# Chapter 4
# Interdisciplinary Solutions for Tertiary Education Institutions and a Stagnating Labor Market in Jordan:
## A Case Study at a Public University

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**ABSTRACT**

*In the late 1980s, the Jordanian economy suffered a depression; consequently, public higher education institutions started receiving less government funding. To contain the economic crisis, Jordan underwent an economic reform which changed labor market needs. In response to these developments, Yarmouk University (YU) established global partnerships in an attempt to face the new challenges. An exceptionally successful example was the first joint program between the University of Arkansas (UA) and YU which was initiated in 1996-1999. The cooperation resulted in the establishment of the Department of Conservation and the Management of Cultural Resources which was an interdisciplinary program, faculty exchange, training programs, and collaboration on interdisciplinary research and grant proposals. This innovative endeavor helped Yarmouk University keep abreast of global changes while providing a demanding and continually changing marketplace with the best possibly trained specialists and professionals. The study explores how such a model can solve problems with stagnant specialties.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The University of Arkansas (UA) and Yarmouk University (YU) were awarded a College and University Affiliations Program grant in 1996 to fund a three-year cooperative program titled *Preserving the Past,*

*Building the Future*: *A Program in Civil Administration and Archaeology.* The program had set two goals: the development of a new curriculum in cultural resource management at both YU and UA and the creation of professional development training programs in geographical information systems (GIS) and in cultural resource management for civil administrators, planners, and antiquities personnel in Jordan and the United States. This program set out to address a common problem in Jordan and the US: the destruction of the cultural heritage by urbanization and economic development. The program was built on the growing relationship between the two institutions that resulted from faculty visits, student exchanges, and the creation of UA's and YU's joint Bioarchaeological Field School. Further, the strengths of the programs offered by the two institutions in anthropology, archaeology, public administration, sociology, and geographical information systems (GIS) through the Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies (CAST) contributed towards the initiation of this project. In the year 2000, the project had successfully created graduate degree programs in CRM at both institutions--the first in both nations--and had also established a CRM training program for civil administrators in Jordan.

Among the most important achievements was the creation of two graduate programs at UA and YU in the management of cultural resources. Another important accomplishment was the development of teaching modules in CRM for interdisciplinary use to educate different stakeholders. In addition, both UA and YU contributed to the transfer of advanced technology and knowledge which incorporated technical training workshops for faculty and graduate students at both institutions in addition to stakeholders in the local communities in both Arkansas and Irbid city. Last but not least, the human relations and friendships which continued to grow during the grant period and turned into long lasting friendships were among the most stimulating of the successes the joint cooperation achieved.

As there are successes, there are also difficulties to overcome and problems to be solved. The wide ranging and recurring administrative changes at both institutions had caused complications during the grant period. Another serious problem which was not to be controlled was the growing political instability in the Middle East during the grant period and beyond. These crises have been having serious impacts on the continuing cooperation between UA and YU.

The two main insights which were gained during the first phase of the YU and UA cooperation were firstly, when it comes to commitment, there are no gray areas. The success of any joint project depends on the support of the administration and the full commitment and cooperation of the participating faculty members. Secondly, in order to create sustainable programs, they must be institutionalized. Then strategies for maintaining and implementing them to preserve their effectiveness and build on their successes need to be carefully planned and applied.

## ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

His Majesty King Hussein Bin Talal issued a royal decree in 1975 in which he stressed the need for a second national university in the Kingdom of Jordan—the first being the University of Jordan (UJ) in Amman. The location of the new university would be Irbid city, about 90 km north of Amman, the capital. The next year, YU was established, named after a local river of great significance in Arab history. On the16th of June 1977, the late King Hussein inaugurated the university during the country's silver jubilee celebrations of the King's accession to the throne.

Ever since the establishment of YU, its growth has been steady and systematic. In 1986 it was decided that this higher education institution be divided into two campuses: the Yarmouk campus located

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