

Site Evaluation Report of the College of Liberal Arts
Kuwait University

November, 2006

Prepared for

The American Academy for Liberal Education
Washington, DC

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1. Introduction

a. Transition from research oriented university to one with a focus on liberal education

The University of Kuwait was founded in 1966 as a traditional, European style research oriented university. The dominant mode of instruction was lecturing, and assessment of student performance was usually carried out by means of end of semester or year written examinations. Text books were not used, but students devised means – sometimes with the help of the faculty – of replicating and distributing copies of lecture notes. That practice was stopped about three years ago, and faculty are now actively encouraged to assign at least one text for students to buy.

With the advent of the new General Education curriculum and the attempt to bring the Faculty of Arts into compliance with AALE standards of accreditation, many far-sweeping reforms have been introduced.

b. The University of Kuwait today

Students who entered the Faculty of Arts beginning in Fall 2005 have followed the new curriculum designed to incorporate the basic principles of liberal education. Both students and faculty appear to be genuinely satisfied with the transition, although some faculty members continue to wonder whether the new General Education curriculum will provide enough particular knowledge for students majoring in Arabic Language and Literature.

c. Institutional strengths as well as areas needing improvement

The support of the administration for the new General Education curriculum at all levels of the University of Kuwait, and especially in the office of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts is strong. Reviews of progress, attempts to persuade all relevant faculty members of the new curriculum's merits, and different initiatives to improve teaching and assessment are on-going and varied.

Ghosts of the old system linger nonetheless, and all departments involved in the new General Education curriculum need to work on changing older, traditional methods of lecturing so as to draw students into newer participatory modes of learning. In addition, the change from reliance on secondary literature to primary sources – both in textbooks and in easily available stand alone works – has not been fully accomplished. Finally, a few problems have yet to be resolved with respect to teaching writing skills in the Department of English Language and Literature and casting a broader intellectual net for the teaching of Arabic in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature.

d. Challenges facing the University of Kuwait in the next 3-4 years

Given the extraordinarily strong support for the new General Education curriculum at all levels of the University of Kuwait administration and among almost all faculty members, there is every reason to expect that the University of Kuwait will have successfully implemented the new curriculum by the time the class that entered in Fall 2005 graduates in Spring 2009. The Faculty of Arts at the University of Kuwait is well on its way to achieving the

goals that it has so clearly set forth in the Self-Study Report made available to AALE site visitors.

e. The visit

Preparations by the University of Kuwait, Faculty of Arts, for the site evaluation team visit from 3-6 November 2006 were excellent. The schedule was well-planned and was implemented most professionally. Travel to Kuwait was arranged quite smoothly, and the team was met at the airport by the Dean of the College of Arts and some faculty. Accommodations and meal were excellent, and transportation arrangements were flawless. Any and all requests by team members were immediately attended to. Requests for extra material such as syllabi, exam papers, and lap-top computers were graciously filled.

Team members were given the opportunity to meet on more than one occasion with members of staff, and there were occasions to meet and talk to students formally and informally. The team was able to attend many classes in different departments.

2. Individuals from the University of Kuwait seen during the site visit

President, University of Kuwait

Provost, University of Kuwait

Dr. Yahia A. Ahmad, Dean of the Faculty of Arts

Dr. Yusur al-Madani, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, Research, and Graduate Studies

Dr. Mohammed Moncef Chenoufi, Professor, Department of Mass Communications

Dr. Izzat Qurani, Professor, Department of Philosophy

Dr. Kenneth Payne, Department of English Language and Literature

3. Report on the Departments of English Language and Literature, History, Arabic Languages and Literature, and Philosophy by individual team members

a. Department of English Language and Literature, Loubna A. Youssef

A review of the numerous documents provided by the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Kuwait – namely, the Self-Study Report, Appendices 1-8, exam question sheets, and student papers – plus a 3 day visit to the site reveal that (i) the “paradigm shift” undertaken by the department in conjunction with the Faculty of Arts to change to the New Major Sheet is complex and challenging and (ii) there are several possible ways to enhance the current practices. This report seeks to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the new program and make a few recommendations for achieving the desired transition.

The Self-Study Report of the Faculty of Arts

Some of the faculty and administrative members of the team who worked on the Self-Study Report clearly and frankly acknowledge that they initially resisted the change and rejected the idea of a General Education curriculum, but have now come to recognize its benefits and potential. The effort expended in writing this comprehensive document, the enthusiasm of the members of the team who clearly worked hard to achieve a common goal, and the cooperation among administration and staff members are remarkably positive. It is obvious that all who took part in writing the Report – in varying degrees, of course – worked hard to produce it and are justifiably proud of the result.

