6 Qatar University

Local Identity and Global Opportunities

Qatar University (QU) is the largest higher education institution in the relatively small education system of Qatar, an oil-rich State on a peninsula located on the northeast coast of the Arabian Gulf. Since it was founded in 1973, the university has tried to balance the country's press to diversify the economy and engage with the international community with a desire to preserve and celebrate Qatari national identity and the Arabic language. To better understand these sometimes-competing demands, some background on Qatar's history and economy is helpful.

BACKGROUND: QATAR'S HISTORY AND ECONOMY

Qatar has a total population of about 2.5 million, of whom about 12 percent are Qatari (CIA, 2023). Most people live in urban areas along the coast, leaving the bulk of the 11,500 square kilometers sparsely populated. The nation was a British protectorate from 1916 to 1971, when it declared independence. Historically, the country's economy was based on camels, fish, and

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pearls (Gonzalez et al., 2008). The discovery of oil in the 1940s transformed the economy and enriched the local community. Substantial oil and gas revenues have enabled Qatar to initiate major development projects, expanding the private sector and providing education, health, and social services. Large construction projects have added to the national infrastructure. The capital, Doha, for example, has grown from about 200,000 people in 1985 to over 650,000 in 2022 (UN, 2023). To extract its natural resources, undertake construction, and enhance services, the country has recruited skilled and unskilled foreign workers in large numbers (Tok et al., 2016).

Qatar is a major global supplier of liquid natural gas (Krauss, 2023), and while it has ample reserves (Calabrese, 2023), the national leadership is conscious of the finite nature of its energy resources. Consequently, for over twenty-five years the Qatar government has been pursuing various national strategies to diversify the economy, lift employment opportunities for citizens, and improve social services. In 2008, the government launched Qatar National Vision 2030, setting ambitious development goals in four principal areas: economic, social, human, and environmental development (Planning and Statistics Authority – Qatar, 2023a). These overarching goals have been pursued through more specific shorter-term national development strategies that established plans for the various sectors in the State, including the education and training sectors (Planning and Statistics Authority – Qatar, 2023b).

Economic imperatives dominated policy debates and shaped various reform and development strategies, underscoring Qatar's connections with global markets and the country's integration into the international community. Higher education policy was dominated by economic concerns rather than social priorities, and national institutions were encouraged to "directly connect with global developments" and emulate "global exemplars" (Crist & Powell, 2020, p. 1). Submerged by this global economic agenda was a persistent and pervasive interest in protecting and promoting traditions and the "Qatari identity, culture, and the Arab and Islamic values" at the level of both the family and the nation (Belkhiria et al., 2021, p. 126). These interests came to the forefront in the National Vision 2030, which sought to balance the press to modernization with greater attention to preservation and celebration of the Qatari national identity and the Arabic language. In practical terms, this more overt emphasis on Qatari culture and language resulted in a State decree in 2012 that shifted the language of instruction at QU from English to Arabic for some academic programs. Commenting on the change soon after it was announced, Jane Kinninmont, a regional expert at the UK-based think tank Chatham House, said that it "reflects wider sensitivities about protecting

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the local culture in the country with the world's highest rate of inward migration" (Guttenplan, 2012).

Intertwined with the themes of supporting economic development and preserving national identity was a desire to prepare young Qataris for active roles in the nation's enterprises and institutions. This would reduce dependence on expatriate labor and talent, provide opportunities for Qatari citizens to be more actively engaged in society, and strengthen support for the State and the emir.

QATAR'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Formal education in Qatar started in the 1950s with a small number of primary and secondary schools. Since then, the education sector has grown, led by the provision of free and compulsory education for Qatari citizens. There are over 200 public schools and about 70 kindergartens serving 125,000 children. The private sector is larger, with over 330 schools licensed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education enrolling approximately 211,000 students in the 2019–2020 academic year (MOEHE, 2023a). Most of these students are from expatriate communities, and the schools offer a wide variety of curricula reflecting the diversity of the expatriate population. The government provides vouchers to defray the cost for Qatari students who attend these private schools.

