Haya Al-Naimi

Escapism, being in a fourth dimension, flying, or anything that defies human limitations were all that occupied my mind when I took this picture. I remember looking at the ladder and thinking, “if only this ladder led me to the sky.” As much as I did not want any faint trace of the Covid-19 pandemic in this description, it is still something we all faced and are yet experiencing to some degree. I took this photo in my house while Qatar was under lockdown.

Photography compels me to appreciate my surroundings regardless of how familiar they are, or maybe my appreciation for my surroundings is what made me get into photography in the first place. I enjoy digital photography and analog film, but analog film is more meaningful to me because it combats the modern prevalence of getting things quickly and conveniently. The digital world is a bit too overwhelming for me, whereas analog gives me a lot more steadiness and patience.

Before the lockdown, I used to go on many photo walks in all kinds of locations with other photographers. We would walk around together and document the place with as many pictures as possible. But during the lockdown, I often had to take photo walks around my house and ended up seeing this arbitrary but beautiful ladder connected between my house and my neighbor’s. The sight of this ladder accompanied me for months in quarantine. However, it still presented itself as a lovely metaphor every time I saw it. It magnified
my yearning to go somewhere miraculous, away from the insipid reality I was living in. I was hoping to go somewhere where the air tastes differently.

From that time to today, I still believe I have unlocked potential that awaits me in a foreign place. Still, I am happy this belief has not left me stagnant but instead propelled me to at least practice what I love for now, and perhaps prepare for that alternate reality and place that I very much hope to experience.

What I love most besides photography is studying music in my spare time. Music is invariably there for me regardless of where I run. I hope to never give up on playing and loving music, and looking at this picture reminds me of the potential I own, and I hope it stirs the same feeling in you. Perhaps my “potential” physically cannot include going beyond my human experiences (this would sadden the Haya that was in lockdown), but at least it embraces my love for music and my ability to settle somewhere I belong.

Lastly, I want to thank Best Writing for providing people with an incredibly essential outlet to use. It is a critical initiative that makes one feel seen, valued, and heard. I greatly commend everyone contributing to it in any way.
Embracing Ambiguity — What Does It Mean to Me?

Embracing ambiguity means accepting that there are things that you cannot control. Therefore, stay calm, go with the flow, keep a positive attitude, and trust God that all things work for good. —Vanessa Lina

Creative curiosity. —Mo Younes

Ambiguity is the new normal. The world is evolving. For instance, the weather pattern itself has changed. However, we can, as a human race, adapt to every change. The irony is that the problem creators were once the problem solvers. We have to pay the price for tainting the earth. So, we end up in the vicious cycle of problem-creating and problem-solving. Hopefully the legacy we leave behind for the generations to come will not be of just, chasing power and lust but of mutual love, respect, integrity, selfless service, leadership, loyalty and excellence. Together we can head towards a better world not just in words but in action despite the ambiguities ahead. —Neenu Shaji

The spheres in which one can safely say what one thinks have shrunk and dwindled. Smile and nod. Log off. —Anonymous

Resignation to the disorder of the world. —Phillip W. Gray

To me, embracing ambiguity is about being open-minded, staying curious, and accepting that most things in this life are not crystal clear and do not always go as planned. Most of my deepest learning experiences and best adventures have taken place in the ambiguous moments! —Sara Hillman

Chaos. —Anonymous

Understanding that things are not black or white, but there are different shades of gray in between. —Karina Santana

I’d like to share something I read about “Embracing Ambiguity”: As you adjust to loved ones being at risk, working from home, unemployment, or whatever has manifested in your life as a result of Covid-19, I invite you to consider what choices are you making towards living amongst uncertainty. It’s completely okay to feel anxious, nervous, uncomfortable, exhausted, and even angry at how things have changed. Acknowledging these feelings
makes you more understanding of yourself, and even others, as you try to navigate these changes. — Adil Egaili

Life is full of ambiguities. You learn to deal with them. Some of us may even embrace them. I suppose that’s what life is about: the never-ending struggle to accept the things we can’t understand or the things we don’t like. — Mark Van de Logt

Uncertainty; accepting that we do not know everything and it is ok; understanding that those things (ways of thinking, doing, being) that differ from us are not wrong, just different. — Karina Santana

Accepting. — Anonymous

The same as “embracing life.” — Nancy Abraham
Dear Readers:

Welcome to our ninth volume of Best Writing! This volume explores the theme: “Embracing Ambiguity.” Ambiguity is itself ambiguous. Some people mistake ambiguity for vagueness. However, these two terms are different. “Vagueness” is a lack of precision, whereas “ambiguity” is most often defined as having multiple meanings or interpretations. Ambiguity involves uncertainty, yes, but not imprecision. The word “ambiguous” actually comes from the Latin term, which means “wandering about” (Nordquist, 2019). Its Latin root is ambo: “two at the same time” (Gamboni, qtd. in Otty and Roberts, 2013).

At this point, you may be wondering what all of this has to do with Best Writing 2022? Why is the theme for this volume “Embracing Ambiguity”? What does it mean to “embrace ambiguity”? We humans have a tendency to think of ambiguity in negative terms, as something to be avoided, something that feels unsettled, unsettling.

Unsettling. This is why the Best Writing committee selected the term ambiguity to explore in 2022. The eighth volume of Best Writing (2021) was entitled “Moving Forward” in hopes that the pandemic was in the “rearview mirror.” In last year’s volume, our esteemed colleague and BW creator and former editor, Dr. Mysti Rudd, noted that as much as we “[...] longed to move forward [and] to put Covid-19 in the rear view mirror [it] refused to recede.” And still, more than halfway through 2022, it refuses to yield to our astounding capacity to invent new technologies to reduce its impact, to pull together to protect our most vulnerable, to fight our common enemy. Although the current pandemic “has been a great unifier and differentiator on various levels [the] one constant it has generated is a sense of pervasive anxiety over endless what-ifs and what-thens” (Bhattacharjee, 2022). We have been unable to vanquish the enemy, leaving us unsettled, wandering about through a fog of uncertainty. We are unsure. We are unsteady. We are unclear.

Perhaps we have grown complacent, even smug about our abilities to know and thus to control nature, to bow it to our will. Our Best Writing committee asks: what if we were to embrace ambiguity, instead of avoiding it? What if we were to think of ambiguity as a gift?
Keats coined the term “negative capability” to describe the artistic imagination as occurring when we allow ourselves to be: “[…] capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Hirsch, 2014). It is “a moment ripe with creative potential” (Otty and Roberts, 2013). However, it is not simply the artistic imagination that is spurred on by ambiguity. Otty and Roberts point out that “more sophisticated theories of scientific knowledge recognize that ambiguity is an inescapable feature of the pursuit of knowledge, and indeed may have potential benefits, generating openings for innovation in scientific practice” (pg. 41). Thus, ambiguity may be the basis for knowledge creation across all disciplines.

In a sense, the ninth volume of *Best Writing* was a gift to us, Dr. Mary Queen and Sahar Mari, the new co-editors for *Best Writing 2022*, from Dr. Mysti Rudd, whose creative spirit animated the original *Best Writing* (2014) and its seven subsequent materializations. Dr. Mysti created and continues to foster a place in which our “poet-engineers” explore and share their own experiences, ideas, and “ambiguities,” a space that dissolves the engineer-scientist/liberal arts binary, as well as the student/staff and student/faculty and staff/faculty binaries. She fostered a community of writers-readers who share their gifts in an unending cycle. *Best Writing* fosters an emotional and intellectual commitment to the value of sharing with others whatever we in the TAMUQ community, most especially students, want to, perhaps even need to, share. In the eight chapters that follow, you will discover the range of experiences and stories that individual members of our community have chosen to share with us.

The process of “embracing ambiguity” didn’t come easy. Dr. Mysti has done such a wonderful job with previous volumes that the idea of trying to fill her shoes was daunting. Keeping with the tradition of welcoming all kinds of submissions, you will find poems, reflective writing, research papers, and personal essays. In the spirit of “moving forward,” we invited more members to the committee to explore new ideas while collectively keeping the “soul” of *Best Writing* alive.

We invited writers to respond to the theme: “Embracing Ambiguity.” The range and thoughtfulness of their responses is inspiring. We encourage you to ponder “what ‘embracing ambiguity’ means to you.”
In our first chapter, “Capturing Longing,” writers relive moments from their past with vivid details allowing readers to immerse themselves in the experience. Through the writer’s thick description, we stand in the shadow of their memory seeing, listening, smelling, tasting, and feeling the significance of that moment. The following chapter, “Revealing Emotions,” spirals into the inner vortex of self, diving into the sometimes dangerous, sometimes exhilarating undercurrents of emotions. Chapter 3, “Finding Ourselves,” continues the inner exploration of identity, navigating through the challenges of self-discovery. Stories of accepting hardship—sometimes thorny and ambiguous—exemplify the value of “Embracing Struggle.” The next chapter explores what it means to push the limits of our mind and body. “Questioning Power” moves outward from self to others, interrogating the boundaries defined by society. “Standing Still,” reflecting on where we’ve been, enables us to recalibrate our course toward the future. The beautiful photo of the sunrise/sunset for the final chapter, “Expressing Gratitude,” reminds us to stay in the moment, acknowledging how far we’ve come, and being mindful of the limitless opportunities ahead. We end this volume with seniors sharing their parting words as they close their chapter at TAMUQ — for now.

And so, we gift you, dear readers, this ninth volume of Best Writing — Embracing Ambiguity — with hopes that our community might be able conceive of and enact a new spirit, one that embraces “personal and collective well-being based on denaturalizing the need for constant certainty as a pre-requisite for [our well-being]” (Bhattacharjee, 2022). Margaret Atwood suggests that “gifts transform the soul in ways that simple commodities cannot” (2019). How they may do so is ... ambiguous.

Embrace ambiguity as a moment of ripe potential. We hope you share your own gifts with us in future volumes of Best Writing.

Happy reading!

Dr. Mary Queen | Ms. Sahar Mari

Co-editors, Best Writing 2022
Acknowledgements

We appreciate each and every one of the students, staff, and faculty who bravely submitted their pieces for potential publication in this year’s volume. Without your vulnerability in sharing your stories, this *Best Writing* volume would not be possible.

We also greatly value the fresh perspectives, new ideas, and creativity provided by the 2021/2022 *Best Writing* Committee composed of one graduate and nine undergraduate students, six staff, and four faculty members:

**Abdullah Kabalaki**, Class of 2023  
**Aljawhara Althani**, Class of 2023  
**Amanda Cruz**, Class of 2025  
**Amna Cassim**, Class of 2024  
**Dr. Bryant Scott**, Liberal Arts  
**Fatima Abuhaliqa**, Class of 2023  
**Ira Setiawan**, Library  
**Khadija El Cadi**, Liberal Arts  
**Dr. Konstantinos Kacosimos**, Chemical Engineering  
**Marwa AbdelGawad**, Class of 2012  
**Dr. Mary Queen**, Liberal Arts  
**Meera Jarrar**, Class of 2025  
**Dr. Mohamed Fadlelmula**, Petroleum Engineering  
**Nikoloz Vashakidze**, Class of 2024  
**Olena Snitko**, Liberal Arts  
**Sahar Mari**, Center for Teaching & Learning  
**Saud Al-Thani**, Class of 2024  
**Shauna Loej**, Center for Teaching & Learning  
**Vanessa Lina**, Center for Teaching & Learning  
**Wala Abdelhalim**, Class of 2025

Thank you to all members of the *Best Writing* committee for serving on the committee, promoting the initiative, reviewing submissions, and helping with the launch party. Special thanks must be given to Ira Setiawan and Khadija El Cadi for serving as project managers who collected and organized all submissions, communicated with authors, and brought it all together. Vanessa Lina, the backbone of this committee, tracked the budget, coordinated tasks and helped in organizing the launch event, always with a can-do attitude and a big smile. Aljawhara Althani provided insightful comments and challenged our graphic designer, resulting in the beautiful publication you hold in your hands today. Drs. Mohamed Fadlelmula, Konstantinos Kacosimos, and Bryant Scott for advocating for
the value of *Best Writing* to all students and faculty. We also appreciate Shauna Loej’s contributions including recruiting and coaching student speakers for the book launch event. Thank you to all student committee members who bring enthusiasm, humor, and new ideas to the work of the committee. And finally, we are especially grateful to former student Safin Bayes ('21) who served as a brilliant master of ceremonies at the 2021 virtual book launch, and for doing so from more than 10,900 kilometers away!

The cover photograph contest winner, Haya AlNaimi, was chosen by the following committee:

Olena Snitko (chair), Karina Santana (Library), Stephanie Martinez (Department of Student Affairs), Sara Amani (former student), Mohammad Younes (Office of Admissions), Dr. Bernard Lamel (Chair of the Division of Liberal Arts and Science), Joselia Neves (HBKU).

A special thank you to George Hale for providing editorial suggestions to preserve student voices and to Lesley Kriewald for diligently reviewing the manuscript and getting it ready for production. Also, thanks to Khaled Farzat for his meticulous edits on the Arabic submission. We are especially grateful to Dr. Mysti Rudd who graciously volunteered to carefully review all poetry submissions. We were lucky to again collaborate with graphic designer, Jawad Hamdan, who enlivened this year’s *Best Writing* with playful and brilliant interpretations of the images capturing this year’s theme: Embracing Ambiguity.

We are thankful to Dr. Bilal Mansoor, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, for his willingness to support this project in collaboration with the Liberal Arts Program under the leadership of Dr. Bernhard Lamel. Throughout the years, *Best Writing* has significantly grown — in its page count, number of authors, as well as its readership — and we hope that it continues to benefit the students and fulfill the university’s mission to educate holistic engineering leaders. We greatly appreciate the continued support by the Deans to fund this student-centered anthology — which is now in its ninth year.
Dedication

The ninth volume of *Best Writing* is dedicated to the TAMUQ Liberal Arts faculty whose integrity and commitment to students’ learning and holistic development prepares them to contribute not only to their profession but also to society. Thanks to these faculty for ensuring that students’ core curriculum is grounded in the richness and diversity of our shared humanity.

This volume is also dedicated to Dr. Mysti Rudd. Dr. Mysti’s firm belief in the power of the written word and the importance of sharing stories to build community inspired her to conceive the idea of this anthology. Her vision, persistence, and determination brought it into being. Dr. Mysti has dedicated the last eight years to growing this publication and fostering students’ confidence in themselves and their perception of themselves as writers. She spent countless hours encouraging potential authors to submit their stories, coaching them, revising with them, and finally celebrating their published work. *Best Writing* commemorates the many experiences and varied stories of TAMUQ students, faculty, and staff — connecting people through the power of language and image.

Lastly, this volume is dedicated to all the students, staff, and faculty at TAMUQ who honor the powerful practice of writing. *Best Writing* contributes significantly to transforming the disparate individuals at TAMUQ into a community connected by our shared love of and commitment to writing and reading.
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Capturing Longing
You know those days when there is a lot you are thinking about and don’t know how to express your thoughts, so you grab a paper and a pen and start writing. This piece is the outcome of one of those days. As the author of the poem, I wrote to describe the whole adventure of looking for something that is too close yet too far away for you to find it. Such as looking for yourself, for the you that you may have lost or may not have found yet. I think many people can relate to this poem, each from their perspective because everyone is looking for something, whether it is tangible or intangible.

Hala AlMughanni
I Look for You

Between the lines of a fairytale,  
that ends with happily ever after.  
Between the lines of a poem,  
written by a lovesick poet.  
Between the petals of a timorous lily  
hiding its beauty from a scrutinizing world

I look for you

In the barrel of a rolling wave.  
In the bubbles of froth  
dancing on the surface  
of a perfect cup of coffee.  
In the jazzy ribbons of a rainbow  
gleaming as the sun peaks through the clouds

I look for you

In the blackness of a starless night  
and the brightness of a cloudless day.  
Between the scintillating  
golden strings of sunlight,  
between the pale  
silver bands of moonlight

I look for you.

Hala AlMughanni is a mechanical engineering sophomore who has an enthusiasm for writing, who writes when there are too many thoughts, too many emotions, and too many words bottled up in her. She started writing as a hobby when her teacher Mrs. Sarah made her unleash her writing talent in 11th grade, and she hasn’t stopped ever since! She hopes to use her love for writing to develop engineering in some way one day.
Wala
Abdelhalim
My Distant Friend

A place of significance? Isn’t that too broad a term to mean something particular? A few places come to mind, but they don’t do my curiosity justice. Do I talk of home? I have had a few too many for that word to mean much.

I sat on this topic for a few nights now, and I have yet to reach an end. Thus, I conform to my old habit and sit in our backyard facing the night sky in an attempt to clear my head. Qatar’s moon isn’t as luminescent as that of Sudan, and the stars are hidden away in the void of the night. Back home they used to be too many to count, but now my fingers grow numb while I look for more than three. Even after laying there for hours, nothing came to mind.

“Does the moon not respond outside of my late grandparents’ yard? Will it only listen to my questions when I lay in my grandmother’s arms, on those metal-framed beds?”

Their house is in the region of Algoz in the south of Sudan. Algoz was certainly different; it was where the village people lived among modern walls. Though it might not look that way from outside, we had electricity and television, the water ran cold, and the doors locked well. The cracks on the walls were but a testament to the longevity of the area. The area was stuck 30 years back and all that is old and traditional felt in place.

I wasn’t the most observant kid, but even with my distracted half-asleep gaze and travel fatigue, I recognized when the cities ended and Algoz began. The distinguishable scent triggered my saliva, the cars began to disappear, and the children emerged, their loud laughter ringing my ears through the closed car windows. The two-hour long journey suddenly felt worthwhile.

There is one wide field of sun-kissed sand where the neighborhood kids played, and everyone else sat on top of the four cars parked nearby, watching the game with great anticipation. I never knew who won because the game never ended and new players were constantly
added. A few homes surround the field in a curve and on the end of this array is my grandparents’ house.

There you stand in front of these giant black metal gates, which remain unlocked night and day. On your left around the corner is a well that my great-grandfather built decades ago, the bricks gouging out of its side and the trees growing into it forming a peculiar shade. There is always a metal cup on its brim, for any passerby to use. Everyone in the neighborhood, old or young, has once had a drink from this well. The atmosphere exudes kindness and love, and you have yet to set foot into my grandparents’ yard.

I reckon you can’t stand out there under the hot Sudanese sun for much longer, so you go in. The gates creak open, an array of sunlight reflecting off their glossy finish. There it is, a rectangular yard which to my child-self seemed endless. The ground is of burnt clay bricks, their crimson color shone best after rain, and the walls are of various shades of red and brown stones. The house looked like all the others in the neighborhood 2, yet—to me at the very least—it felt sacred, a soil on which all our unrelated family trees flourished.

If you look up front, you will find a wash basin used for ablution (wudu) in the distance. It is of a light peach brick that looked unnatural amid browns, yet it fitted oh so perfectly in that far left corner. Its faucet ran cold water even on the hottest of summer days. I am still in awe of its functionality after being used by three generations of both (close and distant) family and strangers who were in a hurry to go pray. The stream of water is almost silent when accompanied with the engines of cars driving by the house, the cheers of the kids playing football on the street, the far away radio music, and the tea talks of the neighborhood aunties and uncles just outside.

Two peach colored metal-framed beds sit on your right, though you may find them elsewhere as they change places every Friday. However, I’m not certain they still do; five years is quite a long time, isn’t it? I reminisce about the late nights where I laid in my late grandmother’s arms, staring at the star-filled sky and singing one of her latest lullabies. My most frequently sung one translates to:
Oh, my moon, oh lovely moon, won’t you check on mom and dad and tell me when they are on their way back.

I remember sleeping on those beds, which we often pushed together in the middle of the yard, enjoying the cool breeze and waking up to the sunlight gently kissing my cheeks (though the mosquitos always got to me first).

My grandmother said some of the most brilliant poetry while sitting on those beds. She had one of us write her words down since she couldn't read or write. Maybe in the future, when I need inspiration, I will visit those beds, lay down on their cool mattresses, and stare at my moon again. For now, however, I must abide my hopes a sincere goodbye and continue to reminisce on that favorable place of mine.

If you are to look beyond the beds to the far right, across from where the wash basin lies, there are two doors. They are simply white metal doors with glass windows on each side. Beyond them my memory is quite feverish, but I most certainly remember the laughter and song, the way time was an ignorable concept, and the distinctive taste of hot milk. The house knew a fair share of my mischiefs, but the yard knew far more.

The yard did not make up a great deal of their house; it was simply an extension of where all the memories were truly made, but to me it stands more sincere. Perhaps I recognize it as truly “my own,” compared to the actual house, which belonged to everyone who visited. The yard was the one place where the world revolved around me alone. The moon was mine and the wind twirled to my entertainment. In heavy rain, I sat by the white doors, staring through the fog of their windows to the rain droplets bouncing off the bricks, washing off the dirt brown and showcasing their crimson hue. My face would light up with surprise during the color reveal as if I hadn't witnessed it hundreds of times before.

I don’t recommend you blindly trust my narrative, for my depiction is but fragments of memory viewed through rose-colored lenses. It is likely that the ”real” yard is simply shades of brown and grey,
humidity and headache. Nevertheless, it unveils my past and youth, allows my child mind to flourish far beyond the physical factors, and becomes the space embodiment of my past pure self, which I have grown unfamiliar with. I am allowed this nuanced sense of security for I could never truly lose myself as that yard stands rejoiced, awaiting my triumphant visit.

To best state my dear fondness of this yard, I call it the close friend of a lifetime. The Sudanese culture I grew amid recognized the significance of friendship; we are told stories of friendship and how it surpasses obstacles of war, time, and distance. Swinging my feet off the corner of the metal-framed beds, I would always lavish such a great bond, one that exceeds the test of time, not aware that I already had it.

My grandmother’s yard is the friend I knew from before I could open my eyes; it saw my first falls, tears, and joys. It saw my heartbreaks from early on and introduced me to all the miraculous beauties of life. As I grew up, I took my grandmother’s yard for granted. Then I had to leave the country and leave it behind. I tried to stay connected, but I couldn’t do much it was all out of reach. As time goes by, I slowly lose ties with it and the feelings and sights I grew accustomed are beginning to be foreign.

To expect my dear friend to remain unchanged when I am away is rather selfish of me, naive even, yet I cannot help but ponder on the slight possibility of the rain smelling as poignant, the noise sounding as soothing, and the stars shining as brightly. Nothing can overcome the test of time, even the area that was stuck 30 years in the past could adopt the modern ways. The cracks must inevitably get covered, the color changing bricks will be permanently stained with that dirt brown shade, and the car engines will one day overtake the noise palette unique to that place. Perhaps the inevitable has already occurred.

This distance of little to no connection arouses at the very least an uncertainty that hinders my comfort and arouses a lingering anxiousness of something that I hardly have control over. In a more morbid sense, this fear of a partially inevitable loss empowers my
connection; it allows for the yard to be far more significant to me than my own self.

Thus, my place attachment to this yard is akin to the one you feel for a distant old friend; one that you hold more significant than your own self.

References

Wala Abdelhalim was born and raised in central Sudan. Wala is what one may consider culture and family oriented. Enjoying the little nuances in life led to an imaginative mind from earlier in her youth. She enjoyed writing about the different particulars, from the tickle of rain to the loud chatter of crowds on a Thursday afternoon.
Branches

Where do we go
when we are no longer
here?

Who do we become when
we are no longer us?

An army of me
marches behind me
out of the cold, clear past
through the
fractured present
into the future

Where is the me that made
myself?

Where is the you that
never was?

What will become
of our
now?
This piece was originally an assignment; a dull, bland task that had to be completed, but through sleepy rambles and a lot of self-reflection on the past, morphed itself into a story of personal meaning and contemplation. Experimenting with self-awareness and view, hindsight proved itself to be naturally biased in ways I could not even begin to fathom as I attempted to deconstruct my way from the inside out. This piece was a journey on both the conscious and subconscious level, with sudden realizations of previously trivial details becoming a staple of the process, and I hope that as you read on, you are able to feel even a semblance of these infinitesimal moments of euphoria that I did.

Meera Jarrar
Children’s Museum: 
The Art Studio

One: Interaction¹

A metallic blue kaleidoscope with silver swirls set upon a purple table, alongside a piece of white, A4 paper and a print of a painting of a woman made of too many colors to count. She looked like a figure from a Picasso artwork, though I didn’t know it at the time. The background was a pale peach, although there were significant splotches of forest green, magenta, and bright yellow decorating the art. She sported an odd-shaped object on her head: circular, tall, pinched near the top, but widening out, something akin to a flower vase. This “hat” was predominantly black, red, and blue, with flashes of light orange and rose pink.

As for me, I was sitting at the beginning of a short row of plastic chairs, mine being red, followed by a sunset orange one, and then emerald green. On my other side was empty, leaving space for passersby. The room itself was enclosed in glass, which had two stripes, green and blue, running all around, and contained a couple of wood benches. Only one of the four walls was actually made out of brick; however, you couldn’t really see it due to the sheer number of shelves and drawers on it, filled with art and crafts supplies such as yarn, glitter, crayons, and more. As your eyes raked over the room, they would have gone over a cement beam once in a while. It may have seemed plain and lacking in comparison to other, more eye-catching objects, but the red and yellow circles on the beam give it a pop of color, and make it fit in with the general theme: youth, vitality, and life.

The Art Studio used to be my favorite place to go to in the Children’s Museum. As such, I would spend hours upon hours there, sometimes the entire visit, neglecting to visit other, more interactive

¹ (Scannell & Gifford, 2014, p. 291)
exhibitions. It was as if visiting the studio was a requirement, a part of the routine, and thus not doing so was an impossibility.

Two: Identity

While most of my visits to The Art Studio were random and of my own volition, I once had a scheduled activity there as part of winter camp. I remember it being early in the morning, the sunlight softly filtering through rectangular beige blinds onto the large wooden table, standing tall and rigid, in the middle of the room. The light caused an odd sort of pattern, similar to a barcode. There were six children, all seated on one side of the table in thick winter coats, and two volunteers, who were meant to guide us through the activity, which revolved around trying to draw everyday objects from a purely physical perspective. In front of each of us was a small piece of paper, an assortment of pictures from everyday life, and a variety of colored pencils, of which the most available are shades of green, to my great displeasure. We were asked to randomly select a picture and try to draw it, and when my turn came, I blindly chose a front-facing image of colored pencils in rows. I remember having a sort of inner conflict and frustration: I couldn’t draw the pencils. In hindsight, I realize it was because I could not bring myself to see the actual object as it is, but rather only as the abstract concept of coloring. I was close to tears when one of the volunteers in a blue smock approached me. They then proceeded to draw colored triangles to represent the pencils, and I could finally see it.

It was the first time I remember growing aware of my surroundings as actual objects instead of a setting for my life experiences. This new perception of the world around me led to a new perception of myself too; I was now able to look at myself from an outsider’s point of view, and that astounded me. I don’t believe there could have been a merging of my sense of identity and the physical environment around me without a conscious awareness of both, but it was that moment in time that caused a pivotal change in my mindset. So, in

2 (Scannell & Gifford, 2014)
addition to feeling fondness and nostalgia for The Art Studio, it is also be the place I associate with the beginning of my self-awareness.

**Three: Release**

Not long after my self-awareness epiphany, we had another activity that involved creating dolls out of recycled materials. Laid out on the table were the materials my eyes feasted upon, starting with carton bags that came to form the body of my doll and ending with plastic bottles that were repurposed as eyes. The doll’s hair was created from discarded black string and the limbs out of pink smoothie straws. We were the same six kids as before, but the difference was that this time, their parents were with them, as was a journalist who wanted to write a small article about the benefits of the ongoing winter camp. I don’t really remember if my parents were there as I was overwhelmed by the sights and the sounds. I remember the lights being brighter than ever before, the background chatter of the room gradually getting louder with every passing minute, and people rushing in and out in a hurry. Suddenly, amid the chaos, I found myself being asked questions about my doll. I was terribly confused, my head felt light and my cheeks felt warm, but I answered as straightforwardly as possible. To be honest, I didn’t really understand what was going on or where it was leading to. However, a week later, my mother was reading the morning news over breakfast, flimsy pieces of paper with dramatic headlines and grayscale picture, with a hot mug of mint tea, and it was then I saw my name and comment mentioned in the article. I was delighted because I felt “famous.” More specifically, I felt as if my actions had left an effect and I was now significant, or valid, in a way. It never happened again, to say the least, but having the experience happen in The Art Studio, a place I “love,” made it all the more special to my child-self.

**Four: Realization**

At times, The Art Studio felt like a haven, it was a place of freedom and creativity; a place I could create and enjoy and receive both

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3 (Scannell & Gifford, 2014, p. 291)
4 (Scannell & Gifford, 2014, p. 291)
feedback and praise afterwards. To me, no other place at the time was able to give me that. School was a place of learning, but it felt too rigid and structured to actually be any fun. Home was comfortable and safe, but my mind could not associate it with any actual productivity. When I was bored of both, when I felt like I had to do something or I would go crazy (which to my child-self seemed like the biggest problem in the world), I would ask to go to The Art Studio. I was aware of the distinctive character of the place at the time, but only subconsciously, which manifested itself in my actions. I can now say that no other place felt like it; no other place let me do what I wanted to do in the same way. I could only get a taste of the experience somewhere else, and it was never enough.

Five: Creation

About 10 years after I had my epiphany and 15 minutes of fame, I went back to The Art Studio. However, this time, it was not for myself, but for others. I had stopped going to the Children’s Museum as a whole soon after my realizations; I had outgrown it. Nevertheless, during my junior year in high school, we had to volunteer at a variety of institutions, one of which was the Children’s Museum. Going back there after such a long time felt very nostalgic, but that wasn’t my focus, so I elected to ignore this bittersweet attachment. What was my focus, however, was handling the arts and crafts station at The Art Studio for two days as part of a festival. I designed my own activity for kids: making personalized corner bookmarks. What was significant here is that I remember being really concerned with making the place seem as inviting and comfortable as possible. I wanted the visiting children to have experiences as good as mine; for them to form an attachment to The Art Studio and what it can offer as a place, alongside a desire to visit again. Although I was a temporary member of the place, I felt a sense of stewardship. I believe it was mainly because I was the one designing and implementing the activity, but also because I wanted the place to be as special to other children as it was to me.

5 (Scannell & Gifford, 2014)
Six: Intensification

I believe that the purpose of The Art Studio was fully achieved, in the sense that it is a place that aims to help children unleash their creativity in a welcoming environment. Every interaction I had there only serves to reinforce this belief and re-achieve this goal, but perhaps what really made me attached to it was the time I spent there. The place felt familiar and comfortable, and it fit perfectly in the routine that was life. Feeling free to create and explore, being productive and creating artwork, it was all something I experienced every time I went there with no exceptions, and the stability of it was gratifying. I would almost call it a second home, if not for the fact that I had to leave at the end of the day. The design of the place and the time I spent there caused me to become attached to it, but the opposite is also true. When you look at it like that, it is more of a cycle than anything else: a loop that feeds into itself.

References


Meera Jarrar is a CHEN sophomore student from Jordan with a penchant for liberal arts. She enjoys reading existentialist literature and analyzing cinematography. You can usually find her in the library procrastinating her math homework. One phrase she lives by is “to each, their own,” and hopes that one day someone else will be able to see the wisdom in it.

6 (Scannell & Gifford, 2014)
Dr. Mysti Rudd and her ENGL 219 students

AlDana Al-Dosari, 
Salman Al-Khori, 
Maha Al-Mulla, 
Saif Al-Naemi, 
Asmaa Al-Qahtani, 
AlAnoud Alawainati, 
and Naseem Dehaibi.
Thirteen Ways of Looking at Art
-after a poem by Wallace Stevens

Among many engineering students,
the Art Spirit shrinks to fit the building’s blueprint.
O, Artist within, who taught you to appear
smaller than you are—and when?

Reading, listening, watching—
seeking to understand,
when the Artist within awakens,
the universe expands.

Born between colorful canvases
and mud, when I see a painting,
I wonder how it’s done—
until I lift a brush.

Pausing at a painting vivid, abstract and deep.
a stirring occurs between the seer and the seen,
while the artist, spent, lies in bed and weeps.

Looking at a painting
that is staring back at me,
I wonder who the subject is
and whether it is me.

Space in mind.
Place in soul.
When you hang a painting,
Art is your home.

Viewed in a museum,
admired in nature,
or practiced in the gym.
Art is a one-way ticket
from all you’ve kept in.
Exhausting our bodies, 
draining our thoughts, 
and shattering our souls,
Art drives us to the places we need to be 
but were warned not to go.

Writing rigorous rhymes. 
Singing soothing songs. 
Art is like picking up dimes 
to arrange in fresh designs 
in hopes of righting my wrongs.

Amidst mountains of chaos 
whose ledges I have crept across, 
though some say to sing is a sin, 
I keep singing.

Why is it I talk to paper? 
Are there stories I can’t tell? 
Maybe Art is the keeper 
of my imagined secrets.

Sad and mad, 
feared and attractive, 
inspired by hurt and love. 
Art is the smudged edge 
between black and white, 
male and female, dark and light, 
welcoming novices and devils alike.

Ears of the unheard, 
and eyes of the farsighted. 
No boundaries, no restrictions, 
no translation needed between 
the spirit of the Artist and the wisdom 
each soul seeks.
Revealing Emotions
Spiral of Flowers. Al-Hilal, Doha, Qatar 2020 / Sayed Kameli
writing this poem expresses how the play on words speaks to more than just one definition or explanation. it allows the reader to interpret it based on how they feel is relative to them. which opens a world of different interpretations and points of view.
It Started with a Secret

It started with a secret...
my heart wanted to speak but my mouth decided to deceive.
I tried my best to be proper, but I lost myself in copper.
This secret has no lock, just my deep mind to forget.
Please keep me there as I shall never leave,
for I am bolted onto your tongue.
Don’t gossip about me or I will be your biggest enemy.
Face me behind closed doors, never for the world to know.
Leave me be and let me be a part of you.
Although I fade into your long-lost mind,
I creep in when you’ve lost your mind.
I wait for you to want me, and I oblige.
“Here...here, Human, I am always there for you.
Even when you do not want me, I am here for you.
When you are sad, happy, or angry...just manifest me and I am there,”
says the secret to the lonely human.

Fatima Abuhaliqa is an electrical engineering junior. Writing is a way for her to express her vision through words. It also pivots her imagination into a world she creates herself.
“A Special Afternoon” is the first chapter of my book called Curse of Tomorrow. The story centers around a 14-year-old girl called Lucia, who unexpectedly meets a boy who will change her life forever. Through meeting him, she learns his secret, and the dangerous truth about time-travel. This book is about friendship, love, and change. I hope to publish the full-length version of this book someday.
A Special Afternoon

Afternoon befell the school, painting it with all shades of warm colors. It was finally the last lesson of the day. Lucia had her hand on her cheek as the messy classroom quietened down. The teacher already began the lesson, and it was almost midway through when Lucia realized she had not been listening to anything. Something else was on her mind. She peered over at her curly-haired friend.

“It’s not fair,” she whispered to Nala.

“What’s not fair?” questioned Nala.

“You know how … Anna has the perfect life?” Lucia said slowly, realizing it was a stupid thing to say halfway through saying it. “Like she’s pretty and has good grades and it’s just not fair … she also gets all the cute or cool boys.”

“You told me you didn’t think anyone was cute or cool,” Nala replied suspiciously.

“Yeah, but some are, like kind of.”

“Like who?”

“Honestly I don’t know, never mind,” Lucia slumped down on her desk. She gave up trying to explain her feelings to her friend. The history teacher talked on and on about a war she couldn’t care less about. Lucia was really bored of her life. Her eyes darted towards the tree outside the classroom window.

All she dreamed of was an interesting and eventful life. She wanted a cute guy who doesn’t have a crush on the most popular girl in school, Anna. Someone for her only.

She sighed as the bell rang. It was time to leave.

