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Meeting at ITHRAA, Inward Investment and Export Development Agency

Cruise Ships, Mountains, and Deserts: An Oman Tourist Infrastructure

Joe P. Dunn, Charles A. Dana Professor, Converse College

I had the unique opportunity to participate in National Council trips to Oman twice within nine months as an Alwaleed bin Talal scholar. The circumstances of that I will simply characterize as my good fortune. The different mix of academics, and in the latter trip with four undergraduate students as well, made each National Council trip special. As with all such experiences, the second time provided new insights. The trips followed

much the same itinerary with the significant difference that the first trip was in late December and early January, when the weather was beautifully mild. The second trip in late August and early September was brutally hot. The most important reality, however, was that the heat played a role in a bout of dehydration that allowed me to experience the Omani medical system and my trip ended a bit prematurely.

(continued on page 2)



Grounds of the National Mosque

When I wrote about my initial trip in January in the last edition of *Newslines*, I focused on political and security topics, my general area of expertise. However, on both trips I spent considerable time talking with our incredible tour guide Badar Al Yazeedi and his associates about tourism in Oman. As a experienced traveler, I am always interested in that subject, and on a second visit to a different culture one absorbs much more than one does the first time. My second trip reaffirmed the beauty of Muscat and environs and I re-experienced the friendly openness of the country. Although I did not make it there on the second trip, I enjoyed perusing my colleagues' pictures on Facebook that demonstrated that the Dhofar region is indeed a different experience in the various seasons of the year. Back in the U.S., I envied my peers continuing travel.

My wife has heard much

about my two trips to Oman, so a return to the country with her is likely. We both enjoy cruise ships. On both visits I observed the cruise ships and their guests in Muscat; Oman is becoming a popular stop in the region. As one commentator explained though, what is necessary is that Oman develops the infrastructure that will encourage companies to schedule longer stops beyond a few hours in port for shopping in the souq. The tourism bureau projected around 152 cruise ships to visit the new Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat and a smaller number to dock in Khasab and Salalah during the winter cruise season from October 2016 to May 2017. But the dream is to become a homeport from which tourists would fly into and out and thus increase the time and money spent in the country.

Oman has significant potential in the tourist sector but it will take expansion of infrastructure

to maximize the possibilities. As I thought about what I wished to highlight in this piece, I decided that Oman's potential tourist industry would be a worthy focus. The country has much to offer but also some considerable obstacles to overcome especially for the European and American markets. The first issue is perception. Oman is impeccably safe. But few Americans have ever heard of the country and concern about turmoil in the region is a problem to overcome.

Oman's Vision 2020 plan emphasizes tourism as a significant area of diversification of the economy. Presently, approximately 75% of Oman's tourism comes from Arabian Gulf neighbors with Europe, particularly Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom, next. Oman projected in 2015 as much as a 10% increase in tourist numbers. Hotel and resort expansion is imperative. In the last couple of years, Westin,



Banquet at Royal Military Officers Club

St. Regis, W, and Ritz-Carlton Reserve have entered the market and resorts such as the 700-room Shati Salalah and the Alila Resort Salalah with 125 rooms and 46 residential units and 49 villas in the capital of Dhofar have been completed. On the coast southeast of Muscat, the 550-room Yiti Resort, with 550 rooms and 1100 residential units and villas, and the Saraya Bandar Jissah open in 2017. The tourism ministry expects to add 10,000 hotel rooms, from luxury resorts to budget hotels, by 2018, up from 315 hotels accounting for 16,691 rooms in Oman in mid-2016.

Other development projections include "a world-class multi-cluster 1.5 million square meter entertainment and leisure theme park," built by the Muscat National Development Company in Barka, on the coast north of Muscat, which will feature an integrated theme park, a wildlife and waterpark, an equestrian facility,

edutainment center, multiple hotels, and a residential zone and retail areas. A 13,000 square feet National Museum in Muscat is being planned.

