

Higher Education in the Middle East:

Opportunities and Challenges for U.S. Universities and Middle East Partners

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, there has been a significant increase in the presence of U.S. universities and colleges in the Middle East. This article examines the challenges and opportunities that are found in the evolving establishment of regional institutions of higher education in the Middle East, with particular attention to the Persian Gulf region. Despite the best intentions of those involved there are conflicting interests and ambitions among Middle Eastern and U.S. elites who are involved in the various partnerships and collaborations. This article reviews and examines some of the current partnerships in hopes that future endeavors will profit from recent events and design more effective and productive collaborations.

No other region in the world confronts the next U.S. president with a greater set of challenges than the Middle East. Virtually each country in the region has a long and complicated relationship with Washington and other Western capitals. From Bagdad to Riyadh, from Islamabad to Jerusalem, from Tehran to Ankara, and from Doha to Muscat, the next occupant of the White House will confront nations and peoples fatigued from longstanding tensions and hopeful for change.

Washington's foreign policy initiatives in the Middle East know few supporters in the region but there is at least one American institution that remains admired and sought

after by the region's elites and general public. U.S. universities and colleges have long been viewed, both domestically and internationally, as agents for positive change and progress. In the United States rapid expansion of universities and colleges following World War II facilitated the rise of the nation's middle class, economic and scientific dynamism, and social progress. Just as the United States reaped great benefits owing to the expansion of higher education during the past 60 years, so too can the Middle East today.

In recent years, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, there has been a significant increase in the presence of U.S. colleges and universities in the Middle East. While tens of thousands of Middle East citizens have earned advanced degrees in the United States and Europe, these same individuals acknowledge the need to build an indigenous system of colleges and universities within their own countries. Recognizing the challenges that exist in building new institutions of higher learning in a region that has few existing institutions relative to its population base and demands, it is logical for governmental, educational, and business elites to reach out to U.S. universities for counsel and partnership. While other western nations are actively involved in the development of higher education in the Middle East, this paper focuses on the role of U.S. universities and colleges.

This paper examines the challenges and opportunities that are found in the evolving establishment of regional institutions of higher education in the Middle East, with particular attention to the Persian Gulf region. At first glance the proliferation of partnerships may appear an obvious good for all concerned. Like any institution, there are flaws in American higher education that educators, administrators, students, and

politicians are quick to note. However, when one considers the current state of U.S. financial institutions and the body politic, America's higher education system remains a strong and dynamic positive force both domestically and internationally. Despite the best intentions of those involved there are conflicting interests and ambitions among Middle Eastern and U.S. elites who are involved in the various partnerships and collaborations. This paper reviews and examines some of the existing partnerships in hopes that future endeavors will profit from recent events and design more effective and productive collaborations.

WESTERN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: THE EARLY YEARS

Higher education, like so many institutions in the Middle East, was significantly shaped by European colonialism. The colonial powers sought to build educational systems that largely served French and British interests rather than the indigenous interests of the region. Though Europeans can be credited with introducing compulsory education, their primary interest was to foster an educational system that supported European control. While a limited number of local elites were educated in European schools or sent abroad to study in Western Europe, the goal was to produce a loyal cadre of indigenous elites who would facilitate control and development of the colonial system.

Prior to World War II the United States played a modest role in the Middle East. Perhaps most notably was the role that U.S. missionaries and educators had in the establishment of the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 1866 and the American University in Cairo (AUC) in 1919. The university's founders were eager to introduce American-style higher education into the Middle East. Since their inception, AUC and AUB have grown dramatically and offer degrees in a range of disciplines. The mode of

instruction remains English. Both universities have long been hailed as progressive educational agents that have trained thousands of students from the Middle East and around the world

In the aftermath of World War II states throughout the Middle East made great strides in expanding primary and secondary education. A 2007 study commissioned by the World Bank entitled, “The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa” notes:

The modern history of education in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is a tale of ambition, accomplishment, falling short, and unfinished. Along this path, the region has accomplished much: most children benefit from compulsory schooling, quite a few have opportunities to continue their formal education, and learning outcomes have improved. These achievements are impressive, particularly if one considers the starting point during the 1960s (The World Bank, 2007).

