

# Overview of Kuwait's Educational Landscape

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## The University Model

### *Brief Historical Overview of Higher Education in Kuwait*

Kuwait is a fairly young oil-rich nation-state whose institutions have developed rapidly throughout the twentieth century in an attempt to become competitive on a global scale. Kuwait has a small, yet growing, population of over a million citizens and approximately 2.5 million expatriates and the Bidoon (stateless Arabs); both these groups face difficulties receiving support from and assimilating into Kuwaiti society. Kuwait's advantages are its massive reservoirs of fossil fuels, particularly oil, which were discovered in the 1950s and capital derived from them is used to fund major government initiatives. Specifically, funds from the exploitation of these oil reserves have been used in developing the educational infrastructure in the country.<sup>1</sup> Since Kuwait's independence from Britain in 1961, the rate of development has been dramatic. In order to increase and sustain this economic development policy, in the last ten years higher education has exceedingly and rapidly become privatized.

The Kuwaiti government is well-aware of the importance of higher education in the ongoing progress of the country. Indeed, Articles 13, 14, and 40 of Kuwait's 1962 Constitution emphasize that education is a right for all citizens and that it is a crucial element in preparing individuals to become active, engaged members of Kuwaiti society. This is most clearly stated in Article 40, which reads as follows:

1. Education is a right for Kuwaitis, guaranteed by the State in accordance with law and within the limits of public policy and morals. Education in its preliminary stages is compulsory and free in accordance with the law.
2. The law lays down the necessary plan to eliminate illiteracy.
3. The State devotes particular care to the physical, moral, and mental development of the youth.

Such acknowledgement, however, faces obstacles such as mismanagement by a massive bureaucratic system, technological difficulties, socioeconomic and gender segregation. Furthermore, recent political conflicts have stalled the modernization and development of higher education as a source of professional training and personal development.

Prior to the early twentieth century, formal education in Kuwait and the Gulf region

took place in homes or mosques where both genders were taught in informal classrooms the basics of writing and arithmetic and the Koran (Bahgat 1999, 129). The first formal higher educational institution was introduced in 1936; nearly 600 male students registered with the Board of Education in the first year alone (Al-Atiqi and Al-Harbi 2009, 5). By 1939, the government established a scholarship program to send students to two higher educational institutions abroad—in Baghdad and Cairo. By 1955, 126 students were studying abroad, seventy-seven of them in Egyptian institutions (ibid.). A year later, the first group of female students was sent abroad, which indicates that the government’s intentions were to educate both male and female Kuwaiti citizens (“Sharia, Constitution” 2010).

In 1966, five years after independence from British control, the first public university in the country, the Kuwait University (KU), was established. Its three colleges—Science and Arts, Education, and the Women's College—offered a humanities and a general science program. It also accepted a large number of foreign students, although that policy would change over time with the influence of a process known as “Kuwaitization.” Further decrees gave the university the mandate to establish more than ten faculties, such as the colleges of Law (est. 1967), Medicine (1973), Engineering and Petroleum (1974), Sharia and Islamic Studies (1977), Education (1980), Pharmacy (1996).

Calls for the creation of a Ministry of Higher Education separate from the Ministry of Education, which governed all educational sectors at the time, begun in 1981. This was motivated by the need to reform and upgrade KU, which, as the only institution for all forms of higher education for both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti students, was already facing considerable strain. In consequence, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) was founded in 1981 “to consolidate the vocational education and training that started in the 1950s” (Al-Atiqi and Al-Harbi 2009, 6). Essentially, this institution attempted to ensure specialized labor market-oriented training and education for Kuwaitis.

Another hallmark in the educational field was the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education in 1988 with Law 164/88. It is separate from the Ministry of Education, but they are both headed by the same person. The Ministry of Higher Education administers matters pertaining to higher education and applied scientific research structures further the field in line with its significance for the development of Kuwait. The Ministry also has the mandate to direct graduates toward disciplines in needed sectors of the domestic labor market, to supervise the application of the agreed-upon curriculum, to determine types of degrees and their accreditation, and to administer faculty and staff of these institutions. The

Ministry has the final say in all matters related to higher education.

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990–1991 brought a major setback in terms of the physical destruction of educational infrastructure and the flight of the population during the invasion and occupation. After liberation, the 1990s were a decade of rebuilding and attempts to improve on the major failures. 1996 was a pivotal year that marked the beginning of private higher education and the passage of a gender segregation law applicable to both university faculty and students. This legislation was passed by Kuwait's National Assembly (Parliament) that was notoriously conservative and butted heads with the government on many issues. This ongoing conflict between the legislative and executive apparatuses routinely would stall efforts to reform or update various sectors in the country, including higher education.

The drive toward private education began in 1996 when the government launched a commission to study the state of postsecondary education in the country. Three years later the commission produced a report with two major conclusions: it identified, first, an urgent need for vocational education that would help reduce the number of Kuwaiti students studying abroad; and second, the need for the country to become a competitive player in the global economy (Al-Atiqi and Al-Harbi 2009, 11). Other rationales for instituting private universities included pressure at home and abroad to open avenues for education of the children of expatriate workers and the need for a cost-effective solution to current flaws in the ballooning postsecondary education system. As a result, Law 34 (commonly known as the Private Universities Law) was passed in 2000 and the Private Universities Council (PUC) was established. The PUC is an administrative body tasked with accrediting and overseeing private educational institutions. It is linked to the government through the Minister of Higher Education who chairs the Council and the PUC's members are appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers.

Higher education, and by extension the entire national education policy, is governed ideologically and socially by the Constitution and the perceived requirement of abiding by the principals of sharia (Islamic jurisprudence). The Kuwaiti government has emphasized in both domestic and international forums that these are the two foundations of educational policy in the country ("Sharia, Constitution" 2010). While the Constitution offers guidelines on how to structure higher education, sharia is used to try to govern, successfully or not, the types of degrees offered, the subjects taught, and even the behaviour and lifestyle of students and faculty members. This element within higher education represents a microcosm of the

social and political issues facing the country, particularly in the early twenty-first century, and the challenges that they pose.

### *The Institutional Landscape*

Kuwait currently has nearly twenty public and private higher education institutions that enrol approximately 45,000 students;<sup>2</sup> however, not all of these institutions are popular or influential. It must be noted that accurate domestic and international studies and reports on enrolment and numbers of graduating students are currently non-existent—a major flaw in the strategic planning of the government.<sup>3</sup> The two major public universities, KU and PAAET, are geared mainly to Kuwaiti citizens, therefore informally excluding the majority of the population—expatriates and the Bidoon—either through a tight quota system or a lack of scholarships for non-Kuwaitis in these institutions.

