

## Global Journalist: American higher education “brand” expands in the Gulf

**Abstract:** In the course of this Feb. 14, 2008 episode, Stuart Loory and the panelists do a deep dive into American higher education’s growth as a brand worldwide in response to 9/11. They analyze American style higher education as a commodity and its expansion in Qatar, Egypt, China and India, both in quantity and quality.

### Bios

[Stuart Loory](#) was a long-time reporter and editor for the Chicago Sun-Times and CNN. He was the inaugural Lee Hills Chair in Free Press Studies at the Missouri School of Journalism. He [died in 2015](#).

Tamar Lewin is an American Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and a Columbia Journalism School scholar. She wrote mostly about education, for [The New York Times](#), for over [three decades](#).

Philip G. Altbach is an American scholar, researcher and author. He is a [Professor Emeritus](#) at Boston College’s Center for International Higher Education, being its [founding director](#) in 1995. He has taught at Harvard University.

Richard R. Gross is an American journalist and [media educator](#). He is a founding faculty member and was the administrator of the Bachelor of Communication and Information Sciences Program at American University in Dubai, where he worked from 2007 to 2009.

Rachel Ann Morris is an Australian food blogger and a PR specialist based in Qatar. She first moved to the country [as a journalist](#), as she was appointed the [managing editor](#) of the Doha newspaper The Peninsula.

Abdallah Schleifer is a journalist and the editor-at-large of the [Arab Media & Society](#). He is a Professor Emeritus in journalism and mass communication at [American University in Cairo](#), Egypt. He has covered the Middle East for American media for four decades.

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**Stuart Loory** 00:00

Welcome to, welcome to Global Journalist. I'm Stuart Loory, of the Missouri School of Journalism. United States, public and private organizations have been exporting billions and billions of dollars worth of goods and services to country around the world to make money in the rapidly developing global economy. What started years ago as study abroad programs for American students, mostly in Western Europe, have now developed into huge projects, including building actual campuses abroad to educate local students in their home country or region, rather than bringing them to the United States. You can think of American higher education now as a commodity valued around the world in much the same manner as entertainment, music or computer technology. The value to this country in its global education programs other than money making -- there is value I should say -- American educators abroad help to spread this country's ideals, techniques and scientific method, as well as its belief in democracy in a manner that gets immediate attention. It is one area where the United States can do well for the world and do good for itself at the same time. All of this was detailed in two articles in The New York Times early this week by Tamar Lewin, an education writer who is a guest on today's program. To discuss the globalization of education with her are Dr. Philip Altbach, Professor of higher education and Director of the Center for Higher Education at Boston College. Richard Gross, associate professor for Communication and Information Studies at the American University in Dubai. Rachel Morris, managing editor of the peninsula in Doha, Qatar. And Abdallah Schleifer, Professor Emeritus and senior fellow at the Center for Electronic Journalism of the American University in Cairo, Egypt. Let's start with Tamar Lewin. Certainly Tamar, the growth of American higher education abroad has been going on for years. What made this a major front-page story in The New York Times right now?

**Tamar Lewin** 02:24

I think we are seeing it accelerate in a lot of places. We're seeing a lot of people trying to go to India, we're seeing hundreds of universities having joint programs in China, and mostly because of the money, we're seeing just a fantastic growth of American programs in the Gulf.

**Stuart Loory** 02:45

Tamar, what you say mostly because of the money, are American educational institutions doing this, developing overseas programs because of the money involved?

**Tamar Lewin** 03:00

Partly because of the money involved. But what I think I was trying to suggest was that probably the choice of the Gulf as a location has to do as much with how much support they get there as with it's, it's not the, the logical place to, to spread to. It's not a big enough population. So, there, I would say yeah, it has a lot to do with the money.

**Stuart Loory** 03:24

Yeah, I should say that, Richard Gross, our guest in Dubai at the American University there, is a former PhD student at the Missouri School of Journalism. Richard, why is there interest now in an American style communications and journalism program in Dubai.

