

# CPS Newsletter

"Avenue for exchanging views, sharing expertise, and demonstrating teaching methodologies" Oman ELT Conference Chair, 2019

## INSIDE THE ISSUE

Director Address

P. 2

Are We Doing Enough CPD?

P. 4

ELT Conference

P. 6

Celestial Bodies book review  
by Dr. Mary Anne Mazboudi

P. 8

Celestial Bodies book review  
by: Duane Daniels

P. 10

SQU IELTS Centre

P. 13

Aviation Program

P. 16

The Confessions of an HOD

P. 18

Getting the most out of your  
CTS scores

P. 20

Modern Pre-Life Skills for University  
Students

P. 23

Student Support Services at CPS

P. 25



Dr. Badria Ibrahim Al Shihi  
Director for Centre for Preparatory Studies

### CPS MISSION:

The Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS) is committed to providing a high quality preparatory program that develops in the students the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for success in their respective colleges. It provides students with the necessary language, technical and life skills to enter, participate and thrive in their academic undergraduate programs.

# DIRECTOR ADDRESS



Dr. Badria Ibrahim Al Shihi  
Director for Centre for Preparatory Studies

The Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS) of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) was established in June 2016 as a result of a merger of the Language Centre, which had been in operation since 1986, and the departments of Math and IT which were serving in the Foundation Programme (FP) in affiliation with the College of Science. The newly acquired status of the centre involved a number of radical changes that led to restructuring the institution to bring together English language teaching at the foundation level with Math and IT, and ensure a smooth transition of the students to their credit courses.

The CPS went through a huge transition stage from the old administrative system to the new one during Fall 2016. During this transition period, a number of committees and units were formed to better meet the needs of the center, and a new structure came in to operation in Spring 2017. Since then, the newly established committees and units have been working towards the achievement of the CPS' vision and mission.



Many accomplishments have been recorded since the inception of CPS and I am going to summarize few of them here:

1. New CPS structure was implemented.
2. Job descriptions of all units, committees, course leaders, administrative positions were reviewed. In addition, unit heads, members of committees, standing members and course leaders were appointed.
3. New units such as the Quality Management Unit (QMU), Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) were established.
4. A number of new internal policies were finalized and implemented such as conference attendance, university day award procedure, class cover, peer observation, timetabling procedure, etc.
5. A new comprehensive headquarter for Assessment Unit (AU) was established. Also, a room was dedicated for QMU records.
6. General Foundation Program Portfolio required by Oman Authority of Academic Accreditation (OAAA) for quality audit was prepared and submitted (November 2018). A mock audit was conducted and an external examiner was hired to review the portfolio prior to submission.
7. All credit courses underwent revision by Central Curriculum Committee and AU. The Recommended changes were implemented and test banks were renewed. SQU Assessment Policy has been carefully implemented.
8. Recruitment Committee introduced online job application system and video interviews which proved effective and helped in recruiting more new staff with diverse backgrounds. TESOL Arabia trips were accordingly suspended. In 2018, total 177 interviews were conducted in comparison to 76 in 2017.
9. Professional Development Committee introduced online semester PD planning calendar and digital badges to help staff to be internationally recognized for their PD initiatives. Also, they introduced EDcamp to make PD more independent, autonomous and self-driven.

10. A contract was signed between CPS and the Oman Aviation Academy (OAA) to run a foundation course for their students that could be renewed after 10 years. Sustainable Development Unit is following up with OAA every semester to receive new batches. CPS is in the process of receiving the seventh batch of training pilots. First two batches have already graduated.

11. Promotion Committee was reactivated in 2018. A new CPS promotion document has been developed to fit with SQU academic promotion guidelines..

12. Management evaluation surveys are being developed. In 2019 Course leader evaluation process was established and reports were prepared for discussion and follow up. In 2020 more management positions will be surveyed and evaluated.



All these efforts plus others by many hard working committees and staff lead to a more organized and systematic running of CPS. This has encouraged more people to be on board to contribute to decision making and reducing probability of unintentional bias and error.

I am sure that our teams within CPS will be highly recognized and appreciated in SQU for their professionalism and dedication and I thank everyone who is helping in keeping the excellent and well-earned reputation of our center.

# ARE WE DOING ENOUGH CPD?

By: Jokha Al Hosni



**C**ontinuous professional development (CPD) has been in increasingly high demand. This is due to the unprecedented flow of information in the digital world in all fields and directions, which requires up-to-date professional knowledge and skills. CPD refers to “the process of tracking and documenting the skills, knowledge and experience that you gain both formally and informally as you work, beyond any initial training,” (Allen, 2009). CPD goes beyond attending traditional face-to face sessions, as it requires enhancing technical and non-technical, or soft skills through constant

implementation and reflection. I have recently read a short article by Jenkins about the significance of developing soft skills, particularly those related to interpersonal relationships. The author highlights an interesting fact when he says, “The Industrial Revolution required muscle from its workers. The Information Age traded muscle for mental capacity, which explains the rise of ‘knowledge workers’”. The future will require workers to be emotionally intelligent,” (Jenkins, 2019). I believe that CPD is a major means through which we can learn and develop these essential skills.





In the CPS community, based on data from Spring 2018 to Spring 2019, 51% of CPS staff attended PD sessions organized by the PD & AS committee during this period. Just 37% of this number, however, attended only 1-2 sessions. This is not good news, as it indicates that only a meager percentage of the staff is involved in the PD sessions offered by the centre. Although I believe participating in these sessions is very rewarding, particularly because we share the same students, interests and concerns, attending the CPS internal PD program is definitely not the only key indicator of staff involvement in CPD. Academic and non-academic staff can pursue PD online via free and paid MOOCs, (offered on popular platforms such as Coursera, FuturLearn, Khan Academy, edX and Udemy), Professional Learning Networks and learning communities on Google, Facebook and Twitter. They can also present at local and international conferences, develop course materials and publish journal articles.

## Are We Doing Enough CPD?

To answer this question, we need to reflect on the variety and frequency of our own PD practices. I am sharing with you the Interactive CPD Toolkit designed by jobs.ac.uk - the leading international job board for careers in academic, research, science and other professions. This e-book (<https://www.jobs.ac.uk/media/pdf/careers/resources/interactive-cpd-toolkit.pdf>) can help you reflect on your current PD activities so you can start pursuing better CPD paths. Also, the Centre for Educational Technology has recently launched a smart initiative for SQU staff to document their professional achievements online using the Injazi e-portfolio platform (<https://injazi.squ.edu.om/>). I encourage you to reflect on, document and maintain best CPD practices. I hope attending our internal PD program activities will always be on your agenda!

