

SPRING 2005

DARTMOUTH-AUK INTERN NEWSLETTER



Part One: Observations Concerning University Life, Free Time, Kuwaiti Travels, Qatar, Weather, Clothing, and Language

University Life

Everyone in Kuwait seems impressed by AUK's new campus, which opened as scheduled in September of 2004. The campus is fairly small, but well organized. The campus center is composed of small buildings, all of which house Intensive English Program (IEP) classes. Because AUK teaches nearly completely in English, many members of the incoming classes require intensive language instruction to bring their level of English up to par before beginning their undergraduate degrees. 180 of American University's 500 and some students are from the IEP program.

Other buildings on campus include two locker rooms, the library with its La Maison du Café, Arts and Sciences, home to Starbucks, and the Administration building, which provides one-stop shopping for Media and Dialog, Public Relations, Finance, Facilities Management, the President and the AUK bookstore.

Like any young institution, AUK is vibrant, excitable and tentative. The campus is a "safe space" for students in the relatively conservative climate of Kuwait. Young men and women study work and just hang out at AUK. Students often stay on campus until it closes-11pm everyday. However, some of the University policies, like the ban on non-AUK students after certain hours, inspire student dissent. Kuwaiti cultural norms- like *wasta*, using "pull" based on nationality or family- are thrown into limbo on a campus where cheating is wrong and no means no. The "no is not negotiable" policy is one of the trickiest policies to enforce here.



The enforcement of University policies has led the two interns into such adventures as helping to talk down a visiting soccer team and keeping one of our players barricaded until he calmed down.

The students roughly parallel the stereotypical college age in the United States- between 18 and 23 years old. However, college age here does not appear to be confined as closely to the 18 to 22 years as it is in the states. Every student has a story- some served in the Kuwait military before starting at AUK, others are here to "get another degree" others still started

At your service

University in other countries and failed out and so on. One of the most interesting parts of the work at the University is the opportunity to share life stories.

Our actual duties vary from day to day. Jen is in the University's Media and Dialog center. The other post that is open is in Student Affairs, where Hema works. In student affairs, she has helped with supervision and planning of events, including Academic Advising week, the first University Career Fair in Kuwait an "AUK Night" at the popular restaurant Casper and Gambini's. Hema was also trained as an Academic Advisor, and fulfilled that role during the University's week of open advising. As one of the events through student affairs, four Force Protection Officers for the U.S. Army came and did a self-defense workshop for the women of AUK- these four have become close friends of the interns. Additionally both interns work intimately with the Intensive English Program. Each one TA's two separate classes on alternating work days- Saturday through Wednesday. After class, each interns tutors for two hours in half hour segments.

Tutoring appears to be one of the duties that will be standard for interns coming to AUK. Many students in the IE program are able to read and write English, but not speak it easily. Tutoring is both frustrating and rewarding. The students who have gotten first priority in tutoring are the ones who are the weakest but most willing to work hard. This means that tutoring does not always yield quick and satisfying results for either tutor or tutee. However, like this past week, when one of our tutees who had failed her midterm got the second highest grade on a quiz, the hard work seems worth it. Generally, tutoring is really rewarding, and an easy way to make friends with the students.

Jen has an internship with PR/Marketing in the Media and Dialogue Center (MDC), an independent think-tank affiliated with the American University of Kuwait. On a day to day basis Jen writes press releases, drafts memos, and edits documents. She on occasion writes text of brochures and pamphlets, does research and writes text for other important letters, memos, and documents. In addition to working for the MDC, Jen and Hema both serve as Teaching Assistants in the Intensive English Program, tutor Intensive English Students, and have even started supervising an Intensive English Independent Study Class.

A quick note on faculty, staff and administration: All are fantastic. Everyone here is committed to the idea of liberal arts education for Kuwait and works hard to uphold what are deemed "proper" academic standards. These tend to coincide with what a Dartmouth student would consider proper, though enforcement is



"Let a hundred flowers bloom"

file:///Anthro:Dartmouth:AUK/AUK/Newsletters/Photos/flowers!.jpg another story entirely. Additionally, all the faculty and staff are very excited about "the Dartmouth girls" and have taken us on tours, invited us into their

homes for tea, coffee, and dinner, and acted very hospitably. In fact, in general, the hospitality we have received from Kuwaitis has been more than gracious. As of now, we have felt welcome, at home, and wanted. The Kuwaitis and other regional expatriates seem excited to show us their culture and express their views about America. We feel really taken care of here. Anything we need, all we do is ask.

