

Synopsis of Interview
Laila Sayeh
August 17, 2008

First local hire at Texas A&M in Qatar. Qatar Foundation contacted her, asking her to interview with a new American University. Was contacted in May 2003 when the agreement between the university and Qatar Foundation was signed. Was called again late June, early July, was interviewed at Qatar Foundation, and then introduced to Lallah Howard, in charge of Administration and Finance at Texas A&M. Asked to start working the next day. Needed help to work in the culture. Laila acted as a 'culture consultant' to advise on the ways to approach people and tasks.

Shocked to start at such a large university, working with Dr. Holste, Lallah Howard, Joe and Shannon Estrada, Tim Chester, Dennis Busch. Deal with such important and significant people, to be a part of Qatar Foundation. Has changed as a person. Working with academic people, have learned a lot professionally, worked with senior administrators. Started as administrative assistant, was promoted to assistant to the Dean and CEO.

Found [TAMUQ] people very respectful of the culture, was able to teach faculty and administrative about prayer breaks, Ramadan, holidays, cultural expectations of the region. Feels she has a fingerprint in helping to build Texas A&M Qatar.

Background in administration and finance, had worked with Americans before, Middle Eastern culture is own culture. Need to deal with protocols for palace, local Qataris, visiting dignitaries. Feel very loyal to the organization.

Started as administrative assistant in Finance and Administration, helping Finance, Admissions, Dean's office, some work with housing and Human Resources. In the early days, did almost some of everything.

Now in sixth year, incoming freshman class exceeds the target of 100 students. Starting in Villa #7, using bedrooms turned into office, shared with Cornell building, then moved to LAS building for two years, moved to Engineering Building in summer 2007.

Important being member of the staff team, having been the first local hire. People worked very hard to prove that the project of starting the university would be successful. There were many doubts, and this resulted in great determination. People coming over from main campus seemed to adjust well.

Exciting moments: met Sheikha Mozah, talked with her.

Likes the work, support and professional progress available to a staff member at TAMUQ. Feels respected and encouraged by friendly, helpful people.

Previously, in Jordan worked with the United Nations. Had the skills to apply to the tasks needed at TAMUQ. Enjoy and like the work and people at Texas A&M Qatar.

Changes: more formal now in the way people deal with each other. More structure, management has changed. Staff and faculty numbers are larger, requires more organization. Delighted at the feeling of success. Proud for the first graduates in May 2008. Knew all the students for their entire academic career, met them all when they started school in September 2003.

First Arabic speaking staff. Students used to ask about what to do, how to do, learning the 'American' style. Big early issue was male and female. Difficult for students and faculty, some students refused to mingle. Has changed now, for the most part. Some students self segregate, but mostly students are adjusted to the co-education.

Significant memories

Dealing with Texas people, dealing with the project that was the first time in the world to happen. Lucky to be such an active part of the work. The student accomplishments are impressive; they will be leaders in the Qatar community.

Legacy

Would like to people remember that Arabic women are educated, smart and dedicated. That there are no barriers because of language, culture or lack of interest or freedom. Women can do anything.