

Censorship and its Impact on Al Akawayn University Newspapers

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Abstract

The aim of this project was to identify the kinds of censorship exerted at AUI and on what bases this phenomenon is practiced. The literature review highlights the issue of censorship in other universities. It also shows that censorship happens for a variety of reasons such as protecting the universities' reputation, avoiding disturbance in the educational system, and improving the quality of the articles. The data tool used was a survey sample size given in a convenience sample to collect data from students and faculty. The results showed that the majority of the participants believe that censorship exists to protect the university's reputation and image, but it did not affect the readership. Furthermore, the population at AUI feels censorship and asks for more freedom. All in all, censorship at AUI is not a problem, but it can be practiced in a way that does not create a feeling of repression.

Introduction

Censorship exists in every country. In fact, this is not the case only in AUI, but many universities, especially in the United States, face this problem. Censorship can be used for movies, books, articles, speeches, and songs. So, censorship can be defined as the use of power to control speech and other forms of human expression and what is censored may range from specific words to entire concepts.

At Al Akhawayn University of Ifrane (AUI), the power of censorship is used by the Deans and the adviser to ban articles from the university's newspapers. It is a university that follows the American system curriculum. Therefore, one may expect more freedom of expression than it exists in Morocco, since it is a country where censorship is predominant. Indeed, censoring articles can limit the AUI newspapers in several ways especially that. In the same way, writers suffer from the lack of freedom in their writings. They are obliged to stay politically correct and to not bring to light what lies underneath the appearances. Therefore, the readers are confronted to a loss of interest in the articles written in the university newspapers. The articles are thus in short of depth and truth. Moreover, censorship may be used to protect the university's reputation and faculty members. On the other hand, a certain control on publications is necessary to avoid extreme and aggressive opinions. Finally, the question that comes to mind is what kind of censorship is used at AUI.

As a result, the research is based on the criteria of censorship and the impact of this act on both the reader and the writer. One can notice that too much censorship can inhibit and may be suppress all kinds of freedom. Therefore, the purpose is to figure out the limitations of censorship at AUI. Hence, it is essential to look for the possible menace

of this power of control. As a result, solutions must be provided to overcome these boundaries.

Literature Review

On the one hand, some articles highlight the reasons for censorship through problems that occurred in three different universities. In his article about censorship issues in college newspapers, Bortz (2003) deals with the problem of censorship in Massachusetts University, the proposed solutions, and their consequences. First of all, he explained that the aim of the university is to avoid any case of discrimination within their newspapers. In addition, they state that the responsibility of the university is to keep away from any act of “reverse censorship”. In other words, they try to avoid things that may hurt the reputation and the quality of the publication. The daily collegian newspaper was interested in including women’s issues in its pages. As a result, the writers were obliged to confine their writing and follow the norms of censorship in order to enlighten readers and not persuade them. Because of various genders, religious, and sexuality groups, the administration was obliged to restrict the writer to focus on the quality of the content.

In the same way, Jeffrey (2005) shows the real face of the censorship at the Governors State University in the University Park of Illinois. Behind the students’ back, the President of the university called the paper’s printer and ordered not to print until an administrator checks them and makes sure of the content of the articles in order to avoid the degradation of the university’s reputation. In this article, Stuart I. Fagan, the president of the Governors State, confirms that “an angry barrage of unsubstantiated allegations (...) essentially -and unfairly - excoriate some members of the university’s faculty and administration (myself included).” (Jeffrey, 2005, p.2). When students knew what

happened, they did not want to be restricted in their freedom of expression. As a result, they went to court and accused the Governor State University of violating the students' rights. However, the violator denied it all. The court decided that the student's papers should be reviewed.

In 2003, Lukianoff presented the decrease of freedom of speech in the Texas Tech University. In fact, in his article in which he described universities as censorship zones, he further argues that campus speeches have been refused because they could offend members of the university's community. In contrast, he believes that the degradation of any member is not a reason for censorship. Moreover he said that "college students are more guarded about their views than students of previous generations" (Lukianoff, 2002, p. 3).