Airport expansion also is necessary. Thirty airlines presently fly in and out of Muscat, and a new low-cost domestic airline has been commissioned alongside the national airline, Gulf Air. When the first phase of the Muscat International Airport expansion is completed in 2017, it will be increase capacity from 7 million to 12 million passengers annually, and when fully operational in subsequent years it can handle 36 million annual passengers. The Salalah Airport, being expanded to handle 3 million passengers (with hopes of 6 million eventually), will increase passenger volume significantly. Commercial airports are under development in Duqm and Sofar as well. In late December 2016 the Muscat International Air Traffic Control Center

opened as the largest and most advanced in the region.

The Oman National Railway project, the development of high speed railways for domestic transportation and commercial usage, is the largest construction project presently underway in the Sultanate. It will connect major urban centers to ports and to the GCC-wide railway project, which is projected for completion in 2018. Highway expansion to reduce traffic congestion and connect the urban areas on the coast to the inner country is also under development.

As one of the most successful Gulf countries in diversifying its economy from the very high concentration on petroleum, Oman has high hopes for ongoing economic development. Tourism is an important component for the future, and I can attest to the virtues of travel to the country. I haven't made it to Musandam in the far north yet, so I must return.

Seeking Religious Diversity in Oman

Jason Loscuito
Chaplain, Converse College

“We have appointed a law and a practice for every one of you. Had God willed, He would have made you a single community, but He wanted to test you regarding what has come to you. So compete with each other in doing good. Every one of you will return to God and He will inform you regarding the things about which you differed.”

Surat al-Ma’ida, 48

partnered with the Interfaith Youth Corp to provide trainings for our students and we recently received a grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation to create an Interfaith Studies Program. I felt that the trip to Oman would provide an opportunity to explore, observe, and reflect on a sect of Islam of which I had little knowledge.

There were numerous opportunities on the trip for me to learn about how Islam is practiced in Oman. The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat reflected the beauty of Islam through the architecture and use of space which reminds the visitor about the holiness of Allah. I asked questions about religious pluralism in Oman and our host, Badar Al Yazeedi, told me about the Christian, Buddhist and Hindu communities in Muscat and in other areas of Oman. I watched as Muslims answered the call to prayer in small towns, large cities like Salalah and next to a wadi on a Friday afternoon.

The visit to the tomb of the Prophet Job stands out as a moment of religious pluralism on the trip. The memorial site is located in Beit Zarbij which is 27 kilometers outside of Salalah. The site includes a small mosque in addition to the building where the tomb is located. Outside of that building is an ancient prayer area with prayer rugs lined up next to each other on the ground. We mingled among the pilgrims making their visit to this holy site, taking pictures



In the Dhofar Mountains

I have to confess that when I was invited on the Oman Al-waleed Fellowship Study Visit the first thing I did was pull out my smart phone and say, “Siri, where is Oman?” After locating Oman on the map, I talked with my wife and the Provost, to make sure that my absence at the beginning of the semester would not be too much of a burden on my family and my colleagues. Upon securing their blessing I made preparations for the trip.

During the time before our departure I met with a colleague who has spent time in the Arab world during both his military and academic career. Over lunch in the dining hall he answered my questions about Arab culture, politics, and Islam. His knowledge, in addition to the pre-departure

readings from the Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, provided me with a strong knowledge base of Oman in general and Ibadi Islam in particular. After our last meeting my colleague handed me a set of Islamic prayer beads which he had purchased in Iraq. He told me to take them with me on the trip for safe travel.

