

# CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN WORKING WITH SAUDI ARABIAN STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITIES

ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS  
(AIEA) ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
NEW ORLEANS, LA, FEBRUARY 17-20, 2013

K. Cyrus Homayounpour, Director  
American & Saudi Arabian Dialogue (ASAD) Education Center  
The George Washington University

## INTRODUCTION:

### SAUDI ARABIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

- Rapid expansion of the sector under a 25-year strategic plan (Afagh = horizons) approved in 2009; will establish 4 universities, 49 technical colleges and 142 vocational centers
- 37 universities (80% public, 20% private) as of mid-2012
- University capacity to reach 1.7 million by 2014 (55% women, 45% men)

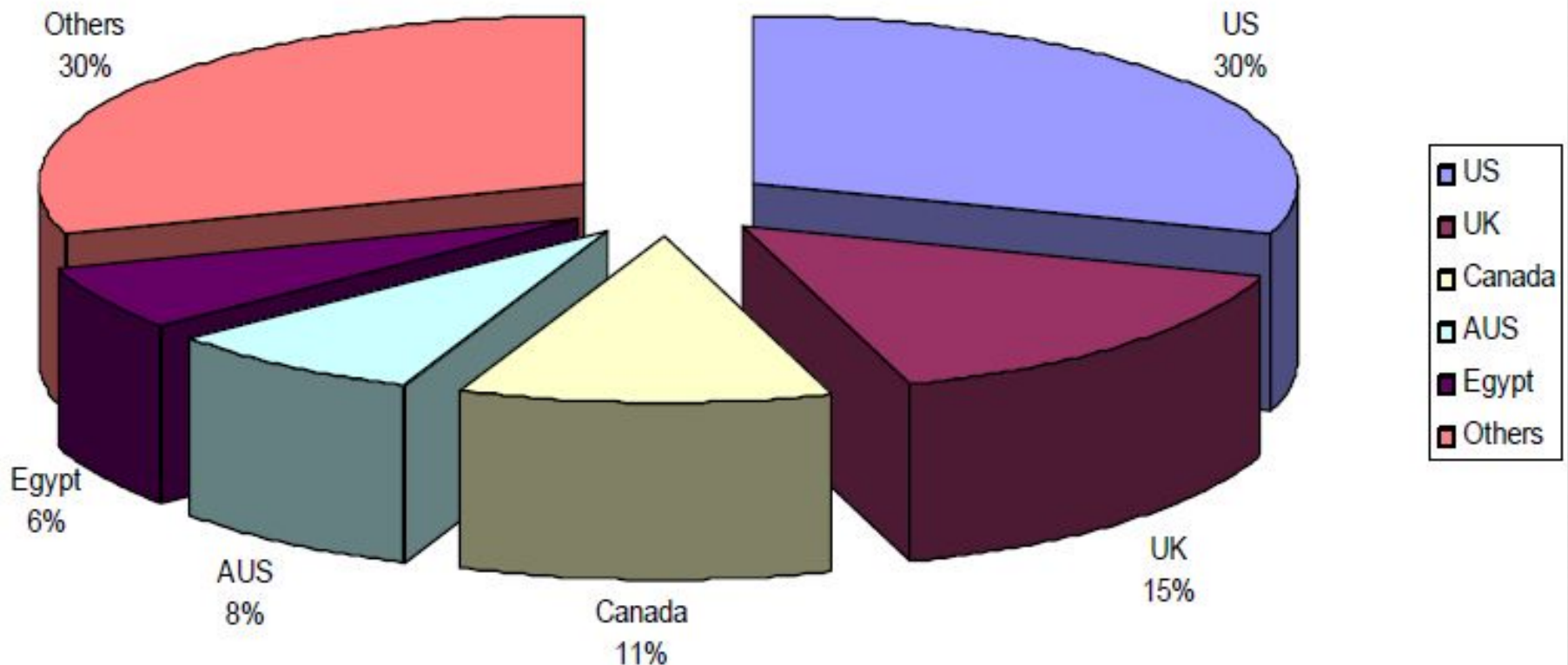
## PART I:

# KING ABDULLAH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (KASP)

- Established in 2005 and extended several times, most recently until 2020
- Annual expenditure of \$2.4 billion
- Difficult to pin down the exact number of students studying under KASP:
  - 145,000 (*The Washington Post*: 11/13/2012)
  - 140,000 (*The Economist*: 6/23/2012)
  - 130,000 (ICEF Monitor: 1/30/2013)
  - 80,000 (*University World News*: 4/24/2012)
- Approx. 20% are women; they have to be accompanied by a male family member/guardian
- U.S. is the most popular destination accounting for 30-40 percent of total
  - 52,000 students as of March 2012 according to Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS); up from 36,500 in March 2011

# King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP)

130,397 Saudi students studying abroad.



