Non-classroom Activities and the Development of Graduate
Employability Attributes for Emirati Female Students in Higher
Education

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Rula Al-Abbas Al-Kayyali

February 2017
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## ABBREVIATIONS

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<td>ADWC:</td>
<td>Abu Dhabi Women’s College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHEAN:</td>
<td>College Human Ethics Advisory Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeSeCo:</td>
<td>Definition and Selection of Competencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCT:</td>
<td>Higher Colleges of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>HE:</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>IWL:</td>
<td>Integrated Work Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENA:</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCA:</td>
<td>Non-classroom activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCVER:</td>
<td>The National Centre for Vocational Education Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD:</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCANS:</td>
<td>The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAEU:</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET:</td>
<td>Australian Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZU:</td>
<td>Zayed University</td>
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Abstract

Developments in society, technology and the economy require that educational systems equip their graduates with graduate employability attributes beyond the disciplinary content skills and knowledge. Graduates in today’s knowledge economy need to be ready to face the new challenges, adapt to the needs of the emerging societal and economic models, and take their place in the competitive career market. Building graduate employability attributes that meet 21st century requirements is important for all graduates of higher education. Women in higher education in conservative cultures, such as many Middle Eastern cultures, face challenges related to the limited exposure to industry expectations and inadequate experiences with life outside family and school. Pressure between the ambitions to join the job market and build the competitive 21st century skills required for a successful career path, and the cultural restrictions that limit the application and advancement of such skills, result in the need to seek innovative ways to bridge this gap whilst respecting the values of the society.

This study sought to explore ways to enrich the educational experiences of women students in a conservative culture by taking UAE Emirati women’s college students’ experiences as a case study. The study investigated venues for opening up opportunities for the students to interact with the wider world through participation in non-classroom activities and build the necessary skills and attributes to join the workforce and succeed in it. The study built on the assumption that in order to investigate ways of advancing students’ educational experiences it is important to understand their culturally informed epistemological beliefs and take into consideration their unique setup and circumstances.
This is a qualitative research undertaking that investigated the richness, depth, and complexity of women students’ experiences with participation in non-classroom activities. The study considered different types of non-classroom activities that took place in and outside the college premises.

Findings of this study provided a deeper understanding of the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and the development of students’ 21st century skills with a focus on women students in the local UAE conservative culture. The study found that extending students’ educational experiences beyond the formal learning of subjects through involving them in purposeful activities and events that require formal and informal interactions beyond their close circles provided a significant and non-confronting approach for developing graduate employability attributes for this category of students. The study found that these interactions can lead to students discovering their own potential and reconstructing their own identities which lead to the production and reproduction of the social structures around them, and subsequently enable them to take a more active role in the workforce and in the community.

The study recommended strong cooperation between educational institutions, industry, and the community. This is to ensure that all stakeholders play their appropriate roles in preparing the graduates with the attributes required for the competitive career market, acting as agents of social good for an unknown future. The study highlighted the importance of internship and recommended integrating it in higher education programs as much as possible. It also recommended the integration of community service hours in higher education as this was considered a constructive approach in helping the students to develop graduate attributes. The study emphasized the importance of continuously listening to students and considering their
changing circumstances. It recommended involving students in college activities and giving them responsibilities to plan and implement projects.
Chapter 1 - An Overview of the Research Study

1.0 Background and Context

Today’s fast paced changes, and global citizenship requirements pose pressure on educational systems to ensure that their graduates are equipped with the necessary skills and attributes to face the new challenges of the global knowledge-based economy and take their place in the competitive career market. Both male and female students must face these new challenges. However, women in conservative cultures, such as the UAE local culture, are faced with multifaceted challenges often encompassing conflicting cultural values and graduate attributes. Therefore, women from conservative cultures need even more support by educational systems to ensure that they develop the necessary qualities to adapt to changes and acquire the needed graduate employability attributes.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women is one of the eight major goals that have been specified by the United Nations as the millennium development goals (UN Millennium Project, 2005). Looking at the UAE context in particular, a major objective of the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 is to “Maximize the participation of national women in the workforce” (The Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008, p. 41), and a main goal of the UAE Vision 2021 is to equip the youth with the skills required for the 21st century (UAE Government, 2013).

Preparing graduates with the skills required for the competitive knowledge economy requires building diverse graduate employability attributes or 21st century skills that have been considered essential requirements in today’s job market (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Barrie & Prosser, 2004). These are described as the set of competencies that play a significant role in contributing to an individual's effective and successful participation in the workforce.
Employability skills refer to skills necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well in the job (J. Robinson, 2000). Those extend beyond the discipline specific knowledge to include important employability attributes like communication skills, higher order thinking skills, and personal qualities; where communication skills include verbal communication, written communication, and presentation skills; higher order thinking skills include reasoning, creativity, decision making, and problem solving; and personal qualities include teamwork, assertiveness, persuasiveness, self-motivation, self-management, adaptability, flexibility, and self-confidence (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007).

Engagement with a university level curriculum is obviously one way to develop such graduate employability attributes. Participation in non-classroom activities may be considered another way for developing these essential employability attributes. However, the relationship between the development of graduate employability attributes and participation in non-classroom activities (NCAs) is not strongly represented in the literature. Moreover this relationship has not been specifically studied for higher education women students in conservative cultures, an environment where NCAs may be explored as a strategy for building graduate employability attributes for this category of students.

This study seeks to explore the relationship between non-classroom activities and the development of graduate employability attributes with a focus on female Emirati college students in the UAE. Findings of this study shall deepen our understanding of the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and the development of graduates employability attributes, and be used to develop recommendations for improving students’ 21st century capabilities. As a staff member working in a UAE higher education institution these findings shall have implications for how we view the whole student college experience in preparing Emirati
women for participation in the workforce and for leading more active and successful roles in the community.

Student engagement in non-classroom activities is proposed in this research as a useful approach for the development of employability attributes for women in conservative cultures as many of those women have limited access to life outside home or college. The objective of this study is to investigate ways to advance female students’ capacities and build well-rounded graduates who are equipped with abilities beyond their academic knowledge with a focus on employability attributes for female students in conservative cultures. Employability attributes are vital in today’s business world, and nurturing them is important for all students in higher education with an even stronger need to develop such capacities in female students in conservative cultures. In such cultures, the role of the woman has been linked to raising children and performing household chores; this restricts the involvement of the woman in the public domain and limits her participation to the domestic domain. The role of women in the world has changed dramatically in the past four decades with women assuming more responsibilities related to the public sphere. This creates new challenges for women in general and even more challenges for women in conservative cultures in particular, this is because conservative cultures favour traditional views and tend to oppose change. Participation in non-classroom activities is considered a factor that may play a role in helping young female students face such challenges and develop the professional attributes needed to become part of the workforce, as this participation provides opportunities for those women to engage with the national and international community.
1.1 Aim of the Study and Research Questions

This study aims to explore and critically analyse the nature of the relationship between the development of graduate employability attributes and student participation in non-classroom activities for Emirati women in tertiary level education in the UAE.

It is expected that this research will inform the development of recommendations for higher education in relation to how participation in non-classroom activities at tertiary level relate to graduate employability attributes development; and possible ways to advance and empower students.

The main research question guiding this study is:

What is the nature of the relationship between the development of graduate employability attributes and participation in non-classroom activities for Emirati female students?

This is a qualitative study where the richness, depth, and complexity of the students’ experiences will be investigated in an attempt to find ways to advance student graduate employability attributes (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). This study aims at hearing the voices of the participants, understanding the students’ experiences, and looking at ways of advancing their graduate employability attributes. The following sub-questions were used to address the main research question in this study:

1. How does participation in non-classroom activities impact on students’ perception of the development of graduate employability attributes?

2. How do students make sense of their participation in non-classroom activities?

3. How does participation in non-classroom activities affect the personal development and future decisions of Emirati female students?
4. In what ways can participation in non-classroom activities be directed to improve components of student graduate employability attributes?

5. What can the Emirati female students’ experiences tell us about building graduate employability attributes for female students in conservative cultures?

1.2 Significance of the Study

The Arab Gulf states have a high percentage of women who are either first or second generation in education (The World Bank, 2014). The Arabian Gulf area witnessed rapid and successful development in economic growth in the past few years. Education was one of the main fields that captured special attention from the government and leaders in the area (Kemp, 2013). Female participation in education received considerable stimulus resulting in high enrolment rates of women in higher education where female rates exceeded male rates in tertiary education in Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates (OECD, 2012). Moreover, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait were ranked among the highest-ranking economies of the region that have invested many resources in increasing women’s education levels (The World Economic Forum, 2011). Moreover, women’s empowerment has always been one of the main goals in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and is reflected in the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 where one of the major objectives specified is to expand national women’s participation in the workforce (The Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008). The objective was not only to maximize the number, but also to maintain a high quality of education and equip the youth with the skills required for the 21st century. This is one of the main goals of the UAE Vision 2021, where theme 4.2 in the vision is ‘first-rate education’; it reads: “all Emiratis will have equal opportunity and access to first-rate education that allows them to develop into well-

8
rounded individuals, enhance their educational attainment, and achieve their true potential, contributing positively to society” (UAE Government, 2013, p. 10). The importance of building the necessary graduate employability attributes was explicitly stated in the UAE Vision 2021 where the vision statement of theme 4.2 noted: “A progressive national curriculum will extend beyond rote learning to encompass critical thinking and practical abilities, equipping our youth with essential skills and knowledge for the modern world” (UAE Government, 2013, p. 10).

Looking at the population growth of the UAE, close to 40% of Emiratis are below the age of 15 (UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2013), and the UAE national population is growing at a rate of 3.28% per year where predictions estimate that the UAE National population will double in 21 years (Central Intelligence Agency [US], 2011). This represents an opportunity for expanding the productive capacity of the nation by ensuring that the educational systems prepare the new generations for the requirements of the competitive knowledge economy.

In the past two decades, the Emirates went a long way in bringing women into the workforce. Figures from the year 2005 show that women, from all nationalities, comprise 13% of the workforce in UAE and 14.5% in Abu Dhabi, and that Emirati national women comprise 18.5% of the total Emirati national workforce in Abu Dhabi (The Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008). Statistics from the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) show that over its 25 years of operation in 2013, it graduated 62,000 graduates (all nationals) out of which 38,299 (62%) were female graduates and 23,701 (38%) were male graduates. The HCT graduates employment figures in the academic year 2011/2012 show 90% employment rate for male graduates and 51% employment rate for female graduates (HCT, 2013). These numbers do not show an adequate participation of Emirati women in the workforce, particularly as women comprise 49.5% of the national Emirati population (UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Based on this it is
important that research is conducted in the area of empowering the Emirati national women and ensuring that they are prepared for the workforce.

Another factor to consider is the rapid changes that are taking place in the UAE. The community in the UAE went from a basic simple community to an advanced complex multicultural society in just a few years (Al Fahim, 2008). Such rapid societal change provided both challenge and stimulus for the national women to ensure that they are equipped with the needed capabilities to adapt to changes and be able to participate and compete in the workforce.

In this regard educational systems play a pivotal role in students’ empowerment and building women’s capacity in the community. One way of building student capacity, particularly women students, is exposure to the business world and the involvement of students in several projects and activities in and outside the classroom (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragnolini, 2004; Madsen & Cook, 2010). The Higher Colleges of Technology are known to be active in organizing activities and events that aim at helping young Emiratis to operate effectively in today’s global business environment (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2015b). The activities and events organized and hosted by the HCT include, but are not limited to: organizing international conferences; organizing and hosting forums across a number of fields; national and international internships; language training courses in other countries; international cultural visits; participation in national and international competitions; participation in country level activities; participation in student clubs such as languages, sports, music, art and others; and organizing and participating in charitable projects.

Participation in such non-classroom activities is one of the techniques used by educational institutions to broaden the horizons of the students and provide them with opportunities to develop skills that may not be developed in the classroom. Participation in goal-oriented
activities raises the level of students’ critical thinking. Being involved in humanitarian or charitable projects can raise the level of students’ social responsibility and awareness of global challenges. Participation in students’ organizations can assist the students to learn time management skills, develop leadership skills, and deal with different types of people. The relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and development of student employability attributes has not been adequately researched. Researchers (Howard, 1986; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Rubin, Bommer, & Baldwin, 2002) found a significant relationship between participation in extra-curricular activities and career attainment and performance variables. This research study raises the question about such involvement for Emirati women. Furthermore, this study considers the context and dynamics of the area which constitute important factors for understanding students’ learning and development. Sholkamy (2010) stated “it is hard to understand the empowerment of women anywhere in the world in isolation from the dynamics of context, history and social transformation” (p. 254).

1.3 Thesis Structure

I have presented my thesis in 8 chapters. Chapter 1 highlights the aim and significance of this study and states the research question and sub-questions. Chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework that sets the parameters for developing the research question and investigates ways of developing graduate employability attributes and practices; it looks at the development of education for women and associated employment in the area. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the context of the research and provides an account of the cultural realities that influence people and education in the area.
Chapter 4 outlines the research design and the rationale for using a Constructionist research approach and an Interpretive theoretical perspective as it applies to this study. It highlights the choice of the research methods used to bring the students’ and staff members’ experiences into the constructive dialogue.

Chapter 5 provides a framework of the research findings and draws an initial understanding of the nature of the relationship between the development of graduate employability attributes and participation in non-classroom activities for local UAE female students.

Building on the results presented in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 provides an in-depth discussion of the students’ experiences and compiles themes emerged from the research findings. It acknowledges the area, period of time, culture, and distinctiveness of the place in this UAE case study and discusses how the extension of the students’ learning activities to a range of non-classroom activities impacted their development.

Chapter 7 then discusses what the Emirati female students’ experiences can tell us about building graduate employability attributes for female students in conservative cultures. It outlines the lessons, challenges, and opportunities that emerge from the research.

Chapter 8 draws together ideas emerging from chapters 5, 6 and 7 to present conclusions and recommendations in response to the research question and sub-questions. It also outlines areas for further research and provides valuable insights into improving female students’ educational experiences and their preparedness for the workforce with a focus on conservative cultures.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

To promote economic and personal growth, higher educational institutions worldwide set measures and apply practices to ensure the preparedness of their graduates for the job market. Judging whether a graduate is employable depends upon whether the graduate is ready to face the challenges of the workforce, possesses the needed competencies required by the job market, meets the professional registration requirements as needed, and exhibits the attributes that employers need and value. In this chapter, these attributes will be explored and the context and measures for developing such attributes will be reviewed. A closer consideration of developing these attributes for women in conservative cultures, such as the context of this study, the UAE local society, will be considered. This research investigates the relationship between the development of graduate employability attributes for women students in a UAE women’s college and their participation in non-classroom activities.

2.1 Graduate Employability Attributes

The widely accepted view of a university education nowadays goes beyond providing students with the technical skills and knowledge of a discipline or a profession: the mandate has been extended to consider the development of generic graduate attributes/employability attributes which have been considered fundamental to the process of preparing the graduates to face the unknown future and be ready to take an active role in the knowledge economy of the 21st century (Barrie & Prosser, 2004; Kember, 2009; Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011). The shift in the
world economy from the industrial era (20\textsuperscript{th} century) to the post-industrial era of the knowledge economy (21\textsuperscript{st} century) has resulted in major changes in the skills and capabilities requirements in the workforce. The new knowledge economy replaced the routine skills of the assembly line with needs for up-to-date technical skills; needs for graduates who are capable of lifelong and self-managed learning; needs for graduates who are able to deal with the service oriented jobs; and needs for graduates who are able to meet the requirements of the high performance work systems (Carnevale & Smith, 2013; Labi, 2014). These needs imply a range of attributes like critical thinking, adaptability, dealing with ill-defined problems, communication skills, and others (Kember, 2009). From an economic perspective, the development of graduate employability attributes has been regarded important to increase the competitiveness, efficiency and productivity of the labour market (Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

\textbf{2.1.1 Definitions}

The definition of employability attributes is receiving explicit attention in higher education in an international scale, this is because universities in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century are expected to graduate employable graduates who possess the needed attributes to perform in the workforce on a global level. This attention started in the late 1980s and early 1990s where countries across the world created work tasks and launched projects to identify the graduate employability attributes; examples are: the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) in 1990 in the United States, the work of the Karmel committee in 1985 followed by the Mayer Committee report in 1992 in Australia, and the Essential Skills Research Project (ESRP) in 1994 in Canada (Young & Chapman, 2010).

An early definition of such attributes was provided by the Higher Education Council in Australia which defined the graduate attributes as “the skills, personal attributes and values which
should be acquired by all graduates regardless of their discipline or field of study. In other words, they should represent the central achievements of higher education as a process” (Higher Education Council [HEC] Australia, 1992, p. 20).

The National Skills Task Force in England explicitly listed the skills required and provided the following definition:

*those skills which can be used across large numbers of different occupations. They include what are defined as key skills – communication, problem solving, team working, IT skills, application of number and an ability to improve personal learning and performance. They also include reasoning skills, scheduling work and diagnosing work problems, work process management skills, visualizing output, working backwards for forward planning purposes and sequencing operations. (National Skills Task Force, 2000, p. 24)*

Yorke and Knight (2006) working with the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) in England defined employability attributes as “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (p. 3).

The Deputy Director for Education and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Secretary-General Schleicher, refers to Key Competencies as “the ability to successfully meet complex demands in varied contexts through the mobilization of psychosocial resources, including knowledge and skills, motivation, attitudes, emotions, and other social and behavioral components” (Schleicher, 2007, p. 349).
In Australia, the generic graduate attributes have come to be accepted as “the skills, knowledge, and abilities of university graduates, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, which are applicable in a range of contexts and are acquired as a result of completing any undergraduate degree” (Barrie, 2006, p. 217). Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, and Watts (2000) referred to them as the attributes that go beyond the disciplinary expertise and are the qualities that prepare the graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future.

In general the concept of graduate employability attributes has been considered in educational systems for some time and is being reflected in educational institutions’ goals, mission statements, and strategic plans. The definition of such attributes and ways of achieving them are deemed to be fundamental to good educational practices, with a trend that moved from implicit to explicit identification of those attributes in recent years. However, it is important to recognize the variation in the terms and concepts used to refer to similar attributes.

2.1.2 Terminology

The terminology used to refer to the graduate employability attributes has little consistency across countries and among different educational institutions. A wide range of terms is being used which include: graduate attributes, graduate outcomes, generic attributes, key competencies, employability skills, and employability attributes; some use the terms key skills, core skills, soft skills, and transferable skills (Barrie, 2007; Clayton, Blom, Meyers, & Bateman, 2003). The least preferred term of all is ‘soft skills’ because of its fuzziness and implication of unimportance (Clayton et al., 2003). Despite the differences in the outcomes of the different educational systems and the differences of what may be considered a ‘skill’ and what may be considered an ‘attribute’, these are interchangeable terms that generally refer to the same set of
qualities, skills, and attributes. Table 2.1 below shows the different terms used in various countries to describe such attributes.

Table 2.1 Different labels used for graduate employability attributes in various countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Terms Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Core skills, key skills, common skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Essential skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Key competencies, employability skills, generic skills, graduate attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Employability skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Basic skills, necessary skills, workplace know-how, essential learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Critical enabling skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Transformable skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Key qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Trans-disciplinary goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Process independent qualifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2003, p. 2)

In some countries, the terminology used differs between the different sectors of education, for example in Australia the terminology used is as follows:

- key competencies and general capabilities in Australian schools
- employability skills and associated attributes in the Australian vocational education and Training (VET) sector.
This wide range of terms used generates a source of inconsistency amongst researchers as they try to understand the nature of the characteristics of the terms in question, most commonly referred to as attributes, skills, capabilities, or competencies. Some clearly differentiate between the terms and consider them holding different implications for assessment and practice, whereas others see them as interchangeable terms (Chapman & O’Neill, 2010). As an example, RMIT University in Australia differentiates between employability skills and graduate attributes and provides the following two distinct sets of descriptors:

**List of employability skills:** communication; self-management; planning and organizing; technology; teamwork; problem solving; learning; and initiative and enterprise (RMIT Students Group, 2014). **List of graduate attributes:** Work-ready; global in outlook and competence; environmentally aware and responsible; culturally and socially aware; active and lifelong learners; and innovative (RMIT University, 2015).

In the UAE, the term used is ‘core life skills’: “this title endeavours to cover and promote as a brand, the general intent and nature of the key competencies or generic skills … that underpin and support performance and functionality in work, learning, and everyday life” (Cornelius, 2011, p. 75). However, in this study the Australian terminology that refers to those attributes as employability skills, employability attributes, and generic graduate attributes (Barrie, 2012; National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2003) provides a base for using the term ‘graduate employability attributes’.
2.1.3 Rationale for using the term graduate employability attributes

This research study is directed towards building employability attributes for tertiary level female students in the UAE. The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), which is the institution where the study took place, is an applied educational institution that offers both Applied Diploma and Applied Bachelor degrees. Based on the mix of the level of programs offered in HCT both the Australian terms for the VET sector (recently referred to as VE sector) and higher education sector are considered in the term ‘graduate employability attributes’. Other reasons that support the choice of term include:

- Barrie (2012) recommended the use of the word ‘graduate’ as these attributes should be present in a university ‘graduate’ from any undergraduate degree, and should be considered as important outcomes of university learning.

- Key, core, basic or fundamental skills can refer to literacy and numeracy skills only and does not necessarily cover the full set of attributes needed.

- The employability skills defined in the VET sector in Australia include: communication skills; teamwork skills; problem-solving skills; self-management; planning and organizing; technology skills; lifelong learning skills; and initiative and enterprise skills (Yorke & Knight, 2006). Those skills can be mapped to HCT defined graduate outcomes (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2014).

- Due to industry influence, the term employability attributes receives attention in the different educational sectors.

- The focus of this study is ‘employability’ of UAE female graduates.
• The word ‘attributes’ is used rather than ‘skills’ because attribute encompass more than skills and attitudes, as ‘attribute’ is a more global term that can accommodate new or alternative conceptions of knowledge and understanding (Barrie, 2012).

• Although Barrie (2012) recommended the use of the word ‘generic’ in the term, as he recommended the term ‘generic graduates attributes’, I find the concept ‘generic’ inherent in the term ‘graduate employability attributes’ as the term is associated with graduates employability in general and not a particular discipline.

Based on the above reasons, the term ‘graduate employability attributes’ was used as the main term in this study; another term used as needed is ‘generic graduate attributes’. Although I argue that the word ‘generic’ may be considered implicit, the term ‘generic graduate attributes’ can be viewed as a more comprehensive term covering more than employability attributes as employability attributes focus on work and are being viewed as a subset of the generic attributes of the university sector (Yorke & Knight, 2006). Moreover, terms like ‘generic attributes’, ‘employability skills’, or ‘graduate outcomes’ may be used in this study when a reference is made to a particular piece of work or to an institution’s list.

2.1.4 Sets of graduate employability attributes

The identification of the sets of graduate employability attributes and ways of developing them is receiving broad consideration by educational institutions and researchers. Extensive research of the literature took place to identify such attributes (Barrie, 2006; Barrie & Prosser, 2004; Pitman & Broomhall, 2009; Salama, Keogh, & Tabunshchikova, 2007) and investigate ways of developing them (de la Harpe, Radloff, & Wyber, 2000; Kember, 2009; Kember & Leung, 2005; O'Connor, Lynch, & Owen, 2011). In recent years the need for graduate
employability attributes has intensified as the economic forces, demands for information
technology, effective communication, and higher order thinking skills hold a great influence and
impact on the necessity for the educational systems to develop the needed attributes to ensure that
their graduates are job ready and have the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for the
job market (DeSeCo, 2002; Kember & Leung, 2005). Along with knowledge in the subject
matter, employers focus on skills and attributes like adaptation, creativity, and increased
productivity; employees need to demonstrate skills like teamwork, problem-solving, decision
making, capacity to deal with non-routine processes, and effective communication (Australian
Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia 2002 as cited in National
Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2003).

Bowden, et. al., (2000) provided three principal arguments why a university should
identify a set of graduates attributes and ensure the development of these attributes in the
programs it offers. The first argument is that part of a university’s role is to provide citizens who
can function as agents of social good and reform in the community; they argue that meeting this
goal requires more than disciplinary skills and knowledge. The second argument is that
universities need to prepare their graduates for the unknown realm of future professional practice;
because students need to learn in a way and with a purpose that develops the ability to adapt to
unfamiliar situations. The third argument relates to the employability of graduates where
disciplinary expertise is considered as a subset of a large set of abilities and skills that determine
whether an individual will succeed in his/her profession.

In a review of research conducted by Kearns and the National Centre for Vocational
Education Research (2001), Kearns concluded that there is no international consensus regarding
the identification of the graduate attributes, and that fostering graduate attributes requires active
learning strategies in which learners assume responsibility for their own learning. Although there is no consensus about the lists of graduate employability attributes, there is considerable similarity between the sets compiled with justified variations between countries, universities and disciplines due to the nature of the place or priorities identified. The following figure shows a list of skills and abilities for the knowledge economy compiled by Carnevale and Smith (2013).

![Skills and Abilities in the Knowledge Economy](image)

**Figure 1. Skills and abilities in the knowledge economy – adapted from (Carnevale & Smith, 2013, p. 494)**

Tony Wagner the co-director of the Change Leadership Group at Harvard Graduate School of Education defined the core 21st century survival skills as:

1. **Critical thinking and problem solving**
2. **The ability to create, collaborate and communicate across media-rich networks and systems**
3. **Agility and adaptability**
4. **Initiative and entrepreneurship**
5. **Effective oral and written communication**
6. Accessing and analyzing information, and
7. Curiosity and imagination. (Cornelius, 2011, p. 51)

A study conducted by Labi in The Economist Intelligence Unit (2014) collected and analysed responses from 343 executives in the US, who were familiar with their company’s workforce-development strategy and higher-education efforts. The study showed a high demand for critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration and teamwork; and effective and timely communication. The following figure shows the percentages of the responses collected when those executives were asked to select the top four skills required.

![Figure 2. Skills required by employers in the US (Labi, 2014, p. 5)](image)

This leads us to talk about the 21st century skills and competencies that are often referred to as the “new skills and competencies, which allow young people to benefit from the emerging new forms of socialization and to contribute actively to economic development under a system where the main asset is knowledge” (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 5). Finegold and Notabartolo
(2010) conducted an interdisciplinary literature review and compiled the following worker competencies that are considered most important for the 21st century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic skills</th>
<th>Interpersonal skills</th>
<th>Ability to execute</th>
<th>Information processing</th>
<th>Capacity for change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Initiative and self direction</td>
<td>Information literacy</td>
<td>Creativity / innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>Media literacy</td>
<td>Adaptive learning / learning to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Leadership and responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital citizenship</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ICT operations and concepts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Twenty first century competencies (Finegold & Notabartolo, 2010, p. 7)

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research in Australia (2003) compiled a summary of several common features when looking at sets of graduate employability attributes; some of the main points recorded are:

- Six common elements appear in the different lists of skills, these are: 1) basic/fundamental skills e.g., literacy; 2) people related skills e.g., communication; 3) conceptual/thinking skills e.g., thinking innovatively and creatively; 4) personal skills and attributes e.g., responsibility and flexibility; 5) skills related to the business world
e.g., innovation; 6) skills related to the community e.g., citizenship knowledge and skills

- Lists of skills developed by employers emphasizing personal attributes
- All major generic skills schemes include conceptual (thinking skills) and interpersonal (teamwork) skills
- Lifelong learning and self-improvement is also common in the lists.

The work above shows a widespread consensus that more than subject matter knowledge is being valued by the employing organizations and that the new knowledge economy requires a wider set of skills and abilities than discipline specific skills. Those skills and abilities are important for individuals, firms, and nations to compete successfully in the global economy of the 21st century. Young and Chapman (2010) reported that “owing to shifts in the workplace demands of the new economy, employees with excellent generic competencies quickly found themselves in higher demand than those with advanced, yet subject-specific, technical skills” (p. 3).

### 2.1.5 International frameworks

In response to the needs for developing graduate employability attributes, countries around the world placed the identification of graduate employability attributes on their national agendas (Young & Chapman, 2010). The following section is an overview of frameworks from the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, and the OECD DeSeCo project.

#### 2.1.5.1 Frameworks from the United States (US)

In the US the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) was established in 1990 with the goals of identifying the generic competencies required to succeed in
the workforce in the new economy, and determining the extent to which students were equipped with these skills. In its first report in 1991 the commission identified two types of skills: competencies in the workplace and foundation skills. “Competencies are the skills necessary for success in the workplace and are organized into five areas. Foundations are skills and qualities that underlie the competencies” (SCANS Commission, 1991, p. 3). Both the competencies and foundations are generic skills that are required for most jobs. The five areas of the competencies in the workplace are: resources, interpersonal skills, information, systems and technology. The foundation skills were divided into three sets which are: basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities.

In regards to the competencies in the workplace, ‘Resources’ include identifying, organizing, planning, and allocating; while ‘Interpersonal’ means working with others in a diverse team; ‘Information’ includes interpreting and communicating; ‘Systems’ includes understanding complex interrelationships; and ‘Technology’ is identified as working with, selecting, and applying technologies.

As for the foundations skills, the basic skills consist of reading, writing, arithmetic, mathematics, listening, speaking; the thinking skills include creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, seeing things in the mind’s eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning; and personal qualities include responsibility, self-esteem, social, self-management, and integrative/honesty (SCANS Commission, 1991).

Another initiative which sought to address the skills required by industry, is the 21st Century Workforce Commission, which is an independent commission that was appointed by the President and Congress of the United States in 2000. The commission was charged with determining the tasks and skills necessary for the 21st century workforce, and was established in
response to concerns about America’s competitiveness as a result of the technological changes and globalization. Initially, the commission built upon the SCANS foundation, but in a second report, there was a much stronger emphasis on information technology skills. The commission argued that America’s future competitiveness lay with growth in the information technology sector; the report also included emphases on teamwork and communication (Curtis, 2004).

In 2005 the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) launched the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative. LEAP responds to the changing demands of the 21st century and champions the importance of a 21st liberal education. LEAP defines a set of ‘Essential Learning Outcomes” which include: Knowledge of human cultures and physical and natural world; intellectual and practical skills; personal and social responsibility; and integrative and applied learning (AAC&U, 2016). Through LEAP, hundreds of campuses in the United States are making far-reaching educational changes to help their students acquire the essential learning outcomes needed to succeed both in the local economy and in the global market.

2.1.5.2 Frameworks from Australia

In Australia, the focus on graduate employability attributes began as early as the 1980s when Peter Karmel, Chair of the Quality of Education Review Committee, highlighted the importance of an internationally competitive labour force and stressed that outcomes of education should contribute to Australia’s competitiveness (Quality of Education Review Committee (Chair P. Karmel), April, 1985). This was followed by a review of the young people’s post-compulsory education in Australia chaired by Brian Finn who recommended that education and training systems must emphasize both the acquisition of technical skills for the job and flexibility, which requires strong grounding in generic and transferable skills (Australian Education Council Review
Committee (Chair B. Finn), July, 1991. At Finn’s recommendation, the Australian Education Council, chaired by Eric Mayer (September, 1992) developed a set of key competencies essential for preparing young people for employment, those being:

“ 1. Collecting, analysing and organising information

2. Communicating ideas and information

3. Planning and organising activities

4. Working with others in teams

5. Using mathematical ideas and techniques

6. Solving problems

7. Using technology.” (p. viii)

In the late 1990s, the Australian Industry Group commissioned a study on generic competencies based on 350 companies from a diverse range of industries in Australia, including manufacturing, information technology, and construction. Results of interviews conducted with representatives from the companies indicated that, to remain competitive in the current marketplace, businesses require employees with basic skills, interpersonal skills, and positive personal attributes and values (Young & Chapman, 2010).

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in Australia then conducted studies to examine approaches for incorporating generic competencies into VET education and proposed additional skills which were deemed essential for workplace success, including personal values and attributes, and the acceptance of diversity in the workplace. Studies conducted by ACNeilson Research Services and the Allen Consulting Group in 2000 found that generic skills desired by employers included interpersonal skills relating to business
communication, customer focus, teamwork, building relationships and networking. They also noted the importance of personal attributes, which included the desire to learn and apply learning, personal responsibility, time management, critical analysis, flexibility and adaptability (Dawe, 2004).

In 2002, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA), with support from the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training, undertook a comprehensive study to identify the employability skills required by employees in the changing economy in Australia and elsewhere. Their work included reviews of relevant literature from Australia and overseas, interviews with individuals from a variety of industries, and a validation study. The competency framework proposed by the ACCI/BCA built on Mayer’s work and expanded the scope of the Mayer key competencies by incorporating both generic employability skills and personal attributes. ACCI-BCA considered employability skills as skills not only required to gain employment, but also to progress well in the workplace and achieve one’s potential. The report proposed an Employability Skills Framework, and recognized the importance of Mayer key competencies as a basis for continuing work in this field (Curtin, 2004; Curtis, 2004). A summary of ACCI-BCA employability attributes compared with Mayer key competencies is outlined in Figure 4.
In 2009 the ‘21 century skills’ (ATCS) project was established by a consortium of The University of Melbourne and technology companies CISCO, INTEL and Microsoft, with a goal to examine the assessment and teaching of 21st century skills. This project involves international working groups and focuses on defining those skills and measuring them using information technology. The ATCS project’s framework of 21st century skills defines ten skills, and groups them into four categories (Bowman, 2010). The following table shows the list of those skills:
Table 2.2 The ATCS 21st century skills (Bowman, 2010, p. 24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of Thinking</th>
<th>Ways of Working</th>
<th>Tools for Working</th>
<th>Living in the World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and Innovation</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Information literacy (includes research on sources, evidence, biases etc.)</td>
<td>Citizenship – local and global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking,</td>
<td>Collaboration (teamwork)</td>
<td>ICT literacy</td>
<td>Life and career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal and social responsibility – including cultural awareness and competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to learn,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.5.3 Frameworks from the United Kingdom (UK)

In the UK, the sets of generic skills identified are similar to those in Australia, however, the terminology used is key skills or core skills. In 2004, six key skills at Level 1-4 were identified by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in the UK; those are divided into three core basic skills and three wider key skills.

The Level 1-4 core basic skills are:

1. Communication
2. Application of number (numeracy)
3. Information and communication technology (ICT).

The Level 1-4 wider key skills are:

4. Working with others
5. Improving own learning and performance

6. Problem solving. (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004, p. 3)

This set of key skills is considered the most commonly needed skills for success at work; in education and training; and life in general (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004). One of the key findings of the ‘Skills in England 2007’ report is that “individuals need to continue to acquire the generic and technical skills they will need to succeed in an increasingly competitive environment” (University of Warwick Institute for Employment Research (IER) & Cambridge Econometrics (CE), 2007, p. 41).

2.1.5.4 Frameworks from Canada

In Canada, the employability skills identified are similar to those identified in Australia and the UK but are more extensive. The work on identifying employability skills in Canada started in the early 1990s, when the Conference Board of Canada developed the Employability Skills Profile (ESP) which identified three broad domains of employability skills: the generic academic, personal management, and teamwork skills. Each of the three broad domains comprised a further three to four sub-domains and a number of more specific skills resulting in a profile with 26 specific skills. The Employability Skills Profile in Canada was aimed at new entrants to the workforce and was adopted by all provinces in their education curriculum planning (Curtis, 2004).

The Conference Board of Canada then built on the work of the 1992 Employability Skills Profile and published the Employability Skills 2000+ framework (The Conference Board of Canada, 2000). In this version an extensive list of 56 employability skills were identified; these skills are referred to as “the employability skills, attitudes, and behaviours you need to participate and progress in today’s dynamic world of work” (p. 1). This list of skills is divided into four main
domains: fundamental skills, personal management skills, teamwork skills, and orientation to values and attitudes with reference to self-esteem, integrity, and responsibility. Each of those domains are then further divided, the following is the second level of skills identified under each domain:

Fundamental skills, the skills needed as a basis for future development:

1. Communication
2. Manage information
3. Use numbers
4. Think and solve problems.

Personal management skills, the personal skills, attitudes, and behaviours that drive one’s potential for growth:

5. Demonstrate positive attitude and behaviours
6. Be responsible
7. Be adaptable
8. Learn continuously

Teamwork skills, the skills and attributes needed to contribute to productivity:

10. Work with others

2.1.5.5 Framework from the UAE

The National Qualifications Authority in the UAE recognizes the importance of identifying and developing the generic skills as it plays a major role in preparing the graduates for
work, learning, and life, “The recognition of these skills is important because they underpin and recognize the ability of learners to learn throughout their lives” (UAE National Qualifications Authority, 2012, p. 73). They are also seen as essential competencies for the “effective participation in the emerging patterns of learning, work, and work organization” (UAE National Qualifications Authority, 2012, p. 74). Work in the identification and development of the graduate employability attributes in the UAE is covered in the section ‘Graduate employability attributes in the UAE’.

2.1.5.6 The DeSeCo Project

In 2002, the DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) project started. This is an international project supported through the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and managed by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office with support from the United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. The project aims at establishing a theoretical academic foundation for defining and selecting the key competencies, developing reference points for the development and understanding of future indicators of competencies, and to respond to the long term information needs of policymakers. DeSeCo classified the key competencies in three broad categories: use tools interactively, interact in heterogeneous groups, and act autonomously (DeSeCo, 2005).
The DeSeCo project is considered an important generic skills initiative as it goes beyond the national scope, has an orientation that is broader than workforce participation, and includes strong personal fulfilment and community involvement objectives.

Moreover, the project is considered an influential project as it is supported by the OECD, thus ensuring that member countries of the OECD and other countries are kept abreast of the progress and findings of this project. In the DeSeCo project, experts from five major disciplines: anthropology, sociology, economics, psychology and philosophy participated in identifying the key competencies (Curtis, 2004). At the centre of the framework of key competencies of the DeSeCo project “is the ability of individuals to think for themselves as an expression of moral and intellectual maturity, and to take responsibility for their learning and for their actions” (DeSeCo, 2005, p. 8).
2.1.6 Examples of generic graduate attributes’ statements

In response to the importance associated with the graduate attributes and as part of their efforts to provide a description of the qualities of their graduates and clarify the nature of the education they offer, academic institutions around the word articulated the outcomes of the educational experiences they provide by developing and publishing statements that define the qualities, skills and attributes of their graduating students (Barrie, 2012; Drummond, Nixon, & Wiltshire, 1998).

An academic institution’s values and beliefs, as well as the political and social environment they exist in, affect the way they define their graduate attributes. Higher educational authorities encourage universities to develop individual and distinct missions, with the expectation that the graduate attributes will reflect the specific mission of the graduating institution. This is also generally linked to quality assurance and funding. Following are two examples of generic graduate attributes’ statements by The Edinburgh Napier University in Scotland, and RMIT University in Australia. The Edinburgh Napier University (2013) defines graduate attributes as:

*The high level qualities, skills and understandings that a student should develop as a consequence of the program learning they engage with while at university. This sense of graduateness is therefore what distinguishes them from individuals who have not studied at degree level, and is the added value graduates offer to employers and society generally, shaping the way they think, interact and contribute in an uncertain future ahead. (Edinburgh Napier University, 2013, May, p. 1).*

RMIT University Australia defines the set of generic graduate attributes as:
The broad skills that RMIT University expects that graduates will have acquired and be able to demonstrate to an appropriate level whatever their program of study. They link to employability skills and program learning outcomes, ...RMIT graduate attributes are: work-ready, global in outlook and competence, environmentally aware and responsible, culturally and socially aware, active and lifelong learners, and innovative. (RMIT University, 2015, Para.1)

2.1.7 Challenges

Although considerable work has been put into defining and listing the graduate employability attributes in the different educational systems across the world, there has been little attention paid to ways of achieving such attributes and how this is built into the educational experience of students (Barrie, 2006). Further, little attention has been paid to ways of assessing the attainment of those attributes; a survey study conducted by OECD shows that there is no clear formative or summative assessment policies for the 21st century competencies in most countries or regions covered (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). Similarly there are few teacher training programs that target the teaching or development of the 21st century competencies.

A major difficulty also arises from the complexity of the interrelationships amongst these employability attributes; this was flagged in the DeSeCo report 2002 where the recommendation was the construction of profiles of competencies based on the context instead of isolated individual competencies (Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

Another challenge is the difficulty of distinguishing between attributes and personal traits of the individual, for example teamwork could be related to some extent to individual differences in personality, and problems solving could be related to individual general intelligence. Chapman and O’Neil (2010) suggest that in the descriptions of associated assessments “there should be
some consideration of the extent to which the measure will reflect these personal traits, rather than levels of the competencies themselves” (p. 117).

The high level abstraction of the defined graduate attributes and the variation of the underlying understandings of what the graduate attributes are across academics make it a difficult task to determine what these competencies look like in practice and, in turn, the task of selecting the relevant assessments and the indicators that may be used in those assessments (Barrie, 2006; Chapman & O'Neill, 2010).

Barriers to the implementation of graduate attributes were compiled by Jones (2009) based on her qualitative study involving 37 academics representing a number of disciplines. Following are some of the reported barriers:

**Epistemological:** Generic attributes are not considered as part of the discipline.

**Cultural:** Generic attributes are not perceived as a central role of university.

**Intrinsic:** Generic attributes are complex and difficult to define.

**Pedagogical:** There is a lack of understanding regarding the nature of, experience with, or confidence in teaching generic attributes.

**Structural:** Reasons include large classes, lack of time, emphasis on research and the teaching of generic attributes not supported by the department.

From a different perspective, some researchers claim that although the concept of generic graduate attributes is very valuable for guiding how teaching and learning should unfold, it represents the voices of businesses and firms that consider the focus on the 21st century competencies as another facet of an economist approach to education. They claim that the discourse on the generic competencies overstates the relevance of work-related competencies, and
moves away from putting the emphasis on a balanced development of human abilities. Another argument is that the defined 21st century competencies are not within the reach of all young people across the world, because this emphasis does not consider the needs of the vast majority of the world’s population in developing countries. It is argued that the work on the 21st century competencies is therefore not relevant in all contexts and there is a risk of enlarging the socio-economic disparities when promoting such competencies among the world’s elite (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009).

2.1.8 Contributing factors for the increased demand for graduate employability attributes

Although there are challenges in ways of building and assessing the graduate employability attributes and some voices do not see the work in this area being relevant in all contexts, the factors that support the demands for these attributes are numerous and the projects in the national and international scales place demands on educational systems to comply to the needs of this era of flexible production, service delivery systems, and rapid economic and societal changes. Graduates in today’s world do not only need better technical preparation: they also need sufficiently robust skills to adapt to the changing requirements of the job, economy, and society (Carnevale & Smith, 2013). Contributing factors that created demands for new skills include: the post-industrial service oriented jobs which require good levels of interpersonal and problem solving skills as higher levels of human interaction and personalized responses are required. This in turn necessitated higher levels of commitment to customer satisfaction which means high levels of adaptability and communication skills. Globalization is another important factor where employees in recent years became part of a knowledge-based global labour market where they interact, work, and compete with other employees from around the world. In earlier days the
countries focused primarily on their respective economies which meant a strong emphasis on centralized industries like agriculture and manufacturing; education systems in turn focused on developing human resources that would be prepared to perform well in those well-defined occupations. Globalization brought a shift away from the typical agriculture/manufacturing economies to the service oriented economies where employees compete with their counterparts across the world (Young & Chapman, 2010).

The high adaptation of new technologies in almost every sector provides individuals with the means to access and distribute specialized information quickly and easily, reducing the demand for skills associated with the storage and retrieval of detailed technical information (Garcia-Aracil & Van der Velden, 2008; Young & Chapman, 2010).

New economies increased the demand for workers who are able to keep pace with the rapid changes that the new economy brought in; this includes rapid technical advancements, societal changes, and competitive performance levels. These changes affected the nature of work and changed the value and content of the attributes required. Employers nowadays require a level of flexibility that corresponds to the pace of the knowledge society development, and the ability to adjust to the unpredictable changes which emerge in the world of work (Allen, Ramaekers, & van der Velden, 2005).

Moreover, the traditional competition based on the ability of mass production of standardized goods and services and being able to sell them at low cost, is being replaced by a competition based on a diverse mix of personalized requirements and new kinds of value added factors like quality, variety, convenience, and customization (Carnevale & Smith, 2013).
2.2 Graduate Employability Attributes in the UAE

Work on identifying and setting up processes for developing the graduate employability attributes in higher education in the UAE is still in its infancy. Although there are attempts in the federal higher educational institutions, those require more structured work and work is also needed in the private higher educational institutions in the country where the identification of generic skills in many of them does not go beyond a brief mention in the mission statement or an incorporation in some goals in the strategic plans with no explicit listing. More attention has been paid recently following the identification of the generic skills/core life skills by the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) in the UAE. The qualifications framework in the UAE was completed in 2012 and began to inform and enforce the development and implementation of the graduate employability attributes in the universities and higher educational institutions in the country. The NQA realizes the importance of developing graduate competencies and capacities through adopting scientific, academic, and practical approaches that enable learners to attain sufficient and required skills and competencies to meet the needs of the UAE labour market (UAE National Qualifications Authority, 2012). The NQA in the UAE identified seven core life skills and eight generic skills areas to be introduced and implemented within the context of higher education; a list of those skills is in Figure 6.
Universities and higher educational institutions in the UAE started to align their educational outcomes to the requirements of the UAE National Qualifications Framework. Work on the generic graduate attributes in the three federal higher educational institutions in the UAE: Zayed University (ZU), United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), and the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) started in different stages and is reflected in different ways in the mission statements, prospectus, or explicitly identified generic learning outcomes.

### 2.2.1 Zayed University

At Zayed University (ZU) a robust model of generic learning outcomes is in place where different levels of learning outcomes are defined and mapped to each other. The university adopts...
an outcome-based education model where the primary objective of the undergraduate programs is “the development of the skills necessary for lifelong learning” (Zayed University, 2013, p. 10).

To that end the university defined three levels of learning outcomes: Institution level learning outcomes which are the Zayed University Learning outcomes (ZULOs), program level learning outcomes which are defined as Major Learning Outcomes (MALOs) and course level learning outcomes (McLean, 2010; Zayed University, 2013). The university level learning outcomes (ZULOs) guide the development of the other outcomes which are identified as essential in assuring the future success of ZU graduates and preparing them as educated leaders. The six University-specified learning outcomes (ZULOs) are:

1. Language,
2. Technological Literacy,
3. Critical thinking and Quantitative Reasoning,
4. Information Literacy,
5. Global Awareness, and

The Major Learning Outcomes (MALOs) are defined and advertised by each college and are designed to apply a disciplinary lens to the appropriately aligned ZULOs. Course level learning outcomes then are mapped to the MALOs and ZULOs and those learning outcomes are incorporated into normal coursework. An example of the mapping between the institution level learning outcomes and major level learning outcomes is shown in Figure 7 which reflects the mapping of the learning outcomes for the College of Education.
2.2.2 The UAE University

The UAE University (UAEU) developed five ‘essential capabilities’ for undergraduate students: “(1) Arabic language proficiency, (2) English language proficiency, (3) numerical literacy, (4) critical thinking and independent scholarly enquiry, and (5) skills and values transferable to employment, further study and informed and engaged citizenship” (United Arab Emirates University, 2013, p. 16). Developing such skills and capabilities in the university students was facilitated by the establishment of a University College which consists of four
different units that support building the essential capabilities in different stages of the student’s educational journey. The University College four units are: The University Foundations Program, the Center for Student Academic Success and Advising, the General Education Unit, and the Center for Planning and Placement (United Arab Emirates University, 2013).

The University Foundations Program helps in developing prerequisite essential skills to assist students to become ready to take on university level work. The Center for Student Academic Success and Advising provides academic support services throughout a student’s study program that includes writing centres, speaking centres, and tutorial centres. The General Education program offers students a large variety of courses that formulates about one third of every program offered in the university; these courses are designed to provide the students with the breadth requirements and “ensure that students are equipped with core knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills that will help them succeed in their studies, lives and careers” (United Arab Emirates University, 2013, p. 16). Moreover, the courses are designed to enhance students’ capacity for teamwork, leadership and innovation. The fourth unit in the University College is the Center for Planning and Placement which provides students with career planning services, internship services, and work integrated learning opportunities.

2.2.3 Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT)

In the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), the graduate employability attributes are referred to as graduate outcomes and are published in the HCT Learning Model (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2014).

Work on graduate outcomes started in the early years of the institution as the HCT adopted a learning model that defined its graduate outcomes; these graduate outcomes have been regarded as essential for teaching and learning in the institution; for students as they graduate and
enter the professional world of work; and for the community stakeholders as the graduate outcomes clarify what is expected of HCT graduates and describe their capabilities. The HCT learning model provides a framework within which HCT students receive their education. The learning model is based on five professional values and defines eight graduate outcomes. The five professional values are: innovative practice; continuous improvement; professional integrity; efficiency and effectiveness; and responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2014). The learning model defines the HCT educational philosophy and identifies the institution graduate outcomes; the eight graduate outcome headings and the set of skills under each heading are portrayed in Figure 8.
Graduate Outcome One: Communication and information literacy
According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:
- Communicating information, opinions, concepts and ideas effectively in English through the spoken and written mediums to a variety of audiences;
- Selecting, understanding, evaluating, and making effective use of information from a variety of sources presented in both spoken and written forms in English; and
- Acting ethically in the use and presentation of information from a variety of sources.

Graduate Outcome Two: Critical and creative thinking
According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:
- Evaluating and analyzing knowledge and information;
- Identifying and understanding problems; and
- Demonstrating creativity and innovation in problem-solving.

Graduate Outcome Three: Global awareness and citizenship
According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in recognizing and analyzing
- Ethical dilemmas, and practicing ethical decision making;
- The issues affecting the local, regional, and global environment; and the interrelations between local, regional, and global contexts and cultures.

Graduate Outcome Four: Technological literacy
According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:
- Recognizing the influence of technology upon individuals and society;
- Using technology to perform effectively in their personal and professional lives and acting ethically when using technology.

Graduate Outcome Five: Self-management and independent learning
According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:
- Reflecting on and evaluating their own learning;
- Adapting to change;
- Working independently; and
- Demonstrating a positive work attitude and effective work habits.

Graduate Outcome Six: Teamwork and leadership
According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:
- Understanding the functions and dynamics of groups;
- Contributing effectively to teamwork;
- Acting effectively in a leadership role; and
- Demonstrating confidence and social maturity in interpersonal relationships.