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# ELT Conference

By: Dr. Anfal Al Wahaibi



**B**uilding on the success of the previous Oman ELT Conference, which was held at Sultan Qaboos University, the conference has become the largest in scale, most extensive, spectacular event on English Learning and

Teaching in Oman, hosted by the Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS). The ELT Annual Conference is one of the highlights of the CPS calendar, giving our faculty members the chance to meet, share ideas, and receive key updates on strategy, statistics, and broader trends in ELT worldwide. It is a prestigious event organized with a motivation to provide an excellent international platform for the academics, teachers, researchers, and industrial participants in Oman and around the region to share their research findings with global experts. It mirrors a wide range of theoretical and practical issues and developments in the teaching world.

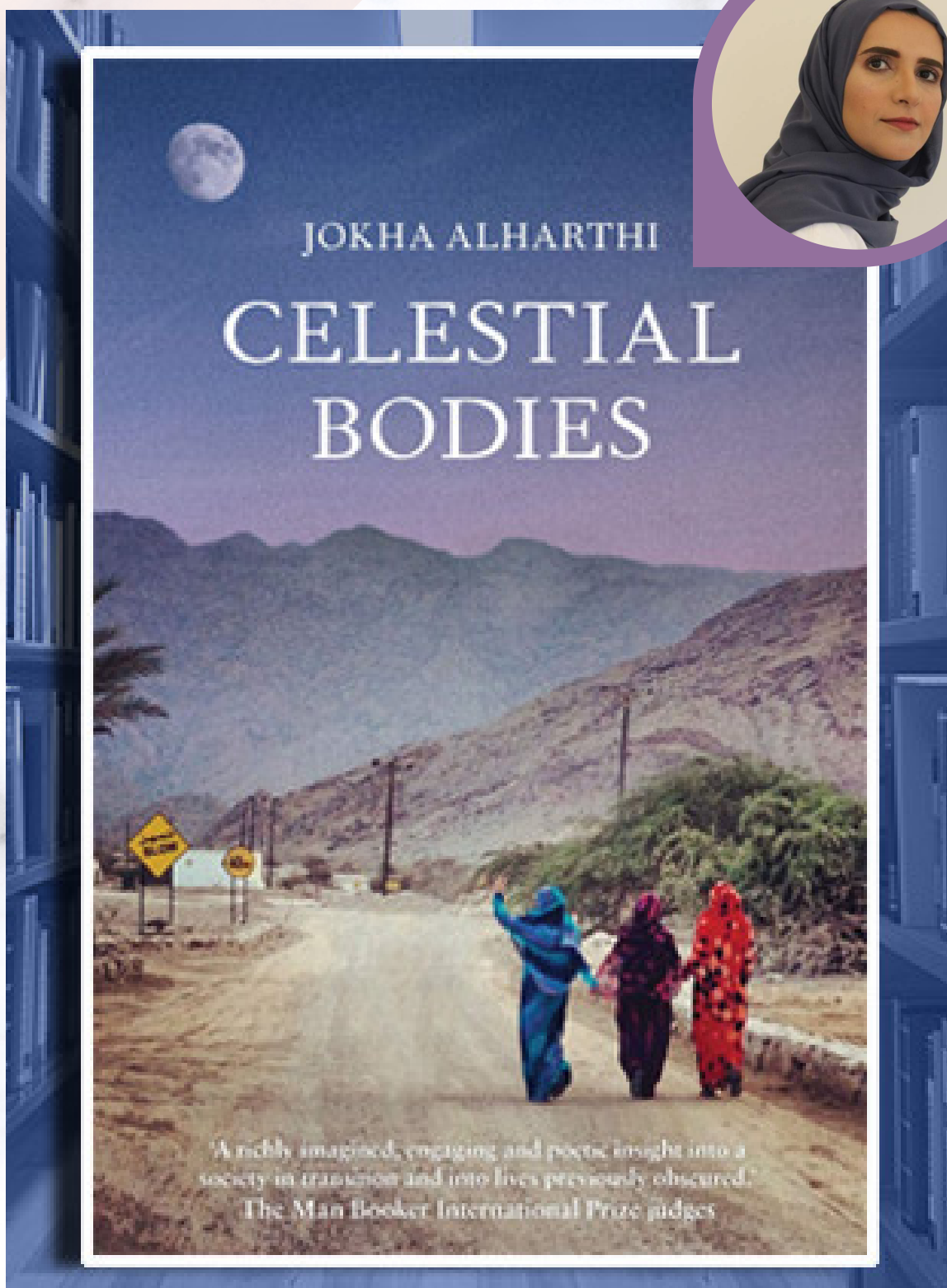
The conference in 2019 had record-breaking attendance with over 700 delegates (from more than 20 countries) attending and 150 CPS staff participating. They were joined by almost 100 students and staff volunteers who were of great help over the two days of the conference. During the two days, the conference brought together practitioners and specialists to explore different perspectives on the application of research findings into different practices. In addition to the distinguished keynote speakers, we were very fortunate to have over 100 dedicated researchers who presented their research at our conference, got involved in discussions, and contributed to the growth of knowledge and understanding on various ELT issues. There were so many engaging sessions and workshops with lots of hands-on activities.

The 19th ELT Conference was another success added to the records. The team was amazing! They were all very dedicated, helpful, and reliable. They were true professionals, and it was an honor working with each one of them. This year's 2020 conference is a reflection upon the 20-year experience that has been amassed by Oman ELT as well as a look into new and innovative ways of approaching teaching and learning as the field moves forward into the future. The title of the Oman 20th ELT conference is **"Building Upon the Past, Envisioning the Future."** The conference this year invites all educators to share their best practices, consider strategies to encourage engagement of all stakeholders in ELT, and promote new ways of looking at teaching and learning in ELT. The conference this year will introduce pre-conference certified workshops that will focus on two academic areas: Special Needs and Writing focus. The workshops are designed to increase awareness of the best practice, explore modern teaching techniques, and introduce analytical tools to maximize teaching and learning.

