A THOUSAND WAYS TO BEGIN

BEST WRITING
About the Cover Photo

By Taif Almeflehi

I cannot deny my love and passion for discovering the cities and villages of different parts of the earth and learning about their cultures and customs, even their beliefs and superstitious stories. To mark these moments, I like to capture these sights and adventures through my humble phone screen to save them and move them to my favorite album that I called “Taibo.” I browse through it whenever I wish to move to the world of beautiful memories and to recharge my energy by taking my thoughts and imagination back to those moments.

The cover picture is a reflection of my love and my passion for my Arabic language, as I was attracted to its colors at that very moment. With these letters on the walls, I will build beautiful words that will express the charm and heritage of the city of Chefchaouen in northern Morocco, which expresses Amazigh history in North Africa with its Islamic and Arab character. I know what may cross the mind of everyone who reads the name of this so called blue gem of a city: Why is it called Chefchaouen? or what does that word mean? There are many stories around its name; one is that it was the only source of drinkable water in the past. Another story says that a military commander in 1471 built a castle near a glimmering spring of water and expanded the area around the castle to become a city. As for the sweep of the blue that fills the city, it is said to be a reflection of the famous Arabic Andalusian architecture, reflecting the people’s passion for Sufism that inspires them to paint the outside of houses blue, a color that gives us a sense of fun and vitality and also calmness of the soul and peace. I still feel it until now when I describe my feelings as if I am in the blue jewel while I browse the memories and pictures of my journey in this charming city. I look forward to another meeting that brings us together with a picture and a story.
Dear Readers,

Welcome to the sixth volume of *Best Writing*, the annual anthology of writing composed primarily by undergraduate students at Texas A&M University at Qatar. For those of you unfamiliar with our programs, Texas A&M at Qatar offers bachelor of science degrees in four majors: petroleum, mechanical, chemical, and electrical and computer engineering. We also offer master’s degrees in chemical engineering. Our campus is relatively small—although we like to call it cozy—with an enrollment of around 600 students who take courses in a single building located in Education City. We are proud to be part of a diverse international institution that can now boast that we graduate almost as many female students as male students annually, a rarity for an engineering school. In May of 2019, we witnessed our one thousandth graduate walk the stage—an important milestone in the brief history of this campus whose doors opened in 2003. To honor this, we have chosen our theme to be “A Thousand Ways to Begin.”

To open this volume, we asked faculty members to briefly reminisce about their first semester teaching in Qatar. Through a three-part *Best Writing* Studio Series we also encouraged staff members to workshop poems and stories that reflected their own beginnings, and you can find these powerful pieces sprinkled throughout this volume. But the real treasure buried beneath this book is the cumulative courage displayed by the many students who submitted pieces for consideration in this year’s volume. Let us be clear: without these students and their hard work and bravery, there would be no *Best Writing*. By submitting their pieces for publication, the students in this university acknowledge the power of writing and the accompanying terror/exhilaration of sharing their stories, assignments, and philosophies with an audience beyond their teachers and peers. This is especially laudatory for students for whom English is a second (or third or fourth) language. Facing the blank page is terrifying for many writers, but it can be additionally fraught for a multilingual engineering student who has a 15-page lab report due tomorrow but has to take time out to reflect on a prompt they received in their English class that day, such as “Why are you here?” or “Trace your journey towards literacy,” or “Tell me about your relationship with writing.” Many of the pieces in this volume started out as S.F.D.s, an acronym that writer Anne Lamott has coined to give us all permission to write “sh— first drafts” as we try to get something—*anything*—written down on that first blank page!

But where to begin? Sometimes the pressure we put on ourselves to have a spectacular hook or a powerful first paragraph dries up the river of writing within us. This is especially true for those who are perfectionists, and the advice we offer them in order to turn on the faucet of writing is this: “You don't have to begin at the beginning.” This may seem illogical, but giving a struggling writer the permission to start in the middle—or reminding them that there are many, many ways to begin and that there is no single right way to start—can unleash
the writer within. We also remind our students that “real writers revise” and therefore there is a 90% chance that the opening they wrote in the first draft will be replaced by something even more powerful in a later draft. “Since when,” asks Irish poet Seamus Heaney, “are the first line and last line of any poem where the poem begins and ends?” What does it mean to begin something? And do we always know when we are at the end?

Beginnings and endings are inextricably linked, most obviously because beginnings wouldn’t exist without a previous ending. The pieces in this volume attest to the difficulties students have experienced when leaving a beloved high school environment to begin a grueling engineering degree, like the transitions that Aysha Naser Al-Melhim and Hanan Al-Ansari describe in their pieces. Other writers, such as Ebtihal Youssef in “Maybe My Dreams Will Shine Again,” merely hint at the end of a childhood dream and imply the acceptance of a hard-earned maturity. When students enroll at Texas A&M, they embark on many beginnings that will never be recorded on a transcript as they begin new relationships and make new friends. They fluctuate between feeling confident and full of doubt as they situate themselves in new social groups, trying to learn what it means to responsibly live in community with their fellow Aggies. As the pieces from our alumni Yousef Al-Jaber, Pavithra Manghaipathy, and Omar Barhoumi show, these early experiences at Texas A&M shape their new identities and values and prepare them for learning new ways of belonging in the workplace.

And you, dear reader, have been invited to bear witness to all of these beginnings. Whether or not your curiosity causes you to read all of the words in this volume, the desire to be heard is a core human need—and if left unfilled, leads to suffering. By paying attention to the poems, stories, essays, and arguments collected in Best Writing 2019, you will be gifted with a front-row seat to the journeys that we all go through as human beings—whether intellectual, philosophical, social, or emotional. And just maybe the pieces in this volume will inspire you to write about your own beginnings—whether they be about a school, a person, a place, or a profession. Do you remember the first day/semester/year of ______? It is up to you, of course, to fill in this blank. As you relive these memories (and consider submitting them for Best Writing 2020), consider the advice of storyteller Nancy Lamb: “Experiment—push your boundaries. Don’t settle for the first try. Explore several options. Place your hero somewhere new, either physically or psychologically. Then take a deep breath, give your imagination full rein, and let it run.” But the most important step is simply to begin!

Wishing you success in your writing lives,

Mysti Rudd and Amy Hodges
Co-editors of the Best Writing Series
Acknowledgments

We would like to thank each and every one of the students, staff, and faculty who submitted their pieces for possible publication in this year’s volume. Without your commitment to sitting down to write, plus your courage to share your writing with the world, the Best Writing series published annually by Texas A&M at Qatar would not be able to continue.

We are indebted to the care and work that the Best Writing committee contributed to make this volume a reality. We thank each of the nine students, seven staff, and four faculty members (including the co-editors) of this year’s Best Writing committee:

Sara Albanna, Class of 2022  Abir Aboulhosn
Aalaa Abdallah, Class of 2019  Beth Caerlang
Shouroq Al-Siddiqi, Class of 2020  Lana El Ladki
Abdulla Al-Tamimi, Class of 2020  Vanessa Lina
Van Balaoro, Class of 2022  Shauna Loej
Zeina Barghouti, Class of 2021  Sahar Mari
Ghaith Glaied, Class of 2020  Deanna Rasmussen
Midhat Javaid, Class of 2020  Sherry Ward
Nadim Wahbeh, Class of 2019  Kelly Wilson

We also wish to acknowledge the talents of the student photographers whose work is displayed on the front cover and the chapter dividers:

Front Cover   Taif Almeflehi
Chapter 1: The Road Ahead   Bashayer Al-Mohammed
Chapter 2: Choosing a Path   Kenana Dalle
Chapter 3: Belonging   Rand Alagha
Chapter 4: Withstanding Challenges   Kenana Dalle
Chapter 5: Becoming Ourselves   Fatima Al-Janahi
Chapter 6: The Beauty of Words   Taif Almeflehi
Chapter 7: Begin Again   Kenana Dalle

We express our gratitude to Sahar Mari for professionalizing our submission process and organizing the Best Writing Cover Photo Competition along with Midhat Javaid, who created a survey to solicit responses (and votes!) from the following photo competition judges: George Awde (VCUQatar), Richard Bentley (photographer), Midhat Javaid, Sahar Mari, Dr. Ryan McLawhon, and
Sine Scanlon. And a special thanks to the contest winner, Taif Almeflehi, for submitting an interesting and artistic photo of Arabic letters she discovered on a wall in Chefchaouen, Morocco, resulting in our most colorful cover to date. Graphic designer Salma Hamouda applied her exceptional creativity to this year’s cover and layout, suggesting a stencil cut-out that gives this volume an added 3-dimensional feel. We are thrilled that Salma has been willing to offer her design expertise for the past three years.

A big thanks to Beth Caerlang for her help in keeping track of the reviewed submissions, but also for the compassion and guidance she has so freely given to dozens of students as they begin their heroic journeys towards becoming successful writers and truth-tellers in a second language.

For six years in a row, Kelly Wilson has recruited students to read their writing in front of teachers, staff, friends, and family at our beloved book launch party each fall. She has helped dozens of students choose excerpts to read and coached them to give their best performances. Kelly has also solicited parting words from seniors in the last chapter of this book, and we have given her the final word this year as she embarks on a new career, reminding us that every ending leads to a new beginning.
Dedication

To Sherry Ward, Deanna Rasmussen, and Michael Telafici, innovative and dedicated writing teachers who have helped countless students find a way to begin. Please know that the Best Writing series would not have been possible without your tireless work behind the scenes. May you enjoy the blessings that you deserve from your engaged teaching and generous service.

