



Outsourced to Qatar

A Case Study of Northwestern University-Qatar

NATIONAL
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*A Case Study of
Northwestern University-Qatar*

A report by the

NATIONAL
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of SCHOLARS

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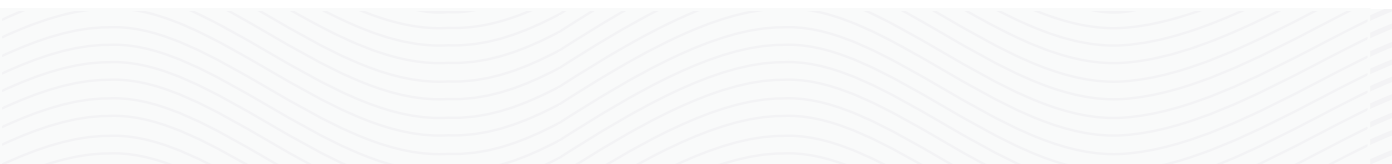
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Northwestern University- Qatar Case Study

Saudi Arabia has historically provided the largest amount of funding to American universities out of all the Middle Eastern countries. In recent years, however, neighboring Qatar has emerged as a significant rival. A small but wealthy Persian Gulf petrostate, Qatar recently became the top foreign funder of American universities, donating at least \$4.7 billion between 2001 and 2021.¹ Qataris fund research projects in many different fields, including medical research, cybersecurity, and economic development.

The top recipients of Qatari funds have something in common: they all have branch campuses in the country. According to the Department of Education, Northwestern University received nearly \$582 million in Qatari gifts and contracts since it opened a branch campus in the country in 2008. The Illinois-based university is one of six American campuses in Qatar, each of which has a particular specialization. Cornell University, for example, focuses on medical education, while Georgetown University specializes in government and politics. Northwestern University's branch campus in Qatar (NU-Q) primarily covers journalism.

Figure 1: American Campuses in Qatar

| Name | Year Established | Total Funds from Qatar | Specialization |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Virginia Commonwealth University | 1997 | \$203,362,261.08 | Fine Arts |
| Cornell University | 2001 | \$1,793,025,926.00 | Medicine |
| Texas A&M University | 2003 | \$696,412,859.00 | Engineering |

¹ "College Foreign Gift and Contract Report," Department of Education, accessed August 11, 2022, <https://sites.ed.gov/foreigngifts/>.

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Carnegie Mellon University | 2004 | \$740,910,072.80 | Computer Science and Technology |
| Georgetown University | 2005 | \$760,562,241.00 | Politics |
| Northwestern University | 2008 | \$601,958,863.00 | Journalism |

The Qatar Foundation (QF), a state-led non-profit founded in 1995 by Qatar’s ruling family to improve Qatari society, funded this educational complex. Through the QF, the country hopes to 1) increase the workforce participation rate among Qataris; 2) equip Qataris to replace the foreigners who dominate many sectors of their current workforce; 3) prevent the “brain drain” that results when Qataris study abroad and fail to return home; and 4) maintain the strength of Qatar’s Islamic religious customs and traditions.²

After founding QF, Qatar began to recruit Western universities to build branch campuses in Education City, Doha, so that the nation could provide its youth with educational opportunities.³ The first branch campus, established by Virginia Commonwealth University, opened in 1997. NU-Q opened in 2008, largely due to the work of Carnegie Foundation of New York president Vartan Gregorian, who was both a member of QF’s board of trustees and a close friend of one of Northwestern’s trustees.⁴

About Vartan Gregorian

Vartan Gregorian held many prominent leadership positions throughout his life—ranging from president of Brown University to CEO of the New York Public Library (NYPL). He was born in Iran in 1934 to Armenian parents and moved to the United States in the 1950s to pursue higher education.

Gregorian’s immigrant background shaped his approach throughout his career. Prior to his leadership roles, Gregorian worked as a professor and specialized in Middle Eastern and European affairs. As the CEO of the NYPL during the 1980s, he increased circulation of multicultural materials. When Gregorian served as Brown’s 16th president from 1989 to 1997, he worked to increase the university’s international reputation and expand its influence abroad. And during his presidency for the Carnegie Corporation of New York from 1997 until his death in 2021, Gregorian expressed interest in projects that celebrated Islamic culture and society. In 2003, Gregorian published *Islam: A Mosaic, Not A Monolith*, which rebutted Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis.⁵

Gregorian’s interest to change Western perceptions of Islam and his expansive influence in the academic world made him an ideal candidate for QF’s board of trustees.

