

Middle East and North Africa

Regional EducationUSA Profile

Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

27

EducationUSA Advising Centers in the Region

16 Comprehensive
10 Standard
1 Reference

EducationUSA advising centers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are located at U.S. embassies and consulates; America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST), offices; American Centers; and a new World Learning center in Algeria. EducationUSA advising activities for Iran, Libya, and Syria are conducted virtually. The region has 27 centers (16 comprehensive, 10 standard, and one reference) in 19 countries and territories and 30 advisers who provide up-to-date services and programming.

The advisers within the EducationUSA network are an invaluable resource, providing expertise, support, and information about their local context. In addition to advising students and counselors, the centers offer U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) and governmental partners the opportunity to engage in tailored programs and activities to increase student mobility. Gulf countries such as Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) offer government scholarship programs to their citizens. EducationUSA advisers maintain contact with these scholarship offices to connect them with potential HEI partners and to guide students looking for study opportunities in the United States.

The MENA region is a dynamic and complex area that can be generally divided into three sub-regions: North Africa, the Levant, and the Gulf. While

these sub-regions share a lot in common, each also possesses distinct features. For example, many countries in the Gulf region offer students government scholarship programs, and across North Africa, there is broad student interest in studying in Europe.

EducationUSA advisers in the MENA region work in an environment of frequent change and opportunity. Despite overall growth in population over the past decade, the 2019 *Open Doors* report indicates an 11.2 percent decrease in students coming from the region during academic year (AY) 2018-2019, compared to AY 2017-2018. This decline from the MENA region represents a decrease for the third consecutive year, with Libya (-16.9 percent), Qatar (-26 percent), Saudi Arabia (-16.5 percent), and the UAE (-5 percent) decreasing as a result of scaled-back government scholarship programs, recent changes in mandatory military service requirements, growing higher education options in the region, and increased competition from other countries. After 10 years of consistent growth, student numbers from Kuwait also dropped 9.8 percent. However, numbers from select countries grew, including Algeria (+12.3 percent), Israel (+2.8 percent), Jordan (+0.6 percent), and Lebanon (+2.4 percent).

The region boasts many Competitive College Clubs (CCCs) through which advisers meet regularly with highly motivated and engaged high school students to prepare them for study

at U.S. campuses and to guide them through the unique aspects of the college application process. Advisers work with students to find the best institutional fit—academically, socially, and financially. CCC activities include community service projects, book clubs, spelling bees, guest speakers, test preparation, and information sessions on the application process. All CCCs foster student leadership skills. Currently, there are CCCs in Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and the West Bank. EducationUSA Egypt and EducationUSA Lebanon also support Opportunity Funds students.

EducationUSA advising centers in MENA conduct strategic outreach in collaboration with Public Affairs and Consular sections of embassies and consulates. Approximately half of the advising centers in MENA are based at an embassy or consulate and are located within Public Affairs sections. Regional Educational Advising Coordinators (REACs) and EducationUSA advisers hold regular education briefings and recruitment webinars for U.S. HEIs about local educational systems, trends, opportunities, and recruitment strategies.

Regional Overview

The United States remains one of the top higher education destinations for students from MENA, despite an 11.2 percent decrease in MENA students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities in 2018-2019. The decline in new enrollments is primarily the result of scaled-back government scholarship programs in Iraq, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Scholarship programs across the region are being revised and restructured, often as a result of lower oil prices. Changes in the lists of approved institutions for Gulf government scholarship programs have also disrupted the pipeline for students coming to the United States. Local and regional institutions are becoming attractive destinations because of their costs, locations, and partnerships with local institutions. However, there are still significant opportunities for growth in student numbers from the region.

Student demand for postsecondary education far exceeds the capacity of local universities in many countries. In addition, the uneven quality of the



higher education systems in the region leaves some students without the necessary skills to enter a competitive labor market. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields are in high demand, and there is a growing interest in health fields. Students in countries such as Lebanon and Tunisia are interested in exploring the benefits of community colleges.

Most countries in the region have engaged with the U.S. government and U.S. colleges and universities to expand local higher education capacity through institutional linkages. Many universities in the Gulf are interested in hosting U.S.-educated professors to develop their institutional capacity and are eager to connect with faculty at U.S. institutions for collaborative research and teaching opportunities. Although students in the Gulf region have adequate access to universities in their home countries, they have a strong interest in pursuing education in the United States, particularly at the graduate level.

Recent Trends

Many countries in the region want their workforces to include U.S.-trained professionals. Governments support this goal through scholarship programs, short-term grants for faculty, and short-term training programs for government officials and administrators. This support is in response to the demographic boom and rapid urbanization across the Arab world. Scholarship programs are directly tying scholarship objectives and fields of study to national labor market needs.

MENA students are interested in a variety of countries for study abroad plans. Some choose Canada because of the perception that the country offers lower tuition rates and an easier student visa process. The United Kingdom is attractive because of geographic proximity and strong ties to Gulf countries such as Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE. For students from North Africa, France remains a viable alternative because of geographic proximity and linguistic affinity.

