



Dartmouth-AUKuwait Internship Program

Intern Newsletter – Spring 2015

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When I began my freshmen fall by signing up for Arabic 1, my parents weren't particularly surprised -- they knew of my love of languages and my interest in the Middle East. Extended family and friends, however, were confused about why I would study such an intricate language. Imagine their surprise when I told them I would be working in Kuwait for three months!

I initially applied for this internship precisely because the description was so open. I was excited for the unknown and for the opportunity to be totally independent, far away from my existing support circles. As my departure date grew closer, my friends and family grew more persistent in asking, "But what are you *doing* there?" Even after my return from Kuwait, I can't sum up my work, life, or experience there in a simple sentence.

AUK

My very first impression of the University was that my 400-student high school in California had a larger campus. All of AUK can easily fit within the Dartmouth Green, buildings and courtyards included. The current student body is only about half that of Dartmouth but the University is growing rapidly.

I divided my time between three departments: the library, the Writing Center, and the Office of Student Life.

The Library

I did not thoroughly appreciate what librarians do until I worked in the AUK library for three months. While I only worked on certain projects, I was impressed to see what the library staff created and developed on a daily basis.

I was first placed at the Reference Desk, where I helped students and faculty find resources. The library has a copy of the textbooks for each course, along with calculators and other academic tools, so I organized and lent these out. My favorite part of working the Reference Desk was helping students with research questions. The AUK library has access to extensive resources, including printed books and references, e-books, online journals, and audiovisual materials. I enjoyed explaining how to use these resources and helping students learn about research.

For many students at AUK, English 101 is their first experience with research and long essays. I loved working through the process with students, and watching them grow interested and excited as their papers developed. This allowed me to reflect on my own experiences at Dartmouth where I often conduct research, both for class and for my job in the Government department. By crafting presentations for AUK students and explaining each step, I learned more myself about the intricacies of research.

My favorite part of working in the library was getting to know the staff. All of them were incredibly welcoming. They answered any questions I had and suggested places to visit and things to do in my free time. I especially enjoyed the food. Every week, it seemed one of my coworkers would bring in fresh falafel and Jordanian almonds, or homemade olive oil and labneh (sort of a combination between Greek yoghurt and cream cheese, but far tastier than either—it quickly became a staple in my diet).

The Writing Center

The AUK Writing Center provides essentially the same services as the Institute for Writing and Rhetoric (RWIT) at Dartmouth. My responsibilities included conducting research with the staff to come up with ways to improve the Center and holding consultation sessions with students about their papers and writing skills.

I researched how other university writing centers hold sessions, gather feedback, and transfer services online. Throughout this process I gained a better understanding of the role of a new liberal arts university in the Gulf. Most colleges I reviewed had long histories of established tutoring programs while AUK is still in the early stages of developing its program. It is drawing on the best ideas from universities elsewhere in order to create the best possible programs, departments, and curriculum for its students.

I also served as a writing consultant, helping students develop their essays. I even got a chance to use some Spanish when students came in with essays for their Spanish classes. I met many wonderful students and truly gained a better insight into Kuwait and the region by reading students' opinions and experiences.

Arabic and English differ not only in vocabulary and grammar but also in rhetorical style. Arabic values long, flowing, descriptive sentences. English, particularly in an academic setting, requires concise sentences without excessive adjectives. It was a constant challenge for me to explain to students why they had to chop up, streamline, or shorten their beautifully descriptive sentences.

The greatest challenge I encountered was something I often discussed with the assistant director, Hanouf Al-Juhail. She attended Kuwaiti schools and, like many other children in Kuwait, was not taught the importance of writing until college. For many American universities, writing is a core part of most classes. Good writers are good communicators, and good communication is an essential skill for leadership and the workplace. My greatest struggle in the Writing Center was helping students understand that good writing doesn't end with their English or history papers. I loved when students came back to me for help on another paper, not because they wanted to get an A but because they had become excited about writing.

Student Life

"Organized chaos" is the best way to describe the Student Life office. The office consists of several young staff members, many of whom are AUK graduates. There was always something going on: planning events, meeting with clubs, playing office volleyball. Like the Library, Student Life also had a variety of delicious foods.

My main project in Student Life involved working with the sports coordinator, Omar Mehdi, to develop an athletics league for the Gulf. While AUK participates in a local university league and teams travel occasionally to international competitions, Omar wanted to expand competitive options and unite the Gulf region. It was a lofty goal, which is one of the reasons I was so excited to work on the project.

