



Dartmouth-American University of Kuwait Internship Program
Intern Newsletter - Fall 2021
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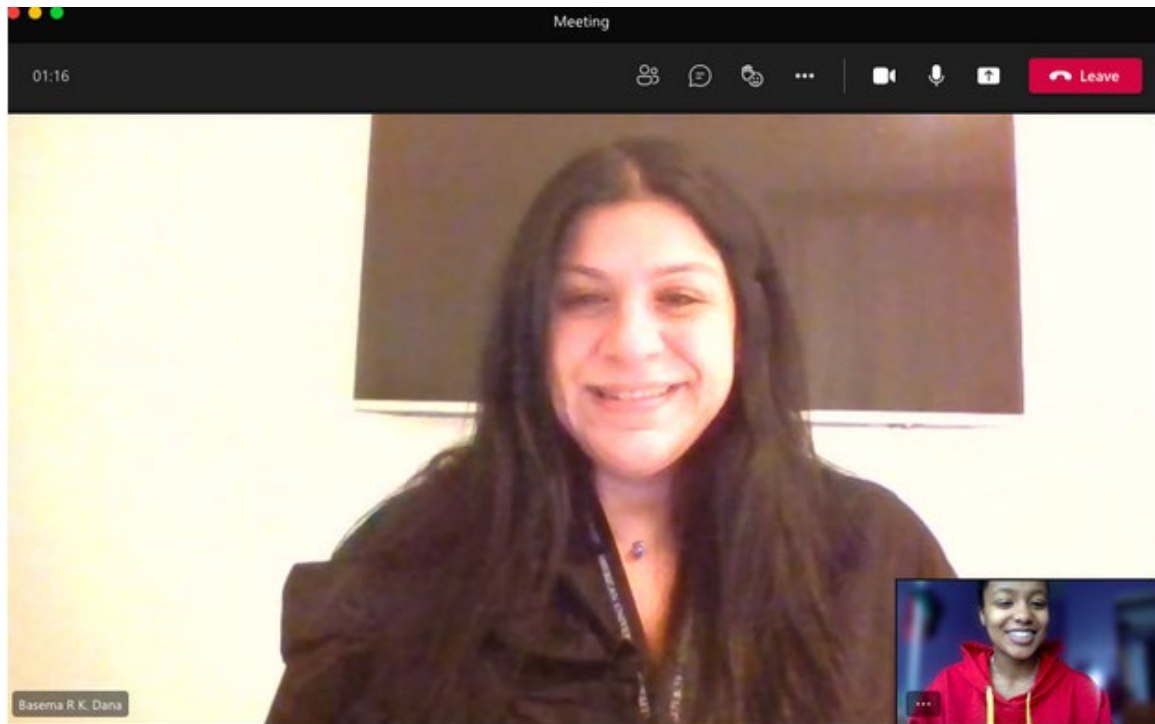
Dartmouth-AUK: The Virtual Experience

When I first visited Dartmouth as a senior in high school, I was elated by the number of students that were able to study or travel abroad, and multiple times at that. It was a goal of mine to take every opportunity possible to have a global experience. By the end of freshman winter, I had plans to go to Italy freshman summer, to Kuwait in sophomore spring, and possibly to participate in an exchange semester in Atlanta in junior fall. At the same time, a highly transmissible disease was quickly spreading across the world, and everyone had to redefine their lives to keep themselves and their communities safe. When we were sent home during the spring of 2020, I was relatively sure that my plans for Italy were over, but no one could have anticipated how long the pandemic would affect us. I was sure I could still go to Kuwait in spring 2021, but when the time came the outcome was the same as with Italy. There was an opportunity, however, to push the internship to the fall and likely go then. I assumed, with the availability of vaccines and the transition back to normality, it would be possible for me to go to Kuwait. But as the time to leave drew closer, it became clear that I wouldn't be able to go. And this time, it was certain. There was not going to be another opportunity. So when the possibility of a remote internship was proposed, and with no other plans, I was more than willing to participate.

Given all the confusion preceding the start of the internship, any semblance of an expectation I may have had beforehand was gone. I had no idea what to expect. The department I was working with, the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), was a little over a year old, so none of the past interns' testimonials could give me any insight on the kind of work I would be doing. And above all, this was the first time this internship would be virtual! Luckily, I was working from home, so I didn't have any sort of environmental changes to adjust to.

