

THE ORIGIN STORY:

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE FOUNDING OF NYU ABU DHABI 2005-2010

قصة المنشأ:

التاريخ الشفوي لتأسيس جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي من 2005 إلى 2010



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أصول التاريخ الشفوي لجامعة نيويورك أبوظبي دايان يو

the ORIGINS OF THE NYUAD ORAL HISTORY

FOREWORD
DIANE C. YU

DIANE YU
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Advisor to Leadership of NYU Abu Dhabi since 2016; NYU Deputy President from 2012-2015; Chief of Staff and Deputy to the President of NYU from 2002-2012; Executive Director of the NYU Abu Dhabi Summer Academy since 2009; Executive Director of the Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Scholars Program since 2008

The founding of New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) is a great story, and one not fully known by many. It began with the unique joint vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan – the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces – and then NYU President John Sexton to create a world-class liberal arts and research university in the United Arab Emirates. The two leaders realized that the unprecedented alliance between the Abu Dhabi government and NYU to achieve this goal would make history.

All of us who have come in contact with NYUAD since its birth in 2007 owe both men a huge debt of gratitude for their eagerness to undertake this pioneering private-public partnership to establish a premier university unlike any other.

The catalyst for this project was the passing away of NYU Trustee Jay Furman in January 2015. Jay had been a longtime member of the NYU Board of Trustees and close friend of John Sexton. He was the first member of the board to travel to Abu Dhabi in a delegation with John, when the idea of building a new university was still nascent.

I began to wonder: Who would be around to tell the fascinating and complex story of why and how NYUAD came to be? When I was John's chief of staff and deputy, from 2002-12, I was often asked what had motivated the University to go forward in 2007 with such a bold plan. After all, it was an extraordinary act of faith and a subject of much

speculation, if not outright skepticism, especially for anyone following trends in higher education and global education. I realized that the narrators of the genesis of NYUAD were only a small number of people living in the US and the UAE. Even though Jay Furman was gone, there was still an opportunity to gather the recollections of many of the others who had been there at the inception.

My interest was grounded in two facts: I was fortunate to have a front-row seat: I was in the core group of leaders at NYU who met almost daily with John when he was president and so was an observer of the decision to move ahead with the agreement. I was also one of the first movers from NYU in Abu Dhabi when I was asked in 2008 to build one of the first two programs there – the Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Scholars Program. (The other was the NYUAD Institute.)

The notion of NYU's forming a partnership with the government of Abu Dhabi was not an obvious or inevitable one – and the University that stands today in Abu Dhabi was not the initial plan NYU had in mind when it began to consider a relationship in the UAE. How and why it changed and became NYUAD is an exciting evolutionary and revolutionary tale and is the basis of this publication. The forging of a global academic partnership, the development of a curriculum out of whole cloth, the recruitment of an entering class of students with no campus yet, and the creation of a top-notch faculty drawn from NYU and around the world – these aspects of the tale may also hold lessons (some

cautionary ones) for those interested in higher education as it entered the 21st century and took on an increasingly international cast.

في أبوظبي، حيث كلفنتي الجامعة بإنشاء مشروع برنامج منحة الشيخ محمد بن زايد للتعليم العالي، وهو ثاني مشاريع الجامعة الفتية بعد مشروع إنشاء معهد جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي. يروي هذا الكتاب مراحل تطور خطة جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي، ومن الجدير بالذكر أن تأسيس هذه الجامعة لم يكن أمراً متوقعاً أو سهلاً، وقد مرت الخطط بمراحل عديدة، حيث تمت مراجعتها عدة مرات منذ الفكرة الأولية لعقد شراكة مع حكومة إمارة أبوظبي وصولاً إلى الشكل النهائي للجامعة الذي يختلف تماماً عن تصوراتنا في البداية. ولهذا السبب فإن الحكاية التي نضعها بين أيديكم تضم مراحل عديدة وتحولات جذرية مدهشة. نصف لكم في هذه الصفحات خطوات وتحديات عقد شراكة أكاديمية عالمية، ووضع مناهج جديدة كلياً، واستقطاب دفعة جديدة من الطلاب والأساتذة من جامعة نيويورك ومن جميع أنحاء العالم- وكل ذلك دون وجود حرم جامعي أصلاً! لقد كانت فعلاً مغامرة تعلمنا من خلالها الكثير كما أنها قد تشكل مرجعاً لكل من يهتم تطور المجال الأكاديمي في أواخر بدايات القرن الحالي وتداعيات العولمة.

The voices reflected in this book include those who were the visionaries and leaders – as well as the scouts, facilitators, ambassadors, negotiators, educators, consultants, managers, and architects of what has ultimately emerged as NYUAD. I acknowledge that it is not possible to do justice to all people and events related to NYUAD's beginnings. Perhaps future historians will do so. But the main purpose of this oral history is to convey the essence and spirit of the NYUAD origin story.

I wish to thank a number of people who made this project possible. In particular, my deep appreciation goes out to John Sexton, Khaldoon Al Mubarak, Rima Al Mokarrab, Al Bloom, Mariët Westermann, and especially Her Highness Sheikha Mariam bint Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, for their support of my undertaking this effort from the outset. I also want to acknowledge the contributions of Elisa Guarino, Kendall Boyda, Erica Zolberg, Angela Migally, Laurie Behringer, and Dustin Harris. Finally, I would like to issue a special "thank you" to the amazing team of Kate Chandler and Nessa Rapoport, who worked tirelessly with me on the manuscript itself. To all of you - I hope you enjoy the journey!

يتضمن هذا الكتاب مساهمات من العديد من الأشخاص، من القيادات العليا إلى فرق استطلاع المواقع والسفراء والمفاوضين والأساتذة والمستشارين والمعماريين الذين مهدوا الطريق لتحقيق الرؤية الفريدة للجامعة. لا يمكنني أن أحيط بكل تفاصيل هذا المشروع، أو أن أفني بحق كل من ساهم في إنجازه، لكنني سأترك هذا العمل الجبار لأجيال لاحقة من المؤرخين، فكل ما بوسعني عمله هو أن أرسم لكم بعضاً من الملامح العريضة التي تصف روح العمل والفكرة التي أهتمنا آنذاك.

لقد شارك هذا المشروع مجموعة من الأشخاص الذين كان لهم دور مؤثر في نجاحه، فأقدم بالشكر إلى جون سكستون وخذون المبارك وربما المقرب آل بلوم ومارييت ويستermann وأخص بالذكر سمو الشيخة مريم بنت محمد بن زايد آل نهيان لما أبدته من دعم لجهودي منذ البداية. كما أود أن أعبر عن امتناني لمساهمات أليسا غوارينو وكيندال بويدا وأريكا زولبيرغ وأنجيلا ميجالي وولوري بيرنجر ودستن هارس، إضافة إلى إهداء شكري الخاص إلى كيت تشاندلر ونيسا رابوبورت، الثنائي الذي عمل معي ليلاً ونهاراً على تحسين النص. أتمنى لكم جميعاً رحلة شيقة!

إن لتأسيس جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي حكاية لا يعرف تفاصيلها الكثيرون، فقد بدأت برؤية مشتركة لصاحب السمو الشيخ محمد بن زايد آل نهيان، ولي عهد أبوظبي ونائب القائد الأعلى للقوات المسلحة، وجون سكستون الذي كان آنذاك رئيس جامعة نيويورك. وبفضل تلك النظرة الثاقبة، ارتأى الإثنين أن تأسيس جامعة تعنى بالفنون والأبحاث على مستوى عالمي في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة من شأنه أن يشكل تحالفاً غير مسبوق وأن يساهم في تحقيق هدف تاريخي.

ولا شك في أن كل من له علاقة بالجامعة منذ بداياتها في عام 2007 يدين بالكثير لسموه ولرئيس الجامعة، لما أبداه من حماس وتشجيع لهذه الفكرة التي أثمرت عن تأسيس جامعة مرموقة فريدة من نوعها من خلال شراكة رائدة بين القطاعين الخاص والعام.

لقد بدأت فكرة هذه المطبوعة بعد وفاة جاي فورمان في شهر يناير من 2015، الذي كان من أقدم أعضاء مجلس أمناء جامعة نيويورك حينما رافق صديقه جون سكستون في أول وفد رسمي من الجامعة إلى أبوظبي لدراسة الفكرة الجديدة.

وبعد وفاة جاي فورمان، بدأت أتساءل: من سيكون هنا لروي قصة ومسيرة انطلاق جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي؟ وبما أنني كنت رئيسة فريق موظفي جاي فورمان ونائباً له في الفترة من 2001 إلى 2012، فقد عر لي الكثيرون عن استغرابهم لهذه الفكرة الجريئة. ولم تكن تلك الانتقادات صادمة لمن كان ملماً بقطاع التعليم العالي آنذاك. وسرعان ما تبلورت في ذهني فكرة تسجيل روايات الأحداث، فهذه تجربة نادرة عاصرها عدد محدود من الشخصيات المؤثرة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة والولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. قررت عندها أن أباشر بتوثيق تفاصيل تأسيس الجامعة بالاستفادة من ذكريات أولئك الأشخاص الذين شهدوا تلك الأيام.

ثمة عنصران أساسيان في قراري هذا: الأول هو أنني قد حظيت بفرصة نادرة لمتابعة الأحداث عن كعب، كوني أحد قادة الجامعة تحت رئاسة جون سكستون الذين جمعهم به اجتماعات يومية تقريباً، فكنت على مقربة من موقع اتخاذ القرار بالموافقة. الأمر الثاني هو أنني كنت ضمن المجموعة الأولى من الإداريين الذين انتقلوا إلى الموقع التأسيسي

Introduction

MARIËT WESTERMANN

IN A SHORT 10 YEARS,

NYU Abu Dhabi has become a unique and distinctive institution of higher education, grounded in three overlapping and connected spheres. It is a university in and of Abu Dhabi, in and of New York University – a global institution whose 15 sites stretch across six continents – and in and of the world. Jointly conceived by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and John Sexton, then the president of New York University, NYUAD is a resolutely international institution. Its mission is to develop great Emirati talent, as well as students magnetized to Abu Dhabi from around the world; to attract outstanding and creative scientists and scholars who conduct innovative research and make major contributions to local and international knowledge; and to become an exemplary community that intentionally fosters intercultural understanding and dialogue on and beyond its campus.

Fueled by this mission, NYUAD has enjoyed quick and extraordinary success. Its 3,100 undergraduate students who have joined the University to date are among the world's best, drawn to the dynamic crossroads of the UAE from some 120 countries. They are selected for their academic prowess and promise, desire to study with peers who are very different from themselves in numerous ways, and potential to make lasting contributions to a more creative, sustainable, prosperous, and peaceable world. Among our 1,700 graduates are 16 Rhodes Scholars – more per capita than any university in the history of the program. Several dozen have been

recognized with Fulbright awards, Schwarzman, Yen-Ching, and Erasmus Mundus scholarships, and other distinguished awards for graduate study. Our alumni have gone on to pursue graduate degrees in the greatest universities, founded companies and social enterprises, become artists and curators, and found employment at uncommonly high rates – in the UAE, the region, their home countries, or countries they fell in love with while studying away at one of NYU's sites. More than 100 PhD students in the sciences and engineering, jointly advised by NYU faculty in Abu Dhabi and New York, have begun their trajectories onto promising paths of research and positions in and outside the academy.

Our approximately 300 faculty are an extraordinarily vibrant community of scholars, scientists, artists, inventors, writers, and entrepreneurs. They are at the top of their fields, having published more than 3,600 peer-reviewed articles and books, filed more than 130 patents, and created more than 250 artistic productions. They also love to tackle hard problems they can solve with their colleagues in other disciplines. These extraordinarily productive researchers have won major awards from the social sciences to the arts, built innovative labs in genomics, environmental sustainability, cybersecurity, and public health, and even created a groundbreaking Library of Arabic Literature. And they come not only to build their research portfolios in state-of-the-art facilities buoyed by resourceful staff, but are dedicated teachers who involve our deeply curious students in the birth of new knowledge.

None of these successes were assured when we opened our doors to about 140 students in 2010, but we were blessed with the tremendous joint commitment and ambitious vision of the government of Abu Dhabi and New York University.

MARIËT WESTERMANN
ماریت ویسترفمان
Vice Chancellor of NYU Abu Dhabi since 2019; Provost of NYU Abu Dhabi from 2009–2010; Special Assistant to the President and Vice Chancellor for Regional Campus Development from 2007–2009; Judy and Michael Steinhardt Director, and Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts from 2002–2008

The book before you is an oral history of the early days of this remarkable institution, and particularly of the vision and hard work of those who founded it and were among the pioneers who turned a magnificent, alluring idea into a viable and vital academic institution, a place, and a community of learning and inquiry. It is a story of origins, with an emphasis on the founding ideas and actions that led to the opening of our Downtown Campus in just three years, and the move to our permanent home on Saadiyat Island in 2014, at the time of our first Commencement.

The prodigious literature on the history of higher education does not have many in-depth accounts of the origins of innovative institutions. One of the finest is *The Distinctive College* (1970), in which the sociologist Burton Clark traced the development of three outstanding liberal arts colleges founded between 1853 and 1910.¹ Clark wanted to ascertain what made these three institutions – Antioch in Ohio, Swarthmore in Pennsylvania, and Reed in Oregon – so distinctively excellent. Although many factors went into their success, including charismatic leadership, a strong originating vision, a passionate faculty and staff, and an ability to raise resources at critical moments, Clark thought there was something that made these three colleges especially mission-driven and distinctive. Ultimately, he concluded, central to the making of the distinctive college is “the phenomenon of the organizational saga.” While we may be used to thinking of “saga” as a general term for a great story, Clark had a more specific idea in mind.

A university with a strong organizational saga typically has a unique founding vision, pursued with great alacrity and drive by energetic leaders, and carried through in innovative curricula, research programs, and forms of campus life that are embraced and advanced further by pioneering faculty and students who are deeply motivated by the purpose

of the institution. As the organization evolves, it can draw on these founding elements and renew itself by recalling the original vision, remembering the words and deeds of its founders, and testing new programs and campus life innovations against the touchstone of the original idea. Great faculty and student recruitment efforts, beloved programs and initial facilities, and wonderful tales of challenge, occasional failings, and unlikely success enter the institutional saga over time. As the origin story builds, it becomes both a valuable archive of institutional aspiration and a bottomless fount of renewal, growth, and continuous creation.

Most universities today were created between the 16th century and the middle of the 20th. Few would have had the luxury or even the notion to create an oral history of their beginnings while their founders and first faculty and students would have been able to bear witness. The flourishing of oral history since the 1960s was predicated on the popularization of tape recorders and the evolution of digital video and database technology. NYU Abu Dhabi is fortunate to have been envisioned in 2006–07, when these methods of creating a live institutional archive were well established. Thanks to the prodigious, thoughtful, and creative efforts of Diane Yu and the wonderful contributions of our Abu Dhabi government partners and many NYU and NYUAD colleagues, NYUAD now has a first record of its origin story. I am profoundly grateful to all who shared their memories and insights. We hope that over time this composition in many voices will be complemented with the stories of faculty, students, and staff who have brought our campus to further life and embedded NYUAD in our local and global communities.

May this story be the beginning of one of the great institutional sagas in the history of higher education, and a source of unending renewal and inspiration for decades to come.

¹ Burton R. Clark, *The Distinctive College*, Chicago, 1970. It is surely no coincidence that NYU Abu Dhabi's first vice chancellor, Al Bloom, was president of Swarthmore College, one of Clark's case studies, from 1991 to 2009.

المقدمة

مارييت ويسترمان

ارتقت جامعة نيويورك أبو ظبي

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بنموها وتميّزها خلال عشر سنين من التقدم والإنجاز، وأصبحت مؤسسة أكاديمية ذات جذور راسخة ضمن ثلاث نطاقات مترابطة. تفتخر الجامعة بانتمائها إلى أبو ظبي، وبكونها جزءاً من مجموعة جامعات نيويورك التي تتكون من خمسة عشر موقعاً في ست قارات، وبأنها مؤسسة أكاديمية ذات منظور عالمي يؤهلها للتعامل مع قضايا تتعدى الحدود الجغرافية. وانطلاقاً من النظرة التي مهدت لتأسيسها والتفاهم المشترك بين صاحب السمو الشيخ محمد بن زايد آل نهيان، ولي عهد أبو ظبي، وجون سكستون، الذي كان آنذاك رئيس جامعة نيويورك، فما زالت الجامعة ملتزمة بمهمتها الأساسية وهي تأهيل الطلاب من أبناء دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة في بيئة عالمية رحية مع أقرانهم من النخب الأكاديمية من مختلف الدول. يساهم في تحقيق هذه الرؤية كادر يُميز بمواهبه في مجالات التدريس والأبحاث ممن لهم دور مهم في إثراء البيئة التعليمية على المستويين المحلي والعالمي، إلى جانب المساهمة في مشهد الفن والثقافة والعلوم من خلال سلسلة من الندوات والفعاليات التي تعنى بتبادل الثقافات وتحفيز الحوار المتمدن في مختلف المجالات.

ومما يزيدني فخرأ أن جامعتنا الفتية قد برعت في هذا الدور، فعدا عن شرط تفوق الطلاب أكاديمياً، لقد حرصنا على استقطاب نخبة أكاديمية تمثل حوالي 120 دولة ممن يتمتعون بقابليات استثنائية للقيادة والتميّز على مستوى العالم ورغبة في الدراسة في جو يقدّر التنوع الثقافي، وتقبل الآخر، مما يشر إلى قدرتهم على المساهمة في إحداث تغييرات مستدامة تدفع بالعالم إلى مستقبل أكثر استقراراً وازدهاراً وسلاماً. وخلال عشر سنين مضت، حصل ستة عشر من خريجينا على منحة ”رودس“ المرموقة، مما جعل جامعة نيويورك أبو ظبي أكثر جامعات العالم نجاحا في تاريخ منحة

”رودس“ من حيث عدد المنح مقارنة بعدد الخريجين وتعدادهم ألف وسبعمئة. وبالإضافة إلى منحة ”رودس“، فقد حاز العديد من طلابنا على منح أخرى مثل جوائز ”فلرايت“ و”شوارتزمان“ و”ين تشينغ“ و”إيراسموس موندوس“ الدولية وغيرها. كما أننا نفتخر بالمسارات المهنية المختلفة التي اتبعتها طلاب الجامعة بعد التخرج، سواء كانت لتأسيس شركاتهم الخاصة، أو لمواصلة عملهم في مجال الفنون، أو للالتحاق بوظيفة في إحدى الشركات - ويتميز خريجو جامعة نيويورك بمعدل توظيف عال جداً مقارنة بغيرهم من الخريجين. وقد انتشر الخريجون حول العالم، فمنهم من استقر في الإمارات العربية المتحدة أو في أحد دول المنطقة بشكل عام، ومنهم من عاد إلى بلده، أو إلى ذات المدينة التي تحتضن أحد مواقع جامعة نيويورك حيث قضى فيها فصلاً دراسياً. تتضمن أعداد الخريجين أكثر من مئة باحث من طلبة الدكتوراه في مختلف مجالات العلوم والهندسة يعملون تحت إشراف أساتذة في جامعتي نيويورك ونيويورك أبو ظبي، وينتظرهم مستقبل باهر في الأبحاث والمشاريع التطبيقية المتنوعة.

أما الكادر التعليمي فيضم حوالي 300 من الأساتذة والفنانين والمعلمين والمخترعين والكتاب، الذين يعملون نخبة مختارة من العاملين في مجالات تخصصاتهم، ويبلغ مجموع المنشورات التي أصدروها حوالي 3600 ورقة بحثية، كما أنهم حاصلين على أكثر من 130 براءة اختراع، وقد ألفوا أكثر من 250 عرضاً فنياً. إن العامل المشترك هو جهم للمغامرة وروح التحدي، وحماسهم للعمل المشترك في مواجهة الصعاب مستغلين توفر مختلف الخبراء من جميع الاختصاصات الأكاديمية. لقد أسفرت جهودهم عن الفوز بعدد من الجوائز في سثنى مجالات الفنون، كما نجحوا في تأسيس مختبرات في علم الجينومات والاستدامة البيئية والأمن السبراني والصحة العامة، فضلاً عن

إنجازهم لمشروع مكتبة الأدب العربي. وبقدر ما اجتذبتهم فرصة بناء مساراتهم المهنية والعمل في بيئة حديثة، فإن ما يدفعهم بالدرجة الأولى هو فرصة العمل مع جيل واعد من الطلاب المتحمسين للعلم والتواقين لتخطي الحدود التقليدية.

في عام 2010 فتحت الجامعة أبوابها للدفعة الأولى التي تكونت من 140 طالباً، وكان إيماننا برؤية المؤسسين والتزامنا بها أهم مواردنا وأقواها ولقد قطعنا عهداً على أنفسنا أن نكزس جهودنا في خدمة حكومة أبو ظبي وجامعة نيويورك. يروي هذا الكتاب قصة تلك الأيام الأولى لتأسيس الجامعة، وخصوصاً جهود فئة من الرواد الذين حولوا الحلم إلى واقع، فالمؤسسة التي نراها اليوم ليست مجرد مجموعة مبان فحسب، بل هي تجسيد لرؤية مستدامة بمجتمعها الغني بالعلم وحب المعرفة، وأفرادها الذين يسعون إلى توسعة نطاق معارف الآخرين بقدر ما يهتمون بتنمية أنفسهم. تركّز هذه الحكاية على المبادئ والأسس التي يعتمد عليها هذا الصرح الأكاديمي، منذ افتتاح المقر الأول في قلب العاصمة خلال ثلاث سنين، إلى انتقالنا إلى الموقع النهائي في جزيرة السعديات قبيل حفل التخرج الأول للجامعة.

لا تخلو المكتبات عادة من تأريخ الجامعات وإنجازاتها، وعلى النقيض من ذلك، فقلماً تحوي كتباً عن بدايات تلك الجامعات وتأسيسها، ومنها نذكر الكتاب الرائع للعلامة في علم الاجتماع برتون كلارك (The Distinctive College) المنشور في 1970، الذي يروي تفاصيل نشوء ثلاث جامعات متميزة في الفترة من 1853 إلى 1910. يتركّز هذا العمل الرائد في تحديد تلك الخصائص التي ميّزت تلك المؤسسات عن مثيلاتها، وفي الحقيقة إنها اشتركت في عدد من الصفات، كونها جامعات فنون حرّة تتمتع بكادر تدريسي كفاء تديره قيادة فذة وفق استراتيجية واضحة وفي ظروف أتاحت لها الحصول على التمويل اللازم. ووفقاً لكلارك، فإن العامل المشترك بين جامعة أنتيوك في ولاية أوهايو وجامعة سوارثمور في ولاية بنسلفانيا وجامعة ريد في ولاية أوريغون كان أهم وأعرق بكثير، ولذلك فقد استحدث مفهوم ”الرواية المؤسسية“ للإشارة إلى هذه الميزة، ولم يقصد بهذا المصطلح المعنى المعتاد، بل كان يقصد به فكرة أدق.

حسب مفهوم كلارك، تتميز الجامعات ذات الرواية المؤسسية بتوجه فريد منذ تأسيسها، إذ يدفع قياداتها إلى العمل بهمة ونشاط استثنائي، مما

ينعكس على كل جوانب الحياة متمثلة في المناهج المبتكرة، والأبحاث الرائدة، وغيرها من النشاطات التي يسيّرها كادر تعليمي وطلابي متفوّق وملتزم بتوجهات الجامعة وأهدافها. وخلال مراحل نمو الجامعة وتطوّرها، تعمل ”الرواية المؤسسية“ على إذكاء روح القيم النبيلة التي أسست الجامعة وذلك باستذكار مواقف المؤسسين وأفكارهم التي تصبح معياراً لكل نشاطات الجامعة والمنتسبين إليها. وبمرور الوقت تتبلور حول هذه الفكرة المحورية فقرات إضافية حول أحداث ومواقف أنتجتها القيم الأساسية، لتزيدها متانة وترسخ مكانتها، حول التغلب على الصعاب وتذليلها والنجاحات الباهرة والشخصيات الساحرة، تسهم كلها في تكوين شخصية الجامعة وتجدد روحها، ولكي تصبح جزءاً من تراثها ومصدر إلهام يستمد منه الأفراد قوة وعزيمة.

يعود تاريخ معظم الجامعات القائمة حالياً إلى الفترة ما بين القرن السادس عشر إلى منتصف القرن الماضي، ولم تتوفر لمعظمها فرصة توثيق خطوات تأسيسها- بل ربما لم تخطر الفكرة على بال أحد، وخاصة خلال حياة الأشخاص المعنيين وقدرتهم على الإدلاء بالتفاصيل الدقيقة. ولم يزدهر قطاع توثيق الروايات إلا في الستينيات من القرن الماضي بعد توفر أجهزة التسجيل الصوتية والمرئية وأنظمة حفظ التسجيلات الرقمية، مما يضع جامعة نيويورك في موقف خاص، يتميز بوجود الشخصيات القيادية التي أسست الجامعة وعاصرت أولى خطواتها. وكذلك في توفر أحدث أجهزة التسجيل وأنظمتها التي تمكننا من توثيق التجربة بالكامل. وبفضل دايان يو وجهدها الدؤوب، ومساهمات شركائنا في أبو ظبي والعديد من الزملاء ضمن الجامعتين في نيويورك وأبو ظبي، فقد أصبح لدينا سجل موثّق لحكاية تأسيس جامعة نيويورك أبو ظبي.

أتوجه بخالص الشكر والتقدير إلى كل من ساهم في تحقيق هذا الهدف بسرد الأحداث والوقائع، وأرجو أن يشكل هذا العمل أساساً للعديد من مساهمات أفراد مجتمع الجامعة الذين أضفوا عليها طابعاً فريداً بلمساتهم الخاصة وسخوا مكانة جامعة نيويورك أبو ظبي على الصعيدين المحلي والعالمي.

ويشرفني أن أكون جزءاً من تأسيس جامعة ذات رواية مؤسسية، ستدرج حتماً في مصاف الجامعات العالمية المساهمة في التجديد والإلهام للعقود القادمة.



NYUAD



NYUAD

a
**BOLD
IDEA**

فكرة جريئة

JOHN SEXTON: There was an evolution to the moment NYU Abu Dhabi was conceived.

1.0, the first phase, was a view of New York City. In 2001, as I was moving to become president of NYU, I was looking to find a distinct quality for the University that could justify people's commitment.

I was then involved with Dan Doctoroff, who was not yet deputy mayor under Mike Bloomberg, and Jay Kriegel, who had been deputy mayor under John Lindsay, in an effort to bring the 2008 Olympics to New York.

They had conceptualized New York City as the first city in the world that had a neighborhood for every country in the world, inhabited by people born in that country.

So the motto for the Olympic bid became, "Come to New York, the world's second home."

That prompted me to think of New York as a unique community of communities – because people in the neighborhoods thought of themselves as part of this overarching whole, which was New York City. They identified as New Yorkers, even as they carried their heritage with them.

That made New York, to use my word, the first ecumenical city – in the sense of being comprised and embracing of every category of people.

NYU could then be viewed as the first ecumenical university. It was interconnected with the city precisely because it didn't have a traditional campus. All of a sudden, what had been viewed by some as a liability became an asset.

2.0 came from a different vision of NYU's four legacy study-away sites – Madrid and Paris for language students, La Pietra in Florence, and London.

With the 1.0 view of the University as ecumenical, the 2.0 phase became our making the sites part of the curriculum and encouraging our students in New York to spend time in those places.

There was then a natural expansion. Sites in Prague and Berlin followed quickly, but the Eurocentrism was evident. To ameliorate it, we created sites in Accra in Ghana, Shanghai in China, and Buenos Aires in Argentina.

We were beginning to think about our presence in a more expansive way.

JOHN SEXTON

جون سكستون

NYU President

Emeritus since 2016;

NYU President

from 2002-2015;

Dean of the School

of Law from 1988-

2002; Professor

of Law since 1981

NYU ABU DHABI:

the PREMISE

جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي: الفكرة الأساسية



“we wanted “أردنا شيئاً أكبر” SOMETHING MORE”

JOHN SEXTON: Sometime around 2005, the obvious absence of NYU’s presence in the Arab world occurred to us, and we began to study the feasibility of a study-away site.

In this tiptoeing toward what became the global network university, we were first movers. We were getting visits from people all the time, week after week. They would come to New York from all parts of the world, wanting us to open a site there. A study-away site, a school: The proposals were across the gamut.

It was largely private entrepreneurial people, who may have viewed their ideas as for-profit – which, of course, was not attractive to us. But there were some governments as well.

Very quickly, six possible sites in the Arab and Muslim world materialized: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi – and Egypt, especially in Cairo. Those were the places we began to investigate.

As I talked to a wide range of people – from heads of state in the West and in the region to people who did business in the Gulf – there was a consensus that Abu Dhabi was a special place.

KHALDOON AL MUBARAK: Sheikh Mohamed had been speaking to me about the priority of higher education and having an elite US university based in Abu Dhabi. The aim was to provide a first-rate university education in Abu Dhabi for future generations who wanted to study in the UAE rather than abroad.

We were already doing work and early studies – looking at what universities we would want to establish here and how they could contribute to our aim of offering a world-class education in this increasingly globalized world.

WALEED AL MOKARRAB AL MUHAIRI: I remember getting a phone call from Khaldoon. We had a conversation about the potential of creating a liberal arts university in Abu Dhabi.

KHALDOON KHALIFA AL MUBARAK
معالي خالدون خليفة المبارك
Chairman, Executive Affairs Authority of Abu Dhabi; NYU Trustee

WALEED AL MOKARRAB AL MUHAIRI
وليد المقرب المهياري
Deputy Group CEO, Mubadala Investment Company

RIMA AL MOKARRAB
ريما المقرب
Executive Director of Strategic Affairs, Executive Affairs Authority of Abu Dhabi; Chairman, Tamkeen LLC; NYU Trustee

The idea was a simple but powerful one. He knew I would understand it quickly because I went to a liberal arts college in the United States. He said: We want to be forward-leading.

We wanted to create something that’s a little bit different, but under no circumstance did we want to compromise on quality.

Ten or 15 years ago, when we started, people were still of the mindset of – whether it was in healthcare, working with management companies, or in education – let’s bring in somebody, pay them a fee, and then have them set something up. That was fine in the early stage of Abu Dhabi’s development.

But NYUAD came out of a recognition that this model of cooperation was no longer good enough and did not serve either us or our population particularly well. As we started having those initial conversations with Khaldoon, we very quickly came to the realization that we wanted NYU here.

We didn’t want them to send out five professors. No, we wanted something more. Because at the end of the day, if you don’t ask for it, if you don’t get that entire package, you’re going to get something that is likely to fall short, that will not ultimately deliver on the vision of leadership and what we wanted to do from an Abu Dhabi perspective at that time.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: One of the things that was so compelling about this partnership is that both NYU and Abu Dhabi were asking the same questions: What does the future of higher ed look like? How do you educate students in a world that is more interconnected? How do you pre-

pare them for rapid technological change, more globalization? Is there something that needs to change about how we educate them?

WALEED AL MOKARRAB AL MUHAIRI: It was a time characterized by new thinking, a desire to do new and interesting things, and to do them a bit differently.

We were still in the development and build-up mode. It was about saying, Look, I think Abu Dhabi and its society are ready for something like this, and so we want to encourage the kind of discourse that we know is going to come with this type of education.

That’s number one.

And number two is: We were ready for top-tier rigorous education. That’s why we brought NYU on board.

There was a recognition that if you fast-forward 15, 20 years, and we have been successful in building this wonderful university, with great researchers, with the best of the best coming in from everywhere in the world, in addition to educating 20, 30 percent of the population over time, you are really going to have an impact.

You’re going to have a cadre of Emiratis who have been educated and curious in a certain way, but, just as important, you’re going to have a huge number of expats who, we were betting, would have had a great experience in Abu Dhabi.

They would turn into cultural ambassadors for Abu Dhabi, with a spillover effect we’d never really had before in this sphere.

“IT WAS IN THE air”

“شيء ما يجعل هذا المكان مميزاً”

YAW NYARKO

ياو نياركو

Professor at NYU Abu Dhabi since 2010; NYU Vice Provost for Globalization and Multicultural Affairs from 2002–2007; Professor of Economics since 1998

YAW NYARKO: It began in 2005, with an email from Dave Finney, then dean of NYU School of Continuing Professional Studies (now SPS), saying there were some people in town who were interested in setting up global online courses for universities.

Coming from the Faculty of Arts and Science, I admit I wasn't passionate about online study. But I was vice provost for globalization and multicultural affairs, responsible for NYU's international campuses and programs, which were increasingly a focus of the University.

People come, and you listen.

This delegation was thinking about the United Arab Emirates and Abu Dhabi.

I had come to the provost's office in 2002, the first year of John Sexton's presidency. John said very clearly that he wanted to have global campuses. They would be his signature.

Dave McLaughlin, the provost, also wanted us to have as many campuses abroad as possible.

We were having lots of conversations with faculty about it. It was in the air.

DICK FOLEY: Everybody who was involved in the upper administration was thinking about these issues. But Yaw had the responsibility of taking the lead and looking for potential partners.