Graduate Outcome Seven: Vocational competencies
According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:
- Applying profession-specific knowledge required for successful employment in their chosen field;
- Applying profession-specific skills required for successful employment in their chosen field; and
- Demonstrating the specific attributes required for successful employment in their chosen field.

Graduate Outcome Eight: Mathematical literacy
According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:
- Applying relevant numerical analytical tools to solve problems in authentic contexts; and
- Analyzing and communicating mathematical concepts with confidence in authentic contexts.

Figure 8. HCT UAE graduate outcomes (Adapted from the HCT Learning Model (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2014)
The HCT learning model sets standards for the design of curricula, and guides the learning and teaching practices in the institution. Work towards building graduate outcomes takes place in different fronts; these vary from classroom level teaching and learning activities, such as the task based project driven writing projects within language learning classes (Karagianakis, 2007), to college wide mega functions mapped to program learning modules and aimed at contributing to building a number of graduate outcomes; examples of such projects are Mosaic which is a final year diploma project that allows students to be active participants in the learning process and enables them to make positive criticisms rather than being passive; the project targets GO1, GO2, GO5, and GO6 in Figure 8 (D. Mason, 2007; Raymond, 2007). Continuous work takes place in the institution to map the course learning outcomes to academic programs’ learning outcomes to the institutional graduate outcomes (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2015a).

### 2.2.4 Private higher educational institutions in the UAE

In regards to the private higher educational institutions in the UAE, most of the institutions include the generic graduate attributes in their documentation in one way or another; some include it briefly in their mission statements, others are more explicit. They also vary in ways and processes for measuring, monitoring, and reporting on students’ progress. Following are examples from some private higher educational institutions in the UAE.

The American University of Sharjah (AUS) states in its mission statement that the institution “educates lifelong learners who display mastery in the core competencies of their areas of specialization, and who communicate clearly, think critically and solve problems creatively” (American University of Sharjah, 2012, p. 6). The Khalifa University of Science Technology and Research (KUSTAR) in Abu Dhabi includes in its mission statement: “The University endeavours to serve the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, UAE society, the region and the world by providing an
environment of creative enquiry within which critical thinking, human values, technical competence and practical and social skills, business acumen and a capability for lifetime learning are cultivated and sustained” (Khalifa University, 2012, p. 3). The American University in Dubai (AUD) includes the following in the purpose-related goals of the university: guiding students in the use of knowledge and skills for personal and professional fulfilment; fostering on-going development of human culture; developing critical thinking, effective communication and lifelong learning skills; promoting the value of ethical behaviour, responsibility, and commitment; and fostering intercultural understanding as a basis for preparing students to become members of a global community (AUD, 2014).

After looking at sets of graduate employability attributes defined at different parts of the world and going over how graduate employability attributes are considered in higher educational institutions in the UAE, I found it helpful to look at some higher educational institutions’ measures and best practices in how they approached building such attributes.

2.3 Higher Educational Institutions’ Measures to Promote Graduate Employability Attributes

Higher educational institutions adopt a number of approaches to promote employability skills and attributes for their graduates. These approaches include developing graduate employability attributes as part of a study program, internship, extra-curricular experiences, and personal development planning programs. A number of researchers indicated that the development of graduate employability attributes should be integrated in the curriculum (de la Harpe et al., 2000; Kember, 2009), whilst others suggested that students should be entitled to develop these attributes through internships, work experience, or participation in co-curricular and
extra-curricular college experiences (Crebert et al., 2004; Harvey, Moon, & Geall, 1997; Te Wiata, 2001; Virgona, Waterhouse, Sefton, & Sansuinetti, 2003).

Looking at the case of the University of Sydney, which identified itself as a world leader in research in the area of graduate attributes, the University started by incorporating the development of graduate attributes in its strategic directions. This committed it to foster the development of its graduate attributes in order to build graduates who would excel in the world of work and contribute as leaders and agents of social good in society (Institute for Teaching and Learning - The University of Sydney, 2014). Based on evidence driven from the educational research projects within the university and benchmarks to similar initiatives at international universities (Barrie, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2012; Barrie & Prosser, 2004), the university specified two levels of graduate attributes. The first level consisted of three overarching attributes: scholarship, lifelong learning, and global citizenship. The second level is described as five clusters of more specific attributes: research and inquiry; communication; information literacy; ethical social and professional understanding; and personal and intellectual autonomy. The university found that the first level overarching attributes were better developed through students’ participation as active members of the university community through participation in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, and through formal studies. On the other hand, the development of the second level graduate attributes was decided to be left to the different disciplinary domains and to be built within the formal studies through teaching and assessment. Another aspect that was found to be useful is to support the development of graduate attributes through the development of generic foundation skills and abilities. For that the university created a range of foundation skills programs which were offered by university centres such as the library and learning centres.
Research in different parts of the world (Harvey, Locke, & Morey, 2002; Panagiotakopoulos, 2012; Weligamage, 2009) show that universities responded to the need of developing graduate employability attributes with a range of policies, projects and educational activities that aim at fulfilling the goals set. This included incorporating graduate employability attributes in universities’ strategic plans, and adopting a range of approaches to build the needed attributes. These approaches varied from attempts to integrate the development of graduate attributes in the curriculum and attach them to the context of study; to offering specialized workshops and supporting students through integrated work experiences. Some built a structure of mapping from course level to program level to institutional level outcomes in regards to graduate attributes (University of Tasmania, 2004; Zayed University, 2015).

The work experience or internships were found to be important for building those attributes (Crebert et al., 2004), and a number of universities worked on innovative provision of integrated work related activities opportunities within, or external to the programs of study. The inclusion of work integrated learning, peer learning, and industry learning have been advocated as effective approaches (Barrie, Hughes, & Smith, 2009). Many valued the students’ participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and found these to be successful methods for preparing the students with the needed employability attributes (Tchibozo, 2007).

This leads to the understanding that there is no one preferred method and that universities may employ several approaches to develop those attributes, where universities vary in the way they value the development of employability. Some have structured ways where others have relaxed approaches and consider those skills as an implicit outcome of the university experience in general.
Looking at models developed to help students with employability, a comprehensive model that integrated different components was developed by Harvey (2002) and presented in Figure 9. The model incorporated the three main contributors: the Higher Education Institution (HEI), the graduate (student), and the employer. It also defined three core processes that impact on employability: first the pedagogic process that encourages development; second, self-reflection by the student; and third, articulation of experiences and abilities. In the model, the graduate engages in employability development opportunities provided by the institution. It shows that extra-curricular experiences are a considerable contributor to the employability development opportunities and to employability development which includes developing employability attributes.

Figure 9 A model of graduate employability development (Harvey, 2002, p. 4)
It is clear that as the educational reform places considerable value on the development of the graduate employability attributes, (Barnett, 2000; Barrie et al., 2009; Pumphrey & Slater, 2002), this move towards making the graduates’ job ready indicates that educators should find ways to ensure that their graduates build the needed attributes to survive in the new challenging economies. Carnevale and Smith reported that “we are only at the very beginning of the dialogue and experimentation on exactly how we should teach these skills, … the learning curve is gentlest when these skills are introduced to students within a practical framework and appropriate context” (2013, p. 501).

2.4 Research Studies Investigating Graduate Attributes

2.4.1 Conceptualization and ways of development

One of the challenges that face the work on building graduate employability attributes is the inconsistency in the conceptualization and ways of developing those attributes among academics. Barrie (2006) studied academics' conceptions of the generic attributes through a Phenomenographic investigation; his research revealed that academics hold a variety of different understandings of the nature of generic attributes, the teaching and learning of such attributes, and their place amongst the outcomes of a university education. Academics hold qualitatively different understandings of such outcomes which vary along several dimensions. They vary in terms of the nature of the outcomes, ranging from atomistic low-level technical and personal skills, to holistic abilities and aptitudes for learning. They also differ in terms of the relationship between these outcomes and discipline knowledge, and the additive or transformative potential of such attributes.
Barrie (2006) defined four qualitatively distinct understandings of generic graduate attributes by academics involved in his research:

1. Precursor Conception (Level 1): An understanding of generic graduate attributes as basic precursor abilities which provide a foundation to the discipline knowledge of a university education.

2. Complement Conception (Level 2): An understanding of generic graduate attributes as general functional abilities and personal skills that can usefully complement the discipline-specific learning outcomes.

3. Translation Conception (Level 3): An understanding of generic graduate attributes as specialized variants of general skills that are essential in the application of discipline knowledge and the translation of university learning to unfamiliar settings.

4. Enabling Conception (Level 4): A more complex understanding of generic graduate attributes as enabling abilities and aptitudes that lie at the heart of all scholarly learning and knowledge, with the potential to transform the knowledge they are part of and to support the creation of new knowledge and transform the individual.

In further research by Barrie (2007), he collected and analysed data from a group of academics who had been involved in contemporary curriculum development in Australia, and studied the conceptions of how generic graduate attributes were developed. Based on his study he identified six categories of descriptions:

1. Remedial: Some academics expressed an understanding that the generic graduate attributes are not part of the university teaching and are not the responsibility of university teachers. Such attributes were considered to be the responsibility of previous education and are only relevant in a remedial context at the university level.
2. Associated: This understanding suggests that generic graduate attributes are taught as a discrete subset of the teaching in a university course. In this understanding the development of generic graduate attributes involved the teaching of these skills and attributes as an isolated subset of the teaching or as a relevant addition to the usual curriculum.

3. Teaching content: In this understanding the generic graduate attributes are taught in the context of teaching the disciplinary knowledge; under this conception the teaching of the generic attributes is integrated with the teaching of discipline content; a main point here is that the focus is on the teaching rather than learning.

4. Teaching process: In this understanding the generic graduate attributes are taught through the same way the course disciplinary knowledge is taught. Under this conception the process of teaching disciplinary knowledge provide the opportunities for students to be taught generic attributes. They are not necessarily taught as part of the content.

5. Engagement: In this understanding the generic graduate attributes are learned through the way students engage with the course’s learning experiences. In this conception, the development of generic attributes is understood as being about learning not about teaching, with the learner rather than the teacher being in the foreground. This category is similar in many ways to the previous category (teaching process); however, the focus is no longer on the teacher or teaching, it is more about learning.

6. Participatory: In this understanding the generic graduate attributes are learned through the way students participate in the experiences of university life. As with the preceding category (engagement), the learner is the focus of this conception rather than the teacher, and each student’s perceptions and approaches to learning are perceived to
significantly influence the development of generic graduate attributes. In this
conception the learner’s engagement in learning is not restricted to the way the learner
engages in the formal teaching and learning experiences of the course. Instead, what is
foregrounded in this conception is the way the student participates in the broader
experience of university life.

In a study by Jones (2009) to investigate the relationship between the disciplinary context
and the development of generic graduate attributes, she concluded that “One way of
understanding generic attributes is as discipline knowledge in action” (p. 95). In her study she
highlighted the importance of the disciplinary context in the construction of the generic graduate
attributes and considered the de-disciplining and decontextualizing of graduate attributes as
barriers for implementation. She argued that generic skills and attributes are discipline dependent
and are shaped by the social practice of the discipline. A large body of research looked at
development of graduate attributes through engagement in activities, whether they are related to
the discipline of study or are contextualized otherwise, like in cultural or community related
activities (O'Connor et al., 2011; C. Smith & Bath, 2006; Watters & Diezmann, 2013). Pascarella
and Terenzini (1991) indicate that involvement in intellectual and cultural activities may be more
important than other campus activities in developing students’ graduates attributes.

A method that is used frequently and attempts to define areas of graduate attribute
development within existing curricula is ‘curriculum maps’ (Hager & Holland, 2006). However,
some research shows that such curriculum mapping has the potential to foster superficial and
ineffective approaches to the development of graduate attributes (Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2004).

Despite the hard work that educational institutions and researchers have put into
investigating ways of developing graduate employability attributes, Barrie (2005, 2006) reported
that the implementation and uptake of effective initiatives to develop graduate attributes have remained ‘patchy’. Green, Hammer, and Star (2009) reported that the most pressing challenge comes from the considerable confusion by academic staff over how the graduate attributes should be defined and implemented. Jones (2009) confirmed that while attributes such as critical thinking, problem-solving and communication may be highly valued by teachers, what is actually taught depends on an individual academic’s interpretations of generic attributes. These studies revealed a gap between academics’ notions of generic attributes and how those are being considered in the teaching practice. The same gap was realized in a study that involved teaching staff across 16 Australian universities which found that although 73% of academic staff surveyed believed that graduate attributes were important, there was a substantial difference between beliefs and actual emphasis reported in practice (de la Harpe & David, 2012). McLean stated: “As educators and educational administrators, we have definitely not all been singing from the same hymn sheet in terms of graduate attributes!” (McLean, 2010, p. 18).

Green et al. (2009) concluded that the work in developing graduate attributes is multi-faceted and faces different challenges including a range of external pressures and internal management issues that have the potential to affect this important project negatively. They confirmed that to date, stakeholders such as government, business, and universities have underestimated the kind of cultural, institutional and policy changes required to implement the graduate skills agenda.

2.4.2 Pedagogy and graduate attributes development

During the past few decades a significant body of research concentrated on the approaches of teaching and learning. A review by Kember (1997) that included 13 studies on the conceptions of teaching suggested two broad approaches: a teacher centred/content oriented approach, and a
student centred/learning oriented approach. The traditional methods of teaching and learning start from designing programs and courses with the content being the centre of attention. Teachers then decide on the content to cover, how to deliver it, and methods of assessing how well the students comprehended that content; the emphasis in this approach is on ‘what is learned’. International trends in education show a shift from this traditional ‘teacher centred’ approach to a ‘student centred’ approach where the emphasis is on what the students are expected to ‘be able to do’ and how well can they do it by the end of the program of study (Daly, 1994; Moy, 1999).

In a student centred approach, the learning outcomes are designed with an emphasis on the interdisciplinary knowledge and a vigorous encouragement of higher order thinking and information skills like problem solving, access, organization, interpretation and communication of knowledge. The SCANS Report for America 2000 included the statement: “Developing the capacity to do requires multiple and longitudinal opportunities to acquire knowledge, as well, as to apply and refine it” (SCANS Commission, 1991, p. 100).

Torenbeek, Jansen, and Hofman (2011) suggested that opportunities should be created for students to acquire generic skills in the first 10 weeks of the students’ study program; they argue that this not only affects the students’ achievement in the first year but also affects their development as the development of generic skills is a slow process; they further argue that to produce graduates equipped with generic skills, attention must be paid to these from the moment of enrolment. On the other hand, de la Harpe et al. (2000) argued that because knowledge is fundamentally situated and since learning is most likely to be effective when it occurs in context “it is necessary for professional skills to permeate the whole curriculum rather than be isolated in a single or specialized course, avoiding the ‘one-shot’ or inoculation model of teaching” (p. 233).
In a study to examine the influence of active learning experiences on the development of graduate capabilities in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Kember and Leung (2005) found that the teaching approach has a major effect on the development of graduate attributes. Graduate attributes examined included: critical thinking, creative thinking, adaptability, problem solving and others. They concluded that if universities wish to produce graduates with the capabilities required for the knowledge base society they should consider the types of teaching employed in their courses and that “the conventional didactic teaching commonly employed in lecture-based teaching appears to be less effective in developing intellectual capabilities than forms of teaching and learning involving active student participation” (Kember & Leung, 2005, p. 167). Active student participation is not restricted to in-class participation but includes a wide range of teaching and learning practices including group projects, field work, independent learning components, online discussions and other sets of activities. Kember (2009) reported that in spite of the long history of advocacy of the benefits of active learning for specific learning objectives, “the principle of providing practice in the deployment of generic capabilities does not seem to have been widely promulgated as the principal mechanism for their development” (p. 52).

In order to explore the constraints the universities face in advancing student experiences which aim at fostering the development of graduate attributes, The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (2007-2008) funded the National Graduate Attributes Project (National GAP). The project aims at exploring curriculum renewal strategies to achieve graduate attributes in Australian universities. The Issues papers published as part of this project identify graduate attributes as being conceptualized in different ways within different universities and acknowledge that these different understandings have influenced curriculum design. The National GAP team states that the notion of simply adding some generic skills development to existing courses is a somewhat simplistic approach to a complex teaching and learning challenge. The project Issue
paper ‘Conceptualization’ concludes that conceptualizing graduate attributes involves representing “complex outcomes reflecting new notions of ‘knowledge’ or ways of thinking or dealing with the world . . .’ (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2007-8, p. 5).

In looking at teaching models that aim at preparing students to be ready to take an effective and professional role in this dynamically changing global world, an interesting model was proposed by Sullivan and Rosin (2008) in their book ‘A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice’ where they proposed a model and provided practical suggestions for undergraduate teaching that focuses on the interdependence of a liberal education and professional training. They considered the three habits of mind, hand and heart as essential for the formation of today's students. The primary emphasis of the model was teaching for practical reasoning and responsible judgment through critical thinking. It offered a conception of educational purpose based on higher education's utility for enhancing both the practical and the intellectual dimensions of life. Based on the model, the liberal education shall provide the students with the intellectual capacity to make sense of their environment and to locate themselves for a future practical profession by being ready to face challenges through professional judgement. The model values practical reasoning that encourage students to think and act responsibly, with integrity, civility, and in a caring manner.

2.4.3 Examining the relationship between non-classroom activities and the development of graduate attributes

A number of research studies have found the development of graduate attributes to be most effectively achieved within the context of disciplinary knowledge (de la Harpe et al., 2000; Jones, 2009). Others report that the development of the graduate attributes is more likely achieved
when students are engaged with realistic and relevant experiences that demand the integration and practice of these attributes in contexts that the students can relate to and find meaningful (Crosthwaite, Cameron, Lant, & Litster, 2006). Allen, Ramaekers and van der Velden (2005) report that generic competencies are difficult, if not impossible, to learn in a classroom setting and need to be learned in practice. They emphasize that if the curriculum is aimed only at the development of certain occupational skills, the future careers of graduates are put at risk with changes in labour demands, or unexpected circumstances that may negatively affect graduates’ abilities to adapt to the changes and turn them into possibilities.

Barrie (2012) argues that these attributes should result from the usual process of higher education and should not be a set of supplementary outcomes requiring an additional curriculum or program. Yorke and Knight (2006) reported that there is a need to recognize that the co-curricular and extra-curricular achievements of students contribute to a graduate’s employability. Tchibozo (2007) found that extra-curricular involvement assisted students in the successful transition from higher education to the workplace; and reported that the nature of the experience and its meaning for students play a critical role.

Findings of the National GAP project in Australia support both the co-curricular and extra-curricular approaches for building graduates’ employability attributes. The project findings consider the co-curricular approach as a beneficial approach that allows the development of complex graduate attributes throughout a degree program. In this approach co-curricular is looked at as a strand of subjects that run alongside the disciplinary curriculum in which graduate attributes are embedded. This strand may run through all years of a degree where a sequential development of graduate attributes can take place throughout all stages of the program, allowing for a more complex level of attainment of such attributes. One of the limitations of this approach
is the potential for the graduate attributes curriculum to be isolated from the disciplinary curriculum; for students this may result in the perception of a lack of relevance of the graduate attributes curriculum to their disciplinary degree and can promote a decontextualizing of the generic attributes (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2007-8).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) named ten high-impact educational practices that, based on research, suggest positive benefits to students. These practices include a number of non-classroom practices and contain: (1) first-year seminars and experiences, (2) common intellectual experiences, (3) learning communities, (4) writing-intensive courses, (5) collaborative assignments and projects, (6) undergraduate research, (7) diversity/global learning, (8) service learning and community based learning, (9) internships, and (10) capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008).

Universities offer the co-curricular strand of subjects/activities in various ways; typically it is through the provision of generic skills subjects/activities which are available to students across the university or by the provision of a series of generic skills units developed specifically for students in a particular degree. Research shows that students who were engaged in co-curricular campus organizations rated themselves on their leadership traits and relational behaviours higher than students who were not involved in these activities (L. Smith & Chenoweth, 2015). According to the GAP project findings, even in countries with a longer history of graduate attributes implementation, such a co-curricular strand of subjects approach is still recognized as being significantly limited (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2007-8).

Community service is another acknowledged venue for helping students build personal and social attributes and foster values development (Delve, Mintz, & Stewart, 1990; Kuh, 2008). A number of frameworks have been developed to promote student development through
community service learning and to help them develop a better understanding of the needs and realities of the world around them (Delve et al., 1990; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; O'Brien, Freund, Jantzi, & Sinanan, 2014). In an early study by Giles Jr and Eyler (1994), they reported that students who participated in college community service practices showed a significant increase in their belief that they can make a difference. In research on service learning experiences Reed, Christian, Hawley, Reber, and DuBois (2005) found that students who participate in short term service learning experiences in the college develop a sense of social responsibility. Their results indicate that even a minimal service learning experience can have measurable positive impacts on the outlook and attitudes of student participants.

The challenge of all such approaches is that they may not develop all aspects of the graduate attributes required, and may be mistakenly perceived by students and staff members as sufficient practices for the achievement of the set of graduate attributes needed. Care needs to be taken as this can lead to some undesirable outcomes, including the perception of students that the other parts of their university studies do little to build their graduate attributes. Another risk is that staff may consider this co-curricular – including work integrated – learning as a sufficient and adequate means of developing the generic graduate attributes and continue to teach their courses in ways that focus on the transmission of content and not consider ways of developing the necessary graduate attributes in the context of that content (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2007-8; Crebert et al., 2004).

As we examine ways of developing graduate employability attributes it is important to look into the potential that the extra-curricular learning approaches provide. Findings of the National GAP project recognize extra-curricular learning opportunities as having a rich potential for the development of the graduate attributes and that such opportunities can be explicitly
harnessed for this purpose (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2007-8). Initiatives in the extra-curricular category include student participation in conferences, involvement in competitions, student exchange programs, membership in clubs and societies, service learning, governance and public intellectual activities. A challenge is that such opportunities are often only utilized by a select few students despite the attempts in many universities to broaden the access to such experiences through different practices.

Barrie, Hughes, and Smith (2009) stressed that no matter how much effort is put into teaching graduate attributes, strategies do not work unless students actively engage in the development of those attributes. Examples provided for this active engagement is that students choose to develop attributes through extra-curricular activities. In the same report on the National GAP integration and assessment of graduate attributes in curriculum, examples provided by the interview respondents and symposium participants suggested a point system where the students choose to undertake activities in three different categories: extra-curricular learning and training; professional development; and community contribution. Activities are registered and assessed, and when students achieve a certain amount of points, they can receive an award along with their graduation certificate.

In the third round of National GAP symposia, representatives of university student organizations, as members of a student panel in each state in Australia, suggested that universities should improve the connection between the curricular and extra-curricular activities to improve the development of graduate attributes; they also suggested empowering students as agents of their own learning (Barrie et al., 2009).

In a research study that contains the exploration of the key approaches to developing 21st century skills currently in use in England and Wales as well as in some international contexts,
Suto (2013) pointed out that an important perspective in nurturing the 21st century skills is through extra-curricular activities (ECAs) where students seek and thrive on activities outside the traditional classroom setting; she highlighted that whilst the broad benefits of extra-curricular activities are rarely disputed, concerns over inequity and inequality have been raised. Rae (2007) reported that extra-curricular activities, including student clubs, sports activities or societies, are an important aspect of education as they provide opportunities for personal and skills development. Hall, Forrester, and Borsz (2008) found that students involved in campus sports clubs, particularly in leadership roles, enhanced their self-confidence, problem solving, decision making, and communication skills. Research by Tchibozo (2007) shows how UK degree graduates who have been involved in ECA are advantaged in terms of getting work, and that those who engaged in ECA at leadership level had better access to managerial positions.

In their study on gender dynamics in the valuing of ECAs in higher education, Stevenson and Clegg (2012) found that participation in ECA is being used by some students as a very specific and purposeful strategy to enhance the likelihood of gaining future employment. They also found that there are significant gender differences in how students fashion their ECA into future focused employability narratives, and found that male students value their participation in ECAs as a venue for future employment much more than women. They argued that higher education institutions need to support students, in particular women, to recognize the value of participation in ECAs as an approach connected to the development of an employable self.

In their research that involved 6 employers and 664 graduates, Crebert et al. (2004) found that both graduates and employers felt strongly that industry involvement in all aspects of the undergraduate studies was beneficial because it exposed students to ‘real world’ problems and gave them experiences in meeting deadlines and developing time management and teamwork.
skills. They found that involving students in work placement develops their leadership and entrepreneurial skills; it also helps students develop decision making skills and assists in developing high ethical standards.

Generally, these extra-curricular activities potentially suffer from the same limitations as co-curricular schemes. Fully realizing the potential of such experiences is a challenge; it is argued that achieving graduate attributes is a complex goal that requires strategies across all levels of a university’s educational enterprise (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2007-8).

As we talk about co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, it is important to look at the role of mentoring in the process. Mentoring in this context refers to "a formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that person's career and personal development" (Miller, 2002, p. 162). In a review of the value of mentoring based on empirical research studies from different parts of the world published between 1990 and summer 2007, Crisp and Cruz (2009) reported that research findings indicated a positive relationship between mentoring and undergraduate students’ persistence. The study referred to broad aims of student mentoring in higher education and defined three objectives of mentoring: developmental, work related, and subject mentoring. The developmental aims involved personal and social development such as social skills, self-esteem, and motivation. The objectives of work related mentoring included developing knowledge valued by employers, and broadening students’ horizons. The third objective, subject mentoring, referred to knowledge relevant to the field of study and included vocational, academic, and learning skills.
2.4.4 Experiential learning and work integrated learning (WIL)

Participatory learning models including experiential learning and work integrated learning (WIL) have been implemented in many higher educational institutions and their effectiveness in assisting students’ readiness for the job market is evidenced in the education literature (Canto de Loura, 2014; Freudenberg, Brimble, & Cameron, 2010, 2011; Jollands, 2015). WIL includes programs that occur in the workplace and are implemented as a formal aspect of higher education. WIL includes cooperative education, collaborative education, learning in the workplace, learning in the community, clinical education, field education, service learning, mentored employment, university/industry research, supervised work experience, entrepreneurial programs, and simulations (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Freudenberg et al., 2011). Although there are differences in the different models, the common denominator is that the learning is situated within the act of working, whether the work takes place at a recognizable workplace, in the community, or is simulated. WIL may be considered a form of co-curricular educational practice and researchers found that WIL programs help students develop skills such as teamwork, leadership, communication skills, and decision making (Crebert et al., 2004; Freudenberg, Brimble, & Cameron, 2009). It is important to note that these forms of work related experiences, although having considerable value, may only focus on a subset of the graduate employability attributes required. C. Smith (2012) reported that WIL activities aim at developing students’ professional identities and abilities, emphasizing linkages between theory and practice and allowing transfer of learning from university to the workplace and back to university.

On their research on the development of business students’ graduate attributes through WIL, Freudenberg et al. (2011) concluded that engaging students in a specialized work related program that is well integrated, and well managed and structured generated many benefits for the
development of generic skills including interpersonal skills, self-management, learning and adaptability, problem solving, initiative, communication skills, and teamwork. They also reported that involving the students in such programs allowed them to appreciate the link between their academic studies and their future careers more clearly. Other positive results were found in research studies with students in other majors and in different levels of study (Crebert et al., 2004; Freudenberg et al., 2010; Smith-Ruig, 2014). While the body of research outlining the benefits of WIL is steadily growing, a survey by the Australian Council of Educational Research on Student Engagement indicates that there is still long way to go in the adoption of such strategies (Radloff, 2010).

Experiential learning is defined as a “particular form of learning from life experience” (Kolb, 2015, p. xviii) and is often contrasted with lecture and classroom learning. In experiential learning the learner gets into direct contact with what is being studied. Keeton and Tate (as cited in Kolb, 2015) offered the definition “Learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied. It is contrasted with the learner who only reads about, hears about, talks about, or writes about these realities but never comes into contact with them as part of the learning process” (p. xviii). A good body of research shows that experiential learning methods improve students’ positive attitudes to learning, improve students’ communication skills, and is an effective and widely accepted method of building employability attributes (Koponen, Pyörälä, & Isotalus, 2012; Landrum, Hettich, & Wilner, 2010; Lieneck & Greathouse, 2015). In her research on business management undergraduate students, Canto de Loura (2014) found that developing relevant experiential active learning models stood out as being a powerful teaching and learning tool and it seemed to help to enhance students’ critical thinking.
Kolb argued that knowledge results from the interaction between theory and experience and proposed that experiential learning has six main characteristics:

1. Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
2. All learning is relearning. Learning is best facilitated by a process that draws out the students’ beliefs and ideas.
3. Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.
4. Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
5. Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.
6. Learning is the process of creating knowledge that is the result of the transaction between social knowledge and personal knowledge. (Kolb, 2005, 2015)

Kolb's learning theory sets out four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four stage learning cycle. His model differs from others as it offers both a way to understand individual learning styles, which he named the "Learning Styles Inventory" (LSI), and also an explanation of a cycle of experiential learning that applies to all learners.

Kolb’s learning cycle shows a model that consists of four stage: concrete experience (feeling), reflective observation (reflection), abstract conceptualization (thinking), and active experimentation (doing). The learning styles inventory (LSI) identifies four different orientations to learning, depending on the parts of the experiential learning cycle one prefers. The LSI includes: Accommodators, Divergers, Convergers, and assimilators. Accommodators are activists who learn best when they become fully involved, they enjoy simulations and case studies and are adventurous who will try anything. Convergers are pragmatists interested in finding the practical
application of ideas, they learn well in laboratories and in field work. Assimilators are theorists who enjoy working with ideas and constructing models, they are concise and logical and are more concerned with abstract concepts than practical or human implications. Divergers are reflective learners who prefer to learn by observing and making sense of experiences (Kolb, 2015).

Rius, Sicillia, and Gaia-Barriocanal (2008) suggested that in order to construct an intelligent and adaptive learning system, we must consider learning scenarios in a broader vision of learning activities, where we put the students’ own skills and tacit knowledge at work for their own personal knowledge creation. Candy (2000) suggested that teaching approaches that involve experiential and real-world learning, particularly those that encourage students to engage in self-directed and peer-assisted learning, and those which include reflective practice and critical awareness, are best in supporting the development of generic skills.

The Gallup-Purdue study (Gallup, 2015) surveyed more than 30,000 graduates from across the U.S. with a bachelor’s degree or higher and its results indicated that the value of a college education may be determined less by conventional indicators, like a university’s reputation or the amount of money it spends, and more by the less commonly measured factors, such as faculty members’ interaction with students and meaningful experiential learning. The study found that experiential learning opportunities, an internship related to students’ studies, and active involvement in extracurricular activities or a project that took a semester or more to complete have a lasting impact on graduates’ lives.

2.4.5 Communications, teamwork, and globalization

Looking at the graduate employability attributes, communication has always been considered a key attribute. In the work towards the development of generic skills in the UK,
Pumphrey and Slater (2002) reported that “government directives have put significant resources into the development of three Key Skills in particular: communication, application of number and IT” (p. 7). In recent years the closer interaction with customers and the increased tendencies towards teamwork puts particular demands on professional communication skills. Communication skills are required at all levels of occupations with such skills being especially evident amongst higher skilled workers such as managerial, professionals, and associate professionals (Pumphrey & Slater, 2002; Snyder & Forbus, 2014). Communication skills are considered key skills required in the job market (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007; Ortiz, Region-Sebest, & MacDermott, 2016). A large body of research investigated ways of developing communication skills, ranging from traditional writing, reading, listening, speaking, and business communication courses to the growing recognition of discipline-specific communication demands and the more inventive ways like involving students in discussion groups, compiling personal portfolios, constructive participation in meetings, role plays, and field work (Conn, Lake, G., Bilszta, & Woodward-Kron, 2012; He, Mackey, O’Brien, Ng, & Arthur, 2011; Lieneck & Greathouse, 2015; Maguire & Pitceathly, 2002; Morgan, 1997; Riemer, 2002). Ortiz et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of oral communication, particularly in the areas of basic communication competencies (grammar), people skills/audience awareness, confidence, and professionalism. Remier (2002) reported that “the incorporation of several components of the fundamentals of emotional intelligence in education will facilitate advanced communication skills” (p. 99).

The progressively complex work practices in today’s business world require a matching increase in communication abilities and the ability to be an effective team player (Pumphrey & Slater, 2002). Teamwork involves supporting others, solving conflicts, exchanging information, and coordinating activities. Kohn and O’Connell (2015) identified nine practices for powerful
teamwork: expanding self-awareness, practising empathy, maintaining proper boundary, criticizing artfully, and accepting different people styles. In their study on bridging the gap between industry and higher education in regards to student teamwork skills, Dunne and Rawlins (2000) recommended explicit training of both students and staff in teamwork skills, the strengthening of professional development in teaching skills, and effective partnerships with external bodies.

The growth in team working requirements and new organizational frameworks draws on other generic skills, such as higher levels of task discretion, communication, initiative, and ability to work in the global business market and deal with people from different cultures (Pumphrey & Slater, 2002). The work environment demands that people cooperate effectively with groups of co-workers. These co-workers may differ in race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other ways (Guffey & Loewy, 2013). Globalization and workplace diversity are important factors that are part of the business world today and it is essential for the worker to be able to work effectively with colleagues and customers from around the world. For this reason it is crucial to enable students to expand their frame of reference and to acquire new international knowledge and competencies (Stier, 2003). The more the student knows about other cultures in general and their own culture in particular, the better they will be able to adapt to an intercultural perspective (Young & Chapman, 2010). Hytten and Bettez (2008) reported that teaching about globalization is a central component to education for critical thinking and social justice; and that teaching about globalization can help students to develop the ability to unlearn dominant assumptions and ideologies and to create more critical habits of thinking and social engagement. They concluded that it provides students with a better sense of the context within which they live and work. Muresan (2011) suggested that the interdisciplinary and intercultural perspectives in the process of generating knowledge should represent a horizontal component of tertiary education. Research
by Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) revealed a model of intercultural communication competence in which positive attitudes toward culturally different people contribute to the motivation to communicate with these people and lead to experiences that enhance intercultural communication competence.

Stewart and Johnson (2009) noted that being able to apply diverse perspectives to a problem or an issue allows groups to be able to consider a range of alternatives and solutions, thus enhancing problem solving and decision making.

As per a 21st century skills grouping, communication and teamwork are categorized under ‘Ways of Working’; and creativity and innovation are categorized under ‘Ways of Thinking’ (Bowman, 2010). This leads us to look at ways of developing creativity and innovation in the next section.

### 2.4.6 Creativity and innovation

Creativity is the ability to produce work that is both novel and appropriate (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). De Bono (1995) described twelve diagnostic, analytical, and evaluative processing skills that contribute to creative thinking, these are: (1) recognition, (2) interpreting clues, (3) concept formation, (4) generating possibilities, (5) judgment, (6) developing alternatives, (7) comparison and choice, (8) analysis, (9) perception, (10) values and feelings, (11) design, and (12) problem solving. Looking at developing creativity through non-classroom activities, Kuh et al. (1991) reported that schools of higher education can implement practices that promote educationally purposeful out-of-class activities within the context of their campus communities, and these practices can help develop faculty and student creativity and initiative. Creativity can be supported through a wide array of disciplines and activities; art has creative, ontological and
epistemological potential (Grierson, 2011). “Craft presents a rich opportunity to explore creativity because it provides circumstances in which an individual can easily observe and experiment with the materials, processes and their interplay” (Cordes-Spence & Beach, 2010, p. 184). Developing and supporting creativity can be done through science and engineering activities (Charyton, 2015). Creativity has impact both on the societal and economic levels, at the societal level creativity can lead to new scientific findings, new movements in art, new inventions, and new social programs. In the economic side creativity creates new products or services which create new jobs (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Creativity and innovation are among the important graduate attributes that are required by the job market (Bowman, 2010; Commonwealth of Australia, 2007; SCANS Commission, 1991).

2.5 Graduate Employability Attributes - Employer Perspective

It is important to consider the employer perspective as a main stakeholder in relation to graduate employability attributes. The main concern of employers is finding employees who have the employability or job-readiness skills that are required to help them fit into the work environment and perform well in it (J. Robinson, 2000). The technological and economic changes in the past few decades changed the nature of the employment requirements by increasing demands for graduates who possess employability skills like professional communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and information literacy (de la Harpe et al., 2000). Employers of the 21st century are generally willing to provide job-specific training but wish to find graduates who possess the generic employability attributes which allow them to meet the needs and challenges of today’s competitive market.
Unlike the job, or occupation specific skills, the generic employability attributes, as the name implies, are generic in nature and cut across all industry types and the different levels of jobs. Although there is no general agreement about those skills classifications, and economic theory does not provide any clear categorization (Garcia-Aracil & Van der Velden, 2008). J. Robinson (2000) reported that these skills are generally aggregated in three sets: basic academic skills, higher order thinking skills, and personal qualities Table 2.3 shows details of the skills in each set as categorized by the Department of Labor in Washington in the SCANS Report for America 2000.

Table 2.3 Employability skills categorized by skills sets (SCANS Commission, 1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Academic Skills</th>
<th>Higher Order Thinking skills</th>
<th>Personal Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Punctual and Efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Self-directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Good Work Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptable and Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Have Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employers also report that failure to equip young people with the job readiness skills critical for performing well in their jobs is equivalent to placing barriers in their career path and may have extensive implications in the economies of the countries. Young and Chapman (2010)
reported that employers in today’s economy tend to favour individuals with good generic competencies, they pointed out that nations who focus on developing such competencies place their citizens at a distinct advantage.

The perception from business, government and education leaders of 50 nations at the Bahrain 2010 Global Education conference is that “the global achievement gap between what industry expects and what education delivers is not caused by a lack of content, it is caused by a failure to provide opportunity for creativity, collaboration, context and practical application” (Cornelius, 2011, p. 50).

The Abu Dhabi government, via the Centre of Excellence in the General Secretariat of the Executive Council (GSEC) in Abu Dhabi, identified and published a set of leadership competencies that have been considered important in directly impacting the success of employees and organizations in the country. These competencies are considered a critical component of the Abu Dhabi government employee performance management system. The set of competencies identified are: teamwork; communication; performance orientation; creativity and innovation; problem solving and decision making; people management; and strategic thinking. Three additional competencies have been added to the leadership competency framework, these are: living with values, self-management, and customer focus (Kraebber & Greenan, 2012). A listing of these competencies and their descriptions are in Figure 10.
In summary, employers find the basic academic skills important for good job performance are that new employees should have the ability and willingness to learn, and should be able to communicate effectively in the work environment including reading and listening to instructions, dealing with customers, writing reports, and presenting their work. The higher order thinking
skills are considered crucial for employees desiring to do well and advance in their jobs, for example, thinking critically, acting logically, and the ability to evaluate situations and make decisions; these skills are important and desired skills in the job market. Employees also find it important that the employers have the appropriate personal skills that would allow them to see themselves as part of a team; work in diverse cultures and with different types of people; have a positive attitude; and are accountable for their decisions and actions (J. Robinson, 2000).

### 2.6 The Skills Gap

A wealth of empirical research and government reports highlighted the extent and nature of employer dissatisfaction with graduate skills and attributes, and questions have been raised in a number of countries about the level of the acquirement of the generic graduate skills/attributes and if the graduates have sufficiently developed those attributes to be effective contributors to the knowledge-based economy (Business Council of Australia, 2006; Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council [BIHECC], 2007; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Robles, 2012; SCANS Commission, 1991). The current situation was not found to be adequate and as a result universities worldwide have been asked to work on the issue of developing the generic graduate attributes of their graduates. The difference between the skills needed on the job and those possessed by higher education graduates is referred to as the skills gap. One of the challenges in measuring the skills gap for generic graduate attributes is the difficulty surrounding the accurate assessment of the attainment of those attributes as this has a highly subjective interpretative component (Pumphrey & Slater, 2002).

A study based on a major survey involving more than 36,000 graduates from 11 European countries – namely Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Finland, France, Germany, The Netherlands,
Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom – revealed interesting information about the acquired competencies of HE graduates and the required competencies of the job market (Garcia-Aracil & Van der Velden, 2008). The study is based on graduates’ responses – where they were asked to indicate, on an ordered scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very great extent) – to the strength of a given competence (the acquired level of competence) at the time of graduation and the extent to which this given competence was required in their current work (the required level of competence). Figure 11 below shows the list of competencies considered and the differences between the acquired and required competencies. The study shows that graduates reported lower levels of acquired competence than the required competence by the job market in almost all competencies except for broad general knowledge, field-specific theoretical knowledge, learning abilities, and foreign language proficiency.
The skills gap does not necessarily mark failure, but is a consequence of the dynamic vibrant economies which cause changes in the needs of the skills required in the workforce. This situation in turn depends on the importance of preparing individuals and working with the education and training systems to be sufficiently flexible and able to adapt to the changing needs in order to attend to those gaps as they emerge (University of Warwick Institute for Employment Research (IER) & Cambridge Econometrics (CE), 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Acquired Mean</th>
<th>Acquired Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Required Mean</th>
<th>Required Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Difference (Acq - Req)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>-1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning, coordinating and organizing</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking responsibilities, decisions</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>-0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working under pressure</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic reasoning</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving ability</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral communication skills</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness, decisiveness, persistence</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in a team</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>-0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding complex social, organizational</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and technical systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documenting ideas and information</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy, attention to detail</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective thinking, assessing one's own work</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working independently</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting personally involved</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
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<td>Analytical competencies</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-disciplinary thinking/knowledge</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field-specific knowledge of methods</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance, appreciating different points of</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty, integrity</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication skills</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power of concentration</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad general knowledge</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field-specific theoretical knowledge</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning abilities</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language proficiency</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11. Differences between the acquired and required competencies (Garcia-Aracil & Van der Velden, 2008, p. 223)
Research on skills gaps and required graduate attributes revealed that employers cited interpersonal communication skills as a key skill for graduates in today’s market; the research also revealed that both students and employers reported that these skills were not adequately built during study programs (Ortiz et al., 2016; Robles, 2012). In a study that examined the perceptions and expectations of students and employers about the need for accounting graduates to develop a broader set of skills to be able to pursue a career in the accounting profession, findings indicated that both students and employers reported that many of the ‘essential’ non-technical and professional skills and attributes are not being developed sufficiently in university programs (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008).

Confidence and assertiveness were identified among the most valued graduate capabilities by employers (Garcia-Aracil & Van der Velden, 2008; I. Thomas, Barth, & Day, 2013). Moon (2009) referred to assertiveness as the capacity to cope better with challenges. She reported that when you are more assertive you can ask for what you want or need, you are able to stand up for yourself without undue anxiety, and you can express feelings reasonably openly. Moreover, assertiveness leads to building a sense of self-confidence which then helps in facing up to issues in life, and people with a reasonable level of assertiveness are more likely to get what they need to be successful, and will feel less stuck in some situations (Moon, 2009).

The Arab World Competitiveness Report 2013, produced by the World Economic Forum in conjunction with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), found Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to be the most competitive economies in the Arab World and that these countries still face a severe skills gap that hinders their economic development (The World Economic Forum & The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2013). Pearson’s Regional Director for Qualifications, Mark Andrews, commented on a research study
undertaken by Pearson in the causes of youth unemployment and under-employment in the Arab World by explaining that although possessing qualifications, graduates do not have the capabilities employers are seeking. He stated that industry consultations told them that: “organizations across all sectors find it difficult to find employees with valuable workplace skills, such as acceptable English language, critical thinking, written and oral communication, and importantly, an attitude that allows for success in a competitive work environment” (Arab News, 2013, para. 9). With the reported skills gap in the Arab countries, it is important to look at development of a much needed human capacity in the area; it is vital that we consider the women’s sector of the workforce in the Arab countries as according to the 2013 World Bank Middle East and North Africa (MENA) development report, the participation of females in the labour force in the MENA region is lower than the OECD average by 47% (The World Bank, 2013).

2.7 Women in Conservative Cultures with a Focus on the UAE

The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia defines culture as “the integrated system of socially acquired values, beliefs, and rules of conduct which delimit the range of accepted behaviours in any given society” (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2013, Para 1). Culture is then looked at as an important factor that affects the shaping of people’s personalities, beliefs, and subsequent actions. Conservative cultures are those that favour traditional views and values and tend to oppose change. When looking at women in the Middle East, Crocco, Prevez and Kat (2009) stated that “located at the crossroads of many cultural, religious, geographic, and economic influences, today’s Middle Eastern women have had long, multifaceted, and complex histories”
Traditionally the role of women has been linked to raising children and performing household chores, restricting their involvement in the public domain and limiting their participation to few fields like education and nursing (Rosaldo & Zimbalist, 1974). The role of women in the society has changed dramatically in the past few decades, with women starting to assume more responsibilities that are related to the public sphere rather than being limited to the domestic sphere (Metcalfe, 2011; Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2003). This has created new challenges which some communities have been able to cope with but others are still struggling to accept.

Coleman (2002) argued that stereotyping is a factor that hinders women’s career progress and participation in the workforce with a “taken-for-granted belief that there exists a ‘natural order’: male leaders and female followers” (p. 79). This leads us to talk about patriarchy which is a factor that affects the woman’s role and participation in the public domain. Patriarchy is a form of social organization where the father or the male head of the family have the supreme legal and economic authority over females and other family members. Patriarchy existed in various forms in different parts of the world; the tribal social structure in the Middle East formed a perfect set-up for a patriarchal organization which is still found in many Arab countries (Moghadam, 1992).

When talking about the Middle East, it is important to consider religion as a key factor that plays a significant role in the lives of its people and their decisions. Crocco et al. (2009) stated that “Middle Eastern women are as much a product of their cultures as of religions” (p. 107). Although the teachings of Islam addressed specifically the rights of women and granted them rights to seek education, work, and own property, many practices that hinder their progress
are still in place in many areas of the Middle East; most of these practices have been inherited from ancient civilizations and have been incorrectly attributed to Islam. Crocco et al. (2009) stated that the “purportedly ‘religiously grounded’ restrictions placed on women within certain societies have little or nothing to do with the teachings of Islam. More often they are a function of socioeconomic and political factors” (p. 110)

Research shows that although cultural norms and values play an important role in influencing people’s behaviour, situational factors have an important effect on the extent of such behaviours (Briley & Wyer, 2001). As this study takes place in the UAE it is important to look into the situational factors that affect the development of women in the area. It is also beneficial to look at students’ epistemological paradigms as this helps educators become more aware of how to approach the teaching and learning by considering students’ favoured ways of knowing. By understanding students’ preferred ways of knowing educators become more aware of how to approach students’ development and how to better help them grow towards a deeper understanding of themselves as learners and as future employees (Hofer, 2008). In a study on the preferred ways of knowing of Emirati female students Khine and Hayes (2010) found that Emirati females, like many other women in the world, tend to have a preference for ‘connected’ over ‘separate’ ways of knowing. Connected knowers are empathetic and receptive, they like to be attached to others; their aim is to understand and be understood, and generally their thinking can’t be detached from their feeling. On the other hand separate knowers can be described as critical and detached: they seek to convince and be convinced and can be ‘argumentative’.

The exploration of the epistemological beliefs of individuals within any society is complex and is informed by the cultural values of the society. Hofstede (1984) identified four cultural dimensions that are useful to consider: power distance, collectivism versus individualism,
uncertainty avoidance, and femininity versus masculinity. With respect to women’s right to work, in the majority of the Arab Gulf States this is granted via the constitution; however, the interpretation of employment laws is guided by cultural practices, which reflect a belief in protecting women and creating an appropriate and decent work environment. Education in general is gender-segregated in the Arab Gulf States, and some workplaces are expected to be segregated as well, resulting in restricting many women from engaging in a number of professional roles (Metcalf, 2011). In the UAE community “women live in a family-based, patriarchal, Islamic society where gender-roles are strictly defined and kinship is highly emphasized” (Gallant & Pounder, 2008, p. 29). Exposure to men through the work environment may be seen as harmful to a UAE woman’s reputation, thus, efforts to keep men and women separate for moral reasons constrain women’s work opportunities; for example, jobs that require the woman to meet customers outside the office or travel with men may be considered inappropriate. Added to that, women are generally encouraged to choose careers that are perceived to be more suitable for women such as education or office work, which limits the career choices for the UAE women and accounts for the relatively low level of UAE female participation in the labour force (Gallant & Pounder, 2008).

In his research on the development and empowerment of women in the Arab Gulf States, Metcalf (2011) argued that models of national human resource development systems that address women’s development need to illustrate the complexities of gendered cultural practices and gendered power relations. In conservative cultures social factors like the authority of a male guardian who makes decisions on behalf of the woman, or lack of mobility and access to resources are all important factors that play key roles in the woman’s progress, employment opportunities, and advancement at work.
Realizing the need for the empowerment of women as a major factor for development in the country, the government in the UAE took serious steps to provide women with the necessary tools to remove the social barriers that hinder their full integration into the workforce. Under the UAE constitution, women enjoy the same legal status, claim to titles, access to education and social welfare, and the same right to practice professions as men (Embassy of the UAE in Washington DC, 2010). Moreover the UAE Constitution stresses the importance of equality for all citizens. Article 14 states: “Equality, social justice, and providing safety, security, and equal opportunities to all citizens are pillars on which the community stands. Solidarity and shared sympathies are close links that tie the Emirates together” (The UAE Cabinet, 2013, p. 6). Under the UAE Labour Law men and women have equal employment rights. Moreover, a National Strategy for the Advancement of Women, a joint initiative with UN Women, the UN entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women, has been in place since 2007. This strategy provided a road map for the empowerment of women in eight main areas: education, health, the economy, law-making, the environment, the social domain, information, political participation and decision making; the strategy was updated later to cover the 2013 to 2017 period (UAEinteract, 2014). The UNDP Human Development report 2013 shows that UAE ranks 40 out of 148 countries in the 2012 Gender Inequality Index (GII) (UNDP, 2013). In 2006 one woman was elected to the Federal National Council (FNC) in the UAE, and seven additional women were appointed to be council members. Twenty-two percent of women were nominated to the lower house, higher than the UK and USA (Metcalf, 2011).

