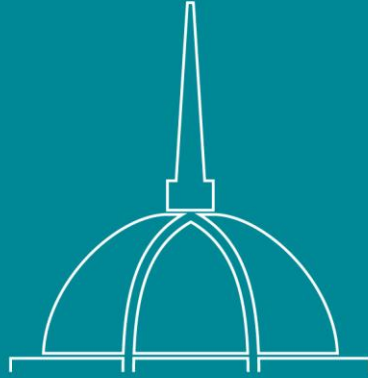




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**AMERICAN-STYLE HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRAQ
A SURVEY OF
DEPARTMENT OF STATE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS
JANUARY 2024**



OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

Through Grants from the U.S. Department of State titled “Supporting American-Style Higher Education in Iraq”, students of lower-income families, minority and underrepresented groups have gained access to American-style higher education; this in turn, impacts awardees’ appreciation of American culture and values. This approach aligns with the broader vision of the University serving as an instrument of U.S. soft power, promoting the American values of critical thinking, gender equality, freedom of expression, and global awareness.

The American University of Kurdistan (AUK) is dedicated to growing the future leaders of Kurdistan and Iraq. But as the population of the nation consists of a broad spectrum of ethnicities and religions, so too must the student population at AUK. All qualified applicants who demonstrate a strong motivation for an American-style higher education, should have access regardless of their ability to pay. Such scholarship awards, as administered in the ongoing three DoS Grants, contribute to the diversification of the student demographic and improve the applicant pool. As a result, more women, minorities, IDPs, and refugees will attain a bachelor’s degree at a liberal arts institution that better prepares them for the professions of the 21st century. This educational experience also ensures their adoption of critical thinking, respect for perspectives different from one’s own, and a commitment to social responsibility that will effectively counter the false ideologies and negative mindsets that pervade the region.

The survey was distributed to 133 DoS scholarship awardees who have been enrolled at the AUK for at least a year. There were 90 respondents; 68% of the total number of awardees.

Characteristics of the Scholarship

Conditions:

- Be a citizen or resident of Iraq and be from one of the prioritized populations.
- Have a high school score of 80% and higher.
- Maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.00 for the duration of their studies.
- Maintain full-time status, a minimum of 12 credits each semester.
- Abide by the student code of conduct.

Applicable bachelor’s programs:

- Nursing
- Electronics & Telecommunication Engineering
- Computer Software & Security
- Business Administration

Objectives of the Survey

- To evaluate the level of understanding of American culture among DoS Scholarship recipients at the beginning of their matriculation at AUK and later in the college career.
- To assess their comprehension and adaptation to the American higher educational system.
- To identify challenges faced in assimilating into an American higher education culture.
- To provide recommendations for enhancing the support mechanisms and orientation programs for scholarship recipients.

Research Methodology:

Recipients of the DoS Scholarships were notified of the research through official email notifications. The survey took place January 10-24, at the AUK Library, selected for its computer lab, which would facilitate the administration of the survey.

To accommodate diverse class schedules and other student commitments, the survey sessions were scheduled multiple times during the weeks in January. This approach provided flexibility, allowing participants to choose suitable time slots. The survey was designed to be anonymous, ensuring that all students could participate knowing that their responses would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Improvement in overall perception of US Culture after enrollment to AUK.

Figure 4 illustrates the transformation in the overall perception of the U.S. and its culture before and after the scholarship award. The most significant shift was observed in the "Very Positive" category, which increased from 28% to 36% after matriculation. This migration of respondents primarily originated from the neutral category, while the other categories remained relatively stable.

Enrollment at AUK has also promoted American Values, Culture and Lifestyles among friends and family members of the students.

Figure 7 demonstrates that a predominant percentage of respondents (93%) noticed enhanced comprehension of American values, culture, and lifestyles among their family and friends since enrolling at AUK.