On the other hand, some articles support the main point that censorship is used in the wrong way. Quill (2005) claims that a school administration, which imposes new guidelines to a newspaper, caused many conflicts between the administrators and the publishers. Such problems start when a newspaper publishes articles that seem to be critical of the school system. In the same article, Andrew Alexander, the Tattlers news editor, was quoted to prove that the majority of the administration appears to feel that the newspaper's duty is not to criticize and engender debate, but to create a feeling of pride. In order to get to this end, administrators gave to the advisers of newspapers an extra role: they had to make sure that the articles are not jeopardizing the university concerned. In fact, the assistant superintendent of instruction and curriculum cited in this source claimed that students thought that their advisers were there to help them improve their writings and support them, yet they were there to control them.

The editorial board of the Daily Eastern News (2004) reported that censorship should not exist, especially when it is exerted by a university student government organization. They faced a case where the SGO used censorship in a university newspaper in order to gain power. Therefore, they came to the conclusion that a newspaper should not be supervised by any organization so that they can avoid conflict of interest. Additionally, the editorial board believes that “A newspaper's duty is to report the facts good or bad” (Daily Eastern News, 2004, p.1.)

The findings of Bankes et al. (2005) showed that the perfect environment where young adults can be part of discussion concerning their academic, personal, and political life is the university newspaper. However, these authors believed that university administrators banned some student publications “in an effort to control campus climate” (Bankes et al., 2005, p. 1). As a result, sometimes the university administrators find themselves obliged to destroy the publications that could be the cause of the educational process disturbance. The universities should give legal and undeniable reasons of prohibiting such articles, but this is not the case as the university administrators think they have the right to do so because they are in position of authority and power.

According to Burnette (2005), a center has been created in Missouri to protect the universities newspaper's articles from being banned. It is called the Student Press Law Center (SPLC). In his article about battling censorship of campus publications, Burnette begins with an observation made by this center: black colleges censor more than other colleges because of their sensitivity to racist language. He quotes the director of the SPLC, Mark Goodman who stated “When you censor, everybody loses.” (Burnette, 2005, p.2.). Actually, because society often criticizes the media, students asked for a more

controlled newspaper in order to improve the quality of their publications and avoid criticism. However, according to Goodman (as cited by Brunette), it has been “a negative attitude”. In other words, even if the society is demanding a lot from the media, students should not be compelled to establish a censor community inside the university government.

Another article about censorship of student publications brought to light actual criteria of university censorship. Indeed, it is underlined that the university administrators give themselves the right to censor college newspapers’ articles on the basis of “the journalistic standards” and the parameters of the university. In fact, some articles are more likely to be censored for criticism of university policies. To support this idea, this source presented a case raised by the SPLC in 2002: “Two university journal articles criticizing campus policies on condoms (...) caused the president and a trustee to attack the newspaper, and led to a steering committee addressing final control over the newspaper’s content.” (College freedom, n.d, p. 5).

The editor of the North Carolina University newspaper (2002) complained about censorship in a letter to a chancellor. He explains the lack of freedom his writers get when writing their articles for the Carolinian newspaper. The main problem came from the media board that was headed by “university bureaucrats” and one student. Therefore, the cause of censorship came mainly from the lack of student’s presence in the board in charge of censorship. The bureaucrats prohibit articles from the university newspapers according to some criteria unknown by the students; thus, the latter demand the presence of more student representative in the media board.

Overall, one can notice that censorship is a widespread problem which touches the majority of universities' newspapers. In fact, our assumptions were confirmed: the real criteria of censorship are based on the universities government decisions. They censor articles that jeopardize the university policies, or the university members. Moreover, the team discovered that almost all the universities concerned in this literature review hide the real reasons of censoring some articles behind conventional criteria.

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to investigate censorship in AUI newspapers. This team used a survey because it is the best tool to collect data in a short time so as to achieve our goal in the research. Through this survey, the team collected data from various participants who include both the readers and writers.