And to the writer within each of you—may you relax in the knowledge that there is not one single way to begin; may you learn to trust your mind and your pen . . . and the connections between them.
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People will never stop chasing you if you never stop running from them. The ultimate answer for assumptions is not ignorance. The response is to ignore the ignorance by showing love in 1000 different ways.
1000 Ways to Begin, 1000 Ways to Show Love

عشت القلب عمره لعبة بأيديك
شلون تحتس اللعبة من تنكسر!
كل ظنهم بيوم أسمعك هالكلام!
الملك ماينقال له غير تأمر أمر
عشتني وياك انسى تتبدل بيوم
لو حطوك بكفة وية كل البشر
رفي الجفن وغر العقل وطار؟
أعدمه وقلبي ينغي جسمي للقبر
ماحبك قد البحر جيف اله حدود
احبتني بقد مشتئى الزرع للمطر
حتى الهوى يحس مختنق بلياك
واللاني بنظرة خجل يصبح جمر
مو كل المتزوجين معناها يحبون
فرق الدفع مهر عن اليدفع عُمر
قمت احجي قصة بهواك ليش
كلما تركن نترك دموعي تنهر
انا العاشق المارق الطرق لدار
العشق سيديتي أتسامى مع القمر
ليلي في كل ليلة بات يشتهى الك
أبي لا أن يحزن حزانتي للسفر
في كل مرة لابحول بيننا سوئ
عين منهكة من حكم السهر
وعدن ودني أم أن لأنبالي في عشفك
حتى وان رأسي بكلهم نبحر
Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi is a mechanical engineering student who is originally from Iraq. Ahmed is currently a student at Texas A&M at Qatar, Class of 2020. He is a street fighter, a goalkeeper, a businessman, and a poet. Ahmed is very passionate about politics.
Chapter 1
The Road Ahead
Faculty Memories of Moving to Qatar

Moving half-way around the world is one of the biggest life-changing experiences one can undertake. An even bigger one is having a child. I did both at the same time, so moving to Qatar and becoming a parent are inextricably linked for me. I was far more worried about being in charge of a tiny person, so for the weeks before we moved, I did not think much at all about what living in Qatar would be like. There were a million things that needed to be accomplished, so between swaddling, feeding, wiping, changing, and marveling at our newborn son, I completed endless tasks of packing, acquiring passports, organizing flights, and obtaining paperwork for our cats to be transported. I did not have time to think of anything else. Call it denial, call it self-preservation. Whatever the reason, the result was this: the very first time that I allowed myself to wonder what living in Qatar would be like was as we landed at the old Doha International Airport and I looked out the window. There was sand everywhere. The buildings along the Corniche seemed more at home in Star Wars than belonging to the real world. I hadn't landed in Doha—I had landed on Tatooine! I was completely overwhelmed by the otherness of my surroundings. Thankfully, the learning curve to living in Doha is short. Within three months we were giving advice to “newcomers.” If only the learning curve to being a parent was that quick.

Nicole Brothers, Public Services Librarian

I remember how surprised I was the first time I came to Doha for the interview visit. We arrived in an early evening of July. My children were amazed by the colorful lights along the road off the airport and near City Center. For a day or two I was indulging myself in the luxury offices and spaces in Education City and the hospitality offered by the colleagues and friends. I thought to myself, “If I can tolerate the heat, this place is not much different than other metropolitan cities.” Then it happened on a bright afternoon—the largest sand storm that I ever experienced in my life. The sunlight faded, the sky changed color, and the dusts fell like monsters. Strangely, I was excited to witness this “apocalyptic” event that I only saw on the movies before. Next morning, looking out of the window from the Marriott Hotel, I saw buildings covered by dust that now had lost their glare, and I felt that I was in an unworldly place. Doha showed me its many faces, and I chose to experience it in full. I came to love Doha after two years of living in this amazing and different city.

Jim Ji, Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering
Being a professor was always in my plans after retiring from the industry. It had always been my desire to teach what I had learned through my experiences. What I did not foresee was the opportunity to arrive sooner than I had expected. So when Texas A&M University, my alma mater, offered a position as a visiting faculty member of their Petroleum Engineering Program in Qatar, I immediately accepted. I arrived in Qatar in the fall of 2009 and was assigned to teach production engineering, a senior-level course in my area of expertise. Even though teaching in a classroom for students or industry people was not my first experience, this was my first time teaching in a traditional classroom in the Middle East, specifically in Qatar. There were 11 students in the class; seven of them were female students. I will never forget my experiences while teaching my first course in TAMUQ. The female students were always enthusiastic and were in class before me. They sat in the first row and participated actively during lecture. I am really proud of them and even nominated one of them to be the recipient of the TAMUQ Alumnus of the Year Award in 2016.

Albertus Retnanto, Professor of the Practice, Petroleum Engineering

I clearly remember the night I arrived in Doha, with my three-year old daughter in a stroller. That was 12 years ago. It was in August and at midnight, the outside temperature was 43 degrees Celsius. I remember thinking that the Doha airport was really small. Of course, it was much smaller than LAX I had just left! Two of my new colleagues had arranged to meet Claire and me. That was nice. Then, Warren, who is still with us at TAMUQ, took us to our new home, a compound close to the Villaggio area. My neighbors were Joseph Boutros, Eyad Masad and Daryl Daniel. The next day, I got a ride to TAMUQ and was quite pleased with my new office. During the same weekend, I went on a mission/tour to drive myself to campus. I remember the directions: “Turn left, pass two round-abouts, left again, and then straight. This will take you to Gate 3.” And it worked! A few days later, I was assigned to teach my first class (MEEN 363) in which 13 students were enrolled. I liked being able to interact with each of them. The next semester was a little bit more challenging catering to 46 students enrolled in one section of MEEN 221 and 39 in the other. In all, I remember that I instantaneously liked being in Doha, and that I decided I would try to learn as much as I could about the place. I am happy that I made that choice.

Annie Ruimi, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering
I remember that when I came to Doha from Athens in May 2012 to interview at TAMUQ, I was shocked by the amount of construction throughout the city. When I left to return home, I was very skeptical, thinking that I would never come back to Doha again. A few weeks later, I received a phone call informing me that TAMUQ was ready to make me an offer to join their faculty. Back then, I thought that I would come for only a year. More than six years have passed, and I am still in Doha having a great time in TAMUQ and in the city! I live in West Bay, and I am able to see the Arabian Gulf from my apartment, which I truly enjoy. In the evenings, I can go out and walk in the Corniche, at least for eight to nine months during the year. Unlike other places, summer is tough in Doha, but still there are good things to do inside, such as visiting museums, attending cultural events, etc. No matter whether it is summer or winter, life is good in Doha and at TAMUQ.

Ioannis Economou, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of Chemical Engineering

Standing at a new crossroad, it is time to choose. The only road I knew well is the one that I already passed through. If I turn, I have no reference. Luckily, I’ve got binoculars. Looking through them, it seems as if this road ahead is very challenging. But wait a minute, I see many shining stars with beautiful colors, and they look marvelous. That’s it, I will go for the turn. My new journey is Texas A&M University at Qatar.

Standing at the start, I think about what to carry for the journey. If I take too many things, the load will be heavy and it will slow me down. I could also lose the flexibility and ability to adapt to road dynamics. If I take a few things, I can go fast and be flexible. However, I can easily break down as I am not prepared for any unexpected challenges. And like anything in life, I would also need energy and support to keep going. I’d rather take a thinking moment to select what to carry and be fit for the journey. What do I have: family, memories, friends, house, work, knowledge, skills, passion, dreams and so on? Oops, the list is large and I need a way to select from it. I have an idea! When I looked through the binoculars, I saw some challenges that I know I will be facing. Also, I will meet many new people at the start of the journey. I can ask for their help and listen carefully to their experiences. If really needed, I can go back to pick essential things that I forgot as I am still at the start. For the rest, I have nothing but to surrender and accept which is a very powerful idea. Last, I will keep the good habits that helped me always. I always start with myself, doubt each information I get, work in my sphere of influence, and finally work toward greater goodness and helping others.
Standing at those challenges for becoming an assistant professor in the Chemical Engineering Program, the first one is being an instructor. There is nothing in life more noble than teaching a person new skills and assisting them to discover their full potential. Personally, I don’t believe in the American Dream as depicted in Hollywood. Nor that a person’s destiny is decided based on their color, cultural heritage, and economic status. For a person to excel and discover their full potential, it is important to create a supportive environment and an infrastructure supporting students to experiment and innovate without being afraid to fail. By experiment, I mean its broader meaning beyond science and economy to include social and cultural ones as well. I feel lucky to be part of Texas A&M and the educational city in Qatar. You can feel the vision everywhere in this city toward creating this supportive environment, and I want to be part of it and contribute partly to its success. I once learned that democracy needs to be introduced in the classroom. In other words, allowing students to talk equally in the classroom as the instructor. Just think about it, how to let those who come to learn speak 50% of the class time. Having this in my mind is driving me to think and innovate to go beyond classical approaches of teaching. Although I am not there yet, it’s one of my main missions which I am aiming to achieve in the near future. As a researcher, I want to develop new processes and technologies which are more environmentally friendly, safer, and can be powered by renewable energy. Being in Qatar that is rich in natural gas, I want to transform it and make chemicals that are needed for most of our daily products. I want to create technologies that allow my family, friends and all people to live healthily and comfortably without being exposed to risks and pollutants. Last, I want to contribute to bringing awareness to society on issues like product life cycle and the impact of our lifestyle on the environment and other people in the world. With that, let me end by this idea that I fully support: “think globally and act locally.”

Ma’moun Al-Rawashdeh, Assistant Professor of Chemical Engineering
Howdy! Welcome to the Qatari Aggieland

My Journey to Becoming an Aggie!

If I remember correctly, when studying at the Academic Bridge Program (ABP) we were told to attend an information session offered by the new university that will open at Qatar Foundation: Texas A&M University. We were surprised; most of us were getting ready to apply to attend universities abroad, mostly in the US, UK, and Australia. The information session was scheduled just before the winter breaks in December 2002. I personally was very interested in joining the new university as they were offering the subject I was planning to study, Chemical Engineering. In addition, I would get to stay in Qatar with my family and friends. During the information session, I remember clearly asking Dr. Joseph Estrada, the Director of Admissions, about the university’s expectations for prospective students. His answer was very encouraging, at least to me; he replied that the university cares about graduating engineers who will make great engineers technically in addition to being great leaders. That line was enough to trigger all my senses to be focused on achieving all the requirements in order to be part of this university. At that time, I didn’t realize that we were creating history.

After completing all the tests and interviews, I was waiting for my test results and acceptance letter. The waiting was not easy as some of my friends got their acceptance letters before me. Waiting was hard and difficult as I didn't apply to any other university as a second option. If I were not accepted, I was determined to come back the following semester and the following year; I was going to continue applying until I was admitted. There was no doubt in my mind that Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ) was the right institute for me. One day in April, a few weeks before I graduated from the ABP, I received a call from the Admission office of TAMUQ. I had to drive to the villas across from the Liberal Arts and Science (LAS) Building, which was just under construction at that time, to collect the letter. The letter could confirm that I was admitted or not, so my heart was racing. When I arrived in front of the villa, time seemed as if it was slowing down. I walked in, and from a pile of letters the receptionist retrieved my letter; I opened the letter as soon as I walked out of the admissions office villa.

