

# Saudi Scholarship Program 2016 Update



During King Abdullah's reign, the Saudi Arabian government had two major goals: to pay more attention and set aside additional money towards education and to focus more attention on being open to the western world. As a result, the Saudi Arabian government began to send more and more students to the United States and Europe to study and created the King Abdullah Scholarship Program.

The objectives of this program were:

- To try to have more open mindedness
- To expose the youth of Saudi Arabia to travel and to become open to the world
- To improve the English language skills of the country's citizens

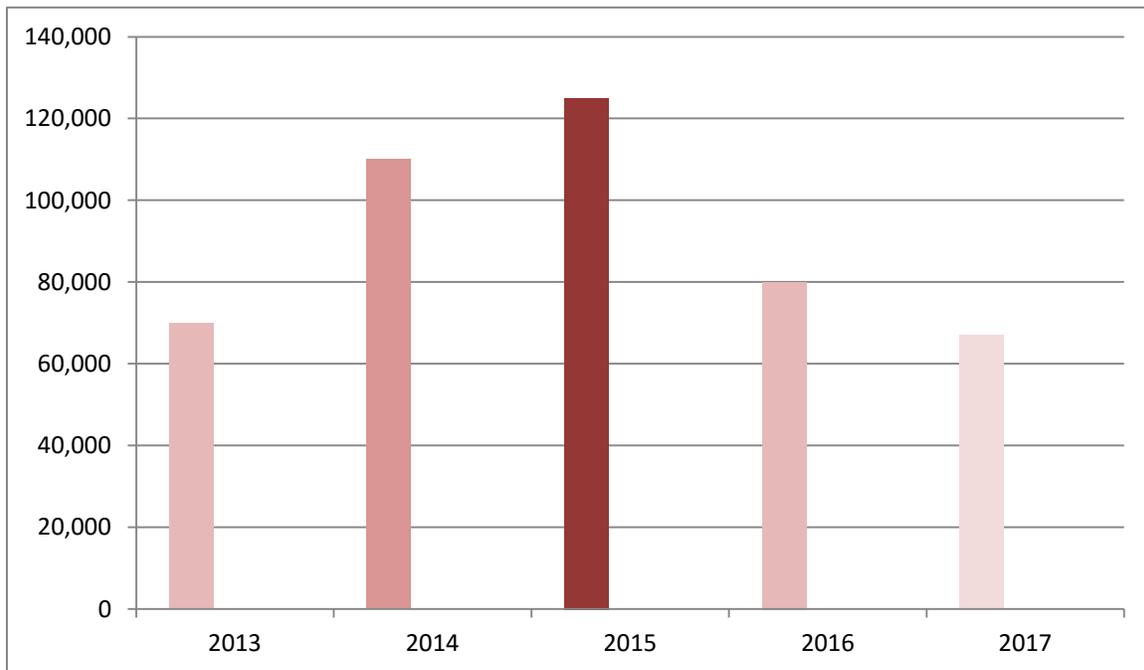
An overarching goal of the program was for the students to return to Saudi Arabia and lead the country's jobs and help to change the country's culture.

The Saudi government made a dedicated budget for the scholarship program of six billion U.S. dollars. Therefore, government sponsored all of the student's needs including tuition, living expenses, health insurance and travel expenses.

The United States was the largest recipient of Saudi Arabian students.

- 2013: 70,000 Saudi students

- 2014: 110,000 Saudi students
- 2015: 125,000 Saudi students
- 2016: 80,000 Saudi students
- 2017: 67,000 Saudi students (13,000 will graduate by the end of 2016)



