



Ghassan Aouad

Chancellor of Abu Dhabi University, Past President of the Chartered Institute of Building (CI...
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A Journey Through the History of Universities

The concept of the university has its roots deep in human civilization, evolving over centuries to become the cornerstone of modern intellectual discourse. As the world has grown more complex, the role of universities has become increasingly vital, serving as hubs of knowledge, research, and innovation.

The earliest universities can be traced back to ancient Greece and the Middle East, where centers of learning, such as the Academy founded by Plato in Athens and the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, provided instruction in a range of subjects. However the concept of universities started to emerge nearly 1,300 years ago. According to research, the oldest universities in the world include Al-Zaytuna University in Tunisia established in 737, Al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco in 859, Al-Azhar University in Egypt in 972, the University of Bologna, in 1088 in Italy, University of Oxford in 1096, University of Salamanca Spain in 1134, University of Paris in 1150, University of Cambridge in 1209, University of Montpellier France in 1220, University of Padua Italy in 1222, University of Naples Federico Italy in 1224, Al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad in 1227, University of Valladolid Spain in 1241, and University of Coimbra Portugal in 1291. However, there are many debates about which one is the oldest continuously operating university.

Over the past millennium, the number of universities worldwide has grown exponentially. Today, there are over 33,000 universities and colleges globally, with the largest concentrations found in the US, China, and India. This expansion has been driven by the increasing demand for Higher Education, as well as the recognition of the vital role universities play in advancing scientific research and economic development, and shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

In an era of rapid technological change and global interconnectedness, the role of universities has become more crucial than ever driving advancements in fields ranging from medicine to renewable energy. They also play a vital role in shaping the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and problem-solvers, equipping students with the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to tackle the complex challenges of the modern world.

As we look to the future, it is clear that universities will continue to be at the forefront of human progress, serving as beacons of intellectual curiosity. The big question is how universities may look like in the future.

ADU is only 21 year old. However, we are very proud of our achievements so far, especially our presence on the international stage. Many thanks to our visionary Chairman, Dr Ali Aldhaferi (also established Liwa College as a sister institution), faculty, staff, students, alumni, and academic and industry partners for their efforts.

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Ali Bin Harmal Aldhaferi, Ph.D. [Hamad Odhabi Prof. Mohamed Dhiab Khulud Abdallah Abu Dhabi University Liwa College](#)



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