Successfully Serving our Growing Middle Eastern Student Population

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International Student Services

Quick Facts

- Currently, a little less than 300 Saudis and about 200 Kuwaitis are enrolled at Boise State University.
- Middle Eastern (ME) students attend US universities through scholarships with the goal of an educated workforce and creating cultural exchanges. (See Slide 4 in the PowerPoint presentation located in Appendix A for more information.)
  - Areas of study tend to be limited by the scholarship program resulting in high rates of enrollment in Engineering, Business, and some Health Care programs.
  - Middle Eastern students tend to be present in large groups in lower level courses.

Cultural and Societal Traits

The following are normative features of Middle Eastern Culture that help us to understand how these students approach things differently than our native US students might.

Collectivistic Cultural Orientation- Middle Eastern cultures are family/tribe based, with individuals displaying loyalty and responsibility to their family. Family obligations prevail individual and academic needs as members have a duty to their family. This obligation of duty may sometimes lead to academic dishonesty, as ME students feel it is their “duty” to help other ME students.

Honor- Middle Easterners strive to maintain honor. This sometimes leads to ME student’s unwillingness to accept a grade, participate in class, or ask questions in order to save face.

Polychronic Time Orientation- Middle Eastern student’s perception of time is flexible and relationship centered which may impact punctuality and attendance.

Hierarchical Authority- Emphasis on hierarchical authority in the Middle Eastern culture results in ME students expecting to be told exactly what to do and how to do it. In addition, they tend to take issues up with the highest authority and ignore/avoid communications with “lower” individuals.

Communication-Middle Eastern students prefer face-to-face communication and also have a preference for information to be delivered orally.
Religion: Middle Eastern society is shaped by strict religious beliefs, rules, and traditions; individuals are granted limited freedom of expression or speech.

Outcomes:

1) Cultural and societal forces do not foster independent/critical thinking.
2) Students may not be used to being engaged or involved in classroom settings. They may also encounter difficulties with finding their voice, actively participating, and critically thinking in class or on assignments.
3) Students often have difficulties balancing new freedoms with academic obligations.

Current Struggles on Campus

Negotiation:

Middle Eastern students may attempt to negotiate with the instructor on a variety of different issues. In general, "no" almost never means "no" in the Middle Eastern culture, so students consistently try to negotiate. Often their persistence can be misinterpreted as harassment or resistance to rules. In addition, ME students tend to prefer face to face interactions over email or other forms of communication during the negotiation process, so they may show up at an instructors office without an appointment. They may also bring other students with them to help in their negotiation. This strategy is known as "wasta", an Arab term meaning to use intermediaries to solve problems.

Managing Negotiations:

To reduce the occurrence of attempted negotiation, instructors can outline and explain their class policies from the very beginning of the course and stay consistent with those policies throughout the duration of the course. It is also helpful if everyone in the department delivers the same message consistently. If students still make attempts to negotiate, explain why exceptions can’t be made and try to provide some context for the reasoning. Be firm (but friendly) during the interaction and express your authority when needed. Finally, it may be useful to identify and engage a dependable ME student to use as a resource to assist you in these interactions.

Academic Dishonesty:

A large number of the reports regarding academic dishonesty received by the Dean of Students Office involved ME students. Recently, during the orientation process, international students are being informed of what constitutes academic dishonesty and the consequences that may ensue after an incident occurs. Since this component has been added to orientation for international students, the rate of academic dishonesty among this group of students has declined. International Student Services is investigating the development of a workshop that focuses on this topic. In the meantime, it may be helpful to clearly define academic dishonesty at the beginning of your course and in your syllabus. Often students do not realize what they are doing
is considered “cheating” in our culture. In addition, it is important to specifically explain what is considered “group work” and what is not, emphasizing the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Providing examples may help students understand what academic dishonesty looks like.

**Middle Eastern Student Panel**

Below are statements made by the Middle Eastern Student Panel at the end of the workshop:

**Things to consider:**

- It takes more time for us to read and understand the material compared to domestic students.
- Our traditional learning style is “group study”.
- We might spend hours reading and translating the material but are not really able to learn a lot of the content.

**Things Instructors can do to help us:**

- It is really helpful when a professor assigns groups rather than letting the class choose their own groups. We often get excluded and do not have the opportunity to learn from different people.
- Assign activities that can be done outside the classroom
- Short assignments after each lecture
- Detailed written instructions
- Using Lecture Capture
- Clear explicit directions for assignments
Objectives

- Present a brief background about the growing Middle Eastern student population on campus
- Engage in an open discussion of the relevant challenges and opportunities that come with serving this cohort
- Multiple strategies for effective interaction with this student population

Who are our Middle Eastern Students?

