

## 6/11/2007 MEASURE Survey Release:

### High barriers to a US Education: Saudi Students

*The Middle East Academic Survey Research Exposition (MEASURE) project polled Saudi Arabian students as a continuation of our in-depth research into the opportunity costs of new US non-immigrant visa policies. Our 2006 study, "Visa Denied: How Anti-Arab Visa Policies Destroy US Exports, Jobs and Higher Education" found that visa processing security screening was largely outsourced via the State Department's "Visa Express" program before 9/11. Now non-immigrant visitors face long waits for mandatory visa interviews, opaque processing, and general lack of US accountability. Visitor flow from the 22 member Arab League of countries to the US continues to be severely restricted by new barriers to business, tourist and student travelers. Foreign students are particularly affected. And costs in terms of academic exchange, campus diversity and education related US service jobs are staggering.*

*On the "supply side" the US has lost US \$1.989 billion in education service revenue and 9,000 higher education related jobs through 2005. More important it has lost a vital and broad intercultural link to the region's future civic, business and government leaders. (For a copy of this 200 page report, see [http://IRmep.org/PDF/visa\\_denied.pdf](http://IRmep.org/PDF/visa_denied.pdf)). No international student group has been restricted more by new US post 9-11 visa policies than Saudi Arabians. This first ever survey of Saudi students in the US sought the answer to basic "demand side" questions:*

1. How do visa processing and renewal in US consulates abroad and student port of entry experience affect perceptions and continuity of study?
2. What is the perceived value Saudi students place on a US education and their perceived alternative choices?
3. How supportive is the US education environment and staff dedicated to international student success?
4. What social and personal safety risks are perceived on and off the US campus?

*IRmep developed a specialized survey tool to assess Saudi student perceptions and comments about access to a US higher education experience. The key focus areas of the survey dealt intensively with the incentives to study in the US, on and off campus environments, and characteristics of student interactions in both multiple choice and open ended questions.*

*The survey was tested and fielded between April 15, 2007 and June 2, 2007. IRmep compiled and presents survey responses drawn from a pool of 2,193 Saudi Arabian students. This poll should not be interpreted as a statistically significant reflection on the views of all Saudi Arabian students currently studying in the US, but more as a large*

online "focus group" consisting of 46 Saudi students studying a wide range of disciplines scattered around campuses throughout the US.

### **Key Findings:**

1. **The US is a "First Choice" Education Destination:** 67% of Saudi students polled consider the US as their "first choice" for international higher education. Second choice destinations included Canada 40%, UK 30%, and not leaving Saudi Arabia, (9%). Canada's higher score was a partial result of student experience and comfort with crossing the US-Canada border.
2. **Insufficient Student Visa Durations:** Saudi students polled held student (F-1) visas with an average duration of only 50% their anticipated length of study in the US. 58% held 24 month visas although they were enrolled in four year academic programs.
3. **High perceived Visa Renewal Risk:** 78% of Saudi students polled are "worried" or "extremely worries" that their visa will not be renewed, or that renewal will be delayed during periods of travel back to Saudi Arabia when the US consulate explicitly makes no guarantees about timely processing.
4. **Isolation from Americans on Campus** Saudi students on average spend only 17% of their free time with fellow American students, the very same level of free time they spend with other foreign students who make up only about 3.3% of the higher education student population.
5. **Support from campus International Student Services** 46% of Saudi students scored that help received from teaching assistants and tutors was only at "average treatment" levels. This may be a warning light that additional vital additional help with the English language, understanding US society and culture, and achieving more positive study and social relationships with American students is not being delivered.
6. **Saudi Contributions to Learning and Campus Diversity** 95% of Saudi students feel that their views are solicited and insights about Saudi Arabia are highly valued in classroom discussions.
7. **US Consular Official Professionalism** A majority of Saudi students undergoing visa applications and mandatory visa interviews in Saudi Arabia had a neutral 33%, or negative impression about the professionalism of the US officials processing their visa in Saudi Arabia. This is in contrast to DHS officials at the US port of entry. 54% were ranked as "professional" and 11% as "very professional", far higher rankings than given to US officials processing visas in-country.
8. **Reputation and standing of US academic institutions** 74% found the reputation and standing of US colleges and universities to be "extremely influential" to "influential", although these ratings must be considered within the range of available choices. 22% of Saudis stated that academic standing of US institutions was "neutral" in their decision and only 2% stated it was "not at all" influential in their decision to study in the US.

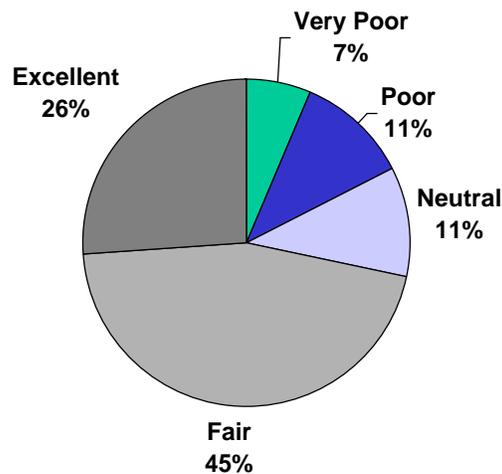
See the following charts, analysis and comments for elaboration on each survey question.

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## I. Survey Results, Analysis and Recommendations

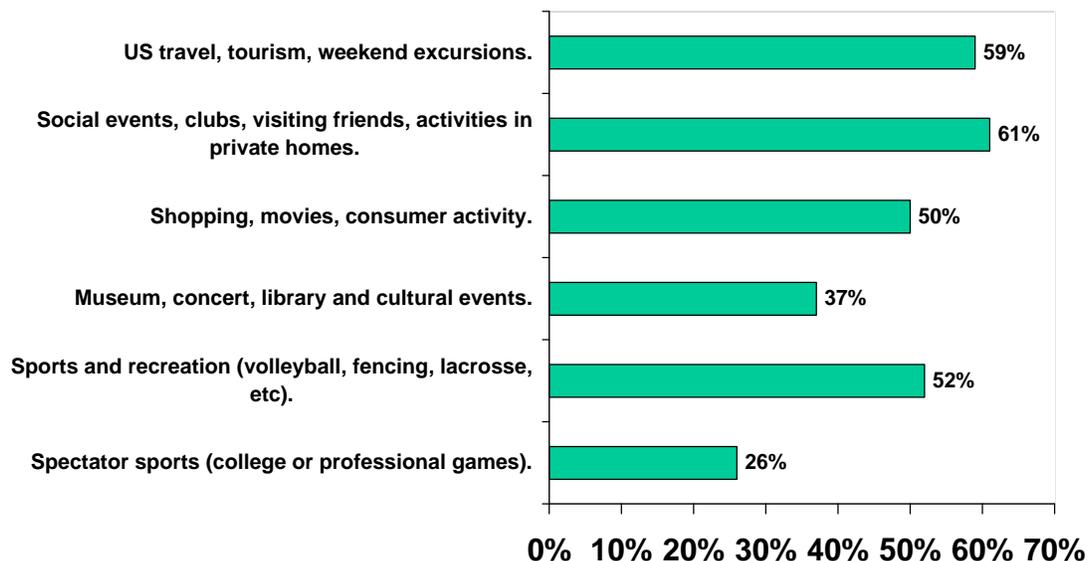
The following results and recommendations are organized by the order they appeared on the survey instrument. Student comments, IRmep research analysis and researcher recommendations are separated and clearly defined as well as additional input from sourced non-survey based research.

### 1.0 Do you feel your college/university has provided you with enough support to successfully participate in campus society and student groups?



Analysis: 74% of Saudi students feel that their US college or university has done a "fair" (45%) or less (29%) job of supporting them in campus society and student groups. Later questions reveal problems finding "buddies" to achieve fluency in English, alienation driving students to seek out and make common cause with other international and Saudi students, and, in general, failure to integrate and achieve the full potential of campus social and recreational activities outside the classroom.

## 2.0 What types of extra-curricular activities do you like to participate in as part of academic groups or independently?



**Analysis:** Saudi student feelings of not being adequately supported by campus administrators are not linked with general apathy about the wealth of potential activities on and off campus. Majorities of Saudi students actively seek out extracurricular activities such as social events, shopping and movies, sports and recreation. Others seek to volunteer and otherwise interface with society through good works.

**Saudi Student Comments:** "International students from Saudi Arabia are usually forgotten by the school administrators for some odd reason!"

"Volunteering." (2 open comment responses)

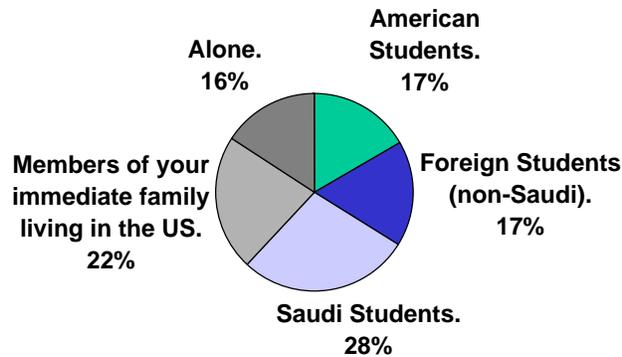
**Analysis:** Most campus advisors and other responsible staff tasked with supporting Saudi students may in actuality have little to do with Saudi students. The survey originally anticipated leveraging this high level of contact with international student advisors and tutors closely networked with Saudi students. In reality, their contact level may actually be so low that they have little idea who and what Saudi students are doing, and have little information beyond their total number on campus.

**Recommendation #1:** United States higher education system may consider Saudi students to be a sort of "entitlement plan" in which students paying an extra margin of full out of state tuition contribute a great deal to campus diversity and the bottom line, but in turn colleges and universities do not make enough of an effort to deliver the level of integration these students require and deserve. A full primary research study should be undertaken to understand campus support

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networks can serve Saudi and other international students and how to incentivize that institutional support which is not being adequately delivered.

### 3.0 What percentage of your free time do you spend with the following people?



**Analysis:** Saudi students report spending only 17% of their time with fellow American students, the same level they spend with other foreign students who make up only about 3.3%<sup>1</sup> of the higher education student population.

In 2005-2006 Total foreign students studying in the US higher education system totaled 564,766.2 In 2004 total US higher education population was approximately 17 million.

This means that Saudis likely spend about as much time with dominant foreign student nationalities from such countries as India, China, South Korea, Japan, Canada, and Taiwan as they do with their American colleagues. This is not a preferred outcome, for Saudi or US students. While integration with other foreign students certainly has its benefits, it is another signal that programs to socially connect Saudi students to host country opportunities are either lacking, or failing or entirely absent.

