



Dartmouth-AUKuwait Internship Program

Intern Newsletter – Fall 2019

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From Morocco to Kuwait

When choosing a college in my senior year of high school, one of the biggest factors in my decision to pick Dartmouth was the variety of study abroad experiences. I dove head first into international education, applying for the Arabic LSA+ in Morocco for the summer after my first year and then pursued an internship at the American University of Kuwait in the fall of my second year. In fact, I flew straight from Rabat to Kuwait City because my internship was due to begin just two days after my final exams finished in Morocco. I had fallen in love with Morocco - the food, the hustle and bustle of the old medina, and the fun and adventure that seemed to be waiting around every corner. I found myself tearing up on the plane and feeling uneasy about Kuwait. I wouldn't have called it homesickness, but I had to face a new routine and cultural norms just after I had adjusted to life in Morocco. However, I was undoubtedly excited to be living with other Dartmouth students in an apartment, and I knew that AUK would be just as welcoming as my Moroccan friends and family.

Arriving in Kuwait, basically all small talk on campus revolved around how hot the weather was. To be completely honest, I was constantly meeting new faculty, students, and staff at AUK and I always knew a great conversation starter: "Isn't this weather just the worst?" Nonetheless, it was surprisingly difficult for me to adjust to air conditioning everywhere. Morocco never really had completely functional air conditioning, so entering a building that was below 80 degrees was definitely a shock. I found myself bringing sweaters (and sometimes even a scarf) into work with me almost every day!

Kuwait often had a lot of things that I had learned to see as luxuries. Everything from grocery stores to restaurants to salons seemed to have their own sleek, luxurious aesthetics. This look was definitely fun and interesting, but I often missed the ways Dartmouth felt historic and cozy. My favorite spot in Kuwait was a restaurant a few blocks from my apartment called Pick. After having some stomach problems and watching the sheep slaughter of the Eid in August, I decided to experiment with vegetarianism, which was surprisingly easy in Kuwait. Restaurants like Pick had

Kunafa, a dessert made of sweet cheese and a thin, crispy pastry. Traditionally served with pistachios (but I'm allergic!) and an amazing saffron syrup.



great vegetarian options and delicious salads and sandwiches with falafel, hummus, and my new favorite sauce, tahini. Kuwait City is informally known as the food capital of the world, and I would say that the label isn't too far off. To say the least, I ate well in Kuwait and expanded my taste and knowledge of food more than I thought possible. I became obsessed with anything and everything saffron related, and I developed a love of Middle Eastern desserts that will leave me dreaming of *kunafa* until the day I die.

My days were divided into three placements at AUK: the Intensive English Program (IEP), the International Relations Department, and the Writing Center. Working with IEP was one of the most fulfilling experiences during my time in Kuwait. I basically acted as a teaching



Some IEP students and me on a field trip to the cultural center!

assistant for a few classes, and my main focus was on helping students prepare informative presentations for a speech class. None of the students were native English speakers, and they all constantly slipped in and out of English to make frustrated remarks in Arabic. This reminded me of my own struggles with learning Arabic in Morocco. As they struggled with grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in English, I completely understood what they were feeling because just weeks ago I was in their exact position.

Observing their effort and progress allowed me to be emotionally invested in something while at AUK, and I'm happy to say that I think of most of the students as friends who made Kuwait a fun and special place for me.

My next placement was with the International Relations Department. I worked on several projects for various faculty as needed. I often compiled research and articles for professors, which was a really interesting job because I was able to utilize Dartmouth's library catalog and digital database to its fullest potential and really help faculty gain access to materials they otherwise wouldn't have been able to see. I also helped with some programming for the Center for Gulf Studies, and I was able to be a little creative in filming and making a promotional video for their October lecture with doctoral candidate Océane Saily. This was my primary placement, so I spent a lot of time in my office, which was a little difficult as I can get restless and love to be spontaneous. Learning what it feels like to be doing office work for extended periods of time has really been helpful in making me think about my future career choices, and I now know that I will thrive in a work environment that requires creativity and movement.

