormalities might be higher here. In the field of diabetes, we will be doing genomic studies to see if there are particular genes that might be involved in diabetes in this population as opposed to a western population.

QC: What about cardiovascular disease?

Dr. Sheikh: We do not know as yet, but we will have an extensive laboratory to focus on cardiovascular disorders. They would also be doing standard studies here, again to explore whether there are very distinct genetic characteristics in the population.

QC: How will WCMC-Q facilitate the translational research?

Dr. Sheikh: We will be working very closely with our colleagues from Sidra and Hamad (Medical Corporation). We are setting up training programs for our colleagues from Hamad who are interested in research, so they will be our collaborators and full investigators from the clinical side in this research.

QC: What does Education City offer in this area?

Dr. Sheikh: For commercial applications of patents, we will ultimately have Qatar Science and Technology Park. Until then we will look to our New York campus for their expertise in IT, technology transfer, and commercial application.

QC: Will WCMC-Q be collaborating with other universities at Education City?

Dr. Sheikh: Until now we have focused on establishing ourselves here. You have to walk before you run, so you can build a track record. Now, during this upcoming cycle of NPRP, there will be many collaborations in applications from our colleagues in New York, Ithaca, London, and from other parts of the world. And the same thing with Qatar University and other branch campuses here. So we are beginning to do that, and with time it will become more significant.

QC: Is it difficult for researchers from the US to understand the unique setup of Education City?

Dr. Sheikh: I think they will grasp it, but we have to give them the background. This part of the world is not renowned historically for research and scientific contributions. But once you demonstrate, and once they come visit, then it’s quite clear.

QC: Is there a working environment equivalent to what you are creating here?

Dr. Sheikh: Well, certainly our colleagues in New York. We want to have the same excitement that you find in any first-rate medical school in the US. In our case we are very closely aligned with our New York campus.

QC: What other aspects of this program would you want people to be aware of?

Dr. Sheikh: I want to convey the enthusiasm and excitement overall, which sometimes does not come across when you are looking at the details. This is a unique historical experiment. The potential is great. People who come here will be pioneers.
Aft
erswards, they stood a little taller, a little straight-
er. Perhaps they felt a newfound confidence, along with an enhanced sense of responsibility. They were now more than just students—they were officially doctors in training!

In a ceremony rich in tradition and symbolism, the WCMC-Q Class of 2012 was formally welcomed into the medical community on September 9, 2008 at the annual White Coat ceremony.

For these 27 young men and women, donning the white coat was a memorable moment—the traditional rite of passage marking their entry into medical studies and their formal commitment to the practice of medicine. The evening ceremony drew a full house, with members of the faculty, staff, family, friends and guests in attendance.

The most poignant moment of the evening was the actual “cloaking” ceremony, when Dean Alonso helped each student put on his or her coat for the first time. The white coats worn by medical students are shorter than those typically worn by physicians, in recognition of the students’ training status.

In addition to receiving their white coats, the students were also presented with a stethoscope by a member of the faculty. As the Class of 2012 crossed the threshold from their pre-medical studies and were recognized as medical students, Dr. Alonso emphasized the significance of the ceremony.

“As you don your white coats,” he told the students, “you acknowledge the responsibilities and obligations of our profession and commit yourselves to both scientific excellence and compassionate patient care.”

Another traditional part of the ceremony is the reading of the Hippocratic Oath. This evening, the students listened only. Yet each surely listened closely, with the knowledge that in four years, their hard work will allow them to recite the words as they make yet another transition—from medical student to medical doctor.
A “proud graduate of WCMC-Q” addresses the entering Medical class

A n old Chinese proverb advises, “If you love something, set it free. If it comes back to you, then it is yours.” Though the sentiment has become something of a cliché, Dr. Jehan Al-Rayahi’s return to the WCMC-Q campus for the keynote address at this year’s White Coat Ceremony demonstrates that there is still some truth to the expression.

A self-described “proud graduate of WCMC-Q”, Al-Rayahi was among the first 15 students to complete their studies at the Medical College earlier in the year. She has since chosen to remain highly involved in the life of the college. Before starting work at Hamad Medical Corporation towards her goal of becoming a radiologist, she and another of her ’08 classmates took time out to develop a very successful series of Summer Enrichment Programs for the college (see story on page 3).

Although the Medical College considers her one of its own, Al-Rayahi could equally consider herself a child of Qatar. Born and raised there, she showed herself to be an outstanding student in the local school system before coming to WCMC-Q, where she continued to excel and receive honors.

