

Tawasol

Qatar University

Educational Reform Journal

8th Issue - Spring 2008

Issued by the External Relations Department



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Qatar University Reform Newsletter

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myQU portal – Academia Online

Michael Shulman¹

Through online availability, digital information has become increasingly relied upon as a standard for its ease of access and widespread practicality. Universities in particular have turned to focus on network and web technologies as primary centers for organization and distribution of their academic, reference and promotional materials. QU has made every effort to reinforce itself with the latest and most practical options to facilitate the day-to-day functions of students, faculty and staff. However, as new services are added, there is a continual need to become familiar with new software packages, and to locate or arrange them on the website. Attempts to weave multiple applications together often proved daunting or impractical, and the system did not cater to the range of experiences and needs of its users. As a result of these considerations, Qatar University has invested in a powerful and dynamic online system, the Luminis Platform portal, now branded for the University as *myQU*.

The *myQU* portal is intended to be a single-source solution for all of QU's academic requirements and resources on the web. It is a center for all of the University's existing technologies (academic records and registration, elearning, HR, etc...) and allows for the freedom of expansion with many new ones, including those unique to the software itself. The governing idea of the portal arrangement is to provide a complete and centralized source of information and activity, while ensuring an efficient and individualized user experience.

myQU represents many services and functions of the University, yet it holds first and foremost the principle of personalization and relevance; “*my*”. Users who log into their accounts on *myQU* have at their fingertips all the information they need, without having to sort through superfluous text or links. Rather than restructure for every individual, the portal also enables arrangement and access for specific groups of users, so that it becomes possible for only members of a certain “role” (e.g. faculty), or even students within one department, to view this content. Any personal details collected during registration are a valid means of categorization for these groups.

There are two purposes in excluding other students or roles; firstly, it provides a measure of privacy or security for a time when potentially sensitive information might be released; and second and more commonly, targeted interaction allows people to know that the information present is relevant to them. When all available information is presented at once, a great deal of time is spent searching through it for the desired piece, and causes frustration and lack of productivity. *myQU* assures its users that the information in front of them is exactly what they need to know.

Services provided within the portal structure are highly sophisticated, yet reassuringly simple to approach and use. The principle concept underlying the implementation of these services is the way in which the portal software supports them. Using a generalized model, three distinctions can be made; pre-packaged services inherent to the platform (groups, announcements, RSS), services of other software like Blackboard (elearning) which have access seamlessly incorporated into the portal's channels, and content which is created specifically by the University and implemented into the portal. Each of these combine to offer unique advantages which allow the making of a highly-refined site many times more capable and comfortable to use than a traditional webpage.

¹ Michael Shulman is a Senior Editor at the External Relations Department, QU

Content can be added to *myQU* through a variety of ways, with each of the preceding channel types requiring one of several unique methods. Since pre-packaged and dynamic channels have an inherent connection with IT, the subject of most widespread significance is involvement in static content.

Content – LCMS: Along with the portal platform, Qatar University has invested in a supplementary package titled LCMS, or “Luminis Content Management System”. Much as its name implies, this is a system which will allow specified users across the university to directly add, remove, or modify content to edit departmental web pages or portal channels. With exception of a few key individuals, most university interaction with portal content will be based on this software. The system itself is quite robust, and is capable of any number of basic routines in adding and arranging text, images, and other web essentials. Several strict limitations do currently exist; as a foreign system, LCMS is unable to support Arabic language; direct input of html/code is unavailable, and there is a definite learning curve to interface with the software itself. Ultimately though, LCMS presents itself as the best option for QU among many, in that it does support the widest range of needs, and facilitates participation by less technical users.

Content – Ownership: In order to effectively delegate responsibility over material, “Content Owners” have been defined, giving specific individuals ultimate authority over what may be displayed in their department’s channels or tab. Channel owners may specify a desired presentation for content to a third party, or create it directly themselves with the LCMS system. Tab owners hold responsibility for all channels within a *myQU* tab, as well as the general layout and presentation of the tab itself. In general, content owners are department directors, deans, or other top administrators who will likely apportion work to a set of “content managers”, and issue approvals as needed.

