




A sit down with the Dean

Interview with Dr. Laurence Renault





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In your professional opinion, what does a well-rounded university education entail

A well-rounded university education combines academic study and extracurricular engagement. From a purely academic standpoint, selecting a field that you are passionate about is crucially important. You want to study something that excites you to get out of bed everyday.

Selecting an institution that is recognised for excellence in academia is also another important consideration as their degrees carry high reputational value.

However finding opportunities to engage in cultural events, sports and getting involved with group activities and clubs also contributes to a healthy university experience. At SUAD, students meet people from many different cultural backgrounds and experience living together, which is central to broadening perspectives, and developing knowledge on culture.

Finally SUAD students benefit from one of the region's best-stocked libraries to enrich their study experience by discovering by themselves new fields of interest. They are given comprehensive career advice and supported with internship placements to gain practical experience in preparation for their career.

Can you tell us a little about the background of Sorbonne and how it came to be in 1971 in Paris?

Sorbonne University was in fact established as the Collège de Sorbonne during the Middle Ages in 1253. In 1971, it was named Paris-Sorbonne University following the closure of the University of Paris. In 2018, following the merger between Paris-Sorbonne University and the Pierre and Marie Curie University, it was renamed as Sorbonne University.

As one of the oldest universities in the world, Sorbonne University has achieved a remarkable legacy of academic excellence having educated some of the most celebrated thinkers throughout history including 32 Nobel Prize winners. The university is consistently ranked as one of the finest academic institutions globally, and the number one University in France.

What are some of the university's most notable achievements in both branches?


In 2018, Paris-Sorbonne University and the Pierre and Marie Curie University merged to form Sorbonne University, France's largest university including over 6,400 academic staff and 55,600 students. This new entity houses literature and humanities, social sciences, sciences, engineering and medicine under one roof. It is the leading university in France according to the Times Higher Education, Leiden and Shanghai World Rankings, and is recognised as a top 100 global institution for academic research and study.

Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi has graduated over 2,000 students including more than 600 Emirati citizens, firmly establishing strong roots in the United Arab Emirates. In 2019, SUAD was awarded the Best University in Humanities in the Middle East, at the Forbes Higher Education Awards.

How would you describe your leadership style?

My leadership style is strongly informed by the philosophy that people will do their best if they are happy and are able to find personal fulfilment in their work. I believe in giving people the opportunity to be creative.

I have built sound relationships based on trust and openness, and always adopt a friendly demeanour with everyone I encounter in my professional life. At the same time I expect staff to be effective in their



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work, comply with regulations and more generally, to behave in a rational manner that serves the best interests of the university and its students.

What are some of the values and principles the university is run on? What are the activities that implement them?

There are a number of values and principles guiding our daily activities including the pursuit of academic excellence, promoting dialogue between different cultures, fostering an atmosphere of tolerance and empowering women. We want to build a multifaceted campus community by educating and bringing together international and exchange students with students from the UAE.

Our annual International Day event is emblematic of our commitment to these values and principles by bringing together students from different cultures, nationalities and backgrounds to celebrate diversity, tolerance and acceptance in a very festive atmosphere.

How do you ensure students receive a well-rounded education that is based on practical knowledge, and not necessarily only theory-based?

Most of our academic programmes include a mandatory internship, which are an important feature of our student's learning journey in helping them gain practical and relevant experience in the modern workplace. We also encourage students to engage with local organisations through volunteering opportunities.

Students also take part in applied research competitions to put theory into practice. Our students were recently nominated for an award on "how to measure tolerance". At Sorbonne, students have the opportunity to engage. Recently, a student was nominated to run a mini mart in the university premises.

As the world continues to face up to the dangers of climate change, what actions has your university taken in this area to boost sustainability and environmental awareness?


SUAD is committed to sustainability and building greater awareness about environmentally friendly practices.

In 2018 we joined the United Nations Global Compact initiative, which is an Executive-level commitment to implement universal sustainability principles within organisations around the world.

Since joining the UNGC we have implemented key sustainability drivers in many areas across the university including energy-efficient lighting fixtures, water consumption management policies, campus waste and recycling initiatives, a reduction in paper use and the implementation of sustainable procurement procedures to name a few.

Sorbonne Abu Dhabi has also signed up to the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi's Sustainable Campus Initiative involving students in year-round sustainability activities. In February, our students took part in a clean up initiative on the Al Reem Island Corniche and later in the year they were involved in an initiative to plant Ghaf trees in the desert. We recently launched an initiative to reduce the consumption of single-use plastics and plastic in general on campus. Students collected 5,705 plastic bottles in a single week!

Additionally, the university is an active participant in hosting a number of environment-led events and workshops throughout the year. In March, as part of Earth Day, we partnered with seven local entities including the former Sustainable Development Advisor to the United Nations Development Programme to deliver a comprehensive programme of talks, which also included sustainable product demonstrations.



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We have partnered with local experts and academics to deliver talks and workshops regarding energy, climate, environmental hazards management and recycling, which continues to be an active area of engagement for us moving forward.

Why should students choose your university?

Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi shares a close and unique association with our mother institution in Paris, which is acknowledged as one of the finest higher-education institutions in the world. Students can be safe in the knowledge that they're attaining a truly world-class education at SUAD.

Additionally, the United Arab Emirates is a rapidly developing, forward-looking country that cultivates the value of tolerance, promoting dialogue between cultures and bringing people together, which fundamentally connects to the ethos of SUAD in being "a bridge between civilisations." We are a globally connected institution of academic excellence located in the epicentre of growth and development in the GCC.

Are placements or study abroad on offer, where are they, and how are they organised?

Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi runs a number of exchange and summer placement programmes to give our students greater exposure to the world.

The 4EU+ European University Alliance brings together 6 leading European universities including Sorbonne University, University of Milan, Heidelberg University, Charles University, University of Warsaw and the University of Copenhagen as part of a unified framework to enhance mutual cooperation and promote the seamless mobility of education and students across borders.

SUAD students, who are a part of the student body registered in Paris will benefit from this alliance very soon.

What careers guidance facilities are there and do you run job fairs?

We are proud to have recently launched a new Career Centre on campus providing students with an open space to discuss career options, find work and internship placements and attend specialised workshops with local and international employers.

Every year we arrange the Astrolabe Career Forum, which attracts a host of local and international companies to our campus helping students connect with potential employers and discover the range of career options available to them that best align with their interests.

What's the best thing a graduate could say about their experience of the university?

It was the most thrilling experience of my life and a time entirely dedicated to my own development and making friends for life from all over the world.



Dr. Laurence Renault

Acting Executive Director and Deputy Executive
Director for Academic Affairs

Dr. Laurence Renault is the Acting Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director for Academic Affairs of Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi.

She is a former student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure (St Cloud) and holds a doctoral degree in philosophy. Winner of the Foundation Thiers Research Grant (Institut de France), Dr. Laurence Renault has been an Associate Professor at Sorbonne University since 1999. She first joined the university's campus in Abu Dhabi as Head of the Philosophy and Sociology Department (2016-2018).

Her research focuses Metaphysics, Theory of knowledge and Ethics as they play a role in the formation of the modern thinking.

She is the author of several books, multiple articles and chapters of collective works in international publications and peer-reviewed journals.