While educational opportunities and learning outcomes vary from state to state, the World Bank reports that states in the region devoted 20 percent of governmental expenditures to education during the past 40 years which dramatically improved access to schools and increased literacy. “The crowning achievement for the MENA region,” according to the World Bank, “has been the closing of the education gender gap. Gender parity for basic education is almost complete” (The World Bank, 2007). Despite these accomplishments regional elites, along with World Bank officials, concede that primary and secondary education in the Middle East requires substantial improvement if students are to matriculate at the university and college level. While there are numerous countries in the region that are producing competitive schools and students, particularly those states in the Gulf region and Jordan and Lebanon (Labi, 2008), too many schools throughout the Middle East are staffed by under qualified teachers using dated materials for

instruction. Rather than develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, students in many countries continue to memorize materials and are only expected to regurgitate that information on examinations.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AMONG ARAB AND U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

There is little debate among Arab elites about the essential need to build and nurture a system of higher education throughout the Middle East. The era when virtually all Arab elites received their educations in the United States and Western Europe has drawn to a close. For the region and its citizens to become fully integrated into the global economy, it is vital for larger and large numbers of Arab men and women to be educated in their home countries. Operating on the assumption that oil revenues will decline in the years to come, Arab elites recognize that a highly skilled and educated domestic work force is a requirement for operating in a globalized world.

Both public and private universities have operated in Middle East states for decades, but they remain few in number relative to the needs of the populations. While there are fine Middle East universities, on the whole, these institutions have not adequately prepared their students for the local or global job market. For instance, it is widely recognized that Arab governments have neglected scientific education and research at the university level. As Farouk el-Baz, Director of the Center for Remote Sensing at Boston University contends, “Science education has not been given the support or significance it should have. Among Arab leaders there is a belief that science and technology, research and development, is something that only rich countries can do, and it’s a very defeatist attitude”(Del Catillo, 2004). An October 2003 report by the United Nations’ Development Program and the Kuwait-based Arab Fund for Social and

Economic Development painted a grim picture of the state of science and scientific education in the Middle East. The report (Del Catillo, 2004) found:

- No Arab country spends more than 0.2 percent of its gross national product on scientific research, and most of that money goes toward salaries.
- Fewer than one in 20 Arab university students pursue scientific disciplines.
- There are only 18 computers per 1,000 people in the Arab world. The global average is 78 per 1,000.
- Only 370 industrial patents were issued to people in Arab countries between 1980 and 2000. In South Korea during the same period, 16,000 industrial patents were issued.
- No more than 10,000 books [have been] translated into Arabic over the entire past millennium, equivalent to the number translated into Spanish each year.

In recent years, Arab governments and educational elites have taken many steps to highlight the importance of indigenous higher education and have commenced an array of projects that are yielding tangible change. U.S. universities have been an integral player in this process. As a group of states in the region, the states belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman, have devoted billions to the development of new institutions in the past decade. As education specialist Sherin Deghady has commented, “All the GCC nations are pouring billions of dollars into expanding their private higher education institutions . . . Among the dozens of private universities that have been built in the region, it would be hard to find a single one that is not either in partnership or affiliated with an American university” (Deghady, 2008). Below we will consider the numerous partnerships and projects that have been undertaken, the challenges that have been identified and the early results of these collaborations.

In a 2007 report for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy entitled “Studying the American Way: An Assessment of American-style Higher Education in Arab Countries”, Shafeeq Ghabra and Margreet Arnold observe:

Despite public opinion poll data that show Arab popular support for U.S. foreign policy at an all-time low, the popularity of American-style higher education in Arab society is at an all time high. American-style education is widely accepted as being the best form of higher education possible for younger men and women in the Arab world. Arab families have always placed great value on acquiring the best available higher education in an attempt to raise their social status, and they are prepared to pay high tuition fees, even going into debt, to do so. What is keeping students in the region rather than traveling to the United States for education is sharper competition from new, local American-style universities (Ghabra and Arnold, 2007).

