



# AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

2024 Student Commencement Address

**Lynn Mazen Kobeissi**

Beirut, Friday, June 7, 2024

Esteemed members of the Board of Trustees, President Fadlo Khuri, deans, faculty, parents, families, friends, and my dearest fellow graduates of the Class of 2024,

Good evening, and thank you for granting me the honor of addressing you all tonight.

I would like you to please join me in a trip down memory lane.

Seven years ago, as an undergraduate at AUB, my father told me that I was fortunate to live on an island. It wasn't until after 2020 that I truly understood the depth of his words. AUB became my sanctuary—it was where I sought refuge for electricity and a cool place during power outages, a working internet connection during strikes and where I went with my colleagues to study during the pandemic. AUB, in essence, became an island where we could isolate ourselves from the outside world and focus on our studies. It was on this island that I met like-minded individuals and built lifelong friendships that are making saying goodbye to AUB even harder.

However, this island falls short of being completely isolated from the outside world. Recognizing the privilege AUB offered us, my colleagues and I established a free clinic at AUBMC to provide healthcare to the underprivileged. Together, students, faculty, and staff joined hands to overcome obstacles, from economic constraints to medication shortages, devising solutions to give back to our community. To date, we have been able to provide free healthcare services, including labs, imaging and medications, to more than 400 patients. Through this experience I learned that this safe space not only allows us to thrive but also empowers us to uplift others along the way.

Two years ago, thanks to COVID, I stood on this stage for my late undergraduate graduation, unaware of how much I would grow in the following years. My colleagues and I were eager to leave seeking new opportunities. However, as our departure approached, many of us found ourselves reluctant to leave. We learned to appreciate AUB for what it had offered us. I can speak for myself when I say that I have never been prouder of being from AUB than during my time in the United States. It was remarkable to realize how much AUB's reputation preceded me; every faculty member I encountered not only knew AUB but also looked upon me with admiration when I mentioned I was a student here. AUB has not only equipped us with academic knowledge, it has instilled in us the ability to compete on a global scale.

A few months back, while enjoying the sun here on the Green Field with my best friend, she turned to me with a wistful smile. Gazing at the families and children playing around us, she expressed her anticipation for the day when our kids would play here. It was in that moment that the reality hit me. We were about to embark on a new chapter, and for the next few years, we wouldn't be able to meet at the Main Gate or grab coffee from Bliss for a study break that stretched into hours. No more sun-bathing on the Green Field or meeting each

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other on our way to Hostler. And of course, no more daily library gatherings—whether it was Jafet, where we studied for hours, or my beloved SML, which I like to call “Café SML.” A place, where we not only shared laughter that echoed so loudly we had to step outside to catch our breath, but also shed tears—for failed exams, broken hearts, or the loss of patients who touched our lives deeply.

Today, as we prepare to bid farewell to AUB and some of us to Lebanon, I know that many of us share this sentiment of sadness. However, I make a personal promise to myself and to this institution to return. In many of our interviews, we were often asked if we would consider coming back, and the majority of us expressed a strong desire to do so. We leave Lebanon and AUB not just to explore, learn, and grow but also with the intention of returning stronger.

As we head out into the world beyond AUB, we cannot ignore the political realities that shape our region and world. It’s important, as educated individuals to engage with these issues thoughtfully and passionately.

Amidst the ongoing fight for freedom of speech around the world, I am proud to be part of one of the few institutions in the Middle East that truly fosters this freedom. A freedom that allows us to challenge ideas and have meaningful conversations without fear. This freedom is the foundation of our growth both academically and personally, helping us not only become better students but also better citizens of the world, voices of change and advocates for justice.

Thus, I would like to send out my heartfelt prayers for the people of Palestine. The situation there is a heart-breaking reminder of the ongoing struggle for justice in our world. I hope that as future leaders we can work towards a future where everyone can live with dignity, peace, and freedom.

Allow me now to express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents, family, friends, and mentors at AUB, who have played an instrumental role in shaping me into the person I am today.

Finally, before we leave, I invite you, the class of 2024, to stand, to look at each other, and to give yourselves a resounding round of applause. You are the class that endured a pandemic, a blast, an economic crisis, and the mass exodus of friends and family. You faced the departure of doctors and professors, and yet, amidst all of these challenges, you found light in the darkness and extended a helping hand to others in every possible way.

May we always find our way back to where it all began.

Please join me in applauding the Class of 2024.