**I believe it  
will turn  
out to be  
a great  
success.**



# CELESTIAL BODIES



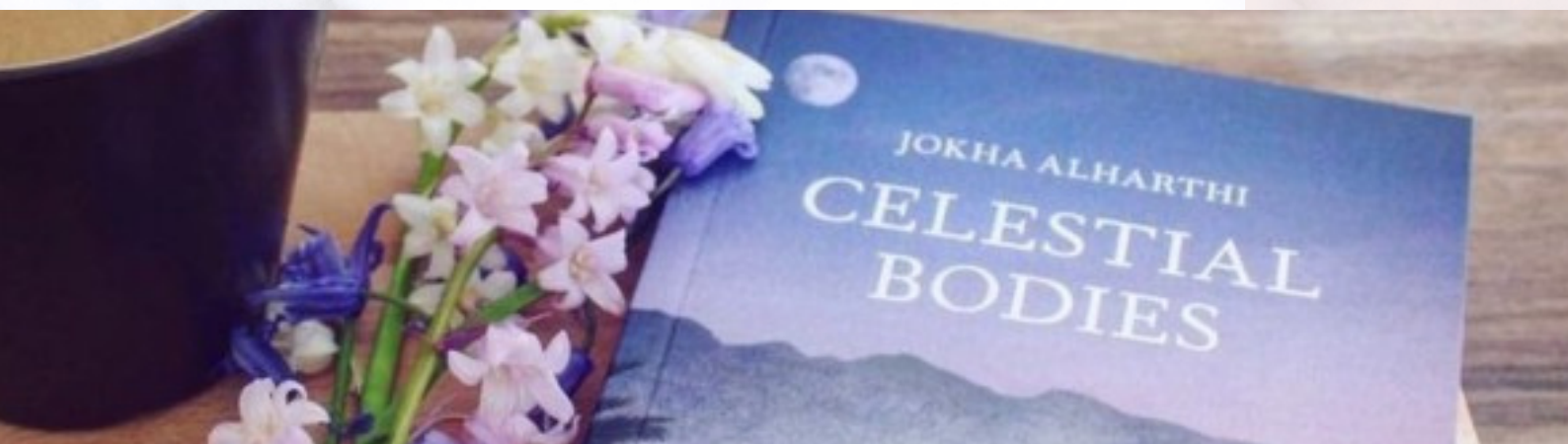
## CELESTIAL BODIES BOOK REVIEW

BY DR. MARY ANNE MAZBOUDI

**C**elestial Bodies is a translated book from the Arabic language, published in 2018, authored by Jokha Alharthi and translated by Marilyn Booth. It won the Man Booker International Prize 2019. Set in Oman, it encompasses history, culture and religion of Oman all at the same time, while describing the characters' personalities, life experiences, thoughts and actions in intricate detail. Dr. Alharthi weaves stories of past and present in clear and eloquent language and uncovers the characters' relationships to each other very well. One can also see the key role Muscat had as the economic centre of the country and how major historical events, such as the banning of slavery, also played a major role. One can also read about England's involvement in Maritime trade.

The reader might be familiar with some of settings in the book, like Sib, which gets mentioned a few times. The main characters are family members composed of the parents, Azzan and Salima and their three daughters, Mayya, Asma and Khawla. Mayya is in love with someone, but marries Abdullah, who never really knows if she loves him as much as he loves her. Through the chapters, the author reveals Abdullah's psyche and how he is still haunted by his father's treatment of him, and especially the time his father punished him for taking his gun without permission. The book lets the readers peek into the family life as the three sisters live together (before and after their marriages) and each sister has her own hopes and talents. The mother, Salima, also mourns loss in her family and remembers her loss at different stages in her life.

Dr. Alharthi doesn't hide the ugly realities of life in this book. She clearly explains the sorrows that Abdullah has with his son who was born with a learning disability and how that has affected family dynamics. He also struggled with not knowing how his mother died and heard several versions of a story. Another character brother also has a disability and she spends her life caring for him. One main character, Zarifa, has diabetes (Sikkari). The book explains how she acts despite her disease and how it progresses. Besides physical challenges, there are also emotional struggles that several characters suffer through and love doesn't come easy. The author describes Abdullah's struggles with not feeling loved. She also tells the story of London (his daughter) and her failed marriage, as well as the struggles that Mayya's sisters, Asma and Khawla experience in theirs. There are stories of marital infidelity, pain, shame, enduring adversity, and tragedy.



Family values and duties are held in high regard. Besides the parents' responsibilities towards their daughters, the stories show other demonstrations of dedication to family. Khawla raises her children and cares for them even though her husband is far away. She sees it as her obligation to stay dedicated to her husband even though he was in Canada for a decade. Najiya is dedicated to her brother's care and protects him fiercely as his only legal guardian. Another character is so dedicated to her husband that she refuses to remarry after her husband's early death. The book shows a twist on marriage when Asma is given the advice of fighting/hitting her husband on their wedding night so that she doesn't look easy. Some women are depicted as ambitious and intelligent. London became a doctor and has hopes of continuing in a specialization in Canada. Asma wants to study law. Najiya runs her father's business. Zarifa handles her husband's affairs after he died.



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The reader can clearly see how culture and religion operate in everyday life. Expressions like “may God give him mercy” when talking about someone who has passed away are common in Muslim cultures and are expressed in the book as well. Some words related to Islam are kept in Arabic, such as Muezzin. The Muezzin’s wife is clearly respected as well and is invited to social events. Moreover, her words of wisdom and scorn are heeded and respected. Incidents of uncleanness, such as a period of time after a woman has a baby, are part of the stories and explain not only the cultural aspect of society, but also its religious influence. The book includes moments of superstition and magic. One scene depicts a magic chant to break up a relationship and the influence of Jinn is talked about throughout the book. Independent of religion, the culture is low-context and characters can be found to say one thing and others are left to interpret what was said. One example of this was when Asma woke up on her wedding day and, because of the tone of her parents’ voices, felt that there was something wrong even though nobody said anything. *Celestial Bodies* also reveals how marriages were arranged and how the women and the parents of both bride and groom agree on whether the marriage takes place or not, even though on occasion, the woman is only informed of her wedding on the same day. It takes the reader through a wedding day or evening, what happens in the household on that day, how people celebrate, and what parents do. Finally, the love of Arabic literature and poetry can be seen in the main family, with the father and daughter Asma having memorized verses of poetry by several famous poets.