Content – Updating/Supply: Content for *myQU* will become an ever-increasing reservoir, building in proportion to the needs and resources of the University. As information is required, Content Managers will be tasked with providing it in practical and engaging means, while individual contributors (students/ teachers) gather the necessary data and specify any suggested means of presentation. Overall, the system is extremely flexible, and can accommodate virtually any workflow desired.

Although largely complete, *myQU* is still being rapidly developed and refined. Support for Arabic is being given full attention, with several partial methods already available, and true system support for announcements already confirmed. Policies for regulating daily *myQU* affairs and enabling users to provide more input (such as desired channels) are being drafted, and under serious consideration. Finally, long-term implementation issues (training new students, staff, and Content Managers) is being looked into, so that *myQU* remains a simple and highly approachable solution to all university needs.

Post-Secondary Education in Qatar

Cathleen Stasz, Eric R. Eide, and Francisco Martorell, with Louay Constant, Charles A. Goldman, Joy S. Moini, Vazha Nadareishvili, and Hanine Salem, *Post-Secondary Education in Qatar: Employer Demand, Student Choice, and Options for Policy*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-644-QATAR, 2007, pp. xiii-xx, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG644/>. Copyright RAND Corporation. Used with permission.

Summary

Like the government of many other countries, Qatar's government views education as a crucial element in the nation's economic, social, and political development. Qatar has embarked on reforms at all levels of its education system, the goal being to develop the human capital of Qatari nationals and to ensure that Qatar's citizens can contribute fully to society, both economically and socially.

Progress is being made, but Qatar still faces a number of challenges. The education system for kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) does not adequately prepare Qataris for work or post-secondary study, and current reforms to the K–12 system will take time to bear fruit. The Qatari population is small, and the country depends on a large expatriate workforce for both low- and high-skilled labor. Few Qataris have the training or qualifications needed for high-demand, high-skill jobs. Employment practices, which are linked to the social welfare system, provide Qataris, especially men, with secure, well compensated jobs in the government sector: Nearly 77 percent of employed Qataris work in the government or government enterprise sectors. And Qatari women, who are more highly educated than Qatari men, are less likely to pursue career employment and have limited employment opportunities because of cultural tradition.

Qatar has used its wealth to improve post-secondary educational opportunities—for example, by establishing a number of world-class institutions in Doha's Education City. But these efforts to enhance the quality of education have not undergone a broad strategic review. As a result, the extent to which available post-secondary educational offerings can meet Qatar's current and future demands remains uncertain.

Qatar's Supreme Education Council (SEC) asked RAND Education to analyze the current situation and to help articulate priorities for developing post-secondary educational opportunities, either in Qatar or through financed study abroad. The resulting one-year study addressed several questions:

1. In which occupations can Qataris make the greatest contribution to the society and economy, and what education and training are needed to realize these contributions?
2. What measures might encourage more Qataris, especially young men, to pursue post-secondary education?
3. To what extent do existing institutions meet education and training needs? Are new investments required, and if so, where?
4. What are the benefits and costs of establishing local postsecondary institutions at the undergraduate and graduate levels versus sending students abroad for these studies?

Data and Methods

We used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods for the study. To address issues of occupation and skill demand, our research team reviewed secondary data and research from Qatar's Planning Council, formally interviewed key employers in Qatar, and informally discussed relevant issues with other education stakeholders.

The study team also inventoried the post-secondary educational offerings in Qatar, including private training organizations, and obtained data on Qatar's scholarship programs, which support high-achieving students studying in Qatar and abroad.

Many decision-makers in Qatar recognize that the education and employment choices made by Qataris are often not well aligned with Qatar's new national priorities and initiatives, but evidence for why these choices are made has been mostly anecdotal. To shed light on the factors influencing education and employment choices, we used two surveys to gather systematic data that allowed us to generalize: a telephone survey of 99 Qataris who had graduated from secondary school in 1998, and a survey administered to 260 students who were secondary school seniors in 2006. The survey of the 1998 graduates provided a look at the transition to post-secondary education and employment in the eight years following graduation from secondary school; the survey of the 2006 seniors provided information on education and employment aspirations and the factors influencing those aspirations.

