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SAUDI MALE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES: AN  
ANALYSIS OF KING ABDULLAH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS.

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky


In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education


By  
T. Ryan Hall


December 2013

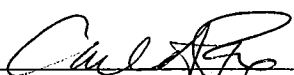
SAUDI MALE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES: AN  
ANALYSIS OF KING ABDULLAH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS.

Date Recommended 10/31/13

  
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I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Emily Hall. Her selflessness and indomitable spirit are an inspiration. Her unwavering love and support lead me places I could never reach alone.

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SAUDI MALE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES: AN  
ANALYSIS OF KING ABDULLAH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

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Directed by: Barbara Burch, Alex Poole, and Ric Keaster

Education Leadership Doctoral Program

Western Kentucky University

The Saudi Arabian Government's establishment of the multi-billion dollar King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), which sends students abroad for language training and university study, is responsible for tens of thousands of Saudi men studying in the United States. With the extension of the program through 2020, it is critical that education leaders in higher education and stakeholders at all levels understand the challenges and opportunities presented by this group increasingly populating American classrooms. Several studies have been conducted on international students in the U.S. over the years with just a few focusing on Saudi students specifically. There is a need for research that seeks to understand Saudi students in the U.S. now that the scholarship program has matured several years.

The goals of this grounded theory study were to ascertain the rationale Saudi men in the KASP use to elect to study in the United States, how their experiences studying in the United States have affected their perceptions and aligned with their expectations, and to determine if the experiences and changes in beliefs and perceptions are aligned with the Saudi government's stated goals for the scholarship program. This study utilized a qualitative, grounded theory approach in order to ascertain the pertinent information related to Saudi students studying in the United States.

Twelve Saudi men agreed to participate, and each of them ultimately participated in an hour-long, face-to-face interview.

Five key patterns were identified from the research and interviews, and each of these patterns had 3-4 themes for a total of 17 themes. The patterns and themes focused on the rationale for Saudi men studying in the United States and the special issues presented by the KASP when it comes to choosing to study abroad. The study also reveals a considerable amount of understanding the men are gaining about their own culture as a result of study in the United States, the academic challenges due to a lack of preparation, particularly in reading and writing, and some concerns Saudi men have about the outcomes of the KASP.

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

**Introduction**

American colleges and universities entered the twentieth century as the unrivaled destination for international students. While that dominance has been eroded as other nations continue to bolster education at home and private multi-national educational organizations move into the market, America continues to lead the world in terms of international enrollments. According to the 2000 *Open Doors* Report (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2000), America took in a little more than half of a million international students, which was far greater than any other nation hosting international students. A comparison to the 2012 report (IIE, 2012), which shows that America had over 750,000 students studying in the country (a 5% growth from the previous year), suggests America has tremendous appeal for international students.

America is certainly caught up in a trend brought on by the information age and the focus of global knowledge exchange. Mok and Welch (2003) pointed out that “The evolution of globalization and of the knowledge society has led to systemic and institutional changes in higher education systems, and has required universities to adapt their character and functions to meet complex societal demands and expectations” (p. 287). America is no different in this regard, as it has created a number of new systems or co-ops systems from other industries to participate in the global knowledge society. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) made the assertion that “Most universities worldwide have needed to change and become more entrepreneurial, and this entrepreneurial attitude has led universities to extend the scope of their activities outside the national borders” (p. 47).

This entrepreneurial spirit has changed the operations and student body at home, but has also produced significant changes in American operations around the globe. Dosa (1993) provided a discussion on the motives of higher education being involved in bringing in international students: “Three kinds of incentives have been identified by the literature: self-interest; contribution to international scholarship and professional improvement” (p. 105).

However, this entrepreneurial spirit, while perhaps having the positives of expanding opportunity and knowledge sharing, certainly presents pitfalls—and there are many critics of America’s approach. Dosa (1993) elaborated on this situation: “Many educational institutions, especially in the public sector, are still reluctant to openly admit to self-interest as the dominating factor; it is as if they conceive of the education of international students as a moral obligation, a kind of charity” (p. 39). These circumstances may be alarming enough on the surface, but the effects on international students can be devastating. “New students are not unaware of the attitude. Disoriented already by abrupt immersion in a different culture, and often able to communicate only with difficulty, they face the additional discomforts of being, or at least feeling, stigmatized, and of being treated, however subtly, as burdens” (p. 103). This certainly is not the idealized situation imagined by many as international education continues to grow—less authentic engagement with international students and increased reliance on the revenues they generate.

The ability to attract international students has been precipitated by a number of factors, not the least of which is the incredible higher education infrastructure constructed in the United States throughout the twentieth century and the continued focus on

promoting education abroad in many ways informed by the entrepreneurial. Not only has the United States established universities and colleges that generate cutting edge technology and advances in all areas of thought, but it has established a powerful marketing presence generated by universities' own in-house marketing teams. In addition to these in-house marketing teams that recruit and "sell" the college overseas, the United States government helps promote American schools in the form of EducationUSA, an arm of the State Department charged with generating interest in American colleges and universities through branch offices all across the globe. EducationUSA has established a network of hundreds of advising centers in 170 countries, where millions of international students each year find accurate, comprehensive, and current information about how to apply to accredited U.S. colleges and universities. The EducationUSA network is supported by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), and "strives to foster mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries" EducationUSA advisers and staff work with U.S. higher education professionals to promote international student enrollment (EducationUSA, 2012).

As substantial and impressive as the State Department efforts to promote education are, perhaps the government's greatest impact on supporting international enrollments in the U.S. is the various alliances and agreements the federal government manages to establish with other governments and organizations from countries interested in American education. These agreements vary in size and impact, but all of them help America not only establish greater diplomatic relations, but also help maintain America's dominance in terms of international enrollments. Arguably, no such agreement is as

important to the current internationalization efforts of American colleges as the agreement between Saudi Arabia and the United States in the form of the King Abdullah Scholarship program (KASP). KASP, created in 2005, established an agreement between the United States and Saudi Arabia that has seen thousands of Saudi students enrolling in American universities and has, in many ways, changed the landscape of higher education in the United States. Describing the KASP as one of the world's largest scholarship schemes is a "modest description" (Thomas, 2013, p. 44). This agreement has meant 22.7 billion dollars for American higher education and has promises of not only helping American colleges overcome their ever-present budget deficits, but also to change the culture and society of Saudi Arabia (Jiffry, 2013).

This wave of Saudi students helping fill American college classrooms not only helps American universities overcome financial challenges, but also, at least ostensibly, advances learning on campus in unique ways that is beneficial for both American and international students. The potential to interact with students from other cultures is an oft-cited advantage of bringing students on to campus, as it is argued that domestic and international students gain academically from these interactions. Mamiseishvili (2011) states,

An internationally diverse student body brings valuable educational, cultural, and economic benefits to U.S. colleges and universities. Greater exposure to international education and international students increases American students' cultural sensitivities and global understanding and equips them with the skills to interact with people from diverse backgrounds in today's global workplace.

(p. 2)



Undoubtedly, the interactions that take place between international students and American students in and out of the class promote understanding of different cultures. Comparing and contrasting religious, philosophical, and cultural beliefs can be illustrative for students and having different perspectives in the classroom and on campus can certainly provide academic advantages.

The research on these potential benefits is mixed, however. Findings indicate that the interaction between international students has difficulty taking place without intervention from the university. Thus, the potential academic benefits of interactions between students, particularly outside of class, are not realized. In addition, international students often cite being uncomfortable with the language as an impediment to their education in the United States, and this curtails international students' interactions in the classroom, again preventing the full realization of all the potential benefits of hosting international students on campus. This difficulty of international students to feel comfortable with the English language and the difficulty in interacting with domestic students all lead international students to segregate themselves and interact predominantly with those from their own country, this not only inhibits the students' English acquisition, but also eliminates opportunities for authentic interaction—thus, a negative loop is created where international students feel uncomfortable with the language which drives them away from interaction with domestic students, and thus further inhibits the students' language abilities.

With Saudi students flooding American schools, it is as important as ever for colleges and universities to make a concerted effort to understand the challenges these students face and provide the necessary support for them as their numbers grow. There

has been a tremendous amount of research on the effect of hosting international students, as well as the various challenges for institutions and the students themselves, but the specific impact of the KASP and the needs of Saudi students in the United States continue to grow in importance with the research only beginning to shed light on the situation (ICEF Monitor, 2012).

Just like with all international students, there is an ethical and financial imperative for American colleges to provide a welcoming and positive environment while integrating the students appropriately and recognizing areas of cultural and religious sensitivity to further these aims. However, unlike many other international populations, Saudi students in the United States originate from an environment entirely divorced from many aspects of Western culture and unquestionably face unique challenges while studying in the United States. Lippman (2004) accurately describes the differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia as a “panorama of contrasts,” (p. 180) and these contrasts must be well understood to create the necessary bridge between the cultures to facilitate education. With significant cultural, religious, gender, and academic differences at home, Saudi students and the stakeholders who work with them have to be conscious of unreasonable expectations of international student engagement and potential pitfalls to academic success.

This study intends to better understand the motives, experiences, and personal views of Saudi students relative to their study in a U.S. higher education institution and in light of the KASP. The research will aid in understanding if the motives and expectations of the Saudi students are aligned with their experiences in the United States, as well as if the stated goals of the KASP program are being met. The qualitative, grounded theory

study will seek to understand the experiences of KASP participants. Data collection will be based on document and record review as well as in-depth, face-to-face interviews with a close analysis that will be coded in terms of themes and patterns in the responses through quantitative content analysis. This approach will grant insight into ways to more effectively host Saudi students and fulfill the goals of all stakeholders.

### **Background**

While Saudi Arabia's KASP has created significant ripples in higher education circles, the history of Saudi Arabia's engagement with overseas education endeavors begins nearly with the inception of the country itself. With the unification of the country in 1934 and the subsequent discovery of oil, the nation was thrust into the center of global economics without the necessary business or educational infrastructure to be an industrial leader. It was clear to then King Abdul Aziz that the significant revenues generated by the oil resources in the country would need to be wisely utilized, and plans to expand education were quickly put into place (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Initial investments in Saudi Arabian education largely focused on domestic improvements. It was not until 1950 that America would host 13 students from Saudi Arabia. Over subsequent years, the numbers of Saudi students studying abroad would continue to climb, and the United States would become one of the destinations of choice competing with other education hubs like Egypt and the United Kingdom (IIE, 2012). The Saudi students studying abroad often focused on science as well as scientific research methods that would help promote industry back home. For the greater part of the twentieth century, Saudi Arabia educational and governmental officials focused on sending students abroad in order to gain knowledge with the express intent of those

students returning home to promote new and critical industries at home. While the advantages of significant oil revenues cannot be discounted, the process of sending students abroad to gain critical knowledge led to Saudi Arabia's not only becoming the world's premier oil exporter, but also generated significant wealth for the entire nation and led to considerable improvements in education as well as agriculture and industry (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission [SACM], 2013).

Over the course of the three decades from 1960 to 1990, Saudi students studying in the United States would continue to grow at a steady pace as the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States became increasingly warm, spurred on by the significant trade between the two nations. In 2000, the Saudi population topped 10,000 students in the United States, and, while these numbers were small by comparison, they were well established as a reliable source of international students for the United States (IIE, 2012).

In 2004, due to restrictive immigration laws and policies created in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on America, the Saudi student population studying in the United States plummeted to a mere 1,024 students. Given that the Saudi international student population had been significant and reliable in the years leading up to September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the cost of this decline is estimated to have cost 40 million dollars in revenue. That same year, Crown Prince Abdullah and President George W. Bush came to an agreement to help repair the economic and diplomatic damage caused by 9/11, and the KASP was launched in 2005. For the Saudis, this scholarship represented not only an opportunity to build cultural understanding and overcome negative perceptions, but it also would set the stage for Saudi Arabia to overcome significant challenges to its future, including

declining oil revenues, a youthful population, and lagging education standards. (Thomas, 2013).

Now in season eight, the King Abdullah scholarship has altered the face of higher education across the United States. With over 70,000 Saudi students now studying in the U.S. on a full KASP scholarship, many individual campuses now host hundreds of Saudi men and women. In addition, the recent announcement by the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education that the scholarship will continue through 2020, guarantees increased Saudi enrollment in the United States (SACM, 2013).

### **Importance of the Study**

With the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia extending the KASP through the year 2020, the already swollen numbers of Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States is set to increase even further, yet little research has been conducted to understand the motivations or goals of KASP students or the program's success in reaching its stated goals. With \$5 billion U.S. already spent by the Saudi government on sending students to study abroad and the Saudi student population being the fourth largest in the U.S., understanding the motivations of the Saudi students for coming to the United States is of considerable importance for leaders in higher education.

In addition, the experiences of the students currently studying in the U.S., if well understood, can help the growing number of schools hosting Saudi students to more properly prepare and provide a greater level of tailored services and opportunities for the Saudi population. Finally, this study can also help gain insight into the effectiveness of the KASP and ascertain whether the partnership between the United States and Saudi

Arabia is accomplishing the stated goals of the KASP of increasing understanding between both cultures and facilitating cultural exchange and understanding.

### **Purpose and Scope of the Study**

This study is a qualitative, grounded theory study that uses purposeful critical sampling to better understand the motives, experiences, and personal views of Saudi students relative to their study in a U.S. higher education institution and in light of the KASP. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 12 Saudi KASP participants who have completed language training in the United States and the interviews were subsequently transcribed. These transcripts were analyzed for themes and patterns to elucidate the experiences of Saudi students studying in the United States. In addition, the students' academic records from university study and college-language program were analyzed to provide further context.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. *Culture*: The traditions and customs that have developed over time among a group of people often separated geographically and/or ideologically from others in the human race.
2. *Culture Shock*: The negative physical and psychological effects international students often feel when encountering the host culture for the first time.
3. *EducationUSA*: A branch of the United States State Department tasked with promoting American colleges and universities abroad through various field agents and offices. EducationUSA assists potential students with applications and acts to supply the State Department with information and advice on creating policies to promote education.

4. *F-1 Visa (F-1 Student, F-1)*: A visa type designating a person of foreign citizenship allowed to enter the United States.
5. *Full-Time Student*: Defined by both academic institutions and government immigration offices as a required number of hours to maintain immigration status and making reasonable progress toward graduation.
6. *Ghettoization*: The tendency of international students to live and socialize within a homogenous group while studying in the United States.
7. *I-20*: A required document issued by schools hosting international students that is used in conjunction with acceptance letters and financial documents to secure a visa to the United States and to ensure continued legality while in the United States.
8. *Koran (Q'uran)*: The holy book of the religion of Islam that informs not only the religious lives of the majority of individuals from Saudi Arabia, but also the major inspiration for the governmental system, laws, and cultural practices of the Kingdom.
9. *Ministry of Higher Education*: The Saudi Arabian government agency stationed in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and responsible for overseeing all aspects of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program including the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the United States.
10. *Multiversities*: A modern university structure characterized by serving multiple stakeholders and is often made up of a conglomeration of private companies, research organizations, and public resources.

11. *Persistence*: The ability of any student to maintain full-time enrollment through graduation while studying at a higher education institution.
12. *SACM (Saudi Cultural Mission)*: The government office of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that is a branch of the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education charged with overseeing and administering all facets of the King Abdullah Scholarship in the United States.
13. *Saudification*: The processes in modern Saudi Arabia of replacing the current expatriate work force with native-born Saudi citizens.
14. *S.E.V.I.S.*: The Student Exchange and Visitor Information System. The government system that maintains records and registration information for all F-1 visa holders.
15. *Shiite*: One of two major divisions within the religion of Islam. Shiite is the second largest branch and is considered the less conservative branch of Islam. Members of the Shiite branch deviate from the Sunni tradition in terms of who they believe is the successor to the Prophet Mohammed.
16. *Sunni*: One of two major divisions within the religion of Islam. Sunni is the largest branch of Islam and is considered the more conservative branch of the religion. Its major diversion from Shiite beliefs is the declaration of who the first of the prophets is and who is rightful heir to the mantle of Mohammed, the first of God's prophets.
17. *U.S.C.I.S.* United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. An office of the Department of Homeland Security that oversees most aspects of the SEVIS



system and provides support for international students and the institutions that host them.

### **Assumptions**

In general, there is an assumption that the academic and culture experiences of international students studying in the United States are representative of the population as a whole. Also, there is an assumption that KASP students are capable of identifying and relating their experiences and opinions in an effective manner if they have completed an English language program with reasonable proficiency. In addition, it is assumed that by identifying themes and patterns in the KASP student responses valuable information can be understood concerning the effectiveness of academia in addressing the academic and cultural needs of Saudi students and to what degree the goals of the KASP are being met.

### **Research Questions**

1. What factors motivated the Saudi students in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program to pursue higher education in the United States?
2. How have the experiences of King Abdullah Scholarship Program participants in the United States:
  - a. Impeded/promoted academic success?
  - b. Affected personal values?
  - c. Met, exceeded, or failed to meet expectations?
3. How do the experiences and views of the Saudi students participating in the King Abdullah Scholarship program align with the stated goals of the scholarship program?

## **Significance**

This study may aid in developing effective strategies to engage with Saudi Arabian students on American campuses and within American communities. In addition, the results of the study will allow universities to enhance the academic and cultural experiences of Saudi students in the classroom. The relationship between the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education and institutions hosting KASP students can also be strengthened and enhanced by understanding the perceptions and experiences of KASP students currently studying in the United States.

Thus this study will be of particular interest to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in particular the Ministry of Higher Education and the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. Also, the study will be significant to any institution hosting Saudi students.

## **Summary of Chapters**

Chapter One Introduction

Chapter Two Review of the Literature

Chapter Three Methodology

Chapter Four Findings

Chapter Five Discussion and Recommendations

This study is divided into five chapters with subsections within each chapter. Chapter I has provided a brief overview of the study's purpose in the examination of themes and patterns found in the accounts of Saudi Arabian students in the KASP. Chapter II provides a literature review detailing the research and writings on international student attitudes, the importance of international students to American higher education, and the means by which one may seek to interpret the attitudes and articulated

experiences of international students. Chapter III details the research methodology of the study, including document and record review and interviews of students to ascertain motives, attitudes, and experiences. Chapter IV provides the findings gathered from in-depth interviews. The chapter is organized into the various themes and patterns recognized in the responses and highlights universal experiences and feelings held by all of the Saudi males in the study. Finally, Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings and recommendations for higher education stakeholders based on the findings in the study, and recommendations for future studies and areas where this study's limitations provide opportunities to expand on the research in the area of internationalization, Saudi students, and the impact of the KASP in the United States.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

The current literature on international students is quite expansive with various studies and continuing research focused on the effects international students have on the United States and its economy, the educational impact on both the international students themselves and domestic students, and the challenges American universities face in bringing international students to the United States and providing adequate and appropriate services. In addition, there have been several studies through the latter half of the twentieth century to present that discusses the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the educational exchange of the two countries. There have been several studies that focus on the lives of Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States and the unique challenges they face. There have been a few studies in the last decade concerning the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) and its participants, but this is an area where there is further room for study and review.

This chapter serves not only to provide a review of current literature covering international students and Saudi students in particular, but also provides a review of background literature on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the cultural, religious, diplomatic, and governmental practices that inform the lives of Saudi citizens and also present challenges for Saudi international students. In order to conduct a thorough, grounded-theory study, it is imperative for the researcher to be able to have a comprehensive understanding of the factors that go into informing the lives of the

participants in the study, but also such background information provides the necessary context to find interpretation and nuance in the responses to interview questions.

Finally, this chapter gives a discussion of analysis of the modern American university and organizational theories that aid in understanding the motivations for American universities enrolling international students and the philosophies informing the management of these students when they are on American campuses.

### **Overview of Saudi Arabia**

To understand the history of Saudi Arabia is to understand, as Al-Rasheed (2010) writes, “the observation that this history shows a striking accommodation between the old and the new” (p. 5). Saudi Arabia was not formed until 1932, and the country had yet to enjoy the substantial oil wealth it would have for the majority of the twentieth century beginning in the late 1930s. At the time, the country was established as a monarchy under the first King Sa’ud who through wealth and genealogy managed to unite a series of distinct tribes in the region, and this absolute monarchy established in 1932 continues to this day (Al-Saloom, 1995). The Kingdom comprises 13 provinces all managed by governors appointed by the king. The king has ultimate authority in the country, and any policy or government activity can be dictated by the king, who also serves as the final court.

With the massive influx of oil wealth Saudi Arabia began collecting in the ‘30s, the traditional, largely nomadic nation began an unprecedented modernization process. While the population would remain nomadic even through the ‘60s, tremendous expenditures on infrastructure, industry, and education would see the country transformed throughout the twentieth century. These expenditures were largely financed through an

alliance with the American Standard Oil Company (SOCAL), which provided most of the oil exploration and infrastructure for the industry in Saudi Arabia, and subsequently made both the Kingdom and the American oil giant substantial revenues, though it was not until 1935 that commercial levels of oil would flow from wells around the nation. “In 1933 SOCAL placed the oil concession with Saudi Arabia in a wholly owned subsidiary, California Arab Standard Oil Company (CASOC). This company was the precursor of Arab American Oil Company (ARAMCO) established in 1944” (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 89).

Thus, very early in the country’s development, America forged a relationship, albeit through a private venture that was entirely economically motivated, with an unlikely nation of quite different culture and practices. As government bonds and diplomatic relations grew between the two nations, ARAMCO was increasingly taken over by the Saudis. “Saudi Arabia acquired 25 percent of ARAMCO in 1973; this was increased to 60 percent in 1974. ARAMCO became Saudi ARAMCO in 1980 when Saudi Arabia took full control of the company” (Al-Rasheed, 2010, p. 91). To this day, Saudi ARAMCO remains the nation’s greatest wealth producer and is the core of the nation’s oil industry.