**Richard R. Gross** 03:48

Well, it's very interesting. This particular program is a startup this year. This university was started in 1995 and in all that time, like many of the universities that are overseas, particularly in the Gulf region, the standard sort of curricula the majors that were offered tended to be toward business, which is still very large here -- over 60% of our students -- engineering, information, technology and in our case, visual communications and interior design, which were very useful commodities in the local business sense. But now there's been a large expansion in Dubai in particular. Many people read about it. Many people know of it. And there has been a move afoot here in the city, in the city, state of Dubai, to make media far more prominent, both in terms of making it a production site for media, for film, particularly, and also to expand its media, both in television and radio. And it's often been a major that has been desired by students over in other majors, particularly business and marketing, and as with many other majors that are in or as with this major in the arts and humanities, in most American universities, it's become popular very quickly. For example, when the MBA program started here, very popular now, but when they started, it took them three years to achieve a major population of 50 students. We had 50 majors when we opened the door. And so it's instantly popular, instantly desirable. And in part, it's because it offers a window, I think, to opportunities that have long been available to Western students, and that makes it very attractive here.

**Stuart Loory** 05:33

Abdallah Schleifer, you are an old timer in American education overseas. You were the director of the Adnan Center for Professional Electronic Journalism at the American University in Cairo, when I first met you in the late 1980s. Why do you think there is now such a rapidly expanding system of American education abroad? And particularly in the Middle East?

**Abdallah Schleifer** 06:10

Stuart, I think there are a couple of reasons. The first is almost what you described as a political reason is, it has to do with 9-11. After 9-11 a lot of parents and educators were concerned what sort of environment their children would be going into the uniform of going to study inside

America. You know, when this is good news and, and although the wonderful acts of compassion and friendship and support for Muslims who might have been subject to discrimination or even hate literature on the part of the community as a whole, the stories that would appear to play up the negative, a, a Molotov cocktail thrown at a mosque, people insulted women insulted because they're in a gap. So, there was a fear that the en... environment would be unfriendly America, and a lot of parents were looking around for an alternative. Enrollments went up in existing schools, and this was a new school, and the same thing had an effect on the American side, because what happened is, with this attitude, coupled with the really severe tightening of security (poor connection, inaudible) services, a couple (poor connection, inaudible) a couple of weeks could take a year. Suddenly, enrollment of foreign students at American University fell off, and to many universities, that's a significant factor. You know, the enrollment, because American education, as you noted in your comments, is a major commodity, commodity that people shop for generally in the United States. Now that was another incentive for universities to reach out, of course. So, then also you have countries (sic) like Doha , which have tremendous wealth. I mean, Doha is going to be the major producer of natural gas. It's already number two in the next year or two, and across the price of petroleum. So there's, there's a lot of money to invest in this sort of thing. And developing educational centers is one of the things in which the Emirates compete, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, both in the United Arab Emirates, but competitive in a way. And, and Doha, which is not in the UAE, but it's in that same area. So, there's a competitive spirit in the air.

**Stuart Loory** 08:36

Abdallah, when you say Doha, I think you mean Qatar?

**Abdallah Schleifer** 08:40

Yes, exactly. I'm referring to the capital of Qatar.

**Stuart Loory** 08:42

Right.

**Abdallah Schleifer** 08:42

That's right.

**Stuart Loory** 08:43

Okay, keep going. I'm sorry to break in.

**Abdallah Schleifer** 08:47

(Unintelligible) So, these are factors which have contributed simultaneously to the to this new to this phenomena and this new phenomena, you know, in the past, in the past, the, the approach was like American University in Cairo, the American University in Beirut, the American University in (unintelligible), the American University in Dubai is an American University in Kuwait, where universities are established, they may have American administration and a high percentage of American faculty. For instance, at our university, American University Cairo, 50, at least 50% of the faculty, of the faculty have to be American. And then you have other nationalities, including Arab. So, there, there these schools were available, offering American education, and at the same time they were not part of any specific university. Then you had another model coming up about 10-15, years ago, which was a totally Egyptian university, that it would achieve some sort of affiliation with an American university. The affiliation could be nebulous. Those schools did not have the same prestige as say AUC and AUB. But now there's this fascinating third model. Which started in Qatar with as, as, as Tamar has reported at the Education City, this extraordinary thing would bring an entire faculty or school representative of school like Georgetown's representation. It's that's a school at Georgetown for diplomacy and political science...