The report (i) shows that the different departments of the Faculty of Arts have incorporated the courses required for general education and (ii) identifies (in Part 2 of the Conclusion, p.138) two serious shortcomings needing to be addressed, namely, enhancing “the level of collaboration among the academic Departments in the Faculty of Arts, in various fields” and achieving “a more effective and useful means of faculty evaluation.” By identifying these shortcomings themselves, the team members who produced this report show how seriously they have subjected the process to scrutiny.

The Self-Study Report provides evidence that the different departments of the Faculty of Arts have revised their curriculum requirements in order to comply with AALE Standards and Criteria. Students must declare a major in their second year in the Faculty of Arts. There are clear general rules for declaring a major as well as special departmental rules (p. 57). The latter are logical insofar as different departments have differing requirements for potential students. In keeping with the perfectly justifiable desire that students joining the Department of English be competent in English, the department has introduced two rules for declaring a major: (i) passing 141 and 142 (offered by the Language Center) with no less than a B- and (ii) passing 297 (Literature and the Arts) or 197 (Introduction to World Literature in Translation), both offered by the Department of English with a C (p. 57). The faculty explained that there is no coordination between the Language Center and the Department of English and that they have no say in what students are taught before seeking to major in English. They also explained that the B- is high enough to guarantee that the students who take courses in the Language Center have adequate language skills and the C high enough grade for the courses taught in the Department of English because the curriculum is quite demanding.

The Grading System. The scale recommended by the University is reasonable (p. 60). What is not clear, though, is how grades are actually determined. The Report indicates that each “course grade is distributed according to the instructor’s policy,” but points out in the following sentence that “50% of the grade is assigned to the course work . . . and at least 40% for the final exam.” If this implies that the instructor may distribute the 50% in the way s/he sees fit, students – especially those on probation – will not stop “asking for amendments to their final grades” (p. 82). What needs to be taken into consideration is that with the New Major Sheet certain courses will be taught by different members of staff in different departments and that in this case rubrics can help. Another relevant point is the absence of an indication anywhere in the report that the format of the exam and the assessment of students will change to reflect the change in the system.

The section defining the vision, mission, aims, goals, and values of the different departments of the Faculty of Arts (pp. 87-92) refers to the analytical, critical, reading, writing, and technological skills acquired by students, but does not explain at what academic level these skills must be acquired or point out the purpose of learning to use the technology (p. 88).

The Self-Study Report of the Department of English Language and Literature Standard One: Liberal learning assessment

Effective Reasoning. It is not clear there is awareness that (i) this change does not simply mean adding new courses to the curriculum, but changing the method of teaching from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach; (ii) a link must be established between the various disciplines of the general education courses as well as between the major and minor on the other; and (iii) assessment of students has been modified to correspond with the new system.

Even though the New Major Sheet has been applied to the freshman class only recently (2005-06 in some cases and 2006-07 in others), the principles of liberal/general education can be applied in the class room throughout. Assuming that “Broad and Deep Learning” (Criterion Two) can be applied only when the New Major Sheet is in effect, it is not clear why “Effective Reasoning” and “The Inclination to Inquire” (Criteria One and Three) are not encouraged in all classes for the benefit of students in both the old and new system.

In most of the classes observed, students asked questions freely; and faculty sought to establish links with topics raised in previous classes, to anticipate ones to be considered in future classes, and to ensure that students understood. Still, many faculty relied heavily on lecturing. Students did not take part in analysis, discussions, or debates. Student-student interaction was absent.

The questions students asked were ones that required explanation and clarification of points that had not been understood rather than ones that revealed an inquisitive mind. This does not imply that the students are incapable of asking intelligent questions. On the contrary, they seem to have potential but need training.

It is interesting that in response to a survey, students expressed satisfaction with the faculty being able “to convey information and to create a positive teacher-student environment” but were not quite satisfied with “the updating of ‘teaching methodology’ ” (p. 42). The Report does not clarify how seriously the faculty have taken this important finding or how they have responded to it, even though there is a section that addresses AALE Standards, “Teaching and Educational Resources Standard 12: Importance of Teaching” (p. 59) in the Self-Study Report.

During the visit to the site, some students were taking midterm exams. A perusal of these exams and other exam questions from different courses reveals that students are expected to reproduce the information introduced in the lecture hall or in a text book rather than think for themselves. Thus, typical exam questions ask students to identify main themes, distinguish differences and similarities, or discuss the characters in particular pieces of literature.