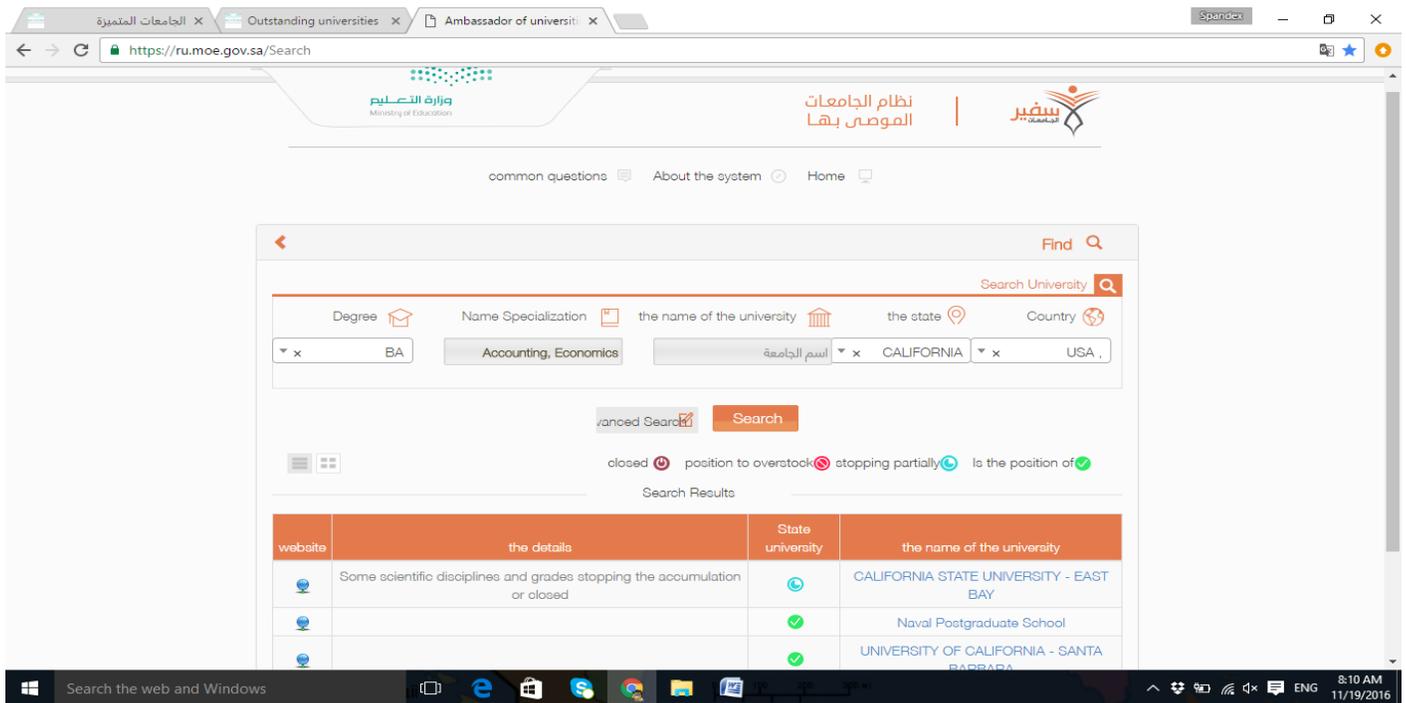
The highest number of students to receive scholarships was in 2015, when 125,000 students attended U.S. universities, these students contributed \$3.2 billion to the United State’s economy. In 2016, because the number of students decreased to 80,0000, the amount of money contributed to the U.S. economy dropped by 30%. In 2017, only a projected number of 67,000 students will attend U.S. universities and the amount contributed to the U.S. economy will drop by 50% compared to 2015.

The number of Saudi students has drastically dropped. I am going to talk about this issue through three main topics:

- A. Old Scholarship System Overview***
- B. Events that Effected the Scholarship System***
- C. The New Scholarship System Overview.***

### A. **Old Scholarship System Overview:**

- Students used to get guaranteed government full scholarships - before they leave their country - including travel expenses.
- Students used to study English for one year and were then eligible for a six month extended study. Moreover, if the students needs more study time they were eligible for an additional three months, as a total of 20 month for English study only.
- Students used to be able to choose between a large number of U.S. recommended schools, as it shown below (<https://ru.moe.gov.sa/Search> )



(Please note that this link is still valid for students who received the scholarship up until February 2015.)

- Students used to be able to choose the city they wanted to study in and move between cities easily according to the recommended schools in each city.
- Students used to be able to obtain a degree from an U.S. university and then upgrade their scholarship and therefore continue to study at the masters and Ph.D. levels without separate scholarship applications.

The system was flexible with the majority of applicants getting accepted. This system was operating for students who entered the U.S. before February 2015. (these students are allowed to continue their education)

### ***B. Events that affected the Scholarship system:***

In 2015 when the Saudi government re-evaluated their budget and proposed the budget for the upcoming fiscal year the government discovered they had a budget deficit problem. As a result, the government started cutting expenses for all ministries, especially the education ministry, which was costing the government 25% of their total spending. The government then created new economic policies in 2015 and cut the budget for education spending for these reasons:

1. Budget Deficit - which was \$87 billion dollars for 2016.
2. The war between Saudi Arabia and Yemen and its impact on economics, which cost Saudi Arabia \$725 billion dollars (according to Foreign Policy)
3. Decrease in oil prices - which was in 2015 the lowest price in the last 10 years.