For WCMC-Q, Dr. Al-Rayahi’s address is a reminder that it continues to mature as an institution. Last May’s graduation celebrated not only the individual achievement of the class of 2008, but also the college’s first journey through the complete educational cycle—from accepting Pre-medical students to graduating doctors. One of those graduates addressing the entering class is another milestone in that maturation process.

For the new Medical students, Dr. Al-Rayahi represents a worthy role model—someone who has been in their “coats” as well as their shoes, who can advise on what the next four years hold in store for them.

Dr. Al-Rayahi described the “White Coat Effect”—a transformation that takes place the moment students don the garment of their new station. “Your task as future physicians starts today, and not four years from now,” she explained. She evoked before-and-after images of how their posture would straighten, their pace quicken, how they would instantly feel and appear more confident.

Over time, Al-Rayahi predicted, their desire to learn would increase, leading them to master not just the science but also the art of medicine. They would come to see beyond the pathology of patients, to also detect emotional, economic and social factors that could influence both the patient’s current condition and their recovery.

She described the White Coat as “a simple contract” where the doctors in training vow to do no harm, save lives, and ease discomfort.

In return, patients offer their trust. “They will allow you to examine them, to manipulate the dynamics of their bodies with different chemicals and the most invasive procedures. They will also allow you to touch their lives. They will let you into their insecurities and their deepest of secrets. Do not underestimate the power of the White Coat.”

She counseled them that exams, projects and the myriad other things that will consume their attention over the next few years, though important, are only part of a bigger picture.

As a final piece of advice, she told the students to value each other and the friendships and bonds they would form. They will be each other’s greatest resource through the upcoming years. As she put it, “My classmates were my family.”

Dr. Al-Rayahi described the “White Coat Effect”—a transformation that takes place the moment students don the garment of their new station. “Your task as future physicians starts today, and not four years from now,” she explained.
Last March they were hopeful fourth-year medical students competing for a “match” with their chosen residency. Today, they are doctors working in laboratories and surgical suites and emergency rooms, at hospitals and universities and medical centers, in Qatar and across the United States. We recently caught up with four members of the Class of 2008 to report back on their early days as working doctors.

Dr. Osama Alsaied has joined Dr. Ronald Crystal’s research lab as a full time post-doctoral fellow at the Department of Genetic Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. He is currently working at the Gene Therapy Core Facility on novel vaccination projects involving anti-addictive substance vaccines for cocaine and nicotine. Alsaied eventually plans to practice as a surgeon in Qatar, and is currently applying for a general surgery residency in the United States.

Halfway across the country, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Dr. Aisha Yousuf is devoting a year to research with the internationally recognized Pelvic Floor Research Group at the University of Michigan, one of the largest public research institutions in the United States.

Yousuf’s current work focuses on pelvic floor disorders, and two of her abstracts have been accepted by the Society of Gynecologic Surgeons. She will also give an oral presentation and a poster at the 35th Annual Meeting of the Society of Gynecologic Surgeons’ scientific meeting next spring. After residency and fellowship training, Yousuf plans to return to Doha to practice obstetrics and gynecology.

Across the Atlantic, Dr. Khaled Al Khelaifi has begun surgical rotations at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) in Doha, starting with orthopedics. He credits the three months spent at HMC doing clerkships with providing excellent preparation.

After his 18-month residency at HMC, he plans to go abroad for additional post-graduate training, focusing on his eventual goal of returning to Doha to practice sports medicine.

For Al Khelaifi, making the leap from student to doctor has meant assuming more responsibility and growing in confidence and maturity. He admits that, with the long hours and nighttime phone calls, social life might suffer a bit and you feel “quite bonded to the hospital”. But he claims the sacrifice is worth it: “When you see a patient improve, you forget your tiredness.”

Dr. Ali Farooki can empathize with Al Khelaifi’s long schedule. In residency at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, Farooki is up before dawn to be at the hospital by 5:30 am, often not returning until after 7 pm that evening.

Farooki is in the Department of Anesthesiology, but reports that year one is a transitional year, meaning he’ll rotate among General Medicine, Emergency Room, Thoracic Surgery, Medical Intensive Care Unit, Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, Pulmonary Consults, Cardiology Consults and finally Anesthesiology. He selected Rush for its superb reputation; U.S. News & World Report has consistently ranked it among the top hospitals in the country.

