

For Immediate Release



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AUB Graduates 1708 Students

Khuri: “Go forth to change the world for the better”

The American University of Beirut (AUB) completed the second phase of its commencement ceremonies for the current academic year, by graduating 1708 fresh undergraduates.

The impressive ceremony, held on the Green Field in AUB’s lower campus, was attended by members of the Board of Trustees, parents, alumni, and friends.

After the arrival of the graduates’ procession and the procession of the university President, Provost, Deans, Faculty members and Trustees in their full academic regalia, the ceremony began with the Lebanese National Anthem. AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri then spoke.

Fadlo R. Khuri:

President Khuri said: Today is your day, a day which you will share forever with all our graduates, including these five distinguished honorands who have impacted the world through their lasting accomplishments, in cinema, theatre, banking, public health, public

life, in science and astronomy, who are also your fellow graduates. Each one of us, on the stage or in the audience, has their own unique story, their own frame of reference.

He continued: As a scientist and as a physician, I have spent my entire career developing data, exploring them and putting them to the test, and accepting the evidence that they present. While there are different ways to interpret data, we have to agree on their basic worth, their rigor, their soundness to endure real testing. Most of my generation has struggled conscientiously to create a better world—but we have not always been successful. Despite the turmoil we see around us, on balance, if you look at the evidence from Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, the data tell us we are in a better world. Pinker cites less crime, less poverty, people do live longer. We can disagree on the context and significance of these facts, but data are data. But while the world is undoubtedly a better place than it was 100 years ago, we cannot rest on our laurels and we cannot accept things as they are. We must effect positive change. And you, Class of 2018—whether you like it or not—are among the people to whom the mantle of change must be passed. Great institutions and great nations are built by engaged citizens, and engaged citizens participate in the full spectrum of public and private life.

He added: We are a long way from where we need to be, but things are happening. However, we cannot take this progress “the better angels of our nature” for granted. Tom Wolfe, again, urged us never to become a “slave[s] to how you think others are judging you”. It is on you, the outstanding graduates of the class of 2018 to work to create a better world, a world where the divide is not between truth and falsehood, nor Left and Right, nor North and South but between what has been accomplished and what we can accomplish still. And for this, you must be dogged proponents and determined advocates and effectors.

He said: Yet, there is a sense of a promise unkept, undelivered, and incomplete, when we look at a world where eight individuals, all men, can lay claim to the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of humanity, and where still the ravages of war, disease, and misfortune continue to plague the globe. We are conscious every day that in our mission, we must be more inclusive, more supportive, and more effective in advocating for you, our extraordinary students. But you are the ultimate advocates, you are the ultimate champions, you are the ultimate effectors. So

whether you have prepared for a future at a top graduate school, or you are training to become a physician or nurse, whether you have landed your ideal job or not-so-ideal-job as a stepping stone to your ideal job, whether you have decided to create your own path through entrepreneurship, or whether you are still looking for your True North, to figure out your direction in life, you have developed the tools to analyze data critically, to bring people who are at great divides together, to ensure that tomorrow is indeed the purview of what Lincoln once called "the better angels of our nature".

He ended: Congratulations AUB class of 2018! Go forth to change the world for the better.

The Graduating Class Speech:

Faculty of Arts and Sciences student Talal Al Saleh and Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture student Joseph Matar, delivered a speech on behalf of the graduates.

Al Saleh:

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.

She continued: 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.

She added: 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.

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

Matar:

Dear President Khuri, members of the Board of trustees, esteemed Deans, Faculty, Families, Distinguished Guests and finally my fellow colleagues of Class of 2018. It is a privilege to welcome you all to this special commencement ceremony.

I remember the first couple of weeks at the American University of Beirut, and I am pretty sure that every one of you my fellow colleagues recalls what it feels to be

welcomed to AUB. Personally, I still remember the feeling of graduating from high school and entering my university parkour full of enthusiasm and optimism, expecting everything to be as smooth as before. Little did I know, that I was about to experience what I would like to call the “Shock effect”.

He added: I always conceived AUB as being just a checkpoint in my life where I had to do my job, study, graduate and move on with my professional life. However, my four years at the American University of Beirut, proved to be an awakening journey on a personal level.

AUB has been the trailblazer in facing social stereotypes and has always encouraged us to overcome barriers and fight for our own ideas.