One of the biggest questions we are asked by our family and friends is whether or not we feel safe. The answer: Yes, very much so. Kuwait is different than the US, but all of the rules and practices we use are those everyone should use in any large city. As long as we practice caution, discretion, and awareness in public we feel very safe. One of the most salient forms of awareness though is not just of our surroundings, but the awareness of cultural norms and the social expectations of the people around us. This we have found is the most different and most important form of awareness we practice.

Free Time

At the end of the university day we usually take advantage of the many culinary options in Salmiyya and Kuwait City. The dining is varied and can either be cheap or expensive depending on the locale and clientele. We have had the options of eating anything from authentic Norwegian Pizza, Tex-Mex, Thai, and Lebanese, to American-style fast food. Believe it or not, the full assortment of fast food, including restaurants that are no longer popular in the States like Hardee's and Little Caesar's (Pizza! Pizza!), are readily available.



The beautiful blue Persian Gulf

Instead of pubs or bars like in Europe or the States, coffeehouses and malls are the “place to be” on the weekends. With wireless Internet access, a quiet place to read, and an outlet to meet people, coffeehouses are the hub of the pedestrian areas. Starbucks even brings in live bands on the weekends to entertain their customers. (For more on malls and shopping, see our section on local travels.)

After work we sometimes walk along the Arabian Gulf (Persian Gulf) coast, watching the waves and people jogging. On the weekend we can see families having

picnics in the grass. The coast is gorgeous and on a nice day you can see forever. The water is clear and clean. Public beaches are not exactly the place to go if, as a female, you want to wear a bathing suit and not scandalize the passersby. There are a variety of hotels in the area which allow visitors to use their beaches, pools, and fitness facilities for a fee. Luckily most of these hotel beaches are tailored toward Westerners and you can make an entrance in your bikini without turning too many heads.

Local Travels

On the weekends we get more of a break from the fast-paced university life and get a chance to see some of the regional “must-sees.” In Kuwait there are a number of natural sights to see. In addition to the gorgeous beaches trimming the country, our first week in the region we were fortunate enough to drive outside the city limits and see the desert. As we approached the Iraqi border we saw a number of camels, herds of sheep and other wildlife. (These camels occasionally attempt to chase people and eat their hair. We speak from experience!) While living in the modern City, it is easy to forget how recently the Iraqis occupied Kuwait. While driving in the desert we were shocked to see remnants of the first Gulf War (1991) still present on the road north.



