



NORTHWESTERN
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IN QATAR

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NU-Q Students Research Role of Qatari Women in Society
First-of-its-kind, grant-winning project surveys nearly 1000 Qatari women

Doha, Qatar – April 7, 2014 – Female student researchers from Northwestern University in Qatar have begun to observe and interview Qatari women about their influence on society. Their findings promise to offer a window of insight on the relationship between female participation in social groups, known as *majlis al-hareem*, and their empowerment in society at large.

“We anticipate that our findings will help us see more clearly the link between this type of participation and general societal influence among women,” said Jocelyn Sage Mitchell, assistant professor in NU-Q’s liberal arts program, and the primary investigator of the study, which “is the first of its kind to survey a large sample of Qatari women about their participation in social groups and their choices in the economic, educational and political spheres.”

Stereotypes abound about women’s limited roles in the Middle East, particularly in the Arab Gulf. A closer look at Qatar, however, challenges misconceptions about female repression and exclusion. Leadership, voting rights, education levels and participation in the workforce all measure highly among women in Qatar, according to recent research.

The NU-Q-led study entitled “Qatari Women: Engagement and Empowerment” was granted US\$150,000 in the latest award cycle of Qatar National Research Fund’s Undergraduate Research Experience Program (UREP). It entails surveying nearly 1,000 Qatari women about their participation and level of involvement in *majlis al-hareem*, ranging in type—from family, social and neighborhood, to intellectual and religious. The Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University will conduct the study.

Most of the students involved in the study are Qatari nationals. With data collection to finish in the spring, the team plans to process data and curate audio-visual results over the summer and fall.

Nour Al-Tamimi, a journalism sophomore at NU-Q and one of the student researchers involved in the project, said: “Being an observer of an environment that I have been a part of for my whole life is very interesting to me. Now, I don’t only participate in these majlis, but I also observe and write ethnographic observations that document women’s participation in society.”

“I am motivated to take part in this project, because our research will contribute to a better understanding of Qatari women here and throughout the world,” Najlaa Al-Khulaifi, an NU-Q communication sophomore student researcher, explained. “Currently, there is no recent data or information about this topic, and I feel that up-to-date research including our conclusions will be very important for the empowerment of women.”

The research team consists of 15 female NU-Q students, overseen by three NU-Q faculty members—Mitchell, Christina Paschyn, lecturer in residence in the Journalism Program and Kirsten Pike, assistant professor in the communication program—joined by three researchers from other Qatar-based universities: Tanya Kane, adjunct anthropology lecturer at Texas A&M University at Qatar and Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar; Justin Gengler, senior researcher at the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute of Qatar University, and Sadia Mir, language studies instructor at College of the North Atlantic-Qatar.

Through audio-visual recording and ethnographic observation, the study results will feature rich contextual elements. These curated findings will be presented throughout the fall at museums, conferences and film festivals in Qatar and internationally.

Keywords: NU-Q, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY IN QATAR, QATARI WOMEN, STUDENTS, ARAB GULF, SOCIETY, WOMEN ROLE, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, MIDDLE EAST, SURVEY, RESEARCH, MAJLIS AL HAREEM, EDUCATION, STEREOTYPES, QATAR NATIONAL RESEARCH FUND

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About Northwestern University in Qatar

Northwestern University in Qatar draws from its parent organization, Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois), a distinguished history, famous programs and an exceptional faculty. Founded in partnership with Qatar Foundation, NU-Q provides a framework through which students explore the world and, ultimately, shape its future through its distinguished schools of communication, journalism, and liberal arts.