

Northwestern University in Qatar: A Distinctive Global University

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Founded in 2008 through a partnership between Northwestern University and Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) educates creative, ethical, and impactful communicators, and contributes both to Northwestern's excellence and the rise of Qatar as a knowledge-based society. NU-Q's vision is multidisciplinary, multi-modal, multilingual, and focused on the Global South as an intellectual and creative space for research and teaching. NU-Q positions itself as an "embedded institution" in which U.S. higher education overlaps with regional and "Southern" circuits of academic exchange that catalyze critical debates on enduring and emerging issues, and enables a relationship between the university and the world that is globally competitive and locally resonant. NU-Q is a distinctive university dedicated to that vision.

Founded through a partnership between Northwestern University and Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) opened its doors in 2008 to an inaugural class of thirty-eight students from fourteen nations, including thirty women and fourteen Qataris. One of three Northwestern campuses and an active member of QF's Education City in Doha, alongside Carnegie Mellon University, Cornell University, Georgetown University, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Texas A&M University, and Virginia Commonwealth University, NU-Q educates students to become creative, ethical, and impactful communicators. We offer a world-class professional education nourished by the liberal arts, and contribute to Northwestern's excellence and to the rise of Qatar as a knowledge-based society.

Excellence, collaboration, community, and sustainability are key values. A faculty of 43 and a staff of 107 collaborate in a state-of-the-art building to offer undergraduate degrees in journalism and in communication, and minors in media and politics, Middle East studies, strategic communication, Africana studies, and film and design. Even with increasingly selective admissions, our yearly enrollment has grown to 473 in 2023. Since 2008, NU-Q has graduated five hundred students, now leaders in media and public affairs. In the last five years, our faculty has pro-

duced fifty major scholarly or creative-media pieces. In 2022, as we graduated our tenth class, one student received a Rhodes Scholarship, and another was a Rhodes finalist and the winner of a McCall MacBain Award, a flagship graduate scholarship at McGill University. In 2023, for the first time, one of NU-Q's students was selected as a Schwarzman Scholar, with a scholarship to complete a Masters of Global Affairs at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Professors have been awarded grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Qatar National Research Fund.

NU-Q is an embedded institution – nested within multiple contexts: U.S. higher education, QF's Education City, and the Arab region. Doha is a cosmopolitan city, where expatriates vastly outnumber nationals, and NU-Q has grown similarly, with students and employees from over sixty countries. While English is our official language, numerous languages are spoken on campus, and many of our students are multilingual.

According to the American Council on Education (ACE), which publishes an annual report, *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses*, a leading goal of internationalization in 2022 was “diversifying students, faculty, and staff” at 64 percent (second to “improving student preparedness for a global era,” at 70 percent).¹ Diversification increased in importance from below 50 percent in 2011 to above 60 percent in 2021, culminating at 64 percent in 2022.

NU-Q's awe-inspiring national, racial, ethnic, social class, religious, linguistic, and gender diversity exemplifies ACE's goals. Our vision blends U.S. diversity, equity, and inclusion norms and practices with the global diversity of our community. Qatar's intergroup relations differ from those in the United States: Qataris are a demographic minority. There is a large and white-collar expatriate community, global in composition, but with a significant North American and European contingent. Manual laborers hail mostly from South Asian countries like Bangladesh and India, and security guards mostly from African countries like Kenya and the Sudan.

A key leadership task is to harmonize our contextual specificities, our global community, and Northwestern's norms, policies, and procedures. Some of our tasks include the application of U.S. diversity standards and practices to a workforce whose international composition and ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity differ from customary U.S. frameworks, as well as broader sociocultural issues.² For example, a lot of work goes into reconciling Northwestern's nondiscrimination policies while adhering to Qatari laws that ban public expression of LGBTQ+ identities and recognize only two genders, male and female.

Our institutional enmeshments, faculty expertise, community demographics, geographic location, and sociocultural context enable us to make a distinctive contribution to Northwestern's global engagement along with the Roberta Buffet Institute for Global Affairs. As we renewed our vision in 2020 to focus on

the Global South, we doubled down on Northwestern's norms and standards of excellence. In our vision, the Global South is not a specific geographical territory (what we used to call "developing nations" or "third world countries") but an intellectual space that integrates local, national, and regional ways of knowing for the development of global knowledge production in dialogue and debate with the Western humanities and social science canon. Our inclusive emphasis on the Global South complements Northwestern's global work. Generous internal funding mechanisms support faculty projects on a wide range of subjects.

Our renewed mission integrates our faculty of humanists, social scientists, practicing journalists, digital creators, and filmmakers into "a community of evidence-based storytellers" committed to excellence in scholarly and creative craft, focused on the Global South. Faculty-student collaborations are multidisciplinary, multilingual, and multimodal, using words, images, sounds, and emerging digital tools in the rigorous conduct and compelling conveyance of research, hence "evidence-based storytelling."³ With this, we contribute to a richer and more pluralistic landscape of knowledge production and dissemination. We build research and teaching capacity in and about the Global South. We include Arab, African, and Asian topics and scholars. And we explore schools of thought that are important but lesser known, in tandem with canonical approaches.