Findings

Demands for Education and Employment

Our employer interviews and data from Qatar's Planning Council indicate that demands for men are in the professional, technical, and sales and service occupations and that women are more likely to find employment in clerical jobs and in professional jobs within the government. Overall, the pattern of occupational demand favors individuals with some post-secondary education supplemented with more-specific job training.

Survey data from our study align with Qatar's 2004 census data in indicating that patterns of education and employment among Qataris are somewhat misaligned with demand. This is especially true for males: Qatari men continue to pursue careers in fields other than those in demand—most notably the military and police—and a majority of the male students surveyed aspire to these professions. As for Qatari females, a high proportion are in the teaching profession, about 15 percent of the Qatari women surveyed hold professional jobs, and a high proportion of the female students surveyed aspire to be managers or professionals rather than teachers. Women's opportunities appear to be expanding, but cultural expectations may still work against women's employment in some fields.

The trend for Qatari females to pursue and achieve a postsecondary education in greater proportions than Qatari men will likely continue given that twice as many female students as male students indicated that they plan to attend a university or obtain a postsecondary diploma.

While government policy aims to increase Qataris' employment in the growing private sector, the trend for Qataris to work for or seek work in the government or government enterprises will likely continue.

Employers showed a high demand for people skilled in certain areas, especially English, information and communication technology (ICT), and business. They also value the so-called soft skills, such as a good work attitude and a willingness to learn. By and large, employers indicated dissatisfaction with the skills of secondary school and university graduates; they also pointed out several shortcomings of Qataris compared with expatriate workers with respect to attitudes toward work.

We found that many factors influence education and employment choices and aspirations, and that these factors often vary for males versus females and for older versus younger people. For example, in making post-secondary education and career choices, students are highly influenced by parents and religious beliefs. While our findings about these factors are in no way conclusive, they do provide important insights for policymakers.

Qataris Who Do Not Pursue Post-Secondary Study

Even though economic demands in Qatar favor individuals with postsecondary education and training, a majority of Qataris do not pursue post-secondary studies. What might induce more Qataris, especially Qatari males, to do so? To isolate factors that might underlie the decision to pursue an education at the post-secondary level, we used census data and data from our surveys to compare the characteristics and experiences of Qataris who had decided to pursue a post-secondary education with those of Qataris who had decided not to.

Our survey results highlight several factors involved in this complex decision. These findings are somewhat speculative, however, because the sample sizes in some of the comparisons were small. With this caveat, we can state that the most common reasons for not pursuing a post-secondary education are ineligibility for a scholarship and family responsibilities. Because scholarships are attached to grades in Qatar, what this effectively means is that a student's poor performance in secondary school is a significant barrier to further study. For these individuals, opportunities for remedial education may have appeal and may be of benefit for bringing more students into post-secondary education.

Workers without a post-secondary education viewed additional training in English and, to a lesser extent, basic computer skills as helpful for either advancing in their current job or getting a better job in the future. These views align with the skill demands indicated by employers.

Secondary school seniors who do not plan to pursue postsecondary studies are more likely to want to work in a government ministry and less likely to go on to work in a government-owned or privately owned company than are those who intend to continue their studies. This suggests that the availability of secure, prestigious, and well-paying government jobs that do not require post-secondary schooling may act as a disincentive to pursuing further education, especially for Qatari males. In this case, changes in educational opportunities alone may not be sufficient for altering the patterns of those choosing not to pursue post-secondary studies.

Adequacy of Post-Secondary Education and Training Offerings

Our analysis of the opportunities available in Qatar for postsecondary education in high-demand fields indicated that there are numerous relevant offerings at the certificate/diploma level and undergraduate-degree level. It also indicated that there are very few offerings at the graduate level in any field. However, Qatar's Higher Education Institute offers numerous scholarship opportunities for students of different abilities who want to study abroad, where such offerings are available, and some of these scholarships target preparation for high-demand occupations.

One part of our review identified a large number of organizations in Qatar that provide training, including training in specific skills highly valued in the labor market, such as English and ICT. The opportunities for this type of training thus seem plentiful, although our study did not attempt to assess the quality of the training being offered.