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This book depicts a short time in history but moves back into the past several times. It lets the reader feel what was happening at the time. Also this book has been reviewed as “disjointed at times and lacking character depth”

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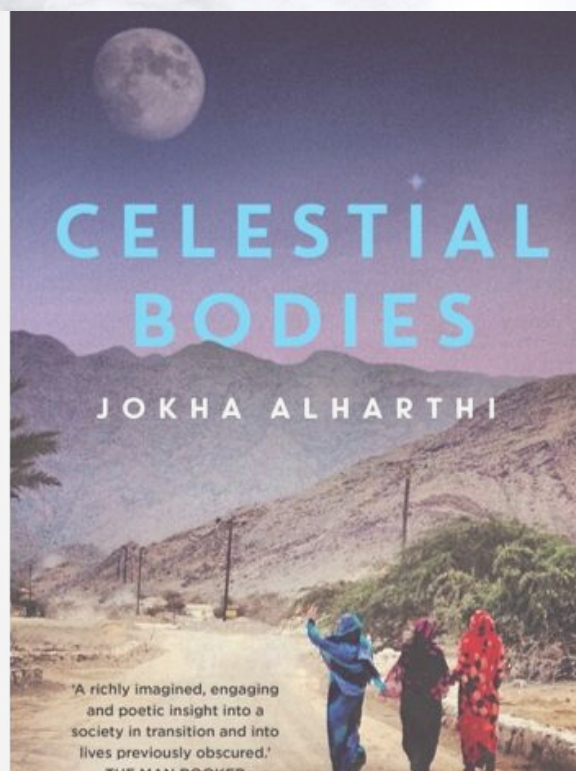
I believe the author intended to show, through a stream of consciousness and frame stories, how the characters develop. Their depth is shown in low-context and allows the reader to form an opinion of these characters through their thoughts and actions, as if reading between the lines. This is a reflection of the culture too, so even though it may take some patience to understand the development of the plot, it expresses a thought pattern that makes perhaps more sense when read in Arabic. Nevertheless, it still makes the point that the author is driving very clearly and that is to express the malaise joys and disappointment of the people in their daily life as framed by the culture, religion and history of Oman.



# Celestial Bodies

## by: Jokha Alharthi

Reviewed by: Duane Daniels



**Many** colleagues will be able to read Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* in Arabic as well as in translation, enviably bending their ear to the resonances of both languages. Reading her in English, her book is a page turner. Her prose is crisp with the use of declaratives. Alharthi also favours free indirect discourse over dialogue, uses first and third person narrative modes, and, where restraint within her characters falters, she uses poetry.

Her narrator presents the stories and histories of an extended Omani family and their slaves through episodic chapters. In each of these chapters named for the person who tells it, a character draws the reader into 'a sea of troubles' that nags at their lives. It is not surprising then that Alharthi's literary motif of 'finding a voice' offers her characters up in their fragile and defensive uncertainties. For all but one character – Abdallah, who speaks in first person – the narrator is omniscient, restoring to each the aptitude for expression through the safety of narrative.



## CELESTIAL BODIES BY: JOKHA ALHARTHI

Reviewed by: Duane Daniels

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Her uncle's house? No, what she really saw was the thin line where the high thick wall of that fortress met the sky.

How many years had plodded by as she leaned against the kitchen's outside wall, listening to the slave women quarrelling inside and the slave men's jokes and shouting on the other side, the children screaming and fighting in the courtyard.....

Many times since those days, she had tried to remember what her feelings were as she leant there slumped against the wall. Did she feel any sadness when she learned her father had died? Did she feel any longings for her mother? Was she angry? She didn't remember any of these things, though she tried. All she recalled was a sun so bright it hurt her eyes and the odour of kitchen smoke everywhere. She did remember one sensation especially well: hunger. [p.111]

..... People used to talk, back then, about the impact of the world war, the terrible inflation and all of the unrest among the tribes, but she did not understand what any of it had to do with the way her uncle's wife stared at her niece's hands and mouth as the family ate their main midday meal. [p.112]



It is important to be able to refer back to the family tree as the reader works through the web of generational relationships within the episodes. This deepens and widens in unexpected ways, not through linear narration but through free indirect discourse in which each character speaks for themselves, rather than being spoken for. Characters as family members, as slaves, as bold outliers, as celestial bodies and as magic in its injurious uses, fill in the story. The reader soon realizes that what appears to be throw-away lines and uncharted fears are all cues to how we read the stories. For most if not all the characters, conflict and loneliness are not necessarily softened and cracks are not papered over.

The questions and provocations that Alharthi raises would, I think, be shared by her readership the world over, rooted as we are in wanting to know if a writer represents cultural by-laws through their writing. This proposes a word of caution, however, in how much we expect a writer to 'speak for' their culture. Alharthi's translator, Booth, makes the point that Arab fiction is often viewed "as a road-map to the Arab world rather than first and foremost as art, as imaginative writing, pushing the boundaries of what can be thought and said." (Hawksley, 2019).

The 'road-map' view begs the question of why writers tell stories at all. We love stories because they are true, more so than because they are real. The 'real' world is happenstance but stories allow us to explore meaning. Here, for example, is Salima as she remembers herself in her uncle's house:



Alharthi assures us that we are invited to “look at Oman with an open mind and heart.” In other words, we are invited to listen to the many voices that course through the novel. The multiple stories or voices are interspersed with the first person narration of Abdallah. He is the sensitive shadow that stirs the surface of practical life. Perhaps because he tells his own story, unwillingly it seems, he is the one with whom the reader has a more discomfiting relationship:



“

....Returning home on those evenings when I had stolen away to hear the wails of Suwayd's oud, I would find Zayd's ghost looming in front of me all of a sudden, blocking my way. It was only when I saw Mayya, so sad and pretty and pale, bending over the sewing machine as if she were putting her arms around a tiny child, that I stopped seeing Zayd, whether in my dreams or on the dark path leading back to my father's house. [p.100]

Each story seems to pivot on the meaning of love or the lack of love. The changing domestic life of a family is presented through the evasive and often threatening nature of memory and the often searing nature of solitariness. Through her masterful and compelling story, Alharthi leaves us with a sobering view of how much we lean on writers to clear a path for us through what lies hidden from view.

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# SQU IELTS CENTRE

By: Kristina Bayburtsyan

What do we  
do in the  
SQU IELTS  
Centre ?

Apart from responding to all sorts of walk-in inquiries not related to IELTS, we serve the SQU community: students and alumni, employees and their family members by delivering the IELTS exam once a month. However, our clientele is not limited to the SQU students and staff. Those who take the IELTS preparation course organized by the Centre for Continuing Education in collaboration with the CPS Sustainable Development Committee are also eligible to take the exam in our centre. Our potential candidates get a discount and pay less than in the IELTS centres outside SQU. By the end of 2019, we will have administered the exam to around 600 candidates.



In March 2019, we became an OSM Centre. “What does this mean?” you may wonder. OSM stands for Onscreen Marking. “I still don’t get it”, you might say. In previous years, all scripts were marked in the centre by certified writing examiners and clerical markers. However, with the transition to the OSM system, all scripts are now scanned in the centre but marked outside the country in the marking hubs located in Britain and India. It was a huge shift in the centre staff and invigilators’ duties and responsibilities which required intensive training for all. These recent changes have resulted in the reduction of the number of examiners in the centre since only Speaking examiners are now required. Currently, we have six permanent speaking examiners with us.