KU was planned after Egyptian French-based educational model and its first administrative staff and faculty members were mainly Egyptian (Al-Ebraheem and Stevens 1980, 203). The founding of the university responded to concerns in the 1960s for reducing the number of students studying overseas and preparing Kuwait to better compete internationally. At the time, the Department of Education commissioned a report by three distinguished scholars from Cambridge in the United Kingdom, Asyout in Egypt, and the American University of Beirut, on the need for a university and the feasibility to create one (204). The report noted that “the most important justification for the establishment of a university was that it would provide an apex for the general system of education, raise academic standards, assist in preserving and developing Kuwait's culture and provide a center 'where truth is pursued for its own sake'” (204-5). The university was viewed as the means to strengthen society and Kuwaiti identity and to mobilize a local pool of educated Kuwaitis who can contribute to the development of their country. Today KU is composed of four campuses located in different areas of the country: Khaldiya, Adailiah, Keyfan, and Shuwaikh. The Shuwaikh campus is the largest and houses the main faculties, student dormitories (for foreign students), and administrative offices.

Specializing in vocational training, PAAET was established with the aim to “rebalance[e] the labour market in the State of Kuwait in particular” (State of Kuwait, UNESCO, and IBE 2008, 41). This signalled a desire to rely less on the large numbers of expatriates who dominated, and still do, the private sector. In June 2009, IMF figures showed that the total Kuwaiti workforce (male and female) is 351,500 people or 31.4% of the total

Kuwaiti-born population of 1,118,900. The number of non-Kuwaiti workers is 1,741,700 or 73.6% of the total non-Kuwaiti population of 2,366,000 (Khamis et al 2010, 12). This reveals a major disproportion and dependence on a foreign workforce to run and sustain the country, a point that has not been lost on the government and the society at large. PAAET has four major colleges—Basic Education, Business Studies, Health Science, and Technological Studies—spread out between the Adailiya, Ardiyah, South Subahiya, Al-Tamimi, and Shuwaikh areas. Additionally, it has five training institutes: Electricity and Water, Telecommunication and Navigation, Industrial Training, Nursing, and Constructional Training. It has a high enrolment rate of nearly 10,000 students per year.

Two other lesser-known and less-developed public postsecondary education institutions are the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts and the Higher Institute of Musical Arts that only cater to Kuwaiti nationals, with a low enrolment rate of a few hundred. Information about these two institutions is limited, which is perhaps a sign of the smaller role they play in the overall goal of developing Kuwait economically.

When considering the various types of degrees available in public postsecondary education, it is clear that the focus is mainly on technical and professional programs. Those who seek liberal arts degrees often face the scrutiny of their families and society at large because such degrees are not seen as productive or valuable; to be considered “respectable,” education has to offer the qualifications that would allow the students to earn an income. Therefore, the emphasis in higher education is not on critical thinking (at least not in practice), but rather on preparing young people to enter the job market. As a result, emphasis is placed on developing scientific, professional, and technical skills, while liberal arts is a rarely sought-after field (although the need to offer such programs also explains to some extent the rise of private institutions).

In the ten years following the passage of Law 34, private universities flourished. There are currently fifteen private universities and colleges in the country (with more expected to come): Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), established in 2002–2003; Australian College of Kuwait (ACK), in 2004; American University of Kuwait (AUK), in 2004; Kuwait Maastricht Business School (KMBS), in 2009; American College of Middle East (ACME); Arab Open University (AOU), in 2002; Box-Hill College–Kuwait established in 2007; Kuwait Technical College; American University of Middle East; College of Aviation Technology; Kuwait Institute for Science and Technology; Kuwait Asia University; British Academy of Business Studies; University of Atlanta Kuwait; and Kuwait

International Law College. These institutions teach well over 13,000 students, the vast majority of whom are Kuwaiti (Al-Atiqi and Al-Harbi 2009, 6; also noted in the *Kuwait Al-Yaoum Gazette* issue on Sept. 14, 2008). It is projected that private universities and colleges will accept the bulk of students in the country with expected numbers of enrolment reaching 35,000–45,000 by 2025–2030 (Al-Atiqi and Al-Harbi 2009, 6). These institutions are seen as a means to alleviate the strain on the public education sector, such as the dire need to provide more admission places for a rapidly growing population and to offer liberal arts courses unavailable at KU or PAAET, not to mention the flexibility students have in choosing minor degrees, something that public institutions do not offer.

Three private universities—AUK, GUST, and ACK—have Western names and/or affiliations; one can think of them as franchises. Box Hill and KMBS are the only higher education institutions that are actual branches to their original institutions: the Box Hill College in Melbourne, Australia and the Maastricht School of Business in the Netherlands. AOU is unique in that it is a local, English-language institution and it serves as the headquarters for a pan-Arab network of affiliated universities linked to the British Open University. The ambition of this latter institution is to have a student body of 75,000 between its branches in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Oman.

The rise of these institutions represents perhaps the most radical change in Kuwait's education sector in the recent past. Not only do they provide another outlet of postsecondary studies beyond KU and PAAET and offer an alternative to students who cannot study abroad, but they also offer a variety of courses, particularly in the liberal arts and social sciences disciplines (such as sociology, which was introduced with much difficulty at AUK in 2008) that were not available previously in the public sector. Furthermore, the existence and growth of private universities pushed the Ministry to upgrade the educational infrastructure in the country and to introduce the use of technology in public universities.

The mantra of e-education has gained momentum over the past several years, especially as private institutions incorporated e-learning technologies within their educational framework.<sup>4</sup> E-learning requires the use of digital media and other forms of new technology to enhance learning and teaching. Throughout 2010, the Ministry expanded the use of e-learning, and it looked to East Asian countries like Singapore and Malaysia as examples to emulate.<sup>5</sup> The first “smart classroom” was inaugurated in 2010 in the College of Education at KU, with PAAET administrators promising to follow suit (see “First Smart Classrooms” 2010 and “Smart Classes Coming Soon” 2010). This technological upgrade in public universities

could be understood as the desire to match and surpass the development of e-learning in private institutions, especially since Kuwaitis are prone to be highly critical of the shortcomings of their public institutions. Nevertheless, the move toward e-learning has not been smooth. The few existing studies in this area have shown that the seeming exclusivity of English as the primary language of e-learning has been a barrier for students in public institutions, who are predominately Arabic speakers, compared to private institutions (see Al-Doub, Goodwin, and Al-Hunaiyyan 2008).

An informal status hierarchy exists between public and private universities. As the first university in the country, KU is an esteemed institution, scoring high on international and regional rankings.<sup>6</sup> Yet the private institutions, because of their links to the Western system, are seen as more appealing socially, even though they are fairly new and face major start-up challenges. It is quite common for high school graduates who could not study abroad to seek admission into these private institutions due to their brands. In other words, the demand is driven by a perceived bias that “Western is better” rather than on grounded empirical considerations.

