

Abu Dhabi students on course for world's elite

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DRESDEN // When Mohammed al Merri found out he had been accepted to study at Globalfoundries, he was proud to become part of “The Elite”.

The recent electrical engineering graduate from Abu Dhabi’s Higher College of Technology had long dreamt of pursuing a career in technology. Now, with Abu Dhabi investing heavily in the semiconductor industry, the young Emirati has earned the opportunity of a lifetime – to become part of “Al Nokhba”, which is Arabic for “The Elite”.

The programme, run at the Globalfoundries campus in Dresden, gives the students a crash course in the elemental physics behind semiconductors and the theory of designing microchips plus the chance to follow assigned mentors to perform tasks in the foundry’s clean room.

“For me, I’m studying something that is very futuristic,” said Mr al Merri. “It’s a very amazing experience.”

He is one of 60 students – half of whom are women – invited by Abu Dhabi’s Advanced Technology Investment Company (ATIC) and Globalfoundries to take part in an intensive seven-week internship designed to introduce them to the world of semiconductors and hopefully foster the people who will take the reins in running Abu Dhabi’s foundry.

“When I told my professors that I was going to work at a foundry, they said that this is an opportunity that engineering students don’t often get,” said Ammar al Marzouqi, a third-year computer engineering student from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“We’re getting to look at what’s actually being produced now and what the research and development teams are trying to work on for the future.”

It also opens the door for young Arab females to become trained as semiconductor engineers, a field that generally does not attract a lot of women.

“It’s great that females from the UAE have entered this industry and that the country is looking carefully for its plan for the future,” said Ebtesam al Mazrooei, a masters communications engineering student at United Arab Emirates University.

“There’s a lot of information coming at you for the first two weeks but once you enter and see the manufacturing of wafers in the clean room, it is really an amazing experience.”

Hamda al Shehhi, a third-year chemical engineering student at the same university, said the experience had given her a new “plan for the rest of her life”.

“It was difficult for me at the beginning because I’m not trained in electrical engineering, but when I came to Dresden, I feel that this is something I can be good at,” Ms al Shehhi said.

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