Increasing numbers of MENA students are opting to study closer to home, choosing institutions in Oman, Turkey, and the UAE. Competition for international students in the Gulf is growing as Qatar and the UAE both strive to be an education hub. Many Gulf countries make it easier for foreign nationals to remain in their countries to finish their higher education by easing visa restrictions and allowing students to work. There are also growing numbers of U.S. branch campuses in the region—including six in Qatar and three in the UAE—that are growing in popularity. For example, UAE student enrollment at U.S. university branch campuses has increased 43 percent, from 8,317 in AY 2008-2009 to 14,549 in AY 2018-2019. Additionally, numerous American-style HEIs in the region have attained accreditation from one or more U.S. accrediting organizations. Currently, such HEIs include one in Egypt, two in Lebanon, one in Morocco, one in Qatar, one in Saudi Arabia, and six in the UAE.

Recruiters are often asked to seek local government permission before entering

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secondary schools. The security process required to gain access takes time, especially in STEM-focused and other government schools. These schools tend to have the most qualified students for scholarships as well as those who demonstrate high financial need. Some countries, such as Jordan, Kuwait, and the UAE, introduced mandates requiring public fair organizers to collaborate with a local agency.

Some MENA students remain concerned about their reception and treatment in the United States. The #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign is one way that U.S. institutions can share messages and videos with the global student community about their commitment to a diverse student population on campus and a welcoming environment for international students. Visiting the region and holding recruitment events in person are also positive ways to show that the United States welcomes students from MENA.

Countries in the Spotlight

Lebanon. With recent popular demonstrations in Beirut and the current political climate in Lebanon, many parents are interested in their children studying abroad. Traditionally, Lebanese students have been mostly interested in STEM fields or business programs; however, there has been an increased interest in the liberal arts and sciences over the last year. High-quality English programs are offered in Lebanon, so students tend to develop the needed language skills in-country. Most schools in Lebanon are trilingual and use Arabic with English and/or French as the medium of instruction for mathematics and

science. English or French is taught along with Arabic beginning in primary school. Lebanon does not offer government scholarship programs, so students are either self-funded or seek institutional financial support from U.S. HEIs. EducationUSA Lebanon advisers serve a diverse student population, including Lebanese nationals and refugees from the West Bank and Syria. The advisers manage a robust CCC and Opportunity Funds program. The CCC attracts students who are some of the best from the region and who have outstanding academic and extracurricular profiles. In fall 2019, 12 CCC students began their studies in the United States, receiving USD\$2.9 million in scholarships over a four-year period.

Morocco. According to the latest *Open Doors* figures, Morocco experienced a decline in student numbers for the second consecutive year, after a steady increase from 2013 to 2017. Despite this drop, there are a variety of upcoming changes to the educational system in Morocco that should lead to a positive shift in numbers of Moroccan students studying in the United States. In January 2020, the Minister of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education, and Scientific Research announced that as of September of the same year, Morocco will adopt the Bachelor system to replace the Licence, Master, Doctorat (LMD) system. With this new alignment with the U.S. undergraduate model, more students will be able to easily transfer to graduate programs in the United States. Additional higher education reforms are underway in Morocco that will better prepare students for U.S. programs, including a greater focus on English

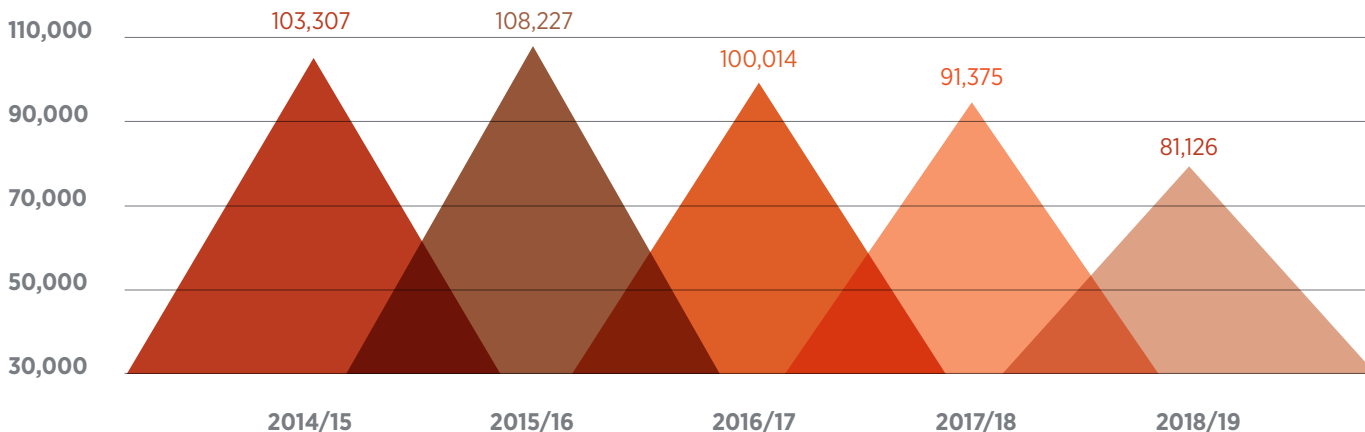
language skills. There is also an anticipated need for U.S. HEIs to provide English training for teachers of mathematics and science, especially teachers of physics and chemistry.