Outside, Lucia bid her friends goodbye and paced along the usual way home. Lucia’s house was only a 20-minute walk from school, so she always walked to school. She liked to feel the fresh air around her, but that was about it. Other than that, the roads became quite boring.
The main street near the school gates was always too crowded for her liking, while the street nearer to her home was completely empty.

Throughout her whole life, Lucia always lived in the same place and went to the same school. In her hometown, leafy bushes surrounded every corner. Even in the fall time, the trees were still blooming. Lucia had come to realize how boring her life really was as she got older. She would often feel jealous of other girls in her class who talked about their fun dates and exciting trips.

Suddenly, she tripped over a small rock and fell hard on her back. Pain shot through her body as she slowly massaged her behind.

“Are you okay? You look like you hurt yourself.”

Lucia looked up at the owner of the deep voice. There was a guy with an unfamiliar face standing in front of her, and he looked about her age. He had hair that matched the warm colors of the humid afternoon. She thought his facial expression looked confused, but the moment she noticed what was on his head, she became even more confused than him.

“Uh, yeah…” Lucia stammered, blushing at the handsome boy. He held out his hand for her and helped her up.

“Th-thanks,” blurted Lucia. At last, her long awaited prince has come to her!

“No problem.” She got startled at his deep voice once more. His eyes met hers as he added, “You’re clumsy.”

She took a good look at him now. On his head was something she had never seen on a human before: a pair of cat ears.

They appeared soft, just like a normal cat’s ears. She wondered if she was hallucinating. Was he a cat-human? Did these kinds of people really exist? Is her life finally becoming more interesting now?

“Maybe I’m so bored that I started making up things,” Lucia thought to herself. She found herself staring at him, and although she was aware of it, she couldn’t stop herself.
“Hey um-,” he spoke again, and she flinched.


“Well, I’m just kind of confused…” The boy’s ear twitched as he asked thoughtfully. “Do you know what year this is?”

“Huh?”

“Um…like what year are you living in? Is it the 1800’s?”

Lucia stared at him with a blank expression. “No, it’s 2014.”

“Oh,” was the disappointed answer she got.

“Oh,” Lucia repeated after him. Did she offend him? She hoped not. She was sad that her dream prince was kind of stupid. Maybe he needed some food. Or maybe he already ate good food? What did he eat for lunch? What did her mom prepare for lunch? She hoped it was potatoes and meat; she was really craving them right now.

After a few minutes of awkward silence, Lucia looked back at the boy and realized that there was a tail down his back. She really wanted to ask him about his cat ears and tail but thought she would be rude. So instead she asked, “So what year do you live in then? Not 2014?”

“No, 2318.”

“WHAT?” Lucia screamed from shock. Was this cat guy from the future?

“You see, my friend created this time machine that we decided to use to travel to the past, before your century, to see how the people used to live. But I can’t find him now…”

There were a million thoughts running through Lucia’s head. Although she was confused, she decided that she wanted to help him out.

“Okay, how old are you?” Lucia asked.
“I’m fourteen,” he answered. “You?”

Lucia felt really happy. “I’m fourteen too!” she said excitedly.

“Wow, a coincidence,” he smiled at her.

Lucia had the biggest crush on this guy. He was perfect. But the perfect moment with this perfect guy was ruined when Lucia looked at her watch.

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Lucia.

“What happened?” asked the cat boy.

“It’s already late, I need to go home…”

“Oh, I’m sorry I distracted you. Please forget about me.”

“But don’t you need help?”

“No, I’ll be fine,” he assured her.

Lucia didn’t want to leave him, but he wanted to seem responsible. Also, she was really craving the meat and potatoes that she assumed her mom made.

“Okay so…bye!” she waved as she ran home.

“Bye!” he waved back.

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Leen AlNouri is an electrical engineering major in the Class of 2022. Her hobbies include writing and drawing.
Vishmi
Singhapura
Closely

I loved you so closely, before
the pain became insufferable.

You loved so well
you slowly forgot how to speak.

I tried to change a stagnant man,
but you couldn’t absorb confrontation.

You chose me to assume I was your first.
But knowing me, I don’t absorb reassurance.

Just then, you chose her

In a mundane conversation
I learned how to fight,
so that I could let go later.

But you made it faster
when you loved so comfortably
to mistreat me better.

I thought of loving you at a distance,
for the peace of my heavy heart.

You tried to approach me.
But I kept my defense,

to end something I loved,
to continue loving it,
forever.

Vishmi Mandira Singhapura is a rising chemical engineering senior. She likes writing poetry and watching Korean dramas. She enjoys the depth life offers on simple terms.
Anonymous

Different people have different reasons to feel hate, and mine was my body. This hatred transformed into a disorder. It stuck with me for as long as I can remember, and it always felt like I wasn’t seen or heard. Therefore, I conducted this research for my ENGL 104 class, hoping that I’d figure out what led to my eating disorder, and to validate anyone that felt the way I felt. I also hoped this was a way to help others avert it before they get too deep into it.
I Feel...

It’s 1:30 pm, and I had just woken up. I kept myself up last night, so I would sleep in later today. I had to skip breakfast, a trick I had learned at too young of an age. My boyfriend and I were going out for dinner tonight, and I had to look my best. I look around my room, making a mental checklist of what I can do to pass the time. I open Netflix on my phone, and I start pacing around my room. In my mind, I couldn’t stop until I finished two complete forty-minute episodes. I had to burn the calories I’d be eating later. I take a shower, I tidy my bed, I do my hair and makeup, and it’s now 6:00 pm. I did it; I passed the time without eating. I feel so good!

It’s 6:30 pm, and I’m at The Cheesecake Factory looking at the “SkinnyLicious” menu, better known as the “healthier options” menu. I looked up the calorie counts of meals that seemed somewhat appealing to me on my phone. I decide to go with the Mexican Chicken Lettuce Wrap Tacos, the lowest calorie choice at 220 kcal. When our orders start coming in, I look around, and his plate looks more appetizing than mine. I look back down at my plate, and I start eating it slowly to avoid comments on how hungry I seem to be. I’m not even halfway done with my meal, and he’s done with his. I see him wipe his mouth with satisfaction. Everything in me wanted to finish my plate, but I was too embarrassed to be the only one eating at the table. I hate this. I feel so hungry.

“I’m so full. Do you want to have some of mine?” I hear myself say.

“Are you sure? You’ve barely touched your plate, babe,” he says with a concerned look on his face.

“Yeah, I had lunch late today. Don’t worry!” I reply with a smile as I drown out the sounds of my rumbling stomach. “Try some of mine; it’s delicious,” I add, in hopes of changing the subject and comforting his worries.

It’s 11:00 pm, and he drops me off at the back door that leads to the kitchen. My stomach is now growling at me like it’s begging me to eat. I try to resist, but I can’t handle it anymore. I opened the fridge and
cabinets that were filled with foods I’ve restricted myself from the whole day. Everyone was asleep; it was just me, my thoughts, and the forbidden food. I look at the box of 4-pack Oreos, and I feel it calling my name, so I impulsively grab it. I open one of the packs and begin eating. It feels so wrong, but I keep going. I feel controlled.

I have eaten four packs now. Why am I still eating? I take out the tub of ice cream that’s been there for the longest time, and I thoughtlessly devour it all. Why am I still eating? I continue to grab any edible thing in sight and stuff my mouth with it. I want to stop, but I have lost control. I feel so uncomfortable, but I keep going until I can’t take in any more. I slide down the refrigerator and look around at the mess I’ve made. The forming tears blur my vision and make my surroundings look like a murder scene. Opened boxes, wiped out plates of food, and used spoons all lay there in a way where I feel judged by them. The guilt in me peaks, and a stream of tears falls down my face as I look down at my thighs and stomach. I hate myself. I feel so rotten.

After a few minutes of internal judgments and insults, I pick myself up from the floor and run to the bathroom in my room. I need to get all of that out of my body right now. I can’t think straight. I look down at the toilet bowl and, automatically as if I was programmed to do this, place my finger at the back of my throat, causing myself to throw up. I sit there, promising myself this was the last time I’ll do this and that tomorrow is a new start to my diet. I feel relieved.

I walk out of the bathroom and into my room. It is filled with mirrors, which is not my ideal place. I feel my room getting smaller, and the mirrors fill up the space, forcing me to look at myself. I look back, and all I can see is this ugly monster staring at me. I hate her. All I feel now is hate.

**Introduction**

Eating disorders (EDs). What are they, really? An ED is a severe mental health condition characterized by problems in eating behaviors and related thoughts and emotions. In general, those with an ED become obsessed with food and their size, weight, or
shape. There are many types of eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia (Knight, 2021). People with EDs suffer silently because of how little it is talked about. I believe Eds are a topic that should be talked about more often to make people with them feel seen and heard by everyone else. Their minds convince them that they cannot fit in, and when others belittle their struggles, they are reassured by this statement: “Eating disorders are the second most deadly form of mental illness. Approximately 10,200 deaths each year result directly from it—one death every 52 minutes” (ANAD, n.d.).

Its development must be talked about to help raise self-awareness to prevent reaching the extent of a severe eating disorder, whether intentional or accidental. This is very important to me as I was once a part of this group. It took me a long time to realize how my eating habits turned into a disorder and it felt like I was stuck in a maze with no exit. My research aims to understand and identify what factors affected the development of my eating disorder to find ways to prevent others from developing it.

**My Research Question**

What are the main factors that led to my ED and that could possibly lead someone else into theirs? How can it be averted?

**Methodologies**

How I chose to go around this was through primary research resources. I interviewed a university student who was once medically diagnosed with anorexia. I used her experience and mine with eating habits and our ED in general to develop questions for a survey I sent out to students.

**Interviews**

The interviews I conducted both used “convenience sampling” (Convenience Sampling: Definition, Advantages and Examples, n.d.).
**Interviewee:**
I chose this person to interview because I knew her well enough to know that she had an ED and found a way to recover. I asked her to sign an informed consent letter to make sure she knew what the topic was about and to allow me to ask my questions. I showed her the questions (see Appendix A) beforehand to avoid asking a very sensitive and personal question that could cause her any harm. She approved of them all, and I made sure she knew she could withdraw from any question, or the entire interview, at any moment if she felt the need to. I then proceeded by asking her questions related to her journey as a survivor of such a condition to get a clearer understanding of what this community goes through daily.

**Self-interview:**
I answered the exact same questions I asked the interviewee to see any relation I had with her answers and help conduct even more questions for the survey.

**Survey**
Using what the interviewee considered as “bad” eating habits, I established questions (see Appendix B) for my survey. I also added some questions about the psychological thinking of a person with an eating disorder that I caught myself and the interviewee both having. I wanted my survey to reach all students worldwide, whether in high school or university. Luckily, I was able to do that through my high school friends. I sent out my survey to them, and they all sent it to their university groups on WhatsApp. I also wanted some replies from older generations to compare the results, so I sent the survey to the more aged part of my family. I also asked them to send it out to their friends and coworkers. My survey circulated well enough, leaving it with 192 responses.

**Results & Discussion**
“A friend left a comment after a school event saying I had a large belly and that it stuck out ‘like her dad’s.’” I never really thought that deeply
about my body until that comment came across. Afterwards, my only goal was to lose weight” (Anonymous, 2021).

“My family realized, but did not think much of it because, in this world, skinnier is prettier. I clearly understood that when they would comment on how much healthier and better I looked” (Anonymous, 2021).

“People around me leaving comments like, ‘you look so good now’ and ‘oh my god, how did you lose weight that fast’ would motivate me to lose more. I felt like I was getting closer to fitting in” (Anonymous, 2021).

Those were the interviewee’s responses when I asked her about how her ED started in the first place, if anything encouraged it, and if anyone around her realized it. Anyone can tell that she was pressured into it just by comparing her to a man and then convincing her in a way that she looked better and more fit than ever when she lost all the weight. I completely related to all her statements. I generally thought getting skinnier would make me look healthier, more attractive, and more feminine because that’s exactly what everyone around me told me. It is a way of societal pressure, and it has been built into everyone’s mindset for women and men to look a certain way, no matter at what age. Looking around in the real world confirms that “skinnier is better” for women and “bigger is stronger and stronger is better” for men. Women were presented as small and petite for many years, especially with modeling agencies. It is only recently where “bigger” women can model, and even with that, their body type must be stated. No one has seen a model being labeled as “skinny,” so why should there be “plus-sized” labeling next to models who aren’t as “small?” This is a way of convincing women they have to look a certain way. A study showed that “In a college campus survey, 91% of the women admitted to controlling their weight through dieting” (ANAD, n.d.).

From the 192 responses to the survey, 115 were females and 77 were male. After comparing their responses to the statement “I’m terrified of gaining 2 kgs,” I found that the number of females that completely related to this statement (37) was almost triple that of
males (14). When normalizing this data to percentages, 48% of the males completely disagreed with the statement. Still, only 29% of the females did so. Looking at these numbers, I can conclude that the fear of gaining weight is more common in women than in men.

“I would wake up and check how much I lost overnight, and me eating on that specific day would depend on how much I lost” (Anonymous, 2021).

“It quite literally felt like two people were constantly in a war in my head, and it clogged up my mind to the point where I could not focus on school anymore, my hair would fall out, and I would faint in the middle of the university” (Anonymous, 2021).

When I asked the interviewee what her typical day looked like and when she realized she needed help, she replied with those statements above. I entirely understood where she was coming from with her habits. The mentality of wanting to “lose weight” to look better starts as a desire, turns into an obsession, and eventually affects the person psychologically. It ends up affecting the way they look at food: as if it were their enemy. This results in it becoming an obsession with food intake as they lose control of themselves and the ED starts controlling them instead. They start skipping meals to satisfy their ED, which leads to a lack of nutrients that the body uses to function and affects the person physically.

I compared the responses between how often a person skips meals and the importance of their weight from the survey. Of the people that considered weight as the most crucial factor in their lives, only 4% said they never skip meals and the other 96% percent skip meals more frequently. The same data shows that as the significance of their weight decreases, their likelihood to skip meals decreases consequently. It is evident that there is a direct relationship between those two factors.

“I matured at too young of an age when I heard my mom saying I shouldn’t eat that much, especially when someone was watching as it displayed bad etiquette” (Anonymous, 2021)
The interviewee replied with this when I asked her if anything influenced it. This shows how an external factor such as a parent can spark these practices. I believe this occurs to most people, especially ones surrounded by the Arab culture. Eating a “large amount” of food in front of people is looked down upon and is considered impolite. This tricks the brain into believing eating in public is a shameful act that leads to skipping meals. When the person finally decides to have a meal, it would be in secret. I experienced this at such a young age, thinking that’s what everyone does: eat in secret. We’d have dinner as a family, and I’d refrain from eating until everyone was asleep. I would hope no one walked in on me eating in the middle of the night. Studies show that “adolescents with secretive eating are more likely to report restrictive eating behaviors and purging than those who do not eat in secret” (Ranzenhofer, 2017).

With that said, I compared how much people agreed with the statement “I eat in secret” and how often they skipped meals from the survey. I found that people who never skip meals never eat in secret either. The more a person skips meals, the more likely they are to eat in secret. This, again, shows a direct relationship between those two elements.

My mom always asked my siblings and me why we would always complain about our appearance, body types, and measurements. She would always talk about how that was the last thing on anyone’s mind back “in her days” and how everyone felt comfortable and happy with their bodies. This made me wonder: is it more common in our generation to feel less comfortable in our bodies? When I was analyzing the survey results, I realized that a person’s discomfort in their bodies actually decreased with age. It was more common for the younger generations to dislike their bodies and avoid looking at them due to lower self-esteem. A large study showed that “42% of 1st–3rd grade girls want to be thinner; 81% of 10-year-old children are afraid of being fat, and 46% of 9–11 year-olds are “sometimes” or “very often” on diets.” (ANAD, n.d.).

I believe this is because of the excessive use of social media these days. Social media can influence a person’s way of thinking. This is
also a way of societal pressure as a whole. I could imagine myself feeling less and less confident with my body with every viral video of girls I watched on TikTok because of how “perfectly” they were shaped and built. This isn’t any of the girls’ faults, but the social standards set for everyone else, making it seem like you could only be labeled as perfect if you looked the same way they did. During my years of struggle with an ED, I have found a dark side to the internet. I have discovered many platforms where people encourage Eds and motivate everyone to join their “cult.” They would promote the unhealthiest eating habits and ironically end their sentences with “stay safe.” I was a child reading those tips and tricks and following them. I even caught on the terms they would use on their platforms like “safe foods” and “fear foods.” I can conclude that social media is a significant factor in today’s life with all that being said. It can influence many harmful things without the person realizing it.

**A message to you**

If you struggle with an ED or have a bad relationship with your body and food, please know that you are not alone. I hear your cries for help. I feel your battles. I see you. It might feel like there is no way out of it, but what start has no end? What entrance has no exit? The same way you found your way into it, you will find your way out.

For so long, I thought I could never get myself out of that state of mind, but I did, and so did the interviewee. So why can’t you? We all have ways to find comfort, and you can find yours, too. Mine was finding people on the internet who promoted healthy relationships with food. Watching them live their best lives and feeling no guilt with the amount they ate. Looking at their bodies and loving them precisely the way they are, even if they are not labeled as “perfect” by everyone around them. Yours could be visiting counselors with a specialization in EDs to help you through it. There is no shame in therapy and counseling, even if everyone around you thinks there is.

Recovering can be scary, and you may feel like you want to go back to your comfort zone. Keep your mind to it. If you think checking your weight might hurt your feelings, hide that scale. If calories
scare you, take those nutritional labels off the food packages. If a platform promotes EDs, delete that app. It’s a process, and it will take a long time, but it’s all so worth it in the end. You deserve to feel confident in your body. You deserve to feel satisfied after a meal. You deserve to feel happiness. And you are most definitely worthy of living a normal life.

References

Anonymous. (2021, November 11). (J. Jarrar, Interviewer)


Appendix A

i. How did it all start?
ii. How was your journey towards it?
iii. Did anything encourage/influence it?
iv. What did a typical day look like to you?
v. Did anyone notice it?
vi. When did you realize you needed help?
vii. How did you get help and how’s it going?
viii. What kind of things do you like to do to stay healthy and away from these thoughts?

Appendix B

i. I am (male, female, other, prefer not to say)
ii. My age group is (12–17, 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55+)
iii. I live in **insert country** (optional free write)
iv. I skip meals (often, sometimes, never)
v. Compared to other things in your life, how important is your weight to you? (Most important thing in my life. In between. Not important at all.)
vi. Do you feel comfortable looking at your body in the mirror? (Yes!! I love my body. Somewhat. No! I try to avoid looking at myself.)
vii. How much do you relate to this statement? (0%, 25%, 50% 75% 100%)
   **0% = I do not relate at all**
   **100% = I completely relate**
   • I’m satisfied with my eating patterns.
   • I feel guilty after eating something “unhealthy.”
   • The nutritional value of the food I’m eating matters to me.
   • My weight and measurements affect the way I feel about myself.
   • My life is centered around the food and/or meals I eat.
   • I eat in secret.
   • I’m terrified of gaining 2 kgs.
Nancy Abraham
Embracing Ambiguity, are you Serious?

Does water require the ocean to accept it prior to being in it?

From before our birth, until we die, every cell in our body is born, grown, mutates, and dies. This is a complete circle; a cycle of what is.

It is the sphere that exists in all living organisms and throughout the galaxies. Inside these sphere’s a natural flow exists. Some call it change while others call it evolution.

Neither change nor evolution require our embracing to exist; they exist inside of us and all around us.

This cycle cannot be broken by any means. It is absurd to think one can stop birth, or take out mutation, which makes it a complete and unchangeable cycle.

So, the true question is: why can’t we embarrass our true nature?

Is it because we are afraid of “the end?” Thinking that things that do not change are secure, and assuming they are warding off “the end.” The opposite must then be true because change brings us closer. Even a sturdy home will crumble a bit at a time.

If it is “the end” that we fear, then where does your faith truly lie? Doesn’t faith tell you that you never die? Even those bricks that you stake so high do nothing at the end of time.

I must then ask, does the ocean require the water to exist? And I will leave you at this.
Fatima Al-Khayarin

The poem represents an insight of random colorful thoughts poured in a paper.
Gray is the New Blue

Have you ever wondered why a synonym for sadness is “blue”? While Blue is ultramarine, azure, with some green, it’s AQUAMARINE!

Blue is confidence, faithfulness, and intelligence. Loyalty, trust, and integrity. It is tactful, reliable, and responsible, peacefulness and calmness. The color of a clear sky and a deep ocean. Blue shows perseverance, therefore it is strong. Referring blue to sadness feels wrong.

Don’t get out of the blues, as it is a delightful place; instead, why can’t a new word for sad be “Gray”?

So get out of the Gray, where a colorful soul never finds a place. Gray is clouds on a stormy, rainy day. Neither warm nor cold, neither spirit nor material, Gray is too weak to be considered masculine and too menacing to be considered feminine. Gray is lost; with Gray, nothing seems to be decided. So Gray is an unstable color in a palette. Gray can be black, and Gray can be white. Gray is indecisive, uncertain, and lost. Therefore, Gray is the new blue!

Stop calling sadness Blue, because Sad is when someone is broken-hearted, depressed, doleful, and down. These are all synonyms for “Gray.” When feelings are sad, then feelings are Gray. When you think you don’t really fit in or belong anywhere on a paint palette, when you no longer enjoy the colors...
of sunsets and sunrises,  
when it’s difficult to make choices in life,  
or wonder if you belong more to black or white,  
when you think you’re unworthy of love  
and not good enough for red hearts  
and see people’s true colors

That Gray feeling when you stop bonding with other colors,  
fearing you might disturb them with so much dullness,  
when you just stop loving your colorless self.  
When others share their colors with you, you’re just  
another shade of gray,  
but when you share your colors, they’ll change and  
transform into gray.

All colors came together in a palette of pain,  
seeking help, then leaving relieved,  
released and painted on a portrait of a rainbow  
but Gray was left behind  
because there was no place for Gray in the rainbow.  
Now is the time to embrace Gray,  
adding it to the Palette of Pain.

Fatima Al-Khayarin is a petroleum engineering student, Class of 2022.  
Besides engineering, she is passionate about writing poetry. What inspires  
Fatima to write is that poetry has no apoetry beautiful is the hidden  
meanings behind every word that each reader sees differently.
Finding Ourselves
I came to think of this piece when we were asked in my English 104 class to write about a struggle in life. Whatever it may be. My main focus in this piece was trying to express my feelings and make them seem as realistic as possible to the reader. Before this assignment, I wasn’t really a big fan of writing, but after expressing my feelings through this piece, I’ve grown somewhat fond of writing and will continue to pursue this hobby.
Why am I here? What on earth am I doing here? Looking at the top corner of my bedroom window—not covered by curtains—on an early Saturday morning, seeing the striking light of sunshine reflected through the glass, hearing the swishing sound of the wind and the voice in my head, again and again repeating the same question: why I am here? I have been long ignoring it, hoping he would one day give up, or would be satisfied with my achievements and vanish. Or at least he would give me a break and stop boiling in my head and destroying every moment. The voice never stops. “Why am I here?” The sunshine in the early morning is really the best and is meaning of life. It is a mixture of light, happiness, and warmth. It is strange; it not only penetrates the glass of the window to my gloomy room, it also gets through the flesh, bones, and blood to my inner organs, to my heart, and makes it lit, warm, and happy. It is only at that moment of the day that I feel I am delighted—satisfied with everything, satisfied that I am here, confident of all the hardships and heavy moments I must go through all day long. I can be confident that I am here again for a beautiful new day. Then, I raise up happy and warm, full of promising hopes reflected by the beautiful sunlight, and start my day again.

This energy and warmth give me the feeling of motivation. To push me to start up my new day. But I still must find the ultimate answer to the question of why I am here. I sometimes tell myself: isn’t it too early to answer that question? Maybe these philosophical questions should be answered at a more mature age than mine. The philosopher Rene Descartes had a rule that I really like: “…clarity and excellence.” My path should be clear to reach excellent results. Then I should answer the recurring question as soon as possible to draw the right path and choose the correct way that leads me to my goals. The irony is that the more the question repeats in my head, the less it gives me the courage and enthusiasm to rise and engage in drawing my path. It instead enslaves me in the feeling that nothing is worth it. In vain, I try to convince the voice speaking inside me that I have done this and that and that I am in a good place; however,
it gives me a feeling of frustration, replying to all my achievements and dreams “so what?” People spend their entire lives searching for something that makes their life have more meaning, and most people don’t even know what that thing is. “So, why bother?” As I lay there on my bed, tired and unmotivated, leaving my homework unattended, I think to myself again: “why am I here?”

I thought about every decision I’ve made in my life, imagining what would have happened if I chose a different option. All the actions I’ve made for the past 17 years led me here to my bed, feeling lazy and idle. Although everyone thinks college is the way, maybe it is not. What if I never chose engineering? Where would I be? A doctor perhaps, or a football player, for all I know. This questioning of everything—good or bad, chosen or imposed—is what gives me this bitter feeling and throws me into periods of laziness and no motivation. Nevertheless, I’m here now, and that’s the most important. Again, comes the fantastic sunshine penetrating the glass of my window, lightening my gloomy room and inspiring my tired heart with positive energy, after a long night arguing with my inner philosophical question: “why am I here?” That sunshine saved me from loss. That bright sunshine taught me that I love to be here. It taught me that whether I chose existence or not, it is so beautiful, wonderful, and amazing to be here. It led me to realize that whatever the option I come out with, it is nice to stick to it, it is positive to fight for it, and it is a joy to stand up and realize it. The morning sunshine is the new life regenerating inside me every day, pushing me for success and hope, and liberating me from questioning, frustration, and depression. Sunshine is the “clarity” in Descartes’ rule. It is so clear that it executes all the gloominess and defeats all the obscurity and unclear questioning. Now my path is clear and my aim is set. My plan is to improve my being here, to expand, achieve, and help to be positive throughout my journey here. I am here to trace a memorable voyage for myself and for those around me, full of love, hope, and positivity.

Mohamed Mounir Hamila is a Tunisian who was born and raised in Qatar. He is currently studying as a transient student in Texas A&M, Class of 2025.
Imane Kahramane

This essay is the first piece I wrote since entering university. It was for my ENGL 104 class, and we were asked to talk about our relationship with writing. I had to dig in deep and try to find all the feelings I have for words. This essay was written with all the threads I kept from the past. I hope my unconditional love can be felt in its words, that each letter you read will spark something. My parents are the ones who put the pen in my hands, and for them I owe this essay and many more. It is dedicated to them. I thank them, as well as every person who has made me write, for it is what deepened and strengthened this bond.
To a Faithful Lover

My earliest memories are but nebulous bodies. They roam around my being, only molded by thoughts sprung on summer evenings. The only constant is my love for drawing, or so I thought. You were here, patiently waiting for me to turn around. You hid beneath the pages of my first book. You laid gracefully on each word, steadily drawing me into a world that is yet to reveal its ends, spelled in warm light, a messy desk, and cloying chocolate bars. But I was stubborn. When I would never give in to my curiosity, you would send your minions, who knew just as much as you that I loved to salve with words, and I was a deft dancer. The earliest encounter we’ve had was in first grade, though I haven’t thought much of it, you were good-natured, and though you stole all my textbooks, they returned heaving with poems and an engrossingly enthusiastic narration, followed by detailed descriptions of a dim hallway and vegetated playgrounds. I loved reading what you brought; I guess that is why we became friends. A lot of times we would lose each other, but once reunited, our bond only grew stronger. I admit that drawing takes up all of my time; I apologize, really. Our parents are great friends; you know this. I opened my eyes to find sketchbooks and soft pencils wrapped in canvas sheets that failed to reveal a lone piece of lined paper.

You were very nervous when my English teachers gave us writing assignments. That is one thing I will never forget. You couldn’t bear the scowls my classmates wore when they were condemned to spend time with you. They didn’t hate you, or so I choose to believe; I do not dislike you. You were always graceful; you excused yourself each time you heard a sigh escape a poor high school sophomore’s lips. It was your call; they cried your name in silent letters. I spoke them too, but rather than an irritated exhale, I formed a soft, tender smile, spelled in the curve of my lips and wrinkles around my eyes. Then I sat, patiently waiting for you, observing your craft. You wrapped each word in roses and offered it to ungrateful hands; they latched onto your bouquets, but oftentimes discarded the most beautiful flowers, those you picked up, and added to a dainty arrangement. You turned to me exhausted and hollow, rummaging through your pockets and
muttering, “There must be something for you.” I repeatedly refused, stating that it’s my turn to give, and laughed at the bewildered expression on your face. You loved listening to my descriptions. Although clumsy, I loved to entertain you. I would scarcely narrate, painting instead, with what little words I had in my palette, a scenery that only you, my confidant, would see.

Drawing makes me incorporate life into everything I create, and I try to breathe it into every word I utter. This word bores you; I am aware of that. But you have taught me to be delicate. My strokes play a part in an orchestra you conduct; they learned to describe the words you affirm. In this last year, you gifted me a college essay. I love coming back to read it; each word is illuminated by my room’s fairy lights, sprawled across an old textbook. I see you in their reflection, working relentlessly. The deadline was a few days away, but both of us were so calm, happy, and composed. I was never able to label my feelings toward you, but the paragraphs spoke to me that night, I heard them stutter at each tap on my keyboard. Words kept slowly coming out and paragraphs were birthed; every letter was dancing to the rhythm of my thinking.

I typed my last word, and my whole essay denoted one word: Love. Love was what I felt when you kept me company and when I spent days thinking of you, restless and eager to meet you. This summer, you sang a sad song, one that I wrote, yes, but your voice was beautiful. My friends heard you sing and demanded more. I started college and we are closer than ever. I will love you until I become unable to reciprocate your efforts. Perhaps the next step would be for us to experiment with new genres and new flavors. I want a challenge that will spring more adoration. My heart is big enough, if drawing was my forever love, then you, writing, are the one thing I would never let go of.
Imane Kahramane is a petroleum engineering student in the 2025 class. Born and raised in Morocco, she got to experience the fusion of countless cultures and languages, even more so when she moved to Qatar to attend university. She enjoys sports, especially Formula 1. Writing is something that has accompanied her throughout her entire life, in many forms and shapes, and in many languages. This goes entirely to her parents, who have helped her nurture a love for words from a young age. Thus, this piece is dedicated to them, and to her family.
Amanda Cruz

Why did Orpheus turn around? The question has been around for centuries. A lover, a lyricist, a poet draws inspiration from the movie Portrait of Lady on Fire. It explores the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. With a doomed love from the start, Orpheus was a musician who fell in love with Eurydice and later attempts to retrieve her from the Underworld. As they exit the underworld, Orpheus was warned to not turn around or else he loses Eurydice forever. The piece aims to explore the internal conflict Orpheus faces throughout his life and possibly during the most important decision he makes. Ultimately, his poetic soul prevails, and the piece attempts begs to question the role tragedy plays in great art.
A Lover, a Lyricist, a Poet

You—
with your tenacity,
your careful manipulation
of letters and words,
blissfully ignorant
of their finite permutations

You—
with your eloquence,
as your deft limbs unite
with string and wood,
absent of any ghost
of pretention – simply pure and righteous

You—
are a visionary
who zealously dares
lead a life with only warmth and ardour.
Ever so alluring – You
are a lover,
a lyricist,
a poet.

So, I ask you
at which point do they meet?
Three tangents intertwined
becoming one singularity

So, I ask
within the labyrinth of You,
terrorized by three traits,
these three identities,
distinct—
desperate to triumph,
do you ever struggle?
“No,”
You would declare.

And when I met Death,
you journeyed
into the Earth—
down, down, down,
beneath the only blue we have ever known
you showed up
(of course!)

Oh, grieving, melancholic you!
your agony—
so, so tender
white searing pain,
sweeping through remote pitch black
permeating
rendering the world into an absolute state of disillusion
enveloped with turmoil and chaos

For when you wept,
scarlet coursed and flowed
feral and ruthless
like the river Styx.

For when you begged,
the Crown:
omnipotent and ominous
obliged.

You—
a masterful maestro,
cannot look back.
And if you do,
I shall perish forever—
two hearts severed.
There, in the realm of loss and hurt we made ours, reveled in joy, warmth and genius.

You—
a lover through pain,
a lyricist through wit,
a poet through gaze.

Amanda Cruz is a chemical engineering sophomore student from the Philippines, who deeply enjoys liberal arts. She likes analyzing Taylor Swift songs and reading feminist retellings of historical female figures. If she could pick two songs that everyone must listen to at least once it would be “Fast Car” by Tracy Chapman and “Vienna” by Billy Joel. You could probably find her upstairs in the library, or at DSA making coffee.
Kushal Guptha
Guruvasudevan

This piece is very dear and close to my heart. I openly discuss the difficulties and problems I faced as a new kid trying to fit in. I currently do not have the courage to say this story out loud, but I did find a way to share my story. I know that I am not the only one who has faced situations like this; so many of my friends in college share so many of my experiences. It is very easy to just give up and distance yourself from the world. It is necessary to have hope as you will find your people. Just as a caution this piece contains discussion and scenes of bullying.

I faced many social hardships during high school. It was hard, and sometimes I just wanted everything to just stop, transport myself to a lush green hilly paradise, and worry about nothing and no one. But if I were able to do that, the person who I am right now wouldn’t exist. High school is just a stranglehold between your academic and social life. Simple things become so complicated and convoluted. Your brain overloads, and you just want to take a nap all the time. This becomes so much more difficult with online learning.
My Name is Kush!

In the Hindu tradition, a starting syllable for a name is given when a child is born, using the date and time of birth. Mine was Ku, and my parents chose to name me Kushal. An innocent name filled with lots of love and care. I still remember my mom’s warm words as she called me baggu (little boy). I am an only child, which came with some downsides but a lot of perks. The loving way my family called me Kushal. I was raised in Pune, which is three hours away from the sprawling city of Mumbai. Pune is well known for being an IT hub. My mom is from Hyderabad, a vast metropolitan city, and my dad is from a small town, Coimbatore, which was an integral part of many townships around the place. They had an arranged marriage, which is pretty standard. They quickly moved to Maharashtra, the largest state in India, settled down in Pune, got a house, and things went very smoothly. When I was almost seven years old, my dad found a fantastic new job that paid handsomely in the country’s capital, New Delhi, but my mom refused to move to a new place. We had settled in very well, and my mom also had a great job working in the insurance department of one of the biggest hospitals in Pune. She was not going to give it all up without a fight. After a lot of tension, my dad decided to go alone. My family had some financial problems that caused this drastic decision. It was hard at first, but I was a kid who didn’t know much. All I knew was that all my friend’s dads were there when we celebrated Diwali, Ganesh Chaturthi, and all the other festivals, and innocently asking my mom: “Why is dad not here?”

Things started to change drastically when my dad got a new job offer. This time, it was out of the country in the Middle East—Qatar. I was around 12 years old. My mom was not too happy about this. The only reason she was convinced was that my family would finally be united and live under one roof. I was very excited and curious because this was the first time I would go out of my country. As the plane went higher up, I saw the sea go from water to slime to paste till it became so still it became a blue rock.

Stepping out of the plane, I felt the hot breeze on my face. My eyes were being flashed by light reflected from the glossy glass-covered
skyscrapers in the distance. Coming to Qatar made me realize you can sweat through your brows. After a month or so, I got my residential permit and I was eligible to apply for school. Note that this was in the middle of the academic year, and not a single school wanted me for that sole reason. Finally, a school called Doha Modern Indian School took me in. I joined in the 8th grade. I didn’t have the school uniform yet, so on the first day, I wore casual clothes, which was awkward. I immediately realized that wearing a pale maroon shirt that said “cowboys” paired with bright yellow three-quarter pants was not a very informed fashion choice.

