

IBSAR

The Newsletter of the Initiative for Biodiversity Studies in Arid Regions Issue No. 4 April 2003

Editorial

How long does a multidisciplinary group last? And is it of value to the university?

This issue was discussed during the Annual Meeting of the Academic Council of Stanford University. (G. Kapitan. April 23, 2002. 'The vital role of multidisciplinary scholarship'. Stanford Report. Vol XXXIV, No. 26).

I have summarized in italic below what I believe were the main points raised in the meeting and included selected excerpts (in italic).

Multidisciplinarity was considered vital and Stanford University was found to be "poised to become a leader in multidisciplinary scholarship". As multidisciplinary research and teaching efforts were on the rise, the University was "superbly well positioned to take advantage of these efforts". It was pointed out that the University had several unique strengths that helped foster a multidisciplinary approach: It always encouraged collaboration across departmental and school lines. In addition, all of Stanford's disciplines are clustered onto one campus, making collaboration even easier.

Interdisciplinary programs were defended against any suggestions which indicated that they are academically lightweight and assumed that they divert faculty and students out of the core disciplines into new areas that have less intellectual depth and long-term impact. Instead, the belief was that when the focus was on those areas requiring in-depth research from multiple disciplines involving faculty

and students, new knowledge and new solutions are produced..

Of course I deliberately chose to only cover the 'rosy' aspects of multidisciplinary programs. But I have a reason for that: I believe that we can safely focus on the positive aspects as long as we do recognize that these programs will eventually become obsolete and will be replaced by new areas requiring new or different teams. In spite of their academic value, multidisciplinary programs often come with a cost to the University and may become a financial burden if there are no clear strategies to close or end them when they are no longer relevant. The solution, however, is not to discourage such programs by making it more difficult for them to start.

The picture is rosy because innovative approaches are readily possible. New multidisciplinary programs should be encouraged and guidelines should be developed jointly to ensure that these program are based on a flexible organization, that they generate the bulk of their funding needs, and that they establish indicators which will be used to determine the time when they should terminate themselves.

In other terms, the freedom to select one's partner should be encouraged, the 'union' should be supported, and the divorce papers should be agreed upon while planning for the wedding...

S. N. Talhouk

For your precious contribution to this invaluable newsletter, including the editorial section contact M. Daouk at me11@aub.edu.lb
Submission deadlines 20th of each month.

News

WASHINGTON, May 6, 2003 - The World Bank's Board of Directors approved a US\$5 million grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to help the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan improve the conservation of medicinal and herbal (M/H) plants and the livelihood of rural communities. The GEF's US\$5 million contribution has leveraged an additional US\$9.2 million in co-financing from the Government of Jordan and other international organizations for the World Bank/GEF project.

Meetings, contacts & Seminars

IBSAR meetings. IBSAR meetings are scheduled every 2 weeks starting February 27, 2003. (Schedule of speakers on the web)

Workshop: 'Biodiversity Opportunities in Lebanon'.



IBSAR launched the first of a series of workshops on Biodiversity Opportunities. The workshop, (held March 27th and 28th) was jointly coordinated with the Ministry of Environment and focused on issues of interest to local industries using natural

products. Mr. Joe Nasr, general manager of Avicenna "Avicenna Natural Products" (UK), and senior lecturer in herbal medicine at the University of Central Lancashire (UK) addressed different topics during these two days. Discussions included quality specifications, manufacturing requirements, potential customers for each type of product, identification of market niches regionally and internationally and the identification of plausible competitors for processed Lebanese products. Discussions between all participants highlighted the need to establish links between all stakeholders of this sector to be able to progress on a sound basis. A follow up workshop will be held this coming summer, with the objective of assessing the needs of each category of stakeholders and to initiate exchange of information and possible collaboration between the various stakeholders.



Coffee breaks during the workshop were enriched with natural products marketed by Atayeb el Reef, a cooperative supported by YMCA. The lunch walks between the Cafeteria in Ada Dodge Hall and the conference room gave an opportunity for the participants to enjoy the campus vegetation and exchange information on uses related to some of the exiting plants! *More on the web.*

Seminar of 10 April. R. Baalbaki and S. Talhouk gave a presentation entitled: "Will Bioprospection improve agriculture and conserve Biodiversity in Lebanon " in which they reviewed the role of bioprospection in relation to biodiversity conservation and agriculture development (Minutes of meeting and presentation on the web).

Seminar of 24 April. N. Hwalla gave a presentation entitled: "The anti-diabetic effects of *Salvia triloba* water effect on rats" in which she described the assays performed and relayed the results (Minutes of meeting and presentation on the web).

Contacts. A visitor from Iran, Mr. A. Gharib, who has an MSc in industrial chemistry and currently works in a private company in Iran has expressed interest in joining IBSAR and conducting research as a visiting scientist next year (on his own expenses). He is interested in natural dye products used in the textile industry. A. Gharib has met with several IBSAR members and visited the facilities at AUB (core Lab and Central Research Science lab).

Contacts. A meeting (16 April) was held between IBSAR members and five visitors (ecologists and landscape architects) from various institutions in Germany interested in biodiversity research. Y. Attallah established the initial contact. Youssef is a Lebanese student enrolled in Hohenheim University and interested in conducting a comparative study on the biodiversity of Mediterranean ecosystems by focusing on sites in Lebanon and California. After the meeting the visitors toured the core

lab and central research science lab as well as the Post Herbarium.

Contacts. Two lunch meetings (22 and 23 April 2003) were held between several IBSAR members and company representatives to discuss research needs of pharmaceutical industries and investigate ways to open channels with the private sector. The first lunch was held with 'Pharmaline' representatives (Dr. G. Sarraf, Vice President and A. Tohme, Scientific office manager) and the second with Holy Land (M. Traboulsi, General Manager, and L. Traboulsi, Marketing manager). (IBSAR Members who attended the lunches included E. Barbour, K. Bouhadir, N. Darwiche, S. Harakeh, F. Homaidan, N. Hwalla, H. Mohtaseb, B. Saab, M. Sabban, R. Talhouk, and S. Talhouk.

B. Vermey (consultant, accreditation project) kindly allowed IBSAR members to use her office in the Old Lee Observatory where these lunch meetings were held.

Fund Raising

Funds received!

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Proposals Submitted

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Publication from IBSAR

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The enthusiastic attendance to the workshop (March 27-28) was composed of 26 individuals (not all shown in picture) representing local industries, farmers, NGOs and the public sector including Ministries of environment, agriculture, industry, economy and trade.