

## **Bridging Cultures:**

### **A Kuwaiti Student's Journey of Transformation in the U.S.**

Essay by E4, ELI student, University of Delaware

As an international student hailing from Kuwait, studying in the United States (U.S.) has been a transformative experience for me. The decision to study in the U.S. was not a mere whim but a conscious choice fueled by a burning desire for personal growth and a commitment to further my career. In this essay, I will share my personal journey as an international student, highlighting the motivations behind my decision, the challenges I faced, and the valuable lessons I have learned along the way. My story seeks to dispel misconceptions about Kuwait and shed light on the unique experiences of international students at the University of Delaware (UD) and in the U.S. To truly understand my journey, it is essential to grasp the nuances of my home country, Kuwait. Often, misconceptions and stereotypes exist about Kuwaitis and the Middle East. While some might imagine deserts and camels, Kuwait is a modern nation with a rich culture and heritage. My choice to study in the U.S. was fueled by a desire to broaden my horizons, not to escape a stereotypical image.

As an international student in the U.S., I have encountered a spectrum of challenges and opportunities, and my experiences reflect the profound importance of cultural exchange and understanding. Throughout this essay, I present the story of my life which has been fraught with new learning, challenges, and opportunities.

My journey as an international student began with meticulous preparation and unwavering support. Pursuing higher education in the U.S. is no small feat since it necessitates not only academic excellence but also proficiency in English. To meet this requirement, I had to take the IELTS, a crucial test measuring English language proficiency. The support I received from teachers, mentors, and my family was invaluable, and without it, I wouldn't have embarked on this adventure. My high school experience in Kuwait played a crucial role in shaping my journey. The Kuwaiti education system, while different from the U.S., instilled in me a strong work ethic and a thirst for knowledge. It prepared me academically and emotionally for the challenges of studying abroad, supporting my determination to succeed.

Studying in the U.S. was a purposeful decision. My goals and aspirations are deeply rooted in my personal and career objectives. I sought a global perspective, exposure to cutting-edge research, and the opportunity to connect with open-minded people. The U.S. educational system, known for its innovation and diversity, was the perfect platform to achieve these aspirations.

Before arriving in the U.S., I had the privilege of being an international student in schools like the Jakarta International School (2017-2018) and the International School of Islamabad (2019-2021). These experiences not only exposed me to diverse cultures but also presented unique challenges. Adapting to new environments, making friends from various backgrounds, and adjusting to different education systems provided a solid foundation for my U.S. experience.

One of the most profound aspects of my journey has been the cultural adaptation and the challenges that accompanied it. Navigating the cultural norms, traditions, and communication protocols in each country brought both positive and challenging experiences. It taught me the value of flexibility and the beauty of embracing differences.

My experiences in diverse settings have highlighted the vital importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity. Cultural misunderstandings are inevitable, but they are also opportunities for growth. I've learned that fostering an environment of mutual respect and understanding is crucial for bridging cultural gaps.

To incoming international students, I offer some advice based on my journey. Embrace the experience with an open heart and mind. Seek support from mentors, engage with the local community, and make the most of the educational and cultural opportunities. Understanding that challenges are a part of the journey will help you navigate them with resilience.

My journey as an international student at the University of Delaware has been a transformative experience that has not only expanded my horizons but also enriched my perspective on the world. It's a journey that has helped dismantle stereotypes about my home country, Kuwait, and highlighted the power of cultural exchange and understanding. As I look back on the challenges and opportunities I've encountered, I am convinced that the bond between people from different backgrounds is strengthened through open dialogue and respect. Studying at the English Language Institute of the University of Delaware has not only advanced my academic and career

goals but has also broadened my cultural awareness and deepened my commitment to bridging cultures and fostering understanding.