The number of American universities and colleges that have established partnerships in the Arab world in recent year span the U.S. continent and include both public and private institutions. A partial list includes:

- The University of Texas at Austin
- Texas A&M University
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- University of California, Berkeley
- Stanford University
- George Mason University
- Michigan State University
- New York University
- New York Institute of Technology
- Cornell Medical College
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Georgetown University
- Northwestern University
- Yale University
- University of Washington
- University of Missouri at St. Louis
- University of Missouri at Rolla
- Dartmouth College
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- Purdue University Calumet

U.S. involvement in the region has followed several paths including: 1) the establishment of research partnerships; 2) consultations; 3) joint-degree programs; and 4) the construction of degree-granting American-satellite campuses. On one end of the spectrum U.S. institutions including New York University, New York Institute of Technology, George Mason University, and Michigan State University have committed to building full-service branch campuses that will have the same admission standards and curriculum requirements as the home campuses. Graduates from these campuses will receive the same diploma as those students graduating in New York, Virginia, or East Lansing. Slightly less ambitious are the efforts of a consortium of U.S. institutions, including Virginia Commonwealth University, Carnegie Mellon University, Texas A&M, Northwestern University, and Georgetown University, which are operating in Qatar's Education City. These universities have pledged to offer equivalent-level graduate courses in fields ranging from medicine to international relations. Education City is a 2,500 acre campus just outside Doha, Qatar. Students are recruited both from within Qatar and the wider region and instruction is in English. Charles E. Thorpe, dean of Carnegie Mellon in Qatar, maintains the U.S. position in Education City is different than most U.S. overseas programs. "There are lots of programs in different countries that are 'kind of like,' 'in partnership with,' or 'inspired by' American education," maintains Thorpe, "But this is American education. And for many of our students, that's a very big change. Almost all of them went to single-sex secondary schools. As recently as six years ago, the elementary reader in Qatar was the Koran, so students learned beautiful classical Arabic, but they had no experience with questions like 'What do you think the author meant by that?' or 'Do you agree or disagree?'" (Lewin, 2008). Before students

from Qatar and other nations are permitted to respond to these questions, they must first gain acceptance to Education City which requires meeting admission standards that are the equivalent of the home campuses of the U.S. universities.

While establishing and maintaining degree-granting regional campuses pose an array of challenges which will be discussed below, a great many U.S. institutions have engaged in less ambitious partnerships with numerous Arab institutions. These partnerships come in a variety of shapes and sizes with a range of purposes and contractual obligations. For instance, three U.S. Universities, University of Texas at Austin, the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University, are partnering with the new King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (Kaust), in Saudi Arabia. Kaust will be a graduate-level research university and the U.S. universities will receive fees for providing their Saudi counterparts with advice in the selection of faculty and the development of curriculum. Purdue University Calumet has established ties with Bayan College in Muscat, Oman. Bayan College is a new institution of higher education in Oman offering undergraduate degree programs in Media Studies and related fields. In recent years administrators and faculty from the two institutions have worked together on issues including curriculum design, faculty development, operational planning and strategic direction. Purdue staff have repeatedly visited the campus to evaluate the college's progress and have offered recommendations for future reform and initiatives.

There is little doubt that U.S. universities have much to offer their new and emerging counterparts in the Middle East. Most of the U.S. institutions involved in the Middle East today were established well over 100 years ago and have great experience in curriculum design, faculty development, student success, fundraising, and research. Arab

elites, many of whom were educated in the United States, appreciate that U.S. institutions have a positive role to play in the design of colleges and campuses for the region. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. However, there are a number of issues that must be considered, particularly at this juncture, as new partnerships are proposed and adopted.

CHALLENGES AND HURDLES

George Mason University's efforts to construct a regional campus in Ras al Khaymah, in the United Arab Emirates, serves as an example of the challenges that are being confronted by some U.S. universities and their Arab partners. Planning for the GMU campus in Ras al Khaymah began several years ago with hopes that fall 2008 would witness the first class of students in their new classrooms and state-of-the-art facilities. Owing to an array of difficulties the proposed campus has yet to be built and the incoming class is in the low hundreds as opposed to the low thousands that had been envisioned.

George Mason's memorandum of understanding [MOU] with Crown Prince Sheik Saud Saqr al-Qasimi, stipulated that the government would "guarantee full financial backing to the venture, covering all operational and capital costs, as well as faculty salaries" (Mills, 2008). The goal was to build a regional campus of George Mason University in Ras al Khaymah. The same admission standards and curriculum and degree requirements applicable to students at the Virginia campus would be applicable to students in Ras al Khaymah. Ultimately, as Andrew Mills reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Students at Ras al Khaymah would graduate with the same authentic American degrees as their counterparts in the United States" (Mills, 2008). The high hopes and expectations that initially inspired this undertaking have been

sobered by many unforeseen and foreseeable challenges. Construction of the campus is well behind schedule and the first class of 164 students is well behind the goal of 2,000 (Mills, 2008).

