

2022 Student Commencement Address

Amani Bayrakdar

June 9, 2022

President Fadlo Khuri, esteemed deans, distinguished faculty, parents, spouses, family members, and fellow graduates present here and behind the screen, Good evening.

If I tell you that I remember the first day I came to AUB, I would be lying. Well, that's because it was 23 years ago!

I first stepped foot into the AUB campus in 1999 when I started my bachelors journey as a nursing student. And I can't seem to leave!

I graduated in 2002 with my BS in Nursing. Now mind you, I was not a top student back then, not even within the top 10 of my class, but nursing was my passion. So when, two years later, the school of nursing opened its first master's program, I applied without hesitation. And in 2007 I became one of the first 5 students to graduate with a master's degree in nursing from AUB. During the following years, my career path was very exciting where I held several clinical, managerial, and academic positions; both in Lebanon and abroad, but I always kept an eye on my alma mater, so when in 2018, the Hariri School of Nursing launched its PhD program, guess who applied? I did. And here I am standing before you four years later, among the first cohort to graduate from AUB with a PhD in Nursing.

Was it easy? Oh definitely it was not. It was an extraordinary journey, filled with hard work, several breakdowns, and many sacrifices. Being a wife and the mother of three children, I missed a lot of quality family-time and missed a lot of bed-time stories. But what comforts me is that I was able to be a good role model for my three kids, teaching them that you can reach out for the stars, as they are nearer than you expect.

You know, when I look back on my journey. One image keeps crossing my mind. A caterpillar transforming into a butterfly.

During the last four years, I can honestly say that I went through a metamorphosis from being someone who sought knowledge and a higher degree to becoming someone who wanted to make an impact in her world. AUB taught me that a PhD is not a just a university degree. It is not just about increasing your knowledge or putting "Dr." in your title. It's about combining knowledge and wisdom to make an impact. During my transformation, like the caterpillar that feels vulnerable outside its cocoon, I was constantly challenged, challenged to be the best that I can. And oh what challenges did we all face during the last four years!

My fellow graduates, we are definitely not just some people who got a graduate degree. The degrees we are holding today are not normal ones. We excelled when the world was in a hiatus unable to function, we persevered when our nation was crumbling. We took one hit after the other, and of course, we sometimes felt like we hit rock bottom, but it turned out that this rock bottom was a great foundation on which we built ourselves up, better, stronger, and wiser than ever.

Now none of this would have been possible without the support we got from AUB and our faculty members. Their provision and adaptation to the challenging times taught us how to persevere and give our best. And we did. We conducted research during these challenging times, with the limited resources that we had, in a country that was worrying about how to secure the next loaf of bread, not to mention our own struggles in our personal lives. And despite all of that, we made an impact. The research that we did was deemed as outstanding by top universities in the USA. In fact, our involvement with those universities during our research residencies showcased the high caliber of our

education and confirmed that Lebanon’s greatest asset is its brain power. Well, that and hommos of course.

So now, nothing seems impossible to me. And just as Aristotle said: “you are what you repeatedly do,” and well you know that we made “excellence” our habit.

If the last years have taught me anything, it is that: First, it’s always better to aim high and miss than aim low and hit, but it is definitely very sweet when you aim high and hit too. Second, always aim your actions into kindness, because the effect you have on others is what matters the most. And third, coffee is the elixir of life!

Now finally, on behalf of myself and all the graduates here today, I want to thank our deans and all the faculty members. I would also like to thank all the parents, spouses, family members, and friends who supported us during these past years. Thank you for putting up with us, we know we haven’t been so easy to live with lately!

And to my fellow graduates of the Class of 2022. We are AUB ambassadors. Whether in Lebanon or any other place on this planet. So, let the butterflies fly and show the world what it means to be called an AUBite.