

EDITORIAL

Commentary for Special Issue “Public health is new in Saudi Arabia. With this degree, I can go back and help to develop the field there.” — Naif Mohammed Alraihan, King Abdullah Fellow, Rollins School of Public Health, 2015



1. Overview

In May 2010, His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Al Rabeeah (previous) Minister of Health of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) visited Emory University, Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH) to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU). This MOU contained elements of collaboration that included the challenge to train MoH staff in the sciences of public health practice (e.g., epidemiology, biostatistics, program monitoring and evaluation, public health surveillance).

What emerged that year was the King Abdullah Fellowship Program (KAFF); a joint effort of the Ministry of Health (MoH) of KSA, the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), and the RSPH. The KAFP was established to further strengthen the healthcare in KSA by boosting the public health capacity there, raising the quality of the professional workforce, and promoting mutually beneficial scientific collaboration.

Since its inception, the KAFP has grown in numbers and visibility, serving as a premier career development program in public health. To qualify for this 2-year scholarship, candidates are required to have worked four years at the MoH as physicians and be committed to returning to work in KSA after completion of their Master of Public Health (MPH)

degrees. By May 2015, 30 students will have graduated; 28 students are currently enrolled.

At RSPH, KA Fellows gain in-depth knowledge about core principles, theories, and best practices in public health. They have the benefit of RSPH's location adjacent to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) headquarters, a proximity that provides our faculty and students with unparalleled opportunities for collaboration, joint research, teaching, continuing education and mentoring. At the same time, Fellows research issues of critical importance to the KSA healthcare landscape, completing at least 200 h of in-country fieldwork (called a practicum) and writing a research thesis.

The issues that students face during the acceptance, matriculation, and post-graduation phases of their MPH program point to the opportunities and challenges that exist for Saudis as both students studying in the United States and health professionals working to more firmly establish and expand the public health field currently taking shape in the KSA.

2. Admissions process

Initially, KAFP candidates are interviewed and screened in KSA by KAFP alumni who know what the students will face. After this, qualified

candidates apply directly to Emory, just as any other student would. During the application phase, candidates are judged on their transcripts, statements of purpose, Graduate Record Examination (GRE), and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores. Standardized test scores are a major component of admissions criteria at RSPH. Because the test scores of KAFP candidates have generally been lower than those of other applicants, there has been resistance to offer them admission, which has been a major challenge to the KAFP.

The KSA applicants do not “look good on paper”. There are a several reasons why KAFP applicant performance on these exams is low compared to other applicants. The GRE contains information based on North American cultural norms and therefore can be considered culturally biased [8]. Due to different cultures, languages, and educational systems, foreign students tend to score substantially lower than Americans [7]. The use of topics such as sports, literature, and art in questions may make it more difficult for someone of a different cultural background to answer correctly within the allotted time period, no matter how intelligent or proficient in English they are. Furthermore, it was determined that GRE scores under-predicted grades received by older students and over-predicted the graduate ability of younger students [5]. This observation could be an

explanation for the situation of KA Fellows, who, as mid-career professionals, have been able to outperform expectations drawn from their GRE results (Fig. 1). Although their performance on the GRE may be lower than that of other applicants, their performance in the actual MPH program is commensurate with that of other students (see Tables 1–6).

While scores on both the TOEFL and IELTS exams are reliable indicators of English proficiency, it should be noted that correlations are negligible between TOEFL and GPA [4]. This is because above a certain level of English proficiency, other factors such as previous experience with subject matter, determination, academic aptitude, cultural awareness, and financial security have greater influence on academic success [6]. Medical training and work experience provide KA Fellows with both background knowledge and vocabularies well adapted for common class topics. In addition, KA Fellows, like any other students, have the ability to preview and review course material, record lectures, use dictionaries, and ask questions in and out of class. These facts allow KA Fellows to overcome any possible English weakness. Another factor unique to KA Fellows, which may explain their ability to succeed beyond what their standardized test scores predict, is the academic support they receive. KA Fellows receive supplemental instruction and editing assistance from full-time English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors as well as from tutors

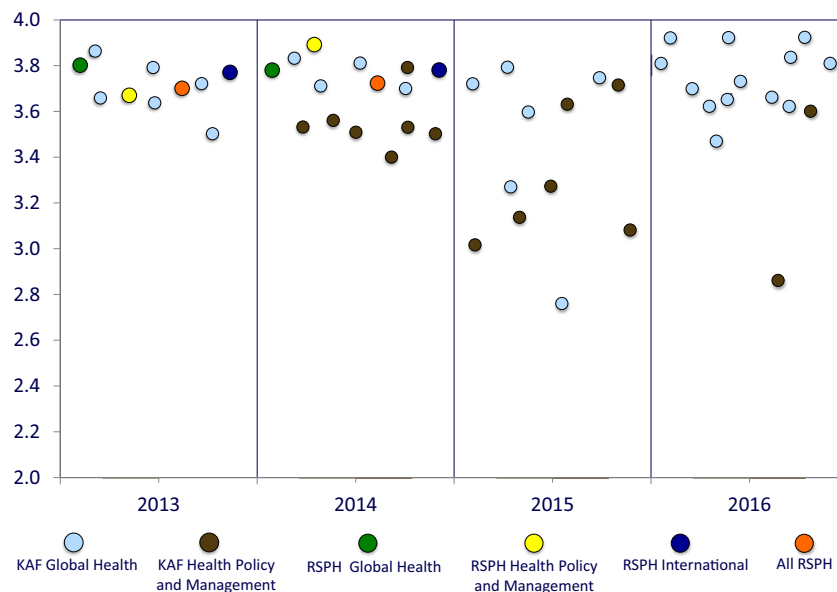


Fig. 1 Overall grade point averages of King Abdullah Fellows compared to Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH) graduates, by Department and Graduating Class, 2015–2016.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/3327441>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/3327441>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)