

Arab Students' Explanations of Interactions and Study Experiences at a United States University

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Abstract

This study investigated the Arab students' view of their treatment by faculty at the University of Arkansas/USA in the light of the events of September 11. It also investigated difficulties that Arab students face while at an American university that is in a region with no long-standing tradition of interaction with Arab or Moslem populations. The study tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the Arab students' attitudes towards the faculty members at the University of Arkansas?
2. What are the difficulties that the Arab students at the University of Arkansas face in their study at the university and in their life there?

The results indicated that Arab students in fact were satisfied with those assigned to teach and advise them. This was obtained regardless of variables within the population. Men and women, sponsored or non-sponsored, regardless of their country of origin reported that they were confident and pleased with their professors at least in regards to their own treatment as students.

The findings were encouraging. They reported those difficulties and "problems" that one would expect with students from a different language group, culture and religious background. Language presented barriers to academic success, and there were difficulties in adjusting to a different culture.

Introduction

Much has been said following the events of September 11, 2001 about relationships or the need for better ones between and among Arabs and Americans; Moslems, Christians, and Jews, and Middle Eastern nations and Western nations. Much is being said about the need for international understanding in a world that is rapidly shrinking. In addition, a topic of debate in almost every sector of policy planning is that of the English language proliferation. There have developed extreme positions on each side of these debates with each position passionately supported by its proponents.

Hotly debated is the question of “What should be the role of English worldwide and within nations¹?” Some call for an end to the spread of English and argue that a better worldview might be fostered if we all became multilingual (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Complicating the issue is the fact that English language learners (ELLs) of the debate are often ambivalent about their (and their institutions’ or countries’) need for English.² Most authorities, at least at the level of federal or *nation-state* (Fishman’s term), believe that knowledge of the English language is critical for the economic health of their economies.

English has become the “ex-officio” language of international business; many nations (and their language planners) believe that to participate in international business their citizens must have access to some variety of English. On the other hand, detractors say that the English language impetus gives western nations such as Britain, Canada and the United States of America undue advantage. Some hold that we should all learn a second language but not necessarily English. Some go so far as to assert that the proliferation of English in non-English states is a type of colonialism that results in language genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). With such a belief people who move to live in a foreign country may not desire to learn the language of the majority unless there is a very good motivator (Cummins, 1989; Cummins & Danesi, 1990;

¹ Within nations, some questions raised are “Should all citizens be required to speak the dominant language?” and “Should it be the ‘only’ language?”

² For complete discussion of this topic see Tollefson, 2000.

Skehan, 1991). Moreover, the majority or dominant group may not feel the need to learn the minority's language, especially if it is characterized as a low status language (Abu-Rabbia, 1995). As a result, attitudes towards the second language and its native speakers have been studied over the last decades (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; McGroarty, 1996). Moreover, gender differences in attitudes towards second language learning have been witnessed (Loulidi, 1990; Bacon & Finneman, 1992, Ellis, 1994; and Clark & Trafford, 1995, 996). Swain and Miccoli (1994) found that learners of the second language (L2) attitudes change throughout their study, their limited English ability, the nature of classroom tasks, and their cultural background.

Societies and especially those who are involved with policy or diplomacy need to understand the position of ELLs in the USA and on the United States college campuses to better understand each other and the world. If we are to truly understand the difficult relationships that have developed between Moslem nations and the US, attention must be paid to giving voice and agency to all participants to create a dialogue in which all parties are heard and "powerful". This may be the only way "to stem the phenomenon of negativity to one more appropriate and hopeful" (Lincoln, 2001: 20).

Many who are trying to understand the hostilities among factions of people in the Middle East believe that any hope of lasting peace among those nations, and especially since 9/11, can only be occasioned when better understanding of cogent issues is brought to the table by both sides. What is a certainty in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 is that Americans to date have not understood the desperation that can create a Bin Laden or any of a plethora of people willing to kill themselves and others to be "heard."

These issues are part of what make the role of universities such as the University of Arkansas so crucial. Intellectuals and scholars from all parts of the discussion must come together in the academy to learn from each other in nonviolent ways. American scholars and students in the academic community must begin to recognize the benefit to both sides of the arguments that can result from an international scholarly presence. Middle Eastern students attend classes throughout the university

interacting every day with the greater academic community. In addition, they live in these greater communities; their children go to local schools, participating in the routines of community life. Those benefits are at least two-fold. First, Americans come to know these visitors as people with families, similar hopes and dreams for their children much the same as anyone else (first and foremost usually is a desire for a peaceful future). Secondly, these guests in the US go home as “culture-teachers.” They tell their friends, families, academic institutions and greater communities about Americans as “real” people with faces, names and hopes for a better future for their children.