YAW NYARKO: The delegation continued to come in 2005. Over several conversations that year, we started to dream: Wouldn't it be wonderful if NYU could open a full-fledged campus in Abu Dhabi?

DICK FOLEY

ديك فولبي

NYU Professor of Philosophy since 2000; Vice Chancellor for Strategic Planning from 2010-2015; Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science at NYU from 2000-2009

NYU is made up of a large number of constituents. Everybody has a different view about why global campuses are good. Undergraduate students want to see other worlds. Professors want to do research abroad. Graduate students working on Italian history may want to be at the La Pietra campus in Florence. Some faculty members who work on Africa may live for a year on the Ghana campus.

Those are the two main constituencies – students and professors.

You also have people outside the global programs who say it's a distraction. If you're in my department – economics – and your research isn't on anything abroad, whenever you hear the idea of global, you get upset.

But a lot of people, many of them very quiet, are really passionate about our international programs.

Especially in the global office, you never know what's going to become something. I said to myself, "Maybe this will work, maybe it won't. But if it works, it'll be a great thing, so pursue it."



AL BLOOM, NYU ABU DHABI
VICE CHANCELLOR FROM 2008 TO 2019



“I THINK THERE’S SOMETHING HERE”

“إنها فكرة جديدة بالاهتمام”

DIANE YU: I first heard about this idea in late 2005, when NYU started thinking about having some kind of study-away site or study center in the Middle East or Gulf region. In 2006, Abu Dhabi began to emerge as a prime candidate.

During that year, I was hearing about more and more meetings with Abu Dhabi officials. When it looked as if it was actually going to happen, we learned that a study-away site was not ambitious enough. Abu Dhabi was interested in going bigger and more bold – to create an actual university.

It was a dramatic change from what we had thought, a real boundary breaker.

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: We were looking for ways to internationalize NYU. The creation of a full university in the Middle East seemed to us a very strong step in that direction, exactly the sort of thing NYU should be doing.

We were pretty positive almost from the start.

BOB BERNE: There was an idea that we could take additional risks and generate the kind of activity that would further a number of objectives – education, research, as well as the good that NYU could do in the world.

The specifics were that we were visited by many people from the Middle East with ideas. The conversation was interesting, it was productive, but it never led to further action on the part of the University. We never felt the fit between what the host wanted and what we thought we could do until the Abu Dhabi delegation met with Yaw.

They knew NYU was on the end of the continuum in terms of universities willing to engage in global activities.

Yaw went to John and the University leadership team and said, “I think there’s something here.”

“GO TALK TO JOHN SEXTON”

“اطرح الموضوع على جون سكستون”

YAW NYARKO: At the first meeting, I knew zero about the UAE. I had never been there. I knew Egypt, Tunisia, but not the Middle East.

In those days, I talked to the provost every day. So Dave knew what was going on and was very encouraging.

Of course, I had to do due diligence and cross-check with fellow faculty members in the Middle Eastern studies department that it was actually a good idea.

I wasn’t worried about things like faculty or student recruitment, because in the global programs we’d done that. We had just opened up a Ghana campus from scratch. We knew how to build programs, at least at the study-abroad level. And I knew we’d have to engage faculty, which was something I did a lot when I was a vice provost.

I was more worried about: Who are these people on the other side? Are they for real?

So I went to the UAE several times, and to Abu Dhabi – and saw that the people running things on the UAE side are very, very sophisticated. They understand the American higher education system. They were in it not as a business deal but to change their society. They knew the risks in bringing a Western institution to Abu Dhabi, but they bought into it.

That’s what made me feel comfortable.

I spoke to Dave, and he said, “Go talk to John Sexton.”

I actually don’t remember this, but John says I knocked on his door and asked, “Hey, John, have you ever heard of a place called Abu Dhabi?”

He hadn’t.

We sat down and had a conversation. I explained everything that was going on and that I had confidence that the people I was working with on the other side were serious people. And that it would be good for the University.

John was cautious. He wanted me to go back to double-check things.

DAVE McLAUGHLIN
ديف مكلوكلين

Silver Professor of Mathematics and Neural Science at NYU since 2014; NYU Provost from 2002-2016; Director of the Courant Institute from 1994-2002; Professor of Mathematics since 1994 and of Neural Science since 2000; Assistant Professor at Courant from 1970-1972

BOB BERNE
بوب بيرن

Executive Vice President for Health at NYU from 2010-2017; Senior Vice President for Health from 2002-2010; Vice President for Academic Development and then Vice President for Academic and Health Affairs from 1996-2002; Associate Dean and then Dean of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service from 1988-1997; faculty at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service from 1976-2017; founder and inaugural co-director of NYU’s Institute for Education and Social Policy from 1994-1996

A COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

الالتزام بالتعليم

MIKE ALFANO
مايك ألفانو

Senior Presidential Fellow at NYU from 2013-2014; Executive Vice President of NYU from 2006-2013; Dean of the College of Dentistry from 1998-2006; Professor of Basic Science and Craniofacial Biology from 1998-2014

MARTY LIPTON
مارتي ليبتون

Chair of the NYU Board of Trustees from 1998-2015 (member since 1975); member of the NYU Langone Medical Center Board of Trustees since 1997; Chair of the Law School Board of Trustees from 1988-1998 (member since 1972); President of the Law Alumni Association from 1973-1975; Adjunct Professor of Law from 1959-1978

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: A few countries had come to us previously, but they always wanted professional schools. They wanted to be profit-making in the end. None of them wanted the American-style liberal arts the way Abu Dhabi did.

MIKE ALFANO: I first came across Abu Dhabi in a different context than we know NYU Abu Dhabi today. As dean of the College of Dentistry, I had been approached by two different organizations interested in building a dental school in the United Arab Emirates.

I asked John Sexton if he had an interest.

It didn’t make any sense to him, given that we were beginning to build this global university. He was interested – but not for other aspects of the campus. He said, “Go ahead and pursue it. See if you can get a good deal for the College of Dentistry.”

For various reasons, we didn’t pursue either of those opportunities. Perhaps eight months later, I was approached a third time, now by a representative of Abu Dhabi.

Given NYU’s global interest, I took the interview.

DICK FOLEY: When we began thinking about Abu Dhabi, NYU had gone through a period of extraordinary growth. Extraordinary in size but, even more important, in the quality of faculty and students. Obviously, we were interested in building on that and accelerating it.

We were also in a time when every corporation, person, and university was thinking increasingly in global terms. But most universities were doing so in a relatively piecemeal fashion.

“It was a dramatic change from what we had thought, a real boundary breaker.”

Many thought we already had the best base of global activities and programs of any university in North America. Instead of being satisfied with our hand, we decided to emphasize it.

One strategy is to correct and fill in weaknesses. You have to do that.

Another is to build on your strengths. Take what are already great strengths and try to make them overwhelming.

MARTY LIPTON: The concept of international scope was not new. It started with John Brademas, when he was president of NYU, and continued through Jay Oliva. John Sexton brought it to fruition.

We had international scope in the law school before John, but he developed it at the law school and the University. He had put the University on a very good trajectory when the opportunity in Abu Dhabi came to us.

It wasn’t something we sought out. Abu Dhabi had the concept of creating a full campus for an American-style university there. They proposed it.

MIKE ALFANO: It was just a concept at that time. But I loved it. I loved the idea of the global network – that NYU was approaching global education in a manner that valued the local culture and citizenry.



THE VISION

DIANE YU: I was astonished by how breathtakingly original the idea was, not just in the region but in the world. It was definitely something that had not been undertaken by any other university. I was very excited about NYU being the first to pioneer the concept, the arrangement, and the partnership.

The fact that we would create a unique university, when it's pretty hard to find something unique anymore: It was very, very captivating.

JOHN SEXTON: Through connections of President Clinton, a man came into my life by the name of Marty Edelman, who is one of the people closest to me to this day.

MARTY EDELMAN: On a Saturday morning, Cheryl Mills, whom I've known for many years, called to say that there was a group of people interested in trying to create an educational institution somewhere in the Middle East, perhaps in the UAE.

Since Cheryl knew I spent a lot of time in the UAE and was an advisor to the royal family and some of the institutions there, she asked what my views were.

I told her I would get back to her in 10 minutes and called a senior colleague in Abu Dhabi.

We spoke about the possibility of locating an American-style university in the UAE – and there was interest.

MARTY EDELMAN
مارتي إيدلمان
Senior of Counsel,
Paul Hastings LLP

In fact, I'd had a very preliminary conversation with Princeton, where I was an alumnus, about possibly doing something like this. And they weren't interested at the time.

When I called Cheryl back, she said, "You have to meet John Sexton."

JOHN SEXTON: Very early, there were counterparts in Abu Dhabi – most notably Khaldoon Al Mubarak, Waleed Al Mokarrab, and Rima Al Mokarrab – who stood as allies and full partners in the development of this idea.

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: Their desire was to convert Abu Dhabi into the center of the Middle East, in transportation, culture, and leadership. And they really believed that to accomplish it, they needed a very strong liberal arts university. The aspiration was to have the leading university in the region.

WALEED AL MOKARRAB AL MUHAIRI: If you think about what a university is, it's this: A university, other than making you study and hopefully learn something, is a way to have a dialogue between different segments of society. It's a great mixer in terms of folks who would not ordinarily have mixed – whether it's the expats who have come in just for the purpose of studying at NYUAD or the different

OF THE PARTNERS

رؤية المؤسسين

segments of Emiratis who are coming in – so that social cohesion element was also recognized and is important, because dialogue is critically important.

And I think there was a recognition from the leadership, both at the NYU level and the Abu Dhabi level, that we wanted to promote that type of dialogue.

DIANE YU: The more we found out how sincere our government partners were in Abu Dhabi, the more convinced we were that this was the right commitment to make, the right partner, country, and leadership.

We assembled a very strong leadership team in New York so that we could know what was crucial to us, try to understand what was crucial to them, and be able to move forward.

It was John Sexton; Dave McLaughlin, the provost; Bob Berne, executive vice president for health; Jack Lew, executive vice president in 2005, and later Mike Alfano; and Dick Foley, who was then

dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science. Occasionally, Harvey Stedman, a provost emeritus, would join us. I was there as chief of staff to John.

Because the model was unprecedented, we had to be our own advisors. We did tap into existing expertise – politically, culturally, religiously – but we didn't have any people we could talk to, any counterparts who'd had a similar experience building a true academic institution.

Our Abu Dhabi government partners had pushed us to think beyond the study-away notion, to build a new university, something we had not contemplated.

What would it entail? What would we need to have in place in team and resources, knowledge and know-how, in order to build a university from

the very beginning? Not to deal with a place where you'd have to change and transform and revamp and reengineer it to become the liberal arts college and eventually the research university of the future, but to have the time and effort and new platform to do it as you would want to.

It was an astounding opportunity.

JOHN SEXTON: All of it was talked out with the deans and the senior leadership team. It was fully discussed every step of the way.



“TO
PUT
ALL
THE
PUZZLE
PIECES
TOGETHER”

“إعادة ترتيب الأجزاء”

JEANNE SMITH: The excitement of working for and with John Sexton was his tremendous entrepreneurial spirit. There were always at least a dozen, sometimes more, ideas in formation.

We had been grappling for some time with how to make this explosion of our global programs, primarily across Europe, work in a way that gave students the ability to get a degree off-campus. But it was impossible to figure out how to put all the puzzle pieces together.

With the opportunity of Abu Dhabi, we saw a strategy – to develop what they were seeking as a country and leadership position and what we were seeking in establishing an entire curriculum and degree-granting site.

BOB BERNE: John thought we could do a degree-granting campus. Degree-granting is the key term, because of the ventures taking place in the Middle East, in US higher education, and, to some degree, British higher education, very few were degree-granting. An exception was Cornell and its medical school in Qatar.

We thought that if it weren't degree-granting, the students would not be getting the full benefits of NYU.

JOHN SEXTON: New York University and its degrees stand for a level of excellence. They don't stand for a place. NYU also stands for a certain attitude, but our attitudinal endowment – as I call it – also isn't located in a place.

Quite the opposite. It's more openness to the world. It's more accepting of difference. It's more welcoming of the 40% of the citizens of New York City who were born in other countries.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: Of course, there are differences between NYU and Abu Dhabi, but that is the point. We're different – but we're the same in the way we deal with difference.

We wouldn't want a world in which everyone agrees all the time, or where everyone's the same. In those ways, New York and Abu Dhabi really make a lot of sense. Both were coming up with very similar answers to the question of how to create an environment where you can absorb difference without fearing it, rejecting it, or compromising on your core principles: You have to connect people, you have put them together, they have to live and grow and learn in the same place – and that place

can't be only one place, it has to happen all over the world in cities and environments that have their own context but the same animating ethos.

JOHN SEXTON: Then it's about taking the next step, where you don't insist only that the wonderful people who enlighten your world by displaying their differences, manifesting their humanity and their experiences, come to you and your territory – but you welcome going to them and seeing them in their context.

And you make adjustments for them that are not essential to the core of what you are but are important to them, rather than asking them only to make adjustments for you.

This notion that because an NYU degree is given in Abu Dhabi it's not an NYU degree is as absurd as saying that because we give some of our degrees in Brooklyn, they're not NYU degrees.

JEANNE SMITH: NYU's global experiment was already working quite well in its first generation. My experience had been in trying to figure out how you make it work in its next generation.

How might it work in a way that developed a substantial enough campus presence that students have the opportunity to enroll in NYU – but have a degree-granting program in some place other than New York City?

My role in the very early phases was: This was one more idea. And so my responsibilities were principally around: How big could this thing be that we would still be able to manage it?

JEANNEMARIE (JEANNE) SMITH
جينماري (جين) سميث
Senior Vice President
for Fiscal Affairs at
NYU from 2002-2010;
Associate Dean and
Chief Financial Officer
of the Law School
from 1994-2002

“THIS MAY HAVE SOME LEGS”

“قد يكون هذا ممكناً فعلاً”

JOHN SEXTON: There was also conversation with the trustees, who were experiencing an interconnected world in ways that we as academics might not have seen.

TONY WELTERS: It was in a conversation with John Sexton that I first heard about it. John was excited. He had this great idea. He thought he had found a great partner, great opportunity, and he wanted to move out on it.

I had a little bit of information about the UAE, but nothing to understand the significance. Not at all.

I believe in letting things percolate, so I put John's idea about Abu Dhabi in that category to see what would happen.

When I started to hear about it from other trustees, I said, “This may have some legs.”

MARTY LIPTON: We discussed it. We thought it would fulfill a concept we had been pursuing – to give our students exposure to other countries. For many years, we had been bringing distinguished academics from around the world to spend time at New York University.

It fit into a pattern.

HARVEY STEDMAN: NYU has a long history of international involvement. We had study-away sites for Washington Square, undergraduates in particular. Over the years, we'd also welcomed thousands of students from abroad to study in New York City. The idea was exciting and far-reaching, but nonetheless an extension of the traditions and customs already in place at NYU.

But this idea was a different move by an order of magnitude. All of us were intrigued.

As it began to unfold, we were mesmerized. It seemed so futuristic, and yet it was happening right in front of us.

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: Many of our faculty colleagues believed we were involved in some kind of a colonialization project and imposing the American style on Abu Dhabi, but it was quite the opposite. It was they who were insistent on an American-style university. In their eyes, the American model was by far the strongest in the world.

JOHN SEXTON: One of the things that exacerbated some of the tensions was that we could not explain completely what we were doing. We had a direction, an intuition. But we didn't know.

“READY TO TRY SOMETHING NEW”

“فلنجرب شيئاً جديداً”

MARTY EDELMAN: You know when you're watching TV, and they start telling you that a hurricane is coming, and you see the weather map? My meeting John for the first time was like going into the red zone.

John is today, as he probably was for his whole life – and certainly during the time I've known him – an extraordinary leader and thinker. He took my original vision for Princeton and put it, as usual, on steroids. His notion was grander and more thoughtful, more creative, more dynamic, which was to create a full-scale, American-style university in Abu Dhabi and have it provide opportunities not only for Emiratis, but for young people all over the world.

As the group of these NYU graduates became members of society, they would understand what Abu Dhabi is, what it could be – and will be.

BOB BERNE: The role I brought was as someone who'd been at NYU for a long time but didn't have a direct stake in the activities. I wasn't teaching in the areas that were going to be emphasized. I wasn't going to be a faculty member there.

I could step back with John and say, “What really are the risks in doing this? How could we mitigate them? And what are the walk-aways that we couldn't negotiate?”

That is: What are the things that if they said, “This is as far as we could go on an issue,” and we needed to go farther, we would say, “Thanks very much, but it's not going to work.”

I'd been a dean of a school, so I knew what it took to run a school and to guarantee the resources and freedoms. But I also had a sense of how multiple schools are integrated and work together to form the whole university.

HARVEY STEDMAN

هارفي ستيدمان

NYU Vice Chancellor Emeritus since 2003; Vice Chancellor from 2001-2003; Provost from 1999-2001; Senior Vice President from 1993-1999; Vice President, Planning from 1990-1993; Dean of the School of Professional Studies from 1982-1990

A lot of my work in my primary area, which was the health components of NYU, was managing risk. A health enterprise, particularly one that provides clinical services, has a completely different risk profile from the rest of NYU.

I think John thought I could translate that kind of risk assessment into what we were potentially going to do in Abu Dhabi.

MARTY EDELMAN: As we talked about the possibility, I tried to give John some insight into the way Abu Dhabi worked, which is quite unique for the region – the incredibly advanced thinking the leadership had, the kind of people he would be meeting and talking to, the quality of their intellects and their vision, and their determination to find a balance between the world they had lived in and the world they were going to live in.

There's a reason that so many institutions of the West who want to do business in the region have their headquarters in Abu Dhabi.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: I'm from the UAE, but I grew up in the US and started my professional life in New York. In many of the ways that matter, New York and Abu Dhabi are really similar. There is this energy, this ambient energy, of wanting to create and innovate. You respect history and your heritage, but you don't feel shackled by it. You're ready to try something new, take a calculated risk and a leap of faith, because you're forward looking.

JOHN SEXTON: So an introduction was made to Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed.

TONY WELTERS

طوني ويلترز

Chair Emeritus of the Board of Trustees of NYU Law since 2018; Chair of the Board of Trustees of NYU Law from 2008-2018; Vice Chair of the NYU Board of Trustees from 2004-present; Member of the NYU Langone Health Board of Trustees from 2004-present; Member of NYU Board of Trustees from 2002-present; Member of the NYU School of Law Foundation Board of Trustees from 1996-present





“YOU GET

Orn

CHANCE”

“لديك فرصة واحدة”

MARTY EDELMAN: After a number of conversations, we ended up bringing a small group over to have John meet Sheikh Mohamed – which started the project.

This would be around 2006.

KHALDOON AL MUBARAK: At a critical juncture, John and His Highness needed to meet. I arranged for John to be a guest of His Highness’s majlis. They both had to look each other in the eye.

JOHN SEXTON: Word came that we could have 15 minutes with Sheikh Mohamed at the majlis that was going to occur on the coming Sunday.

Sunday is the first day of the week in Abu Dhabi. And the majlis is when the Sheikh opens up his court to any citizen who wishes to come, along with some appointments.

MARTY EDELMAN: It’s a tradition that Sheikh Mohamed has kept, which leaders of tribal cultures keep. Members of the society come and talk to each other, but also apply to the Crown Prince for resources of various kinds – support for a family member, discussion of a divorce, or a personal issue.

People come from all over.

JOHN SEXTON: Many members of the royal family have a regular majlis. It is a listening-consensus society. A guest will come and sit publicly with the convening sheikh. There aren’t microphones, so nobody else can hear the conversation except the people immediately proximate.

The group that went over was Bob Berne, a trusted friend and advisor. Cheryl Mills, who was just becoming general counsel. NYU trustee Jay Furman. And Lee Huebner, an old friend with a deep and varied background in politics, journalism, and

international development.

BOB BERNE: Abu Dhabi was like nothing I’d ever seen. The country was founded in 1971, so it was only 30-something years old when we began. There were a lot of new buildings, construction cranes, concrete, some green, with desert outside the city.

There was also a lot of energy. People on the street were very multicultural.

JOHN SEXTON: We landed around 2pm and drove to the Emirates Palace Hotel, where they had set up rooms for us.

Our appointment was supposed to be for 6:30pm, so we were going to leave the hotel at 5:45pm. But then we learned that the appointment had to be moved up.

The cars they’d sent for us were waiting. We all

rushed out and jumped in.

When we got to the palace for the majlis, we realized we had left Lee Huebner behind.

BOB BERNE: It was an intense few hours. But Lee participated in other aspects of the visit.

MARTY EDELMAN: Enough people have told and retold the story that you’d think there were actually 150 people who came to the majlis. But we were really a small group.

JOHN SEXTON: We pull up in front of the palace. On the way, I’m being briefed: “Please, when you meet His Highness, no hugs.”

We got out of the cars. There were people there to greet us, and then we were whisked through the various palaces. It was the first experience of this kind for me.





THE SHEIKH ZAYED GRAND MOSQUE IN ABU DHABI

HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH MOHAMED BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN,
CROWN PRINCE OF ABU DHABI AND DEPUTY SUPREME
COMMANDER OF THE UAE ARMED FORCES,
WITH NYU PRESIDENT EMERITUS JOHN SEXTON



“WE STARTED TALKING”

“وهكذا بدأنا الحوار”

MARTY EDELMAN: At a majlis, people are around the sides of the room, chatting, with the Crown Prince sitting in the middle. Then someone will come up to sit and talk to him, either in front of him or next to him. It's not done in loud voices. It's an intimate setting, despite the number of people.

JOHN SEXTON: Suddenly, we're in a large rectangular room – close to the length and width of a football field. Around the walls are seated men in traditional dress, a sea of white on the perimeter. To the right, a person who turned out to be His Highness stood up, with one or two others, and walked toward me.

He greeted me in the middle of the room by extending his hand. Then he brought me over, and people cleared space.

He and I sat down on a couch. I remember that Jay was to my right and Cheryl to my left. The others in our party spread out, but the only two who could really hear the conversation were Jay and Cheryl.

BOB BERNE: We were all in a row facing the center of the room, with John and the Crown Prince leaning toward each other and speaking.

We weren't exactly sure what part we were supposed to play, because we weren't talking to the Crown Prince. I was close enough to the conversation to hear snippets, but not really close enough to follow it. I also didn't know whether I was supposed to be listening – or pretending I wasn't listening.

There wasn't anyone else there to talk to. So we would talk to ourselves a little bit. But the room was pretty quiet when John and the Crown Prince were speaking.

There were others from Abu Dhabi around, including Khaldoon Al Mubarak, people involved on the education side, and several senior officials. But they were playing a role similar to ours, in the sense that they weren't directly involved in the conversation.

“IT HAS NEVER BEEN DONE”

“إنها أول مرة”

JOHN SEXTON: The conversation went on and on. I was expecting 15 minutes, but it ended up being more than an hour.

The Crown Prince raised with me some of my writing about this century's having a network of idea capitals that connected the talented people of the world. In addition to the basic institutions of a city – finance, insurance, real estate, and cultural institutions – these idea capitals would be characterized by one or more great educational institutions.

He asked if I could conceive of creating a university in the Gulf that would be as good as the best universities in the world, far more than a study-away site.

I said, “It has never been done in a short period of time. I could conceive of it. But it would be an enormous effort.”

He said, “What would be your greatest fear in doing it?”

I said, “My greatest fear would be that either you or we would compromise excellence.”

I said that there was a way in which we would be creating a new norm of what the best was. Because we wouldn't want to do it disconnected from New York. We'd want it to be integrated with New York.

We hadn't yet developed the vocabulary of the global network university. But the concept was driving us.

“We were really enthusiastic”

THE DATE EPISODE

حادثة التمر

BOB BERNE: The Crown Prince brought out an enormous serving of dates for us and offered one to John.

I was sitting a couple of people down. I watched the Crown Prince de-pit the date in a second and eat it.

But John just popped the date into his mouth – with the pit.

I said to myself, “Well, this will be fun to watch.”

John talked a little bit with the date in his mouth. You have to picture the room: Everyone's sitting around the edge, all eyes on the Crown Prince.

Something has to give, because John can't swallow the pit.

MARTY EDELMAN: If history looks at this conversation, there was that moment when the pit might have destroyed the entire opportunity.

JOHN SEXTON: The Crown Prince said, “These dates are the first product of my mother's trees. We want you to have the honor of having some.”

I took one. And he took one. He put it in his mouth and proceeded to talk. And I put it in my mouth. There was a pit in it. I hadn't seen him do anything with the pit – and there was no obvious place to put the pit.

So I lodged it up in my mouth for a while. But then I was afraid. Because it was an animated conversation. We were really enthusiastic and talking candidly with each other.

I didn't tell him this for a year: I swallowed the pit.

I told him, “You can't imagine what's necessary to create a great university. Because we wouldn't want to lose the research nature of NYU. That means creating an undergraduate school, a liberal arts school in the context of a research university. On the other hand, we could very easily, without your knowing any better, admit A- students, send A- faculty. Frankly, what we'd want is to admit students we admit to NYU New York but sometimes lose to other universities.”

I said, “NYU New York students are extremely strong. But most of the students we admit, if they're admitted to Harvard or Yale or Princeton or Stanford or Oxford, will go to those other schools, not to us. If we're going to create this here, we'd want it to be a step up for NYU.”

We didn't talk in that first conversation about the fairly obvious fears, issues such as academic freedom. We didn't, I think, because it was clear to me that we wouldn't proceed if those things weren't addressed satisfactorily. They were the conditions of going forward, which would have to be resolved in a way that was understood by both sides.

The Crown Prince is an extraordinarily gifted, intuitive leader, and at the intuitive level he knew those issues were there.

But he also assumed that we had to decide the strategic issue of whether or not to create, for the first time ever, a fully integrated campus that did everything NYU in New York did – maybe not at the same scale, but at the highest level of quality and in a meaningful way.

What he wanted was a university that would support and sustain and help to create in Abu Dhabi one of the main nodes of the network of idea capitals. He was fully aware there was no such idea capital in the Arab and Muslim world. And he wanted Abu Dhabi to be that.

No one had ever imagined doing anything like this. I think we both realized we had to make that decision.



“THEY WANTED TO EXPERIMENT”

“أرادوا التجربة”

MARTY EDELMAN: What was exchanged in that conversation was trust.

That’s all it took. That’s all it takes. They believed in each other.

BOB BERNE: In my judgment, John’s vision and relationship with the Crown Prince played a crucial role.

Both were willing to take risks. Both wanted it to be high quality. And neither wanted to do it if it wasn’t going to be high quality.

MARTY EDELMAN: There are certainly personalities who are able to change the direction of cultures. John Sexton is one in the educational environment. And Mohamed bin Zayed is one in the region.

BOB BERNE: The leadership who reported to the Crown Prince had a sense that the relationship was important to him, which it was. That led to our working relationship with the leadership there, which was critically important in this incredible university experiment.

There was an openness to this kind of venture. You felt it early on, from the various officials we met – not just the Crown Prince but others – that they wanted to be different. They cared about education. They thought the world could learn about their culture and benefit, and they could learn about other cultures and benefit.

They wanted to do an experiment, something they couldn’t do themselves. This was an opportunity to partner with an organization that perhaps they could work with.

I felt they were doing it for the right reasons.

“GET THIS DONE”

“لنفعلها”

KHALDOON AL MUBARAK: From day one, John’s view was to go all the way.

He was very clear and open in his conversations about what Abu Dhabi would need to do in order for this project to happen together.

Early on, John introduced to His Highness the leadership, government support, and commitment that would be required from us. There was clarity quickly.

His Highness appreciated John’s approach, his personality, and his clear commitment to education. To use an expression of John’s, it was love at first sight. They clicked.

During that majlis, they had thoughtful, deep conversations. John knew His Highness had a vision and genuine leadership.

His Highness saw in John someone he could trust.

After that meeting, Sheikh Mohamed said to me: “Get this done.”

It all became real after the first majlis meeting.

BOB BERNE: There are very few ventures in life when you can see the exact point it all began. It was dramatic.

You could tell from the conversation that they were talking as though they’d known each other for a long time. They talked about what was important to them. They talked about their kids. And that evolved into a discussion about education.

It laid the foundation for the longer-term relationship they still have and for everything to come.

“WHERE’S MY HUG?”

“ألن تهنئني؟”

BOB BERNE: The meeting went extremely well.

Several times, John apologized for taking up so much of his time. The Crown Prince would say, “Don’t worry, don’t worry.”

When John did it for the seventh time, he said, “Okay, we’ll walk out to the car.”

MARTY EDELMAN: We walked out, and His Highness said, “So say goodbye.”

BOB BERNE: Just as we were briefed about no hugging, he was probably briefed that John was a hugger. Meanwhile, John is doing what people told him to do – not hugging the Prince.

And the Crown Prince says, “Where’s my hug?”

They hugged.

We got into the car, went back to the hotel, and debriefed.

We all felt good about it. John was very upbeat. He felt the long trip and the time all of us gave were worth it.

“WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?”

“ما خطوتنا التالية؟”

When we came back, we said, “Now we’ve got to develop a proposal and really think about what this means.”

The trip began the conversation about: Where do we go from here? What do we have to develop?

There was a lot of back and forth about the idea between New York and Abu Dhabi – enough so that we believed we could do it. We were now in direct contact with the leaders in Abu Dhabi, and they were interested.

You knew there were many, many ways it could unravel, go off the tracks.

At the same time, you have a leader in Abu Dhabi and someone as bold and innovative as John who agree to try to do something together. You rarely get to witness that.

MARTY EDELMAN: Sheikh Mohamed was the final decision maker. There were skeptics in Abu Dhabi. It was a dramatic change in the way the educational system functioned, to have this kind of institution there.

HH SHEIKHA MARIAM BINT MOHAMED BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN
سمو الشيخة مريم بنت محمد بن زايد آل نهيان
Executive Chair of the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation

“STRONG LEADERSHIP ON BOTH SIDES”

“قيادة حكيمة من الطرفين”

HH SHEIKHA MARIAM BINT MOHAMED BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN: I had no reservations about the project. Not at all. Not for a second. I don’t know if it was my being naïve, or if I just had a lot of trust in the two people who were leading this partnership – by which I mean my father and John Sexton.

I remember my father introducing me to John for the first time. I immediately knew, within a few minutes of meeting him, that this was a perfect partnership. They are actually similar in a lot of ways, and you could already see the friendship and the warmth between them.

This project would not have worked without strong leadership on both sides. It’s one thing to collaborate or partner with talented people, but it’s another to partner with talented people who share your vision. A lot of people, especially at that time, might have painted the Middle East with one big brush stroke and been judgmental or cynical, but John was not like that.

My father is also a very optimistic man. The reality is that this kind of partnership just doesn’t happen all the time. It’s very rare to see two people come together with a shared vision, shared values, shared interests, and a clear direction for where they want to go.

I definitely think that the connection between them was a big part of it, but it was the right time as well. Our country had spent a long time basically trying to survive. For our founding fathers, it was, “Quick, quick, quick, let’s build schools, let’s build houses, let’s build hospitals, let’s build all of the things that our people urgently need.”

But during the period we are talking about, around the time that the NYUAD partnership was established, there was something in the air in Abu Dhabi – a lot of reflection and a growing desire to move from surviving to thriving.

There were so many announcements during those years: We’re going to develop Saadiyat Island, and we’re going to create museums, and we’re going to establish NYUAD, and the Sorbonne – and so many other things. Our leaders seemed determined to make sure we would take advantage of every single opportunity that was available to us. If we can do it, and it will be good for the country, then why not?

It was an uplifting time, and it was exciting. In that context, I had no reason to doubt that the partnership with NYU was going to be positive.

JOHN SEXTON: The single most important thing that contributed to the ultimate success of NYU Abu Dhabi was the fact that we had great partners.

We’ve been in very, very good partnerships in many dimensions over the 14 years I was coaching the team at NYU. But on a scale of 100, Sheikh Mohamed as a partner is 100. Khaldoon – to whom the Crown Prince turned to work out the details – and, later, Rima, understood and embraced and encouraged his support.

We remain very, very good friends and frequently say to each other that each of us has exceeded the other’s expectation. And continues to do so.

That great partnership is key to the enterprise. Everything else flows from that.



A
PARTNERSHIP
of
EQUALS

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TOM JACKSON
 طوم جاكسون
 President of the
 University of
 Rochester from
 1994-2005

SYLVAIN CAPPELL
 سيلفان كابيل
 Silver Professor
 of Mathematics at
 the Courant Institute
 of Mathematical
 Sciences; with
 NYU since 1974

BUILDING THE TEAM

بناء فريق العمل

MARTY LIPTON: As is true in any endeavor of this kind, it's that nucleus group you start with, which then expands and attracts people. As soon as you attract one whose interest, reputation is well-regarded, others come in.

The people who were involved in the first three years were the ones who got it started and off the ground. That's why we're where we are today.

John put it together. And Diane Yu was a major factor.

It was a stellar team.

DIANE YU: We brought in some experts in international education, people with experience and knowledge about the region and higher education ideas that might take hold there.

