Towards a “Generic” Social and Academic Handbook for Saudi Arabian Female Students Studying Abroad

by

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I am really speechless in regards to whom I show my gratitude. At the beginning, a special thanks to King Abdullah who passed away few weeks ago and without his program, I would not be here in Canada finishing my graduate study. The efforts of the ministry of the higher education as represented by Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in Ottawa are highly appreciated for their support, trust and care.

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Abstract

My research aimed to develop a handbook that assists females from Saudi Arabia who are studying or consider studying abroad in the King's program. Currently, there is a lack of social and academic preparation for these women. Therefore, moving from inside the kingdom of Saudi Arabia to other countries make the integration very difficult for Saudi Arabian female students. Women students would benefit from reading the experiences of others. Using the phenomenological approach, I conducted interviews with four Saudi women who have studied or currently studying abroad. I used their knowledge and their experiences to design a handbook to help prepare other Saudi women for the challenges of international education. The result is the handbook in both English and Arabic. I am hoping this project will also help Western postsecondary instructors understand the cultural adjustments experienced by their female Saudi students.
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A HANDBOOK FOR SAUDI WOMEN

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Glossary

Culture shock

The negative physical and psychological effects international students often feel when encountering the host culture for the first time (Hall, 2013).

Ethnocentrism

The making of judgments based on the criteria of one’s cultural groups by applying those criteria to judge the behaviors and beliefs of people from different cultural backgrounds (Zikargae, 2013).

Hadith

An item of news, conversation, a tale, a story or a report that refers to the actions and sayings of the prophet Muhammad (Philips, 2007).

Muhram

A man that a woman is permanently prohibited to marry due to his close blood relationship, such as a father, a brother, uncle, or an elder son or nephew after he has reached puberty. A muhram can also be the woman’s husband (Al Sheha, 2000).

Q’uran

The holy book of the religion of Islam that informs not only the religious
lives of the majority of individuals from Saudi Arabia but is also the major inspiration for the governmental system, laws, and cultural practices of the Kingdom (Hall, 2013).

Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau SACB

The Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in Canada is an administrative and financial extension of the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013).

Shari'ah

Shari'ah refers to the body of Islamic law. It serves as a guideline for all legal matters in Saudi Arabia. In the Shari'ah, and therefore in Saudi Arabia, there is no difference between the sacred and the secular aspects of society. Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, 2015)
Chapter 1: International Education and Saudi Arabian Female Students

I remember the challenges I faced when I first came to Canada in 2010, as a female student from Saudi Arabia studying abroad with the support of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). I was not aware that I would be studying with males for the first time in my life. Although I used to be very argumentative and active in my all-female classes, I found it difficult even to talk in the presence of men, which changed how I interacted in the classroom. The situation was made more complex because I was recently married. I traveled to Canada accompanied by a new husband as my caretaker, or ‘Muhram’. My husband was also uncomfortable and embarrassed for me to be in the company of men and I also had similar feelings as a result of the unfamiliar situation. Unfortunately, this gender related issue caused confrontations. While we worked through these issues, it was very challenging to meet the expectations of the academic world in Canada and the cultural world of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, I believe that more information about the challenges and cultural differences would have made it much easier for us to enjoy and benefit from the travel experience and our new relationship. While my husband and I adjusted to the new circumstances and trust was built, this may not be the experience of every Saudi female.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the project was I wanted to develop a handbook for female international students from Saudi Arabia. The handbook is designed to provide information about the experiences of other women. This information would act as ‘assistance’ to Saudi women preparing to study abroad with the King Abdullah
Scholarship Program (KASP). The King’s Program is an International Scholarship program intended to improve the education level of Saudi Arabians and to send young Saudi people into the Western world as ambassadors for their country. As Aljalahma added; the duty of the Saudi students who study abroad exceeds attaining a high degree. Rather, their respect to their religion and country will leave a positive impression about their identities to others, which ultimately will contribute to enhance the image of Muslims around the world (2012).

Since its inception in 2005, KASP has sent thousands of Saudi Arabian people abroad annually. However, there exists limited research on how Saudi Arabian women experienced Western educational systems and the cultural experiences associated with studying abroad.

While, both men and women are accepted to the KASP program, I believe women are more likely to experience culture shock because of the differences between Saudi Arabia and Western countries, such as Canada, are immense. The cultural differences are larger for Saudi Arabian women because they are segregated from men at home. Not only the segregation would create some challenges when abroad, but also the nature of social relationship within the families might affect the students as well as the academic backgrounds. Consequently, there is a need to identify potential academic and cultural challenges or differences address the differences so Saudi Arabian women can participate fully and more contently in KASP.

A handbook based on the experiences of women who have already studied abroad provides future students with specific information related to cultural differences that may
improve their opportunities for success in the new environment. For this reason, I first gathered information for the handbook by conducting a phenomenological study, email interviews with four Saudi women who are currently studying internationally or who have already returned home. I wanted to develop a compact, informative and culturally appropriate handbook. I also wanted a bilingual handbook, in both English and Arabic. This is important for two reasons. While most of the nominees to the KASP program are non-English speakers, the handbook may also help instructors and host universities understand the challenges that Saudi women face when they live and study in a Western country.

Organization of the Research

My completed research will be divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, I present the problem and outline my own interest in the study as well as some context for understanding culture that impacts the education of Saudi women. In the second chapter, my literature review, I explored the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) in more depth, noting how it was designed and what preparation has been provided for women.

I also reviewed the literature related to international students, Saudi students, and Saudi women in particular. In the third chapter, I provided a rationale and description of my two part research method: A) phenomenological email interviews, and B) application of the findings in the design of the handbook. In the fourth chapter, I analyzed the interview data in order to select material for the handbook and then shared my final reflections on the findings and on the process of designing the handbook. And last, based on the results, I built up the handbook in chapter five in both Arabic and English.
Research Questions

The main question that I am seeking to answer through this research is: What cultural and academic challenges do Saudi Arabian female students need to be prepared for when they study internationally? This question guided the email interview questions that I provided to the participants. The aim was understanding the challenges that female KASP scholars encountered in relation to:

1. Academics;
2. Family and social relationship maintenance and support;
3. Cultural shock, difference, awareness, and safety.

The email questionnaire also included a question that invited participants to describe other challenges that I did not specifically asked about.

Personal Connection to the Proposed Project

This research is important and personal to me because I am a woman from Saudi Arabia participating in the scholarship program created by King Abdullah. Although the opportunity to study in Canada provided the most exciting opportunity of my life, challenges because of cultural and educational differences and language barriers. I believe that Saudi Arabian women preparing to study outside of the Kingdom will benefit knowing about my experience and that of others.

In 2009, I graduated from Umm Alqura University, Makkah, with a major in English Language and Translation. In 2010, after I completed my Bachelor Degree, I married my husband and I was awarded a governmental scholarship through the King
Abdullah Scholarship Program. I mention my marriage to demonstrate the importance of this event in my life. Without my husband, I would not be here in Canada finishing my Masters Degree.

Under the Islamic Law and within Saudi Arabian traditions, a woman is not permitted to travel without the presence of a male ‘Muham’, who must be a close blood relative or who can also be her husband. The presence of a Muham in a Saudi woman’s life is extremely important.

From religiously rooted origins, women are encouraged to be accompanied by a Muham all times when they are outside of their homes (Al Sheha, 2000). Males are the ones who are supposed to take care of the women and assist them in all their needs. As stated by Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, IbnKathir & Al-Bukhari: “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means”. (1996, p.117) Although gender discrimination is experienced in many cultures, it is important to understand that Saudi Arabian women traveling and attending Western universities must still function within traditional religious expectations.

Unlike most applicants to the King’s Program, I have been practicing English for more than eight years, which provides me with a certain advantage. Yet, even with the advantage of proficiency in the English language, challenges persist because I was unprepared for the differences I would encounter in Canada.

Not only was I recently married and pregnant; I was also unaware of the situations I would face because I had never travelled before. I wanted the opportunity to learn and
enjoy the experience of studying abroad but I believe more information in advance could have improved the experience for me. I needed information that might include how Saudi Arabian expectations could be met in a new cultural environment and how I could adapt to the new situation but still follow my traditions. I was worried about which friendship I would be permitted to develop. I was confused about how I was going to spend my time and how I was going to manage myself culturally and socially.

Although the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia made some efforts to prepare applicants, the orientation sessions focused only on academic assistance. Prior to departure, the Ministry provided some instructional handouts and pamphlets. There were also conferences, segregated by gender that I attended but even these were not enough to prepare me as an international female student.

The Context of Women’s Education in Saudi Arabia

In order to understand Saudi Arabian women and international education, it is important to understand Saudi Arabia, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, and the gender dynamics in Saudi Arabia. I will provide a brief introduction to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its geography and history, and the lifestyle of its women.

Geography. The Arabian Peninsula located at the southeastern side of Asia connects Africa to Asia and Europe. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies 80 percent of the whole peninsula, about 2,150,000 square kilometers (see Figure 1). It is surrounded by the Red Sea from the west, Yemen and Oman on the south, Jordan, Kuwait, and Iraq on its North side and Arabian Gulf, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar from the east. The
geography of Saudi Arabia is unique especially the southeastern area, which is purely desert and is known as the Empty Quarter. (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

From http://www.emapsworld.com/saudi-arabia-location-map.html

**History.** Historically, it was necessary for commercial caravans from Europe to Asia and Africa to pass through the peninsula, which created a strategic importance to the location throughout the time. The main language is Arabic and the official religion is Islam. Compared to other Gulf Countries (Kuwait, Iraq, Kingdom of Bahrain, Qatar, Unites States of Emirates, and Sultanate of Oman), Saudi Arabia has the lowest literacy rates. The overall literacy rate has been estimated at 62 percent, however, female literacy is 50 percent and male literacy is 72 percent (Hamdan, 2005). The female literacy rate, as indicated by Hamdan (2005), has been increasing recently which explains the significant
national progress related to women’s education in Saudi Arabia over the past decade (Hamdan, 2005).

**Government.** Saudi Arabia is an Islamic monarchy headed by a king who inherits the throne from his antecedents. In 1932, King Abdulaziz bin Abdelrahman Al Saud founded the modern kingdom, which established based on Shariah (Islamic law). As reviewed in the website of Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, the governmental bodies start with the king who acts as the prime minister and ensures the application of Shariah. As the crown prince is expected to be appointed by the king, a counsel of chosen ministers or as it calls Majlis Al-Shura (consultative council) would provide him with needed assistance to fulfill his duties successfully. The country has 20 different ministries with specialized responsibilities such as the foreign affairs, education and finance (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2015).

Saudi Arabia consists of 13 provinces, which each one is assigned to a governor and has a deputy governor along with a provincial council. The provincial system was originally established by King Fahad in 1992. The members of the council as discussed above are chosen by the king as the highest body of the government. However, in 2005, the criteria of assigning the members of the provincial council was changed to involve the public municipal elections (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, 2015).

**The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP).**

King Abdullah (see Figure 2) announced the scholarship program in 2005. According to his vision, he wanted a brighter future for his people by giving them the
Historically, when looking back to the starting point of women’s education in Saudi Arabia, it was inseparable from the social and cultural status of women. The main social and cultural role of women in Saudi society was to be prepared to become a mother and a housewife. Women’s education was neglected until a group of men in the 1950s proposed to the government the benefits of girls’ schooling (Baki, 2004).