United Arab Emirates. The number of Emiratis studying in the United States has more than doubled since AY 2008-2009. The UAE National Higher Education Strategy outlines the country's goal to become an international education destination. It aims to raise the global rankings of local universities to build a globally competitive generation equipped to contribute to the country's knowledge-based economy. The landscape brings opportunities both at home and abroad. Four major American universities—American University, City University College in Ajman, New York University, and the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT)—operate across seven UAE campuses. This summer, RIT Dubai will open a new campus that will be able to accommodate 4,000 students. The UAE has 99 International Baccalaureate schools, and many Emirati students are well prepared to study at selective U.S. institutions. In 2018, the UAE Armed Forces extended its national service term from 12 to 16 months. As a result, many Emirati high school graduates have to defer their enrollment in higher education by one academic year. This will affect fall intake for higher education institutes in the UAE and abroad.

What to Expect in the Next Three to Five Years

- As English instruction is introduced to more schools in North Africa, the

Student Mobility in the Region (Five-Year Trend)



interest in Intensive English language Programs (IEPs) will likely see a continued decline. There has already been a decline in the broader Middle East region as government scholarship programs limit English language study abroad and as more affordable local and regional opportunities have become available. The Middle East saw a 29 percent decrease in IEP students from 2017 to 2018, and North Africa saw an 8 percent decline. There was also a 32 percent drop in students going to the United States for IEP programs from North Africa and an 18 percent drop in students from the Middle East. The coming years will likely see the establishment of more faculty exchange and U.S. training partnerships between local institutions and the United States.

U.S. colleges and universities will continue to see interest from students in countries offering government scholarships; however, stricter eligibility requirements and limitations on location of study impact students' choice of institution. Given recent domestic economic challenges, countries are making policy changes to the conditions of their government scholarship programs. Scholarship recipients are held to strict standards regarding program criteria, approved areas of study, and the governments' lists of pre-approved institutions, which significantly affects how many students receive scholarships, where they study, and what their programs of study will be. In Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, students no longer apply directly to the

scholarship program. Admission must be granted from the institution first. These changes to the scholarship programs have resulted in fewer students being able to study in the United States and a corresponding decline in students enrolling in U.S.-based English language institutes prior to their studies.

- MENA governments look to the United States for educational expertise and are eager to send students abroad so they can gain the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to higher education reform at home. American institutions should expect more calls for partnerships, linkages, and U.S. faculty visits to the region, as local institutions see their U.S. counterparts as models. STEM fields are the highest priority across the region. Many institutions in the region have funding to send faculty to the United States for teacher training and advanced research, but they sometimes struggle to find the right partner.
- The weakening of local currencies in Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Yemen has led to an increase in financial need, causing students to consider a wide range of destinations that offer full scholarships. In contrast, many Gulf countries—such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—have currencies that are pegged against a basket of currencies, creating greater stability for students contemplating studying abroad. In 2018, in response to a decline in oil revenue, Gulf countries began implementing a value-added tax of 5 percent on most

goods and services, boosting non-oil economies. On July 1, 2020 the VAT in Saudi Arabia increased to 15 percent, reflecting the current economic state of the country.

- Many governments sponsor college and university fairs and value the participation of U.S. institutions. EducationUSA advisers can provide guidance on participating in these events, gaining approvals, and facilitating communication with ministries of higher education. Countries that regularly sponsor these events include Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. U.S. institutions can also send faculty to EducationUSA-sponsored events, where staff can arrange faculty-to-faculty dialogues and provide U.S. higher education representatives a focused approach toward collaborative research projects. Alumni of U.S. institutions are often welcome to attend and represent their alma maters as well. Most events will indicate on the website if alumni may register.

Virtual Engagement and Social Media Usage

According to the *Digital in 2020* report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, there were 297.5 million internet users in the MENA region in 2019. Internet penetration in the region is generally sufficient, with Yemen and Syria having the lowest percentage. A majority of users get online through mobile devices, but in larger cities, internet is available at home, in cybercafes, on university campuses, and

36.0%

Algeria has the largest percentage growth in the region over the last five years (*with over 100 students*)

Five Countries of Origin (with over 100 students) with Highest Percentage Growth, International Students in the Region (Five-Year Trend)

Country	2014/15	2018/19	%Change
Algeria	175	238	36.0%
Oman	2,200	2,963	34.7%
Egypt	2,974	3,675	23.6%
Tunisia	592	703	18.8%
Lebanon	1,416	1,672	18.1%

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at other learning centers. Reliable access to webinars, large files, or certain online systems is a challenge for those who are in areas affected by power outages, slow connection speeds, or bandwidth limitations. For example, connection speeds are generally slowest in Algeria, Iraq, and the West Bank. EducationUSA advising centers can receive promotional videos or large electronic files and assist students in opening and viewing them.