He ended: Dear parents, like Gebran Khalil Gebran once said: “You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth”. Truly, you have bended and you have sacrificed a lot of your personal interests to see us reach this far. Tonight, is also your night, and for all your efforts and for all your love, we are deeply grateful. To my father Georges, my mother Kako and my sister Karele, the courage and significance you give me every day is unparalleled. You are the 3 persons in my life that I want to make the proudest of me. Thank you for everything.

Howard Koh:

Renowned public health policy leader and physician Howard Koh, who had received the honorary doctorate in humane letters during yesterday’s ceremony, took the podium to deliver his keynote speech. He said: Congratulations AUB Class of 2018! You did it! In a few moments, you will graduate from one of the great universities of the world. Perched at the crossroads of the Middle East, the American University of Beirut has long promoted a noble mission of “excellence in education ... advancement of knowledge ... (and service) to the peoples of the Middle East and beyond... ”. On my first visit to Lebanon, I am so honored to celebrate this mission and this day with you.

He added: AUB has provided you a world-class education in many fields ranging from agriculture to the arts, from philosophy to physics. An education at AUB is a privilege. But now, as you collectively face the future, I know all of you are wondering—what is next for me? What will guide me as I make life decisions? How do I make a life and not just a living? At my own college graduation years ago, I thought I had some inkling of how to answer these basic, yet profound questions.

He continued: In my early years of medical training in Boston, I happened to meet a beautiful physician Dr. Claudia Arrigg. She told me she was raised in a family that celebrated a proud immigrant culture from Lebanon. As a child, her parents regularly shared with her their pride in their homeland, their love of culture (especially the food!), their desire that their children receive the best education possible, and their dream that someday she and her siblings would become fulfilled adults, committed to a life of purpose.

He said: Back in Boston, I also met another extraordinary physician Dr. Fadlo Khuri. Through my career, I have worked with many great doctors. But Dr Khuri always stood out as someone special. First of all, upon meeting one other, we immediately connected over our Lebanese heritage! Moreover, he exuded a rare combination of brilliance, energy and vision matched only by his humanity, humility and generosity of spirit. Fortunately, in 2015, AUB appointed Dr. Khuri its 16th President in recognition of his enormous talents. When I called to offer hearty congratulations, he enthusiastically shared with me his dreams for AUB. Then he graciously said “you know Howard, someday you and Claudia should visit Lebanon—you will love it”. Someday is today. I am so proud of President Khuri who lives a life of mission as a devoted president, physician, researcher, husband, father, and citizen of the world. President Khuri, please rise so we can give you a well-deserved round of applause.

He added: As US Assistant Secretary for Health, I had the privilege of joining so many committed colleagues in a powerful mission to: promote tobacco control and try to save

lives otherwise lost to tobacco dependence; protect people during the 2009 global H1N1 pandemic; help implement the Affordable Care Act that has brought health insurance coverage to over 20 million Americans; and address health disparities to help all people, regardless of race and culture, reach their full potential for health. It was a special honor to serve in the US delegation to the World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, an astonishing annual global gathering committed to global health. Few of my health colleagues are doctors---most of them come from other walks of life: law, policy, politics, government, business, education, housing and much more. All of them want to make a difference.

He said: Dear graduates, I believe there is a mission and calling for each one of us. I didn't understand this when I was younger but I certainly do now. Some of you may have no idea what your calling may be ---and that's fine. And for those of you who already have every step for the future planned --- let me assure you, it won't happen that way. Life will put before you so many twists and turns that are critically important. But as you face them, please keep your hearts open and ready to hear that quiet voice of calling. If you do, you can discover what is ultimate in your lives-- versus what is merely important.

He concluded: So as I close, thank you again for welcoming Claudia and me to this beautiful campus. Lebanon will always hold a special place in my heart. This is my first visit but in many ways, I feel like I am coming home. As you leave, may you fully leverage your AUB education to serve the Middle East and beyond. May you live a life brimming with purpose and mission. And someday, maybe you too can have the incredible honor of sharing, before a global audience, how the privilege of education, the power of calling and the passionate love of family and friends changed your life.

The Degrees:

President Khuri and the deans then distributed degrees to the 1708 undergraduate students:

Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences 126
Faculty of Arts and Sciences 585
Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture 555
Faculty of Health Sciences 78
Suliman S. Olayan School of Business 327
Rafic Hariri School of Nursing 37

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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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 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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