Never the less, Saudi students, possibly out of courtesy, do not hold their international student coordinators responsible for the gap between their needs and the results they feel they are getting on campus.

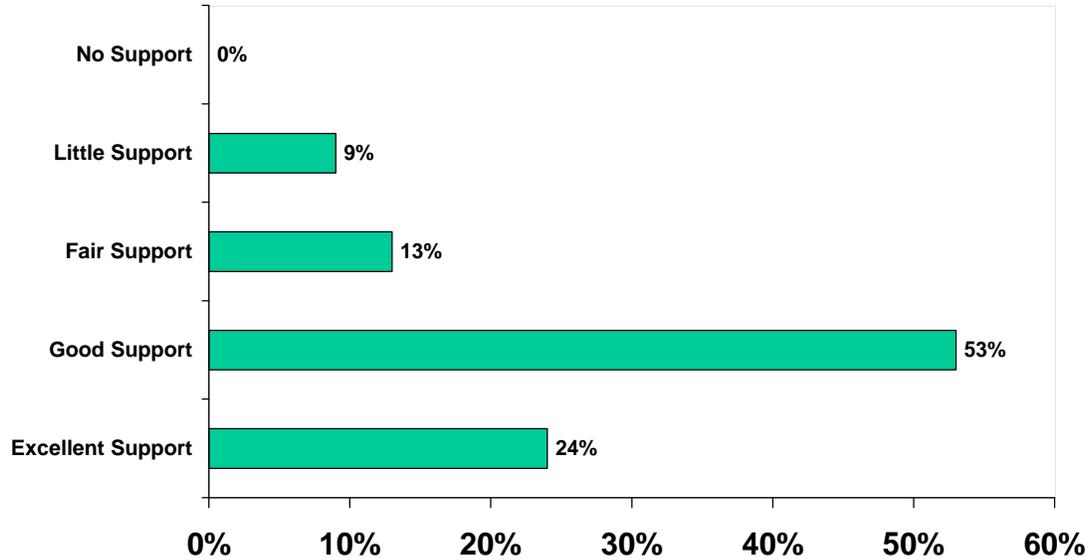
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<sup>1</sup> Higher Education Retail Market Facts and Figures 2007, [http://www.nacs.org/public/research/higher\\_ed\\_retail.asp](http://www.nacs.org/public/research/higher_ed_retail.asp)

<sup>2</sup> Open Doors Study, Institute for International Education <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=89251>

## 4.0 How accommodating is your educational institution to Saudi students?

### 4.1 College and University international program staff.

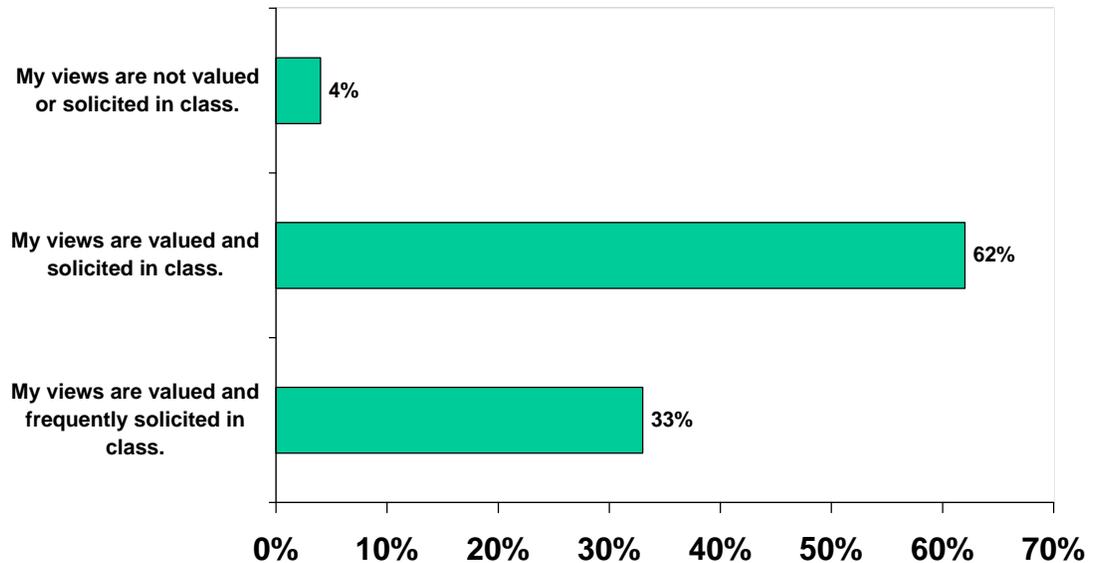


77% of Saudi students report that their international program staffs at their college or university provide "good" to "excellent" despite feelings about their success integrating into campus society. This may indicate that Saudi students take more personal responsibility for the "gap" than they really should, attributing results to their own failings, rather than the educators.

Similarly, in the classroom, Saudi students generally feel their input and unique viewpoints are solicited, and valued.

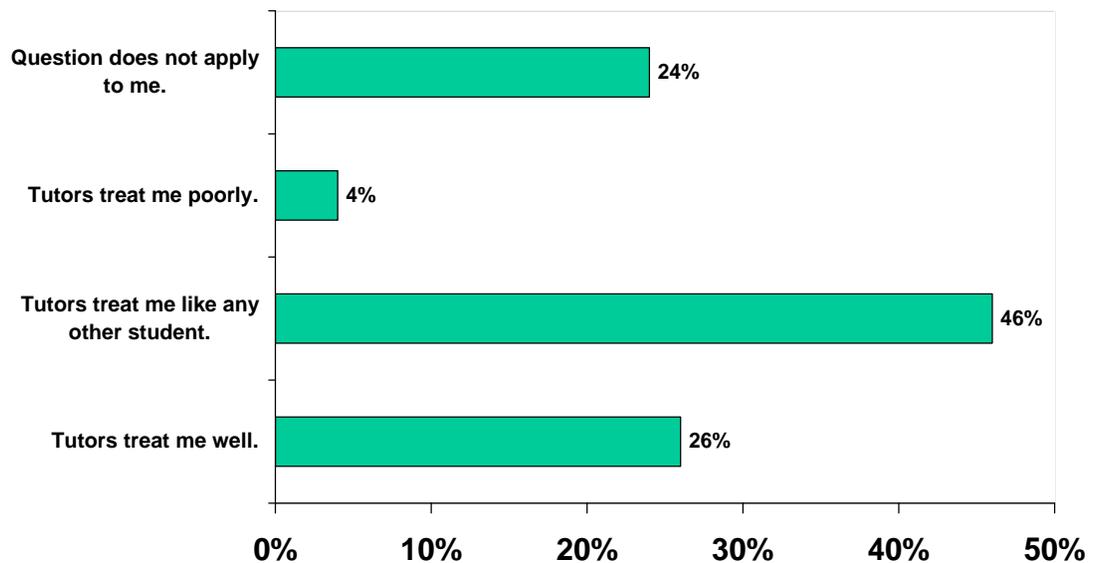
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## 4.2 Classroom discussions.



95% of Saudi students feel that their views are solicited and valued in classroom discussions. Their evaluation of tutors and teaching assistants is more ambivalent.

## 4.3 Treatment by Tutors/teaching assistants.



26% of Saudi students indicate they are treated "well" or preferentially by tutors and teaching assistants, while 46% indicate they are treated as well as any other student. The "does not apply to me" figure of 24% would be a red flag if it indicated that no

special tutoring or teaching assistance relationships exist. However, most of these responses, when cross tabulated with level of study, reveal that "does not apply" category members are typically graduate school students who may themselves be teaching assistants, and would probably not employ tutors.

**Analysis:** The student's perception that they are getting only attention levels equivalent to those of "any other student" from TA's and tutors may indicate a lack of attention to their special needs. Students in highly technical fields such as engineering, medicine and other major tracks pursued in the United States would benefit more from special awareness and support at the TA and tutor level delivered in a way that is conscious of unique needs. Colleges and universities committed to serving international students should consider this 46% "average treatment" score as a warning sign that they are not doing enough to deliver needed support.

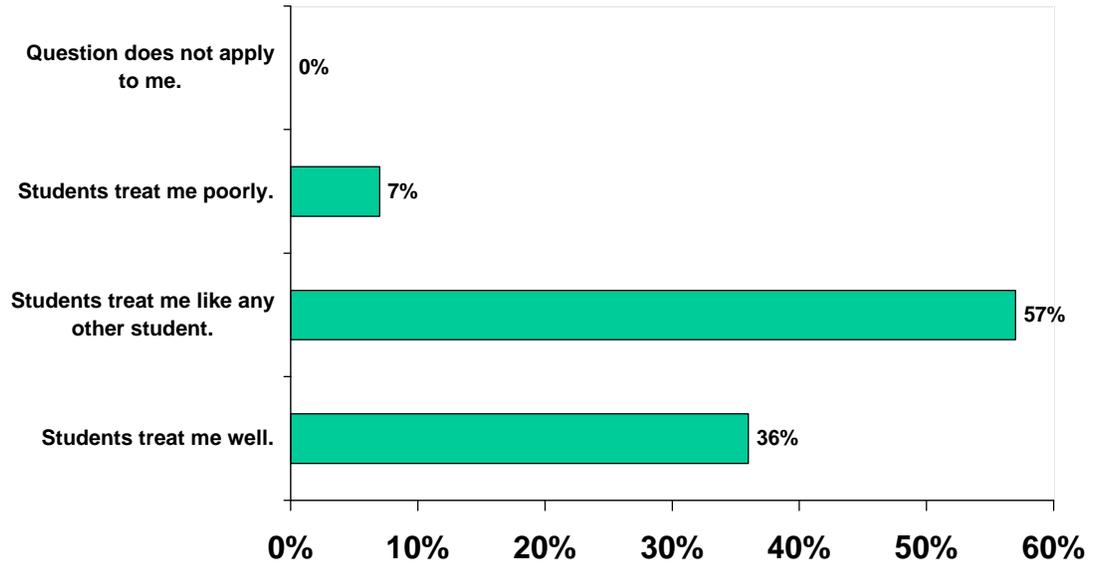
**Recommendation #2:** Tutors and TA's are often the "front line" of higher education in the United States, delivering far more "face time" to students than star professors who can be largely inaccessible due to class size and time constraints.

**Additional demand side (Saudi student expectations) secondary research (what tutor and TA activities maximize foreign student performance) and supply side research is needed to identify which services need to be motivated in higher education, or obtained through special programs so that students feel they are receiving warranted attention and support.**

Equal and egalitarian treatment by other students, the majority sentiment of Saudi students, should be considered a success.