In the fall of 2001, a Jordanian scholar came to the University of Arkansas as a graduate student in the University’s King Fahd Middle Eastern Center. He and an American professor began a dialogue concerning attitudes and issues that might interfere with understanding among these concerned nations. They also began to raise questions as to how to better achieve understanding across cultures, ethnicities and language groups.³ This dialogue was intensified by the tragedy of September 11. The two academics created research surveys concerning issues related to this topic. Two of the overarching questions that motivated this research, are (in the aftermath of 9/11): How do Arabs studying in an American university describe their interactions with Americans at this university? And how do Arabs express their feelings about their perceived need for English and a study abroad experience in the US?

This paper addresses the findings of a survey developed to investigate the perceptions of Arab students at this university towards the academic community where they have located. The researchers hope that the analysis of the data will increase understanding of cross-cultural issues both at micro- and macro-levels.

³ We will from here forward use the more generic terms Arab/American to distinguish the participants in these studies. It is important to remember, however, that the “American” designation really includes many other nation-states (particularly in the Iraqi conflict, we must include Britain. Additionally, Arab can apply to the ethnic roots of many people in many cultures: The Gulf States, northern Africa and the “Mediterranean” countries.)

Most of us agree that attitudes affect people's behavior and performance. For students' attitudes toward faculty play vital roles in their educational and academic progress (Baniabdelrahman, 2003). One of the main factors that plays a significant role in students' academic progress and their achievement is how they perceive their relationships with faculty members.

Arab students (as many people from around the globe) often hope to come to the US to further their studies. Many believe that a high quality of education at the university level in the US and the democratic atmosphere in which its citizens participate, allow students to study and succeed. The tragedy of September 11, though, has had different effects on different people. Some Arab students at US universities could now be studying under pressure and the fear of being forced to leave the country, for instance, or for other reasons. Students from many Arab countries have recently been required to appear for interviews at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Some who go home during their school breaks report to us that they have faced difficulties in returning to the university, perhaps because of changing US procedures in issuing visas, or possibly because their parents refuse to allow them to return because of concerns about changing relationships between the US and the Arab world.⁴ They could create for them new kinds of difficulties in their studies and their life in the US. It is possible that faculty members are also feeling tension and concern about these international students. Those tensions may be concern for the well being of Arab students. Whatever the focus of the tensions or whether there are no tensions, perceptions by either group can create nuances that are troubling and confusing. These circumstances could affect the Arab students' attitudes towards their study in the US and towards faculty members. This study then investigated Arab students' attitudes towards and their perceptions of faculty members' attitudes toward Arab students at the University of Arkansas since the events of September 11, 2001.

⁴ These impressions are based on anecdotal evidence and the Arab researcher's involvement with Arab students on campus.

Purpose of the study

This study investigated attitudes of both faculty and the Arab students of their treatment by faculty at the University of Arkansas. It also investigated difficulties that Arab students face while at an American university that is in a region with no long-standing tradition of interaction with Arab or Moslem populations.

Questions motivating the study

The study tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the Arab students' attitudes towards the faculty members at the University of Arkansas?
2. What are the difficulties that the Arab students at the University of Arkansas face in their study at the university and in their life here?
3. Are there differences in the Arab students' perceptions of the university life and faculty members at the university due to:
 - A). gender;
 - B). level of study (graduate or undergraduate);
 - C). college of study (Education, Business, etc.);
 - D). whether they have an assistantship from the university;
 - E). whether they are sponsored by their home countries; and
 - F). country of origin?
4. Are there differences in the student-identified "problems" at the University of Arkansas due to the independent variables: A). gender; B). level of study (graduate or undergraduate); C). their university college; D). whether they have assistantship from the university; E). whether they are sponsored from their countries; and F). countries of origin?

Variables of the Study

The dependent variable of the study was students' attitudes towards faculty members (and their perceptions of faculty attitudes toward them) at the University of Arkansas. The independent variables were the students' gender (male or female), level of study (graduate or undergraduate), colleges (education, Fulbright, science, engineering, business, intensive English language program, and art), whether they had been awarded assistantships or not, whether they were sponsored, and their countries (Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Qatar, UAE, and Oman).