The challenges that George Mason officials and their Arab partners have confronted in building the new campus are not unique to other U.S. – Arab ventures in recent years. Virtually every joint effort has grappled with problems associated with student recruitment. While there are a large number of college-aged students eager to enter regional universities affiliated with the United States, many of these students do not meet admission standards. This dilemma is not easily resolved because it is linked to the primary and secondary education system in most Middle East states. Ali Shuhaimy, of the American University of Sharjah, readily concedes this point noting that the “region’s high-school system simply isn’t an effective university pipeline” (Mills, 2008).

Recognizing that regional high schools are not equipping students for the type of educational experience that awaits at American-style universities, many of the new Middle East institutions are adapting to the challenge. Some institutions require students upon entry to complete a year-long remedial program designed to prepare students for the rigor of the Western curriculum. Rather than admit students directly into a remedial year of preparation, the American University of Sharja adopted a different approach. “We realized we couldn’t just start at the top, we had to go to the middle and attract average students,” Mr. Shuhaimy says. “And then we started building on that” (Mills, 2008). “For the first five years,” at the American University of Sharjah, “students with the equivalent of a C average and above were admitted to the university. The cutoff gradually raised. Now nobody gets in the door with anything less than a B+” (Mills,

2008). This practice has been praised by education experts including Shafeeq Ghabra, the former president of the American University of Kuwait. From Ghabra's perspective, "Institutions need to lower admission standards and design a freshman and sophomore curriculum that enable students, by their junior year, to express themselves, think critically, and be independent learners."

Of course, as Andrew Mills is quick to point out, if Middle East Universities are keen to replicate a U.S. program and offer U.S.-equivalent and accredited degree programs, radically altering the admission criteria for incoming students will pose obvious problems (Mills, 2008).

Deficiencies in high school curriculum may not be the greatest problem confronting university admission officers. If English is to be the mode of instruction at the new campuses and in the various joint-degree programs, then competency in English is required. Reports throughout the region indicate that many aspiring students do not have TOFEL scores that meet the entry level requirements at U.S. institutions. While this can be remedied through time and additional course work, English Language Programs (ELP) are not the programs that are attracting U.S. colleges and universities to the region. Nevertheless, if these cooperative efforts are to go forward this central issue must be forthrightly and effectively addressed.

Recruitment of qualified students is not the only recruitment issue confronting universities and colleges in the region. Faculty recruitment and retention is also a major issue. One might assume that a key element of the American-style educational experience centers on the participation of U.S. faculty. While New York University President John Sexton has literally commuted between New York and his campus in the

United Arab Emirates to teach a course, few U.S. academics will have this luxury. Virtually all of the American-styled institutions emerging in the Middle East are having difficulty attracting U.S. faculty for prolonged stays in the region. Despite the competitive salaries, tax benefits, and housing arrangements relatively few U.S. faculty members are making their way to the region. Dr. Antonio M. Gotto Jr., dean of Weill Cornell Medical School in New York, notes the difficulties encountered in recruiting Cornell faculty for the Education City campus. “We have half a dozen faculty who moved to Qatar, and 30 or 40 who go for a couple of weeks (Lewin, 2008).

Attracting faculty is not the only staffing problem involved in building new universities. One of the primary reasons why George Mason University’s progress has been so slow in Ras al Khaymah is owing to the rapid turnover of key administrators. Indeed GMU has gone through a string of three Vice Presidents since the conception of the project in 2005. As of July 2008, the GMU project in Ras al Khaymah was not staffed by any personnel from the Virginia campus. As one disgruntled individual in Ras al Khaymah understandably declared, “If they can’t find anybody in Fairfax who wants to come here and be part of this, then you’ve got to question why they’re doing this in the first place (Mills, 2008).