In 2021, we launched the Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South to catalyze faculty-student collaborations, foment teaching-research symbioses, integrate humanistic inquiry with professional curricula, and spearhead active intellectual and professional engagement with the Global South. The Institute's centerpiece is a fellowship that provides highly qualified undergraduates with intensive mentorship to complete a major scholarly or creative project.

Another core initiative at the Institute is the Arab Information and Media Studies (AIMS) project, which aims to build the field of media, communication, and information research in the Arab region and integrate Arabophone, Francophone, and Anglophone scholarly networks through multilingual conferences and publications. This project is supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and will be implemented in partnership with the Arab Social Science Research Council.

We also launched a three-pronged initiative on artificial intelligence, which includes a research lab where faculty members, postdoctoral scholars, and students collaborate on cutting-edge scholarship, a minor in media and artificial intelligence, and an institution-wide series of workshops to sustain a sophisticated community-wide conversation about, and the selective adoption of, artificial intelligence at NU-Q.

A key strategic challenge for Northwestern University in Qatar is the cyclical time horizon of our institution, which operates on renewable ten-year contracts, an imperfect timeframe for long-term strategic planning, recruitment, and main-

taining excellence. Since the institution does not offer tenure, some faculty members feel a sense of precarity due to the lack of career-long job security that they can expect at a major research university in the United States. To bolster stability, we have established contracts that are reliable and consistent, and implemented a coherent, transparent, and equitable recruitment, reappointment, and promotion process – all deeply rooted in the tenets of faculty governance – in addition to strategic research support.

The initial expectations for NU-Q have evolved from a major focus on teaching and a relatively minor focus on research to a combined emphasis on teaching global communication leaders while producing original knowledge and media content about the world, particularly the Global South. Today, although it maintains its institutional autonomy, NU-Q is more deeply enmeshed with other U.S. universities in Qatar, offering joint minors, experiencing increased cross-registration with other campuses, and contributing to more collaborations between universities. As it evolved from a start-up to a mature institution, NU-Q has become more closely aligned with Northwestern's norms and standards while making distinctive contributions to education and research, reflected chiefly in coursework and original scholarship focused on the Global South.

One possible unintended consequence of U.S. international campuses is the impoverishment of regional academic life. NU-Q and its peers (New York University Abu Dhabi, American University in Beirut, American University in Cairo) have older connections with U.S. universities than with institutions in the Arab region.⁴ Besides, with their prestige, their highly competitive compensations, and their integration with North American networks, they attract the best and brightest faculty at the risk of an intellectual desertification of local institutions. Within the Arab world, as the political and economic center of gravity shifts to Gulf states like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, erstwhile higher-education leaders like Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon, in the throes of protracted all-encompassing crises, suffer an accelerated brain drain toward the Gulf that is reshaping regional higher education.

Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins famously argued that the nail in the coffin of the Hawaiian Kingdom was not British control per se, but rather the severing of relationships between the individual islands of the archipelago in favor of direct individual connections with the British. Universities within a geocultural and linguistic region, much like islands in an archipelago, form an ecosystem in which individual entities are interdependent and mutually enriching. Consider one example: in the Arab region, one important asset that is at risk with the internationalization of higher education is the Arabic language, which requires a fertile milieu of scholarly exchange to thrive and continue developing scientific and humanistic vocabularies that keep up with technological change. This can be done only in an atmosphere of exchange and mutual growth with other languages, where Arabic

is a vital, but not exclusive medium of teaching, scholarship, and exchange. The same general rule should apply to English, which at U.S. international campuses in the region leaves very little oxygen for other languages to thrive. Hence the trilingual AIMS project combines Arabic, French, and English.⁵

Circuits of academic exchange across and within various countries in the Global South are crucial to preserving universities in a region like the Arab world as a rare and relatively autonomous space of critical reflection, as well as local and transnational knowledge development, especially in the humanities and social sciences. These circuits enable a relationship between the university and the world that is globally competitive and locally resonant. Grounded in Northwestern values and practices, NU-Q is a distinctive global university dedicated to that vision.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marwan M. Kraidy is the Dean and CEO of Northwestern University in Qatar, and the Anthony Shadid Chair in Media, Politics, and Culture at Northwestern University. He is the author of several books, including *The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World* (2016), *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life* (2009), and *Hybridity: The Cultural Logic of Globalization* (2008).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses, 2022 Edition* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 2022).
- ² This can also be the case in China. See Mianheng Jiang, “The Liberal Arts in a Chinese Tech University: ShanghaiTech,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 98–105; <https://www.amacad.org/publication/liberal-arts-chinese-tech-university-shanghaitech>.
- ³ Much like The London Interdisciplinary School (LIS), NU-Q breaks barriers between subjects of study. For more on LIS, see Carl Gombrich and Amelia Peterson, “Teaching for Synthesis at The London Interdisciplinary School,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 217–223; <https://www.amacad.org/publication/teaching-synthesis-london-interdisciplinary-school>.
- ⁴ For information on NYU Abu Dhabi, see Mariët Westermann, “The International University in an Age of Deglobalization,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 36–47; <https://www.amacad.org/publication/international-university-age-deglobalization>.
- ⁵ In doing so, we follow the pioneering trilingual model of the Beirut-based Arab Council for the Social Sciences.