

Founders Day Ceremony 2013

Peter Dorman

Dear students, faculty, staff, and friends of AUB, I am pleased to welcome you to this year's Founders Day ceremony, which commemorates the establishment of our university 147 years ago. Founders Day is an annual opportunity to consider what makes this university unique in the region and in the world. It is a time 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.

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.

Our founders, in choosing this city for their bold initiative, made a considered choice. In the university's charter, signed in New York in 1863, the text declares:

“Beirut or its vicinity is deemed the most eligible location for the College, both from the growing population and commercial importance of that city, and also from its central position in respect to the millions who speak the Arabic language throughout the East, and who, it is hoped, will ultimately be reached by influences flowing from this institution.”

“Serving the peoples of the Middle East and beyond” remains one of AUB's primary objectives and is a prominent part of our mission statement. Nor is it by any means outdated or obsolete. This local and regional focus continues to be crucial in setting our strategic goals and objectives for the future in terms of education, research, medical care, and outreach.

Another mainstay of our unique character is a firm commitment to the liberal arts model of higher education. Since its beginning, the university's focus on humanistic values and character development

has been our hallmark, and is why so many of our alumni speak of the “transformative nature” of an AUB education.

In *The Reminiscences of Daniel Bliss*, our first and longest-serving president described how the school sought to instill more than professional skills:

“Facts are the seeds of thought and, like seeds in the vegetable world, are of little value garnered up; but under the power of reason, will and conscience are made into ideals and laws that govern matter and mind. So at the commencement of the College, we endeavored to stimulate not the memory, which was usually well developed, but the reason and the other governing powers of the mind. In other words, we wished to make men who would see in all events the beauty and the glory of living.”

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. Over the past 147 years, AUB has been acknowledged as a “beacon of learning.” We fully intend to stay true to this legacy in the years ahead, benefitting from – as we have over our long history – an engaged and phenomenally productive faculty, as well as academically competitive students, who aspire to apply knowledge and research innovations to advance peace, justice, economic empowerment, and good health in our communities.

In his keynote address today, Mr. Talal Shair will speak at greater length on why a liberal education is important, particularly at this time and place.

But first, we have the opportunity to celebrate the creativity of our students with the annual Founders Day Student Essay Contest, now in its 15th year. This year’s theme is “the arts at AUB,” a subject that resonates with both of the main pillars I have just described: liberal arts education and our regional focus.

One of the primary characteristics of a liberal arts education is exposure to the humanistic disciplines, including fine arts.

We believe that AUB has a role and responsibility to preserve and promote the art and culture of Lebanon and the region through teaching and research, and by engaging the wider public and partner institutions internationally. To this end, we are committed to increasing our academic programs, building our own collections of art, increasing the variety of live performances on campus, and to developing an increasingly ambitious program of art exhibitions and collaborative initiatives with other institutions.

With this in mind, our undergraduate students were asked to think about the arts and what AUB's role should be, now and in the future. They were also invited to consider the place of fine arts in the modern world, the broader purpose of art, and the arts scene in Lebanon.

Before announcing the winners, I want to extend my special thanks to the faculty committee who were asked to review and judge the submissions: Dr. Rico Franses, Associate Professor in the Department of Fine Arts and Art History as well as Director of AUB Galleries and Collections; Dr. Angela Harutyunyan, Assistant Professor in the Department of Fine Arts and Art History; and Dr. Lina Ghaibeh, Associate Professor in the Department of Architecture and Design. I also want to express my personal appreciation to all of the students who took the time to write an essay this year. This year, the committee chose to recognize two outstanding essays:

- Second prize has been awarded to **Mark Hayek**, a junior in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, majoring in English Literature. The selection committee describe Mark's essay, entitled *On Truth and Lies in Representation*, as making "the case that art is unique in its ability to capture the interconnection of individuals through their subjectivity." I urge you to read Mark's essay, which will be available on the President's Office website, after today's ceremony.

[President gives Mark Hayek the gift, certificate, and envelope]

- First prize has been awarded to senior **Jinan Mohamad Mantash**, who is also in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and also majoring in English Literature. The committee praised this essay, written in multiple voices and changing perspectives, as being "a highly sophisticated 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." Please welcome Jinan to read her essay, *The Howl of Art*.

[President gives Jinan Mantash the gift, certificate, and envelope]

[CHOIR sings!]

I want to express my great appreciation for the choir's contribution to this ceremony today, and to remind everyone in our audience that tonight and tomorrow night, the choir will be giving their annual Christmas concert here in Assembly Hall at 7 PM, under the baton of Riika Pietaleinin-Caffrey. I hope you will join us for this festive occasion.

And I rarely have the chance to thank our organist, Dr. Ramzi Sabra, for marching us in and out of this Hall, and for his artistry on the organ on many other occasions as well.

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It is a distinct pleasure for me to introduce the keynote speaker for Founder's Day 2013, Mr. Talal Shair, CEO and chairman of Dar Al Handasah, and a distinguished member of AUB's Board of Trustees.

Dar al Handasah ("Dar" for short) is a leading international project design, management, and supervision consultancy, consistently ranked among the world's top 10 engineering and architectural global consultancies. Many of you will recognize the name of Mr. Shair's family and his company, as their philanthropic and personal contributions to AUB over the decades have been extensive and profound. One could say that if AUB had new Founders for the 21st century, the Shair family would certainly be among them, so great is their vision, influence, and generosity.

After graduating from International College, Talal spent two years studying at AUB, then moved to Princeton for his bachelor's in civil engineering, and later went on to receive a master's degree in engineering from Cornell University. Returning to his homeland, Talal began working his way up the ranks at Dar and has been at the helm as CEO and chairman since 2008.

A dedicated benefactor to our alma mater, Mr. Shair is an eloquent spokesman for the fundamental values of this institution and for the importance of the liberal arts model of higher education. Please join me in welcoming Talal Shair, to deliver this year's Founders Day address.