While a great deal of wealth flooded the nation predominantly from America but also from several other first-world nations over years, the kingdom has faced challenges of melding its traditional, religious culture with the massive innovations and modernization it has undertaken. Krieger (2007) expounds on the economic and cultural issues facing modern Saudi Arabia,

The country's oil wealth has led to a sweeping rise in living standards and subsequent population surge. The kingdom's relatively small higher-education system has not been able to handle the growing demand, leaving large numbers of young people without college degrees and thus unemployable. That has been a huge hindrance to the government's efforts at 'Saudification,' or the shifting of jobs away from foreign workers. (p. 2)

Al-Raasheed (2010) states that “measured in terms of material affluence, technology, modern health facilities and education, the achievements of the state are abundant and visible to people inside and outside of Saudi Arabia” (p. 12). However, these advances are counterbalanced by traditional, religious forces and a supply that does not always meet demand in terms of government services.

Today, the population of the Royal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia includes approximately 28.8 million citizens and 7 million expatriates. It is the world's 13<sup>th</sup> largest country in terms of land mass, and serves as an important hub for much of the Middle East's culture and exchange (CIA World Fact Book, 2013). Saudi Arabia has the world's 19<sup>th</sup> largest gross domestic product with \$727 billion. The GDP per capita for Saudi Arabia is \$31,000 ranking it 26<sup>th</sup> in the world. This per capita GDP makes it competitive with many Western and Middle Eastern countries, but it pales in comparison to some of the wealthier, more sparsely populated nations in the region like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. This does not tell the whole story, however, as Saudi Arabia is home to 15 billionaires, including the King himself and Prince AlSaud who is the 19<sup>th</sup> wealthiest man in the world (Forbes, 2013).

## **Religion**

Modern Saudi Arabia is defined by its vast oil wealth, but its strict adherence to Islam, the world's second largest religion, is perhaps even more of a defining characteristic. Nehme (1994) points out that "Loyalty to Islam is indisputable among all the Saudis. This loyalty means the acceptance of the indivisibility and the oneness of God and the belief that Muhammad is the seal of the Prophets" (p. 637). Saudi Arabia is considered the birthplace of Mohammed, the most important prophet in Islamic religion, as well as the home to Islam's most important religious sites and artifacts, and the revered cities of Mecca and Medina. The country has a strict interpretation of Islamic law, and the Koran serves as the unifying force in the country and is therefore designated as its constitution (Lippman, 2004). The stricture of the Koran dictates both domestic and foreign policy for Saudi Arabia and has informed much of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States. Bronson (2005) expands on this relationship, writing the following:

For nearly a half-century, the kingdom's religious fervor kept the oil-rich country in the U.S. political camp, helped inoculate future generations against communist expansion, and aided U.S. causes from Central America to Central Asia. As early as 1954, historian Bernard Lewis wrote the 'pious Muslims—and most Muslims are pious—will not long tolerate an atheist creed.' True to these words, Saudi Arabia stood steadfastly against the spread of communism and was a useful Cold War partner to the United States. (p. 121)

Islam requires all practitioners to pray five times a day and fast during certain important religious holidays, especially during the holy month of Ramadan (Pharaon,



2004). Al-Saloom (1995), in discussing the importance of religion to education, states, “Islam teaches that the pursuit of knowledge is a religious duty for every Muslim” (p. 1). Any attempts to understand the academic and cultural challenges faced by Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States must be underpinned by an understanding of how deeply rooted Islam is in the lives of Saudi citizens. Religious holidays and setting time aside to conduct the necessary prayers is absolutely essential to the students and can cause tremendous academic and social pressures when studying in the U.S.

While Saudi Arabia identifies itself as an Islamic state and all of the nation’s citizens are required to practice and adhere to Islam, there are important differences in the beliefs within practitioners of the religion. Notably, Islam is divided between two major sects—the Sunni and the Shiite (Shi’a). It is estimated that the world’s Muslim population is roughly 80%-90% Sunni while 10%-20% are Shiite (CIA Fact Book, 2013). This division is similar within Saudi Arabia. The major division between the two branches of Islam largely involves the belief of who is the rightful heir to the prophet Mohammed, the preeminent prophet of God in Islamic tradition. In a congressional report, Blanchard (2005) noted the following,

The differences between the Sunni and Shiite Islamic sects are rooted in disagreements over the succession to the Prophet Muhammad, who died in 632 AD, and over the nature of political leadership in the Muslim community. The historic debate centered on whether to award leadership to a qualified and pious individual who would lead by following the customs of the Prophet or to preserve the leadership exclusively through the Prophet’s bloodline. (p. 1)

The decision to keep leadership in the hands of those of the immediate bloodline of Muhammad was eventually decided, but followers of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, a distant cousin of the Prophet through marriage but a prominent figure during the Prophet's life, believed he had been chosen by the Prophet himself for succession. Those that supported the direct bloodline would become the Sunni branch of Islam, while those supporting Ali Talib would become the minority Shiite. Since these events, the conflict between the two sects has been an issue in many Islamic nations, but in Saudi Arabia the conflict has, at times, been at a fever pitch.

Nasr (2007) writes, "The Shia-Sunni conflict is at once a struggle for the soul of Islam—a great war of competing theologies and conceptions of sacred history—and a manifestation of the kind of tribal war of ethnicities and identities...with which humanity has become wearily familiar" (p. 20). The conflict is an interesting reflection of the struggle in Saudi Arabia between history and modernity—tradition and progression. Nasr goes further in his analysis, writing, "Theological and historical disagreement fuel it, but so do today's concerns with power, subjugation, freedom, and equality, not to mention regional conflicts and foreign intrigues. It is, paradoxically, a very old, very modern conflict" (p. 20).

With the kingdom's continued adherence to Sunni tradition, and the majority of the citizens identifying as Sunni, the Shiite Muslims in the nation have often been the subject of discrimination and oppression. Majidyar (2013) describes the institutional discrimination currently in place in Saudi Arabia,

Over the past century, the Shi'ites have suffered from high levels of religious discrimination, political exclusion, and economic deprivation...Saudi Shi'ites are

also denied basic civil rights and are barred from senior positions in the government. At present, there is no single Shi'ite cabinet member, deputy minister, ambassador, head of a university, or even girls' school principal. Similar discriminatory policies exist in the private sector, where the ministry of interior strictly monitors the recruitment process for senior positions.

This discrimination in Saudi Arabia has the potential to have an effect on Saudi students studying in the United States, as the KASP sends both Sunni and Shiite students to the United States, putting them in close contact with each other in ways they may not have been at home. As their numbers grow in the United States, there is the potential for factions to be recreated in the communities they often form in the U.S., causing potential isolation and cultural adjustment issues.

### **Gender Issues**

Unquestionably, one of the more radical differences between Saudi culture and American culture is the gender dynamics in the two countries. The religiously motivated gender segregation and gender stratification in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is among the more criticized and analyzed aspects of Saudi culture. For Saudi students studying in the United States, the challenges of navigating a culture where women are afforded the same opportunities as men and genders are not segregated is often a major impediment to integration and interaction with Americans. Alhazmi (2010) suggests this difference in gender treatment is one of the more shocking changes for Saudis as “this student cohort has come from the most gender segregated environment in the world” (p. 2).

In Saudi Arabia, men and women almost never intermingle; they have separate shopping areas in malls, segregation is the norm in restaurants and men and women

attend different schools from the beginning all the way through college. Men are most often taught by men, and women are taught by women with rare instances where various methods are contrived to allow the women to see the male instructor while he is unable to view them. This means that many of the men and women participating in the KASP are interacting with members of the opposite sex in not only an education setting but also in a public setting. It also means that male students are interacting with a woman in an authority position for the first time, and women are being thrust into a situation where they must interact with male instructors in a way that would be entirely inappropriate back home (Alhazmi, 2010). Without question, this creates anxiety, culture shock, and in general, can be a serious impediment to academic success.

According to Alhazmi (2010), “Being in mixed gender environment for Saudi female is like being under threat from males in the class...It has been argued that in segregated gender societies, girls are brought up with ‘intimidation’ and ‘warning’ about boys and mixing with them” (p. 7). Thus, for females suddenly finding themselves in a mixed gender environment, the threat is not only to their religious and cultural identity, but is quite literally perceived as a threat to their physical person. The kind of anxiety this creates for the Saudi female cannot be understated, as they must navigate all of the difficulties faced by other international students while also feeling fear for their person.

For Saudi men studying in the United States, there may not be a fear of physical violence, but the classroom creates a serious threat to their identity as men. In Saudi culture, women are absolutely subordinate to men, particularly husbands, fathers and brothers, as dictated by the Koran. While the rationale for this is that these men help protect women from other men in the society, this takes on a character of men populating

nearly all professional and decision-making jobs in society, women being required to ask a man for permission for nearly all activities, and, in general, men being charged with responsibility for the actions that women take in society. Al-Rasheed (2010) describes the gender disparity, “Gender discrimination remains common practice. Male guardianship over adult women is held to be a source of gender discrimination...and guardianship means that women must seek permission from male relatives” (p. 270). As an extreme example, the Saudi government is currently contacting the man responsible for a woman when she engages in certain activities, such as travelling, to ensure that she has been given permission and the activity has been authorized by her male protector (Harding, 2012).

Thus, for men studying in American classrooms who are now being asked to take direction from female teachers, be respectful of and sometimes be punished by female administrators, and being confronted by women freely expressing their opinions in a classroom, there can be a real sense that they have lost control and have certainly found themselves in an alien environment. Alhazmi (2010) argues the severity of the situation: “Saudi international students may have a serious challenge and encounter difficulties in adjusting to a social environment that is extremely different and might be, in some ways, contradictory to their home social environment” (p.197). The loss of gender identity for both the Saudi men and women unquestionably has an effect on the numbers of Saudi students able to persist in the United States and their quality of life on campus.

### **Saudi Scholarship History and Goals**

Saudi Arabia has enjoyed a great deal of success in the twentieth century, fueled by the rich oil reserves found within the country’s borders. Krieger (2007) points out that

“Saudi Arabia has been developing at breakneck speed since the end of World War II, when oil production transformed this country of Bedouins into one of the richest polities in the world. Its higher-education system, however, has not kept pace” (p. 1). Thus, while the country has a tremendous amount of wealth, and thus general prosperity in economic terms, the demand for higher education has spiked while the country has failed to allocate necessary resources and systems to higher education. However, this is not necessarily a novel idea, as the government of Saudi Arabia recognized early in the twentieth century the need to promote higher education. Thus, the issue has always been a matter of degree rather than recognition, and the KASP is certainly an attempt to absolutely overcome the issue of degree.

Saudi Arabia’s study abroad scholarship program was technically launched in 1928 when a handful of Saudi students were sent to Egypt (Thomas, 1965). This set the stage for great interest for education cooperation and study outside the country and the scholarship program has operated under a series of stated goals since. Objectives of the scholarship program are,

- Sponsor qualified Saudis for study in universities around the world.
- Work to bring about a high level of academic and professional standards through the foreign scholarship program.
- Exchange culture with countries worldwide.
- Build up qualified and professional Saudi staff in the work environment.

Al-Khedaire (1978) further expounds on the objectives of the country's scholarship program, saying, “In Saudi Arabia, government and educational leaders have achieved much in making educational opportunities available to the youth of the Kingdom. Much of this effort has been oriented to technology in an attempt to leap-frog

the development process” (p. 13). The KASP seeks not only to facilitate an exchange of cultures but also to bolster future industries in the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia has identified a number of STEM fields they deem critical, like many other nations, and the KASP dictates to students what fields can be studied through the SACM. Redden (2013) states, “the program, which started in 2005, funds 12 to 18 months of language training in addition to undergraduate or graduate degree study, predominantly in science- or engineering-related fields.”

President George Bush and Prince Abdullah met in 2004 and 2005 to discuss ways in which the two countries could develop greater relations in the future. They agreed that person-to-person contact was the most beneficial and efficient way to relieve misconceptions about both cultures (Chu & Shannon, 2006). Bollag (2006) reports that this meeting led to a commitment to fund Saudi students so that they could study in the United States. Crown Prince Abdullah pledged to “increase the number of young Saudi students to travel and study in the United States,” (p. 2) and that the U.S. “must exert greater efforts to overcome obstacles facing Saudi businessmen and students who wish to enter the United States” (p. 2). Table 1 from the Institute of International Education (2012) clearly shows the impact of the KASP.

Table 1

*Saudi Student Enrollment in the United States*

<u>Year</u>	<u># of Students from Saudi Arabia</u>	<u>% Change</u>
2011/12	34,139	50.4%
2010/11	22,704	43.6%
2009/10	15,810	24.9%
2008/09	12,661	28.2%
2007/08	9,873	25.2%
2006/07	7,886	128.7%
2005/06	3,448	13.6%
2004/05	3,035	-13.8%
2003/04	3,521	-15.7%
2002/03	4,175	-25.2%
2001/02	5,579	5.8%
2000/01	5,273	2.3%
1999/00	5,156	4.6%
1998/99	4,931	7.9%
1997/98	4,571	-

While the United States lost over 25% of the Saudi enrollment in 2002-2003 after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the numbers rebounded impressively. By the 2006-2007 academic year, the numbers of students surpassed pre-9/11 numbers and grew an astounding 128.7% from the 2005-2006 numbers.

The reinvention of Saudi Arabia's efforts to educate its population abroad provided an opportunity to repair the deeply damaged relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia (Chu & Shannon, 2006). The original scholarship scheme allocated funding for a five-year period of study. Students are provided significant financial support for both English language training and an approved program of study.



## **International Students in the United States**

America's formalized education system has, nearly since its inception, attracted students from abroad, though it was not until the modern age that internationalizing universities was a priority for the United States. American interest in international education began in the 1940s, though there were a significant number of students studying in the United States without the formal support of the federal government. With the close of World War II, there was a push globally to use education to repair the damage caused by the war. Nations recognized that trained professionals were going to be needed globally to rebuild shattered industries and regions, but also the power of education to promote greater understanding between cultures gained popularity at this time (Bevis & Lucas, 2007).

In 1946, the American Congress passed the Fulbright Act, which granted broad authorities to the Secretary of State in order to get involved in international education (Gross, 1948). The Fulbright Program made a priority of promoting international understanding while also generating research in the arts and sciences (Ward, 1947). Niefeld and Mendelsohn (1954) provide the background on the funding of the Fulbright Act, which was made possible through the sale of surplus from World War II. In the modern era, the United States has instated many acts allowing for international study, which has led to an increase in the number of international students represented on U.S. campuses (Al-Jasir, 1993).

An analysis of the Institute of International Education (2012) *Open Doors Report* also reveals the effects of America's shift toward being mindful of international education. Since 1950, America has only suffered three years of declining percentages in

international student enrollments. Table 2 (IIE, 2012) not only shows the incredible growth and reliability of America's international numbers, but it also demonstrates the slowly growing overall percentage of total enrollments that are comprised of international students.

Table 2

*U.S. International Student Enrollment*

Year	Int'l Students	Annual % Change	Total Enrollment <sup>1</sup>	% Int'l
1948/49	25,464	-	2,403,400	1.1
1949/50	26,433	3.8	2,445,000	1.1
1950/51	29,813	12.8	2,281,000	1.3
1951/52	30,462	2.2	2,102,000	1.4
1952/53	33,675	10.5	2,134,000	1.6
1953/54	33,833	0.5	2,231,000	1.5
1954/55	34,232	1.2	2,447,000	1.4
1955/56	36,494	6.6	2,653,000	1.4
1956/57	40,666	11.4	2,918,000	1.4
1957/58	43,391	6.7	3,324,000	1.3
1958/59	47,245	8.9	no data	-
1959/60	48,486	2.6	3,640,000	1.3
1960/61	53,107	9.5	no data	-
1961/62	58,086	9.4	4,146,000	1.4
1962/63	64,705	11.4	no data	-
1963/64	74,814	15.6	4,780,000	1.6
1964/65	82,045	9.7	5,280,000	1.6
1965/66	82,709	0.8	5,921,000	1.4
1966/67	100,262	21.2	6,390,000	1.6
1967/68	110,315	10	6,912,000	1.6
1968/69	121,362	10	7,513,000	1.6
1969/70	134,959	11.2	8,005,000	1.7
1970/71	144,708	7.2	8,581,000	1.7
1971/72	140,126	-3.2	8,949,000	1.6
1972/73	146,097	4.3	9,215,000	1.6
1973/74	151,066	3.4	9,602,000	1.6
1974/75 <sup>2</sup>	154,580	2.3	10,224,000	1.5
1975/76	179,344	16	11,185,000	1.6
1976/77	203,068	13.2	11,012,000	1.8

1977/78	235,509	16	11,286,000	2.1
1978/79	263,938	12.1	11,260,000	2.3
1979/80	286,343	8.5	11,570,000	2.5
1980/81	311,882	8.9	12,097,000	2.6
1981/82	326,299	4.6	12,372,000	2.6
1982/83	336,985	3.3	12,426,000	2.7
1983/84	338,894	0.6	12,465,000	2.7
1984/85	342,113	0.9	12,242,000	2.8
1985/86	343,777	0.5	12,247,000	2.8
1986/87	349,609	1.7	12,504,000	2.8
1987/88	356,187	1.9	12,767,000	2.8
1988/89	366,354	2.9	13,055,000	2.8
1989/90	386,851	5.6	13,539,000	2.9
1990/91	407,529	5.3	13,819,000	2.9
1991/92	419,585	3.0	14,359,000	2.9
1992/93	438,618	4.5	14,487,000	3.0
1993/94	449,749	2.5	14,305,000	3.1
1994/95	452,635	0.6	14,279,000	3.2
1995/96	453,787	0.3	14,262,000	3.2
1996/97	457,984	0.9	14,368,000	3.2
1997/98	481,280	5.1	14,502,000	3.3
1998/99	490,933	2.0	14,507,000	3.4
1999/00	514,723	4.8	14,791,000	3.5
2000/01	547,867	6.4	15,312,000	3.6
2001/02	582,996	6.4	15,928,000	3.7
2002/03	586,323	0.6	16,612,000	3.5
2003/04	572,509	-2.4	16,911,000	3.4
2004/05	565,039	-1.3	17,272,000	3.3
2005/06	564,766	-0.05	17,487,000	3.2
2006/07	582,984	3.2	17,759,000	3.3
2007/08	623,805	7.0	18,248,000	3.4
2008/09	671,616	7.7	19,103,000	3.5
2009/10	690,923	2.9	20,428,000	3.4
2010/11	723,277	4.7	20,550,000	3.5
2011/12	764,495	5.7	20,625,000	3.7

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<sup>1</sup>Data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>2</sup>The data collection process was changed in 1974/75. Refugees were counted from 1975/76 to 1990/91.

The financial impact of the growing enrollments of international students cannot be understated. The enrollment of international students across the States contributes more than \$22.7 billion to the US economy, according to the Institute of International Education (2012). Every state in the U.S. enjoys a significant number of international students, and the financial contributions represent millions of dollars in each state. Table 3 (IIE, 2012) provides a breakdown of the financial impact in each state.

Table 3

*International Student Enrollment and Financial Contributions*

State	# of International Students	Tuition and Fees (millions)	Living Expenses and Dependents (millions)	Less U.S. Support (millions)	Total
Alabama	6,450	\$100.90	\$89.50	\$54.80	\$135.60
Alaska	603	\$8.60	\$9.60	\$4.00	\$14.30
Arizona	12,738	\$226.80	\$215.60	\$120.90	\$321.40
Arkansas	4,217	\$65.00	\$61.00	\$28.30	\$97.70
California	102,789	\$1,897.70	\$2,300.00	\$983.20	\$3,214.60
Colorado	8,445	\$181.30	\$170.20	\$98.10	\$253.30
Connecticut	9,350	\$236.30	\$197.40	\$115.40	\$318.20
Delaware	3,754	\$78.30	\$67.30	\$40.80	\$104.80
District of Columbia	8419	\$252.10	\$212.20	\$162.30	\$302.00
Florida	32,567	\$666.70	\$609.90	\$340.90	\$935.70
Georgia	16,193	\$371.00	\$288.40	\$196.40	\$463.00
Hawaii	4,446	\$55.90	\$79.30	\$28.00	\$107.20
Idaho	2,956	\$35.50	\$40.40	\$15.70	\$60.20
Illinois	35,920	\$836.20	\$682.40	\$514.60	\$1,004.00
Indiana	22,194	\$563.20	\$385.20	\$260.20	\$688.20
Iowa	11,164	\$221.90	\$175.30	\$90.90	\$306.30
Kansas	9,277	\$140.60	\$130.30	\$66.60	\$204.20
Kentucky	5,787	\$95.40	\$85.60	\$43.90	\$137.10
Louisiana	7,420	\$111.20	\$106.40	\$62.90	\$154.70
Maine	1,250	\$28.20	\$22.00	\$9.60	\$40.50
Maryland	13,969	\$302.50	\$301.30	\$187.90	\$415.90
Massachusetts	41,258	\$1,221.10	\$936.20	\$668.10	\$1,489.20
Michigan	25,551	\$639.30	\$433.10	\$313.70	\$758.70

Minnesota	12,735	\$227.00	\$198.30	\$106.10	\$319.20
Mississippi	2,621	\$32.10	\$35.40	\$19.10	\$48.50
Missouri	16,061	\$304.50	\$264.60	\$151.30	\$417.90
Montana	1,323	\$22.50	\$19.90	\$7.70	\$34.70
Nebraska	4,372	\$63.40	\$67.50	\$32.50	\$98.30
Nevada	2,551	\$40.70	\$49.80	\$20.50	\$70.00
New Hampshire	2,912	\$78.80	\$54.80	\$37.30	\$96.40
New Jersey	15,155	\$340.80	\$327.60	\$222.10	\$446.30
New Mexico	3,419	\$46.40	\$52.30	\$26.30	\$72.30
New York	82,436	\$1,930.40	\$1,774.80	\$1,120.30	\$2,584.90
North Carolina	13,770	\$281.10	\$229.70	\$172.30	\$338.40
North Dakota	3,182	\$45.80	\$41.40	\$22.20	\$65.00
Ohio	26,427	\$549.50	\$476.40	\$308.50	\$717.30
Oklahoma	8,722	\$120.60	\$136.70	\$64.60	\$192.60
Oregon	9,896	\$184.60	\$193.30	\$72.90	\$304.90
Pennsylvania	33,398	\$897.60	\$654.60	\$475.70	\$1,076.60
Puerto Rico	888	\$5.80	\$11.30	\$4.00	\$13.10
Rhode Island	5,054	\$141.70	\$102.40	\$52.90	\$191.20
South Carolina	4,883	\$101.40	\$76.20	\$55.90	\$121.80
South Dakota	1,355	\$15.80	\$16.00	\$4.90	\$26.90
Tennessee	7,004	\$160.80	\$125.50	\$73.30	\$213.00
Texas	61,511	\$886.50	\$979.90	\$510.80	\$1,355.50
Utah	7,761	\$97.50	\$104.10	\$45.40	\$156.20
Vermont	1,114	\$30.00	\$20.30	\$10.00	\$40.30
Virgin Islands	94	\$0.80	\$1.80	\$0.40	\$2.20
Virginia	15,169	\$302.30	\$236.90	\$133.70	\$405.50
Washington	20,198	\$300.50	\$342.70	\$109.40	\$533.80
West Virginia	2,708	\$42.30	\$40.70	\$23.20	\$59.90
Wisconsin	9,987	\$213.00	\$143.40	\$99.90	\$256.40
Wyoming	1,072	\$12.10	\$16.50	\$8.30	\$20.30

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A glimpse of the top 25 origin locations for international students from the Institute of International Education (2012) also reveals the countries that are sending students to the United States (Table 4). For many years, the number one origin country for the United States has been China, with India and South Korea also being perennial top placing countries. However, Saudi Arabia is a relative new-comer to the list, and to

move into the top five nations is something that would have been considered impossible a decade ago.