We knew we were treading on new ground – very fertile, but also uncertain.

JOHN SEXTON: Obviously, I had the tremendous team inside of NYU to work with. But there were a few external people who were particularly important in that testing period, university presidents who were my colleagues.

They were the people to whom I would say, "Is this crazy? Do you think I should go forward with it? What would you suggest?"

One was Tom Jackson.

TOM JACKSON: After I was intrigued by John's idea, I came down to NYU and met with him and a group he had assembled at NYU to work on it.

I was hooked from that moment on.

JOHN SEXTON: Tom had been dean of University of Virginia School of Law when I was dean of NYU law school, and then had gone on to be president of the University of Rochester. During that year, he acted more or less as a consultant to the process. His memo on academic freedom was particularly useful and important.

TOM JACKSON: The core negotiating group was already in place. It was Cheryl Mills and Jeanne Smith, Bob Berne and Marty Edelman.

Unanswered early questions were: Will the students come? Are there enough students who want this style of education that we won't have to compromise our teaching standards to get them?

I don't think any of us had a clue about the answer to that.

Will the faculty come? Is anybody going to be interested in having a tenure-track position at this place in Abu Dhabi? If so, will they meet the standards of Washington Square faculty in terms of how they will be perceived?

I don't think we had an answer to that, either.

STARTING WITH FACULTY

نبدأ بالكادر التدريسي

JOHN SEXTON: The year of deliberation about whether to go forward or not was a year in which we wanted to engage the governance processes of the University. But we needed to do it in a way that could respect confidentiality.

We constituted a committee of the Faculty Senators Council and the University Senate, chaired by Sylvain Cappell.

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: I was very interested in the idea from the get-go. I was well aware of the tensions that had to be overcome in the region to make this project go forward. But in principle I was very positive.

I'm a mathematician. While most people think of mathematicians as an isolated bunch of nerds, mathematics is an extremely international and cross-cultural activity.

Moreover, mathematics has a history that goes back to the Middle East strongly. Beyond Greek mathematics, Babylonian mathematics are the ultimate sources of what we think of as the Western mathematical tradition.

Also, mathematicians are very cooperative with one another. We get along well. We collaborate internationally a great deal, which has only been augmented by the internet and other new modes of interaction.

That is to say, mathematics transcends culture. Which set us up in advance to be open-minded about this possibility.

As chair, I helped introduce this issue to the Faculty Senate and, through them, to the faculty at large. I had many conversations with President Sexton, Diane Yu, and other officers of the administration.

I helped set up some of the committees for the Faculty Senate that dealt with this issue. And also participated in University committees, including those with specific oversight for the global network university.

DICK FOLEY: Faculty members are trained to be skeptical. That's what we do for a living. Somebody says X, and the first thing we do is think of two dozen reasons for not-X.

So there was one side of me that was filled with, "What about this? What about that?" But I know Yaw Nyarko well, and I know his values well. His academic values are not just strong but of the very, very highest level. I knew that he didn't come to positive views lightly.

Questions Questions Questions

مواجهة الأسئلة

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: Many questions came up in the Faculty Senate and at faculty forums. At the beginning, there was a lot of ignorance, inevitably, about the region and its issues.

That's bound to lead to some initial difficulties. There were concerns about the stability of the region, about the roles of women and their academic rights – in particular, the academic participation of women and how it would be accommodated. There were questions about how homosexual rights would be respected for gay people among faculty or students. There were concerns about how Jews might be received, and Israelis within that.

There were also basic questions. Remember, NYU already had an international character, but nowhere near as much as it would. There were lots of questions, not all of which can be put to bed at any one time – and are still not put to bed entirely – about how you coordinate an international program.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: I had been director of the Institute of Fine Arts for no more than three years, and John was saying, because John is John: “Mariët, I see you doing something else in the international sphere.”

I didn't see any need for it. I had a great time at the Institute. We were just hitting our stride. And I felt I was doing plenty of international work, because art history and archeology are very international affairs.

But, of course, I kept hearing about the idea.

I remember sitting in the university leadership team, with some of the deans expressing very considerable concern about issues such as how we were going to guarantee academic freedom.

We were such a leader in that zone. How would it play out in the UAE?

MIKE ALFANO: I don't think we would have even tested the waters or the reality of how to do this if we couldn't get past the hurdle of concretizing what it meant in terms of academic freedom.

We were looking to establish an institution, not a program.

MARY BRABECK: I first heard about it in a university leadership team meeting, which occurred pretty regularly, usually once a week. I can remember John's exuberance and enthusiasm about the possibility.

It was very easy to get excited. And indeed, the rationale he gave – which I understand was something he and Lisa, his wife, had talked about – was the potential of having a partner in the Middle East at a time when the Middle East had so many challenges for the rest of the world and so much in resources, but had not really partnered with the West. So it was a bridge.

There were the concerns that everybody has when you don't know a country – civil rights, human

rights, freedom of speech. All the concerns the faculty had when they learned about Abu Dhabi, the deans had initially.

Academic freedom was a big one. “Are we going to be an ugly American over there?” “How do we do this in a way that's culturally respectful and appropriate?”

Among the deans, these issues were raised, openly discussed, and explored – sometimes ad nauseam.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: They were extremely valid concerns. At the same time, I remember having a certain worry that as a group we too quickly rejected the idea, or were at risk of rejecting the idea.

Having been raised quite internationally, I felt that if you had a government interested in having a liberal university like NYU active in your country, you should at least listen and see what the opportunities were.

I represented that point of view from time to time.

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: President Sexton was his own best representative. He made a number of presentations to the Faculty Senate in which he discussed the issues, presented the challenges, and gave reports on where things were and where he hoped they would go.

In addition, he had excellent staff who made

presentations to the Faculty Senate at some meetings and also to some meetings I helped organize with the faculty at large.

Not that everything got settled. What gets settled at once?

ELLEN SCHALL: There were faculty who embraced it, and faculty for whom it was a bad idea – or a scary one. It was a range of views across the University.

As a group, the deans believed very much in the global network university. Not that they didn't have concerns or questions, but there was support.

There was a different amount of work to be done, school by school, to bring faculty along. Of course, in some places that happened more readily than others.

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: There were questions about how you make sure that you maintain quality while also maintaining uniformity, because people are taking courses in place A that are supposed to fulfill prerequisites in place B.

These are very difficult questions, which naturally concerned faculty.

There were also questions about how you build up a research center from scratch, how you make it focused on research.

MARY BRABECK
ماري برابيك
Professor of Applied Psychology at NYU Steinhardt from 2003-2020; Dean of the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development from 2003-2014

ELLEN SCHALL
إيلن شال
Senior Presidential Fellow at NYU since 2013; Dean Emeritus of the Wagner School since 2018; Dean of the Wagner School from 2002-2013; Professor of Health Policy and Management at Wagner since 1992



THE INDISPENSABLE PLACE OF RESEARCH

أهمية الأبحاث

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: Most of the graduate students would be master's students, but there would be PhD students as well.

At our scale, we were not going to create a research university the size of Berkeley or Harvard or NYU. The only way to accomplish a research university was to tie it very, very closely to NYU New York. We worried greatly about how we could design it to accomplish that.

Then we worried about how we were going to recruit a truly exceptional, outstanding undergraduate class that realized the opportunities of undergraduate education at a research university. How could we make sure that the undergraduate curriculum and programs really made full use of the research university environment?

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: Faculty had many legitimate concerns about academic coordination, academic integration, and maintenance of academic standards and uniformity.

On the other hand, people didn't want to be in the position of repressing individuality. It was understood that part of what you gain by having an international setup is that you get to express different cultures and their different foci and priorities.

You don't want to impose uniformity to the point where you suppress experimentation, local individuality, or manifestations of local culture.

It's kind of tricky to figure out how to balance it.

The development in Abu Dhabi was a novel one, not only for NYU but, in some ways, for American academia altogether. When you're pioneering something, there are new questions to consider.

All of this required extensive reflection and discussion. The very process helped build faculty trust. Through the discussions, faculty felt a sense of involvement.

But faculty trust is a dicey thing. You build it. But after you build it a lot, there's room to build it a lot more.

“NYU LIKES DOING THINGS THAT ARE HARD”

“إن جامعة نيويورك تبحث عن التحديات”

DICK FOLEY: The skepticism was partially about that part of the world. Would it be a safe place to build the campus?

Skepticism from faculty, especially about academic freedom: How could you get strong provisions for academic freedom?

NYU had made tremendous improvements over the years in its ability in New York City to attract better and better students and better and better faculty – to the point where, especially with faculty, we are able to compete with anybody. We don't always win the competitions, but we win them for top faculty more often than not.

Would we be able to attract the kind of students we were currently attracting to New York? And would we be able to attract to this part of the world the quality of faculty of the sort we want to attract?

Those are questions that good, reasonable people who are enthusiastic about global education had different views about.

So there was skepticism there. And skepticism to this day among some faculty.

But it's NYU. And NYU likes doing things that are hard. This was going to be hard. It was going to be hard to recruit students and hard to recruit faculty.

Coming to an agreement and coming to the legal guarantees of academic freedom, that was hard. And building the campus is hard.

I don't want to dismiss any of that.

THE EXECUTIVE AFFAIRS AUTHORITY

The Executive Affairs Authority (EAA) is a specialized government agency mandated to provide strategic policy advice to the Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces. The EAA provides the Chairman of the Executive Council with analysis and advice across all portfolios of Government, and facilitates greater coordination in the development and implementation of policy in the Emirate.

But the really hard part was figuring out a way to go out and recruit students from around the world to come to this place that a lot of them, frankly, had not heard of. And doing the hard work of recruiting faculty to come to this place.

JOHN SEXTON: The questions were legitimate ones. We worked diligently on answering them, but the answers we gave could be tested in terms of their sustainability only in the fullness of time.

The Faculty Senate committee said, “Go forward if these questions can be answered well.”

Throughout that time, there were several meetings among Khaldoon and Waleed Al Mokarrab and me. Cheryl Mills was involved, as was Mariët Westermann.

“KEY PLAYERS” “أهم الشخصيات”

MARIËT WESTERMANN: I had been very aware of what was happening at the University from John's university leadership team and also from the Deans Council. Both were active bodies in creating a sense of common enterprise among us.

John was good about bringing to the table ideas as they were developing. Sometime in the middle of 2006, we heard about this meeting between the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and John.

YAW NYARKO: When I first started talking to groups there, there were key players who were members of two different organizations – Mubadala and the Executive Affairs Authority.

JEANNE SMITH: In the very early days, our partners were Waleed Al Mokarrab and Ali Al Frayhat, EAA Chief Legal Counsel.

Marty Edelman, on our side of the equation, helped interpret a lot of what was meant in our conversations.

Every few weeks, we would go to Abu Dhabi – Cheryl, Marty, and I – to meet with Waleed, Ali, and sometimes other folks to negotiate the points of what it would mean if we went forward.

As John and others developed a stronger relationship with the leadership of the country, it became clear that there was a strategy to advance in terms of what they were seeking as a country and a leadership position and what we were seeking: To have the capacity, in a number of different ways, to establish an entire degree-granting site.

WALEED AL MOKARRAB AL MUHAIRI: I'm convinced that but for John Sexton – his vision and his ability to articulate the benefits of having NYU in Abu Dhabi – we would have gotten something suboptimal. They would have walked away, or we would have walked away.

In many ways, John inspired our leadership to say: This is what we want. And then he brought Abu Dhabi along for the ride.

Because in the early days, not everybody moved at the same speed as John. Not everybody on the NYU side had fully bought into what he wanted to do, especially when we started talking about some of the thornier issues, like the labor issues that would come to bear, academic freedom, and visa issues.

MUBADALA

Mubadala's history is anchored in the vision and legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who envisaged a secure and prosperous future for the United Arab Emirates people. Mubadala Investment Company was created in 2017 through the merger of IPIC and Mubadala Development Company – respectively formed in 1984 and 2002 – resulting in the creation of a future-focused global investment company of significant scale and prominence for Abu Dhabi. In 2018, the Abu Dhabi Investment Council became part of the Mubadala Group, doubling the portfolio's value with its globally diversified investments based on an endowment model. Today, Mubadala's business is built across four investment platforms: UAE Investments, Direct Investments, Disruptive Investments, and Real Estate & Infrastructure Investments, which make up a diverse portfolio of assets and asset classes spanning more than 50 countries, continuing the vision of the UAE's founding father. Central to Mubadala's mandate is sustainable growth and the continued diversification and success of the UAE as an advanced, knowledge-based economy.





INSTALLATION VIEW; HUSSEIN SHARIF, *INSTALLATION*, 1995.
CEMENT, FOUND OBJECTS. PHOTO: JOHN VARGHESE. THE NYUAD ART GALLERY

“A COUPLE OF IRREDUCIBLE PRINCIPLES”

“عدد من المبادئ الثابتة”

JOHN SEXTON: It was December 2006, some months after the first meeting in Abu Dhabi. I decided I would crystallize the objectives of the project in a brief memo I wrote – six or seven pages – in which I laid out a couple of irreducible principles.

Our goal was to create something that, judged objectively, would represent the finest in higher education anywhere in the world; that both on its own – and this was an important part – and in conjunction with New York University, it would be judged to be the very best by whatever norm people used for excellence.

A collateral goal was to create in Abu Dhabi itself one of the premier idea capitals in the world, and a singular idea capital in the Gulf and the greater Middle East region.

The memo went on to talk about how, if we were going to achieve these goals, what we were creating could not be solitary. We could not be building a university that stood alone as excellence in the desert and shoulder to shoulder with the great universities of the world.

Rather, neither NYU New York nor NYU Abu Dhabi would be the fullness of itself without the other. It would be complete integration.

Another principle was that the integration would be performed by, supervised by, defined by, and implemented by NYU as a university.

The idea was to create, as far as possible, a certain degree of overlapping Venn diagrams between the interests of Abu Dhabi in particular areas and NYU's interests – but that in the end, the definition fell to NYU to make. That was without compromise.

Then there were elements in the memo about complete control over admissions, complete control over faculty, complete control over curriculum.

And that both partners wanted to show how a working community at all levels – not just the professorate, not just the academic offices, but everybody in the security force, the driving force, the janitorial force, the construction force, all of that – would set a new standard for the region.

They would provide complete financial support.

So that was the gist of it.

I sent it off, and it was very well received by Khaldoon – and, I assume, through Khaldoon, by His Highness.

But there was still an enormous amount of detail to work out. I don't think either their side or our side had certitude at that point.

KHALDOON AL MUBARAK: After this majlis meeting came a year of long, hard negotiations – getting into things we never knew we would have to discuss.

Marty Edelman was a bridge to both parties.

Rima, Waleed, and Ali were part of my team and deeply involved at this stage.

A TIME OF **NEW** THINKING

لقد حان الوقت للتفكير بشكل مختلف

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: My mandate for this project was very simple and straightforward. It was to work with these wonderful people and get it done – in our lifetime, not in 200 years. Which is a pretty tall order.

What was remarkable wasn't the mandate but the vision animating it. The vision for why we were building NYU Abu Dhabi was very specific. We wanted a new kind of higher education that created a forum for dialogue. The forum would reflect our values, of inclusion, openness, tolerance, and engagement with others – where the first instinct is to see the common humanity of the other person, to seek to understand them, and, where you disagree, to disagree respectfully.

We have 200 nationalities living in the UAE, so the student body had to reflect that diversity.

We wanted to create a place that had an Arab identity, a New York identity, and a global identity, and show that those three things could live together harmoniously, enrich one another, and do good for the world. And that great things can happen when you collaborate and when you bring these different perspectives together.

These were some of the important visions, aside from the obvious vision of academic excellence. We wanted our students to be among the best in the world, to compete with Oxbridge, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford. The faculty, too, should be at that level of quality and conduct serious research. But that research would be animated by those core visions of being globally facing, feeling responsible to a global citizenry, trying to solve global as well as local problems.

That kind of person is very outward oriented and feels a responsibility not only to one place but to a common humanity, to the world. Those values then need to be reflected in everything from the curriculum, to the student body, to the research agenda. They represent the future-looking model for higher education.





“We wanted to create a place that had an Arab identity, a New York identity, and a global identity,

and show that those three things could live together harmoniously, enrich one another, and do good for the world. And that great things can happen when you collaborate and when you bring these different perspectives together.”

THE FIRST PROVOST

أول عميد للجامعة

MARIËT WESTERMANN: Sometime in February 2007 – I remember it very well – when John had returned to work, he pulled me out of a meeting and said, “I think this Abu Dhabi thing is going to happen, and I want you to play a role.”

I was quite startled, because I hadn’t been that close to how the conversations Yaw had been having with faculty had evolved. But I certainly wanted to be open and hear what was possible.

When I asked why, he told me one of the things he had considered. Just looking at the deans around the table, he realized that very few of them would have more than two or three words of Arabic.

Although I am very far from an Arabist, it is true that at the Institute we had digs in Turkey, where cognate languages would be spoken, and at Abydos in Upper Egypt. I certainly had spent time in these places negotiating our concessions and supporting our faculty and staff on the ground.

I had about 10 sentences in Arabic. It still wasn’t a heck of a lot.

It turns out that in Abu Dhabi you can get around with English very well, but it was helpful at least to have a certain sense of how negotiations in those parts of the world can proceed, how difficult and lengthy they can be – and the kind of patience they require. I slowly began to see why John came to me. And I had that attitude that at least we should listen.

I am a perennial optimist, so I saw the opportunity very much in terms of creating a real campus in Abu Dhabi of a kind that did not exist in the Middle East, as there was no fully fledged research university with a liberal arts base there.

Higher education is under considerable duress. It

“I was also very aware that there had been no new universities built in the 21st century.”

was already then. We had been saying for years – and I myself, as my husband then reminded me, had been saying for years – that our American involvement in the Middle East has been very unproductive, focused far too little on true intercultural understanding, things we can do together to train young people, bring people and ideas together.

If I’d been saying this forever – that you can’t do it just by bombing places and fighting wars – I should put my money where my mouth is, given that I do have some capacities for building programs and for working internationally.

I thought about the intercultural opportunity. And I was also very aware that there had been no new universities built in the 21st century.

What was a new university going to look like? Let alone in a place that hadn’t really had a traditional model of a university available to it? It seemed a big challenge. I wasn’t sure I was the right person to try to get it going, but it was too good a leadership opportunity to pass up.

John’s very persuasive – and so is my husband, who had worked with the government of Abu Dhabi in international investment since the early nineties. He had great confidence not only in me but in the country.

So I was very interested in making sure that mutual respect and mutual learning were built into the way we were going to do business together.

PETER CHRISTENSEN
بيتر كريستنسن
Associate Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at NYU and NYU Abu Dhabi Chief Administrative and Business Officer since 2019; Assistant Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at NYU from 2018-2019; Associate Vice Chancellor for Finance and Planning from 2011-2018; Director of Finance and Planning from 2004-2011

REACHING AGREEMENT

الوصول إلى اتفاق

BOB BERNE: For us, it was a chance to think about the Arab and Muslim world, how much we could infuse it into our curriculum in Abu Dhabi and how much it would spill over to New York.

It was a different society, a different set of rules. Even years later, there are still people who feel that the ground rules in Abu Dhabi – the life, the culture, the laws – are such that we shouldn’t be doing any business there.

But we felt that if we could get a guarantee for the freedoms on our campus about what we teach and how we do research – recognizing that off-campus there would be limitations to what people could do when they were students and faculty – and that if the on-campus guarantees were adhered to, we could do something really special.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: When I signed on sometime in April 2007, we didn’t even have a contract with Abu Dhabi. So the first order of business was that the MOU, the memorandum of understanding, have the right academic framework.

Cheryl Mills made very sure we stayed close to that goal, as did Jeanne Smith, who really got the conditions set up correctly.

PETER CHRISTENSEN: What made the planning easier was that a group of people – John, Mariët, and a few others – had developed a financial modeling document that outlined our ideas.

Although in some ways NYU Abu Dhabi is very different from what was in the document, which was written in the early years, many of the document’s elements continue today.

They created the foundation for our success.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: At the same time, in those first four or five months, I was very concerned that the people in Abu Dhabi, whom we barely knew, didn’t see us as just robber barons coming and trying to get their money to do it – which, of course, was a suspicion in New York.

PETER CHRISTENSEN: Marty Dorph sent Cathy DeLong, who had worked for the provost on finance, to see if she could sort out the budget – and asked me to go along.

Cathy and I spent many, many sleepless nights working on another iteration of the financial plan.

In Abu Dhabi, the call to prayer comes early. One night, we stayed up until the first call to prayer. Then we stayed up until the second call to prayer. Finally, it was the third call to prayer. I had done a lot of initial plans, but they really needed updating. Cathy helped make them more sophisticated.

She was a terrific partner. Together, we created a set of financial models – tuition, fees – that we continued to use. I don’t know that we would have been able to overcome the other governance and structural issues if Cathy hadn’t helped us create such a fine set of financial models and principles.

Jeanne and Cathy are two people I still talk about a lot. They were both really important.

THE PARAMOUNT ISSUE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

أهمية مبدأ الحرية الأكاديمية

JEANNE SMITH: In our partnering in Abu Dhabi and in the UAE, I worked very closely with Cheryl, because there were quite a few things about academic freedom and freedom of thought and expression that were not as easily solved in terms of our being in that part of the world.

Those were the first barriers we were trying to figure out.

JOHN SEXTON: There was a good bit of conversation to try to specify it, always in the spirit of a partnership. One of the things that made it a success was that each of the partners was determined to make sure the other partner had a full understanding of what was at stake.

There were conversations, for example, in which Khaldoon would say to me, “What His Highness wants is the NYU that’s at Washington Square.”

I said, “That carries a lot of implications you shouldn’t want and we shouldn’t want.” Because if it were just going to be Washington Square someplace else, why would we do it?

We’re very happy in Washington Square. We had to think of this project as bringing something distinctive and additive to the world.

We got into a conversation about academic freedom. What did academic freedom mean?

MARTY LIPTON: They assured us of academic freedom. The campus would be no different from an academic freedom standpoint than Washington Square.

JOHN SEXTON: Khaldoon and Waleed said, “Of course there will be academic freedom. You’ll have complete control.”

“Well, this is complex stuff,” I said, “so let me define for you what I’m talking about. I teach the First Amendment religion clauses. But there are also the First Amendment speech clauses. And the Supreme Court has wrestled with what it means to say, ‘The government may make no law restricting speech.’

“What is speech? Is gesture speech? Is pornography speech? Pornography has vexed the Court. Through the seventies, there were maybe a dozen Supreme Court opinions, until finally Potter Stewart famously said, ‘I know it when I see it.’ There’s a way in which that’s the test for the Supreme Court for whether or not something is pornography, in which case it’s not protected by the First Amendment according to the United States Supreme Court; or it’s speech and is protected. That makes all the difference in the world.

“Now,” I said, “I’m going to give you a hypothesis. I’ve never known of any American law professor to do this, but as a professor I might think, ‘Wait a minute. If the test is, I know it when I see it, I’m going to bring in 12 photographs to class. One will be of Botticelli’s painting, *The Birth of Venus*. Another will be hardcore pornography. And I’m going to say to the class: Which of these 12 is pornography and which isn’t?”

I continued, “Here’s what academic freedom is. I am going to try to avoid sending over to teach a professor who is so sophomoric that he or she would do that twelve-picture test solely for the purpose of seeing whether or not you really respect academic freedom.

“On the other hand, I may send over a professor who, perhaps not for sophomoric reasons but for very good reasons, decides to do it.

“Whatever the reasons, if it’s done, you have to put up with it. That’s academic freedom.”

“WE WERE ALL DOING THIS PROJECT FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS”

”لقد انضمنا للمشروع
للأسباب الصحيحة”

WALEED AL MOKARRAB AL MUHAIRI: Everybody understood that academic freedom was at the core of a liberal arts education – and that it would be fundamental to attract the best professors, the best students, and have the best kind of debate.

But New York and Abu Dhabi don’t necessarily move at the same speed, and I don’t mean from an implementation perspective. New York, especially when we’re talking about NYU, is the bastion of left-leaning liberalism. And Abu Dhabi’s a little bit different. It doesn’t mean we’re not open or tolerant, and it doesn’t mean that Abu Dhabi didn’t want to do all these great things.

It was never about convincing us that we needed academic freedom. It was about speed and trajectory and what made sense. That’s where most of the conversations were.

KHALDOON AL MUBARAK: It was a challenge: There were points for us – back 10 or 15 years ago – that were very difficult.

I remember hearing the words “unfettered access,” the same level of “unfettered access” as NYU in New York.

For us, there was no precedent to this negotiation and what we were being asked to do: Agreeing to

full academic freedom, with NYUAD managing its curriculum. Back then, this was very difficult.

Cheryl Mills was the chief negotiator for NYU, and she is a tough New York lawyer.

John had made it clear from the very beginning that there was no way NYU could bend on key issues, which we were not opposed to. In fact, we were aligned in our belief in these fundamental points. However, this realm was new to us in the development of a young country’s agenda.

We kept thinking we could find a hybrid solution: We would give as much as we could within our constraints, but not everything. We tried to find solutions but couldn’t.

At the same time, His Highness’s relationship with John continued to grow.

I finally went to Sheikh Mohamed and said: Either we accept these terms – which were unprecedented for us – or we walk away.

His Highness understood the challenges and understood that it was a leap, but he also had trust in John.

We were all doing this project for all the right reasons.

There is a big element of trust between Sheikh Mohamed, John, and myself. And we have worked to establish this same level of trust and confidence institutionally, so that this project always lives on.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: I developed a high degree of respect for the government leaders, many of them still quite young, who were willing to stand with us.

ELLEN SCHALL: Going over to Abu Dhabi, as a woman and as a Jewish woman, I was thinking about how I would be received, whether it would be difficult. But it was a very welcoming, open, receptive group of people, who also had a lot of imagination.

It was a bolder step for them than for us, in a lot of ways – to invite an American university committed to academic freedom and liberal arts education and critical thinking into a society that was very young but more bound by its history and traditions.

It was a big leap.

ABOUT ISRAEL

حول إسرائيل

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: I was concerned about how this idea would be viewed by various communities within the University. One of the things I did, encouraged by President Sexton, was to contact some leading Israeli academics to get their input. In particular, I spoke to friends who are presidents of Israeli universities.

The response of Israeli colleagues, especially the presidents, was overwhelmingly positive. They were, I would say, very enthusiastic about the idea – that the academic context would benefit everybody and could be a fulcrum to leverage further progress.

JOHN SEXTON: I had important conversations with the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Dan Gillerman, who aggressively urged me to do this and said he would stand with us anywhere. And with Itamar Rabinovich, who had been the ambassador from Israel to the United States and was president of Tel Aviv University. And Abe Foxman, who was head of the Anti-Defamation League.

All these people said to me, “Abu Dhabi’s the place to do it.”

And many of the trustees, notably Marty Lipton, were immediately supportive.

MARTY LIPTON: It was extensively discussed from the standpoint of Arab-Israeli relationships. John and I met with the Israeli ambassador and with some of the leaders of the Jewish community in New York to make sure they would be open-minded.

It turned out not to be a problem.

MARTY EDELMAN: We were aware of it as an issue. And there was no unwillingness to identify it as a topic. But to punish a society because that problem exists makes no sense. I probably qualify as the best example of a passionate advocate because I am American, I am Jewish, I believe in Israel, but I have had an extraordinary second home in Abu Dhabi.

And no one has ever said to me, “You can’t come here, and you shouldn’t be here, because you’re Jewish.” I’ve never felt ill at ease or not at home in Abu Dhabi. Nor, I think, has anybody else who’s done business there who happens to be Jewish.

“EVERYBODY HAS MISGIVINGS IF THEY’RE DOING A GOOD JOB”

”ستساورك الشكوك طالما
كنت تعمل بإخلاص”

DIANE YU: Our interactions with our partners and their representatives sometimes had ups and downs, but we worked hard to make sure communications were strong and effective.

MARTY EDELMAN: Of course, periodically issues would have to come up to John or to Sheikh Mohamed. I can’t even begin to tell you how many hours and hours of phone call meetings there were in places all around the world, and the disruptions of world events that affected what we were doing: It was a turbulent period.

MARY BRABECK: People like Marty Edelman played a key role in working both sides. He was with us, but he was well-respected there, so he could help us find a middle ground.

MARTY EDELMAN: I think the criticism is important. The openness of the discussion is important. I also think that using any one of these topics as the hammer that allows you to break the model is narrow-minded and its own kind of destructive weapon.

If we always allow what you can’t do to stop us from trying, we’ll end up encircling America in a different kind of prison.

PIETRINA SCARAGLINO
بيترينا سكاراالينو
Deputy General
Counsel at NYU Langone
Health since 2020;
Deputy General Counsel
at NYU from 2015-2020

MARTY LIPTON: Of course, you have misgivings at the beginning of something like this. The point of making a careful decision on a major matter is to check out your misgivings, satisfy yourself that the misgivings are not an impediment, and go ahead.

The reason for careful due diligence on a program or transaction is to satisfy all your concerns on a step-by-step basis.

Everybody has misgivings if they’re doing a good job.

PIETRINA SCARAGLINO: Top on everyone’s list was academic freedom.

Then, just trying to get the lay of the land. You have to get a sense of what it would be like to actually operate in that jurisdiction.

I was on some of the phone calls when they were vetting these ideas. And having discussions about how it might work, how it could be structured.

Then people went off and gave it more thought – and, I’m sure, many more meetings.

At some point, Cheryl Mills came to me to say we were going to go forward, and we now had to negotiate to get an agreement in place.

That’s when I became very involved.

I was on the team that negotiated those agreements, and then in my role to draft them. We had many, many negotiating sessions with Cheryl and Jeanne, and sometimes with Marty Edelman.

It was bold for a university to do this. Everything about it was different.

BOB BERNE: We negotiated and concluded and signed the agreement, which led to the beginning of the planning for NYU Abu Dhabi.





“TO MAKE A MAJOR
MOVE”
“خطوة كبيرة”

MARTY LIPTON: NYUAD would give us the opportunity to have a major campus, with 2,000 undergraduate students from all over the world – not just from one or two or even four or five countries, but from as many as 100.

It would give students from Washington Square an opportunity for exposure to 100 different cultures by spending a semester or so in Abu Dhabi.

DIANE YU: We also expected about 200 graduate students.

MARTY LIPTON: There are always trustees and faculty members and others who are cautious about bold ventures. But the University – in 2006, 2007 – had had a long run of great success.

We were prepared to make a major move and, assuming we did succeed, bring NYU to a new level in the world of academic universities.

DICK FOLEY: The best relationships have to be symmetrical. Any relationship – between people, between groups of people, between institutions – has to be based on mutual regard for one another.

That’s what developed over time.

PIETRINA SCARAGLINO: There was always a willingness – on both sides – to listen to what the concerns were. And then to try to make accommodations.

There was an atmosphere of trying to understand where each side was coming from.

JOHN SEXTON: Trust was the bedrock on which it was built. Twelve or 15 months in, I knew with certainty that something special was going to happen.

Then came the testing of trying to make it concrete. But at that point we knew we had the relationship that was key to making the enterprise work.





TELLING THE STORY رواية القصة

JOHN BECKMAN: I started thinking about the communication strategy pretty early on.

Universities are not like many other institutions. There is a notion of consultation that takes place in a university that doesn't really have an equivalent in government or in the private sector. Unless something is pretty strictly administrative, to make a big announcement and surprise the faculty, surprise the students, surprise the various constituencies on campus is often not such a great idea.

They don't really want to read about it in the newspaper first.

And so, while I had in mind the idea that we would give this story as an exclusive to a major newspaper or some other major news organization, every time NYU Abu Dhabi got talked about in public, I knew we were making it more and more difficult for that to happen.

John would go to a room with 100 people and say, "Listen, this is totally off the record. But let me tell you that we're talking with people in a country I won't name, but the first part is Abu and the second part is Dhabi, about the possibility of creating a whole new campus."

As John is talking to more and more groups and saying, "By the way, this is completely off the record..." – there is, by the way, no off the record when you're talking to a room with 100 people – I kept thinking: This is going to be that much harder to pitch.

After the news came out, we moved early to let the NYU community know that academic freedom in the agreement would be consistent with the way we knew it at the Washington Square campus.

October 12, 2007

NEWS RELEASE

NYU TO OPEN CAMPUS IN ABU DHABI

Important Step in Transforming NYU into A Global Network University

First Comprehensive Liberal Arts Campus Abroad Developed by a Major U.S. Research University

Martin Lipton, Chair of NYU's Board of Trustees; John Sexton, President of NYU; and His Excellency Khaldoon Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Executive Affairs Authority of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, today announced that they have reached an agreement to create NYU Abu Dhabi, a Middle Eastern campus of NYU. This will be the first comprehensive liberal arts campus established abroad by a major U.S. research university. It is projected that a first class of students will enroll in 2010...

NYU Abu Dhabi will be a residential research university built with academic quality and practices consistent with the prevailing standards at NYU's Washington Square campus, including adherence to its standards of academic freedom. The development of all the programs at the Abu Dhabi campus will be overseen by the New York-based faculty and senior administrators. The campus, created using programs and standards set by NYU, will include extensive classroom, library and information technology facilities, laboratories, academic buildings, dormitories, faculty and residential

housing, student services, and athletic and performance facilities.