Participants

Because the team is limited by the lack of time in the summer session, its members used surveys not interviews as the latter take more time. Also, the surveys which are anonymous give reliable data as the participants feel reassured about their answers.

During the process of research, the team conveniently distributed surveys to 30 AUI students. The reason behind distributing the survey to the participants is to know their point of view as readers or writers, how they judge the articles written, and whether they think the articles are credible or not, especially with the presence of censorship. The fact of dealing with this topic made some of the participants eager to know the reasons of censorship.

The goal of the team in this research was to collect the students' points of view, regardless of their age, gender, cultural geographic background, and status in order to be objective and have credible data. Therefore, the first informants are the students (including undergraduate, graduate, Moroccans, exchange). In fact, the group emphasized the perception that all students have about AUI newspapers and the effects of censorship on readership. In addition, the team discovered the different perspectives that students have about censorship.

The survey is given to identified faculty members. One of the participants is a Dean of Students' Affairs because he censors the articles. The main reason why the team chose to make him answer a survey and not an interview is because of reliability and timeliness of our data. Indeed, the Dean of the Students' Affairs is a person much in demand by the students of SSK 1202 and other courses such as sociology. Therefore, having an appointment with him would be difficult especially for an interview which takes a lot of time. Hence, he answered the survey quickly and without any hurry. Moreover, as a Dean and major censor of the university newspapers, our questions were not answered truly and efficiently. In fact, the team noticed contradictory answers from the Dean. Another faculty member who is a good informant is a journalist, reporter, writer, and professor, who teaches journalism at AUI. As a journalist, he probably faced censorship more than once. He was also the adviser of some "AUI news" articles; thus, he knows cases of censorship and the reasons why some articles have been censored.

Consequently, the team has chosen to deal with the opinions of mentioned faculty members because they represent people who are the most concerned by censorship. Certainly, they are the ones who control, react, or undergo censorship; thus the choice is

not random. However, the group chose to eliminate other faculty members because their point of view would be external as they would have a reader's vision.

The last participants are the students' activities bureau which involves no more than 10 members. These participants are usually in charge of the newspapers and their publication; they are also the ones who face the problem of censorship directly. Some of these participants are the writers of the newspapers' articles.

A participant can choose not to complete the survey. However, this survey was not considered in the unanswered questions, yet the team looked forward to know why the participant did not complete the survey. In fact, it is necessary for the group to be aware of those reasons because they might involve important aspects of the research.

Materials

Concerning the content of the survey, the group thought to form a sample of survey appropriate for both students and faculty. The survey mainly included a total number of eleven questions which contain Yes or No questions, multiple choice questions, and questions that consisted of personal comments. In fact, the team looked for direct and precise answers that are not ambiguous or off topic. The questions were designed so as to get directly to the main problem, censorship, and to give factual written answers in English.

Procedure

As there are many courses that require research through surveys, the participants suffered from survey fatigue, so they could feel bored and could not be ready to answer the questions seriously, yet they did. The group thought that it was a good idea to

distribute the surveys before the other groups so as to gather data effectively and to not have efficient results.

First, the task was split between all members. Then, on Monday, June 27th, 2005, the surveys were distributed to students in the cafeteria, in front of the restaurant, and the laboratories. The team assured to not disturb the students and to make them answer the survey during their free time. All members of the group were happy to translate or explain something which the participants did not understand or feel confused about. Hence, team members agreed about the explanations and clarifications that were given for each question so as to avoid confronting with different messages of different meanings. Furthermore, all the surveys were kept anonymous. Two member of the team faced the Dean of the Students' Affairs on Tuesday, June 28th, 2005. Some of the questions are very direct; therefore, the team members used their interpersonal communication skills to make them acceptable. Afterwards, another teammate was in charge of distributing the surveys to the students' activities bureau. The teammate noticed that there was only one person that was in charge of the newspaper; therefore, he was the one who answered the survey. The same team member gave the survey to the journalist while he was doing his research in the library and she made sure to not disturb him. As a last step, the group itemized the results in charts and tables; then they selected the most reliable and demonstrative data in order to present them in the results section.