It took a lot of time for me to adjust and feel comfortable in my skin. All my “friends” at this point were all fake and toxic. I knew them as this person from this class and that’s it. I was always the new kid till the very end. Although I didn’t like them, I was forced to cooperate with them. I sat alone at lunch. Minded my own business. I was happy with this. This was fine. Being by yourself has always been portrayed as something terrible, but for me, it was alright. I wouldn’t be writing this whole thing just because nothing happened.

This was the 10th grade, and I had all new classes with all new people. It was nice meeting new people because you can reinvent yourself. I met this new group and their energy was very positive and sound, and I loved it. I had yet not realized what I was getting myself into. This group didn’t care one bit about me. They always used me as the butt of every joke they ever made. They always said, “Kushal, but it’s just a joke; why do you take it so seriously?”

As my studies got hard, I went to tuition, extra classes to help with my schoolwork, which was very close to my school, about 10 minutes by walk. There is a petrol station on the way, where I had my lunch. Two kids from my school used to go to the same tuitions, so they started to come with me. I’d change my clothes in the bathroom stalls so I could wear something comfortable. One of the girls was on Instagram Live and thought it would be funny to put her phone under the stall and record me. I was stunned and couldn’t move for a minute until I regained consciousness and understood the situation. Thankfully I was fully dressed by then. I was furious and would have
broken her phone, but then she told me I shouldn’t get angry because it’s just a joke and be chill. It was outrageous. If this were to happen to her, someone would be in jail by now.

My high school was a hellish place. Everyone there had high walls around them and would treat day-to-day conversation like a battle. Their ideology was that if they made fun of the weakest in the group, they would be praised and applauded. So they did. You can guess by now that I was the weakest among them. What I thought was that I was being ridiculed because I was the new kid, but wow, I was so wrong. In 9th grade this new kid came to our school; his dad had got a transfer from Dubai to Doha. I was so surprised when the same people who did not even look at my face when I first came ran toward him to know all about him. They just didn’t like me because of me? What did I not have? I was just as smart as him. I was just as funny. I was just as understanding and caring.

As I came into 10th grade, the stress of academics was getting to me. See, 10th and 12th grades are the biggest years in an Indian student’s life. The final exam that we give for those years is called Board exams. These exams are set by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), a truly evil organization. In Board exams, our school has no say in our final marks, and they are graded by people who care about us as much as they care about our serial number.

In this time, I found a group of three. I loved these people. They understood me so well and 10th grade was the best year in my education. If I could, I would go back and live it on repeat. My grades were amazing; I was getting straight As. The final exam was approaching, and you know it’s a difficult and exhausting exam when they give you 5–8 days of study break in between. We were not allowed calculators, periodic tables, and basic formulas either. Everything is up here in our heads. All the things that TAMUQ gives for tests would be considered cheating and get you expelled and barred from returning to any CBSE school. These are not even allowed in Indian colleges. Yet I was able to score a 95%.

No matter what I do, the universe hates me. From the real friends I had, one left for India and another went to another school, and the
last one took a very different subject than me, so we rarely got to meet. I was pushed right back to those toxic people. As much as I didn’t want to be there, they were the only people I knew. “Kushal, why do you hate us so much? What did we do to you?” they say.

I was so happy when I learned that we were having things online now because of the pandemic. Although not seeing people in person for a long time was kind of depressing, it was way better than seeing their faces ever again. The CBSE board canceled my final exam because the Board could not make such a big exam face to face (Sharma, 2021). After all, Indians had a massive crisis to take care of: the Oxygen Demand (Unnithan, 2021). So, making almost 1.2 million unvaccinated children do something that could be easily prevented was a no-go. This saved me from the devil of the final exam.

Getting accepted into TAMUQ was no easy feat. I had a lot on my plate during application time as at first I wanted to go to the USA and got accepted to all colleges I applied to. But it seemed like the pandemic would ruin all the joy of college. Also, I didn’t want to go away from my family yet. I still wanted to have an American education, so I applied to TAMUQ for chemical engineering, thinking if I could get into those US universities, this won’t be that hard. Oh boy, I was wrong. I was put on the waiting list. After many interactions, I realized that I wouldn’t be able to get accepted for chemical engineering. I finally decided to ask for a seat in a different major, and they offered me petroleum engineering. I took it immediately.

The first week was the best time of my life. I found this fantastic group of people, and we became so close it made me feel like I knew them forever. I discovered kindness and respect. For the first time in my life, I am confident enough to call some people FRIENDS. These people are so understanding, caring, and relatable. I have told them so much of me, and they understand it and don’t make fun of me. When I told them about my insecurities and asked them to not make fun of me, they innocently said, “why would we make fun of you?” I held my tears back even though I knew full well that they would understand. I had made it a point that I was going to be
open, outgoing, and responsive. I was just feeling so happy. One of my friends asked why I was so, and she said they were doing the bare minimum. That hit me on so many levels as I realized people didn’t even do the bare minimum for me. I love these people so much, and I am scared to the bone to lose them. Even the little things made me feel that I was with the Right People. They waited for me so I could tie my shoelaces. My previous “friends” would probably be the reason why I would have stopped to tie my laces, and they would have run away.

Since coming to TAMUQ, I have wanted to be a new me, a better person, and happier. For that, I need to lose Kushal and adopt Kush. Kushal means a person who makes others happy. For once, I wanted to be happy. I wanted to be Kush.

References


Kushal Guptha Guruvasudevan is a chemical engineering rising sophomore who wants to do research as it has been a place of interest for him. He also hopes to gain many more valuable relationships down the line.
Nancy Abraham
Incubation to Transformation

Lost in daily routine, a ferret on its wheel
Slithering out of bed, wash and dress
Traffic lights, raging cars pass by
Body ache, behind a desk for over eight
Get home, change and cook
No time to love, bed is on the clock
The day is done, but what have I done?

Staying at home, a wish came true
Lock down now, overwhelmed and confused
Fear all around, drowning with news
Thoughts rise, eat what’s in sight
All this time, laying heavy on this earth
Over consumption, pollution, and destruction
The day is done, but what have I done?

Nothing to do, into a dark retreat
Surfacing, that which lays beneath
Feelings creep, past pain arises
Guilt surfaces, chest ache heightens
Loveless thoughts, loneliness prevails
The mind, inner and outer obliteration
The day is done, but what have I done?

Storm so strong, took over the soul
Wrapped the body, tight and hold
Squeezing suffering, tears juiced
Enveloped, consciousness is numb
Summoning, loves power within
Force, incubation to elevate
The day is done, I have begun.

Patience, suspended in a cocoon
Surrender, provides only peace
Calmness, swung in the breeze
Faith, breath will return
Immersed, by the maker's love
Tears, painting the future
The day is done, I have transformed.

I am, the inner voice speaks
Love, your true nature revealed
Acceptance, you are perfect
Safe, an infinite being of light
Opening, sorrow has disappeared
Released, a new world of peace
The day is done, I am done.
I have always wanted to write an essay expressing how I feel about being a pianist, forgetting about my life as an engineering student for some time. I sat down and thought of all the possible sentences that would express my feeling. Let me start with a simple one: I love playing the piano. I love listening to its soft and peaceful sound filling my room. I get mixed feelings whenever I put my fingers on the keys and start playing. Happy or sad? Who cares, as long as its enchanting sound and the movement of the melodies calm my heart. I play one key, and I can imagine a tear falling from a woman’s eyes, longing for her lover. Or picture a smile painted on a child’s face after he found his mother in a crowded place. When I start playing, I become part of another world and my heart gets released from the struggles of being an engineering student. Nothing else can make me happier, my piano is the only thing that has kept me standing through tough times. That is why my piano is my only therapist.
My Piano is My Therapist

I am writing this essay while listening to *Nuvole Bianche* (White Clouds) by Ludovico Einaudi, which is one of my favorite classical compositions and the piece that pushed me into learning how to play the piano. My obsession with this instrument started from a young age. I was seven years old the first time my fingers touched a real piano key back in elementary school. My vision was not clear of what exactly I wanted in life, but I was seven years old, so I guess that was a normal thing for a child. The moment I heard the gentle sound of its keys it captured my heart, and I said to myself one thing: “I MUST learn how to play the piano!” I knew that it would be a long journey to learn a new thing in life, but I also knew that one day it would all be worth it. From my point of view, learning new things that piqued my interests provided me with an escape from the real world and its hardships. I felt as if I had my safe space, where I would toss all my feelings on that instrument, and it would not complain.

Playing the piano has changed my life dramatically in many respects. I learned how to be patient, how to separate my left hand from my right hand, and it also increased my math skills since the sheet music requires some mathematical calculations to get the exact number of beats per measure, which is an aspect of how I think it converges with my engineering skills. But what changed me the most is how I started viewing music and rhythm. Everything that makes a sound has a rhythm, even when we breathe. When it comes to the sound of the piano, it has this special soft sound that captures everyone’s hearts, as well as mine. Its sound is a combination of melodies and harmonies, which also helps people improve emotionally and physically. As a pianist, playing these sounds with your fingers is totally different than listening to them. Imagine pressing on a piano key and all these enchanting rhythms coming out of it. It is a simple finger movement, yet it cures all the depression and wipes all the sorrow away. Whenever I feel down, I always have my piano to cheer me up. I need no person, nor a therapist, to help me emotionally. My piano is my therapist.
Growing up I realized how much people misunderstand the power of music, or more specifically, the power of the piano. I realized that some might view it as a music box that creates different sounds. But I, Hind, view it differently, and I want to correct this confusion to everyone who underestimates what a piano can do. After my first few music classes, I knew that I wanted to become a pianist. I was astonished by the power of that instrument and how it could fill someone’s eyes with tears. As for me, I always get asked why I am learning how to play the piano while being an engineering student. Is it challenging? Of course it is, and that is what makes it more interesting. Facing our challenges and failures boosts our self-confidence. Throughout my journey, I failed a lot; I experienced all types of feelings, and that is what helped me improve. I must admit though, it was hard to split my paths into two; that is, being an engineering student and being a pianist, I did not know which one to focus on, but I was sure of one thing: I love what I am doing, and I will continue doing it, and that is how playing the piano became my path through ambiguity.

Hind Fakhroo is an electrical and computer engineering student at Texas A&M University at Qatar. Apart from her life as an engineering student, she is also a pianist who loves playing and hearing those flowing notes. She started playing when she was seven years old but had to stop for many years. Hind is finally resuming her piano classes and she is not willing to ever stop playing as she finds passion and joy in this beautiful instrument. Hind expresses how playing the piano changed her life dramatically and how it became part of her identity. What helped her the most is her love for experiencing new things, which makes her an artist and a chess player as well.
Random Thoughts

Sleep Deprivation

Another sleepless night, awake with our baby girl since 3:00 am. She started coughing earlier that night, as she did the night before. Nasal spray, cough syrup, antiallergic, panadol, we have tried all of them. That was not our first restless night. It has been a month that our daughter is sick, since she started going to the nursery. Sleep deprivation has been part of our routine. Steroid nasal spray, ventolin, flixotide, vicks vaporub, we hoped for the new treatment efficiency. Perhaps it was just thirst as she took her medicine before sleeping. I gave her water and she laid down again. Gorgeous being! So strong and yet so fragile. Her chest moving up and down, her eyes closed, her hands holding her bottle while she drank from it. Everything in her is so precious. Standing at the side of her crib, I gently stroked her chest and felt her lungs wheezing.

3:30 my husband came to us and I went back to bed. There are nights in which our baby whines and goes back to sleep in five minutes. Other nights it takes an hour or two. When this happens, my husband and I take turns. We both try to figure out how to help our children, so they –and us– can go back to sleep. It is quite challenging sometimes. We do not think properly, overwhelmed, exhausted. We rely on each other and make a huge effort to have a positive approach, following Dr. Jane Nelsen’s parenting model. My husband noticed that her congested nose was troubling her breath and wiped it. She protested turning her face right and left, but he managed to get it done. Our baby was sick, tired, struggling to sleep, and seeking comfort. He did not leave her alone.

4:00 went back to her room, took her in my arms, and put the bedside lamp on. She opened her eyes quickly and contracted her forehead, displeased by the light. I applied the new spray in each of her nostrils and wiped her nose again. She whined but soon relaxed and fell asleep. Back to her crib, she moved until finding a good position for herself. 4:30 my husband came to check on us. It is
curious how thirty minutes passes like three when you are awake with your child at night, but feels like three hundred when you have to wake up in the morning. Our daughter was coughing again. My husband took her in his arms, gave her ventolin, and put her asleep back in her crib. She was not crying out loud throughout those hours, but she would if we tried to leave her room.

5:00 took her in my arms and started singing for her. We have given all the medicines, so a lullaby should be the solution. In fifteen minutes, she was in a deep sleep. Going back to bed, I saw my husband with our son. Our big boy had a tummy ache and cried for help. He no longer is afraid of the darkness, waking up at night and going back to sleep on his own. But that night he was in pain. Moisturizing, tummy massage, feet massage. I recalled what he had eaten the day before trying to identify the cause of his discomfort. He fell asleep while getting his feet massaged. Marvelous soul! So independent and yet so reliant. His bare feet relaxed, his peaceful face expression, his long body lying on his back. Everything in him is so genuine. While I caressed our boy’s hair, his blanket was pulled over him by my husband. We looked at each other and went back to bed hoping to sleep a bit before waking up again, preparing our children for school and ourselves for work.

**Breathing Meditation**

“Inhale… exhale…,” says the audio, bringing me back to my meditation session. “Inhale for four seconds—one, two, three, four; exhale—four, three, two, one.” I have been practicing meditation while driving to work every morning. It takes me out of memories and wonders and helps me to focus on what really matters: the present moment. “Do not worry about what is going on outside, the week that was. Try very hard not to worry about the week that is upcoming. Find some stillness. Deep breath in… deep breath out… Our aim is not to silence the mind, just slow it down. Let every thought that comes in be there. Do not worry about trying to black everything out.” Inhaling… exhaling… “The breathing power you carry is the vital link to your energy, your awareness, and your
compulsion. Breathe. Fill the lungs and blow our bellies like a little balloon and then let the air out.”

Body Alteration
We were in Lebanon visiting my husband’s family two years after my first labor. It was summertime and we went to a park with our son. That day was wonderfully sunny and extremely hot and I was wearing a short, tight, sleeveless red dress. My husband gave me compliments about my outfit and how I looked stunning. However, I could just think about how that dress was highlighting my post pregnancy belly and the bump around my cesarean scar. It was hard for me to accept that my previously flawless flat tummy was gone. That has always been one of my favorite parts in my body, one that I used to be proud of. It never went back to what it was before my first pregnancy and did not get better after my second. Not only the skin texture changed, but also its elasticity. My upper belly has extra skin and my lower belly is uneven due to my C-section.

During six months after my first delivery, I cried when looking in the mirror. I have always believed that I would have a natural delivery. My pregnancy was so fine and smooth. I have been and am a healthy person. Not even for a second did the thought of having a cesarean cross my mind. In some of those times in front of the mirror, I also felt shallow and guilty. My son came to the world through that cut in my belly, and he is a healthy, lovely child. I should be grateful for that and not suffer for the changes that happened in my body. I should not give that image in the mirror such importance, such power to put me down and make me sad. Why do I value it so much?

My son was so happy in that park, he ran and laughed and was so very curious about each flower and each toy in the park playground. We were taking photos, so many photos, so many smiles and hugs and kisses. It was a good time to create memories and connections. However, afterwards, seeing those pictures, I could just think that I was not good enough and would not post any of those pictures on social media. Since my first C-section I have noticed that the muscles of my lower belly were not as flexible and strong as they used to be.
Actually, sometimes I have the impression that those muscles are numb. Self-criticism towards my body is cruel, several times I feel inadequate and unworthy.

I should remember to be kind to myself, as Dr. Kristin Neff, pioneer of self-compassion research, says. I should appreciate this body that is mine, that has been through so much with me, and given me so much. My body has developed two lives, two amazing human beings inside it. My body has functioned perfectly on both occasions, both pregnancies were healthy and smooth. One year after that day in the park, those photos came up on my mobile phone as memories. I looked at them and found myself so beautiful, fit, and charming. In a year’s time, my perception of myself in those photos changed to its opposite. I cannot keep on waiting one more year to love the image I see in the photos and in the mirror. My children are growing healthy and safe and this body of mine was their first source of food, affection, and protection. I do love my children unconditionally, and so should I love myself and my body. Could I?

**Visual Meditation**

“Keep your eyes opened and look around.” I have never closed them, I am driving. “What can we see? As you become aware of your breath, maybe you notice something in your surroundings that you have never seen before. Allow your eyes to scan the horizon.” I have always used the same road to come to work, the same gate, every day, for many years. “Slowly move your head, look up, look down, look to your right, look to your left.” Good this part came when I was at a red traffic light. “Can we find something that we have never seen before?” I followed the instructions, uncertain that I could see anything different. Then I noticed a mosque tower at the far-left horizon. The minaret stood as the tallest among the buildings in that area. I am not sure how long it has been there, if it has been built during the time I was already doing this path. Education City is to my right and I have always looked in the same direction when driving there. Now looking to the left, having a different perspective, I could see something unexpected and unusual.
Cooking Consideration

I parked my car in the garage back home after a full day in the office. Carrying both my hand and lunch bags, I opened my house front door. My baby who just a few months ago started walking on her own, dropped her toys and walked at her full speed in my direction. She was so happy to see me. I dropped my bags on the console and kneeled with open arms. She jumped into my arms and we hugged tightly. What warmth, a wonderful feeling! My son paused the TV and joined us in that hug. He looked into my eyes and said “Eu te amo, mamãe” then smashingly kissed my cheek. Their unexpected expression of pure love burst my spirit with happiness. Being their mother is my best role. Nothing else matters.

That night I was cooking molokhia, a type of leaves, that are very popular in the Arabic cuisine. Its Lebanese version is usually made with chicken—chicken molokhia stew—and eaten with rice. My children, especially my son is not a big fan of salad, but cooked green leaves, such as molokhia and spinach, are his favorite. Molokhia is nutritious and helps with digestion. First you make chicken broth by cooking chicken breast with onion, bay leaves, and cinnamon sticks in water. Set the chicken broth aside and shred the chicken. In another pot, fry garlic and coriander in olive oil, then add the molokhia, seven spices, salt, and pepper. At the end, add the shredded chicken, chicken broth, and lemon juice. Let them cook on low fire to mix the flavors. I prefer fresh organic molokhia. Fresh or dry, both take time to prepare, separating their stems and cleaning.

How long have things changed without me seeing that? I used to be a free spirit, a rebel. My meals could be anything from my mom’s cooking to any delivery option. Suddenly I spend hours cooking a single dish. I have promised myself that I would never be the kind of wife-mother that spends her spare time cooking and cleaning. I was meant to break that cycle. I would rather read an interesting joyful book. However, I do not want these post-work cooking evenings to be a burden to me. I chose to give healthy homemade food to my children. I should not suffer from my own choices. Once I read a book where the protagonist gives away through her food the feelings that she had while cooking. What kind of feeling am I giving to
my children through my cooking? Love, joy, and peace, or rancor, sadness, and distress? I took my mobile and turned my Audible on. Courageous women, supportive to each other, and united to solve a mystery. *Mexican* Gothic was entertaining and seductive. Having a culinary and a literary experience at once made me feel closer to myself.

**Intention Meditation**

“Inhaling: peace begins with me. Exhaling: *I am happy, I am healthy, I am whole.*” These are the mantras suggested for this meditation session, to be said out loud while breathing. “Inhaling: peace begins with me. Exhaling: *I am happy, I am healthy, I am whole.*” Car has reached the TAMUQ garage. I am looking for an available spot to park near to the fish bowl entrance. I want to believe in those mantras. I want them to be meaningful to me. I keep on repeating them. Breathing in: peace begins with me. No anxiety, no fear. Acceptance—I seek that peace in myself. Breathing out: *I am happy, I am healthy, I am whole.* No self-judgment, no self-criticism. Self-love—I seek that wholeness in my existence. “Whatever it is, wherever you are, enjoy being with you.” Inhale… exhale… Conscious breathing actually has its power. Car parked, time to go to my office. “Let your thoughts come and go. Do not resist and they will fade naturally, following their natural flow.” Hardships come and go, how we deal with them determines our life experience. “All the light and love inside of me honors the light and love inside of each and all of you. See you, guys, next time.”
I intermittently encounter existential crises that can be cynical or optimistic. Optimistic in the sense that sometimes I am in great awe and admiration towards our sheer existence and how it came to be. However lovely as the feeling seems, it still leads to existential crises from how overwhelming it is (similar to the feeling of love: beautiful but hefty). And sometimes, my crises are rather pessimistic by scorning the absurdity of our existence. This poem addresses both contrasting experiences, and I compare them to music because music is also extraordinarily mysterious and exquisite, but then it can frustrate me when I play it myself on an instrument. It doesn’t make instant sense or any sense at all sometimes.
The Inexplicable

The musical beat that permeates your soul, quenches its thirst, and maybe even satisfies its sugary craving. The sugar of jazzy rhythms, the tartness of funky singing and sometimes, of course, the tongue yearns for savory. In the Oud recordings, the seemingly out of tune quavery, the feelings that arise out of all these mysterious melodies, it’s all inexplicable, isn’t it?

A similar conundrum exists in our being, a signature in everything. The sole existence of anything is remarkable, and I am ready to embrace our absurdity: we are only fleeting particles, almost suborbital, sometimes plagued astronomically; that’s when we need to recall our mortality.

Haya Al-Naimi is a petroleum engineering student at TAMUQ, but mainly working on becoming a musician outside of TAMUQ. She enjoys playing Oud, writing, cinema, reading and photography.
Embracing Struggle
This literacy narrative talks about my growing relationship with English. Whenever I read this piece, I realize how even the worst events led to a few of my greatest achievements. This narrative is a reminder that I’ve done so much. Writing this piece helped me recall many memories that I don’t usually think about, and I know my first-grade self would never believe that this narrative is about her.
I-N-G-L-E-S-H

I-N-G-L-E-S-H. English. She meant to spell English, but she didn’t know how to. As far as I can remember, she was seven years old when the journey started. She had English vocabulary words explained in Arabic and hid notes in her pockets on her way to every English exam she took, but somehow still failed the subject in elementary school.

“We’re moving to Qatar.” Those words that she heard in Arabic—those were the words that were worse than her worst nightmare. It wasn’t the fact that she had to leave her friends and family behind; it was the fact that she was enrolled in an American school with a diverse group of students. How was she supposed to transition from speaking Arabic daily to studying all the subjects in English? She sat in the front row of class to focus, but the language itself was this wall she couldn’t wreck so she could pass through. So, she drew random stick figures on the old, light gray, wooden table instead. Her teacher wrote a list of vocabulary words on the whiteboard, which was poorly cleaned as it still had smears of the blue marker from the day before.

“Assembly.” That was the only word she understood from that list, so she excitedly opened her notebook, thinking that she was writing down the class schedule. It was a tough phase; she would come back home on the school bus and arrive at an empty house—both of her parents had work, so seldom did she go to them to clarify her doubts. She was the eldest sibling, so all these responsibilities of being a big sister and a substitute parent would stack up on her shoulders; she never had time to learn a new language. The humidity and the roasting sun didn’t help her whenever she went outside to get a breath of fresh air as a break from school.

On her twelfth birthday, she got a simple gift: a notebook. A spiral notebook with single-lined pages that were stacked under a random-quoted cover page made of cardboard. Nothing was special about it, but she added life to the empty, delicate pages. She can hear the rustle with every page she flips. She’s had the habit of keeping the first page of every notebook she owns empty, so that’s what she did. Out of everything else she could have written, she wrote poems.
It was the rhythm that satisfied her. The trial-and-error phases of each poem she wrote were her pastime. It was the satisfaction that followed every poem she read aloud that kept her going. She would search for rhyming words on Google because her dictionary of words was less than a dozen pages. For two years, she wrote one-paged poems about strange topics like gadgets. She hardly used gadgets, so why did she write about them? The topics she wrote about never mattered to her. It was the rhythm that did. In sixth grade, she shared her poems with someone for the first time—her English teacher. “You have a great potential to be a writer. Keep on writing my dear! Continue to enhance your gift. I am glad that you can write pieces like these … —Ms. Gem,” she wrote with red ink, which was vibrant compared to all the graphite-filled poems that the little poet wrote. For once, a response in red ink from her English teacher filled her system with ecstasy. A smile was instantly drawn onto her round face after reading the message, and she immediately flipped the page to start writing a poem about anything that came to mind. After minutes of staring at a blank page, she decided to go back to the very first empty page—“It may seem ridiculous, but this gift developed my talent and made me a little poet!” It was that one sentence that her teacher wrote that helped her finally label herself as a “Little Poet.”

Years passed by and she had to move schools again. She had to go to a public school this time. At that point, English was that last puzzle piece that made her life complete. Unlike the last time she changed schools, her main concern this time was disconnecting from English. Her connection was way too deep for her to let go. She’s read way too many novels and written too many diary entries for her to let go, but she had to take two curricula in a year, so she was almost certain that her relationship with English ended at that moment as she had to focus on taking three sciences in a year and improving her Arabic skills, which were affected by her obsession with writing and studying in English. She knew that by the time she graduated, she would go back to her starting point. I-N-G-L-E-S-H. She felt that phase yell her name at the top of its lungs. What made the experience during her high school years unique is the fact that her English teacher was her mom, but it came with obstacles—mainly
underestimation. After every exam she aced, she’d hear one question: “Did your mom tell you the questions she was going to include before we all took the test?” She invariably said “no,” but it wasn’t enough for them to believe the truth. She was often seen as the teacher’s daughter, not the hardworking student, even though she consistently called her mom “Miss” during school hours.

The underestimation was why she kept going. She took it as a chance to go beyond the limit her classmates set for her. With every esteem-destroying comment she received, she built herself back up. She printed more reading comprehension quizzes and listened to more audio tracks to answer the listening exercises. She’d practice speaking by herself by recording her own responses and later correcting herself. She got an A* in English as a Second Language, including speaking. In fact, she was the only one who scored an A* in her class and was one of the two students in the entire school who managed to reach that score.

A few months later, her mom went for a meeting in the British Council. Since she’s been to many meetings like these, she wasn’t looking forward to it, and her mind wasn’t thinking of anything specific. She was there to represent the school and hear any updates as an IGCSE coordinator and exam officer. As the presenter switched slides, her eyes widened, and she sat there with her mouth agape in awe. It was almost as if she has seen her daughter’s name highlighted among the other names displayed on the data show. She could not process anything after she’d seen her daughter’s name on the screen. After the presentation was over, she immediately ran to the presenter who was shutting his laptop down and ready to leave. She insisted on opening his laptop and checking that slide, which she hardly got a look at. She wasn’t sure whether she was imagining things or not, but it was her daughter on that list. She got the highest score in Qatar in IGCSE English.

Then here’s me, impressed by what that girl has been doing since first grade. I wish I could go up to her when she first moved to Qatar to tell her about that rainbow that comes after the storm, but I can’t. Because I am her.
Selina Haddad is a computer engineering student at HBKU, Class of 2025. Besides listening to music, reading books, playing the piano, and going to the gym, she enjoys writing as it helps her explore herself from different viewpoints without any boundaries.
I wrote this piece as a cover letter to my mid-term process portfolio in ENGL 104. This piece perfectly introduces the reader to my relationship with English. It took me a long time to get a hang of it, but deep down I think I knew how to write.
I will be honest: I never liked English, don’t like English, and never will like English. I grew up in Pune, India. At the time, many parents thought that sending their children to an English medium school (mode of instruction being English) made the kids superior and more intelligent in some way. I went to DAV, short for Dayanand Anglovedic School. It was the worst school ever. It is a private school, but a private school in India is equivalent to a public school in America and a public school in India is worse than the worst you can think of. There were broken washbasins and bathroom stalls with no doors. And I would rather eat rats than the food they provided. These schools were always overcrowded; the private schools did this to increase profit at the expense of quality. I was in a classroom of 56 students in class J, and there were as many students in classes A to K. I still can’t believe the teachers managed all these classes without their brains exploding. Many teachers constantly lost the power in their voice because of all the screaming and shouting they did to calm and teach lessons.

From a young age, I knew that if I had to learn something, it would be my own. It is alright to study like this for my technical subjects, but I fell on my face for English. It was the one subject that used to drag my whole average down. I never had a good English teacher; even while explaining a poem or a story, they would switch from Hindi to Marathi to English. I never really knew which language class I was in. I wasn’t taught how to omit the swirl of ideas from my head on a piece of paper. The teachers mostly wanted to keep our thoughts locked in the back of our heads. If I had a writing topic like” what do you think about English?” it was apparent that I was supposed to write positively. I wanted to write, “English is the abnormal child in the group,” but I would get a failing grade if I did that. I couldn’t read a paragraph properly as I would lose focus very fast and I would stutter. Writing something good or from my thoughts was a far-flung dream. Everything was pre-made. I just had to fill in the grammar and the correct spelling of the words. My parents sent me many tutors and trainers to do some magic and
make me write, speak, and read like some old English noblemen. All I learned was that the English tutor always had spinach stuck in his teeth. Either he liked spinach a lot, or it’s always been there and no one told him.

It was alright when I was in India. But all my lacunas and insecurities came crashing into my face when I came to Qatar. The physics teacher wasn’t going to explain in Hindi why if you throw a ball in the air and look at it, it will hit your head. The worst, which I say with a lot of meaning to it, thing to happen to me was when my history teacher made me read a paragraph on why the British suck. I stuttered a lot and read words while swinging from a high and low tone, making me sound like I was singing. I was stuck on the word beginning; I kept saying “bennengin” until I heard a pistt*, “it’s beginning.” The whole class was trying their best to keep their laughs in their stomachs while thinking, look at this freak. This was in the 8th grade. I used to take a whole minute to try to make a proper sentence to reply to people. Forget my spelling; it was all a dumpster fire. I don't like English because English used to get me bullied. Still, it sometimes makes me the butt of some jokes. One of my teacher’s favorite comments on my writing work used to be, “when I grade his work, I need to keep a dictionary near me as his spellings confuse me.”

Out of everything in English, writing is the best thing ever. I love just to go wild and play with my thoughts and ideas. Write them down, change them, use fancy words, get people’s opinion, and change it again. I love all of it. I adore a beautiful and neat final piece that is complete with everything I wanted to say.

A very unlikely source helped me. I took a guidance counselor for my college applications, who took me through all the steps to get accepted into a good college. One of the primary and essential steps was to write an essay for college. I was made to sit down and write my first very shitty draft. It was the worst! I can’t even believe these hands could type such an essay. She took a solid two weeks to navigate through my work and give me comments in Google Docs. She nudged me to write the best I could without me having a
breakdown. For that first draft, I may have gotten some 50 comments. We sat together and worked on it for almost three months. I was very close to giving her the laptop and saying, “write what you want.” I am here in TAMUQ, so I think it worked. I want you to know that this is the first time in my life that I have written something with my mind running free with no constraints. It is scary, but at the same time, it is fascinating!

Kushal Guptha Guruvasudevan was born in Hyderabad and raised in Pune, a city near Mumbai, Maharashtra, India. He spoke Telegu in the house and Hindi or Mahariti outside. Although he learned and was taught in English, it only became an important part of his life when he moved to Qatar with his family in eighth grade. It was hard to make friends with broken English, but he managed to survive. He is a rising sophomore in chemical engineering at TAMUQ and wants to do further research.
Neenu
Shaji
The Ellipsis

The musings unending,
Under the mantle of shades of grey hovering,
Pouring out, Running over,
In this unchanging changing world.

The trails I left,
The trails I followed,
A wavering wanderer,
A fellow follower.

Times then and times now,
Moves on with each tick-tock,
The soul yearns for a drink of freedom,
Oh! So free! But, yet free seldom!
Tangled, in the waves of webbed wisdom.

Whispers of wars and echoes of peace,
Lust for power never cease,
Values bartered for fleeting pleasure,
Reign of impostors in mighty measure.

Certainly, uncertain Deja vu,
Flickering lights in a hazy view,
Battling, on the barren fields,
Towards a peaceful eternity.

A mirage, milling the horizon,
Requiem of peace once forsaken,
Embrace Ambiguity, with hope’s beacon!
So, for now it’s not a period,
Rather an ellipsis to the moments myriad…
Selina Haddad

This was the first piece I was assigned to write in university. I had to write an essay that answers the question, “Why am I here?” After listening to my professor’s explanation of what an essay is, the question evolved into, “Why am I here, writing this so-called essay?” I’ve been taught for so long that the format of an essay should be restricted that writing this piece’s first draft felt wrong to me. This essay shows how I see English composition in a completely different way now. It was fun getting to display the personal conflict in the form of art!
The Irony

Why am I here? That’s the question I have to answer in the form of an essay for university. *But, why are you here writing this essay? Where is your “attention grabber?” Where is your thesis statement? Isn’t an essay supposed to be in the form of five paragraphs? Shouldn’t essays be about topics like the pros and cons of smoking or how Covid-19 affected the education system? Why are you writing about yourself? Why are you using the first-person point of view in your so-called “essay”?*

Despite the innumerable thoughts in my head, I can’t write anything down, and my essay hasn’t exceeded 200 words yet. *Thank you for finally adding a number; please add statistics; you can’t write anything down because this isn’t an essay in the first place.* Not to mention the hesitance I have felt since I started writing this essay. *Thank you for using passive voice—you’re doing something right in this essay for once.* However, I like how this essay is being written. *It feels like word vomit; please don’t get too comfortable—you’re doing this the wrong way; this should’ve been your first body paragraph, not whatever this is.*

“You’ll have to write an argumentative essay for your exam.” “Make sure you have enough time to do the reading comprehension, though.” “Don’t write anything down for your essay unless you’re sure that it makes sense.” “Remember you’ll only have an hour to write your essay, so try not to make any mistakes.” “I won’t revise the writing section of the exam because you’ve all heard this already: introduction, three body paragraphs, conclusion.” “In each paragraph, make sure you include your thesis statement, some sort of evidence, and examples.” “If you don’t know how to write like this, memorize this model answer. I know it’s too much to memorize, but at least you can guarantee a good score in the writing section of the exam.” “Good grammar, vocabulary, and correct spelling—use these if you want to ace the writing section of the exam.” This is what I’ve been taught my entire life. As I type these comments, I hear them in my teachers’ voices; they’re ringing loud and clear. *I don’t know about you, but this is music to my ears.*
Despite all my concerns, I can say this for sure: I have never felt this laid-back while writing an essay, and I do feel way more comfortable expressing myself as I write this. You’re a perfectionist—can you not see all the flaws of this essay? Imagine the look on your English teachers’ faces if they read this; you won’t pass the subject if you continue to write like this. Why am I here writing this essay? It’s most likely to know what an essay means, and to find out more about myself. Your “SFD” was better than whatever thi-

My high school self is trying to keep up with my pace but can’t. I’d already run past the finish line and feel like I’ve broken free from the essay writer I used to be.

**References**


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**Selina Haddad** is a computer engineering student at HBKU, Class of 2025. Besides listening to music, reading books, playing the piano, and going to the gym, she enjoys writing as it helps her explore herself from different viewpoints without any boundaries.
This piece was written for my English 104 class during freshman year. I really connected to this piece while writing it as it helped me strengthen my relationship with creativity. As an engineering major, my classes tend to lack creative writing. Writing this piece inspired me to rediscover my relationship with reading and writing. Hopefully my piece can inspire someone to read or write something and unleash their creativity.
My Relationship with Books

Ever since I was a little girl, my father always emphasized the importance of reading. It not only makes you quicker, more intelligent, it also connects you to geniuses who lived before your time and those living right now. Books are one of the most beautiful ways of communicating one’s ideas to the masses and have been the main method of communicating ideas to later generations, which is the sole reason why ideas and stories live on and become immortalized through time. Books have also shown me the value of expression through writing, though that is something I continue to struggle with.

The first books that helped me develop my reading skills and love of books were the *Harry Potter* series. I found an instant connection to Harry because he was shy and so was I. It is, in a way, the perfect encapsulation of what teenage life in a school filled with problems really is. Seeing how Harry developed to become a leading character in the book gave me an understanding of character development in both books and in life.