Table 4

*Top 25 of Origin of International Students, 2010/11-2011/12*

Rank	Place of Origin	2010/11	2011/12	2011/12 % of Total	% Change
	WORLD TOTAL	723,277	764,495	100	5.7
1	China	157,558	194,029	25.4	23.1
2	India	103,895	100,270	13.1	-3.5
3	South Korea	73,351	72,295	9.5	-1.4
4	Saudi Arabia	22,704	34,139	4.5	50.4
5	Canada	27,546	26,821	3.5	-2.6
6	Taiwan	24,818	23,250	3	-6.3
7	Japan	21,290	19,966	2.6	-6.2
8	Vietnam	14,888	15,572	2	4.6
9	Mexico	13,713	13,893	1.8	1.3
10	Turkey	12,184	11,973	1.6	-1.7
11	Nepal	10,301	9,621	1.3	-6.6
12	Germany	9,458	9,347	1.2	-1.2
13	United Kingdom	8,947	9,186	1.2	2.7
14	Brazil	8,777	9,029	1.2	2.9
15	France	8,098	8,232	1.1	1.7
16	Hong Kong	8,136	8,032	1.1	-1.3
17	Thailand	8,236	7,626	1	-7.4
18	Indonesia	6,942	7,131	0.9	2.7
19	Nigeria	7,148	7,028	0.9	-1.7
20	Iran	5,626	6,982	0.9	24.1
21	Malaysia	6,735	6,743	0.9	0.1
22	Colombia	6,456	6,295	0.8	-2.5
23	Venezuela	5,491	6,281	0.8	14.4
24	Spain	4,330	4,924	0.6	13.7
25	Russia	4,692	4,805	0.6	2.4

## **International Student Adjustment**

International students, unsurprisingly, face a great number of challenges unique among all other members of the student population. Andrade (2006) suggests that “Foreign students have greater adjustment difficulties than local students both academically and socially” (p. 142). In fact, a great deal of literature and research has been produced and much of it suggests that international student issues fall into three categories: academic, social, and cultural (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985, p. 7). These three categories are not only broadly comprehensive for the challenges international students face but they also suggest the degree and complexity of those challenges. It is important to remember that the problems of international students can fall into multiple categories. Andrade (2006) reminds us that “Student adjustment issues overlap and interact extensively” (p. 34). In general, research makes it clear that overseas students tend to experience common student problems, only to a larger degree (e.g., personal doubts about academic ability; difficulties with academic work, social isolation, homesickness, support needs) (McInnis & James, 1995).

International students who endeavor to study in the United States face significant challenges, not the least of which is the foreign language being used all around them. In addition, they are exposed to new cultural, psychological, and social problems that characterize all attempts to live, study, and work abroad. Pedersen (1997) stated,

When international students arrive at overseas universities, the circumstances suddenly and simultaneously impose a variety of competing and sometimes contradictory roles that must be learned. When the requirements of those roles are realistically perceived and effectively learned, the student's experience is

likely to be 'successful,' but when the roles are not accommodated, the resulting identity diffusion and role conflict may affect the student's emotional well-being, and present serious obstacles to the achievement of educational objectives. (p.122)

Jenkins (2001) concurs with the analysis of the serious problems international students often face but suggests that the majority of them have the fortitude to achieve the goals of their study abroad though undoubtedly these issues create barriers for completion for many or restrict interest for others to come to the United States. Sharma (1971) carried out a study on 195 non-European international students and found that students often reported issues with the English language, participating in class, and selecting appropriate materials or even classes. Cultural and logistical issues such as housing problems, homesickness, and inability to establish friendships were also related by the study participants.

The academic challenges international students confront have nearly all of the same characteristics of domestic students, with several issues that are unique to their population. Andrade (2006) points out that "Most domestic students do not have to attempt university study in a second language, nor do they have to adjust to an entirely new educational system" (p. 62). Of course, these challenges in the classroom can affect a student's ability to befriend domestic students, thus causing the issues in the realm of the academic to spill over into the realm of the cultural or social.

And while international students face these challenges when studying in the States, U.S. education organizations are increasingly dependent on revenues generated by international students in the face of declining state contributions and competition from



home and abroad. These students nearly always pay significantly higher tuition than domestic students, and therefore the allure of hosting these students is great. In 2011, international students contributed 22.7 billion dollars to the U.S. economy, with the majority of the students going to California, Texas, and New York (IIE, 2012). Thus, Jenkins (2001) rightly argues that it is of the utmost importance that higher education institutions understand the challenges and opportunities international students face and work diligently to capitalize on opportunities while minimizing challenges. Jenkins argues that the institution is morally, ethically, and financially responsible for the students by admitting them and relying on the revenue they generate so heavily. Similarly, Ping (1999) states that “International exchange transformed many American campuses” and “The presence on campus of students from many countries brings to student affairs administration a whole new set of responsibilities for providing a range of services for international students and faculty” (p. 19).

### **International Student Motivations**

While financial and career opportunity incentives have been obvious motivators for Saudi students to study in the United States (Altbach et al., 1985), there are a number of other factors the literature suggests could be in play. Often, a weak (or perceived to be weak) education system at home will push students to seek opportunity abroad. With UNESCO reporting that Saudi Arabia ranks 93<sup>rd</sup> out of 129 countries in terms of education in 2008, many Saudis believe they cannot be competitive without an education abroad.

In addition, Jenkins (2007) found that international students were often motivated to study abroad by issues of prejudice or concerns for their own safety within

their home country. With the deep divide in Saudi Arabia along Sunni and Shiite lines, and the oft oppressive social and religious practices of the Saudi government, these issues no doubt play a role in the motivations of Saudi students who wish to come to the United States for study. Klieger (2005) also found that students were motivated by a desire to be near family members living in the United States—even distant relatives—or to be around friends and peers that have travelled to the United States. This is no doubt a phenomenon taking place in the United States with the KASP as many students travel to the United States to reunite with family or to join friends.

Another key motivator for international students, according to Crawford (2001), is to be in an environment where English can be mastered. With the increased need for English skills to be successful across many industries (Hwang, 1998), there is an emphasis on countries that are native English speakers, particularly the United States, England, and Australia. The United States offers many intensive English language programs, and with the Saudi government providing a stipend to attend these schools as part of KASP, the motivation for Saudi's to come to the U.S. for this reason is great. Thomas (2013) states that Saudi students are all “generously covered for English language training” (p. 46).

Of course, the prestige and opportunity that comes along with earning a degree in the United States cannot be understated. Students from nearly every country studying in the United States report that having a degree of any sort from an institution in the United States will give them not only greater opportunities for a career or greater earnings, but also the respect of family and peers. Families in developing nations have viewed an education in a developed or wealthy nation as more favorable than an education in their

developing nation (McMahon, 1992). The cultural importance of this prestige outside the U.S. is powerful and Saudi Arabia is no different as its wealth may be evident, but its education infrastructure is still very much developing.

### **Saudi Students**

Saudi students, like all other international students, find themselves suddenly in a minority group when studying in the United States, which is often a jarring experience, particularly for those in the majority group in their home country. Lee and Rice (2007) found that international students are often alarmed or at least deeply disappointed to discover that their expectations of studying in America are marred by negative labels in media as well as personal experiences and this leads to embarrassment, anger, and humiliation. International students may be familiar with discriminatory practices based on class or religious belief, particularly for Saudis with a deep Sunni and Shiite divide, but are often unfamiliar with the discriminatory ideas based on skin color or perceptions of “terrorism.” In a survey conducted by Lee and Rice, Asian, Indian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern students reported discriminatory practices based on “othering” and physical differences while, somewhat obviously, students with lighter skin and European features from nations such as Canada and France, reported far fewer instances of discrimination. Lee and Rice found that Middle Eastern students often reported discriminatory practices ranging from direct confrontation to denial of services.

Saudi students do have some unique characteristics that set them apart from other international students. While the significant gender and religious issues present a challenge, the financial benefits offered by the KASP do allow Saudi students to avoid some of the significant challenges represented by the financial difficulty put on the

typical international student by the significant cost of education in the United States. Alhazmi (2010) points out that “Most of these students are sponsored by the Saudi government and are offered financial and academic support. They therefore have less issues relating to such concerns as finding accommodation, employment and struggling with course fees” (p. 2).

Jammaz (1972) studied the Saudi student population in the United States directly in 1971-1972—well before the KASP was established, but still useful in terms of understanding Saudi student experiences in the United States. Jammaz found that marital status, age, size of college attended, and major all played a role in determining a student’s satisfaction with studying in the United States and were also important factors in predicting Saudi students’ success academically. Jammaz’s research found that those Saudi students studying at smaller colleges reported being happier and achieved greater academic success, which suggests that a more hands-on experience and greater interaction with support staff are instrumental in international student success. This is perhaps counter intuitive to the findings that Saudi students do a better job of thriving at smaller institutions. Jammaz also found social interaction with other domestic students key to Saudi student satisfaction rates. When polled, Saudi students reported to Jammaz that true friendships were hard to develop with American students and, in fact, casual contact with Americans led to reports of decreased satisfaction. In addition, 25% of Saudi students reported that language barriers and self consciousness about language use prevented them from achieving a desired romantic relationship with an American while in the United States. One can imagine that this, compounded with the already

significantly different gender dynamics between the two countries is a source of much consternation for Saudis, particularly males, studying in the United States.

A final point from Jammaz's study should be made: 23% of the students reported religious or ethnic slurs being used against them, and several indicated that remarks indicative of stereotypes and drastically ignorant of the true nature of their nation and culture (such as attacks on Saudi males for the use of "harems" and lack of first-world innovations, i.e. riding camels). This led many Saudi students to determine that Americans were ignorant of other cultures and not interested in eradicating that ignorance.

Al-Jasir (1993) worked with 218 Saudi students in the United States and discovered, perhaps counter to the findings of Jammaz, that, in general, Saudi students were pleased with their experiences (cultural, academic, and social) while in the United States, and the Saudi students perceived significant levels of personal growth while in the U.S. However, much like Jammaz, Al-Jasir reported that Saudi students had limited "true" interaction with Americans, yet, despite this, were largely satisfied with the few close relationships they did manage to establish. Highly relevant to any study of Saudi students in the KASP is Al-Jasir's findings that the majority of his Saudi participants reported nearly no change to their personal values due to their studies in the U.S. However, it is important to remember that these students were not given specific instructions to observe and adopt new values as the study was conducted in 1993—well before the majority of Saudi students were abroad under the auspices of a scholarship program. Interestingly, Al-Jasir also found a negative correlation between the time spent in the U.S. and the degree to which the students felt they had grown personally. Al-Jasir

maintains that this is due to homesickness and students' realizations of how detached they are from their home culture after some time. In essence, when students are no longer visitors but rather begin to be part of the culture, they tend to retreat a bit in terms of personal growth and change in values.

Brislin (1981) found that international students in the United States from nations like Saudi Arabia which are steeped in tradition, venerate elders, and have a familial and fraternal underpinning, tend to bond together closely within the new culture. Not only does this make integration more difficult, but negative experiences among one member of the group can spread to other members of such a tightly knit community. Andrade (2006) points out that "Even on smaller campuses, an international housing situation can quickly lead to the 'ghettoization' of international students" (p. 212). Andrade further states, "[The international housing situation], while providing invaluable support for those from that culture, can lead to obvious barriers to those students interacting with others" (p. 212). Likewise, Chui, Sherry, and Thomas (2009) suggest that "One of the ways in which international students can feel a sense of community while abroad is by connecting with other people from their own culture" (p. 42). Ultimately, this "ghettoization" severely retards one of the more important goals of the KASP, universities, and students themselves—gaining English language proficiency and exchanging ideas with Westerners.

While a great deal of campus support is now directed toward helping students cope with the emotional and psychological strains of both being a student and being in transitional periods in their lives, international students, who are under high levels of stress, often come from countries where mental illness is poorly understood, criticized, or

even denied. Saudi students in particular come from a background where society is likely to seek religious remedy as much if not more than medical or counseling remedies. According to Kilinc and Granello (2003), international students are far less likely to seek out services though they are likely among the population that requires it most. Students in need of support who are resistant to these services will also gravitate toward members of their own culture, and this only further exacerbates the bonding tendencies of Saudi students.

### **Academic Culture and the Interactions with KASP**

Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) suggest that campuses in the United States are dominated by a series of six cultures: the virtual, tangible, advocacy, developmental, managerial and collegial. Their analysis suggests that there are six distinct ideologies and sets of motivations present on campuses and “Although most colleges and universities, and most faculty and administrators, tend to embrace or exemplify one of these six cultures, the other five cultures are always present and interact with the dominant culture” (p. 17). Both the motivations of the American universities hosting KASP students and the Saudi students choosing to study in the United States can be better understood by viewing them through the lens of the academic cultures. Of particular importance are the managerial and advocacy cultures.

The significant dollars produced by enrolling KASP students affords American universities the ability to undertake a number of important projects, improve the experience of students on campus, and, in fact, enroll more students. The managerial culture Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) describe places great emphasis on the need for “efficiencies” in order to educate as many students as possible,

The managerial culture was enhanced by the rapid growth in the 1960s not only of multiversities but also of megasystems. Higher educational systems were spawned that encouraged statewide planning of facilities, development of sophisticated cost-finding procedures, and demand for comparability in the description, budgeting, and evaluation of academic programs. (p. 59)

Managerial culture is concerned heavily with creating economic conditions that allow for expansion of resources and the ability to educate as many students as possible. New delivery systems such as online classes have become the darling of college administration and those motivated by managerial culture. So, too, have international students become a focus of those invested in managerial culture, as international students pay rates often two to three times higher than those of domestic students. This additional revenue can, arguably, allow a university to keep tuition rates low for domestic students, expand technologies to enroll more students in a class with less (expensive) physical space, and provide greater scholarship opportunities. Thus, the potential to work with a country flush with wealth and ready to enroll thousands of students in American institutions is a great motivator for those vested in the managerial culture.

However, critics of the managerial culture, and those cultures opposed to it, such as the advocacy, would suggest that the additional revenues collected from international students rarely have the effect of expanding opportunity, and “efficiencies” have simply become a buzz word to justify collecting large sums of money while funneling them to projects and personnel that do not expand college access. Bergquist and Pawlak point out that “Attempts to transfer procedures from corporate settings to colleges and universities have often been insensitive, and as a result, have been received with hostility and



profound skepticism” (p. 63). A great deal of criticism has surrounded the increased fees that institutions collect from international students including the Saudis, as research suggests that only a small amount of the funds actually support international students.

The academic arguments that international students bring additional opportunities for education and promote global understanding are common on campuses, and these sentiments are squarely in the realm of the advocacy culture. The advocacy culture “emerged in response to the inability of the managerial culture to meet the personal and financial needs of faculty and staff” (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008, p. 111). Thus, the advocacy culture is focused, or was at least originally focused, on advocating for employees, and advocacy for just treatment of students has become a byproduct of the advocacy culture’s original intentions. Thus, while the advocacy culture finds the methods and motivations of the managerial culture to be exploitive and abusive, it does encourage the enrollment of international students for wholly different reasons. Those who are members of the advocacy culture promote the inclusion of international students because they view the college campus as a place to promote understanding and provide unique opportunities for interaction between various groups that would rarely come into contact. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) point out, “They [advocacy culture practitioners] care deeply about the fundamental advocacy culture values of equity and egalitarianism” (p. 135). A stated goal of universities and the KASP alike are to promote understanding and equality in treatment, and the advocacy culture is squarely aligned with these goals.

This opposition between managerial and advocacy culture informs a great many conflicts on America’s campuses, and the decisions on how to treat international students and the goals of inviting them to campus is no different. This tension between goals is

something Bergquist and Pawlak call “polarity.” Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) argue that “If we manage polarities we will have a more productive, healthy workplace and achieve our goals more easily” (p. 232). These polarities are ultimately intractable, as they are fundamental and exist on principles. Thus, the conflicting goals of inviting Saudi students on campus—increased revenues and efficiency versus expanding the educational opportunities and understanding of all involved—will not disappear, but conscious efforts to manage the two poles should be a goal of all stakeholders, and an understanding of student perspectives on this can help in developing systems and approaches that maximize the strengths of both approaches while avoiding the pitfalls that can have a devastating effect on international populations.

### **U-Curve Theory and Shock**

Research suggests that international students experience a pattern in the way they develop emotions and cope with the stresses and excitement that are part of studying abroad. One such theory is the U-curve theory (UCT) of adjustment originally developed in the 1950s among several researchers including anthropologist Cora DuBois and Kalervo Oberg (Berardo, 2006). The UCT suggests that international students begin their study in the United States on a high; they are excited about the new country and the opportunities study abroad will provide them. They may even begin with a sense of pride and accomplishment as they conceptualize the massive undertaking in their lives. This is referred to as the “honeymoon stage” as the students have an idealized version of what study in the foreign country will be like. As the students start experiencing disillusionment, they will begin to lose the excitement and may experience deep sadness or depression, something we commonly refer to as culture shock and this stage is often

referred to as the “culture shock stage.” In the final stage, students adjust and achieve a level of mastery of the culture and language that returns them to a level of normalcy though forever altered by the experience. For decades, this was an accepted model for cultural adjustment and continues to be used in education and industry where engagement with overseas living and travel are common. The model provides a useful and neat summation of the range of emotions being in a foreign environment can inspire.

However, Black and Mendenhall (1999) challenged the UCT and suggested that it is not as all-encompassing as many suggest, and far more nuance is required to understand the adjustment process and culture shock. An analysis of various models of culture shock conducted by the National Association for Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA) suggested that “[although] culture shock remains a viable and useful theoretical and explanatory tool, the parallel ‘curves’ have not held up nearly as well, in spite of their almost iconic status among trainers and the general public” (NAFSA, 2012).

Despite some of the criticisms concerning reliable patterns in predicting culture shock, it is clear to researchers that the phenomenon does in fact exist. Schumann (1986) provides a discussion of how culture shock functions,

Cultural shock can be defined as anxiety resulting from the disorientation encountered upon entering a new culture. When moving into a new culture, the learner finds himself in a dependent state. The coping and problem-solving mechanisms that he has at his disposal often do not work. As a result, activities which were routine in his native country require a great deal of energy in the new environment. This situation can cause disorientation, stress, anxiety and fear. The resulting mental state can produce a powerful syndrome of rejection which diverts

energy and attention from second-language learning. The learner, in attempting to find a cause for his disorientation, may reject himself, his own culture, the organisation for which he is working and the people of the host country. Under such conditions the learner is unlikely to make the effort necessary to become bilingual. (p. 383)

Schumann (1986) also offers a discussion on the language shock theories of Stengal (1939). Akin to culture shock, language shock describes a situation whereby a person's very identity and self-worth are assaulted due to language deficiencies. Schumann (1986) states, "Learners often get a good deal of narcissistic gratification from their use of their native language, and in many cases, they use language to attract attention and praise. When speaking a second language... they lose an important source of narcissistic gratification" (p. 382).

### **Conclusion**

It is easy to conclude that international students in the United States face significant challenges no matter from where they originate. What is also clear is that the more a student originates from a country with significant cultural and religious differences, the more challenges that student potentially faces. Given the fundamental religious practices of Saudi Arabia and the difference in the treatment of men and women, Saudi students matriculating in American universities face issues that are substantial and unique. Saudi's history with the United States has established close economic bonds that have kept the countries in relations, but ultimately there has been relatively little true cultural exchange in the years since the two countries began business ties.

Because of these issues, it is difficult for American universities to entirely comprehend the challenges these students face and to provide adequate support and services to ensure these students persist and succeed. While many of the strategies and policies developed over centuries of interaction with international students in general provide some support to Saudi students in the United States, the substantial numbers of Saudi students now in the United States due to the KASP have exacerbated and compounded traditional international student issues, while creating entirely new situations with which universities must contend. The review of literature in this chapter covers the history and relevant cultural issues of Saudi Arabia, engagement of international students, and relevant theoretical frameworks to analyze the motivations and patterns of Saudi students and the institutions that host them.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

While a great deal of literature and research has focused on the experience and impact of international students, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the specific experiences of Saudi students since the inception of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). Additionally, research focused on the stated goals of the KASP and how the experiences of Saudi males in the United States coincides with those goals is absent from the literature. Given that these Saudi students represent, according to Thomas (2013), “some US \$5 billion and counting” and the number studying in the U.S. has topped 70,000, the importance of understanding the Saudi students and the KASP is pressing and ever-growing.