At that time, women’s education was proposed mainly for the sake of learning the Quraan, which is the holy book of the religion of Islam that informs the religious lives of the majority of individuals from Saudi Arabia and is the major inspiration for the governmental system, laws, and cultural practices of the Kingdom (Hamdan, 2005). It was also thought that education would allow women to learn the Hadith, which are items of news, conversations, tales, stories or reports that refer to the actions and sayings of the
prophet Muhammad (Philips, 2007). Women could then educate their children, which was associated originally with their traditional nurturing duties (Baki, 2004; Hamdan, 2005).

Ironically, although traditional Saudi cultural norms are powered by religious and cultural roots, yet neither the Quraan nor the Hadith discuss preventing women from receiving education (Hamdan, 2005). However, religious traditions do discourage the unnecessary interaction of females and males. The first official public school for girls was established in the early 1960’s (Baki, 2004, Hamdan, 2005). Since then, women’s education has continued to improve through many different programs, including the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP).

**Ethnocentrism and Family Centralization**

There are two unique features that characterize Saudi Arabian culture and society: a) the *ethnocentrism* that has been experienced for a long time and b) *family centralization*. These two factors are relevant to my study because of their strong impact on Saudi females, particularly, when they impact how women experience lifestyles and diverse academic environments.

Picturing the cultural background of Saudi people is impossible without referring to the religion, which has contributed to a mono-cultural or *ethnocentric society* (Baki, 2004; Hyen, 2013: p 24). Cushner & Brislin; Kottak defined ethnocentrism (as cited by Zikargae, 2013) as “*the making of judgments* based on the criteria’s of one’s cultural groups by applying those criteria’s in judging others behaviors and beliefs of people who may be from different cultural backgrounds*.”
Since the time when the prophet Mohammad was sent in 610 A.D., vast majority of Arabs became Muslims who follow the same traditions and rituals (Heyn, 2013; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). The formation of Islam is defined by submission and peace. The religion has a profound influence in all aspects of lifestyle of Saudi Arabia, including education (Hyen, 2013; Hamdan, 2005; Baki, 2004).

In addition to having one Islamic community, all of the tribes inhabiting the Arabian peninsula speak the same language, which is another unifying factor (Hyen 2013). As a result of the common religious heritage and common language, the Islamic roots of the culture are carried from one generation to another.

The reason I am discussing the ethnocentrism is because of when as a Saudi female who have rarely get in touch with males will affect my experience when studying abroad. Thus, although Saudi Arabia does have different ethnicities with different backgrounds, the set of the customs and the tradition system restrict the women of engage with the men. It was difficult for me to deal with males during activities, which was constraining my adjustment in the new learning setting.

Moreover, contacting with different gender is a bit challenging by itself, dealing with different classmates that are not Saudi and speak no Arabic is another issue that would ultimately influence my experience when studying abroad. In Saudi female schools, all students are Saudi who come from the same region, carry almost similar traditions and speak one language. Thus, in the absence of diversity, it is difficult to look at any facet of Saudi Arabian life without returning to its ethnic background.
Another important fact of Saudi history that was described by Shaw (2013) is the centrality of the family or *family centralization* as a cultural value. Saudi descendants continue to believe and act on the behalf that family takes precedence over any other obligation (Heyn, 2013). In the Islamic context, “family designates a special kind of social structure whose principles are related to one another through blood ties and/or marital bonds and whose relatedness is such that it entails mutual role expectations prescribed by religion, reinforced by law, and upheld by society” (AbdalAti, 1995, p. 19).

As part of my results in this project, parental support would make a huge difference in females’ experiences while abroad. The existence of the parents as generators of motivation will increase the success and achievements of the students. On the contrary, the lack of familial support can be damaging for the students progress.

Hall (2013) demonstrated the above by saying; “international students in the United States from nations like Saudi Arabia which are steeped in tradition, venerate elders, and have a familial and fraternal underpinning, tend to bond together closely within the new culture. Not only does this make integration more difficult, but negative experiences among one member of the group can spread to other members of such a tightly knit community” (p. 42).

Therefore, it is important to discuss the family connections of Saudi students, especially women, because female students are raised in a different culture compared to other Western cultures and the impact of such background cannot be neglected.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented some of the experiences that lead to difficult cultural adjustments for Saudi women who study in Western countries with the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). I proposed gathering information through phenomenological email interviews with current and former female students. These interviews will provide more information about the challenges and cultural adjustments they experienced. This information was gathered for the purpose of designing a handbook to ease the transition for future students.

As well, I identified the question that guided my research and I outlined my personal connection to the topic. Finally, in order to achieve the information needed for my study, it is essential to investigate three main points: A) the cultural framework of women education in Saudi Arabia, B) how the Scholarship Program promoted women’s education, and C) the impact of ethnocentrism and family structure on women education in Saudi Arabia.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a more thorough overview of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), including the objectives, the vision, the mission of the Program, the role of the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, and the support of the Saudi Arabian Culture Bureau in Canada. I will highlight the role of King Abdullah in building the education levels of the Saudi people, particularly his important contribution to women’s education. Furthermore I will showcase literature on the experiences of international students and focus on articles about Saudi students studying abroad. My literature review will demonstrate a lack of literature that focuses on the experiences of female students from Saudi Arabia. The literatures that I found are predominately concerned with men’s experiences. Therefore my project will make an important contribution, because it centers on the experiences of female students.

King Abdullah Scholarship Program: An Overview Since 2005

The King Abdullah Scholarship Program was launched in 2005, in the same year that the King ascended the throne. The program was announced through public media, social networking, and the Ministry of Higher Education. The program targets students who seek to pursue Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral Degrees (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013; Hall, 2013; Shaw, 2010) and supports them to study in Western countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom as well as Egypt, Jordan, or the United Arab Emirates. The proportion of Saudi students studying internationally has risen steadily over the years since the Program was developed. As stated by Khalid Alangari, the Minister of Higher Education, within only nine years of
launching the program, the numbers of Saudi scholars has increased from 5000 to 150,000 students enrolled in approximately 30 countries around the world. (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014).

There is a wealth of literature that identifies the benefits of KASP in terms of its goals to create a stronger economy and working population, as identified by the Ministry of Higher Education (2011), Alhareth (2011), Hall, (2013) and Shaw (2010). During King Abdullah’s reign, Saudi Arabian economy, agriculture, industry, architecture, society, and education progressed positively. According to the Ministry of Higher Education (2011), the King’s focus and ideological orientation continued to be his interest in education. The KASP, one of King Abdullah’s most important accomplishments has been a contributing factor to the increasing educational level of Saudi Arabian people (Alharthi, 2010). According to Ministry of Higher Education (2010), there are five main objectives involved with initiating this huge, high-budget program:

1. To sponsor qualified Saudis to study in the best universities around the world;
2. To work to bring about a higher level of academic and professional standards through the foreign scholarship program;
3. To exchange scientific, educational and cultural experience with countries worldwide;

King Abdullah passed away in 23rd of January, 2015 near the final draft of this work. As such, all reference to King Abdullah will refer to him in the present continues tense.
4. To build up qualified and professional Saudi staff in the work environment;
5. To raise and develop the level of professionalism among Saudis.

Vision and Mission

The objectives of the KASP were derived from the vision of King Abdullah himself. As stated by Ministry of Higher Education (2011), King Abdullah’s vision of this program is to equip Saudi individuals with the tools that they need to be prosperous in the 21st century. The main goal was and continues to be to improve the society by developing a knowledge-based community of people. The program mission, as represented by Ministry of Higher Education, demonstrates the importance of qualifying Saudi people for the professional workplace and ensuring their competency on an international level.

To show his care and ultimate concern for international students, King Abdullah advised them to represent the country in a good, respectful manner. He called the KASP students’ ambassadors for the country as well as for the religion. Since 2005, The King’s description of the KASP scholars as the leading ambassadors for the best place has been used as the scholarship program’s slogan (Mahraji, 2012).

The Role of the Ministry of Higher Education

The Ministry of Higher Education was established in 1975 under the decree 236/1. The Ministry implemented three main projects in order to increase its efficiency. The first project was designed to increase the quality of higher education faculties. The second project aimed to initiate and support scientific research centers and the last one was to
assist the universities to support the institutions of science (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

The development that most nations seek is the improvement of the human resources in their countries. Higher education is one of the most effective means to improve human resources. From that vision, the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia believes that expanding as well as sustaining the knowledge of Saudi citizens is the ultimate goal of the national development process.

The KASP is financed and sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education. Annually, King Abdullah ensures that expenditures specified to the program are meeting the needs and demands. According to statics center, the number of Saudi students and employee abroad is around 120,000 scholars with expenses reach 21,600,000,000 Saudi Riyals. (Report, Ministry of Higher Education, 2013).

As indicated by Hall, 2013, most international students would experience more stress and anxiety related to schools fees and tuitions than domestic students. What is unique about Saudi students is that with the financial support they receive from the ministry. Hall stated: “Saudi students do have some unique characteristics that set them apart from other international students. While the significant gender and religious issues present a challenge, the financial benefits offered by the KASP do allow Saudi students to avoid some of the significant challenges represented by the financial difficulty put on the typical international student by the significant cost of education in the United States”. (p.39).
The Role of the Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau

According to the vision of the Ministry of Higher Education, Cultural Bureaus were established in various countries. Like embassies, the bureaus are in place to assist Saudi civilians in foreign countries. However, they function differently. Academic matters and financial support for students are the responsibilities of the bureaus whereas political issues, diplomatic relations, and urgent situations are the main concerns of the embassies (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2013).

The Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in Canada is an administrative and financial extension of the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia. It was established in Ottawa in 1978, with three main objectives. The first mission of the cultural bureau in Canada is to provide assistance to Saudi students in Canada by coordinating all scholarships as a liaison between universities or colleges and Ministries or private firms in Saudi Arabia. The second potential of the bureau is to implement and apply the policy of scholarship that the Kingdom follows through the Ministry of Higher Education. A third objective of the bureau is to provide information about Saudi Arabia to the academic and cultural institutions in Canada (Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau, 2013). Last year, Dr. Ali Albishri became the attaché of the bureau, responsible for supervising all its operations.

Women and the King’s Program

When King Abdullah came to rule the country in 2005, education was the beacon of his achievements. As discussed by Alkhoshiban (2013), education is improving rapidly
during his reign due to three different trajectories: a) the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), b) The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), and c) Princess Nora University. These initiatives have enabled women to become involved in the national development process. The KASP provides a unique opportunity for Saudi females to prove their capability of taking leading positions at the local and international levels.

Islam (2014), noted that the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology is a unique institution in that it includes only science and technology programs and accepts international students only at the graduate levels. Saudi women are permitted only to be involved in this university as faculty members or administrators. For women who work in KAUST, this university is contributing to the involvement of women and their expertise in mixed schools.

A third effort that has contributed to women’s education in Saudi Arabia was the foundation Princess Noura University, the first university for women in 1970. King Abdullah was a remarkable contributor to this university in terms of the development process as well as funding. Islam (2014) added that the construction of the campus was designed uniquely to accommodate women. These universities are equipped with specific railways to transport women in and out of the campus. The faculty is composed solely of women with a variety of educational backgrounds that includes expertise from highly reputable universities around the world.

Both genders receive equal opportunities to apply to the King’s Program. The genders also, share the same requirements, have their applications processed in similar
ways, and prepared by attending specifically gendered seminars prior to leaving. This means that the educational, social, cultural environments that Saudi females are involved in are segregated from men. This segregation changes when women participate in the program and study overseas. Therefore, both women and men need to be prepared through the program according to their distinct needs and conditions.

One of the main requirements to enrolling in the program is a female must be able to travel with a male. Regardless of marital status or age, women from Saudi Arabia are not allowed to travel alone (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). If a female applicant is married, it is mandatory that a male from her family accompany her while she studies abroad. Thus, a woman who is single would be accompanied by a brother or a father with her (Alsheha, 2000).