Changing hospital systems and changing countries can be a big transition for students who go to the United States for their post-graduate training. Based on his personal experience and observation of his classmates, Farooki has come to realize that students from WCMC-Q graduate with versatility and flexibility, which he believes strengthens them as candidates for residency.

“I believe our pre-clinical years at WCMC-Q are second to none … and that lays a strong foundation for the clinical years and allows a medical student to be versatile and capable of assimilating into any clinical program.”
The Supreme Education Council (SEC) of Qatar has named four Qatari college graduates as Platinum Award winners of its prestigious 2007-08 Education Excellence Awards—and two of them are from WCMC-Q. Drs. Jehan Al-Rayahi and Khalid Al Khelaifi of the class of 2008 each received a Platinum Medal at the November 11 ceremony.

As winners, Al-Rayahi and Al Khelaifi demonstrated high standards of leadership, academic performance, communication skills, personal development, and a high level of involvement in educational, community, and recreational activities. Each is currently in residency at Hamad Medical Corporation.

“Our graduates continue to make us very proud of their achievements,” said Dr. Maya Hammoud, Senior Associate Dean for Education at WCMC-Q. “These awards are a testament to the caliber of our students and the quality of our educational program.”

The other two Platinum Award winners were also Education City students, both graduates of Texas A&M University at Qatar. Another ten students were awarded Gold Medals. In all, 49 candidates had applied for the outstanding university student award.

The Education Excellence Day (EED) awards were created to encourage and recognize outstanding Qatari students, and to advance education and scientific research in the country. Other EED award categories acknowledge exceptional schools, teachers and researchers. A total of 37 awards were given this year across all categories.

Education Excellence Day is held under the patronage of HH the Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who spoke at the ceremony. Afterwards, student winners were invited as a group for a private chat with him.

Al Khelaifi said: “It was an privilege to be honored by His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani.”

“This is not just an award for us, but for the country,” said Al-Rayahi. “It is proof that the country has wisely invested its resources in education, and that we are on the right track.”

The EED Board of Trustees sets high standards for the awards, and the process of evaluation and analysis is objective, transparent and rigorous. Winners in each category are selected by committees, and HE Sheikha Al Mahmoud, Minister of Education and Higher Education and chairperson of the EED Board of Trustees, approves the finalists.

The annual event exemplifies the commitment of Qatar’s leadership to education and the development of a knowledge-based society. This year’s ceremony is the third annual Education Excellence Day. The event builds on the tradition of Education Day, which has been celebrated in Qatar for 44 years.
A Farewell to Dean

This fall, Dr. Daniel R. Alonso, Dean of WCMC-Q, announced to the Medical College community his intent to retire and pursue other interests in his private life. Dean since its inception in 2001, Dean Alonso has guided the Medical College through every phase of its growth. Qatar Chronicle takes a look at the past eight years and Dean Alonso’s many accomplishments at WCMC-Q.

Dr. Alonso distinguished himself during his prior service at Weill Cornell in New York, displaying a pioneering spirit and dedication as an educator. His direction of the curricular reform at the Medical College in the mid 90’s stands out as a major highlight.

The resulting integrated curriculum, blending the teaching of basic and clinical sciences, problem-based learning, office-based preceptorships, and primary-care and doctoring courses, remains the cornerstone of the quality education the Medical College offers today. Antonio M. Gotto Jr., Dean of WCMC, remarks that Dean Alonso will be remembered “as one of the leaders of medical education in the history of the College.”

Having successfully implemented this new curriculum in New York, he was selected to then replicate it in the new branch campus overseas, a historic first in US medical education. “The idea of creating a medical school in Qatar was an opportunity that was inspiring beyond anything we had ever before attempted,” Dr. Alonso enthuses.

After he first visited Qatar in 2000 with Dean Gotto, developments came very quickly. An agreement between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation, an implementation plan, and his appointment as Dean all followed by January of 2001. The challenge was to maintain Weill Cornell’s rigorous standards some 7,000 miles away from New York. The achievements of the years that followed prove beyond question that he did.

The first students entered the Pre-medical program in 2002, spending that year in the renovated wing of the Qatar Academy. Dr. Alonso still fondly remembers the official launching of the program in an air-conditioned tent in the desert, adjacent to the construction of the new building.