Setting

The setting is a land grant university in northwest Arkansas. The university has a student population of approximately 15,000, about 1000 of whom are international. There is industry and a healthy economy in what is a beautiful, resort setting. Although the region is rapidly growing, but to date has escaped many of the urban (inner-city) problems. Immigrants to the region often say it is safer and more peaceful than large urban east and west coast cities.

Historically, it has been a working class region of the state, but in the last 40 years, since Sam Walton built Wal-Mart headquarters in that region it has begun to change. Major trucking companies have also located there, as have several large companies in the poultry industry. It is now the fastest growing and wealthiest region in Arkansas. The current economic recession of the US does not seem to have been felt there.

Most studies have involved urban settings and regions of the US with a history and tradition of educating international students, places such as California, New York, and Florida. As ports of entry to the US and large urban centers, those states on the perimeter of the US naturally attract visiting scholars and international students. They beg the question, however, of how internationals in universities in regions less studied might describe their experiences. It is possible that less urban or more mid-west, mid-south educational settings affect language minority students differently than do those educational settings more commonly chosen. Another concern is that the language majority population and those who plan for their education also do not get a true overview of another "kind" of typical American university setting (Lincoln, 2001).

Population and sample of the study

The population in the study consisted of approximately 100 Arab students at the University of Arkansas. The sample itself consisted of 72 Arab students who were enrolled in the university during the academic year 2002/2003. They were distributed over seven colleges and from seven Arab countries. There were students from these colleges and programs: 14 from education, 16 from the school of arts and sciences, 15 from science, 11 from engineering, 5 from business, 10 from an intensive English language program, and 1 from art. There were 59 male students and 13 female students. There were 25 students from Jordan, 5 from

Palestine, 33 from Saudi Arabia, 3 from Syria, 4 from Qatar, 1 from UAE, and 1 from Oman. There were 58 graduate students and 14 undergraduates. 26 students had assistantships and 46 did not. There were also 38 students sponsored in some way by their home countries and 34 who were not sponsored.

Instrument of the Study

The researchers developed a questionnaire of two subscales and 29 items. The first subscale consisted of 20 items and dealt with the Arab students' attitudes towards the faculty members at the University of Arkansas. The second subscale (9 items) dealt with students' problems at the same university (See Appendix A). All the items were based on a 5-point "Likert-type" scale. After developing the questionnaire, approval from the institutional review board (IRB) was obtained. A letter and consent form were developed and distributed with the questionnaire to participants of the study during the fall semester of the academic year 2002/2003. In these documents the researchers explained the purpose of the study to the participants. The researchers assured them that their names would remain anonymous if they responded by e-mail. Those who responded either by mail or by hand delivery were told not to write their names or include any identifying information. All direct contact (hand delivered responses) was with the Arab researcher, and the email and mail questionnaires were also sent to him as well. The questionnaire was distributed directly to the participants at a meeting of the Association of Arab Students. Then a week later they were e-mailed to the participants for a second time. The researchers repeated the e-mail once more to encourage participation in the study. The researchers received 72 responses, which is 72 percent of the population surveyed. The questionnaire was validated by three professors of curriculum and instruction, one professor of teaching English as a second language, three Arab graduate students of curriculum and instruction and three EFL teachers.

Results

Results relating to the first question: What are the Arab students' attitudes towards the faculty members at the University of Arkansas?

Table 1 below represents the statistical analysis of the subjects' attitudes towards their faculty members.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the attitudes of Arab students in the USA towards faculty members at the University of Arkansas

