



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

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AUB Graduate Students Engage Global Peers at the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature 2026

Four graduate students from the American University of Beirut (AUB), affiliated with the Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies at the university, participated in the International Youth Programme (IYP) held in Dubai as part of the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature 2026. The students, pursuing master's and doctoral degrees in Arabic and History, were accompanied by Dr. Ramzi Baalbaki, the Margaret Weyerhaeuser Jewett Chair of Arabic at AUB, and joined an international cohort of emerging scholars and creatives for an intensive five-day academic and cultural experience.

Hosted at the InterContinental Hotel in Dubai, the International Youth Programme brought together 200 students from 22 universities worldwide, including institutions from the United Kingdom, Italy, China, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates. Through a series of curated panel discussions, keynote talks, and hands-on workshops, the programme created a global space for intellectual exchange centered on Arabic language, literature, and culture.

Beyond its academic framework, the programme positioned Arabic as a dynamic, contemporary medium—one capable of shaping digital spaces, fostering cross-cultural dialogue, and enabling students to assume leadership roles in global conversations. Participants were encouraged to engage with Arabic not only as a scholarly field, but as a living language with creative, social, and technological potential.

“The Emirates Airline Festival of Literature provided me with an opportunity to explore new interests, build up my skill set, and connect within a diverse network of students, authors, and scholars worldwide,” Maria Khasmetdinova, a master’s student in the AUB Department of History and Archaeology, remarked.

The AUB students described the experience as deeply enriching on both academic and personal levels. They attended specialized sessions addressing topics such as Arabic storytelling, the cultural significance of calligraphy, the intricate process of translation, and various ways the youth can participate in shaping the media and circulating information.

Reflecting on the experience, Bouchra Frangieh, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages at AUB, emphasized the programme’s direct impact on her

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research. “Participating in the International Youth Programme at the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature allowed me to deepen my engagement with my dissertation topic in ways I had not anticipated,” she said. “I was able to attend panels directly related to my field, meet an author whose work is central to my research, and engage with him in person. This encounter not only enriched my academic perspective, but also allowed me to acquire his latest publication, which will be integral to my ongoing work.”

Notably, the festival hosted a series of high-profile literary events moderated by Dr. Bilal Orfali, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies at AUB. These sessions hosted distinguished writers and academics such as Dr. Ali Bin Tamim, Huda Barakat, Ezzat El Kamhawi, and other notable authors.

Outside the conference halls, students participated in a rich cultural programme that introduced them to both the contemporary and heritage dimensions of the United Arab Emirates. Visits to Global Village offered insight into Dubai’s multicultural fabric, while heritage-oriented experiences—such as the Sikka arts festival—provided hands-on engagement with traditional practices, including fragrance-making and fabric printing, allowing students to experience culture through the senses as well as scholarship.

Equally significant were the informal spaces of exchange that emerged during the programme. Whether through activities curated by the IYP organizers or organically created by the students themselves, participants forged meaningful connections with peers from diverse national and academic backgrounds. These interactions fostered dialogue, collaboration, and a shared sense of intellectual community that extended well beyond formal sessions.

At the conclusion of the programme, the AUB students received a certificate of participation, recognizing their active engagement in this international academic initiative. Their participation reflects AUB’s continued commitment to fostering global academic exchange and supporting graduate students in pursuing interdisciplinary, cross-cultural research experiences.

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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 790 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 9000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 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 365-bed hospital.

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