Although some private and public institutions are located in urban commercial and residential areas, most campuses can be described as “compounds”—gated communities outside urban areas, built there perhaps in anticipation of an urban sprawl. They rent land allocated from the government at subsidized prices,<sup>7</sup> although there does not seem to be a concrete, long-term urban-planning agenda for such allocations. Therefore the impact of universities on their surrounding areas is minimal in economic terms.

Private universities are usually smaller in size and each is situated within a single geographical location where all buildings, from faculty departments to the library, are squeezed together. PAAET and KU, on the other hand, are spread over different parts of Kuwait, as mentioned above, and the government has upgraded their infrastructure by building new, large, and modern campuses for both. In the case of KU, the Shadadiya project (also known as the Sabah Al-Salem University City) will cover an area of “490 hectares [and] will have six different campuses spread out throughout Kuwait City” (Page n.d.); it is set to be completed by 2015 (“City University” 2010). For PAAET, construction of a modern campus and new buildings will be developed in the Shuwaikh, Jahra, and the Ardiya areas. The total size of this ambitious project will encompass 130,000 square meters, will cost an estimated 75 million Kuwaiti dinars (KD), and will house the offices of the PAAET administration, new faculties, labs, and Olympic-size stadiums, among others (“PAAET

launches ambitious plan” 2010). For both public and private universities, recent demands for gender segregation also mean that the architectural designs of new campuses have to be reworked—at great cost.

In the Kuwaiti welfare society few choose to seek employment in higher education institutions. Universities constantly face shortage of Kuwaiti nationals willing and qualified to teach. In public universities, Kuwaitis dominate in administration, faculty is mixed, with a significant portion of expatriates, while menial labor is exclusively done by foreigners. Within the private sphere, there is even less Kuwaiti staff employed. In effect, these institutions are not major employers in their local regions. The National Assembly has tried to replace foreign educators with Kuwaitis, but students and faculty have not been supportive of such moves, arguing that this will “destroy academics” (“Expats 'flooding' higher education” 2010). What is implied by this is that even though a large number of Kuwaitis hold PhD degrees, they are perceived to lack experience, be less efficient, and fall behind current academic standards (ibid.). Therefore, universities are not centers of employment for the local population who either seek work within the sprawling government apparatus or try to start their own business.

What universities do provide, however, is an outlet for cultural and social events in a country where such activities are few and far between. These attract the general public and include comedy shows, theatre, national and embassy-sponsored events, musical shows, lectures, film screenings, among many others.

### ***The Economy of Higher Education***

Funding for both private and public universities comes from the government, specifically the Ministry of Finance, which reviews the amounts requested by the Ministry of Higher Education and allocates the necessary funds for each year. A statistical study by the International Monetary Fund has shown that from 2004 to 2009 the Kuwaiti government’s expenditure on education has, as a whole, steadily increased. In 2004/2005, the government spent KD 740 million. By 2008/2009, expenditure radically increased to KD 1.32 billion (Khamis et al 2010). According to the *Al-Yaoum Gazette*, the budget of the Ministry of Higher Education for 2009/2010 was KD 123,189,000, the bulk of which was used for “miscellaneous” needs (KD 99,600,000) and salaries (KD 15,057,000).<sup>8</sup> This explains the gradual increase of the budget from the previous years.<sup>9</sup> Surprisingly, funding does not come easy as every budget request is frequently questioned and scrutinized by the Parliament,

which exercises its power on decision, especially regarding the national budget, and can vote against it. Deliberations are often heated and can be stalled, whether because amendments have to be made as a protective measure to alleviate the personal interests and concerns of MPs or because of tough questioning of ministers on how they plan to spend the state funds.<sup>10</sup>

Private universities receive a good part of their budget from private investors, yet a significant portion comes in the form of scholarship money that covers the cost of study for Kuwaiti students. Therefore, one can argue that the source of all funding for all higher education institutions is the Kuwaiti government. Private investors supporting universities are subject to a number of requirements set by the government and supervised by the PUC. Roughly, a foreign partner must be ranked among the top 200 universities in prestigious international rankings as defined by educational (mainly American) journals, and the relationship must go beyond simply representing a brand—there must be continuous joint research projects and other forms of collaboration and exchange (Mills 2009). The foreign investor must also work with a local partner, as required by Kuwaiti law, and the relationship varies depending on the type of private institution. For example, in the cases of KMBS and Box Hill, the Kuwaiti partner has largely “take[n] a back seat when it comes to day-to-day operations” (ibid.). In other cases, local partners are highly involved, for example, in the capacity of board members where they are being called to make decisions, work with the PUC, and generally contribute to the operation of the university.

Universities are not, at this moment, pivotal economic centers, as mentioned earlier; their role is to train the future employees of Kuwait who, the government hopes, can boost and sustain the country’s development. Education, according to the Minister of Higher Education, should be improved “in line with the government action plan for development, which envisions transforming the State of Kuwait into a commercial and financial hub by the year 2035” (“Education Minister Discusses” 2010). In other words, education is a means in the economic rather than social, political, or cultural development of the country. As part of this larger strategic policy of development, there have been proposals to privatize certain departments in public institutions too. For example, the KU management conducted studies investigating the possibility of privatizing its university press (“Kuwait University Press” 2010). However, actions have not been taken and no announcements have been made on this or other similar proposals.

Funding, as mentioned earlier, has increased every year over the last decade. The

flood of cash from high and increasing oil prices (the oil sector accounts for KD 7,7 million of Kuwait's gross domestic product [Khamis et al. 2010, 4]), has given Kuwait an advantage in its pursuit of major transformations in education and covering the substantial cost that this entails. Because private institutions are able to cover a good portion of such costs, this eases the burden that public institutions have had for decades. These two main factors have given the Ministry of Higher Education much more room to allocate funds that are not consumed by the colossal bureaucratic machine.

The government, as legislated by the Constitution, has the mandate to provide education for all Kuwaiti nationals for free. Even Kuwaiti students enrolled in private universities can apply for scholarships, which the majority try to get. In addition, the government provides a monthly allowance of KD 250 for each Kuwaiti student in either private or public universities. For those opting to study abroad, the scholarships cover the cost of tuition, travel expenses, educational materials, complete health insurance, and a monthly stipend of KD 400–600, varying according to the type of degree and type and location of the university where the student seeks to enrol, as well as the type of scholarship received: normal or merit. Scholarships take up a significant portion of the government budget for education, amounting to nearly 30% of the total. This should not come as a surprise, as Kuwait is dedicated to providing financially for its citizens.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Regional and Global Dynamics and Relationships***

The Kuwaiti government is aware of the need to look internationally for ways to benefit and develop the country when internal resources are lacking, and it has tailored its educational policy accordingly. Currently, students can apply to scholarship programs for more than sixty countries. For many, this opportunity is very appealing and is usually their first choice. In order to apply, students must go through a process that many term “a bureaucratic nightmare.”<sup>12</sup> This includes ensuring that they have the necessary documents, including civil papers, high school diploma, and an acceptance letter from the university they wish to attend, gathering signatures and approvals from different departments, occasionally dealing with administrators who are unaware of new policies, or conforming to sporadic opening hours at various departments and institutions. The choice of university is limited to a list composed by a ministry committee and can vary from year to year. In some cases the Ministry can suddenly revoke the authentication of certain universities, usually justified by the fact that the institution has failed to reach domestic and international educational quality standards or in

case of suspicions—confirmed or not—that the diplomas of the university are commonly or easily forged (“Higher Education Ministry” 2010). Social norms also come into play, especially regarding female students whose families are not keen to see them travelling outside of the country—a factor that explains why predominately male students study abroad.