KSA and Kuwaiti Scholarship

Scholarship programs aimed to develop sustainable and competitive global economies in KUW and KSA by educating workforce at home and abroad
Declining oil reserves
Private sector driven by foreign labor (KSA) = bloated public sector

How It works:
Students admitted to scholarship programs based on HS GPA (4)
Students select university based on admission & scholarship parameters
Scholarship covers tuition, insurance, monthly stipend
Students are closely monitored by a scholarship advisor
Scholarship has limited timeline (4-5 years)
Culture Mapping Activity

* Take a few moments to map your cultural orientation for each of the traits listed on the hand out.

A Few Disclaimers...

1. All students are unique, but cultural generalizations can aid in cross-cultural comparisons to better understand specific associations.
2. Culture is learned through time, and becomes ingrained in our behavior.
3. Adjusting to a new culture/environment may require "unlearning" behaviors that are deeply ingrained, a process which takes time.

KSA & KUW Cultural Traits

Collectivistic Cultural Orientation
1. Family / tribe as basis of social structure
2. Interdependent view of the self as member of a group
3. Family obligations may prevail over needs of individual & academics
4. Unquestioning loyalty and responsibility to family/group
5. Friendship and group membership implies duty
   - Can lead to academic dishonesty

Interdependence may:
1. Dissuade integration in classroom/campus/community
2. Impede progress of English language development

Cultural Traits

Hered:
1. Maintenance of honor:
   - Is extremely important and protected above all
   - May be placed above facts (students may not accept their grades, shortcomings)
2. Students may avoid asking questions or actively seek help to avoid failure.

"Insha' Allah (God Willing)
1. God has decreed all things, and has ultimate control of destiny
2. Failure/little planning for the future, may contribute to time management issues
3. Can be misunderstood as complacency and may clash with go-getting attitude of West

Polychronic time orientation
1. More flexible, relationship-centered perception of time (may exhibit tardiness/absences)
Cultural Traits

High Power Distance
1) Refers to a society's comfort level with hierarchical authority
2) People may expect to be told exactly what to do
3) Want to take their issues to the highest authority, disregarding messages from individuals who are in "lower" positions
4) Not accept accountability

High Uncertainty Avoidance
1) Refers to a society's low level of tolerance for ambiguity/security
2) Change not readily accepted (linked to conservatism & maintaining tradition)
3) Not reading between the lines may lead to anxiety/frustration

Cultural Traits

Negotiation and Persuasion
1) Long tradition of personal appeal to authorities for exceptions to rules
2) People are more important than the rules
3) Face-to-face interactions, where a student's case can be made [person], is more valued than formalized processes
4) May be misinterpreted as harassment/resistance to rules

Wasta
An Arabic term for using connections (intermediaries) to solve a problem

Managing Negotiation

1) Outline and explain your policies in the beginning & be consistent
2) Explain why exceptions can't be made - contextualize the reason
3) Be sure that everyone in the department delivers same message
4) Prepare an elevator speech
5) Don't make exceptional (considerations not exceptions)
6) Be firm, but friendly (maintaining the relationship is important)
7) You are the authority figure. A useful tool for bringing the negotiation to a close is to present options, if available, and student to choose their next step
8) Identify an engaged and dependable ME student and use him/her as a resource to reinforce your message

KSA & KUW Society

KSA
1) Saudi society shaped by firm religious beliefs, rules, and traditions
2) Islam governs political, economic, social, cultural aspects of Saudi life
3) Adherence to conservative Muslim practices expected
4) Limited freedom of expression and public free speech [criticism of public policy, Islam]

Kuwait: Also conservative & traditional, but less than KSA
Note: This may be changing due to a shift in generational values and exposure to different cultures, values, norms, and technology (internet)

Outcomes:
1) Cultural and societal forces do not foster independent/critical thinking
2) Students may not be used to being engaged, involved and may encounter difficulties with finding their voice, active participation, and critical thinking
3) Difficulties balancing new freedoms with academic obligations

Slide 9
Slide 10
Slide 11
Slide 12
Gender & Society

KSA very gender-segregated society
1) Female public behavior is restricted and monitored
2) Females are not permitted to be alone or touch a strange man
3) Women are owners of businesses and are employed

Kuwait also gender segregated, but more flexible
1) Fewer restrictions on female behavior in public, but women encouraged to dress and behave modestly and in line with Muslim tradition
2) More women are educated at higher levels and in the workforce than elsewhere in Persian Gulf

KSA & Kuwait are patriarchal societies, BUT...
1) Though the father is head of the family, the mother is queen of the home
2) A mother is greatly respected, and is generally responsible for her children’s education and setting the rules – She is firm and rarely negotiate (They do understand the end of negotiations)