- 2 Qatar National Vision 2030, General Secretariat for Development Planning, Government of Qatar, July 2008, <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/about-qatar/national-vision2030/>; “QF Stemming the Brain Drain,” *The Peninsula*, September 11, 2021, <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/11/09/2021/QF-stemming-the-brain-drain>.
- 3 “About Qatar Foundation,” Qatar Foundation, accessed December 8, 2021, <https://www.qf.org.qa/about>.
- 4 Nancy Deneen, “Crown Gift Boosts Middle East Studies,” Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences, Northwestern University, Spring/Summer 2010, <https://weinberg.northwestern.edu/after-graduation/weinberg-magazine/crosscurrents-archival/2010-spring-summer/crown-gift-middle-east-studies.html>.
- 5 Burton Bollag, “Vartan Gregorian: From Immigrant to Leading Philanthropist,” *Al-Fanar Media*, May 2, 2021, <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2021/05/vartan-gregorian/>; “Vartan Gregorian: 1934–2021,” Carnegie Corporation of New York, April 16, 2021, <https://www.carnegie.org/news/articles/obituary-president-vartan-gregorian/>; “Vartan Gregorian: 1989–1997,” Office of the President, Brown University, accessed April 8, 2022, <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/president/people/past-presidents/vartan-gregorian-1989-1997>.

QF recruited Northwestern to establish a Qatari branch campus in the hopes that the university would train future journalists who could build Qatar's media presence abroad. At first, this purpose was largely unstated. In 2013, however, NU-Q entered a formal agreement with the Qatari-owned news outlet Al Jazeera designed to train journalists for the outlet. NU-Q and Al Jazeera signed a Memorandum of Understanding that created Al Jazeera scholarships for NU-Q students and established journalist exchange programs and training workshops in which the students could participate. As part of the agreement, NU-Q committed to help Al Jazeera expand into the American media market via its Al Jazeera America (AJA) news channel:

NU-Q will conduct consultations with Al Jazeera leadership based on its faculty research interests and expertise in the American media industry, as the news network moves forward with its planning for Al Jazeera America.⁶

AJA shut down in 2016, but Al Jazeera continues to reach American audiences via its social media platform AJ+.⁷

Nearly 500 students have graduated since NU-Q's founding; the number of graduates increased from 35 for the class of 2012 to somewhere between 75–80 in the 2021 class.⁸

Universities that enter into agreements with Qatar receive significant criticism because of the emirate's illiberal practices. Qatar is a quasi-absolute monarchy that offers little in the way of protections for workers, women's rights, or freedom of the press. Critics of the Qatari government frequently end up in jail, so academic freedom for professors at branch campuses remains a major concern—as does the willingness of American universities to turn a blind eye to Qatar's illiberal practices.⁹ Qatar's National Vision, a development plan, emphasizes its intention to modernize to keep up with globalization, but *modernization* does not mean *liberalization*. Indeed, the National Vision clearly stipulates that Qatar will not compromise its local and traditional values for the sake of modernization.

Qatar's stipulation prompts a natural concern about whether American universities should enter partnerships with the Qatari government, since American values differ considerably from those of Qatar. Former Northwestern professor and faculty senate president

6 "NU-Q and Al Jazeera Network Sign MoU to Facilitate Knowledge Transfer, Increase Student Engagement, and Strengthen Collaboration," Northwestern University in Qatar, March 19, 2013, <https://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/news/articles/2013/03-nu-q-al-jazeera-mou.html>.

7 Eyder Peralta, "Al-Jazeera Will Shut Down Its American Network In April," *NPR*, January 13, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/01/13/462940239/al-jazeera-will-shutdown-its-american-network-in-april>.

8 NU-Q Director of Communications and Public Affairs Nanci Martin, email to author, December 5, 2021.

9 See Will Fitzgibbon, "Life in Prison for Poet Who Dared Insult Qatari Leader," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, November 30, 2012, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2012-11-30/life-in-jail-for-poet-who-dared-insult-qatari-leader>; Mark Lobel, "Arrested for Reporting on Qatar's World Cup Labourers," *BBC*, May 18, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32775563>.

