

## PRESS RELEASE

# HBKU Students Visit Rice University's Baker Institute during Spring Break

**Doha, April 6, 2016** – Students from Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF), recently visited Rice University's James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy (Baker Institute) as part of the Public Diplomacy and Global Policymaking Program (PDGP). The program seeks to promote cross-cultural understanding and facilitate dialogue on public policy and diplomacy issues among students from the United States and Qatar, with this year's PDGP exchange supported by Qatar Development Bank.

Established in 2013, the PDGP exchange program offers students the opportunity to experience Arab or American culture in an effort to learn how cultural identity, political context, and geography affect policy. Eight Qatari students - Hamad Al Obaidly, Latifa Al Amri, Noof Alejji, Mona Al Saadi, Abdulla Al Shaiba, Ahmad Al Jassim, Alya Bint Mohammed and Mohammed Al Buenain – traveled to Houston, Texas this year with Dr. Mohammed Evren Tok, the coordinator of Public Policy in Islam program at Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, a college of HBKU. The cohort discussed current issues in public policy in detail and Dr. Tok shared information from his forthcoming book with the program participants. The book, entitled *Policy Making in a Transformative State: The Case of Qatar*, is co-edited by Lolwah Al Khater and Leslie A. Pal and will be available in May 2016.

As part of the week-long learning trip, each student presented a policy memo, written under the supervision of Dr. Tok as a key component of the PDGP program. Students offered their perspectives on a wide range of policy issues, such as preventative health care, science diplomacy, energy sustainability, the development of knowledge-based economies, interfaith dialogue, the role of social media, and U.S. and Qatari Middle East foreign policy. Various topics pertaining to development were discussed in detail, with the HBKU students also commenting on Qatar National Vision 2030 and Qatar's growing entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Hamad Al Obaidly commented on the experience: "The Baker Institute is one of the leading policy institutes in the world. Our group was proud to represent Qatar in this exchange and we learned so much."

Abdulla Al Shaiba added: "For me, interaction was key. It was not only an academic event, but also gave us the opportunity to be youth ambassadors of our country. When I saw photographs of the Father Emir, His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, and Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser in the Baker Institute from when they delivered speeches there, the importance of participating in the program really hit me."

Although the exchange is only one-week long, the conversations between the American and Qatari students often continue in the weeks and months to come. Ahmed Jassim noted: “In a relatively short amount of time, we built a very strong bridge between the two groups of students, strengthening the relationship between the two universities, two countries, two cultures, and two realms of policy making.”

In line with HBKU’s aim to drive collaboration with international partners, the initiative is committed to empowering students to think critically and develop their leadership skills. To learn more about the PDGP program, please visit: <http://bakerinstitute.org/public-diplomacy/>

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### **About Hamad bin Khalifa University**

Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, is an emerging research university that is building its foundation upon unique collaborations with local and international partners. Located in Education City, HBKU delivers undergraduate and graduate programs through its College of Science and Engineering, Law School, College of Public Health, Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, and its College of Humanities and Social Sciences. It also provides unparalleled opportunities for research and scholarship through its three national research institutes, and its Center of Executive Education delivers customized programs for the business community of Qatar and the region, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.