Although considerable steps have been made, there is an awareness that the work is still at the beginning and the government is committed to improving its gender equality strategies, with raising awareness through education being one of them (UAE Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs (MFNCA), 2010).
According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2012, the UAE ranks number one in terms of educational achievement. This places the UAE equal with developed nations such as Australia, Finland, France, Norway, and the United States in this regard. In fact, women in the UAE are gaining places at universities at a higher rate than men and they often outperform men in academic achievement. The UAE holds the top position in the Middle East and North Africa region in regards to investments in increasing women’s education levels. The success of integrating women into the economy to gain the benefit of this investment is still to be reached. The UAE holds the top position among the Arab countries in regards to women’s education and is the only country from the region that has closed the educational attainment gap (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2012).

With education being more widely available for women nowadays, the quality of education is a significant factor in empowering women and preparing them to face the new challenges. Quality of education does not cover only the subject matter but extends to qualities like teamwork, communication skills, assertiveness, self-confidence and other qualities that are needed to ensure that women are capable of balancing their life challenges and stand up for their own decisions.

2.8 Women’s Entrepreneurship

Research shows that pathways of entrepreneurship as a career option for women increased considerably in different parts of the world (Bledsoe & Oatsvall, 2010; De Bruin, Brush, & Welter, 2006; Maden, 2015). Looking at the number of women entrepreneurs in the UAE, it has been reported that those compare well with other Arab Gulf States but lag behind other countries.
with similar levels of GDP per capita such as Norway, Finland, and Singapore (Goby & Erogul, 2011).

2.8.1 Motivation, barriers, and culture

Individual, social, and environmental factors all have a direct bearing on the entrepreneurial process in terms of motivation, innovation, continuity, and expansion (Goby & Erogul, 2011). Among the common challenges that female entrepreneurs face in different parts of the world are unequal opportunities, poor credibility, lack of recognition, family responsibilities, skills deficits, gender segregation, and poor access to financial capital and networks (OECD, 1998, 2000).

Studies of entrepreneurship have determined that culture is a major situational variable in understanding entrepreneurship; and that the type of ideas and the way in which the entrepreneurs come up with them, along with the obstacles faced and the way entrepreneurs address them, are all context driven (Dechant & Lamky, 2005; Hoffmann, Junge, & Malchow-Moller, 2015; Madichie & Gallant, 2012; Tlaiss, 2014).

Women’s reasons for starting businesses are often categorized as ‘push’ or ‘pull’ reasons. Push reasons are driven by negative circumstances such as situational factors like lack of employment opportunities or the need for flexible work hours because of family obligations. The pull reasons are fostered by positive opportunities like the need for self-fulfilment, or the desire for achievement. Pull and push factors are not exclusive of each other. Thus a woman may choose to start her own business because of a desire for achievement but also because she needs a flexible work schedule because of her family responsibilities (S. Robinson, 2001).
In a study on a group of Arab women entrepreneurs in Bahrain and Oman, the results show that the motivational factors that drove both Bahraini and Omani women entrepreneurs were primarily categorized as pull factors. The women were mainly motivated by a need for achievement and self-fulfilment as well as desire to improve the society. The study subjects may have chosen self-employment as a viable option to meet their need for achievement in a society imbued with organizational and cultural constraints (Dechant & Lamky, 2005). Similar findings were indicated in a study on women entrepreneurs in Turkey where the motivational factors were: being independent in one’s decisions and actions, and working for the good of society. On the other hand, finding and managing financials emerged as the most important problem for women entrepreneurs in Turkey despite the existence of various support mechanisms (Maden, 2015).

With respect to cultural effects, Hofstede (2001) reported that the sociocultural fabric of society shapes its social and political institutions, which reflect and reinforce values, beliefs, and a wide range of human behaviour including that of entrepreneurship. Studies suggested that high power distance (like what is experienced in the Arab World) promotes entrepreneurial activity and influences the decision to start a new business (Mitchell, Smith, Seawright & Morse, 2000 as cited in Tlaiss, 2014). Studies on women as entrepreneurs in the Middle East highlighted the significance of the impact of culture on women entrepreneurs in the area and found that the local women entrepreneurs were pulled and pushed into entrepreneurship in a complex manner that highlights the interplay between macro sociocultural, economic and religious factors (Dechant & Lamky, 2005; Tlaiss, 2014, 2015).

The effects of the restricted sociocultural practices were evidenced in a study by Dechant and Lamky (2005); although participants in the study were well-educated they had limited real-world business experience and lacked key managerial skills important for running a business.
Moreover, the exclusion of women entrepreneurs from informal networks was an obstacle in accessing a wide and diverse network of contacts in order to connect to equity capital markets (Tlaiss, 2014). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted the importance of networking for entrepreneurs as it increases the flow of information, serves as an exchange of information and experiences, facilitates the reconfiguring of relationships with suppliers, allows for the sharing of overhead costs and is a means of accessing technology and increasing familiarity with business cultures in foreign markets (OECD, 2000). The OECD study also reported that “there is evidence, however, that women entrepreneurs may not exploit to the same degree as men the benefits that come from networking with other business owners working in similar sectors and at different levels in the supply chain around the world” (OECD, 2000, p. 4).

Looking at the role of education in facilitating women’s engagement in entrepreneurship, a large body of research confirmed that education plays an important role in equipping women with skills required for entrepreneurial activities (Dechant & Lamky, 2005; Goby & Erogul, 2011; Maden, 2015; Tlaiss, 2014). As an example, business education provides students with the technical tools like accounting, marketing, and finance. Education also can help reorient individuals toward self-reliance, independent action, creativity, and flexible thinking (Goby & Erogul, 2011).

### 2.8.2 Women’s entrepreneurship in the United Arab Emirates

The UAE government introduced several initiatives to support and increase women’s entrepreneurship. These include the establishment of businesswomen’s councils in each of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry throughout the seven emirates that constitute the UAE. These centres provide training on entrepreneurship, help in creating feasibility studies, and
provide consulting services for setting up businesses including securing finance for small and medium sized ventures. The support includes training programs in accounting, marketing, administration, management, and legal issues to prepare women to be successful entrepreneurs. One such program is training potential female entrepreneurs in collaboration with two major UAE educational institutes, Zayed University and the Higher Colleges of Technology (Goby & Erogul, 2011). Numerous other initiatives were supported by the UAE government to encourage women’s entrepreneurship, including the compilation of a commercial directory for businesswomen in the UAE in 2005, dedicating a special floor for business transactions for women at the Abu Dhabi Securities Market (ADSM) with the aim of encouraging UAE women citizens to participate in the securities market, creating the Emirates Business Women Award (EBA), and establishing a women-centric scheme known as the ‘Sougha’ initiative to support a revival of home-based Emirati handicraft entrepreneurial ventures by women (‘sougha’ means souvenir in the local Emirati dialect).

Despite the continuous government support, women’s entrepreneurial potential in the UAE remains significantly untapped and fails to match up with the government’s efforts (Madichie & Gallant, 2012; Mulnix, Beede, & López-Mulnix, 2014). Tlaiss (2014, 2015) suggested that culture is a key factor when it comes to the barriers experienced by women entrepreneurs in the UAE, noting that cultural values and contextual factors may provide an explanation of the low rates of women’s entrepreneurship. In similar vein, Goby and Erogul (2011) identified four key areas that affect the success of UAE female entrepreneurship: “(1) the legislative attempts to enhance female entrepreneurial achievement; (2) the socio-cultural realities constraining women in business ventures; (3) the impact of the UAE’s strongly collectivist culture on business networking among women; (4) UAE women's motivation for entrepreneurial endeavor given the abundant options for more secure employment” (p. 329)
2.8.3 Entrepreneurship and role models

Research studies proposed links between role models and entrepreneurial intentions, with many entrepreneurs claiming that their business start-up decision and the development of their business had been influenced by other entrepreneurs who are seen as role models (Bosma, Hessels, Schutjens, Praag, & Verheul, 2012; Hoffmann et al., 2015; Rametse, 2014). While people are extensively and increasingly exposed to entrepreneurial role models through the media, these ‘icons’ are seldom considered role models for entrepreneurs: “entrepreneurial role models tend to be next-door examples rather than more remote icons” (Bosma et al., 2012, p. 422).

Even outside entrepreneurship, research shows that women actively draw on role models and that role models are used to develop “ideal selves” for future career success (Gibson, 2004; Singh, Vinnicombe, & James, 2006). Moreover there was evidence that ambitious young women tend to use a selection of role models in order to guide them through their careers and build appropriate identities (Gibson, 2004). In other research women highlighted the prominent role played by role models on their personalities (Rametse, 2014).

2.9 Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is a theory of adult learning that “refers to transforming a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 20); the theory is about how adults interpret and make meaning from their experiences. Clark (1993) stated that “Transformational learning shapes people; they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize.” (p. 47). Research found that transformative learning has three core components: (1) Mental construction of experience: this happens through engaging with life
experiences and realizing that there are opportunities for a change in perspective or behaviour. (2) Critical reflection: this happens when the individual not only participates in experiences but critically reflects about these experiences. (3) Development/action: this happens when individuals explore options for forming new roles, relationships, or actions (Mezirow, 1991).

Wortham and Jackson (2013) reported that education is a fuzzy set of processes that happen through involvement in formal and informal learning events and institutions. Their review of educational Constructionism revealed that educational institutions and processes are in some cases powerfully restraining and in others powerfully liberating and that Constructionist research in education has the potential to help practitioners make their work more liberating. They concluded that constructionist accounts can help students, educators, parents, and others appreciate the power that education has to construct more productive identities for students; and reported that constructionist approaches to education can help education better achieve its transformative potential.

Madsen and Cook (2010) conducted research on transformative learning experiences for female Emirati students. The study investigated potential influences that affected the transformation of female Emirati students during their college years. Their study surveyed 294 students at Abu Dhabi Women’s College in the UAE and results show that transformative learning experiences (for this group of students) can lead to a redefinition of the role of work for women and their broader role in the Emirati society. The predictive factors explored in their study were: learning assignments and activities, influential individuals, and outside college-related influences. The results found that “all factors were significantly correlated with student transformation” (p. 140). My study builds on Madsen and Cook’s research and uses a qualitative approach to investigate the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and
building students’ graduate employability attributes. I argue that the process of building graduate employability attributes would be considered a transformative learning experience for this group of students.

2.10 Summary

Despite the fact that graduate employability attributes comprise more than just taught knowledge, the researcher team in the DeSeCo Project suggested that competencies can be learned within a favourable learning environment. They state that “at the center of the framework of key competencies is the ability of individuals to think for themselves as an expression of moral and intellectual maturity and to take responsibility for their learning and for their actions” (DeSeCo, 2005, p. 8).

Achieving this goal is a complex task that requires educators to consider various and possibly creative models. Although I value linking the development of the graduate employability attributes to the disciplinary courses and mapping those to program outcomes, I argue that this should not only take place in the classroom but should be extended to non-classroom educational experiences. In this study I stress the fact that there are groups of students who require creative models or possibly extra work on certain facets of the educational experience to facilitate building the needed graduate employability attributes.

Supporters and advocates of the 21st century skills movement argue for the need for reforms in the educational institutions to respond to the social and economic needs of students and society in the 21st century (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). Barnett confirmed that claims of graduate attributes contributed to the many forces that influenced reshaping higher education (2000). Crebert et al. (2004) suggested that what universities should ensure is that all their students have
the opportunity to learn and develop generic skills and abilities during their undergraduate study. Although there has been ample research on the topic, there is need to research the development of graduate attributes in the Middle East context, particularly with female students who may live in restrictive cultures.

In summary, work on graduate employability attributes defines teaching and learning as a process where not only subject related skills and knowledge are acquired but also, and more importantly, practices, values, and attitudes which are deemed necessary for building the graduates of tomorrow are to be nurtured. This indicates a considerable extension to the educational institution’s responsibility, and challenges those institutions and researchers in the field to work to build the students’ graduate employability attributes. It is important to consider the different cultural and societal norms in place and to research practices that may be more fitting to the different epistemological beliefs of students, as well as the epistemological values of institutions in different parts in the world. In this study the setting of women in a conservative culture is considered, and students’ lived experiences will be studied to construct a deeper knowledge and understanding of this topic. The work then may inform a possible model for nurturing the development of employability graduate attributes for this group of students and even similar groups in other contexts.

In the next chapter I shed light on the UAE, its demographics, and the Emirati family social structure. I then present an overview of the education in the UAE with a focus on women’s education and give an overview of the institution where this study took place.
Chapter 3 - The Research Context

3.0 Introduction

This research takes place in one of the federal higher educational institutions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). UAE has had a unique experience of development as within about four decades (1970 – 2010) the region was transformed from a desert inhabited by Bedouin tribes to a major international business centre and one of the most modern countries in the world (Vine, Al Abed, & Hellyer, 2010). As a result of the discovery of oil and the wise investment of money, the country enjoyed a rapid development. This rapid change in trade, industry, construction, and processes was not met with comparable changes in the local Emirati social and cultural traditions and family structure. The UAE nowadays has a diverse multicultural society, is considered one of the most liberal Arab Gulf States, and is known for accepting and respecting different cultures and belief systems. In this highly diversified society, the national Emirati people endeavour to maintain their unique cultural identity. They are traditionally conservative, and many national women are still overprotected and do not participate in the workforce or in public life. It is important to note that there has been a rapid expansion of women’s education and societal roles (Statistics Centre - AD, 2015) and that the leadership in the country realizes the importance of the role of women in building the nation and consequently supports their empowerment and development.
3.1 The United Arab Emirates - UAE

Although there is evidence of extensive human occupation in the area from 5500 BC (Potts, 2001), the United Arab Emirates as a nation-state has only been in existence since 1971. It was officially formed through the federation of seven existing sheikhdoms: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qawain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah (Al Abed, 2001). The country is predominantly desert located on the southeast tip of the Arabian Peninsula, close to the entrance of the Arabian Gulf. It borders Oman to the east, Saudi Arabia to the south and west, and shares sea borders with Qatar and Iran. This makes it geographically and culturally located at an inner place in the Middle East and it is part of the Arab culture area. Islam is the official religion in the country and Arabic is the official language. The UAE occupies an area of about 82,880 square kilometres; of which, Abu Dhabi accounts for 87% of the country’s total landmass. Abu Dhabi is the capital of the UAE; it is the largest and richest emirate and is the state’s centre of political, industrial, and cultural activities. The UAE is a member of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Not long ago, the UAE was a land of desert inhabited by nomadic Bedouin tribes, with some fishing villages and date farms. Abu Dhabi at that time consisted of several hundred palm huts, a few coral buildings and the Ruler’s Fort. Inhabitants of the area lived a harsh life with little resources where pearl diving and fishing were the main forms of subsistence. Most people lived in houses built from the branches of date palm trees; this type of housing was used until the late 1960s. In the early days there was no running water or electricity, and water was salty and came from wells which were often located some distance from the settlements. Fresh, clean water was not available until the 1960s when the first desalination plant was built. The discovery of oil in 1958 brought radical change to the area; revenues have been invested in the country and have
helped to facilitate a remarkable transformation. The UAE today bears very little resemblance to that of 50 years ago; it is now a major international tourist and business centre as well as one of the very modern, stable and safe countries in the world. The per capita GDP in the UAE has been one of the highest in the world for several years (Starr, 2001; The World Bank, 2016a; Zayed University, n.d.).

### 3.1.1 Demographics of the UAE

The UAE population has witnessed massive increases since the establishment of the Federation on 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 1971. The UAE population was estimated at 248,000 in 1970, increased to about one million in 1980, and went up to nearly three million in the year 2000. It then increased to about eight million in 2010, and reached more than nine and a half million by 2016 (The World Bank, 2016b; UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2012b). The following figure shows the population growth from 1968 to 2016.

![UAE Population Chart](image)

**Figure 12. UAE population 1968 to 2016**
This rapid growth rate, which is among the highest in the world, is attributable to the improved healthcare, enhanced environment and education systems and increased per capita income, but more importantly, to a large and ever-increasing immigrant workforce. The total number of UAE nationals (Emiratis) in 2010 was about one million, comprising no more than 12.5% of the total population and making the Emiratis a minority in their own country; the rest of the population are expatriate workers from many countries around the world (Vine et al., 2010). About two-thirds of the UAE’s non-Emirati population are Asians, largely Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, and Filipinos. The other third are Iranians or Arabs, primarily Jordanians, Palestinians, and Egyptians (Starr, 2001). Although much of the growth in population is attributed to immigration, the growth rate of the local Emirati population has more than tripled over the past 15 years; the percentage of men to women of the total local Emirati population is 49.5% women compared to 50.5% men. The UAE local Emirati population is a young population with about 65% of the citizens below 25 year of age, and only 2% above 70 years (UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

Arabic is the official language of the UAE. English is widely spoken, as are Hindi, Urdu, and Persian. English has become the main language of communication in almost all business sectors in the country (Boyle, 2011). Islam is the official religion of the country and all Emiratis and a majority of the expatriates are Muslims.

3.1.2 Culture of the UAE

The UAE today is a multicultural society where people from all over the world live and work. In this study I refer to culture as a set of shared values, beliefs and behaviours that are deeply embedded, unconscious and shared by a society (Hofstede, 2001). Although the UAE society is very diverse and heterogeneous, for the UAE nationals, “the basic structure of their
tribal society has remained intact” (Heard-Bey, 2001, p. 114), and the dynamics of the Arab culture are deeply rooted in the Emirati community. As per Hofstede’s study of national cultures of 71 countries, he found that Arab countries (including the UAE) are male-dominated societies where gender roles are strictly defined and differentiated. Arab societies were also found to be highly collectivist where group conformity is emphasized, and members are expected to adjust their aspirations to meet or fulfil the goals of the group (Hofstede, 2001).

Although the dramatic changes in the economic circumstances have revolutionized many aspects of the Emirati’s lives, like access to modern housing, education and healthcare systems, the basic patterns of their lives have seen minimal change and they respect and highly regard the traditional local customs which are still very much part of the daily life of the local people. As an example, traditional sports such as falconry and camel racing remain popular in the country, and most Emiratis enjoy family-centred entertainment, including routine visits within a network of friends and relatives.

The society’s tribal structure supported resilience in the face of the extreme hardship in the past, and provided a strong context for connecting the people together. The socio-cultural practices of the Bedouin tribes are deeply rooted in the UAE national community and continue to have effects on the UAE community today. In the tribal social structure each family was traditionally bound by obligations of mutual assistance to their immediate relatives and to the tribe as a whole. In this structure the building block of the society is the tribe, not the individual. Individual's selfless hospitality was considered a source of honour and pride, and this code of hospitality continues today among the modern Emirati population who still practise great respect and honour to guests (UAEinteract, 2012).
Although Bedouins are known for herding, the long coasts of the UAE resulted in a close relationship between the Emirati and the sea and significantly affected the culture and traditions of the UAE. Fishing, ship-building, pearling, and trading were the most important forms of employment in the past and were major factors in defining UAE socio-cultural practices. Pearling, as an example, was not only a trade or a means of survival for the population: it was an entirely integrated social system, which has left a rich heritage of traditions among which is music and dance. Songs were composed to accompany different tasks, from ship-building, to diving for pearl-oysters. A professional song-leader was kept on the pearling dhows; his job was to rally the men to work through music and song. He would launch into song and all the sailors would join in as they worked, the music being an inspiration for good teamwork (Heard-Bey, 2001; UAEinteract, 2012). Emiratis today, particularly on special occasions, still perform those traditional dances and consider them a commitment to preserving the traditional arts and culture (Starr, 2001).

In the pearl diving season men would leave their families for three months or more. The women were then in charge of maintaining the affairs of the entire household and looked after food, clothing, and even the building of houses where they would weave and colour the palm leaves from which houses were built. The women accordingly carried a great deal of responsibility; they were the decision makers and engaged in work like fishing, making fishing equipment, farming, herding, trading and other pursuits such as midwifery and Quranic teaching. Even when the men were around, it was common for a man to go fishing, whilst his wife would sell the catch in the market, and then purchase the necessary household items with the earnings (Krause, 2011). Despite such productive activities, the main role of the woman continued to be that of taking care of the home and raising the children; at the same time it should be noted that the notion of a working woman was not a ‘strange’ one in society in those early days. With that
being said, it has been perceived that after the discovery of oil in the region, the high levels of welfare payments and social services that the people in the Arabian Gulf counties enjoyed made it possible for women in those countries to remain in the position of housewife regardless of how highly educated they became (Kirk & Napier, 2009). This system of public benefits did little to encourage women to take a more active role in the development of a nationalized workforce; on the contrary, it encouraged them to maintain a relaxed lifestyle. However, in later years there has been a strong push by the UAE government towards encouraging women to join the workforce (UAE Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs (MFNCA), 2010).

A major factor that affected the socio-cultural practices of the communities in the Middle East area is the common religion, Islam. Islam influenced the dynamics of life and provided a strong bond that held the society together. The traditional Islamic rituals remain important, especially the Eid al-Fitr and the Eid al-Adha, the festivals that mark the end of Ramadan (a month of fasting) and the conclusion of the haj (pilgrimage to Mecca) on the Islamic calendar. The teachings of Islam defined many aspects of the UAE nationals’ lifestyle, including the national dress, which reflects the modesty expected by the religion. UAE men wear the white ankle-length shirt or ‘kandura’ and a white or sometimes red-checked head cloth or ‘gutra’, with a black coil or ‘agal’ to hold it in place. On formal occasions men wear a thin cloak finely woven from camel hair with a gold braid. Emirati women wear brightly coloured long dresses but when they go out they put over their dresses a thin, floor length black cloak or ‘abaya’ and they cover their hair with a headscarf or ‘sheila’. Traditionally, a woman's face was hidden behind a golden face cover ‘burqa’, but this is now only seen with the older generations. The UAE national dress is a symbol of identity in the UAE and is worn by nearly all nationals even today. Emiratis both men and women use their national dress as a significant marker for maintaining their distinct national identity within the highly globalized multi-ethnic urban contexts that are found in the
UAE today. The woman’s ‘abaya’ developed as the society did and now reflects the status of the Emirati woman with the high standard fabric and the artistic embroidery and designs that define the modern ‘abaya’ today. Houses of fashion nowadays are making various changes to the ‘abaya’, and it is increasingly becoming an expensive fashion garment among young and wealthy women in the UAE (Lindholm, 2013). Despite the modernization of the ‘abaya’, it is still a black, long layered garment that covers the woman’s figure and adheres to Islamic teachings (Khalaf, 2005).

UAE Society is strongly influenced by religion and traditions, especially with respect to the woman’s role in society. Although Islam supports equality, the culture tends to reinforce traditional roles for women rather than encourage true equality between the genders. Today there are families and sectors of UAE society who have begun to accept the breaking down of constraints on women. However, many maintain the old traditions which make it difficult for women to take an active role in the commercial business world.

Another important factor to consider is that the Emirati people are faced with challenges in their lifestyle nowadays, as their traditional Islamic tribal culture has begun to mix with other world practices. Men are more likely to adjust and interact with the modern cultures as they deal with the business world, but the honour of traditions and culture binds women to their own homes, resulting in a lack of opportunities for advancement. The new generation of Emirati women find themselves in a state of unrest due to the novelty of the situation of finding their place in the public sector within a society and economy that are changing exponentially.
3.1.3 Family social structure in the UAE

The tribal social structure is still dominant in UAE society where, in most sectors, it is a traditional male dominated society. Men may still take up to four wives and the male administered ways of honour are still in place. However, this is beginning to change at an accelerating pace, and the doors are being pushed open but in a non-confronting manner.

Although UAE women are advocating change they are not discarding their most valued traditions: they ensure that they are always dressed in their long black cloaks, “Abaya”, and wear their head cover when they meet strangers. They have a very high regard for marriage and family; according to Abu Dhabi statistics in 2014 more than half the Emirati women who were 15 years and older were married. The average marriage age of the Emirati woman registered a noticeable increase; it was 23 years in 1995 and went up to 25.9 in 2010 (Statistics Centre - AD, 2015). The status of motherhood is highly respected in the society, and the mother is expected to have many children (Salloum, 2003).

In UAE society, variables such as tribal descent, ideology, and ethnic affiliation remain very influential when it comes to marital choices, and many families favour endogamy and cousin marriages (El-Haddad, 2003; Moghadam, 2004). In general, it is expected that the newly married couple lives with the husband’s family for several years until they have their own children, although in urban areas a shift is occurring from the extended household unit to a more modernized smaller version (Farrell, 2008). It is a common practice for families to get domestic help, with most families having at least one live-in helper at home; a considerable number of families employ private drivers to help in meeting the family needs.

In the UAE, like in many Middle Eastern countries, the Arab Islamic norms govern the family affairs of the local Emirati families. Traditional gender stereotypes are common and are
built on the premise that men are breadwinners and women are caregivers (Tlaiss, 2015). Women are required to obtain permission of father, husband, or other male guardian to marry, seek employment or travel. The formal Islamic marriage contract is mandatory to register marriages for Muslim people and this requires the consent of the wife to the marriage (Moghadam, 2004). Marriage in Emirati culture is considered an agreement between two families rather than two individuals, and children acquire citizenship and religious status through their fathers, not their mothers.

The modernized and urbanized transition in the country varies in different areas with some places still maintaining rural lifestyles whilst others have moved to modern urban ways of life. However, when it comes to education the country registered very high percentages in achieving the millennium goal to ‘achieve universal primary education’ with a percentage of 97% in 1990 and 98.3% in 2010 (UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). The expansion of a modernized urban lifestyle, coupled with state-sponsored education and the demands for greater women’s rights on the basis of global discourses and international conventions, affected the patriarchal family authority and provided more opportunities for women to develop and take a more active role in society.

### 3.2 Education in the UAE

Before federation, education in the UAE mainly relied upon Koranic teaching or educational circles which were conducted in a mosque or at a scholar’s home. In the 1950s work started on setting up organized schools, operated under the supervision of the Kuwaiti government and with support from Egypt and Jordan (Alhebsi, Pettaway, & Waller, 2015). It wasn’t until the year 1967 that the secondary school certificate exams were conducted in the
Emirates; prior to that year students completed their secondary school certificates by taking exams in Kuwait. In 1953 there were only 230 registered students in schools and 6 teachers in the country, the number went up to 6212 students and 284 teachers in 1963, and it was not until 1972 that the new federal government was able to make education free and compulsory to all UAE nationals, which was an important feature of UAE’s human capital development (Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority, 2015).

3.2.1 Progress of education in the UAE

Like other sectors, education influences and is influenced by economic and social structures and practices. Since the founding of the UAE, there was recognition that education is fundamental in the nation's development, and that investment in human resource development would help secure the future workforce needs of the national economy. This was reflected in a well-known quote of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder of the UAE federation and the late ruler of the UAE:

Wealth is not money. Wealth lies in men. This is where true power lies, the power that we value. They are the shield behind which we seek protection. This is what has convinced us to direct all our resources to building the individual, and to using the wealth with which God has provided us in the service of the nation, so that it may grow and prosper. (UAEinteract, 2013, p. 19)

Since then the UAE has provided a sufficient budget for public education, both K1-12 and higher education. This budget grew to approximately 2.7 billion dollars in 2009, comprising 28% of the federal budget for that year (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011). The importance of education was also distinguished as pivotal to support the development of a coherent and new
society formed from the old tribal groupings. Moreover, there was recognition that the integration and participation of women in education was a determining factor in the educational success and national well-being.

Figure 13. UAE students at the Women’s College library (Abu Dhabi Women's College (Photographer), 2012)

The UAE has focused on educating both men and women. In 1975, the rate of adult literacy was 54 percent among men and 31 percent among women. In 2012, literacy rates for both genders were more than 90 percent (Embassy of the UAE in Washington DC, 2012; UAE National Qualifications Authority, 2013). The education system of the UAE continued to evolve and develop. In 2010, the UAE established a National Qualifications Authority (NQA) to coordinate the establishment and implementation of an internationally recognized qualifications system for the UAE. This included a national qualifications framework and all its associated policies and procedures. The existing school level educational structure, which was established in the early 1970s, is a four-tier system covering 14 years of education. The tiers include: pre-school
education covering nursery and kindergarten (4-5 years old); primary education covering elementary education and referred to as Cycle 1 (6-11 years old); and secondary education that covers two tiers, the lower secondary and upper secondary, or vocational technical secondary. The lower secondary is referred to as Cycle 2 (12-14 years old), and the upper secondary is referred to as Cycle 3 (15-17 years old). After completing Cycle 2 students may opt to joint vocational technical secondary instead of upper secondary; both tracks lead to higher education. The following figure shows the education structure operating in the UAE and the relevant qualification levels as approved by the UAE NQA:
The education sector in the UAE consists of two distinct groups of institutions, public and private, with a third, smaller group of semi-government institutions. The central government funds the public sector, with some discretionary local funding often provided by the individual emirates in which the school is located. Public schools and universities are gender-segregated and are open to all UAE national citizens (Shaw, Badri, & Hukul, 1995). Public schools are primarily Arabic language centred, with English taught in a limited capacity as a foreign language. However, more focus is being put on building an appropriate level of English and one of the main
objectives of the strategic Abu Dhabi Education reform plan for 2030 is: “develop Arabic and English language abilities, critical thinking skills, and cultural and national identity through the consistent use of rigorous learning outcomes and pedagogy” (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2012, p. 4). The private sector, running parallel to government schools, was initially developed to provide education for non-national students, and these schools and universities offer an international curriculum and are funded predominantly through student fees (Kirk, 2010).

In the early days, much of the assistance in the establishment of schools in the UAE came from Egypt and Jordan, two countries with long-standing educational traditions and knowledge. However, this led to an early reliance on foreign curricula, practices, staff, resources and administrative techniques. This early reliance on expatriate educators, along with the importation of foreign educational systems, created a situation that still exists in the UAE today.

In recent years, the UAE has been recruiting a large number of American, British, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand teachers to staff the growing school, higher and tertiary level sectors. This expansion, coupled with the increase in the number of foreign private schools and universities, has led to the UAE being host to thousands of foreign educators, working in numerous and diverse educational institutions and following an array of models, systems and curricula (Godwin, 2006; Kirk & Napier, 2009).

The UAE opted recently for a hybrid model of imported Western and traditional Arabic-based education as a shortcut to achieving widespread educational provision. This is an interesting case in terms of the globalization of education and adherence to the traditions and values of the area. Given the nature of the traditional Islamic society in the UAE, and the specific considerations of education for girls and women, gender issues in the UAE's higher education system are of particular importance, especially regarding the prospects for participation of women
in a modernized society. Female participation rates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) labour markets are still lower than the global average. This situation is compounded, in part, through conservative policies to 'protect' women against entry into the workplace, functioning through a generous social service provision and traditional images of women remaining in the home as mothers and wives (Al Sebaie, 2011).

Teaching in the UAE, when viewed culturally, is a career and role undertaken primarily by women. Many women do not choose teacher education as their field of study, but rather it is often chosen for them by family members, primarily the father and older male siblings, who retain a certain degree of control over such decisions for young Emirati women. This situation creates a power structure that empowers a patriarchal social system and marginalizes female participation in other fields.

### 3.2.2 Higher Education

From an historical point of view, four pillars of policy were adopted in the early years and served as the foundation of higher education structure in the UAE:

> (1) The UAE would build and operate its own public higher education institutions for nationals, (2) instruction would be in English as the international language of business and commerce, (3) qualified English-speaking faculty would be recruited, and (4) females would be included and afforded separate facilities as religion and customs call for. (Halsey & Al Shamsi, 2013, p. 65)

The UAE is home to a wide range of universities, both public and private. The three main (public) federally funded higher educational institutions in the country are: the UAE University (UAEU), Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), and Zayed University (ZU). These were mainly
established to educate UAE nationals and the education in these three institutions is fully funded by the federal government. In recent years a considerable number of international universities’ branch campuses started to operate in the country, including New York University, the Sorbonne, and the University of Wollongong among others. From the year 2000 onward, the UAE has deliberately increased the number of universities and programs to develop a skilled workforce in an effort to diversify the economy from oil to trade, tourism, and other activities. As of 2012, the UAE became home to the largest number of international branch campuses in the world (Halsey & Al Shamsi, 2013).

Higher education participation continues to rise in the UAE; it went up from 18% in 2000 to 25% in 2008 (UAE National Qualifications Authority, 2013). The total enrolment of students in higher education in the UAE has grown from 79,800 students in 2006–2007 to about 117,000 students in 2010–2011. The total enrolment in the federal institutions is estimated at 36,500 which represents about 32% of the total UAE enrolments (UAE Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2012). The UAE realizes that although the increase in progression rates to higher education is a success indicator, success in higher education provision goes beyond enrolment rates to include the assessment of existing coordination mechanisms that link the education systems to the workforce requirements. This is because, ultimately, the county’s economic development and growth is fostered by education providers focusing on relevant and up-to-date programs, technologies, skills and attributes that are needed for today’s knowledge economy.

As this study focuses on preparing national Emirati women for the world of work, I will provide a quick overview of the three federal higher educational institutions in the country as these are the institutions where the majority of the Emirati women students study.
1. **UAE University (UAEU)**, where enrolment has increased from 502 in its founding year 1977 to approximately 14,000 in 2012/13, and women represent about 75% of the student body. The UAE University is a comprehensive, research-intensive university; it offers a full range of accredited graduate and undergraduate programs through nine Colleges: Business and Economics; Education; Engineering; Food and Agriculture; Humanities and Social Sciences; IT; Law; Medicine and Health Sciences; and Science. The university operates in gender-segregated campuses. ([http://www.uaeu.ac.ae/](http://www.uaeu.ac.ae/)).

2. **Zayed University (ZU)**, established in 1998 as an all-women’s institution, and expanded to open two campuses for men in 2011. The university has separate male and female campuses and operates in Abu Dhabi and Dubai; it offers a wide range of programs and is organized into the following colleges: the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises, the College of Business, the College of Communication and Media Sciences, the College of Education, the College of Sustainability Sciences and Humanities, the College of Technological Innovation, and the Institute for Islamic World Studies ([http://www.zu.ac.ae](http://www.zu.ac.ae)).

3. **Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT)**, founded in 1988 and started with four campuses in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. HCT today is the largest higher educational institution in the UAE with an enrolment of more than 25,000 UAE nationals, and more than 2000 employees. HCT includes a total of 17 campuses for men and women in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Madinat Zayed, Ruwais, Dubai, Ra’s al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Fujairah. HCT prides itself as being one of the most progressive and innovative centres for higher learning in the Middle East ([http://www.hct.ac.ae/](http://www.hct.ac.ae/)).

Women in the UAE embraced the formal educational opportunities made available to them since the foundation of the state; female students are now in all levels of higher education in
the country and are outperforming their male counterparts in many areas (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014).

### 3.3 The Institution Where the Research Took Place

This research took place at Abu Dhabi Women’s College, which is one of the colleges in the HCT system. The HCT was founded by the president of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, and the members of the Supreme Council. It was established by Federal Law No. 2 of 1988 concerning the establishment of the HCT system in the United Arab Emirates (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2012). This action was in response to the vision of His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research at that time, who made a commitment in 1985 to establish a system of post-secondary education for nationals of the UAE that would stress the ideas of productivity, self-determination, and excellence. The HCT is a system of seventeen colleges that is dedicated to the delivery of technical and professional programs to Emirati citizens throughout the UAE. It offers about 88 programs that have been developed in response to the fast-paced economy of the UAE. These academic programs are offered by seven academic divisions: Applied Communications, Business, Education, Engineering Technology, General Education, Health Sciences, and Information Technology. The HCT had enrolments exceeding 19,000 students in the 2012/13 academic year, with 35% male and 65% female. The student body in the HCT is supported by over 1000 faculty members, more than 60 administrators, and about 900 professional staff, representing 64 different nationalities (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2013a).

The HCT offers applied education in four levels of credentials: Applied Diploma (AD) which is a two-year program, Higher Diploma (HD) which is a three-year program, Bachelor of
Applied Science (BAS) which is a four-year program, and a Masters program which is about a two-year program post BAS level. The HCT has formal alliances with a number of international tertiary education and training institutions, its programs are internationally accredited, and it has corporate partnerships with local and multi-national companies.

The HCT also seeks to meet the needs of men and women who were unable to enter college directly after high school by offering a Work Readiness Program that prepares them for careers in private, public or self-owned companies.

### 3.3.1 The Women’s College

The Women’s College in Abu Dhabi is one of the largest colleges in the HCT system with two campuses, one in the heart of the business area in Abu Dhabi city, and one in the outskirts of Abu Dhabi city serving students who live in suburbs. The college is dynamic and students enjoy a wide range of non-classroom activities such as clubs, conferences, exhibitions, sports activities, humanitarian projects, and others (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2012b).

For many young women who now have desires to contribute both inside and outside their homes, college is their hope to obtain the preparation they need to join the workforce and professionally contribute to their communities. The college offers professional and career-oriented education for Emirati women. All of the courses taught in these colleges are done so in English, hence, for most students a foundations program is needed to equip them with a reasonable English language level to be able to join the academic programs. The college is a teaching-centred institution that provides Emirati women with academic, technical and professional learning experiences. It opened in 1988 and the student population has grown from 43 to over 3000 students in 2014. There are about 400 faculty and staff members from more than
30 nationalities in the college. In addition to relying on modern and innovative teaching and learning methodologies, one of the college strengths is its heavy investment in technology, and its state-of-the-art labs. All students in the college use tablets or laptops, and technologies like satellite channels, video conferencing, and blended-learning tools are available to be used in the classroom. With its technological support and globalized faculty and staff, students are exposed to the wider world.

In keeping up with the cultural requirements of the Emirati community, the women’s colleges in HCT do not allow the students to leave the college premises before their classes are completed as per their official college schedule. Most women students receive a college bus service from and to their homes. Students are expected to arrive at the college on time for their first class and remain in the college until the last class is finished for the day. Scan machines are available on the gates where women students scan their student card when they enter and leave the campus. If a student needs to leave the campus before her classes end for the day, she must get leave permission from her program chairperson and obtain a leave pass from the Student Support and Development Department. This department then contacts the student guardian for permission to leave the campus; students who get a leave permission need to present the pass to the gate security guard when they leave. Guardians are also informed if students return to the campus past their scheduled hours. This process is not needed however if a student has a special ID card (green card) which allows her to leave the campus and come back at any time without obtaining a leave pass. Students may obtain this card by bringing their official guardian to the Student Support and Development Department to complete and sign the Special ID Card Application Form. Students with green cards need to present their card to the security guard at the campus gate (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2013b).
As the students spend long hours on campus with a good portion of free time, the colleges offer a range of options to allow the students to use their college free time in a quality way. This includes sports facilities, music rooms, independent learning facilities, learning support centres, game rooms, and a range of clubs and activities. The colleges have introduced a common free hour in the schedules of the students “falcon hour” to allow for participation in clubs which require attendance in set times like the language clubs where students receive structured classes in foreign languages.

### 3.4 Summary

The United Arab Emirates is a modern country in the Arabian Gulf. It is a federation of seven states established in 1971 after the sheikdoms won independence from Britain. The oil revenue facilitated a high standard of living to the citizens of the area, changing their lifestyle from simple and limited to a modern and progressive style in less than 40 years. The United Arab Emirates has the world’s sixth largest oil reserves and possesses one of the most developed economies in the Middle East. The development of the economy attracted a high number of people from all over the world to work in the country; foreign workers account for more than three-quarters of the population. Dubai, which has smaller oil reserves than Abu Dhabi, has diversified its economy in an effort to become the financial hub of the Middle East.

One of the UAE’s highest priorities has always been education. As President His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founder of the UAE, stated: “The greatest use that can be made of wealth is to invest it in creating generations of educated and trained people” (UAEinteract, 2013, p. 20). The importance of the woman’s role in the society has been recognized since early days, and the government provided the needed legislations and directions
to support women’s education and participation in public life. Statistics show that women have achieved high percentages in educational attainment in the country but they still need more support to participate as needed in the workforce. This research study is responsive to the reality that there are challenges in the face of national women’s participation in the workforce, particularly as the country is moving towards a knowledge-based economy where maximizing the participation of the national workforce, especially women, in the transformation process is crucial.

This research looks at ways of developing Emirati women’s graduate employability attributes taking into consideration their unique culture. It is a qualitative study that examines students’ experiences of participation in non-classroom activities and how this participation relates to preparing this group of students for the job market.
Chapter 4 - Research Methodology

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I present the research paradigm adopted and the rationale for using a Constructionist Interpretive research approach and a Case Study methodology as it applies to this enquiry. I begin by explaining the nature of the qualitative research and how it applies in this scenario. I then outline the research process followed and describe my role as a researcher in this study. I present Crotty’s (1998) research model as a guiding model for my research study. I describe the epistemology and theoretical framework assumed and how this feeds into the process of enquiry. I illustrate the methodology used to address the research questions and talk about Feminism in the Arab World. I then describe the methods applied to collect the data. I establish my research as a case study, where the richness and depth of information are investigated through capturing students lived stories and analysing the documentation related to the non-classroom activities (NCAs) offered in the college. I cover the sampling techniques adopted and provide an overview of the characteristics of the research participants. I talk about the validity and reliability of the research and present both RMIT University and Abu Dhabi Women’s College research ethics requirements. At the end of the chapter I present the process followed for analysing the data collected.

4.1 Qualitative Research

Research is “a systematic process of investigation, the general purpose of which is to contribute to the body of knowledge that shapes and guides academic and/or practice disciplines”
It is the nature of the research topic and the research questions that the researchers aim to address that guide the selection of the research approach to be adopted. In this study, I aimed to understand how students’ graduate employability attributes may be influenced by students’ participation in non-classroom activities (NCAs) considering the case of female Emirati students in a local Higher Education (HE) college in the UAE. The main research question that guides this study is:

What is the nature of the relationship between the development of graduate employability attributes and participation in non-classroom activities for Emirati female students?

And the research sub-questions are:

1. How does participation in non-classroom activities impact on students’ perception of the development of graduate employability attributes?

2. How do students make sense of their participation in non-classroom activities?

3. How does participation in non-classroom activities affect the personal development and future decisions of Emirati female students?

4. In what ways can participation in non-classroom activities be directed to improve components of student graduate employability attributes?

5. What can the Emirati female students’ experiences tell us about building graduate employability attributes for female students in conservative cultures?

This research investigates students’ HE experiences as understood by the students themselves and by a group of staff members who dealt closely with students who participate in NCAs in the college. The ontology in this study is related to the internal reality of the students’ perception of their abilities and experiences, which is subjective as it involves students’ multiple
realities rather than independent numerical data (Connole, 1993). It is also related to the staff members’ experiences and understanding of student development and progress. In this study I established my research within a qualitative research framework as the study aimed at “exploring the meaning as understood by the participants, in a natural setting” (Arghode, 2012, p. 157). Moreover, I believe the qualitative research to be most fitting to my study as the reality in this case is subjective, multiple, and is socially constructed by the participants themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Defining the qualitative research approach Merriam (2009) focuses on purpose, stating that “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). Denzin and Lincoln (2005), focusing on the process and data collection aspects of a study, provided the following definition.

*Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)*

Wiersma, and Jurs (2009) add that “It is the perceptions of those being studied that are important and, to the extent possible, these perceptions are to be captured in order to obtain an accurate ‘measure’ of reality” (p. 232). Qualitative research involves collecting information about
personal experiences, life stories, and interactions that are meaningful in peoples' lives. It seeks to understand and gain insight into human characteristics such as motivation, attitudes and behaviour in order to increase the understanding of a situation or problem (Bell, 2010). As my study concerns understanding the female students’ professional and personal development through their lived experiences in their own culture, I adopt a qualitative research approach.

4.2 The Research Process Followed

In this section I outline the research process I followed and the steps I pursued to define my research paradigm. I found guidance in Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005) five overarching phases of the research process, namely: identifying the role of the researcher, defining the theoretical paradigm and perspectives, identifying the strategies of enquiry and interpretation, defining the methods of data collection, and specifying the practices of interpretation and presentation. I started by looking at my role as a researcher in this enquiry and the role of the researcher as a participant in the research. I then outlined and briefly described the other phases.

4.2.1 Phase 1: Identifying the role of the researcher

My role as a researcher in this enquiry is a distinguishing feature of the qualitative research approach that differentiates it from a quantitative approach in which objectivity and detachment are essential. As a researcher, I consider myself an integral part of this study as I have been living in the UAE for about two decades and have been exposed to its local culture and societal norms. I also have been working in the HCT system of colleges for about the same time and have a detailed knowledge of its policies, procedures, and the internal organizational culture. Moreover, one of my positions in the organization was at the Women’s College in Abu Dhabi
where I have worked for five years. During that time I have dealt with the students on a daily basis and had the chance to observe their actions and development first-hand. I also had the opportunity to witness students’ involvement in several types of non-classroom activities and was able to learn about how things work and observe students’ progress. This allowed me to take what Hoare, Buetow, Mills, and Francis (2013) identify as the emic stance or insider to this research study and reflect on the findings from an internal perspective.

Minichiello and Kottler (2009) advised that it is not only legitimate to acknowledge the role of the researcher in qualitative research but also it is important to look at it as part of the process. They argued that researchers cannot understand qualitative research without understanding their own personality, that is, their own motives, interests, values, and goals. To this end, as a researcher and staff member in higher education, I am interested to study about and participate in advancing student learning and personal development. I have a particular interest in advancing female students’ learning as I saw high potential in those women and was exposed to the restrictions and constraints that those students face. I worked with the students at the Women’s College closely and interacted with them in formal and informal settings. Moreover, as part of my job remit I received reports about students’ employment and was able to witness students’ progress in the college and upon graduation. Furthermore, I come from a Middle Eastern background and have lived in the UAE for a long time, sufficient for me to have a comprehensive understanding of the culture and dynamics of the area. This informed my research and guided my question and investigation interests. I would argue that I have valuable insider information that helped me formulate a clearer picture of the situation, study different practices that took place in the college and draw recommendations for a way forward that can help student and community advancement. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) reported that it is the researcher’s experience, depth of knowledge, perspectives, and conceptions of self and the others that guide
and constrain the work done in qualitative studies. They also explained that social sciences realities are constructed depending on people’s experiences, time in history, perspective of the researcher, and other factors.

4.2.2 Phase 2: Theoretical paradigms and perspectives

After identifying my role as a researcher, I started to look into my research paradigm and perspectives. Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Zeichner (1979) argued that the selection of the research approach depends on the paradigm that guides the research activity, more specifically, beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology); the theory of knowledge that informs the research, which is the relationship between the enquirer and the enquired (epistemology); and how that knowledge may be gained (methodology). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identified the research paradigm as the structure that contains the researcher’s ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises. As discussed earlier I situated my research in a qualitative research approach as the ontology in this study involves multiple realities. Looking at the theoretical paradigm and perspectives, I adopted the Constructionist Interpretive (Crotty, 1998) paradigm as the aim is to construct an understanding of the way participation in non-classroom activities may influence building student graduate employability attributes in a culture like that in the UAE where there is a unique mix of a conservative UAE national Emirati community, and an open multi-cultural state. Although the Interpretive theoretical perspective was adopted in the study, a critical aspect is built into the process. This study is directed towards understanding, but understanding will be used as a tool in the on-going process of transformation of society and empowerment of individuals. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) reported that social science researchers need to have a good grasp of the wider social and political forces that continually produce new knowledge; therefore it was important for me as a researcher to take a critical view
in order to recognize the forces that affect the students’ choices and consequently their development. This led me to investigate the cultural and social aspects that influence the students’ decisions.

Women in a culture like the UAE may be comfortable in their society but life is changing around them and they need to be prepared to cope with such changes. Societies are moving from simple closed communities to open multicultural societies; women particularly in conservative cultures may not be ready to face the new challenges and they need to be supported. This led me to consider the ideologies associated with Feminism (Ahmed, 1992; Barrett, 2005) in my study.

Women empowerment is one of the objectives of Feminist ideology, so it is very relevant to this research study. However, it is important to note that this study was not about trying to check, or advocate equal opportunity for women, nor was it about seeking justice for women; its main objective was to advance education and investigate ways of building occupation-ready women graduates. This ideological consideration will be addressed later in section 4.3.3.

4.2.3 Phase 3: Strategies of enquiry and Interpretive paradigms

After defining the theoretical paradigm and perspectives, I started to look at the strategies of enquiry. This is where I looked at moving the theoretical paradigm into action and started to think about the research design, the choice of participants, the information to be collected and the methods of data collection. In this study, I constructed a research design that focused on female students in a college in Abu Dhabi in the UAE. I used a Case Study approach (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009) to investigate how a complex set of circumstances in this particular context come together to affect students’ learning and development. I planned to document the students’ experiences from a number of students studying in different levels and different programs of
study. Students who were recruited in the study participated in at least one semester of non-classroom activities. The staff members recruited covered a spectrum of college employees who had direct contact with students who were involved in non-classroom activities. This ranged from staff members who worked in student affairs and organized student clubs, trips, and activities to faculty members who participated in non-classroom activities with students; and technical staff members who looked after technical conferences and competitions. Details of participants and sampling techniques will be covered in the subsequent sections.

4.2.4 Phase 4: Data collection

The next phase was identifying the methods of data collection. There is no single method that can capture all the variations of a human experience; to this end I decided to use two interconnected methods to gain a better understanding of the worlds of experiences I wanted to study. I used interviews as the major data collection technique because they allowed me to interact with the students directly and to reflect and follow up on what was discussed. I complemented the interviews with documents review. The documents reviewed involved collecting and analysing processes, procedures, and news about NCAs. Interviews and document reviews are identified as major data collection techniques used in qualitative Case Study research (Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2005). Details of methods used will be covered in section 4.3.5.

4.2.5 Phase 5: The art, practices, and politics of interpretation and presentation

The last phase of the research process was making sense of the data collected, interpreting and constructing findings, and producing the public text that is published for the reader (Denzin &
Lincoln, 2005). In this stage I employed coding and analysis techniques to convert the field text collected into research text. I went into iterations of making sense of the text by employing coding and iterative thematic analysis techniques until I came up with a public form of the knowledge constructed. This was done by using evaluation criteria and ensuring the moral-political commitment. Details about the validity and reliability of data, and stages of data analysis will be covered in subsequent sections.

### 4.2.6 Research design considerations

I have conducted this study as a single-case design containing multiple units of analysis that examined the main research question which was ‘What is the nature of the relationship between the development of graduate employability attributes and participation in non-classroom activities for Emirati female students?’ The study took place in a women’s college in the UAE which is considered as a single-case. Stake (2005) suggested that Case Study methodology is beneficial because it is better to study a “specific, unique, bounded system” (p. 445) than attempting to take a general approach to seek explanations to broad social contexts.