The first thing I did was shout, “Alhamdulial, (Thank God), I was admitted!” Then I called my parents to tell them the good news. Then I went back to the Recreation Building where the ABP was located at that time before it moved to the LAS building. I told most of my teachers and friends the good news as I was very happy to share this achievement with them; they were happy for me as well. In a few months we would attend our first class at the university, so I thought I better get ready during the summer; the reputation of the university made me realize and expect challenging classes. When all the acceptance letters were given, I had the chance to ask about the admission statistics. I found out that out
of about 110 completed applications, only 30 students were admitted and got the honor to be part of the Class of 2007. We were members of the very first class at TAMUQ.

Once an Aggie Always an Aggie!
In August 2003 we started our orientation at the university. Today, not many people know this information, but the very first class at TAMUQ was delivered at the very first building that TAMUQ used, which was actually the Medical School building occupied by Weill Cornell Medical College (WCMC) at the time. While Weill Cornell’s students were starting their second year in that building, it was the first year for TAMUQ students. Our area in this building was quite limited as we only had a couple of classrooms, an open area, access to one lecture hall, and a computer lab plus a library. We spent only the fall of 2003 in that building, but with WCMC there was a special rivalry; we were very proud and loud, making sure that we would leave our mark everywhere. Nevertheless, I must mention that the building was quite empty as it is huge with just a few students and staff occupying it, but this didn’t stop WCMC students from complaining about us being loud and very visible. After our classes, we used to stay late at night, something that was unusual for the management and security of that building. We really enjoyed our time there and created beautiful memories.

Some of the great memories in the first semester and the first building were unforgettable. I recall that I was the first president of the Student Council and I also created a couple of clubs. The very first club was called “TAMUQ News and Views.” I worked with my colleagues to fill this newsletter with great news along with reflections that included our views and opinions. The newsletter was updated every two weeks. Unfortunately, it didn’t last longer than one semester because two weeks wasn’t quite long enough to get an update on the world news compared with the fast Internet. One of my friends created the Multi Media Club which developed a few of the very first short films about TAMUQ. I am not sure where these videos and short clips are today; they are the very first record of our time at TAMUQ. I hope someone has a copy, and if so, he or she should share it with the university for archiving.

In the spring of 2004, we moved to the LAS building where we felt like kings. The whole building was dedicated to us, at least for a semester until the fall of 2004 when we were joined by the ABP students. In this building we created great memories as well. One of the most important memories is that we were all disoriented at this new building for the first few weeks. Still today, if you ever visit the LAS building, you will be confused; all the walls and corridors look the same and you will feel as if you are walking in a maze. To make matters worse, the building decoration internally has a massive amount of decorative steel structure, creating a nice Faraday cage that prevented the coverage of the mobile network from reaching inside the building. This problem was solved a few months after we moved in and today the LAS Building has great coverage.
Another issue we faced was a repeated false alarm to evacuate the building. We were very lucky if we completed a day without this false alarm (or shall I say unlucky!). Being the first in occupying the LAS Building made us enjoy a special experience and its memories stay with us for years to come.

Creating History!
“You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards,” Steve Jobs once said. Indeed, that’s very true; none of us knew that history was written during those days, a history that will stay for years and years to come. Our first day, first class, first semester, first professor, first exam, first semester, first year, and many first things that we have experienced; after all, we were the first class to ever attend TAMUQ.

We cannot thank enough our leaders in Qatar, specifically H.H. The Father Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani and H.H. Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser for their dedication and support. Their vision was the driving force to make the dream become a reality. Since the establishment of Education City, Qataris and people living in Qatar can indeed receive a world class education without leaving Qatar. This gift was given to us and will last for our children and grandchildren and many generations to come. We all are proud to be part of the Qatar Foundation Family.

I am really proud to have attended TAMUQ and to have been in its very first graduating class; it was an honor and a privilege. Many have attended universities around the world, but very few have the privilege to call themselves Aggies, and even fewer can call themselves Qatari Aggies. Aggies are sought after by employers, and we are changing the world. If you had the chance to read this bit of history, please pass it on to others; you just might inspire your friends or family to be in the next graduating class of Aggies at TAMUQ.

After graduating in 2008 with a chemical engineering degree from Texas A&M at Qatar, Yousef M. Al-Jaber attended the Carnegie Mellon University Tepper School of Business for a post-graduate Corporate Innovation and Entrepreneurship Program in 2009. He later obtained an Executive Master’s Degree in Energy and Resources from the Hamad Bin Khalifa University in 2016.

Yousef joined Qatar Petroleum in 2008 as a Sustainable Projects Specialist, managing and reporting on all sustainable activities taking place within the energy and industry sector in the State of Qatar. He served from 2011 to 2012 as Deputy Head of Social Responsibility for the World Petroleum Congress, managing both the Sustainability Award Initiative and the Carbon Offsetting Initiative. He was then named Senior Renewable Energy Analyst, working on renewable energy projects in Qatar.
I wish I could give some comfort to past me to not worry about grades, time or other quantities that seem to “measure success.” I now think it’s more important to value yourself, to focus on your mental and physical health, to understand who you are, where you are, where you would like to go and then find yourself along the way. Through all of that, the pressure of these different numbers only causes more anxiety that brings about even harder times, and I want anyone who reads this to know that they are not alone. We are all stronger than we know, and every single one of us has potential that shines through all the hardships and fear. I hope that we can all work together to understand these restrictions that we and society put on ourselves and untangle them so we can move to infinity. We can move towards a mindset that is more open and forgiving when it comes to growth and living.
What I Lost to Numbers

I have always loved maths. The more I learn about it the more I realize how much I don't know. While I suppose that is true for any learning experience, I realized that I might have been trying to dig through its secrets because of numbers. Of course, countless poets have waxed poetically on how numbers can help us break down the universe and visualize metaphysical wonders, but I'm not a wise mathematician or a physicist; I'm a recent graduate, extremely green in my first job, and all I know is that numbers control me.

I have a deep relationship with numbers. Its closest friend time and I go way back to all the times I laid on my side and watched the clock run along. I was the audience of my own story, each second showing a number that would laugh at me just to prove that I was powerless against it. I can hear the numbers one through 60 screaming at me to chase them, and when I ask them why, I’m left behind, confused with numb errors. Numbers control me, leaving marks that will never heal.

I have lost so much to numbers. My biggest regret is focusing on numbers in a way that hurt me. From GPA and grades to weight, calories and social media interactions, I’ve lived a quantified life. If something hadn’t been completed to a certain percentage, with a fixed result within a certain time, I was a failure, and I suppose I am. Numbers control me, and I lost myself in them.

I left my youth for numbers. I sacrificed myself for the sake of “building a profile.” I let myself burn down to the ground for the sake of fancy numbers, and oh how I wish I just learned how to take care of myself. Look at me now, I know how to churn out numbers like a pro, but I have no self to take care of. Numbers control me, and a me no longer exists.

I do not want to be a number. I refuse to become a statistic; every new number I'm supposed to be only increases the weight on my aching shoulders. I do not want to be just a number. There is a world out there, that exists outside numbers, outside binaries, outside comparisons, outside functions and definitions. I do not want to be a lost soul that gets a number, because I am a terrible number. Numbers control me and I want to escape.

I am finding a home in other numbers. The imaginary impossible numbers, away from reality, the ones that no one really cares about because you cannot see them. The ones who have no direction, no definition and no path, I want to go there. Numbers are losing control of me; I’m heading to infinity.

I have lost numbers to infinity. Not there yet but I am working towards making my base here in infinity. Too much or too little, that’s up to me to decide. I want to stay here, far away from any lines, untouched by any function, moving freely
in my own infinite boundary. Let me be here in infinity without a second, a quantum zero-point energy driven by possibilities. So don’t worry about me; I will not let numbers control me, and I will live in infinity.

Pavithra Manghaipathy graduated in 2016 and then moved to get her masters in the U.S. She then had the chance to move to France to work on another advanced degree and is currently working with a company on aerospace engineering innovation and design for multiple use cases. She juggles her day job with volunteering with the UN Youth Organization SGAC for Space Outreach which lets her communicate, debate and write constantly. She spends most of her free time writing, listening to music, dancing and more often than not, over-thinking, which again leads her to journaling to help her visualize the organized chaos that is her mind.
A Consultant’s Take on Your First Job

The first sentence of an essay is always the hardest. Once you write it though, you can try to stray away from it as much as you would like, but in one way or another, it helps in shaping the rest of the essay. I believe that all beginnings have that same weight. The start of anything is vital to building a foundation and a structure that will shape how you go on with that experience. When I graduated high school and was about to join Texas A&M, I wanted to take on as many opportunities to both fail and succeed as much as possible and, in the process, learn and grow inside and outside of the classroom. When I graduated Texas A&M in 2017 and was about to join Ernst & Young, I wanted to make sure that I set up the correct foundations that will allow me to grow and achieve my goals. Throughout this piece, I want to share advice on starting your career journey as well as a few experiences I have had.

1. No question is a silly question, but ask the right person.

Regardless of the company you decide to join or the job description you have, odds are that you will not know everything. As work picks up, you will hear a ton of work related abbreviations, a bunch of document names, and you will be asked to complete tasks that you do not understand at first. When this confusion first hits, people react in different ways that can range from taking time to research every bit and piece of the information to come up with the best possible outcome to having a nervous breakdown where you cannot perform what is expected out of you. The solution to this problem seems easy; ask enough questions to understand the entire problem and the expected approach to solving it. The problem with that is your manager is probably busy, or else they would have done the task themselves. You really have to master the art of knowing what can be known vs. what cannot be known.

For example, I was once asked to design a sheet on excel in order to process information in a certain way and provide outcomes using certain formulas. My manager at the time told me that there are many approaches to getting this outcome, and he wanted me to test formulas to find what works. The first step I took was to search for similar functions online to replicate and adapt to serve our purposes. The second step was to check with my peers to see if they have done a similar task or know of a specific approach. If I could not find solutions from the first two steps, I would share my findings with the manager and ask for feedback. The reason I think this is important is that managers or people in leadership positions are looking for people who can perform their tasks with as much independence as possible and to provide quality work. Of course, there are always fundamental questions or points where clarifications are needed, and a quality manager would never discourage asking these questions.
2. Lessons learned are as important for individuals as they are for a business.