Broad and Deep Learning. Broad learning is accomplished through the general education courses and the minor chosen by the student. Faculty members need to give attention to examining the texts more deeply in oral discussions as well as in writing in and out of class.

The Inclination to Inquire. This is an area that requires attention. Students should be encouraged to be involved constantly in discovery, exploration, and sharing. The 205 Oral Presentation course can fill part of the gap, but is not sufficient. To be sure, the Department organizes English Day and Film Week that the students greatly enjoy, but these are not academic activities. Organizing Model United Nations and Model Arab League activities would allow students to interact, take part in debates, and use English in different formal settings.

Standard Two: Program Mission

There is more emphasis on preparing young men and women for the job market than on training critical thinkers or educating students to value knowledge for its own sake.

Standard Three: General Education and Curriculum

Student Writing. In both the Literature and the Linguistics sections, the curriculum of many of the content courses has been transferred from the Old Major Sheet to the New Major Sheet. There is no need to re-design the courses, but the content ought to be handled differently to encourage student interaction and participation.

In the Department of English as well as in other departments of the Faculty of Arts the writing component requires serious revision and reconsideration. In the New Major Sheet, students of the Department of English take 4 courses of writing: in the first year, they are given a choice between 106, Varieties of Writing or 108, English Composition. These courses teach completely different skills: the forms and skills purportedly taught in 106 – “genres of writing: essay, short story, poem, play, etc.; modes: expository, interpretive, narrative, descriptive, lyric, etc.; emphasis on literary criticism and creative writing; methodology: observation of exemplary models followed by student practice” – would require an academic year rather than a term. The content of 108, however, is manageable. The second writing course that students have to take is Principles of Academic Writing 210, one of the compulsory courses of the General Education Core Courses. Since it is assumed that students will become familiar with basic research strategies and skills at this level, it is not clear why this is the content of the third writing course, namely, 308, Research Writing in Literature, that focuses on “How to use a library; reading of primary and secondary texts; note taking . . . writing an outline; . . . compiling a list of Works Cited.” The fourth writing course is 402, Senior Research Project. Comparing the one offered in the Literature concentration and the one offered in the Linguistics concentration, it appears that students in the first use an up-to-date text book even though the content of the course is hardly different from 308, Research Writing in Literature, whereas the text books used in the second are old (why?) but that the content is detailed and different from 308.

In sum, the course objectives of the four different required writing courses are not such as to develop the skills of students at different levels and in and out of class. Indeed, there seems to be limited carry over from one course to the other and from one level to the other.

General Observation: the writing courses in the other departments of the Faculty of Arts are no different. The Faculty of Arts can perhaps make use of staff members who are

skilled and experienced in teaching these courses in Arabic by organizing workshops or presentations in which they can share their expertise.

Standard Four: Teaching and Educational Resources

The Faculty and Administrators. Both faculty members and administrators appear eager to cooperate to take the steps necessary to introduce and implement the change.

There is a collegial spirit among staff members in the Department of English and a sincere desire and willingness to implement the changes required. They emphasize that the process leading to the birth and implementation of the New Major Sheet was long and exhausting and that throughout the process there was need for self-evaluation. The good spirit and effort are admirable, as is the awareness that producing this New Major Sheet is not the end of the process.

The Faculty. The team that produced the Department of English Self-Study Report notes the need to recruit new faculty, especially in the areas of Linguistics and Translation studies. There is also a need for faculty experienced in teaching rhetoric, composition, and principles of academic writing, not only in English, but in Arabic as well.

Library/Computer Labs/Language Labs. Library and Research facilities seem adequate.

Standard Five: Program Standards

The Students. In the classes I attended, students were alert, interested, and enthusiastic. Moreover, they asked questions freely. However, they need to be more engaged in the learning process.

Suggestions for Support Mechanisms

1. Limit the students admitted to a size the Faculty of Arts can handle (Faculty of Arts Self-Study Report p. 81).
2. Devise a clear, transparent, on-line registration system.
3. Review the warning/probation system.
4. Offer more mixed classes (males and females).
5. Form committees for coordination between the Language Center and the Department of English as well as between the Departments of English and Arabic and other departments.
6. Recruit members of staff who can teach the General Core Courses in English.
7. In addition to establishing a Writing Center, provide some mechanism to help students overcome problems in using English as a foreign language.
8. Create a master file for supplementary material: handouts, prompts, readings, etc.
9. Provide professional development workshops: Training the Teacher.

b. Department of History, Hoda Elsadda

The Self-Study Report of the Faculty of Arts

Overview. The self-study submitted by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Kuwait to AALE is comprehensive, evaluative, informative, and consistent. It comprises information regarding educational programs, financial matters, administration, and policy. Two types of self-studies were submitted to AALE: a faculty self-study and departmental self-studies from the departments of History, Philosophy, Arabic Literature, and English Literature. All of these self-studies demonstrate seriousness and commitment to liberal education.

