

**SPRING 2007**



**DARTMOUTH-AUK  
INTERN NEWSLETTER**

**Nicholas Williams and Edward Kim  
Part 1**



Nick and Ed were swiftly swept out of the Kuwait International Airport in the early hours of March 27th, 2007 and driven to our new apartment in Salmiya, Kuwait City, just blocks from the campus of AUK. We began work the next day. Thankfully, the 28th was a Wednesday. Because the Kuwaiti weekend begins on Thursday and Saturday was the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, we were able to enjoy three full days to adjust.

We were both initially struck by how “western” Kuwait appears. Both of us had traveled to the Middle East before – Nick to Morocco and Ed to Lebanon and Syria – so while neither of us had fantastic images of camels and Bedouin tents in our heads, we were nevertheless surprised. Kuwait City, in fact, appears more “western” than many American cities. On the drive to our luxurious two-bedroom apartment, set in the heart of Salmiya, an extremely commercial district in the city, we could not help but notice the abundance of American brand vehicles and English printed everywhere we looked. Salmiya itself boasts three shopping malls, nearly every major American fast-food chain, and stores lining nearly every inch of sidewalk down the main thoroughfare. The only significant difference in a visit to the Sultan Center, Salmiya’s local grocery store, from a stop by Hanover’s Co-op is the clientele.

Despite the superficial resemblance to American life, we slowly have become more attuned to the Kuwaiti lifestyle. For example, the city is one of the least pedestrian-oriented cities one is likely to encounter. Walking in Kuwait is generally avoided for at least two good reasons. Why walk when you have cars, and nice ones at that, which you can fill up with locally drilled petroleum for about US \$7, especially when summer temperatures can soar above 50 degrees Celsius? Still, car-less and ready to take on the city, we spent the first week walking to restaurants, to the University, and along the Corniche as taxi drivers gleefully beeped at us in the hopes of snagging a couple of Americans, presumably with loaded pockets (they presumed wrong).

Following our long weekend and eased entry into life in the Gulf, we settled into our daily routines. Nick was assigned to the Admissions Office and Ed to Student Affairs. We quickly got to know people in the AUK community—faculty, staff and students alike—who graciously invited us out to dinner, local hangouts, and University events.

Because AUK is a school that opened its gates to students only in 2004, it is much smaller than Dartmouth. It isn’t a residential university and the campus itself isn’t much larger than the size of Occum Pond, although with its contemporary architecture and palm trees, it does have a rather nice view, especially in the evening. In addition, there are only about 1,900 students currently enrolled in the university, about a third of the number comprised solely of Intensive English (pre-University) students. Despite the small size, however, the students are lively and engaged with the University, as we have both seen hands-on.

Working in Student Affairs, Ed has had the opportunity to interact closely with AUK students. As can be expected, their personalities, lifestyles, work ethic, self-motivation, and level of friendliness cover a wide range. Although a small number of students appear rude and somewhat spoiled, the large majority of students has been overwhelmingly welcoming and willing to accept us into their community. Working in the Student Affairs Office entails a great deal of planning and coordinating, but perhaps even more important than outlining the proper protocols that pertain to the student activities is the encouragement that the students get from those working in our office. Because of the cultural divide between America and Kuwait, many students at AUK are not familiar with the idea that student-run organizations are just that, and therefore require a lot of guidance. While the seeming hand-holding often leads to feelings of exasperation, it just as often leads to feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction. The great thing about AUK students is that many of them are willing to learn to take charge and responsibility, to become leaders with goals and opinions. In a society that on many levels still distrusts innovative ideas and concepts, this willingness is both surprising and inspiring.

Across campus and not quite as deeply involved in the daily lives AUK students, Nick has been working spending about half his time in the Office of Admissions. Working closely with administrators, he has been given the task of editing and updating the Admissions website, developing brochures, and maintaining the constant ebb and flow of current and prospective students filing through the office. Working in the Admissions Office has presented sometimes frustrating, but mostly rewarding, challenges. The admissions staff has been eager to gain the perspective of an outside student. Everyone seems to both trust and value Nick's opinions and insight, asking for input on a variety of issues. While at first there seemed to be not enough work to do, Nick quickly realized that he had been given more responsibility than he expected. The work tends to be coordinating and managing projects, rather than constant minute secretarial tasks.

Just like AUK itself, the admissions office staff is much smaller than one at older institutions. With only five permanent, non-student professionals, everyone must be willing and ready to fulfill a variety of roles and accomplish whatever tasks are at hand. The environment is flexible, not only in this way, but also in regards to defined working hours and languages of communication used in the office. Breaks from the drudgery of office duties are encouraged, and Arabic and English freely mix in a linguistic situation that blurs the line between code-switching and pidgin-formation. The view from the Office of Admissions at AUK has given Nick the opportunity to witness the vivacity with which a nascent institution is able to adapt.

With our internship less than halfway over, we have a lot more to learn and experience in Kuwait. From fashion shows, lectures, camel races, boat races, awards ceremonies, and open houses, our work here is really just beginning. Having finally settled in, we're looking forward to six more weeks in the "desert" and still waiting on that reported 50+ degrees weather