Most successful businesses will have systems in place after a project or an initiative is done to collect feedback on the experience and find ways to improve it for future work. This is important, as there is no need to reinvent the wheel all the time; learning from the past can help improve the quality of your deliverables while possibly reducing cost and time. In the same spirit, self-reflection can bring awareness about how colleagues perceive you, how you can optimize your time, and how to bring the best out of your work. Personally, I spend a few minutes frequently after work to reflect on areas of improvement. I have discussed this with other people who prefer to take notes or to have discussions with colleagues to collect feedback. Different approaches all bring about different aspects of results and usually the healthiest, most productive approach is a combination of the various approaches.

An example of this happened for me in a period where I was having a lot of conflict with a manager of mine. I received feedback that I was distant, indifferent and uninterested in the work, where in reality I did not actually feel such a way. After a few rounds of feedback and a lot of self-reflection, I came to the realization that I sometimes avoid eye contact; I often have a poker face and am inside my head when I am being assigned a task. All of these signs can be perceived negatively, especially that I was not aware of what I was doing; therefore, I could not explain myself properly. I had to put an active effort after this reflection to reduce doing these actions and focus more on active listening to portray my interest and understanding of the tasks being assigned, and my feedback improved after this point.

3. Information is power, so always read your e-mails.

As obvious as this may sound, many of us have a system in place to filter out e-mails based on whether we think it is of priority to us or not. I have always encouraged people, even when I was in A&M, to read the content of e-mails. The system you have in place to do this can be different; I personally prefer to take a few seconds to read any e-mail as soon as I receive it. A few examples of other systems are to leave e-mails unread until they are less busy, to schedule a few time slots during the day to check their e-mails, or quickly skim e-mails and take notes of the content.

I was exposed to many opportunities, both as a student and as an employee, because of the simple task of reading my e-mails. The opportunities ranged from conferences, service trips, learning certifications, projects and awards. The most recent example was when I received an e-mail about a networking event at CMU. I spoke with the partner at work and asked him if I can attend as a Qatar Foundation alumnus and he said yes and thanked me for being proactive. A few weeks later, he reached out to me as he was heading a new initiative at the regional level and requested my support on it. I believe that being proactive with
the networking event led to him requesting my support on the initiative.

4. Find a balance, but enjoy the ride.

You might have heard of the work-life balance notion that is spreading very quickly across the world. The idea is that work should not take all your time; you need to have time set up for family, friends and other commitments outside of work. Setting expectations can be difficult at work, especially when the expectation can be eight or nine hours of work (and sometimes overtime) as well as having some extracurricular activities. While sometimes you may have to sacrifice a night out to work on an important deliverable, the general idea is that you should be able to manage your time while fulfilling your work obligations. The main input here has to be constant and clear communication; there are times where you should ask for more responsibility and more workload, but there are times where you need to ask for help. Many fresh graduates tend to enter the job excited and ready to change the world, working overtime every day and taking on every responsibility possible. The reality is, this is not sustainable, and you will be worn out very quickly.

Everyone needs to have a work-life balance in place, but also, people need to ensure that they enjoy what they do and the teams they work with. A great portion of your day will be spent in an office, on a site, or with clients working with people who you will be seeing and interacting with frequently. Often times, how you feel at work will carry over and affect other parts of your life. You can easily tell from a short conversation if someone enjoys what they do or if they are just scraping by. This is not to say that you will not face difficulties as everything has ups and downs, but this is to say that you should be careful when choosing a company. A job is a long-term commitment, and we need to treat it as such and put in the necessary time to determine if this job and company helps you in reaching where you want to be in five years and in 10 years.

5. Build your personal brand.

We all have a personal brand, regardless if we are aware of it or not. In university, your brand might be that you know how to tutor for a certain class or you know how to get in student organizations or you are the sports person. At work, creating a personal brand is an important step in building relationships and accelerating your growth. If you can build a personal brand where colleagues can depend on you to complete a specific task with quality that they are unsure they can do themselves, then you have successfully made the company depend on you and you have become more valuable to the business. As you grow and create a more complex personal brand, you will gain more bargaining power and you will have more control over your career.

A small example from my career has been a simple survey tool that Ernest Young has for internal and external use. I found about this tool from a
colleague in Dubai and learned that some members of the Doha office were not familiar with it. I created an account and learned how to use the tool in a few days. I worked with a senior member in the firm, used the tool effectively, and established a part of my personal brand as the person that knows how to use this tool. In a competitive environment, finding a personal brand gets more challenging, but I believe there are always opportunities that remain unexploited. While my example has been on a specific tool, building a personal brand at work can also consist of becoming experienced with a specific document or client.

Once you graduate, different members of the class will enter different companies in different fields and possibly in different countries. Each culture has different needs and there really is not a one-size fits all sort of advice, but what I stand by wholeheartedly is that I believe Texas A&M had the environment (whether it was the classes, the students, the opportunities or the culture) that prepared students with the skills needed to take on any career they wish to. This is evident by the alumni who have gone into the world and succeeded in all possible ways. As you graduate Texas A&M, you do not only have the responsibility of upholding a certain standard that past alumni have set, but you also have the responsibility of raising the bar.
Howdy. My name is Benjamin Cieslinski, and I build robots, and play with LEGOS, and fly airships. And study crime scenes. And very often, I get to blow things up.

I’m the outreach manager at Texas A&M University at Qatar, so my job is to engage children in exciting STEM outreach projects and creative engineering. If you don’t know what STEM stands for, it’s Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Now, I don’t work in our admissions office; I’m not out trying to recruit the best and brightest. My job is to motivate and stimulate young people so they can develop into the best and brightest. My job is to inspire and create a spark of wonder for students to get them interested in studying the STEM fields. But if my job is inspiring kids, what inspired me when I was a child?

When I was just a kid, we had career days in our schools. Parents would come to school in their work uniforms as firefighters, nurses, accountants, etc., and we were encouraged to come to school dressed as what we wanted to be when we grew up. There were always little astronauts, pro athletes, movie stars, and even the occasional superhero. But I always knew what I wanted to be when I grew up: a scientist.

When people ask me why I became a scientist, I always say that it’s because I look so good in a lab coat. But really, it was because scientists always seemed to know the answers, no matter what the questions; whether it was about the age of dinosaurs, or who built the pyramids, or how many moons Saturn has, they always knew the answers. They were, to me, the smartest people on the planet.

But where did I ever get to see scientists in action as a little kid? Where was my inspiration to study science? Well, it was, strangely, television.

In the early 1980s, before cable and satellite TV, educational television shows were broadcast on TV stations around the U.S. Shows like Sesame Street and Electric Company taught generations of children my age about numbers and the alphabet and reading. I remember staring at the television in the living room when the Space Shuttle Columbia launched on its maiden voyage, and glided back down to Earth. I remember watching Jacques Cousteau taking us down to explore the ocean depths.

The home computer age was just starting, and along with it came shows like 3-2-1 Contact. On that show, they had young people ask questions about the world around them, and they went on adventures with scientists to find the answers. They answered questions that I actually had, like using physics to teach the perfect fastball and to explain how bees communicated with each other. Every week they had on the Bloodhound Gang, teen private detectives who solved mysteries using science! I so wanted to be one of the gang.
Later we had a program called *Mr. Wizard’s World*, where a kindly gentle Mr. Wizard (real name, Don Herbert), would ask a young assistant an innocent question, like “Have you ever thought why you can use a drinking straw?” or “Have you ever seen a liquid boil at room temperature?” Together, they would perform an experiment to find the answer, creating ammonia fountains, making Styrofoam, and exploding balloons. And I loved it.

And the best part of these shows was that they always encouraged you to try this at home. Their experiments weren’t done in a lab; they did them on the kitchen counter with the same stuff all of us had lying around the house. I remember making balloon rockets and crushing a soda can with only atmospheric pressure. I even made homemade barometers, because every eight-year-old needs to know when a cold front is coming.

And that’s what these shows did for me, they inspired me to try and find answers. I wanted to be someone who knew the answers… like a docent in a science museum.

After 10 years of being a professional scientist, I was thrilled to be invited to Texas A&M University at Qatar to teach laboratory skills to students studying engineering. But I noticed something in my early students: They lacked that inspiration that I had to find the answers. Being engineering students, I had expected to hear stories of them taking apart their laptops to see how they worked just like I had taken apart a moped engine in my day; but it wasn’t to be.

Where was their passion to be the smartest person on the planet?

It wasn’t long before other people started to see the same problems. Around that time, dedicated scientists, entrepreneurs, creative engineers and amateur tinkerers started making a change. They wanted to inspire a new generation to solve problems and experiment like we had. So around the early 2000s, right at the beginning of the Internet culture, people started to share their ideas, their passions, and their inventions with like-minded others. These communities of what we now call “Makers” swelled from local gatherings and bulletin boards and chat rooms, into, once again, television.

In the early 2000s, *Scrapheap Challenge* showed the world that you could build almost anything out of junk. *BattleBots* and *Robot Wars* took a niche robot building community and showed that anyone could build fantastical machines in their garage. *Mythbusters* challenged everyone to take a look at preconceived notions and test them for yourself.

Nowadays, instead of television, it’s the individual makers who are influencing science and engineering to the masses through YouTube and social media sites. Channels like *Physics Girl*, *Smarter Every Day*, and *Numberphile* are exposing kids and adults alike to completely new concepts and truths using science and
engineering to reach millions of viewers. Don’t believe me? Ask your kids or little brothers and sisters if they’ve watched videos on how to make slime on YouTube. At their highest, they had over 2.5 million Google searches every month, and there are slime channels with over 200 million views.

But as these millions of people watch these videos, are they really getting inspired? Or are they just entertained, and maybe picking up a few new facts along the way? Does it matter?

It does to me, and it does to many other dedicated STEM professionals. I believe that you never truly get into a concept without getting your hands dirty, without trying to build something, or solving a problem on your own, or at least taking part in an activity away from the screen.

