



FALL 2006

DARTMOUTH-AUK INTERN NEWSLETTER

By Rose Mutiso
Part 2



Rose Mutiso and Kuwait

Work Experience

I divided my time between AUK's Writing Center, mathematics tutoring sessions, and office work with the Dean of Student Affairs. Each activity offered valuable experience. Instructing others in the art of writing has helped me in my ongoing work as a member of the Dartmouth Writing Center's ESL (English as a Second Language) team. Moreover, helping students brainstorm, research, develop their ideas, and polish their final drafts revealed their opinions and beliefs, contributing to my own cultural education. With AUK's mathematics department, I led class review sessions, tutored students, and re-discovered my passion for teaching. Working closely with professors, I gained valuable academic and career-related insights.

The AUK Educational Experience

Although a young university, the AUK community has high educational standards. In particular, I was struck by the dedication of faculty members and staff who work tirelessly to ensure that each AUK student has access to a world class educational experience. However, pursuing and maintaining such standards is no easy task. One obstacle is AUK students' varying levels of English proficiency. To be sure, many AUK students studied in American or British high schools and thus are more or less proficient in spoken and written English. However, the average student falls short of college standards in English proficiency. Such a shortfall is problematic in the classroom, where textbooks, writing, and discussions demand superior linguistic ability.

To improve students' English language skills, AUK developed bridge courses centered on an Intensive English Program (IEP). While these programs help students upgrade their language skills, college-level proficiency requires extensive practice which is difficult to attain in such a short span of time. Nonetheless, AUK's IEP students are remarkably motivated and enthusiastic. Many achieve high levels of proficiency in the course of the year-long IEP program. English is also AUK's language of casual conversation. Mixed with Arabic, English dominates most peer conversations, immersing students in English speech and accelerating their linguistic development. Conversely, some have expressed concern that the tendency to use English and informal Arabic undermines the status of formal Arabic, which young Kuwaitis seldom use.

AUK's academic and recruiting successes have won influence and a reputation for excellence in Kuwait. AUK markets itself as a liberal arts institution offering students comprehensive preparation in a range of disciplines. However, the concept of "the liberal arts" is novel in Kuwait. At one level, a "liberal arts"

education means that students are required to take diverse courses to satisfy a “core curriculum” requirement. Some AUK students see these as a burden and dislike enrolling in and paying for courses unrelated to their majors. That said, students’ appreciation for such classes is increasing, particularly with the recent introduction of new fine arts courses. Music and theater are particularly popular. But academic disciplines central to the liberal arts experience such as English and History sometimes struggle to attract student interest. Fields such as Economics, Finance and Advertising are regarded as “practical” and account for the majority of majors filed at AUK. To stimulate interest in the humanities, the AUK administration recently launched an essay competition on the liberal arts experience. This competition, they hope, will both provide student feedback and increase their understanding and appreciation of the liberal arts philosophy. I felt that the both faculty members and staff responded innovatively to academic challenges. I was impressed that they made special efforts to tailor their courses for increased relevance in a Kuwaiti context. For example, teachers covered topics such as the portrayal of Arabs in Western media, traditional Kuwaiti music, and Middle Eastern literature.

Parting Thoughts

Prior to the internship, I expected it would enrich me personally. I was excited about the prospects of cross-cultural education. I hoped that my worldview would be influenced by experiences in a new socio-cultural environment. The results exceeded my expectations. I both expanded my knowledge of the Middle East and Arab world and learned about myself and “re-centered” in a new environment.

I look forward to combining the lessons learned in Kuwait with my other experiences abroad to work towards a better world.

I will remember fondly the wonderful friends I made in Kuwait and late night feasts during the month of Ramadan.