

# EducationUSA Forum: Connecting You to the World

## Near East

### Overview

NEA Near East Affairs in the DOS bureau covering the region that extends from Morocco in northwest Africa to Iran in southwest Asia. In academe and the business world, the region is most often referred to as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The MENA region has a large young population which offers significant challenges and opportunities. The World Bank describes the explosive population growth in the MENA region as a “youth bulge” and many countries are making serious efforts to address the challenges posed by such a young population. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the youth population (ages 15-29) in MENA is 111 million. The number of students in the United States from the Middle East increased by 17.7% in 2008/09 to 29,140 students or 4% of the world total (IIE). The total number of students from MENA was highest in 2003/2004 (36,339) with several factors being responsible for the decline including:

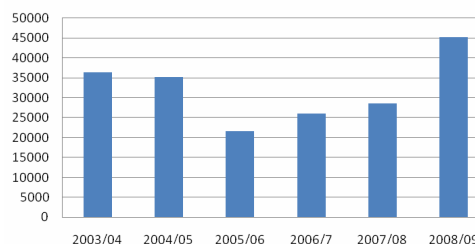
- Increase in local universities and U.S. branch campuses
- Aggressive recruiting from other countries
- Prohibitive costs of U.S. education
- Changes in preference by scholarship authorities
- Lack of opportunity for medical studies

Several countries in the MENA region: Algeria, Libya, The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have vast reserves of petroleum and natural gas that provide economic stability and prosperity. These revenues coupled with the increasing focus on education as a factor in economic stabilization have resulted in many countries sponsoring students to study abroad. Other countries have small numbers of unpublicized scholarships and students with these awards must secure their own acceptance. Countries that do not offer scholarships have a small elite class who can pay for a U.S. education and several middle class families can come up with \$5,000-20,000 towards the cost of a U.S. education. EducationUSA provides advising free of charge to all students from all economic backgrounds to ensure that they find the best fit.

*\*2009 IIE Open Doors Report*

*\*2008/09 SACM numbers for Saudi (total 28,000)*

**MENA Students in the U.S. 2003-2009**



In the past few years, EducationUSA has made successful efforts to recapture the market share for countries such as Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia who are reconsidering their numbers who go to other countries. EducationUSA MENA has 24 advising centers in 18 countries. Our centers are located in U.S. Embassies and Consulates, AMIDEAST centers, Fulbright and we have one virtual center.

### The following are some recent developments within the MENA region:

- Many countries are focusing on providing educational opportunities at home both at American and European branch campuses and private universities with American style curricula (Egypt, KSA, UAE, Qatar, Lebanon): KAUST in KSA, The American University in Cairo, and the Sorbonne in the UAE.
- The youth bulge in the region means that countries are being forced to deal with the unemployment (25% for the region) and are focusing on earlier career development and hard skills and a liberal arts education is getting harder to promote.
- More of the national budget in several countries is going towards education.
- China and Malaysia are heavily recruiting in the Gulf countries offering a more “structured lifestyle”.
- Countries with scholarships continue to be interested in the U.S. and other countries with fewer scholarships such as Oman and Bahrain are interested in cost-sharing opportunities to increase the number of students they send.
- Increased interest in hosting American students and setting up language learning centers at universities to provide a true study abroad experience. (Syria, KSA, Oman, UAE, Lebanon)

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## Countries in the Spotlight

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Libya and Iraq continue to have scholarships and are sending steady numbers to the U.S. All except Iraq have government sponsored fairs this fall which is a valuable opportunity to meet the decision makers and promote your university.