This companion is not only obligated to meet the Program's requirements but to follow the rules of the Shari'ah. The Sharia is the Islamic Law, and it states "the way that God has advised Muslims to live as documented in the Quran and exemplified in the practices of prophet Muhammad" (Quraishi-Landes, 2013).

Preparing Saudi Arabian Female Students for International Education

When I examined current literature on students studying abroad, I found a wealth of research focused on international student issues. For example, Kauffmann, Martin, Weaver, and Weaver (1990), provide stories about the experiences of four international students exposed to different learning environments and the outcomes related to their intellectual development. The authors discussed how being exposed to a different culture increased the students international perspective through immersion in the host country's
language and culture over an extended period of time. They also discussed the benefits of international education for developing personal skills, relationships, and awareness.

I found a small body of literature focused on international students from Saudi Arabia (Baki, 2004; Shaw, 2010; Hall, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Alshehry, 1989; Alhareth, 2011; Alhazmi, 2010; Islam, 2014; Abdal Ati, 1977). These publications highlighted four areas of adjustment: academic, financial, social, and cultural. Alshehry (1989), investigated the academic problems encountered/experienced by Saudi students while studying abroad. Shaw (2010) and Hyen (2013) focused on investigating success strategies that students from Saudi Arabia have utilized to ensure high academic achievement. Additionally, Shaw (2010) discussed the difference between the educational environments in the United States and in Saudi Arabia.

Hall (2013) emphasized the importance of motivation to promote academic success, as well as, focusing on the strategies and techniques that Saudi students implemented to adjust to the new learning environment. These strategies and techniques included However, Alhazmi (2010) expanded his investigation and focused on the impact of a co-educational environments on all Saudi students. Similarly, Baki (2013) examined the impact of a segregated learning environment on employment in Saudi Arabia.

Alshehry (1998), Shaw (2010), and Hall (2013) discussed the financial issues that Saudi students encounter. Alshehry (1989) provided information about four major categories, including lack of money, buying food, transportation costs, and emergencies. Shaw (2010) and Hall (2013) focused on the financial support under the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which is intended to meet the financial needs of fall family
members who are accompanied with the student. Both Shaw (2010) and Hall (2013) also examined the relationship between the financial support for students and their academic success.

Furthermore, the social-economic background of students from Saudi Arabia affects their academic success significantly. Both Hall (2013) and Alhazmi (2010) discussed the social aspects of Saudi students in terms of their communication and ability to adjust in the foreign countries. Hall (2013) identified the factors related to adjustment constraints among Saudi students in the United States. Alhazmi (2010) examined how students' previous experience of gender segregation affects their adjustment in foreign countries. There is also evidence that the complete segregation of genders in Saudi Arabia causes considerable problems for students who study in Western countries.

Hall (2013), Heyn (2013), and AbdalAti (1974) all emphasized importance of the family among all Saudi Arabian people. The centrality of the family in Saudi culture often makes adjustments in Western societies more difficult. Culture was discussed throughout the literature as having major influence on Saudi Arabian students studying abroad. The authors consistently identified religious values as the root of the unique culture of Saudi Arabia. (Shaw, 2010; Hall, 2013; Alhazmi, 2010; Baki, 2013; Heyn, 2013).

**Why Study the Experiences of Women.** I have found that the experiences of females from Saudi Arabia are rarely represented in the academic literature related to international students. Most of the studies I cited focused on male students. Saudi Arabia is a male-dominated society and there are few opportunities for females to have a public
voice. According to Heidegger (as cited in Adlofsson, 2010), the life experience of those who have been marginalized in the literature, such as Saudi women can be accessed through a phenomenological method.

Thus, my research focuses on Saudi females as international students and invites four women to share their experiences of studying abroad with the KASP. Sharing the women’s experiences offers the opportunity for Saudi females to be recognized in the literature, as well as, providing information needed to create the handbook.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the background of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) was reviewed as an important achievement that contributed to women’s international education. The main goals of KASP, as well as, the mission and vision of the program were highlighted so readers have a sense of why the mission and vision was important. The chapter also provided a brief introduction to both the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau SACB in Canada.

A reader of this chapter might notice although there is limited literature which discuss the background of Saudi Arabian students as international students, literature is even more limited to Saudi females. Saudi females studying abroad are rarely represented in the literature and further, in order to provide a better understanding of the cultural challenges of Saudi females studying abroad, I focused on literature about this topic and the KASP program itself.
Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a rationale for the research method that I chose and present a clear outline of the research procedures. I will address the rationale and procedures in two main sections. The rationale section discusses the use of phenomenological interviews and textual analysis that informed how I designed my handbook. The procedure section outlines the three main steps in my research process: (1) textual analysis, (2) phenomenological interviews, and (3) handbook design. The procedure section also includes details about how participants were selected and the ethical considerations involved.

Rationale of the Method

The method that I chose for my study was derived from my theoretical positioning. As referred to by Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2003), theoretical positioning empowers a researcher to choose or shape a certain research design. In this research, I am interested in understanding and improving the quality of the experience of Saudi women studying abroad. In order to improve the quality of these women, I will construct a handbook for future students.

However, to ensure that the handbook contains useful information I needed to explore the experiences of Saudi women who already traveled abroad to study. My focus on the women's experience is my theoretical positioning and it required a qualitative and phenomenological research method. The data collected from participants, using the phenomenological interviewing, was supplemented by textual analysis. The textual
analysis included academic material and materials such as seminars and pamphlets provided by the KASP.

Using this combination of methods and incorporating various sources of information, I believe my handbook will provide more relevant and culturally appropriate information that is missing in existing program materials. The overall goal is to provide information that can help create a better quality of experience for female students in the future.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research has three main philosophical orientations or paradigms: *positivist, interpretive, and critical*. From an interpretive point of view, also termed *constructivist*, a researcher aims to explore a participant’s understandings of a lived phenomenon. Creswell (2007) noted that the goal of the research is “to rely as much as possible at participants’ views of the situation” (p.20). As noted by Merriam (1998), qualitative research supports the ability to express human experiences within their cultural and sociological frames.

My handbook is designed to be more valuable to women preparing to study abroad if it truly reflects the experiences of other women. As a participant in the program myself, I believe that the perspective of women is missing in the material provided for students preparing to study abroad. Therefore, I needed to determine what information was needed in the handbook by comparing a textual analysis of preparation materials with the interviewees concerns expressed in the phenomenological interviews. A
Combination of data collection techniques is a common feature of qualitative research (LeCompte&Schuensual, 1999).

The aim of qualitative inquiry is to create meanings and understandings that make sense of a social phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). I wanted to create meaning and understanding with the women’s experiences. Furthermore, using qualitative investigation provides information that can be used to verify the four women’s experiences and help the researcher improve on “understanding the meaning people have constructed” (Merriam, 1998, p.6).

My interview questions were designed to invite participants to make meaning of their educational experience abroad and identify the difficulties and challenges they faced as they adjusted to Western culture and the strategies that contributed to their successful adjustment. Therefore, the textual analysis and the experiences of women I interviewed provided a variety of data necessary for the handbook.

I wanted to interview four Saudi Arabian females in a short period of time so that the phenomenology of their experiences would be lively and vivid. In my analysis of the interviews, I focused on commonalities and patterns in relation to the challenges that participants experienced in the host countries. A characteristic of the phenomenological method is that it requires all participants to have been exposed to the same experience and the study to be conducted in a short period of time (Creswell, 2006).

**Phenomenological Framework**

Historically, the phenomenological method was articulated after World War I
(1914-1918) by Edmund Husserl. This German philosopher saw that the huge impact of the war on people's thinking made it urgent to create a new approach to describe wartime experiences. The main concern of Husserl was to treat realities as phenomena and to expect that the knowledge analysis would be driven by that phenomenon. (Groenewald, 2004). Therefore, I treated the women's realities of cultural challenges as phenomena and my analysis was driven by their experiences.

A phenomenon as defined by Van Manen (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 58) is "an object of human experience" but according to Creswell (2007) a phenomenon can be explained further by viewing phenomenology as a description of an experience that is shared by more than one individual. Thus, the phenomenological method aims to describe the commonalities of the phenomenon among all the participants.

This new philosophy was further developed by many followers such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Alfred Schultz (1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Maurice Maleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and many others. Phenomenology embodies understanding the different meanings of people's lives in a way that makes sense of people's experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

Qualitative interviews are a common technique that a phenomenologist uses to discover those meanings. As stated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), "focusing the interviews on the experienced meanings of the subjects' life world, phenomenology has been relevant for clarifying the mode of understanding in a qualitative research interview" (p. 26).
**Research Process.** Due to the physical distance between myself, the researcher, and the participants, the interviews were processed through email structured interviews. For the purpose of developing a handbook, I predetermined specific information needed from specific participants through purposive sampling technique.

**Purposive Sampling.** The sample selection in qualitative research is usually, as stated by Merriam (1998) nonrandom, purposeful, and small. In order to generate particular information from interviews, I used purposive sampling. This technique fulfilled the dimensions of focused information from various sources and interpretation. As explained by Creswell (2007), purposeful sampling involves the “certainty of whom and why would the researcher chooses to conduct the study being investigated” (p.126).

Furthermore, when conducting a study using a purposive sampling strategy, it is also important to ensure that all participants were exposed to the same phenomenon. Participants exposed to the same phenomenon are better able to provide specifics and details that pertain to a specific experience or sets of experiences.

Participants were selected carefully to ensure that they were able to contribute information relevant to the research. I focused on the experiences of four Saudi female students who have studied abroad. All the participants shared the following characteristics: possess Bachelor Degrees, between the ages of 25 to 31, and enrolled through the King Abdullah Scholarship Program.

**Remote Interviewing.** As the use of the Internet for conducting interviews has increased substantially during the past ten years (Gubrium, Holstein, Mavasti & McKinney, 2012) and due to the location of my interviewees, I decided to use remote interviewing
technique. The easiest way to access my participants was to process them through Internet medium; therefore, the interviews were highly structured and sent out as questionnaires by emails. The technique of using the Internet to access participants is now mainstream in research design.

King and Harrocks (2010) pointed out that, in cases where “physical distance from participants, availability of participants and the nature of the interview topic "are concerned, remote-interviewing methods [were] found to be more effective than actual, physical or face-to-face meetings”(p.79). As a consequence of increased Internet usage, human interaction is changing. Currently, the tools of communication, that researchers used ‘traditionally’ such as face-to-face contact, telephone or postal mails are no longer current. These ‘traditional’ formats of communication are being surpassed by the Internet. While it loses some of the personal interaction, for my research it proved more cost effective and time efficient. (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004).

**Structured or Standardized Interviews.** in this research, I began with structured interviews through a computer-assisted medium that does not necessarily involve organizational problems, and can be used to greater benefit when geographical boundaries exist(Kvale &Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, I decided to implement online structured interviews as my research and data collection method. This method allowed me to communicate more readily and effectively with my chosen participants. More specifically, I could send an email with an attached document containing the interview questions.
Describing an interview as structured means that researcher formats "a specific set of questions in a predetermined order with a limited number of response categories" (Stuckey, 2013, p.57). According to Stuckey (2013), structured interviews are characterized by very ordered and shortened questions. Additionally, this type of interview style is specifically helpful when the researcher has an expanded prior knowledge about the topic about to be explored.

