Chapter 11
Bridging the Gulf Between the Campus and Workplace: The Role of English-Oriented Student Bodies

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores the way involvement in student organizations contributes to an effective form of learning, particularly at the tertiary level. This can be seen to be part of experiential learning, which has long been the backbone of western education, increasingly being implemented in universities in the Arab Gulf, where education has hitherto followed a more traditional route. Based on the theories in the literature, this qualitative research outlines the multiple roles student organizations play in a context where learning independence, mixed gender interaction, and English language use are still developing concepts. Using personal interviews with stakeholders in a university in the Arab Gulf, this chapter ascertains the extent and the way in which student organizations succeed in enabling students to move beyond traditional learning to enable self-reliance by establishing social and professional networks and offering real-time instruction in such skills as time management and cultural communication, in addition to giving opportunities to use English in real-world contexts.

INTRODUCTION
In tandem with the axiom that, while teaching takes place in the classroom, learning actually occurs outside it, much attention has been placed over the last few decades on creating knowledge societies which focus on education beyond the rigid walls of institutional limits. With increasing concerns about the relevance of a number of academic degrees offered in universities, particularly those in the humani-
ties, it has become ever more important for tertiary education centers to begin offering opportunities to their stakeholders to explore avenues which allow them to work with the world outside, in addition to the pursuit of academic courses. While community involvement has become a catchphrase in many parts of the world, and learning outside the classroom is acknowledged to be a legitimate form of education, educational institutions in the Middle East, and particularly in the Arab Gulf region, are largely yet to incorporate this within their educational matrices. This paper attempts to outline some ways in which university students are empowered by participating in student organizations and through sustained involvement with local and regional communities.

Within the framework of tertiary education, student organizations are best equipped to be linked with community activities as they are self-generated and often at liberty to identity their own priorities and methodologies. A focused approach to encouraging and rewarding student bodies by giving them a variety of opportunities to engage could go a long way in allowing students to better connect with their world while developing the skills of leadership, social interaction, and negotiation, in addition to enhancing team spirit. These are all essential qualities in the workplace.

While investigating the role of student organizations at universities, the perspectives of stakeholders themselves gain predominance as they are able to articulate ways in which involvement with activities outside strictly academic spheres contributes to their evolution as both students and citizens. As such, this paper is based on interviews with a number of students who were members of one of the most successful student bodies, composed of students of English literature and translation, associated with a public university in the Arab Gulf.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Approaches to Learning Outside the Classroom: A Review of Literature

Generic terms given to the system of learning outside the classroom have been various, pointing to the numerous strategies which have been adapted to allow for the continuing of education beyond institutional limits. This has been termed variously as Work Based Learning (Raelin, 2010), Experiential Learning (Qualters, 2010) as well as Transformative Learning (Fried, 2012). Its offshoots have also been seen to be Outdoor Learning and Expanded Learning by many organizations in the United States, Australia, and Canada. Commonly viewed as being learning which embraces the community, both human and natural, it has been widely accepted to have emerged from Robery Fry’s constructive methods of teaching which presuppose that learning is essentially a gradual process which is layered by successive life experiences. Based on early constructivist models of learning and successive socio-constructivist theories, experiential learning is seen by many scholars as bringing the two models together to highlight the way in which education is a process, rather than an end, and how it is constructed rather than acquired.

Carl Rogers’ notion of experiential learning prioritizes learning based on the requirements of the learners themselves rather than a pre-determined learning outcome (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Focusing on what is learnt rather than what is taught, the notion underlines the basic philosophy that learning is most effective when it is self-initiated and when it is evaluated by the learners themselves. Combs (1982) contextualized Rogers’ contribution to education by stating that learning was most productive when the learner felt least threatened and when the subject matter is most relevant to the learner – a theory substantiated by various other studies on experiential learning such as those of Lenning and Ebbers.