

For Immediate Release



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Women world leaders in data science **inspire and educate at AUB-Stanford partnership**

The AUBxStanford Women in Data Science (WiDS) conference took place at the American University of Beirut (AUB) Olayan School of Business (OSB) on March 5, 2018. Now in its second year, the annual conference is in partnership with the Stanford Institute for Computational and Mathematical Engineering and is led by AUB for the Arab Middle East and North Africa region.

The conference aims to inspire and educate data scientists in general, and support Arab women in this fast-growing, data-driven science that encompasses scientific methods, processes, algorithms, and systems to extract knowledge or insights from data in various forms for better decision-making, policy, and planning. With an expected reduction of 50% of current jobs globally and a 30% unemployment rate, data science—widely used in various fields already and expected to rise in demand by 28% in the coming two years—presents key opportunities.

“Data science is shaping the world around us and leading to an unprecedented wave of automation. Leaders need to adjust to this new reality,” said Dr. Lama Moussawi-Haidar, WiDS ambassador and associate professor of management science at OSB. “We are approaching a new frontier, and expanding new horizons that warrant now, more than ever, young women and men to contribute.”

Directed towards business practitioners, researchers, and students, the conference brought in women leaders in the field of data science as inspiring role models and offered the participants an opportunity to hear about the latest data science research in different fields, learn how leading-edge companies are leveraging data science for success, and connect with potential mentors, collaborators, and others in the field.

Data science today has a female representation of 26%, explained Fida Kanaan, WiDS ambassador and director of executive education at OSB, and the growing need and importance of data science in the upcoming era present a unique opportunity for both men and women. "Including women in any business field and particularly in data science is not only the right thing to do but research shows that data science companies with higher gender diversity at different levels of organizations are proven to have a much higher return on equity and growth in their market size and penetration."

The conference presented a complete day of talks, presentations, and discussions. The talks were led by 20 global shapers—renowned women leaders in data science—from Lebanon, Jordan, UAE, Turkey, Ireland, Spain, UK, and the US. Speaking about the use and impact of data science were professionals from LinkedIn, Uber, Microsoft, IBM, SAP PartnerEdge Computer Software, and IE University, in addition to influential thought-leading faculty and researchers representing Stanford University, Washington University, New York University, Bogazici University, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre, as well as AUB and AUBMC.

The speakers focused on three key sectors represented in WiDS' three tracks: business, being redefined today by data science; technology, which remains the principal data science enabler; and health, the track which unveiled how data science and technology is optimizing health and enhancing cures.

"Research in this area is breaking new ground and it is imperative for us here at AUB to think about how to change the way STEM education is taught and to recruit more female students to the STEM fields," said Dr. Nadia El Cheikh, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, speaking on behalf of AUB President Fadlo Khuri and as a promoter of women and gender studies at AUB and women's empowerment in general. "The conference promotes a higher representation of women in data science, showcases female role models, and connects regional researchers," added El Cheikh, who also spoke about AUB's efforts over history and its current initiatives for promoting women leadership.

"There is an enormous enthusiasm in this part of the world for this type of conference," said Dr. Steve Harvey, dean of OSB. "As we enter an accelerated data and digital era, a revolution of sorts, it is critical to realize that those who are close to the information and knowledge that this revolution generates will have the influence in shaping and reshaping our world ... It is imperative, if we are going to get closer to a fair, open, and inclusive society, that all parts be adequately represented in the data and digital revolution."

In parallel to the conference, four moderated roundtable discussions were held under the titles: "Girls got it, the think tank;" "From omics and big data to clinical practice;" "Data rich

corporations, paths to leverage big data and data science;" and "Data science and the UN Sustainable Development Goals."

The AUB WiDS attracted more than 850 in-person registrants and another 100 online, representing more than 400 different organizations. Trending on social media, it was livestreamed at AUB, Prince Sultan University, and Quds University; in addition to the extended team at Stanford University. Interested viewers also watched the sessions live from around the world, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the US. The global WiDS is the largest data science conference on earth; taking place concurrently this year in more than 50 countries, it has attained more than 100,000 attendees and is being tagged as a global movement.

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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 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to 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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