

Interview with: Artificial Intelligence Association

Students at Qatar University participate in various associations to build networks of interaction among students and alumni, helping them develop their scientific and professional skills across multiple disciplines. In this issue, we are delighted to introduce the Artificial Intelligence Association, which was established in September 2021, and its role in enhancing scientific knowledge. Here, we meet Kaoutar Barakat, a graduate student in the Doctor of Pharmacy program at Qatar University and the association's chair.



Student Kaoutar Barakat, the association's chair.

How did the idea of establishing the AI Association begin, and why?

The idea emerged in response to the rapid developments in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact on various aspects of life, says Kaoutar. The primary goal was to create a pioneering platform, the first of its kind in the Middle East, bringing together students interested in AI. It provides them with opportunities to learn, collaborate, and apply their knowledge practically. Through the association, practical understanding of AI is enhanced and linked to real-world challenges facing Qatari and global communities, Kaoutar adds. The founders Mr. Moslem Al-Qawasmi, Founder of AIQU and Mr. Yaman Kutmawi, Co-Founder, believed in the importance of students taking an active role in driving technological innovation and recognizing the Qatar Vision 2030.

How are you guided and mentored in this association?

The association receives academic and professional guidance from professors and experts in the field of AI at Qatar University. Faculty members provide mentorship on technical topics, scientific research, and methods for applying AI to solve real-world problems, says Kaoutar. We take this opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Ali, Assistant Professor of Computer Engineering, College of Engineering, for his efforts in guiding and mentoring the association during the past period, and to Dr. Wadha Labda, Head of Technology Innovation and Engineering Education Unit, College of Engineering, for her ongoing efforts as the current advisor to the association, which undoubtedly contributed to its progress and success, she says.

Additionally, the association receives support and guidance regarding event organization and all related activities from the Students Clubs and Organizations Department at Qatar University, under the Student Activities Department. We would like to thank Mr. Yasser Al Qawasmi, Head of Students Clubs and Organizations Department, for his continuous efforts and dedication in supporting and guiding the association toward achieving success, as well as Mr. Anas Abu Yousef, the association's student program advisor, for his ongoing support.

The association is also keen on benefiting from the expertise of sponsoring organizations and local and international institutions through partnerships and joint workshops. These collaborations help guide students toward using AI responsibly and creatively.

What are the key annual events and activities supervised by the association?

The association organizes many significant events throughout the year, most notably AI Week, the largest annual event, which has been held for the past three years. AI Week includes a series of training workshops, scientific seminars, and lectures held by local and international experts. It also features AI challenge competitions where students can present their innovative ideas and projects. A concurrent exhibition showcases innovative solutions and applications from startups, companies, and sponsors in AI fields, says Kaoutar.

Another notable event is the AI Innovation Program, the official training program for the Qatar IoT & AI Challenge. Over several weeks, students are trained in AI and IoT technologies to create their projects, culminating in a qualifying competition where top participants advance to the finals held during GITEX Dubai, one of the region's largest tech exhibitions. Additionally, the association organizes hackathons, educational workshops targeting schools and youth, and participates in international competitions like the Arab IoT & AI Challenge at GITEX Global, offering students opportunities to explore global advancements and build professional networks. It also hosts discussion sessions on the future of AI in Qatar and its applications in various sectors, Kaoutar adds.

When you graduate from Qatar University, what benefits do you gain from joining such associations?

Joining the Artificial Intelligence Association offers numerous advantages, such as developing practical and technical skills in one of today's most vital technological fields. The association provides an inspiring environment for teamwork and participation in real-world projects, helping students gain practical experience that enhances their employability. Additionally, membership opens doors to expand professional networks within and beyond Qatar, a valuable asset for students aiming to work or pursue

higher education in AI. It also boosts self-confidence, innovation, and critical thinking skills, she says.

Does the association's activity focus solely on campus, or does it extend beyond the university?

The association's activities extend well beyond the campus. It organises events and participates locally, such as in Qatar's tech conferences, and internationally, such as GITEX Dubai, where graduates of the AI Innovation Program showcase their projects and interact with global AI experts. The association also engages with the local community through awareness and training workshops in collaboration with schools and community organizations. This wide outreach strengthens the association's position as a leading AI platform in Qatar and globally, conveys Kaoutar.

Tell us about the support the association receives from the University and other entities.

The association benefits from diverse support from Qatar University, including financial and logistical resources for organizing events, as well as an educational environment that fosters skill development for its members. It also leverages partnerships with tech companies and local as well as international organizations, which actively support these initiatives. For example, Vodafone Qatar, a partner in the association's success, has sponsored events like AI Week and the AI Innovation Program, along with offering technical training programs that enable students to use the latest AI tools and technologies, Kaoutar said.

In your opinion, what role does AI play in achieving Qatar's Vision 2030?

AI plays a crucial role in supporting Qatar's Vision 2030, which aims to build a knowledge-based, diversified economy. AI applications can enhance the efficiency of vital sectors such as education, health, and the economy, while fostering innovation in infrastructure and transportation. Kaoutar

concluded by saying that, AI also promotes environmental sustainability by developing smart solutions for managing natural resources and renewable energy. Furthermore, it supports the digital transformation of institutions, making them more globally competitive.