The structured or standardized interviews I used, as noted by Bryman (2008) and Hesse Biber & Leavy (2004), are associated with close-ended questions (see Appendix D). However, for the purpose of my phenomenological approach; I used fifteen open-ended questions. My phenomenological approach to the interviews emphasized the way respondents interpret their experiences.

Follow up emails were sent to the participants if responses needed further clarification or description. As suggested by Creswell, a list of expected questions should be taken in consideration by the interviewer to eliminate the misunderstood responses or sensitive questions that respondents do not wish to answer (Turner, 2010, p.95).

Ethical Considerations

A review of the plan for a study by a university Research Ethics Board (REB) was required when the researcher is affiliated with a university and when the research involves work with human subjects or participants. I submitted my research proposal and an application for approval to the UNBC Research Ethics Board. This application required that I fulfill certain requirements to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants. I needed to gain informed consent from each participant, so I provided an
information letter (see Appendix A) to explain to participants what 1) I would be asking them to do, 2) how long it would take, and 3) how I would use the information they provided. In the information letter, I also explained how I would keep the names of participants anonymous and the content of their interviews confidential. I explained that participation in the study was voluntary and that they may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Because it is not possible to obtain an actual written signature indicating consent by email, I asked for an email to indicate that each participant read and understood the information letter. I offered to answer any questions participants' had by email before they began to answer the questions in the interview.

Data Collection. The data needed in my research was gathered through two main resources: primary resources and secondary sources. The primary resource was the information given by interviewing the participants. Because the main purpose of the research was to develop a helpful handbook for international Saudi Arabian female students, the first section focused on examining the females' experiences of studying abroad through the structured interviews. The secondary resources focused on analyzing literature that discusses the issues and challenges of international students. I was specifically looking for literature that discussed the experiences of females.

The secondary resource included literature and materials provided to female Saudis before studying abroad such as handbooks, seminars or handouts that could be specifically advantageous to women. The materials included but not limited to the following:

2. Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau website (http://www.saudibureau.org/en/)
4. University of Northern British Colombia website (http://www.unbc.ca/international-education)
5. Pamphlets, handouts, handbooks and booklets distributed prior or after travelling
6. Guidelines, handbooks, manuals from UNBC international center and UNBC website
7. Publications that discuss international students from Saudi Arabia, specifically for women
8. Arabic materials discuss the issue of Saudi students studying abroad through King Program.

Data Analysis. Generally, qualitative data as indicated by Creswell (2007) is analyzed by preparing the data, sorting the data into themes, and finally interpreting the data in order to situate the purpose of the study. Although this process is the most commonly used, it is not fixed to all approaches. Phenomenological studies, such as mine, have specific structured method for data analysis. My approach was mainly used to find the meaning units through the structured interviews from the participants' lived experience of studying overseas while insuring embedding my experience as well.

Creswell modified his analytical approach to improve its practical use in phenomenology. His approach depends on describing personal experience related to the phenomena being studied, followed by providing a researcher’s personal experience. Creswell (2007) developed a list of important statements in order to group items into what he called “meaning units”. Therefore, a researcher is encouraged to provide a
textual description of the participants’ experiences, as well as, a structural description that is the quite essential how the phenomena was experienced. This technique that Creswell identified was utilized in my analysis because it was easy to follow through the analysis. The technique assisted me in focusing on the main issues from the participants’ talks.

Among other qualitative techniques, analyzing interviews is often seen as a daunting process that can overwhelm the researcher. However, as noted by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), it is preferable to pose the question of how to analyze the amount of data before conducting the interviews in the first place. Thus, the researcher’s way of simplifying the analysis process occurs with being aware of having a systematic procedure to follow at the beginning when gathering the data (p.190).

The analysis of my study resulted mainly from the predetermined categorization of the interviews’ questions that I conducted. I sought specific answers for three categories 1) cultural/social adjustment, 2) the academic achievement, and 3) general questions including the experiences of studying overseas. Yet, my analysis was not limited to these categories because additional themes could be developed and discussed during the interviews.

Data Application: Handbook Design. Because I am looking for certain types of information from the participants in order to incorporate them in the handbook, a specific set of questions was predetermined. The questions proposed had a pattern that contributed to the organization of the handbook and the analysis process.
To maximize the handbook's usefulness, I wanted it informative and easy to carry handbook. Additionally, the handbook needs to be completed in both Arabic and English languages. The handbook will enable the prospective Saudi females, who are mostly non-English speakers, to be more prepared for studying abroad.

**The Process of Designing the Handbook.** I designed the handbook using the Microsoft Word template. It is even to ten pages, double-sided. I attached the handbook to the appendices so it can act as a separate book and in isolation from the whole project. As well as the handbook being offered as a hard copy, I will burn the information onto a CD as electronic version. Both the hardcopy of the handbook, as well as the CD of the will be sent to the participants via email and mail.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I outlined my rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach consisting of structured interviews and collected through email. Driven by the literature review, I discussed how I supplemented my two main types of data collection process: (a) the textual analysis of program materials, literature related to international students from Saudi Arabia, and (b) primary resource: the meanings produced from the interviews. To conclude the chapter, I provided a brief description of the data analysis process and the creation of the handbook.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

My project is about examining the challenges and difficulties faced by Saudi Arabian females studying abroad. I wanted to develop a handbook that provides assistance to these women and makes international studying more attractive. Therefore, data collection through the interviews and data analysis was highly important. In chapter four, I discuss how I analyzed the data gathered from structured interviews. I also discuss how the interviews were conducted with four Saudi Arabian females who were all studying abroad.

In order to understand the experiences of the four women, I implemented a phenomenological methodology. Therefore, my analysis of the interviews will be structured and analyzed accordingly. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion about the derived themes developed from the structured interviews.

Analyzing Qualitative Data

Data analysis is the process that comes after the researcher completes gathering data required for the study. Throughout the process, the researcher attempts to make sense of the amount of data resulted. Analyzing the data is not "off-the shelf, but rather, is a costume built, revised and choreographed" (Creswell 2007. P.150). During the data collection process, a researcher and/or analyst goes back and forth to the original script and new results generated.
Huberman and Mills (as cited by Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) stated that defining data analysis involves three sub-processes: 1) data reduction, 2) data display and 3) conclusion drawing. Creswell (2007) also assume that all researchers analyzing qualitative data must go through these three main processes because these are common strategies. As a researcher, I needed to organize the data, transcribe them and finally present the findings.

During my analysis, I prepared the data to be analyzed in an organized and systematic way. Commonly known, this phase of the analysis is ultimately crucial as the amounts of data gathered are usually confusing (Creswell, 2007). After, as a researcher, I read the transcription as an entirety to formulate a general sense of the data, which is referred to by Creswell (2007) as ‘preliminary exploratory analysis’.

Throughout the reading process, which is known to be repetitive, a researcher takes notes, uses tables or matrix, and organizes the material by types or genres (Creswell, 2007). The reading and re-reading processes helped me as the researcher to contribute and develop a thematic understanding (Creswell, 2007). Through the re-reading, I created a considerable amount of familiarity to the research information, which is method according to Shaw (2010).

**Phenomenological Analysis.** According to Creswell (2007), analyzing a given phenomenological study involves specific-structured steps, which I followed in my project. To achieve the authenticity, I will bracket my personal views as a researcher and a Saudi female who is studying abroad. It was recommended by my supervisor to commence the analysis by framing my own experience whenever relevant. Therefore, I
inserted my personal lived phenomenon whenever it was relevant to the discussion. This personal contribution is as described by King (2014) is done by the researcher in a manner that is as objective as possible. Using my personal reflection or ‘bracketing’ of my perspectives increased the transparency or trustworthiness of the methodology.

Creswell (2007) recommends starting the analysis process by exploring the most significant statements of the participants. The statements should be repetitive or overlapping themes and comments. The statements can then be categorized into larger themed units (discussed previously) and what he called ‘meaning units’. These meaning units provide further explanations of the experience of the participants and contributes to another process identified by Creswell (2007) as Textural description”. As a researcher, I also needed to discuss ‘how’ the experience happened, the setting and the context of it, which is referred to by Creswell (2007) as the “Structural Description”.

At the end of the analysis, I concluded by commenting on the findings. Explaining the experience of the participants’ and how their experiences happened is the essence of phenomenological studies.

Meaning Units from Structured Interviews

The main question of my project is “What kind of challenges and adjustments do Saudi Arabian female students need to be prepared for when they travel overseas”? My interview questions were designed to explore the areas of academic, familial/social, financial, safety, and cultural matters. Participants’ responses were then analyzed to provide further understanding of the women experiences.
In my project, I wanted to highlight the importance of understanding the needs of Saudi Arabian women when studying abroad. All my participants encountered difficulties associated with adjusting academically, culturally and socially. Since there is limited information about how Saudi Arabian women experience studying abroad, interviewing four women and using my own experience helped explain the missing information about the cultural adaptation. All the women I interviewed are Saudi females, two of them are married and the other two are single. All the women were around the age of twenty-seven to twenty-nine and applied to the KASP to complete their Masters Degrees abroad. In order to conceal the identity of my partisans, I will refer to the women by the first letters of their first and last names.

1- Cultural/Religious Freedom

From the discussion of the interviews, cultural and religious issues such as being in contact with males in classrooms and Hijab were the largest contributing factors affecting the participants’ experience of studying abroad. All the participants indicated they had no direct involvement in any cultural or religious event while studying abroad. M.M stated; “while my daughter was in childcare she attended those events but I only participated in those events by dressing her up and giving gifts”. M.A had a similar experience, she explained that her involvement in events such as Christmas or Thanksgiving was nothing more than watching, as it is a different event from my own and she lacked the understanding of their values as no one introduced her to the events.

For M.A, not participating in holidays was basically because contributing to cultural activities requires a greater understanding of the background of these certain
occasions. M.A added that she was cautious to talk about her religion in an appropriate way and this also compelled her to avoid meetings in cultural and religious atmosphere.

In terms of performing particular religious or cultural activity, it is fair to say that all the four participants experienced no dramatic issues related to their religion performance such as prayers, fasting and wearing hijab. However, M.A indicated that although she was able to practice her religion freely, she usually struggled to find a space to pray during school time. Similarly, M.M discussed she was interrogated by other students about the “how and why of fasting for Ramadan” during her summer courses.

To E.S, being surrounded by Arabian restaurants and stores reduced the feeling of homesickness and brought some familiarity to her new place. E.S stated, “when I first came to Canada and then Australia, I did not experience any cultural shock or homesickness because I had many friends and there was large number of Arabian stores and restaurants”. S.M added that the preconceived notions that she had when she was accepted to the program were not completely accurate.

The Western media and journalism had a huge impact on my views. S.M. stated; “when I was accepted to study abroad, I started thinking that Western societies do not share the same standards, systems and traditions. The media caused this stereotyping or prejudgment as I thought that western countries do not accept others easily. However, when I arrived to Toronto, the place was multicultural and Torontonians were very friendly and respectful people”.

2- Supporting Systems

The interviews revealed three main types of support discussed by the four participants. Parental and family support was the most important factor for success while studying abroad. As indicated by E.S and M.M, the main reason for their academic success was their parent’s constant support and motivation. As well, academic success as mentioned by E.S, was maintained by good relationships with both instructors and classmates. Developing these relationships assisted E.S in adjusting to the new learning community. E.S commented, "when I first came to Canada and then Australia, I did not experience any cultural shock or homesickness because I had many friends supports.

Both M.M and S.M discussed the importance of the presence of close friends to provide the support needed when experiencing troubles or feeling homesick. According to S.M, she too built strong friendships not only with students and also developed sound rapport with her professors that helped her feel happier. M.M developed close bonds to her new friends which made her feel like they were family.

