

**AUB Speech  
June 14, 2013  
Charles Elachi**

Thank you President Dorman and members of the Board, I am much honored to receive this degree from AUB and to be in the company of very distinguished recipients.

I remember I was a 10-year-old boy growing up in Rayak, Lebanon, when the Soviet Union launched the world's first satellite, Sputnik, in 1957. This seemed amazing to me that you could make something and launch it all the way into space. Then, less than four months later, the United States launched its first satellite, Explorer 1. This came from a place in California called the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. The main thing I knew about California was that it was the land of Hollywood, the home of movie stars and celebrities, and it all seemed very exotic to me. In fact, it was a world away from the environment I grew up in. Now, I might have thought, as a young person, "That is a world I will never get to." But I am very grateful now that I didn't hold myself back. To get to JPL I had to take risks – to let myself be bold. And I strongly encourage all of you to do the same as you start your diverse careers.

It also reminds me of our experience with the Mars Curiosity mission. When the rover safely landed on Mars last August, of course, it was a wonderful success and a great affirmation for everyone who worked on it. But we went through a lot to get it there, and it was never a sure bet. You may be aware that the rover was so big that we couldn't use the same landing method, airbags, that we had used on previous rovers. We had to invent an entirely new landing system called the Sky Crane. Some people looked at it and thought it was preposterous. But our engineers were convinced that the Sky Crane not only could work, but it was the best way to get a large rover to Mars, using the technologies available to us at that time.

So you might say we were very bold – forging ahead with a new technology, one that seemed outlandish to some people – but one that we felt very confident about. And it was a fabulous success.

If I leave you with no other thought today, the most important message I can convey is this: Be bold in whatever you undertake. If you always stick to the safe path, you may never know your possibilities. But if you are bold and proactive, you may not always succeed, but you know you are making the most of your abilities. This doesn't only apply, by the way, to those of you who are following career paths in science or engineering. No matter what your path is – whether it might be science or the arts or music or business or whatever – by being bold and pushing yourself to the fullest, you can really make a difference in what you achieve, the knowledge you develop. In my office I have posted on the wall a quote from the past Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." So thank you, congratulations to all of you and my warmest wishes.