

FROM PAGE ONE: A NEW CMU

University takes elite reputation to Mideast

QATAR • FROM A1

premier college campus by tapping the best programs offered by American universities.

CMU joins Virginia Commonwealth's design programs, Cornell's Weill Medical College, and Texas A&M's engineering programs at the Education City campus on the outskirts of Doha, Qatar's capital.

The universities and the Qatar Foundation, which was established by the sheik and sheikha to oversee Education City, agree the arrangement is a win-win.

The universities provide a world-class education that meets the standards of their home campuses and in exchange get an opportunity to globalize. The Qatar Foundation picks up the tab for the universities, covering everything from new buildings to office supplies.

In return, Qatar gets its next generation of leaders educated at home. The hope is that they will stay and help the country develop politically, economically and socially.

Kevin Lamb, CMU's assistant dean and director of planning and operations in Qatar, recalled a conversation with Qatar Foundation officials here about plans for their new building.

"They said, 'We can tell you're used to working with tight budgets and that you're being modest here,'" Lamb said. So CMU, pleasantly surprised by the exchange, went back to the drawing board.

The building, scheduled to open in the fall of 2007, will be state-of-the-art and include the commons-type design found on the Oakland campus.

"The sentiment of 'Tell us what you need for your programs' is so refreshing," Lamb said. "The sheikha is so supportive. They recognize the value of a world-class education."

All sides agree that it's a unique opportunity to contribute in some small way to the much larger undertaking of improving Arab-American relations.

"Bringing a sense of calm to Arab-American relations is a large task, but it's being done," said Chuck Thorpe, the dean of CMU's Qatar campus.

For now, CMU and its 41 students occupy a few hallways and classrooms in Cornell's medical college, spicing up the otherwise antiseptic corridors with bright reds and yellows and lining lounges with comfortable couches and soft chairs.

The plan — for both CMU and Qatar — is bold.

"I think the other states, not only in the Gulf, but in the Middle East, will take another look and see that this is working," said Charles E. Young, who came out of retirement to head the Qatar Foundation after storied careers at the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Florida. "I think it can serve the region, not only Qatar, but the region, and serve as an example of what can be done."

Reminiscent of Pittsburgh

Even though he's 7,000 miles away from Pittsburgh, Thorpe sees similarities between this Persian Gulf city and the Steel City of old.

Just as Pittsburgh embraced and prospered from the steel industry a century ago, Doha and Qatar now bank in natural gas and oil riches.

Doha attracts immigrants from around the world — laborers and white-collar workers — hoping to ride the wave of one of the region's rising economies, much the way Pittsburgh acted as a magnet for steelworkers at the turn of the 20th century.

"It's a level of dedication, it's a level of excitement and a level of commitment here that Pittsburgh had a century ago," said Thorpe, who is careful not to stretch the analogy too far.

Thorpe left his position as the head of CMU's Robotics Institute and signed a three-year contract to launch the Qatar campus. A marquee name in Pittsburgh, Thorpe realizes that some could question whether Carnegie Mellon was depleting its flagship programs in the name of globalization.

"Of course there are losses when good people leave Pittsburgh," Thorpe said. "But there's an opportunity to hire new people.... In the end, we win more than we lose."

Pittsburgh can gain from the



PHOTOS: TRISH HOOPER/TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Freshman Fahad Al-Jefairi prepares for a Java programming class at Carnegie Mellon University's campus in Doha, Qatar. All students must take a computer programming class.



LEFT: CMU freshman Mohamed Al-Mahmeed relaxes in a bright student lounge while studying between classes. ABOVE: A banner signed by the inaugural class of CMU's Qatar campus hangs in a lounge.

exchange in subtle ways, Thorpe said. With many students at its home campus who speak English as a second language, CMU can learn from the intensive English teaching and coaching it's using in Qatar. Although the students here speak and are taught in English, Arabic is their primary language.

CMU can also put its computer expertise to work at Education City and throughout Qatar.