**Stuart Loory** 10:23

Abdallah, if you don't mind. Let me ask Rachel Morris to come into the discussion and talk about the development of Education City. She's right there in Doha.

**Rachel Ann Morris** 10:38

Hi. With, the thing about to remember about Education City is that it was very important, education is a very important thing for, for, for Qatar, because they're very keen to show that it's not just about that oil and gas wealth. So, essentially, what happened several years ago was as, as a gift, you know, under the auspices of the Emir Sheik, Sheik Hamad, he gifted the land and basically said, under the auspices also of his of his wife, Sheik Moza bint Nasser, Emir said, said, "Look this, we're going to set aside this land for, for Education City", and then went to universities all around the world and invited them to come and set up in, in Doha and make, make Qatar the, the education capital of, of the Gulf. But what's key to remember about this is actually the government paid for the infrastructure. So, essentially, they built it, and all the universities had to do with tell, you know what they wanted. So, it's, it's actually quite an

incredible piece of land or operation they've got going out there. I was just out there yesterday, and just to see the development and the universities that they've got going out there is, is just amazing for, for this country and amazing to the, to the people who live here.

**Stuart Loory** 12:06

Tamar Lewin, you described Education City as a mini Ivy League, and we have their representative campuses of what, five different American universities?

**Tamar Lewin** 12:24

Right. And more coming.

**Stuart Loory** 12:26

Yeah, tell us a little bit about that.

**Tamar Lewin** 12:28

Well, I went to their college fair, which they do every year. And they do it not just in Qatar, but all around. But hundreds and hundreds of families showed up, families from all over. And when I was interviewing, none of them were applying to Qatar University. All of them wanted Education City, which is seen as just better education. One of the young women said "It's a little like we're being colonized, but it's voluntary colonization, because every family wants their kid to have an American education". This is very much seen as the best education in the country, and it's quite competitive to get into. So, I think at Texas A and M, they have, I don't know, something like 1000...

**Rachel Ann Morris** 13:14

Could just say something on that?

**Tamar Lewin** 13:15

Yeah.

**Rachel Ann Morris** 13:15

For, for many years, people Qat... Qatari is that, that is people who live here, citizens of Qatar, as opposed to the very large expatriate population. And this is very much the case in also Dubai, where I worked, prev... previous to, to Qatar, that the local population would traditionally send their children overseas to be educated in places like the UK and the U.S. So, to be able to have these, the these universities here in, in Qatar, is very, very important for them, because the family is number one in, in Arab society. So, to, to have to be able to keep the children here and to keep family unit intact and not send the children off overseas, is very, very important.

**Richard R. Gross** 13:59

It's true. I think, this is Richard Gross. I think that is a very significant point. I have a number of students myself who discuss the decision that they made, and oftentimes they will say that they had considered studying in the UK, particularly, but decided to stay here in Dubai or possibly go to Abu Dhabi or Sharjah because their parents or their family wanted them to stay together, and I think that was very important consideration.

**Tamar Lewin** 14:26

And, and for the young women, particularly the families traditionally not going to send them to the UK or to the United States, so they didn't have quite as many options as they do now.

**Stuart Loory** 14:37

Okay, I, I would like to bring in Professor Philip Altbach to discuss some of the implications of all this, but first I have to tell our listeners that this is Global Journalist, I'm Stuart Loory. Our guests today are Abdallah Schleifer, a senior research fellow at the Adnan Center for Electronic Journalism of the American University in Cairo. Rachel Morris, managing editor of The Peninsula in Doha, Qatar. Tam... Tamar Lewin of The New York Times, in New York. Richard Gross, Associate Professor of Communication and info... Information Studies at the American University in Dubai. And Professor Philip Altbach (sic) of the Boston University Center for Higher Education, or, I should say, Boston College. You may listen to this program again, ask questions or make comments by going to [www.globaljournalist.org](http://www.globaljournalist.org) Professor. Albert (sic), please tell us a little bit if you would, about the implications of all of this for the United States and for global journal or global education generally.