Assessment of the Self-Study

Standard One: Liberal Learning Assessment

Effective Reasoning. The core curriculum of the Faculty of Arts includes courses aimed at developing writing and communication skills and at developing logical and scientific reasoning. Course outlines clearly state course objectives. Students are given regular tests and class participation is encouraged. More advanced courses are offered as students move to higher levels.

Broad and Deep Learning. The Faculty of Arts has radically revised its major sheet so as to incorporate a general education program that offers core curriculum requirements for all Faculty of Arts department. These core subjects cover broad and deep learning in language, science, literature, and the humanities. Students choose a total number of 45 credits (3credits per course), 21 credits of which are compulsory and 24 elective. The compulsory courses include communication skills in Arabic, History of Islamic Civilization and Culture, Modern and Contemporary History of Kuwait, Aesthetics of Arabic Literature, and English Language. Elective courses include topics which cover cultural diversity, aesthetic appreciation, scientific analysis and inductive/deductive reasoning, analysis of social and behavioral phenomena, and ethical enquiry and moral reasoning.

The Inclination to Inquire. The Faculty of Arts offers a variety of courses that aim to develop critical thinking and encourage the pursuit of knowledge.

Standard Two: Program Mission

Mission Standard. The mission is stated clearly and is consistent with the objectives. The programs are regularly reviewed in accordance with the mission statement.

Liberty of Thought and Speech. The University of Kuwait covenant clearly states a commitment to academic freedom that must be met with an accountability codified by law and relevant codes of ethics and tradition. The teaching staff in the Department of History expressed no fears of their academic freedom being threatened.

Standard Three: General Education and Curriculum

General Education Curriculum. All admission requirements and university policies are clearly stated in published material and accessible to faculty and students. In view of the modifications taking place since the University of Kuwait has applied for accreditation to AALE, programs are continually subjected to review with an aim to improve performance.

Proportion of Course-work within the General Education Requirement. Major sheets implemented by departments starting with Fall semester 2005 have one third of the courses in General Education, in accordance with AALE standards. These General Education courses cover a wide variety of disciplines and skills. All were approved and implemented starting as of Fall 2005. The changes have been well advertised to both faculty and students.

Assessment. Most courses in the Department of History are assessed using different methods to evaluate different skills, such as exams, quizzes, oral presentations, short assignments, and class participation. Many courses, especially specialized courses, include research projects among the methods of assessment. Class participation is encouraged. Course descriptions clearly state the skills and abilities that will be evaluated such as critical thinking, clarity of expression, and a deep knowledge of the subject matter.

Good teaching practices are encouraged by annual awards for distinguished performances. Among recent changes that have been introduced are training programs for faculty members to develop teaching and assessment skills.

Student evaluations contribute to a regular assessment of course contents, objectives, and quality teaching.

Suggestions:

1. It might be useful to develop clear structured guidelines for assessment that clearly indicate what is being evaluated as well as the percentage allocated for each skill. These guidelines would be particularly useful for the General Education courses that are typically taught by more than one teacher.

2. Also, it would be useful to develop student feedback sheets that clearly indicate to students how their work is being assessed so they might strive for future improvement.

General Education and Curriculum Structure. All the requirements for a clearly described, well-coordinated, and balanced curriculum are met.

Standard Four: Teaching and Educational Resources

The Faculty. Members of staff are competent and have strong qualifications in their respective fields.

There are annual awards for best teaching practices to encourage good performance.

Training programs to promote good teaching practices have also been introduced.

It is noteworthy that students' evaluations are considered in assessing the competence of staff members when applying for promotion or renewal of contracts.

Class size. Class sizes in specialized classes are very appropriate for an effective teaching and learning environment. Still, some General Education courses need to be reduced in class size to come into compliance with AALE standards.

Qualifications of teaching staff. General Education and introductory courses are taught by senior members of staff and regular faculty members. The Department of History has an established policy that only senior members of staff may teach General Education courses.