Some U.S. faculty who have been approached to relocate to the Middle East have expressed reservations owing to cultural and legal concerns. Kuwait is an example of an Arab state with keen interest and substantial funds available for the move toward American-style universities. Since its establishment in 2004, the American University in Kuwait has grown dramatically. Working with its U.S. partners at Dartmouth College, AUK now has over 1,600 students studying an array of fields on a state-of-the-art

campus. AUK's Mission Statement identifies the institution as "a liberal arts institution based on the American model of higher education. It is dedicated to providing students with knowledge, self-awareness, and personal growth experiences that can enhance critical thinking, effective communication, and respect for diversity" (American University of Kuwait, www.auk.edu.kw). Despite this commitment, AUK and other new universities in the region have grappled with restrictions placed on teaching and faculty by local governments and administrators that may inhibit attracting U.S. faculty. As reported in "Studying the American Way":

One of the challenges facing the new universities in Kuwait, and possibly the whole region, is censorship of teaching materials. Universities offering courses in fine arts, English literature, and humanities are required to adjust the content of these courses because of legal requirements, university administration policy, or student complaints. Examples of censored material include topics in religion, sexual development, mating and marriage, biological development and puberty, and sexual content in Western art theory and literature (Shafeeq and Arnold, 2007).

Middle Eastern elites recognize that attracting U.S. faculty to the region will require compromise on all sides. For instance, in order to establish ties with University of Texas at Austin, University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology has taken steps to meet concerns regarding the rights of U.S. faculty while in the Kingdom. "We are working with a university that has guaranteed nondiscrimination on the basis of race, religion, or gender," said Peter Glynn, director of the Stanford Institute. Nevertheless, Glynn acknowledged challenges and hinted at limitations placed on certain faculty, "We have several Israeli faculty involved with this, but to be honest, there's very little of what Stanford will be doing that will involve travel to Saudi Arabia(Lewin, 2008). In addition

to concerns expressed by Jewish faculty and women's groups, gay U.S. academics have also raised concerns about working in a country where homosexual acts are illegal.

The efforts of George Mason University, New York University, and those U.S. universities in Qatar's Education City clearly require the presence of U.S. faculty. However, a great many of the joint-degree programs and university-affiliated programs do not necessarily require U.S. nationals in the classrooms. A large number of public and private institutions in the Middle East where English is the mode of instruction staff their faculty with western-trained academics from a variety of countries and backgrounds. Ensuring that these individuals are qualified to offer instruction should be a major concern for U.S. and Arab administrators. While U.S. universities do employ individuals with Masters Degrees in classrooms, students and parents, both in the U.S. and the Middle East, envision Ph.D.s as their primary instructors. The individuals who constitute the faculties at the American-affiliated universities may be earnest and wish to participate in a university's mission, but all too often these "nomadic western adjuncts" find themselves underpaid, overworked, and subject to short-term contracts. Indeed, I have interviewed adjuncts who have been asked to teach courses outside of their academic fields. Many report that students are so ill-prepared in English that their courses, whatever they may be, turn into English language instruction. Owing to these frustrations, many short-term adjuncts have limited loyalty to their host institutions and spend considerable time and energy in search of their next position.

SHADES OF COLONIALISM?

This paper opened with a reference to the early French and British colonial impact on education in the Middle East. As a political scientist with a long-standing interest in the politics of the Middle East and a newly found interest in the region's higher education, I have confronted a number of issues that raise difficult questions. The U.S. government has been supportive of efforts to establish partnerships between American and Middle East universities. In 2002 the Bush Administration launched the "U.S. – Middle East Partnership Initiative" which promised to spend \$1 billion annually on projects centered on education, economic reforms, and civil society initiatives (U.S. State Department Fact Sheet, 2002). In addition, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) program Higher Education for Development works to build collaborative relations between U.S. and overseas universities.

American political and educational elites view the expansion of ties between U.S. and Middle East universities as a means of improving relations, spreading democratic values, and reducing the draw of Islamic fundamentalism. Speaking to a forum at the New York Council on Foreign Relations in 2007, John Waterbury, President of the American University in Beirut, joined the presidents from American University in Cairo, Lebanese American University, and American University Sharjah in discussing the mission of the four institutions in the Middle East:

Common to virtually all American institutions of higher learning are a set of values that we try to impart to our students, that we try to impart to our faculty: a sense of mutual respect, tolerance for people of very diverse backgrounds. Of course, diversity itself is something we seek to achieve. We seek to encourage responsible, free speech and of course responsible academic freedom. We expose students to a wide range of choice in the design of their program of studies, and we all emphasize general education or a liberal arts education, a broad-based exposure to the great wealth of human creativity and knowledge (American Universities in the Middle East, www.crf.org, 2007).

