



Dartmouth-AUKuwait Internship Program

Intern Newsletter Spring 2018

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Clarifying through Contrast

I participated in the AUK Intern Exchange Program because I wanted to gain experience. I had no study of economics since high school and wished to plunge into the field and participate in research at the American University of Kuwait. Similarly, I had no experience working with academic administrators. I wanted to compare and contrast this to my previous internship experiences. I also had no exposure to Arab societies.

While my goals were ambitious, the convenience afforded by having so much structure in the internship was certainly a boon. This allowed me to hit the ground running in my internship placements. In the library, I was improved workflows by semi-automating several tasks. I also got the opportunity to learn HTML and even had some of my work implemented in one of the library websites. In the College of Business and Economics, I gave several lectures on my startup, “Who’s Down?”, to a 200-level course, Principles of Entrepreneurship. I was impressed with the amount of student engagement. I also contributed to research on enterprise perception of e-commerce public policy and was even offered a spot as a coauthor on a resulting paper to be submitted to a conference.

As the internship progressed, I also made friends with my AUK colleagues. Thomas Kutty, a Collection Development Librarian, took an interest in the new library intern. Every time we happened to meet, despite initially not knowing me at all, he would generously offer me some food or snacks that the library staff shared. He recognized me as a Kashmiri. Wanting to make me feel at home, he took the initiative to welcome me. His actions were a small reminder of how kind and hospitable my colleagues were, and how fortunate I was to have them. I also became close to Maher Dabbouseh, the Director of Admissions. He made getting to know Devon and myself a priority and established early on that we could trust him.

I also fraternized with members of the security force, cleaning staff, and student body. Through their patience and my small amount of Hindi, I gained an appreciation of the different social worlds present in Kuwait. While we were in Kuwait, the ambassador of the Philippines to Kuwait was recalled, and the resulting tension was sometimes palpable. Even on less divisive issues among the university staff, faculty, and workers, the large diversity of views on everything from human rights to a favorite type of hummus showcased the vast spectrum of people that Kuwait society has to offer.

The youth of Kuwait were generally unafraid of strangers such as myself. They seemed free in their interactions, as they might behave on a sports field. During an excursion to the National Library of Kuwait, a group of ten to twelve young girls eagerly asked to give us a presentation in English on which they had been working. It was a charming and unexpected talk on community health. The tension between social conservatism and the challenge of new

situations was also reflected in the university, as illuminated by conversations with students regarding the balance between propriety and spontaneity.

Kuwait has scenes of absolute beauty. There were striking contrasts in daily routines—you'd be sitting next to an absolutely gorgeous rooftop pool and look at a burnt-out relic from the 1990 Iraqi invasion. The legacy of this time was still very much intact in the minds of many people.

A lot of what I learned in Kuwait came from contrasting it to environments with which I was already familiar. Kuwait has almost no petty crime, and some malls are saturated with Western luxuries. Contrasting observations like these with time spent in Morocco and the American South gave me a sense of Kuwait's distinctiveness as a nation.



The staff of the library and myself. I worked most closely with Ms. Hana Kaouri and Ms. Asma Al Kanan, second and third from the right respectively. To the absolute right is Zainab Al Attabi, and to my left is Souad Badran and Fadia Al-Akhras. The staff was incredibly supportive.



View from the rooftop of Beit Alsadu, a museum dedicated to the Kuwaiti tradition of weaving and handicrafts. The museum “aims to promote and to celebrate Kuwait’s cultural and textile heritage. To tell the story of the land. To speak the languages of the arts ... of the soul.” (www.alsadu.org.kw).



Maher Dabbouseh (center), myself (left), and Devon (right) after an outing to a local diner on our last day