

A Report on Northwestern University Qatar: Nine Proposals

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Introduction

After I became Faculty Senate President in January 2014, I approached Provost Dan Linzer with the proposition that I travel to Doha to review for the Senate the school in Qatar known as NUQ. Previously, Senate President Babette Sanders had been invited but was unable to go during the time proposed. Dan quickly agreed, and the process was set in motion. On January 23, 2015, I returned from three days in Doha, Qatar.

The nation of Qatar on the Arabian Peninsula has a population of 2.2 million, with 275,000 people possessing citizenship. Citizens enjoy the highest per capita income in the world, about \$110,000. They pay no income tax. 90% of the population (citizen and non-citizen, rich and poor) lives in Doha, the capital city. Non-citizens, the majority of whom are foreign workers, come from India (545,000), Nepal (400,000), the Philippines (200,000) Egypt (180,000), and Bangladesh (150,000). They are subject to the *kafala* system, leaving them vulnerable to restrictions imposed by their labor-sponsors. Workers in Qatar have no right to strike or unionize.

The dominant religion in Qatar is Sunni Islam. Arabic is the official language.

The weather in Qatar is subtropical-dry, with temperatures over 100 degrees from May to September.

NUQ was founded in 2008 in collaboration with the Qatar Foundation (QF) as part of Education City, a large, multi-university campus on the outskirts of Doha. The other universities represented on the roughly five square mile campus are: Virginia Commonwealth, Weil Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M, Carnegie-Mellon, Georgetown, Hautes Études Commerciales de Paris, and University College, London.

NUQ

NUQ currently has about 200 students, 36 faculty and 80 staff. It offers BS degrees in Journalism and Communication, a minor in Media and Politics, and a certificate in Middle Eastern Studies. The school is currently housed in an architecturally distinguished facility designed by the late Ricardo Legorreta, and built for Carnegie-Mellon University's programs in biological sciences, business administration, computational biology, computer science and information systems. Next year, NUQ will have its own dedicated building, a vast and splendid affair designed by Antoine Predock. Predock's long career has been based in the American Southwest, so he is

a good choice to design and build in a desert where average summer temperatures are withering.

NU's school in Doha is run by Everette E. Dennis, whose titles are Dean and CEO, the latter a concession to a local political culture in which even junior government ministers are addressed as "your excellency." (The meaning of the term "dean" is apparently imprecise in Arabic, also rendering the title CEO expedient.) Three senior administrators answer directly to Dean Dennis: Kathryn Symank, Chief Operations Officer; Jeremy Cohen, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs; and Klaus Schoenbach, Associate Dean for Research. Professors Scott Curtis (Dir. Program in Communication); Mary Dedinsky (Journalism); and Sandra Richards (Liberal Arts) are each tenured at NU and report to Jeremy Cohen.

Initial Questions

The issues that concerned me prior to my visit to Qatar – posed by faculty within the Senate and without – were the following:

1. What is the mission of NUQ?
2. What is the cost of NUQ to the university as a whole?
3. Is there academic freedom and freedom of inquiry at NUQ?
4. Is it ethical to locate a school in Qatar, an autocratic monarchy?
5. What are the living conditions of the migrant workers in Qatar?
6. What are the terms of appointment and promotion for faculty at NUQ?

My brief answers to these questions are found below.

But it is necessary first to observe that the faculty, staff and students at NUQ are clearly dedicated to the success of the enterprise and to their own intellectual and professional advancement. The dozen faculty members I spoke to were all enthusiastic and engaged teachers and scholars. The untenured faculty in particular were bright, creative, quick-witted, and genuinely concerned about providing the best possible education for their students. I wish that I had time to watch them in the classroom. Dean Dennis is committed to the success of NUQ, appears to know everything that is going on, and is determined to ensure that his school is the equal of others at Education City and Northwestern. Finally, I spoke to about a dozen students – without exception, they were articulate, engaged and thoughtful. Again, I wish I had the opportunity to see them in the classroom or review their work.