No.	Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Acceptable	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
		N %	N %	N %	N %	N %		
1	Faculty members respect the diversity of students in their courses.	2 2.78%	6 8.33%	12 16.67%	39 54.17%	13 18.06%	3.76	.94
2	I have good relationships with faculty members in my program.	0 0.00%	3 4.17%	3 4.17%	39 54.17%	27 37.17%	4.25	.73
3	Faculty members want all their students to be Americans.	2 2.78%	0 0.00%	17 23.61%	46 63.89%	7 9.72%	3.78	.74
4	Faculty members do not like Arab students.	2 2.78%	6 8.33%	22 30.56%	27 37.50%	15 20.83%	3.65	1.00
5	I have no problems with my faculty members.	3 4.17%	2 2.78%	6 8.33%	36 50.00%	25 34.72%	4.08	.96
6	Faculty members respect differences among students' perspectives.	0 0.00%	2 2.78%	14 19.44%	41 56.94%	15 20.83%	3.96	.72
7	Faculty members pay attention to students' needs.	1 1.39%	7 9.72%	10 13.89%	37 51.39%	17 23.61%	3.86	.94
8	Teaching at the university is too traditional/conservative.	2 2.78%	10 13.89%	21 29.17%	30 41.67%	9 12.50%	3.47	.98
9	Faculty members give enough attention to research.	1 1.39%	4 5.56%	21 29.17%	41 56.94%	5 6.94%	3.63	.76
10	Faculty members understand developments in my field of study.	0 0.00%	4 5.56%	10 13.89%	50 69.44%	8 11.11%	3.86	.68
11	Faculty members at the university are qualified in their subject areas.	1 1.39%	6 8.33%	9 12.50%	46 63.89%	10 13.89%	3.81	.83
12	Faculty members seemed nervous about Arab students after September 11.	7 9.72%	12 16.67%	21 29.17%	20 27.78%	13 16.67%	3.25	1.21

		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total
	Faculty members are not qualified to teach Arab students.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
14	Most of the members of faculty members are not qualified to teach Arab students in their fields.	23	31.54%	32	44.44%	31	42.33%	31	42.33%	30	41.33%	28	38	138
15	Faculty members are not qualified to teach Arab students in their fields.	5	6.94%	12	16.67%	15	20.27%	16	21.33%	16	21.33%	15	20	85
16	Faculty members are not qualified to teach Arab students in their fields because I am an Arab student.	7	9.72%	16	21.33%	16	21.33%	16	21.33%	16	21.33%	16	20	93
17	All students at the university are treated equally.	9	12.50%	25	34.72%	26	35.11%	26	35.11%	26	35.11%	26	34	165
18	Faculty members are not qualified to teach Arab students.	1	1.33%	19	26.39%	20	27.03%	20	27.03%	18	24.00%	18	24	81
19	Faculty members are not qualified to teach Arab students.	1	1.33%	15	20.27%	21	28.27%	21	28.27%	12	16.00%	12	16	74
20	Faculty members are not qualified to teach Arab students.	1	1.33%	15	20.27%	20	27.03%	20	27.03%	18	24.00%	18	24	85
	Total													46

The results demonstrate that the Arab students' attitudes towards the faculty members in general were positive ones. The overall mean of their responses was 3.67, which is within the range of positive attitudes. Results reveal that Arab students at the University of Arkansas had good relations with their faculty and their faculty members respect them.

Results related to question Two: What are the difficulties that the Arab students at the University of Arkansas face in their study at the university and in their life there? Table 2 below presents the statistical analysis of the problems that Arab students face at the University of Arkansas.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the Arab students' stated problems at the University of Arkansas

NO.	Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Acceptable		Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
		N %	N %	N %	%	N %	N %		
1	The main barrier to successful study here is English use.	7 9.72%	13 18.06%	21 29.17%		25 34.72%	6 8.33%	3.14	1.11
2	The major barrier to successful study here are cultural differences.	6 8.33%	18 25.00%	18 25.00%		28 38.89%	2 2.78%	3.03	1.05
3	The American accent is a difficulty for me.	6 8.33%	24 33.33%	18 25.00%		20 27.78%	4 5.56%	2.89	1.08
4	Faculty members do not use standard English in their classes.	3 4.17%	26 36.11%	15 20.83%		28 38.89%	0 0.00%	2.94	.96
5	It is difficult to adjust to American culture.	5 6.94%	31 43.06%	14 19.44%		20 27.78%	2 2.78%	2.76	1.03

6	My score on the TOEFL was a major problem for me.	12 16.67%	19 26.39%	11 15.28%	21 29.17%	9 12.50%	2.94	1.32
7	Learning English for academic purposes is difficult for me.	11 15.28%	28 38.89%	9 12.50%	24 33.33%	0 0.00%	2.64	1.10
8	The teaching style at the university does not meet my needs.	12 16.67%	43 59.72%	11 15.28%	6 8.33%	0 0.00%	2.15	.80
9	My program of study is not clear to me.	14 19.44%	43 59.72%	4 5.56%	9 12.50%	2 2.78%	2.19	.99
Total								.47

These results show that Arab students do experience some difficulties in their studies and life in the U of A university to include language difficulties, cultural differences, and language accents. Arab students indicated that the teaching style at the university meets their needs; that is they say the teaching style at the university suits their own learning styles; and they also indicate that their programs of study are clear to them.

