GUIDANCE AS A MEANS FOR ENHANCING THE FUNCTIONAL OPERATIONS OF THE ELECTIVE SYSTEM AT KUWAIT UNIVERSITY*

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Abstract

In 1975/76 Kuwait University was transferred to an Elective System and initially, the article reviews the rationale and objectives of such a change. Guidance or ‘advisement’ is considered a key means to achieve these objectives. The major focus of the article is an examination of several attempts to assess/evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of ‘advisement’. Recommendations for practical solutions to those problems which surround this practice are also discussed.

In the academic year 1975/76 Kuwait University was transferred to the Elective System. This epoch-making step was made after a long period of deliberation and agitation by some members of the faculty seeking a thorough change in the academic structure, outlook and philosophy of university education in Kuwait. The system to which the University was shifted is quite analogous in structure and operations to all its predecessors but with a character of its own.

Generally, it relinquished the old requirement of going through the four-year program with its pre-fixed courses of study in which the students had no choice except the take-it-or-leave-it option. Instead, it adopted a credit hour graduation requirement, the successful completion of 120–126 CHS. This requirement was divided into four distinct but articulated areas: general education, a major, a minor, and a number of electives.

The general-education concept was geared to meet the student’s basic needs for personal and social development. The major and minor were intended to promote the student’s intellectual, scholastic and professional training. The electives were assumed to be instrumental in enhancing the student’s freedom of choice and amplifying his role in planning his programmes of studies and, thus providing him

with a sense of participation and self-determination. The courses in each of these
categories were verified and increased in number in order to facilitate the realization
of these ends. In the Spring semester 1979—80, the university offered 1700 different
courses in its various departments. The number of courses mitigated the
professors' authoritarianism but preserved their authority. The academic year was
extended to 32 working weeks which were divided into two semesters of 16 working
weeks each, thus raising the annual input efforts of both students and instructors
by 60% in comparison with the old arrangement. The allotted time to each course
was three hours weekly, which brought the total class work in each week to 45
working hours per semester, i.e. five hours more than what used to be given to any
identical course under the old system per annum. If a course enjoyed a special
importance and was of a special magnitude and demanded more time, it could be
organized into two cycles (e.g. 300, 301) and carried out in two semesters with a

The adoption of the new system raised high hopes within the academic com-
community, especially among university students, and the society as a whole. The
students were elated by the new rights granted to them under the new arrangements
and by the new air of freedom: to take part in planning their educational pro-
grammes, select their courses and — to a certain degree — choose their teachers. The
society — outside the University — welcomed the shift as a drive toward a more
creative and more rewarding university training for both a richer life and a more
effective future leadership.

The new air of high hopes and elation took an official expression through some
newly acknowledged expectations from university education. The Office of The
Dean of Students Affairs (henceforth ODSA) phrased these expectations in the
following terms:

1. Providing for stronger and more amiable relations between the students and their
   teachers, academically as well as socially;
2. Granting the students a greater measure of freedom to choose their area of
   specialization and their courses according to capability and interest;
3. Enabling the students — should they so wish — to change their specialization in
   due time;
4. Doing away with the previous immobility of the university curriculum and
   encouraging academic departments to reconsider their course offerings and
   upgrade their contents to contemporary international standards;
5. Keeping track of students performance in the classroom, their participation in
   general and group discussions, writing papers under the guidance of their
   teachers and continuously checking on their progress or regress in the class-
   room.
6. Enabling the student to progress in his studies according to his abilities by
   acknowledging his right to carry a manageable course load in each semester
   within a range of 9—18 Credit Hours.
7. Effecting a qualitative alteration in the teaching process itself by shifting it from