The Abu Dhabi Government has committed to provide land, funding, and financing for the development, construction, equipping, maintenance, and operation of the NYU Abu Dhabi campus. It has also made a commitment to NYU that will enhance the University's investment in faculty and programming, both of which are important in achieving world-class educational and research opportunities at NYU, NYU Abu Dhabi, and all of its network locations.

Dr. Sexton said, "This is an extraordinarily exciting and challenging opportunity. NYU was established 175 years ago as a university in and of the city, and it will always remain firmly anchored in Washington Square, but as a foundation, not a limitation. In the 21st century, NYU must also be in and of the world, a role for which our home, New York – that most international of cities – has well prepared us, and which we will fulfill through a network of our global sites for scholarship and education. It is in NYU's institutional nature to be open to change and to see and grasp opportunities others would not. We have found just the right partners in Abu Dhabi..."

Commenting on the agreement, His Excellency Khaldoon Al Mubarak said, "NYU is renowned for having one of the most expansive and successful global programs in higher education. The partnership we have announced today will precipitate a legacy of opportunity for students and researchers from around the world in years to come."...

JOHN BECKMAN
جون بيكمان
Senior Vice President
for Public Affairs
and Strategic
Communications;
with NYU since 1996

COLLABORATING
on the
GROUND
التعاون على أرض الواقع



INSTALLATION VIEW OF SHERINA AL SOWAIDI AND SHAMSA AL DHAHERI:
ROOTS & FIBERS, 2017, OPENING NIGHT, AT THE NYUAD PROJECT SPACE

“A DAZZLING IDEA” “فكرة باهرة”

MARIËT WESTERMANN: Once the agreement was signed, we had to think about how to move the project forward.

It was a big learning curve for all of us. In the early days, the real worry was having enough capacity in Abu Dhabi to reach what was an absolute promise and commitment that we would open in September 2010.

We had three years to do it.

The other big worry, for Diane, Jeanne, Cheryl, and me, was the question of how to mobilize the capacities of NYU – the intellectual capacities, the pedagogic capacities, the know-how of the way a university is built and run; export it in a way that is respectful of that culture; and, at the same time, make sure that the political questions in New York were attended to.

I realized that I needed a very strong partner who could marry curriculum development and a commitment to the liberal arts and teaching with the physical initiation of a campus.

One of the first and best moves I made was hiring Hilary Ballon from Columbia.

HILARY BALLON: Once I was enlisted in the project, just making things happen from day to day became all-absorbing.

There were occasional moments where you took a step back and thought, “Wow, this is a dazzling idea.” John Sexton, as president of the University, was really stressing the impact on higher education. But the very ambitious performance stan-

dards were what I was focused on.

I was tasked to oversee the development of the curriculum and the facilities to assure that they would fulfill our educational vision.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: The initial team was, as John Sexton used to say, all women. We had Cheryl, Jeanne, Hilary, and, pretty soon, Diane very much joining the team to help develop the Sheikh Mohamed Scholars Program.

JOHN SEXTON: When you have talented people around you, and they’ve agreed to modify their lives to become part of the team, you always have to worry: Are they stimulated enough? Are they fulfilled by their lives?

A key moment was when Sheikh Mohamed described to me one night, very late, in one of our private meetings, how he was trying to advance women in the Emirates. And that his immediate project at the moment was his daughter, Sheikha Mariam, who had just graduated with an MBA.

He said, “Next time you come, I’m going to introduce you.”

The next time came. She was sitting on the arm of his chair, and I asked her what she was going to do. She described something her father had planned for her.

I said, “I’m going to offer you something different. You’re going to meet with two phenomenal women, Mariët Westermann and Diane Yu, who will become friends for life. And I’m going to try to co-opt you into the enterprise of NYU Abu Dhabi.”

HILARY BALLON

هيلاري بالون
(1956-2017)

Deputy Vice
Chancellor of NYU
Abu Dhabi from
2007-2017; Professor
of Urban Studies
and Architecture at
NYU Wagner from
2007-2017



المصاعد
Lifts
مبنى الإدارة - غربي
West Administration Building



LAUNCHING THE NYU ABU DHABI INSTITUTE

إطلاق معهد
جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي

October 12, 2007
NEWS RELEASE

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October 12, 2007
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..To initiate academic activities in Abu Dhabi rapidly, next year NYU will establish the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute to host conferences, research workshops, short courses, and seminars involving scholars and students from NYU and the Middle East. These programs will promote academic and intellectual connections between NYU in Washington Square and NYU Abu Dhabi while the campus is being developed....
.....

PETER CHRISTENSEN: For the first couple years, we were running NYU Abu Dhabi out of Washington Square.

The NYU Abu Dhabi Institute was meant to be the incubator and would start having public programming in Abu Dhabi – to be the place where NYU was introduced to the UAE.

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: It’s an institute for public outreach to the Abu Dhabi and UAE community that hosts lectures, seminars, and workshops at a very high rate during the academic year.

It began under Hilary Ballon’s leadership and then under Phil Kennedy’s. Two or three years before the first undergraduate class, we realized we could jumpstart the educational opportunities for the public well in advance of getting an undergraduate class in place.

That part of the institute was very important for the public face of NYU Abu Dhabi.

LAUNCHING THE SHEIKH MOHAMED SCHOLARS PROGRAM (SMSP)

إطلاق برنامج منحة الشيخ
محمد بن زايد للتعليم العالي

DIANE YU: We had already signed the agreement in November 2007, with some modest fanfare. People had lots of questions, but the general mood was expectant and cautiously optimistic that something was going to change NYU in very interesting and positive ways.

Early in 2008, I asked to talk to John about my own involvement. I said, “Look, I’m your chief of staff and deputy. I already have a relatively heavy portfolio in New York, but given that this is likely to be a game changer for NYU, please think of a project I can manage or run or take part in, still being based in New York.

It took him a couple of months, but on April 10, 2008, in one of our regular meetings, he said, “Diane, I have it.”

I said, “You have what?”

“The perfect project for you,” he said. “Actually, it was an idea that His Highness asked me about late last fall. He would love to have some kind of Crown Prince program that would attract really outstanding college students, not those who would go to

NYU Abu Dhabi, but those already enrolled in the three national universities in the Emirates.

“When we give them an NYU Abu Dhabi experience, even though they would not be full-time students there, it will expose them to the ideas NYU will be bringing to the Emirates and give them a chance to get some academic learning, leadership activities, and cross-cultural experience. And maybe a trip.”

John liked the idea of having this program be one of the first things we did in the Emirates.

He then said, “Do you think you can put together a program that gets me a group of students I can teach, because the minute the Crown Prince said this, I volunteered to be one of the first teachers. I thought, as president of NYU, I ought to make a statement.

“And I’ve already put it on my calendar: September 14, 2008, will be the first class. We’d call it the Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Scholars. If you design a program and find me these students and get them there on September 14 we’re golden.”

I said, “Well, this is a daunting task. I have never been there. I’ve never met anybody. I don’t know any students. I don’t know these universities. I guess I need to go to the country and find out how I would go about setting up such a program.”

Luckily, John knew I was very interested in leadership enhancement. I had been teaching the leadership course for undergraduates at NYU since 2002. I had been a White House Fellow and been through fairly rigorous selection processes, so I had some ideas on how we might find good students.

But the challenge of trying to put this together in such a short time, knowing that two and a half months between April and September were summer...

I said, “I’d be happy to give it a whirl.”

Then he asked me to join him on a trip he was taking to Abu Dhabi in five days, so that I could see the country and meet a couple of people there.

As I was thinking, “I don’t know what I’ve agreed to,” John suggested I touch base with Mariët Westermann, who was already in Abu Dhabi. And he said that Her Highness Sheikh Mariam, the eldest child of the Crown Prince, could be a contact for me and a liaison to her father, since this program – John’s idea – would carry her father’s name.

That gave me some confidence that I’d have a few

people in Abu Dhabi who were more knowledgeable than I about some of the managerial and logistical issues.

I put together a strategy, a plan, a business proposal, and met with both of them in April. I remember thinking when I first arrived in the country that it was not at all what I expected – how beautiful parts of the city are in architecture and development.

Then I worked for several months with Mariët and Her Highness Sheikh Mariam.

“BE VERY COLLABORATIVE” “أوصيكم بالتعاون أولاً”

SHEIKHA MARIAM: In truth, my role was mostly ceremonial. It’s really Diane Yu and Mariët Westermann who deserve the credit for getting the project off the ground. However, back at that time, there were not a lot of people involved, and we had not yet created the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, which is my main focus today. So I did have the opportunity to get personally involved in some of the early outreach we did around the program.

One of the first things I remember doing was reaching out to the heads of the different universities and colleges in the UAE and inviting them to a meeting to discuss the program. We wanted to build bridges with existing educational institutions and be very collaborative with them – and make it clear that this was not something being imposed on them.

Since the universities would be the ones nominating their own students for the program, we also had to be really clear about the criteria, the kinds of students we were looking for, and sensitive to the fact that we were asking them to do something that would take up some of their time.

DIANE YU: In mid-May, we held a meeting with the provosts and vice chancellors of each of the three campuses Sheikh Mohamed wanted to include: the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Zayed University, and Higher Colleges of Technology.

SHEIKHA MARIAM: I remember that day very clearly. They came, they listened, and they were all very happy to support the program. I think they believed in the vision behind it. Thanks to their involvement, we were able to select these very talented, very creative, very smart young men and women to become scholars.

It’s been a very successful collaboration ever since.

“What’s amazing about both of them is that, despite how much they have achieved, they are so down to earth, so human.”

FORGING FUTURE LEADERS

تشكيل قادة المستقبل

DIANE YU: The long-term vision His Highness had for the Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Scholars was not just that we find academically talented students, but students who have leadership ability and a commitment to service and giving back, so that they could rise to leadership positions in the country, whether in business or industry or government or any other endeavor, such as the arts, music, or the professions.

It was exciting. I used a lot of different ideas to put together the selection process, which was new in the country – to have the schools nominate students.

The first year, we interviewed everybody they nominated, because they had so little time to think about it. But we chose a terrific group of students – 13 women and three men. It was a bit of a surprise, but in terms of organization and getting their dossiers together, the women students who heard about it jumped on it right away. We did, in fact, have a class that was ready to go in September 2008.

July 23, 2008

NEWS RELEASE

First Group Selected as Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed University Scholars

Her Highness Sheikhha Mariam bint Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, co-chair of the Scholars Program Steering Committee, said, “The students selected to be part of the inaugural class of Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed University Scholars for 2008-09 already have academic records to be very proud of. Participating in this program over the coming year will provide them with even greater access to opportunities to enhance their leadership skills and academic capabilities.”

SHEIKHA MARIAM: I learned so much from working closely with Diane and Mariët. The work they did, just the amount of effort it took to create and then build and run a program that was tailored to our local environment, that connected people from so many different backgrounds, faiths, and nationalities, and to make it work as well as it did. They were pioneers.

Diane is like a mother to the students. She knows everything about them – their background, their family, where they’re really gifted, and where there’s room for improvement. She dedicates so much of her time, and her life, to helping students flourish and grow.

If you think about it, these students aren’t in the Scholars Program for a very long period of time, but it can change their lives because of how carefully they are mentored, and challenged, and guided through what is actually quite a daunting process. It can be transformative for them, both academically and personally.

Mariët was the same. She was also incredible at connecting and building bridges, engaging with all of the different stakeholders. She was instrumental in putting in place the right governance structure for the program, the systems and framework that allowed it to work.

What’s amazing about both of them is that, despite how much they have achieved, they are so down to earth, so human. They were always so generous with their time, and empathetic, which I try to practice in my work today.

They were mentors for me, too. It was a pleasure to work with both of them.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A PIONEERING PROGRAM

مسؤولية البرامج الريادية

DIANE YU: Both the leadership of the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute – Philip Kennedy and Larry Fabian – and I took very seriously our role as pathbreakers to make sure things went well.

We had to market ourselves in ways that retained a level of dignity, but also got the word out that there was something new happening because of this partnership between NYU and the Abu Dhabi government.

Finally, since Abu Dhabi was the seat of government in the UAE, we felt the students should see our seat of government in Washington. So I created a two-city trip for the second semester – New York City and Washington.

The Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Scholars Program offered these very gifted, leadership-oriented students a chance to meet students from the other Emirati universities, which they seldom have a chance to do. And it would be small, so that we could give them personal attention.

His Highness also had a notion that if any of them decided to go to graduate school and got into an NYU graduate or professional school, the government would offer that student a full scholarship.

It was a way to entice them to pursue higher education through graduate and professional degrees. And it was terrific for New York, because those schools would benefit from having some outstanding students join their ranks.

PREPARING WITHOUT PRECEDENT

التحضير للريادة

SHEIKHA MARIAM: At the very beginning, some parents expressed an interest in there being a separate girls-only and boys-only program. However, when we said that this was going to be it, I think they made their peace with it, because I’m not aware of that question coming up again.

DIANE YU: I gave the first class some orientation information and materials to prepare them for what they had not encountered in college.

First, mixed-gender classrooms, which were rare. This was something His Highness thought was important, because he said, “If they’re going to be future leaders, they’re going to be successes in their fields and need to understand how to work with both genders.”

Second, they would be taking four courses we designed, taught by NYU-affiliated faculty, in ways that would challenge them academically, especially in terms of subject matter.

The first course, which John taught, focused on the relationship between church and state in the United States, as seen through the lens of US Supreme Court decisions on the First Amendment rights, religious freedom, and against the establishment of religion.

It may seem like a strange choice, but it’s a course John had been teaching since 1981, with great success, to undergraduates at NYU. And it was a course he very much wanted to teach in a whole new setting.

JOHN SEXTON: In retrospect, I think the idea that I would teach the Sheikh Mohamed Scholars, and then both the Scholars and the NYU Abu Dhabi kids, was an important element of the success of NYU Abu Dhabi. Not because of what happened in the class, but because of two things that resulted from my teaching.

First, it brought me closer to the Crown Prince. That I was in Abu Dhabi about 16 times a year allowed us to spend time together such that a real friendship developed, a major unintended consequence of my teaching there.

I had realized it was logistically possible. If you’re at JFK by 11pm on Friday night, you land in Abu Dhabi on Saturday night. Because Sunday is the first day of the week, you teach on Sunday and then head to the airport. You’re back in New York by 7am Monday morning.

Second, my deep understanding of the Sheikh Mohamed Scholars Program, under Diane’s extraordinary leadership, underscored our commitment to NYU Abu Dhabi, since I started going over to teach in the program two or three years before NYU Abu Dhabi opened.

So the combination of the Sheikh Mohamed Scholars Program and Hilary Ballon’s idea to have conferences there with NYU faculty through the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute meant that we were already active on the ground.



FROM THE MIDDLE EAST PREMIERE OF *WRITTEN IN WATER*
BY RAGAMALA DANCE COMPANY, THE ARTS CENTER AT NYUAD IN 2018

“INVIGORATED AND INSPIRED”

“الانتعاش والإلهام”

DIANE YU: Then came courses in critical thinking and persuasive writing, and leadership development, which I decided to teach, since I already taught it in New York and was interested, just as John was, to see how it worked in the UAE. And the fourth was a public-speaking class.

All this was in addition to their classes at their home universities or internships or whatever else they were doing.

Finally, the program would have a cross-cultural emphasis. Everything would be taught in English, but the students would have the trip to the United States, where they would interact with NYU faculty and students, meet leaders, and visit key governmental and cultural sites in both New York and Washington.

We hoped they would come out of this experience invigorated and inspired.

And, in fact, many have told us it changed their lives, which was something they consciously wanted to do. We taught them how to debate, how to defend their positions, how to anticipate others’ arguments and come up with ways to rebut or overcome the good points others might make. We didn’t want everyone to think alike. We didn’t want them all to come to the same conclusions. We wanted them to argue intelligently.

We also asked them – and this is one of John Sexton’s favorite phrases – to “have a healthy disrespect for authority.” We wanted them to feel comfortable challenging what they heard, to be skeptical, to ask for more depth or detail in explanations of important issues. They were pressed to formulate positions, to learn that others, equally intelligent, might disagree with them, and to learn how to disagree without being disagreeable.

The Scholars Program set an example and modeled what was to come. Since we created it, over half the alumni have obtained or are pursuing master’s or PhD degrees, the vast majority from NYU graduate schools. They have attained top roles in both government and private industry in a variety of fields. One former Scholar was a finalist for the UAE Rhodes Scholarship, and several have become Fulbright Scholars. And a minister in the Abu Dhabi government told me that she had a number of our alumni working in her office and thought they were exceptionally well prepared to serve.

SHEIKHA MARIAM: The program could have easily become a victim of its own success. I do recall a number of our stakeholders asking us at various points to expand the number of students we accepted each year.

Those requests were always politely declined. It wasn’t about being rigid; it was about maintaining the quality of the program and the mentoring provided to the students. If we had compromised on things like that, I don’t think it would be the same program it is now.

CONSIDERING CURRICULUM

تحديد المناهج

HILARY BALLON: There was a small group of people who developed the educational vision, including John Sexton himself, who was very hands-on at this early stage.

The basic premise – that we would have a coeducational liberal arts curriculum – was in place. Now the questions were: What fields would we offer? How would those fields relate to fields at NYU in New York? How we might adapt a liberal arts curriculum for the 21st century for our location in the Middle East and for a student body that, we increasingly understood, would be very international?

HARVEY STEDMAN: John imagined it not as an extension of the undergraduate education at NYU – as interesting and positive as the many versions of NYU undergraduate education at Washington Square are – but as an opportunity to create a new undergraduate liberal arts curriculum.

ELLEN SCHALL: The fun of thinking about the curriculum was the opportunity to reimagine it without being constrained by history or precedent or departmental divisions or existing commitments.

DIANE YU: It might not be as vast or as varied as New York’s, but it could be exceptional, something a very diverse global student body would love to study.

Hilary Ballon and others deserve a huge amount of credit for envisioning what had truly not been seen before in an undergraduate college curriculum. Hilary worked with dozens of faculty in New York to come up with brilliant and innovative approaches on how to educate a worldwide student body in a very intense, rigorous, demanding academic environment.

DEAN WILLIAMSON: In November 2007, I was hired by Hilary Ballon and Mariët Westermann to help with the NYU Abu Dhabi project.

The project was not familiar to the NYU New York crowd. What were we doing in the Middle East? Why were we doing it?

From the very beginning, I thought it was a tremendous project. That startup blood started to flow through my veins: “I want to be part of this. I want to see where it goes.”

Working with Mariët and Hilary meant anything from helping set up curriculum committees to taking notes for those committees to hiring and training staff. It was calls or emails, meeting after meeting after meeting to let people know what the project was about. Why it was important not just for NYU Abu Dhabi, but for NYU as a university.

By that point, I had been with NYU for 21 years. I knew a lot of departments. It took an ombudsman-type person to explain NYU Abu Dhabi to the New York community, to say, “This is urgent, and here’s why.” My main message was, “Just work with us. Let’s get it done.”

Once we started the curriculum committees, which involved most of the faculty who were probably going to go over to Abu Dhabi to teach, the excitement started to build.

Hilary Ballon worked very, very closely with all the affiliated faculty in New York, and all the faculty for that matter, building trust to the point where people started to feel comfortable.

HILARY BALLON: In the first year of planning, 2007-2008, we established a number of committees chaired by significant academic leaders at NYU. Their role was to discuss how domains should look – the domain of humanities, social sciences, the sciences. These conversations took place with faculty groups in New York.

At another level of conversation, we were figuring out the basic structure. Students would take a major. Would they be required to take a core curriculum of general education courses or not? If we had such a program, would there be other minors or opportunities to engage with professional fields?

By the end of the first year of planning, the structure was in place for a core curriculum and a major, as

DEAN WILLIAMSON

دين وليامسون

Director of University Operations Initiatives at NYU Abu Dhabi from 2014-2017; Director of Faculty Business Services from 2011-2014; EA to the Vice Chancellor and then Manager of Office Operations from 2007-2011; with NYU from 1985-2017

well as multidisciplinary concentrations or minors. We would also develop something called pre-professional tracks, an opportunity for the professional schools of NYU to participate in NYU Abu Dhabi and for the students of NYU Abu Dhabi, who, we anticipated, would have strong pre-professional leanings.

Or, if not them, their parents, since that is the dominant model worldwide.

DIANE YU: We weren’t sure who would come to this university. We knew we wanted a liberal arts education, but were also trying to be broad enough in our appeal to attract software engineers.

HILARY BALLON: We could have planned in a way that reflected our location so extensively that the curriculum became parochial – in effect, just a Middle Eastern Studies locale. Which meant that students would come only if it were their subject of interest. But we determined very, very early on that our goal was to create a curriculum that was universal, with the characteristics of excellence of the best curricula in the States, in England, and elsewhere.

We would then inflect that curriculum with certain programs that reflected our location. Place-specificity emerged, for example, in our selection of the languages we would offer – including, of course, Arabic. And in the way we thought about a Middle Eastern studies program, which we called “Arab Crossroads.”

We also decided we would have engineering. Some of the work on curriculum coincided with the merger of Brooklyn Poly with NYU, so key faculty leaders at Poly were involved.

Finding that place along a spectrum between reflecting where we were and yet establishing a program that would be attractive to students from anywhere, whether or not they were interested in Middle Eastern studies: That was our goal.



“WHY NOT?”

A NEW KIND OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

“وما المانع؟” نهج جديد في تدريس العلوم

FABIO PIANO

فابيو بيانو

Provost of NYU Abu Dhabi from 2010-2020; founding director and Director of the Center for Genomics and Systems Biology from 2009; NYU Professor of Biology since 2002

FABIO PIANO: In the earliest days, I participated as a faculty member in a committee of peers to come up with ideas of how we might develop a new, complete undergraduate education with a strong research mission. I was asked by the then-chair of the biology department, Gloria Coruzzi, if I'd be willing to participate from the biology side of the academic world.

At the time, I was the director of the Center for Genomics and Systems Biology and a professor in biology.

In some sense, the way I had developed the center in New York was partly a preparation for all the things that happened later.

The center was a transformation of how things were done in the biology world, because genomics changed the way we do some fundamental things in biology. The genetic revolution then became the genomic revolution.

We built the center in New York mostly on the basis of extremely talented but generally young faculty, as opposed to the Nobel Prize winners you attract and then build around. That became a powerful model, so I felt it could be a way to build science somewhere else.

It was an interesting group of people because

several knew the region. But they also brought with them a lot of baggage. And so they would say, “You can't do this there. You can't do that there.”

Naïve people like me were the ones who said, “Why not?”

I was really intrigued. I went to some of the first meetings with faculty to think about, “What would we do if we were to be able to develop a new project for NYU?” in a place I had never visited, in a city I had to look up on the map.

As I got together with other faculty and heard John Sexton's ideas, I started to think it could be very exciting.

My reaction to most things is often just to absorb it. During the first few weeks and months of listening to each other, I certainly had moments when I said, “What are we doing here, and where are we going with this?”

There were already different voices and opinions wondering, “What could NYU really do? What are we getting ourselves involved in? Would we be able to pull off anything that could have a significant mission and increase NYU's ability to continue to grow as a university?”

I left that initial questioning behind pretty fast. As an international student – and I've been at NYU for a long time – I appreciated the possibility of creating something that was truly international rather than conceptually just a study-away site. The whole University was built around the idea of being international.

And I was very intrigued by the UAE, a country and a part of the world I didn't know.

I immediately said to myself and several of my colleagues, “Even if we don't do it, it's a very useful conversation.” Because it was an amazing intellectual conversation about the future of education and the future of research: What would you do if you were able to build a new university in the new millennium at the crossroads of the world?

David Heeger was one of the faculty with whom I wrote a report around the concept of how we would start research in Abu Dhabi, which ultimately became part of the input to the Research Institute.

المكتبة العربية
في جامعة
نيويورك أبوظبي

DISSOLVING

the DISCIPLINES:

THE LIBRARY OF ARABIC LITERATURE

FABIO PIANO: The Research Institute was developed conceptually as a standalone institute that would initiate very high-level research. We knew from the beginning that it would take us a while to develop that quality of research, more time than it would take to build the undergraduate program.

The institute was originally made up of faculty who were coming from New York to develop the kinds of centers that would be top research centers in the US or anywhere in the world.

Today, we have over a dozen such centers. One of the early projects was the Library of Arabic Literature – “the LAL.” Philip Kennedy is the principal investigator, with colleagues from all over the world, whose goal is to collect and make available the most significant Arabic texts, translated into English for scholars and students but also for a general audience.

I’m told that more than 99% of all Arabic literature has never been translated. The world that doesn’t speak Arabic is missing out on a treasure trove of ideas and ways of thinking from the history of humanity. It might be history of medicine, law, or theater in the very old Arabic tradition. There is beautiful poetry – and much more.

At the LAL, translations are not undertaken by one solitary scholar, but by a group of people who bring their knowledge to bear on the words in relation to the context of their era. All of a sudden, the humanities scholars were working as teams.

The process is reinvigorating the translation world, the Arabic literature world, and how to think about the history of these ideas in the context of the Islamic and pre-Islamic tradition.

This project has been one of the impacts of arts and humanities at NYU Abu Dhabi.



DEVELOPING RESEARCH

تطوير الأبحاث

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: The Research Institute had two components. Its major component and the major funding, by far, is as an institute modeled after a combination of the Max Planck Institutes in Germany, the Howard Hughes research institutes in the US, and the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. It was designed to support research across not only the sciences but also the liberal arts, and the extent of support the faculty member received was critical.

I was very, very involved in the Research Institute – its formation, which projects were funded, the proposal to the Abu Dhabi government, and faculty hiring.

UNA CHAUDHURI

أونا شوردري

Dean of Humanities and Professor of English, Drama, and Environmental Studies at NYU; affiliated faculty member at NYU Abu Dhabi from 2010-2018

AMBITIOUS FOR THE ARTS

طموح فني

UNA CHAUDHURI: I first heard about the idea very early, when faculty were just getting involved, in 2007, 2008. I was invited to be on an exploratory faculty committee for the arts by the person who had been asked informally to start that conversation – Professor Paul Thompson, from the department of film and television at Tisch.

He invited someone from Steinhardt studio arts and someone from Steinhardt music, so that all four of the major art disciplines would be represented: Film, theater, music, and visual arts.

We began to talk about what a curriculum might be in a brand new liberal arts program in that part of the world.

I was born and raised in India. I've been an American all my adult life, but I don't have an exclusively American perspective. Still, I knew nothing about

the UAE or indeed the Arab world. Mainly, I was just excited that NYU was doing something so ambitious. I've always felt that America's greatest achievement is higher education, and that that's what we should export.

The other thing that got me committed to it, to work long-term and really hard, were the leaders of the project, Hilary Ballon and Mariët Westermann. I was very inspired by them. I could tell right away that they were looking for great ideas to create exceptional, excellent educational programs.

They were also very receptive to something I've cared about for much of my life, which is the importance of the arts in the liberal arts context and of serious arts training within a liberal arts trajectory.

We all felt strongly that an arts curriculum should include practice as well as academic study – art making as well as art history, theater studies, cinema studies.

So that was my first phase with the project.

Along the way, we all had to learn about cultural sensitivities, and also some of the boundaries between in-house and public matters. And we had to keep our students aware of that. It's never clear-cut or simple. It isn't in America, either.

We now have the most amazing arts program – great artists coming, doing their shows, including very cutting-edge contemporary performance artists we've invited. It can cause all sorts of debate and discussion within our community. And it has.

I also felt we had as much to learn from their culture. We have scholars in Arabic history, literature, and culture. Very quickly, for those of us who've been spending time in Abu Dhabi, the idea that we were going to another planet simply dissipated.

FOCUS ON UNDERGRADS

مرحلة البكالوريوس

HILARY BALLON: Keeping graduate concerns out of the picture was important. What can happen in research universities is that the courses faculty teach to the undergraduates become slightly milder versions of their graduate courses. We wanted to create a curriculum that foregrounded fundamental problems in the human condition, in the natural world.

DIANE YU: Everyone would take the core curriculum – but students could choose different majors.

HILARY BALLON: We conceived the core curriculum as being comparative. It wasn't going to be about Western civilization – or any one civilization. Rather, it would focus on fundamental ideas, looked at through different lenses, different moments in time, and in different cultures.

And so we would find faculty asking colleagues, “Do you know of a text in the Confucian tradition?” Or “Can you point me to an Islamic text that focuses on X topic?”

In negotiating these courses with faculty, there was invariably a course with a longish title that sounded a lot like an elective in a major: “Japanese History from 1600 to 1800.”

People would tease me, because I said: “The more words in the title, the more specific it is, the more you are abandoning the idea of our core, which is to focus on a fundamental idea.”

So I would drive faculty in this negotiation toward one-word titles with strong nouns, like Equality, Justice, Tolerance, because they embodied the fundamental question of these courses.

We set the class size for these core classes at 12 to 15, so that they were small enough for discussion.

Encouraged strongly by John, we put out a bulletin during the year before we opened to students, saying that we were offering 20 undergraduate majors across the humanities, the arts, social sciences, and engineering.

DIANE YU: The three unique elements of our academic approach were: interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and comparative offerings; global components in both the curriculum and in the mandatory study-away junior year; and no classic departments but rather larger, integrated clusters.

HILARY BALLON: Clearly, we did not have sufficient faculty at the outset to deliver all these majors. But a key feature was that we would bring over New York faculty to Abu Dhabi, and that our Abu Dhabi students would have the opportunity to take two semesters in New York or at another NYU site.

Knowing we could draw upon the extensive resources in New York gave us greater confidence in assuring applicants that they would be able to complete all the requirements of a major in this wide variety of fields, even ahead of our ability to hire all the faculty on the ground.

JOHN SEXTON: I could see that the curriculum was developing. Then the only question became: Would we get students of the first order?

Linda Mills was driving recruitment.







ZIMOUN, 510 PREPARED DC-MOTORS, 2142 M ROPE, WOODEN STICKS 20 CM, 2019 (AS INSTALLED IN ZIMOUN AT THE NYUAD ART GALLERY, 2019, OPENING NIGHT). PHOTO BY WISEMONKEYS/SHIJI ULLERI

Pioneering
STUDENTS
طلابنا المتميزون



“starting VERY HIGH”

“بداية متقدمة للغاية”

LINDA MILLS: When we began, I was overseeing both admissions and student life. I've always had a global perspective, so the idea that we were going to the Arab world to think with leaders there about how to create a university in the Middle East was exciting.

My mother was a Holocaust survivor, and my family and I had experienced 9/11 directly in downtown New York. To me, the world needs more engagement, not less – not pulling back but pushing forward.

John's philosophy and approach were clear: NYU was not afraid of complexity and was open to engaging with the Middle East and all that meant.

He also had ideas about the importance of bringing the best students from around the world. And starting very high, with exceptionally outstanding students. They would then become the magnet for the talent that came afterward.

LINDA G. MILLS
ليندا ج. ميلز
Lisa Ellen Goldberg
Professor; Vice
Chancellor and Senior
Vice Provost for Global
Programs and
University Life at NYU
since 2002; Associate
Vice Chancellor
for Admissions and
Financial Support,
NYU Abu Dhabi from
2009-2016



“YOU HAVE TO GET A LOT OF STUFF DONE”

“هناك كم هائل من العمل”

JOHN SEXTON: You have to reverse engineer this, right? We were hoping to open with a freshman class in September 2010. Which means that those students are entering their senior year of high school in September 2009. If they’re Americans, if they’re middle- or upper-class families, then from September 2008, they’re beginning to think about which colleges are going to be on their lists. And they’re going to be well into it by January 2009.

If you want them to think about NYU Abu Dhabi, you’ve got to have a catalog and courses, and you’ve got to be able to say, “These people are going to be the faculty.”

You have to get a lot of stuff done.

Now, it doesn’t have to be at the level of detail you need by the time you open. The biology course doesn’t have to be worked out week by week. But you have to be able to explain to prospective students how you’re going to teach them biology.

ELLEN SCHALL: John’s dream started to take shape. In an early visit to Abu Dhabi as the MOU was negotiated, I was with Linda Mills in the Emirates Palace. I remember moments of uncertainty and anxiety: Could this happen? Would it actually come to fruition?

But when you look back on the history of NYU, its capacity to reinvent, to imagine things that aren’t possible, it’s very much a place that isn’t bound by its history but driven by people who helped us think about what could be.

Our wish was to develop students who could take up leadership positions across the globe and create a more peaceful, thoughtful world.

“We knew we could recruit stronger students if we recruited all over the world.”

JOHN SEXTON: We decided that the first people we would deal with would be principals and guidance counselors. We wanted to let them know something big was happening, something new.

Initially, it was me and Mariët and Hilary – and, when he came on board in 2008, Al Bloom.

ELLEN SCHALL: I was the person who brought Al Bloom’s name to John’s attention. My brother had worked for Al at Swarthmore and called to tell me Al was retiring.

I walked into John’s office and told him that – and John called Al that afternoon.