The Qatar Foundation plans to build a 350-bed teaching hospital on the campus, and Thorpe sees it as an opportunity for Carnegie Mellon to participate in telemedicine and other high-tech medical systems and in building a state-of-the-art hospital from the ground up.

And Qatar is just beginning to develop its technology backbone. "Here's a country that's not as wired as the U.S.," Thorpe said, as he pondered the possibilities. "How do you wire a country?"

Making new homes

There's been some winning and losing for the faculty and staff on the ground here, too. They miss Steelers games, lunches at local haunts like Oakland's Union Grill and the pets they've left behind.

But for most, the gains outstrip the losses.

"The best part of my experience here professionally has been the students because they really blew me out of the water," said computer science professor Jacobo Carrasquel. "I was told what would happen, what to expect, that they'll be shy, they won't come to your office because you're a male, or they'll come in groups."

"That's just not true. There's more traffic here than in Pittsburgh."

The transition has been personally challenging, too. They

are away from friends and family, navigating unfamiliar and sometimes unmarked roads and traffic roundabouts.

They've created their own names for things, like McDonald's Road — because there's a McDonald's there — and, thanks to markings on a local map, the Burger King Roundabout.

Holidays are different, too. The Pittsburgh transplants experienced the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and they improvised when it came to Thanksgiving. Instead of celebrating Thursday, Thorpe and his family hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for about three dozen on Friday — the start of the weekend in Qatar.

Though traditional in many ways, like the turkey, stuffing and apple pie, the Thorpes' menu also included tabbouleh, baba ganoush, spring rolls and curried rice to appeal to the faculty and staff who hail from at least a dozen countries.

"The one thing we couldn't find for sale in Doha was cran-

berry sauce, so I have three cans from Giant Eagle in my carry-on luggage," said Thorpe, who just returned from a Pittsburgh trip. But in this post 9/11 world, the cranberries surfaced on the airport security radar and prompted a thorough search of Thorpe's bag.

"The lengths we will go to in order to have a traditional Thanksgiving!" he quipped.

For many, the trip overseas is their first. News reports of bombings and attacks in other parts of the Middle East, like Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, strike worry in families and friends left behind.

"It's my first time out of the states and I picked a big one," joked Lisa Ciletti, CMU's business manager here. "(Relatives) thought I was crazy. My dad always tells me, 'Don't leave the compound,' and I don't even live in a compound."

Robert Kail, associate dean of academic and student affairs, admits he's cautious by nature.

"There were bets being placed

on whether or not I would do this by friends, colleagues and family," Kail said. "The overwhelming odds were against me doing this. Some days I wonder why I'm doing this."

But then, the importance of the project reminds him why he's here.

"Being a part of a bold experiment at a fundamental level is exciting, even for a person as cautious as I am," he said. "The potential for failure is so great, but it's really not an option."

Keith Marsh, director of student accounts, found that the best way to acclimate to Qatar was to just throw himself into it. He took a 45-minute trek from his hotel to the souks, Doha's traditional markets, to get familiar with the local scene.

No matter how long they're here, Marsh and others said they will remain mystified by the local driving habits. Turn signals are more of a suggestion than a rule, and most local drivers find it's best to occupy two lanes at once to keep turning options open.

"If I'm here for five months, five years or 50 years, I don't know if I'll ever get used to their style of driving," Marsh joked.

Just as the students see that Americans are not necessarily the embodiments of their country's policies and leaders, the CMU faculty and staff see that the Arab world is much more than the monolith portrayed on the news.

"Just as there are different variations of Christians and Jews at home, there are a lot of variations of Muslims," Kail said. "I think we were too willing to paint them with a broad brush for lack of knowing."

Few terrorism fears

Despite its Middle East locale, there's little more than

passing concern when the prospect of terrorism in Qatar is discussed.

The universities on-site say they considered the terrorism factor when deciding whether to sign on to the project, but they saw a larger process at work that could thwart future terrorism by educating and empowering the region's next generation of leaders.