My team and I do this through our Science and Engineering Road Show, where we perform what my friends call my “magic show,” engaging students in fun and showy activities, all the while sneaking in lessons on fluid dynamics, kinetic energy, and polymer chemistry. The students who see our shows may not walk away knowing all the concepts, but our surveys and feedback from teachers and administrators inform us that the students keep talking about what they saw for days afterwards. They keep asking the questions we want them to ask such as “How did they do that?” and “Can we try it?”

We also host programs at our school, designed to challenge the students to solve problems using creative engineering. For example, in one such program we built small model hovercraft over a series of days; the students created their hovercrafts by measuring the mass and flexibility of their base material, choosing the best power supplies and propellers, and designing their own skirt. We had fun, and all the craft were able to move across the floor and glide over a fountain. But on the last day we gave them a new challenge: Build a hovercraft that can carry a member of your team.

Thirty students were suddenly filled with the enthusiasm and verve that I remember! Under a time crunch and with only the knowledge gleaned from the past few days, each team had to work together and built some truly epic working hovercrafts.

The rise of Maker Movement over the past decade has drastically changed the STEM educational landscape into a hands-on, do-it-yourself approach to learning, emphasizing that anyone can problem solve and make stuff. Spaces giving access to tools and technology have sprouted up across nations, even here in Qatar. There are dedicated spaces in Qatar for creative construction, programming, prototyping, and entrepreneurship, including Texas A&M’s very own STEM Hub, and even a maker space here in the Qatar National Library.
But why does Qatar care? Why is Qatar so invested in having young students try and solve problems? Why does it matter to us if kids try engineering solutions?

Because in just three generations, Qatar has gone from being a nomadic desert culture to one of the wealthiest countries on Earth. That amazing growth and prosperity came with a cost, bringing along many new problems of its own. Recently, Qatar reserved huge tracts of land for agricultural use, but standard farming techniques won't work in the desert. Who is going to develop the technology and new ideas needed to secure the food for an entire country?

Thankfully, Qatar decided years ago to pivot from oil and gas and to invest in its people. We are here to inspire the next generation of Qatar's leaders to develop their problem solving skills, to understand the tools and knowledge needed to take Qatar further than ever before. Our surveys show that most young people think being a scientist or an engineer means a lifetime of sitting at a desk or working on the rigs. But being a scientist or engineer is really like being a superhero: fixing the problems of the world around you using the creative superpowers of your mind.

I used the term *inspire* a lot today, because that’s what I always thought I did; I inspire kids to try to solve problems. But for me, and the people involved in STEM education and maker spaces and creative engineering, we do more than that. We *empower* kids. Because inspiration isn’t enough. Inspiration is the spark, but empowerment is the fuel to the fire. When you empower students, you give them confidence and strength. You give them the desire to keep trying, to be persistent in the face of adversity. By empowering students, we want them to raise their hands in the classroom and ask the tough questions. To empower someone, you give them the tools to build ideas, to use their hands, to get dirty, to make things, including mistakes.

As much as I love sharing my skills and knowledge with students, the rapid growth of a culture of experimentation and making has had an unforeseen impact on me. All I wanted to be was a scientist, the person who knew all the answers. But it pains me to say this: I don't have all the answers. But this hasn't stopped me from trying. In building our STEM lab and creating our in-house programs, I’ve had to hit the books again, and the forums, and the videos. I’m just like the kids who watch the slime videos. I get to spend a few hours each week learning new skills in AutoCAD software, 3D printers, microcomputer programming, C&C machines, new chemistry demos, or just practicing what I have learned. I get to brainstorm ideas for future programs.

And I’m still experimenting. I’m still trying to answer problems. I’m still trying to be the smartest person on the planet. And I hope you’re empowered to do the same.
NANCY
ABRAHAM
Cycles of Beginnings

The cycle of endings and beginnings is constant in our lives. Endings move out of the way for newness to step in. We all start with an impactful new beginning, marking this as our birth. All other beginnings offer different aspects to our existence. We also proclaim many beginnings not realizing what must end, nor knowing when the beginning will unfold. One of my recent profound beginnings was proclaimed as a teen.

At the age of 11, I was fascinated by a book that belonged to my father. It was a particular hard-covered collection where each book represented an overview of one particular country. There started my love for Italy. I could not explain this desire then, nor can I to this day. My family and I moved that year and everything was packed away. After a few months, I recall my father calling my name in his commanding loud voice. That voice could never be ignored. It can be heard halfway through town. So, when he called I ran out of fear and avoidance of any embarrassment at the same time. I got to the garage and did not see him, so I called his name and his voice came from above my head. My father was in the attic and his feet were on the top step of the ladder. As I awaited, I could hear him chuckling from his heart while singing his happy tune. My curiosity grew as he started his descent down the steps; I could see he was trying to get something. He stopped halfway and looked down at me with the biggest smile. He then reached his arm back up into the square hole entrance to the attic, pulling out a long rectangular wooden box.

He handed me the box and asked me to open it. I opened the brass colored clasps and lifted the lid slowly. I saw a set of 8 acrylic tubs of paint, two mediums for matte and gloss, a long wooden palette, and three paint brushes of different sizes. As my father proceeded down the ladder, he told me to go use them and see what comes of it. To him, he had given me the greatest treasure. At the time, I was happy to get them. However, I was not aware then of the impact that very moment would have on my future. He did give me the greatest treasure.

I started to paint on wooden planks because my father had plenty of those in the barn. My mother took me to an art store and bought me cardboard canvases. Those where fun, but the wood had a special look. It was not till I was in High School at the age of 14 that I truly got into art. I started to learn about different artists and techniques. I did not practice, but fell in love with an artist called Michelangelo. I could not help but be mesmerized by his work. Sure, the Mona Lisa and all of Da Vinci’s work was also an inspiration, but the Sistine Chapel stole my heart.

At 16, I started my first real job at McDonald’s as a cashier. I was driving and had my own checking account, living the dream. Okay, not the whole dream: I drove the old family car, a 90s wood-paneled Chevy station wagon. That car was not “cool” by any definition, but I earned it by destroying my first two-door
My job afforded me some extra purchasing power. Clothing was my priority, but I had to have a book of Michelangelo’s work. I used to look at the book every few weeks and always opened the folded pages to reveal the fresco in the Sistine Chapel’s ceiling.

With the car, I was also able to stay after school and work on whatever I wanted in the art room. I did not paint or draw, but explored with pottery and any type of mixed media. At 17, I noted my father’s book collection in our basement. I started looking at the books again, and Italy reappeared. That moment I proclaimed that I will visit Italy and the Sistine Chapel before I die. I also started to draw various pieces of Michelangelo’s work using lead drawing pencils. I fell in love with the shading and the way cloth drooped so effortlessly to reveal a large-figured woman with arms and legs that seemed to have no limit as to how far they would stretch.

My senior year in high school, I received an acceptance to Purdue University’s art department. I was going to study fashion, since I also liked cutting up material and old clothing to make new ones. I had a box full of doodles done in class instead of listening to the teacher. To prepare for college, I bought my portfolio, art box, and a list of must have items. Studying art was so much fun for me, all other classes were just a waste of time. The first semester in collage, I was one of the only freshmen to get her art work exhibited. I not only had one, but three pieces. The one surprise that semester was the fact that I received an A in English. It was a writing class and the teacher was always praising me despite my grammatically-challenged disposition. I had started in the right direction for the future that I wanted.

Yet, life force had another plan for me. I was engaged that year and got married at the age of 19. My new adventure started by moving to Texas. Little did I know that Texas A&M did not have an art program and my husband at the time was not willing to move. I postponed my education but eventually finished with a bachelor’s in agribusiness. Every once in a while, I had to do something creative or I would have exploded. However, I did not have much time with my children, work, and household duties. Art sat on the back burner for over 20 years. Winds had changed and a reviving of Art started to swirl in my heart and mind. I started to paint, but in oil for the first time. This very moment sparked the events that later followed. I finished my masters as it was one of my future objectives, then put my energy into painting.

I went through a divorce which, like all others, is a long and painful process. Painting became my therapy, companion, lover and savior. Life also brought me a dear friend for a brief time who was from Italy, and another spark was lit. I had to go to Italy, and so I went on my own. Italy was an ending to a 30-year-old dream. Prior to entering the Sistine Chapel, I felt an overwhelming energy inside of me. I did not know it was the chapel till the guide said its name, and I started to well up. Uncontrollable tears dripped, and I entered as though into my
mother’s womb; I was home. I wanted everyone to leave so I could just lie on the floor and look up at the magnificence. The idea that I may find something that I could not see in my book made me gaze for hours. When I walked out of the Chapel, I was born again. That day marked the beginning of my new life. A life of inner peace and joy in the presents. The birth of dedication to self-discovery, my paintings, and writing.

I still have a long way to go and many moments of beginning and ending, but my visit to Italy and the Sistine Chapel was a rebirth to me which started over 30 years ago. I find myself again, in a place of creation and gestation. Knowing that I am living the unfolding of events that will lead up to another rebirth.

My first painting inspired by my trip to Italy is called “The Beginning of Love.” It is my interpretation of Creation and includes a poem.