Facebook is the most visited website across the region. YouTube is widely used by students to view videos posted by colleges and universities. Even in countries where the site is blocked, students are often able to access it through proxy servers. Snapchat and Instagram also have a large following in MENA, while WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are the most widely used chat platforms. Snapchat reaches high audiences in Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. As reported in the *Digital in 2020* report, these countries fall in the top 20 globally in Snapchat usage. Qataris are very engaged on Twitter and Instagram, with TikTok growing in popularity.

Although all EducationUSA centers incorporate virtual advising elements, the advisers for Iran, Libya, and Syria continue to work almost exclusively in a virtual capacity, assisting students through social media and other online communication tools. EducationUSA virtual centers reach students using a variety of platforms,

including Facebook, Google Hangouts, IMO video calls, Skype, WhatsApp, and Zoom. While the number of internet users grows in MENA, there are still places, such as Egypt, where only 54 percent of the population is connected.

The EducationUSA virtual advising centers for Iran and Syria focus on providing support and information to students and scholars in a purely virtual capacity. The centers incorporate online tools, campaigns, and interactive social media platforms to communicate with prospective students and conduct outreach in the region and among the diaspora. Advisers for both centers are based in Washington, DC, and offer virtual office hours.

EducationUSA Iran provides information about U.S. higher education via a dedicated website in Farsi (Persian) and English (www.educationusairan.com), and the adviser meets with Iranian students virtually and school representatives through campus visits and EducationUSA conferences. To reach Iranian nationals all around the world, EducationUSA Iran uses global advertising campaigns through outlets such as Radio Javan.

According to the EducationUSA Iran center, interest in undergraduate programs in the U.S. has increased, and 23 percent of inquiries submitted to the center are about undergraduate study options. Telegram and Instagram are top platforms for

Iranians whose access to some social media platforms—including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—is limited. It is strongly recommended that HEIs keep social media platforms updated and boost posts related to Iranian students. Although F, M, and J visas are still granted to Iranian nationals, student visa numbers dropped in AY 2018-2019 and are expected to continue dropping over the coming years. HEIs can get more information on the EducationUSA Iran website, www.educationusairan.com.

EducationUSA Syria primarily reaches its audience through Facebook and Twitter, and added Instagram this year. The majority of Syrians following EducationUSA are located in Germany, Syria, and the United States.

Syrians continue to be interested in pursuing their studies in the U.S., primarily for graduate studies; however, Presidential Proclamation 9465 restricts all visa types for Syrians.

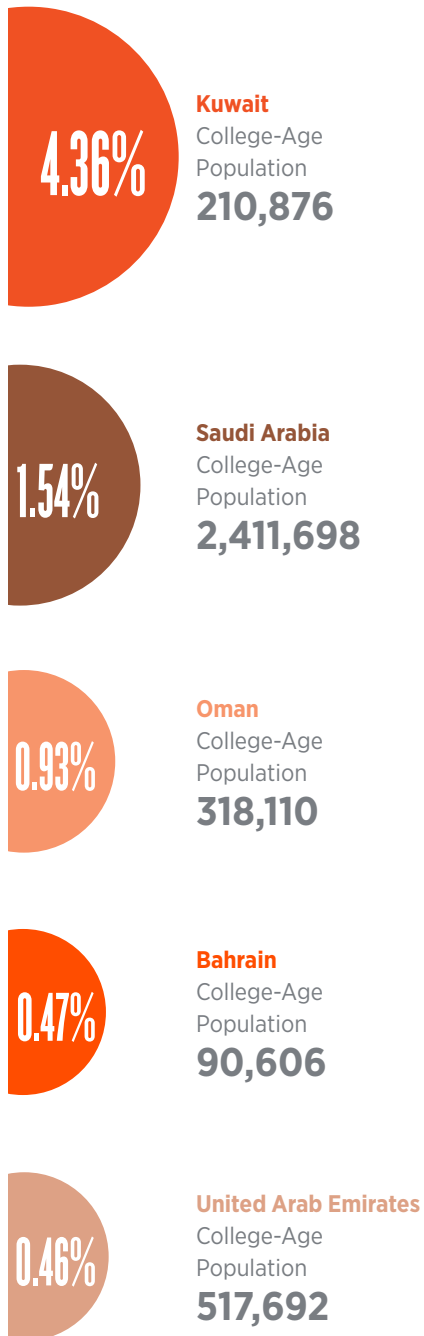
EducationUSA advisers for Libya and Yemen operate in a hybrid virtual setup. Both advisers are based at AMIDEAST centers and are able to provide both in-person and virtual outreach to students. The Libya adviser is based in Tunisia and co-programs with the Tunisia adviser, offering joint sessions for both populations in Tunisia. In Yemen, the adviser is limited to in-person sessions in the south. Students join online sessions, participate in massive open online courses (MOOCs), and continue to be interested in U.S. study. Libyans and Yemenis are eligible for F, M, and J visas, although some students have misinterpreted the policy and anticipate challenges in visa issuance.

