Students of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) are exploring unexpected paths to inspire positive social change through the university’s new multidisciplinary academic programs, which are offering newer perspectives and methodologies for tackling the specific needs of
the region while aligning with current global trends.

The college’s Master of Arts in Digital Humanities and Societies and Master of Arts in Women, Society, and Development, graduating their first cohorts on May 4, are two programs that directly address the ever-changing digital landscape and the evolving role of women in the Arab world.

‘Digital natives’ – those born and brought up in the digital age – know firsthand the power of modern technologies and their power to shape the world. Asma Al Kuwari is one such student, who recognizes the immense influence of digital omnipresence and wants to use technological advancements to promote social good.

Coming from a business administration background, Asma’s interest in how the digital era is shaping our world was a departure from her undergraduate studies in business administration, but a field that piqued her interest and led her to enroll in the MA in Digital Humanities and Societies at HBKU.

“My field of work and my interest has always been in marketing. I built up an interest in digital technology and entrepreneurship throughout the years, and I was looking to pursue a graduate degree that would help me better understand human behavior in relation to technology.

“Social Sciences is something that’s new for me. My background is in business, but digitization and the online world has always been something that I’ve been interested in; how it has impacted lives, and the fact that we all rely heavily on technology in almost every facet of our lives, almost every minute of the day - that’s mind blowing for me.”

The newly introduced program provides students with an opportunity to study the Middle East’s digital culture from a scholarly and digital research perspective. Through the program, students are able to specialize as archival print scholars of Middle Eastern digital culture or as researchers trained to employ the powerful methodologies of the digital humanities to investigate practices, patterns, and trends of digital culture. During her two years at HBKU, Asma focused on a project to preserve the history of her native country, Qatar, and how it can be digitized to become widespread, particularly among today’s youth who instinctively look to the digital space as a primary source of information.
“One of my projects related to Qatar’s history and how we can digitize the information we have to reach more people. There are all these stories, but they are in a colloquial language. The younger generation want something that’s just fast, easy – big stories with general information about Qatar’s history.”

“I felt that the younger generation doesn’t know enough about what Qatar has gone through to become the country it is today, and I wanted the youth to feel blessed and appreciative of what the country has to offer them, and to celebrate how much we have achieved.”

The two years at HBKU have been a rewarding experience for Asma, whose mind is set on fusing her background in business and marketing with her digital studies.

“I plan to focus on my entrepreneurship journey, and incorporating the knowledge I have gained from the digital humanities program within my strategy and approaches, to better understand the different behaviors of my customers through the digital world to enable me to serve them better.”

While Asma is looking to shape the future by harnessing one of the most powerful tools at our disposal in modern times, another student, Abeer Al Dosari, is exploring the evolving role of women in the region.

The Master of Arts in Women, Society, and Development program at CHSS explores how women in the region are embracing their different roles and making unique contributions to shaping a fully developed society.

Abeer is part of the first cohort graduating in May.

“The introduction of the MA in Women, Society, and Development, places our nation and Qatar Foundation on the global map. The program is unique in how it covers multidisciplinary subjects, and raises awareness of how generations of women who came before us shaped our contemporary societies.”

The program focuses on issues in the context of social and economic development in the Middle East, as well as women’s various roles in the advancement of their communities and societies.

Abeer chose to focus her research on the lived experiences of Qatari women and the feminist policies
implemented at Qatar Foundation.

With graduation just ahead, Abeer feels empowered to keep working to tackle issues of importance to women and make a positive impact, and she has already set her plan in motion. “My weekly column in a local newspaper provides me with a voice to share different perspectives on different topics with a wide audience. That’s only the beginning – as women, we have a tremendous responsibility to use the academic tools gained at HBKU to shape our nation into the future society that lives up to our national vision.”

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