**Philip G. Altbach** 15:56

Well, I think there are a number of, of broad points that one needs to keep in mind as part of the context of all this. One is that American higher education, unlike American foreign policy or some other aspects of, of the United States these days, remains highly popular all around the world and is a considerable attraction. So, the United States in higher education has a very important name brand, and that name brand needs to be carefully guarded, and we need to make sure that we're offering high quality products all around the world. And sometimes I worry that with this very rapid expansion overseas, not just in the Gulf, but as Tamar said, in, in China and increasingly in India and so on, we are not sufficiently worrying about quality control. That's one point.

**Richard R. Gross** 16:49

May I make a comment to that? This is Richard Gross. One of the things I would like to mention about that. In fact, we just had a meeting about that this afternoon here at the American University in Dubai. The comment was about the recruitment that we're experiencing right now. And the comment is that in all departments, what we seem to be getting are better educated, highly qualified faculty applicants than formerly was the case before you might get the person who was curious about living overseas, which still is the case, but now, more often than not, you get highly educated people. I, I myself recently hired someone who was a PhD from UMass Amherst, and we have a couple of Columbia PhDs who are being considered for faculty posts right now. So, I don't think that the quality, certainly as a faculty they'll diminish it all.

**Philip G. Altbach** 17:42

I, I hope that's the case. And you know, there's a lot of the this, this whole mini-industry is growing rapidly, and one wonders if there are going to be enough people of that caliber to go around, but the time will tell, and we'll see. I also worry a little bit, and I'd be interested to hear comments from the other members of the panel here about whether, whether in the Gulf, particularly, there are enough really bright students to maintain the selectiveness over the long run of these top-quality U.S. institutions which are going over there. In other words, whether, whether the local population and a regional population -- because the Gulf can attract really bright students from, for example, South Asia -- will be, will be enough to sustain these, these schools over time. So, get do any of you have a, have thoughts about that?

**Stuart Loory** 18:40

I think Tamar, you had some comments about that in your pieces, didn't you?



**Tamar Lewin** 18:47

Yeah, I think that is a real issue. To some extent Dubai serves as the kind of offshoring for India, and India has a huge population. However, finding the right people who have the SAP scores and have the TOEFL scores and speak good enough English has been a real problem, and particularly in Doha, they do offer an extra year of sort of a bridge program for kids whose, whose qualifications aren't quite enough to get in without that, and that's just for the Qatari students. But those programs are very small, and as they expand I, I think there's a real issue about whether the quality will be up to what the faculty at the home campus are used to, particularly in a few areas. In business, I don't think that's a problem. In some engineering, that's a problem and some of the computer programs so they're having a lot of trouble finding students who are at the level that they want them to be.

**Stuart Loory** 19:51

What are the implications of doing all of the instruction in English? Tamar, you had some material about that in your pieces also.

**Tamar Lewin** 20:02

Yes, in the Doha schools, many of the students had gone to high schools where they learned in English. It's really very variable, as Phil said, you know, some of these schools are of wonderful quality, and some of them really aren't, and some of the faculty come with great credentials, and others don't, but they're, they're not the same as the home faculty. Most of them had no previous connection with that school. Most of them are hired only short term. So you don't really know how it's going to, how it's going to gel. I heard everybody at every school I went to was keeping up with the English just fine.

**Stuart Loory** 20:41

I, Philip Altbach, faculty members from the United States institutions who go abroad, generally do it for a relatively short period of time, but that's beginning to change now. Do you think that is going to improve the, the quality of the education overseas?

**Philip G. Altbach** 21:02

Well, I worry about faculty members from the United States making that relatively longer-term commitment as a commitment to, to working overseas, because it does have implications for their broader academic careers. If a person wants to make his or her career abroad, that's one thing, and they can do that and probably have a pretty good long term job prospects if they want to go and come it's a problem for earning tenure. It's a problem for getting promoted. It's a problem from, for, for being in, in the scientific mainstream, especially if you're in a hard science area where you really need to keep up with, you know, laboratory developments and so on. So, I, I think that's a problematical aspect of, of, of all this. And Tamar mentioned, who are the schools hiring? What's the long-term commitment? Are these folks going to be members of the regular faculty at Cornell or NYU or the other schools which are going overseas? And will again in the law in the medium term and long term, will you be able to recruit enough of your regular faculty to have what is a quote, unquote, "real Cornell", rather than a, an institution that is labeled Cornell, but really consists of, of faculty members from many other places.

