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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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## SCHIERA COLLABORATES IN OMAN

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Tony Schiera, a temporary faculty member and third-year PhD student in Composition and TESOL, spent part of his summer in Muscat, Oman, working with the Takatuf Scholars' Summer Residential Programme. In this program, 40 rising 10th-grade students with varying degrees of experience attending Oman's public and private schools spend three weeks in an intensive, integrated program designed to enrich students both intellectually and personally.

While in Muscat, Schiera served with eight other teachers implementing an educational experience designed to prepare students to compete for a limited number of scholarships which include international study of two years in preparatory school and four years at a university, leading to an undergraduate degree. According to the institution's website, "The program comprises a range of intellectual and personal experiences including project-based learning, information technology, public speaking, service learning, and leadership development."



*Tony Schiera, teaching this summer at the Takatuf Scholars' Summer Residential Programme in Muscat, Oman.*

One goal of the SRP is to introduce students to the educational and social dynamics they might encounter should they win one of the scholarships available. Many of the students in the SRP come from single-gender educational settings, but are immediately placed in mixed-gender groups and asked for the first time in

their lives to work with a member of the opposite sex that is not an immediate family member.

Schiera's work this summer focused on helping students navigate the group-forming and functioning processes as well as supporting their efforts in finishing their planning, innovation report, and preparation for a group presentation. Additionally, Schiera organized evening activities

designed to shed light on group forming and performing processes. Students were able to enhance their mixed-gender group's performance through group building activities and subsequent reflection on evening activities.

Schiera has been involved in the Takatuf SRP for a number of years, but what keeps bringing him back to Muscat is the organic and collaborative nature of the program. "Since I'm not teaching content to students, I'm able to meet their needs in terms of where they are and, rather than having some arbitrary goal of 'mastery' of a skill, students are creating their own knowledge and presenting, to the best of their abilities, their findings in written and spoken form."

Together the faculty discover what students need across classes and integrate plans that can change as needed depending on the skills students already have and the skills the faculty feel students need. If faculty feel students need additional time integrating sources into their paper, for example, teachers of each of the different types of classes—communication, critical thinking, technology, and group project creation—have the freedom to alter the lessons to make room for extra coverage of a topic.

Schiera's multiyear involvement in the Takatuf Program extends beyond being a faculty member in the SRP. For the past several years, Schiera has acted as an external marker of assignments that students submit during the independent learning phase (ILP) of the program. Assignments submitted during the ILP carry heavier weight in the scoring and ultimate awarding of the international scholarships for which students are competing.

For more information on the Takatuf Program, visit the [Takatuf Program website](#), and, to better understand the impact the SRP has on participants, consider watching [this video](#).

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