We found that the post-secondary offerings in Qatar provide good coverage of high-demand fields at some levels but that there were notable gaps:

- Opportunities for students who need remedial academic course work are limited.
- High-quality degree choices in Qatar are limited.
- Opportunities to study for a master's degree are limited.

These gaps have different effects on men and women, on recent secondary school graduates and those who have been out of school awhile, and on students considered and not considered highly able.

Options for Post-Secondary Investment and Our Recommendations

For each gap in Qatar's educational offerings, we outlined the conceptual costs and benefits of three post-secondary investment options of interest to the SEC: (1) restructure programs at Qatar University, (2) recruit new foreign institutions to Qatar, and (3) develop new government-sponsored programs of less than four years.

Based on our study, we recommend that Qatari leadership consider the following investments for the three gaps in its post-secondary offerings:

- Gap: Limited opportunities for remedial course work prior to university study
 - Option: Establish a government-sponsored community college

Addressing this gap will benefit remedial and adult students.

- Gap: Limited four-year degree choices for high-achieving students in Qatar beyond the Education City offerings
 - Option: Recruit a top liberal arts college to Education City
 - Option: Develop an honors program at Qatar University

Addressing this gap will benefit high-achieving students.

- Gap: Lack of master's degrees in career-related fields in Qatar
 - Option: Expand offerings of current Education City campuses to include master's degrees in career-related fields
 - Option: Restructure Qatar University programs to begin offering more master's degrees in career-related fields

Addressing this gap will benefit high-achieving students.

We also recommend that a financial-aid program for adults be developed to help finance their post-secondary education and training.

Another recommendation is that Qatari decision-makers not invest in any of these areas without first prioritizing the post-secondary gaps according to their importance to the economy and society. The issues to consider here include the extent to which an option addresses areas of national significance in terms of furthering Qatar's economic and social goals, the number and type of individuals who will benefit from investment in an option, and the trade-offs between study in Qatar and study abroad. For example, providing high-quality graduate training in Qatar will go a long way toward developing future leaders for the country, particularly women.

In addition, we recommend that the SEC conduct further feasibility studies to determine in detail what is involved in investing in the areas of highest priority. It will also be necessary to estimate the demand for post-secondary education related to each option.

We further recommend that a national campaign be conducted to raise awareness of the importance of higher education and the occupational areas that will aid economic development. This campaign should be directed both at parents, because they have much influence over their children's education and career choices, and at adults that might want to resume their schooling, upgrade their English or ICT skills, or further educate themselves as a way to advance in their current job or expand their employment opportunities.

In going forward with these recommendations, it is crucial that a long-term, overarching strategy of investment be developed for postsecondary education in Qatar, one that coordinates the various educational institutions and considers related policy areas, especially those of employment and labor. At present, Qataris continue to pursue traditional occupational pathways in government ministries despite the availability of ample opportunities for post-secondary education and training in high-demand occupations. While the factors that influence people's education and career choices are complex, it is clear that these decisions are to some degree influenced by Qatar's employment policies and customs—for example, the virtual guarantee that Qatari men with no more than a secondary school education will find secure, well-paying, and prestigious jobs in Qatar's government ministries. Another influencing factor may be the limited educational and employment opportunities that exist for women. Any post-secondary investment strategy needs to be framed within a larger context that takes these factors into consideration. Only in this way will policymakers be able to understand the range of incentives likely to be influencing individual choices and thus be able to make the best investments for future generations of Qataris.

Male Student Engagement Taskforce - Survey Summary

Mohana Rajakumar²

Background on Taskforce

The Male Student Engagement Taskforce was a special committee formed for the purpose of studying issues related to Qatari male undergraduate student behavior. The taskforce was formed in December 2007 and was made up of members from the Qatar Foundation, Qatar University, and the College of the North Atlantic-Qatar.

The taskforce was convened to assess appropriate means of information-sharing and comparing day-to-day realities across the three major institutions in Qatar. Concern for the involvement level of male students was made evident as a repeated topic of interest during the second annual Student Affairs Workday held at Qatar University (10/4/2007) and resurfaced in discussions during the Carnegie Mellon-sponsored Symposium on Community Development (10/14/2007). Both events were attended by members of all three educational institutions, as well as invited constituents from across the academic community.