Library and Information Resources. The Faculty has demonstrated a commitment to improving library resources. Some departments have departmental holdings that are made accessible to students. Faculty members in the History Department found no reason to criticize library resources and support for research.

Strengths

1. Clear commitment on the part of the university plus faculty and academic staff to promote and support programs in liberal education.
2. Clear understanding that education reform is a continuous process that requires constant review and self-assessment.
3. Awareness that although the Faculty has taken large strides towards liberal education and has accomplished much in a short period of time, some further measures need to be implemented.
4. Distinct pride in, and appreciation of, the changes made since the start of the process of accreditation.
5. Members of staff in their respective disciplines are competent teachers and scholars whose qualifications are on par with international standards.
6. The faculty is committed to strengthening resources for both teaching and research.
7. Faculty facilities, classrooms, electronic resources, teaching aids, and library holdings are generally good.
8. The Faculty of Arts has implemented measures to bring the structure of their programs into compliance with AALE standards.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. The Faculty of Arts might consider introducing the system of peer review.
2. The assessment guidelines and feedback sheets mentioned above can potentially improve the assessment process and add to student development.
3. Class sizes in General Education courses need to be smaller in accordance with AALE standards.
4. More training programs need be made available to members of staff.
5. In conversation, one faculty member said that teaching was not rated highly in promotions. According to published promotion rules, teaching is mentioned as one criterion of assessment. But no indication is provided as to its relative weight. If the University of Kuwait

follows the more traditional American and European guidelines that give heavy credit to research and less for teaching, a change of emphasis would be appropriate.

c. Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Mohsen Esseesy

The Self-Study Report of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature

Overview. The self-study (in Arabic) of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature (henceforth DALL) includes a brief historical overview; reference to a recent external site review; the vision, mission, goals, values, criteria for a major and minor, transfer of credits, and prerequisites. DALL also offers a list of the old and new course requirements for declaring a major, a minor, and the newly- instituted General Education component. Along with the list of personal and academic records of achievements for DALL faculty, the study includes course syllabi, statistical information concerning the number of current and past students registered in the program, student-teacher ratios, graduation rates, students expelled from the program, and service to other University departments, as well as information about administrative staff, language labs, and physical facilities. Quantitative data on library resources for Arabic and evaluation of DALL in light of AALE standards and criteria were presented. All sections mentioned are accompanied by a brief evaluation of strengths and weaknesses in each respective area and culminates in an overall conclusion and suggestions.

The self-study contains valuable details, and it is evident that much effort went into the preparation of this extensive document. The Accreditation Committee should be commended for the revisions they have made to the former graduation requirements. The work of the Committee is laying a strong foundation on which a program of excellence can emerge.

Areas for Improvement.

1. Course evaluation data. Quantitative and qualitative evaluation of individual courses and the faculty teaching them are absent, and due to institutional restrictions on access to this information, these data were excluded from this study. Hence, a meaningful and accurate assessment of the effectiveness of teaching and course materials based on the students' feedback cannot be established.

2. Assessment of weaknesses. The strengths and weaknesses section of the DALL self-study points to the shortcomings of the older DALL requirements and lists the number of courses required for the major and their replacement by General Education courses, the shortage in administrative staff, and the urgent need for expansion in the Arabic primary resources for the University Library collection plus increase in office space for faculty. It also calls for decrease in class size. It points out the unavailability of a departmental data-base containing an updated list of faculty and students' names, field of specialization for faculty, and information about their research interests and production. The inadequacy of financial support for faculty to travel to conferences and the need to declare that majoring in Arabic is "rare" or "less-common" as a possible remedy for the notable decrease in enrolment are included in the assessment of weaknesses section. All of these points are valid, and the Committee should be commended for raising this issues and taking steps to address them.

That said, additional attention should be paid to the issue of declining enrollments in the Arabic major. The self-study should expand its inquiry into the contributing factors, for such a decline in enrollment is curious given that overall enrollment figures for the college show a steady increase. Perhaps the study could benefit from exploring factors promoting the study of English, a language program having substantially higher enrollment numbers.

3. Faculty training and improvement. The self-study could be enhanced further by illuminating faculty development efforts and financial support.

4. Cooperation across disciplines. The self-study omits information about curricula developed through cooperation across academic disciplines.