The units of analysis were derived from conducting individual interviews with two sets of participants: students and staff members; and from reviewing documents related to students’ non-classroom activities in the college. Each of these units of analysis provided data from which I was able to examine the social and educational issues.

As the study is focused on the personal and professional development of Emirati female students, it took place at one of the largest federally funded Higher Education institutions in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. This college is restricted to female Emirati students – there
are no male students or students from other nationalities; the faculty and staff members in the college are mixed gender and from different nationalities.

The study involved both students and staff members who worked or assumed roles related to students’ non-classroom activities. Students were recruited with the help of the Students’ Services department in the college, which is the department responsible for offering non-classroom activities, and keeping records of students’ participation in these activities.

The scope of non-classroom activities considered was any non-classroom activity organized by the college regardless if it was in or outside the college, national or international, and related or not related to the program of study. The scope of the research did not include students’ academic development. The focus was mainly on the development of graduate employability attributes.

In the next section I will describe the model adopted to guide the research process and explain the epistemology and theoretical framework assumed. I will then provide specific details about the research methodology used and methods employed.

4.3 Crotty’s Model Guiding the Research Process

In this study I used Crotty’ research model (1998) as a pragmatic framework to guide my research process as it provides a structured way for identifying and justifying the research structure and its elements. Crotty outlined four major elements that define the bulk of discussion and terminology in social research: methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology. The four major elements in Crotty’s model are interconnected and inform each other. The following figure illustrates Crotty’s (1998) model with examples of each of the elements defined:
Situating my research in Crotty’s model, the epistemology in my study is Constructionism where “meaning is not discovered but constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). The theoretical perspective, which is the philosophical stance that lies behind the chosen research methodology, is Interpretive as the main concern in this research is to understand. The methodology is Case Study, and the data gathering methods are semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The figure below provides a summary of the model adopted, and the following sections explain the argument behind adopting, or employing, the different elements in details.
4.3.1 Constructionism epistemology

Epistemology involves knowledge; it is about how we know what we know and the nature of knowledge. Maynard (as cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 8) stated: “Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate”. Crotty (1998) defined three main types of epistemologies and their variations: Objectivist, Constructivist, and Subjectivist.

The epistemology that is most suited to my research enquiry is the Constructionism epistemology which assumes that “meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). It does not assume that there is an objective truth waiting for us to discover; rather, it assumes that meaning is not discovered but constructed, and that different people may construct it in different ways. In this epistemology subjects and objects are considered partners in the generation of meaning. The Constructionism epistemology is the epistemology that tends to appeal to qualitative researchers. It is these constructions of reality, or meaning perspectives of individuals, that my research is interested in accessing and
understanding. I am interested in exploring the meanings that students and staff members construct for themselves about the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and the development of students’ employability attributes. The intention in my research is to understand and reconstruct the ideas held by both the participants and myself as a researcher. It is about formulating knowledge based on the situations and experiences of all participants. Meaning in my research can’t be described as objective, nor is it subjective: it is constructed based on the interactions between myself and the participants, being students and staff members.

Epistemology in Crotty’s model sits alongside ontology as ontology is about ‘what is’ whereas epistemology is about ‘how we know what we know’ and the nature of the relationship between the research subjects/objects and the researcher (Gray, 2013). Crotty argues that ontology and epistemology are interrelated and are reflected in the epistemological stance adopted and that both inform the theoretical perspective to be followed. I adopted the same philosophy as what we think (ontology) shapes how we think and how we can know about it, it is important to note that how we look (epistemology) shapes what we can see (J. Mason, 2002). In Constructionism “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices … and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). In Constructionism the focus is on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by the conventions of language and other social processes and it emphasizes the hold our culture has on us as it influences the way we think and construct knowledge (Crotty, 1998).

In the next section I will discuss the Interpretive theoretical perspective adopted in my study based on the Constructionism epistemology considered.
4.3.2 Interpretive theoretical perspective

The Interpretive theoretical perspective was adopted in this study as the focus was to gain in-depth subjective understanding of students’ experiences and explore the reasons for their personal and professional development. Interpretive research assumes that people develop meaning as they interact with the world around them, and Interpretive researchers attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). In terms of epistemology, Interpretivism is linked to Constructionism which is the epistemology adopted in this study. My research study adopts a broad Interpretive approach as the objective is to construct reality about students’ personal and professional progress through interaction with the concerned participants (Creswell, 2012).

4.3.3 Feminism in the Arab World

Although my research is not a study involving Feminism ideology, it intrinsically considers the post-structural form of Feminism (Barrett, 2005) where the development of gendered subjectivity is seen as an ongoing process of interaction between individuals and their societies. This study takes into consideration students’ culture, respect of Islamic values, and the inclination of the women in the area to maintain their societal norms whilst being part of the gradual change that is preparing them for facing the requirements of the job market in a global economy. This study endorses Gallant’s findings that a sustainable Feminism movement in the Arab World should be “sensitive to the need to maintain some legitimacy within both Islamic principles and the cultural norms … while still advancing the opportunities to find new ways of thinking that would benefit women” (Gallant, 2008, p. 196).
In the modern Arab countries of the 20th and 21st centuries, Feminism, Nationalism and Colonialism are three influences that are seen as intersecting elements in Middle Eastern history (Ahmed, 1992; Badran, 1995; Nawar Al-Hassan, 2004). However, it is important to acknowledge that distinct ideological differences between Western and Middle Eastern Feminism exist. Work on Feminism in its ‘Western format’ began in this area at the beginning of the 19th century by activists and intellectuals who were affected by European influences like the work of Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and later by writers like Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir. A ground-breaking work in the Middle East can be attributed to Qasim Amin, an Egyptian judge, who published his book “The Liberation of Women” in 1899. In his book he argued that the education and emancipation of women were essential to strengthen and liberate the Egyptian nation from British colonial rule at that time. His work triggered a lot of opposition and discussion as he did not only call for women’s education, but he advocated the right for women to work, and he asked for legal reforms to improve women’s status. The same period witnessed the work of Huda Sha’rawi (1879-1947), who is considered a Feminist champion in the Middle East. Huda founded the Egyptian Feminist Union, started two important women’s periodicals, and helped women to take action against the British colony in Egypt. Huda was a strong activist in advocating women’s rights, and her work crossed the boundaries of Egypt as she advocated pan-Arab Feminism. This Egyptian Feminist movement reached out to other Arab countries and was followed by the work of a number of Arab and Islamic Feminists from the region.

In spite of such work, for over a century the topic of Feminism has been considered a delicate matter in the Arab region. Feminism in its ‘Western format’ is not necessarily accepted by many Arab women as it is seen as an alien move with imported Western values that do not take into consideration the distinctive needs of women in the region and the particular cultural
differences (Al-Sweel, 2015; Uchendu, 2002). Another dimension that needs to be considered when examining Feminism in the Arab World is the relationship between Feminism and Colonialism and the post-colonial era in the area. Leila Ahmed, in her famous book ‘Women and Gender in Islam’, defined what she referred to as ‘Colonial Feminism’ or Feminism as used against other cultures in the service of Colonialism. She wrote: “The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in the rhetoric of Colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized people” (Ahmed, 1992, p. 154). The association of the Western form of Feminism with Colonialism provided more reason for reservations and sensitivity around Feminism in the region.

In her study about Third World women and the inadequacies of Western Feminism, Crowley (2014) concluded that ethnography is an essential consideration, and that freedom does not mean the same thing to all the women of the world. In this regard it is important to endorse that women in the different parts of the world should be able to define their rights in their own ways based on culture, religion, and other factors unique to their own life situations.

Looking at Feminism in the Middle East and possibly the wider Islamic world, it is important to consider Islam and its teachings as it is a dominant factor that affects every aspect of people’s life in the area. To this end, a number of scholars and Islamic Feminists (Ahmed, 1992; Wadud, 1999) based their work on the belief that justice and equality are intrinsic values in Islam, and they challenged the assumption that Islamic societies are inherently oppressive to women. In their work, they did not try to sugar-coat the poor record of women's rights in Islamic societies, but they worked on putting this record into context. Mernissi (1991) argued that “the problematic position of women in Muslim societies is a result of male-dominated (mis)interpretations of the
holy texts of Islam, rather than of the essence of Islam itself” (p. 56). Work that adopted Islamic Feminism highlighted the problematic issues and challenges that women face in the region and advocated equality based on the Islamic teachings that consider men and women as equal, and do not deprive the woman from any of her rights including education, work, and freedom to make decisions. Islamic Feminism, at its core, draws on the Quranic concept of equality of all human beings, and insists on the application of this in everyday life. Islamic Feminists are not religious clerics; they are scholars who take the holy text of the Quran as a base for their arguments and oppose the imposition of Western methods as the model methods to be followed.

Coleman (2013), in her work that examines Islamic Feminism, noted that the portrayal of women in the American media fed negative stereotypes of Western women in the Middle East and that Islamic Feminism provided a more comfortable alternative toward change. She also proposed that Islamic Feminism can be seen as more culturally relevant and less threatening to core Islamic values.

Looking from a socio-cultural perspective, one of the factors that differentiates communities is the tendency towards Individualism or Communitarianism. Foley (2004) regarded the difference between individualism and communitarianism as a critical factor that differentiates Western Feminism from Eastern Feminism. He found that communitarianism, where family and community take precedence over the rights of the individual, is a key feature of the Arabic society and Feminism in the area must be seen in that context.

My study highlights the complex tension for the young female Islamic participants who are being encouraged to be educated and seek employment yet simultaneously are contextually bound by cultural and religious values. These young women are seeking innovative solutions to
this tension. They are forging new Middle Eastern Feminist perspectives for change whilst respecting the values of the society in which they live.

In the following section I explain how I situated my study as a case study where I considered the women’s college where my study took place as a single-case.

4.3.4 A Case Study methodology

Positioning my research in a Constructionist epistemology and an Interpretive theoretical perspective guided the choice of the methodology and methods needed to complement the underlying assumptions about the reality and understandings of human development that the researcher and participants bring to the research. As the research had to align with the theoretical perspective that lies behind the defined methodology, the theoretical perspective, therefore, discloses the methodology and methods used.

For this research project I have situated the approach to the topic within the Case Study approach opting to employ Merriam’s (2009) case study structure as her work focuses the case study application in education. I also used the work of Yin (2009, 2014) and Stake (2005) as guidelines as their work is seminal in Case Study methodologies. I chose the Case Study approach as it concentrates on the problem within a specific context, explores the issues involved, and looks at the lessons learned in relation to the original hypothesis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Yin (2014) reported that the more your research question seeks to explain present circumstances the more that Case Study research will be relevant. In a Case Study the researcher looks to develop in-depth understanding of the situation and the interest is in discovery rather than confirmation (Laws & McLeod, 2004). Merriam (2009) reported that participant stories convey rich and illustrative information about their lived experiences. Moreover, the Case Study methodology
appropriately caters for my research study because it is well suited for “context-dependent knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 121) as my research is looking specifically at examining graduate employability attributes for women students in a conservative culture like the UAE local Emirati culture. It also allows for respecting the sensitivity of the cultural context. It is through the Case Study that the researcher can tell the story so that the readers can engage in it and discern its details. The Case Study methodology allowed me to cover the depth of the students’ experiences and their reflections which would have been hard for me to achieve through other methodologies. This is mainly because the Case Study methodology does not assume a prescribed and structural process but, rather, provides a flexible framework that allows the investigation to adapt to the unexpected findings and to cater for any new or deep insights that may emerge (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Moreover, the involvement of the researcher in the research investigation allows for creative insights to emerge as the research progresses (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). This allowed me to probe into the details that were provided by the students and gave me the opportunity to discuss their reflections and follow up on new ideas or original insights that came up. In a Case Study methodology “The goal is not to make the case study be all things to all people. The goal is to allow the study to be different things to different people” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 136).

Case studies may be crafted as single-case or multiple-case designs depending on the research questions being asked or social settings in which the research is taking place. The single-case design allows a researcher to look at one or more issues within a single context. Multiple-case designs provide researchers the framework from which to explore multiple cases within several different contexts (Yin, 2009). My study fits within a single-case research as it focused on a specific college with its bounded parameters that comprised this case. This college setting was
an interwoven system of a mono-cultural student body, multi-cultural faculty and staff, interrelationships with community partners, and overarching local Emirati cultural values.

Merriam identified three strategies for Case Study research: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. My study fits within the particularistic strategy as it has a “focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what is reveals about a phenomenon and for what it might represent” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43).

This case study is based on students’ lived experiences as communicated both by the participating students themselves and by the staff members who worked with them and other students in NCAs. A further depth was added to the study as a group of participating students were mature aged students who studied in the college ten years before the research took place and participated in NCAs in the college then. Those students were back in the college for further studies at the time of the research and were able to reflect on the way they thought their participation in NCAs affected their skills, beliefs, and attributes. They also provided information about how their earlier participation in college NCAs affected their decision to join the workforce and subsequent employment advancements. Further richness in terms of understanding emerged from the interviews with the staff members who worked with a large student body and were able to share tens of students’ experiences and reflect on them from different perspectives.

4.3.5 Methods employed

Both Merriam (2009) and Stake (2005) identified three main sources of data collection in case studies: interviews, observations, and document review. In my study I employed both interviews and document review. Although observation is identified as an effective method in Case Study research, I did not use it as a planned data collection technique in my study. However,
my experience in the college allowed me to reflect on my earlier observation of students’
development, particularly that three of the students interviewed started their studies when I was
working at the Abu Dhabi Women’s College and I had the chance to interact with them closely
and witness their development on a daily basis.

The main research method used in this study was semi-structured interviews (Minichiello,
Aroni, & Hays, 2008) which involved a series of open-ended questions that addressed the
research topic. Two sets of interview questions were developed, a set for students (Appendix 2)
and a set for staff members (Appendix 3). The interview questions were designed to address the
main research questions and sub-questions. An example of the interview questions and their
relation to the main research sub-questions is in Table 4.1
Table 4.1 Example of mapping between research sub-questions and interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research sub-question</th>
<th>Student interview questions</th>
<th>Staff interview questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-question 3:</strong> How does participation in non-classroom activities affect the personal development and future decisions of Emirati female students?</td>
<td>Q3: In what ways do you think participation in non-classroom activities affected the following:</td>
<td>Q2: In what ways you think participation in non-classroom activities affected the following in the students you worked with:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a. Your communication skills</td>
<td>a. Student communication skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Assertiveness</td>
<td>b. Student creativity and innovation</td>
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<td>c. Creativity and innovation</td>
<td>c. Student assertiveness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d. Decision making</td>
<td>d. Student problem solving skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e. Problem Solving</td>
<td>e. Student decision making skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f. Your interpersonal skills</td>
<td>f. Student interpersonal skills</td>
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<td>g. Your intrapersonal skills</td>
<td>g. Student intrapersonal skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>h. Adaptability</td>
<td>h. Student adaptability</td>
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<td>i. Stress Management.</td>
<td>i. Student stress management.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Q6: Are you planning to join the workforce after graduation? Do you think participation in non-classroom activities help you to develop employability attributes? Are there any cultural or traditional values or practices that affect your decision in joining or not joining the workforce? In what way? Does participation in non-classroom activities affect your decision? In what way?</td>
<td>Q5: The UAE community is going through rapid changes, do you think participation in non-classroom activities helps students to cope with such changes or initiate change? In what way?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As part of the preparation for the interviews a set of self-reflection questions (Appendix 5) were designed and given to the students before the interviews. This tool was designed to serve as a support technique to stimulate students’ reflections about graduate employability attributes and raise their self-awareness and ability to articulate these attributes in the interview. The purpose of that exercise was to ensure that students were aware of the graduate attributes that would be discussed and think about their own experiences in that context. There was no intention to collect written answers on those self-reflection questions, but those questions may have been referred to in the interview if the discussion probed in a direction where students wanted to refer to an experience or a situation they thought about as they were thinking about the questions. They were also referred to during the interview if a question was not clear to the student and she wanted more clarification.

In the next section, I discuss the rationale behind choosing semi-structured interviews, design of the interviews, and the way the interviews were conducted.

4.3.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

The form of interviews that I considered the most fitting to my research enquiry, based on the theoretical and methodological stance adopted, was the semi-structured interviews as they helped me to stay focused and allowed for two-way communication with the participants (Minichiello et al., 2008). This made me cover all questions needed and gave me the flexibility to probe questions in more depth, discuss additional details with my research participants, and gain deeper understanding of their responses. It is important to note that interviews allow for conversation which is a fundamental interaction for human beings where people learn about each other’s lives and experiences (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2006).
Semi-structured interviews have a set of questions to be covered and a suggested sequence to be followed; at the same time “there is an openness to change the sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the subjects” (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). Moreover, semi-structured interviewing allowed for a friendly and personal environment that fits well with the Emirati culture and gave me as a researcher a better chance to establish rapport with the participants.

Semi-structured interviews are not like structured interviews in terms of reducing bias and ensuring comparability of responses. In structured interviews all participants are asked the same pre-determined set of questions and a standardized question pattern is carefully followed. Semi-structured interviews reduce the comparability of interviews within the study but on the other hand provide a more valid explication of the informants’ perceptions of reality which is core to my study. Unstructured (in-depth) interviews on the other hand have no order and no script – the interaction between the participant and the researcher is more like a conversation where the interview is directed by the participant rather than by the set of questions (Dunn, 2010). Qu and Dumay (2011) argued that structured interviews focus on facts, unstructured interviews focus on meaning, and semi-structured interviews focus on the social construction of situated accounts which makes it the most suited to my research study.

Designing and conducting the interviews was a process that required a good deal of preparation and attention. Designing the interviews involved: framing the research questions, choosing the type of interview to be used, defining the sample, seeking research ethics approval (Appendix 6 and Appendix 11), recruiting participants, and developing an interview guide. Conducting the interviews involved: the interview setting, recording the interview, building
rapport, the way questions were asked, and ensuring a good start and finish of the interview (King & Harrocks, 2010).

An interview protocol was developed to obtain details about participants’ experiences with regards to their perceptions on the way that participation in non-classroom activities affected their employability attributes. The interview protocol consisted of finding out about the major employability attributes considered, with follow-up probes as needed. The preparation of questions and the conduct of the interviews were informed by the examination of relevant literature, and consideration of issues that needed to be clarified.

The questions were prepared in order to examine the nature of the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and the development of those employability attributes. The list of interview questions (Appendix 2 and Appendix 3) guided the interview process, but particular questions were not necessarily raised in the order as listed. Questions were used as appropriate following participants’ responses during the interviews. Flexibility in posing questions was crucial to ensure the flow of discussion.

In regards to conducting the interviews, all interviews conducted in my research were face-to-face individual interviews. I made sure that the interview setting was inviting and convenient for the participants. I was careful about the location of the interview, the physical environment, and the timing of the interview. For all students, the interviews were conducted at their college in one of the modern meeting rooms in the library which has good sound insulation. The physical environment of the interviews was professional and at the same time relaxed where the students were in their own premises and had the privacy of being in a dedicated meeting room with no outside interruptions. The time of the interviews was agreed upon with the participants; we booked a time that was convenient to them during the day when they were already in the
college. I was flexible in setting up the time, ensured that it was suitable to the participants, and avoided as much as possible scheduling more than one interview in the same day. Most interviews with staff members took place in their own offices; they chose to do this as it was more convenient for them. A couple of interviews took place in my office where the participants found it a nice chance to come and visit me in a different campus. All interviews with staff members took place at the end of the semester when all exams and grades were completed; this allowed for a more relaxed time with staff members.

As it is strongly preferable to have a full record of each interview for comprehensive documentation and further reference, I audio recorded all interviews conducted in my research. This took place after seeking approval from participants and agreeing on a protocol where they would give me a signal if they wanted me to stop the recording at any stage in the interview. It was also clearly communicated to participants that, if they wished, they could ask me to discard the interview and the recording at any stage before the work was processed. All participants were happy to have the interviews recorded, and no issues were faced.

Building rapport is a key component in qualitative research interviewing; building rapport is about trust which is essential in this type of research so that participants feel comfortable in opening up and speaking about their experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I ensured that the project was well introduced to the participants and that they had enough lead time and relevant details to allow them to come ready to the interview and feel comfortable. A clear description of the project was given to the participants at the time of the invitation to participate. The set of self-reflection questions and interview questions were emailed at least a week before the interview to the participants. A clear preview about the project was provided to the participants at the start of the interview, and the ethics form (Appendix 6 and Appendix 7) was
clearly explained to them before the interview and recording took place. The topic was a helping factor as students were happy to talk and elaborate about their experiences in this area as participation in non-classroom activities was totally students’ choice and most of them found it very valuable to talk about and reflect on how they thought this affected their graduate employability attributes development. Another factor that I regarded important in building rapport was that I spoke the students’ mother language, Arabic, and I was flexible and invited them to use the language they felt more comfortable to use. Some used English, most used Arabic, and some switched between the two languages. This reduced a huge obstacle, mainly for students, and allowed them to express themselves clearly, reflect, and elaborate on the areas they wished to elaborate on. Moreover, being a member of the HCT administration, which the students highly respect, and having a Middle Eastern background, which assured them that I understood their culture well, were important elements that helped in building the trust and provided the students a secure atmosphere in which to provide information.

In regards to the way questions were asked, I was very careful in the opening remarks, ensuring that participants were clear about the project, and made sure that I introduced myself well in the capacity as a researcher. I was careful not to provide leading questions that may have implied answers; I tried to keep the questions simple, clear, and direct as much as possible. If the participants did not understand the question, I would repeat it in a different way or in Arabic, or refer to the pre-interview self-reflection questions for clarification. I was careful about not giving judgmental comments as those may have affected the participants’ responses; at the same time I was positive and inviting. I was careful about the non-verbal communications and ensured that my body language was positive at all times. I made sure that I listened carefully to what the participants had to say, did not interrupt, and provided some silence space so that the participants could think about further details to give if any. I encouraged elaboration probes so that the
participants provided more details and talked about real life stories, and had some clarification probes where I sought explanation as needed. Lastly, I ensured a good finish to the interviews where I thanked the participants, asked them if they wished to add any other information – some of them did – and I assured them that I would share the work with them once completed. All interviews were transcribed and those transcripts became the main data source used in the analysis.

Interviews were coded using the following convention: (E or S#/DD.MM.YY/###) where E stands for Employee, S stands for Student, DD.MM.YY represent the interview date, and the # stands for a digit. The digits at the end of the code represent the line number of the start of the quote. Following is an example: (E1/26.4.12/212) which represents line number 212 in the interview transcript for employee 1 which was held on the 26th of April 2012. Another example is (S5/14.5.12/7) which represents line number 7 in the interview transcript for student 5 which was held on the 14th of May 2012.

4.3.5.1 Document reviews

Document reviews was the other data collection method used in this research to provide the researcher with data related to the subject under study. I gathered various forms of institutional documents such as college news articles, policies and procedures, student handbook, course outlines, and calendar of non-classroom activities. The largest documentation set (130 documents) was a register of official college news articles that covered non-classroom activities that took place in the college over a seven-year period, from 2007 to 2014. I went back to the year 2007 in my document reviews to try, as much as possible, to cover the period of time during which the student participants as a whole were studying in the college. Some of those students were in their last year of study when I interviewed them in 2012, having undertaken one
foundations year and four years of study in a Bachelor level program, stretching back to 2007. I tried to cover the full period of time my students were in the college so that I could build a more detailed understanding of what was happening in the college then.

The college news articles were publicly available on the college website and provided a rich record of data about NCAs that took place in the college. They included quotes and reflections from students who participated in NCAs; this was useful for my research as it afforded me an even broader perspective, beyond that of the selected participants. A sample of a college news article is provided in Appendix 13.

4.4 Participants and Sampling Techniques

Two groups of participants were interviewed in the study: staff and students. Staff participants were a mix of Emiratis and non-Emiratis and were not limited to only female participants, whereas student participants were all Emirati female students. There was no constraint on the program of study or year level of student participants; they were a mix of junior and senior students from different programs, and one of the participants was a graduate. The student participants were aged between 18 and 30 years.

One of the main research design decisions was not to restrict the study to input from students but to involve relevant staff members as their contribution was important in helping to build a rich picture of the learning context of the student participants and deepen the understanding of students’ experiences. The nine staff participants comprised a faculty member, program coordinators, a professional counsellor, and student affairs personnel. They all had experience in organizing, dealing with, or observing student participation in non-classroom
activities and provided important insight about their experience with women students participating in non-classroom activities.

It is important to mention that there was no power relationship between the participants and the researcher. Although the researcher was a member of the administration team in the colleges, at the time of the interviews the researcher worked for the Central Academic Services division in the HCT system which is an independent body that does not belong to any particular college. The researcher did not teach the students at Abu Dhabi Women’s College and had no direct effect on students’ academic progress, course selection or program decisions. Interview schedules were worked out following communication with participants (Appendix 4).

The following table provides brief information about the research participants and an overview of the activities/ work related to activities they were involved in.

Table 4.2 Research participant details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Interviewee Pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff/ Student</th>
<th>Description/ Program</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>Support Group Coordinator, Peer Tutoring Group Manager, Art Club Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Supervisor - Student Support</td>
<td>Supervisor - Student Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Salwa</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Coordinator - Student Support</td>
<td>Coordinator - Student Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Inaam</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Supervisor - Community Relations</td>
<td>Student Support, Community Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Program Coordinator – Engineering</td>
<td>Engineering projects facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Senior Officer - Student Services</td>
<td>Senior Officer - Student Services - Khalifa Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Faculty – Business School</td>
<td>Art Club participant, organizer of a number of events including ambassadors day, business bazaar, and debate sessions. An active member in the Jerba project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Salma</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Academic Supervisor</td>
<td>Work Readiness Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.4.1 Student participants

Seven Abu Dhabi Women’s College students from a number of programs and different levels were interviewed. The depth of experience of each of these students is important in this research. The following provides a brief introduction to each of the student participants; the names used are all pseudonyms.

**Nouf** was the Vice President of the Students’ Representative Council in the college at the time of the interview; she was a very active student who became so popular that one of the Sheikhas (ruling family member) called her personally to coordinate a new project in the country about women’s development. Nouf provided rich data to the research.

**Reem** was the President of the Students’ Representative Council in the college at the time of the interview; she was a very active student who developed skills to deal with public figures,
VIPs, and people from all over the world. Reem participated in national and international non-classroom activities. She came from a conservative family but was able, with her hard work and development, to change her father’s views. He now supports her to complete her studies abroad and join the diplomatic corps.

**Meera** was a mature student who joined the college in 1998 and graduated from the certificate program in 2001 after which she joined the workforce; a little later she joined the diploma program on a part-time basis and graduated in 2003. She joined the college again in 2010 to complete her degree program; at the time of the interview she was in Year Two of the Bachelor of Applied Business program. Meera was one of the pioneers who joined the Support Group in 1998 which was the first non-classroom activity in the college. She reflected on the experience she gained from her participation in the Support Group and how this affected her development and progress at her work.

**Nadia** was a Year Two student in the Education department at the time of the interview. She had participated in different non-classroom activities since her early days in the college. Nadia was the head of the food committee of the student council. She participated in the French language club, and took part in a number of conferences.

**Ameena** was a mature student with a number of years of industry experience. She is one of those pioneers who participated with Layla (staff member) in the Support Group years ago. Ameena reflected on how her participation in the Support Group helped her develop and the way this affected her progress in her work. She presented interesting examples and talked about situations she faced in the workforce and how she relates her reaction to the experience she gained from participation in the Support Group. Ameena returned to the college as a part-time student to complete her Bachelor degree.
Maria was one of the first Engineering students in the college; she came from a relatively conservative family, with her father having passed away when she was young. She participated in a number of non-classroom activities in the college including a trip to Germany. Maria participated in an Engineering competition in the college; her work led to one of the major oil companies in the country offering her a full-time position which she accepted.

Hala was a graduate from the Diploma in the IT program. She came from a very conservative family. Her father totally refused any attempt of her driving or working. The interview with Hala was rich in information as she provided an example of those females who have a lot of energy but were not in a position of being able to be employed or to participate in the workforce. She refused to waste her time and currently communicates with a number of organizations to arrange functions to help the community. Hala was creative and presented a number of new ideas about adapting some necessary tools to be used by the elderly or when travelling. She continues to be in contact with some manufacturers to produce her ideas. Hala participated in a number of non-classroom activities during her time in the college and reflected on how she thinks this participation affected the way she is leading her life now.

4.4.2 Staff participants

It is important to the research that I record the observations and experiences of a number of key staff members who were involved in students’ non-classroom activities and witnessed the kind of change in students’ personal and professional development during the college journey, particularly in relation to participation in non-classroom activities. The following section provides a brief description about each of the staff participants; the names provided are all pseudonyms.
Layla, was a counsellor and a pioneer in introducing non-classroom activities to the college. She brought a psychologically informed perspective to the research as well as an overview of the history of the development of non-classroom activities in the college.

Julie, was the student affairs supervisor for Abu Dhabi Women’s College City and Khalifa campuses and administered the offering on non-classroom activities in both campuses. She provided a rich observation about students’ development and talked about a number of student cases. Coming from England, where she was educated and had worked, Julie provided a Western observer’s perspective of women’s education in the UAE.

Salwa, was the student support and development officer in the city campus and was in charge of student activities, working on a day-to-day basis with students. Her job involved dealing with external stakeholders and families. She shared students’ stories, challenges faced, and reflected on students’ development. Salwa had been doing this role for 10 years at the time of the interview; during this time she was able to witness some students’ experiences with activities from the start of their college journey until the time they graduated.

Inaam was a community relations and marketing supervisor in the college who had held the position of student services supervisor for nine years. She had dealt with hundreds of students who participated in non-classroom activities in both college campuses. Inaam came from a similar culture to the students’ UAE culture and provided an employee perspective that is relatively conservative.

Sam, who was the head of the Engineering programs at the Women’s College, provided the science and technology aspect to the research. His students mainly participated in Engineering and scientific activities. He talked about the work and development opportunities that his
students acquired when they participated in such activities and provided a number of real life examples of engineering students’ experiences.

**Mona** was a student development and support officer. An Emirati who came from a conservative family, she completed her studies in the college and then got a job in students’ affairs in the same college. Mona dealt with students’ non-classroom activities on a daily basis and had a lot to contribute to the research.

**Diana** was a faculty member in the Business school and an Emirati who had studied in England. She participated in the Art Club with students. Diana provided an interesting aspect of a faculty member’s participation in non-classroom activities and observations of the effects these activities had on the students. Her Western education was reflected in her interview through examples and reflections on students’ experiences, and added another dimension to the data collected.

**Salma** was the supervisor of the college’s “Work Readiness” program that dealt with preparing women who had left studies for a number of years to join the workforce. An Emirati, Salma talked about how the work readiness program dealt with curricular and non-curricular activities.

**Sawsan** held the position of student services assistant and was a student in the Business program in the college. As an Emirati female she uniquely reflected both the student and employee viewpoints.

**4.4.3 Sampling techniques**

The Purposeful Snowball sampling strategy was the main strategy adopted in recruiting student participants in this research study. The purposeful approach was adopted because it
allowed for the selection of information-rich interviewees to study in depth (Patton, 2002). It was regarded as the most appropriate given that qualitative enquiry typically focuses on a small sample of interviewees selected purposefully in comparison to qualitative studies that are more concerned with randomly selected larger samples (Patton, 2002).

I started by sending an invitation to students to participate in this research via the Student Services Department (refer to Appendix 1 for details of the email invitation sent to students in both Arabic and English). However, the main sampling process started when I interviewed one of the college counsellors who played a major role in starting up non-classroom activities in the college years ago. The counsellor then suggested that I talk to students and graduates who participated with her in the Support Group and Art Club in the early days of the college. I informed the Student Services Department who sent invitations to those students to participate in the study; a number of those students accepted the invitation.

One of the students who was interested in participating in my research and accepted the invitation was the Vice President of the Students’ Representative Council in the college. When I interviewed her she referred me to a number of students who were involved in college activities and to whom I then sent invitations to participate through the Student Services Department; a number of them accepted the invitation.

In regards to the staff participants, a Purposeful Sampling Technique was also adopted. Information-rich cases were strategically and purposefully selected to deepen my understanding of the student development and provide a professional perspective (Patton, 2002). When recruiting staff participants I tried to cover different angles: student affairs personnel who were directly involved with student activities; an academic who participated with students in the art activities; the head of the Engineering programs who was responsible for technical activities,
conferences, and competitions; and one of the college counsellors who provided a professional psychological aspect. The staff participants included people from different backgrounds, covering the spectrum of an English female who had been working in the UAE for a few years; staff members from Middle Eastern backgrounds; and local Emirati women, some of whom were college alumnae. Most of the staff members recruited were colleagues with whom I had good working relations at HCT. They were sent email invitations to participate in the study and most of them accepted.

4.5 Validity and Reliability of the Research

Yin (2009) tells us that the quality of a research design is judged based on four criteria: (1) construct validity, (2) internal validity, (3) external validity, and (4) reliability. The first, construct validity, is based on the degree to which correct operational procedures are followed to measure the concepts being studied. For the purposes of this study, I established construct validity through the use of multiple data sources, in this case personal interviews with students and staff members, a pre-interview questionnaire, and document analysis. This established a chain of evidence by which the reader can retrace the process and observe verbatim quotes from the participants.

Looking at the validity of qualitative enquiry, Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that “Qualitative enquirers bring to their studies a different lens towards validity than that brought to traditional, quantitative studies” (p. 125). Looking from the Case Study methodology perspective, case studies are criticized for the inevitable subjectivity involved in creating the narrative, but this subjectivity is reduced by sharing the data with those who are involved in the study (Koshy, 2010). As such I have provided each participant with a copy of the transcript of her/his interview notes to validate the correctness of the information and confirm the contextual accuracy.
Additionally, I compared the data collected from the students’ interviews with data collected from staff interviews. I also tried, as much as possible, to find more details about some issues discussed in the official college news records. This was to counterbalance researcher bias and to ensure the meaning derived from the themes compiled was correct. Comparing and cross-checking data among various sources enhances the overall trustworthiness and is considered a best practice within qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).

Internal validity in my research was tested through the direct interviews with the students and staff members. Merriam reported that because human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research this allows us to access the interpretation of reality directly and brings us closer to the reality than having a data collection instrument interjected between the researcher and the participants. Merriam linked internal reality with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) notion of credibility. E. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) used similar concepts and argued that credibility in qualitative research is comparable to internal validity in quantitative research. Achievement of credibility in qualitative research depends on the effort the researcher is willing to put in to increase accuracy and truthfulness of the data collected. In my research I collected real life stories and situations as much as possible that would explain students’ development. I interviewed staff members who worked closely with students and were able to observe their progress and reflect on it. In my report I used participants’ quotations as accurate representation of participants’ experiences; this was complemented with sufficient detail to provide the credible context necessary for analysis and interpretation. Credibility in qualitative research is also related to looking at the representativeness of the data as a whole (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This has been accomplished by reviewing the individual transcripts of staff and students, looking for similarities within and across participants’ data and producing generic themes from recurring patterns that emerged from multiple sources of data.
External validity attempts to determine whether the study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study. While generalizability was not a goal of this qualitative research, conducting interviews with staff members allowed me to attempt to extrapolate the findings to a larger population, and in doing so I was able to determine external validity. Moreover, examining a seven-year record of college news articles that included quotes from internal and external people allowed me to verify external validity. I would argue that although the scope of my research study is a college at Abu Dhabi in the UAE, the results of the research should be transferable to other women colleges in the UAE and the area including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman. In addition, the study informs ways of developing students’ personal skills and employability attributes; and generates recommendations for curriculum considerations.

Reliability is the degree to which the findings from one research study can be replicated (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This may be possible through the case study protocol documented here and the documentation collected throughout the work. In this study a careful outline of the context of the study has been provided as well as a clear description of the social and cultural settings of the research participants, selection strategies, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. However, due to the unique nature of the college and types of NCAs the students participated in, the reliability of future studies would most likely only apply to students in similar conservative cultures.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined Neutrality as another component to be considered when asserting the trustworthiness of qualitative research. This is also referred to as conformability and takes place when credibility, reliability, and validity have been established (E. Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Researcher reflexivity, awareness and openness are important elements in this regard as they provide a sense of validity in the research. As a researcher I was aware of my own
preconceptions and how these affected my interpretation of the research findings. I ensured that I made a conscious decision to follow rather than lead during the interviews; this was done by asking the participants for clarifications, life stories, and reflections on decisions made. Throughout the research a number of strategies were implemented to contribute to its validity in this aspect; these include the development of the epistemological and theoretical framework aligned to the purpose of the study and the research question and sub-questions. I also clarified the relationship between the researcher and participants in the study. Further, a clear context of the study, the settings, the roles of the participants, and the social and cultural setting was provided.

Based on the discussion above, I argue that my research meets the necessary elements to support the criteria for evaluating the quality of this study within a Constructionism Interpretive research paradigm, and a Case Study approach.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are intrinsic in this type of research due to the nature of the students’ values and cultural issues. The RMIT University and HCT research ethics procedures were followed to guide the research ethical considerations throughout the research journey. Moreover, my understanding of the Emirati culture and its dynamics helped me to realize any sensitive matters and I employed the necessary actions to ensure moral research practices. This research was approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (CHEAN B-2000653-03/12), and the School of Graduate Research (SGR) Confirmation of Candidature dated the 10th of November 2011. It was also approved by the Abu Dhabi Women’s College Research Review Board.
The Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007), and the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) ethics guidelines (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007) were followed in regards to complying with research ethical values, principles, and considerations. This includes fulfilling RMIT (CHEAN) requirements and receiving a written research clearance (Appendix 6). Plain language statements and informed consent forms (PICF) were prepared and used in accordance with RMIT and HCT research ethics. This is to ensure that the two groups of participants (students and staff members) were suitably informed of the purpose and objectives of the research. Forms were signed by all participants in the study (Appendix 7 and Appendix 8).

All participants were assured of their rights and privacy. Anonymity of participants was followed but as the research progressed, it was suspected that the identity of some participants could be identified by either the type of work they did or the role they took in the institution. Based on that I applied for an amendment to the ethics review (Appendix 9) to seek approval to inform participants of such a consequence and obtain their written consent that they had been made aware of this situation and that they were comfortable about this possibility. Participants signed the revised new Plain Information and Consent Form (PICF) (Appendix 10).

At HCT I followed the Abu Dhabi Women’s College research ethics approval process as required because the research was held at Abu Dhabi Women’s College with college students. I produced all the needed documentation which included: research proposal and ethics clearance form, participant voluntary informed consent form, voluntary participation statement, interview questions, and access request. The required documentation was submitted to the Research Review Board (RRB) at Abu Dhabi Women’s College. The RRB asked me to consider few minor
amendments which were implemented. After gaining the RRB initial approval, the process was to present the project to the college leadership committee who showed interest about the project and provided valuable input. I then received the approved research access form signed by the college director – refer to Appendix 11 for a copy of the signed access form and related correspondence.

4.7 Analysis of Data

Consistent with a Constructionist Interpretive methodology (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crotty, 1998), where I aimed at building an understanding of the case under study in terms of the meaning that people bring to it, the analysis of data in my work was ongoing and closely connected to data generation. In order to unfold the analysis I used a three-phase approach that demonstrates how data, conceptualization and the analytical processes interacted during the research to shape and draw meaning from the data. The three phase approach included: an ongoing ‘reflective analysis’; a ‘unit analysis’ of each of the written interview transcripts and of the set of documentation collected; and an ‘in-depth analysis’ that drew on thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and inductive analysis.

4.7.1 Analytical phase 1: Ongoing reflective analysis

The first phase of the analysis involved intuitive and continual reflection on the research process and data collected – what I refer to as preliminary reflective analysis. Preliminary reflections started in a pre-research stage through my daily interactions with the students and observation of their development. This was then refined by the initial literature review and the development of the research question and sub-questions.
When I started the research the reflective thinking continued, particularly during the data collection stage where I conducted the interviews and collected the relevant documentation. I was aware that certain influences such as my background as a woman from the Middle East, and my interactions with Emirati students and colleagues for almost 20 years allowed me to be more responsive and sensitive to the details and nuances of the discussions and interviews. My familiarity with the culture, organization, and the power structure in the area allowed me to be able to untangle certain complexities, be able to follow up on some interesting threads, and be aware of some dominating constraints. This pre-emptive knowledge allowed me to start an overview interview analysis as early as the interview time which helped me to structure follow-up questions and other interviews for subsequent analysis as needed.

A practice I followed is that after conducting each interview I spent time reflecting on what I gathered from the interview and wrote a set of main points in my journal. These reflections revealed certain aspects of the students’ experiences that characterized ways of development, and highlighted critical practices that I tried to pursue during consequent interviews or post-interview clarification questions. As an example, in an excerpt taken from my interview with the college counsellor about students’ participation in the Support Group and how this affected their graduate attributes, the counsellor said: “Participation in the Support Group provided the students with a good setup to deal with different types of people and with different cultures” (E1/26.4.12/179). I followed this up with interviews with two students who participated with the counsellor in the Support Group. The students reflected on their experiences in the Support Group and how they thought it affected their interpersonal skills.

My initial notes and reflections on the interviews revealed other aspects that I found important in building the students’ experiences and valuable to consider as we think about
developing the students’ graduate employability attributes. For example, in the interview with Sam the Head of the Engineering Department in the college, we discussed the way participation in science oriented non-classroom activities contributes to the development of students’ graduate employability attributes including decision making, time management, and adaptability. My initial notes and reflections on the interview revealed other important aspects like the opportunities that can be created, the faculty support required, and ways of encouraging risk taking.

The initial reflective analysis notes gave me a good grasp of the different types of non-classroom activities offered, their scale and the extent those played in developing students’ skills and attributes. This was complemented with the documentation collection and analysis which allowed me to learn more about the different types of activities offered and to check students’ quotes that provided me with information about ways of participation and the impact that participation in non-classroom activities had on students’ graduate employability attributes.

The reflective analysis continued during transcribing the interviews phase as for each interview I compiled a set of summary points that captured the main ideas that came up in the interview. The reflective interview journals, the interview transcripts, and the documentation collected from the college news publications comprised the base for the next phase of analysis, the unit analysis.

### 4.7.2 Analytical phase 2: Unit analysis

In this stage I carried out a unit analysis of each of the written interview transcripts and assembled a list of findings from the interview questions; this was a comprehensive analysis of each of the interviews. I also conducted a unit analysis of the documentation set collected in
relation to the generic graduate employability attributes considered. I then compiled a document noting the points and ideas that came up from each interview. Additionally, in this phase I further examined the three main constructs in the research: the participants, the non-classroom activities, and the graduate employability attributes; and compiled lists to help in the detailed analysis phase. Figure 17 shows the three main constructs and the relation between them. It also lists the graduate employability attributes considered in the research.
Figure 17. The three main constructs in this study
4.7.3 Analytical phase 3: Detailed analysis

In this phase I worked on bringing all the data collected together to extract meaning and compile emerging themes. Merriam (2009) reported that conveying understanding is the paramount consideration in analysing case studies. She also reported that a number of data analysis techniques may be employed in analysing findings from case studies. In this phase I used inductive and comparative data analysis approaches as I tried to draw meaning out of the students’ experiences. For this purpose I drew on the thematic analysis techniques from the comparative method of data analysis defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their work on Grounded Theory.

As a starting point in this phase, I followed Yin’s advice and compiled a case study database as a central repository for analysis. This database comprised all interview transcripts, documentation collected and summaries compiled from the previous phases of analysis. Patton (2002) referred to this database as the case record and considered it the primary source package for data analysis.

Building on the comprehensive unit analysis which was completed in the previous analysis phase, I started to use thematic data analysis techniques to compare and contrast transcripts and unit analysis documentation of the different interviews to look for recurring ideas. Thematic analysis is a practice in qualitative research which involves searching through data to identify recurrent issues (Creswell, 2013). It is an iterative and inductive technique that requires comparing the data in an iterative manner to check for recurring patterns of meaning. In my study I looked for repeated ideas and views from both students and staff member data. I also looked for evidence from the students’ lived stories to help me construct new knowledge to address the research questions.
Thematic analysis requires the involvement and interpretation of the researcher; it moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this process of engagement with the interview data I aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the meanings that the participants brought forward, and looked at accumulating emerging issues that would lead into potential themes. The backbone of this analysis technique is to compare participant with participant, and idea with idea to formulate the emerging patterns in the data and elaborate on these findings by checking them against incoming data from other students and from staff members. In this case study, recurring themes of building graduate employability attributes were derived. Analysis went into iterations where individual participant responses were analysed in the first stage. Then recurring themes from the different students’ responses were extracted; afterwards refinement and interrelationship of categories of information were developed and prominent themes and issues arising from students’ responses were identified. Then theoretical sampling of a different group (staff) was analysed to look for similarities and differences of information. Staff members’ responses opened up a number of doors for useful ideas that may impact the students’ educational journey. Finally the sets of themes derived from both groups of participants (students and staff) were further examined and prominent themes and recommendations were compiled.

4.8 Summary

This Constructionist research project was a Case Study informed by Interpretive enquiry that examined ways of advancing female students’ graduate employability attributes through participation in non-classroom activities. I conducted my research as a single-case design containing multiple units of analysis which explored the relationship between the development of
graduate employability attributes and participation in non-classroom activities in an Emirati college within the federal, public HE system in the UAE. This chapter outlined the research model followed and discussed the methodological position adopted. It has been established within a qualitative research approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) where the researcher seeks to gain insight into students’ characteristics such as their behaviour, motivation, and development in order to increase the understanding of the situation under study. The Constructionism epistemology adopted (Crotty, 1998) accepts the premise that knowledge and truth is constructed, not discovered. As the model used is oriented towards reconstructed understanding of students’ personal and professional development, the Interpretivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2013) guided the study. The Case Study methodology (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009) was adopted in this research and informed the selection of the research methods. Although Feminism ideology is acknowledged, it was not the main focus of the study. The semi-structured interviews (Dunn, 2010) formulated the principal method of data collection in this study supported by documentation analysis. All interviews were transcribed and these transcriptions and the other data collected became the data source used in the analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Yin, 2009) that went through an iterative model to compile themes that emerged from the study and which will be discussed in the following chapters.

The next chapter addresses the results collected from the interview questions and provides a set of points compiled for each question. It also provides results of the document reviews.
Chapter 5 - Results

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I provide a framework of the research findings and present the main ideas and recurring points that came up during the data collection stage. I start with the three main constructs of the study: the participants, the activities, and the graduate employability attributes. I then provide brief descriptions of the participating students’ experiences and backgrounds as these are essential contextual factors in the study. I follow this up with results of each of the interview questions for both students and staff members, and in the end I record results collected from the college documentation gathered from the official college news records that are published publicly on the institution’s corporate website.

5.1 The Participants

During this study nine staff interviews and seven student interviews were conducted. The students and staff members shared their experiences, presented their ideas, and reflected on their involvement in non-classroom activities and how it affected the students’ learning experiences and the development of students’ graduate employability attributes. All staff members interviewed were connected to students’ non-classroom activities (NCAs). They were a mix of academics and administrators, one came from a Western background, four came from Middle Eastern backgrounds, and four were UAE nationals. Of the four UAE national staff members two were college alumnae and one was completing her Bachelor degree as a part-time student in the college. The profile of the employees who completed, or were completing their studies, in the
college allowed them to reflect on both employee and student views on the topic under research. Students who were interviewed were a mix of Year two, Year three, Year four students, and graduates. They came from different programs of study, and a number of them studied and worked at the same time.

Based on the data collected I further categorized the two main groups of participants, students and staff, into five sub-groups. The groups were further categorized based on participants’ backgrounds and experiences. This regrouping formulated a base for examining the graduates’ attributes addressed from different points of view. A simple group code has been used for quick data reference. The group code comprises two characters, the first character indicates whether the group is student (S) or employee (E), and the second character indicates the type of the group using the following notation: (A) for all, (M) for mature aged, (N) for new, and (E) for employee. Table 5.1 below documents the participating groups’ details.
### Table 5.1 Participant groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Code</th>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Participants (Pseudonyms used)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Students All</td>
<td>Set of all students who participated in the research including current and Alumnae.</td>
<td>Nouf, Nadia, Reem, Meera, Ameena, Maria, Hala, Sawsan, Mona, Salma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Mature aged Students</td>
<td>Students, who studied in the college 10 years ago, participated in non-classroom activities at that time and joined the workforce after their graduation. Those students reflected on their experiences on participation in non-classroom activities and how this affected their development and progress in the workforce.</td>
<td>Meera, Ameena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN</td>
<td>New Students</td>
<td>Current college students (at the time of the interview) who are either participating or participated in non-classroom activities. Those students joined the college after completing their high school studies and reflected on their experience.</td>
<td>Nouf, Reem, Maria, Hala, Nadia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Student Employee</td>
<td>Emirati female employees in the college, who completed their studies in the college and either participated or were currently working with students who participated in non-classroom activities. They reflected on their observations and experiences taking into consideration the UAE Emirati culture aspect.</td>
<td>Mona, Salma, Sawsan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA</td>
<td>Employees All</td>
<td>Set of employees who participated in the research. They all work closely with students and reflected on their experiences and observation of students’ progress. The SE group is included in this group.</td>
<td>Layla, Julie, Salwa, Inaam, Sam, Dania, Mona, Salma, Sawsan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I then further characterized the participating staff members’ profiles according to their different positions and backgrounds. This was useful in exploring the different perspectives that staff brought to their reflections on students’ experiences and allowed me to understand the diversity and richness in those reflections. The different staff members’ profiles were presented in section 4.6.2 of the methodology chapter and are further summarized in Table 5.2 below according to their different profile characteristics.

Table 5.2 Staff members’ profile characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Characteristic</th>
<th>Staff Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselling experience</td>
<td>Psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western cultural values</td>
<td>English staff member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local cultural values</td>
<td>Emirati staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific experience</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emirati with Western education values</td>
<td>Emirati staff member who studied in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry experience</td>
<td>Work readiness program supervisor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 The Activities

In this UAE case study that is the focus of research undertaken from 2012 to 2015, the data collected revealed that the non-classroom activities (NCAs) were not merely those organized by the college, but were a wider collection of special events, national and international events, specialized programs, invitations to high level functions, opportunities to take part in industry projects, and others. It is speculated that this may be related to the rapid transformation in the country from a simple society to an international business hub where education, being part of the rapid change, met with great opportunities to develop the students. Another important factor may well be the small number of local Emirati people in the country (12.5%, refer to section 3.1.1) which afforded more opportunities for involving the Emirati students in activities relating to the new developments.