Private universities serve to form strong links between Western, mainly American, institutions and Kuwait. The close partnership with American universities, in particular, can be seen in the context of the influential role that the United States played in the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1990–1991, and which resulted in strengthening the bond between the two countries over the course of the 1990s and in the early twenty-first century. However, in light of the political atmosphere after September 11, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiment in the West, the flow of Kuwaiti students toward the United States has diminished; students now travel more often to Europe or to neighboring countries to study. Educational relationships are initiated and supervised through cultural offices that Kuwait has established in certain countries, mainly from the region or in the West.<sup>13</sup> In the past several years, Kuwait has also expanded its relationships with East Asian countries many of which have become sources of inspiration and guidance in terms of educational policies.

Kuwait is part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional alliance that seeks to have political and economic union, and it is thus subject to certain regional concerns and agendas. The regional educational policy was initiated through the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS) in 1975, prior to the actual formation of the GCC. This organization, which favors joint initiatives with international educational bodies such as the International Bureau of Education and UNESCO, assesses the state of education in each country from the region and offers recommendations for improvement and reform. These recommendations are then discussed during the regular annual meetings of the ministers of higher education of the GCC states, which began in 1985 (Abouammoh 2009, 4). Discussions range from the question of whether high school graduates are prepared to enter universities to the growing issue of applying a common policy of degree equivalences between member nations. ABEGS also provides an overarching procedure for information-sharing, particularly of the successes and failures of member-nations’ domestic policies on education. Presently, the GCC nations are “placing more emphasis on quality and world class university competition” (10).

One can note a similarity of experiences of GCC members with regards to the growth

of private universities and their overall educational policy as they share similar structures and challenges (such as large foreign workforce, high revenues from natural resources, lack of qualified local professionals, et cetera). The move to tighten higher education policy into a standardized system for all countries from the region does not come as a surprise since the GCC is intended to ensure regional political and economic integration. Other aspects of higher education policy were presented in the *Kuwait Paper for Development*, under the rubric Educational Dimension, where four overarching plans concerning education were suggested:

1. Emphasize education for citizenship.
2. Enhance moderate views and remove extremism.
3. Achieve excellence in research.
4. Build models for knowledge management. (Abouammoh 2009, 11)

Essentially, these challenges point to the uniqueness of the educational system in the region. Gawdat Bahgat has described this as follows:

The number of individuals with formal schooling is rising, but the quality of education they receive does not correspond to the need of Gulf societies. In other words, the educational policies pursued in the last several decades have contributed to a number of societal distortions. These include a mismatch between traditional and modern schooling, an imbalance between indigenous and foreign labourers, and a gender gap between men and women. (1999, 129)

Kuwait is working to establish a common direction with its neighboring countries that are facing similar issues. It is also important to mention that the factor of Gulf regionalism manifests itself not only in the sense of cooperation, but competition as well. Thus, each Gulf country vies for international attention and topping each other in the world rankings is a source of national pride.

As a member of the Arab League and the United Nations (and its various sub-departments and organizations), Kuwait also takes part in joint committees and studies assessing the state of higher education throughout the West Asia and North Africa region. As a participant in these international forums, Kuwait is susceptible to foreign criticisms and opinions, which can influence the direction of certain aspects of its educational policy.

### ***State Legislation Governing Higher Education***

In addition to the Constitution and sharia, which are the underpinnings of all educational

policy in the country, two other legislations define the governance, operations, overall structure, and the very nature of public and private higher education—Laws 29 and 34. Passed in 1966, Law 29 formally established public higher education in Kuwait;<sup>14</sup> it outlines the aim of the education system to provide the country with experts in science and technology and to initiate and promote research on Arab and Islamic heritage (Kuwait takes its Islamic and Arab heritage very seriously, viewing “Westernization” and even “modernism”—whatever those abstract concepts tangibly mean—as alien ideologies threatening the country's identity). The law also outlines the provisions for the establishment of the various faculties, administration, and governance of KU (and, later, PAAET).

Law 29 has gone through a number of amendments, whether by Amiri decrees or through the parliamentary process, which have established and modified the structure of higher education.<sup>15</sup> Of these amendments, the most important one was Amiri Decree 140 of 1988 that founded the Ministry of Higher Education, in addition to the Ministry of Education. The amendments also outline the role of the National Assembly in educational policy, including Parliament's ability to scrutinize the policy's ongoing development and transformation (that is, if the National Assembly is not dissolved).<sup>16</sup> For example, any call for tender, from the construction of a new campus to buying new textbooks, must go through the Ministry and the National Assembly for approval.

Another important amendment with a major impact on higher education is the gender segregation law voted in 1996 and implemented in 2001. The law was passed by a predominately conservative National Assembly,<sup>17</sup> which was dissolved three years later<sup>18</sup> due to a political deadlock with the government over a number of issues, including the question of women's suffrage.<sup>19</sup> This law, although not strictly enforced beyond the classroom, is highly controversial and has divided the country between those who feel that it implements an interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence and those who feel it is not effective in the contemporary era and goes against Kuwait's liberal orientation. Attempts to repeal the law in 2008 were unsuccessful and the issue continues to be heavily debated.

The ongoing conflict between the National Assembly and the government essentially revolves around issues of power, particularly concerning questions of political representation and the role of the ruling family in governing society. This conflict also affects liberal- and conservative-oriented factions within the Assembly or society at large. The power of the legislative body has been utilized to impact the Ministry of Higher Education itself. Educational policy is often exploited to further personal interests. In fact, the very first vote

of no-confidence submitted in the Assembly was toward the Minister of Education and Higher Education during the 7th National Assembly in 1996. And in 2008, Minister Nouria Al-Subaih, the first female minister of higher education,<sup>20</sup> survived a no-confidence vote; in this case MPs sought to impeach her for, in their opinion, not adequately punishing a student who had “insulted Islam” (see “Kuwait’s ‘Iron Lady’” 2008).