The higher education sector in Qatar is also a mix of public and private institutions. Apart from QU and the Community College of Qatar, the fifteen public universities and colleges are small and specialize in fields like finance or defense studies. The nine private institutions also are also relatively small. There is also a group of international universities that are supported by the Qatar Foundation; most of these institutions operate within Education City, a dedicated space on the outskirts of Doha. Across all three forms of provision, there were about 40,000 students in 2019–2020 (MOEHE, 2023b). All higher education institutions in Qatar charge fees for international and local expatriate students but offer free education to Qatari citizens who meet the requirements of scholarship schemes administered by the government or some quasi-government organizations in the energy and transport sectors. Scholarships are also available for Qatari citizens to study abroad.

The growth of the education sector overall, a recent expansion of QU, and the creation of Education City are all aligned with the desire to create a knowledge economy in Qatar and deepen the nation's pool of human capital. The institutions are also shaped by Qatar's social and political "aspirations,"

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to be seen as a "tolerant Muslim society" and good place to live and work (Crist & Powell, 2020, p. 2). In addition, QU and the other public institutions are expected to impart and reinforce "Qatari values, heritage and culture" (Amin & Cochrane, 2023, p. 9). These expectations extend to the private institutions and, to a lesser extent, the branch campuses in Education City where the language of instruction is predominately English.

QU was established by State decree in 1973, two years after independence. It started as a College of Education with 150 students, nearly two-thirds of them women – an institutional characteristic that continues to describe QU and higher education in Qatar. In 1977, the College of Education merged with professional schools to become a university. It was a part of a wave of new universities set up by newly independent nations as they sought to "establish legitimacy," provide services to their citizens, and "nurture nationalism" (Romani, 2009, p. 3).

For over two decades, QU was the only higher education institution in Qatar, until 1997 when the new emir established Education City on the outskirts of Doha to house international branch campuses (IBCs) that would offer high-quality programs of study in specific fields with English as the medium of instruction. These programs serve only a small proportion of Qatari secondary school graduates and are not to be "demand absorbing" or to rival QU as the traditional destination for higher education (Moini et al., 2009, p. xviii). Education City was to serve multiple goals and objectives – some economic, some social, and some specific to the education field (Crist & Powell, 2020, p. 2). For example, the very presence of an education city was expected to stimulate and model reforms of education policy in Qatar by importing and demonstrating good practice and supporting "national liberalization initiatives, and globalization" (Khodr, 2011, p. 514).

Some of these education-specific goals were pursued through a national reform strategy called "Education for a New Era" (EFNE). The concept behind this reform was to transform the education system from a traditional centralized model to a decentralized and results-based model (Brewer et al., 2007). The objective was to lift student performance to help Qatari students succeed along international, and particularly Western, benchmarks (Nasser, 2017). Initiated in 2002, EFNE focused primarily on the public school system, but it had significant flow-on effects for higher education, notably in the language of instruction. The EFNE mandated that in K–12 schools English was to be used in classes in mathematics, science, and technology. This seemed to align with practice in higher education that favored English as a mode of instruction. The implementation of EFNE, especially its language

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policy, was problematic. Three common criticisms were its "top-down" formulation, the absence of any improvement in student performance, and "the perceived threat to the Qatari Arab cultural and linguistic identity (Mustafawi & Shaaban, 2019, p. 210). As a result of a "substantial societal backlash" (Nolan, 2012, p. 8), some of the reforms were reversed, including, in 2011, changing the language of instruction in K–12 public schools back to Arabic. This cascaded into the public universities when, in 2012, the "State of Qatar decreed" that QU programs "offered by the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business and Economics and Law" would be in Arabic and that admission requirements would change. Science and engineering majors would continue to be delivered in English (Belkhiria et al., 2021, p. 126). This has continued to be the language and admissions process at QU, which resulted in more Qatari students enrolling and graduating from QU (Belkhiria et al., 2021, p. 131).