I was most excited about traveling to Oman so that I could learn more about Ibadi Islam and how the people of Oman practiced this sect of Islam. During my tenure at Converse College I have made an effort through the co-curricular programs that my office sponsors and through the courses I offer in the Religion Department to stress the importance of interfaith literacy and cooperation to our students, faculty and staff. We have

and looking for the footprint at the bottom of an ancient well that is said to have gushed forth after the prophet Job prayed to God. There is a small sign at the entrance to the site which describes the final resting place of the prophet Job and also makes the connection between the Book of Job in the Bible and the mention of Job in the Holy Quran four times. It also states

that the tenth chapter of Genesis mentions that Job was from Aouss which is located toward Dhofar. This visit to the Prophet Job’s memorial in particular and to Oman in general reminded me that while there are significant theological differences between Islam, Christianity and Judaism we also share the stories of our foremothers and forefathers in the faith. Beyond

that there are shared values such as hospitality, love of neighbor, the alleviation of poverty and our shared humanity which I saw and was the recipient of during our trip. I purchased a set of prayer beads in Nizwa and I carry them with me on occasion as a reminder to pray, but they also remind me of the beauty, hospitality and openness of the Omani people who I met.



Jason, Emily Holbert, Megan Madison, and friend

Converse Participates in the First Rabat (Morocco) International Model Arab League



Ribat University campus

Funded by a grant from the Converse College Golden Club (50th Year Reunion Class), seven senior and junior members of the Converse MAL delegation and three sponsors participated in the first Rabat (Morocco) International University MAL, hosted November 11-12, 2016, at the new French-language, European educational model *Universite Internationale*

de Rabat. Four U.S. institutions, who annually compete at the National Model — Converse (with a single delegation) and Georgia State University, University of Arkansas — Little Rock, and the U.S. Military Academy (all with multiple delegations) joined teams from Rabat International University and Al-Akawayn University. The facilities were outstanding, meals and

breaks were impressive, and the level of debate was excellent.

All the Converse delegates received individual awards in their respective councils and the delegation shared the Outstanding Delegation Award with Georgia State. As the U.S. sponsoring school, Georgia State provided the council chairs and assumed responsibility for training Moroccan students to fill those roles in succeeding years. However, when one Georgia State chair could not make the trip, Converse's Sidney Jones stepped into the role and won the Distinguished Chair Award.

Although the Model was the core purpose of our trip, the three-day excursion to southern Morocco at the end of the conference was the highlight. On Sunday participants traveled to Errachidia, Errissani, Erfoud, and the Mausoleum of Mly Ali Cherif, the founder of the early Alaouite Dynasty. Clearly the most popular event of the entire Moroccan visit was an evening in the desert at Merzouga complete with a camel ride into the dunes to watch the sunset from the top of the dunes. By our good fortune, this was the night of the Super Moon, the closest and largest shinning in the last fifty years. Words cannot capture the beauty of the evening. The painted sky of the sunset was stunning, the moon seemed to fill half the sky, and the stars appeared so close that one could reach up and touch them.

The night concluded with a camp fire, sub-Saharan drummers and dancers, and another wonderful Moroccan meal. Every meal on the trip (usually the traditional Moroccan tagine slow-



Desert Camp



Camel Ride to Top of Dunes

cooked blend of meat and vegetables) was incredible. We slept that evening in Bedouin tents, admittedly rather highline tourist style with Western amenities. The next morning some of the group trekked back to the dunes for the sunrise. From the top of the center's building, the rest of us observed morning life in the surrounding Bedouin encampments and village.

On Monday we traveled through the Toudgha Gorge, a magnificent sight that reminds one of a tour along the bottom of the Grand Canyon in the U.S. or Petra in Jordan, and we enjoyed another grand meal at the bottom of the Gorge. The following day, we visited Ouazazate and spent the night at a four-star hotel. After a day on the bus, a night in the desert, and another day on

the bus, a hot shower and bed were welcome. The buffet meal that evening was accompanied by live native Dkaykya music and dance. Ouazazate is the Hollywood of Morocco, where scores of movies have been filmed. The Museum of Cinema provided a touristy display of props from famous movies such as Ben Hur, Gladiator, Cleopatra, and more recent action films. Another stop at the Kasbah of Ait Ben Haddou afforded a hard climb to the top of the mountain, but the view justified the climb.