Winning the hearts and minds



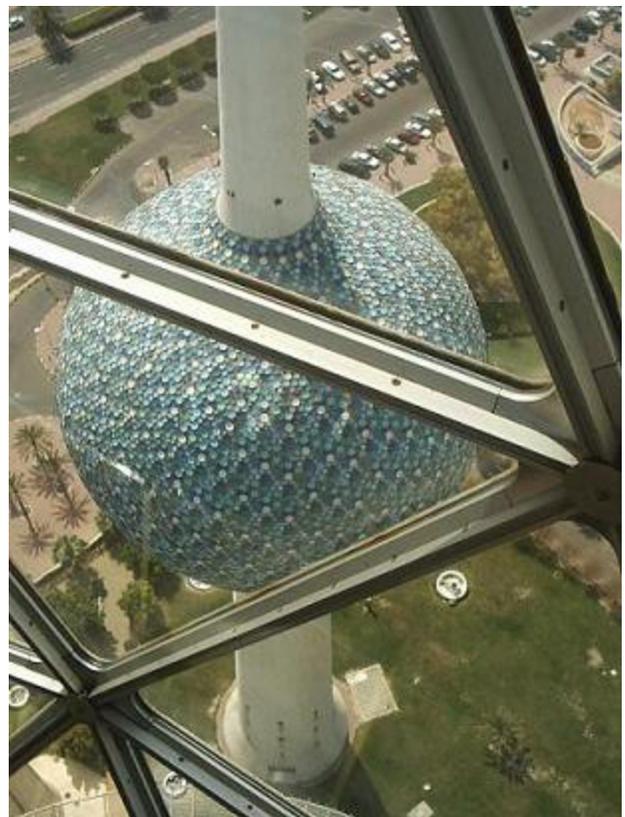
Abayas Dartmouth Style

The Grand Mosque

During our second week in the region we were graciously invited to tour the Grand Mosque. Thinking that as non-Muslim women we would not have the chance to see the inside of a mosque (especially the fifth largest mosque in the world), we eagerly accepted the invitation! As women, inside the building we had to be completely covered (wearing ‘abaya and hijab) and were required to take off our shoes. The inside was massive, beautiful, and intricately decorated with mosaics, carvings, and tapestries. We discovered as we were leaving that the entire complex covered a total of 17 acres and has held up to 70,000 people at one time!

Kuwait Towers

This is one of the most famous images of Kuwait City. They exhibit a unique type of architecture consisting of three spires and mosaic-like blue spheres. To our surprise, one of the blue spheres holds a large buffet of authentic Arabic salads, main courses and



A room with a view

desserts. After our meal we were able to see the top sphere which held a coffee shop and a rotating platform displaying all views of Kuwait City from above.

Shopping

After stepping off of the plane one thing we noticed immediately was the number of malls and first-rate stores present in the city. We soon discovered that one of the more popular pass times here is to shop. We live very near to one of the largest malls in Kuwait – Marina Mall – which on a weekend backs up traffic for miles. Inside there are many interesting stores and restaurants in which to spend time and money. The malls are often the “place to be” and where we can spot our students, especially on the weekends. The malls are nice, but another more frequented place for the two of us are the souqs or large market-places. In the souqs you can find fresh vegetables, a meat market, a fish market, traditional clothing, and beautiful jewelry all at much more reasonable prices. Packed with men and women of all walks of life, the experience is less commercial and so much more enriching.

Regional Travel

We have had the privilege to travel outside Kuwait and see Doha, Qatar – more specifically Education City. Education City is a project underway through the Qatar Foundation started and overseen by her highness Shaikha Mozah, the wife of the ruler of Qatar. It contains the campuses of four different American universities – Carnegie Mellon, Cornell Medical School, Texas A&M, and Virginia Commonwealth – all of which offer Middle Eastern students the same degrees as their American campuses. The sheer size of the project and seeing a country put so much money into education was staggering and inspiring.



Exploring Gulf higher education in style



Camels at play in the fields of the Oil

Weather

We spent our first three weeks in Kuwait FREEZING. While the media and movies lead you to believe that the whole country is one big, hot desert (which it is), no one tells you that between the spring-

time temperatures and the overactive air-conditioning sweatshirts and socks are recommended straight through until mid-April. Mid-April, the temperatures do a quick flip-change limiting wardrobe options to only the lightest cotton. Added to this fascinating mix are the bi-weekly dust storms, some of which have been so strong that we could not see our hands when we placed them in front of us. Kuwait also has fascinating and beautiful lightning storms. While rain only comes in two forms- light drizzle or two-minute downpour- the lightning is plentiful and is both green and blue. Figuring out the weather has been entertaining to say the least. Choosing what to wear daily has become a favorite game.



So much food, so little time

Clothing

Kuwaiti people are very, very stylish. While one leaves the states being told that one should be “covered and wearing loose clothing,” that is not entirely true. Many Kuwaiti women do not wear the veil or sheila, however, there are also a number of women who wear both the black head scarf called hijab, as well as the ‘abaya, the long black robe which conceals the curves of a woman’s body. On campus, many girls choose to wear trendy floor length skirts, pants and jeans as well as body skimming full-sleeve shirts emblazoned with their favorite designer labels like Guess, Gucci and Armani. That said, loose or at least not skin-tight clothes are a good idea to have along as most faculty wear pant or skirt suits, or slacks and long-sleeved collared shirts. Also, some areas of the City are notoriously conservative and wearing the loosest, longest shirts you own and covering your hair (if you are a woman) is highly recommended. None of these areas are within walking distance of the University. Indeed, most of them are at least a half-hour’s drive or more from Salmiyya.