DoS Scholarships play a crucial role in fostering stronger connections between the United States and the Iraqi people

Figure 8 demonstrates that 91% of respondents agree that these scholarships effectively enhance the connections between the people of the United States and Iraq.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Gender Distribution

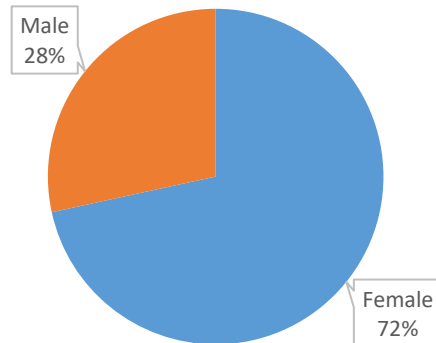


Figure 1: Gender Distribution among the participants

Figure 1 illustrates a higher response rate among females, primarily attributable to the fact that a majority of scholarships are awarded to women.

Year Distribution

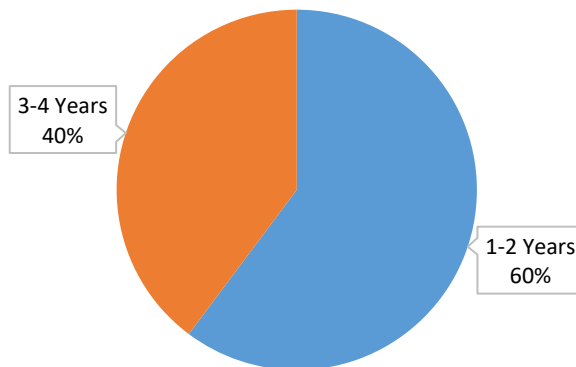


Figure 2: Distribution among the stage of Students

Figure 2 displays the percentage of students in the initial and latter halves of their academic careers at AUK. It's important to emphasize that only students with a minimum enrollment duration of one year were eligible to participate in the survey.

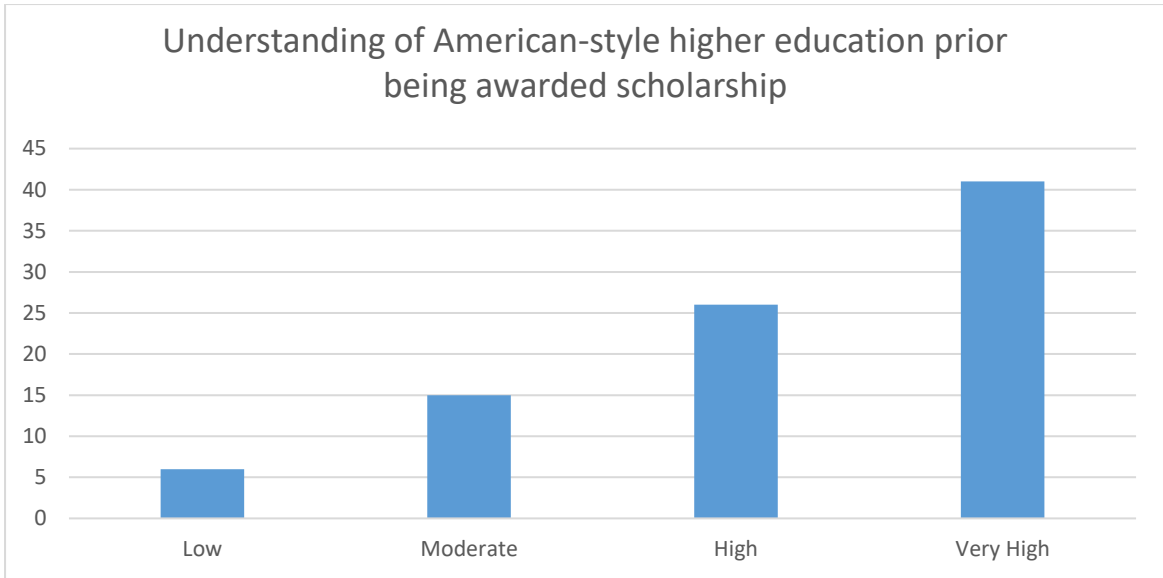


Figure 3: Understanding of American-style higher education prior to receiving the Scholarship