The CTE is very similar to the Dartmouth Center for the Advancement of Learning (DCAL) and was established in February 2020. The goal of the CTE is to provide faculty members with a variety of resources and continuous support to apply modern curricula within the classroom, and to promote a holistic educational culture that allows faculty to utilize the best

methods of teaching to ensure constructive and active learning environments. The CTE came into being right when it was most necessary, and it has especially focused on providing resources to help faculty members optimize their use of technology for virtual learning. I worked primarily with my supervisor, Basema Dana, who is the sole full time faculty member at the CTE. I also worked with Rita El Haddad, the assistant director of the CTE and assistant professor of Psychology at AUK. My role wasn't completely defined beforehand. I was a sort of "second hand" to Basema, but there were a few things we knew we wanted to accomplish by the end of my internship.



Screenshot of my supervisor, Basema Dana, and me in a team meeting

First, the CTE delivers a lot of faculty workshops on how to use remote teaching tools, like Moodle (similar to Canvas) and Zoom. I was able to sit in on one of these workshops where I got to see how faculty structure their classes and gradebooks and learn about some issues they face navigating these platforms. My first job was to set up a series of surveys that would give the CTE a way to measure the effectiveness of these workshops. Once we got that feedback, my job was to present the information to Basema and Rita for improvement. It was really interesting to see education from a faculty member's perspective. This feedback was important, not just for the workshops, but also for the research I would be doing later.

While I was an intern for the CTE, Basema also made it possible for me to explore other aspects of AUK. She knew I was a cognitive science major and a computer science minor, and that at one point I was also interested in majoring in anthropology. She showed me all classes in the psychology, computer science and anthropology departments and gave me free rein to choose classes I was interested in attending. I attended Analysis of Algorithms with Dr. Iyad Doush and Anthropology of Emotions with Dr. Marion Breteau. Seeing as this was my first off term since starting at Dartmouth, I was more than excited for the respite from any academic expectations. But these were classes and departments I enjoyed at Dartmouth, and I was curious to see how much of what I learned would carry over. Dr. Doush's class was very interesting and useful, and its structure was very similar to classes I've taken before. I'd love to see if Dartmouth offers a similar class. However, Dr. Breteau's class gave me the most insight into some of the differences between a school in New Hampshire and a school in Kuwait. AUK is fundamentally a liberal arts college, but there are a number of cultural differences that make it distinct and unique. It seems obvious that the images and examples in class reflect the norms of the students and community they are in, but it was interesting to see how those examples differed from ours.



A fall day in my neighborhood (Aurora, CO), my remote internship headquarters

These classes were interesting from a personal perspective. As an intern, they gave me insight into how the CTE could better help faculty, and even which departments needed which resources. Basema told me this beforehand, but we both observed that professors in the humanities had more technical difficulties with Zoom than professors in the sciences. True to that observation, I could see from a student's perspective how much class time could be lost on screen sharing and other audio or visual issues. These observations were really useful for the second big assignment for my internship - the research. Basema and Rita wanted to provide a database of pedagogical research that faculty could easily access for the most recent and accurate data on topics to improve their classrooms (topics such as academic dishonesty, flipped classrooms, active learning, technological tools, etc.). I spent the majority of my time with the CTE researching topics that I thought professors would be the most interested in based on the surveys, my observations from classes, and also my own experience as a student. I was really happy to see how pleased Basema and Rita were with the research I had found.



Mountain view from a camping trip with my family (Colorado Springs, CO)

I wish I had more to say about the experience of being in Kuwait, recounting stories of places where I ate, shops I visited, and events I attended. I wish I was able to include photos of the landscape from my apartment or group photos I was in. But as disappointed as I was to learn I couldn't go to Kuwait, I am still really glad I was able to participate in the internship. Basema was a pleasure to work with. She was always considerate and professional, and she gave me more freedom than most supervisors would to make the experience as enjoyable as possible. It is not common for a supervisor to allow those working under them to choose the projects they are interested in. I was able to accomplish a lot this fall, both for the CTE and for myself, that improved me professionally and personally. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity and for the relationships I have created. I look forward to Basema's upcoming visit to Dartmouth, and I hope to visit Kuwait myself someday.