On the whole Kuwaiti clothes always seem to look well-pressed and clean. The women pay particular attention to their make-up, the men to their hair. The white national dress for men, the dishdasha, is never worn unless freshly pressed with razor-creased sleeves. The accompanying head-dress, the ghutra, is tied differently by different nationalities. It is actually a very useful tool to use to identify which male is of which nationality.

Languages

Non-Arabic speakers should not worry at all about traveling in Kuwait, as English is spoken nearly everywhere, and sign language suffices when it is not. As AUK is an English-language university, all of the students are required to have a high-enough level of English to be able to do their coursework entirely free of Arabic. Walking around the halls of AUK, one hears not only Arabic and English, but also Hindi, Tamil and a few other languages, as some of the students are international.

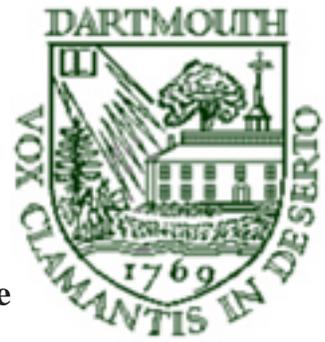
Also, shopkeepers here are slightly more aggressive than in the States, and are wont to walk out of their stores to try to snag passers-by with a friendly hand shake and “how are you today?” which is used as an excuse to tug potential shoppers towards their doors. Admittedly the first time this happened it was a bit unnerving. After that, however, the custom became a part of daily life.

Finally, today the Kuwaiti parliament granted female citizens voting rights, provided that the women “follow Islamic law.” The parliament plans to meet tomorrow to define what that actually means. For our experiences in parliament and at the subsequent celebrations, stay tuned for our next newsletter.



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Part Two: Sawt al-Mar'a First-hand Observations and Reflections on 15 May 2005, the Day Women Won the Right to Vote in Kuwait.

At approximately 9:30am on May 15, 2005, we received a call from Mae Al-Hajjaj, head librarian at AUK and avid supporter of women's rights in Kuwait. "Ladies," said Ms. Al-Hajjaj, "I've been looking for you everywhere! Are you available? I wanted to take you to Parliament to see the debate on women's rights." Neither of us expected that today could be the day that the all-male parliament would vote to approve suffrage for Kuwaiti women.

We excused ourselves from our respective duties, and joined Ms. Al-Hajjaj for the drive down Gulf Road to the Parliament building. We met three male AUK students outside the parliament building, one of whom was dressed in his dishdasha, the male traditional dress, to signify the importance of the occasion.

After being turned away from four separate gates as women, as non-Kuwaitis, and as civilians, we walked three-fourths of the way around the Parliamentary complex perimeter and finally entered. The male students led the expedition. They explained to the guard why our ID cards looked so funny, asserting that Kentucky and New Jersey were in the United States and that our licenses were actually valid American IDs. At this point, we entered without trouble.

The building entrance had white marble floors and a metal detector. Immediately to the right were stairs leading up to the second floor of the building where the main assembly chambers were located. This auditorium housed the Parliament and the second tier housed the public spectators here to view the historic proceedings. The seating area was much like an old amphitheater. The spectator section was segregated by gender. We were told, however, that while women could sit in the men's section if they chose, it was the men who were barred from the women's section. As curious women, we chose to sit in the front row of the men's section, as it had the best view of the events and allowed us to sit with a male student translator.



Women demonstrating for political rights in front of the Parliament building in March 2005.

(from www.emmabonino.it/press/world/2277)



Parliament in session.

(Photo courtesy Jen Krimm and Hema Mohan.)

tion was suggested by a member of the Islamist party and some members of the audience suggested saw this as ploy to kill the proposal of women's rights altogether. They believed that the Islamist knew that many Members who would support women's rights would be uncomfortable voting for all these changes in the voting laws at once. The motion to vote on the inclusion passed and the Parliament took a 2 hour recess to discuss the inclusion of these other elements in committee. By this point, it was nearly 12:30, and many in the audience had thinned out, expecting Parliamentary procedure to postpone the issue once more.