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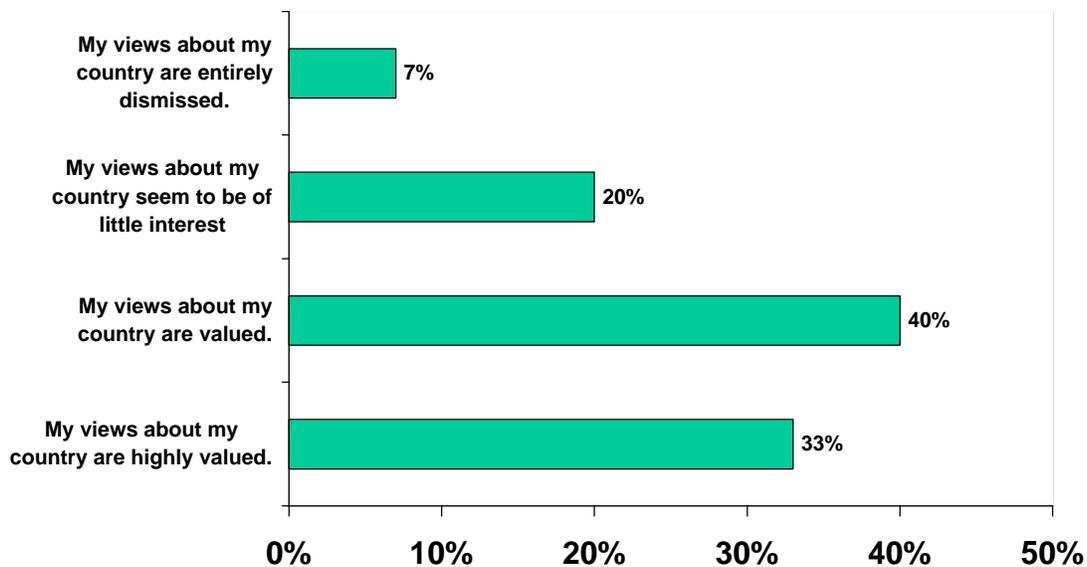
#### 4.4 Treatment by fellow students.



93% of Saudi students feel that fellow students treat them "well" (36%) or largely "like any other student" (57%). In the current environment of the United States, the fact that only 7% of Saudi students feel they are treated "poorly" is probably a victory. Also, fellow students are generally on the "demand" side, along with Saudi students, of the education market, and if they are under no obligations to treat anyone differently, and don't, this should be considered uniquely resistant to xenophobia and deionization of Saudis that have been waged on and off campus and especially in mainstream media since 2001.

In fact, the views of Saudi students are highly valued in the classroom as educators reach out to the Saudi students as vital education resources.

### 4.5 Interest in your views about your country (Saudi Arabia) by teachers.



73% feel that their views are valued (40%) or highly valued (33%) by teachers in the classroom, though comments reveal an awkwardness in educator attempts to tap Saudi student perspectives.

**Saudi Student Comments:** “To tell you the truth my views in the class room are valued but here is what is really interesting. Here the Saudi students were encouraged by the university to start a Saudi student club. Now the students didn't know why they were being pushed for such an activity until "John" arrived. "John" is a Christian Missionary observing the Saudi students trying to convert them engaging with them in many religious confrontations. The Saudi students which lack the experience and have no background of the teachings of the Bible do not know what to respond most of the time. They have been pushed around by this person. So, since I'm a student of comparative religion as well, I took the opportunity to go there and give them a lecture on the Bible and how to respond to claims and allegations by the missionaries specially those made against prophet Mohammad (pbuh). Alhamdulillah it was a success. The Saudi students loved it and may request me to come and deliver another lecture. But I think you have a responsibility to raise the students' awareness of such persons.”

“Saudi Arabia is viewed as a troubled region. The experts at our Islamic/Arabic department do not know how to represent it to the professionals in academia at their respected schools. Therefore many teachers stay away from engaging us.”

“It depends on the teacher or the student. Sometimes they seem to be very interested and sometimes not that much. The student himself plays a big role too; a socially active student is not compared with non-active ones.”

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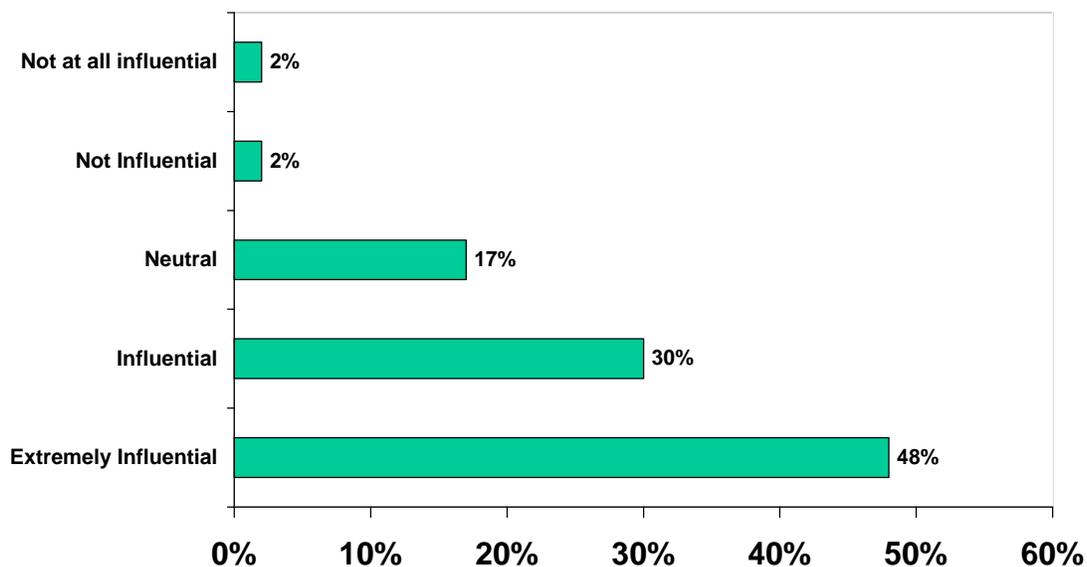
**Recommendation #3:** Some Saudi students may be, as one suggested, more socially successful due to personality traits than any other factor. Socializing on and off US campus is fraught with difficulties from the perspective of many Saudis, from widespread socializing with alcoholic beverages to never before encountered behavior as American students "blow off steam". Understanding what skills sets work in this radically different environment may help even those with lesser skills survive and thrive on US campuses.

## **5.0 What are the main reasons you chose to study in the United States?**

Selection criteria for colleges and universities for students attending a home country institution include admissions policies, test scores, financial resource availability, and what type of program a student wishes to pursue.

The decision matrix for Saudi students studying abroad is tighter. Access to Saudi government scholarships narrows the potential universe of choice for many students, while at the same time giving them educational opportunities unobtainable or very difficult to acquire through any other means.

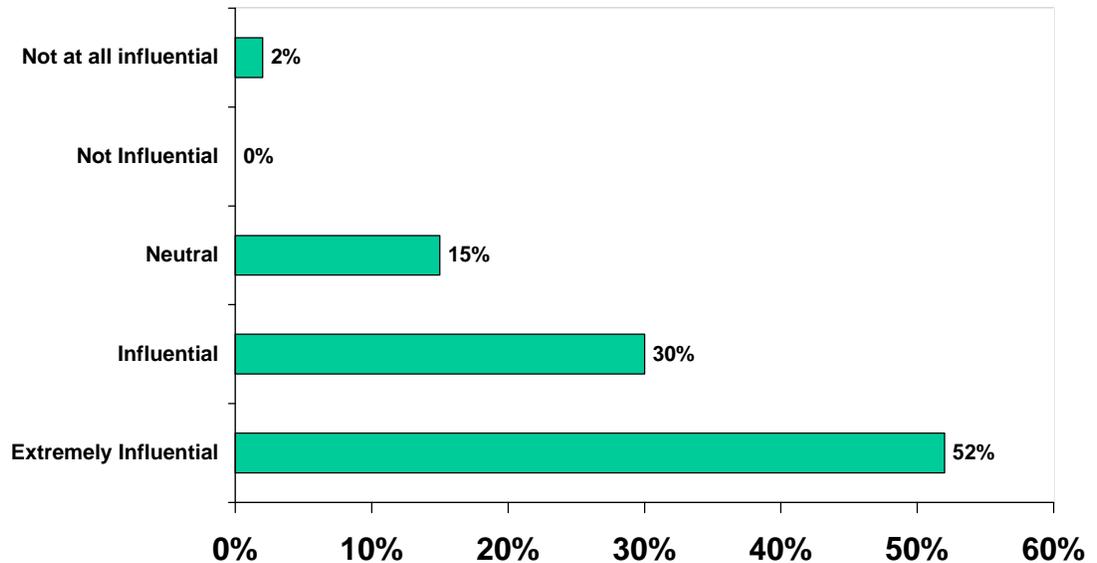
### 5.1 Availability of scholarships funded by the Saudi government.



Unsurprisingly 78% of Saudi students studying in the United States found that access to Saudi government scholarships were an "extremely influential" to "influential" part of their decision to study in the US.

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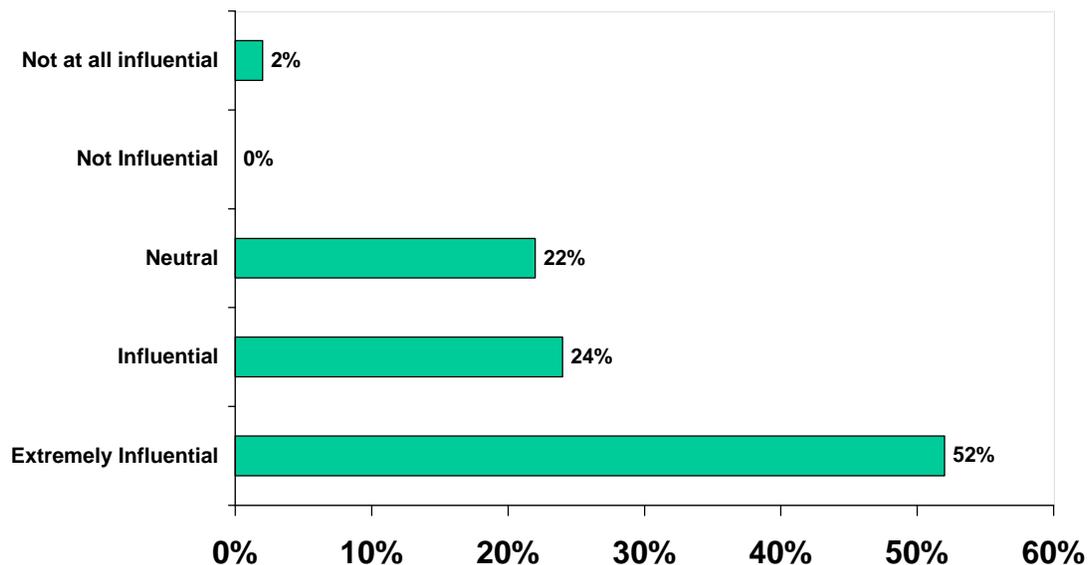
## 5.2 Recommendation of US study by friends or family members



82% of Saudi students stated that "recommendation of US study by friends or family members" was "extremely influential" or "influential" to their decision. This may seem somewhat contrary to the financial issue but is not. In the past, friends and family members had to enter into the same restricted supply universe to obtain scholarship money as current students. Their recommendations within this restricted geographical/career/and institution universe are as much a product of Saudi government criteria as current students.