QATAR UNIVERSITY

QU, the country's first and largest national university, embodies the hopes and aspirations of the Qatari people. Its eleven colleges offer "the widest range of educational programs in the country" (QU, 2017). Located at the northeastern outskirts of Doha, on the opposite side of the city from Education City, the campus is divided into sections for male and female students. Each has its own lecture halls, labs, and other facilities. The university employs more than 1,000 faculty members, approximately 70 percent of whom have an earned doctorate. As of the 2021–2022 academic year, more than 24,000 students were enrolled in its undergraduate (22,043), graduate (1,339), certificate (610), and foundation programs (895) (the latter prepares students for college-level work) (QU, 2022). Graduates of the university are among the most influential people in society. Most of the ministers in the government are alumni. As the institution has evolved, administrators, faculty, and other stakeholders have grappled with a persistent tension regarding its mission – namely, who it should serve and how it can best serve society.

KEY POINTS IN THE EVOLUTION OF QU

QU's mission evolved over the years to support emergent societal needs. It began as a teaching college. In 1977 QU established the colleges of science,

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humanities, and social sciences, as well as the college of Sharia. At the time most faculty members were expatriates from other Arab countries. Qatar provided funding for talented students to study abroad, and several graduates who had earned PhDs came back to the university to work as faculty and administrators. The university's expansion continued with the founding in 1980 of the College of Engineering. In recent years, the need to develop effective infrastructure for healthcare led to the establishment of the colleges of health sciences, medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry, culminating with the opening of the nursing college in 2022.

From its origins, QU's role has been to serve all of society – both the children of Qatari citizens and the children of expatriates who live and work in Qatar. What has been contested is the degree to which the university should seek to mirror conceptions of excellence based on international standards, or develop its own conception of excellence. Prior to the early 2000s, the university functioned largely as a teaching-centered institution, and its expansion reflected the specific needs of Qatari society (e.g., education, healthcare, engineering). However, there were concerns that simply helping students obtain degrees was not enough. As one administrator explained, "there was a feeling that Qatar University was not fulfilling the duties of injecting the needed human resources for the job market." Further, there were questions about whether the quality of education was sufficiently high to serve the needs of graduates and society. One administrator recalling that time said, "the quality – especially in the late 1980s and 1990s – started to fall down."

In 2003, Professor Sheikha Abdulla Al-Misnad became QU's fifth president. She had a PhD in education from the University of Durham and, in addition to being a prolific scholar, had served as the vice president for research and community development at the university. President Al-Misnad presided over a series of major reforms that sought to make QU the leading institution of higher learning in the region. One administrator describing her said, "she was passionate about fixing – about upgrading – the University to really a different level." In 2003 the emir of Qatar, through the Emiri Diwan, commissioned the RAND Corporation, represented by its Qatar office – the RAND Qatar Policy Institute (RQPI) – to evaluate the university and its structure and examine the conditions and resources needed to turn QU into a model national university (Moini et al., 2009). To lead the reform effort, RAND helped QU leadership establish a Senior Reform Committee (SRC), composed of experts from around the world. SRC recommendations included restructuring the university to reflect international

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norms by creating a college of arts and sciences that could provide general education for the entire university. The SRC also recommended making English the language of instruction across all areas except for Arabic and Sharia. Additionally, faculty were encouraged to actively engage in research in addition to teaching. These reforms enabled the university to recruit faculty from a far wider pool of potential applicants. It attracted faculty able to write and publish in English, the lingua franca for many international scholarly journals.

From 2003 until 2011 there was a strong push to improve the quality of the institution. As one administrator explained, "In Qatar, a small country with a small population, we need to focus on quality, not only quantity. We can't afford to produce mediocre students. That's not good for society, especially if you want nationals to be at the forefront of leading the development of Qatar – the economy and Qatari society." One administrator characterized quality improvement efforts as "drastic measures." These efforts involved either shoring up internal quality assurance or even, when necessary, creating new systems. Admissions criteria were elevated. Students now had to perform well in English. One person who was a member of the faculty during those years recalled, "the quality of students changed, and I noticed that [in the classes I taught]." The plans of study for many programs were updated. Several programs began to seek international accreditation; today 40 percent of all programs are accredited. While the goal was greater rigor, another result was greater attrition. One administrator said, "Qatar University was admitting a lot of students. Many students got kicked out after one or two years. They weren't prepared. The University tried to prepare them through a foundation program. Many of the students could not finish the program in two years." Raising academic standards engendered a measure of societal discontent from parents whose children either were not admitted or did not do well.