On the return to the north, we traversed the winding highway through the Atlas Mountains with colorful Fall foliage and snow at the top of the highest mountains. Amidst the huge evening carnival in Marrakech, we ate at a rooftop restaurant and then left for

Casablanca where we arrived in the middle of the night. After spending the early morning hours on a rather cold airport floor, we departed to Greenville/Spartanburg with stops in Paris and Detroit.

My thinking prior to the trip was that the generous funding had provided a one-time opportunity for a fortunate group of Converse students. However, after the trip, I concluded that this experience was too special for only one select number of students to enjoy. I don't know how this will be accomplished, but I intend to find a way to repeat the trip periodically.

We thank all the donors who made this trip possible, and we have the fondest admiration for our Moroccan hosts who provided a lifetime experience.

Qatar: A Cultural Experience

by Claudia Coffin, Converse College



Claudia in Doha

I stepped off the plane at the Hamad International Airport with statistics, percentages, and data in my head. Yet I had no idea what I was about to experience, no idea of the customs and culture in which I was about to be immersed. I spent the next week learning how Qatar is, rather than what Qatar is, and it changed my perspective entirely.

Upon first impression, Qatar is intimidatingly modern. The Doha skyline rises sleek and shining over the bay, while the surrounding land brims with opportunity. Each aspect of the capital's architecture is curated with a futuristic and rich taste. Under the relentless sun, cranes greet each other through the gaps in the skyline, signaling the many projects yet to come. As described by a digital society development representative from Qatar's Ministry of Transport and Communications, there are no historical landmarks or previous development to contend with the sheer potential Qatar carries for infrastructure. The excitement and creativity pulsing across numerous cutting-edge developments was clear as we toured the municipalities around Doha.

Qatar has an interestingly complex dynamic within its culture, government, and economy. With such diverse residents, the place is a true melting pot of Eastern culture. The monarchy in 2013 adopted Sheikh Tamim ibn Hamad Al Thani as its new emir, in a peaceful exchange of power from father to son. The money from oil and, more recently, liquefied natural gas, also plays a massive role in financing the ambitious projects Qatar is pursuing. The underlying theme is the freedom to start from scratch. Qatar,



Doha Skyline

in progressing so rapidly, recently, and richly, has flexibility in its development not afforded to most modern countries.

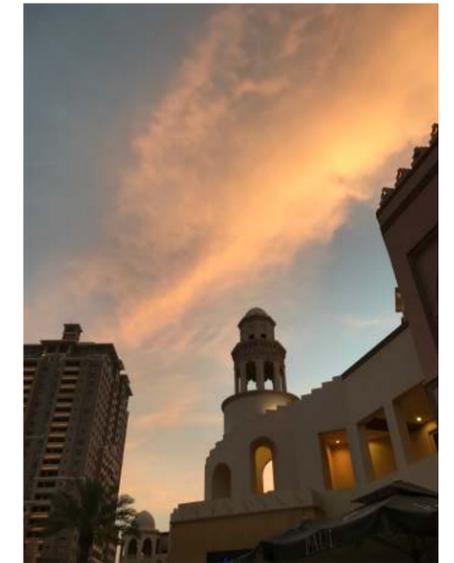
I knew that Qatar gained its independence in 1971. However, seeing the rise and effects of such sudden economic boom was mind-blowing. I had the opportunity to tour a museum exhibit devoted to the Oil and Gas industry, which featured such ancient relics as a phone with a rotary dial and a 12-inch screen box TV. It was then that I realized just how new everything in Doha was. Even a few decades ago, the country was unrecognizable to the gleaming hyperindustrialism it displays today. In fact, the skyline of the West Bay consisted of one pyramid-shaped hotel, which is now of course flanked by a thick- et of shining superstructures.