Because of funding criteria, the reputation and standing of individual US academic institutions may be less of a factor than it otherwise should be.

### 5.3 Reputation and standing of US academic institutions.



22% of Saudis stated that academic standing of US institutions was "neutral" in their decision and 2% stated it was "not at all" influential in their decision to study in the US. Although 74% found standing to be "extremely influential" to "influential", some comments reveal that these could also be understood to mean "within the available universe of choice established by the Ministry of Education" rather than "within the universe of institutions I can obtain through merit, personal initiative, and similar financial support."

**Saudi Student Comments:** "Ease of life here."

"I was planning to study in the U.K. but my family and friends said that the U.S. is a safe place for the international students, more than Europe."

"The high fees (negative)."

"Because of the strong English language and the high tech way of teaching in the University."

"Quality of education and education technology !!"

"I used to live in the U.S. and grew up there in Wisconsin. I love the US as well as Saudi Arabia."

"Both my dad and my brother studied in the US."

"Currently, the US is the main source of tech."

"Availability of all information needed on the net, and ease of communicating with institutions, inquiring about apartments, and evaluating neighborhoods."

"I didn't have a chance to continue my study in Saudi Arabia. I have a diploma from Riyadh Technical College and I applied to most of Saudi's universities but they don't offer to continue my study (inflexible)."

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"It is better opportunity to achieve my dream."

"It's a wastless opportunity."

"I have a relative who was studying in Florida in between 1999 and 2005 and he told me that everything was fine for him. The most important thing that he told is the treatment didn't change in the university even after 9/11 which was my concern."

"Yes, but it didn't influence my decision to study at the U.S."

"I grew up in the USA so basically this is not the first time I come here."

"Yes, my cousin was here 4 years ago, he helped me in the visa and the admission."

"Yes, my father's college supported in every step."

"Yes, they pushed me to study in U.S. There are a good systems for everything , life, studying, etc."

"Yes, I do know. My view and what I think every Saudis' view about US before coming to US is, let us say "not good". The reason is we don't know about US except their government and we know about the government (war, forcing, omnipotent!). So if the Government like this we don't like the US. BUT after the scholarships funded by the Saudi government, we or I tried to collect some information about American citizens. I was surprised because it is very different from what I thought. American people are very kind, friendly, happy, and smiling."

"Yes, it had some effect but the self-developing attitude was the main reason."

"My father and mother. The U.S. is part of us."

"My father supported me."

"They are now in high positions in big companies."

"Yes, most of my family members studied in the US in the 80's, and some of my friends were here before I came. They encouraged me to study in the US due to the great experience they gained in education and lots of other life aspects."

"It affected my decision by 80%."

"Yes, he encourages me to study in U.S."

"My parents, my brother, and many friends. The US is an old Mecca of education for many Saudi's who are now holding influential jobs in Saudi Arabia."

"My father and older brother have studied here."

"It did not affect my decision because I already made my decision."

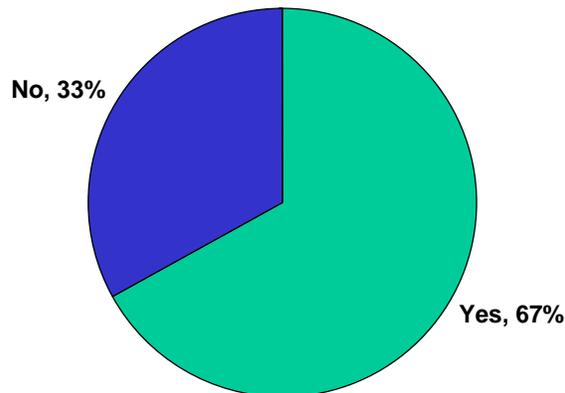
"Yes, I have cousins, so they mostly inspire and affect me to come and live this experience."

"They had succeeded while studying in the U.S. And they've gotten good jobs when they came back to S.A. Also their way of communicating and interacting with others have changed after spending some years in the U.S.; they sounded much more educated and thoughtful people. Finally, they made good friends in the U.S. that they still in touch with."

**Analysis:** Scholarships tied to a pre-existing universe of academic institutions are the main driver for choosing the United States or arriving at one particular academic institution over another. While the long term affect of this tie creates family traditions, success stories, and impressions about the quality of US study options, policies that govern scholarships remain an important driver of selection criteria within a limited universe.

### 7.0 Was the US your first choice for international study?

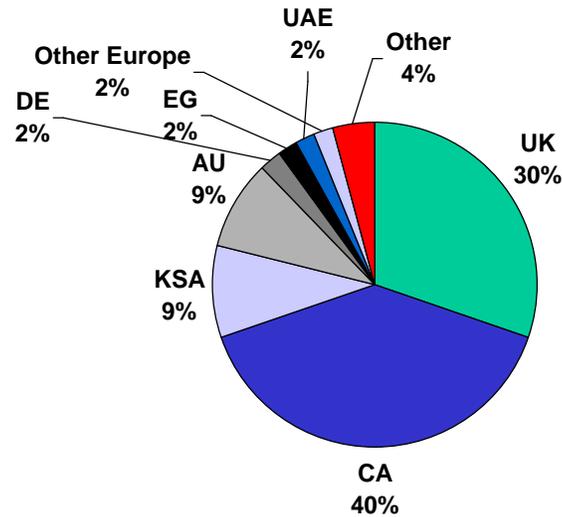
The question about "choosing the US" as a study destination revealed that a full third openly believe that they would have pursued another country for study if the option were available.



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## 8.0 After the US, what country or region would have been your next choice?

When Saudi students were asked what country was the preferred "second choice" over the US, preferences centered on the United Kingdom and Canada.



Of all students, 9% would have remained in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to study while Australia would have been the destination for another 9%. Germany, Egypt, United Arab Emirates or some other continental European country attracted the rest as good second choices. Respondents place blame squarely with the Ministry of Higher Education for a perceived lack of options for their particular situation in comments.

**Saudi Student Comments:** "UK was my first choice, actually."

"The ministry of higher education did not have the doors open to other countries. If I had the choice to go somewhere else it would be Canada."

"Canada or New Zealand."

"Wisconsin is not far from Canada and I have been there with my family."

"The best universities are also in the UK."

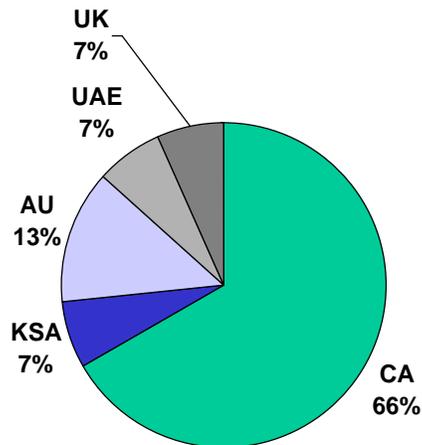
"Canada was actually my first option because I lived there three years (while I used to only tour in the US) so it felt more safe. Furthermore, Canada refrains from any political involvement internationally which made me think it is a better choice. However, as I resided in the US, I changed my mind. Where I am is safe, discrimination free, and very family oriented. Also, very service oriented too!"

"Canada or China."

"New Zealand."

**Analysis** Previous survey iterations asked what Saudi students saw as their first choice if it wasn't the US. While this additional question was cut for length purposes, we can "back into" the same result by cross tabulating the second choice response for those who did not see the US as their first choice, in spite of studying here.

### 8.0 Cross Tabulation: If the US was not your first choice, what country was?



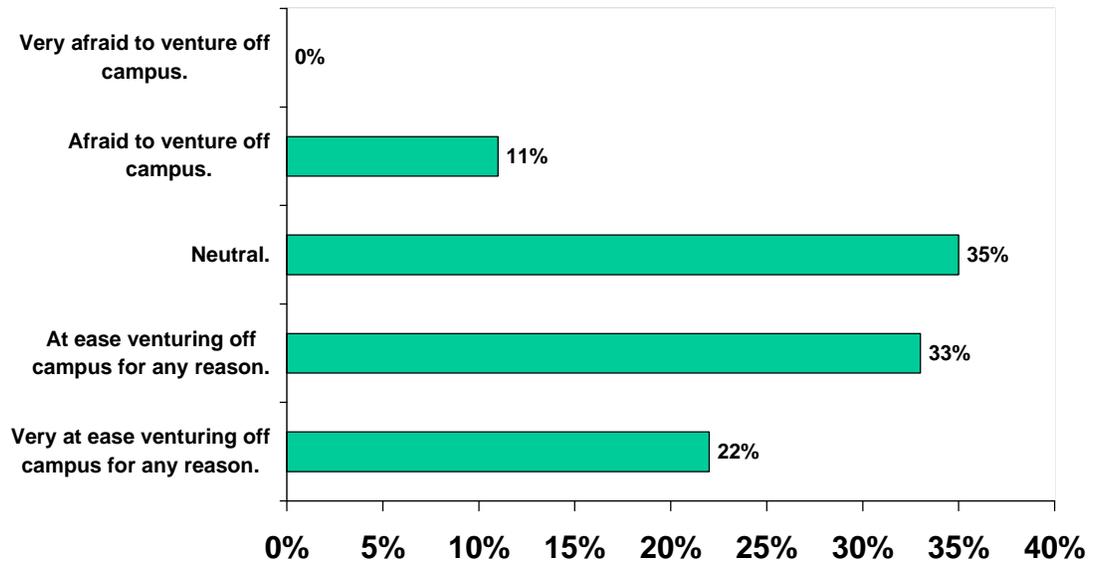
**Analysis** In hindsight, IRmep should not have eliminated earlier survey conditional questions about true first choice. However cross tabulation and comment analysis reveals that those with estimated first choice study destination other than the US had the following characteristics:

- Positive Experiences crossing the US/Canada border, and traveling in Canada.
- Negative experience in US ports of entry such as New York
- More alienation, such as lack of social opportunities and integration for Saudi family members accompanying the student.
- More criticism of US visa transparency and process

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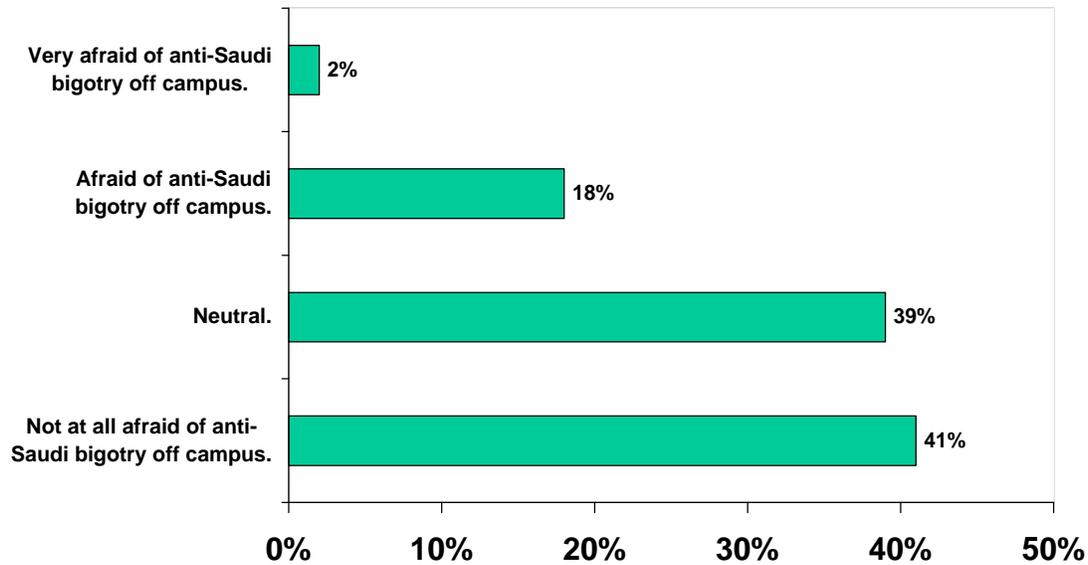
## 9.0 Does fear of negative confrontation affect you as a Saudi student interacting with Americans outside the academic environment?

### 9.1 Venturing off campus.



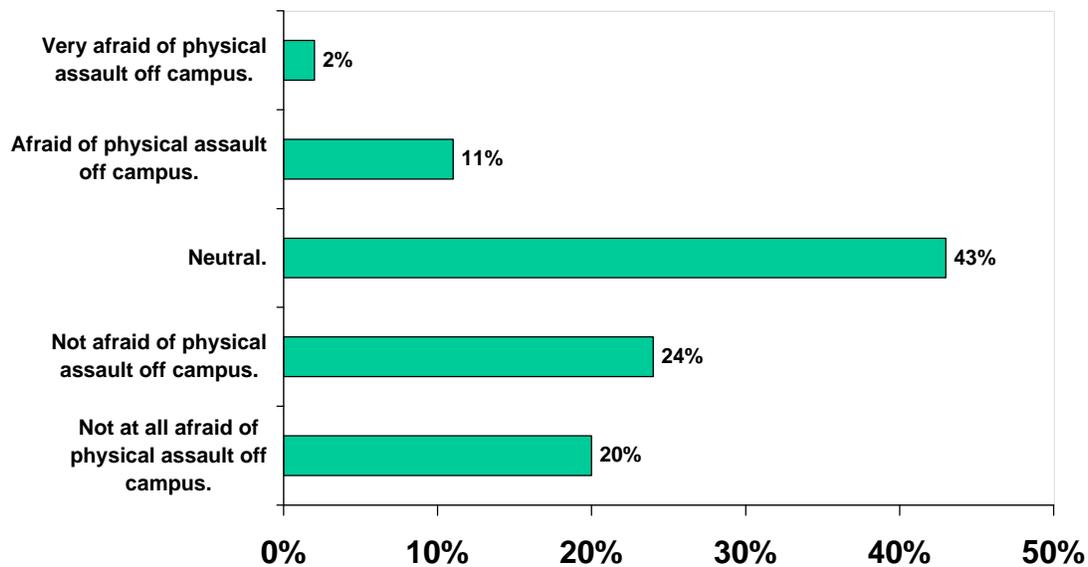
The majority of Saudi students feel "at ease" (33%) to "very at ease" (22%) venturing of campus. Comments from students who are "neutral" (35%) reveal that there is minority fear (11%) of being caught up in violence, sharing the general concerns all US students fear the common threat of street and other crime all Americans face.

### 9.2 Fear of anti-Saudi hate or bigotry off campus.



Of all students, 20% indicated fear of targeted anti-Saudi bigotry off campus is an issue vs. 80% who are neutral (39%) or "not afraid" (41%)

### 9.3 Fear of physical assault.



**Saudi Student Comments:** "You hear about the crime rate in America and it is just terrifying. I even was more afraid after hearing the Virginia Tech incident. Now we are afraid even on campus."

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“Before coming to US, I asked my friend and my relatives who have been in US before about American people. I knew they are with different opinions about Saudis. Some of them like Saudis and some dislike Saudis, so I should chose the state that has what I want.”

“Single incidents are present but nothing alarming.”

“Nothing has happened to me or my friends here, so why I would be afraid?”

“None.”

“Afraid of physical assault in general, and try to avoid late hour walks, and try as much to inform family members of where I am if I had to leave late.”

“All the Oregonians or most of the Americans are treating me well, so that's why I'm not afraid.”

“It was great experience for me living in campus last year and this year I live off campus and it is fine for me.”

“Uhm, not really. Seem to treat people equally.”

“None/No Problems (4)”

“Off campus one of the Saudis had a party, he was non-drinker, but his one of his friends, an American, was totally drunk. The officer came and busted the party and told to everyone to leave. The American asked the officer to have permission to drive drunk. The officer replied ‘Let the towel head give you a ride.’”

“No one is above the law (at least general public).”

“Yes, one of my friends was arrested because the police officer suspected his family's name.”

“All this is about skills. He who has social skills can avoid a lot and gain a lot.”

“They were nice with me when I had a car accident.”

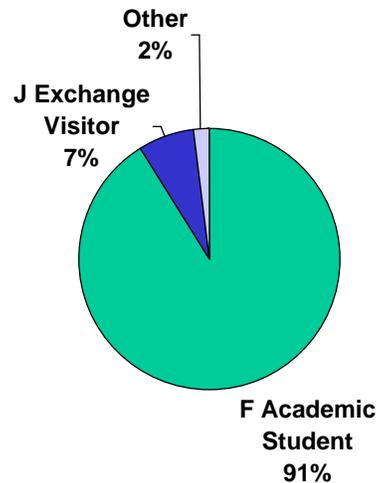
**Recommendation #4: While the recent Virginia Tech shootings show that no student is safe from the scourge of violence and crime in America, it is also true that foreign students who develop better situational sensitivity and awareness can avoid many problems and threats. Special training in recognizing the geographical, social, and situational factors that can lead to an outbreak of violence should be part of specialized orientation class for all international students before leaving Saudi Arabia or shortly after arrival. The current "pre-departure orientation" conducted by the US embassy in Riyadh is very useful and practically oriented, but may not adequately prepare Saudi students to avoid dangerous situations.<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> [http://riyadh.usembassy.gov/saudi-arabia/U.S.\\_Embassy\\_and\\_Consulates\\_General\\_Hold\\_Predeparture\\_Orientation\\_for\\_Students.html](http://riyadh.usembassy.gov/saudi-arabia/U.S._Embassy_and_Consulates_General_Hold_Predeparture_Orientation_for_Students.html)

## 12.0 What category of visa do you hold for studying in the United States?

Acquiring and renewing a visa is an experience almost 100% of Saudi students face as the substantial first human and financial cost to enter and studying in the United States.



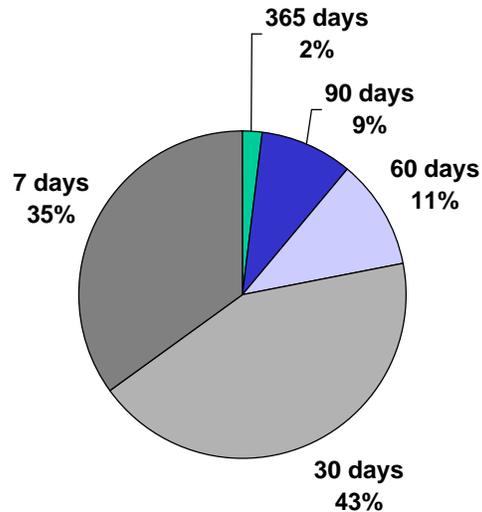
In previous years the US offered and processed more flexible visa classes for students, up to and including diplomatic visas.<sup>4</sup> Surveyed Saudi students, with the exception of green card holders (2%), are now concentrated in F (Academic student) and J (exchange visitor) visas. The loss of flexible or indeterminate duration and ease of multiple entries with no renewal has been the most acute new outcome in the stricter new US visa process.

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<sup>4</sup> It Is Time to Wake Up  
<http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=36232&d=11&m=12&y=2003>

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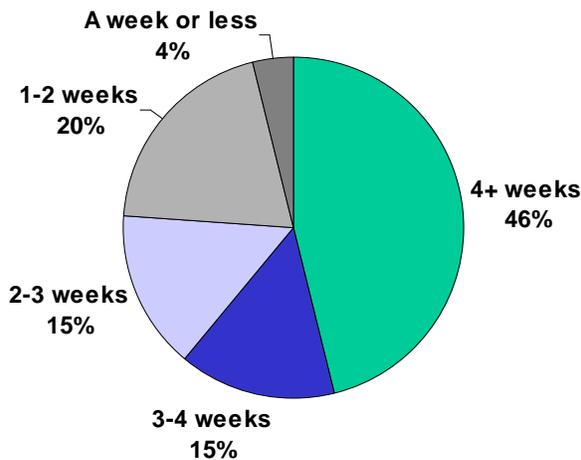
**13.0 How fast did your chosen educational institution issue a Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (I-20 SEVIS) form to include with your student visa application?**



Bottlenecks in the US visa process are easy to identify. One potential bottleneck considered was possible untimely issuance of I-20 SEVIS forms from US educational institutions. Student Exchange Visitor Information Systems forms put the potential student into a searchable database then ensures that the student attends the declared educational institution and carefully tracks any change in status, visible immediately to US immigration officials.