"We really don't worry about it very much," said James C. Holste, chief academic officer for Texas A&M's Qatar campus. "We realize it's prudent to have an evacuation plan, but we don't expect to use it."

Evacuations almost happened at Virginia Commonwealth after 9/11. The home campus in Richmond wanted to pull the plug in Qatar after the terror attacks, said Peter Martin, assistant professor of graphic design. But the faculty and staff in Qatar saw things differently and expressed their sentiments during a conference call with university officials.

"It came down to the faculty (in Qatar) sitting down at the table saying, 'I feel safe and this is the time we need to be here,'" Martin said. "There's a lot of truth to that."

And when the war in Iraq began in the spring of 2003, Martin said VCU used it as an opportunity to have open discussions about the war and politics.

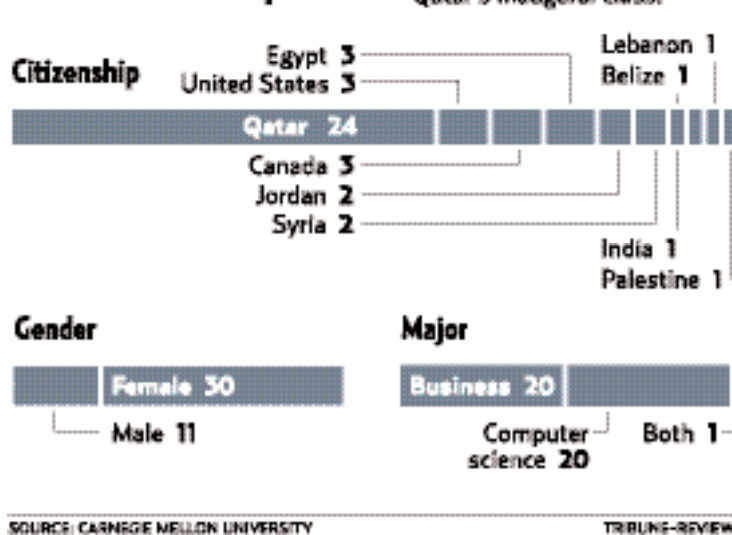
CMU planned for several contingencies, such as getting employees home for family emergencies, and evacuations if there's a terror threat.

"We think the likelihood of needing one is negligible," Lamb said of the evacuation plan. "But it's due diligence."

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Class of 2008 profile

A breakdown of CMU-Qatar's inaugural class:



SOURCE: CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

FROM PAGE ONE: A NEW CMU

Efforts transform Qatari culture

The past decade has brought liberalization under a new regime.

DOHA, Qatar
Yasmine Abdel-Rahman sits in her seat a bit but waits patiently to challenge a Saudi Arabian debate panelist on his view that Arab people, not their governments, shoulder the blame for the slow pace of reform in the Middle East.

Abdel-Rahman, 17, argued at the first in a series of Doha Debates last month that Arabs are ready for reform, but that their governments, afraid of losing power, thwart reform in part by offering substandard public education. Abdel-Rahman, an Egyptian whose family moved to Qatar three years ago, received a private education and now majors in business administration at Carnegie Mellon University's newly opened Qatar campus.

She and the panelist, Hussein Shobokshi, a Saudi businessman and columnist, traded verbal jabs over who is to blame for the political and economic divides in the Arab world.

"We don't learn how to discuss and challenge the material we are being taught," she argued. "How can we change women's rights and racism if we aren't learning how?"

That this debate took place at all — beneath a framed portrait of Qatar's emir in a grand hall financed by the sheik himself — shows how far Qatar, enriched first by pearls, then by natural gas and oil, has come since its bloodless coup in 1995.

If Qatar is known to Americans, it is likely recognized as the home to the Arab satellite news channel Al-Jazeera and the U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But Qatar wants to be known for much more.

Through its financing of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science & Community Development, the monarchy puts its money where it believes it can have the most impact: fostering democracy, establishing position in the global economy, and improving education for Qataris and the region.

The latter is where Carnegie Mellon and three other American universities fit into Qatar's grand plans. CMU, Virginia Commonwealth, Texas A&M and Cornell were lured to the desert on the outskirts of Doha to cobble together a university using the best programs offered by American colleges.