Many of those associated with the blooming partnerships between U.S. and Middle East institutions are motivated by a sense of altruism and a wish to serve. The work is complicated, challenging, and fraught with difficulties. For many the reward is found in the noble goal of empowering young people and building institutions that may well prove essential in bringing democracy and economic prosperity to the Arab world.

While financial gain and profit should not be viewed as contradictory or disqualifying aims for those participating in this process, it is important to question the role that money has come to play. For instance, while John Sexton of New York University has devoted considerable time and effort in his quest to build a campus in the United Arab Emirates, the financial reward for NYU has been substantial. Indeed, prior to entering into serious negotiations, Sexton secured a \$50-million gift for NYU from the government of Abu Dhabi. “It’s like earnest money,” Sexton informed the *New York Times*. “If you’re a \$50 million donor, I’ll take you seriously. It’s a way to test their bona fides (Lewin, 2008).

The Arab world, particularly the wealthy Gulf states, have made clear their willingness to spend billions of dollars to build the region’s university systems. The decision to turn to the United States for expertise is perfectly understandable, but the role and flow of monies need to be carefully considered lest they corrupt the process. The current arrangement between King Abdullah University of Science and Technology and three American universities may be perfectly legal, but the arrangement does raise questions about motivations. The University of Texas at Austin, the University of California at Berkeley, and Stanford University have all pledged to assist Kaust

curriculum design, recruitment of faculty, and research design. For their efforts, “each university will receive a \$10-million gift, \$10-million for research on their home campus and \$5 million for research at Kaust, as well as administrative costs.” All parties can point to a mutually advantageous relationship. As Albert Pisano, the chairman of Berkeley’s mechanical engineering department commented, “The agreement will allow us to improve our facilities here in California, and fund a stream of graduate students, without taxing our existing infrastructure . . . We’re going to work on projects that are good for the Middle East and for California, like energy sources beyond petroleum, improved water desalination, and solar energy in the desert (Lewin, 2008).

To persuade the consortium of U.S. universities to participate in Qatar’s Education City, the government of Qatar made handsome gifts to its U.S. partners. As reported in the *New York Times*, “Dr. Abdullah al-Thani, the Qatar Foundation’s vice president for education, declined to discuss specific gifts but said the foundation had often endowed chairs at the universities that have agreed to come to Education City (Lewin, 2008).

Universities in the United States and the Middle East require resources to function effectively. There are great demands on U.S. administrators to generate new sources of revenue just as there are great demands on Middle East elites to move quickly in the construction of new universities and colleges. While both parties at this table have goods to provide the other, our primary aim should be in sharing educational approaches and building infrastructures, not simply exchanging naming rights of famous U.S. universities for millions of dollars in foreign revenues.

In addition to questions over the role that money, grants, and profits play in this process, are concerns I hold regarding the delicate historic and contemporary relationship between the peoples of the Middle East and the United States. The Middle East has much to gain from close ties with the United States and so too does the United States have much to gain and learn. While “American-styled universities” where “English is the mode of instruction” may be a major draw in the region, there are costs associated with these terms and wishes. In the long term the Middle East will be best served through the maintenance and flourishing of Omani, Kuwaiti, Jordanian, Egyptian Universities among many others. American universities may always have a role to play, but the Middle East is its own unique region with ancient cultures and traditions. These cultures and traditions have much to offer the world and we should be cautious of the role American universities may have in potentially altering or filtering how students from the Middle East view themselves and their national identities.

Linked to these thoughts is a concern regarding hiring Western academics who teach solely in English at the new campuses in the Middle East. What are we saying to young Arabs when they sit in classrooms in their home nations and the only Westerner in the room is the one in front of the class—leading the class? What are we saying about the role and value of Arabic when it is not used in these classrooms? Arab elites clearly identify American-style education as key to economic development and regional progress. There are, however, many roads to development and progress and one model need not fit all. Our globalizing world knows both beneficiaries and casualties. The new American-style universities and partnerships in the Middle East have a dual mission: to at once share and advance proven pedagogies and to instill in students a sense of self-worth

and a desire to serve their nations as constructive citizens. In this light we may want to reconsider the “English-only” approach in a region where English is an import. At minimum American-style universities in the Middle East should employ qualified Arab nationals among the faculties. Ideally a range of courses should be offered in both English and Arabic.