Results

After having collected the data through a survey, the team itemized the results and categorized the most significant data. It was essential to show the contrasts through diverse charts and tables.

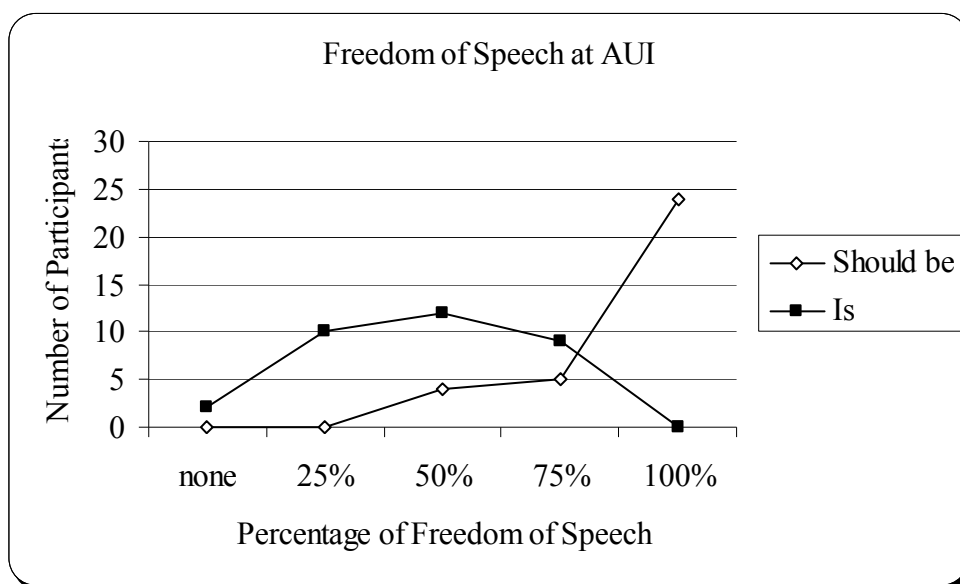
Table 1: The Participants' Belief about Existence of Censorship at AUI (%)

	Readers	Writers/ Editors/ Censor
Exists	39	31
Does not Exist	21	9

N=33

According to this sample, 70% of the participants confirmed the existence of censorship in AUI newspapers, 39% of these were readers and 31% were writers, censors and editors. The other contributors, 21% of whom are readers and 9% writers, censors and editors deny the presence of censorship at AUI. To sum up, the majority of the participants believed that censorship is an existing issue in AUI.