Similarly, I experienced the same situation. When I came to Canada in 2010, I was recently married and pregnant. Studying was hard especially with the absence of my parents. However, when I met S.M and other girls, I found myself happier and adjusting to life abroad much better. To have very close friends in my situation was absolutely important. I would not have had the knowledge and courage to know how to tackle all those so many cultural difference.

Interestingly, M.A differentiates her Saudi friends from those abroad. This is because of the diverse background of her friends. M.A explained; "I will describe how
blessed I am to have friendships with people from all over the world, not only the foreign people but with the “foreign Muslims” who are totally different from my nationality, language, lifestyle but sharing me the most valuable aspect of my life “Islam” my perfect, nice religion”.

The third type of support as agreed by all four participants was the ministerial support. According to the guidelines defined by KASP, it is mandatory for a female to be accompanied by a male who is responsible to take care of her. Married female applicants are mostly accompanied by their husbands and children. Single women can take a father, a brother or an uncle. The primary role of the males is to take care of the females and provide them with the support needed throughout their studies. Accordingly, the dependents of the female applicants are included in the sponsorship. S.M identified that getting accepted to KASP is more advantageous because they allow accompanying the family, which is influentially supportive.

As stated by M.M, enrolling to KASP was not only an educational experience but financially beneficial. The program specifies a monthly stipend to the whole family including school tuitions and fees, medical insurance, reimbursement for different payments such as standardized tests and tickets to the Kingdom every nine months.

The Bureau provided financial, academic support whenever needed. It was easy to contact the office and reach the staff all the time. I remember in 2013, when my father passed away, it was during the weekend and the emergency line was really effective. I needed a plane ticket to return home and they issued me a travel ticket as well as my family on the same day. They were highly supportive.
3- Muslim’s Women Hijab

For the participants in my project, coming from a different culture and looking also different, in terms of headscarf and outfit was always a concern to the women. One of my interview question was about the stereotypes, rumors and expectations the participants had before travelling. All four participants shared the experience of being questioned about their Hijab that they wear in most western societies. This reaction might create embarrassment and discomfort unless treated cautiously as it going to be discussed in the handbook.

M.M and E.S discussed that Hijab had always invited questions from their classmates. Because M.A wears Hijab and a veil, she was constantly questioned in regards to her outfit. Similarly, M.M had the same situation. As for me, I had a preconceived notion about Western Societies that they harass Muslim women wearing Hijab.

In retrospect, this was my preconceived idea developed from the Western media and the propaganda, which happened after 9/11. I was always trying to dress like westerns just to avoid situation where I found myself embarrassed by my outfit. However, I found the Canadian society very respectful to foreigners who are different because of religion, culture and traditions.

In contrast, S.M and E.S pertain the issues of stereotyping or generalization to the place they are studying at. S.M stated; “I think that those ideas depend on the city itself. For me, I lived in a very small university town, which was full of students from different cultures and backgrounds. The people were very simple and respectful.”
4- Safety and Security

Safety and security was one of the largest concerns that participants had during their studying abroad. The four participants shared the same similar experiences. For the participants, they were not aware or informed about the whether they were heading to a safe city and residents for themselves and their family. M.A addressed the issues related to safety in Canada in a very expressive and interesting way. She observed, "I did not expect much of personal security and safety, in other words, I expected to see crimes or drunk people making problems in public places. Yet, I was amazed at the low Canadian crime rate and the lack of security system in public places. I do not really know from where I got such stereotypes about Western societies? Maybe English movies, news and media".

S.M’s experience was similar to M.A. she remarked; "when I arrived to Toronto, I noticed the multicultural society especially in Downtown. The place was totally safe, full of Arabs and friendly citizens. Although I did not receive any advice to where to better live (which would have helped), I was lucky enough to rent an apartment in a very secure street and got avoided some risky neighborhoods".

It was not completely different experience for me. In 2010, when first arrived in Toronto, I had similar ideas but was lucky to rent an apartment in a very decent area. In fact, all downtown Toronto areas were mostly secure especially for newcomers. However, when I arrived to Prince George in Fall 2011, I had the former idea of what downtown looks like and how safe it is. I ended up renting an apartment in Downtown Prince George, which was felt risky especially for families. Although the first three
semesters went fine in that neighborhood, I did not get any recommendations either from school or classmates to where to better live.

5- Improved Educational Opportunities

All four Saudi females who participated in my project agreed that they applied to the program to increase their educational backgrounds and improve their employment opportunities. Whilst M.M believed that getting a Master degree from a highly reputed university ensured a better job when returning to the country, M.A added that her studying in Canada provided her with "a rich educational and laboratories experience which could not possibly have in my country".

For me, I believe that getting a Master Degree from an international university such as UNBC provides me the chance to be hired in the job I favor. Even more, when I was accepted by the Ministry to be a teacher in 2012, the Master certificate will ensure increasing my annual salary.

6- Language Barriers

S.M and M.M had Bachelor's Degrees in English Language and Literature. Therefore, they both spent their language period through KASP enhancing their Academic English. For graduate level students, they are responsible to find academic offers during their language period. As a result, both S.M and M.M had the basics of the language of instruction, which is English. However, M.A and E.S had to learn the language, as they did not use it before studying abroad. This also meant they encountered
more challenged when trying to find a Master’s program, where they could meet the universities requirements and prerequisites.

For M.A, meeting a university’s requirements was a concern. M.A stated, “before starting my graduate program, I was trying to meet the university requirements including the ILTIS and GRE score where both were a bit challenging for me as an ESL (English as Second Language) student”.

According to E.S, the first two months of her academic study as a graduate student were challenging because of the language barriers. She felt confused and lost. However, E.S explained that her feelings of confusion began to fade with her seeking support from her instructors and becoming comfortable with the academic life. What seems interesting is that most of the participants indicated that the most problematic part of learning English was the academic writing. I experienced difficulty with meeting the academic requirements as well.

For me, writing in English was a bit challenging although I have studied English writing for more than four years. Writing academic English was completely different from Arabic, which uses a lot of expressive and metaphoric style. S.M said: “I experienced some minor difficulties related to the certain writing format required in my university since I never used it before in my country”. M.M added; “The language was the most difficult challenge especially writing in academic language”.
7- Co-Education versus Female Centered Education

From the answers of the participants, I noticed that all four participants discussed that they experienced no discomfort in the mixed gender learning environment. However, three of them showed noticeable preference for women only education, which they were accustomed with. Personally, although I found myself adjusting to the new learning environment, it was challenging to be in classroom setting with males. Over time, my husband and I found ourselves in some arguments about my classmates. Ironically, what made it sometimes worse was having Saudi classmates who would their existence discomforting and unfamiliar for both of us. As a Saudi female who never experience contacting with males other than Muhrsams and school professors, I felt uncomfortable studying with Saudi males in the same classroom.

Concluding Comments

Why the Seven Meaning Unites. During the data analysis, the seven meaning units arose and demonstrated there are specific challenges that Saudi women encounter when studying abroad. The seven meaning units were achieved through the main research question of my project, “What kind of adjustments do Saudi Arabian female students need to be prepared for when they travel overseas?”. From the four participants’ discussions about their lived experience of studying abroad, the seven meaning units provided important information that can help bridge the academic/ cultural difference gap. While keeping in mind the cultural and religious impact when studying abroad, self-awareness, prior/ deep knowledge and taking advantage of this one in a life opportunity were showed in the four interviewees’ responses.
Cognitive transformation is the intercultural ability required for adaptation. As discussed by Shaw, "Intercultural competence begins with attitudes that are receptive to change and transformation, and it ends with effective and appropriate communication and behavior in an intercultural situation" (Shaw, 2010, p. 219). And hence, as I noticed with no ignorance to other themes, the cultural matters might influence the whole experience of studying abroad. However, with proper pre-departure orientations, self-awareness and certain success strategies, Saudi female are able to tackle all the cultural, academic and social issues encountered.

Saudi women would probably experience less stress by more information about Western societies and avoid what is called by Cameron and Kirkman, (2010) as 'cultural shock'. More importantly, Saudi females are encouraged to seek for support available inside and outside the school, this will eliminate international students difficulties (Cameron and Kirkman, 2010).

Based on the structured interviews analysis, meaning units will contribute to develop the handbook, the main purpose of my project. The results will be employed to assist future Saudi females who intend to study abroad. The thorough and comprehensive description of the participants lived phenomenon ensures the validity of the data and contributes to the handbook. In the next chapter, I will represent the designed Arabic and English versions of the handbook, which can be used in combination with the whole project or as separate piece.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I analyzed the four structured interviews based on phenomenological approach. Meaning units were generated and discussed according to the participants lived experience while studying abroad. Seven meaning units arose and will be utilized to construct the handbook which will provide assistance to Saudi females studying abroad to adjust and bridge the gap of cultural/religious, social and academic differences.
Chapter 5: Handbook for Saudi Females Studying Abroad

Introduction

The main purpose of my project was to construct a useful handbook for Saudi Arabian females who plan to study abroad specifically through King Abdullah Scholarship Program or KASP. The handbook is designed to be presented in English and Arabic. The information presented in the handbook is based on my projects literature review and the structured interviews.

The King’s Program or KASP is an International Scholarship program intended to improve the education level of Saudi Arabians. The program ends young Saudi people into the Western world as ambassadors for their country. Since its inception in 2005, KASP has sent thousands of Saudi Arabian people abroad annually. However, there has been limited research on the Western educational experiences of Saudi Arabian women.

While both men and women are accepted to the KASP program, I believe that women are more likely to experience culture shock because of the integration of genders within academic settings compared to the separation of genders in Saudi Arabia. Culturally, the fact is that there are immense cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and Western countries, such as Canada. The cultural differences between Western countries and Saudi Arabia impact Saudi Arabian women immensely. Consequently, there is a need to identify these differences and address the differences in order that Saudi Arabian women continue to participate fully and more contently in KASP.
A handbook based on the experiences of women who have already studied abroad provide future students with specific information related to cultural differences that may improve their opportunities for success in their new environment. For this reason, I gathered information for the handbook through a phenomenological study and used primary sources such as email interviews and secondary sources from literature about students studying abroad. The following handbook is based on the experiences of four Saudi women. These women were studying internationally during my project or had recently returned home.

1- Cultural/Religious Freedom

To prospective females who are planning to study abroad, it seemed that cultural/religious aspects are the most influential factors in the whole experience of studying abroad. Although no direct involvement in religious activities might occur, prior understanding and self-awareness of Western social and cultural events is needed. Prior knowledge can provide, an easier evolution of adaptation and absorption of the new environment.

From a religious point of view, Saudi students are able to practice and perform their religion freely in a country such as Canada. However, a respectful and appropriate representation of Islam, as well as, Saudi Arabia should be considered when deciding to act as an official ambassador as described by King Abdullah.

In an era of globalization, when everything and anything can be reached, prospective students will probably experience less cultural shock. The new telecommunication devices, programs and Internet make the connection with the family
easier. In a blink of an eye, students can easily get in touch with their families around the world. Also, Muslims and Arabs citizens, restaurants, mosques and stores are almost everywhere, which reduces the feeling of homesickness.

One last important factor to pay attention to when studying abroad is ignoring the stereotypes created through media. Saudi students should focus on knowing real facts about the places they are going to, as well as, ask those who have already lived the experience to get valid information about the place.