As part of this development, the importance of nurturing women’s education was realized at the topmost echelons of government, and the college received high levels of support in terms of technology infrastructure, state-of-the-art classrooms, modern facilities, and the application of modern teaching and learning techniques. The leadership support was demonstrated in the direct support of His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak who is a member of the ruling family, the founder of the Higher Colleges of Technology, and a person who held the positions of Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research (1990-2013); and, since March 2013, Minister of Culture, Youth and Community Development. With his direct patronage the college tended to become one of the places that many high ranked guests to the UAE visited. Moreover, the college became a host to a number of conferences, forums, and other events. This provided valuable opportunities for the students to be exposed to different cultures, and to interact with a wide range of individuals including people from the community, industry representatives, media
representatives, international students, and school students. Added to these opportunities was a general practice to have students at the front line in all college activities, even if those activities were not student oriented. This included having students take the role of master of ceremony (MC) in conferences, escorting college visitors around the campus, presenting their programs and special projects to industry, and participating in community related events.

Students also had opportunities to take part in authentic projects and were eligible for sponsorships to participate in national and international conferences. Moreover, the college received courtesy spaces in many exhibitions in the country to allow the Emirati students to showcase their projects and talents. They also received invitations to attend specialized talks and workshops that took place at different locations and were hosted in companies, organizations, or in palaces.

Students and staff members shared a number of experiences in their interviews. Sam, one of the employee participants, talked about the projects his students participated in and reflected on the significant effect these special projects had on his students’ development. The projects he talked about were authentic engineering projects with companies, and were not necessarily part of a particular class or subject. As an example, Sam talked about the case of a student who he said was: “very shy to the extent that she was an introvert” (E5/2.5.12/227). He asked her to join two other students in a project with the Abu Dhabi airport administration for real time locating systems for people with disabilities. The students had to participate in meetings with a technical team from Abu Dhabi airport and had to conduct meetings with experts from the European Union in regards to people with disabilities. When talking about the meetings Sam said: “I was present and I could see how difficult that was for the girls at the beginning; at the end if you could see the change at the end of one year, they actually gave a presentation in front of a large group of
managers confidently” (E5/2.5.12/230). These experiences provided significant learning experiences for the students and provided them with great opportunities to practise professional business interactions, showcase their abilities and build connections with the industry.

With this wide range of non-classroom activities, I found it helpful to categorize them for further analysis:

- **College activities:** these included students’ clubs, student run programs, specialized program activities such as the college bazaar, the health and wellness week, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) day; it also included college wide activities such as the breast cancer awareness week.
- **Student leaders’ groups:** these included the Student Representative Council (SRC) and the Student Ambassadors Group.
- **Intercollege activities:** these included leadership programs; specialized forums and conferences like the Engineering Excellence Forum where Engineering students from different colleges participated in the forum. They also participated in system wide competitions like art and design competitions; and scientific and technical competitions like the mobile apps development competition.
- **Activities that expanded across all higher educational institutions:** these included the Sheikh Mohammed Leadership program, sports competitions, and photography exhibitions among other activities.
- **National activities:** these included activities like the Heritage Film Festival, the Open-Source Educational Technology Conference, the Najah Exhibition and other activities.
- **International activities:** these included participation in conferences, international internships, international competitions, and special trips – as for example, in March
2013, nine students from Abu Dhabi Women’s College organized and participated in a trip to climb Tanzania’s Mount Kilimanjaro (HCT News, 2013, March).

- Internships: these were integrated into the curriculum of all programs in the institution. All students had to complete four to eight weeks of internship during their studies in the college. Although this was a ‘must pass’ course in the program, it is considered a non-classroom activity as it did not take place in the college.

Table 5.3 documents examples of the different types of activities classified by level of activity and area covered.
Table 5.3 Classifications of the activities in which participants were involved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level/Area</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Art</th>
<th>Humanitarian</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Community Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Class leaders</td>
<td>Class leaders</td>
<td>Student forum</td>
<td>College Bazaar</td>
<td>Creative Arts Show</td>
<td>Blood donation drive, Breast cancer awareness programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td></td>
<td>Specialized Engineering projects with companies</td>
<td>College Bazaar</td>
<td>Creative Arts Show</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blood donation drive, Breast cancer awareness programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Students Council, Student</td>
<td>Environment Club, Science Club, Math Club</td>
<td>Al Jerba project Workshops</td>
<td>Art Exhibition, Fashion</td>
<td>Projects with the Red Crescent, Projects with the future centre</td>
<td>Language clubs, Story Writing Club, Peer tutors, Support Group, Ajyaluna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambassadors Leadership programs</td>
<td>Specialized workshops</td>
<td></td>
<td>Show</td>
<td></td>
<td>Language clubs, Story Writing Club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing competition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercollege</td>
<td>General Student Council</td>
<td>Northrop Grumman competition</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship competition</td>
<td>Logo design competition, Jewellery design competition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing competition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation wide</td>
<td>Sheikh Mohammed Leadership</td>
<td>Emirates Skills, Engineering Conference</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship competition</td>
<td>Film Festival</td>
<td>Projects with the Red Crescent</td>
<td>Bader Club, National Day activities, Reading for children and elderly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bader Club, National Day activities, Reading for children and elderly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>Education without Borders</td>
<td>IEEE Competition</td>
<td>Art conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Refugee camps visits and support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conference, Festival of Thinkers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 The Graduate Employability Attributes

The graduate employability attributes that were considered in this research were compiled from the United Arab Emirates National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and the HCT graduate outcomes. The NQF defines eight generic skills areas, out of which they compiled seven core life skills, and the HCT defines eight graduate outcomes (GOs). I mapped the NQF areas and core life skills to the HCT GOs, and then mapped those to the generic employability attributes that are considered in this study (refer to Table 5.4).

In this research I did not consider the mathematical and technological literacies as they are out of the scope of the study because they are prominently covered in courses and classroom related work. I also did not consider the vocational competencies as those are defined as part of the HCT graduate outcomes but they are not part of the UAE core life skills, nor they are considered as generic graduate attributes. On the other hand I included social responsibility in the list of the generic graduate attributes considered in this study as it came up frequently in the interviews and is related to the societal NQF generic skills area. Based on this the graduate employability attributes that are considered in this study are: communication skills, creativity and innovation, assertiveness, stress management, intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, problem solving, decision making, and social responsibility.
Table 5.4 Graduates employability attributes considered in this study and their mapping to HCT GOs and NQF skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Employability Attributes Considered in this Study</th>
<th>HCT Graduate Outcomes</th>
<th>NQF Core Life Skills</th>
<th>NQF Generic Skills Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Communication skills</td>
<td>GO1: Communication and information literacy</td>
<td>Collecting, analysing, organizing, and applying information in a given context</td>
<td>1. Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicating information, concepts and ideas</td>
<td>2. Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Creativity and innovation</td>
<td>GO5: Self-management and independent learning</td>
<td>Initiating and organizing self and activities, including motivation, exploration and creativity</td>
<td>3. Organizing self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Assertiveness</td>
<td>GO2: Critical and creative thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Stress management</td>
<td>GO6: Teamwork and leadership</td>
<td>Working with others in teams including leadership</td>
<td>4. Working with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Intrapersonal skills</td>
<td>GO3: Global awareness and citizenship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>GO8: Mathematical literacy</td>
<td>Solving problems including using mathematical ideas and techniques</td>
<td>5. Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Adaptability</td>
<td>GO4: Technological literacy</td>
<td>Applying information and communication technology (ICT)</td>
<td>7. Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Problem solving</td>
<td>GO7: Vocational competencies</td>
<td>Participating in social and civic life including ethical practice</td>
<td>8. Societal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Decision making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 The Students’ Experiences

The students’ experiences and backgrounds were major components in this research. The following sections provide a snapshot of each student participant’s experiences based on what she shared in the interview and follow-up questions. In addition, I have complemented the data with my knowledge through experiences interacting with the students and observing them as some of them are public figures with leadership roles in the college.

5.4.1 Nouf

Nouf was an active young woman and one of the public figures in the college. She developed a level of confidence and a set of professional qualities that made her headhunted by a number of organizations in the country. She began participating in college events and activities since her early days in the college, and progressed to holding the Vice President’s role of the student council and then the President’s role. She participated in language clubs, internal and external trips, leadership programs, local and international conferences, sports club, arts club, and cultural activities. Her participation in college non-classroom activities allowed her to interact with people from different backgrounds and from different levels up to rulers and members of the monarchy. Such participation gave her the opportunity to widen her perspective and develop high level attributes.

Nouf came from a very conservative family, and she was a religious person. Although her family is conservative they had a high level of trust in her, and they were confident that she would not breach their cultural beliefs. This trust developed more as Nouf’s personality matured in the college. The family grew to accept her staying late outside the home and even participating in international activities and trips outside the country.
Nouf had never dealt with male strangers in her life before she joined the college. She was still conservative in her dealings but developed skills that allowed her to deal with men in a professional way while keeping the limits she liked to keep. She was highly respected by all in the college, and developed a reputation as a trustworthy person with other students’ families having high regard for her, considering her reliable and responsible. This resulted in some families allowing their daughters to work with Nouf even if it was beyond working hours or outside the college. Nouf was very active and her days were extremely busy; she explained the change in her life by saying: “I recently came back from a trip to China arranged by the college. I entered the college as a girl who is so strict: I would not even allow anybody to take a photo of me, and I never ever spoke to a guy or had the courage to speak to a guy; I was so closed” (S1/21.5.12/110).

Nouf reported that her mother was very protective of her in her early days in the college, calling and checking on her several times a day, and not allowing her to go to many places. As she progressed in the college, Nouf developed qualities that resulted in her family not minding her making decisions or working in different places. She learnt to drive, worked late at night, ran projects, dealt with the press, and interacted with high level people in the country. Further she had a rich record of voluntary work. At the time of the interview she was in Year three of the Bachelor of Education program and already had experience working in different places, and had become a known figure inside and outside the college.

5.4.2 Reem

Reem was an active person who was commonly seen running from one place to the other in the college, organizing an activity, participating in a specialized program, accompanying a
VIP guest, or offering support to other students. She was capable of fitting many activities into
her daily schedule and maintained a high GPA (3.7/4). She was a popular and pleasant person in
the college. At the time of the interview, Reem was a senior in the last year of a 4-year degree
program, studying Health Information Management. In her last two years Reem held the
President of Student Council position which was an elected role involving a lot of work in and
outside the college. In her last semester she started a job in one of the major hospitals in the
country.

Reem and her sister lived with their father, step-mother, and many siblings; the main
authority at home was the father who came from a conservative family and had been very
protective. During school days, Reem reported that while she had always been a hard worker, she
was not a high achiever. She used to study a lot but wasn’t getting good marks: “this frustrated
me; I used to cry a lot and not know what to do”, she said (S2/6.5.12/181). She wasn’t sure if the
problem was a lack of focus or if she wasn’t in the right education system for her, as it was a
traditional education system mainly based on memorization.

When she joined the college Reem found many opportunities to work on her graduate
employability attributes. She was determined to develop her personality and utilize all that was
available to become a successful person. She said: “I saw many members of my family who got
their lives wasted and I didn’t want to be like them. I want to succeed in my life” (S2/6.5.12/157). When asked about reasons for joining non-classroom activities, she said: “I knew that if I wanted my education to be good, classes were not enough. I had to develop my
personality, and participation in extra-curricular activities gave me that – it helped me develop
my personality” (S2/6.5.12/145).

Reem started off by participating in simple activities, like helping out in school students’
information sessions; she liked the feeling of being productive and loved the learning experiences. Following that she joined some clubs and then applied for membership of the student council and became a working member. She progressed to become the head of the students’ ambassadors, which was a group trained to meet and greet visitors, and then she was elected as the President of the Student Council. When a chance arose for a scholarship to join a prestigious one-year leadership program in collaboration with New York University, she applied, won the scholarship, and completed the program during her studies in the college. As part of this leadership program Reem participated in a six-week specialized training course in the USA. On the research side, she worked on a research paper about education in the UAE, and presented her work in front of an audience of about 1000 people in the “Education without Boarders” conference where students participated from many parts of the world. Her paper was recognized as one of the top papers and she received a special award from the Minister of Higher Education.

The journey was not smooth and easy for Reem; on many occasions she had to take a very firm stand to get her father’s permission for her to participate in activities. She was so keen to participate in the six weeks leadership training in the USA that she went on a food strike in order persuade her father to allow her to travel and join the program.

Reem developed such a high level of self-confidence, professionalism, and communication skills that she became the first choice student that the college relied on in representing the Emirati women. She met and talked with celebrities, university presidents, ambassadors, princesses, and queens. She confirmed that her experiences in the non-classroom activities in the college provided the confidence needed to allow her ambitions to soar high. Reem was planning to complete a post-graduate degree in Global Affairs and Diplomacy in a few years’ time. She was looking at a diplomatic life in a later stage and said: “I want a role
where I can serve a bigger sector of people” (S2//6.5.12/241).

Reem went a long way; her father was the type of person who used to be against women’s participation in public life but her progress changed his views: “My father is a very conservative man … but now my father is my number one fan ... I made my father believe in me” (S2//6.5.12/306).

5.4.3. Meera

Meera was a mature aged student who joined the college in 1998; she graduated with a certificate in 2001 and joined the workforce. She re-joined the college and completed a diploma program in 2003 and seven years later came back again to complete her Bachelor degree. At the time of the interview she was in Year two in the Bachelor of Applied Science in Business program.

Meera was one of the pioneers who joined the non-classroom activities at the college in 1998. At that time a student Support Group was formulated and some students who joined were heavily involved in providing support to other students and community members in and outside the college. Meera reflected on the experiences she gained from her participation in the Support Group and how this affected her development and progress at her work.

Meera came from a relatively conservative family who did not approve of their daughters working in mixed gender environments. They did not mind the work of females, but all of the working women in the family worked in schools where it was totally gender-segregated and where they had very limited interaction with men who were strangers to them. Meera said that her involvement in the Support Group opened up doors to the outside world for her as she was involved in voluntary work activities outside the college. This was not considered a problem by
her family as it was arranged by the college and supervised by teachers from the college. This
involvement gave her opportunities to see and interact with the outside world and develop a level
of self-confidence that helped her in life. When she graduated from the certificate program,
Meera was offered an administrative assistant’s job at Abu Dhabi Police. Although this was not
approved of by Meera’s family at the beginning, she was able to convince her father to allow her
to accept the job. She said: “I didn’t want to be limited to work only in schools; I now know that
the world is much bigger than this, and I already had practice in dealing with the other gender
and I have no problems” (S3/14.6.12/191).

Meera was a woman with ambitions and kept on working on developing herself. She had
been working at Abu Dhabi Police for about 10 years at the time of the interview and she
progressed in her career, but found she needed a more advanced university level education to
progress further and so she came back to the college to complete a Bachelor degree. She
dreamed of holding a high level job one day, and at the time of the interview she was working
full-time and attending her classes in the evening.

Meera commented that she felt like a stranger in the college when she came back because
she just attended classes and went home. She said that “involvement in non-classroom activities
makes the students engage in the college and want to spend more time in it and this opens up
more learning opportunities” (S3/14.6.12/207). She highly recommended organizing non-
classroom activities for the evening students, arguing: “not all of them are working, some of
them are mothers, also some are working in limited places; further, in my opinion some girls
have some talents or potentials like art or so and the non-classroom activities highlight and grow
this” (S3/14.6.12/198). She talked about how the engagement of working students in non-
classroom activities enriched those activities: “When the working students participate in non-
classroom they bring more ideas and practical and industry related ideas to the college which is nice to share with the other students” (S3/14.6.12/207).

5.4.4 Nadia

Nadia was a pleasant young woman who was fun to talk to. At the time of the interview she was in her third year in the college. She completed the foundations year and was in Year two of a Bachelor program in Education, specializing in teaching English in schools. Nadia was an active woman who participated in a number of non-classroom activities in the college and when interviewed was heading the student food committee, a role that exposed her to a lot of life experiences dealing with external bodies, food providers, health authorities, and the like.

Nadia came from a relatively liberal family, which meant her parents did not mind her going out, participating in mixed gender environments, and engaging in community projects. In her school days Nadia went to a private American school in Abu Dhabi until Grade 9, where the education was mixed gender (co-ed). After finishing Grade nine she moved to a girls’ only school, which was a common practice among Emirati families when their daughters reach high school (if they had previously been in co-ed schools). In general all government schools in the UAE are gender-segregated schools and only private schools may offer co-ed education.

When she joined the college Nadia found herself in an environment that was more fitting to her personality. Although the students were all Emirati female students, the staff was mixed gender and from many countries around the world. The college was also open to international visitors with many conferences and activities, and therefore presented many opportunities for exposure to the wider world. Since her early days in the college Nadia realized the opportunities she had to spend an enjoyable and productive time in that environment. She started to participate
in non-classroom activities in her first year. She participated in the French club, made it to the students’ ambassadors group, worked on the student council, and was an MC in a number of events. Nadia enjoyed interacting with people from different cultures, learning new ways of doing things, and spending her time in productive and fulfilling ways.

Nadia developed a level of confidence that allowed her to stand up for what she believed was right and not to worry about what other girls or members of the community might think. In high school she didn’t have the courage to present different ideas to the other girls; she felt that she had to follow the herd and be part of the strict and closed school system. In the college she had the chance to deal with what she thought was right more freely, and consequently many girls found her to be different and not completely complying with the conservative cultural practices. An example was when she appeared on TV in one of the college activities and talked about her role. Many students in the college did not approve of such an action and considered it to be violating their conservative culture, but Nadia was not perturbed by this and moved on. She commented: “I just feel that this is me and I like to be myself” S4/24.5.12/144.

Nadia was a popular girl in the college, and was helpful and positive. She developed a level of diplomacy that allowed her to deal with many student types: “I have many friends in the college and I like that, … there are open-minded girls who are easy to deal with, and there are other types of girls that I now know how to choose my words with; I deal with them in a nice way” S4/24.5.12/147.

Nadia was determined to join the workforce after graduation. She enjoyed the fact that she was busy all the time, that she had a role to play, and that she was productive. Her GPA was high (3.02/4), and she was an enthusiastic person who knew how to present herself and who enjoyed dealing with people from different cultures.
5.4.5 Ameena

Ameena was a mature-aged student with many years of industry experience. She had worked in the army, the oil sector, the banking sector, and with an airline company. She was one of the pioneers who participated in the college non-classroom activities in their first offering in 1999 when she was studying in a Diploma program. Ameena reflected on how she thought that participation in the Support Group helped her in her work and had an important effect on her decisions and development. She considered her experience in the Support Group a turning point in her life, providing her with a wealth of skills that she was still using and building on in her job.

Ameena joined the college in 1999 and graduated in 2002 with a Diploma she worked for many years. She then decided to pursue more education and complete a Bachelor degree, re-joining the college in 2009 and at the time of the interview was in Year three of a Bachelor degree in Business specializing in Human Resources. Talking about her education and future plans, Ameena said:

... when I joined the workforce after graduating from the Diploma, I found out after a short time that I am capable of doing many jobs that the degree graduates are doing but what is stopping me from occupying the better positions they have is not having a Bachelor degree. I decided to join the college again and do my degree; my family did not like this and tried to stop me, but I was very determined and I was able to convince them and start my studies. I am now planning to go ahead and do post-graduate studies once I finish. I really wish to learn languages as well; I want to learn Filipino and Urdu languages. (S5/14.5.12/386)

Ameena came from a conservative family that was not supportive of her desire to join the
workforce, particularly in a mixed gender environment. She was, however, able to convince her family about her aspirations and moved forward. When the chance arose for a job opportunity through the career centre in the college, she got very excited about it but her family objected. It took her sometime for the members of her family to be convinced, but she succeeded: “I had to talk to my mother highlighting to her that she raised me well and I am looked at as a respectable person … and the men in the workplace are educated and expected to be respectful” (S5/14.5.12/378). At the time of the interview, Ameena had had many years of experience and was looking for a senior position. She said: “My life is much better now; I come and go freely, I drive, I make my own decisions, which are things that were forbidden earlier” (S5/14.5.12/395).

After her first job, Ameena found a good job opportunity in the military where she faced a lot of objections, not only from her family but also from her direct boss. She observed: “It was a place considered for men, but I was determined to join, and I was the only Emirati woman on the site among 24 military men and one other woman” (S5/14.5.12/403). On her first day at work her direct boss objected strongly to having an Emirati woman in his team. Of this, she said:

> he has the same mentality as my family, he said I don’t want a woman in my department, this will not work, she is also young. But I faced him also telling him that it’s not about being a man or a woman. To my good luck, this supervisor had to go to a training course the next day, and I refused the transfer that he arranged for me...I was so aggressive in that job, I had to learn and cope with the atmosphere. He had to accept me. (S5/14.5.12/405)

After three years she decided to move on to another job, but the same boss refused her resignation three times but eventually he had to accept it. She reflected: “I don’t forget that day, there were tears in his eyes; this is the same person who kicked me out of his office the first time
I joined saying ‘I don’t accept a woman in my department’” (S5/14.5.12/420).

Ameena’s experience was rich; she talked about her participation in the Support Group with a lot of passion, and connected many of her current decisions, and the way she progressed, to experiences she went through in the Support Group. Ameena worked in the day-time and attended her classes in the evening. She talked about an event when she had to take responsibility for the end-of-year ceremony in her company and her experience on the stage and the way she was able to turn the ceremony into an interesting event. She remarked: “I learned not to accept what is going on if it does not work, and to act quickly and in a responsible way. The management thanked me for the role I took, and started to involve me in many company events” (S5/14.5.12/442).

5.4.6 Maria

My initial impression when I met Maria was that she was a young woman full of energy. She is one of the 14 girls who chose to join the Engineering program when it was offered for the first time in the college. Maria was a hard working student who graduated with a high GPA (3.12/4), and a social person who had always been eager to learn.

Maria’s father is Emirati and her mother is Indian; at the time of the interview Maria’s father had passed away and she was living with her mother, her stepmother and a number of siblings with the main authority in the house being her older step-brother. Maria’s mother got married to her father and came to the country when she was 12 years old, she never went to school and did not know how to read, write or speak the Arabic language. The father passed away when Maria was 13 years old; her mother was young and had no family in the country. Maria said:
after my father died I faced a lot of problems, I lost the security – even my own house was not a secure place for me; that is why I prefer to spend all my time in the college in productive ways and not go home except at night when I just have dinner and sleep. (S6/13.5.12/71)

Maria was an intelligent woman, who was active and a hard worker. She had started joining non-classroom activities from her early days in the college. She joined the Maths club and the peer tutoring group, and then moved on to more scientific engineering oriented activities as she progressed in the engineering program. Maria liked the time she spent in the college and tried hard to stay as long as she could. She found the non-classroom activities a great and fulfilling outlet: “I didn’t want anything to stop my ambitions, I saw my other self when I joined the activities” (S6/13.5.12/74). She participated in a wide range of activities, one of which was playing golf. The golf training was arranged by the college, and she won second place in the college golf competition. Playing golf for her was not only fun, but also stress-relieving.

Maria’s family was a conservative one and her elder step-brother was against girls entering higher education. He thought it was a ‘free’ environment that he wouldn’t like for his sisters and daughters. Maria however joined the college after having stayed at home for the first year following the completion of high school. She said that she matured in the college, gained a lot of self-confidence, and learned to express herself and her needs with no fear. She developed commendable levels of communication skills such that she was able to use to stand up in front of a large audience in Germany and present her work.

Maria participated in a two-month specialized training course on semi-conductors in Germany. She considered the experience of this trip as a critical one in her life; it was the first time she had travelled by herself, visited Europe, and dealt with male students. It was a challenge
for her family to agree to her participation in this trip, but she was persistent and worked for it. She didn’t want anything to stop her ambitions: “I was ready to face the consequences. I am not afraid to take new challenges” (E6/13.5.12/183).

As she progressed in the engineering program, Maria’s participation in non-classroom activities was focused on the departmental activities. She attended the Engineering conferences that took place in the men’s college and participated in engineering competitions. Although Maria’s brothers were not happy about her participation in activities outside the college, she was determined to progress. Her participation in one of the high level engineering competitions resulted in a job offer by one of the prestigious oil companies and at the time of the interview Maria was working in this company.

Maria considered her full college experience as a critical one in her development: “Both classroom and non-classroom participation affected me in huge ways” (S6/13.5.12/117). She also said: “I am a mature person now who knows herself, her capabilities, and how to take her life from now on” (S6/13.5.12/137).

5.4.7. Hala

Hala, who came from a very conservative family, was 26 years old at the time of the interview and had been staying at home for three years following her graduation from a Diploma level program. She came from a large family of six sisters and two brothers; her mother passed away when she was 17. At the time of the interview she was living with her father, her stepmother, the sisters and brothers who were not yet married, and a number of servants.

The father was a wealthy businessman and very strict about the woman’s role in the community. He did not mind the daughters pursuing their studies but was very strict about them
joining the workforce. He did not allow his daughters to work under any circumstances, even with married daughters whose husbands did not mind them working. The father took a rigid stand that the daughters were not able to penetrate. It happened that one of Hala’s sisters was much needed in a position where there were very few qualified Emirati females in her subject area. The authorities contacted the father asking him to allow the daughter to take the position, but he refused totally and it was a big problem for the girls.

Hala was a bright woman who tried to fill her time with productive ideas. She was trying to work on projects where she remodelled some products to match the circumstances of people with special needs. Some of the ideas found their way to producers who were ready to implement them. What is astonishing is that she had no courage to have her name appear against any of those ideas because of her father’s complete refusal to accept her working status or the possibility of her becoming exposed to public life.

During her studies in the college Hala participated in the Maths club and the independent learning centre activities. She thought that this participation helped the development of her communication skills and her self-confidence. She also thought that this participation gave her the opportunity to be involved in practical activities that she didn’t get the opportunity for otherwise.

5.5 Data from Student and Staff Interviews

In this section I provide an outline of the findings collected from the interviews and from the documentation examined. I start with the data collected from students’ interviews, presenting a synopsis of the findings from each interview question. I follow this up with findings from the
interviews with staff members, going through one question at a time. Lastly, I present an overview of the results compiled from the documentation examined.

5.5.1 Data from students’ interviews

This section presents the data collected from the interview questions addressed to the students; refer to Appendix 2 for the student interview questions. The results are based on all students’ responses, and are presented in the following tables.

Table 5.5 Data from student interview Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Students’ Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>After joining non-classroom activities (NCA) for at least a semester, tell me about:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **a. Reasons for joining non-classroom activities** | - Develop personality  
- Spend more time in the college  
- Differentiate herself from others  
- Fill time in a joyful and fulfilling way  
- Support other students |
| **b. Reasons for joining this type of activity** | - Meet people  
- Enhance language skills  
- Help others  
- Like to arrange events  
- Enhance technical skills  
- Teacher/staff recommendation  
- Learn new skills  
- Expand knowledge |
| **c. Intentions to continue joining this type of NCA or other types** | - Six out of the seven students interviewed reported that when students start to join NCAs they continued and encouraged other students to join. |
### Points from Students’ Responses

**d. Challenges you faced as you joined such activities**

- Time management
- Having to deal with strangers
- Having to deal with men
- Having to prove themselves to the college administration
- Part-time or evening students are not able to continue

All students interviewed reflected positively on their non-classroom experiences. They took part in a wide range of NCAs that varied from art and language clubs, to leadership programs and participation in workshops and events outside the country. All students enjoyed their NCA experiences and found them to be sources of happiness and fulfilment. Students who came from unhappy families found these experiences to be a way of spending more time outside home and in a productive way. All students interviewed recommended participation in NCAs for other students. Part-time/evening students reported that they didn’t have as many options to participate as the day-time students and they considered this a gap that the college should address.

Table 5.6 Data from student interview Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Students’ Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From your point of view, did participation in NCAs affect your personal development? In what way? Comment on this in relation to the following:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interview Question</td>
<td>Points from Students’ Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **a. Your relationship with your peers** | • Seen as a trustworthy person  
  • Supportive  
  • More open and accept others better  
  • Popular  
  • More comfortable with people  
  • More confident  
  • Make more friends |
| **b. Your relationship with your teachers** | • More comfortable in dealing with teachers  
  • Better communication skills  
  • Teachers encouraged them to participate  
  • Teachers wanted them to be able to balance between activities and studies  
  • Opportunities to build closer relationships if they both participate in the same club or students participate in peer tutoring |
| **c. Your relationship with the college administration** | • Seen as reliable students who can take responsibility  
  • High respect from both sides  
  • Seen as students with good abilities |
| **d. The way you plan your future** | • Six of the seven students reported that they became more aware of their needs and abilities; they also became more aware of what was required in the job market and this affected the way they looked at their future. |
| **e. Your academic achievement** | • All students interviewed reported that participation in NCAs helped them to improve their time management skills and language skills, which reflected positively on their academic achievement. |
Every student who was interviewed thought that their experience with NCAs positively affected their ability to deal with others in more effective ways. They reflected on opportunities to make more connections, deal with different types of people, get introduced to people with similar interests in or outside the college, learn to be better team players, be more considerate to other people, control their temper, and be able to learn about and deal with people from other cultures. Students who participated in leadership related activities reflected on the self-confidence they gained and the status in the college they received, which made them stand out as students of authority whom other students could approach for help and support. They strongly expressed the view that participation in NCAs expanded their horizons, helped them to improve their English and other communication skills, improved their time management skills and helped them to achieve more in their studies.

Table 5.7 Data from student interview Question 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Students’ Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In what ways do you think participation in NCAs affected the following:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <strong>Your communication skills</strong></td>
<td>▪ Five out of seven students reported that their participation in non-classroom activities improved their communication skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interview Question</td>
<td>Points from Students’ Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The other two students reported that their whole college experience improved their communication skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Assertiveness</td>
<td>▪ Answers varied from becoming more persuasive, to being more comfortable in giving their opinions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| c. Creativity and innovation | ▪ Five of the seven students credited their participation in NCAs to be a way of improving their creativity and innovation in general; they talked about initiatives and taking ownership of new projects.  
▪ One student did not think that this participation affected her creativity at all.  
▪ The remaining student credited her participation in NCAs with helping her to be more creative in writing only. |
| d. Decision making        | ▪ Six of the seven students believed that their participation in NCAs improved their decision making skills.  
▪ Students commented that NCAs allowed them to think in a broader way, develop their knowledge, become more considerate, learn to work in teams and consult other people. |
| e. Problem solving        | ▪ SM students thought that the opportunity to deal with different types of people and to work in different contexts helped them improve their problem solving skills.  
▪ The SN students gave examples of working in teams, learning from each other, and participation in conferences and forums which expanded their knowledge and helped them develop their problem solving skills. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Student Interview Question</strong></th>
<th><strong>Points from Students’ Responses</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>f. Your interpersonal skills</strong></td>
<td>▪ All students reported that they gained valuable experiences in dealing with others including other students, college staff, students from the men’s college, ‘external’ people and people from other cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>g. Your intrapersonal skills</strong></td>
<td>▪ All students reported that they understood themselves better and became more aware of their abilities and their needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **h. Adaptability** | ▪ Five of the seven students reported that NCAs gave them the opportunities to be in real life scenarios where they had to deal with quick changes.  
▪ Students found the exposure to the outside world a way of making them understand other people’s needs and points of view better and hence become more adaptable. |
| **i. Stress management** | ▪ Six of the seven students found NCAs a practical way to learn how to handle stress; phrases they used were: positive stress, learn how to prioritise tasks, work under pressure, a way to release stress, the experience of being able to handle many tasks at the same time. |

SM= Mature aged students, SN= New students

Students regarded their participation in NCAs as an effective way of building or improving the skills listed in question three above. They talked about certain activities having more effect than others in developing certain skills. Communication skills were mentioned frequently in the interviews when students talked about opportunities to speak in public, deal with external bodies, participate in professional meetings, and learn other languages. Assertiveness was reflected in most students’ answers and in their determination to set their future plans. Although creativity was seen to be more connected to art and language NCAs,
students reported that being responsible for special projects, like setting up National Day functions, stimulated creative thinking. Developing better decision making skills was seen to be affected by NCAs. Students reflected that NCAs provided them with good contexts to practice problem-solving skills. All students thought that NCAs improved their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and most students reported that NCAs helped them to be more adaptive. Students found NCAs to be a practical way to learn how to deal with stressful situations and some found them to be a way of providing positive stress that made them better achievers.

Table 5.8 Data from student interview Question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Students’ Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **From your point of view, can the offering of this type of non-classroom activities be directed in a different way so that it has more benefits to the students?** | Five of the seven students said that educational systems need to investigate creative ways of integrating NCAs into the students’ educational journey. Suggestions included:  
  - Point system  
  - Schedules that allow for NCA participation  
  - Consider evening students  
  - Integrate in curriculum  
  - Non-credit hours in students’ curricula  
  - Awareness program/s  
  - Activities that deal with business or outside stakeholders |

While all students interviewed thought that there were ample options for college students to participate in NCAs, many students nonetheless did not participate because they were either not aware of the benefits or did not have the courage to come forward and participate.

Students provided a number of suggestions, including recommending more relationships with external stakeholders. They reported that NCAs that involved dealing with stakeholders
outside the college provided them with great opportunities to develop professional business practices and understand the expectations of the workforce.

Table 5.9 Data from student interview Question 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Students’ Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **The UAE community is going through rapid changes, do you think participation in NCAs helps you to cope with such changes or initiate change? In what way?** | ▪ Six students out of the seven participated in out-of-college NCAs and believed that this helped them understand the changes around them better and to deal with them in a more informed way. The other student participated only in college NCAs.  
▪ All students reported that NCAs in or outside the college exposed them to the bigger world, made them see new ideas, and allowed them to learn about other cultures.  
▪ Students reported that meeting and listening to role models who were able to face challenges encouraged them to think about their own lives and possible prospects.  
▪ Six students reported that participation in NCAs helped acquaint them with the vision for the country and get exposed to new projects and directions.  
▪ Six students indicated that NCAs, particularly those which took place outside the college, affected their thoughts about their future plans. |

Most of the students interviewed thought that participation in NCAs helped them to understand the world around them better, and be able to cope with change and be part of it. Students found NCAs to be a good means of exposing them to the new directions and major projects occurring in the country.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Students’ Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you planning to join the workforce after graduation?</td>
<td>Six of the seven students joined or were planning to join the workforce. One student wished to join the workforce but her family would not allow her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think participation in non-classroom activities helped you to develop employability attributes?</td>
<td>All seven students thought that participation in NCAs helped them to develop employability attributes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does work mean to you?</td>
<td>All students gave positive answers when they were asked this question; some considered work a way of giving them status, others wanted the doors open to prove their skills and abilities and didn’t want a limited life. Further points presented were that work allowed them to know themselves better and was a means of them giving back to their country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any cultural or traditional values or practices that affect your decision in joining or not joining the workforce? In what way?</td>
<td>All students said that cultural and traditional values affect women’s decisions in joining or not joining the workforce; six of the seven students considered this effect to be strong. There was a consensus among all students that there was a big western influence on them and that they needed to be aware of how to retain their local identity and still cope with the changes around them and go along with the developments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does participation in non-classroom activities affect your decision? In what way?</td>
<td>Five students reported that when the students developed the needed skills they become able to prove themselves and open-up closed doors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the students reported that her participation in a competition opened up the door for her to get a job offer. Another stated that her extensive work in NCAs resulted in an offer to lead a special project for women and children in Abu Dhabi.

All students thought that participation in NCAs had a positive effect on preparing them to take more effective roles in the community. Each of them regarded cultural and traditional values as influencing factors in their decisions; they found it important that their identity and values were preserved, and they talked about the importance of being aware of what could be challenged and what should be protected. All students found the opportunities of working on special projects or dealing with industry or the community through NCAs to be a gradual and gentle way of opening up prospects for them to realize their potential and participate in the workforce.

### 5.5.2 Data from staff interviews

Table 5.11 Data from staff interview Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you see participation in non-classroom activities related to students’ personal and professional development, you may comment on the following:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **a. Communication skills**       | ▪ All staff members interviewed found that participation in NCAs improved students’ communication skills.  
▪ Staff members found that NCAs provided a valuable means for students to practise professional communication.  
▪ The counsellor found participation in certain NCAs an effective way to help shy students overcome their shyness.  
▪ It was reported that NCAs afforded students opportunities to interact with different types of people.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| **b. Teamwork**                   | ▪ Staff members reported that most of the NCAs offered involved teamwork and helped students to improve their team working skills.  
▪ Participation in certain types of NCAs required a high level of cooperation between the students.  
▪ NCAs helped students to learn how to deal with conflict.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| **c. Assertiveness**               | ▪ Staff reported that certain types of NCAs provided opportunities for guidance in regards to assertiveness.  
▪ Staff observed that NCAs provided opportunities for students to deal with externals and people from other cultures, see how they expressed their thoughts and desires, and learn from them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
<p>| <strong>d. Creativity and innovation</strong>  | ▪ Staff reported that creativity and innovation is limited to certain types of NCAs, and this also varies in the level of possibilities for such development.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <strong>e. Decision making</strong>            | ▪ Staff shared a number of stories where participation in NCAs helped students to improve their decision making skills.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <strong>f. Problem solving</strong>            | ▪ Staff reported that only certain types of NCAs helped students to build better problem solving skills.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>g. Student self-awareness</strong></td>
<td>NCAs provide opportunities for students to discover their abilities and know about their limitations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>h. Student relationship with peers</strong></td>
<td>Staff members found NCAs that required teamwork helpful in teaching students how to deal professionally with each other and accept different points of view.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **i. Student relationship with teachers and college staff members** | Participation in NCAs that require professional dealings with industry or the public improved students’ professional communication skills.  
| &nbsp; | Staff members who participated in NCAs with students like the Art Club or sports found that this participation created a more open and relaxed relationship between the students and staff members. |
| **j. Dealing with people from other cultures** | All staff members reported that a number of NCAs helped students become exposed to other cultures. |
| **k. Adaptability** | Staff observed that students who participated in events had to adjust to changing circumstances and learn to be more adaptive. |
| **l. Stress Management** | Staff found NCAs that require meeting deadlines or dealing with externals developed stress management skills.  
| &nbsp; | Active students who participate in a number of NCAs learned how to handle the stress of their studies along with the requirements of the NCAs. |

All staff members interviewed reported a positive relationship between participation in NCAs and the development of students’ personal and professional skills, though this varied between types of activities and the differences in students’ experiences. Staff members reported that almost all types of NCAs had an effect in developing students’ communication skills. They
said that different activities provided different levels of possibility for developing specific skills. Staff members highlighted the point that students have individual needs and that an NCA may have a huge effect in building a particular skill in one student but may not have the same effect on another student. However, there was general agreement that NCAs open up more doors for students’ learning and that they provide the students with practical setups to acquire or improve skills.

Table 5.12 Data from staff interview Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| In what ways you think participation in non-classroom activities affected the following in the students you worked with: | a. **Student communication skills**  
  ▪ Staff members provided a number of examples on how NCAs improved students’ level of confidence.  
  ▪ Staff members identified certain types of NCAs, like the story writing competition, to be more effective than others in building students’ writing skills.  
  ▪ NCAs provided opportunities to learn different languages.  
  ▪ Some types of NCAs provided opportunities for students to present their ideas in front of industry or the public.  
  ▪ Certain types of NCAs provided students with opportunities to work on authentic projects, and participate in meetings and correspondence with professional bodies. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. <strong>Student creativity and innovation</strong></td>
<td>▪ Art related activities, technology related activities and some types of public events required creative ideas and different ways of thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. <strong>Student assertiveness</strong></td>
<td>▪ A number of NCAs required a level of assertiveness that the students learn through practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. <strong>Student problem solving skills</strong></td>
<td>▪ Staff talked about leadership roles and technology related activities and the way those affect problem solving skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. <strong>Student decision making skills</strong></td>
<td>▪ Through NCAs students had opportunities to make decisions in relation to the activities they were in charge of or were part of.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. <strong>Student interpersonal skills</strong></td>
<td>▪ NCAs provided students with opportunities to meet and deal with different people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Certain types of NCAs resulted in students becoming popular in the college and they therefore had opportunities to deal with many students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Certain types of NCAs opened up doors for students to deal with industry and external bodies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. <strong>Student intrapersonal skills</strong></td>
<td>▪ Through NCAs students were afforded opportunities to know themselves better and learn about their abilities and limitations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. <strong>Student adaptability</strong></td>
<td>▪ Staff reported that it was highly possible with events that last-minute changes take place and this affected participating students and required them to rework their plans in short time frames.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Student Interview Question  
### Points from Staff Responses

1. **Student stress management**
   - NCAs like sports and arts were seen to have a direct effect on releasing stress.
   - Being in charge of college events or participation in national or international events developed students’ stress management skills.
   - Staff considered competitions, public speaking, dealing with strangers, and other activities, a means of helping students develop stress management skills.

Staff members shared their experiences in regard to the way they saw participation in NCAs affecting students’ personal and professional skills. Topics that arose included language clubs that progressed later into cultural clubs, and those that exposed students to different cultures and resulted in some international trips. Staff observed that those clubs and trips affected students’ communication skills, interpersonal skills, and in some cases adaptability and intrapersonal skills. Staff members talked about NCAs that included technological and art related activities and had a level of creativity involved. Staff considered event organization and taking part in events, like attending to a college booth in an exhibition or supporting the running of a specialized conference, to have an effect on students’ interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and possibly also their decision making.
Staff reported that students’ needs are dynamic and that it is important for the educational system and the people in charge to be aware of this. They recommended an open dialogue so that the offering of non-classroom activities can be more effective. All staff members interviewed emphasized the importance of the supervisory role of the staff members who were in charge of NCAs. They all reported that this could be a delicate role, particularly in this set-up as it requires interactions with families and other stakeholders. Further, this role requires support from the college management.
Table 5.14 Data from staff interview Question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>From your point of view, do certain non-classroom activities or categories of non-classroom activities have more effect than others in advancing students’ employability attributes?</strong></td>
<td>▪ Staff thought that all types of NCAs were beneficial and they help the development of graduate employability attributes in different ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Staff suggested that individual needs must to be understood and that certain activities could have more effect on some students than others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Staff reported that it was important to listen to the students and understand their needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Staff suggested that those who were closer to the students, like advisors or teachers, should get to know students’ abilities and limitations better; and that they could then help in identifying the activities that could be more effective for certain students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Staff noted that art and sports related activities helped in releasing stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Staff reported that activities which involved teamwork helped in building students interpersonal skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Staff observed that NCAs that distinguish students like art, sports, or leadership, built pride and this had direct effect on student confidence level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a general agreement among all staff members interviewed that all types of NCAs play a role in developing students’ graduate employability attributes. They reported that some activities have a direct relationship with some attributes like participation in public
speaking or creative writing that affect students’ communication skills. However, they noticed that different students have different needs and that the same activity can have different effects on different students. They all had high regard for activities that opened up opportunities for students to deal with the wider community. They thought that both discipline related and non-discipline related activities were important in developing students’ capacities. Some staff members noticed that activities that touch on students’ culture and identity drive more energy and pride.

Table 5.15 Data from staff interview Question 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Interview Question</th>
<th>Points from Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The UAE community is going through rapid changes, do you think participation in non-classroom activities help students to cope with such changes or initiate change? In what way? | ▪ All staff members interviewed thought that the development of graduate employability attributes helped students to adapt to change and be part of it.  
▪ Staff recommended that some activities should be guided towards new projects and developments in the country.  
▪ Staff observed that students became more confident to face changes.  
▪ Staff recognized NCAs as opportunities for students to be part of what is going on.  
▪ Staff found NCAs to be a practical means for students to understand cultural diversity and be able to deal with it.  
▪ Emirati staff members reinforced the importance of preserving the Emirati identity, but with the understanding that they need to open up to the world and be part of the global change that is occurring. |
### Staff Interview Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points from Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff believed that exposure to the outside world and to different ways of doing things helped the students to be part of the new development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff found NCAs to be a way for students to make connections with industry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff members reported a direct connection between participation in NCAs and the development of graduate employability attributes that prepare the students to cope with, and be part of, the rapid changes around them. Most staff members interviewed considered NCAs an effective way to expose the students to the outside world to give them opportunities to broaden their horizons and understand other cultures. Some staff members reflected on the confidence, diplomacy and techniques the students learned through NCAs that helped them to cope with change.

### 5.6 Results of Document Reviews

The Higher Colleges of Technology publishes articles about its events, activities, and proceedings on their official institution website under the title HCT News. This register is updated regularly and covers news from the 17 colleges of HCT (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2015b). I found this register to be a rich source of data that helped me build a clearer picture of the proceedings in Abu Dhabi Women’s Colleges, their relation to the wider community, and in many cases the views of students or staff members in relation to those proceedings. In addition I collected and analysed documentation specifically related to the NCAs in the college; Table 5.16 below shows the set of documentation collected.
Table 5.16 Documentation collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document type</th>
<th>Number of documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official college news articles covering NCAs</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register of NCAs offered at Abu Dhabi Women’s College and related documents</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCT policies and procedures documents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCT generic course descriptions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The HCT generic course descriptions collected were the ones that target building graduate employability attributes directly like the ‘Introduction to Community Service’ course, ‘Building Your Future’ course, and the work experience and work related learning courses. The HCT policy and procedures documentation collected were the ones that cover student travel outside the UAE. The register of NCAs offered in the college covered the set of NCAs offered in the academic year 2011/2012. My documentation analysis focused on the news articles from the women’s college that covered non-classroom activities from the year 2007 to the year 2014. Although not a comprehensive list of all the non-classroom activities that took place in the college throughout that period of time, the set of news articles is nonetheless a rich record that provided another dimension to the data collected through the student and staff interviews.

The set of college news articles shows that a wide range of activities took place during this period. These included special industry projects, international trips, competitions, awards, conferences, and exhibitions. Although some of the articles were only a mere record of the activity covered, with scant detail, many articles pointed clearly to the role the activities played in building certain graduate employability attributes. As an example, a number of articles on
international trips addressed the importance of such activities in widening the students’ perspective and increasing their awareness of other cultures. One example is the following excerpt from an article on a trip for Media students to Cape Town: “For the ADWC students, the trip to Cape Town was a platform for meeting other designers, seeing how other people live, and getting inspired to change the world” (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2009b, Para. 4).

Figure 18. A screen shot of the news article on ADWC students discover South Africa by design (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2009b)

Another example that reflected a similar view, and pointed clearly at some of the skills the students gained, is in an article about an international study program, part of which stated:
the study-tour program in Heidelberg, Germany combined lectures, seminars, round table discussions, and debates. As a result of their intensive activities, students were able to improve their skills in technological literacy, critical thinking, independent learning, teamwork, global citizenship and vocational competency. (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2010a, Para. 3)

In the same article, a number of students reflected on their experience of this trip. One student said:

_I also really enjoyed the visit to the Department of Islamic Studies. It was a great experience to meet non-Arab people who are studying Islam and Arabic. One of the highlights of our visit was a roundtable discussion where we had the opportunity to exchange our views and experiences with the University of Heidelberg students._ (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2010a, Para.5).

Another student’s reflection was: “I really enjoyed the tour of Heidelberg Castle and learning about the history of the German people” (Para. 7). A student quote that reported opportunities for improving interpersonal skills was: “this trip offered me new experiences and the possibility to make new friends” (Para. 9). These quotes demonstrated the prospect for improving communication skills, learning about other cultures, and exposure to different experiences.

Another set of articles covered social responsibility and the opportunities given to the students through the non-classroom activities to be part of the wider world and develop a sense of social responsibility. In an article about an event associated with a world drive against poverty, one student remarked: “This is a great opportunity for us as students, to stand up against
poverty that faces our fellow brothers and sisters in many countries, and make a difference through raising money and spreading awareness about this highly important cause” (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2009a, Para.12).

The way non-classroom activities were employed to support creativity and innovation was reflected in the articles about the annual contest and exhibition Al Khaial, which means imagination in Arabic. Al Khaial was a contest where students used their imagination to produce creative work that was not restricted to any form and could include art pieces, stories, poems, films, and other forms. In an article about the Al Khaial Award, the then Dean of General Education said: “This competition has really allowed the students to step outside their curriculum studies and show their creative talents” (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2008, Para. 7). The then director, in the same article, said: “Al Khaial Awards were established to encourage students to use their imaginative skills in addition to their academic training” (Para. 8). Another article about the same award reflected support from the highest levels to such activities and the recognition of the importance of building these skills. This level of support can be seen through the personal attention given to the event by the then Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Chancellor of the Higher Colleges of Technology, who made sure that he reviewed the students’ work and awarded the winning students their trophies (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2011a).

The record of articles about NCAs and the reflections of students and staff members that appeared in those articles indicated a constructive relationship between those activities and the building of graduate employability attributes. Although this hasn’t been assessed using a scientific measure, the reflections provided a valuable input about the role that the NCAs can play. Moreover, the continuity of offering of a number of activities over many academic years,
and the volume of articles that covered those activities over those years, is testimony to the value the colleges attached to such activities. Additionally, the articles revealed a strong level of support for such activities from college personnel, industry, community, and high level officials. This showed a level of belief and trust in relation to the role of those NCAs in enriching the students’ educational experiences.

5.7 Summary

Findings from student interviews, staff interviews, and the documentation collected suggested a noteworthy link between participation in NCAs and the development of graduate employability attributes for these UAE female students in a conservative culture. All types of activities were considered of value and their effect on the development of graduate employability attributes varied between the different students. However, the leadership related activities and the activities that involved exposure to the outside world were mentioned more frequently when students and staff members talked about the way they saw NCAs affecting the development of student graduate employability attributes. There was general agreement among all participants that being involved in NCAs expanded students’ horizons, improved their communication skills, and helped them to discover and develop their abilities as well as learn more about their inner selves. A topic that came up often was the positive effect of participation in NCAs on the shy, and unhappy students.
Chapter 6 - Discussion

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter I build on the results collected through a Constructionist framework to open up the narratives shared by staff and students in order to address the main research question which is: what is the nature of the relationship between the development of graduate employability attributes and participation in non-classroom activities for Emirati female students?