Figure 1: Freedom of Speech at AUI



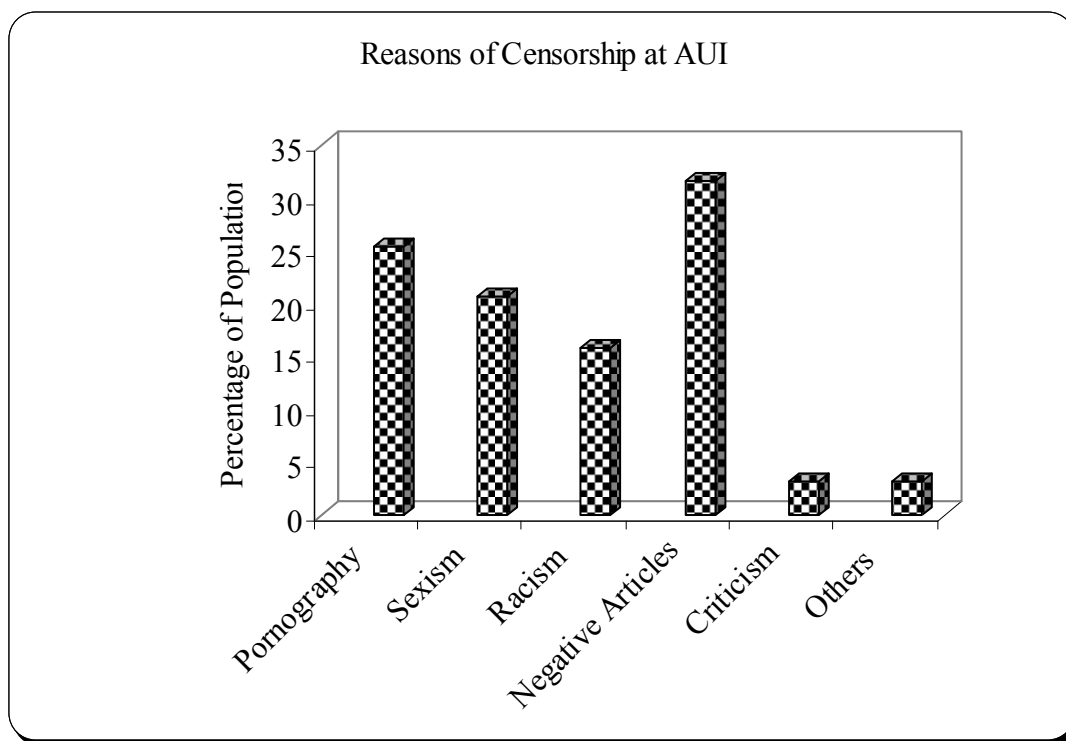
N=33

According to the results in figure 1, no one from the participants believes that there is 100% of freedom of speech at AUI. However, thirty one participants out of thirty

three confirm that the percentage of freedom of speech in AUI is between 25% and 75%. Two participants believe that there is no freedom of speech at AUI.

In addition to that, nine participants believe that the percentage of freedom of speech in AUI should not be less than 50% and 24 participants ask for a total freedom of speech at AUI. All in all, the majority of the population at AUI demands 100% of freedom of speech, yet it seems that they have only a maximum of 50% of freedom of speech. This previous result validates the first assumptions of the team which is that AUI population asks for more freedom of speech, thus less control.