2003 brought the war in Iraq, raising concerns over the ability to recruit high caliber faculty. But the excitement around the project proved enough to outweigh any uncertainties, and faculty numbers continued to grow. “There were doubters who said it could not be done,” Dr. Alonso says. “I think we have proved otherwise.”

The summer of that same year, WCMC-Q moved into the gleaming white halls and modern facilities of its new building. The building inauguration in October brought more than 70 guests from the US campuses including trustees, overseers, and deans. Then another milestone: WCMC-Q held the first white coat ceremony outside the US in the fall of 2004, and with it began the first ever Medical class in Qatar.

A few months later, the Medical College ensured a place for those new medical students to hone their clinical skills in an Affiliation Agreement among Weill Cornell Medical College, New York-Presbyterian Hospital and...
Daniel R. Alonso

Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC). Clinical clerkships began there in the summer of 2006.

Through each new achievement, Dean Alonso’s enthusiasm for this great undertaking remained unabated: the opening of the region’s first Clinical Skills Center in 2005, the first use of the research labs in 2006. But one of the Medical College’s many accomplishments stands out above the rest in his heart:

“Without any doubt, the graduation of the inaugural class on May 8, 2008, the first doctors ever to be trained in Qatar and the date when Cornell became the first American university to award its Doctor of Medicine degree in a foreign country.”

Those doctors embody the foundation of Weill Cornell’s educational program in Qatar. In the words of Cornell President David Skorton: “The quality of the first WCMC-Q class sets a high standard for the future of teaching medicine around the world.”

Dean Alonso is the first to note that credit for these accomplishments goes in large part to the partners that helped make them possible: Qatar Foundation, HMC, the National Health Authority, and other local and international entities. “Their drive to create this world-class higher education model is unique.”

Above all, he credits the leaders of Qatar and of Qatar Foundation: “The vision and ongoing support of the Emir, HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al-Missned, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, and the leadership of the country has made my tenure both enjoyable and stimulating.”

But the common denominator in these collaborations is Alonso himself. “He believed very much in what we were doing and, through that strong belief, was able to enlist hosts of other people associated with this project to feel the same way he did,” notes Chairman of the Board of Overseers Sanford I. Weill.

With the first implementation of WCMC-Q’s educational program successfully completed and the research and patient care missions both underway, the Medical College is positioned for even further success. But that success will come under other hands.

And with his new role as Dean Emeritus, beginning in January 2009, Dr. Alonso will ensure the transition of power to his successor is a smooth one—yet one more service to the Medical College.

And in return, the Medical College offers its gratitude for Dean Alonso’s 43 years of dedication to Cornell. For his drive, vision, warmth, and humility. And for his many contributions to advancement of healthcare and medical education, to the benefit of WCMC and its students, of Qatar, and ultimately of humanity.

Thank you, Dean Alonso.
Words of Respect, Admiration and Appreciation

Colleagues of Dean Alonso, and students past and present, share their thoughts about the man and his legacy to the Medical College:

Dr. Alonso’s tenure as the Dean of WCMC-Q will stand out because it is during this time that history was made, as he led Cornell to be the first American medical college to graduate students trained abroad. Moreover, the quality of the first WCMC-Q class sets a high standard for the future of teaching medicine around the world. I thank Dan Alonso for his vision, his courage and his success.

— Dr. David J. Skorton, President of Cornell University

Dean Alonso is passionate about education and bringing people together from all over the world to help bridge cultural divides. My wife Joan and I, along with the entire WCMC community are grateful for him and his family’s strong commitment and sacrifices over the last seven years. Dean Alonso believed very much in what we were doing, and thru that strong belief was able to enlist hosts of other people associated with this project to feel the same way. He is a true pioneer.

— Sanford I. Weill, Chairman, WCMC-Q Board of Overeers
I am grateful to Cornell University and Weill Cornell Medical College for the opportunity to serve on the faculty and the administration for 43 years. I feel lucky and honored to have worked with so many wonderful people during those years: presidents, deans, faculty and staff colleagues and, above all, the more than 4,000 medical students that I had the privilege of knowing.

— Dr. Daniel R. Alonso, Dean Emeritus

From my first meeting with Dr. Alonso, I admired his efforts to instill a higher level of maturity in the medical students, his cultural competency, and understanding of the cultural milieu with all of its peculiarities and nuances. WCMC-Q will miss Dean Alonso’s unwavering professionalism and the way in which he carried himself and the school into becoming what it is today.