Given the value of face-to-face communication, interactive platforms such as EducationUSA webinars offer creative outlets to engage students while informing them about educational opportunities in the United States. EducationUSA in MENA continues to develop innovative ways to reach students, including the recent launch of a mobile application that provides students and parents information about upcoming fairs and tours in the UAE.

Successful Recruiting Strategies

- HEIs should consider high school guidance counselors as a resource. The EducationUSA network engages

Five Countries of Origin in the Region with Highest Per Capita College-Age Student Mobility to the United States



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics; Indicator: 2017 Population of the official age for tertiary education, both sexes

counselors and provides these key stakeholders with college advising resources. Local counselors meet frequently to share best practices in the admissions process and to discuss topics such as applying for student visas, writing school profiles, meeting application deadlines, and identifying institutions that best meet students' needs.

- Translate websites to Arabic, Farsi, or Kurdish, and record videos of students from MENA to engage parents and students with limited English language skills. Provide more visual information about living on campus. Particularly at the undergraduate level, students want to see what living arrangements are like. Highlight institutional support and student services (e.g., academic, extracurricular, social, security, and medical services) for students who bring families and chaperones, as well as for those who travel alone. Conduct focus groups with new students to ask them how to simplify the application and settling-in processes.
- Family members play an important role. Parents are a part of the students' decision making. Graduate students often have their spouses and children with them and look for institutions that provide support for their families. Consider crafting recruitment messages with these audiences in mind.
- Cultivate relationships with current international students and international alumni, and visit alumni when recruiting abroad. Alumni may hold key positions in the public and private sectors and appreciate the opportunity to engage with admissions officers from their alma maters. Don't underestimate word of mouth when it comes to recruitment plans.
- Engage current international students on campus, as they can provide insight and advice to prospective students from their home countries and regions during recruitment and student orientation seasons.
- Consider recruiting in North Africa, a largely untapped market. The region does not get many HEI visits but has great potential. Contact EducationUSA to assist with a trip to Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, or Tunisia. In March 2019, the

EducationUSA MENA Regional Forum was held in Casablanca, Morocco. More than 50 U.S. HEIs and testing/association representatives attended the three-day conference, which included a student fair welcoming more than 1,000 visitors. Following the Forum, the first ever EducationUSA student fair in Northern Morocco was held in Tangier, with 20 universities represented and more than 800 students in attendance.

Institutional Partnerships

Many universities in MENA seek linkages with U.S. institutions. EducationUSA REACs and advisers provide local institutions information about how to identify appropriate U.S. partners and tips on how to develop effective reciprocal student and scholar exchange agreements. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs also supports the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), which connects current and emerging foreign leaders with their American counterparts through short-term visits to the United States. In 2019, there were several IVLP projects focused on building capacity in the higher education sector for MENA professionals.

Unlike the United States, countries in the MENA region have government ministries that centralize the curriculum, standards, accreditation, teacher/faculty training, and overall goals for the education sector. As a result, governments are a key stakeholder for any institution that wants to establish a partnership with a local university. EducationUSA REACs and advisers can make introductions for those with an interest in a specific country, program, or field of study. In many cases, the U.S. embassy or

Regional Student Totals Top Five Countries of Origin

Country	2018/19	% Change
Saudi Arabia	37,080	-16.5%
Iran	12,142	-5%
Kuwait	9,195	-9.8%
Egypt	3,675	-0.7%
Oman	2,963	-4.3%

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consulate in that country can also connect interested parties.

It is important to note that despite the desire to establish partnerships, some countries in MENA are not necessarily clear on the process to form such arrangements or the parameters involved. Communication is important. All parties should outline commitments clearly, so expectations and terms of the agreement are apparent. U.S. HEIs should be prepared to highlight their strengths and present suggestions for mutually beneficial arrangements. In some cases, there are clear goals for institutional linkages. For example, several countries in MENA are interested in partnerships to further develop English language teaching. This could be accomplished through faculty exchanges, specific in-country workshops, or other distance programs. In addition, research collaborations are of great interest in the MENA region.