In order to provide more informed programming, activities, and educational experiences to the undergraduate populations in Doha, the step towards understanding male student disengagement was undertaken in March 2008. To undertake this task, a fifteen question survey was written jointly by taskforce members and administered at the three member institutions via online media.

Results

Below is a list of some of the more salient response information. In fall 2008, the goal would be to conduct focus groups with students at CNA-Q, QF, and QU to discuss these questions and related issues in depth.

General observations

- Many of the respondents indicated that their sponsors, not themselves nor their families, picked their major or institution.
- 38% of respondents indicated their fathers had completed a Bachelors degree.
- 36.6% of respondents indicated their mothers had completed a Bachelors degree.
- 91% of respondents live with their parents.
- Athletic teams scored the highest for on-campus activity involvement (38.5%) as well as off campus involvement (43.6%).
- 50% of respondents indicated they would like to pursue a Master's degree in the future and 36.3% a Doctorate degree.

Respondent Information

- Total number of people who began the survey: 123
- Number of students who completed the survey: 94
- Completion rate: 76.4 %
- Nationality of Respondents:
Non-Qatari - 62.4% Qatari- 35.8%

² Student Affairs Consultant at Qatar University and Taskforce Chair.

Taskforce team:

Dr. Khalid Faraj, Director, Student Counseling Center, QU
Mohammad Al Kuwari, Hall Director, Education Division, Qatar Foundation
Ronald Woodman, Counselor, College of the North Atlantic
Khalid Al Juferei, Student Representative, Georgetown University, SFS-Qatar

Respondents' Year of Study

First Year	Second Year
37.5%	24.2%
Third Year	Fourth Year
24.2%	15.0%

Table 1.1**Respondents by Institution**

Institution of Respondents	Number of Actual Respondents	Target Number of Respondents
GU SFS-Q	2	
CMU-Q	20	
VCU-Q	2	
QF Total	24	50
QU	44	50
CNA-Q	35	50
Survey Total	123	150

Table 1.2**Question Number 4**

"Rank how much time you spend on each of the following, using a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the least amount of time and 5 being the most amount of time."

Least Amount of Time (1)		Moderate Amount of Time (3)		Most Amount of Time (5)
Learning course material	4.3%	9.8%	33.7%	27.2%
Managing your time	8.7%	26.1%	28.3%	21.7%
Getting help with school work	23.3%	23.3%	37.8%	11.1%
Making new friends	13.2%	20.9%	23.1%	26.4%
Interacting with faculty	12.1%	23.1%	34.1%	16.5%

Table**2.1**

Appendix 1

Qatar University, Student Affairs Sector
Proposal for the Formation of a Task Force on
“Understanding Male Student Engagement”
December 2007 – May 2008

Purpose:

Nearly every educational institution in Qatar is coping with the same issue: the increased numbers of enrollment from female students and decreasing numbers of enrollment from male students. Once the students themselves are admitted, another phenomenon is taking place: male students are not as active, whether in the academic sense or the co-curricular sense, as their female counterparts. This is particularly true amongst comparisons of Qatari male and female students. With the exception of engineering degree programs, the number of male students is decreasing steadily in comparison with the number of female students. This is likely due to the fact that engineering is seen as a viable profession for male students, as well as the emphasis on entering programs that will assure high status and salaries upon completion. But why these students, even after enrolling, are not participating in the entire university experience is unclear to many practitioners.

This issue was made evident and a repeated topic of interest in the recent Student Affairs Workday held at Qatar University (10/4/2007) and resurfaced in discussions during the Carnegie Mellon sponsored Symposium on Community Development (10/14/2007). Both events were attended by members of all three major higher education institutions in Qatar: QU, QF, and CNA-Q, as well as invited constituents from across the educational community.

It is clear that if educators intend to offer world-class programs and activities to the students at these various institutions, the male population is a segment that may be underserved at the present time. The circulation of popular opinion has become open speculation explaining why male students are not as engaged in university. Some notions include: certain future employment, pursuing opportunities abroad, or genuine disinterest.