Take the Apple

Take the apple to feed the hunger
a famine for expression of its divinity
creation summons forces
one's own creativity awakens
eat it all and plant its seeds
nurture and watch grow
fruits will be harvested
by youth and generations
watch the circle repeat
one day it will become satisfied
the hunger started before the apple
the apple was created to fill the hunger

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Nancy Abraham has worked as part of the Texas A&M at Qatar Human Resources team for seven years. She holds an undergraduate degree in agribusiness from Texas A&M University and a graduate degree in HR from Walden University. She loves to express herself in many forms, but even more so through writing and art.
I wanted to write a piece to remember my sister who died within a couple of months after a breast cancer diagnosis. With the abrupt end to her life, my sister had precious little time to say goodbye to a life that was full of love and good people. Attending the Best Writing staff workshop helped me to understand how to move forward with some ideas I was working on which then turned into this heartfelt poem. The words, ideas and emotions from this poem are meant to reflect the happy life she had, the love she had for others and the inspiration for those she loved to carry her spirit of kindness forward.
You’re Going to Miss Me When I am Gone

It’s late but time doesn’t matter
*whisper whisper*
gentle voices ebb and fade
a day at the sandbar with you
and the whole world
back then

A rush of warmth
strong but no strength
a whoosh of air, scents, dear smiles
all of you here
and there
in town, in church, on the bus
at home in the heart
laughter and love, beaming throughout
brings today

*There there*
remember it all, as soon it’s forgotten
carry on filling the holes
with fresh soil, new daisies, maple saplings
the cars will pass,
the house will stand at the bottom of the hill
let’s go

Shauna grew up on the east coast of Canada in a large tight-knit family. She is no stranger to new beginnings, having made moves across Canada, Europe and now the Middle East with her own brood. Each move, she believes, represented a change and a challenge that could be everything that she wanted and nothing that she expected. Over the years, she has written in various genres including poetry which she re-visits in this piece about her sister. Shauna dedicates this piece in memory of her beloved sister whom she and the rest of her eight siblings miss dearly.
Chapter 2
Choosing a Path
This essay that is now titled “Finding My Place” is a piece I truly worked on a lot and had so much fun writing! It was assigned to me by my ENGL 104 professor. At first, I struggled with this piece of writing because my ideas were over-flooded and all over the place. I wrote about so many things all at once without having connections with my ideas, as it was my first time to ever write something like that. For instance, I wrote about owning a planner, and then the mental state of mind, and suddenly to mental illnesses. I tried to modify it by trying to have a flow in the essay and my overthinking mind struggled with that. I kept writing drafts and I didn’t discover the solution until my fifth draft, and it was to narrow down my ideas to a simple one which is “Finding My Place.” It worked! I was so happy to see this progression in my essay when I was about to lose hope. Writing this piece of writing really taught me how to be patient and what the great outcomes to being patient with yourself are. This piece really helped me express myself in a way that I haven’t before, and it is through writing.
Finding My Place

“I cannot believe you don’t have a planner! How do you do all of those home works and assignments without writing them down?” my friend Lina asked during my senior year at high school, which made me ask myself too, “How?” Is it because it is only “high school” and there is not really much to work on or remember? Maybe I will change after I get into university and become overloaded with work and that will force me to get a planner. Well, guess what? I still have not gotten a planner and it is my fifth week in university.

I have always wanted to go to university and study with a real purpose, and what I mean is that I have always wanted to study what I really like. I wanted to choose my courses and not be forced to study something I am not interested in; I wanted to wear whatever I want to wear instead of a school uniform; and along with all of that, I wanted be an organized university student who is doing great academically and mentally which is why I admire people who have planners.

This anticipation in me started when I was in fifth grade, and it kept growing stronger and stronger as I grew up until I reached my senior year in high school. However, the “mentally stable” part wasn’t really there until I went to high school, especially in my senior year, because it was a stage of complete transition from being a “kid” to being an “adult” which is terrifying to me in all honesty since I did not really know how to “change” and the thought of me not knowing something makes me feel weak. University was something that I was really looking forward to because changing to a better version of myself is the goal, a better version in all aspects—like being less stressed, and having a positive attitude towards myself and the hardships that I am going through. What is scary is not being able to do that!

The biggest opportunity for good change for me was university, I mean I like to believe that it is. It is a challenging phase of my life where I have to endure all the pressure from studying and working while trying to enjoy every bit of it. I want to discover new sides of myself. Who knows? I might be great at writing, analyzing or designing. For instance, our university offers so many good opportunities for writing and poetry. It is very encouraging to submit your pieces of writing for others to read and give their opinions, and that helps with finding your inner writer.

It is now my fifth week in university, and I can’t tell if I have found my right place yet. I think I am doing well in terms of completing my assignments, But I had my first midterm a few days ago, and I did really badly. It was the biggest shock of my life. Never in my life have I thought that I would get a grade like the one I got now. I thought I was supposed to be at my best at this age. This actually made me think that I am becoming dumber, which is probably not the case. I hope not, at least. I didn’t even know how to react. I guess this is why people say that university changes you in a way. “The people who change the most in this
building are the freshman year students,” as my English professor said in the first few weeks of university. I can totally understand that now, as how fascinating and intriguing this sounds to me, I still don't know how to change because I really cannot spot where I went off track in terms of studying because I did my best and I put in so much effort. But “that is how life goes” is what my family and other people tell me, trying to make me feel better. I think this is an indicator of the start of my journey of change.

As much as I feel devastated, overwhelmed, and hopeless because of what happened, I am trying to turn those negative emotions into something that drives my will power for me to change and improve. I did the smallest things as in finding the “right” place for me at university to stay at and spend my time there, a place where I feel comfortable enough to be productive and meet my friends. It is in a corridor at university that has small tables that exactly fit the amount of books that I usually have. I think this is a coping mechanism for me as it helped me meet a lot of people and get used to faces that I see almost every day. It also strangely helped me forget about how badly I did on my midterm, yet it is in the same building where I had my awful experience.

I know that I just called it awful, but I think it will make whatever comes after it better. I feel scared because I didn’t see that coming, and this just makes me have mixed feelings and question my place in this place again. But isn’t doubt the feeling that makes us try different things and that increases our chances of finding what is right for us? I think this experience taught me to not give up yet. I still don’t know what might happen in the future if I stay persistent and continue in this course. I think I have reached the stage of accepting what has happened to me. Failure is a part of my experience, and things can always change, and if that happened again, I hope that I have matured enough to accept it again and not beat myself up over it.

Aysha is a chemical engineering student. She loves science and astronomy, and she chose this major out of great interest. She likes asking others about their interests and big dreams. Carl Sagan inspires her, and she really wishes to see the auroras one day. She aims to make the world into a better place, even by the slightest acts, and to give back to her home country Qatar.
To someone who struggled a lot to be where they are now and are still not satisfied, I understand.

“Why am I here?” was the first prompt assigned in my ENGL 104 class. When it was introduced, I immediately started thinking and day-dreaming. It made me realize that it was not about the destination, being here. Rather, it was about the path that lead to the destination, and so I decided to slightly change the prompt: “How did I get here?”

In the next few minutes, you will experience being in my shoes and you will witness the inner struggles I went through before ending up here at Texas A&M University. Although lifting the curtains which were hiding my real feelings was not easy, I overcame my fears by realizing that hiding my real feelings will only make them accumulate, but never released.
Maybe My Dreams Will Shine Again

In the foggy dark streets of 2015, when I was in high school, I was trying to find the correct path, although I had no idea what that meant. Deep down inside, I really wanted to know where was I heading, and whether I’d be able to fulfill my needs and achieve my dreams. Looking around me in the 21st century, I noticed that everything has changed. Our knowledge in different fields has been rapidly evolving, and that stimulated me to wonder “When is my turn to participate?” I started wondering how and where to start from, but I always faced a “404 – not found” error because I didn’t really know what I wanted. Nevertheless, I had no other choice but to keep trying to find where I wanted to go, because sitting down doing nothing and then regretting the time wasted won't get me anywhere I want to go.

THANKFULLY, when I was in the ninth grade, a random dim light brightened up the streets, and I didn't hesitate in following. I never was, never will be independent when it comes to such decisions, and a dim light is certainly something I can depend upon. It was a one-week STEM program, which stands for: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, and was introduced to it by the College of Education at Qatar University. To be honest, it wasn't like I enjoyed anything related to engineering, but it was the science part that made my soul shine and smile involuntarily. To be more specific, it was the forensic science activity. A fake crime scene was set up by the professors. They then divided us into groups, informed us about the different roles we can take, provided us with cameras to collect the necessary pictures from the crime scene along with various tools to collect the evidences, and, of course, a deadline. My team and I collected evidence about the crime, analyzed blood samples, determined their types, and eventually identified the killer out of the 4 suspects, whose information was written on large boards on the walls. I found working on this crime fascinating since it fed my curiosity and attracted my attention in finding details (my favorite) which can distinguish between the innocent and the guilty, such as fingerprints and hairs. It also helped me in being systematic by arranging my evidence and noting down all the steps of my work.

That week was over, and time flew by. I didn't purposefully forget that experience, but I got busy with life concerns, like exams. Then came high school, which wasn't easy. I had to make a couple of significant, life-changing decisions that can't be reversed. And guess what? I was, and still am, awful at making decisions. You never really know if your choice is correct or wrong, and even if you think it's correct, you will at some point think back about the “what ifs”. Out of all the “amazing” decisions I had to make, the most important was choosing my school major, which consequently meant my future university major. It was a life decision, and one wrong turn would cost a lot. And as the Arabic saying states “الوقت كاسيف، إن لم تقطعه قلمتك” ("Time is like a sword: if you do not cut it, it will cut you"). Luckily, I remembered the STEM program and how that week flew. Thinking carefully about it and remembering how I tried to examine each
aspect of the crime scene each day, I started figuring out that I really wanted to study Biological Sciences. Graduating from that major, I could work in similar situations to that of the unforgettable crime scene.

Because it was a job I believed I would want to do unconditionally, a job I wouldn't have to force myself to get out of the bed in the morning for, I started searching for universities who offer bachelor's in biological Sciences. Due to the limited options offered at Qatar, that meant Carnegie Mellon University (CMU).

I then dreamed further about specializing in computational biology, meaning stronger bonds between my interest in biology and my love for computers. Perfect. Plan set. What could go wrong? I was looking forward to enhancing people's lives, being part of something bigger than myself, and I was dreaming big.

I worked my fingers to the bone to get accepted at CMU. I had a glimmer of hope since I thought that I will FINALLY find my destination. I kept describing my love for biological sciences whenever I got the chance to. My family members, friends, and teachers were good listeners, (well, I mean it's not like they had any other choice). I ignored them when they tried to stop me from purposefully retelling the same story for the tenth time—the story of how that one day in the STEM program week changed my life.

Yet, because I have a great history with wrong decisions, I couldn't neglect having a plan B, which was Texas A&M University. The reasons lying behind that choice are enormous. For instance, my culture had defined smartness a long time ago, and the list goes as following: being a doctor means you are a genius, an engineer means you are smart, etc., … and it is hard to simply neglect that. I mean you interact with individuals from your culture on a daily basis, so how will you avoid judgments? But I was also looking for an alternative that can somehow lead to Biological Sciences, while also thinking about and imagining the worst case scenario, being rejected by Carnegie Mellon University. Last but not least, I believed Texas A&M offered at least the same level of challenges I'd face at Carnegie Mellon University, and it's true that challenges excite me.