“A PROJECT YOU MIGHT FIND INTERESTING”

“قد يعجبك هذا المشروع”

AL BLOOM: In May 2007, after many, many years in Swarthmore, with 17 as president, I’d decided that I really wanted to try something new and adventurous. I told the board and faculty that I would be leaving Swarthmore in a year.

That day, I got a call from somebody by the name of John Sexton, whom I didn’t know, except that he was president of NYU. I thought it was probably a recommendation he had for a student or faculty member he’d like me to hire at Swarthmore.

I was dealing with the press, and with the fact that

I was going to be leaving Swarthmore in a year, so I called him back a week later. He said to me, “I hear you’ve just decided to step down from Swarthmore, and I wanted to tell you about a project that I and NYU are undertaking that I thought you might find interesting.”

The call went on for about an hour. John started by talking about creating a liberal arts college of the highest quality in Abu Dhabi, based on a partnership with the Abu Dhabi government. He went on to say that it would be nested within a larger research university, and committed not only to the best of the liberal arts tradition, but to preparing students to be global citizens, leaders of a global world.

I listened, thinking that I was leaving Swarthmore in part because I wanted to go into international education, and that it was quite amazing to have this call within a week of when I had told people I was stepping down.

We made an arrangement to meet each other in New York soon after that. Over the summer, what at first seemed like a total dream became an increasingly exciting reality.

In September 2008, I was appointed vice chancellor.

JOHN BECKMAN: Our idea was that we were going to establish a first-rate, liberal arts research university. Being able to recruit somebody like Al Bloom sent a signal – that serious people were trying to build a serious place.

A STRATEGY FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT

استراتيجية استقطاب الطلاب

JOHN SEXTON: We had to get students at least as good as the ones that NYU New York was getting. NYU New York was considered to be among the top tier of universities, but if somebody said, “Is it among the top 10 in the world?” the answer would have been no. We were in the top tier, but not at the top of the top tier.

This college was designed to be at the top of the top tier.

So how were we going to do that? All the preparatory work had to happen.

I was able to create a marriage between the Institute for International Education (IIE), where I was on the board, and this new enterprise.

IIE does undergraduate admissions for no one. But they run the Fulbright Scholar Program and the Gilman International Scholarship Program. They are the platinum standard of international education, working in about 180 countries.

I had the idea that NYU Abu Dhabi could be presented as a very special project that might fit within IIE’s mandate – and perhaps get the permission of their board. Of course, I recused myself from those discussions. But Allan Goodman, the president, was able to persuade the board that this idea was unique, essentially like a Rhodes Scholarship for undergraduates.

ALLAN GOODMAN: The president of NYU has traditionally been on the board of the institute, a relationship that goes back many years.

IIE was founded in 1919, right after the end of World War I. The aim was to get Americans out of their comfort zone and make sure they interacted with the rest of the world, but also make sure the rest of the world knew they could study in America.

The founder, Elihu Root, one of NYU’s alumni, was part of the progressive internationalist movement. Its supporters believed that if you got people studying in each other’s countries, going to each other’s classes, they would better understand each other and so prevent another world war.

IIE has succeeded in many things since then. We haven’t prevented other wars, but we hope we contributed to having fewer.

And we have experience in working in education in the Middle East.

AL BLOOM: I was there to witness the last negotiations, when the initial contracts were signed. I spoke to the board of my dreams for NYU Abu Dhabi. From that point on, it was about setting up recruitment, how we would get students, how we would get faculty, and what the curriculum would be, although groups of NYU faculty had already discussed the curriculum in many ways.

I remember bringing the head of admissions from Swarthmore to New York and saying, “The only way we can recruit around the world is if we get to know the top high schools in the world,” which is what Swarthmore did. So how in Mongolia, and in Ecuador, and in Malaysia do you raise the reputation of the school?

Linda Mills and I went to see Allan Goodman at IIE.

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: We knew we could recruit stronger students if we recruited all over the world. We could optimize the quality of the student body by using an international recruitment strategy.

It was also consistent with what we thought would enable us to bring in the strongest faculty.

LINDA MILLS: Once the decision was made that we were going to do a four-year college and start bringing students, I would have to think through a plan. So I sat down with Allan.

How would we scout talent? Nobody had ever done that before for an entire university.

Allan was very excited about deploying his organization to identify the best students in the world.

AL BLOOM
أل بلوم
Vice Chancellor of NYU Abu Dhabi from 2008-2019

ALLAN GOODMAN
ألان غودمان
President and CEO of the Institute of International Education since 1998



”اضطررنا إلى التفكير بشكل مختلف تماماً“

“WE HAD TO

think COMPLETELY OUTSIDE THE BOX”

JOSH TAYLOR
جوش تيلور
Associate Vice
Chancellor for
Global Programs and
Mobility Services
at NYU since 2017;
Associate Vice
Chancellor, Global
Programs from
2013-2017; Associate
Vice Chancellor,
Public Affairs and
Community Relations
at NYU Abu Dhabi
from 2009-2013

ALLAN GOODMAN: My first encounter with the NYU Abu Dhabi idea began when I attended the American Council on Education’s annual conference with a fellow named John Sexton. John was on one panel talking about international education. I was on another talking about international student exchange.

When I’d finished mine, I went to his session. It was overwhelmingly crowded, standing room only. I was in the back with maybe half a dozen university presidents while John was talking about a global network university – and NYU’s concept of being in and of the city and of the world.

He was describing a system whereby students could enter NYU without geography as an obstacle. A student could receive an NYU education in multiple locations. And the faculty could also cycle through.

One Big Ten president poked me to say, “Hey, he’s not talking about studying abroad. He’s talking about a whole paradigm shift of what higher education is and does.”

That was my eureka moment.

John and I talked pretty soon afterward. He said he was going to road test the idea by actually going to Abu Dhabi and teaching students in the Sheikh Mohamed Scholars Program.

I thought it was a brilliant way of anticipating all the problems that the lawyers – John being a lawyer – would have. Or trustees or students, their parents, and especially faculty, who would think Abu Dhabi is not a good place to go.

It’s pretty hard to argue with someone who says, “I’ve driven the car, I’ve tested the tires, I’ve gone 100,000 miles.” It allows people who are advocates, as I was, to say, “He isn’t just talking abstractly and then letting a staff make it happen. He’s understanding what it’s like to teach religion, the separation of church and state, liberal arts on the ground.”

LINDA MILLS: To identify potential students for this visionary idea, we needed people in-country, who understood those countries and would have enough connections with school principals and teachers who could identify the best students. They had to have sensibility and mindset – to feel comfortable sending their students to Abu Dhabi and endorsing NYU Abu Dhabi to parents.

It wasn’t enough to identify talent. We had to convince teachers and principals that this new project really was a viable option.

We knew we were competing with Harvard, Princeton, Yale, MIT. So we started to have very intimate events in which we’d identify the top principals and teachers at the top schools in each country or region. These meetings took place in hotels around the world.

I remember going to Berlin and having this remarkable event where there were probably 20, 25 teachers sitting around the table. We were in a hotel that was very close to the Berlin Wall, which had a deep resonance.

Working with IIE on materials, it occurred to me that we needed to imagine a curriculum of what students would do over four years that would make their experience different from every other college experience in the world.

We had to think completely outside the box.

JOSH TAYLOR: I had worked at NYU from 2003 to 2006 and then left to go do other things. In early 2008, I started reading about Abu Dhabi and was fascinated.

I got back in touch with John Beckman and said, “If, at some point, you’re looking to get help with this, it’s the kind of project that could have a huge impact. It will be a little controversial. And it’s not something that will ever allow me to be bored – which sounds great.”

It took about a year, but I wound up coming back to NYU and joining the project.

The initial idea was that I’d be working for the project from New York. I was a lifelong New Yorker, except for about a year and a half in California, and I never thought I’d go farther than San Francisco.

But in a post-9/11 era, the idea of trying to come up with a new mechanism to engage US-Middle East dynamics was really important to me.

The hardest part of my role was: How do you talk about a place that doesn’t exist? How do you speak about yourself in the company of the Ivies and Stanford and Oxford and Cambridge without sounding like you’re either bragging or certifiable?

We were somewhere in between.

“WE’LL GET IT DONE”

“سننجزها”

JOHN SEXTON: I would say from the beginning: There are four things we have to do in admissions.

We have to match with the right kids. And that means possibly turning down kids with a perfect grade point average and a perfect SAT score and great letters if they don’t have that cosmopolitan gene.

Then we have to retain them. Because if 100 come and 30 leave, it’s over.

Then we have to fulfill them, so that at the end of four years they’re glad they came.

And then we have to place them in the best graduate and professional programs or careers in the world.

From day one, we have to be looking at what they’ll be doing four years from now.

So admissions was tougher, because they had to be students that Harvard and Oxford and Beida-Peking would want. But they also had to have the gene of cosmopolitanism and ecumenism.

I was very nervous – but also liberated by this possibility.

Linda and Mariët and Hilary said to me, “We’ll get it done.”

LINDA MILLS: We were a very collaborative team. That’s the startup nature, which is that everybody pitches in, in whatever ways they think they can help.

It was amazing to do it with John. It was amazing to do it with my colleagues. And it was amazing that I could play this role – to create an environment that the best students from all over the world would want to go to, in a place in the Middle East that everybody said they wouldn’t go to.

I was especially sensitive to the concerns of parents. They saw the Middle East as a war-torn place. They were not going to send their children there. With my own family background and the experience of trauma, I understood how they felt.

In the very early years, when I was talking to countless parents, especially Americans, about the safety and security issues in Abu Dhabi, I could bring that dimension to the conversation and reassure them. At NYU, we knew the secure government and stability of Abu Dhabi and the Emirates – and the sense of safety.

ALLAN GOODMAN: It’s valuable to have, anywhere in the world, an American university and the value it represents. So many countries have no understanding of a liberal education.

We need to be in the world in order to influence the world, but also to teach our students what it is like to know their values – and know that values are different in lots of different places.

Abu Dhabi is an interesting place to be. Within four hours, you can be on two other continents with different cultures and value systems. Instead of taking a weeklong trip to Fort Lauderdale, students can travel to the Seven Wonders of the modern and the ancient world simply by leaving from the airport in Abu Dhabi.

Strategically, geographically, it made sense.

TOWARD AN ECUMENICAL, INTEGRATED UNIVERSITY

سعيًا لإنشاء

جامعة تعددية ومترابطة

JOHN SEXTON: Early in 2009, a terrifying reality hit me. We knew by then that we were going to have a great curriculum and a great faculty – that the quality of the education was going to be as good as any. And we thought we had something else – this notion of the ecumenical, integrated university that had never existed before.

The realization I had that was terrifying was: The world could not judge the faculty and the curriculum. Everybody claims to have excellent faculty. But the world would know how to judge the quality of our students.

The one thing parents know is, “Did the best kid or one of the two or three best kids from my kid’s high school go to NYU Abu Dhabi last year? If the kids who went to NYU Abu Dhabi last year from my kid’s high school came from the middle or bottom of the class, well, I know where NYU Abu Dhabi fits. But if the valedictorian went, or the kid in the top two or three, ah, now I know where it fits.”

What was going to define us most out there in the talent market was the quality of the first class.

We had been in hotels and talking to guidance counselors around the world. And we’d brought in IIE to help us.

But I didn’t think we could do it.

So in early 2009, in a meeting with Linda Mills and Mariët and Hilary, I said, “I don’t think we should open in September 2010, because I don’t think we’re ready to produce that group of kids.”

“I DO NOT WANT TO COMPROMISE EXCELLENCE”

“لن نتنازل عن الجودة”

HILARY BALLON: One of the key features of the agreement between NYU and the government of Abu Dhabi is that there would be no enrollment targets of any sort. Quality, quality, quality: That was the mantra – the quality of the student body.

So we really didn’t know what our entering class would look like. Or the subsequent classes.

We had planning expectations, of course, about the size we would eventually get to. But who knew, going in, what the applicant pool would be?

JOHN SEXTON: I went to Khaldoon and said, “We want a class of 100. If we get only 40, we’ll accept only 40 – and the rest will be study-away students. We don’t have any trouble getting study-away students to Abu Dhabi, especially if you’ll give them scholarships to come. But I don’t want to take one student below the standard I’ve set.”

I got permission from the Crown Prince Court that if we found only 30 or 40 kids, we would open with 30 or 40 kids, and we’d fill in with 60 or 70 study-away kids. And that would be okay with them.

But Linda and Mariët and Hilary were adamant. They were convinced they could do it.

A key move was when I said, “Okay, but to make sure we get the right kids, I have to eyeball every kid.”

BIRTH OF CANDIDATE WEEKEND

قصة أسبوع المرشحين

LINDA MILLS: The challenge was: How were we going to recruit students or get them even to consider us or put us on their list, when in fact we didn’t exist a year before?

Although we could provide them with paper and web-based materials, that wasn’t enough. We sensed that students got only so far in the abstract. We would have to help them connect.

John said, “What about if we invited them to Abu Dhabi? What if we invited them, and they met faculty from NYU and their fellow students? They could see what we’re trying to do.”

JOHN SEXTON: Again, I went to Khaldoon and said, “Look, we’re out talking to colleges and high schools and guidance counselors. I don’t want to admit any kids unless I see them and discover who they are. So any kids who on the paper record we think we might admit, I’d like to fly them here to Abu Dhabi for two days of interviews and taking classes.

“That means I want the kids to see what they’re getting into. So wherever they are in the world, bring them into Abu Dhabi and let me talk to them as part of the admissions process.”

And that’s where Candidate Weekend was born. It was born out of a fear that these kids wouldn’t know what they were getting into and would later leave the program, undermining the validity of the experiment.

LINDA MILLS: We wanted to be sure we were getting students who were pioneers, who would see and build on the affirmative aspects of this project.

Candidate Weekend became the mechanism.

Then we started to realize that even bringing prospective students was limited. High school teachers and principals also needed to see what we were doing.

Candidate Weekend became an opportunity for the students to live what this university could be, but also for our interlocutors – our teachers, our principals – to see who these students were.

JOHN SEXTON: In October 2009, we said to this network of guidance counselors and principals, and to the IIE people, “If you can give us a kid you think is right for us who’s at the top of the class, we’ll give them a trip to Abu Dhabi. They don’t even have to apply. You just have to tell us that there’s some serious likelihood they will apply if they like what they see and experience.”

We held the first Candidate Weekend for about 48 kids. None of them had applied. But they came, and we spent two and a half days together.

They walked into the room Friday morning. I think it was Carol Brandt who came up with the idea that students introduce themselves, first in their native language, then translate into English and explain why they were there.

By the time they had gone around all 48, they got it.

Forty-six of those 48 kids ended up applying. We accepted about two thirds.

More important, social networking was really underway. Immediately, these kids went online to say, “We’ve discovered this unique place.”

It caught fire. I think we got 2,000 applications the next week. And more after that.

There were all kinds of questions. But in the intimacy of this interaction, kids who had the right spirit were willing to take the chance.

Also important was something I had never heard of called the United World College high schools. There are 18 around the world. These kids had been yearning for a college that had the same ethos as their high schools.

Several of them were at Candidate Weekend – and their excitement, too, began to go viral.





Is this the right place for me?

”هل هذا هو المكان المناسب لي؟“

LINDA MILLS: In the first six months, we didn't quite have the introduction right. Then we asked the students to bring an object from home. So there are 50, 100 students in the room, and everybody stands up and says what this object means to me.

What's so profound about that experience is the relationship between home, family, and country. One of the most moving moments was a Rwandan student who opened up his object, and it was a UN flag. He said, "This is my family. This is who saved me. My parents died."

The object became a shared experience. Everybody talked about their objects with one another. All of a sudden, there was a means by which people could have a conversation.

They went to class, and then they heard about student life, and then in the evening they went to the desert.

The desert in Abu Dhabi is very special. We arrive as the sun is going down. It's a powerful bonding experience. By now they've had a very complete day, some of them traveling as much as 36 hours to get there.

The next day they had a moment with John, where he would talk about the vision. He did what I used to call "paradoxical intervention" and said, "I don't want you to take a slot, I don't want you to come unless you're serious about coming. And we're not going to think that all of you are the right fit."

Then there was an essay. The writing component was evaluative – how qualified were they to write in English, because for so many of them, English was a second language. More important, it was a

moment for them to reflect on their experience.

Often, it was there that you saw the ambivalence of students. They had to ask and answer the question, "Is this the right place for me?" while we were asking and answering the same question.

ELLEN SCHALL: Very quickly, students began to see the possibilities. What brave souls. Because these kids turned down terrific, established institutions to be pioneers, to take a step off into space.

John went so often because he taught in Abu Dhabi, and he really had us focused on the future of each kid from the moment they entered. That was also pretty intense and amazing.

The kids felt the emotional investment. It was very much a social contract, between a group of kids who were bold enough to step into this and a group of people who had committed their lives to making sure it was worth it.

DICK FOLEY: In order to recruit students to Abu Dhabi, they had to visit the campus. It's a necessity among North American campuses now, and even more of a necessity in this case. And so we made arrangements for it, despite the expense.

One of the things we thought would be helpful – but we vastly underestimated how helpful – was the students' recruiting one another. Students came to these weekends, faculty were there, John did his spectacular thing. All that was important.

But getting the kid from South Korea at a lunch table with the kid from Argentina, together with the kid from Abu Dhabi, together with the kid from Germany: That was the magic. That's when the students would get wide-eyed and say, "This is something I want to be part of."

Sometimes it's important to be lucky as well as good.

AL BLOOM: One of the distinguishing features of the student body in Abu Dhabi is that there is no dominant culture. There is not the feeling that you are there to assimilate into an American or French or Chinese university. Rather, everyone is working together from different perspectives to figure out the best ways they can build a united and cooperative and productive world.

The first Candidate Weekend, when the kids were coming back from the desert, one group of about 30 kids on a bus started singing, "Move It, Move It" from Madagascar – in 29 different languages simultaneously.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: The composition of the class is purposeful. There are nearly 120 nationalities at any given time. There is no single majority, because it is healthy and appropriate to figure out: How do you live when you don't have the comfort and power of the majority, when you aren't in the dominant position?

When you are just like everyone else, how do you behave? How do you befriend people? Do you form an identity, and what makes you form that identity?

We think there are common values to bind you – that you can form a united community, even though you're very different, and still keep your own identity.

LINDA MILLS: We sculpted something profoundly different from what any other university had done. We had top students from around the world, the most diverse class, incredible spokespeople, and people who were articulate about why they made the choice.

”أود أن أشارك في هذا المشروع“

“This is something I want to be part of”

THE CHARLIE GENE

ميزة شارلي

JOHN SEXTON: We had five Candidate Weekends a year every year. Until the end of my NYU presidency, I participated in every one of them.

As part of the weekend, each kid would spend two hours in a group session with me. I would explain to them what I call the essence of the NYU Abu Dhabi difference. I'd introduce them to the word ecumenism or ecumenical, describing the concept of Vatican II, Pope John XXIII, and Teilhard de Chardin as a way of looking at the diversity of the world.

But I'd explain that this religious concept can also be rendered as a secular, progressive view, where one sees the differences among people as a great gift. And how one can adopt an attitude of embrace and view the world not through the one window you're given at birth – whether political or religious or cultural or the sports team for which you root – but rather as through the many facets of a diamond.

Which means entering into a dialogue with the other person, not to try to convert them, but to truly try to understand the world through the other person's eyes – and to understand yourself through the way that person sees you.

All of this, I would explain, came to me from a great man, Charlie Winans, who taught me when I was in high school, in the formative years of my life. He had a phrase that encapsulated the spirit of NYU Abu Dhabi: "Play another octave of the piano."

There are notes you haven't touched on the piano. Reach out and touch them. Listen to how they sound. If there's a food you haven't tasted, if there's music you haven't heard, if there's a kind of person you haven't met, if there's a place you haven't been, as long as it's legal and moral, try it once.

And as long it's not one of the things your parents get to say: "Please don't do these four things, even though they're legal and moral, such as skydiving or riding a motorcycle on a highway" – or

whatever four your parents choose, because parents have rights.

If it's legal and moral and not one of those things, try it once. And then if you don't like the way anchovies taste, fine. Don't eat anchovies again. Or if you're in Iceland, and on the menu they have the thing that is culturally specific to Iceland but nobody ever orders, which is the fermented shark meat, you order it. And when they bring it to the table and its smell fills the room, you eat a piece of it. And if you don't like it, you never order it again. But you do it once.

That's what I call the Charlie gene. Are you a truly ecumenical person? Are you a person who is going to embrace that way of being in the world as part of your mission? Because we're here in Abu Dhabi with a particular mission: To create the finest school in the world, plus.

The finest school in the world, and the plus is that we want to bring together the most diverse student body in the world. Really diverse. Economically, from every sector of society. Geographically, from every corner of the world. And we want to bring those human beings together and cause them to love each and every one of the other people in the class over the four years they interact.

If you want to hide from people, this isn't the place to come. If you want to divide people, this isn't the place to come. Go do that in the world. Just don't do it here. Because this is a sacred pact – that we're going to try to live this way.

Then we will disperse 500 of you a year into the world, and you will go to the four corners of the earth to use the talent you've been lucky enough to be born with. Because all of us won the lottery if we were born smart.

But if you're born smart, you have an obligation to use it in some way to improve the world.

EXCLUDING NO ONE WHO QUALIFIES

النظر في كل من يتأهل

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: One of the core values that was really important to NYU, to Abu Dhabi, and to me was that access to a high-quality education should not put you into crippling debt.

That's why we designed the financial aid policy the way it is. This opportunity should be available to everyone – every Arab, every person in the world who can get into this really great university. Your financial status will not be a barrier.

DIANE YU: We did our best to make it very clear early on that the opportunity had to be affordable to students worldwide.

LINDA MILLS: All of a sudden, NYU Abu Dhabi opened doors that NYU New York couldn't open to a whole set of disadvantaged students from all over the world, which provided them with a world-class education and a transformative experience that meant they would be positioned differently for the rest of their lives.

JOHN SEXTON: If I find a kid who is unable to pay for a pencil, I can still give that kid the best education in the world. If a kid is good enough, I can provide that kid with an NYU education in Abu Dhabi.

From the South Bronx, from South Africa, from South America, from South Asia. Any kid.

That's a great blessing.

LINDA MILLS: We gathered the momentum from the students themselves. They were looking for what they could connect to – for what it was initially that got all of us intrigued, interested, and profoundly invested.

JOHN SEXTON: Al Bloom told us, "If you want 100 acceptances, you've got to make 180 offers – if you can find 180 qualified kids."

At this point we knew we'd have quality.

We made 180 offers, because Swarthmore's yield had been 60%.

About 140 kids said yes.

So we opened with a class of 140.

Once we got that initial class, we were off and running.





“A LEVEL OF EXPECTATION AND EXCELLENCE”

“مستوى من التوقعات والتميز”

DIANE YU: It might have been a bit of a risk for them because it was a school with no history, no pedigree, but the idea of this university in the desert appealed to many. And when we included the Candidate Weekend strategy of bringing some of the very best of those candidates to campus – well, we didn’t even have a campus then – to the country to meet each other, to have some sample classes, to have opportunities to interact, to have their own time to bond in the desert, we found that after those two and a half days, the camaraderie was so strong that, with the help of social media, students started talking about this place as the most exciting place in the world to go to college.

That helped us attract not only great candidates, but also to enjoy one of the most extraordinary yields of any university in history when it came time to offers going out and being accepted. We broke a lot of records in the admissions strategy and process.

It turned out to be a very savvy calculus, because in terms of our ability to attract some of the world’s most talented and outstanding students, we pulled out all the stops and were able to bring that kind of student body together for the very first class.

That set a tone, a level of expectation and excellence we’ve tried our utmost to maintain since then. A huge amount of effort went into it, but the results have been spectacular.

JOSH TAYLOR: Once we started recruiting a class, it was great. Because we could actually start explaining the kind of students who were attracted to a new school in the Gulf.

I remember beginning to talk to *The New York Times* a few months in advance of finalizing that first class. The reporter understood that this was something really different. The result was one of the first stories about the students, which helped put a real face on NYU Abu Dhabi – that it wasn’t just an abstract idea.

It certainly didn’t mean that stories about controversial topics disappeared. But once reporters got to meet the kind of students who would pack up and move to Abu Dhabi, especially in that first class, it was immediately evident that there was something special going on.

It takes a certain kind of 18-, 19-year-old to do that.

LISA TAYLOR: I first learned about NYU Abu Dhabi from my husband, Josh, who brought home the idea in around 2008. As it became more and more real, I knew we would move abroad as a family to embark on this adventure.

We already had a daughter and were thinking about expanding our family. So we visited before making the decision to move, to see what it was like and whether we could visualize ourselves there.

When people asked me, “Why Abu Dhabi?” and “What’s your point of view?” I said, “It’s the most familiar unfamiliar place you’ll ever be.”

You see all these things that you’d find anywhere in the United States or any global city – and then you find them juxtaposed against deserts and camels and traditional dress.

LISA TAYLOR
ليزا تيلور
Chief of Staff, Global Programs and University Life at NYU from 2015 to present; Associate Dean, Global Admissions from 2014–2015; Assistant Dean, Global Admissions from 2013–2014; Assistant Dean for Admissions at NYU Abu Dhabi from 2010–2013

My role was admissions, but I didn’t come until after the first year of recruitment. In 2010, right before the freshmen were coming in that fall, I joined the team.

Our amazing advantage was that we could bring students to tell their own story. I’m a grownup: Who’s going to care what I have to say? I’m not the one who is putting myself out there, making a decision to go to college in Abu Dhabi.

But if an interesting student who is my peer says, “I know it sounds crazy, but this is absolutely the best place you could possibly think of. Everyone’s so wonderful,” a prospective student will hear that story really differently.

So we integrated students into the process. One of the primary reasons students said yes was because of the other students. Consistently, applicants were making decisions based on the experience they could see themselves having over four years with the students they met at Candidate Weekend and others.

We have an amazing yield rate, which to me means we’re doing a really good job in choosing the students who are the best fit and then admitting those who are really committed to being part of this story we’re building.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: In over 10 years of working on this project, nurturing it, and loving every minute, there are some things that stand out as learnings.

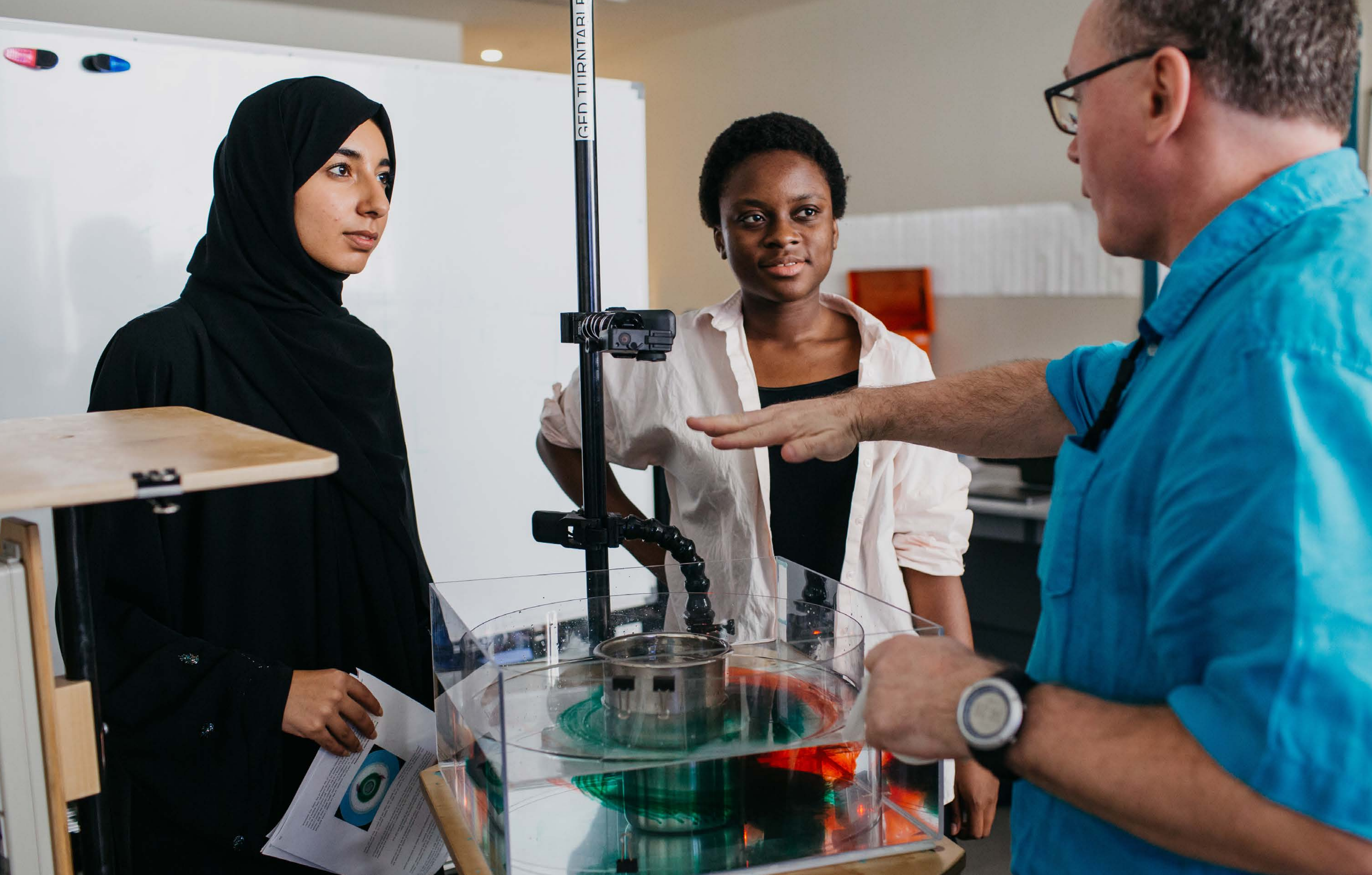
The first is to have enormous faith in the adventurous spirit of 18-years-olds all around the world, who immediately understood what we were trying to do and believed we were going to deliver it.

They then jumped and convinced their parents to jump, saying, “I’m going to Abu Dhabi to enroll in this brand-new university that didn’t exist before. I’m going to bet my future educational career that this university is going to be a force for good, and that it’s real.”

trailblazing

FACULTY

کادر تعلیمی ریادی



GED TIIRNTARI P



RECRUITING THE FACULTY

استقطاب الأساتذة

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: Building up a top-level faculty that has real standing in the academic world is an enormously complex, time-consuming, and demanding effort.

Most people think of universities as a unit. But faculty, to a great extent, live not just in their department but in their field, which is at least as much their self-definition.

When they operate in their professional lives, they have to function in ways that not only justify themselves within the University and to their colleagues at the University, but justify whatever initiatives they're involved in across their particular profession.

Their choice has to make sense to people outside. They have to be able to explain it and even defend it when it's critiqued.

DICK FOLEY: The administration could talk until we're blue in the face about the opportunity of Abu Dhabi, about changing the face of higher education. By and large, faculty are not individually conservative. But when it comes to their academic or professional lives, they're pretty conservative: We've got this system. It's worked well in the past. We don't particularly want it to change.

And we were asking them to change.

So the process has to happen in steps, almost faculty member by faculty member. It certainly has to happen department by department, because the primary way things get done at universities is not at the level of individuals but at the level of departments.

FRUITFUL TENSIONS

صعوبات مثمرة

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: I organized in the Faculty Senate a subcommittee to focus specifically on these issues, so that we would have faculty representation in the discussions.

Sometimes there were differences in views. That's life. It's what faculty are famous for.

The Faculty Senate pushed constantly for greater clarification and greater expansion of the statements about what the rights of faculty at Abu Dhabi would be; how they would be treated; that the assurances they were getting would be legally protected; and that they'd enjoy the same faculty privileges as their colleagues at NYU in New York.

Sometimes, there were tensions with University administration about the extent of the assurances: How robust were they? How much was written down, as opposed to how much was only an oral commitment? And when there were oral commitments, how much would they be actualized?

Inevitably, there was a certain amount of give-and-take, as no number of verbal assurances in advance of building an institution is going to cover every eventuality you're going to face.

Also, if one of the reasons you're doing the project is because you want to be able to spark certain positive social developments, you've got to recognize that you're not starting where you hope to end up.

And if you're not starting where you hope to end up, you can't expect everything to be defined at the beginning.

“WHAT’S THE STANDARD NYU WAY OF DEALING WITH THIS?”

“كيف تتعامل جامعة نيويورك

مع مثل هذه الأمور؟”

DICK FOLEY: In my first months at the Faculty of Arts and Science, I would say, “We have this problem. What's the standard NYU way of dealing with it?”

People would look at me and say, “Standard way of dealing with it?!”

That gave me a lot of freedom.

We wanted outstanding academic leaders in Abu Dhabi. But we also wanted all this talent we had assembled at the Square to be involved. When we were hiring faculty in Abu Dhabi, there wasn't really a model out there. We were inventing it.

We didn't quite know what would work and what wouldn't work, which means you have to run a lot of experiments, try a lot of things.

SYLVAIN CAPPELL: Our philosophy was that the Faculty Senate needed to be perceived by the faculty as neither a pushover, in automatically approving everything that was coming down the pike, nor as obstructionist, just for the sake of proving independence.