The Mission of NUQ

According to Dean Dennis, Provost Linzer and President Schapiro, it is:

a) To educate the young of the region in western-style journalism and communication so that they may extend values of free speech, open inquiry, and critical investigation to the media of the area. About 40% of students are from

Qatar; most of the rest are from the wider Middle East, with a few from Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Qatari students receive a full scholarship for four years. Non-Qatari students, with some exceptions, must pay full costs. (The QF foundation provides loans to most students that need them, allowing them to be paid back by commitments to remain and work in the country for a period after graduation.)

b) To allow Qatari women the opportunity of a full, U.S. style education, since few of them would otherwise be permitted by their religiously conservative families from obtaining an education abroad.

c) To offer NU students in Middle Eastern and North African Studies a safe base from which to study and travel in the region.

d) To give NU faculty in the Journalism and Communication schools, as well as MENA an opportunity to live and research in the Middle East.

The Cost to Northwestern of NUQ

So far as I can tell, NUQ is run at no cost to Northwestern. (I was not given access to any budgets.) Indeed, it appears the university makes money from the arrangement, though not very much. President Schapiro says the support adds up to little more than a “rounding error” in the annual budget. I would note however that five new endowed professorships at NU were recently funded out of QF money.

Academic and Intellectual Freedom at NUQ

The faculty at NUQ enjoy limited academic freedom. This is not so much because they fear they will run afoul of Qatar’s strict censorship laws, though that is a possibility, but because most are untenured and largely answerable to the NUQ dean alone. In many ways, this vulnerability is no different than that experienced by any Non-Tenure Eligible (NTE) faculty member in Evanston or Chicago, but is exacerbated by 1) the broad authority of the Dean; and 2) the fact that continued residency in the country is dependent upon ongoing employment by NUQ. Non-renewal of a contract means leaving one’s house, community, and country of residence.

NUQ students, judging by their spoken responses to my questions, appear to have internalized many speech restrictions and willingly operate within them. They nevertheless also appear able to conduct serious journalistic and other academic inquiry. One obstacle to education at NUQ is the difficulty in obtaining books that violate censorship laws. I was told however that the bans can often be circumvented by diplomatic strategy or subterfuge.

Outside the university speech is highly circumscribed. A new, state cybercrimes law punishes anyone who threatens “social values” or the “general order” by means of

news, photos, and audio or visual recordings, even if they are true. Article 134 of the penal code authorizes a term of up to five years imprisonment for criticizing the emir or vice-emir. Qatari poet Mohammed Rashid al-Ajami is serving a 15-year prison sentence for a poem that was deemed critical of the ruling family. There is little sign that the regime is becoming more liberal in its attitudes toward speech – if anything, just the opposite.

The Ethics of NUQ

The ethics of establishing a campus in an authoritarian country are murky, especially when it inhibits free expression, and counts among its allies several oppressive regimes or groups. In addition, countries that produce enormous amounts of oil and natural gas that increase global CO₂, and generate in equal abundance social and racial inequality, justly offend many. But those characteristics describe the United States no less than Qatar and don't prevent Northwestern from maintaining campuses in Evanston and Chicago.

Labor Conditions in Qatar

Approximately 94% of the workforce is migrant labor who experience poor living and working conditions and have with no say in the government. According to Human Rights Watch, Qatar's Law 14 of 2004, protecting migrant laborer rights is poorly enforced. Workers are controlled by their travel sponsors, (the "*kafala*" system), frequently denied their rightful pay, and as stated earlier, have no right to strike or unionize. Many are subject to arrest or deportation if their sponsors fail to renew their ID cards. In May 2013, the Qatar Foundation announced new rules to protect workers engaged in World Cup (2022) and related projects. It is not yet clear if these guidelines (they are not laws) have had any significant impact on working and living conditions. In November 2014, the Qatar Labor Ministry announced that it would soon replace the existing *kafala* system with a contract-based work regime. The new system will reportedly allow workers to change jobs without risk of deportation.

Domestic workers, especially women, are at greater risk than other migrant laborers to abuse, (including sexual abuse), unpaid periods of work, and unlawful confinement. Domestic workers receive no protection under Qatar's basic labor laws, and are often denied a single day off per week and basic freedom of movement. A year-long effort by the Gulf Cooperation Council to establish a regional framework of rights for domestic workers was recently abandoned.