— Dr. Ali Farooki, Class of 2008

Dean Alonso will be remembered as one of the foremost medical educational leaders in the history of the College, both for introducing a new curriculum in New York City, and then for transferring it to a Middle Eastern culture by successfully establishing our branch in Qatar. His willingness to undertake a new challenge and dedication to medical education are truly inspiring.

— Dr. Antonio M. Gotto, Jr., Dean of Weill Cornell Medical College in New York

Being a pioneer requires vision and tenacity, and Dean Alonso possesses them both in substantial amounts. His optimism is infectious and his commitment to this noblest of causes, beyond reproach. I feel fortunate to have had the chance to work closely with him for the last two years and to have the opportunity to build on the strong foundation that is going to be his lasting legacy.

— Dr. Javaid Sheikh, Interim Dean of WCMC-Q

Dr. Alonso always addresses us with great respect, rivaling that which we hold towards him. I have had the opportunity to work with a great man, dedicated to his work, and a brilliant mentor of the Cornell family here at WCMC-Q. It was a pleasure being a student to such a great teacher.

— Salman K. Aljerdi, Class of 2012, Medical Student Executive Council President
Administrative appointments

Khaled Machaca, PhD, was appointed Associate Dean for Basic Science Research. Dr. Machaca joined WCMC-Q in August 2007 and is also currently in the process of being appointed as a Professor of Physiology and Biophysics on the academic research track. Over the last decade, Dr. Machaca has carried out pioneering studies on the regulation of calcium signaling during oocyte maturation. The Machaca Lab also has a broad interest base in modern cell biology.

Dr. Machaca has made significant contributions to the teaching program by directing the Molecules, Genes, and Cells (MGC) course. Dr. Machaca has also played an important role in building research infrastructure at WCMC-Q.

As Associate Dean for Basic Science Research, Dr. Machaca will oversee basic science infrastructure development, coordinate basic science research compliance issues, and monitor relevant staff management issues. He will also monitor policies and procedures for basic science research and lead the efforts for future development of graduate studies programs. He also chairs the Basic Science Faculty Search Committee.

Marcellina Mian, MDCM, FAAP, FRCPC, was appointed Associate Dean for Clinical Curriculum. Dr. Mian received her BSc and her Medical Degree from McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Her subsequent training in pediatrics was at the Montreal Children’s Hospital and the New England Medical Center in Boston. She obtained her American Board certification in 1975. Dr. Mian recently completed a Master’s degree in the field of Health Professions Education.

Dr. Mian joined WCMC-Q as Professor of Pediatrics in July 2006 to take on the role of Director of the Pediatric Clerkship. She has also been the Director of the Medicine, Patients and Society I course, and one of the facilitators trained through a collaboration with the Stanford Faculty Development Center to provide workshops and seminars in clinical teaching for the Medical Faculty. She also chairs the Clinical Faculty Search Committee.

Powers Peterson, MD, was appointed Acting Associate Dean for Basic Science Curriculum. Dr. Peterson received her medical degree from the Medical College of Georgia, and completed postgraduate training in Medicine at the University of Louisville Affiliated Hospitals, and residency in Pathology at the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center.

Dr. Peterson joined WCMC-Q in 2004, directing the Basis of Disease course. She has also co-directed or participated as teaching faculty in the other four basic science courses and is responsible for overseeing the 4th year teaching electives. Dr. Peterson is also responsible for directing the Virtual Microscopy Project, an important teaching tool used in the 1st and 2nd years of the Medical Program.

In her capacity as the Acting Associate Dean for the Basic Science Curriculum, Dr. Peterson is responsible for the implementation and delivery of the basic science curriculum in the Medical Program. Dr. Peterson has been the Interim Chair of the Basic Science Curriculum Committee since October 2006.

New arrivals to the WCMC-Q faculty

Laith J. Abu-Raddad, PhD, is Visiting Professor of Physics and Visiting Professor of Public Health. His PhD in physics is from Florida State University.

Dr. Abu-Raddad has been a NSF-JSPS Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Research Center for Nuclear Physics in Osaka, Japan and a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology in the Faculty of Medicine, Imperial College London. He was also a Research Scientist at the Statistical Center for HIV/AIDS Research and Prevention, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, Washington, most recently as Assistant Professor in the Biostatistics and Biomathematics Program, Vaccine and Infectious Disease Institute. Since 2007 he has served on projects related to HIV/AIDS for the World Bank, WHO and the Washington State Department of Health.