Stephen Eisenman raised these concerns after visiting the NU-Q campus in 2015.¹⁰ He published a report that offered nine proposals for reform, including the three that follow:

- Expanding scholarship programs for lower-income and non-Qatari students
- Creating a shared-governance structure for NU-Q faculty
- Informing the Qatari government that relaxed speech and press restrictions are pre-conditions for the university’s continued operation in the country

In an email to the author, Eisenman stated that, as of 2021, university administrators have not implemented any of his recommendations.¹¹

Censorship meanwhile continues in full force in Qatar. In 2020, Northwestern moved an event featuring Lebanese Indie rock band Mashrou’ Leila, whose lead singer is gay, from its Qatari campus to its American campus. Qatar makes homosexual relations illegal, and perpetrators can go to prison. Northwestern claimed that they moved the event due to “security concerns.” The QF, however, contradicted Northwestern’s claim and stated that the NU-Q event was canceled because it did not adhere to Qatari social customs.¹²

The Qatari government also insists on maintaining heavy-handed oversight of the reading lists on its American branch campuses.¹³ In 2015, the Qatar banned a question in a media use survey that asked participants whether they believed the country was “headed in the right direction.” Then-Northwestern dean Dennis Everett led the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF)-backed survey.¹⁴

It’s clear that Qatari values differ significantly from American values—in fact, the two belief systems often explicitly contradict. Furthermore, Eisenman’s report indicates that Northwestern has received negligible profits from its Qatari branch campus. So, the question arises: why would Northwestern bother to operate in Qatar?

One of Northwestern’s motivations seems to be a desire to exercise its influence to liberalize Qatar. In America, universities routinely use their authority, knowledge, and position to mold moral, political, and social decisions.¹⁵ Especially following the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, many American academics hoped that Middle Eastern countries would liberalize—and that they could assist with this transformation. As Everett said, “When we

10 Stephen F. Eisenman, *A Report on Northwestern University Qatar: Nine Proposals*, March 2015, <https://www.northwestern.edu/faculty-senate/about/faculty-resources/Senate%20Commentary%20-%20A%20Report%20on%20NUQ%20Mar%202015%20Eisenman.pdf>.

11 Stephen Eisenman, email to author, December 2, 2021.

12 Sarah McLaughlin, “Northwestern University in Qatar Partner Claims Controversial Event was Canceled Due to ‘Qatari Laws’, ‘Cultural and Social Customs,’” *FIRE*, February 5, 2020, <https://www.thefire.org/northwestern-university-in-qatar-partner-claims-controversial-event-was-canceled-due-to-qatari-laws-cultural-and-social-customs/>.

13 Sama Abduljawad, “Education City Universities Face Book Censorship,” *The Daily Q*, accessed December 9, 2021, <https://thedailyq.org/3909/features/education-city-universities-face-book-censorship/>.

14 Nick Anderson, “In Qatar’s Education City, U.S. Colleges are Building an Academic Oasis,” *The Washington Post*, December 6, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/in-qatars-education-city-us-colleges-are-building-an-academic-oasis/2015/12/06/6b538702-8e01-11e5-ae1f-af46b7df8483_story.html.

15 Arnold, *Priced Out: What College Costs America*.

conducted our first study in 2013, there was enthusiasm for the idea that the Arab Spring might mark the start of a movement toward more freedom of expression.”¹⁶

Eisenman recalls the blind enthusiasm that Northwestern administrators had for NU-Q prior to his trip:

The president and then provost thought they were doing “God’s work” in establishing and supporting NU-Q, as they told me before my visit, and evidently felt no need to interfere with the Divine plan.¹⁷

In other words, it appears that Northwestern believed its branch campus would influence Qatar rather than become subject to Qatari influence.

The courses that NU-Q offers certainly disseminate the predominant ideologies of American universities.¹⁸ “Multiethnic American Literature” examines minority writers who challenged the “dominant narratives of America.” Courses such as “Social Construction” and “Children’s Literature” address gender constraints and propagate elements of gender studies.¹⁹ “Journalism in the Digital World,” a mandatory course for first-year Journalism and Media Industry & Technology majors, blends instruction in the craft of journalism with strictures to mistrust *Breitbart News*, an American conservative publication, because the publication has a “long history of distorting facts to suit a far-right agenda.”²⁰ The course description fails to include instances of journalistic malpractice by left-wing media.²¹

Northwestern’s partnership with Qatar also provides the university with opportunities to expand both its reach and its revenue. In 2019, for instance, Northwestern Medicine announced that it would open a hospital in Qatar in partnership with Alfardan Medicine, a part of the Alfardan Group.²² The Alfardan Group is led by Omar Hussain Alfardan, who happens to serve on the Board of Trustees of Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU). HBKU is also a partner of NU-Q.²³ Northwestern’s connection with Qatar has also helped at home, as demonstrated by the five Qatari-funded professorships that the university now boasts.²⁴

16 Alice Yin, “NU-Q Researchers Look at Middle East Social Media Landscape,” *The Daily Northwestern*, October 11, 2015, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2015/10/11/campus/nu-q-researchers-look-at-middle-east-social-media-landscape/>.