In addition 2019 has been marked for our Centre as a year of improvement. This was a year in which we tried to improve our practices based on the recommendations of the external audit in 2018. As a result, the internal audit in 2019 has revealed a significant number of positive changes.

A few words about our future plans: by the end of the year we are planning to introduce computer-delivered IELTS along with a new online registration system (ORS). In October, we will be conducting an IELTS exam to 100 foundation students with the purpose of benchmarking, i.e. correlating the English exam scores with the IELTS bands.





# *CPS Social Committee*

SUMMARY OF EVENTS





## Desert Camp

**Date: 25th March, 2019**

**Venue: Safari Desert Camp, Bidiya, A'Sharqiyah**

Summary: CPS staff and their families took a road trip to Safari Desert Camp in A'Sharqiyah. It was an entertaining weekend filled with music, great food, conversation, and camel rides at sunset. It was a time to relax, unwind, and enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the desert.

## Sunset Dhow Cruise

**Date: 27th April, 2019**

**Venue: Marina Al Bandar**

Summary: CPS staff embarked on a two-hour sunset dhow cruise from Marina Al Bandar, Muscat. Refreshments were served as the crew led the dhow through the calm waters along the coast of Muscat and into the sunset. Stories were told, and memories were made.



## University Day

**Date: 2nd May, 2019**

**Venue: CPS (groundfloor)**

Summary: University Day was organized to commemorate the 19th anniversary of the momentous occasion of the visit of HM Sultan Qaboos to SQU. Attendees enjoyed a varied and exciting schedule of events, which included talented student musicians, informative exhibitions, an insightful panel discussion, and a quiz based on the history of SQU. The event culminated with the presentation of awards as a show of appreciation to the top performing members of CPS staff.

## CPS Iftar

**Date: 22nd May, 2019**

**Venue: Civil Aviation Club**

Summary: At the end of the second semester, CPS staff and their families enjoyed a delightful Iftar consisting of starters, a buffet dinner and dessert. The evening concluded with a farewell ceremony, in which departing colleagues gave a short speech and were presented with a certificate of appreciation and a gift. Attendees were then free to explore the charming grounds of the venue.



## Meet & Greet Potluck

**Date: 3rd September, 2019**

**Venue: CPS Seminar Room**

Summary: To mark the start of the 2019 academic year, and to extend a warm welcome to the new cohort of CPS teachers, a Meet & Greet Potluck was organized in a coordinated effort between the Social Committee and the Induction Committee. New teachers were invited to individually introduce themselves, in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, then presented with a custom made 'Welcome to CPS' cake. Later, new and returning teachers, as well as CPS administration, mingled and enjoyed a delectable selection of sweet and savoury dishes.





# AVIATION PROGRAM

By: Julia Davies

If you look on the notice board in the corridor outside Dr Badria's office, you will see an article from the Oman Observer dated July 2017, entitled "Aviation Academy to Come up in Suhar". The creation of this new academy, known as the Oman Aviation Academy (OAA), was to have big implications for the Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS). In April 2018, after almost 2 years of planning, CPS launched a brand new training program, specifically designed for student pilots enrolled with OAA. Instead of focusing on the academic skills and language content required to pursue a degree in one of the colleges, as in the General Foundation program (GFP), the Aviation Program is set up to help students prepare for ground school, flight training and a career in the aviation industry.

**So what does the Aviation Program look like, what is its role within CPS, and who are the students ?**



*Batch 1: Students selected to represent the OAA at the OCEC Higher Education Fair with their teacher Julia Davies.*



*Batch 3: Students in the Aviation classroom collaborating on their Term 3 Group Project to design an aviation-related website.*



*Students representing the Aviation Program during SQU Day at CPS*



*Batch 2: Students on a field trip to Oman Air Flight Training Centre*





The Aviation Program is administered by the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU), headed by Najat Al Kalbani, and is co-managed by Andrew Daniels and Julia Davies. Andrew co-authored the original course along with Georgina Janitzky, while Julia leads the courses and liaises with the OAA. The program comprises a total of 5 courses, taught over a 12-month period. The academic year is divided into three fourteen-week terms with rigorous end of term exams, but no midterms. Students undertake 3 levels of English (FPAV0100, 0200 and 0300) as well as Maths for Aviation (FPAM0400) and Physics for Aviation (FPAP0500). On successful completion of all 5 courses in our SQU Aviation English Program, the cadets then go on to Ground School, where they cover 14 subjects of aviation theory, followed by their flight training in order to receive their commercial pilot license. Batches 1 and 2 are being sent to Oxford Aviation Academy for the next stage of their training, but it is hoped that the OAA's training facility in Sohar will be finished and ready for subsequent batches to complete their pilot training in country.



The collaboration between SQU and the OAA has been set up for the next 10 years, with the OAA aiming to train 150 Arab pilots per year. Therefore, it is a program that will continue to see growth and development, with even higher numbers of students being recruited by the OAA. Sponsorship of students' tuition is currently provided by Oman Air, with PDO now also offering financial support for those applying for a career as a pilot. It is planned that the OAA will further open up recruitment to students from around the region who are able to self-sponsor, and so the Aviation Program will continue to provide revenue for the CPS.



The students are recruited nationally by the OAA, and must be between 17 and 19 years of age with above average scores in their high school qualifications. To be accepted onto the program, they should also typically achieve level 4 or above on our SQU placement test. They are then given aptitude and psychometric tests by OAA and must also pass panel interviews and a health check before the industry will accept them as future pilots. Once they sign a contract with the OAA, the successful candidates are sent to SQU to begin their language training. Batch size is usually around 15 members, predominantly male, but we currently have 3 female students enrolled with us. Programs can start at any time during the academic year (therefore they do not synchronize with the general foundation program semester system), and batches are staggered, entering the university typically 2 to 3 months apart, so the calendar is in constant flux. The inaugural batch completed their studies at SQU in May, 2019. Batch 2 is currently in its third trimester. Batch 3 returns for their second trimester at the start of the GFP Fall semester. We welcomed Batch 4 in July this year, and Batches 5 and 6 are currently under recruitment and will be joining us soon. The OAA received over 2000 applicants in its latest recruitment drive.

Currently, 50% of the funds paid to SQU by the OAA are allocated to the CPS budget. We are hoping that this positive economic trend will continue, as the national carrier, Oman Air, and other airlines in the region expand the number of pilots in employment.