This chapter details the research methods used in this study, the research design, description of the population and sample methods, instrumentation, procedures for data collection and analysis, and a discussion of validity and ethical concerns. Using a grounded theory approach, this research seeks to answer the central research questions concerning the experiences of Saudi students studying in the United States as well as the effectiveness of the KASP in achieving its stated goals.

#### **Research Design**

This qualitative study used grounded theory to develop an understanding of Saudi male students’ motives and perceptions through establishing patterns and themes in their responses to intensive interview questions and through document analysis. The study

seeks to understand the Saudi students' academic and social life while studying in the United States, their perceptions of the effectiveness of the KASP, and the changes, if any, students have undergone in their personal lives and values. The choice for a qualitative approach is predicated on the necessity to understand the shared experiences of a particular group and the flexibility such an approach grants in discovering theories in nuanced data. Understanding how particular events affect stakeholders at multiple levels is also one advantage of using a qualitative design (Weiss, 1998). Kearney (1998) suggests that the logic of grounded theory can reach across substantive areas and into the realm of formal theory, which means generating abstract concepts and specifying relationships between them to understand problems in multiple substantive areas. That is to say, using grounded theory as the qualitative approach allows the researcher to discover theories and patterns that can be of value to multiple fields and offer a high degree of transferability.

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative methodology often utilizes in-depth interviews to gather "indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees" (p. 191). The grounded theory techniques allow a researcher to establish an understanding based on the analysis of emergent themes established through interaction with individuals participating in a particular phenomenon. Merriam (2002) suggests that a qualitative grounded theory aids in "understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon" and how "this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is richly descriptive" (p. 6). Thus, responses are indicative of the values and experiences of the participants, and this analysis can provide significant insight into understanding a phenomenon and its participants.

According to Charmaz (2006), “Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves. The guidelines offer a set of general principles and heuristic devices rather than formulaic rules” (p. 2). Indeed, grounded theory in many ways reverses the typical process of research in that data are gathered to produce a theory, rather than a theory produced and subsequently tested with data. Charmaz continues by stating,

Thus, data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct. Grounded theorists collect data to develop theoretical analyses from the beginning of a project...Our work culminates in a ‘grounded theory,’ or an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience. (p. 2)

Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide the following components of grounded theory:

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis
- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses
- Using the constant comparative method, this involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis

These principles were closely followed during the course of this study, with the researcher developing questions related to the experiences of Saudi students in the United States to drive the interviews and careful notes being taken during the interview process and during each of the close analyses of the transcripts from the interviews. Coding was



utilized to look for shared words, comments, and themes, and finally theories being generated from the memos and codes. In short, the focus has been on analyzing and comparing data during each stage and focusing on letting the interviewee responses drive the production of any theory.

For this study, a qualitative, grounded theory approach was used to collect data on 12 Saudi Males from an analysis of interviews. This allowed the researcher to collect beliefs, feelings, and reflections concerning their experiences and ultimately reach a level of understanding required to develop an informed theory.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this qualitative study, the researcher is responsible for data collection and analysis. In using face-to-face interviews, the researcher runs the risk of injecting a portion of himself/herself into the data acquisition and can influence interviewees in ways that will skew the data to misrepresent the experiences and beliefs of the Saudi students.

To counterbalance this potential interference of the study, reflexivity, or the conscious acknowledgement of the researcher's own biases and subjectivity, must be used. Hall and Callery (2001) states, "Descriptions of the effects of interactions on interview data and attention to relationships between interviewers and interviewees are necessary for attending to the rigor of grounded theory findings" (p. 1). Likewise, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) state "[Research] is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied. Some beliefs may be taken for granted, invisible, only assumed, whereas others are highly problematic and controversial" (p. 22).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher acknowledges several possible biases and held beliefs that could have an influence on the outcome and the theories produced from the data. Foremost, the researcher has worked as a director for an English language school for many years and has substantial experience with international students and Saudi students in particular. In the role of director, the researcher often engaged with Saudi students in helping them overcome issues and gained a significant familiarity with the challenges the students face with living and studying in the United States.

Second, many of the participants in the study once studied in the English language program while the researcher was the director. While care was taken to select participants who were no longer in the program, and thus have no compulsion to participate for fear of retribution or in an effort to please an authority figure, there can be lingering knowledge between the researcher and the particular student concerning specifics of their lives and studies.

Third, the researcher is currently employed as an instructor for the institution where the students are studying for their undergraduate degrees. The researcher thus has knowledge of the university's stance on international students and the researcher has also developed a number of opinions and understandings about international education that can potential skew primary and follow up questions as well as the interpretation of data. As an instructor, the researcher has also served as a sponsor of the Saudi student international club, which again gives the researcher insight into the issues Saudi students face previous to producing the study.

Finally, the researcher has spent significant time interacting with the Saudi Cultural Mission and the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education. As an English language

program and university representative, the researcher has travelled to the Saudi Cultural Mission headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia on several occasions, and has also travelled to the Ministry of Higher Education in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Through the interactions with officials at these institutions the researcher has developed an understanding of the Saudi government and KASP representative perceptions on the program and the students who participate in it.

The researcher endeavored in every step of the study to be mindful of preconceived notions and biases that are potentially in place due to these experiences and interactions. It is the firm belief of the researcher that reflexivity was used properly throughout the study, and because of this, these potential pitfalls are actually advantageous to the study giving the researcher an additional level of understanding of the topic before developing any specific theory. Grounded theory calls for the researcher to have a comprehensive understanding of the situation and the situation of those taking part in the study before conducting research, and the potential biasing experiences have the positive of strengthening the background knowledge of the researcher.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was purposefully sampled and contained 12 Saudi males currently studying for their undergraduate degree at the same public institution and also participating in the KASP. When establishing a sample size, the standard in grounded theory is quite different from other qualitative approaches. According to Hunter, Hari, Egbu, and Kelly (2005), "Sample size is deemed to be satisfactory only when the key concepts that have been identified from the collected data have reached saturation point, in other words, when no new data emerges" (p. 59). When arriving at

the ultimate sample size, the researcher conducted the interviews in series of threes. The memos and notes from the interviews generated significantly similar patterns and themes, and the researcher considers the interview data comprehensive and complete. This is reinforced by Patton (2002) who suggested that qualitative studies typically focus on small samples to permit in-depth inquiry.

The limiting factors were selected to promote validity and reliability, while also conforming to a level of foreknowledge that is best served by typical-case, purposeful sampling that used direct contact. Limiting the study to KASP participants is an obvious factor in limiting the population as the study is significantly concerned with the effects and efficiency of the KASP.

When limiting the student population to both males and undergraduates, the rationale was data from the Saudi Cultural Mission which points out that the majority of the Saudi students currently studying in the U.S. with the KASP are both male and currently engaged in undergraduate study. In order to utilize typical-case sampling and maximize generalizability in turn, the researcher elected to limit the population by factors that represented the majority currently studying in the U.S.

### **Research Questions**

When selecting the research questions for a grounded theory approach, it is important to use a broader series of questions which allow for the discovery of information in the course of interviews and analysis. However, as the study is interested in a particular population involved in a unique program, the questions all focus on the students themselves and the program goals in general. These questions are appropriate for the population selected while also providing space for the discovery of novel

information that is unbiased by preconceived notions. The guiding research questions are as follows:

1. What factors motivated the Saudi students in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program to pursue higher education in the United States?
2. How have the experiences of King Abdullah Scholarship Program participants in the United States:
  - a. Impeded/promoted academic success?
  - b. Affected personal values?
  - c. Met, exceeded, or failed to meet expectations?
3. How do the experiences and views of the Saudi students participating in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program align with the stated goals of the scholarship program?

### **Instrument Development**

Qualitative research allows for several approaches. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008),

The researcher can use interviews, observations, videos, documents, drawings, diaries, memoirs, newspapers, biographies, historical documents, autobiographies, and other sources not listed here. In any study, the researcher can use one or several of these sources alone or in combination, depending on the problem to be investigated. (p. 27)

While qualitative research offers an array of methods, interviews are predominantly used in grounded theory studies. Interviews were used to generate the in-depth data necessary to recognize themes and patterns as part of grounded theory. This study also utilized the

academic transcripts from the participants to establish the individual student as a participant in the KASP and currently engaged in full-time, undergraduate studies.

A set of interview questions were developed to specifically assess the perceptions of the participant group. These questions focus on the academic and social experiences of Saudi students studying in the United States, their personal beliefs (and changes in those beliefs due to study in the U.S.) and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the KASP. The interview consisted of 21 interview questions that also included potential areas for continued inquiry depending on the tone and direction of individual answers. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The researcher's dissertation committee provided initial feedback on the research questions and the correlation to the interview questions. A methodologist was consulted to revise the interview questions and a clear connection was established between the research questions and the interview questions (as denoted in Appendix A). The dissertation chair provided final feedback before the questions and approach were submitted for approval to IRB along with human subjects application.

### **Procedures**

This study followed a typical approach for grounded theory research. Research questions were mapped to interview questions, the instrument was finalized, and introduction letters (Appendix B) were sent to 53 members of the Saudi population on campus. 14 Saudi men responded to the letter originally, and after contacting the initial 14 respondents, the students were all scheduled to visit the researcher's office in order to be provided further details on the study, counseled on the process, and, if agreed, sign the consent form (Appendix C). All 14 respondents agreed, and each was scheduled a 90-

minute time slot to conduct the interview and a date to submit (or provide access to) a copy of their academic transcript prior to the interview. The academic transcript was used to collect demographic data, provide confirmation that the students conformed to the typical-case analysis, and provide additional background data. Out of the 14 who agreed, one dropped out of the study, and one was found to be inappropriate for study as he did not fit the qualification as a full-time student as he was only enrolled in nine credit hours of classes.

Each participant was sent a reminder email 24 hours before the interview, and 12 interviews were conducted as a whole. The researcher conducted the interviews in a series of three per week over the course of four weeks, and the researcher kept notes and memos as part of the each interview, in addition to recording all of the interviews with a high-quality digital voice recorder. The digital recordings were all uploaded to a portable hard drive that is password-secured by the researcher. Each interview ranged from 48 to 67 minutes.

The transcripts were all transcribed by a professional transcriber contracted by the researcher, and the transcriptions were submitted to the researcher for review and adoption. The researcher listened to the recordings while reviewing the transcripts for error while also making an additional round of notes.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for a grounded theory study takes place at nearly every stage of the study (Charmaz, 2006) and the researcher endeavored to conduct data collection and data analysis at each stage. According to Creswell (2009) one key feature of grounded theory is “the constant comparison of data with emerging categories” (p.13). Thus,

during the interviews, the researcher kept notes and created memos to denote instances of interest during the interviews, and, during later interviews, areas where the responses were familiar or reminiscent of responses from earlier interviews. One important feature of grounded theory is to allow earlier interviews to influence the questioning and direction of interviews in order to narrow the categories ultimately used. In addition, instances where the responses deviated into an area of potential follow up as noted on the interview question were noted. This was the open coding stage of the process, or according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61). Initial codes were beginning to develop from constant comparison of the data. At the completion of the interviews, they were transcribed, and upon completion of the transcriptions, the researcher began transcript analysis and the axial stage of coding whereby the researcher attempted to organize the data further into categories on closer analysis.

The initial analysis of the transcripts focused on listening to the interviews while reading through the transcripts to ensure accuracy and to increase the researcher’s understanding of the responses. Another round of notes and memos were created at this stage, with notes made directly on copies of the transcripts and broader narrative comments written up in separate documents. The second analysis of the transcripts involved color coding responses in terms of similarities in conjunction with previous notes and narrowing of patterns. Software was utilized to aid in the color coding and to cross reference notes. The final stage of analysis involved mapping the color coded responses to the individual research questions and sub-questions, and at this stage, clear patterns and themes emerged in the data. In this final stage, a series of memos were



created to provide a basic description of the categories and note the rationale behind the final series of patterns and themes. This final stage conforms to the “selective coding phase” defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as “the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 116).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher was mindful of ethical considerations throughout the study, endeavored to conform to all accepted standards for ethical study, and also followed the advice and consultation of committee members, methodologists, and IRB representatives. The researcher followed all relevant local, state, and federal laws. The researcher completed required training of the Human Subjects Review Board as required by Western Kentucky University as did members of the researcher’s committee. The Western Kentucky University Institutional Review Board approved the study. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher met with the participants and conducted the interviews with a reasonable level of discretion, and interviews were recorded with a secured digital device. Copies of digital files were made on a secure hard drive with password protection to further ensure participant confidentiality and necessary backup of the data. The contracted transcriber agreed to confidentiality and kept no backups of the transcriptions. The researcher followed all of the described processes and use of data descriptions from the consent form.

## Summary

This study sought to gain an understanding of the perceptions of Saudi Students currently engaged in the KASP in regards to study in the United States and the effectiveness of the KASP. The study utilizes a grounded-theory approach, and the researcher was mindful of the procedures, concerns, and limitations of such an approach. This chapter outlines the research methodology, instrument design, procedures, data analysis and ethical concerns of the study.

The qualitative, grounded theory design relied on triangulation through literature review, participant transcripts and in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Participant transcripts were used primarily to establish demographic data and eligibility while the interviews were the primary source of data for the study. The literature review combined with the researchers experience in the field of international education was utilized to ensure the appropriate level of foreknowledge before conducting the stages of analysis.

The researcher's role in the grounded theory study is to be both researcher and analyst. In this central role, there is the potential for researcher bias and preconceived notions to taint both the data collection and subsequent analysis. Through the use of reflexivity, the researcher remained mindful of these potential pitfalls throughout each stage of the study and consciously acknowledges areas of personal ideology, experiences, and perceptions in an effort to capitalize on them as strengths rather than weaknesses of the study.

The perceptions of 12 Saudi male students were ultimately collected through approximately one-hour interviews. These Saudi males all conformed to a typical-case

sample, as they are all members of the KASP, undergraduates, have confirmed competency with the English language, and are engaged in full-time study. This ultimate participation group was drawn from a population of 53 Saudi undergraduates all reached through interaction with the campus Saudi club and invitation letters.

Using significant analysis during the interviews, and later in-depth analysis of the transcripts from the interviews, a series of patterns and themes were gleaned from the interviews. The notes, memos, and coded data from the transcripts were all used in conjunction to formulate these patterns and themes, and ultimately theories to rationalize the patterns and themes.

The researcher made every effort to conform to ethical standards as dictated by social science standards and the Human Subjects Review Board. The researcher provided a full review of the study to all potential participants, and the researcher conformed to the agreements and outline of the consent form signed by each of the participants. Every effort was made to secure written data and recorded transcripts. In addition, the Institutional Review Board of Western Kentucky University was consulted and approved all aspects of the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

The influx of Saudi students into the United States due to the establishment of the KASP has had impacts both positive and negative since its inception. With the program now aged enough to begin to see the pattern of these problems, and the results of Saudi students completing their education in the United States and returning to Saudi Arabia, an understanding of Saudi students' perceptions and how the program is affecting them personally is highly relevant. Stakeholders at all levels have begun to analyze the program and the impact of Saudi students on American campuses, and there is a continued need to understand the complex interactions taking place as the program is planned to continue for many years.

This chapter outlines the findings of the study and discusses the organization of the findings into patterns and themes as is typical for a qualitative, grounded theory study. Each of the patterns describes a broader issue which was illuminated by a series of themes prevalent in the interviews of the Saudi men. A separate section covering each of the themes and patterns is provided in this chapter. Examples of interview responses from the participants are provided to support the establishment of the patterns and themes. In total, five patterns were identified with a total of 17 themes. Below is an overview of the patterns and themes (Appendix D):

**Pattern 1— Saudi men have three dominant impetuses for electing to study in the United States.**

Theme 1.1- Familial ties are the reason Saudi males elect to study in the U.S.

Theme 1.2- The prestige of American universities is the driving factor for Saudi men to study in the U.S.

Theme 1.3- The policies and directives of KASP is the primary reason Saudi men study in the U.S.

**Pattern 2— Saudi men are being exposed to ideas and individuals from their own culture in ways they would not in Saudi Arabia.**

Theme 2.1- Saudi men who identify as Sunni and Shiite are exposed to members of the other sect to a high degree while in the U.S. and in ways that would not be possible in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 2.2- Saudi men interact with Saudi women while studying in the United States in ways they would not in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 2.3- Ghettoization and reliance on one another is a crucial factor in Saudi men changing perceptions about other groups in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 2.4- Anxiety with the English language forces interaction among Saudi men and is a factor in changed perceptions about other groups in Saudi Arabia.

**Pattern 3— Saudi men tend to compartmentalize their lives in the United States and their lives in Saudi Arabia in a number of ways.**

Theme 3.1- Saudi men studying in the United States tend to compartmentalize their lives in the United States and their lives in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 3.2- Saudi men tend to mask behaviors from some Saudis in the United States for fear of the information being reported in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 3.3- Saudi men intend to abandon aspects of their American lives and learning upon returning to Saudi Arabia.

**Pattern 4— Saudi men experience academic difficulty with classes because of preparation for study in the United States, particularly in reading and writing skills.**

Theme 4.1- Saudi men report having academic difficulty in the United States due to the level of reading expected of them and their lack of preparation

Theme 4.2- Saudi men report having academic difficulty in the United States due to the level of writing expected of them and their lack of preparation.

Theme 4.3- Saudi men report that the proficiency of instructors in Saudi Arabia is inadequate to prepare them for the rigor of study in the United States.

Theme 4.4- Saudi men report that the time management of Saudi schools and the culture in general creates an academic challenge.

**Pattern 5— Saudi men participating in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program are generally pleased with the program, though there are concerns about the future of the program and its management by KASP.**

Theme 5.1- Saudi men are positive about the King Abdullah Scholarship Program and feel that they have been given a unique opportunity.

Theme 5.2- Saudi men have concerns about their job prospects upon returning to Saudi Arabia, and believe some aspect of the program should focus on job opportunities.

Theme 5.3- Saudi men feel that the Saudi Cultural Mission at times is unsatisfactory in managing the King Abdullah Scholarship.

In addition, each of the themes and patterns derived from the interviews are aligned with the study's research questions and were a factor in the final organization of this chapter. As the research questions were used to develop the interview questions, the patterns and themes all demonstrate a connection to one or more of the original research questions. The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What factors motivated the Saudi students in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program to pursue higher education in the United States?
2. How have the experiences of King Abdullah Scholarship Program participants in the United States:
  - d. Impeded/promoted academic success?
  - e. Affected personal values?

- f. Met, exceeded, or failed to meet expectations?
3. How do the experiences and views of the Saudi students participating in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program align with the stated goals of the scholarship program?

Table 5 shows which of the themes and patters are aligned with particular research questions:

Table 5

*Research question alignment to patterns and themes*

Pattern/ Theme	<u>Research Question</u>				
	RQ1	RQ2a	RQ2b	RQ2c	RQ3
Pattern 1	X			X	
Theme 1.1	X			X	
Theme 1.2	X			X	
Theme 1.3	X				
Pattern 2		X	X	X	X
Theme 2.1			X	X	X
Theme 2.2			X	X	X
Theme 2.3		X	X	X	X
Theme 2.4		X	X	X	X
Pattern 3			X		X
Theme 3.1			X		X
Theme 3.2			X		X
Theme 3.3			X		X
Pattern 4	X	X		X	X
Theme 4.1		X			X
Theme 4.2		X			X
Theme 4.3		X		X	X
Theme 4.4		X		X	X
Pattern 5	X	X	X	X	X
Theme 5.1	X		X	X	X
Theme 5.2				X	X
Theme 5.3				X	X

In the presentation of the data below the researcher has preserved the language from the Saudi men in the study, including all of the grammar, syntax, and other errors with the use of the English language. There was no attempt made to correct any of the

errors, as the quotes are clear as to their intent and meaning. In a very few cases, the researcher has provided clarification as to the subject or meaning.

### **Patterns and Themes**

**Pattern 1: Saudi male students often elect to come to the United States due to familial ties, U.S. university prestige, or KASP directives.**

*Theme 1.1: Saudi students are strongly influenced to study in the United States due to family members who have studied or are currently studying in the United States.*

Saudi men commonly decide to study in the United States with the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) due to family members who had experience studying in the United States and in many cases due to family members currently in the United States with the scholarship program. Many of the study participants reported that older family members, most often their fathers, had positive experiences living or studying in the United States, like Respondent 3 who said, “My Dad told me about the United States, and he had a lot of friends and people are nice. My father graduated in 1986 or 87 and was here for four or five years. So he told me not to worry.” Respondent 6 said something similar when asked about his motivations for studying in the United States,

My father was here in America, like 30 years ago, so he was always explaining to me how is the life in America and what he did over there, how is the school over there, how was the American lifestyle and things in America. So I grew up listening to the stories and seeing the news and pictures and stuff like that.

Respondent 11 also indicated his father was a factor in choosing to come to the U.S. for study, “I decided to come to the US because my father he actually asked me to go to U.S.



and not another country.” These comments were indicative of several of the comments from respondents who related having older family members share stories with them about America and encourage them to study abroad as a motivation for their study in the United States.

Saudi men also chose to study in the U.S. because of family members currently studying in the United States in the KASP. Respondent 10 reported, “I came here because of my sister” and Respondent 2 who said, “I have two of my cousins here before I came and they told me about the United States, so I came to here.” Several of the respondents also reported that family members currently studying with KASP were also instrumental in navigating the logistics of securing the scholarship and permission to travel to the U.S. Respondent 1 offered an example of this in his interview saying,

I have family who have scholarship and they have been here for like some of them seven years, some of them six, five. Like a lot of family all over the United States. I asked them about how to get the scholarship and what I should do and what should I not do. I did not want to do something that I couldn't do with the scholarship.