A series of votes, motions and debates followed the recess. Finally, Parliament decided to postpone the other two issues, and to deal solely with the issue women's rights. At this point, the Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Jassim al-Kharafi, issued a very serious warning: if the Parliament voted to address women's rights today, the session would not conclude until a vote had been taken and the issue was resolved. Since the end of the yearly session was drawing near, some Kuwaitis in the audience viewed the Speaker's statement as a way to block a practice similar to what Americans might regard as a "pocket veto", or letting Parliament adjourn for the summer, thus taking the issue off the table indefinitely.

Six speakers - three for women's rights, three against - then addressed the Parliament. Or rather, that was how it was supposed to have been carried out. The first "against" speaker talked about a woman's place in the home, and how women, according to social law, should not be allowed to attend the emergency late-night parliamentary sessions. He added (according to our translator) that women were more delicate than men and would be unable to face men who yelled at them in Parliament without crying. Each speaker was allotted ten minutes to make their arguments; however, their arguments continued long after the allotted time was exhausted. At several points in the debate, the Speaker turned off the microphone when an MP refused to finish his speech.

The Speaker of the Parliament had a higher, larger seat that faced the audience. The MPs who were seated in four curved rows facing him.

The proceedings on granting women the right to vote (sawt al-mar'a), were slated to begin at 9:00AM. By 10 o'clock, Parliament was still debating whether to even take up the issue. Over objections and motions to postpone the topic, the parliament voted to do so. However, an MP moved to change the content of the motion to vote not only on women's rights, but lowering the voting age to 18 and giving men in the armed forces the right to vote. This addition

We saw many political maneuvers during our day in Parliament. MPs continually interrupted one another and speeches devolved into shouting matches. At times the debate became so intense that the Speaker had to call for a 20 minute break.

Additionally, at each call to prayer, Parliament paused for roughly half an hour to give members of Parliament an opportunity to pray.

The “pro” speakers discussed equality and modernization. To counter the Islamists, they gave examples of Kuwait women who were martyrs (in resisting the 1990-1991 Iraqi invasion) as well as prominent Muslim women in history. The speakers noted the irony in allowing a woman to be the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the UN, but not allowing her to vote in her own country. The last “against” speaker repeated many of the previous arguments, with one interesting addition. He acknowledged that women should have the right to vote, but denied that they should be members of Parliament. He asserted that in Islam, women should be free to vote but not to lead, because it would be improper.

The arguments were vigorously presented. Then the most interesting part of the process began: the vote on women’s rights itself. However, during the preparation for the vote, an MP made a motion to vote on whether or not to vote on the wording of the new law. The motion passed, causing a few more hours of heated debate. MPs kept making suggestions and tangential motions to try to block the vote. Some MPs proposed that if women were allowed to vote, all soldiers should be granted the same right (rejected), that every person 20 years of age outside the military should be allowed to vote (rejected), and that women should be allowed to vote, but not be members of Parliament (rejected). Finally, a gentleman wearing the traditional dress of an Shi’i imam, with a turban to complement his dishdasha and bisht, or decorative floor-length robe usually lined in gold, stood and asserted that everyone knew the vote was going to pass, but to satisfy all parties, the clause “according to Islamic regulations” should be added to the new amendment. The vote on this suggestion was taken three times and it passed each time over the very vocal objections from the Islamist corner.



*Kuwaiti women at the moment of victory.
(Photo courtesy Jen Krimm and Hema Mohan.)*

At approximately 6:15PM on May 15th, 2005, the Parliament granted Kuwaiti women political rights for the first time. Some MPs began a rousing rendition of the Kuwaiti national anthem to celebrate the vote. A few women ululated and sang as loudly as the men, who by that point were leading a victory march through the building out onto the street. Cries of “Mabruk!” (congratulations!) and cell phone rings and conversations echoed through the halls out onto the front drive. Witnessing the Kuwaiti women leaving the Parliament building as full participants in the political process was one of the most moving and humbling events either of us had ever seen. We were honored to witness this historic occasion.



*In 1996, Kuwaiti women were already demonstrating for the right to vote. Note that even in 1996, numbers were perhaps less important than media presence.
(From www.newint.org/issue373/keynote.htm)*