My last placement was with the Writing Center, and I worked as a consultant with other AUK students in order to help our peers improve their writing skills. I had never really worked as a tutor for writing before, so learning how to evaluate and work with students to improve their writing made me consider my own writing and ways that I can make myself better at Dartmouth. I also learned how to offer constructive criticism, which I think is an excellent skill to have in a

fast-paced academic environment like Dartmouth. The opportunity to work with undergraduate students who were experiencing the same feelings of stress with which I've often struggled helped me to see just how much asking for help could benefit me in the future.

Perhaps the best part of my time in Kuwait was the opportunity to make friends with so many amazing, kind people. Two AUK students who interned at Dartmouth in the summer, Jumana and Taif, made sure to take care of us, taking us around the city and exposing us to Kuwaiti food, the huge malls, and so much more. We also made trips with friends to Al-Shaheed Park, a beautiful oasis that gave me a much-needed splash of color in a very beige country. The people of Kuwait made it a point to be compassionate and friendly to us as foreigners, and I sometimes even forgot that I wasn't at home-- not because I saw Kuwait as the same as the United States, but because I constantly felt at home with the people around me. Their kindness and willingness to accommodate me made the entire experience so much more worthwhile in my eyes. Even though I missed Dartmouth, I felt like I had a support system in Kuwait in the form of several loving people. This sentiment especially goes to my roommates, who kept me grounded, allowed me to vent, and just kept me company as I worked through adjusting to life in Kuwait.

One of the biggest points of reflection for me on this journey was how my experiences in Morocco differed from those in Kuwait. Morocco and Kuwait both include Arabic as an official language, but the dialect of Arabic spoken in everyday life is very different in each place. Moroccans speak *darija*, a combination of standard Arabic, French, and Tamazight, while Kuwaitis speak their own unique Kuwaiti dialect derived from standard Arabic. Kuwaiti and Moroccan dialects both came from the same language, but to me, they sounded quite different because of *darija*'s extra French and indigenous influences. Interestingly enough, I often found that Kuwaitis knew some *darija* just by essence of listening to Moroccan music. Several famous rappers and singers are Moroccan, and a lot of the pop songs I heard while walking through the Rabat medina also played frequently in Kuwaiti restaurants and malls. In terms of food, Moroccan cuisine revolves around staple foods such as couscous, tajines, lentils, and fresh bread. In Kuwait, bread was also vital to an authentic meal, but the similarities stopped there. Kuwaiti food is heavily influenced by South Asian cuisine, which means that several spices like cardamom, saffron, and cumin dominated the palate. Rice was always present at meals, and the most famous dish, briyani, was a saffron rice dish prepared with lamb or chicken.



Jumana and me at AUK's annual Halloween party.

Finally, perhaps the most interesting set of similarities and differences were that of cultural norms. I constantly got the sense in both places of what is fondly called “Arab hospitality,” and I was always feeling welcome and included wherever I went. However, Kuwaitis often seemed to have lavish taste in everything, including food, clothes, and cars.. Many of my Moroccan friends, on the other hand, struggled with the rampant unemployment crisis that dominates North Africa, and although their generosity was boundless, I could often sense the social strain these issues placed on the youth of the country. I could sense in both Kuwait and Morocco a certain sense of responsibility and obligation towards one’s parents, and both Moroccans and Kuwaitis were expected to live at home until after marriage and eventually purchase their own home. I definitely admired this respect and sense of duty, and seeing it every day made me realize how much I value my parents and family even though I attend university so far from home.

As an intern at the American University of Kuwait, I gained real-world experience and substantially learned about myself as a professional and young adult. I formed close relationships with my lovely roommates and learned how to budget and care for an apartment. I learned about the inner workings of a university, and I collected invaluable advice and information from faculty on graduate school and my own potential future as a professor someday. Even though I felt myself longing for Morocco, I settled into a new set of experiences and memories that I long for now that I’m home in the United States. Kuwait’s booming city scene made me learn how to adjust to urban life after living in small towns for twenty years. The friends I’ve gained and the experiences with food, music, and culture have given me a broader perspective on myself and the value of exploring the world around me.