In preparation for the World Cup especially, transportation, entertainment, and hospitality are undergoing massive advancements. As a soccer player and fan myself, I was interested to learn about the preparation for the event. In 2010, Qatar won the bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the largest event in the most beloved sport in the world. Hordes

of people gathered in the Souq Waqif to hear the news and celebrate when the billet was presented. Then, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy was created to organize it. Billions of dollars in infrastructure and development will be required to successfully host the tournament. Expansion of hotels, a metro-system, a harbor transport system, and new roads are all under construction for 2022, as well as eight new stadiums. Above all, the anticipation is already palpable, myself no exception.

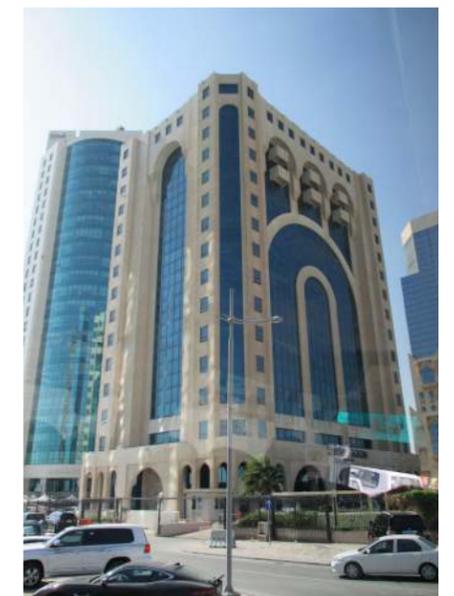
Hosting the World Cup is creating a boom in infrastructure and employment, again mostly of immigrant workers. Along with the workers, there will also be an influx of tourists to the region. I can only hope that the inevitable exchange of culture will reduce misconceptions about the Arab region on a worldwide scale, but only time will tell how large of an impact it will have.

Qatar is a beautiful country with massive changes underway. The Qataris pride themselves on their intellect, respect, and prosperity. I admire how, everywhere I went, Qataris honored their heritage while embracing the future



Evening Downtown

with open arms. Whether it be the call to prayer reverberating over the yachts moored to a man-made island, or the Souq Waqif's reconstruction to appear more "authentic," Qataris do their best to maintain a healthy balance between new and old. In this balance, the Qataris have achieved a vibrant, active beauty like I had never seen. I look forward to seeing their impact on the world in the coming years, because I know they have impacted me.



Thirty Years of Converse Participating in Model Arab League

by Joe P. Dunn

Converse Delegation at SERMAL



Converse began its participation in Model Arab League in 1988, four years after the program came under the auspices of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. Founded by Dr. Michael Nwanze at Georgetown University, the National Council soon became the sponsoring organization. When Converse participated for the first time, the model had moved to American University as host for a few years before returning to Georgetown. The program

was small at that time with only a single annual model and less than fifteen participating schools. None of the schools that participated in 1988 are still active in the National Model today. With thirty consecutive years at the National Model, Converse is, by decades, the senior institution, and I am by far the longest serving faculty advisor.

The growth of Model Arab League has been significant over the years with large expansion

in the last decade. The extensive network of regional college/university and high school models brings the opportunity to thousands of students across the country annually. For me the experience has been an adventure. Multifarious venues, including seven different hotels over my years; a multitude of hotel horror stories alternately funny, frustrating, and infuriating; more travel debacles than one wants to remember, including a "lost" van and being

JDC at NUMAL



snowed in during two blizzards; student mishaps and crises of every imaginable kind; and the constant personnel and policy changes of the National Council provide a myriad of stories for my memoirs. However, bottom line, MAL has been a central event of my academic career.

Converse has excelled. We registered our first overall best delegation award in our third year in 1990 and repeated again in 1994. In 1997 we launched a consecutive record of outstanding delegation awards that runs through the present year. In the early decades we fielded two delegations and both usually won overall top delegations; and for five consecutive years, we chaired all the councils. We participated in the Southeast Model (SERMAL) for the first time in 1997 and have won the top award every year since with our second delegation usually recording a delegation award as well. Converse became the permanent host of SERMAL in 1999.