***Theme 1.2: Saudi students are strongly influenced to study in the United States due to the prestige of American universities and colleges.***

The strength of American colleges and universities and the prestige a degree from the United States carries across the globe, and in particular in Saudi Arabia, is a motivating factor for Saudi men electing to get involved with the KASP and study in the U.S. In general, the Saudi men in the study indicated that a degree from America gave them an edge in Saudi society, even over other nations with prominent reputations and

which offer the opportunity to master English. Respondent 5 offered an analysis typical for many of the respondents, “If you graduate from America and you have a degree and you go back to Saudi Arabia it is easier to get a job than the one who graduated from Canada, Australia, or British.” Respondent 11 offered a statement emphasizing the perceptions of American schools and the value of an American education, “Back home when you say U.S. education it is something great. Like many people have dreamed about it. There are other places we can go but here is the best.” Respondent 1 echoed this by stating, “It is about the education. We believe that American education is better than our country. We do not have that many universities.”

Nearly all of the respondents agreed with the assessment that an American degree is superior, or at least quite valuable, in Saudi Arabia, and the respondents offered a variety of reasons a degree from the U.S. was preferential. One of the major reasons is the large numbers of Saudi companies and industries with American roots. Critical Saudi industries, namely the oil industry and its ancillary businesses, employ large numbers of Americans, and this has inflated the already high level of prestige and desirability a degree from an American school wields in Saudi Arabia. Respondent 6 provided a discussion of this phenomenon, stating,

The companies in Saudi Arabia mainly were made by Americans like Saudi Aramco and most of those big companies and hospitals. The whole administrations were Americans so that is why. They kind of follow the American system in their job and business so they think that when someone graduates from America, they will already have the idea about the system over there. You won't have to tell him do that and do that; he already has that thing.

Several of the respondents indicated that the large number of English speakers working in important jobs in Saudi Arabia drives up the value of a degree from an English-speaking country, particularly the United States.

***Theme 1.3: The policies and directives of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program are often the dominant force in coming to the United States.***

Saudi men are electing to study in the United States, rather than another country, due to several of the policies and procedures of the KASP. For those Saudi men who desire to study in the United States, often the only way to have the proper funding to do so is to participate in the KASP. Those students are often given little choice about where to study. Respondent 9 pointed out that “The program makes it much easier to come to America than other country. They let more come and it’s easier to get the scholarship... That is why everyone comes to America.” Nearly all of the Saudi men in the study indicated that the KASP rules played at least some part in choosing to study in the United States, while nearly all of the respondents also indicated that the policies for financial assistance also encouraged them. Respondent 10 stated, “They give a salary for study in the United States, and that can be the reason some of us come.” Many of the respondents who cited family member encouragement or the prestige of American universities also cited KASP as at least a secondary impetus for realizing the desire to study abroad.

For many of the Saudi men, the reason they choose to come to the United States was that a female family member chose to study in the United States. Per KASP rules, no Saudi woman can study in the United States (with very rare exception) unless they are accompanied by a male family member. A few of the Saudi men in the study reported

that they had no intention to study abroad until prompted by a female family member, or they had a desire to come to study abroad and chose America because of the choice of a sister or other female family member. For example, Respondent 10 reported that, “I had no choice because my sister got the scholarship and they said you have to go with her and I said okay. I didn’t want to come in the beginning, but I came for her.” Other study participants said they were “on the same scholarship” as their female family member, indicating that the two family members must both succeed, or both scholarships are subject to cancellation.

**Pattern 2: Saudi male students studying in the United States have experienced changes in perceptions and beliefs about their own culture and groups in it due to interactions with other Saudis that would be atypical in Saudi Arabia.**

*Theme 2.1: Cooperation and interaction between Shiite and Sunni students studying in the United States is well beyond what would be typical for Saudis in their home country, and this has had a significant impact on the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi students.*

There is, in general, a much greater level of interaction and cooperation between Saudi Shiites and Sunnis while studying in the United States. This has been almost entirely positive, and a great number of the Saudi men feel passionately that this has been the greatest impact of the KASP as a whole. Respondent 5 provided an example of the kind of impassioned comments many of the Saudi men shared,

That is a positive because when we are back home we have had problems. We have had problems. Like people believe if you do not believe what I believe, then you are my enemy. So they were taught that if you talk to a Shiite person, then

you are not good. You must ignore those people and you must not give them their rights. Don't treat them as you do your other brothers as we call it. So actually, that is not something new. It has maybe been for hundreds of years. We have been hiding in a society where we can't have everything sufficient for the society itself. So we do not need somebody else to give help. We do not do something bad and I am not saying that because I am Shiite. But the problem with the very religious people back home who have control over people's minds and they actually change their ideas. They have too many strict channels in the TV and the Internet and everywhere. They are trying to control people's ideas and thoughts. They want to control people. Now people have realized that is a really big mistake. They just realized that, when we got to the U.S. we got close to each other and we talked. We have found no differences between us. No difference between Shiites and Sunni. We are all Muslims. I see that as the best part of the scholarship.

Such responses were similar for both Sunni and Shiite respondents. Respondent 7, who reported that he identifies himself as Sunni, made the following comment,

Before we were in this program while we were in Saudi Arabia, we do not know Shiite and they don't know us. We do not listen to them and they don't listen to us. We are afraid of them and they are afraid of us. But here we know many students who are Shiite and they are like brothers. So we are lucky to have them here. We are lucky for this program that shows us the fact that okay we have a difference in religion but we are the same. We are from the same country, we act the same thing.

A real sense of personal change concerning beliefs and attitudes toward members of the opposite sect permeated the answers and comments of the participants and revealed that the experiences of the Saudi men while studying in the United States were punctuated by this religious exchange that would not take place at home.

While being in closer contact with one another is certainly a driving factor, that is not the entire reason Saudi men feel that they have become more understanding of one another. Even those Saudi men who lived in close proximity and even worked with members of the opposite sect often reported similar positive changes to perceptions. Respondent 7 characterized this phenomenon by stating,

It changed my mind because when I was working back home, we were together Sunni and Shiites but we didn't deal with each other. It was like 'hi,' 'hi,' and that was it. You know the traditional way of eating together we couldn't eat together. Now we eat traditional meals together.

Being in a safe, though alien environment, was often cited as giving Saudi men the latitude necessary to get to know Sunni or Shiite followers.

Respondent 11 summed it up most succinctly when asked about the division between Sunnis and Shiites saying, "When we came here, we found out everything was wrong."

***Theme 2.2: Cooperation and interaction between Saudis of both genders, particularly in the classroom, is significantly greater than would be typical in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi men have undergone a number of changes in perception due to this interaction.***

Interaction between Saudi men and women are at much higher levels while studying in the United States. Because men and women are educated separately for the entirety of their education while in Saudi Arabia, none of the Saudi men have experience spending significant time, particularly in a classroom, with members of the opposite sex. The new interactions in the classroom have led to a great deal of original understanding and positive changes regarding women in Saudi Arabia and cross-gender interaction. Respondent 11 suggested he was “scared by how strange I thought it would be” but ultimately he found that “When we have to work with the girls in the class, we understand that we can work with girls not family and enjoy the time. We can actually do things together.” Many of the respondents shared the feeling that being with the women in class was among the more radical changes they were confronted with upon arrival, but ultimately became something they saw as positive.

The interactions Saudi men have had with Saudi women in the United States has also made them question the beliefs originally taught to them in Saudi Arabia as they recognize their own experiences are divorced from those teachings. Respondent 6 was particularly clear on this point saying,

Unfortunately, back home they taught us that man and woman can't be together, can't be friends, they can't be close together and when we came here we found out that everything is good. You can be friends, boss, coworker. But the way that they taught us back home is wrong.

A later remark from Respondent 6 even further drove home the change in ideas many Saudi men studying in the United States experience; he remarked,

Even when it comes to our religion, Islam doesn't prevent you from dealing with women. You can go to school with, you can work with. You are not going to have sex with the woman who teaches you in school. They have this idea if you and a lady are in the same place then 90% you are going to have sex with. So that is a big misunderstanding.

That all interactions with women are not necessarily sexual and that men and women can operate together without a sexual overtone is a dominant feature of many of the interviews with the Saudi men.

Changes in the behavior of Saudi women have also led to new interactions between Saudi men and women. Respondent 9 reported that "Some of the Saudi girls don't wear hijab or dress the same as in Saudi. They also talk to the Saudi guys different and we have made friends with them that we wouldn't make at home." This sentiment was echoed by Respondent 8 who, like many of the study participants, related that the difference in behavior from both the men and the women led to a reevaluation of previously held beliefs and what is taught about gender and the Koran in Saudi Arabia,

Back in Saudi Arabia it is mandatory for women to cover their faces. It doesn't say in our religion that she is supposed to cover her face. In Saudi Arabia they say

'No, it is mandatory to cover your face.' Why? It [the Koran] doesn't say that.

Respondent 7 summed up the situation saying "When I went back for my first time back home I was like a strange guy. You know sometimes we don't deal with other women outside of my family... we change our minds about the idea of tradition like conservative ideas."



While the increase in understanding of Saudi women and a questioning of the religious edicts and resultant treatment of women in Saudi Arabia is common among Saudi men studying in the United States, there are still limitations to the level of change. In fact, there seems to be at least some members among the Saudi men who still view Saudi women differently despite the gains as typified by Respondent 10's statement that "There are still some difference for Saudi women. We won't see them the same way as the American women, or think its O.K. for them to be like American."

There is also an indication that Saudi men have difficulty being candid with one another concerning their own changing attitudes toward Saudi women. Respondent 2 pointed out that, "We [Saudi male students] will speak about cars, malls, girls, food, but never about Saudi women. We agree that she should work and do what she wants." Indeed, a discomfort in coming to terms with the changes is implied or stated with many of the study participants.

***Theme 2.3: Significant reliance on one another and ghettoization have amplified the changes in beliefs about members of other religious sects and Saudi women for Saudi men studying in the United States.***

The Saudi men studying in the United States tend to live and study together whenever possible and rarely spend significantly more time with Americans or other groups over Saudis. The vast majority of respondents suggested that they spend the largest part of their time both in and out of classes with other Saudi males and this has helped them learn about one another, but they also recognize it as an impediment to their learning about Americans and other international students. Respondent 10 stated, "I came to U.S. and found where the other Saudis live because I wanted to be comfortable.

Most of the younger Saudi guys lived in the same place. The Sunni and Shiite. It was good, but didn't help my English." Respondent 3 similarly reported that "I spent the beginning living with Saudis and made a lot of Saudi friends that I still mostly spend time with these days." Others, like Respondent 7, feel that they follow a particular pattern, "Almost all international students try to find people from their country and they try to live with them and speak with them, but that kind of defeats the purpose because you are here to learn the language and culture."

Saudi men gaining assistance from other Saudi students already established in the United States lays the foundation for spending significant time together over the course of their studies in the United States. Most, like Respondent 11, suggested, "Other Saudi's, Sunni and Shiite and man and woman, helped me when I came in the country or I met them in English classes and they helped me. Lots of those were new friends that I hang out with now."

An aversion to dorm living is prevalent among Saudi men, and they very often adopt the negative perceptions of dorm living from other Saudi men already living and studying in the United States. Respondent 5 said that when he first arrived in the United States, "All of the Saudis talk about the dorms and how bad it is." These negative perceptions, when coupled with the already high anxiety felt by Saudi men who have recently arrived in the United States, leads Saudi men to elect to not live in dorms. Respondent 7 related an account of this phenomenon that was reminiscent of several of the responses, "When we came here, we had the chance to live in the dorm to interact with American students. But we say no, we were stubborn and we say we want to be together we want to live in the same house and this didn't help us."

***Theme 2.4: Lack of confidence with the English language also encourages Saudis to seek out one another and spend time together reinforcing changes in opinions regarding members of the opposite sex and religious sect.***

Most Saudi men studying in the United States report feeling uncomfortable about their abilities in English, particularly when first arriving in the U.S., and they often report continued difficulties over the course of their studies. This is also a factor in Saudi men electing to spend the majority of time with one another. Many of the respondents, as Respondent 3 suggested, “Were just looking for Arabic speakers so they can be comfortable. I met new Saudis but was shy around Americans.” Respondent 1 provides another typical statement on Saudi males’ challenges, “Okay, when I first came, none of my friends were American. When I came here, because of my English I wasn’t talking very well. My English was level one or two. I was not dealing with American students.” While some respondents were more passionate in their responses than others, every respondent, without exception, maintained that language difficulties have shaped their studies in the U.S. and the people they interact with.

Continued difficulties with the language are common for Saudi men studying in the United States, despite English Language training and, in some cases, several years of study in the U.S. Respondent 3 related his feelings stating, “So I would say the language is the most challenging thing, even now. Last semester we took a business class and I was asking, ‘Is he speaking English?’ We didn’t understand anything.” Respondent 11 summed up this sentiment felt by many Saudi men, “I have some American friends, but I am still closest to Saudis because we don’t feel comfortable like speaking English.”

Saudi men studying in the U.S. do often realize the impediments of not interacting with Americans and English language speakers, and they will alter their behavior after the initial period of being cloistered with Saudis or after moving beyond language training. Saudi men want to make friends with Americans and often feel they have to do more to make such interactions happen. They feel as though Americans are largely open to getting to know them and they themselves, due to discomfort using English, are the biggest barrier to having positive interaction with Americans and making friends with them. Respondent 1 discussed his experiences which were echoed in many of the participant responses,

Yeah, actually I have a few American friends, but I am trying to have more. I used to spend my time with my Saudi friends, but I decided to be with Americans to improve my English and get more experience in my life. So I am trying to get more American friends. Like when you see someone you need to go and talk to him or her and let them know who you are and why you want to talk to them. To let them know you.

Finally, many Saudi men quantify the percentage of their time they spend with Saudis and spend with others. In no case does a Saudi male student report spending the majority of their time with Americans. The highest percentage any respondent offered for time spent with Americans was 40%, with the vast majority reporting between 20-30% of their time spent with Americans and 70-80% spent with Saudis.

**Pattern 3: Saudi students retain a great deal of their Saudi culture while studying in the United States, but they do adopt significant portions of American**

**culture and lifestyle. However, the students tend to compartmentalize their Saudi and American lives and the lessons gained from living in both nations.**

*Theme 3.1: Saudi men in the U.S. make a great deal of effort to keep some of their experiences in the United States and changes to their ideology hidden from friends and family back home.*

The KASP officials and published mission statements all highlight that one key feature of the scholarship is the opportunity for cultural *exchange* in addition to the academic goals. While Saudi males in the United States are certainly learning about and adopting aspects of American culture, there is a tendency for the Saudi men to keep clear divisions between their lives in the United States and their lives in Saudi Arabia. Many of the respondents report feeling uncomfortable sharing aspects of what they have learned, ways they have changed their behavior, or changes in beliefs to friends and family back home. Respondent 6 discussed what he witnesses with many Saudi male behaviors responding,

They are living one Saudi life and one American life and there is not a whole lot to help bleed the two together, to bring them together. Like when we are in America, we behave like Americans and when we are Saudi, we are Saudi.

Respondent 10 reported that “My family doesn’t like some of the things I believe now, and I don’t let them know it. I may be different with close friends, but I can’t do everything I think.”

Saudi men often travel home during breaks and spend several weeks or months a year back home during the course of their studies, and they already feel significant pressure to alter behaviors when they go back home. Rather than trying to change the

minds of fellow Saudis who have not studied abroad or discuss the merits of some of the things they have adopted from America, the Saudi men fear scrutiny and chastisement from others and often separate the two lives. Respondent 3 related an instance that highlighted the rationale for masking behaviors upon returning to Saudi Arabia,

If I do some of the things I've learned here or act the way I act here back home you will be the nerd, the stupid guy, the crazy. For example when I first came here and went back home we went to eat at a friend's. When I was done, I took the plate and they looked at me like what the hell are you doing? They are like 'There is an Indian guy who will clean up the shit' and I say 'Forgot about it.' And they made fun of me for the whole day.

Such accounts of being chastised or mocked, even from family members, punctuate all of the interviews from the study participants.

Many of the respondents also suggested they have to be mindful of social media use while in the United States because they don't want individuals at home to be aware of changes in their behavior or clear indicators that they have changed their philosophy and beliefs in significant ways. Respondent 5 offered a response that was typical for many of the Saudi men,

For me I have two Facebook accounts—one for Saudi Arabia and one for America. That is because there is some close-minded; they think that when I am taking a picture on campus and there are girls behind me there are girls in front of me. Then they think I am bad and am showing off and I am in a bad situation; I am doing something wrong right now. I am doing something that is not following my religion or following my culture. So I just create Facebook for Saudi Arabia

and there is nothing in that profile except normal pictures and other profile. In American that is still a normal picture for me but other people think it is not normal. They think you are doing something really bad. You are not following your religion or your culture or you are being disrespectful. There are a lot of Saudi guys who do that, create multiple Facebook pages or hide things they are doing in America.

Respondent 9 mentioned that he felt that many Saudis back home, including family, are perusing his Facebook page and other social media and are “thinking I am doing something wrong because of things around me.” This reluctance to share their lives creates anxiety for the Saudi men as they report sometimes “being nervous” about what family and friends may discover about not just what they are doing in the United States, but also ways they have changed their personal beliefs as a result of living and studying in the U.S.

Respondent 12 related how things he has changed about his beliefs while in America are problematic for him when he returns to Saudi Arabia for visits, “My family wants me to not behave like I am in America and sometime remind that I am not in America anymore if I say something that doesn’t come from religion or is different about girls or Shiite or something.” This feeling that family is not always supportive of changes in attitudes and opinions as a result of studying in America is a common feature of interviews with Saudi men.

***Theme 3.2: Saudi men studying in the United States tend to hide certain behaviors from other Saudi men in the community whom they fear may report on them when they return to Saudi Arabia.***

Saudi men spend significant time with other Saudis while studying in the United States, but often do not feel comfortable relating all of the changes in their ideology or beliefs because of study in the U.S. to all other members of the Saudi community studying in the U.S. with them. They fear that those from a similar city or who have relationships with their family or friends back home may report unfavorable things upon returning to Saudi Arabia. Respondent 10 stated that, “Some of my family study here, and I spend time with most of them. But a few haven’t changed so much in U.S., and I am careful with them.” Many of the respondents felt similarly and seemed to divide the Saudi groups studying in the United States not along traditional Sunni/Shiite or gender lines, but rather between those who have adopted a reasonable level of change while in the U.S. and those who have not adopted new behaviors and beliefs in America.

Respondent 2 offered up an interesting anecdote regarding this situation,

I am always with the same Saudi guys and some are my cousins. I have other cousin who study, but I don’t see them as much and we don’t invite them to eat, go places, whatever. They don’t necessarily do the same things and don’t like some of what we changed here.

Saudi men tend to feel they have to be “careful” not just about letting things get back to Saudi Arabia, but also to not alienate friends and family members studying in the United States along side of them. Respondent 3 pointed out when speaking about Saudis outside the groups that readily adopt aspects of American culture that “We are friendly to them, but they have said things to us or about us at home that makes us keep other away from them here.” Respondent 9 claimed that “Drinking and things like that are part of it, but also treating girls differently, or thinking to get married like American or spending time



with American or other countries.” In general, Saudi men studying in the United States all relate that the Saudi group is not monolithic because they are in the United States, but that divisions are redistributed across cultural adaptation distinctions.

***Theme 3.3: Saudi men studying in the United States intend to abandon aspects of the United States culture if/when they return to Saudi Arabia permanently but have hope of changing the culture in significant ways over a longer period.***

Saudi men studying in the United States are, in general, extremely skeptical of their ability to have an immediate impact on Saudi culture and somewhat skeptical of being able to make changes even over the long term, as they will expect or know they will be pressured to abandon things they have learned and beliefs they have adopted in the U.S. Most of the respondents resign themselves to, as Respondent 9 puts it, “living like other Saudis when back in Saudi.” While a few of the Saudi males report that they are happy to abandon the lifestyle they have had in the United States, most regret that they will be unable to “do some of things or teach some things to people back in Saudi.”

Respondent 10 pointed out that “It will take maybe 15 years for things to really start to change. People at home need to get comfortable with our change. I will teach my children differently than I was taught and about U.S. and things here. There will be change with them and slowly from now.” Some frustrations about the exchange of culture were even harsher. When discussing the things that he has seen in regards to Saudis taking lessons back home or engaging in different behaviors back in Saudi Arabia, Respondent 3 claimed “It really doesn’t happen” though he said he makes an effort in some circles it is very difficult to be comfortable doing so. Respondent 3 also implied

that many of the Saudi men who return home or spend time both in Saudi Arabia and the U. S. take the separation to the extreme—he claims,

Some of them [Saudi men] are completely different and changed from Saudi and the United States. Like when you see them here they wear the best clothes and most expensive clothes. They will fit in here and listen to American music and even drink and treat women differently. But, when they go back home they will live in the desert and call you [Americans] infidels. They will talk about how bad America is and how they don't agree with anything so they can fit in back home. They lie about what they do.

While none of the study participants would acknowledge they have engaged in such drastic changes in behavior themselves, the majority of the men did agree that they live their lives and speak differently when they are in Saudi Arabia and when they are in the U. S. As respondent 7 said when asked about his behavior and the separation between his American and Saudi lives, “It is impossible not to be different, even when we don't want to. My family doesn't understand and doesn't want me to behave different.” In general, the pressure from family and friends back home are an oft-cited reason for being unable to truly integrate things from the Saudi men's studies in the United States into their lives back in Saudi Arabia.

There is also a fear of reprisal or fear of the laws, government, and religious edicts that prevent many of the Saudi men from engaging in activities or voicing opinions based on changed perspectives and beliefs as a result of study in the United States. Respondent 3 pointed out that, “We can't spend time with girls the way we do here.