Figure 2: Reasons of Censorship at AUI

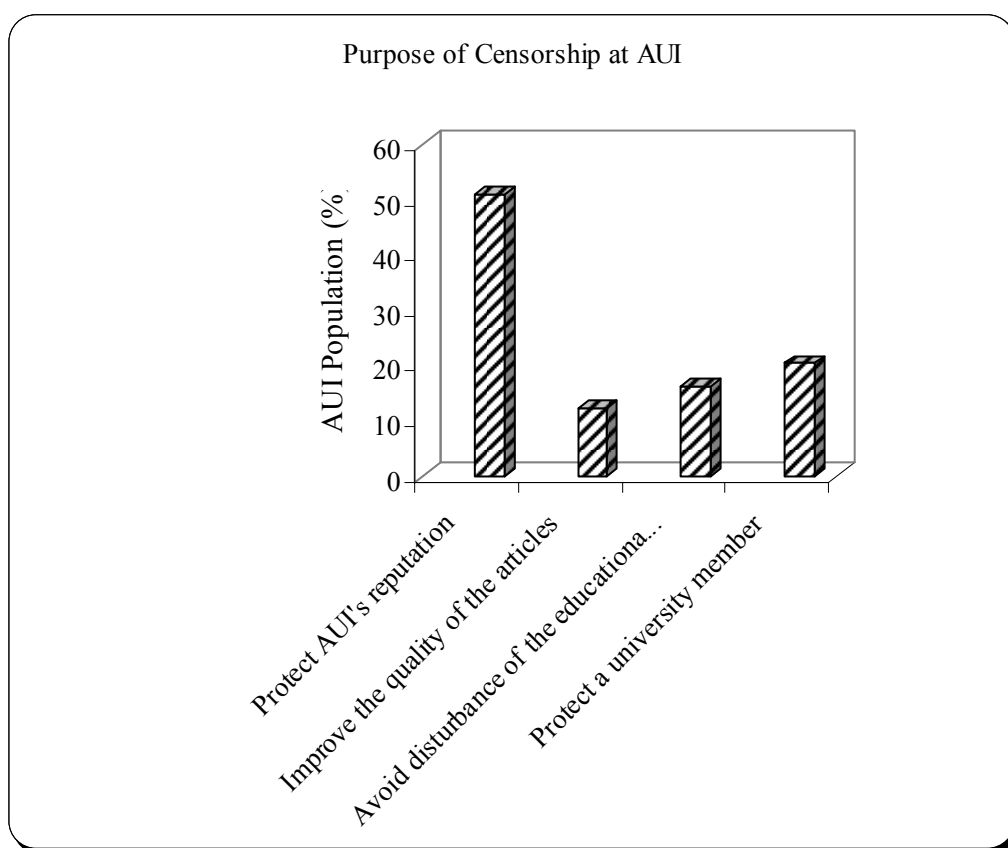


N=33

Based on the results mentioned in figure 2, there are some norms that writers have to respect in order to not be censored. 25% of the population agrees that anything containing pornographic articles should not be published. Furthermore, 21% of the

participants find it logical to censor sexist articles in AUI newspapers. Regarding the issue of racism, 16% of the population thinks that subjects that demonstrate racism have to be avoided. Finally, in order to protect the university's reputation, 32% agreed that AUI articles have probably been censored because of their negativity that may harm both the reputation of the university and students. To conclude, the majority of AUI population thinks that the more the articles contain negative ideas or facts about AUI, the more they are likely to be censored, which confirmed the team's assumptions.

Figure 3: Purpose of Censorship at AUI



N=33

On the subject of the purpose of censorship, 71% of AUI population believe that both protecting AUI's reputation and its members are the main reasons of censorship.

Nevertheless, 12% thinks that the goal of censorship is to improve the quality of the articles. According to the educational system, 16% of the same people believe that censorship avoid disturbance. Indeed, the disturbance involves a contradiction with the knowledge acquired through the educational process, or not respecting the educational hierarchy by attacking it.

Table 2: Who should decide about censorship at AUI?

Administrators	Writers or Editors	Students	Others everybody	Others no one
15	29	49	5	2

N=33

Concerning the person who has the priority of taking decisions about censorship, the majority (49%) of the participants assume that students are the ones who have the right to decide about censorship. Nonetheless, 29% of AUI population thinks that writers and editors are the ones who should decide about censorship. In addition, the contributors did not exclude the administration as 15% agree that it has the right to control the content of the articles that will be published in its newspapers. Also, 7% of the participants consider that none of the previous people has the right to censor the articles. On one hand, 2% think that no one has the right to decide about censorship in other words there should be no place for censorship at AUI. On the other hand, 5% believe that everybody has to contribute when decisions concerning censorship are made.

Table 3: The effects of Censorship on the Readership

	Reading Frequency		
	Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
Does not care, because s/he reads the articles anyway	16	0	3
Reads the articles, but s/he is not getting the whole truth	56	6	9
Reads the articles because s/he thinks censorship gives them quality	3	0	0
Does not read them	3	0	3

N=33

From the people who always read AUI newspapers and represent 78%, 16% do not care about censorship because they reported that they read AUI newspapers anyway. However, 56% of these people believe that because of censorship, they are not getting the whole truth, yet they still read AUI newspapers. In addition, 3% continue reading AUI newspapers since censorship gives good quality to the articles, and 3% stops reading not the whole newspaper but at least those articles that have been censored.

Concerning the next category which consists of those people who sometimes read the AUI newspapers, only 6% continue to read AUI newspapers even if they feel that they are not getting the whole truth. None of them, however, reported that s/he stops reading, does not care about the problem of censorship, or think that censorship increases the quality of the articles. Finally, regarding those who almost never read the AUI newspapers and who represent 15% of AUI population, 3% do not care if the articles are censored or not as this had no effect on their reading. 9% of this group are aware of the problem of censorship, so they read the articles, but they do not believe that they are getting the whole truth. Finally, the fact that the articles in AUI newspapers are censored affect only 3% of people of this group as it leads them to stop reading the university

newspapers. Therefore, it is obvious that censorship is felt in the articles, yet it does not affect the readers' tendency of reading them.