# THE CONFESSIONS OF AN HOD

By: Andrew Daniels



What's it like to be an HOD? Here's the answer in two words: dreadful and wonderful. Probably both the best and the worst moments of my working life have been in my position as HOD. Ambivalence and ambiguity are what characterise life in this post.

You might think it is wonderful to be privy to so much of the goings-on at the CPS and, yes, there is a certain privilege to being able to see 'the bigger picture' and know about the machinations of the CPS; but sometimes I wish I weren't party to quite so much. However, as much as being an HOD allows me to be in the know, there are times when – by dint of position – I am equally left in the dark. At times, I think "Why was I the last to know?"

Every so often, I am witness to high drama and gossip. I sometimes feel as if I am on the set of an Egyptian soap-opera. You may then ask: how easy is it to keep all the hullabaloo to oneself? My job does require a high level of confidentiality and I respect that. But like most of us, I do need to get things off my chest and I have my confidants. But, sorry, I'm not naming them. However, I can assure you that most times, 'what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas'.

As much as I like the diverse nature of my job, it is its unpredictability that makes it so nerve-wracking. Many a morning I come to work with a determination to accomplish something that has been sitting over me for some time, only to have my good intention swept aside by an 'issue' that comes swirling through my door like the swathed villain in a melodrama, and like Hamlet's "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune", these 'villains' tend to come not in single shots but in waves.



The life of an HOD at the CPS is varied. Yes, there is the mundane, routine work of administration. Actually, such work can be quite therapeutic. A good day for me is being able to beaver mindlessly away without interruption. But, there are meetings to organise and others to attend. There are emails to respond to. Reports and minutes have to be written, read and filed. I love interviewing prospective employees and observing new teachers in the classroom- I learn so much from them. I enjoy going to teach my classes. I see the best of students and I see their worst; I also see the best of teachers, and sometimes....um, well... let me just say that teachers have their odd moments too. Perhaps my most bizarre request came from a teacher (long gone in every respect of the word) who, fed up with the crazy traffic at the Al Sahwa clock-tower roundabout, asked if I could arrange to have traffic lights installed there!

Managers have to decide when and when not to act. After all, problems can be resolved as much by well-considered inaction as by prompt decisiveness. To do, or not to do? That is a question I face daily. It's all very interesting. Exhausting too.

As a middle manager, I need to consider and reflect not only on the decisions and behaviours of others, but also on those of my own. This can be a curse as I try to subdue my over-active mind in the small hours of the morning. As a manager, I feel both apart and within. We managers are victims of gross generalisations (the 'they' you hear so much about by teachers when referring to 'CPS senior management'); yet, are managers not guilty of the same offense ('Those bothersome teachers!')

It has been in writing this piece for the new Newsletter that I have come to realise that this ambiguity in professional life is probably shared by all of us at the CPS. From the newest teacher to the Director, we are ALL - to a greater or lesser degree - middle managers, so I am sure that what I have written about of my life as an HOD resonates with you too. I do hope so - for any job that is both challenging and rewarding is one that is worth doing - and cherishing !!





# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR CTS SCORES

By: Andrew Daniels



**I** know what many of you are thinking: “There is nothing to be gained from CTS scores. They are a tool by which students punish me for being a ‘strict’ teacher and a means by which the CPS management comes to doubt my competence and dedication.” Yes, there are grounds for holding such opinions. However, if read carefully, CTS scores may provide you – the instructor and those with an assigned interest in teacher scores – with some useful feedback. This article aims to give all concerned a better understanding of what all those CTS numbers could mean.

First, let us begin with what the university administration considers a valid CTS score. To be valid, at least 30% of the total number of students in the section needs to respond to the survey – and there needs to be a minimum of 5 respondents. This means that if you have a large section of 24 students and only 6 students (25% of the total) answer the survey, the score is considered invalid. If you have a small section of 8 students and 50% of the students respond, this is still an invalid score because this represents only 4 students.

Although bigger sections provide more reliable data than smaller sections, other factors beyond the teacher’s control may come into play. It is possible that some students are less happy in very large sections and it may be more difficult for individual teachers to “provide helpful feedback about marked quizzes/ tests/ assignments” (one of the survey items) in larger sections than in smaller ones.

Next, let us consider what the overall scores mean. The summary of your results is presented in two parts: course items and teaching items. There are just three course items, and these may reflect only partially on the teacher as they concern course design, the instructional materials and laboratory (computer lab) sessions. These course scores are ignored by the CPS management in any teacher evaluation, but as a reflective teacher yourself, you may be able to get an idea about how well you delivered the course even if the students (and you) didn’t like the materials that were on offer.



It is the summary of the teaching items that is of greater interest to both administrators and teachers themselves since they are more personal. However, neither teachers nor administrators should ignore the fact that allocation to a particular course and timetable affects an instructor's ability to teach at his/her optimum. Not all courses and timetables are created equal.

Let us now consider the example teaching summary below:

Q15	Overall, this instructor is a good teacher.	0	0	3	19	0	22	100.0	3.86	3.43	3.49	3.46	
Summary								260	94.24	3.51	3.34	3.38	3.35

There are 6 pieces of data in the summary. Reading from left to right, they are:

1. the total number of item responses (not students) – 260 responses in this section to this survey.
2. the percentage of favourable responses – This means 94.24% of students 'agreed' or strongly agreed' with all the teaching statements. (Note: for the CPS, all items are expressed as positive statements).
3. the section score (3.51 here) out of a possible 4.0. This value is probably of most interest to you, as it is your score (or rather the students' score of your teaching).
4. the course score (3.34 / 4). This is the average score of all the sections / teachers on this course. In this example, this score represents the average score across the sections of FPES0603.
5. 3.38 (out of 4) is the departmental score. This is the average score for all the courses that fall within the remit of the Department of Sciences.
6. The last figure is the CPS score. The score of 3.35 / 4 represents the average for all CPS courses (English for Sciences, English for Humanities as well as Maths & IT).

So, how can we interpret these values? Firstly, the CPS would consider this teacher's score of 3.51 a good score. The students of this section rated this teacher quite a lot better than the average rating for other FPES0603 teachers. However, in this particular semester, the average for FPES0603 was marginally less than the average for all English for Sciences courses, while the Department as a whole performed slightly better than the average for all departments. Since we are dealing in averages, this means that about half of all teachers, courses and departments will be above the average and roughly half would be below. A score that is below average is not necessarily a bad score, and if one teacher's score is better than another, it does not mean that that teacher is a better teacher. It should be obvious to all that what makes a 'good teacher' is much more than a single CTS score.