## Analysis of Trends

- Continued strong interest in STEM fields and business- seen to teach complex problem solving and practical knowledge to meet the needs of the labor market.
- Youth population coming of age producing a higher demand for tertiary education.
- Libya: largest percentage increase in region (333%) due to the Government of Libya Scholarship program
- Saudi Arabia: With 28,000 students currently in the United States, it jumps into the top ten sending countries.
- Qatar: 6 American campuses and the first community college managed by an American institution in the ME. Still interested in sending students to the U.S. but has resumed sending students to U.K. for the foundation year.
- Many countries are recruiting international students to support their new institutions (Lebanon, Egypt, UAE, KSA, Qatar, Morocco)

Top Five Countries Sending Student to U.S. for 2009*		
Rank	Origin	Students in U.S.
1	Saudi Arabia	12,661 IIE 28,000 (SACM)
2	Iran	3,533
3	Israel	3,060
4	Jordan	2,225
5	Kuwait	2,031

Five Countries with Highest Percentage of Growth in Students Coming to U.S. (2009)*		
Rank	Origin	Increase
1	Libya	330.3%
2	Palestinian Authority	45.4%
3	Qatar	34.2%
4	Saudi Arabia	28.2%
5	Jordan	23.7%

## Major Foreign Government Scholarships

- Saudi Arabia - managed by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission and the Ministry of Higher Education
- Qatar - managed by the Higher Education Institute
- Libya - managed by the Canadian Bureau for International Education
- UAE - managed by various Ministries and Government Departments
- Kuwait - managed by the Ministry of Higher Education
- Iraq - managed by the Ministry of Higher Education

## Recruiting realities for U.S. universities:

- Create recruitment strategies with both students and parents in mind
- In the Gulf, the focus is on graduate programs and many are bringing families. Family members and particularly the male “minders” need support in applying to programs and keeping busy.
- Many countries are interested in bridge programs similar to a foundation year that can count for credits, not just ELP.
- Many Gulf students (Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, UAE) have gone through the British A-level system – need to describe course requirements with this system in mind.
- Students are finding the application process long and confusing and might have someone do the application for them leading to a false impression of their current capabilities. Encourage students to visit EducationUSA
- For many students the U.S. is cost prohibitive and EducationUSA needs more information about cost-sharing, in-state tuition offers and other options that make studying in the U.S. more affordable.
- Still a large demand for conditional acceptances.
- Understand the way documents are issued (and not issued) in each country. The EducationUSA adviser will inform you if the Ministry does not issue a document.

\* 2009 IIE Open Doors Report

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## Recruiting Strategies that work in MENA

- Involve the EducationUSA advising center.
- Understand cultural norms- send appropriate staff.
- Offer support with logistics- airport pickup goes a LONG way.
- Researching the job market to promote appropriate programs.
- Conduct focus groups with new students to ask them what could have been easier about the application and settling in process.

## Recruiting Strategies That Aren't Successful for MENA

- Not involving the family.
- Accepting too many students from the same country.
- Asking for school visits on your own.
- Trying to visit when students are in class.
- Not visiting the EducationUSA centers.

## How to Best Partner with EducationUSA

- Contact the REAC to discuss your institution's strategy or visit to learn more about how you can collaborate with centers.
- Participate in government sponsored college fairs (UAE, Libya, Saudi Arabia). Students are bused in and government sponsors take note of who comes.
- Let us know what your institution's goals are (diversity, best and the brightest, fee paying students?)

## Best Times of Year to Interact with Students (in person or via web chat)

- September – mid-December
- January – April, June and July.

You are welcome any time, but to have the most productive visit, come in groups. Many Muslim, Christian and Jewish holidays are movable feasts so plan accordingly. Fall is best to stay on the students' radar during the application time.

Study Abroad in the Region (Open Doors) U.S. Study Abroad: 3,362 U.S. students studied abroad in the Middle East in 2007/08, a 21.9% increase over the previous year

Top Five Receiving Countries*:		
Rank	Origin	U.S. Students
1	Israel	2322
2	Jordan	486
3	UAE	345
4	Kuwait	37
5	Bahrain	35

Top Five Growth Markets Receiving U.S. students*:		
Rank	Origin	Increase
1	Kuwait	1650.0%
2	Lebanon	121.4%
3	Jordan	110.4%
4	UAE	99.4%
5	Oman	57.1%

## What to Watch over the next 3+ Years:

Continued interest from China, UK, France and local universities

- More female students interested in graduate degrees, particularly law.
- Increasing use of social media. Saudi Arabia is second among Arab countries using "Facebook. Statistics from <http://www.checkfacebook.com> show that the total subscribers reached 2,260,000 Saudis.

\* 2009 IIE Open Doors Report