Books that helped me read from a very young age include the *Mr. Men* books, which were always short and straight to the point and perfect for re-reading countless of times with my parents. Such books also provided the steppingstones to reading short stories such as *Death of a Civil Servant* by Anton Chekhov. Sometimes the most powerful ideas and stories are those that are concise and straight to the point.

Furthermore, I always found that reading helps me relax and detach from my hectic life. Sometimes instead of using your brain to plan things out, it’s nice to sit back and have a learned author and story do that for you.

I firmly believe that the ideas held in books—and in paintings, films, music, etc.—act as the foundation for the many ideas we all have in our lives. Anything that moves you directly affects your conscious
and unconscious thinking. Thus, I believe the more we are exposed to different ideas, the further we will advance as a civilization.

Reading has always helped me consolidate my thoughts with those of the characters from the book. Each book, in some way, has a short segment that may be applied to everyone's life and possibly help them in some way. I'll continue to look at books for such help in the future.

In contrast, my relationship with writing hasn't always been as positive. I have always struggled with writing and never enjoyed nor succeeded in it. Of course, it doesn't help that my handwriting is atrocious and barely legible. I never did well in my writing classes in school, always favoring mathematics and sciences. Almost every teacher I've ever had has told me I need to improve my handwriting, but I can't just change the way I write.

However, despite my challenges I understand how fundamental writing is. I didn't enjoy writing at school, but hating writing was never the case. In fact, I write a lot in my free time. I keep a journal where I write about pivotal moments and experiences in my life. I am so thankful for that journal as it helps me relax. Keeping a journal is almost like having a therapist in the sense that writing is a good way to blow off some steam. I have kept a journal for almost seven years now and I still remember the first journal entry I wrote. I had a brown leather-bound journal and started all my entries with “Dear Diary.” However, as I got older, I found that phrase childish and stopped using it. I also recall everyone I knew telling me that I wouldn't maintain keeping a journal. Of course, hearing that made me want to maintain one even more.

I have now reached a point where I realize that although I say I don't like writing, that doesn't mean I can't change it. Books have shown me the value of writing, and if I devote enough time and energy to improve my writing, I know I will succeed. This principle can be applied to everything, and I need to constantly remind myself that so that I can thrive at university.
References

Aljawhara Althani is a mechanical engineering student, Class of 2023. She appreciates art and literature whilst studying mechanical engineering, which is a field she is deeply interested in. She enjoys journaling as a way to help her relieve stress and discover methods of personal development.
I wrote this piece one night when I had some negative feelings to let out. I believe that we all have a dark side, and there is some beauty in embracing it. Our dark side does not only appear for us to experience pain but to learn, understand ourselves better, and grow from it.
إن اللاوعي قدرة كبيرة على السيطرة علينا وعلى تصرفاتنا. فإني الآن أشكو من سيطرة اللاوعي عليّ؛ فقد أبقاني مستيقظة طوال الليل لأواجه يومي الجديد بكل إرهاق وتعب.

في يوم الإنسان تمر أمور كثيرة قد تزعجه أو قد لا ينتبه إلى أنها تزعجه، ولكن اللاوعي شيطان آخر ينتقم من الإنسان في أهنأ لحظاته. يخرج في وقت السكون ليذكّر الإنسان بما ليس لديه ويتمناه. يُشعر الإنسان بأنه شيء ناقص، يريه الجزء الفارغ منه ثم يرهقه حتى يرتاح.

Maryam Al-Buainain is a mechanical engineering graduate, Class of 2020. She is currently pursuing her MS in materials science and engineering at TAMU. She has always been a science girl, but part of her is constantly inspired by artistic paintings and Arabic poetry.
Dr. Brittany Bounds
Embracing Ambiguity in Speaking Up

Sometimes it is scary to speak up. In class, students may not answer questions or join in a discussion or debate because they are afraid of how their peers or the professor may receive a comment, or because they fear being challenged. Many students do not ask questions in the classroom in the trepidation of being perceived as slow or not paying attention. Sometimes, in academia, faculty do not share their research because they suffer from imposter syndrome. Many early-career faculty feel that they will be discredited because they are new to the field. Other times, the campus community does not speak out against administrative decisions because we believe these are already a done deal, or we are powerless against the university leadership. Or we are afraid to open a conversation on campus because it may be controversial. The ambiguity that hovers over how it may go makes many of us hesitate to talk with others.

But when we do, it’s liberating.

I have again rediscovered the power of opening a conversation, but also the ambiguity that comes with it. Last Ramadan, I posted a naïve Twitter response to a video in Arabic that was implicitly about Palestinian borders. It was Mother’s Day weekend and I had not checked the news in days; I had no idea what was happening in Palestine, as the breaking news of the Al Aqsa Mosque was either in Arabic or shared in personal circles. Instead of being able to talk through how I was uninformed or urged to seek out more information, I instead was directed to remove my tweet, issue an apology, and not respond to comments or personal messages. The inability on both sides to discuss where my post came from as a historian, and also the lack of clarity in the respondents’ perspective in sharing why they were so passionate about what was happening in Palestine created a fundamental rift between me and everyone who wanted to silence me. I researched what was happening in the region, and I talked with a few select friends familiar with the history and the tensions. After 10 months, I assumed the furor had died down, until I began talking with students unwilling to work with me because of this issue. It became clear that this problem would not go
away on its own, meaning that open discussion was the only way to clear up the miscommunication.

I took the leap to hold a dialogue on campus. I knew this could be very risky with students who were diametrically opposed to America, its stance on diplomacy in the region, and their perspective of where I stood on the issue. I was warned by students who cared about my fate, fellow colleagues, and Student Affairs that this could potentially go very, very badly. The outcome was uncertain. Working closely with the Peace Club and the Palestinian Culture Club, we brainstormed all the details of an open talk to make sure it would run smoothly, anticipating student questions, opening an online form to prepare us for their questions, determining the best location for the talk, and structuring the discussion between me and the students to be as equal as possible. After all, this was to be a dialogue.

The day came, and the tension in the air was palpable. I spent the weekend prior to the event emotionally preparing for it. Our purpose and our mission were to reach as many students as possible to be able to talk this through and to heal the divide. We may disagree about politics, diplomatic decisions, and religion, but we should at least be able to talk about them openly. The students asked insightful questions, but they did not bring the rage that many expected. They were seen, and they knew they were important. The students are important to me, and they are important to our institution. They are the reason I would risk an open conversation about a controversial subject that could go very, very badly.

Afterward, I debriefed with several students and the Department of Student Affairs, who wanted to share what they thought of the event. I joined in a laugh with some who thought I was absolutely crazy to hold the talk. I learned that students thought I was brave to come forward and be vulnerable enough to give students the ability to voice their disgruntlement to my face. And yes, it did require courage. But they were respectful, even when they disagreed. And this is the main lesson that came out of this event. Brené Brown published a book that influenced my life called Dare to Lead, and I walked the student organization I advised through it for their
professional development. She emphasizes that leaders—even student leaders—must be vulnerable to be effective and genuine. This does not mean being weak. It means being honest and having an open dialogue with others about where you stand. This takes a ton of courage because then others will know what we think, or how we are growing, or that we cannot take a project on ourselves. But that is the beauty of humanity: we should not do this alone. Last year, Qatar Foundation highlighted Students of Courage with the hashtags #studentsofchange and #unmute. It is important to be brave enough to speak up to make a change, whether one is faculty, staff, or a student.

In the landscape of ambiguity, sometimes we must take the plunge and know that our parachutes will hold because the jump is worth the reward.
At first, the prospect of having to write a research paper could seem overwhelming. After all, doing analysis and writing a lengthy paper takes a significant amount of time, commitment, and organization. Writing a research paper, on online learning during Covid-19, was a great way to for me to dig further into a topic that interests me the most. The analysis process encourages me to obtain knowledge about the topic I chose, while the writing process assists me in expressing myself.
Online Learning during Covid 19 from Students’ Perspectives

Abstract
This research aimed to do an online survey to get feedback from students about their perceptions of and experiences with online classes. Qatar’s education system recently implemented online delivery of courses because of the global pandemic. As a result, this study examines the views and concerns of university students about taking online courses, which have become essential as a result of Covid-19. The study included 43 students from Texas A&M University in Qatar and used an online survey form and an interview for data collection. Surprisingly, the survey and interview findings revealed a negative attitude toward online learning.

Introduction
The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted nearly every area of life, even education, and Qatar has not been spared these impacts. Due to the difficulties of preventing the disease from spreading further, world leaders have established stringent guidelines to sever the Covid-19 transmission chain. The World Health Organization suggested a few guidelines, such as physical and social distancing, that have been challenging for every country to implement. Due to the rising number of infected people with Covid-19 in Qatar, major social regulations were implemented in March 2020. Many rules followed, such as working from home for employees, praying in homes, and online learning for students from schools to higher education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) claims that Covid-19 influenced 174,240,920 learners worldwide. Around 10% of all enrolled students were forced to adjust their learning plans due to 27 countries having nationwide closures. This caught my attention as I wanted to learn more about the students’ perspectives and coping.
Study context

Schools and universities are being forced to introduce online learning or distance learning due to changes in educational plans. Qatar’s Ministry of Education introduced online learning strategies, including remote and distance learning opportunities, as practical and relevant to ensure students’ learning continuation during the Covid-19 outbreak. The application of social distance by the Qatari government has affected public activities and students in the educational system. Alternatives such as distance learning have been set to educational institutions to continue learning from home using an online system. According to the Ministry of Education guidelines, educational institutions must arrange online learning to provide a positive learning environment for all students. Distance learning considers the health and welfare of students, educational institutions, employees, and the public.

In terms of Qatar’s educational system, online courses are a relatively new method of education that have not previously been part of traditional classes. Researching and studying how online classes are being experienced and considered by undergraduate students at Texas A&M University at Qatar will assist instructive specialists with knowledge and make changes to suit the necessities of undergraduate students. To successfully implement these practices, educational institutions that will deliver online courses need better insight into how students view and respond to online classes as a teaching method. This recent implementation of online learning has become difficult for students struggling to understand this new educational form. As a result, the importance of this study is to study students’ perspectives regarding online courses compared to traditional face-to-face courses. The survey and interview targeted students from Texas A&M University at Qatar. Since Texas A&M University at Qatar was one of the first universities in the country that implemented online learning from the first day of lockdown, this study will show the results of the survey and interview to determine how well this new approach is being received by students, as well as the common issues they experience when taking online courses, to help instructors in determining the changes that can
be made to make online learning more efficient. This survey and interviews will help develop online courses in providing the students with an excellent learning process.

**Expectations**

Before distributing the survey link, I decided to take the survey to assess time needed to complete the survey. Then I answered the survey based on the expectations that I would receive from the participant responses. Moreover, I expected that 30 students would take the survey, and only half of them would answer the open-ended questions. I have also expected that 90% of the students would enjoy online learning and that only 15% would find online learning stressful. Moreover, I expected that managing time and communicating with professors would be the easiest thing during online learning and that lack of interaction would be the hardest thing. I expected that 80% of students would agree that online courses were transferred efficiently online and only 20% would disagree. Furthermore, I expected that 70% of students would agree that online learning has affected their grades negatively and only 30% would disagree. Lastly, I expected that workload has increased since courses were transferred online.

**Methodology**

There were three phases to the data collection process. The first move was to conduct a survey. The survey link was sent out by Dr. LeeAnn Rudd to all Texas A&M at Qatar students via email and I shared it with friends at TAMUQ via WhatsApp. The survey consisted of 14 questions in the form of a mix of multiple choice and short answers, using Qualtrics survey. The survey data were collected April 21–23, 2021, and 43 students participated in the survey. The questions were organized following a three-level question strategy. They started with two questions for the respondents about themselves in terms of gender and class year, followed by six questions regarding students’ perception of online courses. One question on the effect of online learning on grades and a ranking question on the faculty’s actions to help them improve their online learning.
Moreover, the survey had one question regarding the resources students have at home and how frequently they communicate with their classmates outside of class. Furthermore, the survey included two open-ended questions about what respondents wish their professors knew and what advice they would give freshmen joining in the fall. Following the survey data collection, a report of each respondent’s responses was produced. The second data collection stage involved an interview. The interview consisted of seven open-ended questions, and two of the 43 respondents who took the survey were interviewed. For this research, online interviews were performed. The interviews were conducted to provide more detailed information. From May 2, 2021, to May 3, 2021, interviews were held online for 10–15 minutes per respondent using the WhatsApp application.

**Results**

The survey and interviews aimed to learn more about students’ perspectives with the newly introduced online method of teaching. According to the survey’s findings, 15 percent of students enjoy learning remotely more than face-to-face classes, 45 percent do not enjoy learning remotely, and 40 percent responded that they may be enjoying learning remotely (Fig. 1). The survey also asked students how stressful online learning is. In question four, it was observed that 36.59 percent of respondents feel that online learning is highly stressful and 26.83 percent feel that online learning is very stressful. In contrast, 26.83 percent feel that online learning is somewhat stressful, 4.88 percent feel that online learning is not too stressful, and 4.88 feel that online learning is not stressful (Fig. 2).

Regarding the resources question, 72.50 percent responded that they have all the resources to study at home, while 27.50 percent responded that they do not have all the resources to study at home. When asking the students about what the most straightforward thing was in online learning, 45 percent ranked “keeping track of deadlines and work” as number one, 22.50 percent ranked “communicating with professors” as number two, 17.50 percent ranked “managing time” as number three, 7.50 percent ranked “being productive” as
number four. In comparison, 5 percent ranked “courses and adapting to them more” as number five and 2.50 percent ranked “being motivated” as number six (Fig. 3). For the seventh question, 48.78 percent of students communicate with their classmates multiple times per week and 19.51 percent responded twice per week. However, 12.20 percent answered once per week and 19.51 percent reported no communication with their classmates outside the class per week. The study also found that during online learning, 40 percent agreed that virtual learning had positively affected their grades and 60 percent disagreed that virtual learning has positively affected their grades. Similarly, 57.50% agreed that virtual learning had negatively affected their grades and 42.50% disagreed that virtual learning has negatively affected their grades. Additionally, 25.64% agreed that virtual learning had not affected their grades and 74.36 percent disagreed that it has not affected their grades. Regarding completing and understanding coursework online, 30 percent agreed that completing and understanding coursework online was easy and 70 percent disagreed that completing and understanding coursework online was easy. In contrast, 70 percent agreed that completing and understanding coursework online was difficult and 30 percent disagreed that completing and understanding coursework online was difficult. Regarding the perception of actions faculty can take to help improve students’ online learning, 23.68 percent ranked “support struggling students” as number one and an equal number of respondents ranked “be more lenient and understanding” and “give clear instructions” as number two with 21.05 percent each. In comparison, 18.42 percent ranked “record your lectures” as number three and 15.79 percent ranked “provide interactive activities” as number four.

A critical result of the research is that out of 43 respondents, 35 percent of students ranked “time management” as the biggest challenge and 20 percent of students ranked “self-motivation” as the second biggest challenge to learning online. In contrast, 17.50% of students ranked “lack of in-person interaction” to be the third, and an equal number of respondents ranked “technical issues” and “distractions” to be the least challenge with a percentage of 12.50
each. In addition to asking students about online learning, the open-ended question asked about whether workload increased or not, and nearly 90% of students responded that the workload had increased. The students explain this condition as follows: “The workload is excessive; instructors believe that we have more free time now, but it’s even harder online” (student response). “Some professors did not give us so much work because they understand the situation we are in (by some I mean 1); the rest seem to have no concept of what it means to study online, and treat it as if it’s the same as studying on campus (online is way harder) and give us a bunch of work to do in such little time” (student response). “It has been affected a lot. I have assignments almost every week, and because it is online, I cannot always ask for my professor’s help as some do not reply to emails or say they have meetings after class. That makes it harder to finish them” (student response). “It has increased so much!” (student response).

Additionally, when the respondents were asked if they were transferred efficiently to online courses or not, 7.50 percent of students agreed that courses were transferred efficiently to online courses; 40 percent somewhat agreed that courses were transferred efficiently to online courses; and 27.50 percent neither agreed nor disagreed that courses were transferred efficiently to online courses. In contrast, 12.50 percent of students somewhat disagreed that courses were transferred efficiently to online courses and 12.50 percent disagreed that courses were transferred efficiently to online courses. Furthermore, 22.50 percent of students agreed that courses were not transferred efficiently to online courses; 12.50 percent somewhat agreed that courses were not transferred efficiently to online courses; 32.50 percent of students neither agreed nor disagreed that courses were not transferred efficiently to online courses; 25 percent of students somewhat disagreed that courses were not transferred efficiently to online courses; and 7.50 percent of students strongly disagreed that courses were not transferred efficiently to online courses (Fig. 6). In addition to the coursework load, students were asked about what they wish their professors knew, and most of the students responded that they wish professors
knew that staying at home did not mean that they have a lot of time to do more work. Students also mentioned how hard exams became since the transition to online learning. The students explained these conditions as follows: “Since we are at home, it does not mean we have that much time to do 10 assignment” (student response). “It is just as much work online as offline” (student response). “Staying at home necessarily does not mean students are free” (student response). “This transition is hard on us as well and that it is not our fault that we have to take classes online. Furthermore, by making exams so much harder and time restricting, our self-motivation and self-confidence suffer” (student response). “We are in a hard time right now. Giving much work and making exams extra hard is not helping” (student response). “We have other classes. It is not fair to give us tough exam just because he is afraid that the student will cheat” (student response). Figure 5 shows commonly used words in student responses.

In addition to these responses, students were asked in the last question about some advice they would give to a freshman joining in the fall. Most of them mentioned “time management” and “motivation”; others mentioned “not missing classes”; and a few mentioned about “home setup.” Here are some of the students’ responses: “TIME MANAGEMENT” (student response). “Good luck. The most important thing to navigate this change is to be able to properly time manage and not to be afraid to ask questions, however, how many they are” (student response). “Manage ur time, get out of bed, get out of your PJs. Ask for help when u need it” (student response). “Brace yourself. It is harder than you think but thinks about the fulfilling at the end of it all. Find a single motivation to keep going” (student response). “Just stay focused and motivated” (student response) “Do not lose motivation cause once you lose it; you will not get it back.” (Student answer). “Each class is important, so do not miss out on any!” (student response). “Attend all your classes” (student response). “Attend all classes at a time and never say skip a class knowing that you can go back to it cuz you will never do” (student response). “Get yourself a setup for your house (monitor, mouse, keyboard, chair) to hook up to your laptop because you will
be spending all day in front of that” (student response). “Get a study table” (student response).

According to the interviews’ findings, students feel stressed and less interactive about online learning. The students explain this condition like the following: “Online classes have been very stressful and exhausting. You would think they would allow you to do more chores, but it was the opposite for me. Since after each class, I just wanted to go out of the room and talk to my mother and then come back” (student 1 response). “Online learning does not allow us to comprehend the subject as it limits interactive learning fully” (student 2 response). In response to the issue of what improvements they would like to see in online learning, students responded that they want professors to be less strict when grading as well as to try to make an online class more engaging. The students explain this situation as follows: “I would like to see that the professors are more considerate of the students and be aware that all students are working or doing their classes from home. It is possible that we students do not attend one day due to reasons (personal), but they should not penalize the student on that. They should not be very strict about grading since many professors change how they examine the students” (student 1 response). “Try to make it fully online and organize some activities such as debates, etc., to engage the student” (student 2 response).

Additionally, when the respondents were asked about what they find about online learning to be motivating and demotivating, the interviewees responded that what motivated them was that work is done according to their plans and that they can learn from home; however, what demotivated them was that students do not see the outcomes they want. Moreover, they responded that classes are not interactive. The students explain this situation as follows: “While online learning, the thing that motivated me was to complete my work according to the plan and then have the satisfaction of that. I usually make a to-do list, and when I complete everything for the day, it motivates me even more for the next task. The demotivating thing is sitting in one position and doing your work throughout the day. When we try very hard to get the result we want, but we do not due
to certain reasons, I feel this has increased a lot during the online” (student 1 response). “I find the fact that I can get an education from home motivating; however, not all teachers know how to have an interesting class online, which is demotivating” (student 2 response).

Regarding the time spent on homework during the pandemic, students responded that it takes time to complete their homework; the students explain this situation as follows: “I usually spent 5–6 hours doing homework. Because there are reports, huge chemistry homework, math web assignments, it just keeps on adding through the week. So approximately in one day, I sit at least 5 hours working on homework other than classes and studying time” (student 1 response). “I do not time it; I start an HW and do it until I am done” (student 2 response).

In addition to the finding on online learning, students were asked about their most significant achievement during online learning, and each person have responded differently. The students explained this answer as follows: “So, during the online learning, I was able to actually take care of myself and eat healthily. One of the proudest moments would be doing a student employee job, online learning as a student, working on research together, and not giving up. I love to do those three things; at times, it’s overwhelming, but I think all together it came up just fine, and I am proud of that” (student 1 response). “Passing it is hard” (student 2 response). Students were asked to give others some advice about online learning as well as recommendations to faculty. They responded as follows: “I would tell the students to practice time management because that is the thing that I felt troubled about during my first semester online. Always plan your day and do some physical exercise, even if 15 minutes. My only recommendation would be for faculty to check on the students, if not individually. However, as a group because at times due to online studying, some students might have issues which they do not feel to speak aloud in front of others” (student 1 response). “Try to work on your own and for the faculty to be more engaging in their lectures” (student 2 response).

The last question asked in the interview was to describe when their attitudes toward online learning were at a low point. The students
responded as follows: “This happened during Spring 2021, like this semester during April mid. It was just way too much on my plate. All the professors were given a lot of work to do. Even though we had managed time properly, the stress of completing everything on time and dealing with midterms just one week before the finals (should not be called midterms) was just too much, which led me to a mental breakdown and cry. I am not sure why I was doing that, but I was thinking about students’ workload. Over here, I am talking to many of my peers. Online classes do not feel good anymore” (student 1 response). “At the end of a semester, I get lazy and tend to not concentrate on learning” (student 2 response).

**Discussion**

In terms of social presence, engagement, satisfaction, and overall consistency, the results of this study show that students prefer face-to-face learning over online learning. Even though some students reported enjoying online learning, most students did not enjoy it. Furthermore, the respondents perceived online learning to be highly stressful compared to traditional face-to-face courses. Interactive learning and more engaging courses during class were crucial components in assessing student learning with online courses. When it comes to online learning, self-motivation was ranked most important and described as the hardest among all the choices. Keeping track of deadlines and work was the most straightforward factor regarding student experience in online courses. As a result of the findings, instructors will be able to make better decisions to make online classes less stressful, more enjoyable, and engaging, thereby enhancing knowledge. The classes will also be more productive. Another interesting finding from the survey was that students felt that workload increased during online learning. They cannot manage their time as they used to during traditional face-to-face courses. This frustration hurts students’ learning.

**Conclusion**

Higher education in Qatar is currently restricted by the regulations given by the Ministry of Education. Students’ satisfaction with
the online class system, level of contact between students and instructors, workload, and overall familiarity with online course delivery influence the students’ learning experience. As a result, intensified awareness is required, along with emphasizing flexibility and efficiency to increase student satisfaction with online learning. Students’ learning outcomes can suffer because of feeling less motivated. Challenges that students face during online learning should be considered to improve online learning for students. Establishing a plan that fits the current situation would help students feel more comfortable and less stressed, leading to better outcomes and higher student performance.

Figure 1. Results of the third question.
Figure 2. Results of the fourth question.

Figure 3. Results of the sixth question.
Figure 4. Results of the eighth question.

Figure 5. Words that students responded to.
Figure 6. Results of the twelfth question.

References


Appendix A

Survey questions from Qualtrics: Online Learning during Covid-19
We are 2 English 104 students conducting research on student satisfaction with online learning during Covid-19. We'd love to hear from you about the challenges you faced and your perspectives toward online learning in general. This survey should only take 4 minutes, and your responses are completely anonymous. We greatly value your input!

Q1 - I am....
  Female
  Male

Q2 - I am a....
  Freshman
  Sophomore
  Junior
  Senior

Q3 - Overall, do you enjoy learning remotely? (Please explain your answer).
  Yes
  No
  Maybe

Q4 - How stressful has online learning been for you during the Pandemic?
  1 Extremely stressful
  2 Very stressful
  3 Somewhat stressful
  4 Not too stressful
  5 Not at all stressful
Q5 - Do you have all the resources to study at home? such as internet, laptop, headset, private study area ......etc
Yes
No (Please list what you need)

Q6 - What has been the easiest thing for you in online learning?
1 Managing time
2 Being productive
3 Being motivated
4 Courses and adapting to them more
5 Communicating with professors
6 Keeping track of deadlines and work

Q7 - On average, how often do you communicate with your classmates per week outside of class?
Once a week
Twice
Multiple times
None

Q8 - Indicate whether you agree with the following statements (agree/disagree):
- Virtual learning has affected my grades positively
- Virtual learning has affected my grades negatively.
- Virtual learning has not affected my grades.
- Completing and understanding coursework online was easy
- Completing and understanding coursework online was difficult.

Q9 - Which of the actions should faculty take to help you improve your online learning? (Please rank from most to least important).
- Provide interactive activities
- Record your lectures
- Give clear instructions
- Support struggling students
- Be more lenient and understanding
- Other

Q10 - Rank the following challenges from hardest to easiest.
- Time management
- Technical issues
- Distractions
- Self-Motivation
- Lack of in-person interaction
- Other

Q11 - How has your workload been affected by online learning?
Q12 - To what extent do you agree with the following statements (strongly agree/somewhat agree/neither agree or disagree/somewhat disagree/strongly disagree)
- My courses were transferred efficiently to online courses
- My courses were not transferred efficiently to online courses

Q13 - What I wish my professors knew... (open-ended)

Q14 - What advice about online learning would you give freshmen joining in the fall? (open-ended)

Appendix B
Interview questions:
1. How are you feeling about online learning?
2. What changes would you like to see in virtual learning? (like the changes you would like the institution and the teachers to make)
3. When it comes to online learning—what do you find motivating? What do you find de-motivating?
4. How much time do you spend every day on HW during the pandemic?
5. What do you consider to be your biggest (or proudest?) achievement during online learning?
6. What advice would you give students about online learning? and/or Do you have any recommendations for faculty?
7. Describe (or tell me about) a time when your attitudes toward (relationship with?) online learning was at a low point

Fatima Saleh Ali is a Qatari student who is majoring in electrical engineering. She enjoys writing because it allows her to share her emotions and enhances her feelings in a unique way that can only be achieved via the idea of inserting words together on a page. It’s an experience that cannot be replaced.
Pushing Limits
People always tend to think that there are many obstacles and that it is impossible to overcome them. People always put limits to the things that they can do; however they are created as intelligent creatures with a very complex mind that can handle many more than expected. You can be an engineer, horse rider maybe an artist too… Why not?

I wrote this story to send a message that I always feel like I can do anything. That’s the main thing people are controlled by. Thoughts, their perception of themselves. Their own perception slows them down. If you are taught you can’t do anything, you won’t do anything. I was taught I can do everything! Everyone can when they believe in their abilities.
Unstoppable

“You can’t do it.” “You’ll never have the time.” “You will get exhausted.” “You can’t manage your time.” “You will fail your exams.” “You will regret it.” “Don’t risk it.”

I have been surrounded by negativity. Those words that used to surround me were like obstacles stopping me. They kept telling me it’s impossible, what you want is impossible, you can’t do every single thing you aim for. I asked myself, is it true?

I looked at the successful, beautiful, and intelligent woman in front of me. I looked at my mother. After years of suffering, bullying and hate surrounding her, she reached her dream. She became this young politician and informative businesswoman. She is known for her strong character. They said it was impossible, but she made it possible.

My mother raised me to believe in myself. Today I am an unstoppable 19 years old. I always feel like I can do anything. That’s the main thing people are controlled by: thoughts and their perception of themselves. Their own perceptions slow them down. If you are taught you can’t do anything, you won’t do anything. However, I was taught I can do everything!

Today, I am 19 years old. I am multilingual. I am a fighter pilot. I am a horse rider. I am a professional athlete. I am a diver in oceans and the sky. I am a sniper. I am a fighter, and guess what? Many more are on the way.

I am Amal and this is my story.

Since I was a young child, I was adventurous; I used to like exploring things and asking my mother about every single thing I didn’t know. One day I wanted to become a painter, the next day a doctor, the day after an employee at McDonald’s. A new decision every day, like all children. Until that day when I really knew what I wanted.
I was six years old, and this was my first time travelling. This was my first vacation out of Qatar. I wore my red mini skirt, my black suit, and I let my short hair down with a beret on top of my head. We were heading to London, but somehow, I thought I was heading to Paris and dressed as a French lady. Ten minutes were left for departure, and ten minutes left to see a plane for the first time. I entered the plane, amused by how enormous it was and how it was filled with infinitely many seats: enough for all those travelers, including me. I sat beside the window, squishing my face into the glass to have a better look at the wings. The plane started accelerating, and the pilot took off. I realized how the plane was tilting from side to side, and I was curious to know how and why. I kept wondering how the pilot would fly the plane for seven hours straight without a break. I kept disturbing my mother with numerous questions she had no answer for.

A member of the aircrew came and asked my mother her preference for juice, and then she looked at me. “What about you, young lady?” My reply was, “How is the plane not falling?” She laughed and said, “If you want to know, why don’t you ask the pilot?” She got permission from my mother to take me to the pilot. This kind flight attendant held my hands, taking me to a place I never forgot.

She took me to the cockpit, where the pilot and co-pilot were. The place was surrounded by glass, with a fantastic view of clouds like white cotton candy. The area was filled with black screens and mechanisms. I was surprised that the pilot was relaxed but focused. He turned and smiled at me. The flight attendant told the pilot, “This young lady asked me how the plane is not falling.” He said, “Come here, let me show you.” He took me close to him and pointed at a button called “Auto-pilot.” “This button makes the plane stay up even when I am not controlling it. Airplane wings are shaped to make air move faster over the top of the wing. When air moves faster, the pressure of the air decreases....” “Do you want to sit here?”

The pilot let me sit in this seat and gave me his hat and black shades. “See, now you are a pilot.” “But girls cannot be pilots.” “Who says that? You can be anything you want to be.”
And thanks to this man, I decided to be a pilot. It was not an easy journey, but I did it.

After meeting this pilot, I decided to be one exactly like him, but in December, things changed. It was Qatar’s national day (December 18), where all citizens and immigrants go to the Corniche and watch the national parade, where a large forces in various military sectors march. Military aircraft were flying in Doha’s skies, even better than the regular plane. I was amazed and felt that I wanted to wear this uniform and be a part of them. And this moment when I was nine years old, I decided to be a fighter pilot. I was not interested in the regular planes anymore. I wanted extreme. I wanted harder.

I grew up building planes with Legos and sticking planes around my room. I worked hard in school and got top grades to be a pilot. I grew up in a culture where women cannot be pilots, and where there are limits for women, so I kept my secret to myself my whole life. The only person I shared my secret with was my little sister, my secret keeper and partner in crime. My passion and love grew with me. I learnt every single piece in the cockpit. I memorized the structure and shape of every military aircraft owned by my country Qatar: Eurofighter Typhoon, Dassault Rafale, Dassault Mirage 2000, F-15 Eagle, and many more.

I dedicated all my years to high grades. I did not want anything to stop me, and I did not want any obstacles facing me, but sadly I still did. I became a sophomore, and it was time to decide which university I wanted to go to. Many high school students like me struggled in those days. It was so hard for them; two days ago, we needed an excuse to leave class, but now we should decide our future? I had it all figured out in my case, but it was time to face my culture.

I love my mother so much that I would never take a step that would make her sad. I wanted her acceptance and prayers in every step I took. My mother has allowed me to do everything my heart desires. She used to tell me, “I can’t stop you from making mistakes. You should make them and learn from them; that is the only way you mature.” It was time to tell my mother that I wanted to join the
military and be a fighter pilot. I was hoping the conversation would be as smooth as possible.

It was a calm afternoon when my mother was drinking tea and watching TV. I kissed her forehead and sat beside her. “I need to tell you something, mom.”

“What is it, dear?”

“It is about my major decision. I decided what I want.” I paused and took a breath, “It is in the aircraft field.”

“I knew it! I knew you would study aeronautical engineering,” she interrupted.

I looked at her and nodded quietly. “Yes.” A moment of fear made me say yes. I stood up and gave her my back, heading to my sister’s room, then I turned and burst loudly: “I want to be a pilot. A fighter pilot.”

She looked at me, surprised. “It is dangerous. You will be risking your life every day.”

“Please, Mom, this is my dream. This is the only thing I wish to study. Please understand, and you know I won’t take a path without your blessings.”

“Let me think about it.”

My mother is the person who most believes in me in this whole world, and yet that was her reaction. What will my father’s reaction be? My brothers? I know my uncles and aunts and every family member will be against me, but I didn’t care. I cared for my parents’ acceptance, and in my brother’s case, I didn’t want them to be mad at me. I wanted them to love me for who I am, no matter what choices I made.

Days passed by, and my mother still did not open the subject. I was so worried and yet desperate to know her opinion, which I would take into consideration. I did not want to open the subject, but I had no other choice.
My mother was getting ready to go to work. I knew it was a terrible time to open the subject, but I could not take her silence anymore.

So, I asked her, “Did you think?”

“How often did I tell you to choose the right time for this kind of subject?”

“I know, I am sorry, but please tell me.”

“No, I can’t let you follow this path. I can’t let you be a fighter pilot. You will get married one day. You will have children one day. You do not realize how big this decision is. I know that you would be dedicated and an excellent pilot, and I believe in you, but I do not want you to suffer in the future.”

“You are one of the first women to be a politician in Qatar, especially in your generation. It was forbidden and wrong in the view of the culture, but you continued, and you worked hard until you reached this day where everyone against you in the past respects and appreciates you today.”

“You are right. I faced many obstacles, but do you know what these were these obstacles? I was lonely. My family, friends, and everyone was against me. Everyone was judging me. I cried in my room, wiped my tears, left my room, and smiled. It was not easy! I do not want you to live what I lived. I do not want you to feel the pain I felt. Even if I know, one day, you will be successful. I can’t bear watching you suffer.”

“You will be by my side. You will hold my hands.”

“My mind won’t change.” She left.

This subject was closed. I applied for engineering, and I thought that maybe if I couldn’t fly the plane, at least I would build and design it. I accepted my faith even if it hurt, but I promised myself that I would join the air force and be a fighter pilot when I graduated from engineering. Even if I should study more, it wouldn’t hurt to have a double major, would it? I know anyone in my situation would be sad.
and depressed, but I always look at the positive side. I always look for a solution, even if it costs me more.

During my summer vacation, my last summer before going to university, my family arranged a trip to the United States, which I really wanted to go to. But I chose to stay and focus on horse riding, shooting, running, swimming, and the gym, of course. They tried their best to persuade me, so I agreed to join in the other half of the trip.

It was the first time my family and siblings travelled without me. I was left alone, but I needed this time to work harder. My dream is to participate in the Longines horseback riding competition that takes place every year. I arranged my time. I woke up early, had my breakfast, went to work out in the gym, and would have a break afterwards and go swimming. I then had another break and closed the day with horse riding. The next day I would follow the same routine but go shooting instead of swimming. I know anyone would think this is crazy. This is too much, but when I love something, I give it my time and effort. I even sacrifice things for it. I did not give up my dream of being a fighter pilot, but I kept it on hold.

My mother called me every night and checked up on me. She told me about their day, and I told her about mine.

“How are you going to the gym, shooting, and horse riding on the same day? This is too much!”

“I know, but I am using as much time before university starts.”

“You are doing this because I did not allow you to apply for the army?”

“No.”

“You are my daughter. I am a mother. I know you. Whenever you can’t do something, you blame yourself even if it’s beyond you.”

“I am just trying to improve my skills.”

