

Synopsis of Interview

Dr. Ahmed Abdel-Wahab, Faculty
Chemical Engineering

Starting at the main campus in College Station in 2003, Ahmed Abdul-Wahab was one of the original faculty members to join the project, initiating the first courses. Finished his PhD in CS, then worked as a Research Associate in Environmental Engineering. Eventually made contact with Jim Holste, and continuing to followup, less than a month later, startup of the college accelerated. Hiring ensued, and Dr. Abdul-Wahab come over October 25, 2003.

Starting as Lecturer because there was no other position hierarchy, then moved into an Assistant Professor position when that position was created in 2005-2006. Became Program Coordinator for Chemical Engineering in 2007.

Primarily teaching in the beginning, students didn't know much about college level work, based on the memorization model from their high schools. Part of the education process was inducting students into the western model of critical thinking and problem solving. Much better now, peer students tell each other, especially new freshman and prospective students, what to expect.

For instance, assigned homework was confusing; students would come to the office and expect to be told what to do. Now students know they need to work through assignments. Needed to create a process of managing student expectations, teach them what to expect from the teachers and the process of education.

Reasons for coming

Originally from Egypt, Qatar was close to family. More important, very excited about being a part of the new program in Education City, starting a new branch campus, being a part of doing things that have never been done before. Requires figuring out what to do, without previous models.

Didn't know what to expect, didn't know if family would like living in Qatar, like the schools, if the [children's] education would be equivalent to the quality in the US. Found TAMUQ people to be very helpful, offered support; felt like had found a home. Very good initial experience.

Teaching experience dated from days in Egypt, also in the US as teaching and research assistant, but to come here and teach Qatari students. Different from teaching US students in the US. Students in Qatar are not very independent, expect a lot of help, don't believe in office hours, the culture is different. Being aware of the culture, able to avoid mistakes. Being Egyptian, more able to adapt, speak the same language, similar culture, had Egyptian friends already living in Qatar. Still, learned a lot from the experience that are version important career lessons: teaching and research, even administrative experience has been valuable. So much had to be done, by everyone.

Family adjustment was easy. The first year the children had difficulty, missed their friends, changed schools. Four daughters, took some time to make new friends, now want to visit College Station. Took six months to one year.

Impressions

The way that university people interact with each other. In CS, people even in the same departments don't always know each other, but here being so small, it's like a family.

Changes over time

Started with six faculty members, and around 25 students. No student organizations. Student body government started a bit later. TAMUQ was in the Cornell building, and even now doesn't like that building. It was a very confusing building, easy to get lost. Didn't have academic programs, only freshman. The entire faculty and staff could meet in a room. More important growth is the thinking and problem solving skills in the students, more professionalism now among the students. This is witnessed by company's that the students visit: feedback on students has been that the students are more prepared to assume responsibilities. The feedback is good: good time management, professional behavior, especially management skills.

Changes in administration over time

When small things happen however they happen. With new administration, brings changes in how things happen. Natural part of growth. With addition of programs and graduated students, going through accreditation, having student organizations and government, creates positive effect, by having more stability.

Memorable events

No specific memories

Witnessing the first graduation was a very important moment. Knew every graduating student from every discipline. Was the only Arabic speaking professor at first, so had strong relationship with students, who would stop by and talk about their experiences. Graduation was like seeing own children graduate. Seeing the fruits of the work over the five years. Now our graduates are working in Ras Gas and Qatar Petroleum. It's an advertisement for TAMUQ, with students representing the quality of the education at the college.

Legacy

Happy to see the chemical engineering program as it is now. Happy as instructor, as a researcher and an administrator. Proud of relationship with students. Looking back, and thinking about where the college is now, so much as been done to be the best university in Education City, have research projects with many company, have best relationship with industry in Qatar, have the best faculty members in the region. Think have been very successful to establish the engineering programs in Qatar.

The future

Now have the trust of Education City administration, and the industrial partners. See TAMUQ in the next 10 years as most famous university in the region.