There were also changes in administrative structures. According to a person who graduated from the institution several decades ago, returned in the early 2000s for a time, and now serves in an administrative position, "Before 2002, the University's structure wasn't similar to the common structures you see around the world. There were no vice presidents. There was no research and no graduate programs." The new president established structures to allow for more effective and shared governance, including an Executive Management Council (cabinet) and an Academic Council. President Al-Misnad also found an institution whose resources were insufficient to allow the pursuit of excellence. One administrator explained:

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> When Dr. Sheikha [Al-Misnad] got the job she found a university in name with students and new buildings. She found classrooms but no infrastructure. There were no research centers. There was no interdisciplinary work being done. The change process she launched resulted in a comprehensive review of all programs to see whether they should continue, be expanded, or be eliminated. It was a time of great change, and many enthusiastically joined the effort.

Recalling that era, another administrator said, "I remember those times we began meetings at 6:30 in the morning." This period also saw an increasing emphasis on research.

These quality improvement efforts were not embraced by everyone. Some faculty members disliked the changes because restructuring meant they were no longer in the same small unit they had been in for years. Others felt the change effort was an implicit critique of what the university had already achieved – that their efforts hadn't been good enough. As one administrator explained, a small group of Qatari academics felt that remaking the university according to international standards was the wrong way forward. Over time, however, organizational culture began to shift, with more people espousing a desire to pursue excellence and a growing confidence that such a goal was within their reach. As one administrator explained, "The University has grown in the past seven to ten years, and the mission has changed – it's become research focused as much as undergraduate and graduate teaching focused . . . The University is a catalyst for national development."

All this changed in 2011, as the Arab Spring swept across the Middle East and protests erupted in neighboring countries to voice discontent over a range of political and societal issues. In Qatar, the government sought tangible ways to demonstrate its willingness to be responsive to the desires of its citizens. At QU, a decision was made to pull back on reforms that had, in the words of one senior administrator, resulted in "mixed feelings in society." English was eliminated as the required language of instruction in many programs across the institution, although engineering, science, medicine, pharmacy, and dental medicine programs continue to be offered in English at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Graduate programs in education and business are also offered in English. Further, admissions requirements were somewhat loosened, most notably for English proficiency, which is now required only for programs taught in English. Administrators and faculty members have had varying responses to this decision. Many saw it as a retreat from a bold vision of becoming an internationally competitive university. Some felt it was an appropriate course correction, a way to ensure

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that the university, first and foremost, serves the people of Qatar. The decision did have important implications. It made faculty recruiting somewhat more challenging, since the pool of Arabic speakers with PhDs is far smaller than the pool of English speakers with PhDs. "I think the University is still struggling with this. But I think it has been a good challenge – to try to teach in Arabic with the same standards that you would find in an American counterpart, or anywhere," one administrator said.

One enduring feature of these reforms has been the ongoing development of robust processes aimed at ensuring academic quality. The first is the curriculum enhancement program. Committees at the departmental, college, and university levels review all new courses and programs of study. As one member explained, "we ensure the curriculum is up to date and in line with the best practices and recent trends." A second is the learning outcomes assessment process, which is overseen by academic affairs. Each program is required to define its outcomes. They must annually assess whether they are achieving them and describe what efforts are being made to adjust and improve the program. Finally, an academic program review process requires each program to undertake a self-study every five years, which includes the participation of an external visitor. The office of academic affairs gathers data about all programs across the university, which is a key support to department chairs and deans when they undertake the self-study.