Dr. Abu-Raddad’s multidisciplinary research interests focus on infectious diseases. He anticipates shifting the emphasis of his research to the infectious and non-infectious disease burdens in the Middle East.
Phyllis B. Griffard, PhD
is a Senior Lecturer in Biology. She earned her PhD in Biology Education from Louisiana State University. Her special interests are in cognitive issues related to how students learn college biology. After teaching General Biology for premedical students at Xavier University for several years, she moved to the University of Houston–Downtown (UHD), where she directed the Science Learning Center and later the UHD Scholars Academy, a program designed to promote “scholarship and student success for undergraduate students majoring in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics”. The success of this program led to subsequent funding from the National Science Foundation. She has also been active in teacher development and science education in museums and local schools.

Dr. Griffard came to WCMC-Q by way of China and Japan, where she gave guest lectures in colleges and schools and also taught Introductory Biology online for Northwestern State University in Louisiana.

Fayez Safadi, PhD,
is an Associate Professor of Cell and Developmental Biology. He received his MPhil-PhD from the University of Southampton. Dr. Safadi was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, a faculty member at Temple University School of Medicine in the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology since 1998 and also a faculty member in the school’s Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Sport Medicine since 2005.

Dr. Safadi’s current research interests focus on the regulatory mechanisms of bone cell development, differentiation and function in normal and diseased bone and cartilage (osteo porosis and arthritis). At Temple University, he was Director of the Molecular Histology Core Facility and Vice Chairperson for Research for the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology, and served on a number of committees and boards.

Jeremie Arash Rafii Tabrizi, MD, PhD,
is Assistant Professor of Genetic Medicine and Assistant Professor of Genetic Medicine in Obstetrics/Gynecology. He received an MD from the Université Paris V René Descartes and a PhD in Molecular Oncology from the Université Paris XI, Kremelin Bicêtre. He was a resident in Gynecology-Obstetrics at the Assistance Public-Hopitaux de Paris, and was a Fellow in Gynecologic Oncology at the Institut Claudius Regaud, Toulouse. Additional academic positions held by Dr. Arash include Research Fellow at Washington University, St. Louis, Assistant Professor at the Université Paul Sabatier, Toulouse, and Junior Faculty member at INSERM, U872, Paris. He was attending physician in Gynecologic Oncology at the Institut Claudius Regaud, Toulouse, France in 2007-2008.

Basim Uthman, MD,
is a Professor of Neurology. After earning his MD from the University of Beirut, Dr. Uthman served as a faculty member at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, Department of Neurology, since 1987 and also a faculty member in the school’s Department of Neuroscience since 1996. Dr. Uthman has taught medical and graduate courses in neurology, epilepsy and electroencephalography.

Dr. Uthman’s current research interests include clinical studies in the treatment of epilepsy, pharmacokinetics of antiepileptic drugs, seizures in the elderly and neurostimulation for treatment of epilepsy. He has served on a number of committees and boards, ranging from 12-year service on the Pharmacy & Therapeutics Committee of the VA Medical Center in Gainesville, to his more recent service on the Research and Development Committee in the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System.
An environmental awareness campaign conducted by the 2007 Foundation Program students took top prize for a public awareness program at the 2008 Qatar Today Green Awards.

Created by Qatar Today magazine, the Green Awards acknowledge and promote environmental activism in the country. The students were nominated alongside numerous businesses, institutions, and individuals who had a positive impact on the environment.

The student program, held on April 22 to celebrate Earth Day, was a success in and of itself. A variety of student displays and demonstrations educated faculty, visitors and their fellow students about threats facing the global environment, and about positive steps they can take.

“It was to get the students thinking about how we could preserve the environment,” said Amna Al Khuzaei, a member of the presenting class. With no full-scale recycling currently in Qatar, much of the program focused on reduction and conservation.

Displays included an overview of proposals from the scientific community to reverse the effects of global warming, and concept products made from post-consumer or natural materials. “I designed a garbage can made out of used cans,” Al Khuzaei said. “Other people made paints from natural colors instead of artificial ones. Some others showed how paper is recycled.”

The success of their program inspired the students to also take their message to area schools. Still, satisfaction from the good they did was the only recompense they expected.

But when Qatar Today announced their awards, senior lecturer in English Dr. Krystyna Golkowska saw a chance to show support for her class. “When I nominated the students, I didn’t think we would win anything, but I wanted to recognize their effort,” she said. “We were very pleasantly surprised when we found out we were one of the finalists.”