I build on the view that education is conceptualized as a set of processes that include formal and informal learning practices. I explored in-depth the practice of participation in non-classroom activities (NCAs) as it was employed at a women’s college in the UAE. I investigated, through students’ experiences and lived stories, how such a practice could participate in building Emirati female students’ identities and develop their graduate employability attributes. Wortham and Jackson (2013) affirm that the identities of learners get constructed through educational processes and that this affects the social structures around them which are then produced and reproduced. This relationship highlights the transformative influence of education and the importance of investigating ways of advancing students’ educational experiences that take into consideration their unique setup and circumstances.

In the following sections I present a narrative that examines female students’ experiences with non-classroom activities in this UAE case study. I weave my story around graduate employability attributes and I shed light on students’ lived experiences and how non-classroom activities contributed to or sharpened the different attributes.
In the narrative, I situated myself as a participant in the research, and used both my reflections and the students’ experiences and comments hand-in-hand. I took an emic stance (Hoare et al., 2013) as I am an insider in the college, belong to a Middle Eastern culture, and have been working closely with the students for almost two decades. Taking an emic stance allowed me to provide transparency to the research process as I was able to reflect on the students’ experiences and recognize the cultural influences from an internal perspective. During that time I observed the students’ development first-hand, and had the chance to engage in formal and informal deliberations with them. Coming from a Middle Eastern culture gave me the advantage of understanding the language, interpretations, and nuances; while still allowing me to interpret students’ experiences objectively and be able to understand what is woven into the culture and what impact the NCAs had on students’ lives and development.

6.1 Communication: A Key for Personal and Career Success

6.1.1 From word of mouth to international business correspondence

There is no doubt that communication is an essential attribute required in today’s business world, and that graduates are expected to be prepared to interact professionally in both the local and international markets. Riemer (2002) reported that “Oral communication and presentation skills are considered one of the best career enhancers and to be the single biggest factor in determining a student’s career success or failure” (p. 94). As documented in studies by Starr (2001) and Vine et al. (2010) the UAE went through a complex process of transition from a traditional tribal community, which relied mainly on verbal communication and gentlemen’s agreements, into a multicultural society that competes in the global business market. This puts
high pressure on the Emirati graduates to adjust their traditional communication practices and master the professional communication requirements of today’s world of work. This is important so that these graduates are able to take their place in the local multinational UAE market which attracts professionals from all over the world, and to be ready to handle the workplace requirements of international business transactions. As for the Emirati female students, Kirk and Napier (2009) reported that “research on the experiences and perceptions of females shows tensions between adherence to traditional female roles in the society and new roles linked to education and career development” (p. 303). This places more responsibility on the educational systems to equip female students with professional business communication skills to help them face the challenges of the business market and be ready to take their roles in the workforce. The task becomes more pressing for the female students who have limited exposure to life outside home and college and highlights the need for the UAE educational systems to look into creative ways to bridge this gap and prepare these students to be part of the multinational local workforce, and appropriately skilled to deal with the requirements of international business interactions.

6.1.2 Arabic and English

Historically the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula were known for their strong language skills, which is primarily attributed to the richness of the Arabic language (Chejne, 1969). Arabic is the native language of UAE nationals, the official language of the country, and the primary language of correspondence in all government entities. It is also the main language of instruction in all government schools. This gives the UAE national students a competitive edge in regards to reading, writing, and speaking Arabic. English on the other hand is taught as a
second language in the UAE government schools and became the primary language of
instruction in most programs in Higher Education (HE) in the country. With English being a
global language of interaction in today’s Business world (Hopkyns, 2014; Kachru, 2006), it is
important that the students develop a sufficient command of English to be able to interact
professionally in the world of work. Moreover, although Arabic is the language of
 correspondence in the government entities, the business market in the UAE is an open
international market and English is the language of communication in almost all business sectors
in the country (Boyle, 2011). This puts pressure on both the HE institutions and UAE national
students to ensure that the graduates are prepared with an appropriate level of English for the
business world.

6.1.3 Business communication skills

University and college level graduates are not only expected to acquire a certain level of
language skills in both Arabic and English, but they are expected to build effective business
communication skills that include professional writing, verbal and non-verbal communication
skills, and presentation skills (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007). They also need to be prepared
to use the professional tools and techniques that are needed for communication in today’s
competitive markets. Another important dimension to consider is that Emiratis are faced with the
challenge of preserving their culture and identity while building one of the most multicultural
modern societies in the world today (Khalaf, 2002). This requires a high level of communication
skills to be able to tell their stories and preserve their preferred living styles while being part of
the bigger community. These conflicting demands place many challenges not only on the
individuals but also on the educational systems throughout the UAE.
As the first steps in building communication skills take place in schools, the UAE government puts continual effort to ensure that it modernizes the K1-12 education (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2012; Godwin, 2006). In relation to developing communication skills between people of both genders, it is important to remember that the local Emirati culture does not accept co-education in government schools and that education in the UAE remains largely gender-segregated (Khine & Hayes, 2010; Kirk, 2010). This limits the students’ chances to deal with the different segments of the community and result in challenges when it comes to dealing with the opposite gender. Moreover, this gender segregation extends to other parts of life like social gatherings, wedding ceremonies, and others. This expands the limitation of communication beyond the school day; it mainly affects women as they either stay home or participate in other women only functions, whereas men have opportunities to go out and deal with the broad society. Moreover, the majority of the local government girls schools in the UAE are entirely female settings where the whole school community, including students, teachers, staff, and helpers, are female only (Kirk & Napier, 2009; Shaw et al., 1995). This setup changes slightly in higher education where the students remain gender-segregated while staff become mixed gender. Results from the interview data in this research study showed that this structure of mixed gender staff in women’s colleges helped the female students to open up slightly as evidenced in Hala’s words when she said: “Dealing with men was not easy for me as I never was used to dealing with men … it was good for me to be given the opportunity to deal with male teachers as I never experienced this” S7/08.5.12/61. However, this did not provide the students with enough challenging experiences to learn to deal with the other gender. This could be attributed to the nature of the student-teacher relationship which is generally based on respect, particularly in the tribal Bedouin communities where respect to people older than oneself and to
people in authority is intricately woven within community values and behaviour. This is also reflected in Reem’s words when she said: “in the Arab world we are raised up to respect the teacher so highly” S2/6.5.12/186.

Trying to build functional communication skills in English in this environment is not easy: the challenge is to develop a level of English language skills that is appropriate for business in students who in many cases have been limited to a confined environment and may not have been very successful English learners at school. Barr (2007) reported that

*One of the major difficulties which arises when teaching a foreign language is finding ways to make communication meaningful and realistic. Having an 'audience' for student speaking or writing which is beyond the classroom context and beyond the college community is an excellent way of achieving this, and can be a wonderful way to motivate students to improve their command of the language being taught.* (p. 11)

### 6.1.4 Taking responsibility: Communication outside the lecture rooms

The rules at the women’s college do not allow the female students to leave the college before the end of the working day except for emergencies or if the student gets special permission from her guardian. This has resulted in a considerable amount of free time for the students on campus as, typically, students would not have more than two to three lectures/labs a day. This situation prompted a special project by the name of “The Support Group”, which marked the start of a set of non-classroom activities at the college and progressed into clubs, exhibitions and other sets of activities. The project was initiated in 1997 by the then college counsellor, and aimed at helping students to fill their free time in meaningful tasks by giving
them the opportunity to participate in voluntary activities to support each other. As part of my research I interviewed Layla the counsellor who initiated this project. The interview with Layla did not only give me first-hand information about the Support Group, but also it provided me with a rich source of information about students’ lived experiences in that stage. Layla shared with me tens of students’ stories and discussed her views about their progress. She also guided me to interview some students who participated with her in the Support Group in the early days. This resulted in interviewing Ameena and Meera who completed Diploma level programs in the late nineties and were back in the college for their Bachelor level studies at the time of the interview. When Layla described the start of the Support Group project, she said:

> when I joined the college, the students had classes only and didn’t have any kind of extra-curricular activities. At that time I thought of two projects to help students; one of them was the Support Group. The idea behind the Support Group was to allow the students to use their energy in productive ways by participating in voluntary support activities where they support each other or support a cause.  
> (E1/26.4.12//96)

She mentioned that this Support Group project started with activities like raising awareness, orientation of new students, supporting a cause, and supporting each other in subjects via peer tutoring. Giles Jr and Eyler (1994) found that students who participate in college community service practices showed a significant increase in their belief that they can make a difference. Reed et al. (2005) confirmed that students who participate in short term service learning experiences in the college develop a sense of meaningfulness of college and maintained a sense of social responsibility. O’Brien et al. (2014) found strong evidence that peer tutors took steps towards the formation of students’ professional identities through their participation in a
The results in my study supported these research conclusions as reported in the reflections of Ameena and Meera who participated in the Support Group. Talking about these early days Ameena said: “As part of the Support Group, I did peer tutoring, I tutored English and Math. It was a very interesting experience, I felt so good when the students who I tutored passed the subjects, and this gave me even stronger abilities myself to understand these subjects” (S5/14.5.12/207). Meera echoed Ameena’s words when she said: “I found myself in helping people. I used to tell Mrs. Layla if I am good in this or that subject so that I can help other girls” (S3/14.6.12/66). The students’ reflections revealed the self-satisfaction they experienced when they were given more responsibility and the joy they had in helping other students. I would argue that building the belief that they can make a difference was very important for these female students because it provided them with a route for progress and development, and it gave them more reason for thinking about productive future plans.

Moreover, taking charge of activities like a breast cancer awareness campaign or tutoring other students, required a different level of communication than what was sufficient for classwork. The students had to develop an appropriate level of presentation skills, they needed to be persuasive and clear, and they had to be able to organize their ideas and be able to express them succinctly. Furthermore, peer tutoring and other activities were all conducted in English, which pushed the participating students to improve their English language; as Ameena said: “I had to develop my language skills in a way that would not make me get embarrassed in front of others” (S5/14.5.12/249). This type of statement is evidence that involving students in such activities provided them with active experiential learning practices that urged them to improve their language skills and build the needed presentation skills. This is in line with Riemer’s (2002) research findings that engaging students directly in active learning practices improve their
communication skills. He also reported that “while the study of famous speeches, learning oral communication theories and techniques from textbooks will still be beneficial, it should be noted that the literature has indicated that experiential methods have generally yielded better results than purely didactic means” (p. 95).

Educational research suggests that learning is most likely to be effective when it happens in context and that the transfer of knowledge and skills from the learning environment to the workplace is most likely to occur when the learning environment situation closely resembles the work situation (de la Harpe et al., 2000). To this end the students in the Support Group were required to participate in professional meetings. The Support Group had regular meetings and those involved professional discussions, time management, conflict management, preparing professional meeting minutes, and developing appropriate non-verbal skills that include body language and listening skills. Layla talked about the importance she placed on attending professional meetings:

_ Girls who joined the Support Group had to attend regular meetings; these meetings provided a professional setup for them to develop punctuality, responsibility and teamwork skills ... I used to pay a lot of attention to scheduling the meetings and at times had to do a.m. and p.m. meetings so that all students had a chance to attend. Also I used to do different meetings for the Certificate and the Diploma students because of schedule conflicts. (E1/26.4.12//117) _

The influence this had on the students was reflected in the students’ words, as seen when Ameena said: “I learned not to be hot tempered … I learned to ask and consult, and not to rush to talk about problems; I also learned the importance of confidentiality” (S5/14.5.12/313), and in Meera’s words: “in the meetings we have to agree, the students, on what we want to do so this
helped me in developing my persuasiveness skills” (S3/14.6.12/160). She also said: “I like as much as I can to convince others about my point of view, but if we don’t agree we keep friends and I respect their views” (S3/14.6.12/123). This reflected the development of a range of communication skills including engaged listening skills, ability to express ideas, and a capacity to recognize and control one’s emotions. This is also evidenced in other published research as involving students in meetings or simulated meetings with clients, developers, peers or industry professionals has been considered one of the methods recommended for building students’ professional communication skills (Kember, 2009; Riemer, 2002). Further, this can be seen to be associated with building teamwork skills because the students’ words implied ‘expanding self-awareness’ and ‘accepting different people views and styles’ which are practices identified by Kohn and O’Connell (2015) as powerful ones for professional teamwork.

Interpersonal communication skills refer to the ability of an individual to communicate co-operatively in groups and deal with different types of people (Gardner, 1983). This skill has been highly regarded by employers and is considered one of the identifiers for graduate success in the workplace (Carnevale & Smith, 2013; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; Ortiz et al., 2016; Robles, 2012). Students’ feedback on their experience in the Support Group showed that such involvement can affect the development of students’ interpersonal communication skills. This is demonstrated in Ameena’s words when she talked about how the Support Group affected her relations with others:

*I used to fear to speak to teachers, or speak to girls who I didn’t know. I had the fear that if I approach them they will ignore me, but my work in the Support Group gave me reason for speaking to all the girls by introducing projects or getting feedback, so I developed a lot of important skills.* (S5/14.5.12/292)
Ameena’s words indicated important prospects of development as the students were motivated to discuss possible projects with other students and seek feedback. This opened up doors for the students to think about what they wanted, to realize their abilities and to be able to express themselves and their needs better. Although the counsellor took a lead role in the Support Group at that time, her approach was empowering to the students and she encouraged them to think about the projects they wished to run and to make decisions about who participated in what projects and how to run those projects. Talking about her approach, Layla said:

“Students loved and enjoyed working in the Support Group. They were always active and energetic … they were encouraged to provide new ideas. The girls generally chose the projects they liked to work on” (E1/26.4.12/163). This approach did not only empower the Support Group students but it motivated them to empower other students. Reflecting on her experience Ameena said:

This participation made me feel very special and it was not only words – but by us being the ones doing the work … We used to visit the classes and talk to the students directly. We used to encourage the students to participate and present ideas; if it was a student idea which was presented we used to encourage her to showcase her idea and talk about it. (S5/14.5.12/232)

Encouraging students to brainstorm ideas and think about ways of implementing them initiated a number of proposals, and allowed the college administration to understand what works within the culture and possible ways of implementation. The Support Group then started to take small steps into providing support to organizations outside the college. They started with centres for disabled people and with elderly homes, and then moved on to participation in some social activities and attending art and culture events outside the college.
6.1.5 Pushing the doors open: Communication beyond the college walls

The work in the Support Group can be attributed to community service where, according to the five-phase developmental model of service learning defined by Delve et al. (1990), the participating students started with the exploration phase and moved on to clarification, realization, activation, and internalization. First, the students began getting excited about helping and getting involved, which is part of the exploration phase, and then moved on to the clarification phase where they began exploring various opportunities to exercise their community-service energy. Next, they moved on to the realization and activation phases where they started to recognize what this is all about and to become more involved and focused. The students started serving the internal community in the college, mainly the student body, and moved on into looking at opportunities where they could widen their service domain by supporting some selective bodies outside the college, like centres for people with special needs. The students became more and more involved in what they were doing and developed a high level of commitment; the counsellor commented: “They enjoyed the sense of responsibility and they came up with creative ideas” (E1/26.4.12/164), adding, “interest made them want to give more and [they] did not mind the extra time and effort needed” (E1/26.4.12/166). Ameena reflected: “the word support made me think about what support is, and how to support people” (S5/14.5.12/348). Proposals came forward from the students to provide services to bodies outside the college. The college then developed a process whereby they sought the approval of the students’ guardians for participation in external activities; part of the process was that a college staff member would accompany the students in the activity and that the college was responsible for the transportation to and from the activity and the safety and security of students. This proved to be a workable approach in beginning to expose the students to the world outside the college.
without confronting or challenging the local traditions. The families were fine with their daughters participating in such external humanitarian and social activities as long as it was done under the supervision of college staff members and the college took responsibility for ensuring students’ safety and security.

Looking at the students’ experiences using Kolb’s model on experiential learning and the four stage learning cycle including: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation (Kolb, 2015); the students experiences confirm that the cycle should force the learner to review and apply what they have learned, and help them into self-appraisal of the learning by stepping back after the 'doing' and choosing to transform the experience into something meaningful and build on it. This is what has happened when the students were able to reflect on their internal college community service experience and move it forward to facing the challenges and serving the bigger community outside the college. It is important to emphasize here that experience alone does not create experiential learning. Experiential learning takes place when a student is involved in an activity, reflects on it critically, determines what is useful or important to remember, and uses this information to perform another activity.

The work with external college organizations required professional correspondence, follow-up, meetings, and logistics. This type of work was mainly done by the Support Group students under the supervision of the counsellor and student services staff. Such activities and related responsibilities provided practical ways for the students to build professional communication skills and other important attributes; it also allowed them to develop their abilities to deal with different people and develop their self-confidence. Describing their experiences, Meera said: “The Support Group helped me to deal with different personalities
because I was put in real life scenarios to deal with those people” (S3/14.6.12/173). Ameena recalled: “We used to do visits; I remember in a visit to the British ambassador’s house I learned that we all are similar people and no matter where you are and how tough your role will ask from you, you will always have your human side” (S5/14.5.12/344). Ameena’s experience supports the findings of Hytten and Bettez (2008) that learning practices that involve globalization can help students to develop the ability to unlearn dominant assumptions and ideologies and to create more critical habits of thinking and social engagement. Reflecting on her experience and how the Support Group helped her to advance her communication skills and to be able to deal with people from different cultures, Ameena said:

We come from a conservative culture and we are not used to dealing with males who are strangers to us; we don’t even know our male cousins. In the college we had to deal with male teachers; in the Support Group we had to deal with different people from inside and outside the college, and with people from different cultures. This was not easy for us, but with the support of the teachers and being part of the college, this helped us to become more comfortable in such dealings. (S5/14.5.12/83)

Ameena’s words showed that small steps can lead to important learning advancements for students. It also highlighted the pivotal role the college mentors can play in supporting students to build professional and personal skills (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Ameena’s sentiments revealed that even minor support, like accompanying students on a visit outside the college, can have a major effect on students’ learning. Her experience highlighted the importance of extending the learning processes for this group of students to activities outside the typical
classroom settings; it also showed the added-value such practices can have and which may not be easily achievable otherwise.

Furthermore, being able to participate in functions outside the college opened up opportunities for some social and entertainment activities. Such activities exposed the students to a different set of experiences, created opportunities for peer to peer and student-staff interaction in different contexts, and allowed the students to gain a clearer picture of the world around them. C. Smith and Bath (2006) reported that learning environments which allow for and encourage peer and student-staff interaction, and the creation of a socially integrative learning environment, are most likely to enhance graduate attributes development. A number of research studies suggested real world experiences as a means of building generic skills (Crebert et al., 2004; Landrum et al., 2010). Real world experiences are not limited to curriculum related activities but expand to other types of activities, including social and cultural activities. Talking about her experience in out-of-college social and entertainment activities, Ameena said:

... going to movies was forbidden in our family, but we used to go to movies with the college via the activities, and this was accepted by our families as we are supervised by college teachers and we are among a big group of students, so our families started accepting the change as well. (S5/14.5.12/381)

There is no doubt that the full college experience provided the students with opportunities to develop and grow, but this needed to be augmented with more practices that target students’ life skills and help them to get out of their limited world to see and face the changing world around them. In this regard Ameena declared:
In our culture we are over protected and always surrounded by people older than us to take care of us. In the college I was by my own and had the chance to develop my own personality – mainly from the Support Group and from the teachers. (S5/14.5.12/241)

Meera also opined:

I am from a conservative family where I am not used to going out, I was brought up to deal only with certain people. In the college I found the opportunity and the set-up for my personality to grow and get out what is inside. I had a lot to offer, and the Support Group provided me with that set-up. (S3/14.6.12/73)

The students’ experiences with the Support Group indicated important implications for students’ learning and development. Looking into the personal epistemological beliefs of students – which is how students formulate their beliefs about the nature and acquisition of knowledge and their role in the learning process – research suggests that epistemological beliefs play an important role in people’s intellectual development and ways of development (Hofer, 2008; Hofstede, 1984). The Emirati students’ epistemological position and their preferred ways of knowing would appear to be a preference for ‘connected’ ways of knowing where the students like to be attached to others and aim to understand and be understood (Khine & Hayes, 2010). In this regard, the work in the Support Group can be looked at as a fitting approach to help students advance their learning and build necessary graduates attributes as it supports connected ways of knowing. Moreover, connected knowers are empathetic, receptive, and generally their thinking can’t be detached from their feeling, which is also supported by the Support Group nature of activities. Finally, the work in the Support Group and related activities can be considered a form of real-life active learning that allows students to practise professional behaviours and skills, and
build attributes required for the world of work (Barrie, 2007; Landrum et al., 2010; Lieneck & Greathouse, 2015).

The work towards exposing the students to the bigger community was not limited simply to opening up some doors for them to participate in activities outside the college. An even wider door was opened to give students the opportunity to interact with the broader world by inviting different sectors of the local and international community into the college. This effort was supported by higher authorities and resulted in a number of national and international events being hosted in the college. It enabled students to participate in conferences, meet people from different parts of the world, learn about many cultures, and engage in worthy projects.

6.1.6 Inviting the world in: Opportunities to deal with different ranks, nationalities, and types of people

With the continuous effort of the Abu Dhabi rulers to nurture women’s education (Hausmann et al., 2012; UAE Government, 2013), the women’s colleges received high support in terms of technology infrastructure, state-of-the-art classrooms, modern facilities, and the application of modern teaching and learning techniques. This coupled with the high support of his Excellency Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak who is a member of the ruling family, the founder of the Higher Colleges of Technology, and a person who held the positions of Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research (1990-2013); and Minister of Culture, Youth and Community Development (March 2013 – to date). The college tended to become one of the places that many high ranked UAE guests visited. Among those visitors were queens, princesses, Nobel Laureates, scientists, thinkers, and celebrities. This provided great opportunities for the students to interact with such dignitaries. Added to that was a general practice at the women’s college to have
students at the front line and involve them in receiving the guests, taking them on college tours, and for the students to talk to the guests about their studies and special projects. This setup created considerable prospects for students to improve their verbal and non-verbal communication skills, including speaking in English, stress control, and body language which includes facial expressions, posture, voice, and gestures which are highly regarded skills for preparing students for the job market (Ortiz et al., 2016). It also gave them the opportunity to learn about protocols, and advance their interpersonal skills including listening skills, way of asking questions, and sense of responsibility. Julie, an official in the Students Services department in the college said:

_The nature of our institution is that we have a lot of high profile events and it is very stressful on all: students, staff, everybody. If you have a visiting member of the Royal Family from another country, or you have a ruler from the UAE you have to have to make sure everything is at the highest standard and that is including the work the students do, and they get involved in the organization, and they have to be there in the day... you know, the thing I love about our students is that they take responsibility, they are very professional at what they do._ (E2/25.6.12/393)

Julie’s words not only tell us that the students were given opportunities to interact with people from different cultures and build verbal and non-verbal communication skills, but also she emphasised that the students were up to the task. This could be because they wanted to prove not only that they are capable of taking on responsibilities, but that they could perform the tasks assigned to them professionally. The students also were ready to put in the time and effort required to prepare them for the roles that might be assigned to them. This included going through screening processes and completing workshops and training sessions. At this, Julie said:
... we do have a lot of work with VIPs, we have the student council and the student ambassadors. These two groups are screened, they have to apply, we screen them, they fill an application and then we interview them; they have to have a certain GPA ... what we try and do is mix junior and senior students within our student council and student ambassadors so that there is peer training, so that the older members can train the new ones, but they all go through the screening process. We also have students advisors in each campus who work very closely with the student council and ambassadors groups; they provide the students with professional training.

(E2/25.6.12/181)

In interacting with externals and being put in positions where they had to perform to the best of their abilities, the students appreciated the level of trust and responsibility they were given and tried to ensure that they were the best ambassadors for their culture and for their country. Nouf said: “I learned a lot during these years. People don’t know us well, and I got the great opportunity in the college to be able to show the real culture of us to visitors”

(S1/21.5.12/112). This was very important for the students as they also wanted others to appreciate their culture and learn about it. This gave them pride and confidence, helped them to realize their potential and areas of strength, and encouraged them to look at ways of addressing areas needing improvement. These results confirm Reed’s (2005) results which reported that service learning experiences, even of short duration, can have a constructive impact in the lives of students.

Through the different activities, students got the chance to deal with a wide range of visitors, including people from the community, industry agents, media representatives, international students, and school students who came to visit the college in school arranged trips.
These experiential learning opportunities provided the students with interesting possibilities for building communication skills, self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and the ability to deal with people from different cultures. Such practices exposed the students to the outside world in a practical way. Talking about her experience, Salwa, a staff member who worked with students in activities on a daily basis, reflected on how this type of participation affected students by saying: “It opens their eyes on how different people react, communicate, live – and from the experience we have the students love it” (E3/21.6.12/417). Another reflection came from Inaam, a staff member who worked closely with students in activities and who regarded communications skills as the main skill the students learn through their exposure and participation:

*The first common thing they learn is the communication skills, I mean it’s the number one skill they learn, they learn how to approach people, how to talk to people, when to talk to people and when not to talk, all in practical terms. And it is not just about communicating with other students, or teachers: you are talking on the level of talking to a minister, a princess, or a queen visiting so you are talking that level up. And it is not only this but also when they are involved in recruitment, they need to speak to school students, so it actually goes the full range.* (E4/24.6.12/206)

These experiences did not always go in a positive direction, although there were efforts to prepare students with workshops and training in communication skills; the projects and exposure was not limited to student leader groups. Sam talked about a situation when the lack of experience put a group of his engineering students in an unpleasant situation where they did not know how to address people in certain ranks in the police. This got them into a position where the Police Department did not allow them to continue in a project they were assigned to work on because of their lack of professional communication. Sam said: “This was a learning experience
for us; we realized that this is a something our girls lack, and again not on their abilities but the society doesn’t let them go out that much” (E5/2.5.12/282).

Exposure to different types of people, including positive and negative encounters, suggested considerable added value to students’ skills development. Learning is an ongoing phenomenon and building professional communication skills with different types and ranks of people in students who have very limited interactions with people outside their families is a challenging task. Nadia, one of the students who took part in the ambassadors group and did the Master of Ceremony (MC) role in a number of college events, reflected on how her participation in college hosted events affected her communication skills: “Being an MC gave me great presentation skills. Of course I still shiver if I am to stand up in front of a crowd and speak, but I now have a lot of confidence” (S4/24.5.12/211). When talking about specific communication skills she reflected: “my speaking is much better now for sure. New vocabulary, British accent, American accent – this is to do with exposure. I am not sure about improving the writing skills, not much writing is required” (S4/24.5.12/214). These experiences encouraged and supported the students to be able to interact with different people. C. Smith and Bath (2006) reported that “the social, interactive and collaborative character of the student experience of university life” (p. 275) plays a predominant role in building students’ graduate attributes. Experiences of students show that the participation in non-classroom activities supported them to build their communication and interrelationship skills. This is reflected in Nadia’s words when she talked about her experience when accompanying high ranking people:

The first time I had to speak to his Excellency Sheikh Nahayan I was shivering, I didn’t want to say anything wrong or anything that will not be good. I asked the girls and wanted to be ready. Second time I was more relaxed and told him about what we do in the college. Now
The same impact was also reflected in Ameena’s experience when she talked about how shy she used to be and how she used to hesitate to speak to people she did not know. Reflecting on how the participation in the ambassadors group and the earlier Support Group affected her she said: “I felt that I grew up and matured … I also was in the student ambassadors group and the Support Group and this gave me the chance to develop more self-confidence and deal with different people without fear” (S5/14.5.12/201).

Along the same lines, Reem, one of the students is the SN (new students) group who was very active in college activities and who had the chance to interact with a number of people from different parts of the world and different levels, talked about how such opportunities provided her with invaluable experience that is acknowledged by people around her. She said: “In the beginning my communication skills were normal, now after this experience in NCAs even my family members are commenting, they say you talk like a real diplomat. This shows in the way you stand, in the way you choose your words and talk, how you deal with people, your gestures, and the level of discussions you engage in” (S2/6.5.12/268). These students’ experiences provided an important insight into how such participation can contribute to building students’ confidence, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Inviting the world to the college took different forms; one of the major projects was the Education without Borders (EWB) conference. EWB is an HCT organized international student conference that engages students from countries around the world in dialogue and encourages them to understand and generate solutions for some of the world’s challenges, such as global warming, poverty, and renewable energy. The idea behind this conference was to provide a
forum to facilitate the exchange of ideas for youth to promote human development through education. During the conference days, the HCT hosted students from different parts of the world into the colleges and organized roundtable discussions and recreation and cultural activities to connect the students together. This created networks across cultures and facilitated inter-cultural understanding, collaboration, and respect. The first conference took place in 2001 and the conference ran for seven rounds, once every other year. Around 500 students from no less than 60 different countries participated in every conference (HCT News, 2013).

The conference setup provided an excellent platform of connectivity and learning which were deemed important in research studies related to the development of graduate attributes (Allen et al., 2005; Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2007-8; Barrie et al., 2009). The local students, particularly the female students, had opportunities to interact with international male and female students, learn about different cultures, and engage in discussions that allowed them to get exposed to different parts of the world. Most of the students interviewed in my research had the chance to participate in the EWB in different ways. Reem went through the experience of presenting a paper at the conference. Reflecting on the experience she commented:

*I presented in EWB, this was the first time I presented in front of a crowd like this from all over the world. And when I went down all the other students from all over the world congratulated me on my work and told me that it is one of the presentations that they fully understood. Before I presented I was nervous and panicking; after I did it and I got all the compliments I gained a lot of confidence and I realized that my standard was high too and that I can do well.*

(S2/6.5.12/213)
Reem’s experience showed that her participation in EWB not only affected her research and presentation skills, but also her self-confidence and level of assurance about what she could achieve. Moreover, the opportunity to compete with international students in research and paper writing gave her another and broader perspective in her learning experience beyond that of learning only alongside Emiratis. Cultural sensitivity and ability to communicate professionally with a wide range of people is reflected in the following from Reem in discussing her overall experience with NCAs:

_Travelling, EWB, and conferences, made me meet and deal with people from many different cultures and made me a more culturally sensitive person. I can now easily interact with people from different cultures. I can now easily communicate with people from any culture, and also people from all levels – diplomats, ministers, and even president … the way I interact is very easy for me now._

(S2/6.5.12/253)

Nadia is another student who participated in the EWB conference in her capacity as a student ambassador. She was assigned several roles in Abu Dhabi and Dubai to accompany international students and to be in charge of several functions. Talking about such experiences affected her ability to communicate with different people, she said:

_I really like to deal with people from different cultures, see how they act, the way they dress. Before college I didn’t have much chance to deal with those people, the participation in extra-curricular activities gave me the chance to speak to different people and learn from them. I have more confidence now to deal with different people._

(S4/24.5.12/196)
Nadia’s words about self-confidence and self-assurance were confirmed by Reem: “After being exposed to the world now and seeing the different things that are out there, I want to resume a more impactful role now” (S2/6.5.12/238). The NCAs provided the students with opportunities that they wouldn’t have had if their experiences had been restricted to classrooms only. The self-confidence they gained is an important attribute that influenced their lives and decision making later on.

Nouf and Maria also participated in the EWB conference, both regarding their experiences as valuable. Nouf said: “I ended up gaining a lot of information from the conferences I participated in” (S1/21.5.12/106), and Maria commented: “I feel happy; I feel that I am able to communicate with different types of people” (S6/13.5.12/76). These findings concur with the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (2007-8) findings that extra-curricular learning opportunities have rich potential for the development of the graduate attributes.

Opening the college doors to visitors from all over the world and the effort that was put into hosting national and international events patently had a considerable impact on building students’ capacities. Providing students with opportunities to interact with different cultures and with people in a broad range of positions took the students beyond their limited experiences to the wider world. Although this required considerable effort in many cases, such as that put into organizing international conferences like the Education without Borders (EWB) conference, the effort proved to be worthwhile and rewarding in building students’ capacities.
6.2 Beyond Communication Skills

Exposing students to the business world, and providing them with opportunities to deal with various cultures and different types of people, opened up several possibilities and pathways for their development that extended beyond what can be covered inside the classroom. This included specialized workshops, leadership programs, discussion sessions, and involvement in cultural activities; as a consequence, they revealed potential for developing leadership skills, assertiveness, creativity, and an ability to deal with other cultures.

6.2.1 Extra opportunities for professional training

There is no doubt that courses and classrooms provided the students with ample opportunities to develop their skills and attributes. However, this generally takes place in a limited environment where students work, discuss, write, or present within the predefined setup of the classroom. Staff members who worked closely with students in ECAs highlighted the additional opportunities for professional training that were presented to them. Professional training opportunities included specialized workshops, such as those on public speaking, protocol, team building, conflict management, and dealing with special needs. This was reflected in a number of statements that came across in the interviews. Talking about preparations of the student leaders, Julie said: “We provide the students with professional training in team building, communication skills, leadership to ensure that they are ambassadors of themselves, for the college and for the country” (E2/25.6.12/189). In similar vein Layla commented: “I used to offer the students in the Support Group training about communication skills, listening, problem solving, and conflict management. The major progress that I have seen is in students’ self-esteem, assertiveness, and self-confidence” (E1/26.4.12/139). These workshops gave the
participating students an extra advantage, not only in providing them with specialized training but also in imbuing them with a sense of responsibility and a realization of the high expectations that accompanied this – all of which helped them to build their confidence and self-assurance.

These workshops were not only offered by internal college employees or for students in leadership roles, but included training opportunities offered by external professionals for students in a work readiness program. As Salma said:

_We actually offered a lot of workshops to develop these areas: we invited and conducted many workshops; some of the people who we would invite are famous people in term of their experience. They gave my students lectures, tips, and tricks, and workshops in preparing project proposals._ (E8/24.6.12/206)

The college news also reported a good number of workshops conducted in several areas like the ‘Life and Career Goals Workshop’ (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2013b), the entrepreneurs workshop which was offered by INJAZ-UAE (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2012a), and a five month mentoring program with Boeing (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2013c).

Receiving training directly from industry allowed the students to get information first-hand from business professionals. This afforded them opportunities to learn about industry expectations and think about ways to advance their skills to meet the necessary requirements. It also opened up possibilities for building professional connections. Although this is a typical advantage in any industry training, it can have multi-fold benefits for this category of students as their exposure to the outside world can only take place through such activities.
6.2.2 Inspiration by role models

The association between role models and inspiration for success in life and career is evidenced in research shows that young women draw on role models for guidance and motivation (Gibson, 2004; Rametse, 2014; Singh et al., 2006). The experiences of the Emirati young women in my research align with those findings, particularly with the research of Madsen and Cook (2010) which found that one of the predictive factors that affect Emirati students’ transformative learning is influential individuals. Inviting role models, particularly those Emirati women who had successful career journeys, made the students realize that there is always a way to move forward. Having those women talk to the students directly, share the challenges they faced with them, and teach them how dreams can come true had recognizable impacts on the students who attended the talks, especially if those successful women were college alumnae. In this regard Reem said:

getting role models to speak to students and inspire them, this is how I got motivated at the beginning; when I saw previous students who held good important roles I wished to be like them one day. Many students do not know what is going on outside – they live in their own little worlds. (S2/6.5.12/201)

It was important for the young students to see realistic and achievable career paths, realising that women similar to them can take on successful roles in the workforce. Interacting with role models helped the students to think about their future selves. It also highlighted the importance of building the necessary employability attributes and presented the students with real world examples. Julie, who worked closely with many students in ECAs, highlighted the
importance that role models can play in building students’ graduate employability attributes when she talked about assertiveness:

*I have interviewed a lot of students; they have the tendency to be quite shy and not to be assertive, but I think the longer they are in the college the more assertive they become and I don’t know if this is due to interacting with people from different cultures who have more assertiveness skills, or to do with the workshops they do or events attended where they have seen role models. I think the use of role models is very important, I mean, we try and invite many of our graduates and alumnae back in the college and I think if younger students can see what someone else has done, it is not necessarily assertive skills – we are not talking explicitly about assertiveness – but a way to get to be where an alumnae is you need assertiveness skills.* (E2/25.6.12/267)

Assertiveness is an important graduate attribute for helping students to achieve their goals in that it is about standing up for what you believe in and defending your ideas with confidence (Moon, 2009). It was important for the students to be given opportunities to build assertiveness and to realize its importance. I would argue that getting the students to interact with successful women and learn from their experiences is one of the approaches that can assist the students to strongly develop their ability to become more assertive. Real life examples are always convincing evidence that things can happen. What was important is that the students were seeing women who came from the same culture as them and being able to set goals, express their wishes and desires clearly, and share with the students how they were able to stand up for what they wanted and then achieve it. An example of a college alumnus who was hosted as a guest speaker to share her experience with the students was Mrs. Dana Al Hammadi. Dana was the first Emirati
woman to visit the South Pole in a mission to raise awareness about preserving the earth. She joined four Emirati men on the journey South after three months of intensive training. When she talked to the students Dana said: “I want to inspire you to do something similar for your family and community” (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2011b, Para. 2). When she took this adventure Dana was 38 years old, had a full-time job and was a mother of five children. In a newspaper interview she stated: “I wanted to know the real world and do something different, something that would make my country proud” (Ghazal, 2011, Para. 8). Having conversations with role models like Dana prompted students to think about assertiveness, decision making, hard work, working in teams and time management.

6.2.3 Leadership programs

Opportunities to develop leadership skills came across frequently in the student and staff interviews. They talked about workshops, conferences, and an intensive leadership program (Sheikh Mohammed leadership program) that is fully sponsored by the UAE government and associated with New York University. To qualify to join the program students had to pass a rigorous screening process and make it through a set of interviews. It was a full year program that the students completed in the evening and on weekends and was independent of their college studies. The program required hard work, assertiveness, a level of stress management skill, and very good time management. These were skills that the students progressively built as they participated in the program. Kuh (1995) reported that out-of-class purposeful experiences, particularly those that involve leadership and work experiences, “contributed disproportionately to practical competence (such skills as decision making and time management)” (p. 146). Results reported from the students who participated in the Sheikh Mohammed leadership program
support Kuh’s findings, with the students reporting considerable improvements in their time management and decision making skills.

A compulsory component of the Sheikh Mohammed leadership program was spending six weeks training in the USA. This provided the participating students with another perspective of developing their graduate employability attributes through the cultural exposure to the Western world. It also provided them with a chance to be independent, which in turn affected their decision making skills. Advantages of involvement in intellectual and cultural activities were highlighted by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) who found them to be more important than other campus activities in developing students’ graduate attributes. Two of the students whom I interviewed made it into the Sheikh Mohammed leadership program. Reem had just graduated from it, and Nouf passed the interview phase and was about to start in the program. When reflecting on the six weeks experience in the USA during the program, Reem said: “It was a very different experience, although I used to travel a lot and my Mom is English. It wasn’t the culture that surprised me: it’s the attitude towards education” (S2/6.5.12/192). Reem’s words highlighted the advantages of exposure and learning from other cultures. Her words also indicate an ability to think about advancements and confirm Stier’s (2003) findings that activities that expose the students to other cultures enable the students to expand their frame of reference and acquire new international knowledge and competencies. When looking at how this participation affected her life, Reem talked about her graduation ceremony:

> I saw the pride in me in my father’s eyes, his tears, and he hugged me; now I want my father wherever I go. If families could only come around and see what their daughters can do. My father is a very conservative man; every time I needed to do a something or participate in a program I had to use all the tools in my toolbox to get
him listen to me, but now my father is my number one fan: he talked
about me in front of people telling them my daughter did this and
that, and won this award. I made my father believe in me. It took
some courage to stand up and speak and ask for what I want.
(S2/6.5.12/304)

Reem’s experiences tell us that such involvement not only affected the student but they
affected the community around her, which then helped her to progress further. Nouf is another
student who had been active in NCAs and had the chance to develop her leadership skills
through programs and conferences. She commented: “I have been nominated to go to the US this
year in the leadership program ... I did a three day campaign about leadership with Tawteen. I
have been now offered a leadership role in a committee that is put together by one of the
Sheikhas to promote reading” S1/21.5.12/90. Nouf’s words add support to Tchibozo’s (2007)
findings that students who have been involved in ECA are advantaged in terms of getting work,
and that those who engaged in ECA at the leadership level had better access to managerial roles.
Her experience shows us that students who manage to deal with external stakeholders build
connections and can have opportunities to take part in special projects. The opportunity Nouf had
to join a leadership program with ‘Tawteen’, which is a government body, tells us that students
who participate in ECAs are able to benefit from professional development opportunities outside
the college boundaries and sit with professionals in those training environments.

Moreover, confidence and self-assurance were reflected in Nouf’s words when she said:
“I also attended a conference on leadership, and I understood everything because I am applying
what they talk about and the challenges on a daily basis. I linked what I learned in the
conferences with practical life” (S1/21.5.12/102). Her experience also highlighted the added
value students acquire when they get the chance to connect what they practice with what they study (Allen et al., 2005; Crosthwaite et al., 2006).

Besides the external leadership workshops, conferences and programs, the college news repository included articles about a number of leadership workshops that took place internally, within the college. An example is the DREAM leadership training, which was held for the student council members to prepare them for the leadership tasks they needed to perform (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2013a). The word DREAM in the title of the training corresponded to the major leadership activities that were covered in the training: D (develop, delegate); R (recruit, respect), E (enhance, enjoy), A (appraise, attend), and M (motivate, mentor). Reflections from the students who completed the training included: “I learned how important it is to motivate others” (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2013a, Para. 4). Another student said, “I can see that my way of thinking has changed after hearing this workshop” (Abu Dhabi Women's College, 2013a, Para.4). These reflections correlate with research findings that participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities provide the students with valuable opportunities for developing graduate attributes (Harvey, 2002; Te Wiata, 2001).

6.2.4 Support and reward creativity

An important graduate employability attribute that was signalled in the interviews was creativity. According to Sternberg and Lubart’s (1999) investment theory of creativity, creativity requires a confluence of six interrelated resources: “intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation, and environment” (p. 11). In regards to the intellectual abilities, they reported that it is important for the person to be able to see problems in new ways, not restricted by the bounds of conventional thinking; it is also important that the person is able
to think globally as well as locally. They further stressed the environmental support required to promote and reward creative ideas, reporting that without appropriate environmental support, such as forums, exhibitions, and competitions, the creative ability that one has might never be displayed. With the students participating in non-classroom activities the effect of these on creativity and its interrelated resources can be derived from reported experiences. Nouf reported that the chances she got by participating in a range of non-classroom activities in different setups, and with people from different cultures, widened her horizons and allowed her to start to think in different ways. She said that she now had a full project to run for promoting reading for women and children in Abu Dhabi and that she had to come up with new ideas for the project to succeed. Such projects and opportunities push the students to think differently and to look at ways of materializing their new ideas. These projects also provided the students with the environmental support that is required to support creative ideas.

Innam, a staff member, talked about the National Day project that the students started and operated fully in one of the busy shopping malls in Abu Dhabi. The students were provided with a large open area in a popular shopping mall to use for National Day celebrations. They came up with a number of novel ideas, including the application of technology, in producing attractive and meaningful activities for the public. They worked hard and the community reacted very positively with what the students brought forward. When she talked about preparing for the event, Inaam said: “We were planning for the National Day event; we sat together and brainstormed ideas, and came up with many creative ideas” (E4/24.6.12/288). When she reflected on the event she said:

_The whole event was fully run by the students ... the students were the ones who implemented, they were the ones who came up with the_
ideas, stood, worked and delivered, they were talking on stage, talking to the public, doing everything. They were really assertive: they knew what to say and when. It was a three days event; they had to deal with all types of challenges and with different people. (E4/24.6.12/264)

The work on this National Day event, which enabled the young Emirati women to initiate, organize, and run a public event, can be looked at as a working exercise that fulfilled most of Sternberg and Lubart’s (1999) interrelated resources for creativity. In regards to the intellectual abilities, these students were encouraged to look at problems in new ways, removed from the bounds of conventional thinking. They had to target a wide range of audience, including local and international visitors, and this prompted them to think outside the local boundaries. The environmental support in this project is represented by the college support, the sponsors’ support – including the shopping centre which gave them the area for free – and public support. The choice of this NCA, National Day celebrations project, reinforced students’ patriotic feelings and identity and acted as a motivational resource for creativity in this case. From her observation, Diana said:

Such activity touches on their culture and identity: they wanted to share their heritage. I could see a lot of energy and a lot of pride. They wanted to make it succeed and they wanted to make it look good. Asserting their culture brings other qualities along with exposing them to other cultures. (E7/19.6.12/88)

The findings from the national day project complied with the research of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) indicating that involvement in intellectual and cultural activities may be more important than other campus activities in developing students’ graduate attributes. Other students
and staff members talked about ways NCAs opened up new prospects and affected thinking styles. Ameena talked about how her earlier participation in NCAs affected her thinking and influenced the way she progressed in her career, commenting: “I gave my manager suggestions that surprised him and he would ask where you got these ideas from, how you got this experience? I am telling you it is the Support Group, it changed my personality and my life” (S5/14.5.12/317).

From the science project’s perspective, Sam and his students talked about a range of projects and competitions that they participated in, and how such projects provided them with different views in looking at things and offered them structures to bring their ideas forward. Sam’s reflection highlighted the question of confidence and the importance of giving students the space and trust to talk about their new ideas. He explained that many students are able to come up with novel ideas but their lack of confidence – or possibly shyness – that their ideas would not be taken positively stopped them from speaking about them. He reported that through the specialized projects and competitions the students were encouraged to think differently and present their ideas. These projects also gave the students opportunities to interact with external people like students from other institutions or people from industry. Sam’s observations are in line with those of Muresan (2011) who reported that for harnessing the creative potential of the academic area, it is necessary to enhance the connection between the universities and the business sectors. She also highlighted the importance of placing emphasis on developing a free way of thinking and openness to new premises for supporting creativity. Along these lines and from her experience with many students, Salwa said: “The girls need the space to think differently so that they apply what they learn academically in a more creative manner”
Moreover Diana, a business teacher, talked about creativity and NCAs from the viewpoint of her experience in the Art Club, which she also participated in:

*Being a teacher I see the big difference between asking the students to work on a business case and try to be creative, and the atmosphere of the Art Club where students’ creativity becomes a given without guidance. Not only on producing the art pieces but also in the way we organize the Art Show. It is a different setting that takes off the boundaries between the teacher and the students.*

Diana’s experience shows that NCAs like the Art Club provide a worthwhile setup for promoting creativity. The art pieces produced by the students varied from paintings to sculptures and jewellery; some of the pieces were very artistic and reflected a high level of creativity. It is worth mentioning here that there was no art major in the college and that the students who participated in the Art Club were majoring in programs like engineering, IT, or health sciences. Diana’s reflection highlighted a worthy point about the difference in the effort required to ‘build’ creativity in a class, compared to practical, and ‘unforced’ creative participation in activities like the Art Club. Although one can argue that the nature of any art related work inspires creativity, it is worthwhile noting that providing a setup for students in technical colleges to participate in such art related work can have many benefits, including the development of a less restrained form of thinking and unpacking hidden artistic talents.

The influence of participation in NCAs on students’ creative thinking was not limited to art work; the students’ experiences tell us that having students take ownership of projects inspired them to bring forward new ideas and try to think outside the box. As Ameena said: “taking ownership of the projects made us become creative about what should be done”
(S5/14.5.12/98), and Hala said: “my participation in the independent learning centre helped me in being able to generate new ideas” (S7/08.5.12/26).

I wouldn’t claim that participation in NCAs is the way to teach student creativity but I would argue that supporting students’ participation in NCAs provides a fertile ground for inspiring and fostering creative thinking – certainly with respect to the context of this research undertaking. The different types of NCAs may have different effects on enhancing students’ creativity. Possibly joining a sports team or learning a new language might not necessarily have a high impact on students’ creative thinking, but activities like participation in technical competitions or organizing events, where students have to attract a different audience clientele, can certainly be conducive to the creative production of new ideas. Moreover, participation in cultural-related activities can widen students’ horizons and help them expand their knowledge, which can be an important ingredient for creative thinking.

6.2.5 Exposure to other cultures

The world today faces increased complexity from both economic and socio-cultural perspectives (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). Being able to see – and experience – what other cultures encompass and appreciate, not only reduces this complexity but also it exposes minds to other and alternative experiences and practices that can prompt new ways of doing things – and seeing the world. Muresan (2011) talked about the importance of the intercultural interactions and perspectives in the process of generating knowledge in tertiary education.

In this regard staff and student participants in this research reported that the opportunities the students received through involvement in non-classroom activities that included aspects of cultural diversity, allowed the students to enrich their experience and learn from each other. They
mainly highlighted activities where students dealt with the international community like the Education without Borders (EWB) student conference, international trips, and participation in cultural clubs. They also reported that this exposure revealed or unfolded certain areas of similarity that people had not been aware of. Julie reported: “It’s very interesting how the Emirati and the Japanese and Korean cultures have a lot in common, and the students really like studying about those cultures” (E2/25.6.12/199). When talking about the cultural clubs offered in the college she said that they not only provided students with information about other cultures, or a chance to learn the language, but also opened-up doors for mixing with people from that culture and participating in activities related to the culture. As she put it: “you also have the opportunity to go to events, like they went to the Japanese tea ceremony in the Emirates Palace, and the girls have been to the ambassador’s house for Korea” (E2/25.6.12/213). On the occasion of the Korean Club launch in the college, the First Secretary of Culture and Information at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in the UAE said: "These cultural exchanges enhance the knowledge of each other's heritage and cultures and bring our peoples closer together" (Sherif, 2012, Para. 12). In relation to events associated with the Korean Club, one of the students who is a founding member of this club is quoted in Sherif (2012) as commenting: “Multiple events related to Korea, its culture and art took place in both the Abu Dhabi and Dubai women's colleges in recent semesters” (Para. 5).

The cultural clubs and associated activities also provided the students with the opportunity to interact with instructors and staff members from those cultures in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. This strengthened the students’ relationships with those staff members which in turn had a positive influence on their interpersonal skills.
The exposure to other cultures and to the world can also take place through other types of NCAs like the humanitarian projects that gave opportunities to the students to participate in voluntary work, help disadvantaged people in foreign countries, and learn about the lives and challenges of other people. When she talked about students’ participation in humanitarian projects Julie said: “This widens their thinking and exposes them to different parts of the world and gets them to learn about challenges, problems and how to be part of the bigger world” (E2/25.6.12/88).