“Listen to me. I thought about it for days. I will let you join the army as an engineer, not a fighter pilot.”
“Really???”

“Only if,” she interrupted “your father agrees, too. I did not tell him. I think you are the one who should tell him.”

“Okay, can you pass him the phone?”

“Darling, how are you? I bought you a ticket to come to us as we agreed.”

“I am fine, and I will be better after asking you a question. Do you want me to be happy?”

“Yes, of course.”

“There is something I want to do. I think about it every day, and I do not see myself in any other place.”

“What is it?”

“Can I join the army? As an engineer?”

“I know that you want to. I always see how you look at your siblings in their military outfits and how you watch every single graduation. I was surprised that you did not ask previously. Yes, I agree. If you promise me not to forget your Islamic values.”

I can swear this was the best call in my life. I reached half my dream, and if this happened, I don’t think being a fighter pilot is impossible either.

People might think I am weak and can’t stand in front of my parents. I am not weak. I am strong. I cherish my dreams and cherish my family more than anything. My mother did not stop me because of society. She sees something that I do not see. She wants the best for me, but I have faith that she will be the one leading me to become a fighter pilot one day. I know she will.

I learnt that any path I take that my mother does not accept, I end up regretting later. For example, something terrible happens whenever she tells me “No” and I disobey. When she tells me, “do not eat this
at midnight,” and I eat it, my stomach hurts me minutes later. If she tells me to stay home and study, but I choose to go out instead, I fail. This has been happening since I was a child. Mothers know what they are saying. They know what’s best.

I started with the procedure of applying to the army. My father offered to talk to a friend of his to make the procedure smoother, but I told him that I wanted to be accepted with my own hard work and effort. I know that my chances are weak because they accept a minimum number of women, but I wanted to earn it.

When the interview day came, I was not stressed even a little bit. I have been preparing for this since I was nine years old. I was marching in my room the way lieutenants do. I would stand the way they do and learned their phrases from my brothers.

I was informed that I should be there at six, which I did. I arrived precisely at six, so proud of myself, but I was shocked when I entered. The hall was full of applicants. And that was my first lesson learnt: arriving on time is not enough. The earlier, the better.

An officer told me to put my phone on silent, not use it, remain seated silently, and wait for my turn. This was the longest time I had waited in my whole life; it was as if time froze and my turn would never come.

After a very, very long exhausting wait, my turn finally came. I entered the hall, which looked like a court, and five lieutenants were sitting there like judges. Each lieutenant was from a different military sector: Army, Navy, Air Force, and National Guard. They were all women, which made me so proud. My eyes could not look away from the Air Force lieutenant, who I realized from her uniform was a fighter pilot.

They asked me to introduce myself and then asked me why I chose to join the military.

“This has been my dream since I was nine years old, and I cannot see myself in any other place. I feel that I am an obedient,
determined, and passionate person, and there will be no other place that suits me well.”

“Why did you choose aeronautical engineering?”

I was silent for a moment. I knew my answer, but how could I tell them I chose it instead of being a fighter pilot?

“I love aircraft, and I wanted something in the aviation field; therefore, I chose aeronautical engineering.”

“Why not a fighter pilot?” The fighter pilot asked.

I looked at her, surprised. It was as if she knew it. It was so hard to answer.

“I did not consider it to be honest,” I lied.

“Well, I do not see you fit in any other thing. Do you agree?” She asked all the other lieutenants.

“We wanted to choose three women from all of you that would fit as a fighter pilot. We saw in your character all that we were seeking, confidence, strength, respect, and most important of all, passion.”

“Can you consider our offer? Can you change your plan and study to be a fighter pilot rather than aeronautical engineering?”

I wanted to say “YES” so badly, but I could not.

“Can you give me some time to think about your offer and discuss it with my family?”

“Sure, you have 24 hours.”

I was not surprised at all. This is how things work in the military. I was even lucky to have 24 hours, not less. I felt that this was an award for my patience. I was so happy. I felt that this was the answer to my prayers and patience. I went home and informed my parents. My father did not know what to say, and my mother stared blankly at me.

“How will you inform them of your decision?”
“I should be there at nine a.m. sharp.”

“We will go with you.”

“Sure.” I was happy. This is good news, and if my parents came, there would be 50% of their acceptance.

The next day I arrived there with my parents at eight a.m., an hour earlier. I learnt my lesson. They called my name. I went in with my parents, but they did not let my father in. They took him to a male lieutenant instead.

I went with my mother and explained to them that my mother wanted to know more.

“We understand that you are worried about your daughter. Believe us, this opportunity does not come to anyone. We chose your daughter because we saw the potential she has, her knowledge, her character.”

“Excuse me for my question, but what if she gets married and pregnant one day?”

“In this case, as many others and every single sector in Qatar gives women maternity leave. She will receive a temporary office job when she is pregnant until she gives birth.”

“Will you take her to study abroad?”

“No, she will study here.”

My mother looked at me and asked, “Do you want this?”

“Yes, I do not see myself in any other place.”

“Inshallah, you will be a great fighter pilot.”

After years of dreaming and struggle, I finally reached my dream. I am wearing my combat uniform and my service cap, heading to my training flying a real plane for the first time.

My parents are proud and happy for me. Every person who stabbed me in the back is now saying they are “happy for me.”
Five months later, my graduation came, and I saluted in front of his highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. And I am recognized as one of the first women who became a fighter pilot.

Today I am 22 years old. I am multilingual. I am a fighter pilot. I am a horse rider. I am a professional athlete. I am a diver in oceans and the sky. I am a sniper. I am a fighter. I am a wife. I am a mother.

I am Amal, which means hope. I had hope, and my hope made my dreams come true.

I am Amal, and this is my story.

Noof Al-Meghessib is a 19-year-old from Qatar. She graduated from Al-Jazeera Academy and is majoring in electrical and computer engineering at Texas A&M Qatar. She speaks three languages: Arabic is her native language; English her second language, and Turkish. Noof has joined the Qatar debate for high schools and received certificates twice. She is a sports enthusiast and horse rider.
Ahmad Al-Janahi

I have always been running in my mind for years, dreaming about participating in one of the most difficult races in the world. Training continuously, preparing for the big day, then suddenly it is cancelled due to the coronavirus. But I never gave up on achieving my goal. I trained even harder for one more year and finally, the battle started. It was a battle that I had never expected to be this difficult. It was the hardest and the best experience that I have been through in my life!
15 September

Five years ago, a commercial on the Al-Kass channel popped up to change my life! After a long and exhausting day in high school, I was chilling in our quiet living room watching TV, hungry as a wolf and waiting for my mother to get lunch ready. I was switching between channels and stopped to watch the Olympics from Rio on Al-Kass sports channel. The spots were on the 1000 m runners, and the commenter screamed, “Here he goes again; the legend of the Olympics breaks the world record again and smashes all the runners!” At that moment all I was thinking about was what he was going to eat after such a vigorous effort. Back then, I used to play many sports, but I never loved a sport and decided to take it seriously and improve myself in it. After a while, a commercial for a long-distance race called Samla popped up. Samla is one of the hardest races in the world, combining five sports in one race: running, biking, swimming, kayaking, and shooting. The race has a time limit of 60 hours and the candidates should be able to cover 200 km during this time. The race was streamed on this channel for three days and it was going to start at 6:00 a.m. the day after I saw the commercial (Thursday). I was extremely excited to watch the race and couldn’t wait until it started.

The next day, I woke up at 6:00 a.m. and jumped from my bed to brush my teeth and get ready for school. It was the fastest that I have ever woke up from bed and gone downstairs ready in my life; I was ready in 5 minutes. It literally took me one minute to finish brushing my teeth. Then I went directly to the living room to watch the race while waiting for the driver to pick me up for school. Luckily, once I switched the TV on it was on Al-Kass and I saw the countdown for the beginning of the race. I was amazed by the number of participants and how they all ran together as warriors in a war once the start whistle was blown. I was only able to see this scene as the driver arrived at that time. I wished that it wasn’t a school day, but I had to go. I was counting the hours the whole time in school, and I told all my friends about it. Finally, the time came. I turned on the TV again, brought my blanket, and picked some snacks from the
kitchen, keeping in mind that I was going to spend the weekend in the living room going back and forth. After 12 hours, I was shocked to see that the first candidate had completed the race!

At that moment, I felt as if I had been hit by lightning. I didn’t expect that at all; I thought that the first winner would finish at least by the next day, but the finish line was crossed by a beast only 21 hours after the start whistle. I was extremely excited to participate in this race; these beasts motivated me to start preparing myself. Sadly, the age limit for this race was 18, so I had to wait for two years to be eligible to go through this experience. I took advantage of this and started my investigation into the race. I started by following on Instagram Faisal Al-Qahtani, who was the champ of Samla 2017 and a top 10 ranked player in the past versions. I learned a lot from their knowledge. I learned that this race is not a game and that I need to take it seriously and train very well before participating. This is because many participants wanted to have this experience without training and ended up in hospitals for long periods because of the overload they put on their bodies.

As a beginner, I thought that running was easy, so I decided to run 10 km every day. My favorite place for jogging is Aspire park; I used to do most of my training there. In my first run, I went there and tightened my shoes to get started. I started running without doing any stretching exercises; I just ran slowly and raised my rhythm gradually. The first kilometer went well, but as soon as I finished the third kilometer my leg muscles started to tighten and I was breathing hard, so I couldn’t continue running. At that moment, I realized that I am millions of steps behind my goal. Finishing 200 km would not be easy at all! Even so, I raised my hands to look at them and slapped them on my face and said to myself that I can do it even if it would take me years, and I still have time. I started to get used to running, and I ran three days a week for the rest of the two years. By that time, I had built good endurance and my level of running improved a lot. I tried to do my best to teach myself and improve myself in this sport without a coach. I learned the running technique by practicing, and by watching Faisal Al-Qahtani and many other experts in long distance running. I fixed some mistakes that I used to make.
After graduating high school, the military service called me to join them and finish my required period in the National Service Academy. I was lucky because it would have improved my fitness, and what is even better is that they were looking for new participants in their sports team to participate in Samla, so I worked very hard to join the sports team. One day, after completing the first month in camp, the sports officer gathered all of the 1800 soldiers in the huge theater and announced that after three days all the soldiers are going to have a running test, a 4 km race, that will be settled in the camp. After that, he added that the first 40 ranked soldiers will join the sports team to have a special training and represent the NSA in the Samla race. When I heard that, I wanted to jump and scream with my highest voice from happiness. I talked to myself in my head and promised that I would do whatever it takes to cross the finish line with the first 40 participants. The day has finally come, and I started the race and gave it all that I had built in the past two years. As they say, “hard work pays back,” and I was able to finish in 26th place.

I started training with the team step by step. We were five months away from race day, so we had time to get ready and prepare ourselves. The training was extremely hard; we used to train six days a week, with two training sessions each day. It was hard times, but our coach Ali always inspired us and cheered us on all the time by saying that the pain will vanish and we will forget all about it when we cross the finish line. We resisted the tough training and now it’s time to show up. One week before the race, the team were at the peak of their performance, and we started to prepare our minds and put ourselves in the race mood to be ready. We stopped training for the last week and started eating carbs to have a good load of fuel for the race. All of a sudden, the organizers of the race published a post on the race Instagram account saying that the race has been canceled until further notice due to the spread of coronavirus. Despair surrounded the team, and all our dreams vanished; the hard times that we have been through and the tough nights we have spent awake feeling the pain of our muscles and not being able to go to sleep all washed away for nothing.
The days passed, and we graduated from the military service after spending a wonderful year with the NSA. The organizers of the Samla race finally announced that the race was going to be held the next year. I would have never wasted the hard work that I accomplished and leave it without earning the feeling of achievement, so I didn’t give up and created a WhatsApp group to join all the team members to motivate them and cheer them to participate in the race. I had daily contact with our coach to ask him to provide us with a training schedule so we could get ready for the race. I used to publish the training every day for my friends in the team and gather them in Aspire park for training. We kept following the schedule and remained ready at the end to finally be able to participate in Samla 2021. The race was settled to be in the end of March, so the weather would be not very hot neither cold.

The time has come; the moment that I was dreaming about for five years has come to reality. We gathered at 3:30 a.m. in the far south of Qatar in Salwa District. We signed in to take our tracking devices and ate our breakfast before the start whistle. And here we go, the countdown has started. It was a breathtaking moment. I am finally living the moment I have waited so long to experience. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and the organizer blows into the whistle to announce the beginning of the 200 km journey. The first stage was running 30 km from Salwa to Al Karaij beach. I started running at a low pace as I planned to finish this stage in no more than four hours. It was the easiest part of the race and the weather was still cool as we started before the sun rose. I was able to complete this stage easily by paying attention to my nutrition plan as I had to have a sip of water and sodium every ten minutes to remain hydrated and have some dates and nuts each half hour.

The first stage went better than I expected, but it was the entrance gate for the suffering journey. I went to change my clothes and prepare myself by putting all my running stuff in a water-resistant bag and tying it around my waist to get ready for 3 km of free swimming in the ocean off Al Karaij beach. An interviewer from Al-Kass asked me about my expectations of for the swimming stage, and I said confidently that it is going to be a stage to recover from
running and get ready for the next running stage. This poor man didn't know that he is about to go through the hardest part of the race and is going to think of surrender more than four times in just this “recovery stage.” I jumped into the sea with my swimming shorts at 10:00 a.m. By this time, the weather was extremely hot at a temperature of 42 Celsius. I was sweating like hell, but as soon as I jumped into the sea, I felt relieved because the sea was exceedingly cold. For the first ten minutes, I wished that the full 200 km were in this stage, but after ten or fifteen minutes of swimming, unfortunately, my whole body started to shake! The extreme cold water froze my muscles. What happened to me was just like throwing a fireball in freezing water. I had no idea what to do; I stopped in front of the sea and saw the security jet skis picking up the candidates who asked for surrender. I saw them and thought of calling the security jet ski and was about to raise my hand because I literally didn’t know how I would be able to finish this stage.

I then thought about the years that I have spent in preparing for this race, and the hard training that I managed to resist, so I gathered myself and said there is no way of surrendering and started to swim on my back to reach the stop station after 1.5 km of swimming. I barely jumped to the floating station in the sea, and what made it harder is that in this floating station I had to finish the first obstacle of the race to continue swimming. The obstacle involved diving two meters to pick up a bag of rocks and bring it up. I barely completed this obstacle, and I wanted to jump again to the sea to finish this stage, but my legs were shaking without stopping. The choice of surrender occurred in my mind again, but I forced my body to jump in the sea to shut my mind up, and I kept swimming on my back without stopping. Finally, I was relieved to see land.

Then, I took a good break at the station and stretched my body to be able to get started with the third stage. It was the longest distance of running of the race—about 40 km—but what made this stage very hard is that the first half of the running course was deep sand, so we were forced to walk in many spots, while the other half of this stage involved climbing hills. This hard road made me lose my plan as it took me much longer than I expected to finish this stage. Anyway,
this stage didn’t require a lot of effort. Instead, the challenge was resisting walking slowly for hours without losing my mind. I was in a fight with my brain at this stage; my brain tells me to stop and I punch him back saying no. I remained doing this for the nine hours; it took me to complete this incapacitating stage. It was 9:30 p.m., and by that time I was very tired and feeling sleepy. But I didn’t want to have a nap or rest because I was worried that I wouldn’t wake up until the next day, so I decided to take the risk and go to the next stage, a very long-distance stage of 70 km of off-road biking.

I found three of my friends in the station and we gathered to start the fourth stage together. I collected my bike from the organizers and installed my flashlights in the dark night and started pedaling. Biking was fun, but the problem was that it’s a very long distance and we were heading north against the wind. Everything was fine, and I was about to finish the first 40 km and wished that I would be able to finish this stage before sunrise. I was in the mood and kind of enjoying biking while listening to music, when all of a sudden, I felt that I was carrying an extra 30 kg weight with me. I didn’t want to think of having a hole in my tires tread while I’m in the desert and I was way ahead of my friends. I looked at my tires hard and I was disheartened to see that the back tire was out of air. I had no choice other than riding the bike as it is, so I tried to keep going as far as I could. After one km I was lucky to see a stop station with a bike assist team. Time passed and I had new tires to complete the fourth stage successfully.

By that time, I only had two stages left, I had crossed all the hard stages and all that was left was shooting and kayaking and a bit of running. I collected my strength and convinced myself to spend another few hours without sleeping and I started shooting. Shooting was easy; I just had to shoot five still paper targets. However, the challenge was to do it directly after biking. I passed this stage and went to start the last stage in this unusual race. I started running for 20 km to reach the sea and started kayaking for 6 km. The running distance wasn’t long, but I felt dead sleepy and my eyes kept closing while I was walking in this stage. I barely made it to the kayak station to pick up a kayak to finally give my legs a rest. The kayak went well
and gave a boost charge and activated me to complete the race, as it was something different from running or biking.

Here it comes, the last hour of the race. I have crossed 185 km over the past 47 hours. Just thinking of that gave me a boost to finish the last 15 km of running. I completed the kayak distance successfully and my legs became fresh, so I decided to give all that I had left in this last hour. I raised my pace and ran without stopping at all. All I saw at that moment was the finish line in my mind. I kept running at a very good pace, and my friends came to cheer me on by their cars, honking and saying that there was nothing left. I started seeing huge yellow balloons and it didn’t take me a second to figure that it was the finish line balloons. I ran even faster without feeling to reach them, I actually didn’t want to lower my speed because I knew that there was no way I would be able to run again. Finally, I raised my hand up and crossed the finish line at 48 hours, 16 minutes, and 13 seconds. It was the best feeling ever that I will never forget.

Ahmad Al-Janahi is a sophomore at Texas A&M University at Qatar. He graduated from Tariq Bin Ziyad secondary school and joined the military service to serve for one year. He is obsessed with horses, and his main hobby is show jumping. He is also passionate about experiencing new challenges. Ahmad completed the Samla race once and has ambitions to participate in the next version of the race in 2023 to break his record.
This piece’s prompt was, “What is something/someone that motivated you to do better?” I’ve wanted to write this piece for such a long time because I wanted to tell people about my past, and maybe they’ll be motivated to turn an initially negative thought to a good outcome. Every time I think of the past, I remember how far I have come. There are people out there who have such a bad quality of life, and if I can help a couple of people, then I have achieved my goal. The smallest of actions can make people happy. I used my embarrassment to benefit myself and I think other people should do that too. I enjoyed writing and sharing this with my classmates the most out of all my writings.
Abnormal Incentive

Suddenly, I was thrown into the deep side of the pool, I choked on water and smelled the chlorine flooding my brain and lungs. I was not a good swimmer, or a swimmer to begin with. So, I fought for my life by smashing the water with my arms and pushing downward with my legs. My friends, assuming that I knew how to swim, were just pranking for the laugh, but they didn’t know that I was actually unable to swim, so they stared and laughed. Finally, someone realized and jumped in to help me. My face was red. I was humiliated that everyone saw me lacking a very basic skill. It felt like everyone I loved was disappointed in me even though I was only surrounded by my peers. I didn’t even care who pushed me in, I was too busy thinking whether I should just leave and run away to the changing rooms.

Even if I knew who pushed me, it wouldn’t have mattered; it’s not his fault I don’t know how to swim. I left the pool area, desperately wanting to put an end to this shame. This moment, which many might find simple or stupid, caused me to be insecure. In addition to that, every time I think about what happened, it feels like my chest is being compressed by boulders. Out of the blue, the strength that was hiding in me came out, as sudden as a bullet train from a tunnel. Hence, I ran to my parents demanding immediate swimming lessons.

Without hesitation my parents enrolled me in a swimming club. With the support of my parents, and with the shame building up inside me, I was eager to learn how to swim; however, I was anxious and frightened. My parents and I went to get the proper swimming attire: swimming goggles, a swimming cap, and swimming shorts. A few days passed and it was finally time to go to my swimming lesson. From the photos I saw, the pool seemed enormous and intimidating. Nonetheless, my inflated confidence didn’t let anything shake me or even cause the slightest of panic. Finally, we made it to the building that has the Olympic
sized pool. I entered the building’s reception area with ease and comfort. Then we completed the registration and I headed to the changing rooms alone.

Afterwards, I started to walk towards the door that was supposedly meant to take me to the pool. Approaching the door, the unescapable smell of chlorine hit me like a truck. My heart dropped to my toes and I went from a raging predator to prey, a falcon becoming a simple rodent. A worker was behind me, pushing me forward, thinking I am lost. The door opened up and my heart rate rose like an exponential graph.

“HEY! You there!” I did not know if he was greeting me or about to command me to do something. Terror filled my eyes.

“Yes, sir?” I answered in a nervous voice.

“What’s your name and your skill level?” he said in a firm manner.

“It’s my first-time sir,” I replied. I was ashamed, but I had to face it.

“Well, you should go to the first lane,” he said in a calm voice.

This made me feel a little better; it was normal to not know how to swim at my age, after all. I went to the first lane where another coach was standing. My thoughts started to ease and I began to focus and see the surroundings. I heard the echoing voices of the coaches shouting and the sound of people splashing into the pool. I started to gain back my confidence and my determination. Finally, I dropped into the water, with the assistance of the coach. I paddled my feet like a duckling’s first time in the water. My lungs acting as a balloon to keep me afloat. Approval of my coach, he nodded and said, “Good work kid, keep it up.” I broke into a big, prominent smile like the emoji’s; joy written all over my face. I was delighted and satisfied with the work I did on my first day.

Mission accomplished! I destroyed the chains of fear and shame that were wrapped around my heart. I ended the day with a bottle of champagne, and a huge crowd of cheering voices “Ali! Ali! Ali!
Ali!” was all I heard and saw on my parade back home. Days passed and swimming became a hobby over time, helping me improve my health and physique. I went on to perfect every aspect of swimming; even the coaches couldn’t keep up. I finally achieved my dream of not being afraid of being pushed into the pool; being able to laugh it off and enjoy my day.

Ali Walid Salem was born in Egypt and raised in the Middle East. His native language is Arabic, so he never expected to do well enough to be accepted into Best Writing. He majors in electrical and computer engineering at Texas A&M University at Qatar and hopes to pursue a master’s in artificial intelligence or similar higher education degree.
Last year was very full of uncertainties. Each day that brought me closer to the end of high school filled me with apprehension; I am yet to reconcile with those four years. Hopefully, I will look back on them with fondness when all memory of pain will fade. Weirdly, everything that happened to Lewis Hamilton’s Formula 1 season last year would apply to my life: a rocky start, a long and difficult struggle, and brighter days. Being able to build this link with the sport has rid me of all emotional responsibility, I built my feelings on the struggles and negatives of my favorite driver. But when things started looking up for him, something came back to me: why I joined this sport twelve years ago. The determination, the effort, and the triumph against all odds. And as Lewis was picking his way up the points, I was working to turn everything around. The 2018 Monaco Grand Prix is iconic; it is what pushes me to fight when nothing seems in my favor. Daniel’s drive is phenomenal, what a driver.
The King of Monaco

The RB17 holds a proud man, a tired gladiator with a fist clenched over his distinctive black, Red Bull suit, its red highlights flowing through it like blood in his veins and sweat on his skin. His colorful helmet teases the glimmer of his eyes, one so bright it bleeds through the menacing nature of his car, a dark horse that he rode to take the Bull to the first-place sign, one that seems to be placed at the finish line, as it is visibly a street race. Under his wings rest exhausted and worn-out tires, which appear to be on the softer side of that year’s tire compounds; their speed and grip helped achieve what appears to be a marking event. Around him are trees hanging next to an imposing Rolex banner, on top of which stands the Monegasque flag. This act is circled by gray gates that separate thousands of fans from the actors of what is the most important sporting event of Monte Carlo.

This city’s streets have witnessed countless iconic moments in motorsport, including heartbreaks and controversies, but amongst these moments stand victories so meaningful that their place in Formula One history shall remain forever. Daniel Ricciardo’s story is undeniably one for the books. A lustrous gem from Perth, loved by all enthusiasts of the sport and under Red Bull Racing, Daniel was a fierce and fearless driver. He has never felt any threat, not even when a young Max Verstappen, a wonder boy who needed Daniel’s experience and knowledge, joined his side in 2015. But when the latter rid Max of his anger issues, people saw the rise of what the future face of the sport could be, and started questioning Daniel’s belonging to the team, as if he was only living in the big shell of his potential. To prove that he “still had it,” Daniel fought relentlessly throughout the 2018 season, already being chased by the ghost of his successor, Alex Albon. He had to prove everyone wrong.

Something Daniel prides himself on is his speed around Monaco, it was his playground, and this year was no exception, even if his team principal, Christian Horner, and strict advisor Helmut Marko, were keeping a close and unusually critical eye on a man you wouldn’t normally worry about. Once again, Daniel won the Monaco Grand Prix, and was acclaimed by the crowd and his team as having
redeemed himself: he rose from a very rough period. This victory was as valuable for Daniel as a person as it was for the team, as they were slowly gaining their place next to Mercedes and Ferrari as one of the strongest teams in the paddock. The “Honey Badger,” as Daniel is sometimes called, could relish the taste of champagne under the cloudy sky of Monte Carlo before moving on to the next race. He drove that car brilliantly, and, at the end of the season, said goodbye to Max, who took on the reigns of the Bull. However, he had to see his first friend in Formula One leave for Renault, thus creating what is known today as the curse of the second seat—one that has cost some Red Bull drivers their careers. And when the ladder wasn’t snatched away, those drivers still had to fight hard to earn any other team’s trust in their talent.

The people who mindlessly mixed with the asphalt moved along with their day. Without context, those people would see nothing more than an athlete so used to the feeling of winning, and of competing, that they have become numb to it. Athletes no longer fazed by what used to pump adrenaline into their system, but after a long and painful fight, against doubts, doubters, and time itself. Daniel is a fighter, and his relentlessness and passion is something we can all relate to. The emotions he expressed as rhetor of the message of his win and ambition, are that he is the principal painter of this piece. He is englobed by all the frustration and anger, but also satisfaction and happiness. The stakes were so high, but the rewards were better. This rhetorical situation has a clear discourse: you must believe that it gets better. Even though it may be clearer to the rhetor than his audience, it reaches them eventually. At the end of the darkest tunnels stands a strong gladiator, his armor made with his sweat and effort and brought together with pride. In his moment, the wreath of his accomplishments turned his already revered self into the icon of Monaco’s “swimming pool” (an iconic corner of the track where I would not recommend doing the famous winner’s dive, though it’s much better than the harbor). In his own words: “For those few minutes I felt like a rock star!” (Maher 2021).

I think that something that is also relevant to the message is how he managed to win the race with all the odds against him, driving
a broken-down car, with tires that begged to be released from it, unable to keep up with his desperate desire to cross the finish line and escape the speeding Ferrari behind him. Usually, he wears his emotions on his sleeve, but under his suit. But not that day, which is why this picture totally transcends the world of motorsport. The satisfaction of winning in the toughest of situations is unequaled: a truly unmatched feeling that people who experience savor for as long as they can or want.

I guess each one of us has a Monaco in our heart to chase. Something so priceless and meaningful that it perhaps suppresses all other goals and aspirations in their lives. There is no better reward than the confidence that joins the joy of fulfilling a dream or a promise. The engulfing feeling of joy, pride, and satisfaction that washes over a person and covers them with the ambition to do more, to reach brighter stars and climb higher and steeper mountains that once seemed impossible to confront is what pushes us all: the never-ending surge of accomplishment.

Imane Kahramane is a petroleum engineering student in the 2025 class. Born and raised in Morocco, she got to experience the fusion of countless cultures and languages, even more so when she moved to Qatar to attend university. She enjoys sports, especially Formula 1. Writing is something that has accompanied her throughout her entire life, in many forms and shapes, and in many languages. This goes entirely to her parents, who have helped her nurture a love for words from a young age. Thus, this piece is dedicated to them, and to her family.
Questioning Power
Pendulum of Light. Al-Hilal, Doha, Qatar 2021 / Sayed Kameli
This piece was composed during my first semester as a freshman for an English 104 course as one of the writing assignments. We were asked to choose any piece of campaign/advertisement and do a rhetorical/visual analysis. I chose this advertisement specifically to write about not only to analyze, but I felt the message this picture sends is with great significance in today’s society. I believe this is one of my best writings I have done so far and I truly hope my work has a positive impact to the targeted audience.
Advocating for Women’s Rights Through a Photograph

About one in three women get harassed or abused worldwide. Ninety-one percent of domestic violence crimes are against women, no matter their age, beliefs, or the way they dress. Women all over the world have been struggling with this issue since the beginning of time.

Although this topic may not be brought up often, the advertisement this essay discusses seeks to eliminate ignorance toward violence or harassment against women and raise awareness of it. Hence it will encourage more women to speak up and share their experiences. Inspiring other women to speak up about their experiences with violence or harassment is significant to women’s mental and physical well-being. Therefore, neglecting such things can lead to the development of posttraumatic stress (PTSD), depression, and many more serious physiological disorders.

The purpose of this essay is to determine the effectiveness of this advertisement by breaking down the rhetorical and visual elements, such as ethos, pathos, space, emphasis, and contrast, it uses to convey its message. These elements are significant to the audience as they aid a clear understanding of the chosen piece.

Addressing violence and speaking up is the first step towards healing. However, doing so requires courage. The aim of this advertisement is to raise awareness and encourage women to speak up. Most women’s abusers tend to be men who are blood relatives, making it much more difficult to confront them. The image is specifically targeted to women who experience domestic violence or harassment in any way. This campaign is emotional rather than informative, and mostly depends on visual components to get the message across to the viewer.

The King Khalid Foundation, a charitable organization established in Saudi Arabia, published this advertising campaign. They conveyed their intended message in various ways. Initially, they
used ethos. They pasted the organization’s logo at the bottom of the advertisement to gain credibility. Therefore, the audience will have complete trust when viewing the advertisement as this piece comes from a known and trustworthy source. Furthermore, the advertisement used pathos to create an emotional connection with the viewer. The designers achieved this by using artistic and visual effects like makeup. The bright and bold color around the eye mimics a bloody eye and exaggerates the physical pain this woman is feeling, creating an emotional attachment between the advertisement and the targeted viewer as a result. A careful examination and analysis of the advertisement found many visual compositions that clearly convey the intended message. For example, contrast between the background and the women’s face makes her injured eye stand out. It is the first thing that will grab the viewers’ attention as it does not require contextual knowledge and deep understanding to clearly understand the message behind the advertisement. Also, the advertisement uses space to exaggerate how women who experience such things seem to be alone. The plain black background with a slight glow behind the women supports this.

The most interesting observation about the advertisement that really catches the eyes of a viewer would be the emphasis around the woman’s right eye. The black niqab (face veil worn by Muslim women) creates a contrast between the women’s pale skin, which further assists emphasizing the beaten-up eye.

In my opinion, the two sentences “Some things can’t be covered” and “Fighting women’s abuse together” are vital to fully communicate the purpose behind this advertisement as they explain what is going on in the image, which cannot be done using visual components. The sentences contain simple vocabulary that the majority will understand. Without these sentences first-time viewers will only see an injured woman and they would not know the meaning of it or the message the advertisement is trying to get across.

A possible constraint to conveying this advertisement’s message would be the font size and placement of the text. The campaign included two sentences related to the topic: “Some things can’t be
covered” and “Fighting women’s abuse together”. However, the size of the font may be too small to be effective. Viewers may not notice these two important sentences, which are crucial in the comprehensive understanding of the campaign. To fix that, the publishers should consider using a larger font and placing the sentences in the middle of the advertisement where the viewer’s eye would be mostly fixated.

Figure 1: the visual artifact used for analysis

Even though the campaign lacks clarity of context, we can consider the advertisement effective as it developed all the required components like pathos, contrast, and space to successfully educate people about the issues women face. Moreover, it may inspire women all over the world who face this issue to speak up about their experience and hopefully heal.
Fajer Al-Sulaiti is a freshman at Texas A&M University at Qatar, studying Chemical Engineering, Class of 2025. She is also a current member of Qatari Student Association (QSA) and was a member of The Peace Club at TAMUQ. She is very enthusiastic towards her studies and according to her, she is her best self in leadership positions.

References


Khaloud Al-Buainain

Being a feminist in an anti-feminism community can be challenging, yet my fight for gender equality for all will never stop. I conducted this research to observe Education City students’ understanding of the term “feminist.” This project helped me understand the different perspectives regarding a topic I am very conservative about. I stepped into the field of research expecting to receive hate, which only made me more eager to research this topic and push society’s limits to the unknown. I am a firm believer in change and progression, and I believe that we will live in a more supportive community one day.
“The Aggression of the Oppressed”: What Are the Perspectives of Current Education City Students on Feminism?

I. Introduction

Inequalities amongst people are rooted in our ideologies as humans. Different colors have different social status, different ethnicities have different stereotypes, and different genders have different rights. Women have been dehumanized and discriminated against in all parts of the globe, and having to break free from gender norms is a mission that created a movement: the feminist movement. The feminist movement is “the advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes” (Oxford University Press, 2020). Feminism is often separated from women’s rights; the term feminism is often affiliated with the “evilness of the rebellion amongst young females.” As Veanne Anderson from Indiana State University conceded, “they are also viewed as man-hating extremists, angry, and physically and sexually unattractive” (Anderson, 2009).

Feminists are often looked down upon. One study showed how males were rated less favorably based on their feminist label (Breen & Karpinski, 2008). Feminism is also ridiculed in results to certain campaigns. Celia Walden exclaimed how the “Free the Nipple” campaign ruined her perspective of feminism, and she also mentioned her utter hatred for fourth wave feminism (Walden, 2019). This acknowledges the difference between women’s rights and feminism. While existing studies have clearly established an association between society’s views on feminism and the feminist label amongst the two genders, the association between how different fields of study hold unique perspectives on feminism has yet to addressed. In this research, I will observe different perspectives on feminism amongst Education City students and address the pattern between fields of study and perspectives.
II. Context of This Study

20 March 2017

House of Oppression, Saudi Arabia.

Wadjda, a 14-year-old Saudi Arabian girl, held the bars of her tinted windows, glooming at the free boys her age racing on their bicycles; wondering why He was so unfair in making her a girl. The young, oppressed soul was hiding like a precious souvenir in her white-on-white room that serves her basic human needs: a bed, a small closet, and a pile of the men’s laundry that she needs to get done before Friday prayer the next day. Scrolling through the trending hashtags on Twitter discouraged her from reaching the sky; maybe the roof she’s always under is her limit. The hashtag “#end_male_guardianship” was filled fragile men recruiting their powers, claiming that Feminism is nothing but rebellion against god’s words. Loud masculine laughter echoes from the living room she was forced to clean as the men of the house throw jokes on women and feminism, “yeah my daughters are not feminists, right?” said her guardian before fumes fill his guts at the thought of his daughter being a feminist. The loud bang of his headband being slammed into the table before he got up stressed all the women in the house, forcing them to act busy cleaning to avoid conflict. Wadjda’s heart started racing in fear after hearing her name when eavesdropping her dad’s conversation. She hid her secret phone and began to quickly fold the laundry, waiting for her next round of defeat.

Her dad barges into her room with his hands grasping his headband as he knew what to do to “keep the women in check.” “What do you know about feminism,” he raised his head to prove his power. Before her young soul got to express, bruises covered her body as a way of discipline from her guardian. Feminism is evil in this household.

III. Women’s Rights in Qatar

Women in Qatar have been deprived of basic human rights defined under the law. Women are not allowed to pass their nationality to their children, get married without a male’s permission (World Report 2019: Rights Trends in Qatar, 2021), or travel without a male’s
permission if they’re under the age of 25 (Qatar: Male Guardianship Severely Curtails Women’s Rights, 2021). The wage gap affects many women in Qatar as they are paid 25% to 50% less than men (Report: Women in Qatar paid 25 to 50 percent less than men - Doha News | Qatar, 2021). In addition, social allowances that include housing, children’s education, and travel allowances are mainly offered to men (Salary and Employment Benefits in Doha Qatar for 2019, 2021). Women are prevented from accessing some sexual and reproductive health care, such as pap smears, sterilization and other forms of reproductive health care, without proof of marriage (Qatar: Male Guardianship Severely Curtails Women’s Rights, 2021).

