

For Immediate Release



AUB Founders Day keynote speech: ‘The University’s liberal arts model creates leaders’

Beirut, Lebanon- 02/12/2013 - Without AUB and its liberal arts education model, the region would have had fewer leaders, fewer success stories, said the keynote speaker at the University’s Founders Day ceremony on December 2, 2013.

“What if AUB never existed?” asked Talal Shair, CEO and chairman of Dar Al Handasah, one of the world’s top 10 engineering and architecture consultancies, during his speech. “Where would we be, as Arabs, Lebanese and many other nationalities in this world? I see success stories all over the globe and the primary reason? An education that makes you think, analyze, be critical of your own prejudices and train you to be a leader in this global society.”

Shair addressed an audience of faculty, students, and staff, at Assembly Hall, during a ceremony marking the founding of the University on December 3, 1866. The AUB Choir led by conductor Riikka Pietilainen-Caffrey and organist Ramzi Sabra received a hearty round of applause for its rendition of “Hark I Hear the Harps Eternal.”

Following a formal procession of faculty members and senior administrators, led by chief marshal Huda Zurayk, AUB President Peter Dorman opened the ceremony, highlighting AUB’s role in promoting a liberal arts education in the region, from the time of its founding 147 years ago.

“Founders Day is an annual opportunity ... to reflect upon the attributes and values that connect our storied past to our current prominence and, most importantly, to our ambitions for the future,” said President Dorman. “First and foremost, we are a university in and of the Middle East, and Lebanon in particular. With its extremely diverse population and rich cultural milieu, this country provides a fertile venue for a university in the liberal arts tradition. Lebanon lends its unique character to AUB, and vice versa.”

Dorman added: “Today, we are as determined as ever to advance liberal education and the causes associated with it: those of tolerance, open-mindedness, rational deliberation, scientific argument, and compassionate public service.”

In his speech, Shair argued that a liberal arts education rests on three main pillars: critical thinking, rather than mastery of technical or codified knowledge; cultivation of a moral character and civic responsibility in students in terms of their individual choices and their contribution to the common good; and the use of knowledge and virtue to improve the world is the ultimate aim of an education that serves individual and communal freedom.

He added that “while it’s crucial to receive the best training and knowledge in your field of choice, it is the ability to adapt to unusual circumstances that may fall outside your direct field of expertise. This is where leadership becomes paramount.”

As the region “drowns and rises” in notions and practices of Arab revolutions, AUB has a leadership role to play, by acting “a beacon of liberal values and the enlightenment of generations of students who have served at the vanguard of progress and development throughout the Middle East,” Shair added.” (AUB heeds) the call for our men and women to serve to meet the change necessary in our challenging age of revolution and awakening.”

As every year, the Founders Day essay competition was launched at the beginning of the year, inviting students to write an essay on the theme of “arts at AUB.” Winners of the competition were announced on Founders Day.

Jinan Mantash, an English literature senior, received first prize (\$750) for her essay, “The Howl of Art.” The essay is a snapshot of the many roles and positions that art occupies in history, in contemporary society, and in the personal evolution of those who practice it and observe it.

It concludes by telling the art appreciator not to trap art, nor to try to perfect it. “Stop trying to perfect me because I am here to mimic your imagination,” Mantash says in her essay.

Mark Hayek, an English literature junior grabbed the \$500 second prize for his essay, “On Truth and Lies in Representation,” which argued that art is unique in succeeding to interconnect individuals through their subjectivity. “Science answers the how and what, but everyone knows that the why is the most disquieting question of all,” said Hayek, in his essay. “Art transcends all branches of science, because it is the only form of representation that presents an experience, rather than merely an observation.”

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For more information please contact:

Maha Al-Azar, Director of News and Information, ma110@aub.edu.lb,
01-75 96 85

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 100 programs leading to the 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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