Now in their first year of the Pre-medical program, former Foundation students Al Khuzaei, Aljazy Al-Maraghi, and Zahra Makki were chosen to represent the class at the October awards ceremony. As nominees, the students were in prestigious and worthy company—an environmental studies center and a bank were also nominated in the same category. But when the big moment came, the Foundation Program came out on top.

The students already intended to continue spreading the message of environmental responsibility even before the award. “We can make it on a larger scale and involve other (Education City) schools.” Al-Maraghi said.

Environment and industry in Qatar
Dr. Renee Richer challenges assumptions

Visiting Assistant Professor of Biology at WCMC-Q, Dr. Renee Richer, questioned some common beliefs about the relationship between environmental regulation and industry as guest lecturer at Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service in Qatar’s Monthly Dialogue Series.

The September 15 lecture, “Beauty and the Beast: Environment and Industry in Qatar,” was sponsored by Georgetown University’s Center for International and Regional Studies. Dr. Richer examined two basic assumptions about environmental regulations, and used the situation in Qatar to demonstrate how those assumptions do not always hold true. She also discussed how industry in the country has adapted to try to meet the intent of those regulations.

The first assumption is that stricter environmental standards automatically result in improved environmental conditions. Richer’s research indicates this is not necessarily the case. For instance, although Qatar has adopted strict environmental laws, water and
air emissions travel across borders and impact Qatar. She believes the local battle will be uphill until a regional standard is adopted and enforced.

Richer also gave an example of the unintended consequences and trade-offs inherent in environmental standards. Industrial plants that require seawater for cooling have traditionally used chlorine to kill pearl oysters that become trapped in filters. To comply with stricter chlorine limits, a plant could opt to shut down periodically to mechanically clean out the oysters—but at a different environmental cost. When the plant is re-started, there is a tremendous surge of air emissions.

Faced with this trade-off between water quality and air quality, Qatar Gas is one year into a program of “pulse” chlorination. This program has managed their pearl oyster problem and decreased chlorine use to 56% of previous levels. It is an example of how industry chooses to address strict standards; in this case, the choice appears to be a good one.

The second assumption Richer examined is the notion that businesses go where there is a lack of environmental regulation and enforcement.

But a poor framework of environmental laws generally results in a lack of data on local environmental conditions. As more large lending institutions now require strict environmental compliance to qualify for funding, that dearth of prior data can make it challenging for businesses to demonstrate how their own environmental impact meets those standards.

She argues that, instead, the prime motivator for location is the availability and affordability of resources. Businesses are attracted to Qatar, for example, because of the comparative low cost of labor and energy.

Richer also notes that Qatar’s small size and accelerated pace of growth allow individuals in the field to be exposed to large-scale industry, get involved on the ground floor in the establishment of high standards, and have an impact on the future.

Dr. Bakr Nour uses innovative procedure on young boy’s liver tumor

W hile transplant surgery may be his forte, Dr. Bakr Nour, WCMC-Q Vice Chair of the Department of Surgery and the Director of the Surgery Clerkship, recently employed another innovative technique to offer new hope to a local boy.

The two-and-a-half-year-old child, born with a malignant liver tumor, had endured chemotherapy for much of his young life. Liver transplantation is not currently available in Qatar, and traveling abroad for a transplant was not an option due to the family’s personal circumstances. Dr. Nour has had success with radiofrequency ablation for liver tumors, and proposed it as treatment.

The technique uses radiofrequency energy to produce heat and cellular destruction, resulting in the ablation of tumor tissue. While the procedure is widely practiced elsewhere in the world, Dr. Nour is the first to utilize the technique in a patient this young in Qatar.

Working through an abdominal incision, Dr. Nour was able to access the tumor for treatment. He has used radiofrequency ablation to treat adult patients; this young boy is his youngest patient to date to undergo the procedure.

Dr. Nour is pleased with the result of the treatment, and believes the boy’s prognosis is very good. Although transplant surgery was not available for this patient, in the future the story could very well be different. As a consultant of General Surgery in Hamad Medical Corporation, Dr. Nour started a Hepato-Pancreatico-Biliary surgical service and a Liver Transplant Clinic. During his tenure in Qatar, in addition to building a strong academic Department of General surgery, his larger goal is the establishment of a regional multi-organ transplantation institute to complement and culminate the cooperation between HMC and WCMC-Q.
Education City hosted some 100 high school counselors, social workers and school principals for Doha Counselors Day on October 15. The program provided invaluable information about Education City, college counseling and admissions, as well as student life. WCMC-Q participated along with representatives from every Education City campus and the Academic Bridge Program.