The second legislation, Law 34, is similar in its design to Law 29. It outlines the structures of private higher education, the responsibilities and administrative jurisdictions of the Ministry of Higher Education with regards to private institutions, and the formation of the PUC, which ensures that private universities conform to all rules and regulations of the country.<sup>21</sup>

The PUC has the power to give or revoke licenses, accredit degrees, supervise the institutions’ standards and conditions, and act as a liaison between the government and private institutions. The PUC’s organizational structure is divided into four committees: licensing, internal scholarship, accreditation (with its own evaluation teams and agencies), and research and development. The process of establishing a private university in the country involves following a set of procedures outlined by the PUC, which also constantly supervises the new university and has the power to cancel licences or merge institutions (Ministry of Higher Education n.d.). The PUC then sends its report to the Council of Ministers, which in turn forwards it to the Amir of Kuwait for final approval. The PUC’s role could be quite intrusive, sometimes to such a degree that it criticizes the subjects taught at the universities. An example is the letter that the PUC sent a few years ago to one private university in which it stated its concern that some of the topics taught promoted “modernist ideas, waging war against Islam and spreading poetry and literature of sexuality, alcohol, and immoral love in order to westernise youth” (“Private Universities Council” 2010).

Ultimately, regional or local authorities (those not involved in the government) have limited influence over the founding, governance, and operations of most higher education institutions in the country. However, private universities self-regulate. For the Ministry, this is a cost-cutting solution since its budget (as highlighted above) is mainly spent on salaries (operational costs). Private universities are comparable to any business or corporation functioning in the country and therefore have to follow certain guidelines; specifically, the majority of ownership must be Kuwaiti and they must prove their financial sustainability. This factor has ensured that most educational institutions are funded locally, rather than relying on foreign capital.

When it comes to research, private universities are still formulating their research agendas and need more time to establish themselves as institutions influential to policy-making in the country. Public universities are stronger in that regard. The legal backing through the Constitution, which stipulates the need for scientific and other research institutions for Kuwait, has favored research within KU and PAAET, although this potential is used only to a limited degree by the government. Prior to the Gulf War, scientific and technological research was a major priority and was supported by the government, which allowed the country to be one of the regional leaders in this sector. After the invasion and occupation, the country's capacity for research stagnated or outright collapsed. According to a 2010 UNESCO *Science Report on Arab States*, in 2008 Kuwait adopted a plan to reform its science and technology sector by implementing several measures: establishing a governance mechanism at the state level that would monitor the sector; increasing gross domestic expenditure on research and development; enhancing cooperation between scientific organizations; improving the country's capacity for innovation; and establishing a database for providing information. There are currently three major research centers—the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, and KU's Research Centre. Research by these domestic institutions is nevertheless still trumped by foreign groups hired by the government to conduct various studies and produce reports about the future policy directions of the country. For example, Tony Blair was hired by the Kuwaiti government to assess and consult on the country's development plan; the price for his services is estimated to be US \$42.6 million (“Tony Blair's firm” 2010).

According to UNESCO's report, gross expenditure on research and development in the country is low, estimated at 0.09 as a percentage of the total GDP.<sup>22</sup> Kuwait implemented a five-year plan in 2008 to increase the budget of the science and technology sector from 0.2% of the GDP to 1% by 2014. There are only a few full-time researchers in the country—166 per million of the population—and they are concentrated in the field of clinical medicine. Despite this fact, Kuwait has been a leader in scientific publications per million of the population among the Arab states between 2002 and 2008 (UNESCO 2010, 264).<sup>23</sup>

Due to the overwhelming presence of the government in the field of higher education, academic freedom has its limits. There is some freedom to criticize the government, the National Assembly, and overall state policy. Academics cannot criticize the ruling family, especially the Amir of Kuwait. Any attempts to do so will result in heavy punishment—fines and in some cases, imprisonment. Criticism of religion is also restricted. Any topic of

discussion that is perceived to be against the country's interpretation of Islam can lead to a loss of employment and punishment. In private universities, where most of the faculty are not Kuwaiti, any complaints presented to the PUC, by students or others, can lead to swift termination of contract and deportation. In private universities, censorship is also an issue. It takes the form of scrutinizing the content of textbooks or curricula that are considered controversial or inappropriate; if such content is found, the book can either be outright banned or can be used, but with heavy redactions. In matters requiring greater cultural sensibility, censorship is arbitrary because the law itself is quite vague. Departments within the Ministry and the PUC are vigilant in curbing topics that they feel are contradictory to Kuwaiti culture, religion, and society without outlining the reasons behind their decisions or attempting to incorporate the sentiments of the students and the public. Other limits to academic freedom concern an individual's ability to criticize those in administration or higher positions of power in universities (“Private Universities Council” 2010). Despite this, the state of academic freedom in Kuwait is by far better than in a number of other countries in the region, but it falls behind most states on international level. The issue of censorship is a good illustration of the inherent contradictions and conflicts of Kuwaiti society, which can be described as both conservative and liberal where each group wins some battles over the other from time to time.

### ***University Administration***

As the main administrative body, the Ministry of Higher Education has the responsibility of university accreditation, domestically and in terms of which foreign universities Kuwaiti students with scholarships can apply to. Accreditation of foreign universities, which are preferred by many Kuwaitis, is a matter of concern.<sup>24</sup> Decisions not to recognize certain universities, even after students have applied for scholarships with the intention to attend these institutions or have been studying there for a considerable time, have caused major inconveniences. These decisions, passed through ministerial decrees, are usually sudden and are not announced clearly, much to the confusion and discontent of students (“Ministry of Higher Education” 2010). Accreditation is based on confirming that a specific number of Kuwaiti students—usually fifty—are accepted in each university and that the degrees offered are in line with the list of licenced degrees by the Ministry.

Furthermore, the narrowly defined scholarships in turn restrict students' ability to freely choose the programs they want to pursue; to move beyond the list of degrees often

means the loss of funding. In other words, Kuwaiti students are limited to only “professional” degrees such as MBAs, engineering, medicine, and the like, while those who wish to pursue degrees in arts, politics, and philosophy, among others, generally are under- or unsupported.

The Academic Accreditation Commission licenses public universities; it often hosts international teams (primarily American) to assess the quality of education and standards regarding curriculum, teaching methods, student achievements, academic standards, and programs for alumni. The process began in 2005 when American teams visited KU and suggested various improvements. In 2011, the Architecture Department housed in the College of Petroleum and Engineering became the first in the GCC region to obtain accreditation (Kuwait University n.d.), followed by the College of Social Sciences. For both, the accreditation is for a period of five years, after which another round of evaluation will begin.