Overall, the team noticed that its assumptions were true. Censorship exists at AUI. There is a major awareness of it among the AUI population. Moreover, most of this population wants more freedom, more truth, and the right to express themselves about the newspapers published. However, the team members realized the impact on the readership is not negative but significant because it shows that the censorship and the pressure of control is felt in the articles of AUI newspapers.

Discussion and Conclusion

Before the process of data collection, the group had thought about some assumptions to make sure of their validity after the results. The team made five assumptions. Almost all of them were proved by the participants. The first result that is very important and proves our assumptions is that the participants believe that censorship exists at AUI and at least four of them have faced it. It has been believed that the main reason of the existence of censorship is to protect the university's reputation and its members. In addition, the fact of improving the quality of the articles and avoiding disturbance in the educational system is also highlighted to prove that AUI is selective and academically challenging.

Another assumption that the team founded is that the criteria of censorship could be about sexual language or topic, political issues, and topics that could harm the university's image. Considering the results, this assumption was validated according to the answers of the participants. In fact, all of them agreed that writers have to respect some norms in order to avoid being censored. For instance, they should avoid

pornography, sexism, racism, negative articles, and criticism. None of the participants believed that there is a total freedom of speech at AUI which confirms the team's assumption about the lack of freedom of speech. All the participants want to express themselves freely and not be hindered by censorship. This, in fact, is impossible because if there is total freedom of speech, then the university will become uncontrolled.

The last assumption about the impact of censorship on the readership was not proved. Indeed, the team thought that knowing that censorship exists, readers would not read the articles. However, the team found opposite results as the readers read the articles anyway even if they noticed that there is censorship by thinking that they are not getting the whole truth (see results, table 3).

The research proved that censorship exists in AUI newspapers as the majority of the participants which represent the AUI community confirmed their awareness of this problem. Also, these participants reported their opinions concerning the lack of freedom of speech at AUI. In fact, the majority of the population asked for total freedom of speech so that they will be able to express themselves freely and under any control. However, this will not be the case as the university's administration will never accept such thing. Concerning the reasons and purpose of censorship, the participants agreed that the main reason of censorship is to protect AUI's reputation. In fact, the articles that contain some negative aspects of the university policies and regulations are the most likely to be censored from AUI newspapers because they will harm the university's image in the market. According to the research, if censorship has to exist in the university's publications, students including both readers and writers or editors are the ones who should decide about censorship at AUI by contributing when decisions concerning

censorship are made. This is another suggestion that will never be reached because the university administrators will never agree to give students the right to censor articles. Actually, students are very familiar with what happens inside the university and they demand to be given the right to report their points of view throughout the university's publications. However, if they are given this right, they will certainly be based on other criteria when censoring the articles. As a result, there may be some articles that will create conflict between those who are responsible of censoring the articles and the university administration. Finally, the effects of censorship on the readership were not negative as the participants reported that they do not stop reading AUI newspapers even if they know that some articles could be censored; however, the results were significant as the participants thought that the articles did not give them the real truth. This means that the readers are aware of censorship, but as they are unable to change the situation, they prefer to read the articles even if there are some which are censored.

The problem encountered by AUI is censorship aiming at protecting the university's interest and image. Hence, it is obvious that the results found here correspond to the different cases of censorship in other universities. In sites elsewhere, the majority of the problems about censorship came from a conflict of interest: students wanted more freedom and less control. They want to write about what concerns them as students even if it harms the university's reputation. Therefore, it is essential to understand that having less control can be more beneficial than harmful. A writer brings to light a university problem so that university won't hold it back but face it as a problem to be solved. Nonetheless, the university administration prefers to hide the problem to not face a decrease in the registrations or an increase in the departures or transfers. This

problem is being faced by a lot of universities in the United States (see literature review). Therefore, Al Akhawayn's case is not the only one. All universities are concerned by their reputation, because a university with a great reputation is a university frequented by great students. However, reputation depends on the level of the learning and teaching, on the environment, and the facilities. Therefore, the articles are not an academic scale for AUI's reputation. Parents and students base their choice on more learning centered issues.

