

## **AUB Founders Day 2009**

**“AUB publicly upholds the ideal of tolerance of diversity. In your experience, is the AUB campus a place where all kinds of diversity are indeed accepted?”**

**Timmy Malkoun and Rita Harbie**

**Third Winner**

“Tolerance” and “diversity” resemble bubble-wrap. This is largely due to the fact that we live in a world dominated by political correctness; we use these words because they have fused themselves with the generally accepted principles we seem to collectively adopt as an improvement-oriented community. However, and while such politically correct stances are helpful in quelling possible tensions, rarely do we step back and examine what these terms really mean. Rather, we use them as shields or barriers to avoid being deemed “intolerant”. In this sense, they are bubble-wrap—a protective substance that prevents direct contact with certain encapsulated matter or issues. For such an essay, it would be customary, stereotypical even, to laud AUB with claims of it, above all places in Lebanon, being the epitome of tolerance and diversity. Moreover, and keeping with this stereotypical logic, an essay that would bubble-wrap this issue would be one that forces the concept of AUB being a “melting pot” of sorts, implying that diversities have homogenized to form a uniform entity. Yet, to be frank, such a classification does not seem to holistically apply to Lebanon. In other words, the idea of a melting pot seems to be missing a Lebanese ingredient or flavor.

What does this really mean? What is indicative of “Lebanese flavor”?

Tabbouleh!

Juicy, tangy, spicy, aromatic, and healthy, this dish has caused Lebanese mouths to salivate for centuries. Tabbouleh is a product of specific, fresh ingredients combined to make it unlike any other salad. Ask anyone what the main components of Lebanese cuisine are and, surely, Tabbouleh will be one of the main dishes mentioned, if not the first. For this reason, let us make the bold assumption that Lebanon *is* Tabbouleh. Since AUB is a microcosm of Lebanon, for much like the country itself is composed of people with different beliefs, religions, and even socio-economic backgrounds, we can assume that AUB is also Tabbouleh.

However, surely, there are evident logic holes that belie this metaphor. As an audience, you are most definitely wondering: Why is Lebanon, or AUB, Tabbouleh? This, is due to the fact that much like Tabbouleh is made out of different ingredients, be they the finely diced tomatoes, minced parsley and mint, hints of onion, and grainy groats, AUB, too, is composed of different ingredients or people.

First, with respect to these differences, we cannot ignore the fact that Lebanon is a place of polarization in terms of political ideologies and religions. This, accordingly, has led Lebanon, and AUB by proxy, to include people of different sects and beliefs. It is also not a secret that AUB includes students from different rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. This is another inherent diversity. Diversities, however, should not be limited to those abovementioned, as they always seem to be. Diversity can transcend beyond the clear-cut social, political and economic factors. Students in AUB are also diverse in terms of their interests and passions. AUB houses the artsy types and the math geniuses, the socialites and the introverts, the gym rats and those who belong to the cult of Saj.

Yet, what combines all these different ingredients in the harmonious amalgam of the Tabbouleh, rather than chaotically distinct components consisting of tomatoes, parsley and onions in a bowl? With Tabbouleh, the marriage of fresh lemon juice and earthly olive oil trickles through the crisp vegetables and grains, pulling them together to ensure that each bite contains every flavor Tabbouleh has to offer. With respect to AUB, this cohesive effect is achieved through the academic and scholarly incentive, pulling diverse students into one university. Whether a student is sporting a Louis Vuitton bag or carrying a backpack they've been using all their lives, these bags are all carrying the same thing—books. Education marinates the students' minds in preparation for their futures just as the lemon-oil mix marinates the vegetables to compose a distinctive flavor. The diversities, albeit existent, are brought together by the education or learning we all attend AUB to receive. When working on a group project, contributing in a classroom, or suffering from the same mid-term stress, we are all in the same boat, so to speak. We are all ultimately students attending a university to learn. While this does not do away with our diversities, it places the focus on something else, creates common ground, and makes us more prone to accept or tolerate each other's diversities. Not only are these diversities tolerated, they often affect each other, forcing students to learn, understand and maybe

acknowledge new ideas or interests. A spoonful of Tabbouleh is hence analogous to an AUBite—one bite is representative of the greater whole. An AUB student is an embodiment of the AUB community; the diversity of people ultimately influences the individual.

Nonetheless, in order for an AUBite to contain all the flavors of AUB's influence and education, the shaping components must be mixed and tossed well, for unlike other salads, Tabbouleh's uniqueness is rooted in its cohesive, uniformly-mixed character. A cluster of tomato will not do the salad justice and perpetual polarization of different groups will not cause for a true AUBite. In other words, while AUB can be classified as a Tabbouleh, we must not be a bubble-wrap generation and claim that diversity is fully integrated. Much like a finishing toss can be made to Tabbouleh to further harmonize the ingredients, there is still room for improvement in AUB with respect to harmonizing diversities.

In spite of this room for improvement, the abovementioned claims lend themselves to the conclusion that AUB is indeed a place wherein different diversities mostly come together. It would be far too simplistic, however, and unreflective of reality to claim that these diversities melt together in such a way that they are no longer evident, as this would imply an erosion of the unique characteristics of each entity. On the contrary, and like the ingredients of Tabbouleh, they remain their own defined bodies, but simply mesh together in an offbeat yet deliciously flavorsome manner.

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