Here are more examples:

- In February 2020, a delegation from Columbia University's Teachers College visited Algeria and Tunisia for numerous meetings to explore needs and opportunities for English language training at the university level. Columbia University's Global Centers in the region are based in Amman and Tunis, providing opportunities for local engagement with Columbia's faculty and students.
- In Iraq, a new partnership between Franciscan University of Steubenville and Catholic University in Erbil provides both communities opportunities for learning and engagement. This partnership focuses on exchanges for students and faculty, cultural exchanges for students, Arabic and Aramaic courses in the United States, and support for Iraqi students to take courses in person or online with Franciscan University.
- The UAE launched new initiatives with U.S. partners across all educational

levels, including the establishment of a comprehensive special education program in partnership with the New England Center for Children in Massachusetts. Other programs are designed to give Emirati students the opportunity to obtain U.S. certificates while remaining in the UAE, for example, a partnership between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Masdar Institute of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi focused on clean energy technologies.

Foreign Government and Private Funding

Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE currently fund government scholarship programs. These governments maintain lists of approved receiving institutions. It can be difficult for universities to gain inclusion on such lists, an issue that constitutes a major barrier to recruiting students from these countries. One strategy to raise awareness of U.S. institutions and increase the chance of inclusion on these lists is to visit these countries' cultural missions in Washington, DC, and to reach out to them directly by email or phone. A visit or phone call gives U.S. institutions the opportunity to inform these countries about their programs of study, express interest in hosting students from the region, and explain how U.S. institutions are prepared to be effective and qualified hosts for their international students.

Bahrain. The government of Bahrain, through the Crown Prince's International Scholarship Program (CPISP), sends 10 students to college overseas each year. Fortunately, most of these students choose to study in the United States. In AY2019-2020, seven out of 10 CPISP grantees chose to study in the United States. All scholarship students enter at the undergraduate level and can receive full funding through completion of a Doctoral degree.

Oman. Since 2012, Oman's Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has increased the number of scholarships for Omanis to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies in the United States. It is estimated that more than 75 percent of Omanis studying in the United States benefit from some type of scholarship program. Most scholarships are awarded to support "Omanization," an initiative to increase the number of

U.S. Study Abroad

Top Five Receiving Countries in the Region

Destination	2017/18	% Change
Israel	3,355	11.9%
Morocco	1,411	-20.3%
Jordan	1,017	38.4%
United Arab Emirates	939	8.6%
Egypt	123	-29.3%

Five Countries (with over 100 students) with Highest Percentage Growth, U.S. Students in the Region (Five-Year Trend)

Country	2013/14	2017/18	% Change
Egypt	37	123	232.4%
United Arab Emirates	735	939	27.8%
Israel	2,876	3,355	16.7%
Morocco	1,255	1,411	12.4%
Jordan	1,085	1,017	-6.3%

Omani citizens employed at industries in Oman. For undergraduate study, there are three types of government-funded scholarships: STEM; Education, Social Sciences, Art, and Management (ESAM); and Direct Entry. If students are awarded STEM or ESAM scholarships, the MoHE chooses the school the students attend. The Direct Entry scholarship is for students who selected and were admitted to an approved higher education institution on their own. At the graduate level, the MoHE offers a National Postgraduate scholarship.

Iraq. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR) in Iraq started a program in the last year that awards 8,000 scholarships for government employees. The students can pursue study at any level, for any major, in any country. In addition, MoHESR opened an English language center to provide scholarship students the requisite English language training before they apply to institutions in the United States. This language center is still pending Educational Testing Service (ETS) certification.

Kuwait. The Ministry of Higher Education offers a scholarship for undergraduate studies that includes English language instruction during the first year. In 2018, the Kuwaiti government began requiring that all scholarship recipients receive a score of five or higher with the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or a 45 or higher on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to receive a scholarship to study abroad. This reduced the demand for scholarships to study outside of Kuwait, as there is a generally low standard of English among Kuwaiti public school students, who comprise about 85 percent of scholarship recipients. Scholarships to universities in Kuwait are on the rise as local universities upgrade their facilities and increase their capacity. Pharmacy studies is no longer an approved major for Kuwaiti scholarship recipients wanting to study in the United States, and stringent requirements to pursue medicine and dentistry are causing more Kuwaiti students to pursue these majors in other countries, particularly the UK and Ireland. The MoHE also offers graduate scholarships to students who were under the Ministry's undergraduate sponsorship. Additionally, government



agencies and private institutions—such as Kuwait University, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the Civil Service Commission, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, and the Kuwait Investment Authority—offer scholarship opportunities for graduate students.

Qatar. The government of Qatar offers scholarships to Qatari students for studies within and outside of Qatar. Criteria for eligibility include high school exit scores of 75 percent or higher, English language proficiency equivalent to an IELTS score of 5.0 (or equivalent), and unconditional acceptance to one of the approved universities in a major listed in the scholarship program. In addition, male students have to complete one year of national service or be given a waiver before they can pursue postsecondary studies. While female students have the option to complete national service, they are not required to serve before continuing their education. For this program, students must also commit to work at one of 30 government entities upon graduation. Other companies (such as Qatar Airways and Sidra Medicine), the banking sector, and the gas and petroleum sector offer their own scholarship programs, but most use the requirements of the government program.

