



Dartmouth-AUKuwait Internship Program Intern Newsletter – Fall 2017 Alexis Colbert '19



Learning about Kuwait and Myself

In Kuwait, I discovered pieces of myself that I did not know before. The ten weeks of working at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) was my first internship. I was afraid, even terrified. I set my goals high, wanted to adjust, excel at my jobs, and be a good roommate to Dartmouth classmate Mary Versa, whom I had only met once before.

AUK and my coworkers made me feel comfortable from the start. Even when I made mistakes, they said that I was doing a good job. This was the support system that I needed. Working at the Writing Center seemed straightforward. I consulted students on essays and developed different ways to help large groups of students. However, my placement in the Marketing Office engaged me the most. The environment was warm and bright, coworkers laughed with (and at) each other, often ate together, and helped one other. After the first day, I felt less like an intern and more like part of the team. I had never ventured into marketing before, and found that I flourished in it.



My coworkers and me (second from the right) from the Marketing department.

Being in Kuwait and interacting with students at AUK who were so open allowed me to learn about and experience Islam. I toured the Grand Mosque, was given an English copy of the Qur'an and religious readings, and attended a prayer service. Spirituality inspires me. At Dartmouth, I took an anthropology class on religion where it was suggested that the power and need for religion lies in people's beliefs. I wanted to know more about religion and could do so in a much more meaningful way in Kuwait

than sitting at home online. Nothing is more beautiful than hearing someone else tell you about their culture, their faith, and their life; I often wondered if I learned more from people's words in Kuwait or from how they spoke them.

Kuwait does not represent the entire Gulf or the Middle East, but spending ten weeks in Kuwait has allowed me to have a better sense of life in the Middle East. Unlike what movies and television shows often depict, all Muslim women are not oppressed and all Muslim men are not terrorists. Somewhere in Harper Lee's 1960 novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus tells Scout that "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it," meaning that you can never truly know a person until you take the time to try and understand their perspective and experience. I did not walk in the skin of a Kuwaiti, but I got a small glimpse of the mirror wiped clean. I came to learn the ways in which discrimination, manners, and traditions are deeply contextual.

Context always matters. For example, one day in Kuwait I made a presentation for the writing center about colloquialisms. When I was walking home that day from AUK, avoiding cars, I saw a cat walking along the edge of a yellow dumpster. I remembered the two cats I saw fighting at lunch outside of Starbucks. I laughed to myself. It occurred to me that in the U.S., the phrase "cat fight" evokes two women arguing or fighting, and I had witnessed at lunch a literal cat fight. I could speak to someone on campus and say "catfight" and be mistaken for talking about cats fighting over food. There was a colloquialism on the tip of my tongue that shed light on so many things I had come to Kuwait hoping to learn. Context is important outside literary analysis.



*Picture on the left: The view from the patio of 'Prime and Toas't along the Marina.
Picture on the right: My view as I walked back from AUK to my apartment after work every day.*

I did not leave Kuwait a different person or an expert on the region, but I believe that I have returned to the U.S. as a more enlightened global citizen and a woman with more self-knowledge. I left Kuwait with a new-found sense of confidence in my professional abilities, a capacity to adapt to new surroundings, and to rely on myself. The fear in my belly when I headed to Kuwait had been confronted and replaced with knowledge. I believe that much of a person's fear is really just anxiety about the unknown. Traveling to Kuwait in September, my unknown was what life would be like in a new place, how I would adjust to my position, and what my roommate would be like. Returning to the U.S. last November, I found answers. For me, life in Kuwait was enjoyable, I developed relationships, learned new skills, and came to feel at home. I not only liked my internship placements, but did well in each department, a feeling that I attributed to teamwork. I became a close friend with my roommate, eating dinners together and watching a new movie each week. Time abroad through the internship allowed me not only to travel through education, but to learn through travel, an experience for which I am enormously grateful for. Hopefully, this will not be my only visit to Kuwait.