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WiDs @AUB Conference 2019:
Prominent women in data science lead way
for next generation of female leaders in the region

For the third year in a row, the impactful Women in Data Science at AUB (WiDS @AUB) conference attracted a huge number of professionals, academics, students, and highly accomplished speakers from the field of data science in the region and the world. The Olayan School of Business (OSB) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), in collaboration with the Stanford Institute for Computational and Mathematical Engineering (ICME), organized this event to take place on March 1, 2019, in parallel with the annual Global WiDS Conference held at Stanford University and in over 150 countries worldwide. The WiDS @AUB event was also watched online in Dubai, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, in addition to other locations in the MENA region and around the globe.

With each of its annual events, WiDS @AUB aims at providing an opportunity to hear about the latest practical and research developments in the field. It is a platform to learn how leading-edge organizations are leveraging data science for success. WiDS @AUB encourages exchanges of ideas and multi-disciplinary collaboration. It increases opportunities for women and girls in data science in the region, by providing support and mentorship, as well as showcasing highly accomplished female pioneers.

"Today's conference promotes a culture that supports the diversity critical to our success. We must ensure that women have an equal opportunity in education and economic employment," said Dr. Lama Moussawi-Haidar, founder and chair of WIDS @AUB, WiDS @AUB ambassador, and associate professor of management science at OSB during the event's opening session. "40 percent on average of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) graduates in Arab countries are women – a higher percentage than in the United States and Europe. However, 13 of the 15 countries with the lowest rate of female participation in the workforce are in the Arab world," she added. "Our world, hence, is at a crossroads: as terms like A.I. turn more colloquial, STEM fields turn more excluding of women. Can we do better?"

Dr. Fadlo Khuri, president of AUB, also spoke at the opening session. "The goals of this conference really resonate with the core of AUB's mission on the right to access and use information and the necessity of women's leadership, particularly STEM fields," he stated. "Our goal is to increase the prevalence of knowledge, accessible learning, and create a better life for all. One of the paths must be through data science, which can have a huge impact on the daily life of the already incredibly diverse dynamic and ever complex organism that is the human race."

Dr. Steve Harvey, dean of OSB, spoke about the increasing number of participants who attend this event over the years. He stated that this large number and diversity of attendance shows the interest that people have for the topic. Dean Harvey expressed that this topic is important in two ways. The first is the technical analytics part, which is important for OSB as a business school. The second, and more significant part, Harvey said, "is the connection to inclusiveness." He elaborated, "For us at the business school this becomes extremely important, and will be a pillar of our future as a business school."

Dr. Hoda Daou, WiDS @AUB ambassador and assistant professor at OSB, introduced the conference, its theme, and the discussions that would be held throughout the day. "Today we are going to take you through the journey to discover how data science, how artificial intelligence, is impacting our lives. Sometimes even without our knowledge," she said. "It all starts with the data. Data creates knowledge and with the right knowledge, you have the power to change people's lives."

The event then kicked off with this year's main keynote speaker, data scientist and chief decision scientist at Google New York, Cassie Kozyrkov, who is a globally-known public figure and prominent speaker in the domain of data science. She spoke about making data science useful, and shared with the audience ten tips on the right way to approach data science in an organizational culture. "In my experience data science isn't useful on its own unless you approach it the right way, unless we take the human aspect seriously, and unless we approach leadership in data science properly," said Kozyrkov.

The conference included two tracks, business and medical, with high profile international and regional speakers from companies such as Google, Netflix, and Amazon, among others. The business track aimed at revealing the different applications of data science that can influence people's lives across multiple sectors. Whereas the medical track was focused on digital health and included eye-opening themes discussing the latest research advances and developments in digital health.

The keynote speaker for the healthcare track spoke about the digital revolution in the healthcare industry and the multi-faceted transformation and growth opportunities that would result from

adopting digital systems such as Epic, the system recently integrated by the AUB Medical Center (AUBMC) as part of its digital transformation.

ENDS

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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 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 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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