Prospective educational institutions however, typically deliver I-20's in 7 (35%) to 30 days (43%), a reasonable process duration for an accurate entry and form. This form is required before prospective students apply for a student visa.

**14.0 How long was it from the time you applied for your visa before you were called for an interview at the US Embassy/Consulate in Saudi Arabia?**



**Analysis:** US consular officials routinely postpone student visa application appointments until a few months before the start of class. This can greatly disadvantage students attempting to make conditional arrangements if their attempt to enter a US program fails. In other words, normal prudence and planning ahead and "keeping options open" are largely impossible under the current processes.

54% of surveyed Saudi students gained an appointment 4 weeks or less after they asked for it. This is probably because they were informed and carried through the larger process of steps to obtain and guarantee scholarship funding. 46% waited more than four weeks; perhaps up to the 98 days (17-18 weeks, not counting weekends) the US State Department claimed was the average student visa appointment waiting time for Saudi Arabia as of August of 2006.

## Non-Immigrant Visa Appointment Wait Times (Working Days)<sup>5</sup>

(Source: US State Department, August 2006)

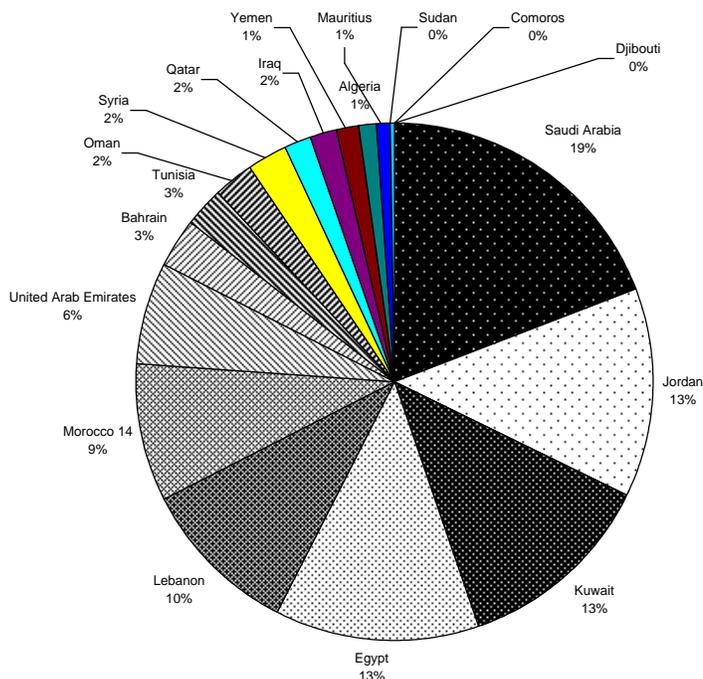
Country	Non-Immigrant Visa Appointment	Student Visa Appointment	Other Appointment
Saudi Arabia	49	98	49
Yemen	45	5	5
Egypt	18	1	18
Morocco	15	0	15
Jordan	11	11	11
Qatar	7	0	0
Djibouti	5	2	5
Kuwait	4	3	4
UAE	2	0	2
Algeria	1	1	1
Syria	1	1	1
Bahrain	0	0	0
Oman	0	0	0
Tunisia	0	0	0
Mauritania	0	0	0

US officials in Saudi Arabia take nine times longer (98 working days) on average, to invite prospective Saudi students to an interview than they do in Jordan (11 working days). This may explain why, in the year 2005 in spite having a population five times smaller than Saudi Arabia, Jordan sent almost as many students to study in the United States.

<sup>5</sup> Does not include processing time. Visa Denied: How Anti Arab Visa Policies Destroy US Exports, Jobs and Higher Education, p. 35, IRmep

### 2005 Arab Student (F-1) Admissions into the United States <sup>6</sup>

(Source: Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security)



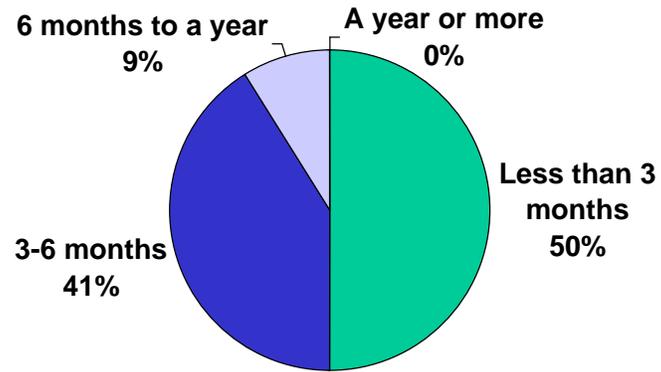
In many other countries in the region, there is essentially no wait time or opportunity cost imposed by US consular officials on students wanting to explore more options or reduce the risk of rejection.

**Recommendation #5:** US officials have still not overhauled policies and processes in a way that favors efficient student entry into the United States. Operating under the rubric of "national security", external opportunity costs imposed on students and the US economy have been and continue to be both ignored and severely damaging. A coordinated campaign to review the quantified risk, opportunity costs and to than promote policies that will overhaul the visa processing system for efficiency and security should be implemented before the backlog of applicants begins to build toward year end 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Can include multiple entries by the same student.

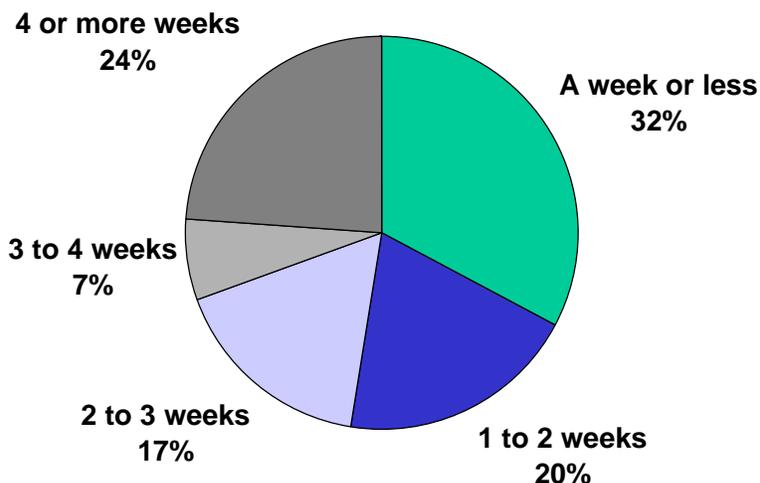
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**15.0 How many days before the start of your chosen education program did you apply for a US Student visa?**



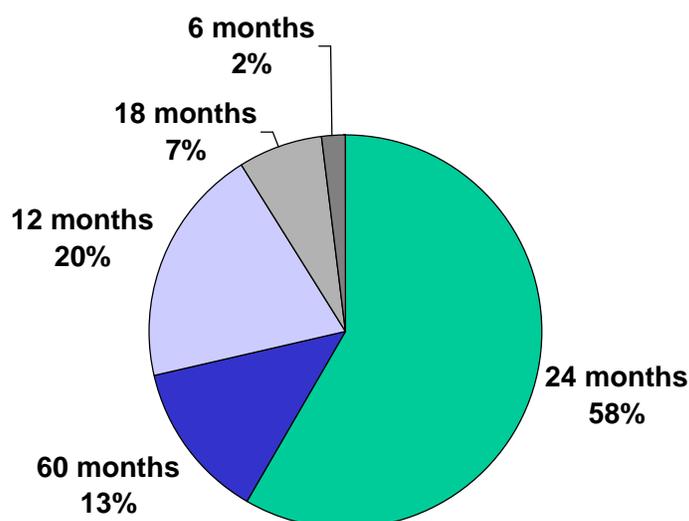
**Analysis:** Although it first appears that students are "waiting until the last minute" to secure a US visa, the process actually encourages waiting until 3 months before initiation of the school year to apply for a student visa.

**16.0 How long did you wait, after interviewing (if applicable) for your US student visa to be processed and delivered to you?**



The process bottleneck created by processing student visas close to the start of the fall academic year creates what appears to be an efficient duration to process and deliver (in reality, passports and documents must be picked up at the US consulate) student visas. In reality the fact that 76% of visas are processed and ready in less than a month is a necessity created by US consulate processing most visa appointments less than three months before the start of the academic year.

## 17.0 What is the duration of your student visa for study in the United States?



For Saudi students, the most painful new reality of the US student visa process is not the appointment bottleneck or I-20 process. It is the mismatch between their expected duration of studies and visa validity duration. Most Saudi students (58%) surveyed had a 24 month visa duration.

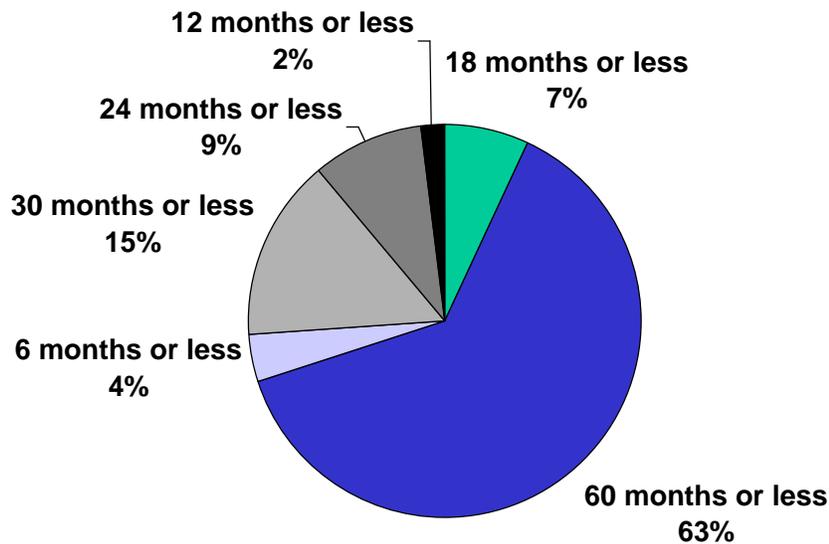
### Arab Student F-1 (Education) Visa Validity Periods<sup>7</sup>

(Source: US State Department)

Country	F-1 Visa Validity Period (Months)
Qatar, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, Oman, Morocco, Bahrain, Tunisia, Egypt, Mauritania	60
United Arab Emirates	48
Palestine	36
Saudi Arabia, Syria	24
Yemen, Libya, Djibouti, Comoros, Algeria	12
Sudan	6
Somalia, Iraq	3

<sup>7</sup> Visa Denied: How Anti Arab Visa Policies Destroy US Exports, Jobs and Higher Education, p. 35, IRmep

### 18.0 How long will you need to complete your planned studies in the United States?

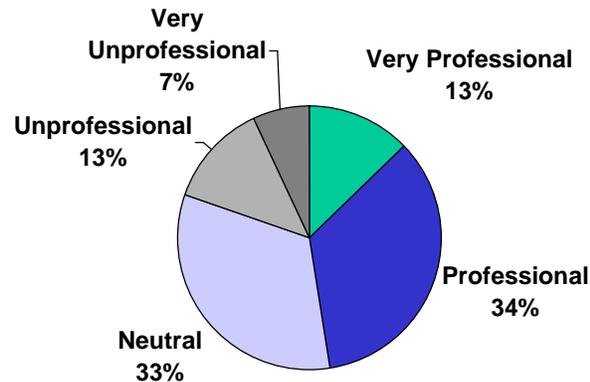


**Analysis:** On average, visa durations held by Saudi students were approximately half the needed forecast study duration. This means that any home or third country exit after visa expiration would necessitate the Saudi student renewing the F-1 visa. On average, US consular officials proactively issued visas with durations that would cover only half the student's expected education duration. Of lesser, but material importance, were the attitudes of US visa officials working in Saudi Arabia.