Rather than ship its students to the United States, which has become monumentally more difficult for Arab students since 9/11, Qatar is bringing the universities here in hopes that the



PHOTOS: TRISH HOOPER/TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Students in a world history class taught by Ben Reilly (right) wear relieved smiles as he returns graded midterm exams.

knowledge improves the region. The monarchy views a well-educated society as the foundation of political, social and economic development.

The education initiative, called Education City, which now claims 750 students, already has graduated three classes of design majors from Virginia Commonwealth. Cornell's medical school held a white-coat ceremony in October to welcome its inaugural class of medical students.

The campus, like the nation's reforms, are a work in progress. But the significance of what's happening here is evident to everyone involved.

"Here's a chance to do something to have Americans and Arabs talking and working together," said Chuck Thorpe, dean of CMU's Qatar campus. "Here's a chance to make a small contribution to this part of the world."

The vision of Education City

In 1995, the current emir, Sheik Hamad bin Kalifa Al Thani, overthrew his father in a bloodless coup and set the country on a rapid path to reform. A constitution approved in 2003, for example, instituted a free press and religious freedoms.

The emir also established the Qatar Foundation and endowed it generously. Exact dollar amounts aren't released by the government or the foundation, but it has been reported that

\$1 billion will be invested in Education City.

"I think this is a very noble project, and this is one thing that attracted me," said Salam Mir, an English professor who teaches CMU's 41 freshmen in Qatar. "To me, as an Arab-American, I think the Middle East has needed good education for a long time."

The modern buildings, whose alabaster-white exteriors blend in almost seamlessly with the barren landscape, house the future computer scientists, doctors, chemical and petroleum engineers, business executives and graphic designers for Qatar and the region.

In Ben Reilly's world history class, the students seem much like their counterparts seven time zones away in Pittsburgh.

As Reilly handed back midterms to students entering class, some groaned while some sighed with relief as they peeked at their scores. Reilly had to raise his voice a bit to be heard over the post-lunch chatter.

"Congratulations. As a whole, these midterms are well done," he said, trying to get the attention of the nearly 30 students, mostly women and about half Qatari. "The average score was an 84."

As the class settled in for the lecture, Reilly began to discuss the Atlantic economy, which started when Columbus discovered the Americas in 1492. Discussing food available to Native

Americans, Reilly noted that potatoes are indigenous to Mexico — a fact that stunned some students and turned up a familiar assumption.

"Weren't the Irish the first to have potatoes?" a student in the front row asked, evoking chuckles from the class and Reilly.

"Oh, gosh no," Reilly said. "We'll get to that."

Though the potato question was lighthearted, the mere act of asking questions in class, questioning a stereotype or speaking out at the Doha Debates goes to the heart of what Education City wants to accomplish.

"We want the debate," said foundation spokesman Robert Wallace Baxter said. "We want people to come forward and talk about issues. There's just not that kind of mind-set here."

Traditionally, education in the Arab world has focused on presenting information to be memorized and regurgitated by students. Little emphasis is placed on critical thinking and analysis. State-run universities lag in research and often are criticized for not producing graduates fit for the private sector.

The U.S. State Department's Bureau of Near East Affairs estimates that 38 percent of the population in the Middle East is illiterate and that about half of adult women lack adequate reading and writing skills. In Qatar, the literacy rate is about 83 percent, and women are slightly more literate than men, according to the

CIA World Fact Book.

The students attending Education City's campus are the region's best and brightest. The hope is that they will use the critical thinking and analytical skills they develop here to improve business, governmental and social conditions throughout the Middle East.

"That's exactly what Wesam Said, a business major at CMU, wants to do."

"I want to work here in Qatar and develop the city," she said. "I think I can make a difference."

Qatar's bold steps

Qatar, originally a land of Bedouins, adheres to strict Wahhabi Muslim traditions.