In addition, the university is in the process of defining core graduation competencies, which include communication skills, teamwork, lifelong learning, and integrity. The idea is for the specific learning outcomes of programs to connect to these overarching competencies. In addition to these processes, there is a university-wide academic planning committee with seventeen representatives from the ten colleges, the seventeen research centers, student affairs, academic affairs, and graduate studies. This committee focuses on the big picture and reviews proposals for new colleges or degree programs. As one administrator explained, "we intended it really to ensure that we have a global view of where the university is going to grow or maybe some programs actually have to be downsized in the future." There is also an institutional effectiveness committee that reviews nonacademic departments.

The university also gathers data by regularly surveying students and faculty to understand their perspectives. It also conducts surveys of employers to learn how graduates are performing. The culture of the institution seems to be one where there is a continuous desire to improve. As one administrator put it, "Are we happy? We need to improve like any institution! We've never been happy, and we always want to continually improve our graduates' attributes."

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THE INSTITUTION'S CURRENT MISSION AND VISION

QU, as the national university of the country, sees its mission as nothing less than helping to shape the future of the country. Announcing QU's successful bid for international accreditation, the QU president affirmed that QU's aspiration is "to be regionally recognized for distinctive excellence in education and research, an institution of choice for students and scholars and a catalyst for sustainable socio-economic development of Qatar" (QU, 2023). QU's strategic plan (QU, 2017) was developed in concert with Qatar's National Development Vision (Planning and Statistics Authority – Qatar, 2023a) and the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2018–2022. Indeed, elements of the Qatar government's national strategy depend on the active involvement of the university. The strategic plan lays out four key pillars of emphasis: education, research, effective governance, and engagement with the broader society, which means addressing pressing societal problems or, as the document puts it, "maximiz[ing] the institution's impact on stakeholders." It also has two cross-cutting goals: fostering innovation and effectively using technology.

The institution sees as a central purpose the cultivation of creativity and innovation among its students. The strategic plan states that the university seeks to "foster and nurture a culture and mindset of entrepreneurship and innovation." In Sheikh Tamin bin Hamnad Al Thani's introduction to the plan, he makes the following observation: "We require diligence, creativity, independent thinking, constructive initiatives and interest in academic achievement in all disciplines, self-reliance and fighting indolence and dependency" (QU, 2017, p. 3). In short, a key aspect of the mission is to foster students' agency, so that they can lead their communities and country forward to a brighter future.

While the lofty goals laid out in the strategic plan are clear, the university is still in the process of operationalizing these aspirations. The institution is currently developing its own framework to ensure quality. Each area of the university is establishing its own key performance indicators. The institution seeks to provide an excellent formative education for its students through specific academic programs and cocurricular activities that allow students to develop leadership skills and encourage them to develop initiatives on their own. The office of student affairs is in the process of defining desired graduate attributes. One student affairs administrator remarked, "We want them to be leaders in their community and in society . . . that doesn't

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mean only in the job market but being a good citizen in general." The university offers ample opportunity to practice soft skills. There are now student representative councils (one for men, one for women) in each college. Student affairs has launched a leadership development program and recently held its fourth annual student leadership conference with student leaders from several different countries. The number of student-led clubs is also expanding. The institution has seen an increase in student volunteerism. Describing the rapid changes that have occurred in recent years, one administrator remarked, "usually things happen incrementally, but if we are able to achieve even 60 to 70 percent of our ambitious strategy, we would be in a much different place than we are now."

QU is both a teaching and research-centered institution. Faculty are expected to research and publish, but teaching remains a significant focus in their daily lives and a key standard by which they are judged. As one administrator put it, "teaching is still the major component of the university." Of course, the university rewards faculty who conduct research, too. There is an internal grants process. Colleges can adjust the workload of faculty to play to their strengths. One faculty member might choose to spend more time and effort teaching, while another may focus a greater portion of his or her energies on research. The institution especially values research that focuses on addressing pressing real-world problems for Qatar and the region. The College of Engineering has had a good deal of success partnering with industry. According to a faculty member from that school, it has received 20 million Riyal ($5.4 million USD) from industry over the past ten years. It recently brought together more than a hundred representatives from industry along with faculty to discuss potential joint ventures that would draw on the expertise of both industry and the university. As one professor put it, "the point of the new strategy is to increase the impact on society and the economy." QU is also launching an office of technology transfer to help faculty establish consulting arrangements with industry. The College of Engineering is looking to integrate emerging areas of study, including artificial intelligence, cyber security, and big data mining into the curriculum to foster expertise that will better serve industry. It is actively seeking to partner with others across the university to address pressing problems such as sustainability, cyber security, and biomedical engineering. As one administrator involved in this effort explained, "Who should work on sustainable development? Physicists? Ecologists? Social scientists? Everybody! It's all linked. But that requires a change of mindset."