Terms of Faculty Appointment

With the exception of visiting, tenured faculty from the Evanston or Chicago campuses, faculty at NUQ are non-tenure eligible. They are hired by Dean Dennis with the cooperation of administrators at the home campus, and less often,

department chairs and faculty. They may be appointed and re-appointed for terms of one, two or three years. Promotion is based primarily upon teaching excellence, though faculty are expected to engage in significant research leading to publication.

Proposals for Immediate Implementation:

1. Encourage the expansion of scholarship programs, funded by the Qatar Foundation, to subsidize tuition and other costs for lower-income, and non-Qatari students. The school in Doha should not be exempt from the goals and priorities of the home institution.

2. Establish a more robust MENA presence at NUQ, with joint faculty appointments and more frequent exchanges of both faculty and students. Such a program may facilitate the establishment of closer ties with other Mideast universities – for example in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel – so that NU and NUQ students and faculty can more easily study and research in these places.

3. Create a more open faculty recruiting procedure. Faculty at NU should be regularly notified of opportunities to visit and teach at NUQ, and provided explicit information about the benefits, costs and conditions of appointments there. As it is, faculty are openly recruited from Communications and Journalism but not from Weinberg. All faculty in fields relevant to the curriculum at NUQ should have the opportunity to apply for visiting terms; e-mail solicitations and Department Chair announcements are better ways to reach faculty than ads in the *Daily Northwestern*.

4. Distribute to Northwestern faculty annual notices of available QF funds for joint NU/NUQ research initiatives. Currently, Indrani Mukherji, Executive Director of International Research Partnerships works with faculty in Evanston and Chicago to partner with colleagues in Doha on grant proposals for research support. But the current Associate Dean for Research at NUQ conveyed to me that much more collaborative research is both desirable and possible.

5. Establish, publish and distribute a policy governing faculty appointment, re-appointment and promotion at NUQ. Create a promotion and reappointment committee consisting of tenured faculty at NUQ and Northwestern Evanston. Currently all reappointment and promotion cases are handled by Dean Dennis and his staff (including the tenured heads of programs) with the advice and consent of the Associate Provost for Faculty. Faculty at NUQ find the current system opaque. When one faculty member asked about promotion guidelines, he/she was told: "I don't know, we're working on it, we'll talk about it another time."

6. Examine the viability of five-year terms of appointment in addition to the current one, two and three year terms. Loss of a position at NUQ also means the loss of a home and a country. In the absence of tenure, long-term contracts can provide stability, improve morale and advance academic freedom. In the unlikely event that

a term of hire exceeds the length of the contract with the Qatar Foundation, faculty members should be allowed to complete their terms in Evanston.

7. Create an NUQ shared-governance structure that enables faculty there to meet regularly and have a significant voice in the organization and structure of the programs.

Proposals for Long Term Implementation:

8. Work in collaboration with other Education City universities to encourage the Qatar government to relax press and other free speech restrictions. Inform the QF that progress toward greater intellectual and press freedom is a precondition for continued NU engagement. Lack of free speech protection cannot be legitimated as a matter of cultural difference; it is the exercise of power by a repressive government over its people.

9. Work in collaboration with other Education City universities to ensure that all migrant workers – men and women alike -- are paid fairly and on-time, that their legal rights are protected, that they have safe and comfortable housing, free health care, freedom of movement, and the right to quit, change jobs or return to their home countries. Encourage student journalists at NUQ to examine worker's rights and especially the rights of female, domestic workers in Qatar and elsewhere in the Middle East. Inform the QF that progress toward greater worker's rights is a precondition for continued NU engagement.

Finally, I would like to thank Dean Everett Dennis and his excellent staff for their kindness and hospitality during my visit. I hope very much that the proposals above will be received in the same spirit of shared engagement and enthusiasm with which they are offered. I am also grateful to Provost Linzer and several faculty members from NUQ for their thoughtful criticisms of an earlier draft of this report.