2- Supporting Systems

Saudi female students should be notified that there are three main types of support when studying abroad: 1) parental/familial support is the most important. One of the influential facts about Saudi history as described by Shaw (2013) is the centrality of the family or *family centralization* as a cultural value. Saudi descendants continue to believe and act on the behalf that family takes precedence over any other obligation (Heyn, 2013). In the Islamic context, *“family designates a special kind of social structure whose principles are related to one another through blood ties and/or marital bonds and whose relatedness is such that it entails mutual role expectations prescribed by religion, reinforced by law, and upheld by society”* (AbdalAti, 1995, p. 19).

Parental support would make a huge difference in females’ experiences while abroad. The existence of the parents as generators of motivation will increase the success and achievements of the students. On the contrary, the lack of familial support can be damaging for the students progress. Hall, 2013 demonstrated the previous by saying; *“international students in the United States from nations like Saudi Arabia which are*
steeped in tradition, venerate elders, and have a familial and fraternal underpinning, tend to bond together closely within the new culture. Not only does this make integration more difficult, but negative experiences among one member of the group can spread to other members of such a tightly knit community” (p.42).

Therefore, it is important to discuss the family connections of Saudi students, especially women, because female students are raised in a different culture compared to other Western cultures and the impact of such background cannot be neglected.

2) Academic support success is maintained by developing relationships with instructors and classmates, and 3) ministry of higher education support. These three support systems assist most students in adjusting in the new learning community.

Students should consider building strong friendship not only with other students but also developing sound rapport with professors to achieve. As well, academic success is more often achieved with the presence of parent’s constant support and motivation. As a part of KASP, females are encouraged to be accompanied by a male who is responsible to take care of them. Married female applicants are mostly accompanied by their husbands and children while single females can take a father, a brother or an uncle. This is advantageous because the family, which is influentially supportive, accompanies.

Cultural shock and homesickness were found to be reduced substantially when good friends are present. Friends can provide the support to tackle several issues especially friends have similar experiences. Also, for Saudi females, good friends can be as supportive as families and compensate the absence of the family.
What is really unique about creating friendship while abroad is the diversity. To Saudi students who come from an extremely monocultural place, it is highly beneficial to explore other friendships. This ‘mingling’ within the diversity offered in Western countries can provide information and support. I recommend sharing experiences and explore friendships to gain more knowledge experience.

As much as the importance of family and school support to females studying abroad, Ministerial support also affect on the Saudi females experience. The ministry represented by Saudi Arabian bureaus and embassies in different countries offer students studying abroad a place to turn when in need of financial, social and academic support.

As indicated by Hall, 2013, most international students would experience more stress and anxiety related to schools fees and tuitions than domestic students. What is unique about Saudi students is that with the financial support they receive from the ministry. Hall stated; “Saudi students do have some unique characteristics that set them apart from other international students. While the significant gender and religious issues present a challenge, the financial benefits offered by the KASP do allow Saudi students to avoid some of the significant challenges represented by the financial difficulty put on the typical international student by the significant cost of education in the United States”. (p.39).

KASP provides a monthly stipend for the whole family including school tuitions and fees, medical insurance, reimbursement for different payments such as standardized tests and annual airline tickets to the Kingdom. Additionally, bureaus can provide academic assistance to the students in terms of universities applications, providing some
academic offers and helping to choose the suitable university. Further, bureaus are qualified and equipped with specialists to provide various assistance such as issues related to politics, security and law. Thus, the types of services that ministry provide are limitless which eventually made to contributes to success.

3- Muslim's Women Hijab

Coming from a different culture and looking different, in terms of outfit and headscarf, is always a concern to Saudi females. There is no doubt that female students will come across situations where they will be asked about their outfit, in particular their Hijab. However, preparedness to answer these types of question is recommended.

Unfortunately, the image that the media usually represents about Muslim women wearing Hijab is that they will get harassed or hurt. This is not correct. Under the 'globalization' we live in, different people with different points of views and backgrounds are able to live together and adjust peacefully as long as respect exists. Saudi females should be aware of that stereotyping; ethnic differences and religion prejudice do exist. However, judging people on religion or color is not acceptable. If they feel they are being judged by their appearance or religion, females should report such behavior to the responsible authorities (universities, police, ministry) so further action can be taken.

4- Safety and Security

Safety and security is one of the most important concerns that female Saudi student worry about while studying abroad. Many students wonder if the place they are
heading to is safe for them and for their families. Students should investigate and investigate through the Internet or by asking other students.

As well, there are several precautions females can practice after leaving Saudi Arabia. Firstly, unlike Saudi Arabia, try to avoid staying out late at night and if so, avoid walking in suspicious neighborhoods. Also, keep emergency contact numbers handy, along with a cell phone.

When newcomers arrive to a new place, they usually look for affordable places to stay. However, affordable places not necessarily safe or appropriate for families. Therefore, one last important suggestion for Saudi females is to make sure to rent in a decent place that is family friendly and secure. To ensure that, Saudi females should consult knowledgeable and trusted people (for example, staff or student groups at universities and local parenting groups), who are able to provide accurate information.

5- Improved Educational Opportunities

When planning to study abroad, Saudi females should take all possible advantages of this experience. While visiting new places is interesting, applying to KASP enables students to increase their educational background and improve their employment opportunities when returning to the Kingdom.

Getting a Master degree from a highly reputable university ensures a better job. Not only that, but the improving the financial status should be thought of when applying to KASP. While studying, KASP provides their students with a very high finance for the whole family.
6- Language Barriers

One of the most crucial issues that students should keep on mind before travelling to study is the language barrier. As Language, and actual requirement, is needed to get academic admission offers. Saudi females are advised to understand their linguistic abilities and assess how much time they need to acquire the language.

While working on the second language acquisition, Saudi females should get academic offers as KASP could but not required to provide Bachelors and Masters offers from the foreign universities. Thus, basing the time to work on both will ensure cost and time efficiency. The IELTS and TOEFL are two standardized language tests that students need time to prepare for. Most international students will encounter obstacles to complete these exams. Therefore, Saudi females should know their options in advance. They need to know which exam is suitable for them and learn their strategies that enable them to achieve their desired outcomes.

Another issue related to language is English academic writing. Most international students in general, and Arabic speakers in particular, will experience problems in regards to academic writing. However, increasing studying times, seeking constant academic support from instructors and reading more English will contribute to overcome this challenging problem. As well, many universities offer tutoring programs.

7- Co-Education versus Female Centered Education

Based on the interviews, for Saudi females, who are used to studying in female-centered learning environments, it is challenging to adjust to the mixed schools when
studying abroad. However, students should not be highly concerned about this case, because with time they will adjust to the new situation gradually.

A mutual understanding is needed between the females and their Muhrams including husbands, fathers, brothers and uncles of that the presence of other sex might be found in academic settings such as the required classes. Further, trust and respect are very important factors. It is important to avoid confrontations that might occur between the females and their partners, which can be avoided by emotional or mental preparation.

**Final.** I have found that the experiences of females from Saudi Arabia are rarely represented in the academic literature on international students. Most of the studies that I have referenced in my project focused on male students studying abroad. Therefore, I wanted my research to focus on Saudi females as international students. I inviting four women to share their experiences of studying abroad with KASP and I think their stories will help other Saudi women.

Sharing the women’s experiences will contribute to increased opportunity for Saudi females to be recognized in the literature, as well as, providing information that is needed to bridge the difference gap when leaving Saudi Arabia. As well, my study can be useful to schools who receive Saudi females because it provides a background about their concerns and expectations.
Conclusion

As a Saudi female studying at UNBC since 2011, it is important to say that this experience was challenging. The adjustment process was getting through but in a slow manner and the issues, which I encountered, were not easy to handle. Neither other Saudi females who have experienced studying overseas nor I were able to adjust easily in the new environment.

The phenomenological approach that I am basing my research on will promote to frame the knowledge related to the phenomena of studying abroad that all participants share. I believe by documenting my experience as well as the experiences of the four female participants is urgently needed in order to develop a helpful handbook to assist other females. The materials reviewed from the KASP and the information produced from the qualitative interviews will enable me to synthesize what is needed for the women in a handbook.

More importantly, to increase the level of the handbook’s usefulness, I will design it in a convenient, simple and bilingual manner. My attempt to designing a handbook is not only to assist females from Saudi Arabia but also to include broader audiences such as foreign institutions. By that, I mean foreign institutions such as UNBC could benefit from the handbook through getting informed or aware of the cultural, social and academic background of the students from Saudi Arabia who got or will be accepted in those institutions.
References


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Appendix A

Handbook Template

This Appendix contains the Handbook in both English and Arabic.
A Handbook for Saudi Females Studying Abroad
A vision of KASP Recipients

Developed by
Suad A. Kurayra
This handbook is constructed specifically for Saudi Arabian females who plan to study abroad through King Abdullah Scholarship Program or KASP. To maximize its efficiency, the handbook is provided in English and Arabic. The information presented in the handbook is based on the literature review and the structured interviews. In the searching process, there is limited information specified namely for Saudi females in the literature, Saudi Arabian Cultural bureau website, Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia and Foreign Educational Institutions such as UNBC.

While both men and women are accepted to the KASP program, I believe that women are more likely to experience culture shock because of the integration of genders within academic settings compared to the separation of genders in Saudi Arabia. Culturally, the fact is that there are immense cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and Western countries, such as Canada. The cultural differences between Western countries and Saudi Arabia impact Saudi Arabian women immensely. Consequently, there is a need to identify these differences and address the differences in order that Saudi Arabian women continue to participate fully and more contently in KASP.

A handbook based on the experiences of women who have already studied abroad provide future students with specific information related to cultural differences that may improve their opportunities for success in their new environment. This handbook will definitely contribute to supplement what is already provided for Saudi females in clarifying the most important factors to bridge the gap between the countries. For this reason, I gathered information for the handbook through a phenomenological study and used primary sources such as email interviews and secondary sources from literature about students studying abroad. This handbook is based on the experiences of four Saudi women. These women were studying internationally during my project or had recently returned home.

1- Cultural/Religious Freedom

To prospective females who are planning to study abroad, it seemed that cultural/religious aspects are the most influential factors in the whole experience of studying abroad. Although no direct involvement in religious activities might occur, prior understanding and self-awareness of Western social and cultural events is needed. Prior knowledge can provide, an easier evolution of adaptation and absorption of the new environment.

From a religious point of view, Saudi students are able to practice and perform their religion freely in a country such as Canada. However, a respectful and appropriate representation of Islam, as well as, Saudi Arabia should be considered when deciding to act as an official ambassador as described by King Abdullah.

In an era of globalization, when everything and anything can be reached, prospective students will probably experience less cultural shock. The new telecommunication devices, programs and Internet make the connection with the family easier. In a blink of an eye, students can easily get in touch with their families around the world. Also, Muslim and Arab citizens, restaurants, mosques and stores are almost everywhere, which reduces the feeling of homesickness.

One last important factor to pay attention to when studying abroad is ignoring the stereotypes created through media. Saudi students should focus on knowing real facts about the places they are going to, as well as, ask those who have already lived the experience to get valid information about the place.
2- Supporting Systems

Saudi female students should be notified that there are three main types of support when studying abroad: 1) parental/familial support is the most important one. One of the influential facts about Saudi history as described by Shaw (2013) is the centrality of the family or family centralization as a cultural value. Saudi descendants continue to believe and act on the behalf that family takes precedence over any other obligation (Heyn, 2013). In the Islamic context, “family designates a special kind of social structure whose principles are related to one another through blood ties and/or marital bonds and whose relatedness is such that it entails mutual role expectations prescribed by religion, reinforced by law, and upheld by society” (Abdal Ati, 1995, p. 19).