Developing exemplary researchers from Qatar is a vitally important aspect of its mission. An administrator, describing research being done on parenting

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and family relations, explained, "You can't have a team from America come and investigate these things ... if you don't have good knowledge about society, you probably will miss the point." One implication of eliminating English as the required language of instruction for many programs is that it leads to the hiring of some faculty who cannot speak and write academic English fluently and, therefore, are at a significant disadvantage when trying to publish research in internationally influential academic journals. As the university continues to grow, it is an open question in the minds of some whether it will be able to find enough well-trained Qataris to lead the institution. As one senior administrator explained, "It will be a challenge in the long run to have enough Qataris among the faculty and staff members. As we grow, we may grow in numbers, but proportionally we become less."

The kinds of people who thrive at QU as faculty are individuals who are committed not only to the traditional work of a faculty member (teaching and research) but also to improving the institution itself. It is a place where people must be able to deal with rapid change. QU is a place that rewards creative thinking. As one faculty member explained, "this is an institution that seeks ideas from all over – it's not just coming from the top." While the opportunity to help shape the future of a program, college, or even the university itself appeals to some faculty, others find the idea daunting and exhausting.

Today, despite a shared commitment to pursuing excellence and quality, there are differences of opinion about what QU's mission ultimately should be. Some harbor hopes of becoming a top-ranked international university. As one faculty member said, "I'd like to see this university in the top – to be honest in the top twenty universities in the world. I think this is achievable. I think this is feasible." Others question whether such a goal is realistic or even desirable. In describing a vision for the institution, one administrator said, "We're not going to compete with Harvard or Cambridge ... We're focusing on being a good model for the region – a good model for a national university." Rising to the top of the rankings would mean dramatically reshaping faculty work and dramatically increasing institutional resources around research. One senior administrator remarked:

> Even if we are not getting higher rankings we should focus on our own model. This is the challenge that Qatar University is facing now, whether to continue as a traditional university or to convert ourselves into an institution that's best for the country in a way that is academically acceptable while maintaining academic quality ... A university in the US or the UK have a department of computer sciences, so I should have one too? No. That's not right.

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According to this line of thinking, the institution should ensure that its practices and activities are aligned with the most pressing problems facing the country and the region. This approach may require rethinking certain practices. For example, might the university hire people with deep expertise in certain areas even though they do not hold doctorates? One administrator even called into question the efficacy of pursuing accreditation. "Accreditation is killing us because they do not let us introduce courses that are tailor-made and culturally relevant. Courses must fit into someone else's model as opposed to being able to create your own."

DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES

QU's current structure reflects the values of the wider culture. In a real sense, the institution operates as two parallel universities – one serving men and one serving women. This situation can be compared with that of Ivy League institutions in the United States – including Harvard, Brown, and Columbia – prior to the late 1970s, when women were either served separately or not admitted at all. The institution is seen as a university for all of Qatar, not just Qatari citizens. Non-Qataris constitute between 35 and 40 percent of the student body at any given time – a fact that has garnered QU the number one ranking in internationalization by *Times Higher Education*.

