

ESU TOUR

Overview

The ESU tour to Lebanon was a fantastic opportunity which we both enjoyed greatly and found immensely rewarding. We are both firmly committed to the continued relationship between the ESU and LAU and would hope the tour will continue to occur each year. The strength of the relationship is testament to the efforts of Ms. Haraty whose careful planning, attention to detail and friendly advice ensured that we were able to coach in a welcoming, secure and friendly atmosphere throughout the trip. We were impressed by the standard of those students we taught both at LAU and at the school in Saida and we think the decision to expand the coaching programme to a schools level was a great success. This report presents a brief breakdown of our experiences teaching in Lebanon and offers some suggestions for future years. It should be said that the tour as it stands and the programme is great, nonetheless if LAU, Miss Haraty and the ESU were thinking of improvements we kindly offer some modest suggestions.

University Teaching at LAU

Our university teaching experience involved a number of short one-hour sessions with three different classes over the course of three days, culminating in an assessment of the students at the end. The students were responsive and engaged and we were impressed with their ability to think quickly and critically. This was especially impressive given that many had little experience of debating before. We think the sessions worked well and were able to find topics and motions that engaged the students' interests. In an ideal world the individual sessions would have been slightly longer, especially the first one with each class, but evidently timetabling commitments mean that this probably isn't possible. We think that the programme as it currently stands provides a good opportunity to introduce students to the basics of debating and to ensure a suitable number of activities can be conducted so that they are prepared for the assessment debate.

With regard to our assessment of the students on the final day we were mainly very encouraged. A number of the students showed real talent; had evidently taken time to prepare; were confident in their material; robust in standing up to opposing arguments whilst being fluent and engaging. Indeed in one case a student valiantly stepped in to fill the place of another who was unable to attend and provided one of the best performances of the day. The majority of the students had taken the time to prepare well for the debate, although sometimes this meant that they were a little unwilling to deviate from their plan when challenged by an opposing speaker. Both of us have significant judging and coaching experience in the UK and internationally and think that a number of the students would do very well at British University standard competitions competing against those for whom English is a first language. There were one or two students who really struggled and seemed to have prepared very little for the debate but these really were the exception rather than the rule. We thought the whole process was worthwhile and afforded an opportunity for constructive feedback alongside the grading required by Ms. Haraty.

We were also impressed by the plans that Ms. Haraty had for the development of debating at LAU. We hear that there is a proposal to set up a debating society. We wholeheartedly support this move. This could provide the chance for more able students to be stretched further and to develop their debating and speaking skills and would hopefully eventually become a vibrant and open space for debate within the university. Future ESU coaches would, I am sure, be happy to spend some time with members of this debating society, perhaps running some more advanced coaching sessions with them alongside the general classes. Moreover, we would both be happy to provide any advice that you might look for in setting up such a society.

We also had a very productive session with members of the Model United Nations group who were organising a conference for high school students on the weekend of our departure. The session was received well and students really managed to get involved in both our display debate and in the session that followed. This also provided a great opportunity to meet with students in a non-classroom environment which meant we were able to get to know them a little better and they were kind enough to show us around Beirut on a number of subsequent occasions. We were impressed by the plans that students had for facilitating a massive MUN conference for school students that weekend and the dedication that so many students had showed in training students in the months running up to the tournament. Their dedication and self-motivation is strong evidence that were the proposed debating society to be set up it has the long term potential to also become involved with similar schools level projects. One of the benefits that a vibrant university debating society can bring is the potential to interact with local schools and train local school students: a process which is usually of immense benefit to those school students and to the confidence and development of university debaters as well. Whilst such a project might, at this stage, be more of a long term aspiration we think given the skills and motivation shown by so many of the students we came into contact with it would be an achievable long term aim. A sign of a flourishing and healthy debating society is often the ability to be able to coach and train younger debaters particularly those at a high school and these programmes often attract a wider range of students who want to be involved in coaching school students in their local communities.

The only minor problem we experienced whilst coaching at LAU concerned entrance and exit to the campus site in Beirut. Security arrangements are understandably tight given the proximity of the University but it seemed that we were often deemed to be causing hassle by needing to enter and exit, at one point declaring that this was the last time we'd be let in. Fortunately it was the last time we needed to enter but perhaps some kind of pass could be provided for future participants?

Overall we were very impressed at all levels by those we came into contact with and hope that the tour continues its relationship with LAU.

High-school Teaching

Our two days in Saida were also enjoyable and fruitful; especially given this was a pioneering experiment in coaching high school students in Lebanon. We coached two different groups on each day in large groups of between 50 and 60 students. On balance we felt the students on the second day were a little more involved and engaged than on the first but that both groups were engaged, willing to take part and some students showed real promise in debating and most approached it enthusiastically. A similar model would work well in the future and there aren't necessarily any changes that need to be implemented. Having said this there are a number of possible ways in which future tours might be able to expand upon this opportunity depending upon the wishes of Ms. Haraty and the current Principal of the school in Saida.

There were a number of students from both the American system classes and the Lebanese system classes who showed a great deal of enthusiasm and interest beyond the short sessions we ran with large groups. It might be worthwhile considering the journey is being taken to Saida at any rate if in future an arrangement was made to run some more advanced coaching for those students who were especially keen to learn how to debate. Through a focussed concentration on slightly smaller groups alongside the general introductory sessions which were run this year it might be possible to deliver even greater benefit to those who attended. Hopefully, if the debating society at LAU develops and grows further it will be able to foster a debating link with the school in Saida, perhaps offering coaching opportunities. If there were sufficient demand from teachers it might also be possible to run a training day for teachers who want to be able to teach debate and use it as a teaching mechanism. A similar programme has been well established in Hong Kong for some time and the skills of coaches selected for the ESU Lebanon tour should be able to deliver a comparable programme with some planning.

Other activities

We were overwhelmed by the kindness and hospitality shown to both of us during the course of our stay by everyone we met. The accommodation was fantastic and its close proximity to the university proved convenient for teaching. We had heard that in the past coaches stayed in university accommodation on site which enabled them a greater chance to meet students at the university and thus get an impression of university life at LAU. Both options have their advantages but we hope that if hotel accommodation is still provided then Ms. Haraty will still encourage future squad members to meet with students groups in a non-classroom situation as well.

The opportunity to take a tour of Beirut with an expert archaeologist was a fantastic opportunity enabling us to discover the varied history of the city. Our trips to Saida, Biblos and Jeita were also fantastic and we are sure that future participants will continue to benefit from the hospitality shown to us on our trip.

Both of us left feeling very happy with the tour and fortunate to be able to see so much of Lebanon and spend time meeting so many people in the process. We would like to once again extend our thanks to Ms. Haraty, the Lebanese American University; the ESU in Lebanon and all those whom we met for making our teaching so straightforward and enjoyable. We hope that future tours will be as successful and will certainly recommend it to any debaters whom we come across.

Ben Jasper & Andrew Tuffin