

Developing a New Science and Technology University in the Middle East: KAUST

Karen A. Holbrook
Vice President for Research and Innovation
University of South Florida

The Middle East has become an attractive site for American Universities to establish new campuses, initiate programs in collaboration with existing campuses, and join consortia of universities to develop new educational complexes. Many of these initiatives are underway presently and will open in the near future; others have been established over the past 5-10 years, and still others have failed. Improving higher education has also become a major emphasis for Middle Eastern countries themselves. The King Abdulla University of Science and Technology (KAUST) was announced in 2006 as a vision of King Abdulla, a very forward looking King who recognizes the need for his country to develop an institution of highest quality, in fields of advanced high technology, that would prepare students to work in fields that will expand the economy of the Kingdom beyond petroleum and petroleum products and to prepare students to solve global problems. KAUST is envisioned to become a graduate student only, world-class institution on Saudi soil, populated by faculty and students recruited from around the globe. Saudi Aramco was given the responsibility for developing the university, modeled after the Aramco compound which includes the company and living accommodations for the employees. KAUST, too, is a village, a university occupying 17 sq miles of space, and a research park and incubator. The planners, which ultimately involved many consulting firms, were challenged with creating a campus and an academic program, and recruiting people such that the university would rank among the top 20 universities within 10 years. The University will adhere to the principles of intellectual freedom and nondiscrimination. Men and women will work together in the classroom and the laboratories, and the facilities, equipment and technology will be among the finest in the world. Generous funding will be available for research, travel and living accommodations. KAUST will open September 5, 2009, as home to students from 67 countries, 25% of them women. Creating a new university beginning with a blank piece of paper is difficult. As stated by one the founders, KAUST is not thinking outside the box....There is no box!