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## 19.0 US Consular Office

### 19.1 US consular officials' professionalism.



The majority of Saudi students undergoing visa applications and mandatory interviews in Saudi Arabia had a neutral (33%), or negative impression of the professionalism of the officials processing their visa.

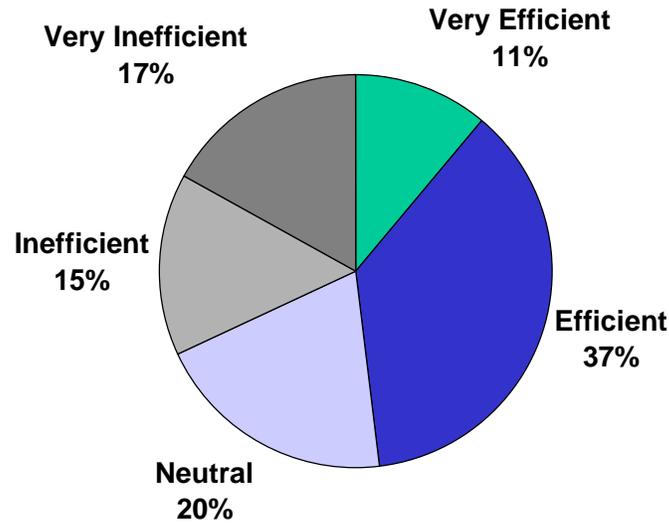
As officials with absolute, at times arbitrary, powers to negate visa applications and place negative information into an applicant's personal record, consular officials are uniquely isolated from applicant feedback.

**Analysis:** An institutional "cover story" that "national security" concerns excuse poor customer service and basic common courtesy to foreigners has long been institutionalized, beginning at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) which was rolled into the Department of Homeland Security after 9/11. US Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff recently both displayed and verified this culture in a call-in public affairs television program. When after hearing a litany of complaints from an irate non-immigrant visa holder; he turned to the program's host and said, "it sounds like she made it in."<sup>8</sup> The implication is that DHS owes non-immigrant visitors little above an opaque, seemingly arbitrary, but nevertheless possible chance to enter the US. There is little that has been done to alter the course of DHS corporate culture when it comes to extending courtesy to non-American citizens, especially in consulates and visa processing operations outside of the United States.

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<sup>8</sup> Morning Journal, C-SPAN Television, 5/23/2007

### 19.2 Visa application process efficiency.

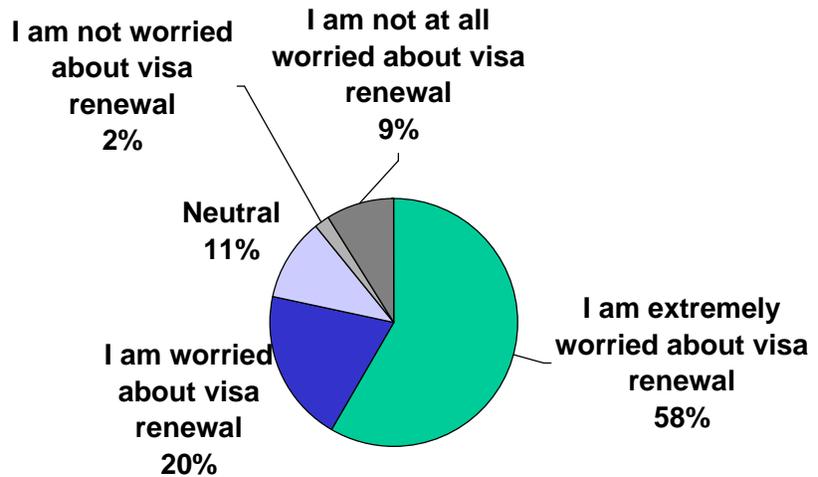


48% of applicants, even after the bottlenecks, dealings with consular officials and wait times scored the visa application process as "efficient" (37%) or "very efficient" (11%). 52% were either neutral (20%), thought it to be "inefficient" (15%), or "very inefficient" (17%). It is important to note that this survey did not reach anyone whose visa or renewal had been denied or placed in "limbo" (neither denied nor approved). A fuller picture of attitudes about efficiency would only be possible by surveying those segments of visa applicants.

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**20.0 The US embassy recommends not traveling back to Saudi Arabia for Eid during December and January because it cannot guarantee expedited return student visa processing.**

**How do Eid and general visa renewal uncertainties personally affect you?**



The US consulate in Saudi Arabia makes a point of warning visa holders that they should not expect high levels of success or efficiency renewing visas during Eid.<sup>9</sup> Students who might typically expect to have access to renewal services during this important travel time expressed that they were worried (78%) about this uncertainty.

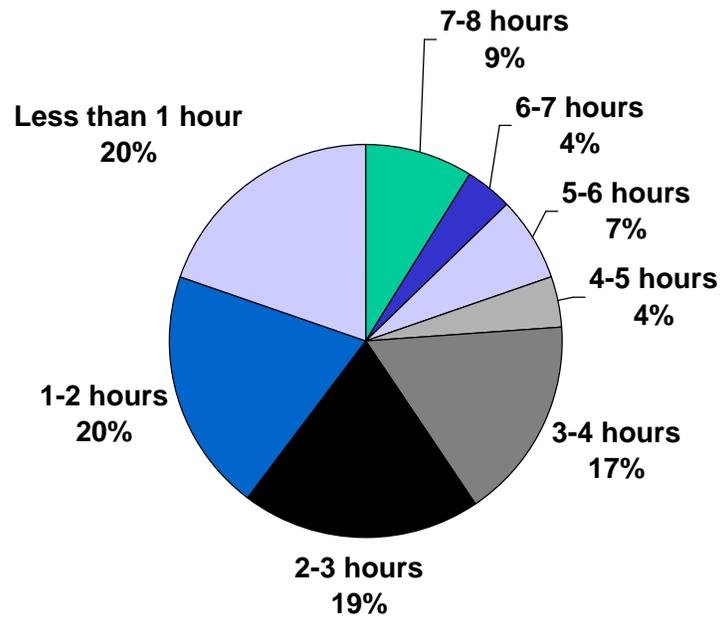
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<sup>9</sup> [http://saudi-arabia.usembassy.gov/saudi-arabia/VISA\\_REISSUANCE.html](http://saudi-arabia.usembassy.gov/saudi-arabia/VISA_REISSUANCE.html)

## 21.0 How long did it take for you to clear Customs and Immigration in the United States after leaving your passenger jet?

Entering the United States can be a traumatic first experience for Saudi students.

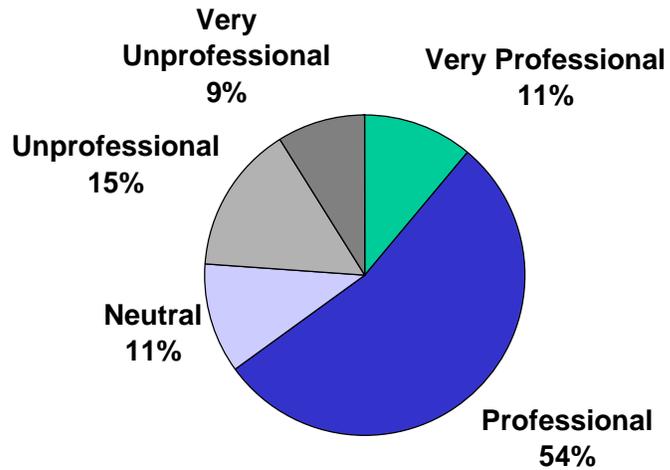
### 21.1 US port of entry clearance.



Only 40% of surveyed students entered the US less than 2 hours after landing. 36% took 2-4 hours to the process and 24% were delayed 4 hours or more.

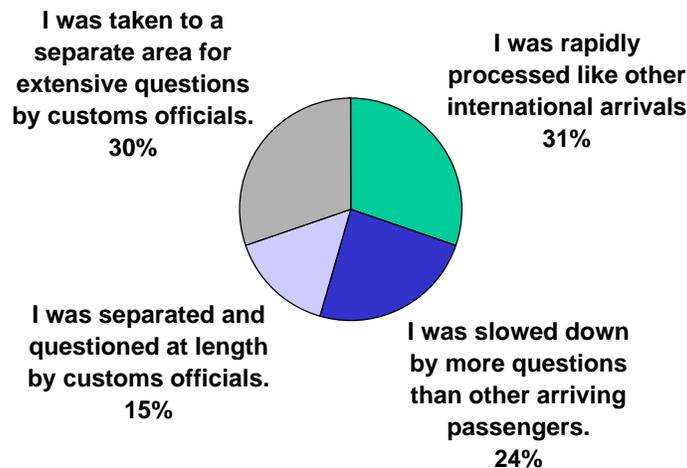
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## 22.1 US port of entry official professionalism.



In spite of the delays, 65% of Saudi students rated DHS officials at the port of entry as professional (54%) or very professional (11%) in their dealings, much higher rankings than they gave officials processing visas in-country.

## 22.2 US port of entry treatment.



Only 31% of Saudi students reported feeling that they were processed exactly like surrounding visitors to the US. A full 45% were separated from other non-immigrant entrants for special questioning by officials. In some cases, the humiliation was both embarrassing and in one case involving a pregnant Saudi student, unpardonable.

**Saudi Student Comments:** "I went back to Saudi Arabia three times. I only stayed for so long in the immigration last time which was in January 07. It took about 5 hours. The other two were very fast."

"First was ok, the second entry the officers in the airport were more sensitive. They noticed that I am Saudi and took me to a separate area just to ask question for nothing, and some of the questions were private for me or personal and should be asked only if the officers suspect something wrong."

