



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

2024 Student Commencement Address

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Good afternoon esteemed guests, good afternoon class of 2024!

We are here today, tasseled, and ready to take the next step forward! Do you remember the early days of becoming an AUB student? Well, mine started with the rumors about university life: They told me that it will not be the same as school, that relationships will only be formal and impersonal. They told me that no one will help you find your path in life here. That here, in the real world, you will be on your own.

But this couldn't be farther from the truth because **they** clearly didn't know how we do it here at AUB.

I remember just 3 years ago, I was still a 17-year-old who'd spent his life surrounded by one small community: the Lebanese Armenian community. I was still a teen who had a lot of trouble speaking Arabic; someone who only had a vague idea of the definition of diversity; someone who was a bit too conscious about his ancestors' difficult past. Because of this, I constantly felt like I was a victim of my circumstances.

It's true: I was scared to exit the gates of my school and hesitant to enter the main gates of the real deal: university.

However, I adopted a 'no regrets' mentality and took the leap of faith.

I'm so glad I did.

It didn't take me much time to see something different in people here at AUB. Not the scary kind of different, but the good kind. I saw resilience, sympathy, and courage. I saw different pieces of different puzzles fitting together perfectly on this very campus. A harmony between the different pieces, where each piece is a story on its own. As I immersed myself fully into campus life, I saw us become a united community that celebrated their time together.

This realization completely shifted my perspective on life:

For once, I knew that I was not alone.

From Lebanon and Syria, to Artsakh and Gaza, a history of oppression and occupation is something we can all relate to.

For once, I knew that I was not an outcast: My Armenian community is part of the plethora of communities that enrich our history here in Lebanon.

I realized that we are not victims of our past and present, we are warriors that never fail to stand up after a hard blow.

I moved from being lost, to finding myself in different societies, organizing events and fundraisers, writing for Outlook and volunteering in Outdoors, joining the Red Cross, and tutoring on the side. And of course, going to the AUB gym; how could I miss mentioning that!

I moved from trying so hard to find my path in life, to finding my passion and getting an early acceptance to AUB's medical school.

I can safely say that here, I truly grew as a person.

I can continue to stand and talk for hours about how AUB is first in Lebanon, and how it is among the most prestigious universities in the MENA region. But we all know this. I am here to tell you something about AUB that you will not find on Google:

Here at AUB, professors and faculty members actually care about the success and future of their students. I want to thank them all for being our support systems, for being our mentors in life.

Here at AUB, classmates are not just classmates. I am proud to call them brothers and sisters.

Here at AUB, we have come to realize that we are part of something bigger. We are not defined by our ID numbers, although we have memorized those even better than our names. We are not defined by the catastrophes we experience, but by our cultural diversity, our coexistence.

Here at AUB, everyone matters.

I often have trouble expressing myself, let alone in front of thousands of people, so to end this speech, I decided to wrap it up in a different way this year: a poem:

From kids who thought they were victims of the system,

From kids who shed blood and tears for a degree,

To entrepreneurs, engineers, architects, teachers, scientists, artists; we learned that believing is key,

Teaching us that we may have life, and have it more abundantly,

We want to thank you AUB, for showing us what it means to be free,

This, class of 2024, isn't the end of our story,

A very powerful bond, we have all created,

I stand with you all and finally say,

From the American University of Beirut, we graduated!