17 Eisenman, email to author, December 2, 2021.

18 Martin, email to author, December 5, 2021.

19 “NU-Q 2021-22 Undergraduate Catalog,” Northwestern University, accessed December 8, 2021, https://my.qatar.northwestern.edu/academic-resources/policies/NU-Q-Catalog-2021_22---Updated2.pdf.

20 “JOUR 202,” Northwestern University in Qatar, accessed December 9, 2021, <https://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/academics/writing-center/resources-JOUR-202.html>.

21 See Brian Flood, “Washington Post’s ‘Find the Fraud’ Correction Points to Larger Issue with Agenda-Driven Anonymous Sources,” *Fox News*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.foxnews.com/media/washington-posts-find-the-fraud-correction-anonymous>.

22 “Alfardan Group Moves into the Health Sector with the Launch of ‘Alfardan Medical with Northwestern Medicine,’” Northwestern Medicine, January 24, 2019, <https://www.nm.org/about-us/northwestern-medicine-newsroom/press-releases/2019/launch-of-alfardan-medical-with-northwestern-medicine>.

23 “Omar Hussain Al Fardan,” Family Business Council Gulf, accessed December 8, 2021, <https://fbc-gulf.org/en/about/about-us/mission-vision-value>; Northwestern is specifically has a partnership with Qatar Computing Research Institute, which is run under the purview of HBKU. “Institutional Partnerships,” Northwestern University in Qatar, accessed December 8, 2021, <https://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/about/partnerships.html>.

24 Eisenman, *A Report on Northwestern University Qatar: Nine Proposals*.

Through its relationship with Qatar, Northwestern has also gained access to a privilege only a handful of universities enjoy: Qatari research funds. Grants from the government-run QNRF are only available to institutions located in Qatar, but Northwestern's branch campus in Qatar, therefore, makes the university eligible to apply for QNRF grants.²⁵ As of 2019, NU-Q received 11 QNRF grants, most of which addressed policy-relevant issues such as "driving behaviors in Qatar, Qatar's foreign aid strategy, and...the development of the Qatar national identity."²⁶

As is often the case with government-funded research, QNRF proposals must address how the research benefits Qatar or aligns with the Gulf State's National Vision. For instance, one of Northwestern's accepted research proposals, "Assessing Qatari Emerging Media Engagement: A Study of How AR, VR, and other Emerging Media are Being Utilized in Qatar," asks Qatari residents about their perception of media in the country. The proposal specifically states that the project will result in "increased opportunities to enhance Qatar's regional and global reputation in the development of and engagement with technological innovation."²⁷

It is difficult to determine the full extent to which Northwestern has benefitted from Qatari research funds, as the university's reports to the Department of Education have remained vague. The university, however, has revealed some of the dollar amounts itself via its celebratory announcements. In 2012, Northwestern announced that its Engineering and Arts School received two research grants from QNRF, both worth \$1,050,000 over the course of three years.²⁸ It remains unclear whether Northwestern has reported all QNRF grants to the Education Department.

25 "Guidelines for Submitting Institutions Registration as Research Office," Qatar National Research Fund, January 2019 revision, <https://www.qnrf.org/en-us/Funding/Policies-Rules-and-Regulations/RO-Registration-Policy>.

26 "Qatar Awards Grants to Northwestern Faculty/Students to Investigate Migrant Contribution and Car Safety," Northwestern University in Qatar, August 19, 2019, <https://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/news/articles/2019/08-UREP-grants.html>.

27 "Assessing Qatari Emerging Media Engagement: A Study of How AR, VR and other Emerging Media are being utilized in Qatar," NPRP12S-0227-190165, Qatar National Research Fund, accessed December 9, 2021, <https://mis.qgrants.org/Public/AwardDetails.aspx?ParamPid=fhgjebebgp>.

28 University Relations, "Grants Add to Northwestern-Qatar Partnership," McCormick School of Engineering, Northwestern University, June 18, 2012, <https://www.mccormick.northwestern.edu/news/articles/2012/06/qatar-national-research-fund-grant.html>.