The idea was to have a reasonable position, where we worked for our common goals and vision for the development of the University, educationally and academically.

But also, if necessary, forcefully bring back the administration's attention to matters the faculty thought hadn't been considered to the extent they should have been.

There were questions about how faculty would be hired, by whom and what kinds of faculty, and what would be the relationships between faculty at a foreign campus and faculty in New York.

What kinds of tenure would be granted? Would people have tenure in one place, the other, in both? What kind of assurances would people have about permanence of employment, since the region was famous even then for a certain amount of instability?

Admittedly, the Gulf states have been an island of stability in the larger turmoil of the region. Nevertheless, the University and faculty were concerned about what would happen in certain worst-case eventualities. What kind of contracts or guarantees would there be for the different kinds of faculty?

All of these were complex questions, which involved not only faculty concerns but also had legal aspects – some clearly beyond the purview of the Faculty Senate.

There were a lot of things to think through and get to feel comfortable about.

“A PRIVILEGE TO GO”

“إنه فعلاً لشرف عظيم”

JOHN SEXTON: NYU is a very, very large place. And NYU Abu Dhabi is relatively small. So you're talking about a New York faculty of thousands, whereas we needed only 12 to open the first year.

Jared Cohon gave me essential advice, based on his Carnegie Mellon University experience in Education City in Qatar.

“John, the key thing is not allowing the question presented to a faculty member to be, ‘Will you do us the favor of going?’ You've got to make it a privilege to go.”

I took his advice seriously. Even before the faculty began to have the experience of being there and teaching these extraordinary students, we said, “This is a privilege. Tell us why should you be among the select cadre we're going to send to Abu Dhabi.”

Mariët and Hilary were the ones who drove that process.

“NOTHING SHORT OF A DREAM COME TRUE”

“لقد تحققت أحلامي”

MARIËT WESTERMANN: Faculty recruitment was front of mind for me from the start, because the quality of an institution stands and falls by its faculty.

There were several mechanisms we had to put in place to make sure that faculty participation, either from NYU or new standing faculty – full-time faculty hired specifically for NYU Abu Dhabi – would be of the highest quality.

Much of this played out in the first year, before we had even recruited a soul.

HILARY BALLON: John made a point over and over and over again, which was critical to the work we did in the beginning. He said to us, to every faculty member who was on any search committee, to anyone who was involved in faculty hiring: We are not hiring second-class faculty.

“You are looking for faculty of exactly the same quality we would look for at NYU in New York.”

Now, admittedly, there may be fewer people who want to go to Abu Dhabi. But there will be enough of these top-quality people for whom an opportunity to teach at NYU Abu Dhabi will be nothing short of a dream come true.

It could be their life circumstances – that they had family in the region. It could be because they'd had an international formation, and being part of a bold experiment in international education would be deeply meaningful to them. It could be because they wanted to be builders, as opposed to entering a big machine that was, in effect, already running on its own.

There would be very many motives – but we should never compromise our standards.



YOUNG,
MID-CAREER,
SENIOR
faculty

أعضاء هيئة
التدريس من جميع
الفئات

The repetition of that message was crucial, because the bias of most people was, “If you want to go to Abu Dhabi, you’re not going to be of the same caliber as people who were hired in New York. Who would want to go to Abu Dhabi if they could be hired in New York?”

We needed to evolve to a place where we recognized that what we were offering – a faculty position at NYU Abu Dhabi – was extraordinary and had very many distinctive, mission-driven features that would be attractive to the finest faculty.

Adjusting the mindsets of faculty so that we agreed on the standards we were looking for was the most important accomplishment in the first few years of our faculty hiring.

The second significant element in recruitment is that when we began, we had no faculty in Abu Dhabi. So the faculty search committees were constituted entirely of New York faculty.

Naturally, they brought to the process a set of goals shaped by their New York experience. But the New York experience wasn’t necessarily identical to our aspirations for Abu Dhabi.

In the first place, NYU Abu Dhabi was starting out as a purely undergraduate institution. We expected to build graduate programs over time, but our student body at the outset was undergraduates.

The faculty in New York also taught graduate students and saw graduate education as a fundamental

part of their mission. But a curriculum designed, in part, for graduate students would look rather different than a curriculum that focused on undergraduates. A faculty candidate’s research profile and range of interests – whether addressing a particular niche in a field or aiming for broader exposure to the field – would be different if the focus were undergraduates rather than graduate students.

These were the kinds of issues that emerged.

DICK FOLEY: We also thought we might have trouble recruiting faculty members with families.

So we went out of our way to make Abu Dhabi and the campus and the life of faculty there as family-friendly as we could. And we found that we were able to recruit young and mid-career faculty members.

Then we thought we’d have trouble recruiting really, really distinguished senior people. Because it’s always difficult to recruit them: They’re part of the life of a university – and it’s hard work to extract them.

But we were able to do that as well.

JOHN SEXTON: Here, Jess Benhabib became very helpful. Jess was a very respected economist, but also a former dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

We enlisted him to try to help us shape faculty recruitment.

A

STRATEGY OF CLUSTER HIRING

استراتيجية توظيف مجموعات عمل كاملة

JESS BENHABIB: The initial responses by New York faculty were very mixed. There were questions from some about whether NYU wanted to be in Abu Dhabi. Also, a lot of criticism that the UAE is not a completely democratic society.

You have to have chutzpah to start something like this.

The biggest challenge was to have a coherent plan and an idea that was attractive to sell to the faculty so that they would go along.

But the other big challenge is that whenever anybody gets an offer anywhere in the country, the first question they ask before they think of going to a place is, "Who's there?"

If nobody is there whom they know – by which they mean other researchers in their field – they won't go. Because their productivity very much depends on it.

How were we going to create an environment where people would be willing to go? And then create a critical mass of people so that it could turn out to be attractive?

Of course, good faculty is good faculty. But you can't get them to go there if there's nobody to talk to.

So the strategy was to focus first on sending our good faculty to spend some time in Abu Dhabi. Then the word gets around that a group of people are there continually in a variety of fields. And then others look around and say, "Look, there may be some concentration of people I can work with."

Initially, we focused on getting faculty from New York to go. Once there was something close to a critical mass, we could turn to others beyond NYU and say, "Would you like to come?"

One person would not go alone. There had to be an incentive structure so that quite a number would go together.

It wasn't only a matter of who else would be there. There are also questions such as: Is there a seminar budget? Are there going to be other kinds of visitors? Will there be money to have conferences?

All that had to be put in place as well.

JESS BENHABIB
جيس بن حبيب
Professor of Economics at NYU since 1983 and Paulette Goddard Professor of Political Economy since 1991; Interim Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science from 1997-2000 and from 2009-2011; Senior Vice Provost for Planning from 2005-2008; Dean for Social Sciences from 1977-2000; Chair of the Department of Economics from 1993-1996 and from 1984-1987; Associate Professor at NYU from 1980-1983



THE distinction OF TENURE

وقار مرتبة الأستاذية

MARIËT WESTERMANN: We had to make sure that our partners in Abu Dhabi – but also some very skeptical voices in New York – understood that tenure should be available, as a pathway, to faculty recruited to NYU Abu Dhabi as a school of NYU.

If we couldn't have tenure there, we could forget about recruiting a top-quality faculty.

Once we developed the model, with the great help of Jess Benhabib, and once we explained to both the provost in New York and our partners in Abu Dhabi that tenure was critical, and that it would also set the University apart from every other university in the Middle East, we would have a recipe for recruitment and credibility with the faculty.

Then we could tell the faculty, "You're worried about who we are hiring there? We're going to have you do the reviewing with us."

We set up committees of tenured faculty in New York to review potential candidates.

But what do you do until you have a tenured faculty in Abu Dhabi? We decided that to verify a really high quality, we had to have the best faculty from NYU New York willing to teach there – and make it possible for them to do so.







TO FEEL A SENSE OF BELONGING: AFFILIATED FACULTY

شعور بالانتماء: الأساتذة المنتسبون

HILARY BALLON: When we began, we thought: It's going to be very hard to tear away the most distinguished faculty from their very rich, energetic New York lives. We were going to have to come up with a shorter time increment that seemed manageable.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: So we agreed that we could have semester-long courses taught by NYU faculty; seven-week courses that would cover a whole semester of material; and a January term or J-Term, which we developed with Linda Mills and others.

In this way, there was a range of opportunities for faculty based in New York to get involved, but not necessarily to move there for a longer period of time.

We developed a model, which Hilary was very critical in structuring, where in the first years of NYU Abu Dhabi, perhaps as much as 75% of the courses would be taught by faculty from New York – and only the best faculty.

HILARY BALLON: The role of the NYU faculty, whom we called affiliated faculty, was a very distinctive and critical component of the vision.

It was critical because the opportunity for New York faculty to participate fully in NYU Abu Dhabi was a key to integrating the two campuses.

If the faculty went back and forth and felt a sense of belonging to Abu Dhabi, just as we anticipated students would go back and forth, we would be well-positioned for NYU Abu Dhabi to be experienced not as some distant relation that had no consequence in New York, but as an integrated element of the global network the University was building.

Providing opportunities for both the New York faculty to go to Abu Dhabi and the Abu Dhabi faculty to come to New York was really one of the most creative moves we made.

JESS BENHABIB: There were concerns about New

York faculty being isolated there, far away from everything. Will it be too small a community? Do I really like the expat life?

We overcame those misgivings by making the stays short. They go for seven weeks. And then they go for several years. And sometimes they extend it.

It was a curricular challenge to have seven weeks and then another seven weeks with two different faculty, one the continuation of the course after the other.

But that's what we could do. To get people there, you have to make it attractive. So you have to be flexible. Everybody has to make compromise decisions.

“ONE OF THE GEMS OF OUR CURRICULUM”

“من أروع مناهجنا”

HILARY BALLON: The concept of J-Term – January term – began in dialogue with Mariët, who was the lead person on the project in the early years. She had gone to college at Williams, where, during J-Term, they brought to Williams artists and all kinds of people whom they couldn't normally get to come for a full semester.

As we began to talk about Abu Dhabi, we saw a certain analogy – that there would be a remarkable array of people who might be available to come for a short period of time, during which students would intensively study their single area of expertise.

John was extremely enthusiastic about the idea of a J-Term because it would also allow us to leverage the variety of NYU sites around the world.

In the first year, some of my colleagues were quite apprehensive about it. After all, students were very far away from home. We were sending them home for Christmas break. And the idea of having a very short Christmas break and then asking them to

come back within a week to 10 days to start again felt as if it might be too onerous and cause too much homesickness.

LINDA MILLS: Yet there was something profound about touching the global experience early on in the first year, which got students out of Abu Dhabi, out of themselves, into these one-on-one classes. They came back happy.

HILARY BALLON: Even in that first year, it was clear that J-Term was a very special experience precisely because of the intensity, the cohort that formed, the day-in-and-day-out contact with a professor. The fact that it was such an encompassing three weeks changed the nature of the learning experience from something that was totally cerebral and about reading into something that was much more lived.

We also tried to build into each course a set of experiences that complemented the more academic content – whether field trips or more extended travel or guest speakers. The mix of activities would take a different form, depending on the course.

These courses were offered not just in Abu Dhabi and New York, but at our sites in London and Berlin and Buenos Aires and Shanghai.

It was also a thrilling way to discover those other NYU sites. For example, we recruited a professor of history, now provost of NYU Shanghai, Joanna Waley-Cohen, to teach a course on the history of food in China.

Imagine how exciting it is for students – to be studying with this great professor and then walking the streets of Shanghai, going into the food markets, seeing the whole cultural history played out through food.

J-Term has turned out to be one of the gems of our curriculum.

We benefited greatly from the amazing work of Carol Brandt, who, after we agreed on the topic, would sit with the professor to get an understanding of the professor's goals about what those more experiential activities might be. She would digest them and then come back with a set of proposals.

Many faculty who were coming to teach in Abu Dhabi didn't know the place well enough. Carol was essential in developing on-the-ground experiences for students.

For the faculty, it became a remarkable way to discover NYU Abu Dhabi and to go off-campus.

REASSURING NEW YORK FACULTY

طمأننة أعضاء هيئة التدريس في جامعة نيويورك

DICK FOLEY: We had an evolving strategy. We knew in the early years that to get the kind of academic oomph we needed, we would have to rely more heavily on New York faculty.

One of the worries in departments at the Square was that, far from strengthening what was happening in New York, it might be weakening – because you were taking good faculty away.

We took that concern seriously and listened.

In my heart of hearts, I thought, “Departments send faculty away on leave all the time.” In a way, they are already accustomed to having even their best faculty periodically away from campus. Historically, they have found ways to work around it – usually by having the faculty member accept responsibilities even when he or she is away.

Because you have graduate students with dissertations that still need to be written and students who still need to be advised. Even when faculty members are on a sabbatical leave, they find a way to continue to fulfill those responsibilities.

So some departments had to be reassured that the same model could work in the Abu Dhabi setting.

JESS BENHABIB: One of the biggest complaints in my department was: “How are we going to replace our top people who are going to Abu Dhabi?” Because you would walk into a seminar, where usually there are seven, eight people who are top in their fields. And now there are three.

It makes a difference to the discourse, to the speaker.

In my department in New York, we have 15 seminars a week. We can’t go to all of them. Students are always talking to each other. There are visitors coming and going, in part because it’s New York. It’s a very stimulating environment.

If you’re in the desert, there isn’t that kind of infrastructure. So what are you going to do?

We would acknowledge that it was a legitimate criticism, which we were trying to alleviate by providing generous funding to bring eminent visitors in the field. Sometimes it was very easy to get the same quality of people to visit and commit and be around New York.

It only partially alleviated the problem – but the problem was temporary.

ELLEN SCHALL: In each search, you were asking a lot of NYU New York faculty. As affiliated faculty left to go, whether for half a year or half a semester, they were taken out of their home department. So the burden also falls on the people who stay.

It was a collective effort that required a lot.

And yet, virtually every faculty member who has gone to Abu Dhabi comes back to New York convinced that it was worth the effort, that it’s an extraordinary place and really deserves support.

DICK FOLEY: Some people raised their hand. There were and still are adventurers who said, “That sounds interesting. I’ll go.”

Other people had to be “seduced” into it. We knew we had to do it in steps.

The early steps were to work very hard to get not just any faculty members to go spend time in Abu Dhabi, but faculty members who had great credibility with their colleagues.

Not all our theories turned out to be correct, but this one did.

The theory was: They would go, they would get excited about the projects, and they would come back and say to their more cynical faculty colleagues, “I was worried about X, Y, and Z, but now I’m not so worried about X and Y. Maybe I am still a little worried about Z.”

HILARY BALLON: It was in year two or three of our planning that I reached out to Ron Robin, who was then an associate dean at Steinhardt.

“I FELT I’D WON THE LOTTERY”

“شعرت كمن يربح جائزة اليانصيب”

RON ROBIN: I arrived at NYU in 2006 from the University of Haifa, in Israel.

The reason I attracted Dean Mary Brabeck’s attention at Steinhardt was the leadership experience I’d had in Haifa. I’d been dean of students during very tumultuous times. It was during the second intifada, or uprising, at a university where about 30% of the students are Arab.

You can just imagine the type of tension that existed on campus – and the need to manage that tension, with both faculty and students.

When I got the call from Mary, I couldn’t resist. Our children had grown up. It seemed like a perfect time to try something new. That’s how we got to NYU.

From day one, I felt I’d won the lottery. That became infinitely clear, two years later, when I joined NYU Abu Dhabi’s venture, which happened around 2008.

I cannot think of a better job in academia than building a university from scratch.

HILARY BALLON: Ron’s role evolved to overseeing faculty hiring. The form of faculty hiring was constantly mutating. It was one of the most challenging areas.

RON ROBIN: I had a certain amount of nervousness on the first trip to Abu Dhabi, which was dispelled almost immediately. I found a society of gentle, welcoming people, with genuine curiosity

RON ROBIN

رون روبن

Senior Vice Provost of NYU Abu Dhabi from 2009-2017; NYU Senior Vice Provost for Planning from 2008-2016; Steinhardt Associate Dean for Academic Affairs from 2006-2009; Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development from 2004-2016

about this strange fellow who is not only Jewish but happens to be Israeli.

I never experienced anything except a generous and warm welcome – and, occasionally, curiosity about what was happening in Israel.

I’ve sat in numerous meetings with our Abu Dhabi counterparts. What they understood is that the future of Abu Dhabi lies in a knowledge economy, an economy that can generate diverse and cutting-edge forms of economic activity. Rather than depending exclusively on oil, they would use the money generated from oil judiciously to plan for the future when oil becomes a less valuable commodity.

Still, I don’t think there was anything that happened exactly the way we planned it. Of course, we had blueprints, but a blueprint is a document you change often, to fit circumstances that keep changing.

And circumstances did change around us.

“I cannot think of a better job in academia than building a university from scratch.”



Having a team that understood they should expect the unexpected was what made it work. You need a very special person to deal with a startup – someone who feels comfortable with surprises, because there turn out to be surprises every single day.

All of a sudden, the lab couldn't be built on campus, but had to be built 30 minutes away for a number of years. Or there was no place to teach an art class, so we had to go to the housing complex and transform an apartment into an art studio.

NYU FACULTY: "FIRST MOVERS"

"أول موجة" من أساتذة
جامعة نيويورك

It was an exciting experience – but only for people with the stamina and nature to handle it.

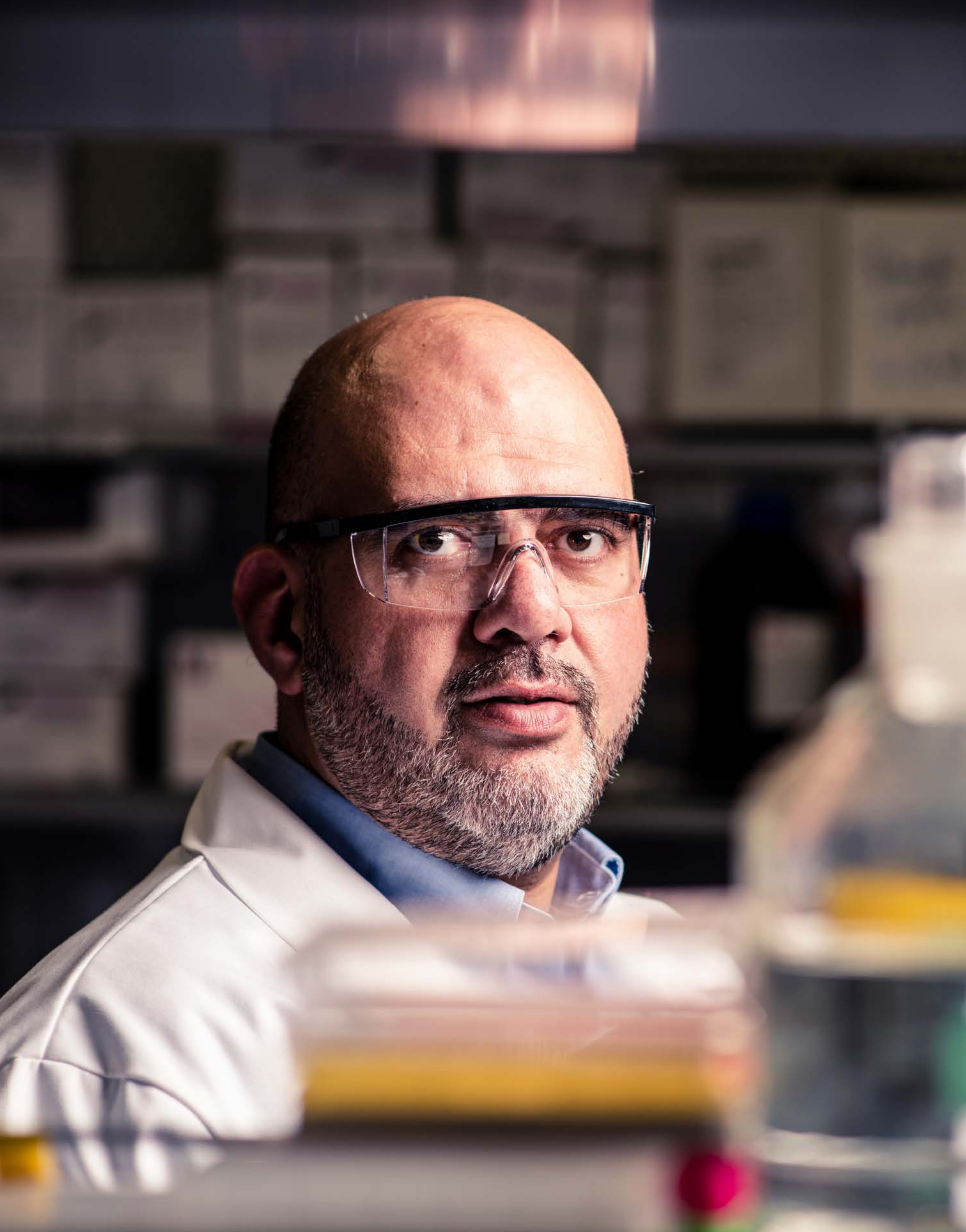
DICK FOLEY: There were faculty members in New York who were first movers, willing to take a risk. We owe them a lot.

Many were young, just beginning their academic careers. We were also institution building, which meant that in addition to all the scholarly work we were expecting them to do, they had to build an institution.

The flip side is that we also gave them a lot. If you talk to them, they'll say they felt it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

There were all sorts of hassles and pains associated with it. But there were glorious pleasures as well.





THE challenges FOR YOUNGER FACULTY

تحديات واجهت الأستاذة الأصغر سنًا

RON ROBIN: One of the greatest challenges for faculty was balancing this moment of creation with their research agenda.

For obvious reasons, most faculty wanted to engage, get their hands really dirty, in building this dream curriculum, this dream campus, from the beginning.

And here we have junior faculty straight out of graduate school, just finished a dissertation. For most, it's their first job. And they have a research agenda.

We recruited them with the idea that they would meet New York standards. Now they are spending hours and hours and hours building this dream university at the expense of their research time.

We came up with a strategy that has served us well. We extended the tenure timeline in Abu Dhabi by another year, to allow people to spend time building this campus without hurting their research and their chances of becoming tenured.

Another huge challenge was family. Most of our faculty came to Abu Dhabi with spouses, some with young kids, but most with the idea of starting a family, under circumstances where there was a lot of outside pressure connected to building a new university.

On the other hand, we had a community that was second to none, where everybody felt they were in the same boat and stretched out a helping hand. We all went through a rough patch at one time or another. But we knew that somebody was looking after us, looking after our children and our spouses, taking care of the greater community.

ABOUT incentives المحفزات

JESS BENHABIB: Not everybody went. But anybody in New York who was good and wanted to go had the option. It was voluntary.

Some people made more money because they went to Abu Dhabi. But I didn't hear much criticism that "some people are getting paid more." The response was, "Fair enough."

Because there is a cost to those who go. And the cost is very clear. The way academic research works is that you get your ideas from talking to the people in the corridor and at seminars, or with visitors. You need that infrastructure. If you don't have that, your productivity drops.

Who goes into this business for the money? People go into academic life to become famous, to have some ideas that have an impact. So productivity is a key factor in determining where people want to go.

I always used to say, "You can take a bad university and say, 'I'm going to pay you three times as much. Come here.'"

Nobody will go.

People who are about to retire also have their role – and we had some in Abu Dhabi. But to get the young 40-, 45-year-olds to abandon their research and their labs: That's a huge cost. So you have to incentivize.

After a while, when Abu Dhabi was able to recruit standing faculty of its own and there was a core there, fewer and fewer affiliated faculty from New York were going. The incentive package was substantially reduced, as it should have been – because now you didn't need New York faculty as much.

INTEGRATING NEW YORK AND ABU DHABI

دمج الأنظمة والإجراءات
بين نيويورك وأبوظبي

HILARY BALLON: In the early years, it was built in structurally to the contracts of the Abu Dhabi faculty we hired that they would first have the opportunity to spend an integration semester or year in NYU New York, to feel themselves a part of the large NYU community. That was important as we were establishing our credibility as a new institution.

There's no question that we were able to recruit such excellent faculty because they saw themselves as part of NYU and part of American higher education, not at an outpost in a place most of them had never visited before.

But they were not sidelining themselves by going to NYU Abu Dhabi. On the contrary, they were participating in one of the most dynamic universities in America and around the world by taking a job there.

In addition to this integration semester or year, faculty who were hired for Abu Dhabi had the opportunity to take sabbatical years in New York or at other NYU sites.





“YOU JUST WANT GOOD PEOPLE”

“نحتاج إلى فريق جيد”

JESS BENHABIB: If you're trying to hire young people who are good enough to get an offer from a prestigious American university, why should they go to Abu Dhabi? They're making their careers – and Abu Dhabi is going into the unknown.

What made it attractive to them is that they could have a year in New York within a strong department and interact with other people there.

We were surprised by the strategy's success. The people we got were very impressive. When you're recruiting faculty, what you want to know is: Have they generated new ideas? Have they made some new contributions? Have they been original and productive?

If there are good people in Abu Dhabi's economics department, and I want to work with them, I don't care where they are based or where they're employed or where their contract is.

You just want good people.

HILARY BALLON: But we also recognized that it wasn't only New York that would be attractive to people. It would also be the campus in Shanghai or our sites in other cities that were central to their research.

We sought out an internationally-oriented faculty who would prize the opportunity to go to different parts of the NYU network.

“IT REQUIRED BOTH SIDES TO GIVE A LITTLE BIT”

“تطلب الأمر بعض التنازلات من الطرفين”

DICK FOLEY: Everybody had to think about things a little differently, especially the Faculty of Arts and Science departments and faculty. We wanted to be hiring faculty in Abu Dhabi who were, in a sense, New York faculty as well.

Obviously, they'd be spending most of their time in Abu Dhabi, and most of their responsibilities would be there. But they would still be history faculty or philosophy faculty or biology faculty.

It was something nobody else had tried to do.

We thought it was really interesting – to create an American-style liberal arts education in Abu Dhabi. But from the very beginning, we also thought it was a vehicle to keep the improvement, the upward trajectory going in New York City.

It's always a balancing act. In the hiring of faculty at Abu Dhabi, we wanted the departments – economics, politics, physics, or my own department, philosophy – to be involved. We wanted their expertise. We wanted their judgment. And also, frankly, we wanted their connections.

All these departments had been doing lots of hiring and had a network of people. Twenty, 25 years ago, the network in physics and philosophy and history would have been mostly North American, with a few countries in Europe – but these days it is almost always international.

We had to take seriously the distinctive mission of Abu Dhabi in looking for faculty who were right at the top of their field, but also excited about the mission.

And also people whom the New York faculty felt comfortable with and could embrace as colleagues.

Like any other balancing act, it required both sides to give a little bit.

“WE FOUND LOTS OF TALENT”

“وجدنا الكثير من المواهب”

JESS BENHABIB: We also recruited very successfully from other universities to Abu Dhabi. For example, we got a lot of very good French colleagues to go. To some, it was very attractive, because the French system allows you to take time off while you're working. So they could easily go for seven weeks or 10 weeks. And it was not as expensive.

DICK FOLEY: There were recruitment opportunities staring us in the face that we didn't recognize right away. We underestimated Europe as a funnel for academic talent. Not that we want all European faculty, but there's a lot of academic talent in Europe.

We found our way to it, but only after a year or two of more conventional searching.

Some of them were getting close to the mandatory retirement age. But the mandatory retirement age in most European countries is 65. So we were getting people in their early 60s, who still had at least a decade left of good intellectual scholarly work.

They were interested in one last interesting academic job. We were able to take advantage of a tight job market in lots of places, where there weren't, frankly, as many jobs as there are in North America.

We found lots of talent.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: Some of the professors were leaving tenured positions at Ivy League universities, saying, “This proposition is so compelling, these students are so incredible, this is where I want to be and what I want to build.”

There was also the draw of the city, which is so energetic, entrepreneurial, and welcoming.

“IT WAS AN ADVENTURE”

“لقد كانت مغامرة”

P.J. HENRY: I was one of the first faculty to be interviewed, to sign a contract.

I got an email passed around to the Society for Social and Personality Psychology, advertising a position with NYU Abu Dhabi. I'm a part of the society. The email was from John Jost, a psychology faculty member at NYU. He's a man whose work I deeply respect and have always admired. So it really caught my attention.

My first position out of graduate school was at the American University of Beirut. I find myself attracted to these kinds of positions. When this one came up, my eyes opened wide.

I was at DePaul University, in a great department with really wonderful people. I had no reason to leave. I was not unhappy by any stretch.

I submitted the application, not really thinking anything would come of it. Then, I got an email inviting me out to New York for an interview.

I was stunned, because it suddenly became very real to me.

NYU had set up a whole schedule, bought the plane tickets, reserved the hotel room. I was set to go. At the very last minute, I got cold feet and said, “I can't do this. I can't just give up everything and leave. It's too risky. I've got a great job, what the hell am I thinking?”

P.J. HENRY
بي جي هنري
Associate Professor
of Psychology at NYU
Abu Dhabi since 2009

So I contacted John Jost and said, “Look, I'm really sorry, and I know this is a terrible inconvenience, but I can't do it. Thank you so much for this opportunity, but I probably need to stay where I am.”

John wrote me back almost immediately and said, “P.J., you haven't even given us a chance. Just come to New York. It won't cost you a thing. See a couple of Broadway shows. There's no obligation whatsoever. Just hear our story.”

I said, “Okay, fine, I love New York. I'll come out to New York, why not?”

So I did. And I was blown away, mostly because I had no idea what NYU Abu Dhabi was trying to be. Once I realized what the reality was, I thought, “This is something extraordinary.”

I didn't even visit, which is also extraordinary. I just went on blind faith. It was an adventure.

But I trusted the vision, that it was going to work, and I thought, “If I just do my job, things will fall into place.”

They did.

“AN INTEGRATION YEAR”

“سنة من الاندماج”

In the first year, fall 2009, I had to stay in New York because there was no Abu Dhabi. The Downtown Campus hadn't even opened yet, so there were no students.

In New York, the concept was an integration year. To me, it was critical for new faculty. Because the spirit behind it was to get those new faculty familiar with NYU culture, the sense of what the University was like.

I spent that year networking with psychologists all over the University – Arts and Science, Stern, Wagner, Steinhardt.

I also spent a lot of time meeting people in very different departments. At that time, I was the only psychologist hired to go there.

Among those of us who were hired for NYU Abu Dhabi, there was a lot of nervous excitement. But also the sense that we're all just figuring it out as we go. There can be something scary about it – but exciting, too.

A lot of us were really young. I was among the most senior faculty – and I had just gotten tenure at DePaul. Many were straight out of graduate school. They would be nervous anywhere, let alone at a university that didn't yet exist, over 10,000 miles away.

We shared a sense of adventure and a willingness to tolerate ambiguity and lack of structure. It sounds very simple, but it's actually not. If you're just out of graduate school, you really need a structure in place, where there's a hierarchy and a way of doing things.

So these people who signed on, especially the younger faculty, were taking an extraordinary risk.





FROM
DOWNTOWN
to
SAADIYAT

الانتقال من المدينة
إلى السعديات



THE Downtown Campus:

“THE HEART OF NYU ABU DHABI”

حرم وسط المدينة:
“قلب جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي”

MARIËT WESTERMANN: We had no site for our first campus and no idea what it was going to look like. We had no site for our residences. We needed performance spaces. We didn't know where our athletic facilities were going to be – and we had no labs.

Meanwhile, we had promised a liberal arts college with majors in 18 to 20 fields, from the sciences and engineering to the social sciences, arts, and humanities.

I realized I had to be on the ground to start running what was basically an all-out real estate project. With my great project partner, Rima Al Mokarrab, who came at the same time to be in the Abu Dhabi government, we went around in her car looking at sites.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: Very early on in the partnership, it was decided that we would take a two-phased campus approach, which would allow us to welcome our inaugural class while the permanent Saadiyat Island campus was still in development.

HILARY BALLON: Mubadala showed us two different sites downtown to consider for our interim campus. The first was a closed-down post office that had great exposure on a main road.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: The other site was the one we ended up choosing, which had been the original fish market. It has a historical resonance for the people of Abu Dhabi and was in a very prime location.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: The first campus – which we called the Downtown Campus – was located in the heart of Abu Dhabi city. We spent time

designing the requirements and academic spaces, and worked with a company in Turkey where the prefab buildings were constructed and later transported and installed on the site.

Fortunately, the location had a sense of place and history, surrounded by landmark neighbors like Qasr Al Hosn – Abu Dhabi's oldest building – and a short stroll from the Corniche beach area and the Arabian Gulf.

The Downtown Campus housed the learning spaces, but not the student and faculty housing, or the research facilities.

HILARY BALLON: I remember distinctly when Mariët, John, and I visited that site. We looked at it, surrounded by Abu Dhabi buildings from the eighties and nineties, with ground-floor retail and a mosque in one corner, and said, “This site is in and of the city. It's perfect for us.”

ELLEN SCHALL: Abu Dhabi is so new. There was very much a sense of the place shifting incredibly rapidly. It was a fish market. Then it was an empty space. And then it was a prefab building that became NYU's Downtown Campus.