Other types of activities that had a considerable cultural exposure aspect and involved positive learning experiences were the international trips, exhibitions, and conferences. Maria talked about her training trip with the college to Germany, and Reem talked about her trip to the USA. Both students regarded their international trips as huge learning experiences that widened their ideas and allowed them to think more globally. This aligns with research findings that exposure to other cultures expands students’ frames of reference and helps them acquire new international knowledge and insights; it also assists them in enhancing their intercultural communication competence (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Stier, 2003). All of this reinforces the contention that non-classroom activities can play a considerable role in exposing this group of students to other cultures.

6.2.6 Discovering potential

The NCAs provided an informal setup for identifying students’ abilities and revealing and developing their potential. Sam brought up a number of stories where his students were able to come up with different ideas as they participated in national and international competitions. This revealed a possible avenue for supporting students’ creativity, which is one of the identified
graduate employability attributes (Carnevale & Smith, 2013), as well as being one of the main graduate outcomes identified by HCT (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2014). Moreover, the NCAs provide the students with ‘possibilities’, ‘perceptions’, and ways of appreciating ‘values and feelings’ which are three of the processing skills that have been identified by De Bono (1995) as contributing to creative thinking. Julie provided some pertinent insights when she talked about a student’s hidden talent, and when given the chance the student produced a distinctive piece of art that qualified her to win an award:

you see a student like this student who won this year’s director award for arts: she has done art for this semester only, one semester and she did a beautiful painting of a bowl of fruit, and it was amazing. You know that shows someone’s creativity. She never thought of painting before, she just had some time in her timetable and she thought I’ll join the Art Club; by the end of the semester she produced a beautiful piece of art. This is discovering a potential. (E2/25.6.12/224)

Other activities like the Writing Club, the Art Show, and the Film Festival all motivated the students to bring their new ideas to light and uncover their talents. Discovering potential gave the students self-confidence and encouraged them to move forward. In this regard Hala talked about her writing attempts: “I started to be able to mix my culture with other cultures that I read about. I also started to become more confident in what I write” (S7/08.5.12/93).

Such experiences support the contention that students in environments where their exposure to the open world is limited, can benefit highly from events that may appear as normal occurrences to other students. The students living in environments with such limitations need the support of the educational systems to provide them with opportunities to discover their potential and build on it.
6.3 Science and Technology – Learn in Authentic Industry Settings

The chance to learn first-hand from industry and to get involved in authentic industry projects adds great value to the learning experience of students. Crebert et al. (2004) identified that stronger linkages between curriculum and ‘real world’ industry examples and applications were a valuable means for developing generic skills in the university context. An approach that some universities adopt is integrating course work with industry projects in selected specialized subjects or in the graduation project. I would argue here that having students participate in authentic industry projects outside the course environment, as with some NCAs, added another dimension to the students’ learning. The NCA approach removed the restriction to the course learning outcomes and opened up the prospect of students building their skills and knowledge in different facets and in a more relaxed environment. The experience of female students participating in NCAs in industry settings related to science and technology revealed a number of interesting points.

Sam, who was in charge of the Engineering programs, talked about a range of authentic projects that his engineering students participated in, and reflected on his observation on students’ development. He also spoke about how those projects provided students with employment opportunities. He relayed an example of a two-year project with the Abu Dhabi airport where students worked on building real time locating systems for people with disabilities. In this project the students had to have regular meetings with engineers from the European Union and with managers from the Abu Dhabi airport. They had to participate in discussions, prepare professional documentations, meet tight deadlines, and interact with professionals from different parts of the world. As Sam worked closely with the students in the project, he was able to witness changes in their graduate attributes, reporting high impact change in their self-
confidence, communication skills, stress management and interpersonal skills. He talked about the big difference between the way the students interacted in meetings at the beginning of the project and at the end of it. He stated that whilst it is expected that after two years of work on a project the working team would gain experience and develop skills, the positive impact on the women students was considerably higher than might normally be expected. Sam reported that this observation was also conveyed by the professional team from the airport who worked with the students. This high impact could be due to the fact that at the beginning of the project the students had very limited experience in interacting with strangers. Another factor is that the students were eager to develop the skills and prove that they could do the tasks assigned to them; it could be due to the fact that they needed to be seen as capable, and hence they put in the extra effort and pushed themselves to perform well. They also knew that such opportunities do not come very often so were willing to work hard to gain every benefit from the experience. This concurs with Candy’s (2000) findings that involving students in experiential and real-world learning, particularly that which encourage engagement in self-directed and peer-assisted learning, is best in supporting the development of generic skills.

Moreover, this type of exposure allowed the students to showcase their abilities and gain opportunities for employment. Sam said: “The project grew and ended up with our students being part-time engineers at Abu Dhabi airport and getting salaries” (E5/2.5.12/534). This opened up intern opportunities for the students and possibly served as a turning point in their lives. It can be looked at as a win-win situation if companies start to think about providing opportunities for senior students to participate in authentic projects; the students have young minds and potentially can provide fresh or new perspectives; they can bring creative ideas to the project; and might even have insights that will allow it to be completed with less cost.
When students have the chance of working on authentic projects, many aspects can emerge that will enrich their students’ experiences. As an example, the project at the Abu Dhabi airport had a social responsibility aspect that helped the students to think about different sectors of the community and ways of supporting them. It also widened their perspectives on how to handle sensitive situations, like dealing with people with disabilities. Speaking of this, Sam said:

... the main idea was how do we help people with disabilities in Abu Dhabi airport ... students had to meet with experts, like there is that international committee that is in charge of visiting airports to ensure that they are equipped with what is needed for people with disabilities ... they want to know what do we want to do, why, and the limitations. To give you an example the girls wanted the people with disabilities to wear a tag and the committee refused that; they said they need to wear a [readily identifiable] watch. (E5/2.5.12/246)

These experiences provided steep learning curves for the students. Sam believed that they were capable, but it was the element of not being exposed to the outside world and dealing with the industry that was missing. As he said: “The social skills are lacking in those girls not because they just lack them but because of lack of experience and lack of options at a younger age” (E5/2.5.12/351). He also said: “so their lack of confidence is not based on their skills but is based on their limited experiences with the outside world, but once we give those experiences you see an enormous transformation” (E5/2.5.12/273). His close relationship and daily interaction with the students allowed him to observe the changes they went through and the abilities they developed. Sam reported that the students have a lot of potential but they need opportunities to bridge the gap of not having enough experience with the outside world. He also observed that they take these opportunities very seriously because they realize the value and benefit of such
experiences: “Once they get these options, because they do appreciate them a lot, they use them to the fullest extent and once their personalities shine employment opportunities just open up everywhere” (E5/2.5.12/354).

Although employment is an important goal, some students were not considering it because of cultural restrictions. This did not stop those students from participating in NCAs as part of their college education, and it certainly had a considerable effect on their skills and development. Sam talked about the case of a student who was not allowed to work and she accepted that. He talked about her participation in a technical non-classroom project where he nominated her to be part of a group who worked with a company to create motion sensors. He commented:

_We are working on it right now; it is not part of course work. We are manufacturing and we are going to sell those sensors to an oil company. She had to go and give a presentation to their board, she had to talk to their health and safety engineers and this has been quite an experience for her._ (E5/2.5.12/577)

When asked if this would help her to join the workforce later, he said: “We don’t advise anybody against their family” (E5/2.5.12/585). He then added “well, as I said, she accepts her family’s culture as correct; it never even crosses her mind to even challenge that, but still that doesn’t stop us from trying to improve her skills” (E5/2.5.12/587). When asked why she would put this time and effort into additional work when she knew that she was not going to work, he said that she was willing to put in the extra work as she was pleased to be acknowledged for her abilities and felt honoured to be selected to participate in this project. Sam then reflected on how this experience affected the student: “I saw this girl changing tremendously, she used to be a very
argumentative, angry girl; after the project she mellowed down and you can see that she gained a lot of confidence and professionalism. Earlier on she wouldn’t even write an email – she would only come and argue; now she writes proper emails and waits for an answer” (E5/2.5.12/602).

Another aspect that arose when talking about technology related NCAs and participation in authentic industry projects, is the opportunities to take part in projects that address world challenges like preserving energy. This expanded students’ knowledge and encouraged them to think about solutions. It also opened up possibilities to participate in specialized training with companies. When he reflected on the impact of such projects on the students, Sam said:

non-classroom activities expose the students to the world much more than what the classroom can do. They get to see what is going on and think about their participation. We worked on a solar project; students built the solar trackers themselves. This is a technical project but when we were done students started coming up with amazing ideas; this actually prepares them for the new projects in the country. One of the girls who participated in building the solar trackers was chosen to go in an internship to Germany for 7 weeks; near the end they liked her so much that they sent her on another internship in the USA. You must see this girl now, a very mature adult and very confident. (E5/2.5.12/184)

Sam’s reflection confirmed earlier reflections from other staff members and students that NCAs open up external training opportunities that have a considerable impact on building students’ employability attributes. These technical training opportunities went beyond extending the students’ technical skills: they gave the students assurance, helped them think about different ways of applying their technical skills, and enabled them to see the real world and its expectations. When reflecting on her experience, Maria, a student who participated in a technical
training course in Germany, said: “The biggest change that happened in my life is when I travelled to Germany by myself” (S6/13.5.12/113). Such an experience put the student in a situation where she had to be independent: she had to make her own decisions without family being around to guide her, she had to be responsible for her own decisions, and she had to deal with externals in an environment that was different from what she was used to.

In addition to the authentic projects and associated training, competitions, forums and conferences were considered as other means for building students’ graduate employability attributes. Maria, an engineering student, said that it was through her participation in an engineering competition that she had the opportunity to showcase her abilities and given the chance of applying for a job, which she got, saying, “It is a dream job for many” (S6/13.5.12/25). Along the same lines she highlighted that attending conferences was another important category of non-classroom activities that added great value to her education journey: “When I attend conferences I happen to meet with many people that I really get to gain a lot of experience and value from” (S6/13.5.12/217).

Sam considered NCAs an effective way to develop students, particularly female students, commenting: “This tells us how much work needs to be done for female engineering students as opposed to male engineering students in this culture” (E5/2.5.12/237). Sam’s experience with the students has given him special insights into important areas of students’ development that are associated with NCAs. This is reflected in his following words:

this makes a tremendous difference in their personalities. There are activities where we teach them technical stuff; I think this is less important because they can learn it in the class. But these life skills can be learnt by using NCAs that will incorporate these somehow:
talking to each other, conflict resolution in a team, how do we address people in the real world. Some of them didn’t have the confidence to write a letter to a manager in a company; they think that there will be some strange person out there who is going to scrutinize everything they write. With all these activities, they gain all these experiences, all this knowledge. (E5/2.5.12/302)

6.4 Discovering the Business World: Entrepreneurship is a Viable Option

Given the case that many female graduates are not be able to commit to full-time jobs due to cultural restrictions and family obligations, entrepreneurship and new business development in the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector provides a viable option and has turned out to be a growing area of emphasis in the UAE (Mulnix et al., 2014; Tlaiss, 2014). Research on Emirati women entrepreneurs found that women’s agency, self-confidence and persistence play an important role in fostering the entrepreneurial ambitions of local women and help them to overcome obstacles (Tlaiss, 2014). It also found that education can play a significant role in supporting and preparing women to become entrepreneurs (Dechant & Lamky, 2005; Goby & Erogul, 2011; Tlaiss, 2014, 2015).

Starting up a new business is often a daunting task, particularly for a novice entrepreneur. Many of the key skills necessary to run an independent business such as finance, marketing, and operational logistics present challenges to long-term success (Mulnix et al., 2014). Moreover, launching a new businesses requires a level of understanding of the business world, risk management, dealing with external parties like suppliers, and building business connections (OECD, 2000). Students’ experiences and staff reflections on this research show that
participation in certain types of NCAs can play an instrumental role in preparing students to pursue entrepreneurial activities. Three sets of activities emerged as constructive practices; these are: the business bazaar, Al Jerba project, and art related activities.

6.4.1 The business bazaar

The business bazaar presented a form of work integrated learning where the students came into direct contact with the realities of business practices and had opportunities to access business knowledge (Freudenberg et al., 2011). The business bazaar was an activity that allowed students to practice starting up a small business but within the security of the educational institution. The students had to submit a feasibility study, secure funds, work on marketing, contact suppliers, run the business, prepare budget documentation and at the end write a reflection. The bazaar took place once every semester, where participating students were given a limited space in the college to run a small business for two days. There were rules and regulations that governed those activities and students had to go through a set of approvals and convince the staff in charge of their business idea before they were given the permission to start. I can reflect on my own experience as I visited the college bazaar for at least eight iterations and interacted with the participating students closely. I also was in charge of approving business bazaar ideas for two iterations. The bazaar days created enormous positive energy in the college and fostered student creativity about ideas that would attract customers. The bazaar provided a safe and secure avenue for students to practise not only their business skills but also to build self-confidence, network with different types of people including peers, customers, and business suppliers and practice decision making and risk taking; which are all important attributes for
business entrepreneurship (OECD, 2000; Tlaiss, 2014). Diana, a business teacher and one of the staff members who served in supporting the business bazaar, said:

*The business bazaar was a chance for students to make business-wise decisions. The students had to choose a product, find a supplier, do the pricing, do the marketing, provide all the paperwork, and provide a marketing plan. They had to make decisions about how will they invest their money, and because they are small amounts of money there was no interference from anybody, so the students had to make their own decisions. It was also that economic drive because the students would want to make a profit. The enthusiasm and the sparkle that you see in their eyes in the bazaar was amazing that sparkle I don’t see in the classroom.* (E7/19.6.12/111)

Diana’s experience reflected a working model where the students got the chance to build graduate employability attributes through experiential learning (Freudenberg et al., 2010, 2011). The students engaged in an activity that allowed them to develop their skills in a real life setup and face the consequences of their own decisions. She added: “For these skills to flourish, we need to build a context. Sometimes a simple event can lead to those skills being exposed, enhanced, and refined. Decision making needs more freedom, maybe a real life experience to be taken seriously” (E7/19.6.12/108). This concurs with research findings that building the context and providing the students with settings to practise their skills and have opportunities to improve them are important learning practices (Allen et al., 2005; Freudenberg et al., 2011).

The business bazaar was an example of integrating programs with NCAs. All Diploma level business students had to take part at least once in the bazaar during their study. It also aimed to engage students in entrepreneurial activities and pushed them to practise business skills with real customers; the customers were all the college student body, staff members and
externals who were invited to the college during the bazaar days. This can be looked at as best practice as it takes the students through a full cycle, from starting up a business to closing the budget and reflecting on the success of the business. Diana commented:

*When we decided on the bazaar we thought of building entrepreneurial flair in the students and show them how the business world works. Students work on this project 14 weeks long. Students were graded on how did they run their business, how do they deal with angry customers; it is also about resilience and how they have to work long hours to make their business work. It gives them the other side of the business because they were always in the customer side. The students learned about taking their businesses from start to end; it is a great learning experience.* (E7/19.6.12/149)

Diana’s words highlighted a number of important attributes that the students had the chance to build and practice. Communication skills was one of the obvious areas, and Diana stated: “we have here communication skills where the students have to convince us about their idea and sometimes go to different levels in the college to convince us about their idea” (E7/19.6.12/160). The need for a good level of communication skills was not only required at the start of the project. This is an attribute that was required all along as the students had to deal with suppliers and they had to support the customers and ensure their satisfaction. The work also incorporated stress management skills, time management skills, decision making, and problem solving.

Looking from the students’ perspective, an example that reflected their views was:

“Students affirm that the bazaar project is demanding, with a need to factor in real-life elements like tight deadlines and arduous competition. One Business Diploma student who participated commented: Many things are hard, but we have to know how to solve the problems” (Abu Dhabi
NCAs like the business bazaar demonstrate the requirements of the business world to the students and give them the chance to practise how to deal with them. This in turn required the attainment of a certain level of graduate attributes that the students got the chance to build.

6.4.2 Al Jerba

In the past some women from Abu Dhabi waited at the coast to sell some drinking water to the fishermen and pearl divers who came to the shore after being away for a long time. The women stored water in a container called ‘Al Jerba’ made of goat skin to keep it cold. Hence they are considered to be the first women entrepreneurs of the Emirates. In honor of these women our college shop is named ‘Al Jerba’. (Abu Dhabi Women’s College, 2009c, Para. 5)

Al Jerba was a project set up by the business faculty team to give the business students the chance to practise business processes in a real life environment. The project was given a name which was inspired by an old local tradition that demonstrated female entrepreneurship. The project is a shop in the college fully run by students. The students were the ones who decided on the goods, communicated with the suppliers, completed the deals, took care of the display in the shop, followed up on sales, did the marketing, managed the daily cash flow, and closed the budget every quarter.

When she talked about decision making, Diana highlighted Al Jerba as a working model that gave the students space for practising decision making and other important attributes. Diana said:
At this point I would like to mention Al Jerba. This is a wonderful project that was setup by the business team; girls would come and buy stationary and other items that they would need on the campus. Al Jerba was named after the business of a grandmother of one of our project leaders. In the old days the men used to go to work in the sea for months and the ground was left for the woman to take over and she would be the decision maker then. Decision making needs space and when there is a man in the house then it’s usually the man who takes this lead, so when the man is out the woman has to take the role. I want to say that about 60 years back the woman was a major decision maker in the family. The UAE history went into episodes and each time has its dynamics. (E7/19.6.12/99)

The Al Jerba project used a reference to history to promote entrepreneurship. It gave the students the space to practise decision making, professional communication, dealing with customers, problem solving, and learning about how the business world would run.

Both Al Jerba and the business bazaar were projects integrated with the business program and students had to participate in them before they graduated. The work on both projects was graded but was done in a non-classroom mode where students practised business processes in real life environments. There was no evidence from the data I collected in this research about the effectiveness of these approaches, but there is no doubt that getting to understand how the business world work provides the students with valuable experience and a real life workplace environment to help them develop the appropriate work skills.
6.4.3 Entrepreneurship through art

The women’s college is a technical college that does not offer art programs. However, the college offered a number of art related activities like the Art Club, the Painting Club, the Fashion Design Club, and the Animation Club. It also organized art related competitions like the Al Khaial competition (an Arabic word for imagination) where students competed in producing work that included elements of creativity and imagination. Moreover, the college organized an annual Art Show, and students were invited to participate in public art exhibitions like the Desert Rose exhibition. These activities attracted many students, revealed interesting talents, and opened up opportunities for connections with industry and involvement in potential projects. When talking about building students’ graduate attributes, Layla presented the college Art Show as a rich example. An interesting point she highlighted is giving equal opportunities to all students to participate and showcase their work and not restricting participation only to those students who meet certain requirements. This emphasized the objective of the project which was to provide opportunities for students to discover their talents, and to support them to build their abilities and attributes. In talking about the Art Show, Layla noted:

*The Art Show was a great venue for the girls to showcase their work, express themselves and demonstrate to the community what they can do. The Art Show was not limited to drawing: it was open to all forms of art including photography, painting, fashion design and others. I didn’t deny a girl the chance to join the Art Show: whoever wanted to join, the door was open for them to do so. In the exhibition itself, I did not choose to showcase only the excellent work – all work that the girls wanted to showcase went into the exhibition. The idea was to encourage the girls and raise their self-esteem.* (E1/26.4.12/273)
An added value of the Art Show was that it attracted a large number of external guests. It showcased students’ talents, allowing them to be seen by relevant parties who might be in a position to give these students opportunities for entrepreneurship. From her experience in this area, Layla gave a practical example of how this might help:

*I remember one of the girl’s Art Show work went into an article in a local magazine. She was contacted then by a company to produce the work and started her own business from there. Another girl, Ayesha, was interested in cartoons and started to produce some handmade pieces that we started to get orders for. This started with us in the college by helping the girls to sell the pieces they produce during the Art Show if they wished.* (E1/26.4.12/279)

A graduate employability attribute that was directly associated with showcasing the work to the public was communication. Students who decided to showcase their work had to be ready to speak about it to the visitors who were from a range of companies, media, families and others. This had a positive effect on students’ self-assurance and confidence. Layla observed: “many girls were shy and find it difficult to speak to strangers. Participation in the Art Show helped them to overcome their shyness as they had to stand up next to their work and speak about it” (E1/26.4.12/288). Creativity is another dimension that is related to the nature of the Art Show. Another attribute that came up in interviews is interpersonal skills; in that regard, Diana, a faculty member who participated with students in the painting club said:

*Participating in the Art Club with the students develops a very special relationship between the students and the teacher – the session becomes very therapeutic. The relationship is no more student-teacher: we are all relaxed, non-judgmental, and open to creativity.* (E7/19.6.12/68)
Supporting graduate employability attributes through art related activities and opening up doors for entrepreneurship can lead to other benefits when students are given the chance to demonstrate their work outside the college and participate in public art events. An example was the frequent participation of the college media and graphics design students in the Desert Rose exhibition. This exhibition was an annual public exhibition that took place in an art gallery in Abu Dhabi and was supported by the Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation. This participation helped the students to showcase their work to the community and to the media industry, among whom could be a prospective employer or a customer for a student’s private business. The students exhibited their work in areas like graphic design, multimedia, photography, and video work; and were available in the exhibition to speak about their work and answer questions. I attended the Desert Rose exhibition myself and witnessed the energy and creativity that was very evident in the event. The students also had their artistic personal cards and art profiles ready to transact business with interested parties. The college director, in talking about students’ participation in Desert Rose in one of the press releases covering the event, said: “One of the college’s strategic goals is to foster our students’ creativity and innovation … prestigious media and design programs around the world show their work in gallery exhibitions, and we’re happy that our students can have the same experience” (GulfNews, 2009, Para.4). Another example is participation in the Abu Dhabi Film Festival where students produced short films that allowed them to highlight their views and inspired them to think about different issues and communicate their own individual messages. These activities, like the college hosted Art Show, had a direct impact on students’ communication skills, confidence, and creativity.

The experiences listed above provided an insight into how participation in different types of NCAs like authentic projects, exhibitions and other events helped the students develop and
gain real life experiences. This no doubt required extra time and effort from the academic team and entailed support from the administration. The experiences suggest a model whereby stakeholders in the community, particularly industry, need to be willing to work hand-in-hand with education to support capacity building which will in turn provide the broader industry with the required human resources.

6.5 Summary

The construction of students’ identities and building their graduate employability attributes is a complex process that is affected by a huge set of factors. The Constructionist approaches to education are valuable because “they can help educators understand and change the highly enabling and constraining outcomes that educational processes have” (Wortham & Jackson, 2013, p. 107). Through Constructionist enquiries researchers can shed light on factors and practices that can affect the development of learners and help education better achieve its transformative potential.

Factors that affect students’ identities are connected to the area, period of time, culture, and distinctiveness of the place. For this reason research needs to acknowledge the place, the time, and the socio-cultural impact on the teaching and learning processes. In this UAE case study the experiences discussed showed that the extension of the students’ learning activities to a number of non-classroom activities took the students beyond the limitations of the place and played a role in building students’ identities and their graduate employability attributes. This research study suggests the consideration of a wider range of approaches than the typical classroom teaching model when it comes to building productive and engaged women citizens in conservative cultures.
This research showed that opening up doors for students to participate in authentic industry projects, showcasing students’ work to industry, or inviting students to brainstorm new ideas for improvements in products, services, or processes are all beneficial and desirable practices. These practices not only help students to find job opportunities but also prepare them to become entrepreneurs. One of the merits of entrepreneurship is that it can provide an entrée into the workforce for women who may not be able to commit to a full-time job or for students with innovative ideas.

In the next chapter I address the research sub-question: What can the Emirati female students’ experiences tell us about building graduate employability attributes for female students in conservative cultures? I also build on the findings for the research sub-question: in what ways can participation in non-classroom activities be directed to improve components of student graduate employability attributes? I address this sub-question through compiling sets of challenges and opportunities as shared by participating students and faculty members.
Chapter 7 - What Can the Emirati Female Students’ Experiences tell us about Building Graduate Employability Attributes for Female Students in Conservative Cultures?

7.0 Introduction

The Emirati students’ experiences at a women’s college in Abu Dhabi, at a stage where the country was transforming from a simple community to a multicultural modern country (Vine et al., 2010), was a rich experience that encompassed valued lessons and worthwhile practices. These experiences suggested different approaches to developing female students’ graduate employability attributes and the possibility of looking at building on those practices and applying them in different scenarios.

In this chapter I discuss what this Emirati female students’ experience can tell us about building graduate employability attributes for female students in conservative cultures. I present the lessons learned from the different categories of students and discuss current challenges. I then explore further opportunities that may arise from this educational practice and suggest how these can be taken forward.

7.1 Lessons Learned

The students’ experiences, shared by the students themselves, or through the faculty and staff members around them, showed that students in a conservative culture can benefit highly from extending their educational experiences beyond the normal university classroom. In the
following sections I look deeper into the experiences of the different students’ categories and compile lessons learned from each category.

7.1.1 Lessons from the mature aged students (SM)

The SM students’ group experiences documented a distinct phase where the college was in its early stages, and those students were pioneers in participating in an initial practice of non-classroom activities that was offered in the college at that time (in the early 2000s). Interestingly, most of the SM students’ group came from conservative families, or it was possibly the norm in the community at that time that the families were highly protective of the daughters and did not allow them to go beyond what is known to be accepted by the community. It is also worth noting that when we speak about family in this context this did not necessarily comprise solely the direct family members; it could extend to uncles and cousins who may have a say in the student’s choices and could even influence her parents to comply with what is expected by the larger community (Moghadam, 2004).

All students in the SM group who participated in this research joined the workforce after completing their studies in the college. At that time the college was offering Diploma and Higher Diploma credentials; the college later introduced Bachelor level programs. As those students progressed in their careers, they decided to re-join the college and complete their Bachelor level degrees. At the time of the research all the students in the SM group were registered in Bachelor level programs. This reflected their persistence and a desire to advance in their careers, as confirmed in Ameena’s words: “Now I know exactly what I want and what to look for; at this stage my objective is to complete my BA degree because this will allow me to go higher up in the ladder in my career” (S5/14.5.12/375). When asked if she thought that her earlier
participation in the Support Group had anything to do with how she thinks now, she said: “Yes, it made me understand myself better and be very honest with myself” (S5/14.5.12/330). She also said that the Support Group helped her to overcome her shyness and be able to express her opinion, thus empowering her to face challenges in her work: “In the Support Group I learned how to make eye contact with people” (S5/14.5.12/334). She added:

I used to say OK always, to the extent that if somebody provided me with a plate of food that I don't like I would eat it because I was too shy to say 'No’. But the Support Group taught me to express my opinion; it is the way we learnt to interact in the Support Group: we had to express our opinion, and we had to defend our views.

(S5/14.5.12/340)

This aligns with findings of Harvey et al. (1997) and Te Wiata (2001) who found that students’ ability to integrate and demonstrate generic skills was linked to the development of confidence in their application to new and different contexts, including the workplace.

The Students’ experiences of how they handled their aspiration to join the workforce with their families, and how they faced the challenges at their workplaces, provided interesting prospects for the way we look at students’ development and ways of building active members in the community. Meera talked about her experience and how her participation in the Support Group helped her to be able to present herself and her needs:

My father would only allow me to work in a ladies only place, I know that the opportunities to work in a ladies only place are very limited, I wanted to have the doors open; also I didn’t want a limited future.

(S3/14.6.12/191)
She also reported that the opportunities she got in the Support Group helped her to develop self-assurance and intrapersonal skills: “It gave me the confidence to present myself. I learned about myself, I knew myself and my abilities better. The Support Group helped me to know myself better and my abilities” (S3/14.6.12/188). She talked about how she approached her father and how she managed to convince him to allow her to apply and take on a position in a mixed gender environment. She proudly stated: “I was able to convince my father to allow me to work and I did” (S3/14.6.12/193). These are important experiences that encompassed valuable lessons and complied with Mezirow’s transformative theory (1991) which suggests that engaging the individual in some type of self-examination process leads to a critical assessment of his or her epistemic or sociocultural assumptions which can then lead to an exploration of options for forming new roles, relationships, or actions. This also indicates assertiveness in line with Moon’s findings that when you are more assertive “you are likely to stop waiting for things to happen, and will start to make them happen (Moon, 2009, p. 12). The experiences of the participating students in this study showed that putting them in settings where they self-examined their abilities led to generating new meanings from their experiences, exploring new options, and being able to take actions. The participation in the NCAs gave the students the opportunity to explore their abilities, which then helped them to consider making the decision about joining the workforce and work towards achieving this goal. These findings also complement the findings of Madsen and Cook (2010) who, in their study on female Emirati students at Abu Dhabi Women’s College, found that engaging women in a wide range of activities afforded them with much greater space for professional contribution and creativity. They also found that the students’ experiences in college assignments and activities provided the students with “an enriched sense of self-understanding, a greater self-realization of their
potential, and the recognition that the future offers more options than they had previously imagined” (p. 143).

The students’ experiences showed that building a good level of graduate attributes can have an important influence on their thinking as well as the way they value their role in society and the way they look at their future selves. This in turn helped them to work towards joining the workforce and becoming more productive citizens. Further, the students’ stories reveal that some of them did not only aim at joining the workforce but they looked at the quality of the jobs and were persistent enough to meet the goals they set for themselves.

7.1.2 Lessons from the new students group (SN)

The new students’ experiences (SN group) represented a wider range of non-classroom activities including leadership roles, forums, conferences, clubs, business projects, art activities, science projects and others. Their experiences suggest that participation in non-classroom activities allowed their talents and abilities to be seen by the larger community which then opened up doors for them to become more active members of society. Nouf talked about how she was recommended to run a special country-wide project based on the good reputation she gained from her participation in non-classroom activities in and outside the college. Maria shared her experience in getting a job offer in one of the reputable companies after participating in an engineering competition which helped her to gain more self-confidence and build professional communication skills. Their experiences indicate that involvement in authentic projects had direct benefits on students’ graduate attributes.
7.1.3 Lessons from the student employee group (SE)

The student employee group (SE), who were staff members who either completed their studies in the college or were still studying in it, provided a rich internal insight into students’ experiences with non-classroom activities. This group worked closely with students in non-classroom activities and had the chance to see and reflect on tens of students’ stories. The SE group shed light on how non-classroom activities could open up opportunities for development, not only for the students who participated in them, but also for a larger student body to benefit from. They gave an example of the outreach group that comprised students who visited schools to talk about college programs. These college students were looked at as role models in terms of their communication skills, commitment and sense of responsibility.

The SE group also talked about the health science students’ activities and how this opened up doors for other students – apart from the organizing students - to take a role in raising awareness in the community about important topics like diabetes, healthy lifestyles, breast cancer and other topics.

An important point the SE group brought up was the approach that was used with students’ guardians when they were asked about their consent for students’ participation in NCAs outside the college. Their experience in this regard suggests that a gradual non-confronting approach that shows respect for the community norms is a workable approach. It was very important for the employees to understand the culture well and to be able to recognize acceptable ways for change. Those in the SE group were all Emirati women who belonged to the local culture and appreciated its dynamics. They knew that the local community respected the educational system and the community members were willing to accept its decisions and actions.
They reported that providing the guardians with assurance that the activities their daughters would participate in were college organized activities and that responsible college staff members would be with the students, was all that it took to have their consent. On the other hand the college was very serious about respecting the culture and set tight rules and regulations to be followed, such as ensuring that the students only went to activities in college arranged transportation with at least two female staff members present, and that they would participate in the designated activity only and be back on time. This provided more assurance to the parents and in turn allowed the college to open up more doors for the students to become part of the bigger community within the norms and regulations that the local community respected. In this regard Mona said: “Many parents allow the girls to go out and even travel outside the country if they are assured that the college is responsible for the trip and that there are responsible staff members from the college on the trip” (E6/04.6.12/315). She also added: “From my experience, generally the students will not participate without talking to their parents first. If the parents do not allow it, then we as a college can speak to the parents and explain” (E6/04.6.12/321). Sawsan, another staff member, confirmed the importance of understanding the culture and using ways that worked within it:

_I didn’t face any challenges from the parents because I belong to the community and I know how to approach them, I always call personally and let them know exactly where we are going and what we will be doing and that the college is responsible so I didn’t face any problems._ (E9/26.6.12/235)

From both her experiences as a staff member and as a college student earlier, Sawsan considered the personal call from a college staff member to the parents an important turning point in the parents’ decision to allow the daughters to participate in out-of-college activities.
This was part of understanding the culture with sensitivity and insight. In talking about her personal experience as a student, Sawsan said:

\[ I \text{ myself faced this; my mother was so overprotective of me and I was not allowed to go in any outside activity but when the college speak to her and assure her that there will be good care taken of me, she wouldn’t mind. The formal call from the college makes a big difference. (E9/26.6.12/295) } \]

The same message was also conveyed by Salma; when she was asked if the families would oppose their daughters’ participation in NCAs outside the college:

\[ If \text{ it is outside the college they do, but I always speak or meet with the guardians, and tell them that I or a staff member from the college will be there, and that the girls will be under our responsibility, and that we will accompany the girls; and they would say of course we trust you; who would take care of our daughters better than you? And many times when I send the girls outside I accompany them personally. (E8/24.6.12/241) } \]

The SE group’s experiences highlight the fact that extra effort was needed from the college to provide families with the needed assurance that the college would be fully responsible for their daughters all the time. Although this looks like restricting the students’ engagement as they needed to have a custodian with them in any out-of-college activity, it was a workable approach that both the students and the guardians accepted and it thus allowed the students to extend and enrich their experiences.
7.1.4 Community engagement

A large number of the NCAs organized by the college and offered in or outside its premises included elements of community engagement. This took the form of engagement with organizations, college partners, families, industry, school students, and community service activities. Researchers have found that student community engagement founded on principles of mutual relations enhances students’ graduate attributes and is an important aspect of modern education (O’Connor et al., 2011). The effect can be stronger for female students in conservative cultures, as such engagement can be a means of bridging the gap with respect to their somewhat limited knowledge and expectations of the requirements of the workforce. From the students’ experiences I saw that this engagement gave them chances to learn and practise important graduate attributes and to become more ready to face the challenges of the outside world.

The strong community engagement through the non-classroom activities provided the students with feelings of inclusion in the bigger community; they became more informed not only about the dynamics of projects but also new conventions and ways of operating or doing things in the broader community. Students were put in real life situations that required problem solving, decision making, taking responsibility, and facing consequences. O’Connor et al. (2011) found that teaching learning that involves community engagement provided a range of opportunities for building graduate attributes in areas of citizenship, employability, resilience, problem-solving and self-motivation. They reported: “Student learning through community engagement is rooted in problem-based, reflective, ‘deep learning’ pedagogies of empowerment, transformation, critical thinking and social participation” (p. 106).
7.1.5 A two-way road

Participation in NCAs, particularly those that involved community and industry engagement, did not only affect students but also had an impact on the industry and the community. With respect to industry related projects and the types of activities that involved innovative ideas, it was seen that there is strong potential for industry to benefit from the students’ fresh minds and their novel ways of thinking.

On the socio-cultural side this relationship fostered learning experiences not only for the students but also their families and the wider community. Mezirow reported: “transformative learning has both individual and social dimensions” (2000, p. 8). Mezirow’s findings are echoed in this study, as seen when students talked about how their participation in NCAs affected their families’ thinking, decisions and actions. This was reinforced by Reem, for example: “after being very restrictive my father is now willing to send me to the United States to complete my post graduate education” (S2/6.5.12/348). Meera, in similar vein, said that her father was not willing to allow her to work in a mixed gender environment, but one of the things that facilitated his change of attitude was her participation in college NCAs in a mixed environment: "My participation in activities in a mixed environment in the college helped a lot" (S3/14.6.12/194). Nouf similarly came from a conservative family and noted that she was active from day one in college activities and events and took a leading role in the student council; this enabled her family to see her as a mature responsible woman and resulted in the family not having any concerns about her joining the workforce in mixed environments. Nouf also talked about other students’ experiences:

Some of the girls are not even allowed to participate in field trips; I am now talking about a particular girl who was working with us in
the student council; her family is very strict but after she worked with us in the student council she gained a lot of self-confidence and was able to convince her father to let her go out of the college on tasks. She then was allowed to attend things like wedding parties of friends, which was not allowed earlier. She developed important skills; beforehand she was not even trying to ask, but she developed the confidence to ask for what she wants and she got it. (S1/21.5.12/293)

Unsurprisingly, this was not the situation with all cases; Hala’s experience revealed a different side. Her father was very restrictive, and although he allowed her to do an internship outside the college during her college days, he was not ready to change his mind about her participation in the workforce and she ended up staying at home after graduation. When she was asked about work, Hala said:

This is a closed door for me, even if I marry a man who won’t mind me working, my father will not allow it. I have four sisters who are married, one of them really wanted to work and her husband doesn’t mind it but my father was like if you go out to work I will never want to see your face and you will not be allowed in my house.
(S7/08.5.12/146)

Cases of families changing their minds about their daughters work came across in staff interviews, where they witnessed guardians loosening their restrictiveness after seeing how their daughters developed. This did not only apply to students’ guardians but also to other community members who attended college events or saw students in action outside the college and witnessed the level of responsibility and professionalism they developed. Staff members and students talked about the impact of having those female students in the front line in public activities as with the example of running the national day celebrations in a mall. This was received very well
by the community and was repeated the next year (HCT News, 2011, 2012a, 2012b). Innam’s comments underscore the success of this activity:

*Actually people came to us to thank us for the professionalism of our students; they said you showed us what Emirati students should be. I had Emirati people who came to thank us and tell us you made us proud of our girls.* (E4/24.6.12/270)

This leads to a recommendation that students need to be seen in action and as collaborative engaged learners and citizens.

### 7.1.6 Meaning-giving practices

Sullivan and Rosin (2008) suggested that the purpose of higher education is to encourage students’ participation in meaning-giving practices; they advocated that higher education has a role to play in helping students appreciate that meaning in life cannot only be found within oneself but also through participation and identification with something that is larger than oneself. This involves intellectual ability, moral purpose and community engagement. It is concerned with the development of a certain kind of person who is prepared to question and criticize for the sake of more informed and responsible engagement. Such meaning-giving practices appeared in students’ responses and in staff members’ testimonies where students reflected on their appreciation of social responsibility and the self-satisfaction they got from involvement in voluntary work and community service activities. They valued taking a role in the bigger community and considering the world beyond themselves or their small circles. When she talked about the voluntary work her students participated in, Sawsan said: “Students loved the voluntary work; they found themselves in it, and it gave them such a great opportunity to feel
that they can contribute and help others” (E9/26.6.12/201). She also highlighted that the voluntary work harnessed the feeling of responsibility and commitment. Her work with the students showed that once they tried the meaning-giving practices, they wanted to contribute more. In talking about her experience with students’ voluntary work, she said:

*In the last graduation ceremony I had girls helping out with the logistics; although that they had exams the next day all of them stayed the full time until late at night and none of them left. They are really committed. Possibly part of it is that the student feels that she has a role and that she can contribute when she participates, ... The nice thing is that every time we finish an event, they register their name to participate in the next event.* (E9/26.6.12/146)

Students reflected similar messages, with Nouf commenting: “In the summer time I engage myself fully in community related projects and voluntary work; this gives me a great feeling” (S1/21.5.12/141). Talking about her participation in a peer tutoring group in the Maths club, Hala said:

*I had never tried to teach other people before I joined the math club. After I joined the math club I felt that beauty of helping others. It was such a good feeling when the girls were coming and thanking me for making them do better and gain better marks. I felt so good helping somebody to pass a subject.* (S7/08.5.12/80)

Speaking more broadly with respect to a wider range of people to serve, Reem, who had a diversified experience with NCAs, having participated in student leaders groups and also had had the opportunity to work in a number of meaning-giving practices, reflected:
After being exposed to the world and seeing the different things that are out there I want to resume a more impacting role now after visiting the UN and seeing what is going on there. I want to do my Masters degree in diplomacy. I plan to help in development and change the world; I want to work more in setting policies and procedures. I want a role where I can serve a bigger sector of people. (S2/6.5.12/238)

The challenge of developing such ambitions in students required establishing self-assurance, providing knowledge of what needs to be done, and enabling the students to engage in and appreciate meaning-giving practices. No doubt this enriched students’ learning journeys and helped them to plan a brighter and meaningful future not only for themselves but also for the broader community. This was reflected in the wide range of projects the students worked in, such as the green earth projects, and reading support for kids, among many others.

**7.1.7 Wider environment support**

It is vital for the wider environment to realize the needs of human capacity building through higher education and to support it. In the case of a women’s college in a conservative culture, where the future of the place required the participation and productivity of every citizen, the support of the wider environment played an important role in encouraging the women to pursue their education and build the needed skills to join the workforce. Hugo (2013) reported that it is estimated that in the next ten years, 200,000 young Emirati nationals (or 25 percent of the current Emirati population) will be entering the labour force, and that the Emiratization policy obliges certain industries, starting with the banking sector, to achieve a minimum native/migrant ratio of 50 percent. This creates opportunities but also generates pressure to develop a competitive work force. Hugo (2013) confirmed that “Building a competitive labor
force will take much more than a government mandate” (p. 41), and that “the country still faces the challenges of developing a productive native workforce capable of competing in the global economy” (p.42).

The support of the woman’s development and her right to take her place in the workforce was enforced by the founder of the UAE, the late Sheikh Zayed, who is known to be visionary and his words have always been highly respected by all in the nation. One of the best known quotes of Sheikh Zayed was: "Islam affords women their rightful status, and encourages them to work in all sectors, as long as they are afforded appropriate respect” (UAEinteract, 2015, Para.12). Although the cultural heritage and social structures restricted women’s participation in public life, the UAE government realized the vital importance of women’s participation in building the economy of the nation, and the UAE has been consistent in developing policies to support women’s empowerment. One of the important decisions that provided an opportunity for Emirati women to actively participate in the overall development process in the nation was taken in December of 2012, when the UAE passed a law calling for Emirati women’s mandatory representation on the Boards of Directors of all government companies and authorities in the UAE (Gutcher, 2012). Another significant move was the appointment of eight female ministers among the 29 ministers comprising the new UAE federal government in Feb 2016. This marked one of the highest ratios in the region and reflected the huge support of the country’s leaders towards women’s empowerment. It also passed a strong message that women are not only expected to join the workforce but given opportunities to do so, and supported to hold leadership roles.

It is important to note that such support and openness to the world has had its effect on UAE local society, with gender divisions becoming less rigid in some respects as women begin
to penetrate the barriers to their professional participation in the society. However, there is still a long way to go and there are other factors that affect the move towards this professional participation. One of these factors is the high level of welfare payments which are amply sufficient to enable a family to rely on one income only, thus making it possible for women to stay home and not join the workforce. Nevertheless, I would argue that the direct and continuous support of the leaders and government, which in turn is reflected in the support of industry and other authorities in the country, has played an important role in encouraging women’s participation in public life and paved the way for them assuming higher level roles.

In the college, the direct support for women’s education and development was demonstrated in the patronage and direct encouragement by high authority figures of a number of college activities and events. In a tribal community where a Sheikh’s appearance in a conference gives enormous support to the event, the frequent support and personal presence of Sheikh Nahayan – who is a member of the ruling family and the Minister of Higher Education – in college events gave those events a different level of attention and attracted increased support from other stakeholders like companies and organizations. The same applied to specialized programs and activities like the Sheikh Mohammed leadership program, where a Sheikh’s support to the program gave it a different level of credibility and acceptance within the families and the community.

The support of the wider environment to college activities was also represented by the close ties with the industry which provided different angles and approaches to students’ development through class projects and NCAs. Other support was characterized by the sponsorship of college activities through specialized organizations, and national and international companies. This allowed for more work experience and wider exposure to the outside world.
This support of the wider environment led to an understanding that higher education should not work alone in preparing the new generations for the next stage of employment, and that the distinctive dynamics of each context or environment may require different types of support that could vary significantly from place to place. It also indicates that the higher the emphasis is on the readiness of graduates for the workforce, the more support higher education needs from the wider environment; this implies an increased need for stronger relationship-building between higher education on the one hand, and industry and the community on the other.

7.2 Challenges and Opportunities

The students’ experiences in this study highlighted some challenges and many opportunities that need to be examined. The challenges include scheduling issues for NCAs, staffing, budgets, student safety and security, an understanding by externals of cultural dynamics, and the effort and support required in building relations with the outside world. Opportunities are principally concerned with building students’ graduate employability attributes, providing students with richer learning experiences, global awareness, functional ways for dealing with students with difficulties, and opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.

7.2.1 Scheduling

In regards to scheduling, students and staff members reported the challenges of finding slots in students’ schedules that would give increased opportunities for students to participate in NCAs like clubs or workshops. They also reported that sometimes students missed classes to participate in NCAs which is not a preferred approach and can cause disapproval from the
teachers’ side. Although the college came up with the initiative of the falcon hour (a common free hour for all students) this did not serve the evening students nor was it enough for out-of-college NCAs. NCAs offer students an opportunity to engage in an area of interest that they can do in an ‘informal’ way without having to be concerned with the often restrictive thought of assessment. An attraction of NCAs might be that they offer a ‘sociable’ element; for some students it might be that some NCAs open up the possibility of getting to know the wider world; and for others it might be that NCAs offer the possibility of ‘testing’ if a choice of occupation or career is something that they would like to pursue. This gives these learning practices a different flavour and builds the feeling of ownership and enjoyment that leads to students working on their skills to make sure that their tasks succeed. Such type of work requires time and work balance from the students’ side, and needs support from the college side. Talking about how she handled this balance and found time for NCAs, Nouf said:

Also talking about my projects work, if I was not involved in the activities I would always work on my projects in the last minute, but now when I know that I have commitments, I would finish my projects before time, like when we had the EWB - I finished all my projects before the EWB started. I take my participation in NCAs as a reward so I had to finish my academic work so that I reward myself with the NCAs. (S1/21.5.12/133)

Being active in NCAs entailed the ability to use time efficiently and to prioritize the set of tasks students needed to complete. This required time management skills and a level of maturity that may not be a reasonable ask from junior students. In this regard I suggest that building a free hour like the falcon hour in students’ schedules or even building some space in their programs for independent learning can be a good approach for junior students to help them
to start joining NCAs. Once the students reach Year two or Year three of the program it should be their responsibility to manage their time and be able to make time for NCAs.

### 7.2.2 Cost and resources

A different challenge that higher education staff face relates to the resources required to offer NCAs and the cost associated with their implementation. Organizing meaningful NCAs requires time, effort and in some cases specialized and dedicated employees. It can also have direct running costs like the cost of equipment, transportation, and costs incurred in attending conferences. This added cost can be a burden that educational institutions may not be able to carry. A rational way out is seeking the support of industry in terms of sponsorships or other means. This is because industry is the major party that will benefit from getting qualified job-ready graduates.

### 7.2.3 Students with difficulties or disruptive behaviour

An opportunity that came up frequently in staff and students interviews was the impact that participation in NCAs could have on students who were troublesome or were facing challenging circumstances. Talking about this Sawsan presented a case of three students who had to go through an incident hearing because of their disruptive attitude. Following that Sawsan advised them to join a voluntary group that provided orientation to school students about the college programs and facilities. To Sawsan’s surprise the positive impact of this participation was more than expected: “they participated in the voluntary group and became a great asset and great help to many in and outside the college. I tended to rely on them a lot as they matured” (E9/26.6.12/40). It is known that the students in this age group have a lot of energy; in
considering this category of students whose world is limited, the possibility that they may expend their energy in useless or troublesome directions should not be ignored. In the example relayed by Sawsan, the NCA provided the students with a positive and rewarding outlet to spend their energy in constructive ways. Moreover, the self-satisfaction and self-assurance that may be built can have a transformative impact on such students.

Layla, reflecting on this from the perspective of a counsellor, considered it as a form of therapy. She reported that she used to encourage students who were shy, disruptive or lacking in abilities to join the NCAs: “This strategy proved to be effective for the weak and disruptive students; it helped them to overcome their problems and develop self-confidence” (E1/26.4.12/157). In elaborating on this Layla said: “this positive set-up and the close dealing with the peers and with staff members provided the students with a way of relieving stress and building a sense of belonging” (E1/26.4.12/194).

Salwa talked about an experience with weak and shy students whose participation in NCAs gave them the opportunity to overcome their weaknesses and build self-confidence. She presented a case of junior students whose participation in an activity early in their educational journey had a big impact on their confidence and self-assurance:

*One of our highlights this year was a group of foundations students working together on a project about sustainability. Although they are just starting and having language barriers, they really did well. I had tears in my eyes watching them in the event; for those students to stand up in front of more than 250 in the audience and to present their work. When His Excellency arrived, I was very very proud of those students; you can’t imagine how proud of themselves they were. ‘Even if I am a foundations student I am able to put a presentation*
together and have confidence to stand up in front of a big audience and have the confidence to talk and discuss my work’...those students came out of this event very energized and saying that they want to do more of this; they broke the barrier... you can automatically see the difference. (E3/21.6.12/137)

This is a strong indication that providing those students with the set-up that pushes them to showcase their abilities, interact with people other than their close circle, and present their work had a high impact on them and allowed them to realize that they can do it.

Another perspective on students who faced difficult circumstances came from one of the students interviewed who said that there were problems in her house and that she used to extend her time in the college as much as possible. This student found the NCAs to be a great means of remaining in the college for a longer period of a day in order to limit the time she spent at home whilst helping her to spend her time in a productive and meaningful way where she felt comfortable and happy about her achievements.

7.3 Summary

The Emirati Female Students’ Experiences presented in this study – as revealed principally in interviews with students and staff members – demonstrated a positive relationship between participation in NCAs and building graduate employability attributes for this category of students. The NCAs provided an effective and acceptable way of opening up an important door for extending the students’ experiences beyond their limited circles. NCA participation provided important opportunities for these students to interact with the professional world which played a major role in supporting the development of their graduate attributes. The study also
revealed the ripple effect that building students’ graduate attributes can have on the students’ immediate community where there were indications of deep-seated rigidities being broken down, with evidence of a ‘smoothing’ of such rigidity and signs of a new openness in considering different views. It has been seen that the wider environment support provided by the country’s leaders and evident in policies, together with the collaboration with industry, represented an important factor towards encouraging the students to build the graduate attributes they needed to join the professional domain.

Supporting students to have a higher level of involvement in non-classroom activities, and offering a wide range of activities, aided and benefited the students as they explored their abilities, built more self-confidence, became more assertive, and improved their functional communication skills.

