

Please provide an overview of your organization's role in international higher education accreditation and quality assurance.

The American University of Ras Al Khaimah (AURAK) in the United Arab Emirates places a strong emphasis on international higher education accreditation and quality assurance, with a particular focus on promoting accreditation, especially in the Gulf region. Consistent with this commitment, AURAK has achieved institutional accreditation from the UAE accreditor (i.e., the Commission on Academic Accreditation of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research), accreditation from Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), in the US, in keeping with our American identity, and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the higher education accrediting body of the UK. While incredibly challenging, obtaining and maintaining these multiple accreditations ensures that AURAK is aligned with best practices in higher education, that AURAK coursework and degrees will be recognized globally, and that we remain competitive in an increasingly flourishing market. Additionally, it is an example of the competitive global market and the belief that more accreditations are better.

How does your organization measure success and impact?

We place great importance on employability, as we are increasingly judged by our ability, especially by our local accreditor, and the ranking agencies, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and The Times Higher Education, to produce graduates who are prepared for a changing marketplace.

This is a challenging job because, quite honestly, for many of us, especially those who lead “American” institutions abroad, it can conflict with the traditional idea of a university. However, with increased and diversified demands and established KPIs from various stakeholders, especially accrediting bodies and parents, graduating market-ready graduates who can secure jobs within six months of graduation is our primary objective, and one that, unfortunately, factors into a large percentage of our ranking formula.

Additional ways we measure our success and impact include the research and scholarship of our faculty, the quality and diversity of our faculty, and our international accreditations. In particular, our academic excellence is reflected in the university’s international certification by the SACSCOC, accreditation of all eight engineering programs and our Biotechnology program by ABET, and the School of Business’ AACSB accreditation. These accreditations enable us to develop 2+2 and 3+2 options with U.S. universities, establishing pathways for AURAK undergraduates to complete dual degrees and a master’s degree at prominent U.S. institutions.

Can you discuss any emerging trends or issues in higher education that challenge traditional quality assurance approaches, such as online learning, artificial intelligence, competency-based education, or interdisciplinary programs?

The emergence of ChatGPT and other similar tools poses a challenge for universities. However, at AURAK, we believe in embracing these tools simply as tools. Our course of action is to guide our university students from the first semester onward to use AI-enabled text-generation programs responsibly and ethically. We integrate these tools into our orientation and teaching practices, demonstrating to students both the appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI-generated content.

As the first university in the UAE to offer an AI undergraduate degree, AURAK is well-positioned to continue leading the implementation of AI as an emerging technology trend. The university has recently introduced an interdisciplinary AI minor across the curriculum to better prepare our students. The tangible benefits are increased internship placements and improved employability rates.

How does your organization collaborate with colleges and universities, other academic institutions, and other organizations worldwide to promote access to higher education?

As mentioned, we strive to establish partnerships with similar prestigious institutions that enhance AURAK's reputation. For example, our Study Abroad and Exchange program provides several options for students to spend a semester or year abroad. In some cases, these universities also partner with us to offer 2+2 and 3+2 programs, enabling AURAK students to begin their studies in the UAE and then transfer to a U.S. partner institution to complete their undergraduate degree, pursue a dual degree, or earn a Master's degree. These options offer students a transformative educational experience that enriches their global perspective and fosters their personal and professional development. Given our American accreditation and identity, the majority of our partnerships are with US institutions; however, we also have a few European and Asian partnerships to meet the requests of some students and families who prefer a location closer to the UAE.

What are your organization's priorities and plans for the future in advancing international higher education accreditation and fostering quality assurance on a global scale?

As president, my goal is to curb and resist the 'more is better' approach, as it often places us in conflicting or even contradictory situations regarding standards. We will focus primarily on the two key institutional accreditations, the UAE's CAA and our US accrediting body, SACSCOC. Additionally, we will continue to pursue available international accreditations for all our academic programs. Our AACSB and various ABET accreditations

have ensured our adherence to internationally recognized standards of quality, fostering stronger international partnerships and reputation.