Analysis of the Self-Study in light of AALE Standards and Criteria

1. Students in DALL demonstrated a grasp of foundational skills (reading, oral communication, writing, etc.). However, students would benefit from active participation in debates, guided discussion, and other critical-thinking-development opportunities. The prevalent mode of interaction in classes is teacher-student and vice versa. To ensure full participation, adoption of a student-centered teaching approach would be essential. The faculty member could design engaging activities and handouts to guide interactive student participation in class.

2. A common denominator for Arabic courses is the (College/University?) mandatory minimum allocation of a very high percentage of the course grade to final exams (40% minimum for any given course). Moreover, a maximum of 50% of the course grade is allowed for other coursework (exams, assignments and research). In all syllabi included in the self-study, a clear preference for allocating most of the 50% to course exams is noted. This allocation leaves very little or no percentage for research and individual/group projects. The few samples of exams available for review clearly target information presented in the readings and lectures. For example, tests measuring students' critical thinking abilities would enable students to evaluate multiple viewpoints, to formulate and substantiate their own opinions, and to develop critical problem-solving skills.

3. Some course syllabi contain citations for required textbooks, while others list photocopy packets only. Reading texts (e.g., poems, short stories, and other literary pieces) could be supplemented with published critical reviews, commentaries, and research.

4. Arabic course syllabi necessitate clear, measurable, and precise course objectives and goals. That is, the identification of skills the students gain once they successfully complete their respective courses. Because such clear, measurable, specified goals, along with any direct assessment of course and instructional objectives are missing, effective and informed evaluation is impeded.

5. Arabic courses (except 228 and 427) require consideration of prerequisites. These prerequisites are needed to assess students' attainment of knowledge and gradual

intellectual development. Established linkages in content and sequence among courses in the major and General Education are unattested in the self-study.

6. Evaluating the reading lists for multi-section courses at the 100 level reveals divergence in topics studied among those sections, thereby suggesting that a common mid-term and final exam, as required by the College (College of Arts Program of Self-Study Report: 61), would be difficult to develop successfully.

7. Class size and enrollment policies raise some concerns. There are all-male, all-female, and a few co-ed sections in DALL. Females enrolled in DALL outnumber their male counterparts by 2 to 1 ratios, and even more in some cases. All-male sections, on average, have fewer students (20+), whereas all-female sections have 50+ students in most cases. Inequality in class-size between male and female sections may have a negative impact on the quality of female education as it curtails the extent of in-class interaction with the possible dire consequence that a gendered gap may exist in the quality of education. Furthermore, DALL administrators, in consultation with course instructors, should be entrusted with the primary decisionmaking authority over class size.

8. Physical facilities: Given the differential in class-size based on gender, technology equipped classrooms – which can accommodate 36 students (College of Arts Program Self-Study Report, Table 24:75), at the most – fall short of meeting the needs of the female sections having 50+ students.

Assessment of Applicant's fulfillment of mission and objectives

Overview. DALL at the University of Kuwait has a wealth of credentialed and competent faculty with an excellent command of their subject matter. The student body at DALL also appears dedicated to learning and to pursuing their academic goals, and the University of Kuwait administration is committed to reform and to bringing about improvement in the quality of education. Major strides have been made in revising and broadening course requirements to meet AALE Standards and Criteria; new courses have been introduced; and critical appraisal of the mission of the program and goals have been launched. Variety and breadth of subjects covered in course listing is impressive.

Areas for Improvement.

1. Unlike their peers in other disciplines at the University of Kuwait, DALL faculty are exempted from the requirement to publish in languages other than Arabic. Most faculty members publish their work domestically and in publishing houses in Arabic-speaking countries. Moreover, most have no affiliations with associations outside the Arab world such as the Middle Eastern Studies Association of North America, American Association for Teachers of Arabic, Arabic Linguistic Society, and Modern Language Association. Pedagogy and research by faculty would be enriched by publishing in languages other than Arabic and by participating in the events of international academic organizations (pedagogical workshops, presentations, roundtable discussions) relevant to the field.

2. Several faculty members in DALL received their degrees from reputable American and European universities, and their competence in foreign languages is well-attested. Institutional support and encouragement for participation in major international conferences is critically needed in order for faculty to keep abreast of the latest applied and theoretical research in the teaching of Arabic.

3. It seems thus that the Department made significant strides in creating new courses and in modifying and revising existing degree requirements, but paid very little attention to paradigm shifts in pedagogy that aim at giving students maximum opportunity to develop critical thinking skills as an integral component of liberal education. Although the college insists that pedagogical workshops have been offered to faculty, their effects on classroom instruction were not evident in the classes visited. There needs to be comprehensive institutional support for faculty training and a realization that being a scholar on a certain subject is an insufficient indicator for effectiveness in teaching in that field.