2. Results related to question three: *Are there differences in the Arab students' perceptions of the university life and faculty members at the university due to: gender; level of study (graduate or undergraduate); college of study (Education, Business, etc.); whether they have an assistantship from the university; whether they are sponsored by their home countries; and country of origin?*

The following tables present the statistical analysis and the distribution of the sample according to the variables of the study.

A): *Descriptive statistics of the sample responses according to gender*

Table 3 presents findings regarding Arab students' attitudes towards faculty members.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the sample responses according to gender

Subscales	Male			Female		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Faculty	59	3.62	.44	13	3.93	.50
problems	59	2.77	.52	13	2.63	.50

The responses of both females and males concerning their problems reveal very similar findings. The mean for the 59 male students was 3.62 while the mean of the 13 female students was 3.93. This would seem to indicate that although both male and female students had positive attitudes towards faculty, female students demonstrated stronger positive attitudes than their male counterparts.

B). *Responses of Arab students by country of origin*

Table 4 presents the sample responses by country

Table 4: The distribution of the sample of the study and their responses by countries of origin

Subscale	Jordan			Palestine			Saudi Arabia		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Faculty	25	3.64	.44	5	3.56	.58	33	3.67	.49
problems	25	2.73	.51	5	2.33	.66	33	2.86	.51

Subscales	Syria 4			Qatar 6			UAE 7			Oman 8		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Faculty	3	4.07	.28	4	3.84	.38	1	3.35	...	1	3.70
problems	3	2.48	.23	4	2.61	.42	1	3.22	...	1	2.33	...

This table demonstrates that Arab students' attitudes towards faculty were positive regardless of country of origin. Their means ranged

between 3.35 and 4.07. On the items concerning problems, the means ranged between 2.33 and 3.22.

C). Responses of Arab students according to their levels of study

Table 5 presents the mean and standard deviation of the sample responses according to their level of study

Table 5: The distribution of the sample and their responses according to their levels of study

Subscales	Graduate			Undergraduate		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Faculty	58	3.71	.45	14	3.53	.50
Problems	58	2.74	.50	14	2.78	.57

Table 5 reveals a mean of 3.71 from the 58 graduate students surveyed; and a mean of 3.53 from the 14 undergraduate students. Both graduate and undergraduate students expressed positive attitudes towards faculty. In the item concerning the problems that Arab students face in their study and life in the US, the table presents the mean of 2.74 by the graduate students and 2.78 from by undergraduates. The two means are similar which may indicate that both graduate and undergraduate Arab students face similar problems when studying at the university.

D). Responses of Arab students according to their colleges and programs

Table 6 below presents the mean and standard deviation of the sample responses according to their colleges and programs

Table 6: Distribution of the sample and their responses according to their colleges and programs

Subscales	Education			Fulbright			Science		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Faculty	14	3.85	.45	16	3.66	.41	15	3.65	.35
Problems	14	3.05	.41	16	2.71	.51	15	2.64	.37

Subscales	Engineering			Business			Intensive English language program			Art		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Faculty	11	3.54	.56	5	3.95	.60	10	3.47	.49	1	3.90	...
Problems	11	2.59	.61	5	2.42	.68	10	2.96	.44	1	1.89	...

These results reveal that Arab students expressed positive attitudes towards their faculty regardless their college or program. Their means ranged between 3.47 and 3.95

E). *Responses of Arab students depending on whether they have assistantships*

Table 7 presents the mean and standard deviation of the sample responses depending on whether they have assistantship or not.

Table 7: Assistantship or no assistantship

Subscales	Have assistantship			No assistantship		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Faculty	26	3.68	.43	46	3.67	.48
Problems	26	2.63	.55	46	2.81	.49

Both those who had assistantships and those who did not expressed positive attitudes towards faculty.

