

Synopsis of interview with Dr. Charles Bowman.
March 19, 2008

Early 2002, TAMU approached by Qatar Foundation to consider starting a program at Education City.

Summer 2002, TAMU team visited Doha and recommended pursuing the opportunity. A change in leadership (Ray Bowen stepped down, Bob Gates took over, appointed David Pryor as Provost.)

Dr. Pryor took over the project, started up a small planning group, asked Dr. Bowman to participate in the planning study. Involved from March 2002 – 2008 (still member of

Mark Weichold, Rick Gardeno (sp?), Emily Ashworth, Dean of Engineering; called themselves the “Gang of Four” Drafted a letter agreement – an MoU – to undertake studying the feasibility of starting a campus. Got roughly \$1million to cover cost of trips and time. Was asked by Pryor to work 1/4 time for 3 months, but ended up working fulltime for 9 months.

November 2002, team came to Doha for signing with Sheikha Mozah. Colleges of Engineering, Liberal Arts and Science involved, along with Geology and Education (for Kinesiology.) Started the internal negotiations to determine how it could be done. Formed a curriculum committee.

Spring 2003, Qatar Foundation wanted a first class to start in Sept 2003. Team drafted a ‘how-to’ document to accomplish the goal. Late April, last substantive meeting with Qatar Foundation prior to finalizing the agreement. “Fun” team to work with at that time, grew to nine or ten persons.

Opportunity to run TAMU flag up the mast, succeed with the fundamental mission, belief in TAMU being more able to accomplish the programs than any other.

Got support and guidance from Dr. Gates.

“We will deliver the TAMU engineering curriculum, produce well-educated young students and award them a TAMU degree. Qatar Foundation will pay for it.” Qatar Foundation upheld their end of the bargain, and TAMU graduated the first two students in December 2007.

Formal agreement signed May 25, 2003 with Sheikha Mozah. 105 days later, 7 faculty, 15 staff, 29 students enrolled. Began with freshman courses. Two teams to handle admissions process in June and July. Meanwhile, Dr. Bowman hired faculty, reviewing candidates put up by the colleges, hired Dr. Holste, brought Joe Estrada in as head of admissions. Deborah Wright, Finance came over for six weeks, opened bank accounts, followed by Lallah Howard, Human Resources person found. Decided on skill sets, then found the people. “Dig in there, and do anything you can...”

Three of the Gang of Four lived overseas, and Mark Weichold had traveled extensively. Lots of overseas experience. Oil industry people advised on expat benefits packages. Everyone from the first team stayed for the second year.

Some of the returning people went back to much better jobs.

Pretty spot on for faculty hires, but in working out the 5 year plan for support staff was harder, because hard to understand how many people are in CS doing that kind of support work.

Tried to not push too much of the Aggie tradition, so the Qatar students could develop some of their own customs.

Changing role?

Should have stopped after May 2003, Pryor asked [Bowman] to be interim Dean.

Accessible via email in CS as interim Dean, seven days a week. Dr. Holste full time in Qatar as head onsite.

After Dean appointed, [Bowman] has served on Joint Advisory Board as one of three directors. March 2006, asked to come in on research agreement by Pryor. Loaned Carol Cantrell from VP's office as numbers expert. Came over, spent a few days with Qatar Foundation. About a month later, change of campus leadership, asked again to be interim Dean again, in LAS building. Still commuting from CS, but spent more time in Qatar. In role until first of January 2007, when Mark Weichold arrived as Dean.

"An offer he couldn't refuse" because he was the person who was available, could hit the ground running, and knew all the people. Great satisfaction in being able to make a contribution.

Vision of Education City?

"Vision had some iterations to it." Qatar Foundation had made a list of various disciplines: engineering, medical. Had made several passes at finding institutions that could offer all the programs they wanted, and couldn't find a single institution with all the programs they wanted. The big holdup was petroleum engineering, offered by only 18 schools in the US. Qatar Foundation finally settled on the model on targeting specific schools for specific programs. Some weren't interested, some were, some declined the opportunity and now regret it.

Villa #7 was the first home of the College: 3 bedroom villa with 11 people officed there. Red sign was on the wall out front is one of the historic artifacts. Moved one very hot August day, moved ourselves into the [Cornell] building. Things were a little better in the medical building.

One story about the medical building. Has raised floor throughout the building. Cornell people not always cooperative when TAMU needed to make IT connections. Mark Ridgway would crawl under the raised floor and make the connections without the Cornell knowing. (Tall, real skinny guy crawling under the floor at night) Pioneering spirit.

People had to do a lot of things for themselves. Qatar Foundation would've like to but don't always have the skill sets needed to do it for the programs. People need to be independent; can't afford to have anything go wrong.

[Bowman] Never lived in Middle East: lived in Europe, Australia, Venezuela, but not the Middle East. Knew the culture would be different, but also that some things would be the same. Not a confrontational people. Think it's worked well. Hired an outside company for cultural training, required everyone coming over to go through 2 day cultural, sensitivity training to learn social and cultural mores. Tried to prepare people, give them support in community and living.

Offered everyone a visit trip first, call it absolute imperative to minimize mistakes. Money very well invested. Had a lot of good ambassadors go back.

First time I ever met the Emir, standing in the back over near the green spine, standing with Mike Kemp. Walking across the sand was Sheikha Mozah and with her, the Emir. Just one security guy walking behind them. Introduced the Emir, shook his hand, Mike Kemp was introduced, and then Sheikha Mozah asked [Bowman] about the preparations for the program. Emir started talking to Kemp – said to him “It’s a little hot here.” Kemp said, “We’re from Texas, we’re used to this.” Emir burst out laughing. Took away with me that the Emir was a pretty regular person, easy to speak with. Never forget that moment “We’re from Texas...”

Delighted with this project (campus history). This is something the Qatar Foundation had asked to happen about a year ago. These anecdotes and vignettes are really good to remember.

One more thing: During the approval process, had to go before the Texas Board of Regents and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and process they planned was to show a video, short talk by Robert Gates, then Mark Weichold and Chuck Bowman would answer questions.

The video shown was a 60 minutes segment about Qatar filmed the day the agreement was signed. Video has interview by Ed Bradley with Emir and Her Highness. Western institutions know that Qatar has made a commitment. No questions after showing the video to the Board of Regents, no questions. A vote of affirmation was unanimous. Not a hard sell after people saw that video.

Qatar Foundation trusts TAMUQ, don’t always agree, but there is trust on both sides.

One more little story:

When program was launched, had a big barbeque out at the Emir’s stable. At the end of it, Dr. Sheikha (President of Qatar University and also part of the negotiating team helping Qatar Foundation originally), came over said “You Aggies are just like Qatari’s. You know how to have a good time.”