Figure 3 illustrates the level of understanding among DoS scholarship applicants regarding American-style higher education before receiving the scholarship. Three-quarters expressed having a high to very high understanding of American-style higher education

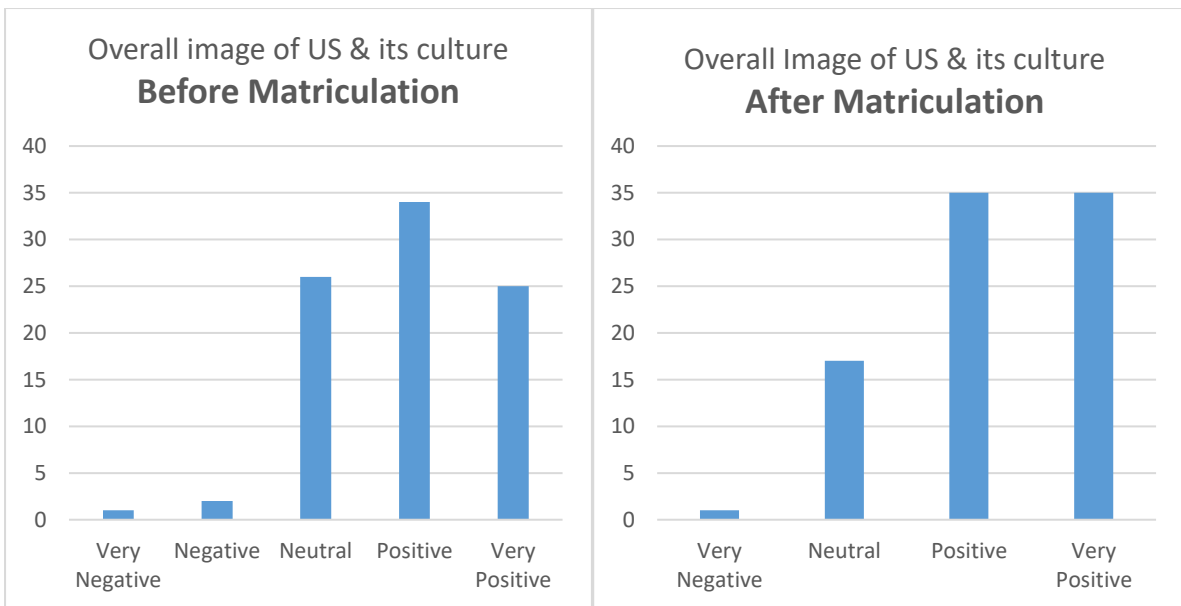


Figure 4: Overall image of the U.S. and American Culture before and after receiving the scholarship

Figure 4 illustrates the transformation in the overall perception of the U.S. and its culture before and after matriculation. The most significant shift was observed in the "Very Positive" category, which increased from 28% to 36% after the scholarship. This change primarily originated from respondents formerly in the neutral category; the other categories remained relatively stable. Please note that there was zero selection of the "Negative" response after matriculation.

Since attending AUK, have you gained awareness of American Values and Culture?

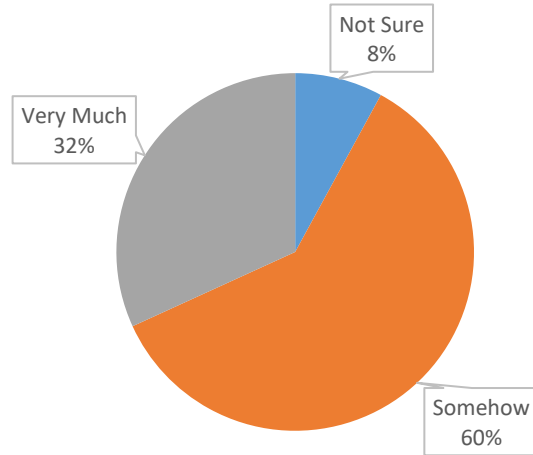


Figure 5: Acquisition of American Values and Culture during attendance at AUK.