Following the path paved by the dim light leading to biological sciences was attractive, whereas the end point was mysterious. After overcoming all the obstacles: the personal essay, school test reports, standardized tests' scores, etc., I had to wait. I had the love, the eagerness, and was extremely passionate for the subject. Thus waiting felt like I was stuck in a loop of time, minutes turning into hours, hours turning into days. During that, I asked many questions about the field, dug for answers, did research, and had several deep conversations with biological science students from Qatar University and Carnegie Mellon University. I knew some of them in real life, while I had met others accidentally on twitter. Drastic times called for drastic measures. Being a biological scientist,
or even better, a computational biologist, was the last thing I thought of before I hit the sack, and the first thing to rise and shine in the morning. It took a month or so, but it was worth the waiting: I got ACCEPTED!

Unfortunately, that wasn't the ending, not the happy ending I had longed for. My joy was incomplete. A road caution appeared just a few miles before I reached my destination of Carnegie Mellon University, stating that the route is temporarily blocked. People, ranging from family members to close family friends, didn't take me seriously until I got accepted; it was only then that they started stating facts about biological sciences that might affect my future. For example, it wasn't until then that I truly knew that being a Qatar resident studying biological sciences won't be a good idea. Job opportunities were limited, and even worse, some graduates couldn't find a job until now, because the workplace has sufficient employees. It was only then that family friends started being honest with me, clarifying why it would be a mistake, a bad decision. My parents got worried, too, this time. But I was always awful at making decisions, so why care this time?

It was different this time. It was my future. You can't go back and fix the past, because you'll forever be stuck and drown in the ocean of your wrong decisions. My parents and I did the search this time simultaneously, studied my case carefully, and contacted many specialists with various opinions. The specialists weren't biological scientists, nor computational biologists, but they were university professors. Finally, sadly, we came to the conclusion: no biological sciences. My dreams were smashed. My hopes were gone. My future was unknown. What was I supposed to do? Well, not a lot. Take a mandatory turn and switch to plan B, Texas A&M University.

I didn't have a solid idea about what I was about to do with the sudden changes, but I knew for sure that I didn't have any other plans. I chose chemical engineering after looking up the different majors offered by Texas A&M. Sincerely speaking, I chose the said major because I loved chemistry, and the idea of being able to pursue any other major through it. I thought about chemical engineering as the boat that will safely drop me on the other side of the river. Additionally, Texas A&M only offers a master's degree in chemical engineering and is working on introducing the Ph.D. That was good enough to convince me.

Now, in 2018, my first college year, it's not as foggy and dark as it was back in 2015, yet it still is as confusing. I'll forever keep searching for the spark that will light my way through the darkness of confusion, and I'll try my best to look at the bigger picture, instead of the small pieces that make it up. I'll be waiting eagerly for that moment; the moment I realize I made an actual positive change in my life, and consequently someone else's life.
I did stumble a few times and got hurt, but who knows? Maybe a new road will be paved, maybe my dreams will shine again, maybe I fell hard this time, so that I would learn to get up again.

“My name is Ebtihal Youssef—an aspiring chemical engineer. I enjoy quoting myself so that I don’t have to cite others” (Youssef, 2019).
The first thing that came to my mind when the instructor asked us to write a piece in response to the prompt “Why Am I Here?” is being in electrical engineering, and the struggles I go through every single day. I enjoyed revising this piece, although I did struggle a bit when I tried to express my feelings. With the help of the instructor I think that I achieved my goal in delivering what I truly feel through words, and I think that it turned out to be one of the most powerful pieces I have ever written.
I Am Here

When the alarm goes off in the morning, a voice in my head starts asking hard questions: why am I here? Why am I not doing what makes me happy? I then get thoughts of wanting to quit, and that I really can't handle engineering school any more. I struggle every single morning to get myself out of the bed. These thoughts are just killing me and ruining my life.

For as long as I can remember, I have always preferred to play with my toy medical kit rather than dolls. I would ask my mother how things in our body work, and I would get simple answers that didn't satisfy me. As I grew up, I started getting more detailed answers to my questions because I was able to search them online or learn them from my science classes. I think my teachers used to feel bothered by me because I asked deep questions whose answers I didn't need to know for the exam. The answer to one question lead me to ask ten more questions. Expanding my knowledge in this field was a joy to me.

In high school I took biology classes, and I noticed that I like to study for that class, unlike my other classmates. I would read passages in the book even if we didn't have to know them. Because of my curiosity in this field, I realized that I wanted to be doctor. My family didn't accept my decision at first, and their answer was “No, medicine is not for you.” After a year of my trying to convince them, they actually said that I can do what I want. My parents then started to make medicine look bad. They gave me examples of people who didn't succeed in medicine, or told me how hard the field is. And because my three brothers are engineers, it made it easier for them to persuade me. I ended up being convinced because I believed that my parents wanted the best for their kid. I didn't want to regret not listening to them, so I did want they wanted. And sadly, that is how I ended up in engineering school.

I try so hard to cope here, but I don't always succeed as these thoughts still attack me. When I am in a physics class, I think What If I was in an anatomy class or neuroscience and learning about cells and the systems in our body? In my second year majoring in something I don't like, I thought that this feeling would go away, but it didn't. I still think about medicine every single day, and I still imagine myself there, learning how organs work together to keep us alive. I just can't believe the fact that I won't be working in a hospital.

I sometimes feel bad about myself, thinking, What if I took the spot of someone who really wanted to be here? Someone who would really appreciate being here? I also feel bad because sometimes when I see a med student, I start thinking What if I were in his/her place? What if I was wearing that white coat, and holding a stethoscope?
Why am I here if I have always been curious about how the human body works, not how computers work? Why am I here if I have always imagined myself fixing people, not machines? These are questions I keep asking myself over and over again.

I am here struggling every single day because of a wrong choice I made. I am here because of the fear of not being supported by my family. I am here because I was that kid between three engineers and was easily convinced.

It is not any one person’s fault, but sometimes I think that it is my fault because I didn't fight for what I like. I shouldn't have let fear control my life. I should have taken risks and chosen to be different, and be myself, because now I really regret choosing to be here. I wonder if I would ever learn to love engineering and forget medicine? But all I know now is that I am here.

Jawaher Kaldari is an electrical engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar. She found out that writing is the only way to express her true feelings and struggles when she couldn't really talk out loud about them. Writing didn't just help her with that, but it gave her the opportunity to explore herself and not be shy about describing her feelings.
This paper was written as a part of the English 104 course. The research was inspired by a friend of mine that was planning to drop Engineering and pursue a different career path. It was extremely interesting to delve deeper into Engineering retention cohorts and understand the reasons behind such retention clusters. It was rather intimidating to realize that me and some of my colleagues were already experiencing key reasons that send Engineering students astray from graduation day.
Why Do Engineering Students Change Their Mind?

Introduction
As a great proportion of a nation’s economic sector is largely dependent on engineering practitioners [1], there is a strong “connection between a STEM workforce and national competitiveness” as James Brown, executive director of the STEM Education Coalition, once said [2]. The loss in potential engineering students dramatically affects the nation's economy [3]. Dropouts cost the national economy over $200 billion annually in the form of lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue [4]. Former U.S. President, Barack Obama, asserted in his speech at the fifth White House Science Fair, that the nation’s success depends on “technology, engineering and math education” [5]. Consequently, a great interest in why some engineering students fail to complete their degrees has been building up recently. Several works of scholarship reveal that a handful of strikingly different reasons that drive students towards failure- from academic difficulties [1] to summer vacations! [6]. Thereby, I have attempted to examine such factors, as suggested by earlier studies, in order to gain a deeper insight into engineering retention clusters. In this short treatise I unveil some of the potential elements behind such trends based on several studies on the subject and further by examining the findings through the analytical lenses of Durkheim and Weber’s socio psychological theories.

Methodology and Analytical Lenses
In examining the attrition rates in scholastic engineering cohorts, I drew upon several published researches on the subject. The elements the various studies suggested were all utilized in deriving an adequate conclusion. Throughout the research multiple factors were encountered, which I attempt to string together to form a clear picture. It’s worth mentioning that the analysis method followed in this research is fundamentally based on the Emile Durkheim's theory of suicide, that those who abandon the wider social space—for the purposes of this research the “social space” is set to engineering colleges—deliberately, do so due to some failure to integrate themselves within its institutions [7]. I further made use of Max Weber’s theory of “social functionalism.” Max Weber, a prominent 19th century sociologist, postulated what would become known widely known as the theory of social functionalism, stating that any given society could be broken down into smaller elements he referred to as functions that act as the connecting loops of the social fabric [8]. He asserted that if one of the functions ceases to operate, the social fabric would slowly, but surely unravel. By applying Durkheim’s and Weber’s epistemological apparatuses, we can get a rather interesting view of what’s actually happening.

Results
The term “quit crisis” was coined to describe the unfortunate fate that many STEM students eventually meet [9]. Generally the “phenomenon” is attributed to an insufficiency in one of the following areas: academic competency,
information retention, motivation, and/or effort as well as, to a lesser extent, gender and race. Several social and institutional factors do also play a significant role in determining student success.

**Academic Incompetency**

Engineering courses are notoriously challenging and a lot of effort to “nail down.” Accordingly, having proper preparedness is a crucial factor in determining whether or not the student will ultimately get to walk down the aisle with the highly coveted scroll in hand. Most high schools are keen to provide students with courses that boast the same workload as an average college course; APs and A-Levels are on top of the list. Despite such hearty efforts, several studies reveal that there is a noticeable mismatch between high school success and college success [10]. These results are attributed to multiple factors, the most important being the various grading and aptitude criteria that high schools adopt (i.e., the effort required to yield a 4.0 GPA in one institution could barely yield a 3.0 in a more competitive school). For such reasons, standardized tests are required by nearly all higher education institutions to equally gauge students from different educational backgrounds. While there is noticeable correlation between SAT scores and academic proficiency [11], the general consensus, however, is that they do fail to accurately gauge how well a student would fare in college [12]. A favorite case study that backs up such conclusion is that of Richard Feynman, a Nobel Prize laureate and one of the pioneers of the Manhattan project. Feynman performed rather poorly on a standardized test he had to take as a middle schooler [13], yet his achievements speak well of him.

