




# Year of Tolerance

Interview with Dr. Fatima Al Shamsi





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## **The Year of Tolerance was announced as the UAE's focus for 2019. What does this mean to the education sector?**

Tolerance is acceptance, openness, and respect for differences. Learning to recognize common ground can be uniting, but learning to recognize and accept differences can be just as endearing. In my opinion, the greatest gift we can give to our students is a tolerance for differences. Teach them ways to develop critical thinking, a capacity for creativity and risk-taking, tolerance and acceptance for those different from themselves.

Teaching tolerance should start from the early school years. The curriculum should be developed in the best way to provide kids with opportunities to explore, recognize and accept that people are different. It is our differences which makes this world a better place to live in. This is what differentiates us from robots and makes every person unique.

Schools and universities play a major role in teaching tolerance. It is true that a major part should be played by the parents and family members but education can be a powerful tool to instill the values of tolerance from a very early age. Our role as educators is to empower the new generation with skills for living ethical and productive lives in an increasingly diverse and complex world.

Marie Curie said, "Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less." Tolerance is the key to increasing understanding and decreasing fear in our next generation, our children.

## **How will your university implement this into the curriculum?**

Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi has always been an exemplary model for co-existence and "a bridge between civilization". SUAD is home for students from over 70 different nationalities who live, study and work together in a perfect setting. SUAD has

already planned to host and organize several events and extracurricular activities for its students and the community that value and emphasize the tolerance principle. As an example, a conference on "Argumentation and Society: for a constructive dialogue, a speech without violence" is set on the 12th and 13th of February 2019 on campus as a platform for a dialogue without boundaries. Several workshops and seminars are also organized and many are planned for the staff, students, and the community as to contribute towards building societies that believe in the values of tolerance, cohesion and dialogue.

Several seminars, lectures, and research activities planned by our faculty researchers that will also revolve around the topic of tolerance and co-existence seeking to solidify the UAE as the global capital for tolerance.

## **Do you think that students in the UAE are naturally more tolerant given that we live here in such a multi-cultural society?**

I strongly believe that students in the UAE are naturally more tolerant given that we live in such a multi-cultural society. They learn that some values are not as bad as they thought they were. They become a bit culture-conscious and learn to be flexible. Furthermore, a more diverse culture means individual differences are better tolerated. They learn that it is acceptable not to like the same things, believe the same things, or even celebrate the same things, but it is also expected in return that they accept and respect the other.

The influx of ideas and different ways of doing things is just interesting and stimulating. In the UAE, people celebrate their differences and are eager to learn more about the different cultures around them. From my experience, students value this diversity and take this as a great opportunity to make friends from all over the world.

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**Based on your experience, what type of initiatives, campaigns and events do you hope to see other universities and students taking part in for the Year of Tolerance?**

Tolerance is not just a buzzword exploited by the media in today's society, but is a core social value which brings people of all races, religions, and ideals into one place. The UAE is the perfect example, a place of diversity, and therefore a place for tolerance. Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi will be focusing on promoting tolerance and co-existence via targeted media campaigns and events.

I would be happy to see collaborations on different initiatives and major events between different universities under the same theme. Having students as well as employees from different universities and educational institutions work hand-in-hand towards organizing a major event or campaign or even a common project will be the greatest example of tolerance. It could be a media campaign directed by students from the different universities from all the 7 Emirates in the UAE or a common artistic project which can be then transformed into a memorial marking 2019 as the Year of Tolerance in the UAE. I would also be happy to see Students volunteering and supporting the 2019 Special Olympics World Games as a way to convey tolerance and unity.



### **Dr. Fatima Al Shamsi**

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Dr. Fatima Al Shamsi is the Former Deputy Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs at Sorbonne Abu Dhabi and a former Secretary General of the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU).

She holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom and a Master of Economics from the University of Baltimore in the USA. She has held several academic and administrative positions. She has served as a consultant to the UAE National Human Resource Development and Employment Authority. Dr. Fatima Al Shamsi's research interests deal with economic development issues and women studies. She has contributed many research publications in refereed academic journals and presented research papers in a number of scientific conferences. Dr. Al-Shamsi is currently the Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington D.C. and has been a member of the Board of Trustees of the Economic Research Forum in Cairo, Egypt since 2014.