Many of its citizens wear traditional dress — men in long white thobes, women covered in black abayas and headscarves. Qataris make up only about a fifth of the country's population of about 750,000. Qatar is largely inhabited by Westerners, Pakistanis, Filipinos, other Asians and Africans.

Despite the sea changes taking place here, Qatar's roots are evident. Alcohol is found only in hotels frequented by Westerners, and conservative dress is strongly encouraged among visitors, especially women. Many restaurants maintain separate entrances for men and women. Daily calls to prayer echo from the many mosques.

Until its independence in 1971, Qatar was a British pro-

tectorate. Even after its emancipation, it remained largely a sleepy Gulf nation.

Until 1995. In a bloodless overthrow, the current emir rose to power over objections from other Gulf states who feared that the idea of a coup could gain traction in their own counties.

Yet the new Al Thani regime forged ahead, at times ranking its neighbors uncomfortable with its rapid changes. As the host country for the 2006 Asian Games, Qatar is undergoing a building boom like never before; it hopes to showcase its progress to visitors from 44 countries.

Unlike neighboring Saudi Arabia, women in Qatar vote, drive and are eligible to run for political office. In fact, the emir's consort, Sheikha Mouzah bint Nasser Al Missned, heads the Qatar Foundation and spearheads its many efforts in a high-profile fashion uncommon for women in the Gulf region.

Although tolerated, Christian denominations often held church services underground. After sanctioning religious freedoms in the 2003 constitution, the Qatari government donated land to build a Catholic church and other Christian churches on the outskirts of Doha.

The future

Education City, now a sparse campus sitting on an unforgiving landscape, has grand aspirations.

Plans through the end of the decade call for adding international studies, Islamic/Middle Eastern studies, and programs in mass communications and music, along with a master's in business administration.

Georgetown University is in talks with the foundation to establish a foreign service program here.

More housing for students and faculty, a common library, a mosque and a theater are on the drawing board. The foundation plans to open a 350-bed teaching hospital specializing in women and children's care in 2008.

If plans proceed as expected, the campus will have about 5,000 students by the end of the decade.

The foundation and universities want to expand their quest for students. Now, students are recruited from several countries in the area, including Kuwait and Egypt, but officials want to draw from Iran and Iraq.

Already, the foundation has brought nine Iraqis to Education City at the behest of the sheikha, and it will pay for their schooling.

"We've got ambitions," Baxter said. "We'd like to see ourselves as a beacon. We think we can provide a model for other countries if they choose."

Launching ambitious venture challenges freshmen, faculty

The students say they are more alike their U.S. peers than different.

DOHA, Qatar
Noora Al-Ansari has big plans.

"I can be many things," said Al-Ansari, a 17-year-old Qatari majoring in business administration at Carnegie Mellon University's campus here. "I can be a CEO. I can be anything as long as I have a good education."

And that's exactly what Carnegie Mellon plans to provide for the 41 students in its inaugural class — the class of 2008.

CMU's first semester in Qatar's Education City has been filled with challenges and opportunities for its students, faculty and staff. But almost to the person, they embrace the new venture and consider themselves pioneers.

The freshman class, which consists mostly of women and is more than half Qatari, was culled from 196 applicants representing 19 countries.

Before they become executives or computer wizards, students must endure the freshman-year rigors: calculus, world history, English and the dreaded Java programming class — all taught in English using the same standards as those applied on CMU's Oakland campus.

"Java? It's really hard," said Yasmine Abdel-Rahman, holding her head as if it were about to explode with bits of computer code. Just as it does in Pittsburgh, CMU requires all students here to take at least

one programming class.

Midterm grades show the students are adjusting to the pace and demands of college. Robert Kail, associate dean of academic and student affairs, counted only one failing grade in all of the classes as he looked over the mid-semester results — unusual for freshmen, even in a class this small.

"When I was seeing the grades coming off, I was smiling," Kail said. Clearly, the majority of the grades coming off were A's and B's."

One of the biggest unknowns facing professors and administrators as they lined up their course offerings was how well the students would be prepared for college-level work.