Figure 6 illustrates the acquisition of American values and culture by students, with a majority of respondents expressing a partial understanding. This suggests that there is room for improvement in instilling American values in students at AUK

Since attending AUK, have you observed any improvement in the understanding of American values, culture, and way of life among your family and friends?

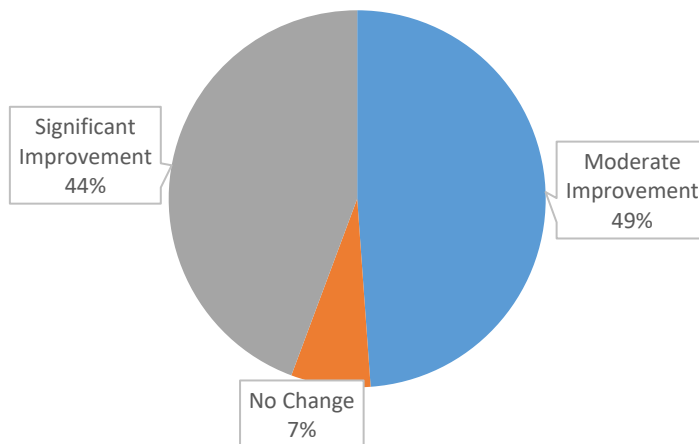


Figure 6: Improvement in understanding American Values, culture and ways of life among family and friends

Figure 7 Demonstrates that a predominant percentage of respondents (93%) have noticed enhanced comprehension of American values, culture, and lifestyles among their family and friends since enrolling at AUK.

Do you believe that such scholarships will positively strengthen ties between the people of the United States and Iraq?

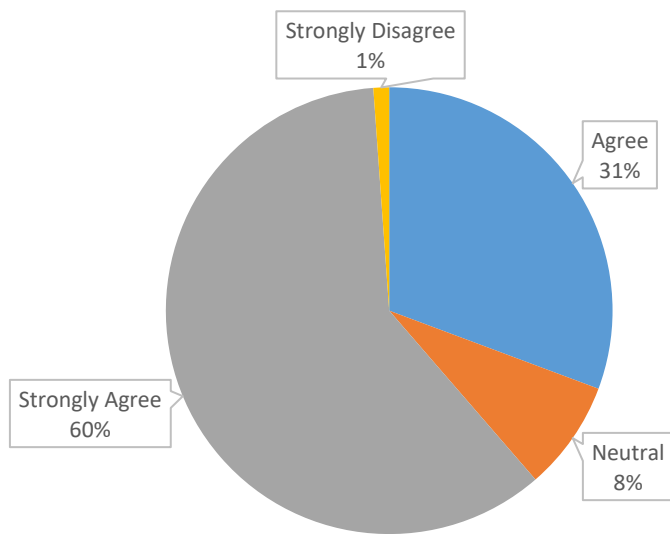


Figure 7: Scholarships' effect on improving ties between the people of the U.S. & Iraq

Figure 8 demonstrates that 91% of respondents agree that these scholarships will effectively enhance the connections between the people of the United States and Iraq.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Students had the opportunity to submit comments to an open question on the perceived differences between the culture of AUK and those of other universities in Kurdistan and Iraq. Responses include:

- AUK not only imparts academic improvement but also offers essential support for personal self-development.
- Several students expressed prior attendance at other universities but opted to choose AUK after visiting the school during open house and recognizing its superior academic quality.
- Others highlighted the appeal of AUK's study plan and the desire to experience a culture beyond the local.
- Mentions were made regarding the need for sports facilities to enhance AUK's cultural atmosphere through increased exercise.
- The recurring theme of language acquisition, particularly in English, was noted. The presence of international faculty emerged as a key distinction.
- Respondents emphasized cultural advantages at AUK, citing greater cultural acceptance among AUK employees compared to other universities where they experienced discrimination or bias.