

For Immediate Release



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AUB's Samir and Claude Abillama Annual Award Ceremony: Innovators prove that Entrepreneurship can be Eco-friendly

The American University of Beirut (AUB) Nature Conservation Center (NCC) has held the annual Samir and Claude Abillama Eco-entrepreneurship Award ceremony that grants the amount of \$20,000 to the best idea of an eco-entrepreneurship product, process, service, or system.

Winning the prize for proposing a feasible project that complies with eco-entrepreneurship indicators and has a desirable impact on Lebanon was a team called Difaf Aquaponic Farms, led by agricultural engineering AUB alumnus Hussam Hawwa ('04). Aquaponics is the integration of aquaculture and hydroponics methods in agriculture to produce vegetable crops and fish. The idea is that fish waste provides a fertilized medium for growing plants while plants provide natural filtering for the water that the fish live in. In addition to a trophy, the winning team received the monetary award that is allocated to support developing the project.

Bringing together the qualities of entrepreneurship, nature conservation, and service to community, the Abillama Eco-Entrepreneurship Award emphasizes the role of developing innovative ideas for marketable and viable products in nature conservation, following the green entrepreneurial model. The award also aims at creating job opportunities in Lebanon through its support for young, responsible entrepreneurs.

“We might have the ideas, passion, and labour of love, but we need to integrate the business part with it,” said Dr. Steve Harvey, Dean of the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business at AUB who was keynote speaker at the ceremony. Dr. Harvey spoke of his personal encounters with eco-entrepreneurs whose work was always a “labor of love”. “A successful project is a sustainable one,” he said.

Also a keynote speaker was Neemat Frem, CEO of INDEVCO group, who spoke about the “recipe of success” which he believed should include having the passion and courage to act. He

argued that working with a set of values and beliefs is important to be able “translate dreams into ideas.”

Guest speaker, Lucien Bourjeily, who is a Lebanese writer, director, and social activist, inspired the youth with his talk about the importance of change in Lebanon. Speaking about his own first-hand experience during the recent waste crisis in Lebanon, he argued for the need to start taking matters into one’s own hands, particularly with regard to the environment. He congratulated the participants and thanked them for their passion and sense of responsibility towards the environment.

More than 50 applicants responded to an open call throughout Lebanon for proposal submission. Applicants were asked to submit a concept note and were invited to attend a workshop on project presentation and the submission of full proposals. Competitors then participated in a Business Model and Pitching workshop and underwent one-on-one coaching sessions to prepare for the final presentations to the jurors and the deliberations that follow.

Five finalists were selected and offered certificates for the innovative ideas and projects that they were asked to pitch. First runner-up was ‘Beirut Koktail She2af’, led by Mona El Hallak, which aims at safeguarding the identity of Beirut by raising awareness about the importance of preserving its architectural, social, and natural heritage through the creation of modern products and combining modern design with local crafts. A team amongst the finalists worked on the idea of making clothes and textile more eco-friendly and using accumulated plastic waste to make useful products; another developed the first sanitizing eco-friendly doormat that can be bought via a mobile platform; and a third team proposed the “Smart Trash Can” that is an automated waste sorter for home use that separates plastics and metals from organic waste.

Administered by NCC at AUB with the support of the Abillama family, the Abillama Award was first celebrated in June 2014 in honor of Samir and Claude Abillama and the values that they stand for such as community service and nature conservation.

“NCC was the first center at AUB and in Lebanon to introduce the “eco” component to the entrepreneurship sector,” Director of NCC, Dr. Najat Saliba, told us. “This was not an easy undertaking because it entailed creating a new culture that focuses on the protection of the environment while flourishing in business... We are proud of the Center’s achievements and as we look into the future, we hope that more similar initiatives emerge and that NCC becomes the reference point for all these awards where applicants and award administrators can come to seek help and advice. We want to provide all available tools so our innovators can win not only in the Abillama Award but in local and international start up competitions as well.”

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For more information please contact:

Simon Kachar
Director of News and Media Relations
Mobile: 03427024 Office: 01374374 Ext: 2676
Email: sk158@aub.edu.lb

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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