They expected students would need extra help with English classes since it's a second language for most. They also found that some students needed to

tackle Professor Marion Oliver's calculus course at a slower pace, so a separate class will cover the material in two semesters instead of one.

"We thought that all of the students who ended up coming here were ready to start our course at the same level," Kail said. "A little bit later in the semester, the third or fourth week, we saw that a handful of them, maybe 10, would benefit from a different sequence."

"We didn't know enough

about the students and what we would find until we got here." And what Oliver found was a group of students ready to learn and eager to ask for help. "They are extremely motivated and they work hard," he said.

As difficult as the classes can be, the students appreciate their professors' efforts, such as Jacobo Carrasquel's attempts to rev up his Java class and keep them engaged in the material.

Business major Wesam Said recalled a class earlier in the semester when Carrasquel noticed the students were dragging a bit. "He said, 'It's sunny outside!' and we were, like, 'So?'" she said, laughing, because it's almost always sunny and hot in Doha, unlike Pittsburgh. "So he



Carnegie Mellon business majors Yasmine Abdel-Rahman (left) and Wesam Said (right) discuss social plans with Cornell premedical student Hekmat Alrouh in a cafeteria shared by the schools.

said, 'Hey! It's snowing!'" Carrasquel said that illustrates how the faculty and staff are willing to shift gears and adjust to the students.

"Normally, there are no surprises," said Carrasquel, who has been teaching computer science at CMU since 1979. "But here, I said, 'Let's throw out the model. We'll try 'A' and if that doesn't work, we'll try 'B.'"

That's exactly what he did. The students in Qatar are about where their counterparts in Pittsburgh are in the Java syllabus, but they've had an additional 90 minutes a week of class, Carrasquel said.

One challenge for both students and staff was how to handle the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began in mid-

October. Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, and many businesses close from 1:30 p.m. until after dark.

Non-Muslim employees were advised to eat discreetly behind closed doors so fasting Muslims wouldn't be offended. The tea service provided for employees was canceled for the month, and the small cafeteria available to students and staff was closed.

Students were still expected to attend classes from Sunday through Thursday, but the class schedule was condensed and free time set aside for lunch dropped. CMU also hosted a seminar for students on how to balance the demands of Ramadan while still finding the energy to study and attend classes.

Despite their small numbers and the fact that they commute, the students are building the vestiges of campus life. And they want students in Pittsburgh to know that they are more alike than different.

They have a student government and a student-run newsletter. They also gather for movie nights with screenings such as "Van Helsing" and "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days."

Although their American counterparts have a penchant for unwinding with a few beers, religious beliefs here prevent students from drinking alcohol. They said that doesn't stop them from having fun and going to the mall.

"I want them to know that we aren't boring, that we have fun here and go out, but that we don't have alcohol or anything," Abdel-Rahman said. She and others are eager to

become exchange students and visit the Pittsburgh campus to build relations with American students. She fears that American students might view them suspiciously because of their ethnicity and religious beliefs. Some students wear traditional Arab dress — abayas and headscarves for women, thobes for men — while others wear standard college attire of jeans, T-shirts and chunky shoes.

Abdel-Rahman is somewhere in the middle. She wears the latest fashions, but always with a matching headscarf.

"I want some of us to go there next year and show them what we are like, so they are not afraid of us," she said.

Indeed, student exchanges, though not yet planned, are in the offing, said CMU-Qatar Dean Chuck Thorpe.

For now, students like Al-Ansari find that their studies gobble up their free time and have made them cancel weekend plans. But she said it's worth it to be a part of an innovative program.

"I always wanted to be a pioneer of sorts," said Al-Ansari, as she demurely tucks away a corner of her headscarf. "When I was 7 years old, I told my mom I wanted to be the first astronaut from the Arabian world. My friends would ask, 'What is an astronaut?'"

Now, with her sights set on other careers, perhaps fashion or working on Qatar's recently opened stock market, she still thinks about her childhood dream of being an astronaut.

"Maybe I will sponsor one with all of my wealth."