There is police that makes sure the man and woman are not travelling together or doing things unless they are family.” Similarly Respondent 11 said,

The Saudi government supports us studying and want us to get jobs, but they haven’t changed about a lot of things. You can be in trouble for saying things or doing things that you do in America, and it makes people be scared of doing things different. Saudi has put people in jail for doing things against Islam.

Many of the interviewees claimed that they were skeptical of any serious adoption of ideas from the United States, or even the authenticity of the Saudi government’s claims to truly want cultural exchange between the two nations. Respondent 4 argued,

If the students change, the government needs to change too. We are not going to be able to change because we don’t control the government or law. Some of the government people are O.K., but most only want better worker, not change against religion or something like that.

This type of comment was echoed in various forms throughout the interviews. While many of the Saudi men who participated in the study were noticeably uncomfortable or even angry about the lack of freedom they felt they suffer from back home, they were clear in their assertions that this pressure at home is a major factor in the compartmentalizing of their lives into one in America and one in Saudi Arabia.

**Pattern 4: Lack of preparation for college studies and in specific academic skills, notably writing and reading, are commonly reported by Saudi men studying in the United States as the greatest challenge to academic success.**

*Theme 4.1: Saudi men studying in the United States report that the level of reading expected of them in English language classes and college classrooms is a significant problem due to the education system in Saudi Arabia.*

Saudi men studying in the United States have significant difficulty managing the academic expectations of them in the U.S. due to the level of reading expected of them in language training and in university classes. Saudi men tend to feel they develop sufficient speaking skills and perform reasonably well in classes, but there is a direct correlation between the amount of reading students have to do in a class and their perception of how well they do in class. Saudi men tend to believe that this is due to a significant lack of preparation for the rigors of university study in general, particularly in the U.S., but specifically the levels of reading and reading comprehension training in Saudi Arabian schools. When asked about the most significant challenge to study in the U.S., Respondent 1 answered,

Reading. I hate reading and since I am here I have to read a lot and people here love to read and love to learn by reading, but we have different ways to learn in Saudi. It is not reading. But here I need to read a lot to learn a lot. Do more reading than we do in schools at home.

The majority of the study participants echoed this response, not only claiming that reading is different in the U.S., but also that the education system and the methods employed by teachers in Saudi Arabia have set them up for the academic difficulties they face in many of their university classes.

Respondent 1 discussed the level of reading expected from Saudi students back home versus the expectations in the United States, as well as the general attitudes toward reading in Saudi Arabia as a whole,

It's not that it's English or just English that makes it hard for Saudis. Like a lot of people back home have the same issue [with reading comprehension] because Americans love to read and many Saudis and most of them do not like to read. If they read they read religious books and stuff so many people do not read other stuff.

The general lack of reading for hobby or as a focus in classrooms was commonly reiterated by the study participants, and many characterized reading as “uncommon” and “mostly something for religion.”

***Theme 4.2: Saudi men studying in the United States report that the level of writing expected of them in English language classes and college classrooms is a significant problem due to the education system in Saudi Arabia.***

Much like the difficulties with reading, Saudi men studying in the United States tend to have significant difficulties with writing assignments in English language classes and in university classrooms. The challenges of writing for the Saudi men go beyond just the difficulty of trying to write in a different language, but are also focused on the significantly increased amount of writing expected from the Saudi men in the U.S. Respondent 3 discussed the situation reporting, “We didn't ever do any essays from the first grade until we graduate from college back there [Saudi Arabia] even in Arabic.” While this may be a bit hyperbolic, Respondent 12 said something similar, “We might do one writing assignment in English classes at home, but usually not. We do only some

writing in classes. We don't write about other subjects in history or whatever. We learn from the book and memorize but we don't write paper." Respondent 4, in self-analyzing, stated, "I am awful at writing in English or Arabic but I don't know why it is important to write" which typifies a common response from the study participants that writing in any language was difficult for them and that they were not always convinced of the necessity or benefit of being able to write proficiently.

The Saudi men report that anxiety with the English language is another reason that writing is difficult for them in the United States. The Saudi men were uniform in relating that they did not always feel "comfortable" writing and disliked the amount of time it takes them to complete even smaller written assignments. Respondent 5 said,

The English program helped me write more, but I have trouble writing longer essays from English classes. Five pages is hard, and I have that in a few classes at the same time. If I can, I find out which classes I don't have to write as much.

Respondent 6 made the comment that, "Sometimes I don't want to turn in writing assignments because I know my English isn't that good and the grade isn't good." Many of the Saudi men related feeling fearful of the grades they would receive on writing assignments and almost all of the respondents characterized their ability to write in English as "poor" or "bad."

Respondent 8 also pointed out that, while professors in the U.S. are sympathetic to the challenges faced by Saudi men in the classroom, they often put more work on the Saudis to ensure that the writing assignments are correct or at least improved. He reported,

Sometimes if you have a paper due or something some of the professors they ask me if you have problem with English or grammar come to me before. Or, if I can't meet with you before, then go to the writing center. This is always good but takes a lot of time.

Most participants had similar viewpoints—professors in American universities are willing to make concessions and are sympathetic to the fact that English is the Saudi men's second language, but often offer solutions that make writing consume even greater portions of the Students' already heavily taxed time.

***Theme 4.3: Saudi men studying in the United States suffer academic difficulty because of the proficiency of the instructors and their methods in Saudi Arabia.***

Saudi men studying in the United States feel that the teaching styles and professionalism of instructors at all levels in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are at least partly responsible for the academic difficulties they face while studying in the United States. While many of the students feel that the level of preparation in reading and writing are part of the culture or they are in some ways to blame for that lack of preparation, a common sentiment among the study participants was the lack of professionalism or the lack of rigor practiced by the instructors in Saudi Arabia.

Respondent 2, when asked about the most difficult part of studying in the United States, said, "How much the teacher ask us to do. We expect things to be mostly out of the book like in Saudi, but that isn't it. Teachers in Saudi give you an assignment from the book. Things are different here." Though Respondent 2 also mentioned the positives of the increased professionalism of the teachers in the U.S., "Their [U.S. instructors] way of teaching, giving a syllabus, we never had that before. It gives us the confidence to take

the class and finish it.” Another positive was mentioned by several respondents including respondent 4, who said,

In my country when we are studying we do not have to get experience but in the US you have to get experience. So when you get the experience it will improve you. So if you have the experience and the knowledge you will be more helpful. When discussing how the difference in teaching in the United States helps the students, many felt like they were getting quality instruction and valuable realistic examples and experiences outside the textbook, unlike in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi men tend to feel like the teachers in Saudi Arabia “don’t really care” and that many of them are just there for the pay and care little for the student’s lives. Many of the study participants reported being shocked by how much American teachers would follow up with them and offer to provide assistance to ensure they were learning and grasping the subject matter. Respondent 11 also pointed out that teachers in Saudi Arabia can be motivated by nepotism or cronyism, stating “Some teacher give grade based on who the student is or who they know. You know, like is his father important in government or know school leader or something like that.” Respondent 6 encapsulated the feeling that many of the Saudi men shared, saying,

I feel like back home they just want to finish the books or the course they have. They just want to finish it. They don't care if you get the point, understand what is going on, learn something. They just want to finish it. I feel like they all teach it the same way; there is nothing different. But when we came here every teacher has his own way or technique of teaching, and I found that interesting.



Respondent 7, when asked about favoritism in classrooms and the differences between teachers in the United States and in Saudi Arabia, had this to say, “They spend more time when I go to their offices. With spending time that is the main thing. With grades they are fair with everyone, which is different than in my country.” Thus, the general feeling of most of the study participants leaves one with the impression that the professionalism of many of the instructors in Saudi Arabia is in question, and much of the work Saudi instructors assign for classes has little in common with what students are ultimately asked to do in the United States. Saudi students are also forced to overcome a system that may have aspects of corruption in Saudi Arabia, and this too sets American education apart, but also adds to the fact that Saudi students are not only being asked to learn another language and a new area of specialization with their major, but also to navigate an entirely different approach to education.

***Theme 4.4: Saudi men studying the United States suffer academic difficulty due to the differences in time management in Saudi schools and in Saudi culture as whole.***

Saudi men studying in the United States as part of the KASP face significant challenges in their lives studying abroad, particularly in terms of academic performance, due to the way time is managed in Saudi classrooms and in Saudi culture at large. This time issue has two main facets: one is the time management of classrooms in language programs and university settings in the United States, and the other is the difference in the weekly, monthly, and yearly calendar between Saudi Arabia and the U.S.

Many of the study respondents reported that the way Saudi schools manage time is significantly different than in the United States, and the reason many students face academic challenges, particularly when they first arrive in the U.S. Saudi students report

that absenteeism and tardiness policies are far more lax in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi students have difficulty adjusting to the new standards. Respondent 2 offered a particularly cogent discussion of the matter,

Whenever you are late, nothing happened to you in Saudi Arabia. This is how it was for the last 20 years and then they started a new decision or rule that every five lates you will get one absent and it doesn't change anything in your grades or anything, so it doesn't really matter. If you are used to being late for twelve years who cares? I will be late in America, too, even if they give me an F. Or if they give me every three lates one absent. I don't care. I used to do this for 12 years.

Many of the Saudi students suggested similar things in their interviews, often claiming that adjusting to the new standards for attendance upon arriving to the United States were among the most difficult challenges and, as Respondent 9 put it, "something I still have a hard time with even after three semesters."

Respondent 12 also proffered some thoughts on why the clock is a significant problem for the Saudi men and accounts for a good amount of the academic difficulty they face. He responded to the question about academic challenges by saying,

The time difference can be the hard part. In Saudi we don't always come to class, and professors here don't make you come to class, but your grade will be bad. Some professors take attendance and count late after just a minute and that isn't the same in Saudi. So we can get help with lots of school work, but no one can help us with getting to class or not be late.

Respondent 12 clearly intended with his final sentence that there are resources available for him to help with the school work while in the United States, but resources are not

readily available to help adjust to time differences, attitudes about punctuality, or, more broadly, cultural norms.

It is not just the day-to-day clock and class times that present challenges for the Saudis, but also the differences in how the weekly calendar for schools works in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi men currently studying with the KASP studied Saturday through Wednesday while in Saudi Arabia with the weekend being on Thursday and Friday. Many of the study participants commented that this can be a challenge for them, particularly in the initial stages of their study in the U.S., as they are accustomed to having those days off and, especially on Fridays, using the time for religious practice. Respondent 11 remarked that “Friday is important day for us, but we don’t have it off here. We have to adjust and change our free time and our religious time. Our prayer times.” Many of the Saudi men suggested similar issues with missing class for religious activities and the normalcy of having the days off.

**Pattern 5: Saudi men studying in the United States through the King Abdullah Scholarship Program are generally pleased with the KASP, though the implementation of the program through the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission is problematic and found lacking in many regards.**

*Theme 5.1: Saudi men studying in the United States are appreciative of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program and understand the opportunity it represents for them.*

Saudi men studying in the United States are appreciative of the opportunity provided them by the KASP, and they recognize the many advantages that the scholarship provides. The overwhelming majority of the study participants felt that the

KASP is a positive use of Saudi resources, and they have only a few reservations concerning the program. Respondent 1 offered a brief description when asked about the positives, “They will give you an income every month which is helping you living here. They will pay your tuition which is much like so many people dream about.” He continued his positive critique a little later in the interview saying, “It is working because people graduated from here and they went back home. They’re more open and they have high education; they are better. So KASP is helping a lot of people to move their life let’s say.” Many of the respondents echoed Respondent 9 who said, “It is a chance to change and get a good job at home. We are lucky to have the scholarship, and we want to make our family proud.”

Respondent 11, like many of the study participants, suggested that being free of worry concerning paying for tuition or expenses is important to being able to be an effective student and focusing on learning about American culture and focusing on academics. When asked about the KASP, he offered the following,

Having the salary and tuition costs the government a lot of money. After seeing the costs for Americans too, we are lucky that our government pays for us, and we don’t have to worry about these things. We don’t work or anything and focus on study. Other international students sometimes talk about how much their family pay in tuition. How it is too much high for them. That makes me know it is good we don’t have to worry about money.

Such sentiments were offered by many of the respondents who, despite sometimes speaking unfavorably about facets of Saudi life and decisions made by the Saudi government in other regards, understand the breadth of support they are getting. This is

made even more apparent to Saudis who understand the substantial costs other international students who are not fortunate enough to have outside funding are paying or once the Saudi men understand the financial burdens that are put on Americans through the student loan system.

***Theme 5.2: Saudi men studying in the United States feel as though the Saudi government may be too focused on the King Abdullah Scholarship Program without being mindful of the real job opportunities in Saudi Arabia.***

While Saudi men participating in the KASP are grateful for the opportunities the scholarship provides them, and are mostly optimistic about the changes for their own lives (if not for Saudi culture as a whole), there remain some concerns about what the program's goals are and if the government of Saudi Arabia is mindful of the ramifications for such a large number of Saudi students studying in the U.S and elsewhere abroad. Most concerning for KASP participants are the job prospects waiting for them upon returning to Saudi Arabia. Respondent 3 put it succinctly saying, "There are a lot of students that have graduated and there is no spaces for them to work when they go back."

Many of the study participants were concerned with the announcement that the Saudi scholarship program would be continued through 2020 with no announcement of work programs or a focus on employability for the newly minted graduates. Respondent 10 argued,

There is a lot of graduates now, but the government doesn't help them when they go home. They need to help with the jobs and spend money to make jobs for the Saudis who will come home. Lots of Saudi guys are trying to find jobs and stay or find a job in another country.

A few of the respondents mentioned that they do not intend to go home because of the lack of job opportunities, such as Respondent 5 who said, “I will keep studying. If I get my undergraduate I will continue to my graduate. And I personally like to open a business in the U.S. I would rather do that than my country. I can have that easier here.” While several of the interviewees stated a desire to build a life in Saudi Arabia after completing a degree in the U.S. and feeling like their studies abroad would give them an advantage in the ailing job market at home, there were those who felt like opportunities were greater outside of Saudi Arabia.

Respondent 5 also offered up an insightful bit of discussion when asked about the KASP and components of it that may be problematic,

Unfortunately now, there are not jobs for everybody who graduates from other countries. They go back home and wait for a while. My cousin he graduated with a master’s degree and he has been waiting for six months now. And he is still waiting because there are no jobs. Unfortunately the plan was not completed.

Okay, we will send them to learn but there was no plan to have jobs for them when they get back. There are no jobs over there.

The comment that the “plan was not completed” captures the essence of the responses of many of the participants, as they have no doubt that many positive outcomes are possible for the KASP and its participants, but the transformation of Saudi culture and industry will require further intervention and commitment from the Saudi government.

***Theme 5.3: Saudi men find that the Saudi Cultural Mission difficult to work with and creates impediments to fulfilling the entire promise of the Saudi scholarship.***

The Saudi men studying in the U.S. under the KASP enjoy the benefits of the program and recognize it as an exceptional opportunity, but nonetheless feel that the program's administration is, on the whole, not managed effectively. While the men in the study recognize the substantial efforts required to manage the program, they feel as though resources are available to improve the management of the scholarship by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) in the U.S. In general, the sense is that the Saudi government has not hired the appropriate number of people to service the swelling number of KASP participants and all of their needs, nor have they allocated enough financial resources to making sure students don't suffer undue difficulty while utilizing the benefits of the scholarship program. Respondent 1 complained, "Some of the SACM employees do not work well and do not do their job exactly." Respondent 2 gave an example of the kind of frustrations many of the Saudi men have with SACM, "Every time you request a thing they will reject it 15 times for no reason and then they will accept the request. Whenever they think an advisor is working well with the students, they will change him." Many of the Saudi men in the study suggested that changes to advisors and changes to policies without clear communication creates many of the issues with delay in funding or an inability to get the necessary paperwork to satisfy school admission departments or secure a transfer to another university. Respondent 8 provided a succinct comment that summarizes many of the respondents' frustrations with SACM, "If you need something it can take three weeks to get it done. It is a waste of time."

As Respondent 5 stated when asked about the Saudi Cultural Mission, They are not doing good because we are a lot, like 70,000 students and they only have 500 employees. That is a problem. They may create a problem for you, put you on hold for a while doing something bad, do not answer their phones, they don't answer your emails and things. But I understand they are busy.

All of the dozen study participants expressed nearly identical concerns about SACM—that it wasn't functioning as well as it could or should be, and it sometimes introduced difficulties into their studies that could be avoided with a greater degree of planning and resource allocation.

Respondent 6 offered up a similar critique, but he also offered up a suggestion that was echoed by many of the interviewees and is seemingly an accepted solution to the SACM management issues among Saudis studying in the U.S.,

They know there are so many Saudis and there are too many students and they know that the number of employees at SACM are not enough for the students. They know that problem, but they do not want to solve it. They can make another building another SACM. They could make a different department or a different SACM, whatever they want to call it, and they could control it. This is the problem. They know but they do not want to take an action or steps to solve it.

For many of the Saudi men, like Respondent 6, there is animosity toward SACM as they do feel that SACM's inaction is inexcusable as the perception is that SACM certainly knows of the issues and certainly has the funding to take the necessary steps to rectify those problems.



Despite some of these complaints, a few of the respondents who have been with the KASP for several semesters or years suggested that SACM has issues and can certainly be frustrating, but things are improving and at least moving the right direction, though still with some significant deficiencies. Respondent 7 offered a comment on the approving aspects of SACM and the administration of the scholarship program,

They are working in good way but they need to improve how they can. The things they know are problems. The electronic gate system was positive 100% because a lot of time you don't have to go to D.C. to work on it. But there can still be an issue with time—it can take three days and you still have to call them sometimes. The electronic gate system, which is a computerized system that allows students to submit paperwork and make requests from any computer, was mentioned by several of the Saudi men and to many of them seems to be a demonstration of SACM's efforts to improve.

### **Summary**

The literature on international students and the Saudi population in the U.S. suggests that there are many unique problems, challenges and perspectives common to the Saudis, but there is a need for a greater understanding of how the Saudis participating in the KASP are faring and how the Saudi students in the United States are changed by the experience. Similarly, there is gap in the literature as to whether the goals of the KASP are being met and how participation in the program has affected the individual Saudi students and the Saudi population as a whole. With the government of Saudi Arabia extending the KASP through 2020 and the Saudi population being the fastest

growing international population studying in the United States, the need for this study is clear.

This study followed a typical grounded theory approach with 12 Saudi males participating in face to face interviews in order to ascertain their perceptions about study in the United States and participation in the KASP. The study was limited to Saudi men studying at the undergraduate level in order to match the demographics and status of the largest number of Saudi students in the U.S. Each of the 12 men were asked a series of questions that were guided by the central research questions, but also the interviews were semi-structured and allowed for the Saudi men in the study to offer accounts of their experiences and beliefs based on the aspects of their study and life in the U.S. they felt most important. At each stage of the interview process and subsequent analysis, the researcher took steps to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each transcription was coded for recognizable themes (open coding) and later these themes were grouped together into overarching patterns (axial coding). The findings are divided into 17 themes organized into five patterns. Each of the patterns is recorded in this chapter, with the details of the themes, supported by examples of interviewee responses, following each of the patterns with the rationale for the organization made apparent.

The first pattern focuses on the Saudi men's rationales for coming to the United States. The responses ultimately fell into three categories: older family members studying in the U.S. in the past or family members currently studying in the U.S.; the prestige of American educational institutions, and the policies and directives of the KASP

and the Saudi Cultural Mission. In some cases, the Saudi students report a combination of these factors for leading to their decision to study in America.

The second pattern exposed the fact that Saudi men studying in the United States are in many ways gaining knowledge and greater exposure to groups from their own culture. By studying in the United States through the KASP, Saudi men are being exposed and learning about members of the opposing religious sect, Sunni or Shiite, that they would not typically interact with at home in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the Saudi men are interacting with Saudi women in ways that they would not in Saudi Arabia, and this is generating a great deal of change in personal beliefs and ideology for the Saudi men.

The third pattern focuses on the compartmentalization taking place in the Saudi men's lives. While most of the Saudi men demonstrate change in attitudes and beliefs because of their study in the U.S., they often feel compelled to hide changes in attitude or behavior from members of their family or friends back in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the men sometimes feel as though they must hide certain changes from other members of the Saudi population studying with them in the U.S. as they fear chastisement or other pressure should family or friends back in Saudi Arabia discover some of the changes ingrained in the Saudi men through living in the U.S.

The fourth pattern focused on the sources for academic difficulties faced by Saudi men studying in the U.S. The interviews revealed that the majority of the Saudi men felt that they were ill-prepared in a number of ways for study in America, and writing and reading difficulties and lack of preparation were paramount among the challenges Saudi men felt. Many of the Saudi men believed that the professionalism of instructors in Saudi Arabia and the school system in general were the source of many of their issues. In

addition, the Saudi men recognized that cultural attitudes toward time and punctuality and the focus schools in the United States put on attendance are a source of difficulty for them as they adjust to these attitudes and, quite literally, a different system of time management in the United States.