Moreover, domestic violence and marital rape are not criminalized by the law (World Report 2019: Rights Trends in Qatar, 2021), which puts the health and lives of many women in the hands of men. Throughout the history of Qatar, only four women have been appointed to a high-level governmental position, which portrays how underrepresented women are (Kovessy et al., 2016). The segregation between the two genders is often ruled by societies beliefs rather than the countries laws, as the psychologist Moza Al-Malki stated (King, 2006).

Qatar’s 2030 vision aims to grant more rights for women and increase women’s “[participation] in economic and political decision-making” (Qatar National Vision 2030, 2008). More women are now being represented across different aspects. In 2012, Qatar sent female athletes to participate in the London Olympic games (Staff, 2012). Additionally, Lolwah Al-Khater is a true inspiration to many young Qatari females; she is a Qatari diplomat that has been the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2017.

IV. Original Research Question

To get a better understanding about where current Education City students stand with feminism, I developed a main question that I will be working to find an answer to:

What are the perspectives of current Education City students on feminism?
A sub-question that I will touch on is:

Is there a pattern in perspectives on feminism amongst students in STEM and those in the humanities and arts?

I will analyze these two questions throughout my research.

V. Methodology

I conducted the primary research online due to the current circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Survey: On April 14, 2021, a survey with 12 possible questions generated by Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) was sent out to Texas A&M students via email by Dr. Mysti Rudd. Snowball sampling was used to survey Education City graduate and undergraduate students. Snowball sampling is defined as: “a way of finding a large number of people so that you can get and study their opinions about something, by finding a few and then asking them to find others” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). With that, I was able to collect responses from national and international students from different institutions to support my research. On April 29, I gathered 149 responses and analyzed them as shown in the results.

Interview: Two participants were interviewed using convenience sampling, where I selected my participants based on accessibility. I used two methods were used to interview: email and Zoom. I interviewed an anti-feminist undergraduate male from Hamad Bin Khalifa University through email to avoid conflicts and a pro-feminist undergraduate female from Texas A&M University through Zoom. I asked the non-feminist male 16 questions and asked the feminist female 17 questions. I received interview responses from the non-feminist on April 26 and the conducted the interview with the feminist on May 1.

VI. Hypothesis

Different genders, nationalities, and majors will have different responses. Males, I believe, are more likely to oppose feminism, whereas females are more likely to favor it. Qatars and Arabs
will refuse feminism more than non-Arabs. I believe Georgetown students will have a better understanding of women's issues than Texas A&M students. I assume that the plurality of Education City students are feminists to a degree. I believe that many people understand feminism as a man-hating and/or a rebellious movement. I presume fewer people would be comfortable with the feminist label due to society's perception of feminism. I believe that some people might consider there to be a difference between women’s rights and feminism and believe that there is a link between the high rate of people coming out (in the LGBTQ+ community) and feminism. I assume that students in Education City have more freedom to speak out on what they really believe than students at other private and public universities.

**VII. Survey Analyses**

Of the 147 responses, only 54 were males, with 17.6% of them strongly agreeing with supporting feminism (Figure 1). In contrast, 48.1% of the female respondents strongly agreed with supporting feminism (Figure 2). This supported my first hypothesis that males are less likely to be feminists than females; however, 75% of the respondents supported feminism to a point, as I had thought. Additionally, 66% of the people taking the survey believed that women rights and feminism differ to a certain extent (Figure 3). This is also an assumption that I believed to be true, yet the number that believed it did not differ was greater than I anticipated.

Furthermore, almost half of the females felt comfortable with the feminist label. This is in contrast to males, who mostly felt somewhat uncomfortable to extremely uncomfortable (Figures 4 and 5). People who despise feminism often tend to mask their identity, which contradicts my assumption as I believed a majority of Education City students would feel free and comfortable to voice their thoughts. Most respondents from Georgetown, Northwestern, and Virginia Commonwealth strongly disagreed that women and men have equal rights, while a majority of respondents from Hamad Bin Khalifa, Texas A&M, and Carnegie Mellon had conflicting opinions on whether men and women are treated equally (Table 1). Surprisingly,
57.1% of the respondents from Weill Cornell strongly disagreed that women and men are treated equally.

In addition, 70% of the respondents didn’t believe that feminism pushes young women to rebel. Those results refute my assumption as I expected more people to believe that feminism is evil. The number of non-Arabs not supporting feminism is 3% higher than Arabs. Remarkably, more Arabs were supportive of feminism than expected, rebuking my first assumption of Arabs being less supportive of this movement.

**VIII. Interview Results and Analysis**

I also interviewed two students based on convenience sampling: a non-feminist male from Hamad Bin Khalifa University (AFI—Anti-feminist interviewee) and a feminist female from Texas A&M University at Qatar (FI—Feminist interviewee). When asked about whether they believe there is a link between the LGBTQ+ community and feminism, both agreed that there is a link. AFI explained how both feminists and the LGBTQ+ community are “thriving on the notion of them being victims.” FI stated that she believes there is a link due to society’s oppression of both feminists and the LGBTQ+ community. Both FI and AFI agreed that there exists a connection between rebellion and feminism, as AFI explained how most young feminists often rebel against their parents with a more traditional views, and FI justified it by stating “Young girls who would seek asylum are most likely feminists because the main reason they would flee is so they get the rights they deserve.”

AFI perceives feminists as “idiotic” and “blatantly oblivious to any form of logic,” exclaiming his strong dislike for feminists. FI is more understanding of non-feminists’ perspective on feminism, claiming they might have been taught an incorrect definition of feminism. When asked about whether there was a turning point for when they decided to be feminists or non-feminists, AFI reported that he was falsely accused of sexual assault, which is a very important fact to consider when trying to understand his stance on feminism. FI stated a similar point as she mentioned how sexual harassments are
the main reason why she is a feminist who supports women and their rights. I believe that sexual assault and harassment play a major role in realizing how oppressed and unprotected by the public women are. AFI believes that an increase in false sexual assault accusations can be a result of feminism, while FI believes that feminism hasn’t affected anything in the Arab world as Arabs “do not have much freedom of speech regarding the way women are sometimes treated.”

IX. Discussion and Conclusion

STEM students were more conservative on the idea of feminism than humanities and arts students. I believe this to be a result of the exposure to different ideas and ideologies humanities students encounter daily. More males were against feminism than females, which isn’t a surprise as men deem feminism as man-hating, while women are asking for equal rights.

For the results, it was clear that most non-feminists had extremely conflicting points on feminism. The rate of women right’s supporters was much higher than feminism supporters as they believed those two ideas differed. I believe that society’s false perspective on feminism plays a huge role in why most people don’t support feminism; many non-feminists explained how they supported old feminism but not modern feminism. The cost of affiliation played a huge role in shaping the results (Johns, 1997). Many people were scared of being labeled as feminists, afraid that their social status amongst their communities would change.

Seeing people masking their identities to express their hatred showed that Education City students are not as vocal with their beliefs as expected. Seeing students disliking feminism meant that current students in Education City were not as open minded as anticipated, thus debunking a public misconception about how “free” the students are. The results made it clear that there is still a lot of room for improvement in society, for being vocal and open to more ideas and perceptions and researching more in-depth into the new concepts one encounters before believing what one has been told.
With that, I believe that feminism here is a hard pill to swallow, but it is medicine that will cure the segregation between genders.

My next step for this project is to conduct further research in the future to observe the perspectives of Education City students on the term feminist, specifically, how they react when acknowledging that someone is a feminist. As an activist myself, I will continue to advocate for feminism through social media (especially Twitter) and use this research to support my arguments. I will further develop my research to publish it through Hamad Bin Khalifa Press.

References


El-Dehaibi, N. (2021, April 1). Consent Form [Scholarly project].


Appendix A

Survey Results

I support feminism. (Male)

Figure 1 Survey Results (males)

I support feminism. (Female)

Figure 2 Survey Results (female)

I believe that women's rights and feminism differ. (All Genders)

Figure 3 Survey Results (all genders)

I feel comfortable with the label "feminist." (Female)

Figure 4 Survey Results (female)

I feel comfortable with the label "feminist." (Male)

Figure 5 Survey Results (male)

Feminism manipulates young women to rebel. (All Genders)

Figure 6 Survey Results (all genders)
Appendix B

Survey Questions

What Does It Mean to Be a Feminist in Education City?
The controversy behind the differences between women’s rights and feminism is a complicated issue. I am an Education City student researching the different perspectives on feminism between Education City institutions. To what extent are your views on feminism affected by the institution you are affiliated with? Feel comfortable answering as honestly as you can; your answers are fully anonymous.

1. I am a:
   a. Female
   b. Male

2. Prefer not to say
   a. I am a:
   b. Freshman
   c. Sophomore
   d. Junior
   e. Senior
   f. Graduate Student

3. I study in:
   a. Carnegie Mellon
   b. Georgetown
   c. Hamad Bin Khalifa
   d. Texas A&M

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<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
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Table 1: Survey Responses (all genders)
4. I am from (country)

5. I am knowledgeable about feminism
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. Please specify. What is your impression of feminist?

7. How strongly do you agree with these statements?
   a. I support women's rights.
   b. I support feminism.
   c. I believe that women's rights and feminism differ.
   d. I believe men and women SHOULD be treated equally.
   e. I believe that men and women ARE treated equally.
   f. I live in a society that advocates for women's rights.
   g. I live in a society that advocates for feminism.
   h. I believe that women belong in STEM as much as men.
   i. My university advocates for women's rights.
   j. My university supports feminism.
   k. I believe that my religion supports equal rights for women.

8. The ratio for male and female students in my institution is:
   a. More females, fewer males
   b. Fewer females, more males
   c. Equal amount of females and males

9. I believe that feminism is evil.
   a. True
   b. False

10. Feminism manipulates young women to rebel.
    a. True
    b. False
    Please explain your answer.

11. I feel comfortable with the label “feminist”.
    a. True
    Why do you think more people don't consider themselves as feminists?
    1. Society
    2. False image on feminism
    3. Religion
    4. Family
    5. Other
b. False  
c. Somewhat uncomfortable

Why do you feel uncomfortable with the label “feminist”?

12. Feel free if you would like to further elaborate on your beliefs.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Gender: M / F / Prefer not to answer
Nationality:
Institution you affiliate with:
Pro Feminism / Anti Feminism
Religious: yes / no

1. What is feminism to you?
2. Do you believe feminism and women’s rights differ? If so, in what ways?
3. Did you grow up in a community that supports feminism? Do you believe their ideologies affected your view on feminism? If so in what way?
4. Do you believe that there is a link between the LGBTQ+ community and feminism? If so, do you believe this can be a reason for why some religious people often avoid the idea of feminism?
5. To what extent do you think there is a connection between feminism and rebellion amongst young girls (fleeing from the country/seeking asylum)?
6. How comfortable are you with the label feminist? Please explain/give examples.
7. In what ways do you perceive feminists differently than non-feminists?
8. Do you recall a turning point when you decided to be/not be a feminist?
9. Do you believe women should be represented in STEM in equal numbers as men? Elaborate.
10. What societal trends do you believe feminism has played a major role in (high divorce rate, etc.)?
11. What would it take for you and your friends to be activist?
12. If you would like to further elaborate on your beliefs, feel free to do so.

Khaloud Al-Buainain is a Qatari computer engineer studying at Hamad Bin Khalifa University. She aspires for a brighter, more accessible, and accepting future for all. She’s a firm advocate for women’s rights, mental health, and inclusivity.
“To Post or Not to Post” is my final project for ENGL 104 Rhetoric and Composition. It explores the many applications of cancel culture and the effects it has on our lives.
To Post or Not to Post

Social media such as Tiktok, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have become increasingly popular (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Just like in the offline world, there seem to be daily discussions online regarding social issues that are exceptionally complex. Through cancel culture, people have familiarized themselves with social movements such as “BLM” and “MeToo” (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). Anyone can join the campaign with a simple hashtag or post, which unfortunately can backfire as it fosters a false mindset towards not actually solving social issues and often simplifying complex social injustices on the internet. This is prevalent nowadays on social media and is a problem that requires all our attention.

Cancel culture is defined as “the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure” (Slyt, n.d.). The term is broad, and its origins are derived from various periods and sources. One cannot determine an exact time when cancel culture came into existence because it has always existed in society but has been labeled differently (Mohan, 2021). There is a sense of ambiguity in cancel culture, which shows that it is flawed.

It is flawed because of how accessible social media is to people today. Around 5 billion of the world’s population have access to the internet (Internet World Stats, 2021). Statistics show that the potential number of people participating in cancel culture is high and ever-growing, which means that there will be more occurrences of misunderstanding of social issues. Users will scroll through social media and come across hashtags such as “#BLM” and “#MeToo” with divided attention because they are preoccupied with multitasking, resulting in many users not fully understanding the issue brought up on the internet (Bouvier & Machin, 2021). As a result, this undermines the importance of understanding and solving the social problem, making cancel culture a double-edged sword.
Emotional posts and comments are what follows with the unknowledgeable crowd.

An example is what filled the comment section under wgoqatar’s post on Instagram. The post was made up of two slides informing the public of animal abuse, specifically a lynching of a cat. Comments such as “So cruel! 😞😞😞” and “Held accountable? Hang that guy like this too, death penalty” piled the comment section (WhatsGoinOn Qatar, 2021). It is evident that the act done on the animal is severely rejected by the public; however, overly emotional comments, which have the purpose of “canceling” the perpetrator, hinder understanding the whole situation and locating the root of the problem. Social media is significantly accessible through devices such as phones, allowing people to post comments that reflect their unfiltered emotions. The comments section demands that the criminal be punished; however, their suggested punishments ranged from torturing the criminal to the death penalty. This shows the hypocritical mindset that cancel culture breeds, which eliminates the good that is done from “canceling.” Violence begets violence and surely does not solve social issues. One could also say that the act’s individualization removed Qatar’s institutional responsibility to implement laws that protect animals’ rights. Sidetracking is often expected when complex issues are simplified into a couple of slides and a summary.

Furthermore, most people use social media to gain fame and notoriety (Vaynerchuk, 2016), which results in fake and hollow responses to cancel culture. The herd mentality of following social media trends has stained cancel culture’s purpose because it changes the focus from solving social issues to fulfilling self-interests. It produces rapid rewards for simply mentioning a cancel culture topic on a post (Henderson, 2019). Big brands and companies utilize people’s social connection with cancel culture to cater to the social need to be in an ingroup (Pop Nuero, 2019). The social identification with ”doing what is right” allows social media users to have a better relationship with the public if they want to, and not solely to do it for the right reasons, thereby transforming social issues into tools that will be used to gain popularity.
Moreover, people have found ways to utilize cancel culture to defraud individuals who are a part of the group trying to bring about positive social change. In Atlanta, a person successfully misused two hundred thousand dollars’ worth of donations that were meant for the “Black Lives Matter” organization (Dzhanova, 2020). This opposes the motives of cancel culture. Not only does this distract the masses from social issues, it takes good actions from people and uses them for their benefit. The internet has made it easy for individuals to exploit cancel culture and, beyond simplifying social issues and creating new ones, make it an accessory to their crimes. Unfortunately, this exploitation has been happening since even before the existence of the internet. Still, the rise of social media usage has made it more practical to conduct similar scams, which is unfortunate.

On the other hand, cancel culture provides massive support to those affected by social injustice. People can rely on the masses to carry out the canceling. But what happens when people go overboard with how they cancel and start using dangerous methods?

**Chaos will occur.**

Extreme examples of cancel culture show that some sort of cyberbullying is involved. People tend to get riled up and end up using threats even worse than the original crime being pointed out (ProCon.org, 2020). Imagine a massive group of people sending death threats or exposing your address because you did something that society ruled incorrect. Yes, you should be held accountable for your actions, but how that accountability is carried out should also be sensible. We should not focus on the punishment of the wrongdoer; instead, we should concentrate more on why it is happening and how we can decrease the occurrences of such offenses in our world. Cancel culture has spread into many other things besides solving social issues, which again distracts the world from potential problems that require immediate resolution.

Perhaps we are the ones who made what cancel culture is today. We fuel its volatility and make it what it has become. Thus, it is up to
us to fix and redefine cancel culture so that it will flourish into a tool that helps us better conquer the injustices roaming freely in the online world.

Read the online version: https://muhammadfarhanhanif.weebly.com/researched-argument.html and References

Muhammad Hanif is a mechanical engineering student and Class of 2025. He was born in Indonesia but has lived in Qatar since he was four years old. He would like to thank everyone who has helped him in his first year at TAMUQ.
I wrote this essay for my English class in the Academic Bridge Program an hour before it was due. That week was a very busy week, so it slipped my mind until one of my classmates asked me for feedback on their essay; only then did I remember that it was due that same night. With no outline or a first draft, I wrote about the topic that was all over my Twitter timeline that particular day. It’s a topic that my friends and I talked about a lot at the time, and I thought it would be a creative approach to the prompt, “False Context.”
False Context: Is Larry Stylinson Real?

Have you ever been invested in a celebrity couple that never confirmed their relationship to the point where you deny them being in other relationships with other people? Larry Stylinson (the “ship” name fans gave to One Direction band members Louis Tomlinson and Harry Styles) is one of those relationships where fans are so certain that the couple is dating (some even believe they are married) even when both parties have denied it. A lot of factors lead up to the fans believing the Larry conspiracy, some of them being the ease of spreading fabricated content, misinterpreting both parties’ music lyrics, and manipulated content.

Fabricated content is misinformation that is composed and intended to trick you into believing that it is true. In Larry’s case, fabricated content usually comes in the form of news articles and fan theories. A lot of articles have come out about Larry Stylinson, some explaining why it is real and some denying the whole relationship. If articles from major news websites with a big young following came out with news such as confirming a major relationship theory, fans will be more likely to believe it. Vox, a news website, has released an article explaining the theory and why they believe it is true. The article’s subtitle says, “Fake babies, fake girlfriends, and real gay soul mates: Larry Stylinson is the only boy band conspiracy you’ll ever need” (Romano). The article was put out in 2016 and fans still talk about it in various social media applications to this day. Hence why fans’ theories are also a major factor when it comes to fabricated content. Fans will try to prove their theories any way they possibly could and are going to use pictures, celebrities’ locations, and whatever else they could get their hand on to prove them. Larries (the Larry fanbase name) use Larry’s locations to determine whether Styles and Tomlinson are together or not, and if they are in the same place, they are automatically assumed to be together.

This links with fans misinterpreting music lyrics. A lot of Styles’ and Tomlinson’s music are alleged to be about each other. “Always You,” a song on Tomlinson’s debut album Walls is rumored to be about Styles, with lyrics like, “I went to Amsterdam without you, and
all I could do was think about you.” Fans speculate that the song is written about Styles because Tomlinson’s last couple of trips to Amsterdam were spent with his girlfriend Eleanor Calder. Larries wonder who he went to Amsterdam without if Calder was with him. When it comes to Styles’ lyrics, fans speculate that the single “Golden” from his second album Fine Line, with unreleased lyrics which he only sang in live performances like, “Golden, golden, he is broken, and I’m hoping someday you’ll open,” is about Tomlinson not being ready to come out to his fanbase and confirm his and Styles’ relationship. Styles and Tomlinson have not confirmed whether the songs are about each other.

Both fabricated content and misinterpreted music lyrics relate to manipulating content. Larries tend to alter a lot of content ranging from images to lyrics and actual songs to manipulate other fans into believing that Larry is real. Photoshopped pictures are a form on manipulated content and there are a lot of photoshopped pictures of Larry Stylinson on the internet, ranging from them taking a selfie together or hanging out to them kissing each other. Fans have also altered music to make it sound like Tomlinson was singing one of Styles’ songs, which went viral on the social media application TikTok. I personally find it disrespectful to Styles and Tomlinson because both of them are in a relationship with other people.

Social media is by far the most important factor in spreading these conspiracies, and without it, the Larry theory would not have been as big as it is today. Social media helps with fabricating content, theorizing hidden meanings behind song lyrics between fans, and sharing manipulated content. All of these factors together make up false context. This is the type of content most youths want to know more about and are invested in. I personally do not believe in the Larry Stylinson theory because both parties have denied it, but other fans believe in it because of the amount of false context they have been exposed to in social media.
References

Najd Al-Hawal is a mechanical engineering freshman.
“The Power of Freedom” is a rhetorical essay paper, written for my English 104 — Composition and Rhetoric course during my freshman year. This was an inspiring piece and linked how freedom and the creativity it promotes is directly proportional to the new emerging technologies around us. Similarly, engineers should aim to express and live their life in a healthy way that will allow them to innovate for a better future.
The Power of Freedom

Famed theoretical physicist Albert Einstein fled from Germany to the United States, taking an Advanced Study position at Princeton University, to escape the aftermath of World War I and the rise of the Nazis. One obvious reason why a person would flee a country is to have a secure future, knowing that no one can take you as a captive. However, this is only one aspect to look at. Having liberty also allows a human being to think, design, and propel forwards, which Einstein mentions in his influential speech on how a country can blossom by avoiding war. An examination of “Science and Civilization” shows that Einstein effectively conveyed his message of freedom that elevates one to a state of prestige and near divinity through the techniques of ethos, pathos, logos, and rhetorical questions.

Einstein presented his lecture, “Science and Civilization” at Royal Albert Hall in London on October 3, 1933. He intended his speech to be for all the listeners present that day, as well as people from all around the world who are interested in learning about his life today. The main purpose of Einstein’s speech was to show how freedom for all individuals (including himself) is necessary to develop innovative ideas and make inventions. This lecture was later published in 1950 in his book titled “Out of my Later Years” and four short film excerpts of the speech were released in 1933.

Einstein departed Germany to avoid being a part of the horrifying and threatening rise of Nazism and the Second World War, which he knew would occur when Adolf Hitler gained power with the goal to conquer Europe. Therefore, in the beginning of his speech, Einstein mentioned how thankful he is that Western Europe would give him a chance to express his views and thoughts. His main concern was saving Europe from war as nothing fruitful would be obtained from it. He reinforces this fact by stating, “Thus distress and evil produce new distress and evil,” implying that wrong intentions will only cause more destruction as a cycle that repeats, getting stronger and more harmful to the world each time. Thus, it was important to find a solution to avoid another disastrous war to occur. Einstein warned that when dogma spreads throughout a country, reasoning takes a
back seat and that strong views, especially political ones, could make people take sides.

The Second World War would not only be disastrous physically; it would also stop the “important task of education and enlightenment,” which is an essential element for individuals to grow, develop, and become better citizens. This is the “individual and intellectual freedom” that the war would bury, but Einstein proves the value of this freedom, stating that “without such freedom there would have been no Shakespeare, no Goethe, no Newton, no Faraday, no Pasteur, and no Lister.” In this repetition Einstein used a rhetorical device called the anaphora to create a dramatic effect. This statement enforced the power of freedom and the wonders of all the amazing people who produced extraordinary work that positively affected the world. Einstein further stated that without freedom “there would be no comfortable houses for the mass of the people, no railway, no wireless, no protection against epidemics, no cheap book, no culture and no enjoyment of art at all.” This showed the significance of the growth and development of individuals toward science and civilization. He concludes his argument saying that “It is only men who are free, who create the inventions and intellectual works which to us moderns make like worthwhile,” making his point explicitly and cohesively to the audience. Even though the war will be inevitable, he insisted that it could be solved by being “free men and women.” However, Einstein also observed how sometimes dark clouds have a silver lining, mentioning that difficult times can make a person strong and lead them to evolve to develop, innovate, and invent.

It is the same freedom that is required by all humanity, including the young scientist, that requires time in solitude to stimulate the creative mind. Einstein asks a rhetorical question of his audience: “Shall we worry over the fact that we are living in a time of danger and want?” This was intended to install the audience with an obvious answer—yes. Nonetheless, he takes the audience by surprise by answering his own question with an unexpected answer—no—which he justifies by indicating that a man is “indolent” by nature. Thus, facing the troubles of life also increases the knowledge and
capability of a person to think outside of the box. Collectively all the points Einstein mentioned in his lecture invoked pathos and logos, appealing to the emotional and logical values of peace and the will to become better citizens. In addition, his lecture proclaimed how freedom is required for every individual to succeed and be renowned for the work they do.

Albert Einstein’s speech also relied a great deal on ethos, which he displayed through his credibility as a notable theoretical physicist who made many important discoveries. For example, Einstein was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1921 for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect long before he gave his speech “Science and Civilization.” Einstein’s work as a campaigning pacifist in the 1930s also gained him respect and trust with his audience, giving him the ethos used to convey his message.

Einstein’s reverence of freedom was not limited to his lecture; it filled his entire life. The following picture of Einstein on the beach is one example of this. Most would expect a professional scientist like Einstein to always be dressed formally. Yet in this picture he showcases freedom by wearing casual clothes and open-toed women’s sandals with utmost confidence. When people see this picture, they might find it rather hilarious to see Einstein wearing women’s sandals. However, if the viewer knew the context of the image, they would instead realize how friendly and generous Einstein was. This image was captured in 1939 by David Rothman, who owned the Rothman Department Store in New York. Albert Einstein visited his shop to buy sandals, but Rothman understood him to say sundials because of Einstein’s German accent.
The most visible feature in this photo is Einstein’s white frizzy hair, followed by his face. Then, moving towards his feet, one would realise that he wore women’s sandals instead of the expected normal. In addition, there is also a balance throughout the picture since it has a good combination of black and white distributed clearly, making the scenery explicit.

In his speech “Science and Civilization,” Einstein portrayed the importance of freedom in the development of science, and in his life, Einstein showed the value of freedom in everyday living. It is through science and its discoveries that we now have innovative gadgets and machines; however, it was peace and cooperation that nourished the world, making it an exceptional place.

References


Humaira Shaffique is a rising computer engineering junior at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU). She has an infatuation for technology and engineering marvels but feels that one’s thoughts and understanding of the world and people around us is important to explore one’s own self, like Columbus discovering a continent of amazing potential within ourselves. Her hobbies are painting, crochet, basketball and reading science fiction. She likes to adopt the value system, which says that “Do good to others without expecting reward in return.”
While ambiguity is not necessarily bad, it begs for the lack of individuality. In this modern age of growing cities, this theme is unpleasantly becoming common. Thus, to approach this from a larger angle, one can look at the city itself and its apocalyptic-like growth.
The Sprawling City and Its Government

In 1950 751 million people lived in urban areas, in 2018 4.2 billion people did, and by 2050, a jarring 68% of the world population is projected to live in urban areas (United Nations, 2018).

The rapid sprawling city is a salient topic of discussion in both developing and developed countries. Numerous studies have explored the topic of urban sprawl and its emergence with urbanization, breaking down approaches to its measurement and possible ways to reduce this issue, yet these approaches often fall short. While at times it seems improbable, urban sprawl can be stopped—it isn’t inevitable. Urban sprawl is often the result of poor planning and short-sightedness (David Suzuki Foundation, 2020). Understanding the key patterns and trends of urbanization to build more probable predictions is vital, and so is the necessary control of the present sprawling occurring all over the world. Thus, the best way to tackle urban sprawl is through centralized policies that prioritize better sustainable urban planning.
The dawn of urbanization

The common view of rural areas as exclusively impoverished and lacking resources is somewhat mythical. A rural area is a low-density region where most of the residing population engages in agricultural professions. They are often on the outskirts of the densely populated urban areas, and have fewer human structures such as houses, commercial buildings, and roads. In contrast, an urban area is a region of high population density with much of its population employed in non-agricultural professions (National Geographic Society, 2012a; National Geographic Society, 2012b).

This distinction between rural and urban came to be circa the industrial revolution, where the rapid emergence of new technological advancement resulted in an economic shift away from agriculture. This economic growth commenced the formation of factories, which in part resulted in a high demand for labor (The Investopedia Team, 2021). People began to relocate to cities because of this economic expansion and the increased job opportunities. This relocation was similarly prompted by the changing methods of farming in rural areas (a byproduct of the Industrial Revolution), which focused on capital incentive (machinery) and thus reduced the need for human labor (Yuko, 2021). This mass population shift from rural to urban settings, and the consequent changes to these urban settings, is known as urbanization (Kuddus et al., 2020).

My depiction of Urban Sprawl
Urbanization has reached a new extreme by the name Urban Sprawl

Over time, what was once a niche became the massive majority, and the industrialism that first drew workers and their families into cities cannot stop bringing in more, ultimately resulting in rapid urban growth (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021). Urban sprawl refers to the spread of an urban area into ex-rural land; however, other sources define it as “a spatial form of disorderly over-expansion” driven by rapid urbanization (Jiating, 2021), and others approach urban sprawl through proposed methodology to measure it instead (Ismael, 2020; Satterthwaite et al., 2010). The exact definition of urban sprawl is yet to be agreed upon, but the basic concept of rapid expansion remains overt throughout. This tendency to expand city boundaries when the inner city is too crowded can be dated back to beginning of the Christian era with Rome (Ismael, 2020). Thus, while the term gains its saliency with the Industrial Revolution, it by no means began with it.

The discussion of urban sprawl is relatively bilateral. While one side views urban sprawl in a problematic limelight, the other side believes urban sprawl to be beneficial, perceiving urban sprawl and urbanization as a modern way of life that manifests local economic growth (Tegegne, 2002). Dr. Robert Bruegmann, an architecture and urban development critic and historian, claims that these sprawling cities provide social and economic opportunities that vastly outweigh the problems they may cause. He similarly claims that attempting to fix the prominent rapid urbanization is “strident,” risks destroying the very nature of their economic growth, and that eventually—if allowed to grow more capital—the “glaring” issues of urban sprawl would simply be alleviated (Bruegmann, 2014). Dr. Bruegmann speaks like an economist, does he not?

Whether the economic boost outweighs the negative consequences of urban sprawl is unlikely, as these consequences are both adamant and threatening to the livelihood of the residents. These consequences include water and air pollution, increased traffic fatalities, loss of agricultural capacity, increased automobile
dependency, effects on human health, loss of natural habitat, unfunded infrastructure, etc. (Everything Connects, 2013). If the latter group is correct on their disapproval of urban sprawl, initiatives should been taken to address the issues proposed, right? Well not exactly. Initiatives that can address issues with land use, such as that of urban sprawl, are rather difficult to present neatly because of the multiple dimensions and factors that constitute sprawl (Jiating, 2021; Ismael, 2020) and the dynamic character of the issue—information can easily become unreliable as urban patterns are continually changing (Terando et al., 2014). The projection of urban sprawl relies on past experiences and conditions, which may not continue to prevail in coming decades.

Centralization vs Decentralization

Centralization or Decentralization

Based on the undermined impact of governmental regulation and political institutions in (inadvertently) enabling urban sprawl (Jiating, 2021; Liu et al., 2021), these groups should play a similarly prevalent role in intervening in this issue. This can be done through the endorsement of policies to combat the different aspects of the issue. With that arises a new question of the type of regulations pushed forward—the age-old question of fragmentation or centralization.

Fragmentation (also known as decentralization) is when urban governance is delegated to more local levels of government (Foldvary,
2001), which is often depicted as more sensible as it allows for smaller regional divisions. In a sense, controlling sprawl by focusing on each smaller district is more effective than tackling the issue at a wider scale by an individual centralized government. People living in smaller districts identify by them and this shared identity improves the attachment formed to the place (Scannel & Gifford, 2014). Moreover, decentralization can be considered beneficial to both economic growth and public good provision (Wu et al., 2018), as the governments are closer to their constituents, allowing both parties mutual great accessibility.

However, these benefits are more short-term—some local authorities may not have the incentive to hear out their constituents (Lin & Liu, 2000)—and relatively selective. Decentralization tends to negatively affect economic growth in developing countries while positively affecting economic growth in developed countries (Davoodi & Zou, 1998). In the long run, the demerits of decentralization will outweigh its merits. As Martinez-Vazquez and McNab stated, “Unfettered fiscal decentralization is likely to lead to a concentration of resources in a few geographical locations and thus increase fiscal disparities across sub-national governments” (Martinez-Vazquez & McNab, 2003). While aiming for regional equality to combat uncontrolled sprawl, further imbalance occurs. A senior government of sorts that overlooks the entire region and has the power to allocate resources equitably may be more appropriate.

Centralization (also known as consolidation) is a system in which urban governing is concentrated within a central, singular governmental body, and that group provides instructions and regulations for the regional groups (Collins, 2021; Joulfaian & Marlow, 1991). The hierarchical, bureaucratic system causes a communication barrier that distorts the flow of information from below to above and vice versa, causing it to be deemed unfavorable (Wu et al., 2018). Although a hierarchy can be exploitative, it provides a certain consistency and rationality that can result in a better quality of public services.
The larger unitary region can also better exploit economies of scale—lower unit cost of output and resources because of the increased production of the larger organization—and thus have better accessibility to cheaper resources (Brutzkus, 1975). Likewise, settlers of centralized regions tend to have better homogeneity as the inclusion of everyone—even those in rural areas—culminates in equality amid regions. This equality incites mutual partnership desired by Colin Russo as the ideal of urbanization (Russo, 2017). Alongside a mutuality matching with that urged by the Anahita Foundation—a non-governmental organization focusing on the empowerment of rural India (Anahita Foundation, 2021)—it can be argued that fragmentation can lead to a similar mutual understanding as the regions are relatively independent and there is less ground for conflict (on taxation distribution for example).

**Policies proposed to combat problems caused by urban sprawl**

China has launched a series of centralized land policy reforms to improve land-use efficiency and rationalize land allocation. The policies include the adoption of “land-use rights, land taxation and use fees, farmland protection, land administration, and regulations on land markets” (Ding, 2003). These policies contributed to governmental revenue for financing infrastructure, aiding in solving the issue of poor infrastructure resulting from sprawl, and possibly leading to more. The policies gave an unfair advantage to certain socioeconomic classes, which in part resulted in conflict on matter of equity (Ding, 2003). The policies failed in recognizing the possible division and inequality that may surface from the regulations put forth.

We have long evolved into this urban ideal and it is too late to start over. Thus, with the resources we are provided, is it not better to control and regulate into a better future? The issue is urgent and strong governance is necessary. Fragmentation has its merits, but in the context of a widespread issue, such as urban sprawl, a concentrated singular government would have the better scope of vision to allocate the necessary regulations.
The complexity of urban sprawl is fascinating. It feels almost apocalyptic in its rapidness and spread, yet it goes unnoticed until you suddenly must travel 2–3 hours to work and the city doubles or triples in size. But by then the damage has already been done. Resurrecting the old natural land from the remains of an uninhabited city is far more of a dilemma than predicting sprawl and setting precautionary measures to reduce and possibly remove the issue.

References


Wala Abdelhalim was born and raised in central Sudan. Wala is what one may consider culture and family oriented. Enjoying the little nuances in life led to an imaginative mind from earlier in her youth. She enjoyed writing about the different particulars, from the tickle of rain to the loud chatter of crowds on a Thursday afternoon.
Meera Jarrar

I wrote this piece when I was angry at the world, when the “but HE said” and “but look at HER” got too much for my ears to just simply disregard, when I had to print over 1,500 coloured pages that I know for a fact people will barely glance to, at the whims of people who have prioritized sentimentality over consequences and shifted responsibilities of their shoulders. It all suddenly clicked in my mind; the “grand” overlying issue with thinking in the global context, and I just hope that if you get anything out of my piece, anything at all, it is to start looking at the world we live in through a more self-aware perspective.
It is safe to say that many are aware, on some level, that greenhouse gas emissions linger in the atmosphere, continuously affecting the environment for longer than we care to remember. However, are they aware of the time lag between emissions and impact?

