

Synopsis of Interview with Margie Billingsley
January 21, 2009
Interviewed by Carole Thompson
In Doha Qatar

Margie Billingsley had been with Texas A&M for 21, and was working on main campus, in Human Resources, at that time coordinating the Leadership Institute. Boss at that time (2002-2003) was working with the Provost's office drafting some of the early policies and looking at what other universities in the international arena would offer in the area of benefits and allowances.

Gloria Schwind was the TAMUQ HR director, and had come to a Leadership Institute reunion, was recruiting for someone with an HR and training/development background. Contacted, convinced to visit Qatar.

Arrived in summer 2005, campus was very small, in the LAS building. Daily could see everyone who worked on campus, literally, would meet at mailroom for mail, supplies, coffee. Got to know everyone. Became like a family of maybe 60 employees.

Became a growth period as the programs advanced, lots of faculty and staff recruited. As people came on recruitment visits, HR became more and more involved, because HR is really looking at the total life of the employee: What school will the children go to? What will be their living accommodation? Will they lease or buy a car? Immigration has many, many detail. Environment was very fast-paced.

Came because was impressed with leadership, had opportunity to see the workings of everything, how staff supported faculty, how faculty supported the students. Became very impressed, employees from over 28 countries, wanted to work with a global employee base.

Exciting time to join. Lived in Al Samyria for the entire time in Qatar. Liked it a lot, came before Asian Games (December 2006), lots of working happening on roads and venues, hotels. Had to learn at least 3 different ways to get to and from work, because by afternoon, the road used to get to work was closed. Had a mantra, "Patience is Joy." Bought a plant that was supposed to be delivered at 6pm, but the knock on the door was at 10pm.

Hala and Gloria and Iyad were in HR when Margie joined HR. Helped with relocations, creating positions on the main campus computer systems, needed to know how positions were organized and documented. Recognized the need to do professional development, but had to go on the back burner, but the needs were so immediate. Benefits packages were unique, lots of people needed one-on-one sessions to understand the benefits. Americans, non-Americans, expats, local hires, some sponsored by Qatar Foundation, or by their spouse or parent. There's a lot to understand, and people needed information from HR.

Left in 2007 on leave, but in just the two years, lots of changes. Became Assistant Director of HR in 2006, but the responsibilities were headed in that direction very early. Now works part-time at the Qatar Support Office in College Station. Now able to work from the main campus side to help relocate people coming to Qatar, and come over quarterly to run professional development training sessions for staff. Not a lot of opportunity for professional development in Qatar, try to give people tools to grow and develop. Helps increase the understanding in a different context of how people can work together.

Mostly staff, but some faculty. Support staff has had to grow in relation to the growth of faculty and research staff.

Adding the research piece is a significant change, moving into the Engineering Building, simultaneously occurred with the big growth period – meant a space crunch as soon as we moved in. Rewarding to see first graduates, still relatively small campus. Even with 362 students, still feels like we know the students, and they know us. Lot of spread in the building design, so interactions have changed.

What's significant to you about Qatar, or living overseas? Aside from Texas A&M, have to be fairly impressed that not that long ago, people made a living from pearl diving or fishing. What's happened since then is comparable to the Gold Rush, almost every country is here represented in some form. Lots of [people] are expats brought here to bring a skill and add value to the country. Exciting to be a part of that growth, but there is some pain as the roads are getting finished. So many heavy trucks, and cranes in the skyline and so much development.

In the compounds, there are palm trees and flowers, and you can work out and swim. Really tried to do that while here: work out – really couldn't walk anywhere here, it's not designed like that yet.

Really enjoyed time. Like College Station and Bryan, has lots of people from all over the world. Found Qatar to be an extension of that globalism. Would recommend living outside the US to anyone, see a wider world view, and it's the best way to learn geography.

Had to help relocated faculty and staff manage all of the changes in their lives. Literally everything aspect of life is different and need new decisions. HR was a part of that, and fortunately, had a quality team to manage immigration, accommodation, relocation, and was able to increase that team over time.

Academic services department created about mid-2007. As the university has grown, and student base has grown, need to offer additional services. Will still see this as the student population grows more. Watching the vision become a reality.