Beyond the modest reach of the press and their own internal self-monitoring systems, there is limited oversight of the on-going relations between U.S. and Middle East universities. While campuses, such as those proposed by NYT and George Mason, will come under the review of U.S. domestic and international accrediting agencies, many of the less formal partnerships will not be subject to oversight by outside monitors. It is essential for the ties between U.S. and Middle East universities to be informed by concern for the traditions and aspirations of the region and its people. The West has a checkered past in the Middle East and Americans should walk gently as they share their institutions and values. Quality controls and best practices need to be enforced.

CONCLUSION

The most comprehensive analysis of the evolving role of U.S. universities in the Middle East remains Ghabra and Arnold’s 2007 study “Studying the American Way.” Though it is not an exhaustive study, their findings are in alignment with much of the reporting that is currently available. Their conclusions and recommendations are worth noting in detail:

Many American-style universities in the region are still going through growing pains that invariably affect the quality of education and the presence of an established faculty. They all experience sudden changes in administration, problems in faculty morale, and shifts in mission and have difficulty attracting high-quality faculty and students. For poor countries like Yemen, the problem is lack of money and resources. For wealthier ones, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain, with only few exceptions, weak administration, poor recruiting strategies and practices, instability of faculty, corporate-style management of the university, a focus on profit, weak faculty representation, and a relatively new and underdeveloped university system have hampered progress. For the region to establish high-quality American-style institutions of higher education that can meet the standards of universities in the United States, the following concepts must be accepted:

- ** An understanding and accepted vision of universities as agents of change;
- ** Quality control of institutions claiming to offer American-style education;
- ** Integration with the local culture, traditions, and laws;
- ** Focus on the student and modern education trends;
- ** Promotion of institutional integrity and standards;
- ** Inclusion of a strong liberal arts foundation in all degree programs;
- ** Employment and retention of high-quality faculty;
- ** Improvement of faculty and institutional governance;
- ** Clear and established policies and procedures;
- ** Promotion of research;
- ** Increased cooperation with American universities;
- ** Global integration. (Shafeeq and Arnold, 2007)

The evolving process of establishing partnerships will know failures and successes. Earlier this year negotiations collapsed between Yale University and officials

in Abu Dhabi who hoped to persuade Yale's art, music, architecture, and drama schools to form a partnership with an arts institute on Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island. According to press reports, talks broke down over the question of degrees being awarded to students of the arts institute. "From the beginning, we were clear that degree programs were not what we were talking about," said Linda K. Lorimer, secretary and vice president of Yale. "We were exploring exciting plans for programs that would be value-added for cultural development. But in the end, they wanted degrees. And at this point in time, we just don't think we could mount a faculty of the same quality we have here, or attract students of the same caliber" (Lewin, 2008).

Still there are success stories. In only ten years the American University of Sharjah (AUS) has evolved from an idea into a fully functioning university that has been compared to the American University in Cairo and the American University in Beirut. With the full financial backing of Sheik Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed al-Qasimi, the ruler of Sharjah, AUS established a not-for-profit university that attracts students from within the UAE and beyond. AUS is licensed in the United States by the Department of Education of Delaware. As reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*:

The American University of Sharjah is now the closest thing the emirates have to a venerable institution. It offers 22 bachelor's degrees, 39 minors, and eight master's-degree programs. It has one of the most extensive English-language libraries in the country. And its administrators boast that they have had to cap enrollment, forcing them to turn away qualified students (Lewin, 2008).

To date the American University of Sharjah has enrolled approximately 5,000 students from over 80 nations throughout the world.

The work at American University of Sharjah is complemented by the other American university campuses in the region including the American University in Cairo,

Lebanese American University, American University of Beirut, and American University of Kuwait. With over 20,000 students enrolled in these campuses, students from throughout the Middle East and beyond are afforded first-rate educational experiences.

Universities and colleges are not built overnight. American administrators should be quick to acknowledge the difficulties in maintaining their home campuses, let alone the start-up challenges associated with building new campuses and institutions in the Middle East. This paper has delineated a host of issues associated with the growth of higher education in the Middle East. The goal was not to deter future partnerships but to inform those considering new and pending collaborations. These are truly exciting times. Throughout the Middle East elites are eager to partner with U.S. universities in building institutions that may alter the landscape of the region. American universities should welcome this opportunity and work thoughtfully to advance this common good.

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