Studies have indicated that CO₂ emissions reach their peak in about 10 years (Ricke & Caldeira, 2014). In other words, we are currently experiencing the climate change caused by 2012 emissions. With wildfires running rampant through Australia, floods drowning the world as we know it in Sudan, and droughts indiscriminately suffocating the people in Guatemala, we're probably going to hit rock bottom before things get better. It saddens me to say that emissions are on a steady rise, with the graph of concentration growth of atmospheric CO₂ forming an almost completely vertical line since 1909 (Ritchie & Roser, 2020).

Nevertheless, this is not the focal point of this essay. Rather, we must address the underlying question laced through every phrase typed out: why? Why did we let things deteriorate this quickly and to this extent? To this I propose the problem with societal mindsets.

Through the lens of our meager lifespan, the Earth always has been and always will be. The seasons change and the days go by, but the Earth will always remain to serve as the context for our lives. We have taken this stability, this solidity, this sureness, for granted. Our passive acceptance of the privilege of existence has evolved. We have come to expect it, and it is this attitude, this entitlement, that will cause our downfall.

The sun does not owe us its beams. The sky does not owe us its air. The earth does not owe us its fruit. The ocean does not have to absorb 90% of heat produced by global warming (“Nasa Change”, n.d.). The trees do not have to recycle the masses of CO₂ produced by ever-increasing emissions of greenhouse gases. Such callous disregard stems, to my belief, from denial, our hamartia.
Detachment from reality is a symptom of the modern era. Overexposure to the horrors plaguing the world has caused us to look at it with a blase outlook at best and derision at worst. Living has become a bland cycle of “sure, that’s sad, but what does it have to do with me” and “well I can’t do anything about it, so it doesn’t matter;” words we utter every day without thought or feeling. The future is inherently unknown, a notion that repels us from any semblance of being responsible for it.

At this point, and any point prior really, “two roads diverge in a yellow wood.” We are presented with a natural ultimatum: either we learn to live with the consequences of our actions (but we won’t, not really, perhaps not ever) or we work towards an existence independent of our perception of others’ behavior. Moving from “strategic” to more “sincere” decisions, so to speak. We can choose to embrace the ambiguity, shaping it into the form we want, giving “living in the present” a different meaning, for a more secure future.

Who cares whether your neighbor is using too much water for their car wash or your colleague printed unnecessary extra copies? As long as you, yourself, are willing to be held accountable for your own actions, then, and only then, will we start progressing as a global society.

References


Meera Jarrar is a CHEN sophomore student from Jordan with a penchant for liberal arts. She enjoys reading existentialist literature and analysing cinematography. You can usually find her in the library procrastinating on her math homework. One phrase she lives by is “to each, their own,” and hopes that one day someone else will be able to see the wisdom in it.
Amanda Cruz

Duterte was first elected on 2016, and back then I knew he was bad. He was misogynistic, crude and a killer. But to anyone I talked to outside of my group of friends, he was a good president, the polls showed it. To me, it didn’t make sense, I felt like an outsider observing the political climate in a country that I belonged to by birth right but feel like could never claim it as my own. I wasn’t even sure if I had the right to comment, growing up from a privileged position elsewhere, out of touch with Filipino reality. Through writing this piece, I was able to navigate the intricacies of Filipino politics and values and therefore I probably consider it as one of the most important pieces I have written as it not only allowed me a glimpse into my country but into myself as well.
Duterte: The Strongman Leader, The Disciplinarian, The Womanizer

“I was angry because she was raped, that’s one thing,” Duterte said. “But she was so beautiful, the mayor should have been first. What a waste.”

“Hitler massacred three million Jews ... there’s three million drug addicts. There are. I’d be happy to slaughter them.”

Rodrigo Duterte is a polarizing figure. Or he should be. One that has promised to eradicate the trade and use of illegal drugs, end criminality and corruption in six months; and within the same breath, joke about the rape of an Australian missionary and call the Pope “a son of a whore” in a country with 86% of its population being Roman Catholics.

Yet, political polarization does not exist within the Philippines as Duterte continues to enjoy a 91% approval rate, according to a September 2020 Pulse Asia survey (Kenny, 2020).

Distrust in liberal democracy & Duterte’s authenticity

The poor have long been ignored, with the deck stacked against them through every stage of life. When the imperial West made its departure from the Philippines, the socioeconomic power previously held by the colonists simply shifted to local elites. Since then, political dynasties and oligarchs have continued to dominate the country’s local and national elections. Ben Kerkvliet, an ethnographer, describes the trajectory that has occurred in local politics, in which “violence, intimidation, monetary inducements” have historically been deployed by Filipino elites “to manipulate formal democratic procedures to their liking” (Curato, 2018). Thus, vernacular forms of political policies that correspond with the country’s culture rather than of those in the West tend to succeed more amongst the non-elite; politicians who can sympathize
and “claim solidarity” with the struggles of ordinary Filipinos (Claudio, 2017).

Duterte emerged as a figure of hope for those who have been continually dismissed and undermined by the system. He is considered a populist by many, a campaign characterized by targeting an urgent issue in the nation, in Duterte’s case being drug addicts, and one that pushes to revolt against an established elite like the Philippine Liberal Party (Uyheng, 2021). He has deployed a “rough-talking” rhetoric and a “strong-man” rule to capitalize on the poor’s disillusionment, particularly with the previous presidency of Benigno S. Aquino III, who exemplified the flawed political structure of the country and embodied the “elite” that Duterte was determined to replace—a reformist president who was part of the wealthy and political dynasty of the Aquino clan. Voters saw Duterte as a “cure” to these political dynasties, with his own local oligarchic background ignored (Claudio, 2017).

His populism taps into “latent anxieties” shared by the poor, defined “as a sense of discomfort that is present but not central, mundane but still worrisome, publicized but not politicized” (Curato, 2018). Duterte successfully appeals to these “latent anxieties” through his anti-drug campaign, with 93% of respondents supporting the campaign in a December 2019 poll. This was even when 79% agreed, in another survey, that extrajudicial killings were happening (Kenny, 2020).

Marites, a mother who suffered the loss of her house during a storm and who worked long hours to build it back, shared her fears. She was scared for her thirteen-year-old son, and the influence of the other teenage boys in her neighborhood, who sold crystal methamphetamine. If he becomes involved, what will happen then of his future? Another story features a wife whose husband got high and smashed her jaw (Curato, 2018). Stories like these populate the vernacular conversations surrounding drug use in rural areas. Innocent bystanders who are constantly threatened not only by the wealthy, but also by their surrounding neighborhood “troublemakers.” Thus, ordinary, working-class Filipinos argue that
the war on drugs has resulted in safer neighborhoods, a problem that was only intimately felt by those outside of the elites, eradicated by a paternal figure in Duterte. While previous politicians have attempted to legitimize these concerns by offering reformist and technocratic solutions like a rehabilitation program, they have failed to appease the frustrations of a public “who feel that they have been patiently waiting for their break for a better life, only to be taken over by unscrupulous others” (Curato, 2018). Whereas Duterte was able to legitimize these concerns by offering a quick solution formed on the basis of retribution—he was able to listen and act on the concerns of ordinary Filipinos the way they wanted to.

Duterte also performs “authenticity” impressively. He is often commended for being “real,” making statements that depart from the political norms: from his rape jokes to cursing the pope. He doesn’t voice his compassion for the poor, promising a better life. Instead, he acts on their concerns by promising to dump the dead bodies of drug addicts in Manila Bay. He attends political debates in everyday clothing, boasting about his sexual exploits as a city mayor. He talks, acts, and looks like an ordinary Filipino. Jessica Zafra describes him as the Filipino id—the impulsive component of the psyche that lacks regard for any consequences. “Duterte’s words are not calculated to impress the voters. He’s just saying words that are already in your head” (Zafra, 2016). Duterte is a media-savvy politician able to deflect any blame on him onto others. A great example of this is the murder committed by the police of Kian Delos Santos, an unarmed seventeen-year-old, shot in August 2017 during an anti-drug raid. Duterte placed the blame on the police officers, framing it as an isolated case of an abuse of power by individual police officers rather than a systematic problem. Delos Santos’ parents even posed for a picture with Duterte, thus publicly absolving the president of any guilt or involvement in the murder of their son.

**Elitism within liberals**

Outside of oligarchies, there is also a smugness present in those who follow liberal and progressive ideologies in the country. The departure of the West has had long lasting consequences in the
Philippines: it has led to a division that continues to populate online discourse in the country. The country’s upper classes, who have access to formal education and media not limited to the Philippines, have been “systematically socialized” into beliefs that align with Western ideals (Uyheng, 2021). For instance, cosmopolitan values that focus on institutions such as human rights and the democracy of a country. Rocco, a Filipino resident, argues that extrajudicial killings are harming the integrity of the Philippine constitution, he says, “You are not a criminal until proven so in a court of law.”

Whilst this argument is valid, he then describes these working-class Filipinos as “en-masse,” people who simply “just cannot understand” (Uyheng, 2021). We must look beyond the belief that working-class Filipinos simply don’t care about human rights or the country. It’s just not at the top of their priorities, especially with a problem that they feel impedes and continues to disproportionately threaten them and their children.

Another example of this smugness is present in the people who are quick to dismiss illiberal voters, in this case those who voted for Duterte, as “bobotante,” a Filipino term that combines the words “bobo” and “botante” to form the word “dumb voter.” The term is used to accuse the masses as “enablers of ineffective leadership… of selling their votes and picking gyrating celebrities over candidates with clear platforms” (Regalado, 2021). A Quora poster, echoed by many in the thread, also described Duterte’s supporters as “mentally challenged”; people who we “shouldn’t take seriously” (Oliveros, 2017).

However, condescension does nothing to further a conversation. How can you generate a genuine, constructive discussion if you’ve prematurely dismissed the person as “less than.” Like the reply in the Quora thread, we must become sensitive to the different plights that people face within the country. Before we call out the futility of the drug war, we must consider the ways some people are affected and the ways we are not. There is a stark contrast between living in an air-conditioned room, studying the politics and appeal of Duterte and a mother who has lost everything and is scared to lose her young son to drugs too. Vernacular arguments are based on the
personal fears of citizens, difficulties that they encounter every day, compared to cosmopolitan values like human rights (Uyheng, 2021). Sociologist Prince Adama expands on this and explains that “as long as the masses are forced to solve everyday problems like hunger on their own, it will be difficult to ask them to think about the country’s future” (Regalado, 2021).

Liberals in the Philippines also undermine the role of emotions that play into people’s choices. Rational politics, based on logic and scientific reasoning alone, can only go so far, particularly in a country that suffers from deep wealth and educational inequalities. These liberal solutions are often detached from the realities of the people they are trying to cater to and serve and dismiss the role of tradition and culture that play into how people vote (Regalado, 2021). “All kinds of things,” Sophia Rosenfeld explains, “are built into what looks like a fact,” such as values, cultural norms, and desires (Nolasco, 2019). This phenomenon explains Duterte’s appeal. While domestic and international criticisms have decried his platform as fascist, illogical, backward, and inhumane, he has also been credited as the country’s serving “paternal figure,” the “walking, talking id” of Filipinos, and a connection formed with ordinary citizens based on kinship and gratitude (Nolasco, 2019).

Some will argue that western liberalism simply does not fit in the Philippines—post-colonial experts have described the ideology as simply a “handmaiden” of colonialism. Duterte himself has spread this rhetoric when his office accused the UN of imposing “liberal Western values” on “an Asian nation that places premium on common good,” concluding that it has “display[ed] a lack of appreciation for the diversity of global culture.” However, liberal thought has always been practiced in the country going as far back to the 1890s when the national hero of the Philippines, Jose Rizal, fought for liberation from the Spanish rule. Rizal believed in Enlightenment, advocating for social progress, tolerance, scientific knowledge, and separation of church and state (Sicat, 2019). He even criticized the Spanish liberals and argued that if they had “more faith in their ideals,” the “modern ideas” of Catholics missionaries
would not “be asphyxiated upon touching the shores of Manila” (Claudio, 2017).

The country has continuously swung from autocratic to reformist leaders. The downfall of Ferdinand Marcos’s dictatorship in 1986 was spearheaded by a revolution of the people. A bloodless demonstration, in which thousands of Filipinos gathered on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue for three days to protest the late president, Marcos, and concluded that enough was enough. But we must do well to remember that these are the same Filipinos who voted Duterte to the highest office of the land. To move forward, we must acknowledge these contradictions and not infantilize the masses, but instead recognize their decisions to be active rather than passive. Liberals must find a way to incorporate these “irrationalities,” and to embrace the role of culture and emotions in politics, as abandoning them will result in the exploitation of others “for their politically nefarious ends” (Nolasco, 2019). In the age of social media, where the act of listening has long been abandoned and where we are so focused on being right, we must not forget the importance of questioning and introspection. Our thoughts cannot simply exist in an echo chamber, but rather we must engage with the concerns and worries of other people in better hopes of understanding them. We must seek to understand before we could be understood (Acidre, 2020). We must quit the celebration of being “woke” and “enlightened,” and instead redirect our focus on empowering the people.

After all, we all just want to be seen.

References


Amanda Cruz is a CHEN sophomore from the Philippines, who deeply enjoys liberal arts. She likes analyzing Taylor Swift songs and reading feminist retellings of historical female figures. If she could pick two songs that everyone must listen to at least once it would be “Fast Car” by Tracy Chapman and “Vienna” by Billy Joel. You could probably find her upstairs in the library, or at DSA making coffee.
Standing Still
Noor Al-Hajri

This was the first prompt I wrote at university for the ASCC 289 class. It talks about the beauty of Paris and the darkness behind it.
The Ambivalent History: 
Paris’s Beautiful Monuments

When you learn the truth about something, you see it differently. That is what happened to me last summer when I visited Paris; the eye-catching tourist attractions made me want to learn about the history behind each one. As I learned more and more, I began to realize that Paris is a lot more than its beautiful monuments: it is a city of ambivalence and of darkness and beauty, intertwined. While most people know the city for the Eiffel Tower and Mona Lisa, they rarely ever learn the stories behind Paris’s most celebrated treasures. Do they know how the Eiffel Tower was built? Do they know the specific tragedy about Versailles in the Middle Ages? In the Middle Ages, when Versailles was central to the French aristocracy, women were oppressed on many levels; there were rigid classes and the lower class did not get paid for their labor and the upper classes brutally enslaved the less fortunate, who had no rights. The dark history of Paris is often overlooked: without slaves there would be no gothic buildings standing now. Learning about this history, and about the Parisian past, has made me realize that we must look under the surface: places and nations have complicated histories, and sometimes dark pasts that are hard to believe or think of.

Take, for example, the Eiffel tower, France’s most famous attraction. Everyone marvels at how it was constructed with little technological assistance, but most do not consider where the metal came from. In fact, there is evidence suggesting that it had been seized from occupied nations like Algeria. France occupied many peoples and nations, and created many colonies in Islamic African countries. The French committed war crimes against the local population and stole natural resources from these places to construct the Eiffel tower. Learning this bloody history made me feel horrible for the people who lived through these experiences, and I wondered how they felt. People were slaughtered for power, money, and resources. If more people knew the truth, their attraction might fade, as it did for me since it’s hard to tolerate a history of war crimes and brutality
France also has a dark history of class and social oppression. In the Middle Ages, long before the construction of the Eiffel Tower, French society was divided into three classes. The wealthy stole all the nation’s income, while the poor worked for no pay in factories and built gothic structures that still stand. The queen herself (Marie Antoinette) benefited from this social divide since the royal family used to play with the country’s money while the people of France were starving in the streets. And when those people protested, she simply responded “let them eat cake.” She was subsequently executed at the Palace of Versailles (which is now the magnificent Versailles Museum). Seeing all the beauty of the Parisian buildings and castles, but also the sadness and hardships they carry within, reminds me of how humans can display perfection even when they are going through difficult times.

Further, the Louvre Museum itself is full of artifacts with dark histories. The museum, which is on the banks of the Seine River and has several glass pyramids in its garden, houses antiquities and works of art, including the world’s most renowned artwork, the Mona Lisa. Often, we focus on the beauty but ignore where it came from or what the backstory is. Actually, the Mona Lisa has a lengthy and tragic story since she may have been married off to a slave trader at the age of 15. Napoleon, who lived at the Louvre when it was a palace, filled it with artifacts and artworks that the French army stole from across Europe, and from Egypt and other Islamic countries. The Louvre is filled with stolen artwork and artifacts gained through colonization and war.

Learning about this history creates a more ambivalent story about Paris and the attractions there. We may understand how past communities, systems, and cultures were built and how they have changed by studying history. Learning about their past sparked my curiosity and made me want to know more about their histories.

Without looking at the other artifacts’ backgrounds, we can tell they have a terrible history, yet without darkness, there is no beauty learning the story behind every famous spot, or artifact. History taught me a new lesson, and that is why I shared how the historical events of Paris impacted my personality.
Noor Al-Hajri is an electrical engineering student, Class of 2025. Noor is passionate about reading and writing about different cultures and art. She enjoys painting.
Ali Hafiz Abdulla, Mohammed Al-Diab, Mohammed Alkorbi, Khalid Al-Rwaili, Aly Diab

This essay was a group project for our English Foundation III class. It explores the history and stories of Al-Zubarah and its influence on Qatar. Al-Zubarah has shaped the society in Qatar over the decades since it was a well-known commercial hub among nations and was famous for its pearls, shells, etc. Qatar is mainly known for being a gas exporter worldwide, which shows parallelism between Al-Zubarah and today’s age. Our group even visited the Al-Zubarah Fort to see its structure and artifacts. It interested us the most inspecting its architecture, mainly its defense system as a fort. Many people only talk about Al-Zubarah as a fortress, and they tend to overlook its background history, ethics, and much more. Researching Al-Zubarah’s history and writing this essay, we learned that Qatar has much more history ready to be discovered by archaeologists or historians.
The Tale of Al Zubarah through the Ages

The Environment and Economy of Al-Zubarah

Al Zubarah is a historical site that is vital to Qatar’s cultural background and heritage. The iconic town served as a trading hub with neighboring towns and beyond. Al Zubarah has been involved in many historical events throughout the years, such as the exploits of Rahmah ibn Jabir Al Jalhami, a sharp admiral who fought for the town. Al Zubarah was a special coastal place because of its riches; however, the town has since largely disintegrated into ruins since many people have migrated to Doha. Thankfully, Sheikh Abdullah bin Qassim Al Thani’s fortress, which was constructed in the town around 1938, remains mostly intact. However, many historians still are not sure what the fort’s purpose was. Most think the fortress was to act as a coastal guard station, but others think it served as a police station. People tend to overlook things in Al Zubarah, especially its environment. The environment of Al Zubarah can give us an idea of how the people there lived (Figure 1).

Geography can explain the abundance of rare things in the village, especially its resources. These resources are the reason why tribal wars occurred next to the site. Al Zubarah is known for its fascinating location, being next to the coast and lacking freshwater since there are no signs of rivers or lakes. Thus, everyone in Al Zubarah must have suffered due to lack of water. The people there attempted to construct a new fort in the town, which facilitated wells. Since Al Zubarah was the location of many historical events, people are puzzled as to why the town’s residents were involved in every
tribal war. Many people question the lifestyles of the villagers who had lived there.

Today Qatar mainly relies on one resource, oil, which attracts many other countries into trading with them. Now imagine the most demanded resources during the Medieval or Renaissance eras. Many empires and kingdoms traded for luxurious items, which led to conflicts over trade routes and various resources such as spices, jewelry, and silk. Countries that had, or could obtain, these resources had more power. For instance, India was a powerhouse because it had many great resources. Thus towns, cities, and colonies with resources were turned into commercial hubs. Al Zubarah was one of these hubs because of its valuable resource: pearls. According to the website Our World, pearls from Al Zubarah were shipped to many other countries, such as China, which is considered the largest pearl producer. The presence of pearls in Al Zubarah attracted a lot of attention from nobles and aristocrats who desired jewelry like necklaces, and many clans who fought to profit from this resource.

The first impression many have about Al Zubarah is that it is near a coastal plain, meaning that the town mainly depended on fishing. In addition, people often think the area lacks vegetation. However, this thought has been disproven because plenty of plants have been found growing next to the ruined town. In addition, the people living in Al Zubarah relied on agriculture as the town could hardly sustain its population without it. A species of plant called Drimia maritima, also known as sea onions, has been found growing around the desert near Al Zubarah. Sea onions had many uses for the people who lived in Al Zubarah, but they are best known for their health benefits and use as medicine to benefit the heart and strengthen muscles. Additionally, truffles have been a significant resource that residents of Al Zubarah frequently gathered for survival. Truffles grow not only near Al Zubarah but also around Doha, so today when people go into the wilderness around Qatar, they mostly try to find as many truffles as possible.

Animal life around Al Zubarah is also very diverse, with oryx and many predators. Over the centuries, people who lived in Al Zubarah
hunted the oryx to survive. In addition, many animals around the coast hunt the oryx. For example, coyotes roam around the desert, especially at night, hunting oryx. The oryx population experienced a massive decline throughout the years due to hunting by coyotes and people; therefore, today the oryx is an endangered species protected by the government. Many hunters used falcons to track down animals, but people in Qatar have stopped hunting for food. However, falcon hunting remains popular and has become a famous sport, especially in Qatar.

In Al Zubarah, they wear Bisht Al Barqaa, a colorful turban with a glossy silver dagger, and Izaar as underwear. Bisht Al Barqaa comes with designable stripes in brown and yellowish-white colors. Najdi andal was an everyday sandal made of bright brown leather with a black line. The people of Al Zubarah ate from what they hunted. The harsh hot weather guides them to eat jerboas with the wild green ghee stored in uromastyx skin called auka. Oryx was the feast of royal and high commissioner people because it contains tasty fat with reddish meat. During that time smoking hookah was popular, depending on the Ottoman empire's affection. Drinking blond coffee differed in the Arabic region; the black matte old kettle was the highest quality. Herbal beverages including senna tea, raisin wine, and date wine, which was considered a summer cocktail.

This can show that Al Zubarah has shaped the society around Qatar. The foods found around Al Zubarah—oryx, sea onion, and truffle—were considered delicacies during the Jabrids dynasty.

Al Zubarah was a rich trading post that had captured the attention of many people around the world because its resources, and its animals and plants influenced Qatari society. But what else makes Al Zubarah such a fascinating place in Qatar?

**Al Zubarah During the 16th to mid-17th Century**

In the 16th and 17th Century, Al Zubarah faced the colonial forces of Portugal. The era started with the arrival of the first Portuguese ships, under the command of Afonso de Albuquerque, who attacked every place in the region, including Al Zubarah.
At this time, the Jabrids, or Banu Jabr, ruled Al Zubarah and most of the surrounding areas. This dynasty was first ruled by Zamil bin Hussein, who founded the largest part of dynasty, including Al Zubarah. The Jabrids were of Najd origin and followed the Malikiah school. This led to a strong relationship between the ruler of Al Zubarah and Moroccan scholars, with most Malikiah scholars and scientists living in the occident region of Muslim Arabic countries. Following Zamil bin Hussein, his majesty Saif bin Zamil ruled from 1463 to 1471. Al Zubarah remained in constant contact with Indian and Hurmuz merchants, and those two countries played a massive role in building up the city of Al Zubarah. Next came Ajwad bin Zamil, whose name means generosity. He was the most generous ruler and he was a great knight who held the Malikiah creed to build up the relationship between the city of Al Zubarah and Moroccan merchants. There was a strong relationship between Sultan Ajwad and the Hormuz dynasty. Ajwad died in 1496 after 25 years of sacrifice and glory; his son Mohammed ruled for seven constant years, but information about him is scarce. Following Mohammed, an unknown person lead Al Zubarah and its suburbs.

Muqrin bin Zamil, the next in the line of Jabrids, faced several problems and fought many battles to protect Al Zubarah from the Portuguese crusade led by Afonso de Albuquerque; a crusade that was spreading panic in the heart of every Muslim. There was a substantial naval battle near Al Zubarah between the Portuguese and the Jabrids, spraying a cloud of gunpowder in the air. During this battle, Muqrin’s cousin Nasser, a drunk and womanizer with a bad reputation, betrayed Muqrin. Muqrin was captured by the Portuguese and later died of his injuries. A picture of Sultan Muqrin’s bleeding head became a symbol of the oppressors of the kingdom of Portugal, a symbol that deeply affected every family living on the coast of the Arabian Gulf. The Jabrids ended their rule of Al-Zubarah in 1521, with the Portuguese commander António Correia erasing the golden dynasty of the Jabrids who were from Bani Khalid.

Al Zubarah was stagnant from 1521 to 1624, but there was a tremendous, gigantic subtribe from the Nabhani dynasty in the region, This remarkable dynasty was the Ya’rubids, from the Ibadi
school of Islam. Ya’rubids formed a strong relationship between Al Zubarah, Nizwa, Ras Al-Khaimah, and the Kathiri dynasty and Hormuz. This relationship, headed by Nasir bin Murshid, made the Portuguese afraid of the Ya’rubids.

The art of reprimand is the best way to describe the brutality of the Portuguese. For example, they used savage methods of torture such as pouring molten pig fat on the private organs of men and putting a man in the barrel of the cannon and shooting him. These atrocities made a fast collision blood particles inside the veins of the Ya’rubids men. The Ya’rubids started with the founder Nasir bin Murshid, who led from 1624 to 1649. Al Zubarah faced an attack by night reapers of the Portuguese navy between September and April 1628. Bal’arab bin Himyar ended the Ya’rubids reign in 1732 in Al Zubarah.

Bani Utbah and the Story of a Legend

The Bani Utbah lighted the lantern of Al Zubarah through the Al Khalifa clan in 1732, and trade refreshed the coast with the smell of fresh products such as Indian Ceylon tea, Omani tobacco, Najdian cloth, and local pearls. Most of the time, Al Khalifa tested the foreigner by measuring the pearl and knowing the pearl’s symmetry. This was the way to expose orientalists, and allows the analyst or intellectual person to realize the importance of Al Zubarah.

In addition, Al Murair castle was built to defend against the Al Musallam subtribe Bani Khalid, who ruled Qatar during the 16th century. The Al Bin Ali subtribe of Al Utub constructed that castle. These two brother tribes shared the strong bond of being Bani Utbah, the wealthiest tribe during that era. The town was on the main trade route because merchants came from different areas to exchange products. Utbah abolished trade taxes, especially after a bloody war between Sadeq Khan Zand from the Zand dynasty and Sultan Abdul Hamid I from the Ottoman empire.

There was a massive change in Al Zubarah after the Persian occupation of Al Basra: an influx of Basra merchants and other refugees who honored their second country of Al Zubarah. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Husain ibn Rizq and his biographer Uthman ibn
Sanad Al Basri wrote Saba`ik Al`Asjad. This book is a history of Al Zubarah. Written in the late 1800s by Sheikh Othman bin Sanad and later republished, it documents the religious and literary scholar who lived in Al Zubarah. Abd al-Djalil al-Tabatabaei, the most famous poem in the book, was on the descent of Ibrahim Tabatabaei. He was the seventh grandson of the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) and had a distant kinship connection with the Rassids dynasty. This gives Al Zubarah a multicultural environment.

During the days of prosperity and happiness, an admiral named Rahmah ibn Jabir bin Athbi Al-Jalhami—who carried the most common name in Qatar, especially in Al Zubarah with his Rahmah tribe—agreed to stand with their cousins in the Al Khalifa tribe. However, they didn't take their right from the loots and treasures. Al Fadhil, Al Rumaihi, Al Naimi, Al Bin Ali, Al Jalahma, and Al Musallam were all tribes participating in the Bani Utbah invasion of Bahrain, which Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa led. As a result, Rahmah’s father was killed and Rahmah lost his right eye. These made Rahmah’s blood boil and led him to take revenge on his cousin Al-Khalifa because Al-Khalifa took the money and deprived their cousin of the funds. The revenge started in 1783 and lasted until 1826.

Rahmah bin Jaber had a son called Bishir, a trilingual person born in Al Zubarah. Rahamah had a long journey to build Al Zubarah up from the most common city. Rahmah’s friends included Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr Al-Qasimi, the poet of Sharika Muhin Al-Shamsi, and Misfer, the guard of Dammam castle. These relationships caused Al Zubarah to have Dual political relations. Eventually, Rahmah died by burning his ship, Al Ghatroushah, with an Omani luxury tobacco pipe, killing him, his servant Darrar, and Balochis reinforcements in 1828.

The fashions and pastimes of Al Zubarah were distinct at this time. Tobacco pipes were available in various designs, made of gold, amber, and rhino horn, and commonly used with Omani tobacco. Tobacco imported from Oman, which was more potent than its Western counterpart, had a yellowish-green color and came with several
notes. Flavorsome tobacco was considered just for the royal family because of the high quality of some Omani tobacco. In Al-Zubarah, there was a significant change in fashion when the Shia came to Qatar from Basra. The Shia would wear black turbans (scholars and descendants of the Prophet Muhammed), green turbans (descendants of Prophet Muhammed descendant), and white turbans (the rest of the people). These colorful turbans come with Al Saia, which is like the Bisht Al Barqaa. People made an agal by twisting a turban around their ghutra, which came in a broad shape with two colored stripes like a Bisht Al Barqaa. Women wore Burqa, covering their beautiful faces with eyeliner due to jealous eyes. People in Al Zubarah drank OP1 loose leaf tea with candy sugar, which was an obligatory traditional way of drinking high-quality Ceylon tea. Coffee came with hazelnut and peanut notes designed with saffron and cardamom taste.

This marked the end of an era in Al Zubarah, which had experienced a golden age over the centuries. But how long until it reaches its peak?

**The Mid-18th to 19th Century in Al Zubarah**

The day passed and Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, turned back to make Al Zubarah his home from 1821 to 1842. However, from 1842 to 1867, Al Zubarah started to become the most crucial region in the conflict between Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Khalifa and Qassim bin Mohammed bin Thani. Eventually the ancient tribe stopped Sheikh Qassim and imprisoned him for one year and two months. In response, Qatar and its tribes revolted against Al Naimi and Al Buainain. The shouting whispers and the beats of the drums of victory and defeat began. However, the revolt failed to turn back their Sheikh; the British drew a border between Qatar and Bahrain.

Meanwhile, the British began intervening in Bahrain’s affairs, and Mohammed bin Khalifa signed a treaty that stipulated that the ruler of Bahrain waived his rights to equip armies and warships, such as when they stole the money of Rahmah ibn Jabir. In return, the British pledged to respond to any attack on Bahrain. When the people of
Qatar revolted against Al Khalifa and Mohammed bin Khalifa and came out for their war, Britain protested. British political agents went to Bahrain and demanded the dismissal of Mohammed bin Khalifa from power because he vetoed and signed with the British, insisted on his needs, and kept Bahrain from being fined 100 thousand Indian rupees. The Al Khalifa tribe took Al Zubarah with their bare hands and the glory of Qassim rose.

Sheikh Qassim had a strong alliance with the Ottoman Empire and the Hanbali School and its religious knowledge. Al Zubarah saw the establishment of religious scholars and faith. Several renowned copies of the Holy Quran are there, such as the two-volume Al Zubarah Quran transcribed in Al Zubarah by Ahmed bin Rashid bin Juma bin Khamis bin Hilal Al Muraikhi. He completed the work on the 16th of Shaban 1221 AH (28 October 1806). This marked the establishment of Al Zubarah as a place of scholars. The Ottoman Empire sent a small formation of troops under commander Hossein Afandi that controlled an area from Al Qatif to Al Zubarah. The Al Naimi tribe, which resided in Al Zubarah, agreed to this and the Ottoman’s would colonize the town during that time. The Al Kubaisi and Al Naimi tribes both want to live in peace and under the rule of justice, so Qassim gives them all their needs and wants.

However, in 1878 there was a tremendous change in Qatar’s history: “Waqaat Al Zubarah” between the Ottomans and Qatari. The sound of the Ottoman march met the sound of the Qatari breeze. Abdulla Basha, the Wali of Al Basra, prepared 2000 armed soldiers and Nasser bin Mubarak and Qassim bin Mohammed turned Al Zubarah into his place on the gulf side. Al Kubaisi, and later Al Bin Ali, resettled the town in 1895, and during the Al Zubarah battle, a small Qatari army killed 800, captured 800, and turned another 800 back to the Wali.

Fashion and lifestyle changed significantly with the growth of the East Indian Company during this period. The ghutra was replaced with the shemagh when the British officer John Bagot Glubb made Arabs wear the strange plaid shemagh instead of their striped ghutra. This resulted in a head-to-foot change in clothes by also making
most Arabs wear shoes. In addition, luxury Omani tobacco turned into ordinary cigarettes. The OP1 loose leaf tea from years past was replaced by BP1 tea and the candy sugar was replaced by processed sugar. Rice starts to make its path through a long journey from India to Al Zubarah via the East Indian Company. Under Sheikh Abdulla, religious leaders wore a pilgrimage white agal. Kings wore Miqasab agal or string agal. There was also a connection string for Taif citizens and a separated string that Sheikh Qassim wore, along with all Arab kings, including some of Al-Zubarah's leaders. Bisht came in different colors with extra fabric in just one whole color unlike the striped Bisht that came in two colors. The sons of the old Sheikh in Al Zubarah changed their thobe to a long collared thobe and normal black agal, and some became like the Arabian British commissioner and wore a vest with a British brand coat.

The Structure of the Fort and its Modern History

The fort of Al Zubarah, located in the city of Al Zubarah in the northern part of Qatar, is one of Qatar’s historical places. Sheikh Abdulla bin Jassim Al Thani originally built the fort in 1938, creating it to act as a coast guard station; however, it was used as a police station at one stage. The fort was used as a coast guard station from 1938 to 1980. The fort is one of the youngest and most prominent features of Al Zubarah and is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

This fort is part of a town dating back to the 17th Century that was once a trading port that thrived with the pearl trade. The square fort guarded the small town of Al Zubarah and guarded the main anchorage and the harbors. The city was known for its pearl diving, so it, and its pearls, needed protection. The town was dependent on pearls and the pearl season was only during summer, but summer is long in Qatar. Diving for the pearls took a long time, and it was exhausting, with one diving session taking weeks.

In the 1970s, a new building was built against the south side of the fort. But during the recent decades, this building was torn down and the fort was restored to its original structure, eventually reaching the
newly restored appearance of today (Figure 2). The fort was a popular trading center between the Indian Ocean, Arabia, and western Asia, linking countries in symbiotic, and competitive, relationships.

Unfortunately, the fort collapsed later in the 20th Century because it was not taken care of. First, the rubblestone and mortar buildings collapsed, then the abandoned fort was covered by sand inch by inch, reaching the point where people visited the remains of the fort used it as a mosque, palace jail, and many other things. What once began as a way to defend the port and city, fell into ruin, and has since been restored to become a museum Qatari society can enjoy.

References


Image Credits

Figure 1: Al Zubarah Village in Ruins (photo: Ali Abdulla)

Figure 2: Al Zubarah Fort (photo: Khalid Rwaili)
Standing Room Only

You said you couldn’t travel much.

Never had the time.

He brought the world to you.

Wandered up the battered sidewalk carefully avoiding the dips in the pavement.

Back to the place you once called home.

Nobody was around; not even the usual menacing barks, chirps and crows.

Years of thinking, “Oh when will all this quiet down?”

The silence numbed.

Soon they came from all over and you were sad but content.

Standing room only.

Love, laughter, and song of the serenading baritone.

Sadly, this is the last piece.

“You know I can still run up the hill?” you said so happily.

You reached the top and looked back.

Your face said it all.

Every groove accounted for the marvels, disappointments and pain.

“I’m going to carry on,” you said. “There’s someone to see.

Moving forward would be more ambiguous than staying put.