# STUDENT BENEFITS UNDER KASP

- Monthly stipend for the student, spouse and children
- Full tuition coverage
- Full medical and dental coverage
- Annual round trip airline ticket(s) for the student and his/her family
- Other benefits and rewards (High GPA rewards, Scientific materials allowance, etc)

## Study Levels and Academic Disciplines

The King Abdullah Scholarship Program provides opportunities for Saudi citizens to pursue their undergraduate and graduate university education abroad in many academic disciplines needed by most government and private sectors. On the undergraduate (Bachelor's degree) level, students are allowed to study medicine, medical sciences, and health sciences. On the graduate level (Master's degree and Ph.D.), the program allows students to study a diversity of fields, including:

- Medicine, dentistry, and the medical fellowship
- Pharmacy
- Nursing
- Medical sciences: radiology, medical laboratories, medical technology, and physical therapy
- Engineering: civil, architectural, electric, mechanical, industrial, chemical, environmental and communications engineering, as well as heavy equipment and machinery
- Computer: computer engineering, computer science, networks, etc.
- Pure sciences: mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology
- Other disciplines: law, accounting, e-commerce, finance, insurance and marketing

Source: Ministry of Higher Education website: [www.mohe.gov.sa/en/default.aspx](http://www.mohe.gov.sa/en/default.aspx)

- Roughly 50% undergraduate
- About 40% in business/management and engineering
- Most students enroll in an intensive English program from 6 to 18 months before they are able to start their degree programs

# ADJUSTMENTS MADE TO KASP (LESSONS LEARNED)

Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) in each country administers KASP for that country. The U.S. SACM has made several adjustments to the program since its inception.

- **Oversaturation Measures**
  - Florida, Texas and Colorado are considered saturated and are no longer on the approved list of states for the program
  - 35% limit for set for any intensive English program: Saudi students should not make up a higher percentage of total students (the case of Southern Utah University); List of approved and oversaturated ESL programs on the SACM website
- **Attendance Requirements**
  - SACM requires 100% attendance and will terminate the scholarship if students fail or have poor attendance; expectation to be notified by language programs and universities in such cases
  - SACM does not provide/approve time off for Ramadan or other Islamic holidays
- **Move to Online**
  - No more orientation sessions for new arrivals; online orientation video on SACM's website
  - Students don't need to contact their SACM advisor for FG's; financial guarantees are requested online
- **Language Requirements**
  - KASP no longer sends students with nil or almost nil language proficiency; such students must complete the beginner level in Saudi Arabia

# PART II

## U.S. – SAUDI ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS: AN INFORMAL SURVEY

- Relatively small number of institution-to-institution linkages: fewer than 50 identified by the U.S. – Saudi Arabian Business Council as of June 2012 ([www.us-sabc.org](http://www.us-sabc.org)); but numbers likely to grow rapidly due to:
  - 25-year Strategic Plan Investments
  - Return of KASP Graduates
  - Increasing Use of English in Saudi Universities (example of KAUST)
- Roughly 36 U.S. and 15 Saudi institutions are involved in these partnerships
- Vast majority of partnerships are in science, engineering and business fields
- 14 U.S. program directors identified and sent a short survey; 10 responded
- Survey focused on the challenges of working with Saudi Arabian partners and on lessons learned



# CHALLENGES OF ESTABLISHING AND MANAGING PARTNERSHIPS WITH SAUDI UNIVERSITIES

- Frequent changes in leadership at Saudi Universities
- Segregation of men and women
- Lack of clarity in lines of communications and responsibilities
- Lack of feedback/response from Saudi counterparts
- Need for regular visits (face-to-face meetings) to resolve issues and keep the program moving forward
- Difference in academic systems and cultures can lead to student confusion and unfulfilled expectations

# STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS (LESSONS LEARNED)

- Extended timelines and allowing at least 6 months for planning
- Strict screening policies for admitting Saudi students and/or conditional admission policies
- Curricula and delivery methods that minimize the need for student and administrative support by the Saudi partner
- Choosing a contact person who has a minimum of familiarity with how U.S. institutions operate (e.g. KAUST's partners have higher levels of satisfaction)
- Having a project manager with a single focus especially for large, multi-year programs
- Partnerships to promote joint research are particularly attractive to Saudi universities and are easier to fund

# CONTACT INFORMATION

Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM)

[www.sacm.org](http://www.sacm.org)

Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education

[www.mohe.gov.sa/en/default.aspx](http://www.mohe.gov.sa/en/default.aspx)

ICEF Monitor (higher ed marketing intelligence)

<http://monitor.icef.com>

World Education Services Report, "Beyond More of the Same: The Top Four Emerging Markets for International Student Recruitment" by Rahul Choudaha

[www.wes.org/ewenr/12oct/feature.htm](http://www.wes.org/ewenr/12oct/feature.htm)

K. Cyrus Homayounpour

[cyrush@gwu.edu](mailto:cyrush@gwu.edu)

Tel. 202-994-1845

<http://cps.gwu.edu/ASADcenter>