The university admits all applicants who score 70 percent or higher on the national secondary school exam, which means that they enroll a student body with a wide range of academic abilities. One administrator said, "The University is not selective. We really are obliged to serve the needs of the country and society. If a student wants to come to QU, we accept them. So [the university's] output is shaped by the input." The university has approximately 6,000 applications annually and accepts 4,000, 60–70 percent of whom are Qatari citizens. Another administrator noted, "if you have twenty students in class, you're teaching to ten different levels [of academic preparedness]." Qatari students also come to the university with certain advantages that some worry can inhibit ambition. One senior administrator in describing the situation explained:

> Society is giving them mixed messages. High school gives them mixed preparation. Many people blame students for a lack of motivation. I don't blame them. They're young. And they're affected by society. If you live in a society where your material needs are met, you don't feel as big a motivation. "Why should I work hard if I'm getting everything?"

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Serving this population well requires an exceptional commitment to student development. Student affairs is developing programming that asks students to define their own life purpose. As one senior administrator explained, "We need to hit them with a plan for the future – one that is meaningful to them, where their drive and motivation can come from. We want them to expand their horizon beyond getting a degree and landing a job. 'I want to be this kind of person, this kind of member of society.'" Supporting students requires a strong commitment to teaching and learning. The institution has employed a variety of strategies to promote student success. There are learning zones – programs that prepare first-year students to complete college-level work. Student affairs is developing a scaffolded system of student support that focuses on the critical first two years, but is being expanded to include the third and fourth years as well. There is extensive use of peer mentoring as well as professional tutoring and advising. Overall retention at the university is strong. In the fall semester 2016 (the last year for which retention data were available when this report was written), the retention rate was 88.3 percent and had risen steadily since 2012. The institution also monitors student progress and has an early warning system if a student begins to falter. As one administrator put it, "If you compare yourself with an American institution, I think we are doing very well. But being a national university, even one or two additional percentage points of attrition is a real loss." Average time to degree is 5.6–5.7 years, including the foundation year for students whose majors require the use of English.

The institution faces a particular challenge attracting Qatari men. Out of the 13,500 Qataris enrolled in 2018, only around 2,500 were men. Men, both Qataris and non-Qataris, constitute about 25 percent of the overall student population at the university. Young Qatari men have excellent employment options. With a high school education, they can enter the military, police, or civil service and enjoy a very good quality of life. This makes activities such as outreach to local high schools important for encouraging young men to pursue higher education. An additional challenge is encouraging Qatari students to enter some of the more academically challenging fields of study, especially in the STEM area. In engineering, for example, the most popular major is engineering management. A Qatari student who graduates with any degree is virtually guaranteed employment. So, it is incumbent on the institution to take on the challenge of explaining to young people why preparing experts in these rigorous areas of study is important for the long-term strength of the nation.

Further complicating the challenge of attracting young Qataris to QU is the presence of well-reputed branch campuses in Education City. In short, there is

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now more competition. One administrator remarked that Hamad bin Khalifa University has systematically created graduate programs that mirror undergraduate majors offered by QU. The Community College of Qatar has also had an impact on the local higher education market. There is no question that it has provided an opportunity for less academically talented students to attend college. The college now offers bachelor's degrees in public administration, electrical engineering, and information technology (CCQ, 2023). These, plus well-developed transfer agreements with Education City campuses for those completing two-year associate degrees at the college to enter four-year degree programs, are further competition for QU. The institution's commitment to responding to the evolving needs of the country has called into question the traditional conception of a university – a collection of established academic disciplines. One administrator remarked that perhaps the institution would be better served by not assuming that it is going to offer all the majors that people expect to see at a university but instead by focusing on those areas that best serve the current needs of the country. He said, "we need to be nimble . . . [and] by logic graduate programs shouldn't stay forever."

The significant challenge now is to sustain and continue these efforts to continually improve the institution. As one administrator put it:

> If we can produce these changes and make them part of the culture and part of institutional practices – so they are not changed once this administration leaves – that would be good. If we produce a culture that's focused on the students and their experience and producing really excellent citizens and excellent individuals that can contribute to society based on a shared sense of mission, based on data and evidence, I can then go back to teaching happy.

The case of QU reminds us that, while globalization and human capital theory encouraged nations to adjust their education policies to give young people access to a global economy, it did not completely displace the role education plays in shaping national identity and passing on norms and values.

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