

Founders Day 2009

President Peter Dorman

December 7, 2009

Distinguished guests, faculty, students, and staff: I am delighted to be able to welcome you all to this celebration of Founders Day, the annual event at AUB that celebrates the birth of our institution in Beirut in 1866. Such occasions afford us an opportunity to both celebrate our history and reflect on our plans to build on this storied past and enhance our reputation as the premier destination for liberal education in the region.

In the coming months and years, we are committed to building a vibrant intellectual community that thrives on collegial discourse, encourages freedom of thought and expression, and fosters tolerance. Crucially important to these efforts is achieving a dynamic and diverse student body. This we plan to accomplish by enhancing the international representation on campus and continuing to expand our financial aid program to attract a wide range of students. You will all recognize the value of students having the freedom to mingle with peers who embrace different perspectives than your own—this is the heart of any great academic community, and the beginning of any meaningful debate.

As you all know, on the occasion of Founders Day, students are invited to contribute essays on a particular topic, and this year's theme addresses the very issues I raised here. Students were invited to respond to the following:

“AUB publicly upholds the ideal of tolerance of diversity. In your experience, is the AUB campus a place where all kinds of diversity are indeed accepted?”

I wish to note that the ideal of diversity is a deceptively simple one. It is one of those concepts that cannot really be opposed by anyone who believes in a campus or in a society that is enriched by different points of view, cultural heritages, and national origins. Yet diversity *per se*

is only a starting point, and its value is actualized in how we choose to deal with it. The challenge is not in celebrating how different we are, but in the commonalities we can discover among us in spite of those differences. And diversity—whether in our peers or mentors or colleagues—invites us not only to question how others believe or what others may think, but to examine what we ourselves believe, and why. In a university this process requires openness and mutual respect, in the knowledge that we will come to know ourselves better, and thus to better understand those who share this vibrant community at AUB.

The number of submissions received to this open call for essay submissions was a three-fold increase over previous years, and I believe this speaks to how engaged our students are with this subject. I have also read a number of opinion pieces in recent issues of the student newspaper *Outlook* that also speak eloquently to the issues of diversity and dialogue.

My special thanks go to the faculty committee who were asked to select the winning submissions: Dr. Mona Fawaz, Assistant Professor of Architecture and Design; Dr. Joshua Andresen, Assistant Professor of Philosophy; and Dr. Paul Newson, Assistant Professor of History and Archeology. Let me also extend my personal thanks to all of the students who took the time to write an essay on the theme of diversity.

- The third prize in this year's essay contest goes to two sophomore students who wrote their paper jointly: Timmy Malkoun, a Business major in the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business; and Rita Harbie, a Political Science major in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.
- Second prize has been awarded to Mohammad Abdallah Ramadan, from the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, a 5th year student in Architecture.
- The first prize winner is Zeina Koreitem, a 4th year student, also an Architecture major from the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture.

I am delighted to introduce Ms. Koreitem, who will now read her essay, entitled "Diversity for Granted."

It is a distinct pleasure for me to introduce the main speaker for Founders Day 2009. Born in Ma'in, Jordan, Dr. Makhluf Haddadin is Professor of Chemistry at AUB and an alumnus. Now an internationally renowned researcher, he earned his bachelors and masters of science from AUB and went on to receive his doctorate from the University of Colorado at Boulder. After he completed two years of post-doctoral experience at Harvard University, AUB was fortunate to welcome Dr. Haddadin back to the university. Since then, he has pursued an illustrious career in the field of Chemistry, publishing over 100 scholarly papers in international journals; he was co-discoverer of *The Beirut Reaction*, which has led to the issuance of 40 patents in 20 different countries. Beyond his scholarly accomplishments, Dr. Haddadin has provided distinguished service to the university, as acting dean of Health Sciences for close to four years and as vice president for academic affairs for twelve years. His most recent honor is to have been granted membership in the prestigious Lebanese Academy of Sciences, an institution committed to the growth, invigoration, and dissemination of the sciences in Lebanon and comprised of the leading and most successful Lebanese scientists working inside and outside the country. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Haddadin, who will speak on the topic of "Torchbearers: Scholars from AUB."