SERMAL has grown dramatically, now hosting well over two hundred participants per year, and as director of this event, I have acquired another whole set of stories. For several years Converse participated in the Northeast Regional Model and in recent years opted for the more financially feasible Appalachian Regional Model.

The auxiliary benefits of MAL participation for my students and me have been considerable. Scores of Converse MAL participants have traveled under National Council sponsorship to the region; I have personally benefited from these excursions as well and have written about them over the years in this newsletter. All this would not have been possible without the long association with MAL.

As an historian I believe in an ongoing record of the past. With the flux of the National Council over the decades, I am not sure that an adequate accounting

of MAL has been systematically maintained. Thus in the 32 issues of this newsletter that I have published since 1998, I attempt to chronicle an annual history of the National Model and the Southeast Model, at least through the lens of our involvement. In that vein, this year's Converse experience follows.

Appalachian Regional Model (ARMAL) (November 4-6, 2016) at Hollins University.

Sending only its eleven first-year delegates, Converse represented Yemen, Iraq, and a couple of students as Bahrain at the small conference. With nine of the eleven participants receiving awards, the Yemen delegation was the Outstanding Delegation and the other two teams were cited as Distinguished Delegations.

Ribat International Model (November 11-12, 2016): See included article.

NEWS AND ARTICLES

Southeast Regional Model (SER-MAL) (March 10-12, 2017) at Converse College.

The opening ceremony included a panel of student and faculty participants on the latest National Council Qatar and Oman trips and brief remarks on the first Ribat International Model. With the illness of the designated Secretary General, Melanie Waddell, Converse 2012 graduate and a former programs associate with the National Council, stepped in to assume the Secretary General role. All the council chairs were from Converse. Sidney Jones (Joint Defense) and Melissa Rickenkaker (Social) shared the Best Chair Award and Jayda Means (Palestinian) was cited as Distinguished Chair.

Winning the Outstanding Delegation Award in five of the eight venues and Distinguished Delegate in the three others, Converse's Yemen delegation finished first over Georgia State University (Oman) and Converse's Iraq delegation finished third overall among the nineteen competing delegations. The other two delegations cited for awards were both new participant colleges—

Elon University (Jordan) and Roanoke College (Bahrain). Other participating colleges were Spartanburg Community College, The Citadel, Jacksonville State (two delegations), Hollins, Georgia Southern, Kennesaw State, and Wofford. Several usual participants, including Mercer, University of North Carolina-Pembroke, and Georgia Perimeter were unable to attend this year. In the high school division, participants were Spartanburg Day School, Southside Christian School, Byrnes High School, and Broome High School.

National Model (NUMAL) (March 30-April 2, 2017) at Georgetown University.

With twenty six participating institutions and over 400 delegates, the 2017 National Model was the largest ever. For Converse, it is the penultimate event of our competition year which this year included four MALs and International Model NATO, in all of which Converse took Outstanding Delegation awards. At the 2017 NUMAL, with awards in five of the councils, Converse (Yemen) received the Outstanding Delegation Award, but our perennial rival,

Northeastern (UAE) received the Overall Best Delegation citation. Distinguished Delegation Awards went to Georgia State (Oman), University of Utah (Bahrain), Miami University of Ohio (Palestine), John Carrol University (Mauritania), and the American University of Cairo (Sudan).

Other participating institutions included Northwestern, Western Kentucky, Mercer, USMA at West Point, University of Houston-Clear Lake, Adrian College, Shawnee State, Universite Laval, University of Houston-Honors College, George Mason, Texas State at San Marcos, Roger Williams, University of Arkansas-Little Rock, Brigham Young, Grand Valley State, George Washington, Kennesaw State, University of Nevada-Reno, and Hollins.