We decided to model the league after the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the U.S. and invite schools from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE to participate. I spent several weeks researching schools, deciding which ones had adequate athletic teams and facilities, finding contact information, and developing the initial proposal. One of our requirements was that both male and female teams have equal opportunities to participate.

Life in Kuwait

I spent Sunday through Thursday from 8 AM until 4 PM at AUK. The afternoons and weekends were left open for exploration and adventure. Alexis, the other Dartmouth student intern, and I saw a lot—Kuwait is not large, so in the cooler months we walked everywhere. Our first weekend we walked from Salmiya to Kuwait City, which only took a couple of hours and let us see sights and enjoy the beautiful path along the water. Everyone we met was shocked to hear how much we walked. Because the weather is generally so hot and gasoline is so cheap, nearly everyone drives everywhere. Also, taxis are relatively inexpensive and easy to find. This came in handy during the final few weeks, when the temperature soared above 100°F.

There were many small differences from life in the US that were surprisingly easy to incorporate into my daily life. Alexis and I quickly grew used to the new currency (Kuwaiti dinar are one of the strongest currencies in the world), the regular call to prayers from mosques, the insistence on using multiple plastic bags for every grocery purchase, and the ever-present haze layer on the horizon.



Visiting the Grand Mosque

We quickly learned that our Arabic professors at Dartmouth had not exaggerated the quality of Arab hospitality. Our coworkers, friends, and random people we met went out of their way to make us feel at home and ensure that we made the most of our time in Kuwait. They took us out for meals and were always willing to take time to sit and chat with us. One of my favorite experiences was the very last weekend, when we visited the Grand Mosque in Kuwait City. Our tour guide was a wonderful Kuwaiti man who wanted to hear all about what we learned over the previous ten weeks. After chatting for a while, he offered to walk with us to the Souk Mubarakia, where he showed us around and introduced us to his friends. Although he had met us just a few hours before, he was so incredibly kind to both of us and even made sure we sampled food from the more traditional booths.

Another interesting difference was the use of the Internet and websites. I first noticed this while doing research for my various placements—few universities in Kuwait and across the Gulf put very much information online. My friends and coworkers explained that, while of course the Internet is important, there are many more preferred methods used for information and communication in the country. One of the biggest is Instagram, which is popular in the US but not nearly at the same level as Kuwait. Alexis and I began following different accounts to learn about events, cultural exhibitions, and exploration opportunities. My favorite discovery was called the Secret Garden Project, which was created by a woman who wanted to build a garden in the middle of Salmiya. Every week they had gardening events and small markets, with delicious foods, homemade crafts, and live music.



I help with gardening at the Secret Garden Project

As a member of the Dartmouth varsity swim team, I was eager to stay active and in shape while in Kuwait. For the first week, I donned long leggings and a t-shirt and went for runs along the path next to the bay. However, I missed the pool and the gym so I searched for a facility nearby. I found several gyms and a beautiful swimming pool complex, all for men only. Although I expected that I probably wouldn't be able to swim due to cultural differences, it was still a challenging adjustment for me.

One of the most interesting differences I noticed was how people self-identify their nationalities. Only about 30% of people living in Kuwait are actually Kuwaiti citizens. The rest come mostly from other Arab countries, South Asia, and the Philippines. Many of the people I met were born and raised in Kuwait yet identified as Egyptian or Lebanese, even if they had never visited their home country. It was really interesting to compare this to many Americans I have met with immigrant backgrounds, who identify as Chinese-American or Irish-American.

Conclusion

I am only just beginning to appreciate the effects that the past ten weeks have had on my life. The people I met, both in and out of the university, were kind, generous, and welcoming. I lived completely on my own (with an awesome roommate) and learned to navigate AUK, the streets, and daily life in a new country. I felt complete independence to explore and make the most of my time. Sometimes it was wonderful to relax at home with a movie, but more often than not I was motivated to wander the streets, find new foods, and experience the country.

Meeting and working with people from such diverse backgrounds helped me grow as both a professional and a person. The three different placements granted me a unique opportunity to work with three very different subsets of university staff, all of who have distinctive life paths and stories. Of course meeting fellow college students in a different country offered me ample time to reflect on my time at Dartmouth. I appreciate the

amazing things on campus a little bit more, and am eager to change things that can be improved. Mostly I am grateful for the experience and the opportunity to learn not just about Kuwait, but about myself too.



Alexis and I share our final meal in Kuwait with the wonderful staff of the Writing Center.



Alexis and me at the *I Heart Kuwait* sculpture in front of the Al Hamra Firdous Business Tower and Luxury Center (the tallest building in Kuwait).