HILARY BALLON: We were very busy with modeling questions, such as the size of the student body, the size of the administration, the curriculum, how many classrooms did we need, what size should they be, and how many offices did we need.

Since we were not, by city regulation, allowed to build science labs there, or student residences, it wasn't the only facility. But it was the heart of NYU Abu Dhabi in the early years.

“THERE WAS A SENSE OF

COMMUNITY”

“شعرنا بالانتماء”



DEAN WILLIAMSON: Our interim campus served us very well. It was very intimate, two modular buildings, where you would get up from your office and see faculty, students, staff – every day, seven days a week.

HILARY BALLON: One of the biggest surprises was how appealing the Downtown Campus was. These were very, very modest facilities, and yet there was an intimacy people really appreciated.

We created two buildings connected at the third floor. The ground level framed an open area and led to a garden. That open area became the central meeting place. Anyone coming and going from the building crossed it, so there was the sense of a community, where you knew everyone.

AL BLOOM: It was a beautiful garden, a little oasis next to the two major academic buildings.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: The garden was going to be a parking lot. I said, “Can we please not have another parking lot? We need some shelter from the environment, but also a verdant place people can look at from their apartments.”

HILARY BALLON: This prefab structure turned out to be so hospitable and nurturing to the project. The downtown location was wonderful because our community were naturally intrepid explorers. They walked all the streets. And where we were located, there was a lot of urban fabric to explore.

That sense of really being in Abu Dhabi was something people prized.

AL BLOOM: True to the name Downtown Campus, it was right in the middle of Abu Dhabi city.

The buildings were purple, a great stroke of distinctiveness in a city that doesn't have much purple.

LIVING nearby:

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: At that time, real estate inventory in Abu Dhabi was remarkably difficult to find, with demand far outweighing supply. Our real estate team had a monumental task, but they identified two options for housing – a community of low-rise villas and a new-build high rise.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: Rima and I had looked at compounds and other buildings coming online. None of them was very suitable. And all were a little far from the Downtown Campus.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: Ultimately, we all agreed that the new-build high rise, in close proximity to the Downtown Campus, was not only convenient and in keeping with the University’s urban feel, but that vertical living would bring forth a sense of community in those early days.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: It’s a little hard to have a vertical campus, but if you have the bottom floors for student dormitories and residences, and you have the dining hall and a little grab-and-go and a bookstore and the gym, it might work.

HILARY BALLON: It was a very short walk, only a few minutes away, from the Downtown Campus, which was a high priority – to create an experience that would not require commuting by bus. We took floors there for student and faculty residences. But also for some of the student life spaces that the Downtown Campus couldn’t accommodate.

Our unified urban campus was born.

JOSH TAYLOR: The amazing thing about NYU Abu Dhabi, especially early on, was just how much of a community it was.



Sama TOWER

على مقربة من السكن في برج سما

Lisa and I had met working at NYU, so we were accustomed to working with one another. But I was struck by the symbolism. I was there with my family, but then, suddenly, our family became much bigger.

We were all in it together. We knew we were all crazy – and we embraced it. We worked really hard, but because we were a startup, there weren’t instant boundaries between staff and faculty, or, for that matter, even with students.

When our son was born in Abu Dhabi, on the day we came home from the hospital there were students waiting to meet the baby.

December 7, 2009

NEWS RELEASE NYU ABU DHABI OPENS DOORS TO DOWNTOWN CAMPUS

His Excellency Khaldoon Al Mubarak, Chairman of the Executive Affairs Authority said: “The opening of the downtown campus today represents a major milestone in the establishment of NYU Abu Dhabi. Alongside other new and existing institutions, NYU Abu Dhabi will contribute to the development of the Emirate’s education system, the diversification of the local economy, and the establishment of Abu Dhabi as one of the world’s true cultural capitals.”

ENSURING THE SYSTEMS

ضمان الأنظمة

MARTY DORPH: My predecessor, Jeannemarie Smith, had been the central player in the negotiations, from a finance and administration standpoint. Even when I came on board as CFO, she continued in that role.

It was only once Jeannemarie moved on to other things in early 2009 that I became directly involved. At that point, the major issue was: We're going to have this four-year campus in this other part of the world. How do we do accounting? Have administrative systems? Have technology? Have all the things that we need to run a university in place?

The Downtown Campus building was occupied, and staff began to come onboard. Now we had to figure out how to pay people. There were lots of glitches around things like making sure our accounting system in Abu Dhabi was talking to our accounting system in New York.

There wasn't any box that we could just reach into and pull out solutions.

MARTY DORPH

مارتي دورف

Executive Vice President at NYU since 2013; Senior Vice President for Finance and Budget and Chief Financial Officer from 2007-2013

PROVOST AT THE DOWNTOWN CAMPUS

العميد في الموقع التأسيسي

FABIO PIANO: I was asked to develop a genome conference in Abu Dhabi. I had been there as part of the science curriculum committee work for a quick visit, which was obviously interesting in its own right. But then I went to develop this idea of a new conference.

Ninety participants from the UAE joined us, so it was large. I started to see an incredible diversity and eagerness to learn, in science, in empirical evidence.

A couple of weeks after I returned from Abu Dhabi, Al Bloom asked me to meet with him.

I thought it was about how the conference went, so I prepared a report and went to his office.

He said, "This is great, wonderful. We're looking for a provost, and I would love for you to be that candidate."

I misheard him and replied, "I would be very happy to participate in the committee that selects the provost."

"No, that's not what I said. I want to know if you can be the provost."

And I said, "Oh, we can have a chat about it."

AL BLOOM: Mariët served in that role for the first year, but she went on to the Mellon Foundation, which made a lot of sense for her. It was sad for us when she left, but now I had the challenge to find the most amazing provost I could.

When I met with Fabio, he started talking about

a conference in Abu Dhabi, in which he was exploring the world of genomics and systems biology with other New York faculty and some worldwide faculty. The values he expressed, the precision of thought he demonstrated, and the personality he had led me to say, "How would you like to think about being provost?"

FABIO PIANO: I certainly did not accept right away, and I did not accept for a while, because I had my whole life in New York. I had just developed the Center for Genomics and Systems Biology in the heart of the Washington Square campus. We had just finished the new building. In fact, we had not yet moved in.

The center eventually moved into its new home in December of 2010. I moved to Abu Dhabi in the summer of 2010 – so I didn't even see the move.

That genomics conference in Abu Dhabi happened in January of 2010. So between January and April, we discussed the possibility of my being the provost.

But I never took it seriously until later, when John Sexton and I had a conversation about it on a trip to Abu Dhabi. That's when he described a whole bunch of reasons for me to try to do it and appealed to my sense of duty, as well as my interest.

I had been an NYU student and continued my career at NYU, so I felt, "If NYU is interested in doing something, I want to help if I'm asked."

I thought I would do it for one year. Of course, I was totally hooked once it got started. It's just too important a project.

AL BLOOM: It took a few months to negotiate with him, but that was the best decision I made in administration.

“ENAMORED AGAIN WITH TEACHING”

“إعادة استكشاف شغفي بالتدريس”

JOHN SEXTON: My going over to teach both the Sheikh Mohamed Scholars and subsequently NYU Abu Dhabi kids was a tremendous signal to the NYU Abu Dhabi students of the importance of the place.

It's wonderful for me to walk on the campus because of the reaction from the students there, who know I love them. But the second consequence, which was not as surprising as the first, was that I could really feel the place as a professor. I was there, so people could talk to me. Not just the students, not just the Emiratis, but people on the campus.

Why have I always taught a full schedule, while being dean of the NYU law school and then president? Because teaching was what I was put on earth to do.

HILARY BALLON: The faculty who came were, frankly, bowled over by the quality of the teaching experience. First, by the quality of the students in Abu Dhabi, their appetite to know things, their diversity, which made classroom conversations extremely interesting.

Because in any Abu Dhabi class, there is much greater diversity of socioeconomic background, country of origin, or religion than in a typical New York class.

DICK FOLEY: Getting used to an environment that is radically international in that way is exciting – but also a challenge.

HILARY BALLON: Moreover, the Abu Dhabi classes were quite small. That meant that instead of the lecture-and-performance mode, the teaching experience for the faculty member was much more about dialogue and conversation. You got to know your students better.

What we discovered is that quite a number of New York faculty became enamored again with teaching when they were put in these intimate settings with such interesting students. When they came back to New York, they were extraordinary ambassadors for our project.

The core curriculum course I taught, called "Time," was one of the most stimulating academic teaching experiences I've had. With roughly 15 students

from about 12 different countries, my very first class demonstrated how the diverse background of the students could enrich the discussion.

For the first class, there's no assigned reading, which is always challenging for a professor: What do you do to engage the students? In order to get at the pervasiveness of our obsession with time, I had opened up a discussion topic: What are time-based phrases in the English language?

Within three or four answers, a student said, "I am a lapsed Buddhist. But I still know enough about Buddhism to say that our concept of time is very different from what you guys have just been talking about."

In short order, people from different religious backgrounds began to describe different concepts of time – very different from the dominant Western biological model.

It was just fantastic. I didn't engineer it. It happened spontaneously. That kind of cross-cultural engagement was one of the things that made the class so interesting to me.

Second, the students were so incredibly smart. As many, many Abu Dhabi faculty noted in their debriefings, the students also had a strong sense of collegiality, of taking care of other students in the classroom, of courtesy and kindness.

I loved going to class.

P.J. HENRY: In the first year, I taught Intro to Psychology to nine students, which is amazing, because anywhere else, the course has hundreds of students. I also taught a course on prejudice, a core course.

LINDA MILLS: The first class was so small, only about 140 people.

P.J. HENRY: The students were the best part of NYU Abu Dhabi. They were the reason everything made sense about why it was such a great idea to go there – so eager to learn, so eager to work, incredibly well-prepared, but also so socially competent.

Because they came from all over the world, one might think it would create an awkward dynamic, or a lot of misunderstandings or miscommunications. Nothing of the sort. They brought their experiences into the classroom in a really constructive way.

That kind of diversity ended up being a real asset to the classes. People would bring up ways of viewing a problem I'd never thought about before.

They were changing the way I was thinking about the very concepts I was teaching.

At the END of the FIRST year

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: We had a very small standing faculty or tenure-track faculty in Abu Dhabi, whose quality was higher than our expectations. And the student body from the first year was just stellar. Their high school credentials placed them at the very top of students at Harvard, Stanford, and Princeton.

The facilities, while temporary, were very good. We had a strong group of affiliated faculty who were there from New York. We were beginning the Research Institute with some strong research projects. And the public outreach was going full speed by then.

All in all, at the end of the first year, we were extremely pleased by where we were.

نهاية العام الأول

DESIGNING THE FUTURE:

HILARY BALLON: Very early on, the government of Abu Dhabi determined that Saadiyat Island would be the site for the permanent campus.

In 2007, Saadiyat was a natural sand island about a mile off the coast of the main island of Abu Dhabi. It was completely undeveloped, without any vehicular access. My first trips to the site were by boat.

The Emirate had established an entity called the Tourism Development and Investment Company, or TDIC, to develop a diversified tourism program in Abu Dhabi. One element of the broad program was to make Saadiyat Island a cultural and resort destination, since the beaches and aquamarine water are natural attractions.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: In terms of design, we wanted the Saadiyat Island campus to be unique. It was offering something new in the world, different from NYU in New York. The campus should embody its global character and novel approach to higher education, including NYUAD's "hybrid" nature. It would embody the philosophy of a liberal arts college, with its intimate spaces, where the community could think, be creative, and come together. But it should also reflect the scope of larger research universities, taking the best of both kinds of institutions.

HILARY BALLON: TDIC had a plan for the island that subdivided it into six different zones, with a target population of approximately 120,000 people when it was fully developed after 20 or so years. When Mariët and I attended a meeting in the offices of the firm TDIC had hired to work on the Saadiyat plans, we learned that the University would be located in the marina district.

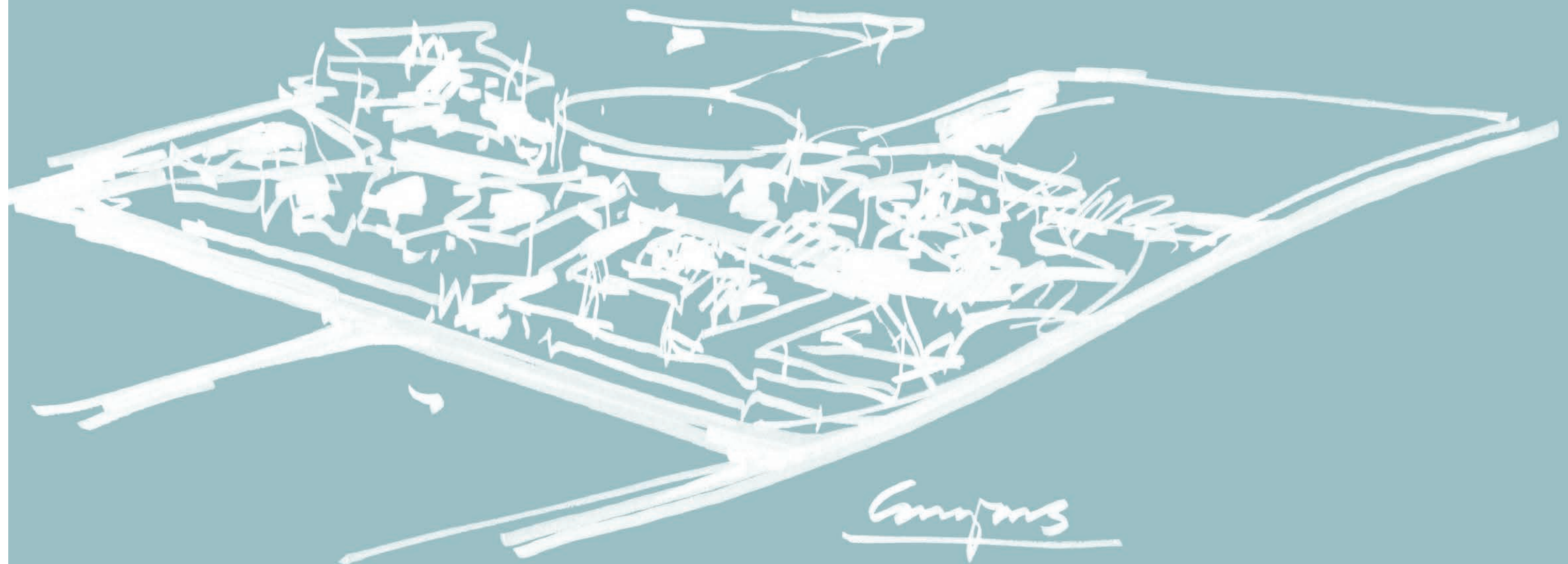
First, we had to tell the firm how much land we needed. It took an intensive space planning effort in 2007-2008 to answer that question for the decades ahead.

In the spring of 2008, we made a request for a certain number of acres. It turned out that we would have a site significantly smaller than what we requested. Of course, that seemed disappointing. But in the end, the size of our site became an asset, because we built a denser campus.

Given how small we would be in our early years and our desire to have a pedestrian environment, our having a compact campus was very helpful.

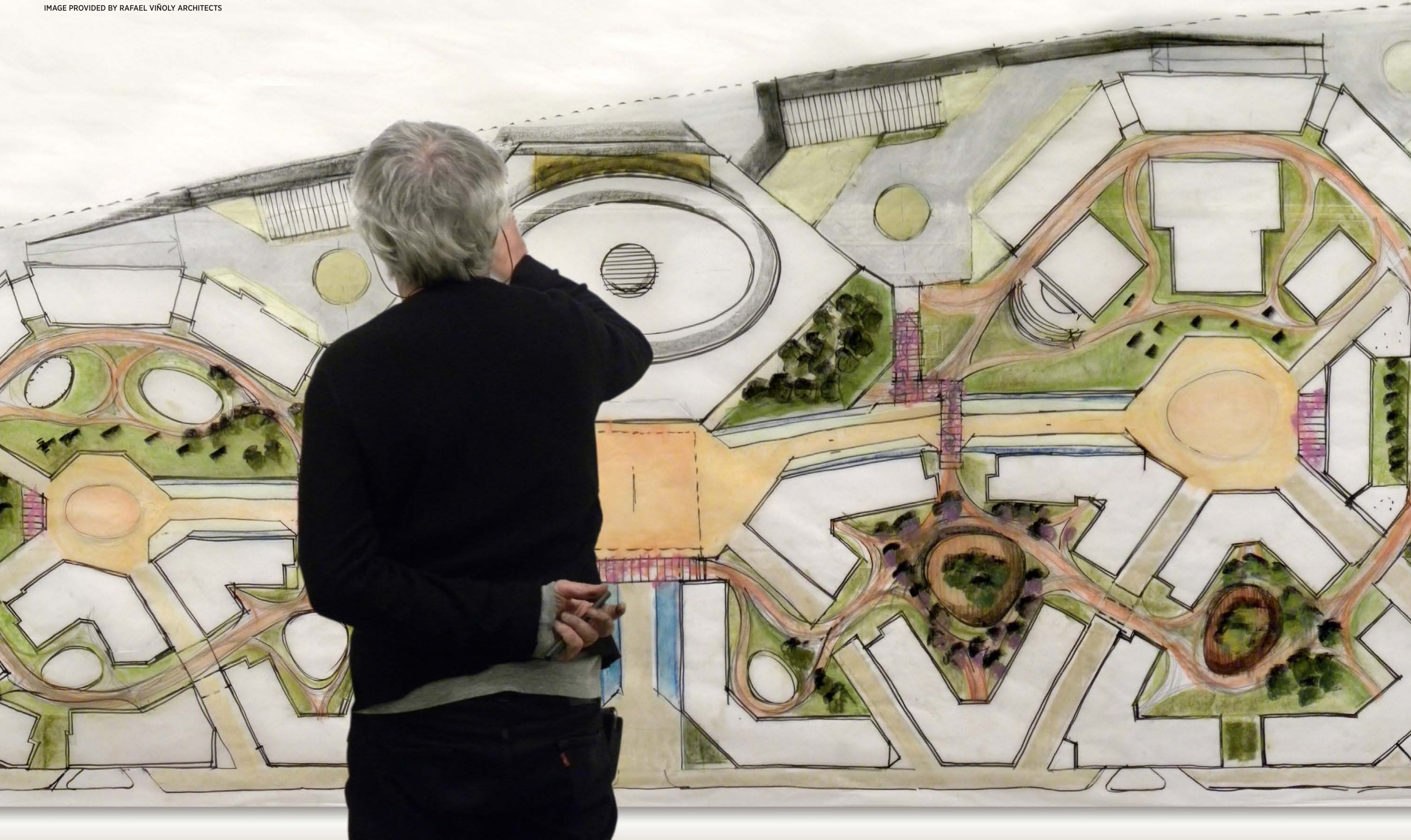
Saadiyat Island

التخطيط للمستقبل: جزيرة السعديات



SKETCH OF THE NYU ABU DHABI CAMPUS ON SAADIYAT ISLAND
IMAGE PROVIDED BY RAFAEL VIÑOLY ARCHITECTS

ARCHITECT RAFAEL VIÑOLY WITH AN NYU ABU DHABI CAMPUS SKETCH
IMAGE PROVIDED BY RAFAEL VIÑOLY ARCHITECTS



“SHARED LABOR VALUES”

“قيم العمل المشتركة”

DIANE YU: Labor values were a topic of conversation right from the beginning, along with academic freedom and openness and diversity among students and faculty. We set out to do something different, unique in the region, including shared labor values.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: The statement of workers’ rights was truly progressive. In the summer of 2009, we sat in Abu Dhabi, going over every condition.

JOSH TAYLOR: We were very proud of our labor standards, which we had worked with our partners to develop. When they were released in 2009, they were recognized for setting a new bar for that part of the world.

HILARY BALLON: The agreement between NYU and the government of Abu Dhabi said we would determine the highest prevailing standards affecting workers.

And that those highest prevailing standards would become the minimum standards for workers employed in the construction of NYU Abu Dhabi. Or employed by NYU Abu Dhabi in any capacity.

Any firm that wanted to bid on work had to sign a nondisclosure agreement, review the labor standards and values, and agree to comply with them.

“A SWEET CONVERGENCE”: CHOOSING THE ARCHITECT

”تقارب جميل“: اختيار المهندس المعماري

The next accomplishment, in the second year, was the selection of an architect to undertake the master plan for the campus. NYU and Mubadala, working together in a shared selection process, produced a short list of firms. Those firms were invited to come to Abu Dhabi for an interview and presentation.

It was a joint decision of Abu Dhabi and NYU to hire Rafael Viñoly Architects to do the master plan.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: From the NYUAD side, we collaborated with Hilary and Mariët. Once Rafael Viñoly was appointed, we worked not only with Rafael but also Jay Bargmann and Andrea Lamberti from his team. It was a combined Tamkeen-Mubadala-NYU-RVA effort that brought out the best of all worlds.

Rafael had already designed incredibly impressive and thoughtful university spaces. He and his team were exceptionally attuned to all the stakeholders involved and went very deep into hosting hundreds of user group meetings to genuinely understand all the requirements and specifications. They were able to respond to – and enhance – the elements that were really important to us.

HILARY BALLON: NYU felt that a university isn’t like any other kind of client. It’s not like building a shopping mall. The Viñoly firm had extensive ex-

perience with universities and a real understanding of university culture – the different building types universities have, where interactions with and among faculty are an asset.

We were also very focused on creativity and the quality of architectural design. Mubadala was a bit more focused on the production capacity of the firm: Was it rightsized to meet tight deadlines and produce all the documents? Did it have a base of operations in the UAE?

RAFAEL VIÑOLY: We were doing work in Abu Dhabi on a couple of very large projects, and I already had an office there.

When the opportunity came to apply for the work on the master plan of NYU Abu Dhabi, we had a series of meetings with the two people who were the eyes and ears of the project John had put together – Hilary and Mariët. They came across as people who really understood, in a much shorter period than it took me, what the project was from the perspective of the mission of the University.

I must have struck a chord in Hilary and Mariët, who became dear friends, because I talked about the mission much more than the physical form.

HILARY BALLON: There was a sweet convergence on Viñoly that addressed both our considerations.

I also thought that having a star architect who was very charismatic and a strong advocate for design quality would ultimately be an asset for us.

THE MASTER PLAN: DESIGNING TOGETHER

الخطة الرئيسية: التصميم معا

RAFAEL VIÑOLY
رافائيل فينولي
Founder, Rafael Viñoly Architects in 1983

JAY BARGMANN
جاي بارغمان
Vice President and Managing Partner of Rafael Viñoly Architects; with Rafael Viñoly Architects since 1983

TAMKEEN
Tamkeen is an Abu Dhabi-based company that delivers projects enriching the UAE’s social, cultural, and educational landscape.

RAFAEL VIÑOLY: So how do you translate an institution that is organized in the center of the economic and political power of the world, New York City? How can it adapt itself to a situation that is completely different without losing its identity – and without trying to impose its identity on a place that is already very well developed?

With Mariët and Hilary and Diane, I had a sense of partnership that Jay Bargmann, who put the project together, adopted immediately. I don’t think the project would exist if it weren’t for him, because how do you manage to deliver the product, with quality, in a ridiculously compressed time frame?

JAY BARGMANN: Rafael and I had been working together for 35 years. We’re a very atypical firm in that we have a wide variety of projects. We do performing arts centers, convention centers, housing. I oversee the operations, but I also really enjoy running big jobs.

When the request for proposal came in, we put together a very detailed proposal that outlined our qualifications and how we would approach the project.

Then we all flew to Abu Dhabi to make the presentation.

Surprisingly, the decision was made very quickly, before we even left the UAE.

We immediately started working with Hilary Ballon and Mariët Westermann and John Sexton in putting together the space plan, listing all the spaces required in a university, which was extremely interesting – to sit down and design a university from a completely blank piece of paper.

HILARY BALLON: It had to be quite fine-grained to align with the amount of space we had.

JAY BARGMANN: We had one piece of information – that there would be 2,600 students in the first phase and 4,000 in the second phase: 2,000 undergraduates, 200 prep academy students who are pre-university level, and 400 graduate students.

Then the question is: How do you turn that into a university?

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: The design process was guided by four principles:

The campus had to be fit for its purposes and future-proofed.

It would combine traditional and modern elements to reflect not only Abu Dhabi and New York but also our global mission.

The University had to connect with and contribute to the wider community of Abu Dhabi.

And finally, we wanted to lead by example, with a campus that reflected the values and priorities of Abu Dhabi and New York – and the meeting of those two seemingly disparate worlds.

RAFAEL VIÑOLY: It became a rather extraordinary process, because the time schedules were completely off the wall. But the people in the local organizations that controlled the project had a level of commitment and sophistication that is hard to imagine anywhere else.

Rima and her colleagues: They were a pleasure to relate to and an honor to get to know.

On our team, Jay was the one, along with Stephanie Tsang, who did a stellar job in understanding the complexities of the project, because you cannot dissociate form from purpose.

The challenge was: How do you take the township notion of NYU’s campus in New York and translate it into a site that is so different in terms of size and proximity to other services?

I always say that university people become separated from reality, but for a very good reason. And they’re smart enough to come back to reality when you describe it in a way that doesn’t deny or negate their aspirations.

Integrated into the role of the architect is the temptation to believe that you know more than they do. To a certain extent it’s true, but it’s also true that they know more than you do.

You need to be educated, and they need to be educated.

ARCHITECTS AS TRANSLATORS

فن العمارة

RAFAEL VIÑOLY: The real challenges of the project were not related to the design implications of dealing with a harsh climate. They were about creating a sense of proximity that is so typical of villages in the area.

How do you shape the lives of the students and faculty to be in a place where they can have privacy and, at the same time, a sense of that collective?

How do you try to accommodate programming for this extraordinary partnership between the West and the East?

JAY BARGMANN: We had to make sure that the project wasn't shaped only by the leaders of the University – both NYU New York and NYU Abu Dhabi – but also by the people who were actually participating in it.

What was brilliant is that the University started recruiting faculty and students before the building began. The educational core of the project was easy to follow because it was growing as quickly as the building was growing.

The plan had one particular challenge that is also a virtue, which is compactness. It's a site that under urban planning conditions in America would have to have been double the size.

But even if we'd had an endless site, we would still have the challenge – to create a sense of the core while trying to foster a new phase of universities, the dissolution of boundaries between disciplines that 35 years ago were completely separate but are now interactive.

Everything was like a discovery exercise.

RAFAEL VIÑOLY: From the architectural-cultural perspective, Hilary and Mariët are as responsible for the form of this project as I am. In architecture, we're translators. And Rima and Khaldoun were as much part of this process as people from NYU New York. It was very, very integrated.

In a normal campus, the academic site is here, the dorms are here, the sports are here. For this project, everything was geared toward making the design as fluid and interconnected as it could be.

JAY BARGMANN: The plan is three plazas, all connected with diagonal walkways that lead in and out of the campus.

NYU – and Hilary particularly – did not want you to be able to walk indoors from one end of the campus to the other. She said, "I don't want this to be a shopping mall," which is the first knee-jerk reaction on how to build: Let's put a roof over this thing and keep everybody indoors.

Instead, you have to go outside to get from one building to another, but you're always in a shaded space.

RAFAEL VIÑOLY: In this design, it's very clear that everybody's together and that you can go directly to your destination in many, many different ways. That's basically the soul of the project – the idea of a center spine with three buildings shaped like pluses, an interconnecting pathway with a colonnade, and water flowing alongside it.

Mariët had written an amazing essay on the evolution of the garden, which shows that you don't need to be a landscape architect or an architect to get things right. That's the kind of contribution she made.

LEARNING FROM NEW YORK

التعلم من نيويورك

HILARY BALLON: We had the great benefit of the knowledge base in New York.

For example, New York had established classroom standards: For a classroom that could accommodate X number of students, what were its features, how large ought it to be, what were its acoustic properties, what were its lighting properties? All these kinds of questions had to be answered.

We were also mindful not to simply replicate New York. It isn't as if the campus in New York is ideal in all of its attributes. And so we had to consider: What were the desirable improvements for learning?

There were extensive consultations with scientists about how the teaching and research labs ought to be, even though at the time these decisions were made, we hadn't yet hired the faculty to teach these labs, let alone undertake the research.

We needed a design that was highly flexible and reconfigurable, as research needs change.

The master plan was completed in 2009. One of the striking things is that although the design evolved considerably, the basic ideas of the master plan were strong and held throughout the design process.

“STACK EVERYTHING”

“تكديس كل شيء”

We also wanted to encourage people to bump into each other in the course of the day. The whole campus is designed with that singular intention, to encourage people to meet outside the classroom.

So, no cars. Everybody lives on campus. Everybody eats on campus. Most campuses, and certainly most liberal arts campuses in the United States, have these precincts where you have a classroom cluster, and then the student housing is over here, and freshmen live over here, and graduate students live there. And if faculty live on campus, they're in some other part.

What we did was take that model and stack everything. The faculty offices are on top of the classrooms, so a professor can't go to the office without seeing students in the classroom. Student housing is on top of the faculty offices, so you can't get to your dorm room without passing by or at least looking into where the faculty are. And graduate students live next to undergraduate students.

In a stack, you are obliged to run into people.

NYU and Mubadala had an idea – that through bricks and mortar we could change people's lives. The building is the resolution of the dialogue between the two parties.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: There is a layering of spaces that promotes social interaction, particularly with the inclusion of the grassy pedestrian High Line, which pays homage to New York City's High Line public space.

DIANE YU: It was a very unusual design for a college campus: Stacking the buildings with connectivity, outdoor walking on shaded pathways. The buildings embodied a different kind of community.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: The final design – with such thought, attention, and creativity – has a profile that is characteristic of many Arab cities and features influenced by its desert climate: It is low-rise with high density to bring people together, oriented in the direction of the sunrise and the prevailing wind to create maximum shading and natural ventilation, with private courtyards and intimate spaces for reflection.

“We also wanted to encourage people to bump into each other in the course of the day.”

“HOW DO YOU TURN THAT INTO A UNIVERSITY?”

“كيف نضع من ذلك جامعة؟”

JAY BARGMANN: We went through 100 interviews with people at NYU to understand how food worked, or how the student center worked, or how you pay your faculty.

We knew you would need 2,600 beds if everybody's living on campus, and we assumed it was going to be 95% residential – but how many two-bedroom, how many four-bedrooms?

When we had the program, we then had to convince everybody else that Hilary and I were right. We were peer reviewed by other architects, and we benchmarked ourselves against comparable universities.

We picked Columbia, which is in a dense urban environment. And then we would pick Brown, or Princeton, which are less dense. We would see how many square feet per student, how many classrooms per student, how many books in the library.

We knew we were going to be on Saadiyat Island, which is big and undeveloped. But we wanted to make the University as dense as we could. And so we benchmarked ourselves more against places like Georgetown or the urban campuses.





“العمل بأسلوب تعاوني”

“A COLLABORATIVE,
OPEN-BOOK
way”

JAY BARGMANN: A typical way of building in the Middle East is a process called design build. It's very rarely done in the United States – and almost never at the university level. You're hired by the contractor, and you have to deliver a high-quality product on time for a fixed amount of money the contractor has agreed to.

In this case, it was terrific. The price was already agreed. The design was somewhat vague, but there was a great deal of specificity in what rooms were to be provided, what kind of lighting, the acoustic criteria. There could have been very serious tension between the builder and the user or the builder and Mubadala, but there wasn't.

We were all in a trailer on site every day for three years. I had 200 engineers and architects in an office in the same building as the construction company and the subcontractors, who were all local. Every day, the librarians would come to look at the plans, or the performing arts center people would come to look at the theater or there would be a researcher to look at the lab plans.

We had a huge tent, in which we would first build a mockup. We would build a bathroom. We actual-

ly built a faculty apartment inside this big tent, as well as a student room, a classroom, a lab.

So the researcher could come in and see the actual lab, the lab bench, before it went into production in Italy and got shipped to the site. The students could see their bedrooms – how the bathroom and shower and toilet were laid out.

We encouraged it. To us, that's the insurance. If you can get the user to walk into the laboratory and say, “This bench is exactly what I want,” you don't have a problem when you deliver 100,000 square feet of lab and they walk in and say, “Oooh, I didn't know I was getting this.”

It was all done in such a collaborative, open-book way.

Abu Dhabi is a very international place. The laboratory case work was prefabricated north of Milan in Italy. The glass came from China. The precast concrete came from Dubai. The stone came from India. If you think about where Abu Dhabi is, it's the nexus of all those settings. So it was really a terrific place to work.

HILARY BALLON: The premise was that it would be a residential campus, a departure from the norm of the UAE universities, which are mostly commuter schools.

There were other dimensions of student life we would take for granted in an American context. I brought a group of Mubadala colleagues to Princeton to see the campus, in part because Rafael Viñoly had done two very significant buildings there, so it was an opportunity to see his work up close.

I remember their surprise and awe, in a very positive way, when they saw some of the dining halls

CREATING A common LANGUAGE النهج الموحد

and the athletic fields, which helped us to convey the wider range of activities we needed to support.