The problems encountered while doing this research were rare. The team was facing a problem of inadequacy of questions. The survey was satisfactory, yet two questions were badly written; thus, the team redid a two question survey to 33 participants. This problem happened because the team did not anticipate the type of results needed. However, after the second data collection, the team came up with uniform and relevant results. The other problem that the team faced was time and number of people. Considering these two factors, a survey was useful, relevant, and satisfactory.

Nevertheless, with more time and less constraints, the team could have come up with further research outside AUI. Indeed, when replicating the research it would be useful to enlarge the research to the parents. In fact, parents are the ones that chose AUI for their children; therefore, they are the ones that take all the criteria into consideration: reputation, facilities, and level of learning and teaching. Therefore, the researchers, who would want to reproduce a research about the same issue, have to make an experiment to see whether AUI reputation depends on the articles written in newspapers. To achieve this goal they need to publish articles that harm in some way the university's reputation, give those newspapers to the parents, observe their reaction, and then make them answer

a survey. The results of this survey would confirm or contradict the results of our research. On the other hand, the same team can look for articles that were censored, compare the original article with the one that was censored and published, and look for the things that were taken out. The research questions would be: why was this article censored? Was it harming AUI image?

Censorship is an issue facing AUI community, so the team was looking for some solutions that can reduce the impact of this problem. In fact, it can be useful to create a media board. It should include a writer, a student, an editor, an adviser, and an administrator who would be chosen by elections. However, the team thinks that this would be a difficult end to reach. Moreover, the university's publications should be independent; in other words not subsidized by the Al Akhawayn administration. Consequently, the AUI newspapers would be free to exert their own censorship based on their own interest. Therefore, the AUI newspaper would not be based the censorship on the AUI's reputation.

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Appendix

Censorship and its Impact on AUI Newspapers

This survey will help us in our research about censorship in AUI newspapers. Therefore, we would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes of your time to complete this survey by placing an “X” in the appropriate box. The answers will remain anonymous.

1. What is your involvement in AUI publications?
 - Reader
 - Writer
 - Editor or Adviser (official or unofficial)
 - Censor

2. How often do you read the AUI newspapers?
 - A) How often:
 - Always
 - Sometimes
 - Almost Never
 - B) What newspaper?
 - Avant-garde
 - AUI News
 - الحياة الجامعية (Al Hayat Al Jamiya)

3. Can you recall the topic of an article ...
 - That you thought was interesting and good:

 - That you thought was badly written and boring:

 - I can not recall.

4. Do you believe that AUI newspapers are censored?
 - Yes
 - No

5. Have you ever censored or been censored?
 - Yes
 - No
6. If yes, what was the subject?

Why?

7. According to you, what is being censored of the AUI newspapers?

- Pornography/ Prostitution
- Sexism
- Racism
- Negative articles about AUI
- Others (please specify) _____

8. What is the purpose of censorship at AUI? To...

- Protect AUI's reputation
- Improve the quality of the articles
- Avoid disturbance in the educational system
- Protect a university member.
- Others: _____

9. How much freedom of speech should there be at AUI?

- 25%
- 50%
- 75%
- 100%

How much freedom of speech is there in AUI?

- None
- 25 %
- 50 %
- 75 %

10. Who should decide about censorship?

- Administrators
- Writers or Editors
- Students
- Others (please specify) _____

11. What are the effects on you as a reader of censored articles of AUI publications?

- I don't care, because I read them anyway.
- I read them, but I think I am not getting the whole truth.
- I read them because I think censorship gives them quality.
- I don't read them.