In the next chapter I present a summary of the findings of this research study and compile a set of recommendations and directions for future research.
Chapter 8 - Conclusion and Recommendations

8.0 Introduction

Schooling is not just about cognitive development, but also about the construction of persons. (Wortham & Jackson, 2013, p. 122)

Building students’ graduate employability attributes and preparing them for the requirements of the 21st century involves the development of a wide range of educational processes that are not limited to the formal teaching covered in the classroom. This applies to all students but is more pressing for groups of students who come from restrictive cultural backgrounds (Kirk & Napier, 2009) and need more assistance and direction. This study highlighted non-classroom activities as a rich source of educational and other opportunities that can be utilized to build students graduate employability attributes. The study focused on women students in a conservative culture who had limited exposure to the world beyond their communities. The study looked deeply at seven Emirati women students’ experiences of non-classroom activities and analysed the reflections and insights of nine staff members who worked closely with women students in non-classroom activities. It also examined 130 college news articles, as well as other documentation, relating to non-classroom activities offered in the institution. In this chapter I provide the main findings of the study and compile a list of recommendations. I then highlight the limitations of the study and propose directions for future research.
8.1 Findings

The requirements of today’s job market are becoming more and more demanding with high emphasis on graduate employability attributes. Such a dynamic and challenging world requires educational systems to investigate creative ways for building graduate employability attributes in ways that are not limited to classroom teaching but, rather, explore less formal learning experiences in which there are fewer restrictive parameters. Potentially, these less formal and less restrictive settings can enrich students with respect to their intellectual, creative, social, and emotional development, and contribute positively to their graduate employability attributes.

Findings of this study complements those of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (2007-8) which recognizes non-classroom learning opportunities as having a rich potential for the development of graduate attributes. In the context of women in a conservative culture, this approach was found to be powerful in harnessing the potential of women students in tertiary education by providing them with an avenue to practise and develop the needed graduate attributes. It also allowed them to construct and reconstruct their ‘identities’ in ways that gave them more opportunities to realize their potential and develop their abilities.

This study proposes complementing the classroom teaching processes that are concerned with graduate attributes with informal, non-classroom activities, particularly for students who have limited exposure to the professional world. Of course, not all types of non-classroom activities contribute in the same way in supporting the development of graduate attributes; individual effects depend on the student, her personal circumstances, and her experiences in life.
A greater understanding of students’ culturally informed epistemological beliefs, and an awareness of their favoured ways of learning will help us become more aware of how we can approach their development and better help them grow towards a deeper understanding of themselves as learners and as future employees. Sholkamy (2010) reported that “empowerment for women in the Arab world demands a nuanced understanding of the dynamics that shape power and policy” (p. 258). In the context of women students in a conservative culture like the UAE Emirati culture, this study found that where institutions provide appropriate non-classroom activities and support their students to participate in national and international events, the students are richer for the experience. It was found that participation in activities promoted by an educational institution and appropriately supervised, provided those activities with an authorized status that made them acceptable by families and guardians. This then created valuable structures for students to develop their graduate attributes by giving them professional opportunities to connect and interact with the wider world yet, at the same time, meet their cultural and societal expectations.

As learning is not confined to absorbing a fixed body of knowledge but, more broadly, implies a process of dynamic change, educational processes can play a powerfully liberating role in regards to students’ thinking and the development of their identities. Participation in non-classroom activities, particularly those that involve leadership roles, global awareness, and professional communication, were found to have high potential in helping students to construct more productive identities.

“Learning entails transformation both of the person and of the social world” (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 227). This study suggests that when students’ identities are expanded, refined and clarified their families and the social structure around them is, potentially,
reconstructed to accept their new roles, and this in turn can affect other women in the community.

The experiences of the Emirati students in this study suggested that non-classroom activities that have a social responsibility aspect can be a good way to start exposing women students in strict cultures to the outside world. The social responsibility aspect of non-classroom activities offers much merit in giving students opportunities to look outward, beyond their more closed societal constraints, and to venture away from their restricted social community – but with the support, accountability and security provided by their educational institution. The provision of such experiences helped the students to utilize their free time in productive ways that provided them with a sense of self-satisfaction and self-assurance; whilst giving them opportunities to develop their graduate employability attributes.

The research also revealed the possibility of working within the norms of the community whilst taking considered but gradual steps to open doors to release restrictions. Such a steady but sensitive approach towards ongoing change would appear to allow time for a shift in thinking on the part of community members and to re-position women in more advantageous ways.

8.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with respect to the context of the research. At the same time, they may have relevance for other, similar educational and cultural contexts.

1. **Cooperation between education, industry and community**: In today’s open world educational systems need to have a closer cooperation with industry and the community. A major reason for this is to give students opportunities to develop
and apply the graduate attributes required to become effective and efficient members in the community and in the workplace. Generally, cooperation between industry and educational policy makers takes place at the level of curriculum design and verification of industry needs. This study shows that collaboration at different levels can result in significant advantages for both sides. I recommend that cooperation between education, industry, and the community take place at several levels, including supporting students to work on authentic industry projects, encouraging students to brainstorm new ideas relating to community level projects, and inviting members from industry to graduation project presentations. Such collaboration builds positive communication between industry partners and the educational institution staff and students and thus has the possibility of enhancing change.

2. **Integrate internship and HE programs as much as possible:** Although this is a common practice in many universities and colleges around the world, I would like to emphasize its importance with groups of students in areas where the exposure to industry is limited. Providing students with opportunities to participate in internships as part of their study has the potential not only to benefit students in their future career by enhancing their graduate employability attributes, but also it is a means of opening-up a rich and mutually beneficial dialogue between universities and industry.

3. **Integrate community service hours in the graduation requirements of university level programs:** This approach obliges the students to take part in real-life situations involving decision making, problem solving, initiative, responsibility,
and accountability for their actions. Although a requisite for graduation, it need not be ‘assessed’ as such. Giles Jr and Eyler (1994) reported that students who participated in college community service practices showed a significant increase in their belief that they could make a difference and became less likely to blame others for their misfortunes and more likely to stress a need for equal opportunity. Further, as seen in this research into students in a women’s college in the UAE, involvement in community service hours can have the added benefit of contributing to the development of a social conscience – especially for students living in a very conservative environment, many of whom still have relatively little direct contact with the outside world.

4. **Scheduling considerations:** Scheduling is an important factor that plays a role in supporting students to participate in activities. Building some common free time blocks in students’ schedules can facilitate them not only joining institution sponsored activities such as talks, clubs and workshops, but also to think about creative ideas for activities, as well as situations that provide industry links. Although difficult, greater consideration should also be given to students who attend evening classes for whom access to such activities and events is normally much more difficult.

5. **Encourage students to take on an active role in college events and activities such that they are given responsibilities to plan and implement projects:** This can include involving students in the organization of college based conferences, providing them with opportunities to run small businesses in the college along the lines that have been detailed in this study, and even organising events, such as an
art show, in the outside community under the supervised jurisdiction of the college.

6. **Listen to students’ needs continually:** Students’ needs are dynamic and are connected to the period of time, distinctiveness of the place, changes in cultural considerations, technological advancements, and other factors. It is important for the educational system and those in charge to be aware of changes in students’ needs and to engage in an open dialogue with them with respect to the type and nature of non-classroom activities that are offered. Also, where appropriate, to adjust these offerings accordingly in order to maximise the possibility of assisting students to develop their graduate employability attributes. In saying this it needs to be acknowledged that not all non-classroom activities necessarily (nor should they) contribute to graduate employability attributes; further, whilst the connection might be obvious in many instances, in other cases it might not be so apparent.

### 8.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One of the main limitations of this study lies with the fact that it was conducted at one institution in one country. The findings therefore are not necessarily generalizable to other cultures; at the same time, consideration of them might be helpful in exploring similar practices in other contexts. Certainly, further studies could be conducted in other universities in similar conservative cultures to compare and contrast the findings. However, I would claim that although the findings were focused on one country, they can be assumed, by extension, to be
applicable to other Arab countries, particularly in the Gulf region as the similarities in culture are very high.

The study is also limited by the strongly homogeneous demographic make-up of the student participants. Although this is considered an advantage in this study as the cultural influences on the students are similar, further research could attempt to explore the topic with a larger research base in an environment with female students from different backgrounds and from different institutions in the UAE. This could help us check the effect of the respective homogenous and heterogeneous student bodies on the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and the development of graduate employability attributes in the UAE context. The heterogeneous student body in this regard could be female students from different backgrounds who may belong to conservative and non-conservative communities. Further research could also take place in mixed gendered institutions in conservative cultures. Findings could lead to working on strategies for utilizing the non-classroom activities in ways that advantage the different student groups.

One more limitation was the fact that no sports activities were considered in this research; this was due to the fact that no sports facilities were available in the college and the sports activities that the students participated in were limited. Certainly however, it can reasonably be conjectured that participation in sports activities could add a different dimension to building graduates’ employability attributes for this group of students (Hall et al., 2008; Rae, 2007). This identifies a further research investigation; one that investigates the benefits of engaging in sporting activities.

Another aspect of future research would be to investigate the various ways educators can incorporate non-classroom offerings in the students’ educational experiences to foster the
development of graduate employability attributes and examine ways of assessing those practices. It could be argued, for example, that an important feature of such offerings is that they are not formally assessed. The question thus arises: would formal assessment detract from some of the benefits of participation in these non-classroom offerings?

As this study took place with female students, similar research could take place with male students in the same culture. Of course, the research would need to examine the effect of non-classroom activities on males within the context of their position within the conservative male-female society in the UAE. It would not be surprising, for example, if this research showed that as males generally have less restrictions than females, the effect of non-classroom activities is different in important respects. At the same time it is not anticipated that this would negate the importance of non-classroom activities even for males. Certainly, such research may add a new dimension to understanding the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and the development of graduate attributes.

A further research project could concentrate on non-classroom activities from the perspective of college or university administrators and teaching staff. It would be interesting to know, for example, to what extent strong support from both groups affects the success of these offerings. In other words, what is the success of such activities in a college or university where there is a culture of support for them compared to one where support is lacking.

Thinking more broadly, it would be interesting to investigate the role of non-classroom activities in a culture that was much less conservative than that in the UAE with respect to graduate employability attributes.

Certainly, the importance of universities adequately preparing students with appropriate graduate employability attributes is a worldwide issue and the present research is but one
contribution to what will no doubt continue to be an issue for universities, industry and the professions, and government.

### 8.4 A Final Word

Awareness of the cultural and societal norms in place is an essential factor into critically analysing the situation and finding ways that can lead to advancing educational practices and positioning students in new or alternative discourses to create more open and productive situations. Placing students in more open and productive situations plays a valuable role in advancing their graduate employability attributes. Consequently, this helps students to reposition themselves into more constructive roles. There is no doubt that certain discourses can render some students powerless. However, a repositioning within a new situation or social discourse can be empowering. This in turn can lead to a continuing process of enhanced situations characterized by more choices, and new views of what is possible and what is attainable. The study found that providing students with a wide range of non-classroom activities and supporting them to participate provided them with opportunities to reposition themselves into more empowering discourses, thus helping them to build professional graduate employability attributes. In the process the students gained an increased freedom of choice while remaining connected to what is culturally acceptable within their society.

Sharing experiences and best practice is one of the key methods for advancing education and learning within and across cultures and societies worldwide. With respect to the present study, it is through the process of research and the recording of students’ experiences that the practices and knowledge repository have the potential to benefit not only the students where the
practices took place, but also other female student groups who live and study in similar situations. But more than this, women’s stories and experiences can provide support not only to other women, but to all who are attempting to address the challenges of the 21st century.
References


Australian Learning and Teaching Council. (2007-8). *The National GAP Graduate Attributes Project, key issues to consider in the renewal of learning and teaching experiences to foster Graduate Attributes*. NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.


Appendices

Appendix 1 – Email Invitation to Students

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research project that aims to contribute to a major objective of the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 which is to "Maximize the participation of national women in the work force" ("The Abu Dhabi," 2008:41). This research investigates the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and the development of graduates' employability attributes for Emirati female students in Higher Education.

Your participation in this project will be in the form of an interview between you and the researcher; this interview will take about one hour. The interview will be preceded by some reflection questions that will be provided to you before the interview to help you be prepared for it. There will not be more than one interview a semester; you may be interviewed in following semesters if you wish to continue participating in the research. The questions in the interview will be about sharing and reflecting on your experience in participation in non-classroom activities. Your real name will not be mentioned in the research report except if you want.

زيزتي الطالبة،

يسرني دعوتك للمشاركة في بحث علمي عن موضوع "العلاقة بين المشاركة في الأعمال اللاصفية وتهيئة الخريجات الإماراتيات لسوق العمل". يهدف هذا البحث للمساهمة في أحد الأهداف الرئيسية لخطة أبو ظبي 2030 و الذي ينص على زيادة المشاركة الفاعلة للمرأة الإماراتية في سوق العمل.

المشاركة في هذا البحث ستكون عن طريق مقابلة شخصية لمدة ساعة واحدة تقريبا بينك وبين الباحثة تتكلم فيها عن تجربتك في المشاركة في الأعمال اللاصفية. سوف تبث لك الباحثة بعض الأسئلة المساعدة قبل مقابلة. لن يكون هناك أكثر من مقابلة واحدة في الفصل الدراسي. في حال أحببت الاستمرار في المشاركة يمكن مقابلتك مرة أخرى في الفصول الدراسية القادمة. لن يشار للأسماء الحقيقية للمشاركين في أي من أوراق البحث الا في حالة طلب الطالبة نفسها الإشارة إلى اسمها الحقيقية.

في حالة الموافقة على المشاركة في البحث يرجى الاتصال في الباحثة السيدة رولا الكيالي على رقم التلفون.. أو الايميل .. لتزويدنا باسمك، و السنة الدراسية، و الأعمال اللاصفية التي شاركت فيها و تحديد موعد للمقابلة.

في حال وافقت على المشاركة في البحث ثم قررت الانسحاب، لك الحرية التامة في ذلك في اي وقت قبل حساب نتائج البحث.

للمزيد من المعلومات عن البحث أو الأسفسار الرجاء الاتصال بي ( رولا الكيالي) على أرقام التلفون أو الايميل المبينة اعلاه.

مع أمنيتي لكن بالتوفيق دائما،

رولا الكيالي
If you decide to take part in this research and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage up until the data is processed. If you would like more information, you are welcome to contact the researcher (Rula Kayyali) at any time on .. or by emailing her at: ..

If you agree to participate in this study, please reply to the researcher at .. with the following information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My name is:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am in year ---- of my studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am currently participating in the following extracurricular activities:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix 2 – Student Interview Questions

Thinking about your cultural context and other factors, and considering your experience in joining non-classroom activities so far, reflect on the following:

1. After joining non-classroom activities for at least a semester, tell me about:
   a. Reasons for joining non-classroom activities
   b. Reasons for joining this type of activity
   c. Intentions to continue joining this type of non-classroom activity or other types
   d. Challenges you faced as you joined such activities.

2. From your point of view, did participation in non-classroom activities affect your personal development? In what way? Comment on this in relation to the following:
   a. Your relationship with your peers
   b. Your relationship with your teachers
   c. Your relationship with the college administration
   d. The way you plan your future
   e. Your academic achievement
   f. The way you deal with people from other cultures.

3. In what ways do you think participation in non-classroom activities affected the following:
   a. Your communication skills
   b. Assertiveness
   c. Creativity and innovation
   d. Decision making
   e. Problem Solving
   f. Your interpersonal skills
   g. Your intrapersonal skills
   h. Adaptability
   i. Stress Management.

4. From your point of view, can the offering of this type of non-classroom activity be directed in a different way so that it has more benefits to the students?

5. The UAE community is going through rapid changes, do you think participation in non-classroom activities help you to cope with such changes or initiate a change? If so in what way/s?

6. Are you planning to join the work force after graduation? Do you think participation in non-classroom activities help you to develop employability attributes? Are there any cultural or traditional values or practices that affect your decision in joining or not joining the workforce? In what way? Does participation in non-classroom activities affect your decision? In what way?
Appendix 3 – Staff Interview Questions

Taking into consideration the UAE cultural context among other factors, and considering your experience with the women students who joined non-classroom activities so far, reflect on the following:

1. How do you see participation in non-classroom activities related to students’ personal and professional development?
   You may comment on the following:
   a. Communication skills
   b. Teamwork
   c. Assertiveness
   d. Creativity and innovation
   e. Decision making
   f. Problem solving
   g. Student self-awareness
   h. Student relationship with peers
   i. Student relationship with teachers and college staff members
   j. Dealing with people from other cultures
   k. Adaptability
   l. Stress Management.

2. In what ways you think participation in non-classroom activities affected the following in the students you worked with:
   a. Student communication skills
   b. Student creativity and innovation
   c. Student assertiveness
   d. Student problem solving skills
   e. Student decision making skills
   f. Student interpersonal skills
   g. Student intrapersonal skills
   h. Student adaptability
   i. Student stress management.

3. From your point of view, can the offering of non-classroom activities be directed in a different way so that it has more benefits to the students?

4. From your point of view, do certain non-classroom activities or categories of non-classroom activities have more effect than others in advancing students’ employability attributes?

5. The UAE community is going through rapid changes, do you think participation in non-classroom activities helps students to cope with such changes or initiate change? In what way?
## Appendix 4 – Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Interviewee Pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff/ Student</th>
<th>Date &amp; Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Layla</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Thu 26 Apr 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.00pm - 1.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Mon 25 Jun 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.30pm - 4.30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Salwa</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Thu 21 Jun 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00pm - 4.00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Inaam</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Sun 24 Jun 2012</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.30pm - 3.30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Wed 2 May 2012</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4.00pm - 5.00pm</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Mon 4 Jun 2012</td>
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<td>12.00pm - 1.00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dania</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Tue 19 Jun 2012</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>10.30am - 11.30am</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Salma</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Sun 24 Jun 2012</td>
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<td>10.30am - 11.30am</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Sawsan</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nouf</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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</table>
Appendix 5 – Self Reflection Questions

Employability Attributes – Self Reflection Questions

Student Name: ________________________________ Date: _____________________

Dear Student,

Thanks for your willingness to participate in the research project “An Examination of the Relationship between Participation in Extracurricular Activities and the Development of Graduate Employability Attributes for Emirati Female students”.

This tool is designed to be a support tool to stimulate students’ reflection about employability attributes and raise their self-awareness and ability to articulate these attributes in the interview.

This is a self-reflection tool that should be completed by the student in her own time before the interview. It is estimated that this tool should take about 30 minutes to 1 hour of the student time.

1. Communication Skills
   Communication skills means to communicate clearly and precisely (verbal and written) and to provide accurate information.

   1.1. Consider a time in which you had to use your presentation skills in order to get an important point across. How did you approach this? What was difficult? What was easy? How did you feel about the result?

   1.2. Think about the most significant written document/report which you had to complete. What was difficult? What was easy? How did you feel about the result? What would you have done differently?

   1.3. Think about a time when you had to put extra effort to make sure that the person you are communicating with had really understood your point. How did you do this?

2. Assertiveness
   Assertiveness is about expressing your opinions, needs, and feelings clearly without ignoring or hurting the opinions, needs, and feelings of others. To assert means to state an opinion, claim a right, or establish authority. If you assert yourself, you behave in a way that expresses your confidence, importance or power and earns you respect from others. - From the Oxford English Dictionary
2.1. Consider an example of an important goal that you set for yourself in the past. Thinking about your success in reaching it, how did you approach it?

2.2. Thinking about a time when you did not achieve a goal or meet a deadline, what did you do? What was the outcome?

2.3. When making a controversial decision how do you deal with criticism?

2.4. How comfortable are you in each of the following situations (Very Comfortable, Comfortable, Not Comfortable)

   2.4.1. Turn down a request for a meeting or an invitation for lunch/dinner
   2.4.2. Admit confusion in a discussion and ask for clarification
   2.4.3. Return a defective item at a store or food at a restaurant
   2.4.4. Apologize when you are at fault
   2.4.5. Admit fear and ask for consideration
   2.4.6. Request the return of a borrowed item
   2.4.7. Tell a friend or a colleague when she says or does something that bothers you
   2.4.8. Tell someone good news about yourself
   2.4.9. Express an opinion different from that of the person you are talking to
   2.4.10. Ask a stranger for a street direction

3. Creativity and Innovation
Generates and/or recognizes how best practice and imaginative ideas can be applied to different situations. Identifies opportunities and is proactive in putting forward ideas and potential solutions

3.1. Think about a problem that you have solved in a unique or unusual way. What was the outcome? Were you satisfied with it?

3.2. What do you do to encourage self / others to think laterally and to generate ideas?

3.3. How do you present an idea that you know may be considered unusual to your family /friends/lecturers?

3.4. What was the best idea that you came up with in your studies? How did you apply it? What was the result?

4. Decision Making
Decision making is the process of selecting a logical choice from the available options. It is about acting decisively based on sound judgment.

4.1. Do you always make decisions on your own without the help of others? In which situations do you seek other’s help for decision-making?
4.2. Discuss an important decision you have made regarding a task or project during your studies. What factors influenced your decision?

4.3. What steps do you go through to ensure that your decisions are correct/effective?

4.4. For each of the following questions answer with one of the following (Yes, No, Sometimes)
   4.4.1. Do you carry on looking for something better even if you have found a course of action that is just about OK?
   4.4.2. Do you prefer to avoid making decisions if you can?
   4.4.3. Do you change your mind about things?
   4.4.4. Do you take the safe option if there is one?
   4.4.5. Do you make up your mind about things regardless of what others think?
   4.4.6. Do you remain calm when you have to make decisions very quickly?

5. **Problem Solving**
   Problem solving involves analyses of complex problems effectively and developing practical solutions. It includes problem definition, problem analysis, data gathering, generating possible solutions, analyzing solutions, selecting and implementing the best solution, and evaluation.

   5.1. Think about a problem you faced and the way you collected information and established a problem solving model.

   5.2. Explain a specific example when you utilized problem solving strategies to correct a problem

   5.3. How do you deal with data from a variety of sources, to identify the key information?

   5.4. How do you ensure the facts that you have collected are correct and complete?

6. **Interpersonal skills**
   Interpersonal skills are skills used by a person to properly interact with others and handle the sensitivity of dealing with other’s moods, feelings, temperatures and motivations.

   6.1. Think about a time when you had to work closely in a project with a student who you disliked or you had trouble working with. What did you do to make the project work?

   6.2. Give a specific example of a time when you had to address an angry colleague. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?

   6.3. How do you cope with silences in conversations?
6.4. Describe what a “team” environment means to you.

6.5. Consider a situation when you have been successful at empowering a group of people in accomplishing a task. What did you do? Why did it work well?

7. **Intrapersonal skills**

   Intrapersonal skills are about deeply understanding self and being able to reflect on and monitor your own progress and behavior.

   7.1. How do you present yourself when meeting people for the first time? What do you pay special attention to?
   
   7.2. How do you introduce yourself in social gatherings or new and different situations?

   7.3. What do you do to ensure people listen to your ideas?

   7.4. What do you reflect on at the end of the day? Do you spend more time on what went well and why, or do you analyze the problems that occurred?

   7.5. For each of the following questions answer with (Agree, disagree, or not sure)
   
   7.5.1. You are well aware of both your strengths and weaknesses
   
   7.5.2. You trust your own instincts and is good at following them
   
   7.5.3. You are a unique original person and you like being that way
   
   7.5.4. If you are feeling bad, you are usually able to discover the reason for your negative emotions
   
   7.5.5. You spend a lot of time thinking about life and reflecting on your place in the world.

8. **Adaptability/ Flexibility**

   Adaptability means flexibility and maintaining effectiveness in a changing environment

   8.1. Think about a situation in which you had to adjust to a colleague’s working style in order to complete a project or reach your objectives. What did you do?

   8.2. What do you do when priorities change quickly? Thinking about an example of when this happened, what did you do? What was the outcome?

   8.3. Reflect on a situation in which you had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it?

   8.4. What tends to work with one person does not necessarily work with another. Think about a time when you had to be flexible in your style of relating to others. How did you vary your communication style with a particular individual? What was the result?
9. **Stress Management**

Maintains performance under pressure and/or opposition

9.1. Describe a time when you were able to effectively communicate a difficult or unpleasant idea to a superior. What did you do? What was the outcome?

9.2. Think about a time when you were particularly effective in prioritizing tasks and completing a project under tight time constraints. What did you do?

9.3. How do you handle excessive workload?
Appendix 6 – Research Ethics Clearance RMIT

RMIT University
College Human Ethics Advisory Network
Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor
Phone: 9925-5974
Email: hums@rmit.edu.au

3 May 2012

Mrs Rula Abbas Kayyali

Dear Rula,

Ethics Clearance

Project title: An Examination of the Relationship between Participation in Extracurricular Activities and the Development of Graduate Employability Attributes for Emirati Female students
Applicant/s: Mrs Rula Abbas Kayyali
Ethics reference number: CHEAN B-200653-03/12

Your amended ethics application has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN). Your application has been approved at a Low Risk classification and will be reported to the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee for noting.

Your ethics clearance expires on 2 May 2015.

Data storage
Please note that all research data should be stored on University Network systems. These systems provide high levels of manageable security and data integrity, can provide secure remote access, are backed on a regular basis and can provide Disaster Recover processes should a large scale incident occur. The use of portable devices such as CDs and memory sticks is valid for archiving, data transport where necessary and some works in progress. The authoritative copy of all current data should reside on appropriate network systems and the Principal Investigator is responsible for the retention and storage of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

Annual/Final report
You are reminded that an Annual/Final report is mandatory and should be forwarded to the Ethics Officer in December 2012. This report is available at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/governance/committees/hrec

Amendments
If you need to make any amendments to your project please submit an amendment form to the Ethics Officer. This form is available at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/governance/committees/hrec

Should need any further information please contact the Chair, Assoc Prof Heather Fehring on heather.fehring@rmit.edu.au or contact Lisa Mann on (03) 9925 2974 or lisa.mann@rmit.edu.au

On behalf of the DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Mann
Ethics Officer
DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN)
Appendix 7 – Staff Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

STAFF PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: An Examination of the Relationship between Participation in Extracurricular Activities and the Development of Graduate Employability Attributes for Emirati Female students

Investigators:
Rula Kayyali; BSc. Computer Science, MSc. Information Technology (RMIT);

Dr. Narelle Lemon, B. Music, B. Teaching, Master of Education, Doctor of Education (Melbourne Uni.); narelle.lemon@rmit.edu.au;
Tel: +61 3 9925 7808

A/P Geoff Shacklock, B.AppSc RMIT, Dip.Ed Hawthorn, B.Ed, M.Ed Admin Deakin, PhD Flinders; Geoff.shacklock@rmit.edu.au;
Tel: +613 99257808

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University and the Higher Colleges of Technology. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

- This research is being conducted as part of a PhD degree in Education at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) by Rula Kayyali.

- This research aims to contribute to a major objective of the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 which is to “Maximize the participation of national women in the work force” (“The Abu Dhabi,” 2008:41).
This project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee and Abu Dhabi Women's College Research Ethics Committee.

This study is partly funded by the Australian Research training scheme (RTS).

**Why have you been approached?**

You have been invited to participate in this research project because you are a member of the Higher Colleges of Technology – Abu Dhabi Women's College who is involved in students’ personal and professional development.

**What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?**

- This project aims at exploring and critically analysing the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and the development of graduate employability attributes for female Emirati college students. Student participants in this project will be interviewed at least once and at most four times during the time of this project to share and reflect on their experience in participation in extracurricular activities. Staff participants will be interviewed one to two times during the time of the project. Questions in the interview will be in the lines of student experience and how does this affect the development of attributes like communication skills, creativity, decision making, adaptability, stress management, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills.

- About 15 students are expected to participate in this research project.

- College staff members like counselors, student services staff, and faculty members may be interviewed.

**If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?**

If you agree to participate in this research, you will need to be interviewed by the researcher at least once and at most two times during the time of the project. Each interview may take up to one hour. In some cases follow up questions may be needed. The staff member will be consulted if there is a need for a second interview after at least one semester of the first interview. The interview will be done in the college premises at a time that is convenient to the participant and the researcher.

**What are the possible risks or disadvantages?**

There are no perceived risks outside the participant’s normal day-to-day activities in this project.

**What are the benefits associated with participation?**

This project can serve as an informative tool for the participants about ways of advancing students employability attributes with a focus on females students in conservative cultures.

**What will happen to the information I provide?**

- Data provided by participants for purposes of this research project will be treated with confidentiality and anonymity. Participants’ identity will not be revealed at any stage of the research. Data of this research will only be seen by the research investigators.

- Results of this research will be disseminated for participating students and staff members in a final research findings report. Findings of this research will be published as a PhD thesis and may be used in academic papers and conferences. Research data will be kept securely at RMIT for 5 years after publication, before being destroyed.

- In general data collected in this research will be aggregated except in the instances where a direct reference is needed for a participant input, in this case pseudonyms will be used.
What are my rights as a participant?
- The right to withdraw from participation at any time
- The right to request that any recording cease
- The right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?
- If you have any questions, please contact Rula Kayyali at ..

What other issues should I be aware of before deciding whether to participate?
- The student participant may participate in this project for a maximum period of two academic years (4 interviews).

Yours sincerely

Rula Kayyali

MSc. Information Technology

Narelle Lemon

Doctor of Education

If you have any complaints about your participation in this project please see the complaints procedure on the Complaints with respect to participation in research at RMIT page.
CONSENT

1. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described

3. I agree to be interviewed about this project and that my voice will be audio recorded

4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
   (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to me. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant’s Consent

Participant: ___________________________ Date: ________________

(Signature)
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

STUDENT PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: An Examination of the Relationship between Participation in Extracurricular Activities and the Development of Graduate Employability Attributes for Emirati Female students

Investigators:
Rula Kayyali; BSc. Computer Science, MSc. Information Technology (RMIT);
Dr. Narelle Lemon, B. Music, B. Teaching, Master of Education, Doctor of Education (Melbourne Uni.); narelle.lemon@rmit.edu.au;
Tel: + 61 3 9925 7808
A/P Geoff Shacklock, B.AppSc RMIT, Dip.Ed Hawthorn, B.Ed, M.Ed Admin Deakin, PhD Flinders; geoff.shacklock@rmit.edu.au;
Tel: +613 99257808

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University and the Higher Colleges of Technology. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

- This research is being conducted as part of a PhD degree in Education at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) by Rula Kayyali.
- This research aims to contribute to a major objective of the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 which is to “Maximize the participation of national women in the work force” (“The Abu Dhabi,” 2008:41).
- This project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee and Abu Dhabi Women’s College Research Ethics Committee.
- This study is partly funded by the Australian Research training scheme (RTS).
Why have you been approached?

You have been invited to participate in this research project because you are an active student at the Higher Colleges of Technology, Abu Dhabi Women's College, who is participating (or participated) in extracurricular activities arranged by the college. Your name has been passed to us by the Student Services department in the college, which keeps details of students who participate in extracurricular activities.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?

- This project aims at exploring and critically analyzing the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and the development of graduate employability attributes for female Emirati college students. Student participants in this project will be interviewed at least once and at most four times during the time of this project to share and reflect on their experience in participation in extracurricular activities. Questions in the questionnaire and the interview will be in the lines of student experience and how does this affect the development of attributes like communication skills, creativity, decision making, adaptability, stress management, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills.

- About 15 students are expected to participate in this research project.

- College staff members like counselors, student services staff, and faculty members may be interviewed as well.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

If you agree to participate in this research, you will need to be interviewed by the researcher at least once and at most four times during the time of the project. Each interview may take up to one hour. In some cases follow up questions may be needed. There will not be more than one interview a semester. Student participants need to complete employability attributes questionnaire in their own time before the interview takes place; this questionnaire will be used as an informative tool to help students reflect on their experience. Results of the questionnaire will only be used by the student and will not be included in the research. The questionnaire will be provided to the students at least one week before the interview. The interview will be done in the college premises at a time that is convenient to the participant and the researcher.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

There are no perceived risks outside the participant's normal day-to-day activities in this project.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

This project can serve as an educational tool about the employability attributes expected in today's competitive career market and ways of advancing those important attributes.

What will happen to the information I provide?

- Data provided by participants for purposes of this research project will be treated with confidentiality and anonymity. Participants’ identity will not be revealed at any stage of the research. Data of this research will only be seen by the research investigators.

- Results of this research will be disseminated for participating students and staff members in a final research findings report. Findings of this research will be published as a PhD thesis and may be used in academic papers and conferences. Research data will be kept securely at RMIT for 5 years after publication, before being destroyed.
• In general data collected in this research will be aggregated except in the instances where a direct reference is needed for a participant input, in this case pseudonyms will be used.

• In case of completing the employability attributes questionnaire or any other related questionnaire; we assume that you have given consent by your completion and return of the materials.

What are my rights as a participant?
• The right to withdraw from participation at any time
• The right to request that any recording cease
• The right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified, and provided that so doing does not increase the risk for the participant.
• The right to have any questions answered at any time.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?
• If you have any questions, please contact Rula Kayyali at .. or at ..

What other issues should I be aware of before deciding whether to participate?
• The student participant may participate in this project for a maximum period of two academic years (4 interviews).

Yours sincerely
Rula Kayyali
MSc. Information Technology

Narelle Lemon
Doctor of Education

If you have any complaints about your participation in this project please see the complaints procedure on the Complaints with respect to participation in research at RMIT page
CONSENT

5. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet.

6. I agree to participate in the research project as described.

7. I agree:
   to be interviewed and complete a questionnaire related to this project and that my voice will be audio recorded.

8. I acknowledge that:
   
   (c) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that if I take part and I later change my mind, I am free to withdraw from the project at any stage and to withdraw my data up until the data is processed.
   
   (d) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   
   (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   
   (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to me. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

   If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage up until the data is processed. Your decision to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with staff nor with HCT.

Participant’s Consent

Participant: ___________________________ Date: ________________

(Signature)
Appendix 9 – Amendment to RMIT Ethics Approval

Date: 28 May 2014

Project number: CHEAN B 2000653-03/12

Project title: Non-classroom Activities and the Development of Graduate Employability Attributes for Emirati Female Students

Risk classification: Low Risk

Investigator: Professor Heather Februn and Mrs. Raha Al-Abbas Al-Kayyali

Approved: From: 28 May 2014 To: 20 November 2018

I am pleased to advise that your amendment to has been granted ethics approval by the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network as a sub-committee of the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

Terms of approval:
1. Responsibilities of investigator
   It is the responsibility of the above investigator/s to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by the CHEAN. Approval is only valid whilst the investigator/s holds a position at RMIT University.

2. Amendments
   Approval must be sought from the CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment please use the 'Request for Amendment Form' that is available on the RMIT website. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.

3. Adverse events
   You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)
   The PICF and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT University logo. The PICF must contain a complaints clause including the project number.

5. Annual reports
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. This form can be located online on the human research ethics web page on the RMIT website.

6. Final report
   A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

7. Monitoring
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.

8. Retention and storage of data
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title.

On behalf of the OSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network I wish you well in your research.

Suzana Kovacevic
Research Ethics Officer
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
Ph: 03 9925 2974
Email: suzana.kovacevic@rmit.edu.au
Website: www.rmit.edu.au/dsc
Appendix 10 – Amendment Approvals

Amendment to

The Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)

**Project Title:** Non-classroom Activities and the Development of Graduate Employability Attributes for Emirati Female Student

**Investigators:**
Rula Kayyali; BSc. PhD HDR candidate (RMIT University);
Professor Heather Fehring, Doctor of Education (RMIT University); heather.fehring@rmit.edu.au; Tel: + 61 3 9925 3145
A/P Geoff Shacklock, PhD Flinders; Geoff.shacklock@rmit.edu.au; Tel: +613 99257808

Dear Participant,

You signed a PICF and participated in an interview for the project “Non-classroom Activities and the Development of Graduate Employability Attributes for Emirati Female Student”. The PICF stated that the identity of participants will be treated with anonymity, and that the participants’ identity will not be revealed. As the work progressed a situation arose where I suspected that your identity may be identified by the role you assumed at the time of the interview or the work you were involved in. Although this information may only be recognized by college internal members who knew the college structure at the time of the interview, I found it important that I make this possibility clear to you and seek your endorsement of your awareness. This situation has arisen because my research is qualitative and the number of participants is limited. However, acknowledgement of the roles of the participants has added a valuable dimension to the richness of the data collected in the study.

If you agree to have your work role retained in the study and acknowledge the possibility this may compromise the anonymity of your identity in this project, please sign the following consent. If you have any questions, please contact Rula Kayyali at ... or Heather Fehring at + 61 3 9925 3145 or heather.fehring@rmit.edu.au;

Yours sincerely

Rula Kayyali
MSc. Information Technology

Prof. Heather Fehring
Doctor of Education
CONSENT

I acknowledge the possibility that my identity may not remain anonymous in this research study. I agree to this possibility.

Participant’s Consent

Participant: ___________________________ Date: ________________

(Signature)
Appendix 11 – Ethics Clearance HCT ADMC

0.1 Request for Research Access

This form should be submitted to the college director along with a copy of detailed research proposal.

Researcher's Name(s): Rula Kayyali
Contact Details: HCT ID

Research Title: An examination of the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and the development of graduate employability attributes for Emirati female students.

Affiliation (if any): Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)

Research Access: Include detailed plans for the research work in the college(s) including the number and duration of visits and procedure of identification of target sample, time commitment required by students/staff, potential benefits to the colleges etc.

A total of 10 to 15 students from both campuses of Abu Dhabi Women's College (City and Khalifa) need to be recruited to participate in this study. Student involvement will be through a one hour interview preceded by filling a self reflection questionnaire that may take 30 minutes to 1 hour. There will not be more than one interview a semester, students who wish to continue participating in the project may be interviewed again the following semester up to a maximum of 4 interviews over two years. Two to three staff members may participate in the project like college counselor and the student services supervisor; their participation will be via an interview; the interview will not take more than one hour.

Student participants will be recruited via the Student Services department in the college. The researcher will contact the Student Services department in the college via an introductory email. Student Services department will recommend names of students to participate and apprach those students via an email invitation. If the student agrees to participate in the research, s/he will be directed to contact the researcher. A list of the students who agree to participate in the research will be compiled and shared with the Student Services department in the college. Staff participants will be approached directly via the researcher through an email invitation. Participation in the research is voluntary, and participant may withdraw from the research at any time.

This research project maps to the UAE vision 2021 point 3.1 “Harness the full potential of national capital”, and the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2050 – The Economic Development priority - objective: "maximizing participation of national women in the workforce". The employability attributes considered in the research project map to the leadership attributes defined by the Executive Council in Abu Dhabi. This project supports the college direction in building well rounded graduates and providing them with learning opportunities both inside and outside the classrooms.

Decision: Access Allowed (RRC to follow-up) [ ] Not Approved [ ] Resubmission Required [ ]

Comments/Amendments/Conditions: Rula has made amendments as required by RRC. Submitted for approval please. I already submit RRC chair

Researcher Signature: Date: 19/3/2012

College Director Signature: Date: 20/9/2012
Rula, thank you for providing us an opportunity to engage in scholarly rhetoric, we should find more ways in which to do this more frequently.

Regards,

**From:** Rula Al Kayyali  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 11, 2012 11:50 PM  
**To:** Dr. Jace Hargis  
**Cc:** Dr. Nadeem Khan; Dr. Cathy Cavanaugh; Stephen Munns  
**Subject:** RE: Research Application

Dear Dr. Jace,

It has been pleasure meeting you and the leadership team at ADWC today. Many thanks for the valuable input and helpful comments, I really enjoyed the discussions and left with useful ideas that I will ensure they are considered in my research.

Thanks to each and every one of you.

Best Regards,

Rula

**From:** Dr. Jace Hargis  
**Sent:** Friday, March 02, 2012 10:40 AM  
**To:** Rula Al Kayyali  
**Cc:** Dr. Nadeem Khan; Dr. Cathy Cavanaugh; Stephen Munns; Kim Richards  
**Subject:** FW: Research Application

Greetings Rula, thank you for the information and interest in exploring attributes, which may assist our students employment. We have implemented a new policy to ensure our students are best served, which include the access form, which you have completed, thank you. In addition, in the spirit of collaboration and high quality scholarship, I would like to ask you to visit ADWC and provide a brief presentation of your experimental design (please, no PowerPoint) to our leadership team, which include myself, our AD Dr. Cavanaugh, Dean Steve Munns, and IRB Chair, Dr. Khan.

I will copy my EA Kim, who will be in touch to identify a time for us to meet.

Regards,

**From:** Rula Al Kayyali  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 01, 2012 3:21 PM
To: Dr. Jace Hargis  
Cc: Dr. Nadeem Khan; Dr. Abdul Rahman Al Hammadi  
Subject: RE: Research Application

Dear Dr. Jace, I am Rula Kayyali, the head of community outreach in the Central Academic Services at HCT. I am currently doing a research project about the relationship between participation in non-classroom activities and the development of employability attributes for students in Higher Education with a focus on female students in the UAE. This research project maps to the UAE vision 2021 point 3.1 “Harness the full potential of national capital”; and the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 – The Economic Development priority - objective: “maximizing participation of national women in the workforce”.

The employability attributes considered in the research project map to the leadership attributes defined by the Executive Council in Abu Dhabi http://sharing.ecouncil.ae/coe/adGLeadership/competencies/Competencies.pdf

I find the project quite interesting and supports the college direction in building well rounded graduates and providing them with learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom. The project shall serve as a good learning experience for the student participants. Ten to fifteen female students who participate in extracurricular activities in the college need to participate in the project; their involvement will not exceed one hour interview a semester preceded by a self reflection questionnaire that shall be filled by students in their own time.

I wish that you find this project as interesting as we do, I am interested in involving students from ADWC in this project, attached is the access request form for the project and the ethics clearance form. Please feel free to contact me anytime if you have questions, if you would like to have a quick chat about the project it will be my pleasure, I can drop by you at any mutually convenient time. Regards,

From: Dr. Nadeem Khan
Sent: Monday, February 27, 2012 12:34 PM
To: Rula Al Kayyali
Subject: Research Application

Hi Rola, We have reviewed the research access procedure. In the light of new guidelines, can you please forward a copy of you detailed research proposal and Research Access form (attached) to our director, Dr. Jace Hargis (jhargis@hct.ac.ae). Once he approves, internal RRC will be able to take up the review process further. With regards,
Appendix 12 ADWC College Activities AY2011-12

**Fall Semester Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Campus</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Student Orientation</td>
<td>Sept. 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations Orientation sessions</td>
<td>Sept. 11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Sept. 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit of Professor (Dr.) Candyce Reynolds</td>
<td>Sept. 11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abu Dhabi TV prog.</td>
<td>Sept. 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Sept. 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Abu Dhabi TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture on Financial Crisis</td>
<td>Sept. 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Shaikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Palace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Assemblies</td>
<td>Sept. 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; (Buss. And Education students)</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sept. 22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; IT and Eng</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools counselors workshop</td>
<td>Sept. 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clubs and Activities Fair</td>
<td>Sept. 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPO school visits</td>
<td>Oct. 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; - Oct. 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Females as Entrepreneurs” workshop</td>
<td>Oct. 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Emirates Center Strategic Studies (ECSSR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Korean National Day</td>
<td>Oct. 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>InterContinental Hotel</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Road Safety Lecture” by Abu Dhabi Police</td>
<td>Oct. 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>National Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Road Safety” Presentation and Interactive activities by</td>
<td>Oct. 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yasalaam and Emirates Driving Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Pink Polo” breast cancer awareness campaign</td>
<td>Oct. 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Najah Exhibition</td>
<td>Oct 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – Oct 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blood Drive</td>
<td>Oct. 25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor from German Parliament</td>
<td>Nov. 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Festival of Thinkers</td>
<td>14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Nov.</td>
<td>KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Breastfeeding Day</td>
<td>Nov. 16&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Diabetes Day</td>
<td>Nov. 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Breastfeeding Day</td>
<td>Nov. 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE 40&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; National Day Celebrations</td>
<td>Nov. 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;  Nov. 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Marina Mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Diabetes Day</td>
<td>Nov. 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry Afternoon</td>
<td>Nov. 27&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE 40&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; National Day Celebrations</td>
<td>Nov. 28&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVIP Visit</td>
<td>Dec. 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walking trail opening</td>
<td>Dec. 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walking trail opening</td>
<td>Dec. 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Movies Week</td>
<td>Dec. 11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; – Dec. 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC, KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int. Day of Disabled</td>
<td>Dec. 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Spring Semester events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Campus</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Breath for Life” Interactive health and wellness activities</td>
<td>Feb. 7th</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clubs and Activities Fair</td>
<td>Feb. 13th-14th</td>
<td>ADWC,KWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations Campaign for Syria (in coordination with Red Crescent)</td>
<td>Feb. 19th-23rd</td>
<td>ADWC@KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well being Various interactive activities</td>
<td>Feb. 21st</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int. Women’s Day “Let it out” Stress relief and relaxation activities</td>
<td>Mar. 6th</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Fair</td>
<td>Mar. 20th</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture on “Carbon Footprint” by Ali Saloom</td>
<td>Apr. 16th</td>
<td>ADWC@KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Council Presidential Elections Campaign</td>
<td>Apr. 29th-May 24th</td>
<td>ADWC@KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Conversations</td>
<td>Apr. 30th</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit by Dr. Nikhil Sinha Vice-Chancellor, Shiv Nadar University</td>
<td>May 3rd</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Music Performance</td>
<td>May 7th</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Festival</td>
<td>May 8th</td>
<td>ADWC&amp;KWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Campus</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lecture “Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better lives: A strategic Approach to skills policies”</td>
<td>May 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Al Bateen Palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Annual Art Show</td>
<td>May 13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; -17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC Cultural Day</td>
<td>May 15&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>KWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Annual Art Show</td>
<td>May 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; -24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>KWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Council Presidential Elections</td>
<td>May 22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; -24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC&amp;KCWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of year students reflection gathering</td>
<td>May 29&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ADWC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of year Student Recognition Ceremony</td>
<td>May 30&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</table>
Appendix 13 – Examples of College News

AD/KCWC team aim for Kilimanjaro to mark HCT’s 25th year
March 31, 2013

With support from the Fatma Bint Mubarak Ladies Sports Academy and Mubadala Development Company, the Higher Colleges of Technology—Abu Dhabi and Khalifa City Women’s Colleges (AD/KCWC) are proud to announce that nine students and three faculty chaperones will set off this week for a charitable challenge to climb Tanzania’s Mount Kilimanjaro.

In conjunction with their trip, which commemorates the HCT’s 25th anniversary year, the students have raised AED 40,000 for charity projects in Tanzania. The donation will be distributed with help from the UAE Embassy in Tanzania.

The students and faculty have been training since September to prepare themselves to climb Africa’s highest mountain. Rising to 5,895 meters, it is also the world’s tallest free-standing mountain.

As a group, the dimbns-in-training have undertaken monthly challenges such as climbing Jebel Hafeet, hiking up and down stairs at the Zayed Sports City Stadium, and participating in the Capital’s Terry Fox Run. Most recently they hiked together across and around Abu Dhabi’s new Masdar Bridge. Team members have also helped each other prepare appropriate clothing, gear, and—most important—footwear, for a trip to a place unlike anything in the UAE.

Climbing Kilimanjaro is physically very demanding. The air near the mountain’s summit has only half the oxygen of sea-level air. Trekking through five different climatic zones and camping out in temperatures ranging from merely cold to well below freezing would discourage most people from undertaking such an adventure. “I want to challenge myself,” said team member Ameena. “And to show the world what Emirati women can do. Even a married Emirati woman like me can get support for an adventure, and make it happen,” she added.

In addition to fitness training to withstand the conditions, students have been raising money over the past months. “I want to help the poor people there (in Africa),” said team member Fatima. “We have been collecting money here, and we will give it to them to use there.”

To date, the team have collected AED 40,000 to be given to a charity that supports African girls’ education.

Her Excellency Noura Al Kaabi, a board member of the Fatma Bint Mubarak Ladies Sports Academy, expressed the Academy’s pleasure and eagerness to support ideas that show a distinctive image of the Emirati female. “This initiative affirms Emirati women’s ambitions in all fields. Our responsibility consists on developing sports awareness and support in the community. We emphasize sports for girls, because they are the mainstay of evolution and development in the UAE community, and we will continue to play an active role in this process,” she said.

Dr. Jace Hargis, Director of AD/KCWC, expressed his enthusiasm for the expedition, saying, “We are all very supportive and proud of our students who have diligently trained and are ready to tackle this adventure. Learning abroad brings exceptional life lessons, and allows our students to both share their culture and connect with other cultures, which helps everyone create a holistic view on life.”

Article printed from HCT News: http://news.hct.ac.ae
URL to article: http://news.hct.ac.ae/2013/03/adkcwc-team-aim-for-kilimanjaro-to-mark-hcts-25th-year/

Teams share work on sustainability at AD/KCWC event
January 16, 2013

Eager students from the HCT’s Abu Dhabi/Khalifa City Women’s College (AD/KCWC) presented projects at a recent “HCT Sustainability Expo.”

Students from several foundation classes, as well as more senior students from General Education, Business (Math), Engineering (Math), and Electronic Engineering, displayed their projects on topics related to water conservation, energy usage, and managing the carbon footprint.

AD/KCWC’s Faculty Fellow for Sustainability, Rebecca Taylor Al-Semaries, invited student groups who had completed sustainability-themed work to share their efforts with the KCWC community. Ten teams responded, bringing with them slides presentations, models, posters, videos, and even a student-designed and-built motion detector.

Electronic Engineering Technology students Murira Al Obaidi and Aisha Al Ali were proud to share their capstone project, a power-saving motion detector that shuts off lights as soon as a room is empty and turns them on when someone enters. “We are more than happy, because we have made this motion detector using our own knowledge,” said Murira. “It wasn’t just using books.” Aisha added, “It was nice to make this final project after all the years studying engineering.”

Groups of Foundation students showed a wide acquaintance with issues related to water usage, displaying videos, graphs, and a detailed drama. They spoke about water usage in the home, giving examples of simple steps we all can take to reduce water use.

Dr. Jace Hargis, Director of AD/KCWC, stated, “Our College has a major goal to improve awareness of sustainability and to implement life changes in order to achieve it. These students display show progress toward that goal, starting with showing how our individual actions influence the earth.”

Article printed from HCT News: http://news.hct.ac.ae
URL to article: http://news.hct.ac.ae/2013/01/teams-share-work-on-sustainability-at-adkcwc-event/