Saudi Arabia. The government of Saudi Arabia remains committed to funding its foreign scholarship program for the

next several years and is restructuring the program to better align with the country's economic goals. Increasing job placement after graduation and fulfilling labor market demands remain top priorities. To be eligible for a scholarship, students must attend one of the world's top 200 universities, with rankings determined by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Students can also receive a scholarship by gaining full admission to an "elite university," a top 20 global university, as defined by the Ministry (including 14 U.S. institutions). The MOE is also working on a few major additional scholarships, including the Qiddiya-General Entertainment Authority (GEA) Scholarship, the Royal Commission for AIUla Scholarship, and the NEOM Scholarship. The United States remains the most popular destination for Saudis studying abroad. Students who value a U.S. degree seek government and private scholarships, but those who have the financial means self-fund their U.S. education.

UAE. The United States remains the top destination for Emirati students who study abroad. Of the 2,361 Emiratis studying in the United States in 2019, 79.3 percent were pursuing undergraduate studies, and 12.3 percent were pursuing graduate studies, with the majority on full scholarship. UAE students are eligible for 13 full scholarships to study in the United States, some of which are specific to a particular emirate. Benefits differ depending on the UAE government

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entity awarding the scholarship. The Ministry of Education scholarship is a preferred option because it is open to all UAE students. Students on a UAE Ministry scholarship are eligible for full tuition, a monthly stipend of more than USD\$3,200, an annual airline ticket, books and clothing, medical insurance, and other benefits. UAE students on scholarship must attend one of the 50 U.S. universities on the MOE-approved list and pursue majors set by the scholarship-granting institution. To qualify, students must gain admission at the approved institution and have English language proficiency and a high grade point average in grade 12. Similarly, the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) restricts its scholarships to a list of 150 schools, based on a variety of academic rankings. The approved majors are determined by projected UAE job market needs and tend to favor STEM fields.

Many oil companies and other private firms in the region offer scholarships to their employees. These funds are available for current and future employees working in STEM fields. Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, Saudi Basic Industries Company (SABIC), and Saudi Aramco all have programs for high school students who are on track to become employees following the completion of a Bachelor's degree in the United States. Companies in Qatar—such as Qatar Airways, Sidra Medicine, Qatar Petroleum—are implementing similar programs.

Regional Economics and Market Demands

Students in the MENA region have typically been interested in STEM fields when looking for programs of study. In Gulf countries, most government scholarship programs specify the approved majors based on the country's labor market needs or demands. Over the last several years, there has been a push from Ministries of Labor to implement policies to nationalize jobs and sectors covered by third-country nationals. These areas include innovation, entrepreneurship, space science, alternative and renewable energy, engineering, artificial intelligence, health sciences, and business information technology.

In addition to the popular STEM fields, some emerging areas constitute

key opportunities for U.S. institution recruitment, including cybersecurity, the arts, and English. Peace studies is evolving as a field of study, especially in current and former conflict zones. New fields of study are emerging in Saudi Arabia as the country opens its borders to outside visitors and tourists. There is a growing need for training in tourism, because historical sites, national parks, theme parks, and musical concerts are new markets in the country. As a result, Saudi Arabia's GEA financed 60 students' University of Central Florida undergraduate studies in entertainment disciplines to support a planned mega-project outside of Riyadh.

Regional EducationUSA Events

EducationUSA centers plan several in-person events throughout the year across the MENA region. Check the EducationUSA website and Facebook pages to find information about webinars, fairs, and workshops in specific countries. Make sure to participate in ongoing virtual outreach opportunities in challenging recruitment environments such as Iran, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, where the majority of outreach is done online. Watch a pre-recorded EducationUSA webinar during which the REAC and in-country adviser provide a one-hour briefing on a specific country and include information on the local educational system. To date, there have been webinars on Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Territories, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the UAE. MENA REACs distribute a MENA HEI newsletter six times a year to all who register. More detailed information about events happening in the region and recent trends can be found there.

After participating in the many in-person student recruitment opportunities, such as EducationUSA fairs and regional forums, representatives of U.S. institutions can build on these events by receiving a country briefing from EducationUSA advisers (in-person or by phone), meeting with U.S. embassy Public Affairs and Consular staff (subject to scheduling availability), making a presentation at an EducationUSA advising center, and visiting local high schools or universities. Contact the EducationUSA center organizing the event to explore options for maximizing the impact of participation. Below upcoming fairs

and exhibitions with EducationUSA participation are highlighted.

Fairs and Conferences

Bahrain. EDUTEX Bahrain Education and Training Exhibition is scheduled to be held at the Bahrain International Exhibition and Convention Center in March 2021. The University of Bahrain Career Fair is scheduled to take place in April 2021.

Egypt. The AMIDEAST Egypt StudyUSA Fair is scheduled to be held virtually in October 2020.

Iraq. The government hosts the Baghdad International Fair annually, which usually takes place in October 2020.