"In my opinion, the hardest airport to check us as Saudis is NEW YORK airport, especially if we traveled on Saudi airlines!"

"The second time I came here I took about 7 hours in the airport. I met the FBI. So I'm so worried about going back to Saudi Arabia to renew my visa."

"AGAIN, THEY WERE VERY STRICT."

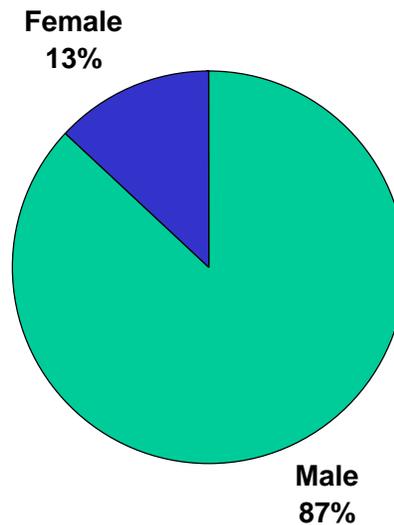
"The only uncomfortable exchange with a US official was when I first arrived to the States. I was 8 months pregnant, and the customs officer kept insisting I had come to the States pregnant. "you want to have an American baby!" he insisted. And I told him that unlike some other nationalities, Saudis are not so big about going to the States just

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to have a baby. It wasn't his job to question that anyway, because I have already passed the area where my passport and I-20 were approved."

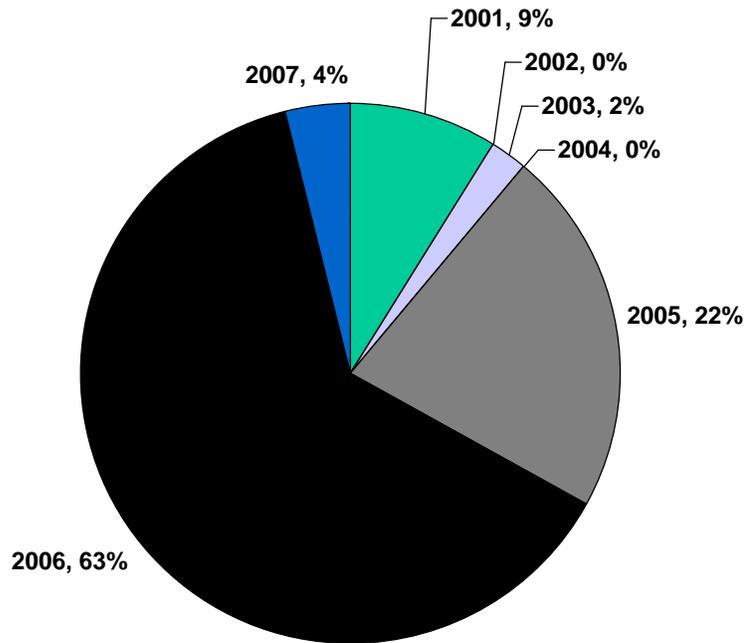
"We were brought to a test room. Just few of the officers were there, we missed our flight. We didn't get any reason for the delay; we couldn't even have the right to ask why. The room was full of Saudi students. It took more than 8 hours. It is real humiliation."

### 23.0 Demographics: Are You Male or Female?



The results reveal that 13% of surveyed Saudi students were female. Cross tabulation reveals that female students have no particular safety concerns above and beyond the levels of the male student population. One female was the subject of an unprovoked "freelance" verbal assault by US immigration officials. Most females are enrolled in finance and business administration, arts, and management information services concentrations (rolled up into computer science in this survey).

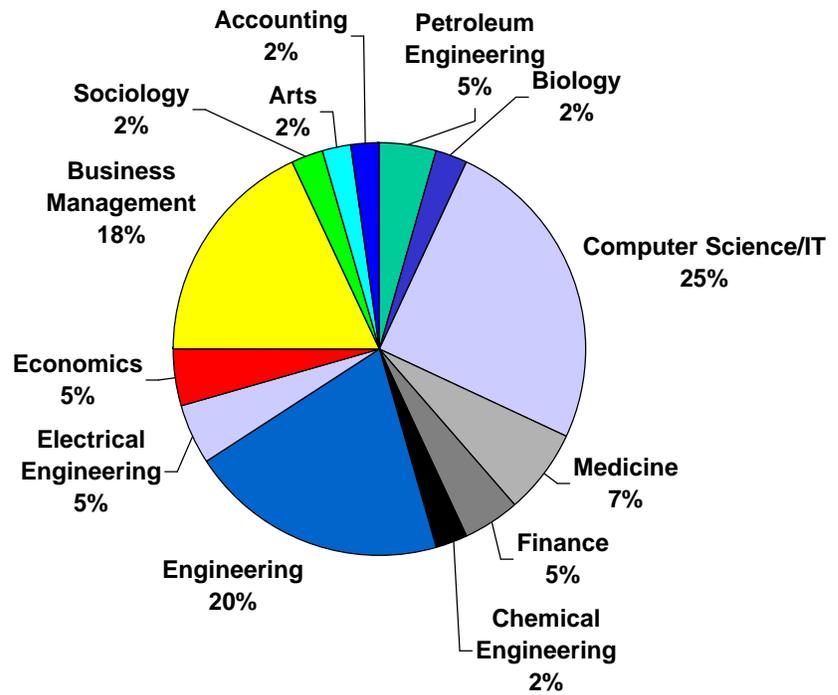
**24. Demographics: What year did you begin study in the US?**



Most of the surveyed population began studies in 2006 (63%) and 2005 (25%).

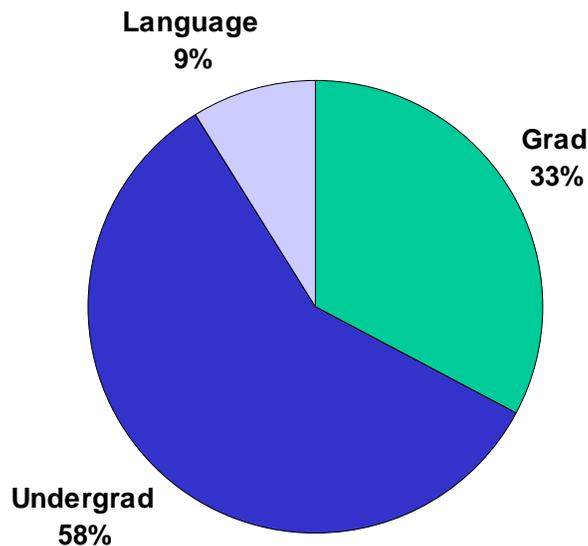
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## 25. What is your current or planned area of academic focus?



Surveyed students are in a broad range of majors and graduate studies programs. While we expected engineering to be a high concentration discipline, it was only 25% of the sample response. Business management and computer sciences (including MIS) were other dominant categories.

## 26. What level of study are you currently pursuing in the US?



### Saudi Student Comments:

"I think there is a very high number of Saudis studying in the US and I don't think I have any thing to say as a recommendation except that it is truly a different world in here than what it looks like in the media."

"The cultural mission needs more employees."

"Please speed up the visa issuing and renewal process. Push school Deans to involve the students in activities."

"Modify the English system (evaluation). Any student who spent one year in ESL should be able to enter into an academic program."

"With things the way they are it's a good number of students going in and out every year ... so I guess the US is OK with the way things are now and there is no hope for change in any of the preexisting problems with visa APPLICANTS BEING DELAYED AND ALL ..."

"Try to give the visa to the students that got more then 90% average in their high school. These students in general are going to be good students and they will come here, study and leave the US without any problems."

"Make student visas easier."

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“Make it easy for them to get in (VISA) Thanks. “

“Students should be ready for their academic studies, not language. They should learn English back home.”

“Giving a valid visa for the whole academic program. If a student got admission for BA, he/she should be given a visa for 4 years. In other words, visa validity should match the I-20 (or equal forms) validity. That would make student safe in terms of leaving to their countries in summer and come back to complete their academic program.”

“Facilitate the visa issuance process. - Be transparent about the rejection reasons.”

“Give 5 years for the visa and make it easier.”

“Giving qualification tests for language capabilities before sending the student.”

“U.S Officers should not to be strict at the airports and with renewing visas.”

“We need a good English program.”

“Have them more prepared before coming: Intensive language programs, and some form of long distance prior education with their intended college. Have Saudi student salary increased, and pay for their children's schooling (daycare, etc.) Those who are approved to be suitable candidates to study in the States, grant them a visa that is long enough for the length of their study.”

“I prefer there are more activities to Saudi families. I prefer there is a conversational partner for each student to improve his language faster.”

“Come and take the opportunity to improve your country.”

“1- be away from the Saudis. 2- be yourself. 3- follow the rule. 4- have fun but don't forget what brought you here. 5- Kiss your advisor's ass.”

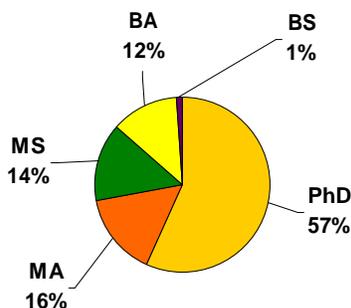
“First, offering good and enough backgrounds about the States and the universities in the U.S. Second, helping the student in the process of his/her documents including visa. Third, providing a good academic advisor that contacts his/her students frequently.”

## About MEASURE

Measure is the acronym of Middle East Academic Survey Research and Exposition. MEASURE is a grant funded research tool that advises policy makers and the American public on highly relevant topics. MEASURE surveys are fielded by the Washington DC based Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy, (IRmep) a non-profit, non-partisan, non- ideological public policy institute.

### Expert Surveys

MEASURE surveys academics via a series of multiple choice and open questions to compile and aggregate of informed opinion on timely policy issues.



MEASURE Expert survey candidates are drawn from a pool of 2,300 academics with advanced degrees in Middle East area studies. Not all MEASURE expert candidates teach or write about contemporary Middle East issues, but are generally more informed and involved in regional issues than their counterparts in academia, and reside within Middle East university departments. The terminal degree profile of this pool reveals a majority at the PhD and Master level.

### Student Surveys

MEASURE also surveys the "next generation of leaders" through targeted surveys of both US and foreign graduate and undergraduate students from important countries currently enrolled in the US higher education system.

### Aggregate Results and Privacy

MEASURE survey results are presented in aggregate form only. Individual responses are anonymous. MEASURE survey results are presented to the public in a timely fashion and also made available to policy makers, participants and the press. MEASURE avoids uninvited or multiple survey responses by soliciting response by invitees only and discarding repeat responses.

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