4. All students interviewed (approximately 4) in DALL voiced concern regarding the usefulness and relevance of General Education courses to their study of Arabic. Perhaps DALL could alleviate their concerns by emphasizing the importance of cross-disciplinary studies and demonstrating those connections in course content (e.g., through team teaching, multidisciplinary seminars and the like).

5. The existing curriculum in DALL tilts heavily towards the Arabo-Islamic eras and omits the Semitic roots of the Arabic language. While it includes the study of a sister language (i.e., Hebrew), existing courses do not show the important connections between Arabic and Hebrew. A course exploring the Semitic language family, the Semites, and their historical relations with non-Semitic races is essential to those specializing in the field of Arabic. The current curriculum thus excludes the historical origin of the Arabic language, its development, and its genetic relation to other members of the Semitic language family.

6. The textbooks and reading materials are mainly authored by Arab scholars. Yet in liberal education there is a high priority on presenting a multitude of opinions and views so as to enhance understanding and knowledge. Awareness of the contributions of non-Arab (primarily Western) scholars is indispensable to the study of the Arabic language, linguistics, and literatures; such perspectives must be included in order to enrich and inform intellectual debates in the field.

d. Department of Philosophy, David DiPasquale

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to assess the University of Kuwait Department of Philosophy in light of the standards and criteria established and codified by the American Academy for the Liberal Arts. The evaluation is based on both a comparison of the printed guidelines set forth by AALE and the self-study report produced by the University of Kuwait

Department of Philosophy, as well as an on-site assessment of the Department's activities during a visit to the University's campus from 3 to 6 November, 2006.

Liberal Learning and Assessment Standards

Standard One: Liberal learning assessment

Effective Reasoning. Although the resources available to the average University of Kuwait student may not in every case match those present on a typical American campus, the efforts made by the philosophy department's faculty on behalf of strengthening the effective reasoning skills of its students on balance meet the standards established by AALE. Observation of classroom activities, meetings with the faculty, conversations with students enrolled in the philosophy program, and examination of syllabi, exams, and classroom exercises provided by the philosophy department testify to a concerted effort on behalf of most faculty "to encourage and foster effective reasoning across the areas of fundamental skills and knowledge." It is clear that the most dedicated and proficient members of the faculty stress in their classrooms and homework assignments the kinds of reasoning skills emphasized by AALE: fluency in reading and writing, proper mastery of communication skills, and the basic principles of logical, mathematical, and scientific reasoning. Indeed, members of the philosophy faculty are keen to stress the importance of those foundational logical skills that lie at the heart of both ancient and modern philosophic activity.

Within the curriculum, more than one course deals specifically with critical or scientific reasoning, and the texts employed adequately serve that stated aim. Assigned readings focus the student's attention on the various methods of argumentation, and quizzes and exams are formulated to test both comprehension and ability to replicate the reasoning skills learned in the classroom and assigned readings.

It is also worth noting that – much to the chagrin of many students, at least as evidenced in the course evaluations – the grading standards of the most faculty members are rigorous. Faculty insist (and examples of exams confirm) that they have no compunction about giving low grades when students fail to satisfy the requirements of the department. There is also ample evidence to bolster the faculty's claim that not a small number of inadequately prepared students are currently enrolled in the philosophy program. Such students mistakenly believe that philosophy is "easier" than other departments in the Faculty of Arts. Faculty have, however, shown a willingness to disabuse such students of that opinion and have done so by focusing attention on those foundational elements of reasoning that have a firm place in the curriculum.

For those graduates who have demonstrated real ability in this area, the department has made efforts to broadcast such success to potential employers within the local Kuwaiti business community and to government officials. There are already signs that such actions are bearing fruit.

Broad and Deep Learning. If the Department of Philosophy is properly in compliance with AALE standards as concerns effective reasoning, its activities in relation to the standards relating to broad and deep learning leave something to be desired. This is due in large measure to the fact that the department, as presently constituted, is designed to introduce students to the tradition of broad and deep philosophical learning mainly by means of secondary source material rather than by primary texts. This significantly compromises the faculty's ability to accomplish

what the self-study report claims, namely, among other goals, to develop a “capability in philosophical analysis and [. . .] enhance philosophical knowledge.”