Kuwait. How Do I Plan My Future? is scheduled to take place in Kuwait City in March 2021. EdEx is scheduled for October 2020 and April 2021.

Oman. The Global Higher Education Exhibition, Oman's largest higher education expo, is scheduled for April 2021 (www.ghedex.om).

Qatar. The University Expo Qatar will be offered as a virtual event October 21-22, 2020. EducationUSA Qatar anticipates hosting its first U.S. university fair in spring 2021.

Saudi Arabia. The International Exhibition and Conference on Higher Education is an MOE-hosted university fair with hundreds of local and international universities participating. The fair is held every other year, and the next one is expected to be held in April 2021 in Riyadh. The Gulf Education Conference in Jeddah is scheduled for February 2021.

UAE. NAJAH, the official government-sponsored education expo attracting more than 1,600 visitors, will take place in Abu Dhabi October 28-30, 2020 as a hybrid in-person/virtual event. Expo2020, originally scheduled to be held in Dubai in October 2020, has been postponed to October 2021-March 2022. The hosts expect the participation of 192 countries and the attendance of an estimated 15 million visitors. The United States pavilion will offer opportunities to engage with students and EducationUSA, as well as key educational events, including NAJAH Dubai, International Education Week, and ReWirEd.

All Countries. Many EducationUSA centers in the region host regular web chats and videoconferences for students. Advisers hold short, online discussions about different programs of study and undergraduate and graduate admissions issues MENA students face. Advisers also present regular weekly or monthly sessions on topics such as obtaining financial aid, writing a personal statement, and preparing for standardized tests.

All centers conduct pre-departure orientations in June or July. Some centers in the Gulf also conduct orientations in January. American institutions should advise accepted students to check educationusa.state.gov or contact their local EducationUSA center for exact dates and times. Even if students have not contacted EducationUSA at any point in the application process, they are welcome to attend a pre-departure orientation.

Many centers host monthly meetings with counselors from surrounding secondary schools. These meetings are a great way to get familiar with the schools and meet prospective students. Interested representatives should contact an adviser and ask to attend the next meeting.

Best and Worst Times of the Year to Interact with Students (Face-to-Face and Virtually)

Algeria. The best time to visit is from November to February. Avoid traveling during Ramadan and the Eid holidays.

Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The best time to visit is from October to February. Avoid traveling during Ramadan and the Eid holidays. Note that there are many different international school calendars due to the large expat community. Consider the Indian school timetable as well as exam preparation times.

Egypt. The best times to visit are from October to December and mid-February to March. Avoid visiting during Ramadan, Eid, and other major holidays, including Sham el Nessim (April) and Sinai Liberation Day (April 25).

Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Travel is not advised (at the time of publication). Virtual interaction is recommended. Consult <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/>.

Israel. The best times to visit are from November to January and March to May. Avoid major holidays, such as New Year and Passover, the dates for which can vary each year.

Jordan. The best times to visit are from October to November and February to May. Avoid traveling during major religious holidays (e.g., Ramadan, Eid, Easter, Palm Sunday).

Lebanon. The best time to visit is from mid-October to March. First-term exams take place in early January. Avoid visiting during major religious holidays.

Morocco. The best times to visit are from October to November and March to April. Avoid visiting during Ramadan and the Eid holidays.

Oman. Visit during the Global Higher Education Exhibition, Oman's largest higher education expo, which is typically held in April (www.ghedex.om). Another good time to visit is during EduTrac, which will take place October 25-27, 2020, in Muscat (www.edutracom.com/).

Palestinian Territories. The best times to visit are from September to November and February to April. Avoid traveling during Ramadan, Eid, major exam periods (January, May, June, October, and December), and the summer break (June to August).

Tunisia. The best time to visit is from October to November and January to mid-February. Avoid major exam periods (early December and late February to early March).

U.S. Study Abroad in the Region

The number of U.S. students studying in the MENA region has generally been relatively small compared with the number of U.S. students studying abroad in other regions. MENA hosted only 2.1 percent of all U.S. study abroad students in AY 2017-2018. The region saw an increase for the second year in a row, with a 4.4 percent increase from the previous year. Key increases include Jordan (38.4 percent), Israel (11.9 percent), and the UAE (8.6 percent). Several U.S. students also study or participate in exchange programs at the six American universities at the Qatar Foundation. These universities have exchange programs with their home campuses and see a flow of students between the U.S. and Doha campuses throughout the year. There are fewer opportunities for U.S. students to study at other HEIs throughout the country because instruction at local institutions is conducted primarily in Arabic.

Although EducationUSA advising centers in the region do not host study abroad programs, some centers offer internship opportunities and are eager to work with American student volunteers. Study abroad staff can inform students about potential internships and connect students with a local advising center.

In 2019, the U.S. embassies in Morocco and Israel received Study Abroad Engagement Grants from the USA StudyAbroad Branch at the U.S. Department of State to carry out capacity-building projects to promote U.S. study abroad in the region.