**Stuart Loory** 22:32

Abdallah Schleifer, if I can bring you back into the conversation, you talked about the impact of 9-11 on the, the globalization of education. Tamar, in her articles, used the phrase, I think educational imperialism to talk about one of the, the criticisms, and I think it's a criticism that Professor Altbach had actually of the, the possibilities here. What do you think about that?

**Abdallah Schleifer** 23:08

Well, I would have to address it, first of all, in Egypt, which is where I'm most familiar with American education. And while sometimes the American University will serve as a convenient alternative. (Connection problem, inaudible). Overwhelmingly, though, the trend is the other way, the quality, the number of students applying there, you see the academic quality in terms of the grades they have, the backgrounds they come from. I mean, no matter what the politics are, the last three Presidents of Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, of all sent their kids, to AUC. So, and that includes the state, Kamal Abdul NAS, who more or less popularized the whole idea of imperialism and something that we struggled against, I don't think of the fact that people here are very aware of several things... (Connection problem, inaudible).

**Stuart Loory** 24:18

Abdallah, if I can just break in. You are breaking up a little bit. Let me ask Professor Altbach to pick up on this situation.

**Philip G. Altbach** 24:30

Yes, there is no question that the American higher education idea is extremely popular all around the world, and indeed, it's an aspect of what you might call U.S. soft power, which is very valuable for, for us in this country in the United States and for others. So, I think it's, it's, it's there. I agree with Professor Schleifer that other countries, other institutions, and particularly the elites of those countries, really want a U.S. style higher education, both because of the name brand. It's considered to be the best kind of higher education out there, especially our elite higher education. The, the prospect of getting jobs. The prospect, by the way, also -- and I think this is one of the reasons for some of the branch campuses -- the prospect of providing a kind of a pipeline for very bright students from foreign countries to come to the United States for graduate study, once they finish their undergraduate at these at these institutions. What may be slightly problematical -- and this, of course, is for people in the region to, to figure out, not for me or for this panel -- is what are the long term implications of American style higher education, on the curriculum on the mindset, on various aspects of the cultures of, of, of not only the Gulf, but India, China and other parts of the world?

**Stuart Loory** 26:11

You just anticipated my next question. Richard, can you deal with that?

**Richard R. Gross** 26:18

Yes, I certainly can. It's been our observation, and in fact, I, I have the experience that most of the new faculty have here, and that is the students, when we first encounter them, are used to a certain form of education, a pedagogy that is more lecture oriented, give them information, test them on the things that are given without any importance placed on things like critical thinking or ideas. My own particular style always tended toward the Socratic the kind of question-and-answer teaching. And my own experience initially was that students were resistant to that. But, as are most students, I find in most places, the ability of students, the quality of their thinking, is fairly evenly well sprinkled, and once they are encouraged to do so, your better students begin to step forward. So, I, I think that...

**Stuart Loory** 27:14

Richard?

**Richard R. Gross** 27:15

...a little more work on the part of the teacher here (unintelligible)...

**Stuart Loory** 27:18

I'm sorry. I do have to cut you off, Richard. Clearly, the export of higher education is a great success story for this country, but equally clearly, its continued development has to be watched carefully or serious problems can develop. Our guests today have been Dr Philip Altbach, Professor of higher education and Director of the Center for Higher Education at Boston College. Richard Gross, associate professor for Communication and Information Studies at the American University in Dubai. Tamar Lewin of The New York Times and Education reporter in New York. Rachel Morris, managing editor of The Peninsula in Doha, Qatar. And Abdallah Schleifer, Professor Emeritus and senior fellow at the Center for Electronic Journalism of the American University in Cairo. Our director is Pat Akers and our producers, Jared Gasson (ph), Eun Young Kim (ph), Heather Pernah (ph), Hu, Way Wang (ph) and Kathryn Wolf (ph). For all, I'm Stuart Loory. Global Journalist will be back next week.