Farah Elharezy of George Mason University served as Secretary General. Converse held four council chair positions and one of them, Jessica Morgan (Heads of State), was voted by the faculty as the Best Chair. Jessica was also named as the 2018 Secretary General and Kathleen Langbehn from Converse will chair the Joint Defense Council in 2018.



Converse Delegation at NUMAL

LEARNING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Model Arab League Manual: A Guide to Preparation and Performance

By Philip A. D'Agati and Holly A. Jordan

Reviewed by Dr. Joe P. Dunn

As an earlier article explained, I have been involved in Model Arab League for thirty years. I have learned how it works and how to be successful in organizing and managing an MAL delegation. But as the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations program continues to expand nationally to include more and more schools at both the college and high school levels, many institutions and new advisors really do not know where to begin to be successful. This is the place.

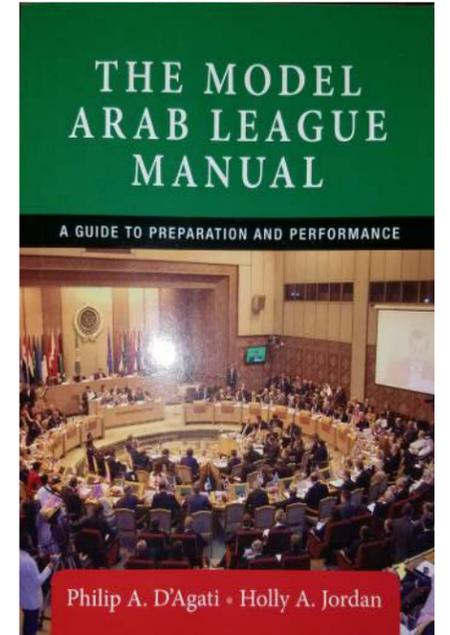
The authors bring to bear their considerable experience with two of the most successful national level programs to offer good advice and best practices. Dr. Phil D'Agati literally came up through the program from participation at the undergraduate and graduate levels on through his Ph.D. and served as the faculty sponsor to the Northeastern University delegation for many years. Dr. Holly A. Jordan was a participant as an undergraduate at Converse College, worked with high school models and helped other university delegations while obtaining her masters' degree at the University of Georgia, founded a delegation during her doctorate work at Virginia Technological University, and established a delegation at Roanoke College while teaching there.

Obviously, every participating institution has different

circumstances, challenges, problems, and opportunities. But this incredibly useful handbook provides an introduction to virtually everything one could want to know about the program. Its Table of Contents is so comprehensive that the best practice is simply to list it: (1) introduction to the League and the model league, (2) conference structure: councils, leadership, and guidelines, (3) representing a country, (4) rules of procedure, (5) research to represent a country, (6) conference leadership, including how to prepare a chair, (7) logistics for running a team, (8) the role of a faculty advisor at a conference, and (8) teaching a model Arab league course. Particularly valuable subtopics under the topics above include how to write resolutions, conduct practice sessions, develop effective team policies, and acquire funding.

Appendices include important historical documents, Model Arab League rules and regulations, samples of resolutions and other procedures, and examples of topic guides. A glossary and index are very helpful.

Throughout the book the authors inject "best practices" suggestions and other useful insights from their experience and ideas garnered from other programs. The best practices that they continually invoke from their experience with the



two top programs in the field will not fit for every institution, but much of what they suggest can be adapted or modified to each individual situation. The essential question is where does a model delegation fit in the individual college structure—is it a class, club, extracurricular activity, or an assembly of students for a single event. This issue significantly impacts the funding sources matter. The authors cannot answer the question for each school, but they do offer the advantages and disadvantages of the various possible structures and examples of what other participants have done.

Bottom line this quite attractive paperback should be acquired by every school involved or contemplating participating in Model Arab League. The authors' passion for their subject is evident and they have provided a great service.