How can architecture provide the most appropriate frameworks for knowledge construction? During this cycle of the Award a large number of the shortlisted projects dealt with this topic, an important one for Muslim communities across the globe. But it is worth noting that they adopted vastly different architectural approaches to achieve their goal. The Guelmim School of Technology in Morocco, for example, uses the clarity and order of a modernist approach to produce a series of buildings that through their placement and relation to the landscape create a calm yet vibrant campus. The architecture of this school is in stark contrast to that of the Royal Academy for Nature Conservancy in Jordan, which uses local stone for the construction of a building that fits seamlessly into the surrounding landscape and nature that shape its programme and use.
Issam Fares Institute
Beirut, Lebanon

‘This building asserts confidently that we are not a university that stays rooted in time and place; rather we challenge conventional thinking and actively promote change and new ideas’, says Peter Dorman, President of the American University of Beirut (AUB), of the Issam Fares Institute, the latest addition to the AUB. In terms of its form, the building is undeniably bold, yet it also displays a sensitivity towards time and place – towards the context, both built and topographical.

The context in this case is the AUB’s upper campus, set on a hilltop with views of the Mediterranean. In the immediate vicinity are four historic buildings and some equally venerable – c 150-year-old – Cypress and Ficus trees, as well as one of the most important open areas on the campus, the Green Oval. Responding to the givens of the site, the architects significantly reduced the building’s footprint by cantilevering a large part of the structure over the entrance courtyard – a move that also draws the space of the adjacent Green Oval towards the base of the new building. The existing landscape is preserved, including all of the old trees, which form a kind of datum line determining the height of the institute, as is evident from a look at the south facade. Further connections with the landscape are established by the roof terrace, with its expansive views, and by the circulation ramp that snakes smoothly through the trees to the southern entrance on the second floor.

The Issam Fares Institute – a research centre for public policy and international affairs – has a combined surface area of 3,000 m², divided into six floors. Its facilities include research spaces and administration offices, seminar and workshop rooms, an auditorium, reading room, recreational lounge and roof terrace. The interiors are divided by walls of partially pigmented glass (though the original idea was for the glazing to be clear, for maximum transparency). The structure is of high-quality in-situ reinforced concrete, in tune with the local construction culture of working with concrete, and particularly fair-faced concrete.
Citation

As the last in a series of buildings, the Issam Fares Institute completes the central oval courtyard of the upper campus of American University of Beirut, located on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean. This educational building solves a dense programme within a surprisingly small footprint in a manner that is sensitive to its context. With its contemporary form and the purity of its architectural language the building differentiates itself from its neighbours, though it is not in conflict with the campus and its architecture.

Cantilevering over the courtyard and overlooking the old Cypress and Ficus trees, the building presents an extremely powerful and authentic volumetric structure without obstructing the view from the buildings behind. The building’s height, matched with that of the trees and the surrounding structures, serves to strengthen the powerful relationship it creates with its context. Throughout, a fluid planning strategy has turned to advantage the level variances of the site, and a welcoming environment has been created by providing entrances at various levels via ramps that weave through existing trees, in the process becoming part of the landscape themselves.

The building makes a courageous – and at the same time fully respectful – contribution to the multilayered physical environment of this historic and rooted university campus. With its simple, exposed concrete surface and strong volumetric presence, it is an elegant yet unique solution to a complex and special context.
Patron
Issam Fares, Beirut, Lebanon

Client
American University of Beirut (AUB), Beirut, Lebanon:
Peter Dorman, president
Bassem Baroumi, facilities planning and design unit
director
Alain Eiz, Issam Fares Institute project manager
Sarit Mitri, director of Issam Fares Institute for Public
Policy and International Affairs
Rami Khouri, founding director of Issam Fares Institute
for Public Policy and International Affairs (2006–2014)

Architect
Zaha Hadid Architects, London, United Kingdom:
Zaha Hadid, Patrik Schumacher, partners
Saleem A Jalil, project manager
Christos Pasas, Saleem A Jalil, Graham Modgil, Human
Talebi, Brandon Buck, Miya Ushida, project team
Saleem A Jalil, Rokhsana Rakshani, Tejal Kim, Ben
Holland, Charbel Chagoury, Anas Younes, Fulvio Wirz,
Mariagrazia Lanza, Renata Dantas, competition team
Rafik El Khouory & Partners, Beirut, Lebanon:
Rafik El Khouory, principal
Hazar Mansour, Roger Skaff, architects
Georges Saade, mechanical engineer
Karim Nammar, electrical engineer
Wassim Sader, acoustics
Zoe Bou Mikhail, contract administrator

Contractor
Kettaneh Construction, Beirut, Lebanon:
Bahzad Choubassi, project director
Elie Awaad, site manager
Sabine Choubassi, Assem Soubra, project coordinators
Georges Saade, mechanical coordinator
Daneesh Haddad, structural engineer

Skylight
Alumco, Choueifat, El Kobeh district, Mount Lebanon

Metal Stairs and Railing
Meztesk Group, Beirut, Lebanon

Mechanical Room Aluminium Louvers
SKAB, Metn, Lebanon

Lifts
Mitsufu Elevating Standards, Metn, Lebanon

Concrete Floor
De-Concreta, Beirut, Lebanon

Gypsum Boards and Paint
Pillar Plan, Beirut, Lebanon

Blinds
Libai, Jai El Dib, Lebanon

Mechanics, Electrics and Plumbing
CLIMTECH – Climate Technology Electro-Mechanical
Contracting, Beirut, Lebanon

Internal Glass-Partition Profiles
Gemino, Padua, Italy
Debbas and Miorecc, Beirut, Lebanon

Tables and Kitchens
DuPont Wilmington, Delaware, USA
HEC, Beirut, Lebanon

Carpet Floor Finish
Picuta, Jdeidet El Metn, Lebanon

Internal Wooden Doors and Kitchens
Awale Awake, Beirut, Lebanon

Internal Steel Doors
Fizpatric Sal, Beirut, Lebanon

Project Data
Total site area: 7,000 m²
Total floor area: 3,000 m²
Building footprint: 560 m²
Cost: 8,800,000 USD
Commission: May 2007
Design: July 2007–December 2009
Construction: January 2010–April 2014
Completion: May 2014

Zaha Hadid Architects
Zaha Hadid Architects is a global leader in pioneering
research and design investigation. Collaborations with
corporations that lead their industries have advanced
the practice’s diversity and knowledge, whilst the imple-
m entation of state-of-the-art technologies has aided the
realisation of fluid and dynamic architectural structures.
Hadid’s vision redefined architecture for the twenty-first
century and captured imaginations across the globe.
Her legacy endures within the DNA of the design studio
she created. Working with office partner Patrik Schu-
macher for three decades, Zaha Hadid Architects’ work
arranges form and space into breath-taking spatial
compositions.

Zaha Hadid’s work of the past 30 years was the subject
of critically acclaimed exhibitions at New York’s Solomon
R Guggenheim Museum in 2006, London’s Design
Museum in 2007, the Palazzo della Ragione, Padua, Italy
Zaha Hadid Architects recently completed the Salerno
Maritime Terminal in Italy and Oxford University’s Middle
East Centre at St Antony’s College. The practice is
currently working on a diversity of projects worldwide
including the new Beijing Airport Terminal Building
in Daxing, China, the Stek Rih Institute in Phnom Penh,
Cambodia, the King Abdullah Financial District Metro
Station in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and the new Mathematics
Gallery at London’s Science Museum. Zaha Hadid Archi-
tects’ portfolio also includes cultural, academic, sporting
and infrastructure projects across six continents.

Website
www.zaha-hadid.com