The goal of the event was to help high school counselors better support and inform students as they apply to Education City universities, and to make counselors more aware of the experiences and opportunities available to their students. Attendees represented Qatar’s government, independent, private and international schools. Students from the various campuses were also on hand to give their perspective on the admissions process and student life at Education City.

Donney Moroney, WCMC-Q Student Academic Services Manager, spoke about career development at the Medical College, which she described as beginning from day one. She pointed out that students are selected for admissions based not solely on academics, but also on their willingness to make a commitment to a profession that is focused on helping others. Pre-medical and medical students are provided support in such areas as study skills, time management and tutoring when needed, along with MCAT preparation and ongoing counsel from advisors.

The program included sessions and discussions on standardized testing requirements and the admissions process. Practical tips were offered on the application process during an interactive presentation of three case studies that entailed a close examination of how specific elements of the student application are viewed by admissions professionals and the different institutions. Counselors participated in the discussions, sharing their thoughts and questions with the admissions team and with their peers.

Representatives from each campus spoke about their courses of study, and also about the wide range of potential careers available to students after graduation. The depth of support available to students, from admissions assistance to internship opportunities to campus job fairs was also discussed.
The Working Lunch Series for Education City writing faculty held its first meeting of the academic year October 16. The series is organized by Dr. Krystyna Golkowska, Senior ESL Lecturer in the WCMC-Q Foundation Program. Some twenty attendees, including visitors from US campuses, enjoyed two superb presentations intended to share the perspectives and expectations teachers at each level have for their students.

Peter Fortunato, Senior Lecturer in the WCMC-Q Writing Department, began with a lively presentation on “Teaching in the Post-literate World.” Fortunato noted that in our post-literate society, the value of reading and writing is increasingly perceived as a means to manipulate other media, with an emphasis on functional knowledge. But he warns that this leads to fragmentation; with everything just a click away, individuals feel they can become “instant experts” on any topic.

But information is not knowledge and knowledge is not wisdom, he reminded the audience. The challenge, then, is to help students become lifelong learners. He believes one way to do so is to develop critical thinkers by giving and modeling “deep” reading and writing.

He provided some practical ideas for finding what Nobel prize-winning author Doris Lessing called “a space, that empty space, which should surround you when you write.” Have students read aloud from books in the classroom, embody the story and enact the text, use guided imagery to develop focus and awareness, and choose the tactile sensation of pen or pencil on paper instead of a laptop. Ask students to think about what they are writing – to re-read and to revise. Finally, says Fortunato, enthusiasm and care can inspire students and help them rise to meet expectations.

Dr. Lorenza Innocenti, humanities teacher and CAS coordinator at Al-Bayan High School, then provided insight into Qatar’s high school curricula and exit exam procedures in her presentation, “A Look at High School Curricula.”

In recent years, she explained, an exit exam was implemented as a requirement for high school graduation in Qatar, and the weight that exam holds in students’ final grades is gradually increasing. This brings with it issues similar to those experienced in the US and their standardized exit exam programs.

Innocenti put those issues in context for the audience and discussed her own efforts to address them. In addition to course content, some areas of focus in her own teaching are time management, study skills, punctuality, classroom rules and the development of initiative – skills that will help students succeed in university and beyond.
Mathematics Professor Thomas Rishel, PhD, was recognized for his six years of service at this year’s Employee Welcome Dinner in October.

The WCMC-Q Cricket Team defeated Texas A&M at Qatar to win the Education City Cricket League championship. Eric Fry, Director of Student Affairs, hoists the trophy.

Samar Al Amad, Rana Salaheddin, Samar Wahbi, and Luma Al Rayyan at the Employee Welcome dinner, a time for staff and faculty to catch up and meet new arrivals at the start of the year.

Sheila Qureshi, PhD, Senior Lecturer in Chemistry in the Foundation Program, cut the cake at her students’ Mole Day celebration on October 23, a day dedicated to honoring the role of chemistry in our lives.

The student Think Pink campaign raised awareness about breast cancer during October, international breast cancer awareness month.

Dr. Bakr Nour recently donated a 450 year-old Islamic manuscript to the newly opened Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. The book had been in Dr. Nour’s family for more than 100 years.
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