

AUD GRADUATION CLASS OF 2021

Held on October 17, 2021

Valedictorian Speech - Yumna Nasrallah

[Thank you --- for this warm welcome]

Good evening distinguished guests, members of faculty and staff, proud parents and relatives, friends, and of course the graduating class of 2021!

As the class valedictorian, you would think writing a speech would come naturally. Well, that was not the case. After staring for hours at the blinking cursor of an empty word document page trying to think of something to say, I realized I did not have a single concrete idea to build my speech on. I then resorted to Google for help.. I remember searching for “great valedictorian speeches” or “what to say in a university graduation speech.” All the speeches I read and watched were excellent and unique, but none of them resonated with me nor came close to the experience I had at AUD. But, what was common among them was the expression of gratitude to those who contributed to the graduates’ success, so on that note:

To the UAE and its leaders, thank you for providing us with the environment, security, and support that we would have not found anywhere else. Thank you for always inspiring us to be the best version of ourselves through your wise leadership.

To the heart of AUD, the faculty members, professors, and administration, thank you for embracing us with open arms from the moment we stepped on campus. Thank you for always pushing us to do our best, for supporting our goals, and for being our home on campus.

To our parents and families, thank you for all your sacrifices and for always believing in us. Without you, we would have not been here today. Mom, dad, Lubna, Roa’a, Yousef, and Nour thank you for being my inspiration and my motivation. I love you to no end.

And finally, to the graduating class of 2021, thank you for the friendships that we have built during the past few years and the memories that we created in our classes, labs, and of course c floors.

I want to take you back four years ago when I had to choose a university. Like most high school students, I was exploring my options both locally and abroad. In the winter of 2017, I dragged my parents, put them on a plane, and flew to visit the universities I had applied to. While I was walking around the campuses, I felt uncomfortable like I was wandering in a new pair of shoes I have never worn before. I simply did not see myself attending any of these schools. I started to yearn for the feeling I had back home – the feeling of safety, the feeling of acceptance, the feeling of being welcomed, and this is precisely what I felt when I first visited AUD for a tour they had organized for prospective students. On my way back home, my mom called me asking about the tour and I remember saying “It’s AUD for sure”. Making wrong decisions is inevitable, but I can gladly and confidently say that choosing AUD was not one of them.

Four years ago, I never imagined I would be standing here tonight as the class valedictorian. I owe my success to the amazing AUD faculty, especially the faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences for their ongoing support and care for my academic success and wellbeing. They did not see their duty as just imparting knowledge to us. They also inspired us, encouraged us, and always pushed us to work harder and excel at what we do best, all while taking the extra time to build relationships with us. There are so many instances I can think of like crying over foreign policy class in Dr. Omar’s office or asking Dr. Elham which Netflix series to binge watch. Through these relationships, I found myself taking academic risks and challenging myself. For that, I will always value the efforts that professors at AUD put forth for their students. For all of the times when our professors challenged us, I thought they were pushing us to become accustomed to stress, but in reality, it was to teach us how to question, how to analyze, and how to discuss, which are skills that will help us succeed in any profession we decide to pursue moving forward.

While there are so many words I can use to describe our class, only one word stands out: we are resilient. We not only faced adversity, but we overcame it with spirit and determination. Now, as we take our first steps into the real world, there will be harder challenges to overcome and unprecedented changes to adapt to, but our perseverance has been proven irrevocable. So, we all deserve to celebrate and be proud of ourselves. And with that, class of 2021, congratulations!

Thank you.