Figure 2: Qatar Research Grants²⁹

| Title | Institution(s) | Amount |
|--|--|-----------|
| National Museums and the Public Imagination: A Longitudinal Study of the National Museum of Qatar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University College London (UCL) – Qatar Northwestern University in Qatar Qatar University University of Puget Sound | \$800,521 |
| Assessing Qatari Emerging Media Engagement: A Study of How AR, VR and other Emerging Media Are Being Utilized in Qatar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar Northwestern University Qatar University Rutgers University | \$482,986 |
| Qatari Women: Engagement and Empowerment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | \$150,000 |
| Qatar and the World Values Survey: Ensuring Conceptual Validity and Cross-Cultural Comparability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | \$99,836 |
| Hashtag Blockade: Exploring the Digital Landscape of the Gulf Crisis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | \$30,000 |
| Fresh Global Media Players: Redistributing Media Power? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Media Use in the Arab Gulf: A Longitudinal Study | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Content Innovation Strategies for Mobile Media in Qatar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar Northwestern University Qatar University Rutgers University | N/A |

²⁹ Qatar National Research Fund, <https://mis.qgrants.org/Public/AwardSearch.aspx>; “Christina M. Paschyn,” Northwestern University in Qatar, <https://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/directory/profiles/paschyn-christina.html#awards-and-grants>; “Jocelyn Sage Mitchell,” Northwestern University in Qatar, <https://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/directory/profiles/mitchell-jocelyn.html#grants>; “S. Venus Jin,” Northwestern University in Qatar, <https://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/directory/profiles/jin-s-venus.html#Grants>.

| | | |
|--|---|-----|
| Media Use in the Middle East: Qatar in a Changing Region | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University | N/A |
| Assessing the Qatari news media's capacities for fostering public understanding of and engagement with science: issues, challenges, opportunities and their socio-political implications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar University of Sharjah Bournemouth University | N/A |
| Qatari adolescents: How do they use digital technologies for health information and health monitoring? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar Northwestern University Qatar University | N/A |
| Virtual Reality as a Hybrid Learning Solution for Education in Peri- and-Post COVID-19 Qatar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Catalysts and constraints: Women's and girls' experience of physical activity and sport in Qatar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Qatar and the World Values Survey: Enhancing the Validity and Cross-Cultural Comparability of Survey Research Measurement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar Qatar University | N/A |
| Development of a survey based tool to measure digital literacy for Arabic Internet users: A new model of assessment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar Qatar University | N/A |
| Chicken is for the birds: Changing the deadly driving behaviors of young Qatari men | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Global Regulation of Parody & Satire as Policy Guidance on the Implementation of Qatar's Cyberlaw | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |

| | | |
|--|--|-----|
| Arab Children and Youth Television: A Study of Role Models | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Cultivating a Science-Based Community and Scientific Culture in Qatar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar Hamad Bin Khalifa University | N/A |
| Helping Oneself by Helping Who Needs: the discourses and practices of Qatari Foreign Aid to developing countries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Assessing and Improving Migrant Workers Access to and Utilization of Health Information and Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Entrepreneurship and Economic Sustainability: contribution of migrant entrepreneurs in Qatar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Keep Them Safe: A Child Car Seats Persuasive Campaign | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |
| Surviving the Covid-19 Pandemic: Socio-cultural impacts of coronavirus outbreak on migrants in Qatar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern University in Qatar | N/A |

Observations

NU-Q provides an important case study in the unique way that Qatar-funded branch campuses operate. These types of partnerships are relatively new forms of foreign funding for American universities, but they have grown in popularity. NU-Q illustrates how foreign relationships can develop: the Qatari government went from paying for the operation of a branch campus to funding American fellowships, research, and even hospitals. By cultivating its relationship with the host country, the university gains the potential to rake in cash through initiatives that extend well beyond the walls of the original branch campus.

Qatar is unique compared to other Gulf States, and partnerships with Qatar pose a unique threat to American higher education. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Qatar exercises extensive bureaucratic oversight into university operations. The Qatari government also owns all the national partner organizations, including the Doha Film Institute, the Qatar National Research Fund, and Al Jazeera. Northwestern's branch campus increases Qatar's influence abroad—and Qatar uses its influence to aid its own friends, which include Western adversaries such as Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hamas. American universities have invested substantial time and manpower to aid the development of an illiberal regime that funds and befriends entities hostile to American national interests.

Branch campuses and other partnerships give American universities a stake in Qatar's future, regardless of whether Qatar promotes or opposes American interests. Northwestern particularly seems eager to remain in Qatar whatever the costs. The university benefits from increased funding and the opportunity to expand—and, subject to Qatari censorship to preserve traditional mores, it can spread the modern brand of illiberal progressivism and identity politics that American academics think constitutes democracy.

American universities profit from Middle East branch campuses, and so do Middle Eastern countries such as Qatar. Northwestern requires nothing of Qatar beyond its money: the nation can preserve its illiberal quasi-absolute monarchy and traditional Islamic mores and still escape criticism. American universities meanwhile gain access to a new “mission field” in which they can work to export American identity politics and the new progressive illiberalism. But this cozy arrangement only further corrupts American universities and serves neither American interests nor ideals.