Now, the figure that is perhaps of most interest to the individual teacher is the response value to Q15 ("Overall, this instructor is a good teacher"). This teacher scored 3.86 / 4 for this item. This is a key value when reviewing teachers' scores. Generally, a CTS score of 2.75 and above is considered 'acceptable'. A score less than this may provoke some concerns especially if repeated across several sections and/or semesters.

The scores for individual items can be revealing too. Although not shown in the above figure, in the case of this teacher, her particular strength seems to have been that she "was available during office hours" (3.77 – her highest individual score). If she was looking for an area to improve, it might be in stimulating "interest in the subject area of the course" (2.95 – her lowest). Of course, it will be up to the teacher to decide what this really means and what to do about it. Time for reflection is needed.

Besides having an invalid score, what else can go wrong with CTS scores? Some of the following are the most common issues:

1. If there is a consistent negative ('Strongly disagree') response amongst an otherwise positive set of responses from students, this may indicate that there is a student who 'clashed' with you – either in personality or on some particular issue. What is more likely though is that this student didn't realise that 1 and 2 are negative responses while 3 and 4 are positive. They have interpreted these numbers the other way around. This is quite a common problem and one we are unable to rectify when it becomes apparent (usually students realise their error after completing the survey and ask the teacher if they can redo it). For obvious reasons, there is no one in the university who can delete a student's response to allow them to do the survey again. However, if you are actually called into question, and you can show that there is an outlier in all the responses, you can draw the supervisor's attention to this. It is a good idea to review the survey with your students before you ask them to complete it and explain how it works.





2. There may be an influential character in the section who persuades all students to answer the survey negatively. It is difficult to produce evidence of this to a third party. However, if this is the case, the results of other sections that you teach within the same semester (or over several semesters), should be able to show that this survey result is an anomaly.

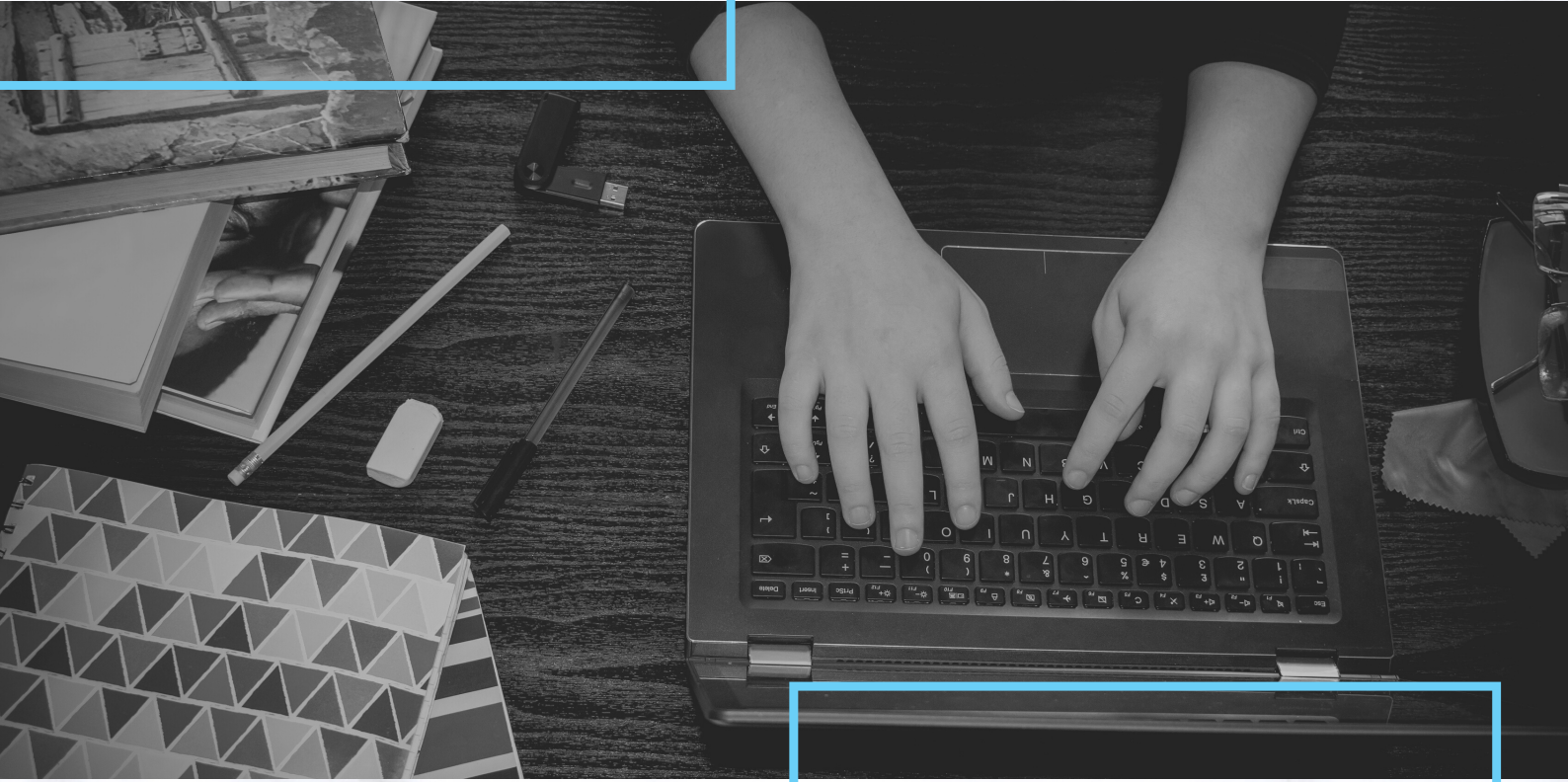
3. If you have a section that is particularly weak and that has a poor attitude, it is likely that you will be evaluated negatively by these students especially if you are strict on lateness, attendance and enforcing other university regulations. However, be assured that if your professionalism is evident in all that you do, this will be acknowledged. Management does understand that being a 'good' teacher doesn't always mean being a 'nice' teacher. It is also important to know that significant decisions about teachers – both positive and negative – are never based on CTS scores alone.

**CTS** scores are hardly likely to revolutionise your teaching. However, read with understanding and interpreted with care, you may gain some insights. The CTS is just one tool for thinking about your teaching. The truly reflective teacher will have several other means for growing professionally.



# Modern Pre-Life Skills for University Students

BY: DR. IBRAHIM DWEIB



Nowadays, having a university certificate is not enough to get a job. To get a job, you should be a prominent or key person in your major or a specialist, since hundreds or thousands could compete with you for the same position. So, you should have the right skills at the right time to secure it.

