

# United Arab Emirates (UAE)

## Demographics for United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Population:	2,563,212
GDP (by PPP method):	US\$63.67 billion
Currency (inc code):	Emirati Dirham (AED)
Language(s):	Arabic (official), Persian, English, Hindi, Urdu
Internet country code:	.ae

## Elementary, preparatory and secondary education

Students typically spend six years in elementary grades, which may be preceded by one to two years in nursery school or kindergarten. Elementary education is followed by a preparatory school program lasting three years. The secondary education program includes three years of high school. Students usually complete elementary, preparatory and secondary education, grades one through 12, by 18 years of age. The Adult Educational program enables individuals who do not complete formal education requirements to demonstrate that they have acquired a level of learning comparable to high school graduates.

## Higher education

Graduates of high school may continue their education in a technical or vocational institution, a higher college of technology (for two-four years), or a four-year college or university. Technical or vocational institutions offer post-secondary technical training leading to specific careers. Higher colleges of technology typically offer associate degrees.

A Bachelor's degree normally requires four years of college-level coursework, in addition to one year of general requirements. Undergraduate studies leading to a Bachelor's degree are generally divided into two phases: a set of general course

requirements in a broad range of subjects and a concentrated (or major) program of study in one or more subjects, such as business, biology, sociology, and education. Applications to a four-year college or university may require completion of an entrance examination and high school transcripts.

Graduate education includes programs of study leading to a Master's. Master's degrees require at least one year of coursework beyond the Bachelor's degree. Policies and standards for admission into graduate programs usually include an application, high performance in undergraduate studies, and letters of recommendation. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) also may be required.

Accreditation of post-secondary institutions is carried out in the UAE by private, not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations. For example, the College of Business and Economics at the UAE University is accredited by AACSB, the College of Engineering at the UAE University is accredited by ABET, while the College of Education at the UAE University is accredited by NCATE.

Most institutions in the UAE operate using a semester academic calendar. The semester system consists of two sessions called semesters, each lasting about 16 weeks. Also, there might be an additional session in the summer. In the UAE an academic year is generally a period of time from September to June that usually equates to two semesters. A credit hour is a unit of measure representing an hour (50 minutes) of instruction over a 16-week period in a semester system. It is applied toward the total number of hours needed for completing the requirements of a degree, which varies by institution.

### **Management education**

Management education in the UAE is provided by a wide range of organizations. Business programs within colleges and universities are usually managed and delivered by an academic unit often referred to as a business school (it may go by many names, such as college of business, department or faculty of management). Only a small part of non-degree management education, such as training programs for corporate employees, short management programs focused on particular topics, and executive leadership development programs, is provided by colleges and universities. Other providers of non-degree management education include associations, consulting companies, and corporations.

Undergraduate education (leading to Bachelor's degrees) in business and management is provided by colleges and universities. Generally, the program involves two years of general studies and two years of specialized studies in business. Degree titles vary depending on institutional preferences, but do not necessarily signal curricular differences. The most commonly offered degree titles are Bachelor of Business Administration and Bachelor of Science in Business. Most degree programs allow students to select a major emphasis within business, which usually requires between four and seven specialized courses in the area of emphasis.

Graduate business education includes Master's level education. Master's level business education includes programs leading to a general business Master's degree (e.g. Master of Business Administration). Substantial variation has developed within the general business Master's degrees.

MBA's might be earned through a variety of program types. Traditional two-year programs usually include study across four semesters spread over two academic years. Part-time MBA programs are designed for professionals who work during the day and attend classes in the evening. Courses are delivered throughout the year and internships are seldom part of the program. Executive MBA (EMBA) programs are designed for working executives with significant management experience, many of whom are company sponsored. The diversity of MBA program options has provided students with a wide range of choices to meet their special needs and circumstances:

- Estimated number of institutions with undergraduate business degree programs: 18.
- Estimated number of institutions with business Master's degree programs: 7.

### **Issues facing business schools**

Issues facing business schools in the UAE are both common and unique. Shortages of doctorally qualified faculty, competitive faculty salaries, competition for MBA students, and budget shortfalls appear to be international issues. Aligning the curriculum to national needs, placement of undergraduate national students, and the conversion of English as a language of business are issues that tend to be unique to the country.

There appears to be shortage of doctorally qualified faculty who are also fully prepared to conduct research. The issue is not only related to the education of the faculty member. When faculty members join a typical faculty they are expected to teach a rather heavy teaching load. At the same time, there is a limited amount of assistance such as graduate assistants and appropriate databases. The shortage of graduate assistants is due mainly to the lack of full-time graduate programs at the Master's and doctoral levels which produce such personnel. Unless a newly recruited faculty member already has a network of colleagues to work with, it is often difficult to start. It is also necessary to have the appropriate databases in order to produce research acceptable in international journals. These issues are becoming highlighted and are beginning to be addressed but the ideal environment is not yet in place.

New business schools are becoming chartered regularly in the UAE and in the Gulf Region in general. This has caused a financial competition among schools with the result that faculty are often encouraged to move from one school to another. Unfortunately, competition based solely on financial reward does not necessarily yield the best academic environment for the profession as a whole. Salaries may be high but teaching without time or incentive for

research is often the result. If one assumes the two activities are linked, the lack of one leaves many faculty members without a scholarly basis for instruction.

The number of MBA programs – public, private, international, national, or hybrid is exploding, especially in the urban areas of the nation. It is often difficult for students to choose the stronger programs when it is difficult to get beyond the “hype”. The word accreditation has many meanings and takes on many forms. Everyone seems to be accredited by someone. Many institutions and organizations from across the world have perceived the great wealth of the area and have further increased the choices. If quality for the student is to be the measure, that may be difficult to achieve given the large number of unfamiliar choices.

The UAE is beginning to realize that it may not be able to provide free education to all of its citizens. This is particularly true at the undergraduate level. Not only is the government faced with the education of the national students, they must also look after the majority of students whose parents are not native to the country. Continuing pressure is exerted on the education budget. Like many other parts of the world, belt tightening is becoming a common theme.

The UAE is changing very rapidly. Commerce, especially tourism is growing rapidly. The government is striving to move the country away from a future of oil dependency. As a result the business curricular model may not be the same as in other parts of the world. Aligning the business curriculum with the newly emerging areas of commerce is uniquely important. Events are happening rapidly and the goal of preparing its citizens for new career paths is, for the moment, a moving target. The faculty must be flexible and aware of their surroundings. Adding difficulty to this situation is the fact that only a small minority of faculty members actually are native to the country. This means that it is even more important to build industry and education bridges in order to provide meaningful careers for students.

The UAE as a nation has invited literally millions of people from around the world to help drive the economy of the country. The questions continue to be, where does the native Emirati fit in? Is it only in the highest positions in the organization? Is that practical in a world of fierce competition? Is there a perception among Emiratis that they should only have the highest positions in an organization? Does this impede their entry into multinational corporations? There is much to decide regarding this unique issue. Currently there is a sizable backlog of young people who are trying to fit into the big picture. It is an issue that must be addressed by professional business schools.

It is easy to see that many issues faced by the UAE are common to those in the rest of the world. There are also some very unique issues to face. The challenges are not insurmountable but they are real and important to the quality of life in the UAE.

**Mohamed Y. El-Bassiouni and David Graf**  
*College of Business and Economics, UAE University*