Parental support would make a huge difference in females’ experiences while abroad. The existence of the parents as generators of motivation will increase the success and achievements of the students. Likewise, the lack of familial support can be damaging for the students progress. Hall, 2013 demonstrated the previous by saying; “international students in the United States from nations like Saudi Arabia which are steeped in tradition, venerate elders, and have a familial and fraternal underpinning, tend to bond together closely within the new culture. Not only does this make integration more difficult, but negative experiences among one member of the group can spread to other members of such a tightly knit community” (p.42).

Therefore, it is important to discuss the family connections of Saudi students, especially women, because female students are raised in a different culture compared to other Western cultures and the impact of such background cannot be neglected. As a part of KASP, females are encouraged to be accompanied by a male who is responsible to take care of them. Married female applicants are mostly accompanied by their husbands and children while single females can take a father, a brother or an uncle. This is advantageous because the family, which is influentially supportive, accompanies.
In addition to the importance of the parental support, Academic success is also maintained by 2) developing relationships with instructors and classmates. Students should consider building strong friendship not only with other students but also developing sound rapport with professors to achieve.

Cultural shock and homesickness were found to be reduced substantially when good friends are present. Friends can provide the support to tackle several issues especially friends have similar experiences. Also, for Saudi females, good friends can be as supportive as families and compensate the absence of the family.

What is really unique about creating friendship while abroad is the diversity. To Saudi students who come from an extremely monocultural place, it is highly beneficial to explore other friendships. This ‘mingling’ within the diversity offered in Western countries can provide information and support. I recommend sharing experiences and explore friendships to gain more knowledge experience.

As much as the importance of family and school support to females studying abroad, 3) the support provided by the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia also affect on the Saudi females experiences. The ministry represented by Saudi Arabian bureaus and embassies in different countries offer students studying abroad a place to turn when in need of financial, social and academic support.

As indicated by Hall (2013), most international students would experience more stress and anxiety related to schools fees and tuitions than domestic students. What is unique about Saudi students is that with the financial support they receive from the ministry. Hall stated; “Saudi students do have some unique characteristics that set them apart from other international students. While the significant gender and religious issues present a challenge, the financial benefits offered by the KASP do allow Saudi students to avoid some of the significant challenges represented by the financial difficulty put on the typical international student by the significant cost of education in the United States”. (p.39).

KASP provides a monthly stipend for the whole family including school tuitions and fees, medical insurance, reimbursement for different payments such as standardized tests and annual airline tickets to the Kingdom. Additionally, bureaus can provide academic assistance to the students in terms of universities applications, providing some academic offers and helping to choose the suitable university. Further, bureaus are qualified and equipped with specialists to provide various assistance such as issues related to politics, security and law. Thus, the types of services that ministry provide are limitless which eventually contributes to success.
3- Muslims women Hijab

Coming from a different culture and looking different, in terms of outfit and headscarf, is always a concern to Saudi females. There is no doubt that female students will come across situations where they will be asked about their outfit, in particular their Hijab. However, preparedness to answer these types of question is recommended.

Unfortunately, the image that the media usually represents about Muslim women wearing hijab is that they will get harassed or hurt. This is not correct. Under the ‘globalization’ we live in, different people with different points of views and backgrounds are able to live together and adjust peacefully as long as respect exists. Saudi females should be aware of that racism does exist, however, judging people on religion or color is not acceptable. If they feel they are being judged by their appearance or religion, females should report such behavior to the responsible authorities (universities, police, ministry) so further action can be taken.

4- Safety and Security

Safety and security is one of the most important concerns that female Saudi student worry about while studying abroad. Many students wonder if the place they are heading to is safe for them and for their families. Students should investigate and investigate through the Internet or by asking other students. As well, there are several precautions females can practice after leaving Saudi Arabia. Firstly, unlike Saudi Arabia, try to avoid staying out late at night and if so, avoid walking in suspicious neighborhoods.

Also, keep emergency contact numbers handy, along with a cellphone. When newcomers arrive to a new place, they usually look for affordable places to stay. However, affordable places not necessarily safe or appropriate for families. Therefore, one last important suggestion for Saudi females is to make sure to rent in a decent place that is family friendly and secure. To ensure that, Saudi females should consult knowledgeable and trusted people (for example, staff or student groups at universities and local parenting groups) who are able to provide accurate information.
5- Improved Educational Opportunities

When planning to study abroad, Saudi females should take all possible advantages of this experience. While visiting new places is interesting, applying to KASP enables students to increase their educational background and improve their employment opportunities when returning to the Kingdom.

Getting a Master’s degree from a highly reputable university ensures a better job. Not only that, but the improving the financial status should be thought of when applying to KASP. While studying, KASP provides their students with a very high finance for the whole family.

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One of the most crucial issues that students should keep on mind before travelling to study is the language barrier. As Language, and actual requirement, is needed to get academic admission offers. Saudi females are advised to understand their linguistic abilities and assess how much time they need to acquire the language.

While working on the second language acquisition, Saudi females should get academic offers as KASP could but not required to provide Bachelors and Masters offers from the foreign universities. Thus, basing the time to work on both will ensure cost and time efficiency. The IELTS and TOEFL are two standardized language tests that students need time to prepare for. Most international students will encounter obstacles to complete these exams. Therefore, Saudi females should know their options in advance. They need to know which exam is suitable for them and learn their strategies that enable them to achieve their desired outcomes.

Another issue related to language is English academic writing. Most international students in general, and Arabic speakers in particular, will experience problems in regards to academic writing. However, increasing studying times, seeking constant academic support from instructors and reading more English will contribute to overcome this challenging problem. As well, many universities offer tutoring programs.

7- Co-Education Versus Female Centered Education

For Saudi females, who are used to studying in female-centered learning environments, it is challenging to adjust to the mixed schools when studying abroad. However, according to the four participants, students should not be highly concerned about this case, because with time they will adjust to the new situation gradually.

A mutual understanding is needed between couples, whether they are married couple or siblings, when the presence of the other sex might be found in academic settings such as the required classes. Further, trust and respect are very important factors. It is important to avoid confrontations that might occur between the females and their partners.
I have found that the experiences of females from Saudi Arabia are rarely represented in the academic literature on international students. Most of the studies that I have referenced in my project focused on male students studying abroad. Therefore, I wanted my research to focus on Saudi females as international students. I invited four women to share their experiences of studying abroad with KASP and I think their stories will help other Saudi women.

Sharing the women's experiences will contribute to increased opportunity for Saudi females to be recognized in the literature, as well as, providing information that is needed to bridge the difference gap when leaving Saudi Arabia. As well, my study can be useful to schools who receive Saudi females because it provides a background about their concerns and expectations.

### Last Recommendations

1. Have all the contact numbers of the Saudi Bureau including the emergency line and Saudi Embassy in the country you are heading to.
2. Take high care of your passport and make sure it is handy whenever you needed it.
3. Open a bank account as soon as arriving in order to keep your cash secure.
4. Have smartphones scanning application in order to use it to upload your document to the Bureau electronic portal.
5. Check the provincial law if you are assumed to get medical care or not.

**Images in this handbook are recruited from web base with free and public access.**
دليل إرشادي للطلابات المبتعثات
رؤية مبتعثات برنامج الملك عبد الله للإبتعاث الخارجي

إنشاء وتصميم
سعاد عبدالله كريزي
من المفيد أن نعلم الطالبات المبتدئات بأنه هناك ثلاثنة أنواع من الدم الذي يحقق عند إتمام قرارات الدراسة في الخارج. ومن أهم أنواع الدم المؤثرة في تجربة الدراسة في الخارج هو الدم الأبيض أو الدم الأسود. ومن الحقائق المهمة التي يجب معرفتها عن تاريخ المجتمع السعودي ما وصفته الباحثة Shaw، بمركزية العائلة كجزء من تقاليد وعادات المجتمع. وقد كان وما زال الدم السعودي يعتبرون العائلة وليداً للتعليم في أصول الأول قبل كل الامتثال أو الالتزامات الاجتماعية (Shaw، 2013).

وفي السياق الإسلامي، "تتكون الأسرة من تركيبة إجتماعية وعوامل وربط اعتصامها رابط الدم أو العائلات الأخرى مما يحتم على تلك الرياح فهم دورها في تلك الأسرة التي ينص عليها الدين، ويجزؤها القانون و يعزها المجتمع" (عبدالمتوفى، 1990، ص. 19).

من المهم أن نلاحظ أن الدم الأبيض يصنع فرقاً إيجابياً كبيراً في تجربة هؤلاء الطالبات المبتدئات. فمع وجود الأشياء كمتعلقات للتعليم و荄حاذاء هؤلاء الطالبات في إزداد Hall، والعكس بالعكس، فإن أي نوع من الدم الأبيض قد يؤثر سلباً على تحقيق النجاح الأكاديمي من خلال هذه التجربة. مما يؤكد هذا الفعل هو مادته الكاتبة 2013، "أن الدماء العالميين في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية كطلاب سعوديين في الذين يدورهم متضمنين للعوامل لانكماش الأفكار ومغايرون للعوامل الأدبية والأدبية الداعمة ممن يواصلون بشكل مكثف في البيئة الجيدة، وهذا لا ينصح فقط للأمكاني في البيئة الجيدة بل أن تجربة واحدة سريرية فرد من أفراد مثل هذه المجموعة من الطلاب تكشف بأن بنينك للأمكاني في هذه المجموعة متراكمة" (ص2، 4).

هناك إجابة عن القوة من أهمية العلاقات الأسرية للطلاب السعوديين لاسيما الإناث اللائي قد تربين في تكلفة متكاملة بالمقارنة مع الكفاءات العربية والعالمية من كبار الأصغر الذين لا يمكّننا تجاوز أرا ما الدعم الأسري من أهمية وتراث عomial في تجارب الطالبات فإن برنامج الملك عبدالعزيز للابتعاث المالي قد حرص على التكريم على أهمية السوء الذي غالباً ما يكون الزوج أو الأب أو الأخ.

وفيشير أهمية الدم الأسود، فإن النجاح الأكاديمي يحقق أيضاً من طريق تكوين علاقات مع زملاء الصف والمدرسين، فعلى الطالبات أن يضمن في الحساب أن بناء علاقات قوية ليس فقط من زمانرهم بل مما يسهمهم في تحقيق هذا النجاح.
وكم أز عم 2013، بأن معظم الطلاب المغتربين يشعرون بالضغط والمواقف المتطرفة بالمملكة العربية السعودية. يتأثر هذا بأعمال الشرطة والممتلكين ممن يمارسون أعمال الادعاء القانوني. كذلك، يتأثر هذا بالأعمال التي تقوم بها الشرطة في المملك_PERMISSION

وراء الحكمة. يمكن أن يكون هذا الوضع الاعتياد بدون إشراف أو مشورة من قبل السلطات المحلية. يمكن أن يكون هذا الوضع الاعتياد بدون إشراف أو مشورة من قبل السلطات المحلية. يمكن أن يكون هذا الوضع الاعتياد بدون إشراف أو مشورة من قبل السلطات المحلية.
الموضوع: الناس والسلامة

الأمن والسلامة من أهم الأصول التي يتم جمعها بالطيات المتاح للسفر للمكان.

تحقيق مصمم هذه الطيات من مدى سلامة المكان الذي يوفره السفر إليه وخصوصاً للإثاث. فمن أهم الإجراءات التي يجب اتخاذها هي محاولة استكشاف المكان الجديد عن طريق الإنترنت أو عن طريق سؤال الطيات المتاح للسفر بهذه المدينة.

إضافة إلى ذلك هناك عدة اختيارات من الممكن قراءتها ككل السفر للمكان.

