

arabian oil money buys technology, change

by ray walden

George Kakish in his four years and Maisun Allahiq in her two years in Lincoln have put aside some illusions about the United States. They and other members of the UNL Arab Students Association want to shake Americans free of prejudices about the Arab states.

"Not every Arab student is a sheik," Allahiq, a 19-year-old Saudi Arabian architecture student, said. She describes America's view of her country as "mainly oil, rich sheiks and sand. And that every Arab is a terrorist."

"Americans hear only one side of the story," she said, "their side. It's very important that they hear the other side . . . They should learn more about other countries."

Better understanding between Arabs and Americans is the purpose of the Arab student group, according to Kakish, a 24-year-old Jordanian senior studying civil engineering. To this end, some of the group's 65 members arrange international parties and lectures about Middle East problems in Lincoln churches and other places.

Kakish and Allahiq described their homelands as nations in rapid change.

Allahiq said Saudi Arabia is changing for the better, although "some ideas might have been adopted too soon and the people weren't ready for it." Oil money in Saudi Arabia is buying American technology, which is the instrument of change.

"The people are changing faster than the government," she said. "The people are moving faster for advancement, and the government is not keeping up with the

change."

Kakish said outdated laws and a poorly organized bureaucracy hamper Jordan in the face of rapid development. Parts of the American model of government would help, he said.

The engineering student noted in particular a bad highway system which could use American-style reform.

Change is coming now to the Arab world because of education and money, he said.

Arab governments invest some of that money in scholarships for students abroad. Allahiq and Kakish both support their

studies privately, but Allahiq said most Arab students at UNL are here on government scholarships. In Jordan, each year on scholarship creates two years of obligation to government service.

Communication was a problem for Kakish his first semester in Lincoln, although he had studied English in high school. He said he has adopted well to necessary English words, such as engineering terms, but not so well otherwise.

Allahiq, on the other hand, speaks almost flawless English, the result of

language study since kindergarten and school in England before coming to the United States. Still, she found America to be "a whole totally different world."

Close family ties at home resulted in a year or two of homesickness for Kakish. But he said he eventually adapted.

While study abroad means isolation and frustration for some students, Allahiq claims to be relaxed here.

"I've made a lot of friends in my dorm and in my classes," she said. American students accept her, she said, though some feel sorry for her—without reason.

"They're very curious toward me," she observed.

Kakish plans to graduate this summer and return to Jordan for three years of government work. His government requires a term of public service for all doctors and engineers, he said. He hopes to use his education to make a better life for his people.

For Allahiq, there is no government obligation. She expects to find her future with a private firm or on her own as an architect.

While Kakish plans to take parts of America back with him to Saudi Arabia, he doesn't agree with everything American. He said his countrymen do not dislike the American people, but they do dislike U.S. foreign policy in some areas.

The main point of difference is U.S. aid to Israel. He said the United States is not pushing hard enough to restore a Palestinian homeland.

Another disagreement focuses on U.S. policy in developing countries. The government's motive in helping countries is economic control, he said, not friendship.



Photo by Mark Billingsley

Maisun Allahiq (left) and George Kakish say Americans hold unjustified stereotypes against the Arab states.

muslims risk loss of identity in america

by ray walden

A muslim student from a traditional Islamic country faces not only culture shock when he comes to study in America, he also risks the loss of his identity.

Everyday life in Lincoln has elements that are strange for any foreign student, but for muslims these elements may go beyond strange to religiously prohibited.

"There are many chances for them to go astray," said Mohamed Ismail, Muslim Student Association president. "We try to get in touch with students when they come and tell them about these aspects. We want them to live a clean and healthy life here, and when they go back we don't want them to be aliens in their own country."

What can be dangerous? Women. Islam teaches strict separation of men and women. Muslim women must not show their beauty. Premarital sex is punishable by death. The muslim man has had no chance of friendship with women.

Suddenly the newly arrived muslim student is confronted with a halter-topped woman in the next seat of his classroom, or bikini-clad sunbathers. And the restrictions of his society are gone.

At home such restrictions may seem more traditional than religious. Foreign study breaks the student free of the religious circle, according to Said Martan, a Saudi Arabian working on a Ph.D. in economics. Here it is a challenge to separate tradition from religion, he said.

The shock of proximity to women can break a muslim student's concentration on his studies and may even destroy an educational career, Ismail, a 39-year-old Ph.D. candidate in curriculum administration from southern India, said.

Other American behaviors which Islam prohibits are eating pork, smoking and drinking alcohol, he said.

The purpose of the Muslim Student Association is to help its members adjust to life in America and at the same time keep their tradition, culture and beliefs, Ismail said.

The association also helps with practical

matters such as finding lodging, and spiritual matters such as celebrating the birth of the prophet Mohammed.

Another function is public relations. The group provides speakers for lectures on Islam and comparative religions for schools, churches, college classes and meetings at the Nebraska Penal Correctional Complex.

"Mostly we try to dispel the misconceptions prevailing about Islam," Ismail said. Religious restrictions against such "signs of progress" as alcoholism and premarital sex

have mislabeled Islam as a conservative religion which opposes progress and which is ill-suited to modern life, he said.

The recent rise in Arab world-power has spurred an interest in Islam, he said. But he cautioned that the way to learn about the religion is to study the Koran and not to look at the muslim people.

"You find a wide gulf between what the muslims believe and what you see the muslims practicing in muslim countries," Ismail said.

In practice, many Islamic values are lost, Martan said. Islam promotes universal education and democracy, he said, but only

recently have Saudi women been educated. Many of the more than 40 muslim countries are dictatorships.

"There is no country in the world that applies Islam absolutely," he said.

Technological change in traditional Islamic nations is diluting practice of the religion with ideologies of the East and West, he said.

"The more the country is open, the more danger there is to Islam," Martan said. "We don't want to be followers of either the East or West. . . We believe that we have the solutions in Islam."

majority of foreign students from third world

More than 800 foreign students attend UNL this semester. Figures from the International Educational Services office vary with the time of year, but, according to coordinator Peter Levitov, there were 478 undergraduate and 414 graduate foreign students.

Third World countries dominate Lincoln's academic foreign colony. Enrollment figures reflect the focus of developing countries on technical and agricultural skills. The dominant study preferences of foreign students are engineering, agriculture, business and architecture.

Men outnumber women six to one among full-time students, Levitov said. The average age of foreign students is older than that of American students—significantly older for graduates.

Most come from developing countries in

Asia or Africa, according to an IES study which divides 833 foreign students into their countries of origin. The top 10 are as follows:

Iran	156
Nigeria	104
Taiwan	69
Hong Kong	59
India	35
Vietnam	31
Venezuela	28
Iraq	21
Indonesia	19
Pakistan	18

Of those from the remaining 69 nations, fewer than half are from industrialized nations.

Levitov said his office offers foreign students an orientation program when they arrive to help them adjust to the new culture. At the end of their stay, there are

workshops for students returning home which attempt to ease their re-entry into once-familiar societies which may have changed while they were away.

"The person who is optimally adjusted is both in his own culture and the other one," he said. Foreign students associations can ease the adjustment either by reinforcing cultural background or giving security for students who sense a campus attitude of indifference.

Many foreign students report that language differences add to their sense of cultural shock. But admission standards eliminate some of this problem. One requirement for a student visa is an English proficiency test for those from non-English-speaking countries. Other criteria for admission are an academic background and full financial support.