Finally, pattern five focuses on the perceptions of Saudi men in regards to the scholarship program as a whole and the Saudi Cultural Mission to the United States. Overwhelmingly the men were appreciative of the program and the opportunity to study abroad and felt extraordinarily fortunate to be afforded the opportunity. Despite these positive feelings, many of the Saudi men felt that the scholarship program was incomplete or not thought through entirely as there is a substantial amount of consternation about the number of educated Saudis returning to Saudi Arabia without a job prospect. Many of the Saudis feel as though they need to stay in the United States or find employment in another country as they feel their chances are much better in places other than Saudi Arabia, but this in many ways undermines the goals of the KASP. There is also a great deal of criticism concerning the ways SACM manages the scholarship program, with many of the Saudi men arguing for improvements.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The goals of this grounded theory study were to ascertain the rationale Saudi men in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) use to elect to study in the United States, how their experiences studying in the United States have affected their perceptions and aligned with their expectations, and finally to determine if the experiences and changes in beliefs and perceptions are aligned with the Saudi government's stated goals for the scholarship program. As American higher education's reliance on international students continues to grow, and as Saudi students continue to become increasingly present on American campuses, the need to understand these populations is critical. Thus, the research questions for this study seek to aid in understanding how to maximize all of the potential benefits of Saudi students enrolling in American schools while minimizing the potential pitfalls. A number of studies on international students have established a reliable series of patterns of behavior in which these students predictably engage. These patterns include specific reasons for electing to study in the United States, a reliance on one another while abroad, and a tendency to stay amongst themselves. In addition, academic challenges centered on language acquisition and the challenges of adjusting to a new education system are common among international students. Research on Saudi students has been sporadic over the last four decades, with only a few studies having been conducted in the years since the inception of the KASP. Notably, there is a need to understand the perceptions of Saudis and the

effectiveness of the scholarship program now that the program has matured and Saudi students have started graduating from American universities and returning to Saudi Arabia.

This study utilized a qualitative, grounded theory approach in order to ascertain the pertinent information related to Saudis studying in the United States. The research questions were used to generate a series of related interview questions that were used in face-to-face interviews. Saudi men currently studying for an undergraduate degree in the U.S. with the KASP were contacted and ultimately 12 valid participants were identified through a contact letter, interview, and review of transcripts. These 12 participants all signed a consent form, and each of them ultimately participated in an hour-long, face-to-face interview in an office setting. The interviews were recorded and the researcher took notes and memos on each of the interviews as they were conducted. The recorded interviews were later transcribed, and open coding was used to characterize each of the responses in the interview. This coding was compared to notes and memos and axial coding was used to identify patterns and themes relevant to research questions.

Five key patterns were identified from the research and interviews, and each of these patterns had three to four themes for a total of 17 themes. Chapter IV provided the organization of the themes and patterns and an indication of how the patterns and themes were relevant to the original research questions. Chapter IV included quotes from the study participants to support each pattern and theme.

Chapter V provides a discussion of the themes and patterns as well as their relation to the research questions. Information from the literature review and other current research is coupled with the findings from this study to synthesize the information

and offer a narrative on the ways in which the findings from this study are aligned with current research on Saudis studying in the U.S., the KASP, and international students studying in the United States in general. In addition, this chapter will highlight the novel aspects of the findings from this study in regards to other research and discussions on international students. Chapter V presents the patterns and themes in relation to each of the research questions. As many of the patterns and themes are related to one or more of the research questions, the discussion section begins with a restatement of the research question and a discussion of each pattern and theme relevant to that research question follows. Andrade and Evans (2009) state that “Student adjustment issues overlap and interact extensively” (p. 34) and that holds true when analyzing how the themes and patterns fit the research questions. Following the individual pattern and themes discussions is a recommendations section. Finally, this chapter includes a conclusions section which encapsulates the relevant findings.

### **Discussion of Patterns and Themes**

#### **Research Question 1- What factors motivated the Saudi students in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program to pursue higher education in the United States?**

A number of research studies have covered the various reasons international students typically choose to come to the United States. Somers, Haines, and Keene (2006) found that recommendations from family members significantly influenced international students in their choice to study abroad. Often Saudi men are inspired or at times required to study in the United States by parents or other family members. Similarly, Klieger (2005) found that international students often desire to be with relatives who are studying in the United States or ultimately make a decision to study in

the U.S. over another country because of relatives studying in America. In addition, studies also show that international students elect to come to the United States due to the prestige of American schools and perceptions of U.S. schools' superiority. Altbach, Gumport, and Johnstone (2001) found that international students tend to believe America has the best education system in the world, and Bornshtein (1987) showed that international students believe that faculty and instruction in the United States are superior.

Pattern 1 and its supporting themes all suggest that Saudis often elect to come to the United States for reasons similar to other findings about international students. Theme 1.1 relates the heavy influence the Saudi men felt from those family members who have studied in the United States in the past—particularly their fathers who studied prior to the development of the KASP. Lipsky (1959) discussed the strict bonds found among family in Arab culture and concluded that “The individual's loyalty and duty to his family are greater than any other social obligation” (p. 296). Thus, it comes as no surprise for the Saudi men to feel compelled to study in the U.S. at the recommendation or insistence of older family members.

Theme 1.1 also demonstrates that Saudi men often elect to come to the United States, or even particular parts of the United States, for study due to family members already in the U.S. Several of the Saudi men in the study discussed having cousins in the program who inspired them to come to the United States. Heyn (2013) points out that “An individual within the family is a reflection of the family as a whole, and status is acquired through the position that one holds in the family. Frequently, the social, psychological, and economic security of the individual stems from membership in an



extended family.” Thus, Saudi fathers encouraging students to come to the United States and the desire to be around extended family members is an extension of the desire for status in the family which is characteristic of men in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the normal pattern of international students electing to come to the United States due to family pressure is, for Saudis, intensified by the deep family bonds and the intra-family desire for status.

The prestige and reputation of American higher education is also a motivating factor in Saudi men electing to come to the United States and that is reflected through Theme 1.2. McMahon (1992) pointed out that developing nations often view education in developed or wealthy nations as superior and Saudi Arabia is no different in this regard. Pattern 4 and Theme 4.3 in particular relate the degree to which the Saudi men felt instruction in Saudi Arabia was inadequate compared to that found in American schools. Respondent answers for Theme 1.2 indicated that American education is held in high regard in Saudi Arabia, and study participants generally felt that an education from the United States would give them an advantage on the job market in Saudi Arabia. Interestingly, the Saudi men also indicated the degree to which American business practices were in place in major industries in Saudi Arabia as well as the number of Americans working in these industries. This phenomenon adds an extra layer of prestige to an American degree in Saudi Arabia, and again only intensifies an already strong predilection among international students to study in America.

Theme 1.3 suggests something a bit different for the Saudi men, however. Many Saudi men are coming to the United States due to the KASP’s policies and procedures, namely the directive to come to the United States if the student wants to receive funding,

or in order to accompany a female family member who cannot study alone per KASP and Saudi laws. Obviously, one unique aspect of why Saudi's choose to come to the United States is the significant financial support they receive for coming. Theme 5.1 points out that the Saudis feel fortunate to have the scholarship and feel little of the typical financial pressures of study abroad. As Alhazmi (2010) points out, "Most of these students are sponsored by the Saudi government and are offered financial and academic support. They therefore have less issues relating to such concerns as finding accommodation, employment and struggling with course fees" (p. 2).

However, as Theme 1.3 suggests, the Saudi students sometimes come to the United States because there are strings attached to either their scholarship or the scholarship of a female family member. Several of the Saudi men discussed the need for Saudi men to travel with Saudi women, and two of the Saudi men indicated that they did not originally intend to come to the United States but their sisters would not be able to receive the scholarship or study abroad without joining the program themselves. As is obvious by the program implementation, Saudis are coming to the United States in droves largely motivated by the financial offerings of the scholarship, but some portion of Saudi men are being swept into the program by the need to accompany female family members.

The findings from the study suggest that the answer to Research Question 1 is that the Saudi men are highly influenced by some of the same factors typically found among other international student populations. However, it is clear that the familial pressures and prestige of the United States in Saudi Arabia have unique components. Of course, the financial incentives for study with the KASP are paramount, but the combination of these other factors provides evidence as to why the numbers of Saudi's studying in the

United States have ballooned the way they have. These factors may also describe another phenomenon with participants in KASP. Recent trends in Saudis studying in the United States have not simply been a matter of Saudi students being evenly distributed across the United States, but rather the students tend to be concentrated in several areas. A commonly accepted fact among those working with international students is that Saudis are being concentrated in areas where the course offerings are aligned with those preferred by the Saudi scholarship program. Thomas (2013) provides a discussion of the scholarship program and also points out that “Only universities...and language programs approved by SACM are eligible to take part. Some say this has led to an ‘over concentration’ of students” (p. 46). This need for a language program and a specific group of majors is certainly a factor in why Saudi students end up in specific areas of the U.S., but the unique familial factors must also be considered when determining why there is a saturation of these students in particular areas. There is a snowball effect happening whereby Saudis are coming to the United States because of the KASP, but they are going to specific areas because it meets academic requirements and because family or friends are already studying in the area.

**Research Question 2a- How have the experiences of King Abdullah Scholarship Program participants in the United States impeded/promoted academic success?**

Andrade and Evans (2009) states a commonly accepted maxim about international students by pointing out, “All students who come from different cultures and backgrounds are likely to have some difficulty adjusting to academic and social life in the United States” (p. 33). While this is fairly obvious, it does prompt the question as to how “difficulty” manifests itself and what are the factors that promote this difficulty? There

are some accepted precepts concerning the types of academic challenges international students face in the United States including the several challenges a lack of English proficiency presents and the difficulty integrating with other Americans. Andrade and Evans (2009) specifies that it is often the case that adjusting to a new education system should be considered as much of a challenge as adjusting to the new language and culture. Many of the findings from this study support that Saudi men are experiencing similar adjustment issues while in the United States, but, again, with components uniquely blended.

Pattern 4 and all of its supporting themes provide insight into the academic lives of Saudi men and the challenges they face. It is commonly accepted that challenges with the English language are a driving force behind the difficulty international students have with writing and reading for university classes. Pattern 4 suggests that this is true to a degree, but one component of the reading difficulties Saudi students are experiencing is the level of reading instruction Saudis receive in Saudi Arabia as well as the reading habits prominent in Saudi culture. Respondents contributing to Theme 4.1 indicated that they did very little reading in schools in Saudi Arabia, and most reported disliking reading in any language. The tone of many of the interviews was that reading is not a prevalent part of Saudi lives with the exception of religious study as demonstrated by a respondent's comment on Saudi people in general, "If they read, they read religious books." The normal challenges an international student faces with language acquisition are certainly in place with Saudi men in the KASP, but the fact that they originate from an academic system lacking in strong reading instruction intensifies the academic challenges Saudi men face.

Theme 4.2 indicates some similar feelings in relation to writing for the Saudi males studying in the U.S. The Saudi men again indicate that the degree of writing expected of them while in the United States is a challenge and that it is not simply that the students are writing in a second language, but that they also are unaccustomed to engaging in writing for school. The comments from the Saudi men suggest that they feel anxiety about writing in English and fear the grades they will receive in writing classes. They also recognize that they are not good with the technical aspects of writing and in general rate themselves as poor in terms of writing even after several semesters of study in the U.S. In some cases, the respondents demonstrate apathy for writing. The education system in Saudi Arabia seems to have inculcated in the Saudi men skepticism for the need to be an effective writer, particularly if they are studying in a scientific field.

Many of the study participants suggested that the quality of instruction in Saudi Arabia is lacking, and in general the preparation the students receive in classrooms in the kingdom did little to help prepare them for study in the United States. Theme 4.3 is based on the respondents' comments that Saudi instructors tended to demonstrate a degree of apathy. Common remarks were that the instructors in Saudi "don't care" and that they "focus on the book" and at times treat students unfairly. The level of unfairness can reach to the level of nepotism as several students indicated some teachers would treat students differently depending on the students' family relations. Again, this indicates the significant challenge Saudi men face in adjusting to a different education system. While instruction may be improved in America, the expectations of instructors in the United States and the de-emphasis on the textbook can be difficult for Saudi students.

Theme 4.4 suggests something different about the Saudis' academic challenges while studying in the U.S. The respondents indicated that they had difficulty adjusting to times in the United States, and the policies regarding school attendance were a challenge to their academic success. While Saudi schools tend to be more lax in terms of absenteeism and tardiness, thus creating an impediment to success in the stricter North American schools, there is also the challenge that Saudi men have to adjust to a school and work week with different days and a lack of time off for religious practices.

Pattern 2, and specifically Theme 2.4, provide some insight into the academic challenges Saudi men face as well. The English language anxiety that forces many of the Saudi students to feel more comfortable with one another and subsequently segment themselves from Americans is certainly indicative of the anxiety being felt when producing essays, speaking in front of class, and tackling lengthy reading assignments. The ghettoization of the Saudi students while in the U.S. creates a cycle where students have less exposure to English and thus perform poorly in schoolwork because of it, which increases anxiety and forces students to withdraw further.

What is clear is that Saudis face serious challenges similar to other international students when tasked with learning the English language. However, Saudi students also face specific challenges in terms of academics, namely that they are at once learning the English language and how to be a student in a significantly different academic environment which has expectations they are ill-prepared to overcome.

**Research Question 2b- How have the experiences of King Abdullah Scholarship Program participants in the United States affected personal values?**

The changes in personal values experienced by participants in the KASP are evident in many of the patterns and themes. In particular, Pattern 2 and Theme 2.1 and 2.2 provide an interesting account of how Saudi men's personal values have changed due to study in the United States. Alhazmi (2010) states that, "Saudi international students may have a serious challenge and encounter difficulties in adjusting to a social environment that is extremely different and might be, in some ways, contradictory to their home social environment" (p.197). In many ways the experiences and beliefs of the Saudi men in the KASP are changed due to the significantly different and contradictory environment in which they find themselves engaged.

Notably, the Saudi men studying with the KASP are finding themselves interacting with either Sunnis or Shiites in ways they would not normally while in Saudi Arabia. Theme 2.3 and 2.4 provide evidence that Saudi men feel anxiety about speaking English and seek out other Saudis in the community to befriend and with which they live. These students tend to remain largely segregated for all or most of their time in the United States; the Saudi men do, however, recognize that this can cause difficulties with more easily adapting to the English language. However, a number of students suggested that they found that because of the reliance the Saudi students have on one another, those students hailing from Sunni and Shiite backgrounds alike discover positive things that in general reduce the animosity the two groups have for one another. Many of the respondents said this was one of the best parts of the experience in the United States, and nearly all agreed they interacted with members of both sects of Islam in positive ways while in the U.S.

Theme 2.2 similarly demonstrates that Saudi men have changed their perceptions and values in regards to Saudi women. Several of the study participants suggested that they have had interaction with Saudi women, particularly in class, in ways that would normally be forbidden at home. Alhazmi (2010) suggests that the difference in the treatment of genders can be one of the greatest shocks for Saudi students when spending time in the United States, and it is clear that the Saudi men do originally believe interactions with women while studying in the United States will be “strange” or “difficult,” though the respondents ultimately report the experience as positive. The study participants directly report changes in their values toward women. Alhazmi also suggests that Saudi men and women are often taught to believe that they cannot interact due to sexual desires, and the respondents in this study were explicit about finding these teachings flawed once they had ample opportunity to interact with both Saudi and non-Saudi women.

Those working with international students or working to send American students abroad tend to believe the goals of a student traveling abroad are to learn about another culture while sharing aspects of their own. In a sense, we view this as a positive change and the focus is on the exchange between two cultures. What this traditional viewpoint on study abroad suggests is in fact a process of acculturation. Interestingly, Saudi men tend to be learning and changing their values and perception about members of their own culture while being in the United States in a kind of *reverse acculturation*. That is not to suggest that Saudi men are failing to learn about American culture and change because of it, rather they are also experiencing a great deal of intra-cultural learning and are changing their ideas and values about members of their own culture as well. This reverse



acculturation clearly has the value of softening attitudes and expanding understanding between various groups within Saudi Arabia, but this has an opportunity cost. These new found understandings may come at a direct cost to learning about American culture and mastering the English language. In addition, the stated goals of the KASP explicitly state that the scholarship is intended to help students exchange culture and gain proficiency in the English language, and the reverse acculturation Saudi students experience arguably compromises the realization of these two stated goals.

This reverse acculturation has potential ramifications for the way study abroad is understood and implemented. With the pressures and concerns of being in a high stress situation like studying abroad, it could be that specific differences among groups from the same culture or nation become less prevalent to study abroad participants in light of the broader changes that surround them and the need for familiarity to relieve stress. Perhaps also are opportunities to advance learning in multiple ways for groups studying abroad that originate from a highly segmented society or a society with groups hostile toward one another. It is not without reason to suggest academic leaders could devise ways to maximize learning of one's own culture *and* a new culture in instances where diverse groups from a similar culture are studying abroad together.

Themes 2.3 and 2.4 suggest a pattern of two important factors that exacerbate the reverse acculturation phenomenon and the changes in thoughts and attitudes Saudis are having about their own culture in addition to American culture. Saudi men indicate that they are living with one another and near one another, as well as relying on one another for a number of things upon arriving in the United States. Andrade and Evans (2009) suggest that international students tend to bond together and these bonds can be positive,

but these bonds, “while providing invaluable support for those from that culture, can lead to obvious barriers.” (p.212). The Saudi men report that a reliance on one another does indeed increase their comfort while in the United States, at least for a while, but they also recognize that they are missing out on opportunities to improve their English and learn about American culture.

One of the significant factors in Saudi men electing to spend time with one another and live together is the anxiety they feel about the English language. Again, being able to speak without the self consciousness brought on by speaking in English as well as finding familiar practices alleviates some of the stresses they feel from being in another culture. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2009) point out that “One of the ways in which international students can feel a sense of community while abroad is by connecting with other people from their own culture” (p.77). This is a commonly accepted phenomenon for nearly all international student populations, but it is not traditionally viewed through the lens of how it promotes bonding and other types of learning within the community.

**Research Question 2c- How have the experiences of King Abdullah Scholarship Program participants in the United States met, exceeded, or failed to meet expectations?**

Pattern 1 and Themes 1.1 and 1.2 suggest that Saudis form expectations about what it is like to study in the United States from older family members, family members studying in the United States, and from the reputation and perception of American higher education that has penetrated media in Saudi Arabia. Berardo (2006) suggests that students often experience a deep sense of optimism when first arriving in the United

States, but students soon learn that expectations often do not match the reality. Pattern 4, when juxtaposed with Pattern 1 and Themes 1.1 and 1.2, suggests that Saudi students initially have positive expectations about the quality of education in the United States and living in the United States in general, but those expectations do not necessarily match reality when it comes to academics. Additionally, Theme 1.1 points out that family members already in the U.S. help Saudi male students have some realistic and grounded expectations about how it is to truly study in the United States. Despite this family assistance, the U-curve theory Berardo (2006) describes and the culture shock that comes along with it is a part of the typical Saudi male's experience in the United States just as it is with other international students.

Pattern 4 shows that Saudi students' expectations for studying in the United States are not necessarily aligned with reality as students are alarmed and surprised by the rigor of classes in the United States. The many comments that suggested lessons and class work in Saudi Arabia leave the students ill-prepared for more rigorous study demonstrate that the students believe the strength of American colleges will make up for deficiencies from their experiences in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi men are often shocked to find that instructors in America do not necessarily "meet them where they are" in terms of academic skills.

The Saudi respondents also indicated that they were aware of the differences of studying with women in the United States prior to arriving in America, and many of them reported having the expectation that it would be hard or strange to have class with Saudi women. Pattern 2 and specifically Theme 2.2 indicate how the Saudi men's interactions with women while in the United States are quite different than those previously

experienced; considering the teachings the men receive in Saudi Arabia about the necessity for men and women to be separate, the disparity between expectation and reality for the Saudi men is natural. Saudi men tend to find the experiences with women positive, as opposed to the negatives the students may have expected originally. Theme 2.4 covers the English language anxiety that promotes Saudi men residing together and seeking each other's companionship, and this seems to at once meet with expectations concerning the support the men expected to have in the United States, but also is a factor in Saudi students not reaching their expected level of English in a reasonable amount of time.

Finally, Pattern 5 also sheds some light on the expectations Saudi students have in the United States as the Saudis highlight their satisfaction with the KASP but also indicate a few challenges that result from certain facets of the program that do not meet with expectations. While the salary and support the students receive while in the program meet with expectations and engender a great deal of appreciation from the Saudi men, they do indicate that their expectation is to get a job upon completing their degree at home, and the great deal of optimism they originally felt has waned somewhat in the face of other Saudi friends and family members returning to Saudi Arabia with degree in hand and no job to be had. Theme 5.3 also centers on some of the disappointment the Saudi men feel concerning the implementation of the KASP through the Saudi Cultural Mission. While the scholarship benefits are meeting the study participants expectations, the ease of maintaining the scholarship, doing necessary paper work and managing other logistics through SACM has fallen well short of expectations. Saudi men have the expectation that the level of service they will receive while in the program is befitting the

level of resources Saudi Arabia has poured into the program, and enter the program expecting as much. However, the Saudi men universally state that the professionalism and level of support they receive from SACM fall well short of what was expected when first registering for participation in KASP.

**Research Question 3- How do the experiences and views of the Saudi students participating in the King Abdullah Scholarship program align with the stated goals of the scholarship program?**

The goals of the KASP, as advertised by the Saudi Cultural Mission, can be summarized as follows:

- Sponsor qualified Saudi students for study in universities around the world
- Work to bring about a high level of academic and professional standards through the foreign scholarship program
- Exchange culture with countries worldwide
- Build up qualified and professional Saudi staff in the work environment

Findings from this study indicate that the stated goals are meeting with a variety of success. Certainly Pattern 1 and Theme 1.3 suggest that students are electing to participate in the scholarship for a variety of reasons, and Pattern 5 and Theme 5.1 show that students are generally pleased with the funding and opportunity the scholarship provides them. Thus, it can be argued that the scholarship program is meeting the goal of sponsoring qualified Saudi students for study in universities around the world. Despite the difficulties the study participants relate about the Saudi Cultural Mission as found in Theme 5.3, the number of Saudis enrolling in the United States and the general level of satisfaction suggest that the program is having no problem finding and successfully funding students to study abroad. The participants suggest in Theme 1.3 that electing to

study in the United States through the KASP is far simpler than choosing other nations and the history of the KASP being established in cooperation with the Bush administration supports the idea that this is largely a cooperative agreement between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. This may bring into question if the Saudis are achieving the goal of placing students “around the world,” but *Open Doors* (IIE, 2012) data shows that while the majority of KASP participants are in the United States, the program is sponsoring students in several nations.