As the main body for accreditation of private universities, the PUC also provides a strong link to ministerial policy. The Accreditation Committee within the PUC is composed of evaluation teams—usually foreign consultants or local experts that may or may not be associated directly with the Ministry of Higher Education—that judge each field of specialization to ultimately determine accreditation. The accreditation process takes place every time a license for an institution is requested and when a new department is proposed. As stated in the PUC's by-laws, in order to be accredited, the institution must contribute to social development through services and research. It also has to be financially viable. A financial report must be conducted by the university's Council of Trustees and reviewed by the Accreditation Committee, which then offers recommendations to the PUC, which makes the final decision. In this sense, private universities are seen as corporations first and foremost, rather than educational centers, and are assessed as such.

Clearly, when it comes to decision making in universities, the Kuwaiti postsecondary education system is highly centralized. It is essentially a top-down structure with the Ministry of Higher Education and the PUC having veto power in educational policy. The organizational structure of KU, for example, has a top tier consisting of the Minister of Higher Education, the University Council, and the Rector's Office (Kuwait University, “About”). Next in the hierarchy are the Dean of Administration and Registration and the Dean of Students' Affairs, followed by the University Secretary General, who heads the various departments, and the University Council, which appoints the various directors and which is chaired by the Minister of Higher Education. The same is true for PAAET where the Board of Directors is appointed by the Ministry and it, in turn, appoints the Director General.

Beyond this centralized system, unions representing the voices of students and faculty members also participate in university governance.<sup>25</sup> In public universities, faculty members are represented by their own unions and through their own elections. The largest is the Kuwait University Faculty Association formed in 2008. The major issues facing faculty unions usually revolve around the lack of adequate pay increase or denouncing external interference in appointments of deans (“PAAET Syndicate Wars” 2010). Strikes have happened, but only sporadically and never on a large scale or over a long period of time.

Annual student elections for each college in PAAET and KU, which usually take place early in the academic year, are followed with interest by students, the public, and the media. Four major parties compete during elections: Al-Wasat Al-Democratayah (the Democratic Circle), a strongly liberal group; Al-Mostaqilla (the Independent), which represents a more centralized, nationalist position; Al-Islamiyah (the Islamic group), representing Shi'a within the university, a coalition between the Al-Hurra and Al-Islamiyyah; and Al-Itelafeyah was Al-Itihad Al-Islamiyyah (the Islamic Coalition and Union group), the largest conservative student bloc representing an alliance between the Islamic Union and the Islamic Coalition.

In the past several years, the Islamic Coalition and Union group has received the most votes, followed by the Independents. The Coalition’s victory is due to its strong voting mobilization power, especially among students in KU’s Islamic Studies department, a power that they have been using to great effect for decades.<sup>26</sup> There are speculations of external pressure, particularly from MPs who seek to control the outcome of the elections and to ensure the continuity of certain educational policies. In the 2010 elections, the Al-Mustaqbal Bloc (the more centrist Future bloc) won in a landslide victory for the position within the National Union of Kuwaiti Students (NUKS) chapter for PAAET.<sup>27</sup> The Independent Bloc was second, followed by the Islamic Coalition and the Democratic Circle (see Al-Fodri and Al-Ahmad 2010, 2). The Islamic Coalition ensured its hold on power at the NUKS branch in KU, as predicted widely.

In private institutions representation of students and faculty is minimal. Being predominately foreign, faculty members lack the social and legal power to address the problems they encounter in a substantial manner. Student organizations are not unified either and lack the strong bond that many have in the public sphere and which inspires a willingness to participate in the decision-making process of the university.

There are some, and growing, efforts to further involve students, faculty, and the

broader public in the development and governance of universities. Nevertheless, power is still in the hands of the government and those it chooses to appoint. Curricula and learning structures are firmly engrained in the political sector with the Ministry proposing decisions that are then assessed and debated in the National Assembly. Students and faculty members have few other courses of action, but to loudly express their opinions and to persuade the mass media and the public to take up their cause for change and put pressure on those in power.

Centralization is a matter of grave concern in the country. Many, including a number of MPs, have noted that this kind of organization drastically reduces the chances for implementing adequate educational policy and adapting it to changing needs. Many working within this system abstain from offering their honest opinions about what can be improved because they are fearful about their own positions, which in a centralized system are predicated on the support of those on a higher level.

### ***Reforms***

Demands for reforms have been ongoing since the inception of higher education in Kuwait. The public, the students, the faculty, and even a number of MPs have continuously pushed for further reforms in order to improve this sector. The rise of private higher education came as a result not only from the recommendation of studies and reports, but also through mobilization of students and faculty in their demands for educational alternatives. The rise of American and Western-style universities and their use of technology gave further impetus to reform the curriculum and the infrastructure of public higher education institutions. More recent calls for reforms are driven by the need to compete in the global educational and development rat race.

The more recent national policy of transforming the country into a commercial and financial hub accelerated the process of upgrading the current educational infrastructure. It is for this reason that the Shadadiya project and the new PAAET campuses are being built. Furthermore, the accelerated process of “Kuwaitization” has made those in administrative and ministerial positions even more determined to gain international accreditation for domestic public universities. These reforms are supervised by the legislative branch of government, which continuously challenges and questions each ministerial action, because ultimately these reforms can only be financed through the national budget. The public, through the media and other public forums,<sup>28</sup> voices informally its concerns and opinions on what needs to change in the system. Reform is a term that comes quick to the lips of policy-

makers; indeed, the newly appointed Director General of PAAET was quick to promise educational reform (“New PAAET Director” 2010).

Reforms take time in Kuwait. In part, this is explained by the unstable relationship between the National Assembly and the government that can create long periods of deadlock, stalling the implementation of new plans. The lack of transparency and broad representation and the disconnection between local and global concerns and experiences are all major obstacles that the country has yet to surpass. This is not to say that people are unaware or keep quiet about what should change, or that those on top have no understanding of what needs to be done; yet the system in itself seems to be broken<sup>29</sup> under the massive bureaucratic weight that is part and parcel of Kuwaiti welfare society.

There is no lack of capital and each new project is ambitious in scale. However, when it comes to implementing things in practice, the end result is off the mark. This is especially the case when most of the work relies on foreign expertise and assessments that do not involve the resources available within the country. There have been recent attempts to change this, and there is still much work to be done.

## **The Student Experience**

### ***Access and Equity***

Unfortunately, statistics of the local population with university degree are currently not recorded. Estimates in 2006/2007 suggest that between 35% and 40% of Kuwaitis have university degrees; of that figure, approximately 40% are females. Public and private institutions are legally bound to have an enrolment quota with Kuwaitis in the majority; this is enforced by the Ministry of Higher Education. Public institutions host approximately 75% of all Kuwaiti university students, the rest head toward private institutions.<sup>30</sup> For both, the majority of students are Kuwaiti. For study abroad programs, the Ministry has restricted the number of student places to fifty for each overseas university that qualifies to be on the list composed by the Ministry and its associated bodies; the scholarship application process also works as a controlling mechanism for this quota.

