

ISANA NSW
“Meeting the Needs of Middle Eastern Students”
May 2008

***The challenge of understanding the
academic expectations of
Gulf students:
traditional student aspirations versus
modern graduate attributes***

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Why undertake this study?

- **Limitations of expert opinion: survey reported by AEI *Market Update***
- **Accepted explanations do not explain why Gulf Sponsored students are different from other international students**
- **No literature that specifically addresses the issue**
- **Implications for market development and student support**



Challenges faced by Gulf students in common with others

- Omani Sponsored students interviewed prior to departure and twice after arrival
- Limited understanding of designated course and career outcomes a consistent theme
- Independence, time management
- Gaps in academic knowledge, adjustment to new mode of learning -- *study strategies*
- Language barriers -- *expectations and responses to difficulty*



Fieldwork: subtext?

“And she would say, like for example, ‘This is what I expect you to do, and this is what I want you to do’. And you follow the steps that she said but then there has to be something that’s wrong. Like, there’s no way to get a perfect score [...]

I try to ask more questions, I try to see exactly what she’s looking for, exactly what the teacher, him or her, are going to be grading the assignment on.”



Where these students have come from and why they are here

- Citizenship is demarcated and hierchised in the Gulf States
- Shift from *rentier* to knowledge economy, to address youth unemployment in the face of depleted oil reserves
- Educational sponsorship important part of *Nationalisation* policy



How this plays out in their behaviour and attitude

- Traditional family values, challenged by modernity = *neopatriarchy*
- Students hail from a society that is organised *vertically*, through tribal affiliations
- Upward advancement negotiated through *wasta* = building face, power always held by person who bestows favour
- Support structures at home: extended family, friends, colleagues, teachers, tutors



Traditional ways of negotiating success problematic out of context

“For example, when I told them that I would be late [returning from my brother’s wedding] and it was easier for me to go and talk to them [...] because she was my teacher, and I knew her way. I was trying to... you know, the words I am saying, the way that I am saying, the sequence of my talk: mentioning my brother’s wedding at the beginning, and then I want to be late.

You know, it’s different when you know the person.”