### **Crude oil (barrel)**

**\$40.40**    -\$31.40    -43.73%

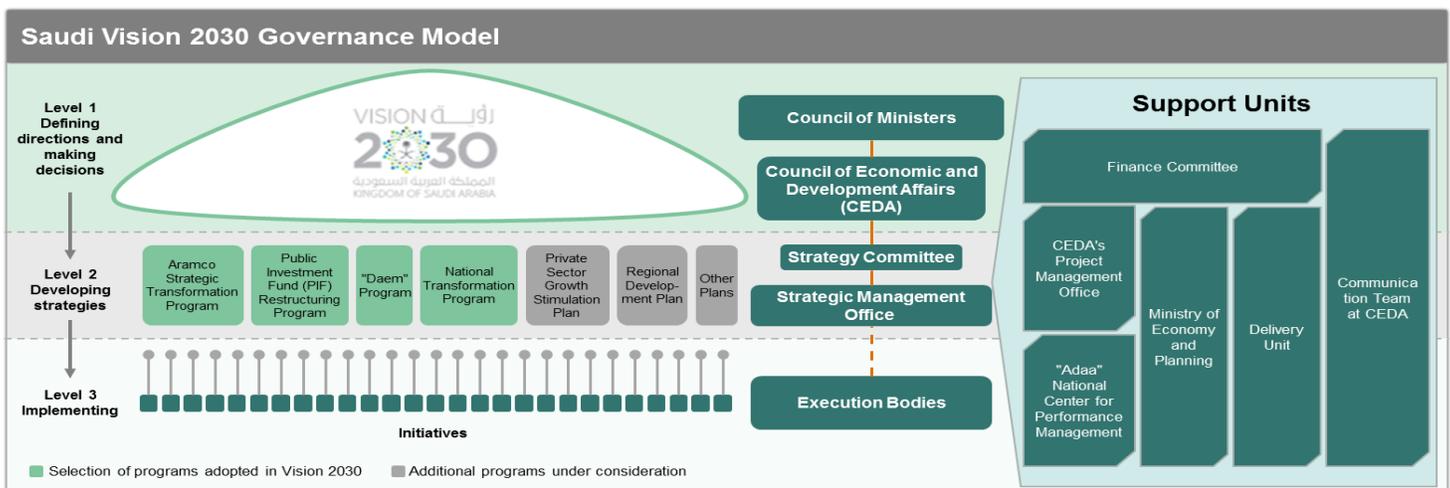
At market close 04/15/2016



Source: Reuters

The New York Times

- The government's desire to decrease dependence on oil production and source other streams of income by focusing on industry and trading. This new development vision is called Vision 2030.



The decision to reduce the education budget came through the Council of Economic Affairs, not through the Ministry of Education implying that the decision is about money and not about education policies. Now SACM found themselves with a new budget, because of this they designed a new scholarship system. The new system, by its nature, because of the budget constraints could no longer recommend as many American Universities as it did before. SACM's new system is now limited to only recommend the top 100 U.S. universities in each topic.

SACM has reported to the media that the new system is about finding better quality students, and a re-evaluation of the old system led to reformation and a new system, however it is about the budget constraints.

### C. *The new Scholarship system overview:*

- There is no longer guaranteed scholarship from back home, except in very specific cases. Specific cases are when students score very high on scholarship application exams taken in Saudi Arabia, or if the student is an employee and his/her employer offers them a scholarship.
- Under the new scholarship program, a student has the option of going to the U.S. and studying on their own for 30 units of undergraduate programs and 9 units for graduate programs. They must also maintain a 2.7 GPA in one of the top 100 universities, and once these requirements are completed they can apply for a scholarship from the Saudi government.
- The old scholarship school's finder that has been created used to be called “U.S. Recommended Universities” and now is referred to as “Best U.S. Universities”, which only lists the top 100 US universities in each topic, as it shown below (<http://www.moe.gov.sa/ar/studyaboard/King-salman-hstages/Pages/UniversitiesList.aspx> )

The screenshot shows the website of the Ministry of Education (www.moe.gov.sa) with the following elements:

- Header:** Ministry of Education logo and navigation menu (Media Center, Channels of communication, Social participation electronic, Electronic products, Eye, University education, public education, Ministry).
- Content Area:**
  - Section: Outstanding universities
  - Note: The need to make reference to the recommended university site and verify that the university recommended the specialization and division and changed \* his position
  - Filters: Country (United States), Specialization (Law)
  - Table of universities:

List universities
Albany Law School
Arizona State University
Baylor University
Boston College
- Right Sidebar:** Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Program Scholarship third phase 1436 - 1440 AH. Links include: Occupation and Bostik program, For More Details Contact, Post-nomination procedures, Bachelor of Medicine at the Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain, Ninth stage, Scrutiny of documents and information, Audit documentation ninth stage, Appointment in the audit centers.
- Taskbar:** Windows taskbar showing search, icons for Edge, File Explorer, and other apps, along with system tray (8:12 AM, 11/19/2016).

- Students are no longer able to move between cities or universities and students must accept a university that accepts them.
- Students are no longer able to upgrade their scholarship degree to a higher degree. Once they are done with their degree they must return to Saudi Arabia and find employment. The government’s goal is that the students

return home and find jobs. The rationale behind this is that there is a great need for educated and highly skilled employees in Saudi Arabia.

- An option for students to obtain a scholarship is through their employer. If the employer that the student works for finds that he/she needs more education then it is up to that employer to pay for the student to return to school with a scholarship and pay 50%, SACM will then pay the other 50%.
- The King Abudallah Scholarship Program is now called “**Your Job & Scholarship**”

SACM has been facing challenges since the inception of the new program, including student protests at home (because the people do not want the government to spend money on wars, but rather on education) and problems with the administration of the new system, while these top schools requires a very high admission requirements and majority of saudi students are not qualify for that.

In my opinion, if the government budget can recover they may go back to the old scholarship system. The government may also go back to the old system because of the protests and the challenges to administration of the new system. Moreover, if the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States remains stable that will be positive for the former scholarship system as well.

**Belal Abujami**

Executive Director



**American Council for International Students**

7710 Balboa Ave. #325

San Diego, California 92111

United States of America

Office: 1-858-836-2126

Fax: 1-858-836-2127

Email: [Director@AmericanCouncil.us](mailto:Director@AmericanCouncil.us)