That the philosophy curriculum may be described as “broad,” there is little doubt. The course of study in the first two years includes: introduction to philosophy, Greek philosophy, medieval philosophy, and early Muslim logic and theology. The third and fourth academic years introduce courses on contemporary philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, philosophy of science, and methodology. It is surprising that, though some attention is paid to the tradition of philosophy within the Islamic world, there are only a couple of courses dedicated to this subject.

More worrisome is the fact that the syllabi suggest that these courses employ secondary source material whose quality varies from class to class; primary source material (even in this area, where the material is in the Arabic language) is used only sparingly. That is to say, although the curriculum is “broad,” it resists the promotion of “deep” learning to the extent to which depth is to be found in the writings of the philosophers themselves. This has not, however, gone unnoticed – by either the faculty or student body. The philosophy faculty has expressed a great deal of frustration with the way in which they are habitually prevented from publishing their own personal Arabic translations of the core texts of the philosophic tradition. During the evaluation visit, this frustration was presented to all participating non-philosophy faculty as well as to members of the administration, and assurances were made on the part of the latter to deal effectively with the matter.

There is reason to be optimistic that this issue concerning the securing of copyright protection will be resolved in the near future, and there is evidence that individual members within the department have already taken steps to challenge what they perceive to be unwarranted intrusions upon their ability to, in the words of their self-study report, “enhance among the graduates a capacity for the development of an enlightened culture that contributes to human development.”

The Inclination to Inquire. Here, too, there is reason to think positively about the program in philosophical studies at the University of Kuwait. It must be remembered, as the university president noted when welcoming the evaluation team, that the University of Kuwait is located within an Islamic nation. This means that the philosophy faculty confront obstacles not known to their American counterparts. Yet their commitment to the values of liberal education – and specifically to those values emphasized by AALE – is as evident as their willingness to stand up for those values when challenged by hostile forces both within and without the campus boundaries.

Faculty efforts on behalf of encouraging and fostering individual and cooperative inquiry appear to have struck a cord with the students, most of whom are women wearing traditional Kuwaiti and Muslim clothing. These students were especially eager, on numerous occasions during the site visit, to express how thankful they are to have such a program on campus – a program that, in their honest and insightful words, “helps us to think about life and how to live it.” That such sentiments may be expressed by any undergraduate student of philosophy is worthy of commendation; that they are expressed enthusiastically by these particular young women is something to be celebrated.

Standard Two: Program Mission

The program attempts to train young men and women in the philosophical sciences, yet also recognizes that a majority of students are concerned with the ways in which a degree in philosophy may handicap them in the job market. Because of this, practical skills are also stressed. In the language of the self-study report, the department seeks to “prepare specialists whom the Ministry of Education needs.”

Standard Three: General Education and Curriculum

In the self-study report submitted by the Department of Philosophy, willingness on the part of the faculty to address shortcomings in the curriculum is evident. One of the most persistent concerns the need to offer a better means of assessing the quality of a given course: “the committee for the development of teaching indicated that the present questionnaire that students check in their evaluation of the course forms is not adequate for evaluation of the courses in terms of stated objectives.” As of May 2006, steps have been taken to resolve this issue in a manner that promotes greater student participation.

Standard Four: Teaching and Educational Resources

Both faculty and administrators are committed to attracting and maintaining the highest quality students. It is a source of pride within the department to note that a growing number of faculty have received advanced degrees from American or European universities. As a result, efforts are being made to offer a philosophy minor in the English language. The justification stems from the fact that 20% of Kuwaiti students receive their education in private schools where English is the language of instruction. Due to the fact that most professors are conversant with at least written English for the purposes of scholarship, the view of the department is that “the bilingual delivery of difficult philosophy concepts enhances understanding, [especially as] there is no doubt that contemporary philosophy is witnessing a golden age in the non-Arabic speaking world.”

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Rubrics from AALE web-site

The Self-Study Report of the Faculty of Arts

Overview.

The Grading System.

Campus-wide assessment issues: Library/Computer Labs/Language Labs.

The Self-Study Report of the Department of English Language and Literature

Standard One: Liberal learning assessment

Effective Reasoning.

Broad and Deep Learning.

The Inclination to Inquire.

Standard Two: Program Mission

Mission Standard.

Liberty of Thought and Speech.

Standard Three: General Education and Curriculum

General Education Curriculum.

Proportion of Course-work within the General Education Requirement.

Student Writing.

Assessment.

General Education and Curriculum Structure.

Standard Four: Teaching and Educational Resources

The Faculty and Administrators.

The Faculty.

Class size.

Qualifications of teaching staff.

Library and Information Resources.

Standard Five: Program Standards

The Students.

Suggestions