

# AUD GRADUATION CLASS OF 2020

Held on October 16, 2021

Falak Kassab - Valedictorian Speech 2020

President David Schmidt, distinguished guests, AUD faculty, MBRSC family, mom, dad, parents, and of course my fellow graduates, good evening...

My name is Falak Kassab, a Palestinian journalism graduate, and the valedictorian of AUD's Class of 2020. A year and a half after leaving AUD, we are reunited to celebrate and achieve closure. I am honoured to be representing a distinguished group of people. We are the class of resilience, not only because we worked through our last semester in 2020 under unknown circumstances, but also because we succeeded in showing ourselves and the world an unprecedented determination and grace during this generation-defining pandemic. AUD class of 2020, Congratulations!

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum once said, "The race for excellence has no finish line." This quote represents the essence of what drives me to wake up every day, and to chase my infinite dreams and goals, with the total belief that I am capable of achieving them. Standing here today was one of the goals that I set for myself, in hope to attain, and since I am giving my commencement speech before you now, I can proudly tell myself that I made it.

But every great story has a cast of characters, and our achievement today would have not been possible without the hard work of a collective system to whom I owe most of my accomplishment.

First, let me start by thanking the country that I was born and raised in, the United Arab Emirates. The UAE not only believed in my dreams, but also provided me with a healthy environment that encourages distinction. I believe that I speak on behalf of all my fellow graduates when I say that we are proud of experiencing this chapter of our lives in Dubai, a city that inspires the whole world by setting the example of a nation that does not know the impossible. To his highness Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, I am personally grateful. In 2016, I was granted the Mohammed bin Rashid School for Communication full scholarship, which was the key that opened the horizon towards pursuing my passion for journalism in a prestigious university like AUD, and a successful school like MBRSC. For that, I am truly thankful.

We are graduates of the American University in Dubai, a place we are lucky to call home. At AUD, we acquired skills that made us better communicators, challenged our curiosity, pushed us out of our comfort zone to constantly learn and improve. AUD's diverse and vibrant community opened many opportunities and nurtured our characters and our thinking. That is why, I have returned to AUD after graduating to pursue my master's degree

in Business Administration. Thank you, AUD faculty, staff, and professors, for your dedication and support.

To my MBRSC family, joining your school was always my dream. It has been an honour and a privilege to be part of the best communication school in the region. Thank you to the entire MBRSC faculty and staff for the endless support that you have given us, and I truly mean it. I remember during our last semester in 2020, when we were working on our graduation projects during the global pandemic. It was a critical timing that the world was going through. I had my luggage packed to travel to Lebanon to work on my final project about Palestinian refugees there. I was doubtful if it was a proper time to travel, with all what was happening in the world. While my colleagues and I were hesitant, our school demonstrated otherwise. The entire MBRSC faculty has provided us with confidence and has put its trust in the abilities of its students. That is why, equipped by the endless support we have received from the MBRSC, my colleagues and I travelled, pursued our investigative reports in multiple countries, and came back with projects that we will always be proud of. Each member of the MBRSC built a piece of our professional character throughout our 4-years journey, and for that we will always be appreciative.

Dad, Mom, Nourhan, Nadine, Adam, and Kinda. The person I am today, and my achievements, I owe it all to you. Mom and dad, I dedicate this accomplishment to you both. My parents were raised in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and have endured the endless hardships of being a refugee, but they never gave up. They have worked so hard and sacrificed a lot so that my siblings and I would never experience what they had to go through. I am lucky to have been raised in a warm household that provided me faith, believed in my abilities, and gave me all the reasons to keep going. Mom and dad, thank you for staying up all night waiting for me to come back home during the nights I spent working on my submissions at AUD. Thank you for never doubting any step I chose to take. Thank you for going with me to every talent show and TV show I auditioned to ever since I was a kid. Today, I stand here to fulfil my promise to you, the promise of making you proud.

AUD class of 2020, this is a defining moment in our lives. 5 years ago, when we first started university, we never thought we would face these extraordinary circumstances. But here we are, standing at a pathway of a changing world, and only we can determine how to shape the future that we want to live in. We will be remembered as the class that has led this change and proved to everyone that we are qualified to overcome any critical situation, and utilize it to become stronger, and more experienced.

Class of 2020, we made it this far and the best is yet to come. So, let us dare to take the next step, to give power to our will, to dream, to achieve, and most importantly to enjoy the journey.