



# Global Highlights

December 14th, 2007

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## Energy & research

### KAUST: a new leading research centre?

- On October 22, Saudi Arabia hosted some 1,500 dignitaries and academics from around the world to officially break ground for “a new world-class, graduate-level science and technology university”.
- To be opened in September 2009, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology ([KAUST](#)) plans to bring western standards of education to a Saudi institution amid an environment of academic freedom. It will be located on the shores of the Red Sea, in a [campus](#) of more than 36 million square meters.
- With one of the largest [university endowments](#) in the world (USD 10 billion), KAUST is leading an aggressive program to recruit top faculty and students from across the globe (only one third of its estimated 600 researchers and 2000 graduate students are expected to be Saudis). In addition, a number of international partnerships are already underway with top research institutions.
- KAUST will be organized around four interdisciplinary [Research Institutes](#). Among them, the Institute for Resources, Energy and Environment will concentrate its research on clean energies (carbon sequestration, hydrogen and fuel cells and solar energy), energy efficiency technologies.<sup>1</sup> Water desalination, water-use management and "green" planning for desert climates will also be main areas of study in this Institute.
- All these fields of interest seek to find solutions to big challenges such as global warming, water scarcity and alternatives to conventional oil (the combination of solar energy, hydrogen and carbon capture seems a good energy mix for a region with desert climate and big oil reserves).
- But, the public opinion regarding the future success of the endeavor is [divided](#), both inside Saudi Arabia and abroad.
- Those who are skeptic claim that, even if the Saudi King has expressed its firm desire that at KAUST campus there would be no discrimination on sex, religion or ethnicity, it will not be able to provide the atmosphere of criticism and openness that is needed for scientific research. Moreover KAUST does not envisage any formal collaboration with Israel (a research powerhouse in the region).
- The optimists, on the other hand, think that KAUST can, indeed, think freely and that the project may serve as a catalytic for things to start changing in the Kingdom. First of all, because it is [fully supported by the King](#) and, second, because KAUST will be managed by independent trustees and the endowment will be managed by a foreign independent foundation. Time will tell which side of the ongoing debate proves to be right.

<sup>1</sup> Saudi Arabia already has a top research institute devoted to oil, the Exploration and Petroleum Engineering Center (EXPEC).