The goal of bringing about a high level of academic and professional standards through the program is more difficult to determine given the findings of this study. While Pattern 4 and its themes suggest that students are having academic difficulty in the United States, and Patterns 2 and 4 suggest that there is continued difficulty with the students gaining proficiency with the English language, many students are overcoming the rigor of studying in America and returning home with degrees. This can be extrapolated to mean that Saudis are gaining an increased level of academic standards. Theme 4.3 demonstrates that Saudi men become accustomed to working with less strict time constraints than they are confronted with in the United States, and the respondents indicated that the challenges of dealing with more formal time continue to plague them throughout their studies. If a level of professionalism is adherence to Western time standards, then the level of success in achieving this goal could be considered in need of improvement. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the substantial numbers of Saudi students in the United States and those returning home with degrees have to in some ways be meeting the goal of increased academic and professional standards. In addition, the confidence the Saudi men have that their American degree will give them an edge in

the professional world, as discussed in Theme 1.2, suggests that this goal is being met to some degree.

The goal of cultural exchange is cast into some doubt based on the findings of this study. Patterns 2 and 3 both suggest that Saudi students are having difficulty interacting with Americans and are electing to spend significant amounts of time together. Pattern 3 highlights the compartmentalization of their lives most of the Saudi men engage in, and any resistance to sharing their experiences with others back home indicates that the scholarship program is not achieving the level of cultural exchange it potentially could. With Saudi students feeling as though they must live two lives, the level of culture exchange is most certainly hindered. Theme 3.3 shows that many Saudi men in KASP feel as though they have to abandon some of their changed attitudes upon returning home due to a variety of pressures, and this again has to be a hindrance to long-term cultural exchange.

Finally, the goal of building up a qualified and professional staff in the work force of Saudi Arabia is also in question. Pattern 5 and specifically Theme 5.2 show that Saudis studying with the KASP are having difficulty finding work upon returning to Saudi Arabia. With the scholarship program now matured to the point where several seasons of program participants have returned to Saudi Arabia, the information Saudi men have regarding the job prospects for them can be assumed to be reliable. While it may be too soon yet to determine if a project the scope of the KASP is succeeding in having a significant impact on the workforce in Saudi Arabia, the initial results seem to be that a supply and demand issue is forming. Krieger (2008) suggests that a long-term goal of the Saudi government is the “Saudification” of its workforce whereby the large

numbers of foreign workers in technical industries in Saudi Arabia are replaced by Saudi citizens. Such a shift will of course take years and therefore it becomes impossible to deem the goal of changing the workforce a failure for the scholarship program.

### **Summary**

This study found that Saudi men tend to make the decision to study in the United States due to family pressures, the prestige of U.S. colleges, and the policies of the KASP. While the Saudi men are of course attracted to the KASP due to the financial assistance, they do have some at least ostensible choice in selecting the nation they will do their study abroad. However, family members with experience studying in the United States and family members already studying in the U.S. are creating a strong impetus to study in America. The prestige of U.S. universities is also strong in Saudi Arabia especially because of the prominence of American industries and American systems in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the policy of Saudi Arabia to not allow women to travel without a male family member as a companion also plays a role in Saudi men travelling to the U.S. for study as they must come along with female family members who want to study in the United States.

This study also found that Saudi men are also discovering a great deal about diverse groups from their own country as well. A process of reverse acculturation is taking place whereby Saudi men are learning a great deal about other religious groups in Saudi Arabia and about Saudi women in ways that they are not able to at home. This may come at the expense of being acculturated to American life or getting to know Americans in addition to creating difficulties in becoming proficient with the English language. This phenomenon is intensified due to the Saudi men's tendency to live and



associate with one another and because of the anxiety they feel about using the English language.

Saudi men are also having difficulty sharing their experiences and changes in values with friends and family in Saudi Arabia. The study shows that Saudi men feel anxiety about individuals in Saudi Arabia discovering some of the changes in attitude and behavior as a result of their studies in America. The Saudi men have felt pressure from peers and family members when returning to Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi men in the KASP often hide social media while in the U.S. and intend to mask their changes in beliefs when returning home.

In addition, Saudi men in the KASP face academic challenges based on the lack of preparation for study in the United States. Specifically, Saudi men tend to struggle with academic reading and writing, which other studies show is common for international students. However, unlike the other research, it is not simply a matter of reading and writing in another language that presents difficulties for Saudi men, but rather it is also the fact that reading and writing are not emphasized in Saudi schools, and the culture in general does not place a high value on reading or writing.

Finally, this study shows that, while many Saudi men are pleased with the opportunity to study in the scholarship program, there is some consternation about the administration of the program by the Saudi Cultural Mission and the Saudi men are worried about the ability to find a job when returning to Saudi Arabia. Many of the men felt privileged to have the financial support of the Saudi government and through interactions with Americans and other international students the Saudi men have developed an even greater appreciation and understanding of the opportunity the

Scholarship provides. However, the men also feel that one of the promises of the scholarship program is that the education would lead to employment for them when they return to Saudi Arabia, and they are skeptical if the program is working in this regard. Finally, the study finds that Saudi men are having some difficulty interacting with the Saudi Cultural Mission and they feel that the administration has caused them some undue difficulty while in the United States. Saudi men commonly feel that the Saudi government would be wise to invest in more human resources and more offices to help with the administration of the KASP in the United States.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for Higher Education**

Given the findings from the study, there are a number of recommendations for stakeholders in all levels of higher education as well as a number of recommendations for future study. What is clear from the findings is that university officials and English language program administrators at all levels hosting Saudi students must improve the understanding of the students' motivations and perceptions. Many of the issues facing Saudi students in the United States stem from the host institution not providing tailored or at least appropriate levels of support for the Saudi men, and this comes from a failure to understand their unique culture and the unique issues they face when studying in the United States. It is not enough to treat all international student groups similarly; rather, school officials have to do more to disseminate the kinds of information found in this study and others to every individual who interacts with the Saudi population. For example, instructors who understand the Saudi students' issues with reading and writing habits may be able to adjust more appropriately, or the housing official who understands

the challenges of getting Saudi students to live in the dorms may be able to develop strategies that will attract greater numbers of Saudi students. In essence, the recommendation is to greater disseminate knowledge concerning this population.

Dealing with the ghettoization that Saudi students are engaging in should be near the top of the priority list in dealing with the Saudi population. Much research suggests that integrating international students into the general population of students is best for their growth and development in terms of English language, and while this is true for the Saudi students as well, it is important to consider the reverse acculturation phenomenon as well. Simply dictating to Saudis that they cannot live together or creating policies that limit their interactions will most likely have the effect of diminishing their enrollment rather than solving any issues caused by Saudi students cloistering themselves. A better solution would be for universities and English language programs to get involved with the student as soon as they arrive in the United States. Breaking up the pattern of Saudi men relying on each other in the early days of their study and subsequently spending most of their time together over the course of their study would best be overcome by early intervention. Having a team of English language speakers and Arabic speakers who help new students find housing and help the new Saudi student adjust would help develop a different pattern than that normally engaged in by Saudi men. Additionally, this would reduce the impediments to English language development caused by Saudi students failing to integrate into campus and with American and other non-Saudi students.

Higher education officials should consider that removing Saudi students from one another may short-circuit the positives of Saudis living together and the reverse acculturation they experience. One recommendation would be for universities and

language programs to try to develop housing opportunities that capture the best of both worlds. Living situations where Saudis live with one another and with Americans studying Arabic, religion, international business or other related majors can be established. Universities taking an active role blending American students in with Saudi students while also allowing Saudi groups to intermingle may allow the Saudi students to at once learn about one another without short circuiting their English language development or their acculturation to the United States.

Language programs and institutes of higher education should also make an effort to deal with the lack of preparation Saudi students have in terms of academic reading and writing skills. The tendency now is to put all international students in similar language learning or remedial classes that begin in the same place and assume the students have similar sets of deficiencies. While many of the challenges that international students face are similar, as this study points out in many ways, there are enough significant differences between populations that must be considered if international student learning is to be maximized. Classes for the Saudi groups that focus on academic skills and the ability to be a student in the United States may go a long way to helping them overcome a lack of academic preparation. It seems to be worthwhile to help Saudi men gain appreciation for the need to be an effective reader and writer as well as help disarm some of the anxiety they feel before they are thrust into a classroom asking them to produce reading and writing in English.

### **Recommendations for KASP**

A few recommendations for the Saudi government and the leadership for the KASP also come out of this study. Foremost, if the Saudi government wants to truly

promote cultural exchange, they must be more explicit to both KASP participants and their entire nation about the goals of this program and the kinds of ideas and values shifts they deem as acceptable. An active program within Saudi Arabia to promote understanding between those who have been fortunate enough to study with the KASP and the members of the society who hold on to more traditional values and are resistant to change would certainly be beneficial.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia must engage in an honest discussion about how the return of Saudi's studying with KASP are changing gender dynamics, and must begin working to integrate these educated women into the society in ways that will lead to positive change in terms of gender dynamics. The Saudi cultural mission should consider integrating more training about gender differences and what the Saudi men and women will experience while in the United States so the Saudi students can begin capturing the advantages of learning of the other gender more quickly. This same conversation about the role of women in Saudi society should be held in Saudi Arabia, with political and religious leaders engaging the public in a conversation about what the incredible numbers of Saudis returning from abroad is intended to do to Saudi life and how this is positive in terms of global economic standing and adherence to Islam. This conversation should touch on the need for employment for both men and women as well.

Finally, the Saudi government should consider branch offices for the Saudi Cultural Mission to the United States as there seems to be a difficulty with the Cultural Mission keeping up with the numbers of students in the United States, and this problem will only become greater as the numbers in the U.S. are set to grow with the extension of the KASP. As many of the men from this study pointed out, a second SACM on the west

coast or branch offices that expand the number of people available to support the Saudi students in the U.S. would go a long way to improving the experience of the Saudis in the U.S. While this is certainly an expensive proposition, the costs of the inefficiencies currently in place cannot be overstated, and an additional investment in the education of Saudis in the United States is aligned with the stated priorities of the Saudi government.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Further studies should be conducted on the Saudi population in the United States as their unique background and significant differences in culture create increased issues and problems. Many studies tend to focus on “international students” and, while these studies are valuable and add to our understanding of how to educate international populations, they can lead to faulty or inadequate conclusions as every international student population, including the Saudi students, has unique factors that change the chemistry of how those students can best be educated.

A study of Saudi women studying in the United States with the KASP would greatly improve the understanding of Saudi experiences as a whole. A focus on Saudi female students at the graduate level would provide a greater level of understanding of the different groups from Saudi Arabia in the United States. A study of Sunni and Shiite groups from Saudi Arabia and the effects of reverse acculturation while in America would not only aid in understanding the education of Saudi students but also the dynamics of cultural exchange that could prove to be useful in a number of fields.

Longitudinal studies that look at specific Saudi populations as they enter the United States and analyzes their time in the U.S. and upon their return home would

greatly aid in understanding the effects of the KASP on the student and on Saudi culture itself.

Finally, studies of Saudi men, Saudi women, or both populations that focus on the Saudis studying at diverse areas of the United States could yield different results. As this study focused on one campus in the United States, a look at potential differences between Saudis studying in rural versus urban areas, or in areas with a rich history of internationalization versus those new to hosting international students could yield fruitful results.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the perceptions of Saudi men studying in the United States and how those perceptions meet with their expectations, how those perceptions have changed, and how their perceptions on the KASP are aligned with the stated goals of the KASP. Many studies show that there are reliable patterns in the difficulties and experiences of international students studying in the United States, and, in many ways, the Saudi men studying in the United States conform to these patterns. However, the findings from this study also demonstrate that there are some unique challenges Saudi men face while studying in the U.S. and the development and shifts in their perceptions and values are all predicated on some specific and nuanced factors effecting the population.

The considerable difference in cultural and religious practices the Saudi men face when studying in the United States creates an interrelated and entrenched series of issues that serve as impediments to acculturating to the United States. Saudi students' tendency to group together and cloister themselves continues to be an issue and in fact may be

exacerbated by the large numbers of Saudis now studying in America and the significant family ties drawing students to the United States. However, the scholarship program sending so many students to the U.S. is promoting greater understanding between various groups of Saudis studying in the United States, and, while this is not the intention of the Saudi program, it is a positive. Thus, the Saudis' experiences while studying in the KASP are in some ways promoting learning of expected and unexpected types while simultaneously in other ways impeding achievement of the goals of the scholarship program and the students.

Lack of preparation for study in higher education may account for Saudi men's academic difficulties as much as the language barrier. Saudi school systems are not aligned with American higher education in terms of academic rigor or expectations and students are often unprepared for how school functions in the United States or how professors conduct classes.

While the scholarship program may be plagued by inefficiencies and some structural issues, the goals of the program are meeting with some success. Saudi men remain positive about the economic outcomes of participation in the program, but the concerns for job availability in Saudi Arabia have the potential to undermine the program and the eroding faith in the Saudi government presents problems on many levels including garnering support for the scholarship program. The goal of the program to support cultural exchange is a mix in terms of success. On one hand Saudi students are graduating and returning home and intend to continue doing so, and while the students do not feel that they can have an immediate impact back home, they will certainly be bringing back ideas from American culture that will affect Saudi Arabia in the long run.



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APPENDIX A:  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS MAPPED TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**Note: Parenthetical notations refer to research questions. Bracketed items represent potential further lines of questioning.**

- What were your perceptions of the United States before you arrived to attend college? (R1/R2B/R3) [**wealth; religion; gender dynamics; education system**]
- What were your perceptions of U.S higher education before you arrived to attend college? (R1/R2B/R3) [**rigor; pedagogy; social dynamics; ideas to be adopted back home**]
- What were your perceptions of American culture before you arrived to attend college? (R1/R2B/R3) [**campus life; interaction with American students**]
- What were these perceptions based on? (R1/R3)  
**[information exchange; honesty of representations; difficulties due to expectation alignment]**
- Why did you want to pursue a degree in the United States? (R1/R2c/R3)  
**[job opportunities; cultural exposure; freedoms]**
- Why did you decide to participate in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program?  
(R1/R3)  
**[scholarship salary; cultural opportunity; language mastery]**
- What are your plans after you receive your degree? (R1/R3)  
**[continued education; career; return to Saudi; another country]**
- How will the education you received in the United States help you reach your goals? (R1/R2C/R3) [**language advantage; prestige of American schools; cultural understandings; financial gain**]

- How would you describe your relationships with American students?  
(R2A/R2B/R2C/R3)[**biases; misunderstandings; gained insights; future professional connections**]
- What are some of the greatest academic challenges you have faced?  
(R2A/R23/R3)[**pedagogy differences; class discomfort; self conscious; professor misunderstandings; administrator understandings; KASP difficulties**]
- What activities have you participated in that helped or hindered your academic development? (R2A/R2C) [**athletics; arts; cultural exchange; greater understanding of America; confusion; offensive practices**]
- What were the most challenging differences between studying in Saudi Arabia and the U.S.? (R2A/R2C/R3)
- What academic/cultural/social experiences have you found helpful?  
(R2A/R2B/R2C/R3)  
**[religion; exchange of ideas; travel; exposure to others]**
- What academic/cultural/social experiences have you found harmful?  
(R2A/R2B/R2C/R3)  
**[religion; exchange of ideas; travel; exposure to others]**
- How helpful has your university been in meeting your needs as an international student? (R2A/R2C/R3) [**interaction with SACM; impediments due to administration; international student support; language**]
- What would be the most helpful change to the university, KASP, or your personal life that would make you a more successful student? (R2A/R2C/R3)

**[college preparation; colleges' preparation; particular challenges of Middle Eastern students]**

- How have your perceptions of the U.S. been affected while participating in the KASP? (R2A/R2B/R3)

**[changes in understanding; respect for others; changes to common perceptions; ideas to bring home]**

- How have your perceptions of Saudi Arabia been affected while participating in the KASP? (R2A/R2B/R3)

- **[changes in understanding; respect for others; changes to common perceptions; ideas to bring home]**

- How have your personal values changed because of your studies here in the United States? (R2B/R3)

**[views of Americans; criticism of America; criticism of Saudi Arabia; gender dynamics; religion]**

APPENDIX B  
LETTER TO STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Dear Saudi Arabian Student:

My name is Terry Ryan Hall, and I am an Ed.D. student in the College of Educational Leadership at Western Kentucky University. I am conducting research on Saudi Arabian students participating in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program who are currently studying in Kentucky. I am interested in conducting in-depth interviews with Saudi students in order to gain insight into their perspectives on studying in the United States and the value of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). As someone with extensive experience with international students, I strongly believe in the value of gaining this insight as the academic ties between Saudi Arabia and the United States have grown since the creation of KASP. I believe this research will help improve the experience for future Saudi students studying in the United States.

I would like to invite you to be part of this research. In order to participate, you will be asked to participate in a single in-depth interview regarding your perceptions and experiences while studying in the United States. The interview will take place in my office on the campus of Western Kentucky University, and your participation as well as your responses will be kept confidential. Do note, you are not required to participate in this study, and you will suffer no penalty if you choose not to participate. There are no risks to your person should you choose to participate, and there are no inherent benefits for you.

I would greatly appreciate if you would participate in this research. If you agree, please contact me by August 25th via email or telephone to schedule a time to meet to sign the necessary documents and conduct the interview. My office telephone number is (270)745-2721, and my email address is terry.hall@wku.edu.

I appreciate your time, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

T. Ryan Hall



APPENDIX C  
CONSENT FORM



## INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Saudi King Abdullah Scholarship Participant Perceptions of U.S. Study  
Investigator: Terry Ryan Hall, Department of Education Leadership, (270) 320 5548

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

- 1. Nature and Purpose of the Project:** As an increasing number of Saudi students come to the United States for the purpose of study, it is of critical importance to understand the Saudi student's perspective on the challenges and opportunities of studying in the United States. In addition, as the vast majority of Saudi students are studying in the United States as a member of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). A study of student perspectives can help elucidate how effectively aligned students, universities, and the Saudi government are in terms of achieving the stated goals of the KASP.
- 2. Explanation of Procedures:** Students currently studying in the United States as part of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program will be interviewed individually for approximately one to two hours. The interviews will be recorded and the results will be transcribed, coded and analyzed by the researcher to search for patterns and themes in the responses. These patterns and themes will help American universities, international students, and the Saudi government improve the experience of hosting KASP students for all stakeholders involved.
- 3. Discomfort and Risks:** There is nearly no risk, and there is no discomfort involved. Students will be asked to participate in an interview in a comfortable setting and will be asked questions of a personal nature, but participants will be kept confidential.
- 4. Benefits:** This study will help promote understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Saudi students studying in the United States and will allow university officials to provide better services and avoid potential pitfalls when interacting with KASP students.
- 5. Confidentiality:** Participants will be kept confidential throughout the research and will be kept confidential in the written dissertation.

WKU IRB# 14-025  
Approval - 8/13/2013  
End Date - 10/15/2013  
Expedited  
Original - 8/13/2013

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

*You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*I agree to the audio/video recording of the interviews for accuracy purposes.  
(Initial here)\_\_\_\_\_

\*\*I agree to the release of my academic scores to allow in-depth correlation  
and validation to the research. (Initial here)\_\_\_\_\_

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT  
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY  
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator  
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129



WKU IRB# 14-025  
Approval - 8/13/2013  
End Date - 10/15/2013  
Expedited  
Original - 8/13/2013

APPENDIX D  
SUMMARY OUTLINE

**Pattern 1—Saudi men have three dominant impetuses for electing to study in the United States.**

Theme 1.1- Familial ties are the reason Saudi Males elect to study in the U.S.

Theme 1.2- The prestige of American universities is the driving factor for Saudi men to study in the U.S.

Theme 1.3- The policies and directives of KASP is the primary reason Saudi Men study in the U.S.

**Pattern 2—Saudi men are being exposed to ideas and individuals from their own culture in ways they would not in Saudi Arabia.**

Theme 2.1- Saudi men who identify as Sunni and Shiite are exposed to members of the other sect to a high degree and in ways that would not be possible in Saudi Arabia while in the U.S.

Theme 2.2- Saudi men interact with Saudi women while studying in the United States in ways they would not in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 2.3- Ghettoization and reliance on one another is a crucial factor in Saudi men changing perceptions about other groups in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 2.4- Anxiety with the English language forces interaction between Saudi men and is a factor in changed perceptions about other groups in Saudi Arabia.

**Pattern 3—Saudi men tend to compartmentalize their lives in the United States and their lives in Saudi Arabia in a number of ways.**

Theme 3.1- Saudi men studying in the Unites tend to compartmentalize their lives in the United States and their lives in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 3.2- Saudi men tend to mask behaviors from some Saudis in the United States for fear of the information being reported in Saudi Arabia.

Theme 3.3- Saudi men intend to abandon aspects of their American lives and learning upon returning to Saudi Arabia.

**Pattern 4—Saudi men experience academic difficulty with classes because of preparation for study in the United States, particularly in regards to reading and writing skills.**

Theme 4.1- Saudi men report having academic difficulty in the United States due to the level of reading expected of them and their lack of preparation.

Theme 4.2- Saudi men report having academic difficulty in the United States due to the level of writing expected of them and their lack of preparation.

Theme 4.3- Saudi men report that the proficiency of instructors in Saudi Arabia is inadequate to prepare them for the rigor of study in the United States.

Theme 4.4- Saudi men report that the time management of Saudi schools and the culture in general creates an academic challenge.

**Pattern 5—Saudi men participating in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program are generally pleased with the program, though there are concerns about the future of the program and the its management by KASP.**

Theme 5.1- Saudi men are positive about the King Abdullah Scholarship Program and feel that they have been given a unique opportunity.

Theme 5.2- Saudi men have concerns about their job prospects upon returning to Saudi Arabia, and believe some aspect of the program should focus on job opportunities.

Theme 5.3- Saudi men feel that the Saudi Cultural Mission at times is unsatisfactory in managing the King Abdullah Scholarship.