In order to provide more informed programming, activities, and educational experiences to the undergraduate populations in Doha, this issue of male student disengagement must be studied. To undertake this task, Qatar University Student Affairs sector proposed the formation of a task force of local educators who will gather, discuss, and involve current active male students, in the examination of how to more effectively connect and engage Qatari male undergraduate students.

Objectives:

The Male Student Engagement taskforce will be a special committee, comprised of members from higher education institutions within Qatar, formed expressly for the purpose of studying issues related to Qatar male undergraduate student behavior.

Initially, the task force will convene to assess appropriate means of information sharing and comparing day to day realities across the three major institutions in Qatar: Qatar Foundation, Qatar University, and College of the North Atlantic-Qatar. As and when deemed appropriate, the task force can invite the participation of other educators from additional institutions, including administrators and teachers from secondary schools.

Secondly, the task force will provide a forum for discussion and idea exchange on the topic of male student engagement, providing a clearing house of resources, programs, and strategies developed in response to this particular issue of engaging male students.

A tertiary step will be suggestions to address specific circumstances as raised by the committee – but this will not be possible without extensive initial study. Ultimately the aim of creating such a group would be to formulate a set of solutions, adaptable to each institution's needs, to draw out more participation from male students.

Benefits:

The main benefits of the task force are clear: information sharing to assess which parts of this issue is systemic and which parts are dependent upon particular circumstances. There are additional benefits to both the higher education philosophy in Qatar as well as to the participants in the discussion. These include:

- Combating stereotypes regarding male students by building bridges with current active students
- Being advocate for change in how the skewed gender numbers affect higher education and the potential future social effects.
- Realizing that most people, including nationals and ex-pats, are unaware that even current stereotypes may be detrimental to enrolled students and potential students.

QU's Biomedical Sciences Program Receives Academic Accreditation

On April 30th, the Health Sciences Department of Qatar University's College of Arts and Sciences celebrated receiving an official 5-year accreditation award for its Biomedical Sciences Program. The accreditation was awarded by the US-based National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS), the premier agency for accreditation of education programs in the clinical laboratory sciences.

At the celebration ceremony held at Ibn-Khaldoon Hall, QU President Prof Sheikha Abdulla Al-Misnad congratulated faculty, students and partners for their commitment to the accreditation process. "It is the first time this accreditation was awarded by NACCLS outside the US", she noted, adding that the process was completed in 2 years which was a record time. Prof Al-Misnad continued: "While this is a great success for the institution, it is also a time for self-reflection and self-evaluation. It is not the end of the process but a first step to QU's goal of excellence". She praised the efforts of Hamad Medical Corporation whom she said was involved and committed to the accreditation process from the outset.

Dr Mohammad Fathy Saoud, President of Qatar Foundation and former QU's Dean of College of Sciences traced the origins of the Biomedical Sciences Program when in 1982, Hamad Medical Corporation requested QU to establish one. "Today the Program's graduates are its best ambassadors, working in clinics and medical institutions all around the country and around the world in such prestigious institutions as Johns Hopkins in the US", Dr Saoud stated.

Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Dr Siham Al-Qaradawi stated that the award is a significant accomplishment for the College of Arts and Sciences and the University as a whole. "It is a true success story. The Program has set the standard for success for other programs at QU to follow", Dr Al-Qaradawi said.

"Throughout the accreditation process, the Biomedical Sciences Program was held to the same standard as all other NACCLS accredited programs", said Accreditation Coordinator Prof Victor Skrinska. "In this achievement, QU has set the stage worldwide in biomedical sciences".

QU President Prof. Al-Misnad was presented with the accreditation award by Dr Cindy Brown, the Program's Distant Program Director who noted that the graduating class of 2008 will be the first from the accredited Program and will be eligible to sit for the professional board exam to become certified biomedical scientists.

In the announcement letter to QU President Prof Al-Misnad, NAACLS President of the Board of Directors Cheryl Caskey stated that the award is based on the initial accreditation review process that included a site visit to the program from 12-14 November 2007. Ms Caskey wrote further that accreditation for the Program will continue until 30 April 2013.

Qatar University established the Biomedical Sciences Program in 1984 which now has more than 300 alumni of various nationalities. There are currently 93 students at various stages in the Program.