F). *Responses of Arab students whether sponsored or not*

Table 8 presents the mean and standard deviation of the sample responses whether sponsored or not

Table 8: Sponsored or non-sponsored

Subscales	Sponsored			Not Sponsored		
	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD
Faculty	38	3.68	.53	34	3.66	.37
Problems	38	2.81	.49	34	2.67	.54

The results describe the responses of 38 sponsored students and 34 non-sponsored students. The results of the attitudes towards the faculty

members were positive ones while concerning problems they encountered, the mean for sponsored students was higher than the mean of the non-sponsored ones.

G) Results of ANOVA TEST

Table 9 below presents the result of the analysis of variance of the subjects' attitudes towards the faculty

Table 9: Results of ANOVA test of variance of the subjects' attitudes towards the faculty

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F value	Pr
Sex	1	0.80	0.80	3.80	0.0564
Level	1	0.02	0.02	0.10	0.7555
Colleges	6	1.41	0.24	1.12	0.3602
Assistant	1	0.13	0.13	0.60	0.4428
Sponsored	1	0.001	0.001	0.00	0.9492
Country	6	0.81	0.14	0.65	0.6927
Within groups	5	11.52	0.21		
Total	71	15.03			

** Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

Although these results demonstrate no statistically significant differences among Arab students' responses towards faculty due to any of the independent variables at $\alpha = 0.05$, the results indicate that there were slight differences due to student gender and that while the difference was not significant, the difference was very close to being a significant one ((F1, 55) = 3.80) P= 0.056.

Results related to question four: *Are there significant differences in the Arab students' problems in their study in the University of Arkansas due to gender; level of study (graduate or undergraduate); college they*

study in (Education, Business, etc.); whether they have an assistantship from the university; whether they are sponsored by their home countries; and country of origin?

Table 10 presents the results of the analysis of variance of the subjects' problems at the University of Arkansas.

Table 10: Results of ANOVA test of variance of the subjects' problems at the University of Arkansas.

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F value	Pr
Sex	1	0.30	0.30	0.12	0.7310
Level	1	0.09	0.09	0.37	0.5463
Colleges	6	2.94	0.49	2.01	0.0800
Assistant	1	0.37	0.37	1.50	0.2259
Sponsored	1	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.8245
Country	6	1.57	0.26	1.07	0.3923
Within groups	55	13.43	0.24		
Total	71	18.83			

** Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

This study shows that there were no statistically significant differences among the problems Arab students face in their study at the University of Arkansas and their life in the US due to any of the independent variables. This might be due to the fact that all those students have nearly the same background and share the similar cultures. This could cause them to describe their perceived barriers to successful study in similar ways.

Discussion of Results

The students' responses indicate that Arab students in fact are satisfied with those assigned to teach and advise them. Men and women, sponsored or non-sponsored, regardless of their country of origin reported that they were confident and pleased with their professors at least in regards to their own treatment as students.

The findings are encouraging. They report those difficulties and “problems” that one would expect with students from a different language group, culture and religious background. Language presented barriers to academic success, and there were difficulties in adjusting to a different culture. This adjustment may be in part due to differences in university systems from their home institutions or differing academic expectations. These are then in addition to the obvious differences in cultural traditions and values. There may be obvious disparity in the economic and social lives they encounter here as well. For some the members of the US university may be economically more affluent than the economic systems they left. Others come from some of the wealthiest nations in the world. Regardless of variables, and the other obvious obstacles to study, Arab students describe positive overall educational experiences.

There are several implications for this university and other similar ones. Overall, the results of the study regarding Arab students' attitudes towards faculty at the University of Arkansas were positive. Students reported that they were satisfied with their faculty members. There are many possible reasons for this. The most obvious is that Arab students in mid-south universities or at least at this one are at ease with this learning context.

The setting itself may be relevant in other ways. Immigrants and migrants to the region describe it as peaceful. They believed crime and violence to be less prevalent than other more common destinations for study, Los Angeles and New York, for instance (Lincoln, 2001).

It is important to note that at the time of this study, the nation was in an economic recession. However, this research setting was not. An international presence in a region is usually less threatening when the

economic status of that region is stable, in this case actually prospering. Community members possibly see these visitors as non-threatening to their own economic well-being. The research demonstrates that a university such as this one in “middle America” has positive contributions to offer to the local communities in exposure to a population little known. Additionally, the university also offers a good learning environment for these international scholars who then return to their home countries to report positive study abroad experiences.