To be accepted at KU and PAAET, students must complete the registration process during the allocated time—usually from July to August—and fill out the necessary application forms available online and through the Ministry of Higher Education. Private universities have similar registration procedures—no admission exams are required and students must apply to be enrolled in the institution.

For the children of expatriate workers, private universities are basically the only way to obtain post-secondary education in the country and this was one of the main arguments invoked in support of the establishment of private universities. There are non-Kuwaitis studying in public institutions as well; however, the positions are very limited and they are filled mostly by students from neighboring Gulf countries. The Bidoon have only recently been allowed semi-access to public university education depending on individual cases, however, not enough has been done to meet the needs of this entire community.

While public postsecondary education is free for all Kuwaitis, in private universities tuition rates vary between KD 1,000 and 1,500 per year, and for many American-inspired institutions tuition is based on a credit per hour system. Thus, the higher education system completely alienates the lower and poor classes, whether they be expatriate workers who earn very little<sup>31</sup> or Bidoon who are generally excluded by the system. In terms of enrolment, gender is not an issue—the numbers of female students are high and growing, especially in private institutions. The country has drastically improved women's access to higher education over the past twenty years. Where gender does come into play is the ratio of women studying abroad, which is lower as many women are restricted from leaving by their families.

### *Student Life*

Public and private universities are social centers for extracurricular activities, ranging from sporting events to religious celebrations (exclusively Islamic). Students in public universities are more engaged, whether in social or political groups. Private universities, on the other hand, host cultural events, film screenings, and various activities that are otherwise unavailable in Kuwaiti society. They are often mounted in collaboration with embassies and international organizations and they attract the audience of expatriates. However, because these institutions are under the strict watch of the PUC, certain events can be considered controversial.

Social groups on campus are separated along national, religious, and class lines, with some intermingling. For Kuwaiti students, campus life is in effect an extension of social interactions forged in high school and many of them keep together with their school friends. Most of Kuwaiti students live at home with their families, which means that university residencies are mostly occupied by foreign students.

Kuwait's inherent conflict between its liberal and conservative identity plays itself out in the incorporation of gender segregation in public universities and pressures on the private

ones to follow suit. For private institutions segregation would entail considerable financial and symbolic costs in terms of academic life, scheduling, and physical infrastructure. The irony is that gender segregation is not vigorously practised in social spaces where students intermingle. Another example of a prevailing conservative attitude in the country was the introduction of a dress code for KU and PAAET students. At KU, a strict code of “modest clothing” was implemented under orders of the Committee of Deans. Male and female students are not to wear shorts, chains, bracelets, clothing with words or pictures that can be deemed offensive, provocative, or suggestive (“New Dress Code” 2010). Similarly, at PAAET male students are banned from wearing necklaces or bracelets and cannot wear shirts with offensive words or images; female students are not allowed to have facial piercings (“Basic Education at PAAET” 2010).

### ***Graduates***

Most Kuwaiti graduates remain and work in Kuwait, even those who have studied abroad. For the latter group, their scholarships stipulate that they must repay this investment by being productive employees in the country's economy. A look at the distribution of employment by sector of the total Kuwaiti workforce shows that the majority, 70.1%, work in public administration (Khamis et al. 2010, 13). This large percentage has been gradually decreasing as the government seeks to encourage the population to enter the private sector, a policy that has had some success as shown by the figures over time.<sup>32</sup> The next largest category of employment is “unclassified,” with 9.7%, followed by finance and business with 4.8% (ibid.).

Graduates with liberal arts degrees rarely work in their field of study as such jobs are limited or simply unavailable. As a highly consumerist society, Kuwait caters toward finance, business, and services. Many Kuwaitis want to start their own businesses or work in the large government apparatus, which ensures them good salary and benefits. The experience of having a heavily subsidized lifestyle reduces the incentives to take major risks. Therefore, many graduates opt to follow the norms of the public system to ensure routine monthly salary and a very comfortable lifestyle.

### **The Faculty Experience<sup>33</sup>**

#### ***Faculty Career Mobility and Promotion***

Foreigners, mainly Egyptians, played an important role in establishing public institutions of higher education in the country, and from the 1960s to the 1980s, they dominated the

faculties of public universities. It was not until after the Gulf War and the rebuilding of the country that faculty members became predominantly Kuwaiti nationals. Many consider this “Kuwaitization” as detrimental in that qualified and experienced personnel are being replaced with Kuwaiti counterparts who do not always meet the standards. In response to accreditation demands, the Ministry has worked to ensure that Kuwaitis hired in public institutions meet international norms, but this is still a work in progress.

Promotion for Kuwaiti staff is not standardized, in the sense that one is not usually promoted through merit and effort. *Wasta* (connections) come into play as one seeks to climb higher on the social ladder and this has been a matter of huge contention within the field of higher education. The situation is different for staff in private universities, whose qualifications are usually considered of higher quality as they go through the PUC’s rigid licensing and accreditation process (for example, 70% of faculty must hold PhD degrees). Recruitment is usually conducted outside Kuwait, in the country of origin of the university, and vetted by the university administrators.

Turnover rates are higher in private institutions as many faculty members are put off by the large workloads and restrictions in Kuwaiti academic culture. The lack of real career and pay mobility and the restrictions on rights and freedoms are factors that have lessened the demand to join these institutions. On the other hand, public institutions have lower turnover rates and faculty members are more likely to stay for their entire careers in the same institution if they accept the system and understand that their mobility to an administrative level is non-existent.

Salaries are based—in an informal manner—on the individual’s nationality. Kuwaitis receive the highest remuneration, followed by people hailing from Western or other Arab countries. In comparison to its neighbors, salaries in Kuwait are not as high, nor is social life appealing—if one compares life and living standards of a foreigner in Qatar or the United Arab Emirates, for example. Therefore, to non-Kuwaitis, it seems that the input of work does not match the output of reward. Tenure is not offered for non-Kuwaitis in either private or public institutions, thereby weakening the incentives of an individual to produce the best in quality of education or be willing to stay for an entire career. This is compounded by the threat of immediate termination and deportation if one commits certain violations, as residency is based on a sponsorship program.

As noted previously, faculty unions do exist and can represent any outstanding disputes; however, given expatriates’ rather vulnerable position, these unions are much more

effective for Kuwaiti nationals who can afford to be more confrontational without the risk of sudden deportation.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of 2014 and the dawn of a new year, Kuwait is still in the process of transforming and expanding its higher education sector. The social and economic demands are great. The nation's native population is growing, with the majority currently under the age of twenty-five. Education and the way it is shaped will be an essential factor for the development and growth of Kuwait in the near future. This will mean providing sufficient and affordable access to higher education, whether within the country or abroad.

The expansion is already underway. Not only has construction of new campuses, both private and public, begun, but institutions have also started expanding their curricula. For example, in November 2014 KU announced that it has plans to provide four new majors: doctorate degrees in nuclear science and pharmacology and master's in social service and criminology (“KU tentatively OKs four new majors” 2014).