In any area of a profession, students should have life skills that help them to do their job properly, and those skills, could change from time to time depending on the working environment and developments in technology. When we come to university life, we can talk about four life skills that university students should have before they go ahead in their majors.

## 01 LANGUAGE SKILLS:

Typically, the teaching language used in schools will be the country's native language. But when it comes to university life, it depends on the country where the student is doing their study. Sometimes the student's country uses an international language like English to allow their students to compete locally and globally. So, students need the following language skills in whichever language used for teaching:

- **Reading:** to read the text, reference books, and articles for their courses
- **Speaking:** to give feedback, transfer the knowledge they have about the topic or topics of discussion, and communicate easily with their instructors and colleagues
- **Writing:** to write lectures notes, do exams, and write articles in an academic way
- **Listening:** to attend classes, seminars, workshops, labs, and understand what is happening around them

Those skills should be at a level where the student can access their major course material easily and in optimal time.



## 02 MATH SKILLS:

Math skills at university-level should allow students to gain and manage a range of life skills like critical thinking, problem solving, analytical thinking, quantitative reasoning, ability to manipulate precise and intricate ideas, construct logical arguments and expose illogical arguments, engage in communication and manage their time.



## 03 IT SKILLS:

IT skills are one of the major skills that students should have to help them to prepare their assignments and find related information in optimal time. These skills are:

- **Using machines in their working environments:** to easily manage their files and applications
- **Word processing:** to write their reports and articles professionally
- **Presentation application:** to prepare their presentations in a professional way applying all required criteria
- **Working sheets:** to organize their data, perform calculations, create charts and conduct analysis
- **Using the internet:** to search the net for useful information, use digital libraries and resources, portals, ELearning and Email
- **Digital security:** understanding viruses, spyware, worms, One Time Passcode (OTP), browsers security setting, hackers, and firewalls

These skills should be at a level to prepare professional assignments in optimal time, and also to reduce the cost of using technology.

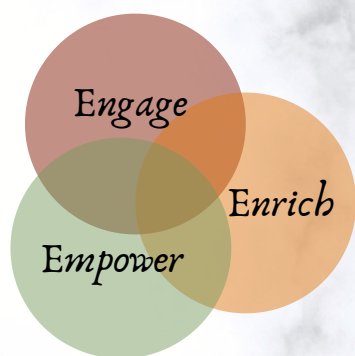
## 04 STUDY SKILLS:

With study skills, students become more effective learners. These skills include how to get organized to study, how to manage time to study, completing quizzes, exams, assignments and activities in time. Study skills include how to paraphrase and summarize, how to become a team worker, how to take notes, read and think critically, retain information, and develop techniques for concentrating.



The order of those skills will sometimes be essential, since language skills could act as a barrier between the student and gainful employment. While IT skills, would help students manage their time in grasping the other three skills through independent learning.





# STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AT CPS

Written by: Fayaz Ahmed



**CPS** supports FP students with a range of services that offer ample opportunities for skills-building and independent learning. The Student Support Unit is responsible for managing these resources under six key components that function seamlessly as a single entity with the shared objective of engaging our students and extending their learning beyond the four walls of the classroom space.



## Tutorial & Writing Centre

The CPS Writing Centre boasts a dedicated team of trained and experienced English teachers from CPS who run both one-on-one conferences and mini workshops for students from higher level FP courses. Teachers provide professional guidance and support in developing the students' academic writing and core research skills. The Writing Centre is not a Fix-It Shop with proof-reading and editing services. A typical thirty-minute WrC session mostly focuses on building the writer's self-confidence and encouraging autonomous writing through a reflective discussion of global issues. In Spring 19, the Writing Centre served over five hundred students with 866[IDM1] one-on-one appointments and 48 interactive workshops on annotation, paraphrasing and summarizing.

The Tutorial Centre, on the other hand, employs around fifty well-trained senior SQU students as peer tutors to provide personalized learning assistance to lower-level FP students in developing their English, Math and IT skills in a friendly, welcoming and informal setting. The peer tutors are chosen from a large number of applicants, based on their academic record and performance in the interview. The selected candidates attend an intensive face-to-face training module ahead of their first semester as tutors.



They then go on to complete a number of tasks which are built into a comprehensive mentoring cycle, ranging from observation of experienced tutors to receiving detailed feedback on a self-recorded session. The Tutorial Centre also recruits a number of international students every semester who work as volunteers. Their exclusive sessions help in developing oral fluency and presentation skills. The Tutorial Centre conducted 2623 one-on-one tutorials last semester including 1945 English appointments, reflecting its ever-growing popularity and continued commitment to excellence.

The Writing and Tutorial Centre operates in a shared space next to the CPS library and uses a highly sophisticated booking portal called WCONLINE that allows students to book their appointments with ease.





## ECA & Self-Access Centre



ECA organizes a wide gamut of fun and engaging extra-curricular activities, including weekly clubs, language workshops, special presentations by guest speakers and several competitive events, with the aim of developing our students' communication, leadership and social skills while offering them an ideal platform to showcase their talent and creativity. ECA carried its new-found momentum into Spring 19, witnessing a slew of fresh initiatives and significant milestones with 914 students having attended various events and activities. Some of the popular clubs offered during the semester included Games Debating, Science News, Spelling, Film and Reading Club. Some of the special events held during the semester were World Book Day celebrations, a team vocabulary competition in two phases and an English music concert. The Self-Access Centre is a resource hub that provides high-quality language learning materials in both conventional and digital formats to foster independent learning. Students can choose from a variety of level-based resources to practice, review and consolidate what they have already learned, at their own pace.

## CPS Library & M-Reader

CPS Library has over 16,000 graded readers across multiple levels for students to browse and borrow to meet their M-Reader requirement. The library also provides a quiet and comfortable space with fifteen computers that students can use for their course work and M-Reader quizzes.

M-Reader is a web-based application that promotes extensive reading and has been an integral part of the FP formative assessment program. It allows students to take online quizzes on a wide variety of graded readers to meet their level-specific word goals.

Student support services offered by CPS continue to play a unique role in an otherwise grade-centred setting with their consistent focus on voluntary learning and real-world skills. These services have appealed to a much wider audience across the SQU campus in recent years, offering a truly liberating experience of education that, in WB Yeats' memorable words, is not just 'the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire'.



## **Acknowledgement**

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**Anfal Alwahaibi**

**Central Research & Conference Committee | Standing Member**

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