These results may simply mean that the events of September 11 have not affected their “world-view” of faculty concerning Arabs, and therefore the ways in which faculty interact with Arab students. This could be because of the region’s geographic isolation from those regions most directly affected by the acts of terrorism. The results may also indicate that faculty at this university have for some reason been able to understand or empathize with the circumstances of the Arab students after the tragedy.

There is one advantage that may not have been intended but may be no less important in the future prosperity of both the US community and the Arab ones. Americans are “world-famous” as monolinguals. The anecdotes of “the ugly American” abound. This university’s seeming ability to attract and suit Arabs who wish to study in the US creates a setting of reciprocal benefit. Arab students report feeling secure in living in this community and often to bring their entire families for periods of time in the US. The hope is that they will take back that satisfactory experience and report on it in their home communities. A factor no less beneficial is their interactions with local monolingual, monocultural communities. Americans encounter “real people” with similar ambitions and dreams for themselves and their families. Their professors are perceived as informed, well intentioned, and even-handed. It is more than possible that these international learning communities can contribute to a better understanding of two somewhat disparate groups.

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Appendix A

University of Arkansas

A Questionnaire for Arab Students at the University of Arkansas

Return to Abdallah Bani Abdelrahman or

Felicia Lincoln

203 Graduate Education Building

University of Arkansas

Fayetteville, AR 72701

Dear student at the University of Arkansas:

This study investigates Arab students' attitudes at the University of Arkansas towards studying in the United States. Furthermore, it aims at investigating the main difficulties they face in their study. Your participation in answering the items of this questionnaire is voluntary, but I appreciate your help. Your participation will help in understanding the situation of Arab students at an American university. All participants are anonymous. If you return your survey by email, your responses will be printed, your address and identifying information will be cut off the top and your email will be deleted from the email program. You may mail it to us and if you do, you need not put your name or any other information on the form. You may answer all the items, part of them or none of them. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences --- no penalty to you.

By answering this questionnaire and returning it to us, you are giving your consent to participating in this study.

Please return your surveys to the address above. Thank you for your help.

You may answer all the items, part of them or none of them. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences --- no penalty to you.

By answering this questionnaire and returning it to us, you are giving your consent to participating in this study.

I. Part One: Personal information

For the following questionnaire items, put an (X) in front of the response that best

describes you.

1. Gender () Male () Female
2. What level of study you have completed:
 () Undergraduate () Graduate
3. Your college:
 () Education () Fulbright
 () Science () Engineering
 () Law () Business
 () Others, mention _____
4. What is your area of specialty or major? -

5. Do you have an assistantship?
 () Yes () No
5. Are you sponsored from your country?
 () Yes () No
6. Nationality:
7. How long have you been in USA? (years, months)
8. How long do you tentatively plan to stay in USA?

Part Two

Please put an (X) under the column that best fits you. 1 means strongly disagree, 2 means disagree, 3 means neutral, 4 means agree, and 5 means strongly agree.

1. Faculty Members

1-----5

#	Items	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Dis agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
1	Faculty members respect the diversity of students in their courses.					
2	I have good relationships with faculty members in my program..					
3	Faculty members want all their students to be Americans.					
4	Faculty members do not like Arab students.					
5	I have no problems with my faculty members.					
6	Faculty members respect differences among students' perspectives.					
7	Faculty members pay attention to students' needs.					
8	Teaching at the university is too traditional / conservative.					
9	Faculty members give enough attention to research.					
10	Faculty members understand developments in my field of study.					
11	Faculty members at the university are qualified in their subject areas.					
12	Faculty members seemed nervous about Arab students after September 11.					
13	Faculty members seem generally interested in students' evaluations of their work.					
14	Students' evaluation of the faculty members is just a formality.					
15	Faculty members are helpful.					
16	Faculty members criticize me occasionally because I am an Arab student.					
17	All students at the university are treated equally.					
18	Faculty members motivate me to achieve my goals.					
19	Faculty members are hard working.					
20	Faculty members are honest.					

2. Problems

1-----

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#	Items	Strongly disagree	Dis-agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	The main barrier to successful study here is English use.					
2	The major barrier to successful study here are cultural differences.					
3	The American accent is a difficulty for me.					
4	Faculty members do not use standard English in their classes.					
5	It is difficult to adjust to American culture.					
6	My score on the TOEFL was a major problem for me.					
7	Learning English for academic purposes is difficult for me.					
8	The teaching style at the university does not meet my needs.					
9	My program of study is not clear to me.					

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