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## *Ancient University Opens Rebuilt Student Center*

By Norris Jones  
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**BAGHDAD, Iraq** – Renovation work on one of the oldest universities in the Islamic world was completed this month in Baghdad by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

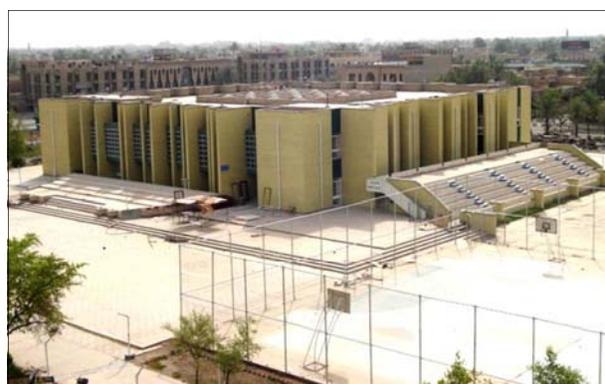
Mustansiriya University, founded in 1234 by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustansir, is located on the east side of the Tigris River near Sadr City.

Mohammad Attar, a 29-year-old civil engineer who works for USACE, graduated from Mustansiriya and says he is proud to have helped oversee the \$1 million in improvements to the student center and soccer field there.

The student center was burned and the looted following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and had been unusable until this month. Historically it has been a key structure on the campus, and Attar remembers attending many graduation festivities there when families and students would gather to celebrate the special day.

The project included new air conditioning ductwork and chillers, new skylights, roof repair, new marble interior walls and floors, new plumbing and electrical wiring, new doors and windows, plastering and painting, and rebuilding the cafeteria kitchen and dining area.

In addition, the university's soccer field



Mustansiriya University in Baghdad has re-opened its Student Center which underwent a two-year \$1 million renovation managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region Central district. [USACE photo]

was reseeded and an irrigation system installed.

"Education is a priority for every Iraqi family," Attar explained. "We are taught from a young age that through education and hard work, anything is possible. That's the reason, despite two separate bomb blasts earlier this year that killed and wounded hundreds of students; their fellow classmates still risk the journey every day."

He says helping with Mustansiriya is definitely a highlight of the projects he deals with. "Our efforts have made a difference benefiting thousands of Baghdad students," he said.

He explained that in Iraqi culture, the

two top educational choices are medicine and engineering. He finds his work rebuilding Iraq a very satisfying profession. "We're constructing new schools and courthouses, installing water and sewer lines, renovating hospitals, upgrading electrical substations and networks, building new fire stations and youth centers."

Attar's has a goal of returning to the college himself someday to earn a Masters Degree and is confident his children will possess that same passion for learning – "it's a fundamental part of our Iraqi society."

**Editor's Note:** Norris Jones is a Public Affairs Specialist with the Gulf Region Central district, Gulf Region Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact the public affairs office at 540-665-1233, by email [CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil](mailto:CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil), or visit [www.grd.usace.army.mil](http://www.grd.usace.army.mil).