

Undergraduate Commencement Exercises Student Speech

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Dear President, Trustees, faculty, parents, guests and of course graduates, I am honored to welcome you to AUB's 2018 graduation ceremony. Today, I am no longer a Physics student. As much as it breaks my heart to leave a department where I spent the best three years of my life, I am reassured by the idea that it will never be REALLY over. Being a Physics student will always be an intrinsic part of my identity, something I've loved and will always do. I will of course miss my professors, who not only taught me how to better understand the universe and its peculiar phenomena, but were also great mentors and a joy to be around. I will miss my friends, who inspire me with their kindness, their courage and their resilience. I will miss the AUB undergraduate experience as a whole; but I will carry all of it safely with me in memory: the laughter, the tears, the lessons learned.

I guess I can say that I've gained some wisdom here. I learned to treat myself with more compassion. I learned that exercise and social activities are as crucial to the mind as other more traditional forms of education. I learned not to accept mediocrity and comfort and to seek challenges that will help me grow and give me a sense of immediate purpose. I learned how to say no and how to ask better questions. I learned that I could have an impact if I choose to voice my opinion.

Some of these opinions I hold today have shifted radically from the ones I came here with sometimes to an extent I never thought possible, similar to a re-formation of identity. I understand that change is a natural part of growing up; but being a part of the faculty of Arts and Sciences was definitely a catalyst. If anything, my AUB experience taught me not to be complacent and self-satisfied with my ready-made thoughts and beliefs. I learned that opinions and implicit biases matter since they end up, inadvertently or not, being reflected in our actions; and therefore, that they should always be brought up to critical inspection. It is usually seen as unpopular for people to "update" their views as they age, but I came to realize there is nothing heroic or virtuous about desperately clinging to inflexible belief systems, and never doubting in what we were made to believe, sadly often to maintain the status quo for the people in power. I learned to rethink and critically examine my beliefs thanks to faculty and classmates in both arts and sciences courses. It is not a cliché that humanities open the mind and elevate the spirit, but it is a mistake to think that humanities and sciences are somehow at odds with one another like the Apollonian and the Dionysian. I very much felt like an artist in Physics classes and followed scientific lines of reasoning in History lectures.

But AUB is not just about classroom learning, I was a permanent resident at some of my instructors' offices, namely Professor Touma's and Professor Klushin's, whose doors were always

eagerly open even when I wasn't taking classes with them. But learning actually awaits you at every corner of AUB, even in places where you least expect it. You bump into an old friend from English class, you start a random conversation and then suddenly here you are learning about far Eastern cultures, or machine learning. You leave your class in Nicely and head to the cafeteria, but then you stop at a booth facing West Hall giving a demo on basic safety rules or spreading awareness about Down syndrome. The specter of knowledge is simply inevitable; it lurks at every corner. Even if you are just visiting the campus you will probably end up learning about at least 5 new tree species by the time you leave.

I learned a lot at AUB, and although I probably won't remember everything, I hope I will still carry with me at least these three lessons. The first is a piece of advice from a beloved Physics Professor, Dr. Klushin, the essence of which is that if we want to feel better we first need to start smiling. I thought it was a funny idea when I first heard it, thinking that smiling won't really solve the problem, but to my surprise it was very effective when implemented. And that is no magic; it was actually mentioned in a Psychology class the following semester. Now I try to smile whenever I feel the universe is out to get me, it really makes my problems feel lighter and gives me the motivation to work on them. I also sing now, singing and smiling seem to be very effective on cloudy days. So smile and sing; it hopefully will make your grey days clearer.

The second is a lesson on hope and courage. I hate to disagree with Lord Byron, but maybe hope is in fact happiness. If life troubles you and it sadly probably will at some point, know that you have it in you to overcome whatever you are faced with, just don't underestimate your own resilience for you are stronger than you give yourself credit for. And even though at the moment some problems might seem impossible to deal with, have the reassurance that nothing lasts forever, including hardship. Never lose hope, for it is the fuel that will keep you going.

The third lesson is one on privilege. We are all very lucky to have been able to receive this kind of world class education and we are now among the very select 7% of the World's population with a university degree and for this we ought to be grateful. I hope we will also use the knowledge we acquired wisely to promote equality and safeguard peace. I actually have no doubt that we will, for I met some of the kindest, most caring and inspiring people I know, here at AUB.

Thank you Professors, friends, colleagues for these memorable years and the wonderful experiences! And most importantly congratulations class of 2018!