أول هذه الاختيارات أنه يجب الأخذ بالإعتبار أن الوضع في المكان يختلف عن الوضع في مكان أخرى.

إذا كان هناك تغير في الأجواء، فقد يكون من المهم تجنب السفر.

الوزارة لإتخاذ الإجراءات اللازمة.
الحاجز اللغوي:
من أهم الموارد التي يجب تعلمها بين الإعداد عند الانتقال للمدارس هو اللغة العربية. من خلالها، تكون من القائمة الأولى في اللغة العربية، بل إنها أحد أهم المقومات عند التقدم للدرجات العليا في الجامعة. وتسمى الطلاب المتعاونين بها، حيث أنه يницنها إلكترونياً.

ومن ميزات البرنامج أن يقدم الطلاب المحترفين والطلاب المتقدمين على الجامعة بجودة عالية من الم méthودات التعليمية المبتكرة، حيث أنه يتم تشييد المدرسة في قلوبهم من هذه البيئة الجديدة، حيث أنه ينور الوقت بشكل ممتع والتعلم تدريجياً.

الاضرار والمصطلحات المتباعدة بين المواد سواء كمتحوياً أو متزوجين مهما يكون وجود الجنس الآخر، معروفاً في اللغة العربية. مما ينفع بثقة التقدم في التعامل مع الضغوطات والامور التي يتعرضون فيها بين الطلاب وشراكتهم.

افظهر الفرض العلمية:
من المهم جداً أن تقوم هؤلاء الطلاب بما تعلموه في الدراسة في 세مة علمية منفصلة عن التكوين، فإنه من الصعب التحكم عند التواجه في البيئة التعليمية المختلفة. استناداً إلى دراسة الأبحاث المتقدمة في الدراسة فإن الطلاب المسلمون والطلاب المحترفين لهم مبادئ في تغطية من هذه البيئة الجديدة، حيث أنه يشيد بالوقت والجهد والتكفل.

من منظورات البرنامج أن يقدم الطلاب المحترفين والطلاب المتقدمين على الجامعة بنقتضي بدون مساهمة من الم méthودات التعليمية، في نفس الفترة المفترضة للكتابة في اللغة العربية. وذلك تنفيذ الروت التدريجي على المطلوبات، والتعلم في المجالات الأولى التي يجب العمل عليها بما يوفر الوقت والجهد والتكفل.

فترة الصحرا الحذرة على شهادة الدراسات العليا من المعاهد، فسيرة علمية عقلية ينحل فيها. من خلال هذه الفترة الحزينة، يسゾع بذلك، فإن الحفاظ على الدراسة باستمرار الاهتمام بطرق برمجة الملك يؤدي. الإبرامات المفترضة يمكن أن تكون العلاقيات المبدعة حديثة.

من مختلف اللغات أيضاً التي تعلمها هؤلاء الطلاب هي مهمة اللغة العربية، بل إنها أحد أهم المقومات عند التقدم للدرجات العليا في الجامعة. وتسمى الطلاب ببعضهم بـ"كتاب" أقباط اللغة الإنجليزية. علاج، تعلم الطلاب المتقدمين الحاسمة، وساعذة اللغة العربية ببعضهم مشكلة اللغة الإنجليزية، ولكن

تشتت هذه المتقدمة من الهجرة إزالة عدد الدراسات العلمية. واستناداً إلى اللغة العربية، يتم التفاعل مع الكبار في جميع السياقات المخبرية، حيث أن التفاعلات تتفاقم بين البحوث المخبرية، ورسائل اللغة، للطلاب الأخبار بما يساهم في تقييم حجم التحليلات المتعلقة بالكتابة الأساسية.
وتمدراً:

فبعد وجدت أن تجارب الطالبات السعوديات المتضمنة من ناحية الوجود في دور الأدب الأكاديمية، كما أن معظم المراجع التي
قامت بتوفيرها في مشاريعنا تركز على فئة الذكور من طلاب السعودية، لذلك ارتدى بعض أن تركز على فئة الطالبات كنظام
عاليمين. وقد قمت ونذكر أنه أحد مشاركات من مختصين هذه التجربة عن طريق برنامج الملك عبد الله للتبادل الخارجي مما
كمساعدته اعتمدت أن تجاربهن سوف تسهم في مساعدة الطالبات المستقبلات،

فالمشاركة الطالبات في هذه المشاريع مساهمة إثراء الأدب بمادة تفاعلية على هذه الفئة من الطالبات بالإضافة إلى توفير المعلومات
الأكاديمية التي تساعد على التعلم ووسائformation التكوين عند مدارس المملكة العربية السعودية. ونعتبر أن دراسات سوف تسهم
بشكل أو آخر في تزويج المناهج والجامعات الأجنبية ببعضها بسلطة عن الفئات الثقافية لهذه الفئة ومايقف عنه وليست

نصائح قبل السفر:

1. تجهيز قائمة بترقية المكتب الثقافية السعودية والمدارس السعودية من ضمن الترقيم الطوارئ.
2. الانتظار بإجراءات السفر والتأكد من وجودها في مكتب البعثة الأم مدة الحاجة إليه.
3. تقيح طبيب يمكن الإرسال إلى بلد الديانة ليتم إعداد المستندات الخاصة.
4. التأكد من حسب الطلب، يمكن معالجتها برنامج موضعي لرفع الملفات على الدراسة الإلكترونية للملف الثقافي.
5. التأكد من نظام المراقبة الفني في حالة تزويجها التأهيل للممتعين وذلك حسب الحالات المحمولة الذي تقدمه
   الوزارة.

* السور المستخدمة في هذا النصلي هي من الصور المطابقة للمصنعين بصورة محترفة.
Appendix B

Participants Information Letter

Date: September 10, 2014

Title of Project: Towards a “Generic” Social and Academic Handbook for Saudi Arabian Female Students Studying Abroad

Investigators:

Student Investigator:
Name: Suad A. Kurayra
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University of Northern British Columbia
Prince George, British Columbia, Canada
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E-mail: Kurayra@unbc.ca

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Purpose of the Study

The study I am conducting is required for the completion of my project in the Master of Multidisciplinary Leadership program. My aim is to develop an assistive handbook for international students but specifically for Saudi Arabian females studying abroad in the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP).

The results that I am seeking from this study will answer the main question which is: “What Kind of cultural differences/cultural adjustments do Saudi Arabian women need to be prepared for when studying abroad?” do Saudi Arabian women need to be
prepared for when they travel overseas? The results from interviews will be used to develop the handbook and provide examples and experiences of previous woman studying abroad. These experiences can help future scholarship recipients understand cultural differences and prepare for studying abroad.

**Procedures Involved in the Research**

Because of the physical distance between me, the researcher, and the participants, the interviews will be conducted through structured emails. All participants will receive a questionnaire, which they are expected to fill out within a month. Being a friend of the participants since 2010, gave me the privilege of having their contact information such as personal emails, phone numbers and BlackBerry Pin numbers all of which make reaching them convenient.

**Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts**

For Saudi females, the discussion of cultural and social aspects of studying abroad might result in some minor sensitive issues that cause discomfort or upset. One way to minimize the tension in case of issues occurred is to encourage the participants to provide counseling resources. The individuals that participants chose personally as resources are:

1. **Dr. Latifah Almaghnam**, King Faisal University, Alahsa, Saudi Arabia.
   L.s.m@windowslive.com
   +966504922744
2. **Mashael Alqahtani**, Waterloo University, Waterloo, ON, Canada.
   M2alqah@uwaterloo.ca
3. **Dr. Judy Magarey**, Adelaide University, Adelaide, Australia.
   Judy.magarey@adelaide.edu.au
   +61883136055

**Potential Benefits**

The research serves two-fold. Firstly, the information produced from the participants' experiences will be used to constructing the handbook to assist prospective female Saudi Arabian international students. Secondly, the study will provide information about Saudi Arabian females and their unique backgrounds to the post secondary institutions. Thus, it will be useful for host schools and learning centres to understand the cultural differences and challenges encountered by Saudi Arabian female students.

**Payment or Reimbursement** [Not applicable]

**Confidentiality**

If participants decided to involve in the project, their real identities will remain anonymous and their information will be confidential. Participants must acknowledge that if they chose to participate, their responses will be used in my project. As part of the
anonymity, participants will be asked for permission if they prefer to stay entirely anonymous or called by pseudo names they chose. Participants will be informed of their preference to answer the questions or not if they feel embarrassed and or uncomfortable.

In terms of confidentiality, respondents information will not be exposed to other than my supervisor and me. Accordingly, interviews will be saved in an electronic file in our laptops until the completion of the project. After, all information will be discarded.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

The participation in this research is voluntary. However, participants are allowed to quit the study at any time even after signing the consent form and are free not to answer uncomfortable questions while still involving in the study. If participants chose to withdraw from the study at any time, their information will be withdrawn and destroyed.

**Information about the Study Results**

I expect to complete my project approximately by May 2015. At the completion of the study, all participants will receive upon their request either a hard copy of the handbook as well as two CDs of both Arabic and English versions of the handbook via mail or electronic copies via email.

**Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

Kurayra@unbc.ca, telephone: 250-552-9626. You can also reach my supervisor Tina Fraser at:

Phone: +1 250-960-5714

Tina.Fraser@unbc.ca

This study has been reviewed by the University of Northern British Columbia Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

Research Ethics Board

c/o Office of Research and Ethics

Telephone: (250) 960-6735

E-mail: reb@unbc.ca
Appendix C

Participants Consent Form

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Suad A. Kurayra of the University of Northern British Columbia.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: ________________________________

Name of Participant (Printed) ________________________________

Please Circle

1)  
   A) Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study’s results.

   Please send them to this email address:

   ________________________________

   Or to this mailing address:

   ________________________________

   ________________________________

   ________________________________

   B) No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study’s results.

2) I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

   A) Yes. Please contact me at:

   ________________________________

   B) No.
Appendix D

Structured Interviews

The following questions are those, which will be sent to the respondents as an email attachment. The questions are grouped into three parts. The first part of questions target academic concerns for Saudi female students and success dynamics. The second part discusses the cultural and social experiences of the respondents while abroad. The last part is set up to produce various information related to the experience.

1. Why did you enrolled in King Abdullah Scholarship Program KASP? Why did you choose to study abroad?

2. Describe the kind of preparations provided to you by King Abdullah scholarship Program when you got accepted.

3. What Academic challenges did you encounter/ experience while studying abroad

4. What motivated you to maintain success? Did you follow certain routines to achieve academically?

5. How did you find the coeducation environment? Please describe the similarities and differences between the new and the former learning environment.

6. As a Saudi woman, did you experience discomfort or anxiety working with classmates, people in authority, in public?

7. Cultural and Social Question

8. Have you participated in any culture activities while studying abroad such as Thanksgiving, Labor Day or else?
9. Have you been involved in social activities while living abroad? Describe. Were there opportunities, invitations, e.g., to homes to festivals, events etc. that you either accepted or refused?

10. Have you developed any social connections (i.e. friendship) while being abroad?
    In what ways were these experiences different from those in Saudi Arabia?

11. What was your preconceived notions of the host country (rumors, stereotypes, expectations) did these ideas actually exist?

12. Most international students experience cultural shock and homesickness. Describe your experience with those issues.

13. General Questions

14. Did/Does the monthly stipend (funding) provided by the scholarship Program meet your financial needs while abroad? Did you learn how to budget your expenses?

15. Did/ Does your financial status affect your lifestyle while living abroad?

16. During your stay abroad, have you experienced any concerns about religious freedom?

17. Describe one positive experience you had while abroad.

18. What other recommendations would you suggest to other females if they decide to study abroad?