These moves, while important, are still far from enough to adequately respond to the challenges posed by the increasing numbers of students. The establishment of private universities has alleviated some of that burden, but it too comes with an array of issues, ranging from rising tuition fees, lack of international accreditation, and the inherent clumsiness of implanting a foreign educational institution into another country. Kuwaiti authorities' desperate desire to respond to the needs of a growing population, combined with an abundance of money from oil, creates peculiar problems. Namely, private higher educational institutions have yet to prove themselves as providers of quality education. So far, Kuwait has imported name brands, but without taking into account that universities are more than just products. They need to develop as institutions, build a legacy, and generate research, beyond simply churning out degrees for students to get jobs.

A recent incident shared with this report's author by a Kuwaiti student enrolled in the MBA program at the Kuwait Maastricht Business School (KMBS) is indicative of the challenges that higher educational institutions face, especially foreign private universities in Kuwait. This student is facing a strange conundrum. He has an exam in a month, but he has heard in the news that KMBS' Board is in conflict with the government over the quality of its campus infrastructure, and there are rumours that the government may revoke KMBS' license. The student asks: Is it worth studying for an exam if the school itself may not exist in

a year?

It is quite difficult to speculate on what the future holds for Kuwait's higher education system. The variables are too great, intertwined with other dilemmas besetting and at times paralyzing the country, or are conditional on whether the various expansion projects are enough to weather any difficulties surely to emerge for Kuwait as a whole.

Fundamentally, Kuwait is approaching a crossroads of sorts, one that demands that various stakeholders—students, faculty, officials, foreigners, or locals—actively and bluntly discuss what type of university is needed, and work together toward that end. The country's higher educational development in the course of nearly a century has been remarkably dramatic. The process has been sorely understudied, yet once in the spotlight, it offers much to ponder over.

## Notes

1. In 2010 alone, revenues from oil increased to Kuwaiti dinars 16 billion, as reported in *Al Watan Daily* (May 29, 2010).

2. This figure is based on rough estimates from information gathered from different sources: the GCC Secretariat Information Center–Statistical Department (*Statistical Bulletin*, v. 15, 2006), enrolment rates in Kuwait University (see *Kuwait University: A Case Study* by Alison Larkin-Koushki), information published in the *Al-Yaoum Gazette* from Sept. 14, 2008, quota numbers for scholarships, and estimations made by the PUC for students in private universities.

3. This was highlighted in the *Al-Yaoum Gazette* issue of Sept. 14, 2008 regarding Kuwait's overall master plan.

4. In fact, GUST was the first in the region to use e-learning technologies in 2005.

5. A Kuwaiti delegation was sent to Singapore in May 2010 where it was introduced to “smart classrooms” and was shown various infrastructure and use. This was followed by a visit by the Kuwaiti Minister of Higher Education in June 2010 during which the plans to incorporate “smart classes” at all levels of education were confirmed.

6. In 2009, Webometrics University Ranking placed Kuwait University ninth regionally and at 1,978th place internationally.

7. This is because the government, which represents the ruling family, controls most of the land in the country.

8. Other costs included: KD 2,488,000 for products/material; KD 264,000 for transport and equipment; KD 5,780,000 KD for construction and maintenance (*Kuwait Al-Yaoum Archives*, April 1, 2009).

9. The total budget of the Ministry of Higher Education for 2008/2009 was KD 92,162,000 and KD 59,910,000 for 2007/2008 (*Kuwait Al-Yaoum Archives*, May 4, 2008).

10. The national budget for a five-year development plan was passed in January 2010 in an extraordinary session and after a series of political infighting and pressure by the government (see “MPs Give Carte Blanche” 2010).

11. This provision applies to Kuwaiti-born individuals only and constitutes one of the bases of the government’s legitimacy.

12. This process is outlined on the Ministry's website at: <http://www.mohe.edu.kw/site/> (accessed Oct. 15, 2014).

13. In such countries as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland, Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Lebanon, and Qatar.

14. Its full text is available on the Kuwait University website: <http://cmt.d.kuniv.edu.kw/cmt.d2008/PDF/MainMapnew.pdf> (accessed Oct. 15, 2014).

15. These amendments are: Law 35 of 1970, Law 95 of 1980, Amiri decrees of June 14, 1981 and of September 1, 2002.

16. If the National Assembly is dissolved for a long period of time, the Amiri decrees become the source of immediate law.

17. This is perhaps due to the increase of Saudi Arabian influence in the country since the first Gulf War, although it is risky to make such assumptions.

18. This was the third time in five moments that the National Assembly was dissolved due to deadlock. It had been dissolved on five other occasions: from 1976 until 1981 and from 1986 until 1992 (these have been deemed unconstitutional since elections were not held two months after dissolution as stated in the Constitution), in 1999, 2006, and in March 2009. In 2010, a sixth dissolution occurred, followed by political paralysis and instability throughout the 2011–2013 period that resulted in further dissolutions. The current National Assembly is more aligned with the government.

19. An Amiri decree in 1999 granted female suffrage that was only passed in the National Assembly in 2005, after much pressure from the domestic public and internationally.

20. Many thought that the real reason for the no-confidence motion was Minister Al-

Subaih's gender.

21. For more, see the PUC's website at:

<http://www.puc.edu.kw/en/index.php?TP=erules> (accessed Oct. 14, 2014).

22. In comparison, Egypt has 0.29% and the United Kingdom—1.82% (UNESCO 2010).

23. This proportion is more understandable when one takes into account the small population of the country compared to other Arab states.

24. For more information, see the Kuwaiti Ministry of Higher Education website at:

<http://www.mohe.edu.kw/site/#> (accessed Oct. 15, 2014).

25. Moreover, the National Union of Kuwaiti Students, for example, also has branches in universities in other countries that host large Kuwaiti student populations.

26. See the confidential US Embassy Cable document 09KUWAIT1012 "University Elections: The Future of Tribal-Islamist Dominance in Kuwait?" from October 22, 2009 at: <http://cables.mrkva.eu/cable.php?id=230864> (accessed Oct. 15, 2014).

27. The NUKS has an important role in accepting various student complaints whether on issues of accreditation of foreign universities or on reforming a grading policy perceived unfair.

28. Blogging and Twitter have become major forums for the Kuwaiti public to express its opinions.

29. When speaking to Kuwaitis, they usually use this phrase to explain the situation.

30. *Kuwait Al-Yaoum Archives*, Sept. 14, 2008.

31. Many receive a salary of KD 60–100 per month.

32. In 2004, 79.2% of the population was employed in public administration.

33. For a detailed discussion of the faculty members' experiences in academia in Kuwait, see Alison Larkin-Koushki's article *Kuwait University: A Case Study*.

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