Religious Considerations

Saudi Arabia is strictly an Islamic country
Kuwait is mostly Islamic, but there is freedom of religion

Muslim practices
1) Prayer 5 times per day
2) Ramadan and other fasting days
3) Friday is Muslim day of worship
   - Jumah Prayer Fridays at 2pm (SIB and Islamic Center) (These times are flexible, it is called Qaswa)
4) Gender relationships
   - Limited or restricted female/male interaction

Communication Style

Verbal communication more significant that written communication
Indirect, but emotional communicators
1) Opposite of majority of Americans, who are direct and emotionally restrained communicators
   - If students seem angry, point it out. They will usually tone it down.
   - May need to be direct in asking what the student needs

Relationship-centered view of communication
1) Communication problems + relationship problems
   - Use of mediators to improve the situation
   - Students may go to another person for instructions/advice
2) Preference for face-to-face communication, most familiar & credible
   - Information delivered in writing not as impactful as verbal delivery

Matson & Algren (2007)

Based on Nydell (2005), Understanding Arabs
Survey: Constancy of Arab Cultural Traits in U.S. Environments
Distributed to 42 ESL Language Centers in U.S.
5 traits were observed by 84% of participants

1) Friends have the duty to help friends (this could include helping friends with tests, papers, etc.).
2) People (and helping other people) are more important than rules and regulations
3) Personal influence is a useful way of getting things done (I.e., getting someone to bend or circumvent the rules for me)
4) You should be able to modify any rule on the basis of compelling personal need
5) Family obligations (e.g., illness of a family member), then you shouldn’t hold me to the rules on attendance
Student Challenges

Teaching/Academic Challenges
1) Language difficulties
   a) Unfamiliarity with vocabulary, content, and context
   b) Time management, translating and converting language takes time
2) Familiarity with computer-based testing
3) Keyboard differences
4) Test Anxiety

Additional Challenges
1) Sponsorship, immigration, and academic pressures
2) Homelessness, loneliness, isolation
3) Discrimination & negative stereotyping
4) Religious & ethnic divisions
5) Family obligations

Anxiety and stress manifest in physical symptoms leading to doctor's visits

Opportunities

Coffee and Conversation
Every Wednesday from 3:30-5pm at the Student Diversity Center

"A Is for Arab" exhibit: Archiving stereotypes in U.S. Popular Culture
October 6-31, SUB Transit Center

Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Viliifies a People
October 10, 3:30 pm, Jordan B Ballroom
October 14, 12:00 pm, Albersen Library Room 201C
(Also available to be streamed by instructors from October 10-15)

Khaleej Luncheon: Cultural luncheon event
October 17, 11:30 am - 1:00 pm, Student Ballroom
International Food Song and Dance Festival
Spring 2015, Jordan Ballroom
Student Panel

Questions?
Evaluations

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Thank you!
References

Appendix B: Mapping Your Cultural Orientation Activity
This activity was done in the workshop prior to discussing the cultural characteristics of Middle Eastern students. Use this activity to identify your cultural traits and reflect on how different cultures may value different traits.

### Mapping Your Cultural Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monochronic</th>
<th>Polychronic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like to be on time and expect the same of others.</td>
<td>What happens is more important than when it starts and ends.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Context</th>
<th>High Context</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When rules are presented, I prefer that every detail is spelled out clearly.</td>
<td>Some rules are understood by everyone so it's not necessary to spell everything out.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualistic</th>
<th>Collectivistic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to work independently and be recognized individually.</td>
<td>I prefer to work as part of a group and think it's better when individuals are not singled out.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egalitarian</th>
<th>Hierarchical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All people should be treated the same, no matter what their position is.</td>
<td>People should be treated differently depending on their title, position, rank.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Focused</th>
<th>Relationship Focused</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When working on a project, I prefer to focus on getting the job done and become impatient with socializing.</td>
<td>When working on a project, I value time spent in building relationships and work better with people when I get to know them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surfacing Differences</th>
<th>Maintaining Harmony</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I directly address differences when there is an issue so the problem can be solved quickly.</td>
<td>I prefer to deal with differences indirectly, behind the scenes, to avoid causing upset.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotionally Restrained</th>
<th>Emotionally Expressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It's better to keep emotions private</td>
<td>It's better to express emotions openly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being</th>
<th>Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I derive more of my identity from who I am and who my family is</td>
<td>I derive more of my identity from what I do: schoolwork, activities, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reflection

- How does your cultural orientation map help you in your life?
- How does your cultural orientation map hold you back in your life?
- How is your cultural orientation map similar or different from your peers’?
- Which traits are difficult for you to deal with in other people?

Based on research by Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede and Aperian Global. Compiled by Natalia Dyba, natalia.dyba@outlook.com.