The campus would require undergraduates to live on campus. Then there were assumptions built into our planning about the percentage of graduate students and faculty who would live on campus as well. When you look at the campus today, the largest type of use is residential.

One of the successes of the design is the way our architects created a common language for the whole campus, but with enough variety to differentiate three very different kinds of housing – undergraduate, graduate, and faculty.





“OUR CAMPUS WOULD BE OPEN”: THE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

”نطمح إلى حرم جامعة مفتوح“:
مركز الفنون المسرحية

The arts center was such an aspirational aspect of the design – performance venues that were very beautiful and that we expected to be open to the public.

We worked closely with faculty at Tisch and Steinhardt – which was very difficult, because the faculty in New York were surrogates for a faculty who hadn’t yet been hired but would be responsible for delivering the programs in Abu Dhabi. Who knew what they would want, or how they would feel the curriculum needed to be developed? And who knew if what Tisch had, as a professional orientation, would be appropriate for our student body?

But we needed to start somewhere.

One of the premises from the outset was that our campus would be open – not a walled enclave.

JAY BARGMANN: The idea was that the public could come in, that there weren’t any gates.

HILARY BALLON: From Lincoln Center, we recruited a brilliant person, Bill Bragin, to develop the arts center’s public programming. That’s been a huge success.

In addition to the programs of the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute, our community outreach groups are constantly working with the local universities and organizations to bring them to campus.

It’s definitely happening.

“KEEPING UP WITH THE PACE OF THE PROJECT”

”مواكبة تطورات المشروع“

The challenge in the design process was in managing the expectations of our community. NYU was not the client. We didn’t hire the architect or the contractor. Our role was defined as end-user. And we were fortunate that the architect and our partners recognized that we had valuable information to share about how the campus ought to work.

But we didn’t have any contractual role in the process. I felt very strongly that one of the reasons we earned a seat at the table was because we kept disproving the assumption that we would be indecisive, constantly relitigate, be fuzzy-brained professors and not recognize the commercially driven deadlines of the process.

Keeping up with the pace of the project, making decisions in a timely way while drawing in the community: That was a difficult thing to manage, because as we’d bring in professors to look at the design of offices or classrooms, they would have many things to say.

Every party wanted more space – but the only way we could grant more space to one party was by taking it from another.

Those were some of the internal challenges.

“ABOUT CITY MAKING”: OPENING SAADIYAT

”تشكيل هوية المدينة“: افتتاح
حرم الجامعة في السعدييات

As we approached the completion of the campus and move-in date in 2014, there was a lot of apprehension about the isolation of Saadiyat. We would say, especially to the faculty, “You are not obliged to live there. You can live wherever you want.”

One of the pleasant surprises was how many faculty opted to live on campus and found it an appealing way of life. Even if not for the full duration of someone’s employment at NYU Abu Dhabi, it was a great place to start out as you’re getting to know the city, or when your children are young and you can take advantage of the day care center.

It has proven to be tremendously popular.

Ten years from now, it will be different again, because Saadiyat will have evolved considerably. I think we will find ourselves surrounded by urban fabric. There will be more natural connections – a transportation system that makes it easier to get to the main island.

When NYU first opened at Washington Square, it was north of the city’s main development. Before long, it was surrounded by New York City. I very much saw the building of NYU Abu Dhabi on Saadiyat Island as about city making. We would be the anchor institution in an entire neighborhood, potentially influencing the kind of development that happens around us. And we’re there for the long haul.

That’s the role universities often play in cities, as institutional anchors that are engines of development.

AL BLOOM: We moved to the Saadiyat campus with the graduation ceremony of our first class, four years after students had arrived.

MAY 2014: “WE FELL SHORT”

مايو 2014: “لم نحقق كل
أهدافنا”

JOHN SEXTON: On May 19, the Monday before the first graduation of a class from an American liberal arts college in the Middle East, I pick up *The New York Times*.

There on the front page is an article with a headline about the workers’ harsh conditions at NYU’s Abu Dhabi site.

JOHN BECKMAN: It was a really brutal story for two reasons. One, it was a big miss for us. Two, there are all these other institutions in the region – and exactly one, NYU, made an effort to try to improve the labor standards for the construction workers who worked on the campus.

We had set that out as a goal. We had very specific ways it was going to manifest itself – higher wages, better living conditions, the ability to hold onto passports, and, in theory, the reimbursement of recruitment fees.

We were the first and the only ones.

JOSH TAYLOR: When *The New York Times* story came out, at first there was just amazement and bewilderment. The thought was, “That can’t possibly be right.”

AL BLOOM: We should have known it would be very hard, but we did not know what happened until it actually occurred.

JOSH TAYLOR: The story hit about a half hour before I was boarding a plane to go to Abu Dhabi to help plan that first Commencement ceremony and put on the final touches.

MAY 20, 2014: STATEMENT FROM TAMKEEN, NYU ABU DHABI’S PARTNER

NYU Abu Dhabi, and its Abu Dhabi partner Tamkeen, have and do take any allegations of contractor violations of the labor monitoring and compliance program with the utmost seriousness. The safety and welfare of those who built and operate the NYU Abu Dhabi campus is of paramount importance. In the four years of construction of the NYU Abu Dhabi campus, the groundbreaking labor standards compliance monitoring regime has been vigorously applied. As a result, any and all identified violations have been successfully and appropriately rectified. A thorough investigation of the allegations revealed in *The New York Times* article was begun immediately following its publication on May 18, 2014. Once the investigation is complete, the results will be transparently reported, as has been the case in any allegation to date and in line with the ongoing reporting commitment of the project since its inception.

JOHN BECKMAN: Whether or not it was a direct report to us, we were responsible for it. We fell short. And that ended up being the story.

We apologized to anybody who didn’t get the benefits they were supposed to get. We said we were going to investigate it and find out what happened. And we said that people who didn’t get what they were supposed to get would be compensated.

JUNE 2014: AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

يونيو 2014: تحقيق مستقل

BOB BERNE: We didn’t realize until it was too late that not everything in the labor values agreement was being followed.

It disappointed us. And it disappointed our partners in Abu Dhabi, who thought things were at a different level.

Some of the ways we were criticized were correct. Many were totally incorrect and exaggerated.

We went in and did the Nardello investigation to get a sense of what the problems were.

JUNE 25, 2014: UPDATED STATEMENT FROM TAMKEEN

Further to Tamkeen’s statement of May 20, 2014:

Tamkeen has appointed Nardello & Co. to conduct a review into the allegations made in recent media reports regarding labor and compliance standards as outlined in the project’s Statement of Labor Values related to the construction of the NYU Abu Dhabi campus on Saadiyat Island..

Tamkeen and NYU Abu Dhabi take any allegations of violations of the labor monitoring and compliance program with the utmost seriousness. This appointment follows an international search for the best-qualified firm and consultation with our partner NYU Abu Dhabi. It underscores our joint and ongoing commitment to the safety and welfare of those who built and operate the NYU Abu Dhabi Saadiyat Campus.

APRIL 16, 2015: NYU-TAMKEEN JOINT STATEMENT ON NARDELLO & CO. REPORT

...We welcome the publication of Nardello & Co.’s report, which confirms that Tamkeen and NYU made good faith efforts to set and enforce standards that protected and benefited the substantial majority of the approximately 30,000 individuals who worked on the construction of the NYU Abu Dhabi campus. The report also acknowledges that the labor monitoring compliance program effectively and routinely identified and resolved issues of

contractor non-compliance.

The report also identifies that the organizations responsible for the project allowed a compliance gap to occur, which resulted in some subcontractors, employed by the project’s master contractor, falling outside of the project’s labor guidelines and compliance oversight. This gap affected workers servicing small and/or short-term subcontracts (approximately one-third of the total workforce), most of whom worked on the project during the final stages of construction.

That error – for which we take responsibility – was inconsistent with the project’s publicly stated commitment to ensure that all of those working on the construction of the NYUAD Saadiyat Campus would be covered by our standards and compliance-monitoring program.

Accordingly, we will provide payment to those workers who were not covered by the compliance-monitoring program to bring their compensation into line with what they should have received under our labor standards. NYU and Tamkeen will appoint an independent third party to implement this process, and we commit to ensuring that we will not allow such a compliance gap to occur in the future.

The report also found some remaining isolated cases of workers who, while covered by the project’s compliance regime, did not receive the full amount of wages they should have, and we are committed to rectifying those situations as well.

In addition, Nardello & Co. made a number of recommendations for the project, including on how standards are enforced, passport retention, and accommodation standards. These recommendations will be studied in depth and, where feasible, we intend to act on them...

JOSH TAYLOR: The worst of times was when we found out that our standards were not in force for about a third of those working on the construction site.

It was devastating.

It was even harder because we all felt such pride in what we thought we’d accomplished.

BOB BERNE: We isolated the problems. We identified how we’d fix them. We wouldn’t do it the same way again. But it was a tough period, because

many of the critics – even if they weren’t critics on the labor side – saw it as an opportunity to critique the whole operation. People thought that if that’s the way we’re going to operate, we shouldn’t do NYU Abu Dhabi at all.

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: The critics thought we shouldn’t be participating in any way, shape, or form. Even if we had good labor relations or the best in the area, it still wasn’t good enough.

There was a lot of angst about our being in that part of the world.

But given the strengths of our agreement, it was clear to me that it was much better to be in the country working with what we had and trying to improve the labor situation, whatever constraints there were, than to refuse to be there.

MAKING THOSE WORKERS WHOLE

تعويض العمال

BOB BERNE: We needed to admit we weren’t on top of it. We needed to admit it could be done better. And we needed to do what we could do with our partners to fix it for the people who were there.

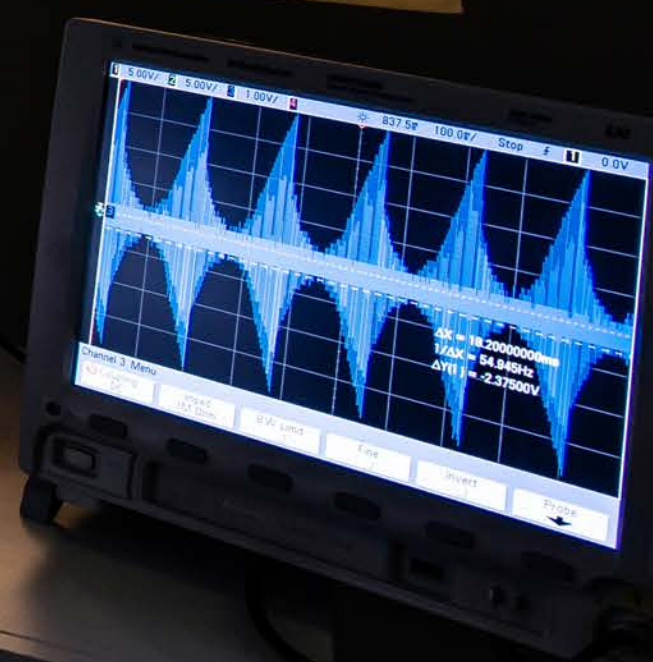
JOHN SEXTON: Our partners agreed immediately to make those people whole. We’d set up these standards and complied with them perfectly in a vast number of areas – but not all. And we made recompense in the areas where we didn’t.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: We did make incredible progress. We got the Statement of Labor Values done. We had all the contractual obligations. We had independent, professional monitors who were telling us things were okay.

I know there was a lot of heartbreak when *The New York Times* story came out and a lot of indignation at NYU. In terms of the health and safety record, we did well with both the Downtown Campus and the Saadiyat campus. But I have spent many hours thinking about how we could have done better to avoid that outcome.

Looking back, I will say this: The positive is that when it came out, our partners really took it on and said, “We must go and investigate this.”

We all took it seriously. And as a learning opportunity. But it was a setback.





living

UP

to

EXPECTATIONS

الارتقاء إلى مستوى
التوقعات

the first

COMMENCEMENT:

May 2014

حفل التخرج الأول: مايو 2014

PETER CHRISTENSEN: I cried my eyes out. In a way, these were all my kids. I knew them well. I knew their stories.

P.J. HENRY: Commencement was in the new campus, which was still being built. There was definitely an excitement. We were all very proud. It felt historic.

DEAN WILLIAMSON: It's very emotional to know that you saw it from a hole in the ground to people actually graduating on stage.

It's such an important day for everybody. For the parents who will cry and cry and cry. And the students who cry and cry and cry. And staff like me who cry and cry and cry.

AL BLOOM: Then we moved to the campus, architecturally splendid, using Arab as well as international elements. It's a spectacular place.





“A major ACCOMPLISHMENT”

“إنجاز عظيم”

HILARY BALLON: When I walked onto the campus for the first time, I was stunned. It was remarkable to see in three dimensions everything that had begun four years earlier on pieces of paper – to begin by pointing to properties on Saadiyat, to numbers in a space plan, and to see it realized.

It was a major accomplishment to have produced a campus with architectural distinction. The relationship of the public realm at plaza level to the very different, much more intimate quality of the High Line, the sense of connectivity, that there are so many different vistas afforded in the campus despite the common vocabulary, and the fact that although it was all designed by one architect, there still is a feeling of considerable variety on the campus: These things amazed me.

It took time for people to become comfortable on the campus, which is completely understandable. Whenever you move into a new space, you bring the patterns from the space you had been in. And it takes a little while to figure out what the new space offers and how you can optimize it.

DEAN WILLIAMSON: What I thought would happen was that faculty and staff would not want to live on campus. People told me: “No one’s going to want to be out in the middle of the desert.”

When we started in June 2014, we had a number of empty apartments, so we filled them with some staff and others.

It turns out that everybody wants to live on campus. Since everything’s full, it makes a huge, vibrant community.

DAVE McLAUGHLIN: I like to say that if you take any facility – whether it’s the library or the sports facility or the dormitories or the music facilities or the classroom facilities or the Research Institute’s building – it may not be the best in the world, but it’ll be in the top five of university buildings in the world for every one of them.

In the first year, there were a lot of startup problems, but by the second year, people realized what a magnificent campus it truly is.

DEAN WILLIAMSON: There’s the ground level that spreads out east and west, north and south. You can take any stairwell – there are many – or any elevator throughout the campus up to what we call the High Line. It’s all green and beautiful.

Even the way the buildings are situated to capture the desert winds so that there’s a constant breeze through the campus and the shading: Rafael Viñoly, along with Hilary Ballon, did a brilliant job with the architecture.

JAY BARGMANN: I’ve been there many times since it’s opened. It’s the most phenomenal thing to go into the dining hall and sit next to two people who are speaking German, and then three people who are speaking Chinese, and then behind you is somebody speaking Arabic.

And you’re just sitting there, taking in all this diversity within a radius of six feet around you.

BECOMING GLOBAL LEADERS: A SEMESTER ABROAD

إكتساب مهارات القيادة: الفصل الدراسي الخارجي

CAROL BRANDT: Our students are from so many places in the world. In coming to the United Arab Emirates as first-year students, they are starting a four-year program outside their home culture or cultures.

Even for the Emirati students, coming to a coeducational system, to an American-style university, is a navigation of cultural difference one would normally experience if one were abroad.

I've come to realize that the first part of our students' global education begins in Abu Dhabi on campus in the first three semesters, before they spend a semester abroad.

Creating common ground toward common good across difference is a daily endeavor. It's not an add-on. Every day, they contend with one another across values and belief systems in the dorms, on the athletic fields, in student government, and in the classroom. We provide a very supportive environment for exploring who they are and allowing them to grow that identity.

The core program and courses offer an important theoretical foundation for the next element of their global education, which is when students take a semester abroad and intensively immerse themselves in NYU Paris, or NYU London, or NYU New York.

The core courses – for example, on migration, on prejudice, on tolerance, on water – look at significant global issues. They raise questions that are very hard to answer from any one disciplinary perspective. They are there to baffle, to confound, to inspire, to get our students to think critically and question knowledge and sources of knowledge, and to feel comfortable generating knowledge themselves.

Many of our students come from countries where they are more passive recipients of knowledge. They'd be in large lecture classes in their home countries, not in small seminar-style core classes.

All of this is a wonderful preparation for when they

CAROL BRANDT
كارول برانت
NYU Abu Dhabi Vice Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor, Global Education and Outreach, since 2009

go abroad and, with that additional confidence and maturity, can think about: “When I'm in Paris, how does what I learned in my migration class apply to understanding the sociocultural, sociopolitical milieu of immigration and migration in France? How can I meet people who have been here for longer and shorter periods of time so that I can begin to hear their stories?”

Their studies abroad are giving them a local example of that big global issue. You then have students from Buenos Aires to Sydney thinking about migration, equipped to be independent learners.

Later, when they're in their professions, they might be able to draw on the frameworks they develop during the core program to have an insight into a particular problem, because they've had that course on migration.

We want our students to become global leaders and have a certain degree of cosmopolitanism and global competence.

In the best of all worlds, they become peacemakers and conflict resolvers, having the skills of mediation and sensitivity to other cultures and intercultural communication skills to understand different positions, different perspectives, and having the forms of expression – artistic or otherwise – to help people come together.

For NYU Abu Dhabi students, it's almost an everyday endeavor.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: What ended up happening was so dramatically different that I had to keep revising and revising my expectations. Now my ambitions are unending for NYU Abu Dhabi – to the sky.

In those first three years, we were getting the most spectacular students. They came, they believed, they had faith that we were going to deliver what

“Creating common ground toward common good across difference is a daily endeavor.”

we had promised. They showed up, these spectacular students who had a social conscience, who had extraordinary academic credentials.

Within the first three years, we had our first three Rhodes Scholars.

JOSH TAYLOR: I think back to the early meetings, the Abu Dhabi core meetings in the President's Conference Room in New York City, where John would lay out this vision.

From a communications perspective, I would beg him to stop. Because there was no way we were ever going to be able to do what he said we would do.

He'd say, “We are going to beat Harvard. We're going to beat Yale.”

And I was thinking, “Can we set the bar a little lower and still be really successful?”

I thought he was just making our life impossible.

Well, he was. And it took a lot of work. But he recognized that while people were going to say he was nuts, we were all going to try to make it happen. And if he didn't set the bar up there, it wasn't going to happen.

If we had picked a top-40 school to aspire to instead of a top-10 school, it still would have been the biggest success story in global higher education.

But that wasn't good enough. It had to be top 10. John would probably say top three. He was crazy enough to realize that, if he said it, he could help make it happen.

JOHN SEXTON: I thought we had a reasonable chance of failing when I realized that we had to get 100 of the best students in the world to go to a place they'd never heard of, instead of going to Harvard or Oxford or Beida University in China. That was a scary moment.

So yes, there have been challenges. I would be terrified to try to do this again.

“TO AIM HIGHER, TO DREAM BIGGER”

“الأحلام الكبيرة”

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: There are a number of milestones that will stay with me for a lifetime. One is when Al Bloom decided to spend his next 10 years building this amazing place, and give it all his energy, and Peggi, his wife, would also come with him and contribute to its success.

Another was those first Rhodes Scholars. Here was the unassailable academic excellence we had always imagined was possible – in years three and four, before our first graduating class.

It gave us the courage to aim higher, to dream bigger, to say, “This isn't going to take 50 or 100 years. We're going to be able to do it faster than we imagined, and then we can do more for our students and for our community.”

Another special milestone was when Bill Bragin left Lincoln Center in New York City for the performing arts center in Abu Dhabi because this is a really exciting place. He wanted to come and build up the artistic and cultural offerings, among the other great Abu Dhabi institutions that are doing that.

And one of the most affirming ones is Mariët Westermann, NYU Abu Dhabi's first provost who went on to great success at the Mellon Foundation. How incredible is it that one of the first people who helped build up the University came back to take it to its next phase. She thought it was so compelling, everything we thought it was going to be, and believed so strongly in it that she wanted to steer it into its next iteration.

I can't think of any bigger indicator of achievement than that.

“THAT’S WHY

I’m back”

“ولهذا عدت”

MARIËT WESTERMANN: I was the first employee of NYU Abu Dhabi – employee number one – when I went to work with our partners in Abu Dhabi on this mutual education project of building a kind of university that didn’t exist, very international, with the liberal arts at its core and a lot of NYU-driven research around it.

As I started the work of figuring out where the campus was going to be, what our curriculum might look like, how we would engage the faculty of NYU, how we would recruit our own faculty to NYU Abu Dhabi, I realized that I should move there. I came to love the place a lot.

I was made the first provost of NYU Abu Dhabi, working with our vice chancellor Al Bloom, helping to bring the institution to open in 2010.

At which point I had always told the University that I would go back to New York to have my family all together, since not everyone lived with us when we were in Abu Dhabi.

I was then recruited by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to oversee grant making and research, which I did with enormous enthusiasm for nine years. It was a fantastic opportunity to look at higher education, especially in the humanities and the arts, from a very broad perspective across the American landscape and indeed in many other countries.

In the process of doing that work, I got to see even better than I did while we were building NYU Abu Dhabi how unique it was – how unusual and mission-driven.

And so, although I had never expected to go back, when NYU began to talk with me in concert with our partners about becoming a vice chancellor to succeed Al Bloom, I realized after a few months that it was an extraordinary opportunity to lead an institution I had helped to imagine but never thought would be as successful as it has been.

That’s why I’m back.

RIMA AL MOKARRAB: An animating ethos for the kind of community we’re creating, the curriculum we’re teaching, the research we’re prioritizing is founded on the idea that problems don’t stay within national borders. We’re all really different, but we’re contending with some of the same issues, so how do you begin to tackle those?

The answer, we believe, is by engaging with your fellow citizens in the world from a place of understanding, of multidisciplinary analysis, a rigorous intellectual base through a global network.

That’s what the University is built to nurture and train you for, because the problems and issues of the future don’t live within a city or a state. They cross the world. Each citizen, each person has a responsibility to their country, and to the global citizenry they are a part of, to tackle these problems together and to work together to the best of their abilities.

If we can provide a framework, a community of people who are ready to do that and do it well, that will have been our great and good contribution to the world.

“DEEPLY integrated

SHEIKHA MARIAM: NYU Abu Dhabi has exceeded my expectations. It's not just the curriculum and the faculty and the administration, but the atmosphere you feel when you walk onto that campus, the diversity of the student body, the research that's being done, and the expertise that is available. It's all of these things.

I grew up at a time when your educational choices after high school were still relatively limited, especially if you wanted to stay in Abu Dhabi. So to walk onto the NYU campus now and see everything that is happening there, along with all the other options that are available to young people in our country today: It really does make you proud.

What's also important about NYUAD is how deeply it is integrated with the local community and how quickly that has happened. You can point to the partnerships and collaborations that have been established with entities from across the public, private, and third sectors of the UAE. You can look at the conferences and events that are hosted there, many of which are open to the public. People from outside are using the research labs. Professors are visiting from other places. The campus was an official venue during the Special Olympics World Games.

NYUAD is already adding real value, not just to its own students and faculty, and not just to Abu Dhabi, but to the whole country – which is really promising for the future.

WALEED AL MOKARRAB AL MUHAIRI: Remember, we're still growing. We still haven't hit full capacity yet – although that's secondary.

What is primary is that there are going to be a few hundred folks who graduate every year. They will be recognized over time as productive members of society, whether they're Emiratis or others. Ultimately, this institution will be woven into the fabric of Abu Dhabi and UAE society.

Fifteen years from now, people are going to say: Wow, this is such a great university. We're so happy about the dialogue, or the community efforts, or the type of thought leadership you would expect an institution like this to have, and the integration the University has with the overall community.

”جزء أساسي من
المجتمع المحلي“

WITH THE
LOCAL
COMMUNITY”

That tells you that NYUAD has been successful. We just want to make sure we help it along the journey.

MARIËT WESTERMANN: Most unexpected of all has been the success of our students. We knew we would recruit really unusual, talented, and interesting students. We didn't know just how successful they would be immediately upon graduation. We have very high rates of PhD placement. Our graduates go to the best programs in the world across disciplines. We now have 16 Rhodes Scholars out of eight graduating classes of about 1,700 students total, among other competitive honors. It's an extraordinary record for any university to build in 10 years.

WALEED AL MOKARRAB AL MUHAIRI: It's worked so well. The truth is, notwithstanding some of the hiccups we had and the challenges we faced, I think most people view NYUAD as something that, wow, in hindsight we're all so happy to have done it.

We've learned so much in terms of how to be a good partner, what it means to create something like this. Everybody is unbelievably impressed with the quality of our graduates, of the folks who have come to visit Abu Dhabi or to study here, a

good number of whom have now made Abu Dhabi their home, either as graduate students or people who have entered the workforce.

All of them are going to have a great feel about Abu Dhabi in a way that would not ordinarily have happened. So from my perspective, it's a huge, huge success.

KHALDOON AL MUBARAK: Ten years ago, none of us would have imagined what this institution has become. Maybe John and His Highness could see it. I knew it was going to become a good university, but now it is playing out as a world-class institution, with world-class faculty and students.

The true achievement is in the speed at which we have seen tangible results – this level of success this quickly. Just incredible.

If you had painted this picture 10-15 years ago, where we are now in 2020, I would not have believed it.

JOHN SEXTON: The whole project is built upon a kind of quixotic hope – that together we can create a community drawn from every sector of the world's society and send out these kids as leaders committed to a cosmopolitan, ecumenical world.

That's been my life – to try to tilt at the windmills that are necessary to get there.



THE students
SPEAK:
FIRST
graduating
class

من منظور الطلاب:
الدفعة الأولى

“Every single lecture, I learn some new fact that blows my mind.”

“I was passing by my high school principal's office one day, and he calls me in. ‘You'll never believe this,’ he said. ‘I just got off the phone with NYU, and they want us to nominate a student for their school in Abu Dhabi.’”

“I didn't really know what Abu Dhabi was.”

“As a historian, it's important for me to understand the place in which I'm living.”

“I got invited to the March Candidate Weekend and had to rush a passport to get here. I fell in love with the campus.”

“WE DIDN'T HAVE CLUBS, WE DIDN'T HAVE A STUDENT GOVERNMENT, SO WE HAD TO CREATE ALL OF THOSE.”

Voices of

May 25, 2014

NEWS RELEASE

New York University President John Sexton and NYU Abu Dhabi Vice Chancellor Alfred Bloom officiated at the University's inaugural Commencement ceremony in Abu Dhabi today. Some 140 students from 49 countries received their undergraduate honors at the ceremony.

“IT WAS AUGUST. I REMEMBER STEPPING OUT OF THE DUBAI AIRPORT. MY VERY FIRST IMPRESSION WAS, ‘IT IS REALLY HOT.’”

of

“I remember telling my mom, ‘Would it be fine with you if I just go and study in the United Arab Emirates?’”

“And she's like, ‘What?’”

“The thing I didn't expect is that it's not over – that it doesn't resolve. You can access all these worlds that you only catch a little glimpse of, and then it sends you out searching and searching, and searching, and searching, and searching.”

“What greater challenge is there than creating a university from scratch?”

THE FIRST GRADUATING CLASS

2014

أصوات من 2014: الدفعة الأولى

“IF I EVER NEED TO GO ON A WORLD TRIP AGAIN, I CAN COUCH SURF IN ALMOST EVERY COUNTRY.”

“You start building up a truly global mindset.”

“Everybody knows everybody on such intimate levels that it really feels like a family.”

“With the museums that are going to be opening on Saadiyat in the near future, I decided I wanted to help get the youth of Abu Dhabi interested in the arts.”

“I've created relationships that will last forever.”

“I like to think that I'm a little less stubborn now.”

“I’m displaying the lives of three Salvadoran artists and the artwork they produced during the civil war.”

“We, the graduates of the inaugural class, have the obligation to go out there and try to make a change.”

“It was so interesting to come to where I’d be meeting someone who’s on the other side of a world conflict.”

“We are teaching health education workshops in local Abu Dhabi schools.”

“IT WAS EXCITING AND SCARY AT THE SAME TIME, BECAUSE WE WERE PIONEERS.”

“It taught me how to be patient, tolerant.”

“I get really sentimental when I think about graduating, because I can’t imagine having all my classmates spread out through different places in the world.”

“I HAVE FLOWN OVER EVERY SINGLE CONTINENT.”

“I got out of the bubble I was raised in.”

“It’s a decision that relies only on us. What are we going to do with those tools?”

“I have been questioning myself in so many different ways.”

“The idea of being in the inaugural class: I thought it was amazing.”

“College couldn’t just be about learning a certain discipline. It had to be about pushing myself to understand a little bit more about my place in the world.”

“One of the things I’ve learned from my four years here is how to sleep with my eyes open. I have Foundations of Science to credit for that.”

“ON MY CANDIDATE WEEKEND IN JANUARY, WE HAD 42 STUDENTS FROM 39 COUNTRIES, SPEAKING 37 LANGUAGES.”



Afterword:

LOOKING AHEAD

الخاتمة: التطلع إلى الأمام

ANDY HAMILTON

أندي هاميلتون

As the president-in-waiting of NYU, I made my first visit to NYU Abu Dhabi with Bill and Marge Berkley, late in 2015. It was magnificent to see the integrity and sense of community the stunning campus creates. Of course, I had been hearing about the project well before then, as vice-chancellor of Oxford. I also got to know John Sexton at a number of international meetings, where he described his vision of what global education could be.

Then, as president, I saw the embodiment of the vision in the students I met. Young people drawn from a vast and rich array of countries, with different histories and traditions, political systems and cultures, religions and races and ethnicities – all brought together to this one place to live and work together. These exceptional young people are the true legacy of NYU Abu Dhabi.

None of it would have been possible without the amazing generosity of Abu Dhabi, whose government partners, Tamkeen, have been remarkable in achieving this goal.

Emblematic of NYU Abu Dhabi are the Candidate Weekends, which I love to attend. My wife, Jennie, and I have gone at least once to a Candidate Weekend each year I've been president. (I know John Sexton went to all of them, but we all know John is a superman – with zero impact from jetlag!)

Two elements stand out. One is that very special moment when prospective students stand up with an object they have brought and, in 15 seconds, talk about where they're from and the meaning of the object to them. It's a uniquely memorable way to introduce themselves to each other. But it's also wonderful for those of us who are watching – to see the staggering diversity of their backgrounds.

BILL BERKLEY

بيل بيركلي

Chair of the NYU Board of Trustees since October 2015 (former Vice Chair and member since 1995); Chair Emeritus of the Stern Executive Board (member since 1987); member of the NYU Langone Health Board of Trustees since 2007; BS, Stern, 1966

ANDY HAMILTON

أندي هاميلتون

President of NYU since 2016

The second part of the weekend that always stays in my mind is dinner under the stars in the desert – which begins with climbing up the sand dune. Jennie and I have done it every year. Certainly for my aging legs it gets harder and harder – which must be, I'm convinced, because that sand dune is getting taller. The students not only connect with all the faculty and staff in a mind-blowing setting, but are able to understand Abu Dhabi's journey to becoming a significant player on the world's financial, energy, industrial, and cultural and educational stage.

Now we are moving into the second decade. Through the initial academic leadership of Al Bloom and Fabio Piano, and the leadership of Mariët Westermann and our new provost, Arlie Petters, the entire world is seeing the speed with which a world-class educational institution – and increasingly, a research institution – has developed before our eyes, taking its place in the region as a foremost institution of higher learning.

In the past ten years, NYU and Abu Dhabi have created an extraordinary undergraduate institution. In the next ten, we'll see the strengthening of graduate education and particularly professional education. I look forward to watching NYU Abu Dhabi's academic standing grow and grow as it has a deepening impact on the life, culture, and economy of Abu Dhabi, the region, and the world.

BILL BERKLEY

بيل بيركلي

The concept of creating a campus in Abu Dhabi was first relayed to me at a board executive committee meeting, where we were briefed by Marty Lipton. I was immediately intrigued by the idea, but, as a board member, I also immediately began to assess the risks. Some concerns I had at the time included 1. Could we deliver the education we were promising to our students? 2. Could students drawn from all around the world acclimate to a cultural and social environment that would be very different in many ways from what they had experienced up to that point?

John and his team were able to lay out plans to meet those concerns. The team already had a recruitment strategy to attract students who could thrive in such a setting. They were intent on enlisting the best faculty to design top-notch courses. They had already thought of the risks and how to meet them, so I was convinced.

I have been to NYU Abu Dhabi no fewer than six times since the campus was established. I believe it has turned out extremely well – maybe better than we ever hoped. In retrospect, I think the reasons it has been so successful are: Recognizing that it was the right time, finding the right people to be in charge, and developing the right relationships. From my point of view, one can never overestimate how important relationships are. Starting at the top, from the initial meeting between John and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, and down the line with our key players at NYU and their counterparts in Abu Dhabi, what developed was trust. From my experience as a businessman, you can work out the best deal on paper, but if the trust is not there, the deal will not hold up. When trust is there, you are able to overcome challenges all along the way.

The process was not always perfect. Sometimes we made mistakes, and sometimes there were misunderstandings. But we could work them out because we trusted each other. The first five years of NYU Abu Dhabi were really the proof of concept. Ten years in, the campus is now part of NYU's architecture. It is fully integrated into how our students and faculty move around the globe. I think NYU Abu Dhabi can and should serve as an example to other institutions of how to create a global educational center. It incorporates the American plan for higher education with the cultural framework of the host nation. An enterprise such as this requires an enormous amount of work and planning, but it is well worth it.