Go home my dear. I will be there soon.”
“Souq Waqif: The Makings of a Historical Site” is a piece of writing that our professor [Dr. Bryant Scott] assigned as the first group project in our English foundation course. We chose to write about it specifically because it is one of the oldest tourist attractions and is a mix of younger and older generations.
Souq Waqif: The Makings of a Historical Site

Souq Waqif, located in the center of Doha, is not only one of Qatar’s most famous tourist attractions, it is also a shopping destination and a place where you can spend time with your loved ones, hold a falcon, and stroke a camel. According to historians in Qatar, the Souq was formed more than 250 years ago and was named Souq Waqif—the Arabic words for market and standing—because vendors used to stand at the entrances to promote their wares such as spices, clothing, and wood. There were no shops at that time, so the vendors displayed their goods on their camels and were thus compelled to sell their wares while standing. Souq Waqif is known for its rich history, beautiful attractions, and exotic markets.

A Step Back in Time

Initially, there were three souqs within Souq Waqif. These souqs belonged to Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad, Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali, and Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali. Each Sheikh established his souq and expanded it until they reached today’s size, thus founding Souq Waqif. As one of Qatar’s oldest marketplaces, Souq Waqif is one of the most historically significant sites in the country. When our grandparents were young, there were very few places to visit or markets to shop from; Souq Waqif was the main one, which is why it is so
significant in Qatar’s history. Furthermore, Souq Waqif was a gathering place for Bedouins and locals as they used to travel to the area to buy and sell fish, goats, and wool. Souq Waqif was the place they used to trade and conduct business to make money to support themselves. People from other countries also used to sell their products in Souq Waqif. For example, people from Iran came to sell nuts, people from Bahrain came to sell gold, and people from Oman came to sell their popular dessert called halwa. Thus, each would offer what is famous in their country and what would identify their countries.

In the past, the only fashion in Qatar was the thobe for men, which came in different colors. Men wear white thobes during summer and black or brown thobes during winter. Women wore the Jalabiya, which was made of different fabrics from India, Japan, or China. Both were extremely basic. People used to get fabric at Souq Waqif, which was the only place to purchase it, and sew clothing at home.

In addition to a location to buy cloth, Souq Waqif was a social gathering place. Visitors to Souq Waqif will notice that it is filled with older people, such as our grandparents, as storekeepers, indicating that the Souq has been open a very long time. When our grandparents’ generation went to Souq Waqif in the afternoons, they used to sit on wooden seats with their friends and smoke “shisha” while taking a break from selling their goods.

In Souq Waqif, there are shops selling vintage items like jewelry and textiles, also there are shops that sell souvenirs of how the Souq used to be in the past. In 2003, a fire destroyed much of the Souq, and as a result, in 2006, the government initiated a re-establishment program (Khan et al., 2021). Thus, Sheikh Hamad and Sheikha Moza decided
to restore Souq Waqif to preserve its architectural and historical identity. By 2008, the re-establishment was done. In the restoration process, they preserved the historical features of the Souq to illustrate its age. One of the traditions in Souq Waqif is that they used to hire a police officer to stand in front of the entrances. This was done to show people where to go as there were no signs to demonstrate how to get to destinations inside the Souq.

Initially, Souq Waqif was intended to be a marketplace where people buy their necessities; however, throughout the years this objective changed to create a tourist attraction. The spiral mosque at Souq Waqif is Doha’s most famous mosque, and every time you see it from a distance, images of the souq come to mind. It is one of the distinguishing features of Souq Waqif.

**Attractions in Souq Waqif**

When people look at Souq Waqif, they see a place so rich in history and culture that it looks like they are walking through an interactive museum. People see Souq Waqif as a reminder of Qatar’s heritage and its foundation as a society, while also allowing tourists to experience many of Qatar’s historical landmarks. Some of the historic sites in Souq Waqif include the Bismillah Hotel—the first hotel in Souq Waqif—and the first restaurant in the souq, which was built in 1950.
What is unique about Souq Waqif is the beauty of its heritage market, an important tourism landmark ranked among the known old-fashioned folk markets in the area, where vendors trade various traditional goods. Qatar’s government restored more than two thousand buildings, following architectural styles connecting the present with the past to make the Souq more special. Visitors are welcomed by swarms of pigeons picking wheat grains and rice around the market workers at the entrance. Depending on their interests, visitors visiting Souq Waqif have a variety of things they can choose to do. Moreover, having a heritage and handicraft market where tourists from around the world can find all sorts of goods reflecting the country’s heritage while taking photos feels exceptional. Additionally, having cafes within the market that serve cuisines from around the globe makes it Souq Waqif the best place for people to interact with families and friends.

The sites, stores, monuments, people, sections, and historical locations in Souq Waqif all carry significant importance. They enhanced levels of community and social engagements and bring about the prerequisite in understanding the historical building of various sites (Abida H. Khan, 2021). For example, Musheireb is a beautiful square that is connected to the Souq underpass that connects Musheireb to Doha and Souq Waqif. Musheireb is a site that is adjacent to the Souq Waqif redevelopment and is in the downtown area of Qatar’s capital city, Doha. Musheireb
Properties launched this site during the sixth phase of the re-establishment. Musheireb has been described as the area where the town of Al Bidda obtained its water supply, often described as scanty and brackish.

Everything in Souq Waqif symbolizes Arab authenticity, starting with the design of its traditional folk-style buildings to each detail contained within the Souq. Souq Waqif has been one of the most influential sites in Doha due to its importance as a market dating to its founding, when people depended on the Souq for their livelihood. As of now, the Souq is rich in many historical stories that make it valuable to Qatari identity, which makes it one of the most visited places in Qatar for both tourists and locals alike.

The Markets
There is a lot more to Souq Waqif that meets the eye. You can visit many different markets and participate in activities ranging from tasting new flavors, learning about falconry, shopping in the gold market, and watching horses. Souq Waqif is also home to a couple of nice hotels, which is great if you want to remain in the heart of Doha and participate in all of these activities. By staying there, you will discover a lot about Qatari culture, including the importance of the Souq and its value to Qatari authenticity.

As you enter the spice area of Souq Waqif, smell after smell assaults your nose: cinnamon, chili, cumin, coriander, cardamom. For many years, Souq Waqif has been home to spice traders who have their wares laid out in cloth-lined wicker baskets for visitors to marvel at. Dried chilies hang down from beams and twigs full of peppercorns are attached to shelves in the markets. Whatever you want to find from the world of spices, this is the place to find...
it. Dried black lemons, sumac, saffron, zaatar—they are all there. The different traders all have their prices laid out too; the prices are nearly in each store, but all prices are negotiable depending on how much you want to haggle. Along the way, you’ll encounter stores specializing in honey and dates and coffee and tea. These stores all have wonderful stuff for people to buy.

If you are interested in arts, Souq Waqif features an outstanding Art Center with exhibitions of works by both local and foreign artists, all of which are for sale. If you want to try your hand at being creative, there are art classes and workshops available for tourists to master new talents. There is also a famous art gallery called “Souq Waqif Art Center” in Doha’s central market, which exhibits traditional Islamic and Middle Eastern art while also providing courses and studio space for budding artists looking to study the principles of several art disciplines. Throughout the years, the center has distinguished itself for its direct contact with the public through art presentations, exhibitions, and public courses. There you will learn how to look through Arabian eyes and paint things that are appropriate for their culture.

The animals in Souq Waqif serve as a reminder of the past since Qataris relied on animals for hunting, transport, and other tasks. There is a stable and enclosure in one portion of the Souq that houses camels, and there are the Emiri stables, which house the stunningly gorgeous Arabian horses. They were placed there so that the Emir of Qatar, Sheik Tamim bin Hamed, may look at them through his office window. While you are at the stables, you can look at the camels walking in front of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Tamim’s office. You will also experience how police used to work in Doha, seeing horses resting from taking the heritage police on their rounds of the Souq.
The **Pet Souq** is home to an array of animals. Rabbits, cats, dogs, birds of all colors and sizes, parrots, tortoises, and many other exotic animals are available for purchase in the Pet Souq. There are also some very good photography opportunities here as there are numerous parrots, which are comfortable with human interaction, stationed outside some of the stores.

The **Falcon Souq** is a slightly quieter part of Souq Waqif. It is quieter because the respect people have for the falcons. Falconry is a traditional sport in Qatar dating back to when records began. The sport of falconry requires a great amount of skill and patience, as well as a bond between the bird and owner, which is usually established the first time they meet, hence the quieter atmosphere. Falcons are majestic birds of prey, and you can also have great photo opportunities in the Falcon Souq, especially if the owner is having a quiet day.

Another fascinating part of Souq Waqif is the **Gold Souq**. Gold is an extremely popular metal for jewelry in the Middle East, and the Gold Souq upholds old traditions by ensuring that people from all walks of life may receive what they need at a reasonable price. The Gold Souq has something to suit every taste and budget. There are various valuable metals and precious stones, such as diamonds and rubies, available. You can also learn about the significance of pearls in Qatar in the Gold Souq. Before the discovery of oil, Qatar’s economy was based on pearls and pearl diving, which were the nation’s main source of wealth for many years. Qatar was at the forefront of the pearl business and was a major global supplier of pearls. In Souq Waqif, local people started businesses exclusively for pearls, to demonstrate how they appear and how they helped in raising Qatar’s economy. In the Gold Souq today, you can learn
about pearls and pearl diving from some of the little shops owned by former pearl divers and purchase some of the amazing trinkets and handicrafts they.

**Restaurants** in the Souq have a huge range in variety. There are some globally franchised eateries as well as small individual restaurants. The cuisines range from traditional Arabic foods, such as machboos, to burgers and fries, kebabs and shawarmas, curries and rice, Moroccan tagines, Syrian lamb and falafel, and Umm Ali and Gulab Jamun. Then there are the dessert shops and ice cream stalls, which have children running wild with the games the vendor play, especially the Turkish ice cream vendor, who drives children and adults alike crazy with his antics. Souq Waqif has attractions for people of all ages and mindsets to enjoy. Whether you are a tourist visiting for a holiday and want to experience a taste of the “real” Doha, or a local who wants to come and enjoy the sights, sounds, and smells, Souq Waqif is your place.

**The Beauty of Souq Waqif**

Souq Waqif was built in Wadi Musheireb at least a century ago. Initially, the stores in Souq Waqif were just little huts that were so small that the space granted was only enough for the owners’ wares and nothing else. The owners had no place to sit in their stores, hence the name Souq Waqif. If we look at the
architecture of today’s Doha and compare it to the old Souq Waqif, we can see that the design has been modernized and globalized. We can see malls, skyscrapers, and many other modern buildings in Doha, but there is nothing else like Souq Waqif. Modern-day Doha does not have those tight store spaces and small huts. Instead, modern-day stores have wide and open areas and concrete walls like any other store in the world; they have no Middle Eastern charm or originality.

As the years went by, Souq Waqif became a place of gathering for trading and the buildings became more and more modernized. The shops became more and more globalized and had large metal signs outside them. The roads filled with cars and Souq Waqif fell into disrepair. In an interview, re-establishment project director Mohammed Ali Abdullah stated that “they felt like they were invaded by inhumane buildings and felt that their architecture was more humane, and it was lovelier.” Fortunately, according to an article in Qulture in 2004, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani decided to demolish all the structures that were made in the 1950s or later and refurbish the old ones that were there before. Unfortunately, the cause of such action was the fire that destroyed most of the Souq in 2003. These decisions that were made by the Sheikh were only the first step in the restoration of Souq Waqif.

The restoration plan was simple: demolish the remaining modern-looking buildings while reinventing the remaining traditional-looking buildings with things like better air conditioning. They were also replacing the demolished building with traditional-style buildings and stores built using traditional means. An article by the BBC states that “they have made cobbled lanes and whitewashed buildings by using traditional Qatari architectural elements, including mud rendered walls and exposed timber beams that looked to be from a bygone era.” They also stated that the designers
sought to revive the memory of the area by demolishing modern buildings and insulating the remaining buildings against extreme heat with traditional methods that use locally sourced wood and bamboo imported from Asia (Rachel Morris, 2011). The new building designs made with traditional methods add a historical charm and originality like no other. This way, the area can have a new feeling to it without adding the overly used aspects of modern buildings, like cold metal roofs and tiles, that don’t fit the theme of Souq Waqif. Many traditional restaurants were built and new stores were opened during the restoration. The restaurants, being traditional, had no tables or chairs. The local practice of having carpets on the floor was common, and visitors would sit on those carpets and eat using their hands in the traditional Qatari way. The restoration project was finished in 2008, and Souq Waqif had a complete form, with newly built traditional buildings, while also retaining some of its old buildings like the Bismillah Hotel. Souq Waqif was also one of the 19 nominees for the 11th cycle of the Aga Khan Award for architecture. (Aga Khan, 2010).

Since 2008, Souq Waqif has become one of the most important places in Qatar for both its history and its tourism. This is a big difference in purpose from when Souq Waqif was first established as a
gathering hub, but the purpose is not the only thing that has changed. While the new buildings have similar exterior designs to the old ones, the spaces inside are different. The walls and roofs were all made of mud and bamboo, insulating against heat, while bamboo sticks stick out from the windows for the birds to perch on, giving the buildings glamor and attractiveness to tourists.

After its initial kickoff, Souq Waqif started adding installations by major artists to further add to its collection of great architecture. One of these additions is Le Pouce (the thumb) by artist Cesar Baldaccini. An Qatar Museums article states, “The statue could act as a landmark of modern art in the heart of the city, combining the traditional with the contemporary.” This is a direction that is best for keeping up the theme and heritage of Souq Waqif.

References


“2010 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.” Youtube, uploaded by TheAgaKhanAward, 3 Jun 2011 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7iCnvjvsOs

Bashayer Alemadi graduated from Cambridge International School in 2021 and is majoring in petroleum engineering at Texas A&M University at Qatar to serve her country.

Mahana Al-Naemi is currently studying electrical engineering at Texas A&M University at Qatar. He has a very keen interest in circuits and wiring. He graduated from Omar bin Khattab Secondary School for Boys.

Maryam Al-Obaidan is majoring in electrical and computer engineering to be able to achieve the vision of Qatar 2030. She will be honored to be a part of the development.

Nour Althani graduated from Albayán school in 2019. She is currently pursuing a degree in electrical and computer Engineering at Texas A&M University at Qatar.
Expressing Gratitude
Depression is more than just feeling bleak or upset. Feeling discouraged, disconnected, ashamed, and disgusted with yourself are all symptoms of depression. This “poem” portrays my dreams and hopes for the future as someone that struggles with depression.
Eternal Internal Peace

My deepest dreams—a collection of hopes I think is too far to reach—yet a spark in me deeply believes one day happiness with rule over my world, and my deepest dreams with at last be reality.

My deepest dream is to be happy and at peace with myself; I hope one day I’ll sit under the sun and things won’t feel so bad anymore. My dream is to wake up in the morning and reflect on my accomplishments rather than failures.

I dream about the day I will finally let go of all the trauma from the past, when I wake up and decide to forgive. I dream about the moment I surround myself with my most loved ones, living a simple life doing simple things with simple feelings.

I dream about a level of success that I can’t pick apart to make less valid. I truly dream of eternal internal peace. I dream about not having to fear my life, where humans are not so scary anymore. I dream, and I dream, but when will it stop being a dream?

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Khaloud Al-Buainain is a Qatari computer engineer studying at Hamad Bin Khalifa University. She aspires for a brighter, more accessible, and accepting future for all. She’s a firm advocate for women’s rights, mental health, and inclusivity.
This is one of the last pieces I have written in my senior year. Throughout my writing process, I was overwhelmed with memories I made in TAMUQ in the past four years.
Looking Back

Looking back, it was in the desk next to the window that offered the panorama of the sun shining down on the pool in the ceremonial court where I found the solace that I once thought was elusive. Throughout my undergrad, this place fostered the tranquility that helped me remain composed during the stressful weeks of the semester.

The education I received here has prepared me to become not just an engineer, but an engineering leader. The academic environment I reveled in has shaped my personality and enriched my research potential. At TAMUQ, I not only discovered my identity, but also my passion for teaching and my potential to grow as a leader, which served as a platform for me to be recognized. I had one of the most enriching and wonderful experiences of my life in this university, and every single day I feel proud and grateful to be a part of this community. Becoming an Aggie is the most important part of my identity, and it empowers me to become a better version of myself every single day. Every single day, the vibrant atmosphere of the university encourages me to become an engineering leader and to lead by example, which is a value I hold onto.

“Once an Aggie, always an Aggie” is my favorite saying at TAMUQ as it makes me feel connected with my fellow Aggies.

Over time I discovered that a person’s communication and leadership skills become sharper when they step out of their comfort zone and indulge in intercultural interactions to gain a better understanding of cross-cultural experiences. The leadership opportunities I had in the university changed me on a personal level and helped me communicate effectively. The most valuable experience I had as a student leader was when I represented TAMUQ at the student leadership exchange program at the main campus in Texas. This was my first time communicating in a cross-cultural setting, and I was excited to get to know people from different cultural backgrounds. The people I met were keen to know my experience as an Indian girl living in the Middle East and how close I was to my roots. The
interactions I had with them made me rethink my identity and realize how Qatar had become my second home over the last sixteen years. I developed and learned about different perspectives of being a leader from the other student leaders, which helped me integrate multiple perspectives to create my style of leadership.

As an undergraduate researcher, I learned the importance of patience—indispensable as a virtue due to the time-consuming work involved—which honed my capacity for the skill. As an intern, I encountered situations that tested my patience mainly due to strong glass ceiling conventions that a few people in the industry bore and instances of gender discrimination. The confidence I developed in the university reflected itself in the experiences I had outside the classroom that helped me stand strong in situations that tested me.

My time at TAMUQ is finally coming to an end, but I think this as a new beginning. “Congratulations! It is a pleasure for me to inform you that you have been admitted to Columbia University.” I felt the chills running down my spine reading my graduate school acceptance letter with the confetti falling down the laptop screen. It was in the middle of the night, where I found myself reflecting on all those moments over the last four years that had brought me here.

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**Ayesha Azimuddin** is a recent TAMUQ graduate. Being an Aggie is not only one of the most enriching experiences of Ayesha’s life but an identity that extends beyond four years of undergrad. From being unaware of the journey that lay ahead of her, she became a confident young woman for whom the experiences at TAMUQ have propelled her to give her best in everything she does.
Before graduation, I listed my accomplishments that I need to highlight in my cover letters, essays, and resume. I recapped my whole time at TAMUQ (obviously missed a few events here and there), and I was proud of pulling through when the times were tough, creating everlasting memories. Hayyam read through the list and gave me an idea of writing it in proper sentences, making the task of writing future essays and cover letters a bit easy. After translating the words into sentences, I couldn’t help myself and had to submit it for Best Writing.
Finding Myself

I vividly remember my first day at Texas A&M University at Qatar, being welcomed by bright-looking orientation leaders who helped me decipher the curriculum Ms. Phylicia handed me. I found myself rolling my eyes at that piece of paper when I saw I had to deal with six liberal arts courses. I never saw myself as a writer beyond writing reports, presenting data, and stating facts. I was hesitant to work on this stumbling block until I walked into my ENGL 104 class to meet the most passionate professor, Dr. Mysti. She allowed me to research and write about what I love most in life, unleashing the writer within me. Writing came naturally to most folks here, and they found pleasure in it. However, I realized that my path to overcoming my struggles with writing was the actual key to satisfying my need for self-actualization. This was my first accomplishment at this university, which led me to author pieces in Best Writing 2018 and 2020.

As a freshman, I was brimming with energy and my quest for a source of self-awakening and individuality expanded beyond writing. Taking advantage of the many opportunities offered in TAMUQ, I found myself involved the CTL programs. I took part in several engineering enrichment courses that certified me for diverse skill sets, including time management, using the Arduino board, and working safely (International Certificate by IOSH), and that had me visit General Electric Aviation. I was also chosen to take part in “Invent for the Planet,” which happens at 30 universities across the globe and has taught me lifelong lessons of teamwork and appreciation.

Building Skills

Expanding my horizons at TAMUQ also introduced me to new disciplines. My expertise in SolidWorks software had already been credited before I joined TAMUQ. After further developing my skills by taking a course at TAMUQ, I found a new field
of interest: designing. After the dawn of Covid-19, I was hired by Dr. Bilal Mansoor to design face shields and other personal protective equipment using SolidWorks. I became part of the MEEN department’s Covid response, which donated 3D-printed face shields to Qatar Red Crescent. I followed this project by designing a system to disinfect N95 masks by treating them under heat and humidity, which required extensive mechanical measurements. The development of my idea was applauded, and I further developed it under Dr. Tafreshi for my MEEN 260 class project.

**Becoming Independent and Leading**

After concluding my experimentations for MEEN 260, I moved into a different sphere of research, working on a project of my own. This project focuses on improving the mechanical properties of magnesium alloys by processing them and testing their hardness, elastic modulus, strength, and corrosive properties to verify improvements. This project will be a part of the Undergraduate Research Scholars thesis program, in which I am leading a team of two under the supervision of Dr. Bilal Mansoor. This thesis will include all the data I have gathered in my 1.5 years of experimentation on magnesium and is closely related to my final year project. I happen to be the only undergrad student working on his independent project, of which I’m proud.

As a rising junior, I took thermodynamics in the summer with Dr. Kumaran. Even though I didn’t get an A, my commitment and understanding of the course led to a research opportunity in the fluid lab, where I serve the role of a project manager, and being a hobbyist repairer came as a bonus to it. My work on this Undergraduate Research Experience Program continued even after Dr. Kumaran left TAMUQ. I manage a team of two juniors who will continue working on this supercritical facility with Dr. Reza Sadr after I graduate.

**Beyond the University**

Internships are a critical part of any program, and my interests, intellect, and hard work secured me two internships: one at Qatar Steel in 2018 and the other at QAPCO in 2020. In these intensive
six-week internships, I interacted with industry experts and leading engineers on a technical level. This made my summer productive, introduced me to the world of professionals and leaders, and helped me further develop my professional knowledge and skills.

Developing great ideas was my ticket to conferences held at Qatar Foundation, and my confidence allowed me to speak in the Qatar Debate competition and Doha Debates. Realizing the advantages of working in teams from these experiences, I continued working in organizations and sports clubs. In my sophomore year, I joined SEC, ADC, Eco Soteria, CODE, and the TAMUQ cricket team. After actively spending six months in these organizations, I became Chair of EDay at SEC. I hosted the annual event in collaboration with Best Buddies at a special education school in Qatar with a team of 15 volunteers and my co-chair, Nivinya. It was a special day seeing Aggies giving back to society by putting a smile on kids’ faces. This event inspired me to take the lead in other organizations, and last semester, I hosted a quiz competition on the environment sponsored by Eco-Soteria and CODE. I saw our cricket team rise from ashes to win the Qatar Foundation Cricket Tournament (gratefully, we remain champions to this day).

Undeniably, TAMUQ served me a hefty pallet of great opportunities and shaped me into an individual who can proudly recognize himself as a writer, researcher, team player, and engineer. For my Fall 2021 semester, I was admitted to the semester abroad program, which will enable me to graduate with all the incredible experiences that this university had to offer. I believe these programs drastically affect one’s outlook on life and help develop a person’s unique identity. My trip to Texas A&M University’s main campus in College Station also opened new horizons for educational adventures, and those were the best four months of my student life. To become an Aggie, one must visit the main campus. The Aggie experience is incomplete without it.
Haseeb Bajwa is a mechanical engineer, Class of 2022. Born and bred here in AlMarkhiya, he takes an active interest in global events, often drawing comparisons on his social media accounts. He wrote and published his first writing back in 2018, inspired by our very own Dr. Mysti, for which he will forever be in debt. Although he is not a big fan of writing, he still holds a pen now and then on global issues like climate change, the cold war, and human rights. He believes that moral values are rigid but different perspectives must be entertained, which should dictate the final verdict of right and wrong. He is proud of his Pakistani heritage and is blessed to be a part of a vibrant community of engineers.
This piece drew out many memories for me. It reminded me of the shy little girl I used to be. My journey at TAMUQ has changed me a lot; I’m tougher than I ever was, I am more dedicated than I used to be, but most importantly, I am more confident than I ever thought I could be. This piece is about a very special person who was the first to bring about this change in me. TAMUQ gave me one of the best friendships and taught me what a blessing it is to have people around you who make you nothing but happy.
A Tribute to My Teacher
(Dedicated to the most caring and sincere professor)

I came to Texas A&M University at Qatar as an international student, and it felt as if I had been separated from my herd. As an introvert, I was not inclined to confide in new friendships with my batchmates, nor did I resort to befriending my professors. Even though most of the professors in my first year had encouraged students to see them during their office hours, and as much as I wanted to go, I did not have the mental determination to bring myself to stand outside their offices. This is rooted in the fear that if a professor confronts me for doing poorly in their course, I won’t even have a reason for it. I was mired in the belief that I had to be doing worse than everybody in the class, and with every submission returned to us in classes, my first instinct was to hide the assignment. One day, I saw as many as three cross marks on my writing assignment and a question written at the bottom of the page. I could not exactly comprehend the handwriting, so I waited until the end of the class to ask my professor what it had said. In those two minutes of a talk, I learned that those cross marks were plus marks with a note asking, “Where did you learn to write so well?” In that short interaction, I understood that I was a valuable student who deserved to be complimented. I walked out of the class as bold as a bear, motivated to perform extraordinarily thereon.

In the fall of 2019, I had met the first professor who colored the black texts on my white sheet of paper with a highlighter to express what she had liked instead of what she did not. A professor who drew tears on the side margins of the article to tell me what I wrote had touched her so deeply and a treble clef if she found my writing poetic. In my English 104 class, I was introduced to a flexible setting where each student could make this class whatever they wanted it to be. Each writing assignment was about the students themselves, followed by reflections on how we felt about writing it or sharing it. No stone was left unturned in the process of our self-actualization, and we became better people with every assignment. Dr. Mysti had her way of making the class a safe space; she knew how to gain the trust of as many as thirty students, one by one, and equally trust
them in return. The stories we wrote in our notebooks did not have to be true, and we knew whatever we wrote would be honored by her so well that it would form a bond between us and her. You could tell that your stories were read with such passion that whatever feedback you received from her were only questions asking more about the story. She would thank us for being open with her, and every attempt of hers was intended to make the writers within us soar.

Dr. Mysti is truly the one who taught me how to read, and by reading, I do not mean making sense of what the words had to say. We each had picked a topic for our research; for some, it was as personal as wearing a hijab, and for some, it was not personal at all. I learned how to look through research papers from this class, something I was not very fond of. I hold the experience of learning how to critically interpret the readings very dearly. It was a massive milestone for me, and I achieved this milestone by interacting with Dr. Mysti one-on-one. Such luxury was offered to every student in the class, where the door for Dr. Mysti’s office was always found open with a student or two waiting in line. The thing about such interactions that delighted me the most was that it gave me the chance to learn more about Dr. Mysti and her approach to life, which helped me clarify and recognize my interests in life and eventually form a meaningful friendship with her. This friendship continued beyond the course, where I found the confidence to submit an excerpt from my diary to Dr. Mysti for Best Writing 2021. Dr. Mysti instilled in me the courage to openly be who I am and be proud of it.

Every student knows the efforts of Dr. Mysti to make the students heard and helped. At the end of every semester, we would all receive a chunk of emails requesting that the students at this university would conduct a survey for her ENGL 104 students’ projects. All of this struggle is dedicated to the students of her class so they can better inform their research papers. Her famous initiative to establish a platform for every member of this university to submit their excellently written essays or research papers (or even poems) is well honored and highly regarded. With this yearly occurring event of Best Writing, students and faculty members are celebrated for their uniqueness and contribution. I have authored two pieces in
Best Writing, one of which was related to my project on 3D printing to support efforts against Covid-19. I could compose something so methodical yet have it precious to me because I had learned how to connect with my work beyond classrooms. I was introduced to this when working with Dr. Mysti on the Meaningful Writing Project in Education City. The project’s sole purpose is to help students in Education City love what they do. Dr. Mysti proposed this project to the Transformational Educational Experience community to improve student experiences by surveying and interviewing them about their most beloved writing encounters and conveying them to their professors. Her dedication went to extremes in creating a space for students who could have a say about their writing curricula.

The impression that Dr. Mysti leaves behind charms almost every individual. Working and meeting weekly with her showed me how she admires her students and coworkers. With every meeting, she taught us and was ready to learn from us and take all our ideas to mesh them into great ideas. She is driven by her love for students and colleagues and, knowingly or unknowingly, changes everyone into better people.

Hayyam Tariq Iqbal, a mechanical engineering student, is expected to graduate in 2023. She hails from a military family and has spent most of her childhood in Pakistan. She is an avid supporter of various humanitarian causes and often takes up the pen rallying for them. Her journey at Texas A&M at Qatar has brought a whole new outlook of life for her, and she proudly acknowledges the influence that her family, the one she has made at TAMUQ, has had on her attitude. While she sees it as imperative to bend according to the need of the time, she is also very ambitious about her studies. With the numerous opportunities provided by TAMUQ, she has immersed herself in science, research, debates, and arts to satiate her need for discovery and self-awakening.
This poem was written for my English 219 — Literature and the Other Arts course during my sophomore year. It encapsulates the essence of happiness in humans, which is not found in surroundings but instead within ourselves. Happiness from within is what keeps one alive, no matter the challenges faced, being able to cultivate the key to happiness with a positive mindset is what opens doors to self acceptance, joy and success.
Happiness Is the Greatest Success

The search for success is arbitrary, like a key that is found then lost again. Some say that it is imaginary; some say that it exists close to their heart.

Magical as it may seem to us all, the sea waves refreshingly thrash mindsets. Some find it the small things that befall; some find it trapped in their large assets.

Carefully catch before you fall into the delf. Happiness is elusive, so don’t cry want. Instead take a glimpse into your own true self, where you will find the treasure of bezant.

Funny how mankind still searches elsewhere, when happiness lives in your veins right here.

Humaira Shaffique is a rising computer engineering junior at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU). She has an infatuation for technology and engineering marvels but feels that one’s thoughts and understanding of the world and people around us is important to explore one’s own self, like Columbus discovering a continent of amazing potential within ourselves. Her hobbies are painting, crochet, basketball, and reading science fiction. She likes to adopt the value system, which says that “Do good to others without expecting reward in return.”
Seniors’ Voices
I couldn’t be more glad than to have had a nicely knit experience at the graduate level. I made some amazing friends and had the most wonderful times. Onwards and upwards! If you’re joining the master’s program here at TAMUQ, remember the following: manage your time and don’t just focus on work; self-care is equally important.

I started with so many doubts, especially related to my major and whether I wanted to pursue petroleum engineering or switch majors. But during the admission reception, way before orientation, I met Dr. Amani and he gave me an overview of what the program was like. That was enough to motivate me to continue with PETE. Now here I am, grateful to all my professors and friends and mainly my family for believing in me to pursue my field of interest. I hope I have made them all proud and that I can continue to do so. The PETE faculty is undoubtedly my second family and I feel blessed to have them as my mentors and advisors. Thank you for shaping me to be the person I am today. <3

I will forever be grateful.

Sincerely,
Afsha Shaikh

This is a message to any student who has been doubted before. Your story is yours only. Do not let anyone make you feel small. You are more than capable when you set your mind to it. Pick yourself up no matter how many times you fall. Falling is a failure only if you stay on the ground. Make mistakes but learn from them. And remember, “One thorn of experience is worth a whole wilderness of warning.”
To my professors who believed in me and saw me beyond the classroom: thank you for motivating me to do better and to want better. I am privileged to have had the opportunity to learn from you. To my classmates: I wish you all the best in your future endeavors. We have all proven to ourselves that if we want it, we can get it, no matter the struggle!

To the people in the Petroleum Engineering Department who eventually became family: thank you for everything!

I would also like to extend a special gratitude to Dr. Mohamed Fadlelmula, who was a truly great professor by all means.

To the “2022 residents” of classroom 122A: I’m grateful for all the memories we built together. I’m glad I met such great friends who I can call family by now <3!

Finally, to future students: it’ll all pay off in the end like it was easy! Make sure to gain knowledge, have fun, and build lifelong friendships.

Respect is the key to success. You must respect your classmates by studying well so you do not think of cheating when you are taking the exam, doing your assignments, or working on your projects. You must respect your professors because they spend time delivering their experiences to you, and your respect will create a safe environment for your learning journey. You must respect everyone, especially those who respect you. From my side, I really want to thank many of my professors, TAs, staff, and friends. I truly recognize and appreciate the following people as they showed me their motivation, care, kindness, and most importantly RESPECT!
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- Dr. Ibrahim Hassan (My advisor and MEEN 461 and MEEN 421 professor)
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- Dr. Mamoun Al-Rawashdeh (My research professor)
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- Dr. Nordine Mir (My MATH 251 professor)
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- Mr. Mohammad AlGammal (My MEEN 210, 315, 441, 401, 402, and ISEN 302 TA)
- Mr. Omar Al-Ani (My MEEN 344, 345, 363, 421, 461, and 464 TA)
- Mr. Shameel Abdulla (My MEEN 260, 357, 364, and 431 TA)

Staff:
- Dr. Majdi Mansouri
- Ms. Joelle Fadlallah
- Ms. Sabina Uzakova
- Ms. Sahar Mari

Thanks to all my family and my friends who supported me in my hard times!

And as I always say:
“Being Optimistic, Being Alive
Stay always Optimistic!”

My sincere and best regards to everyone mentioned above,
Moaz M. Rabie ’22
Mechanical Engineering Graduate
My most memorable experience during my time at TAMUQ would be when I participated in the study abroad program in the summer of 2019. That experience made me learn so much about myself and allowed me to become more independent. Not only did I create the most unforgettable memories, I also got the chance to experience a completely different learning environment. As a result, I made a lifelong friend there. I’ll never forget the late night milkshake runs, baseball games, and all our trips in the back of our friends truck!

I would like to thank all faculty and staff for their continuous support and guidance and their consistent motivation in having us thrive for the best.

I give glory to the almighty God for the success of my program here at TAMUQ. Now, Lukman is a graduate of Texas A&M University; despite the highs and lows, I made it through. Words are not enough to explain who I am and what I have achieved in this beautiful institution, other than my transcript.

During my first semester here (Fall 18), I was like a man dropped in the middle of an ocean in an unknown region. I tried to swim to the shore with my heart and head under the water and my body above. Yet, I could not find Lukman. But I trusted God (Oluwa) because He would lift me above (a Gbemiga) the water from Oluwagbenga. I went back into the water to find my heart and head, of which I found my head and forgot my heart. Then I looked around with my head pointing out from the water like a message pot of an ancient human civilization; though I saw the light, I could not see Lukman with it. I swam close to a rock in the middle of the ocean, sat...
on the rock, and waited for my heart to float on the water. Then Covid-19 came. I stayed on the rock for two and half semesters, and the more I stayed, the more I lacked strategies to pick up my heart. The songs of the birds and the grunts, grinding, and pops of the fishes I was enjoying got boring and depressed me. Suddenly, I fell back into the water to re-strategize for the last time. I penned the best strategies to keep an eye on my heart, track its movement, and re-strategize. Knowing how to lift all parts of my body above the water but my heart, I followed my new strategies. Using my new strategies, I tracked my heart and found my heart was close to the shore at a depth of about 3 ft. I picked up my heart and felt like the real Lukman I knew. On Thursday, 9th Dec 2021, I got home after five exams (two were optional), two final project submissions, and one lab report submission within one week and told a friend, “I am feeling like a warrior who went to war and conquered.” I tried the same strategies this spring (2022) and am proud to say that the cumulative of only my senior year results qualified me for a dean’s list. I remember telling Dr. Ryan during the fall of 2021 that I wanted to get an honor for the semester after he told me the honor award is semester-based.

Although I did not graduate with the highest CGPA, I graduated with the best development, lessons learned, and one of the best performances post Covid or in senior year.

My advice for all students now or in the future is that design a strategy that works for you and track your performance and grades to know what you need in the next quiz, exam, assignment, presentation, or project. Lastly, you may start with any level of performance, but you can always end with a better performance if you track your heart.

I would also like to thank all professors from all departments who taught me throughout my time here at TAMUQ. My thanks go out to the Academic Services and Student Affairs
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