Furthermore, another element that contributes to academic incompetency of students could possibly be the incompetence of the educators themselves! [14] In a testimony before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Research, Elaine Seymour stressed the importance of ensuring the adequacy of high school teacher’s technical knowledge, specifically those who specialize in mathematics and sciences. Such individuals are role models for the students; they should not only profess their knowledge unto their students but also motivate them and develop the material in an interesting and engaging manner. Fiscal reasons also do figure into some cases. Students who have to work off campus to make ends meet generally have a greater potential of dropping out than those who are focused predominantly on their STEM studies [15]. Having a demanding extracurricular job, specifically one whose focus strays far from STEM studies, slows the student’s ability to reflect on and retain valuable knowledge. For all of the preceding reasons, many engineering students suffer from chronic academic inability that hinders their STEM degree journey, and accordingly fail to integrate themselves into their academic institution.

**Information Retention**

One interesting factor that is very often overlooked is “information loss” over the summer break. Historically, families needed a break in the middle of the
year in order to tend to their farm and plantations. Today, however, most people practice jobs that are largely either industrial or intellectual, thus the need for such a break is no longer necessary, yet despite such development the traditional academic year has retained its original structure. In a typical school year, the greatest proportion of the material is taught in two to three semesters with the three- to four-month summer in between academic years. Students, chiefly due to the rigor of the academic year system, are apt not to revisit the material they supposedly mastered over the past nine months during their summer break. While it’s healthy to have a break from time to time, when it comes down to mathematics and science education, a three- to four-month break without even briefly reviewing the material could potentially have detrimental consequences [6]. Subjects like calculus are divided into multiple courses; the material taught in one course is a prerequisite for comprehending the material in the upcoming one, and thus for one to lose his/her grasp on what he/she has already learned would most certainly generate a great deal of frustration and confusion.

In a study by Van de Sande and C. Reiser in 2018, the influence of a summer break gap was documented by statistical means. The research was conducted in a major U.S.-based university. The grades of the students who took calculus II directly after calculus I was compared to those who took calculus II after a summer break. Their results reveal that those who took calculus II after the summer break had much lower grades than those who did the course within the interval of the same academic year. (It’s worth mentioning that SO refers to students who did the course after a summer break, while ST refers to those who took the course within the same year). Figure 1 displays their results.

![Graph](image)

Figure 1. (left) Percentage of students who received a grade of D, failed, or withdrew from Calculus 2, by academic year and summer off status. (right) Percentage of students who received an A or B in Calculus 1 and dropped at least two letter grades in Calculus 2, by academic year and summer off status.

The striking difference revealed by the graph above, emphasizes the adverse effects of summer breaks on knowledge retention and thus acquisition. Failure to master basic material such as calculus or physics makes it nearly impossible to grasp advanced engineering subjects such as thermodynamics or fluid dynamics, and consequently creates a route towards dropping out.
Motivation, Effort and Institutional Factors
Engineering courses, or more broadly STEM courses, are infamous for their mind-bending difficulty. Accordingly, motivation is a crucial element in driving the student to put forth an adequate sum of effort. In some cases, however, the academic institutions themselves lack many assets that encourage their students to succeed [16]. Poor mentorship, academic advising, and faculty accessibility occupy the top of the list. Higher education instructors have a great propensity to present the material in a highly complex manner, wrongly assuming that their students are on the same intellectual comprehension level as they are. The intellectual gap between student and mentor might leave the student discouraged and helpless. In an interview conducted by Matthew Meyer and Sherry Marx for their research on engineering retention, one of the interview subjects given the name “Bob,” a former mechanical engineering student, stressed that one of the major reasons he switched to business was a mismatch between what he expected and what his instructors expected based on their experience [3]. “I listened to and liked the lectures, but I would go home, you know, for the homework, and it was like a totally different thing. The lectures and the homework didn’t line up. They weren’t the same thing,” Bob said.

The Student-professor relationship also plays a prominent role in steering the student towards success [17]. Feedback, accessibility outside the classroom, and academic aid are inestimable measures to a STEM student. An absence of these elements could possibly cause the student to fall behind the stipulated expectations. Particularly when it comes down to the little misconceptions and confusions that usually arise in the average STEM class, a short appointment with the instructor could easily weed out such nuisances, but when such an asset is out of reach, gradually, these minor misconceptions would develop into an insurmountable barrier between the student and the study material. What adds insult to injury, however, is that a lot of academic faculty firmly disbelieve that the student-professor relationship plays a factor in the attrition rates in engineering cohorts [18].

In many cases the student’s incapability to gain meaningful feedback and academic aid prevents them from taking on a space of their own within their institution which drives them astray from their intended goals and eventually unto a major switch.

Gender and Ethnicity
It is almost a rule of thumb that, on average, there are fewer female engineering students than male engineering students, yet statistics reveal that women that do complete their degrees generally do achieve higher grades compared to male students within the same class [19]. Such a paradox could be explained by examining the concept of “implicit bias.” Implicit bias refers to an array of preconceived notions that a certain proportion of the community holds towards something, but don’t vociferously proclaim or assert. Such bias is often what
makes many women shy away from Engineering majors. A great number of female students do hold the conception that they are not as competent as their male colleagues in mathematical and scientific subjects, adversely affecting their success rates in STEM studies [20].

Such a bias could be traced all the way back to the early industrial world, where women were largely excluded from the scientific arena. A popular example is the two-time Nobel laureate, Marie Curie. As young lady, Mrs. Curie was barred from attending a higher studies institution in her home country due to the obvious fact that she is a female. The common wisdom at the time was that women belonged to the scullery or the farm. With the passage of time, however, the adherence to such beliefs waned, yet the general idea that women are unsuccessful as engineers lived on as a latent sentiment. Subsequently, there is an observable imbalance in the male to female ratio in most engineering schools; they are more likely to drop-out compared to their male colleagues [20].

Ethnicity also plays a noticeable role. The important thing one should bear in mind when discussing the influence of ethnicity on STEM attrition rates is that the concept that certain ethnic groups are intellectually superior compared to their counterparts, and accordingly, that individuals belonging to such ethnic groups are more apt to complete their degrees, is fundamentally fallacious. It's the relative difference between the individual's ethnicity and his/her environment that is the variable to consider. A major study by the University of Washington reveals that Whites and Hispanic Americans are more likely to complete their degrees than other ethnic groups in most U.S. universities [19]. The study, however, asserts that such inequality is a product of the relationship between the environment and the student, that is, it's not the individual's ethnicity that drives the student towards dropping out, but rather the heavy burden of not being able to assimilate into the wider environment due to ethnic and cultural barriers.

Such “gap” is further widened by one's gender. Females, as already discussed, are more prone to be negatively influenced by their environment due to a certain degree of doubt that they might be bearing, compared to their male counterparts, and ethnic elements do figure more commonly when examining female retention cohorts. Therefore the potential barrier that might exist between one's ethnicity and environment is further extended by gender.

An example to consider that supports such hypothesis, is the TAMUQ campus. Texas A&M’s campus in Doha does boast an engineering student population that is evenly divided with respect to gender. According to the institution, they managed to achieve such unique balance by providing continued and genuine support to their female students [21]. Such findings indicate that it is, indeed, the link between the individual and the environment that does play the fundamental role in determining the individual’s success.
Discussions
On the basis of the collected data, it’s clearly observable that in accordance with Durkheim’s suicide theory, those who decide to forsake their social sphere (for the purposes of this study the social sphere is consigned to engineering schools), do so, predominantly, because they perpetually fail to integrate themselves into their constituent cohorts. One can easily conclude that according to the reasons proposed thus far, it is that failure to assimilate that steers many students away from graduation. Be it a failure to excel academically, absorb the material, find meaningful support and feedback, retain information, or develop intellectually, an insuperable barrier will ultimately develop, straining and consigning the student away from fusing with their environment, leading him to what Durkheim had prophesied: suicide [7]. “Suicide” in this context is not to be taken literally, but rather metaphorically, in essence, meaning that the individual will abandon their social sphere which I have set to the hypothetical engineering school.

Another perspective we may use to examine such a phenomenon is Max Weber’s theory of “social functionalism.” According to Weber, societies could be broken down into smaller sets of functions, and those “functions” provide the fundamental essence of the social structure. He argued that societies thrive when their functions check in with one another, fostering the subsistence of the social anatomy. However, when one of the functions does fail to fulfill its end, the structure starts to wane sequentially, until it disintegrates completely—or at least partially in the case of a social revolution [8].

Applying Weber’s model to an engineering or STEM student leads to interesting insights. One could immediately establish that any given student is principally reliant on three assets or “functions”: effort, intellectual comprehension, and motivational drive.

![Fig. 2: The 3 functions of Max Weber’s Theory of Social Functionalism](image)

Should one of those three functions cease to operate, cracks and impediments start forming within the student’s epistemological framework. In time, the whole system collapses, impelling the student towards the expected development: dropping out.
As a corollary, one could think of the concept of “functions” in terms of the triangle shown in Figure 2. If any of the sides cease to exist, “the perfect triad” would be diminished, thereby toppling the student's academic pursuits. Having a certain degree of intellectual comprehension but little in the way of effort or motivation will not yield fruitful results. Conversely, putting forth effort but enjoying no motivational drive or comprehension of the material will likewise steer the student towards a botched avenue of repeated disappointments. Finally, being motivated towards getting the degree without actually putting effort to get it nor understanding “what the heck is going on” will not take anyone very far.

Recommendations
To fulfill the aforementioned ends, engineering, or more broadly, STEM institutions could develop certain approaches that would possibly stall the attrition rates. One effective technique is a comprehensive prep course that adds a touch of pragmatism to the incoming students’ expectations by introducing an adequate proportion of the material they’re to expect in a thorough manner. That way, an incoming engineering student would have realistic comprehension of the profession as a study and practice. A study by the Association for Institutional Research revealed that “preparation courses reduced the likelihood of departure by 42% or 55% in the second or third year in college” [22]. The study attributes such improvements to enhancements in academic knowledge as well as a “stronger educational commitment among students who are academically well prepared in high school,” as they get to experience a sense of satisfaction, knowing that the effort they had put in the past does eventually pay off. Acknowledging such a cause-and-effect relationship would most likely compose an individual that is more apt to “keep pushing” in the case of “academic adversity” rather than simply quitting. Such courses also act as an “early trial” period in the sense that students who feel disenchanted with the material after a few weeks of progressing through the prep-course might quickly come to the conclusion that perhaps STEM is not their best choice.

Such an approach could remedy the poor levels of academic preparedness and motivation, that often plague incoming students. Another approach that is slightly more radical is the introduction of summer rehearsal classes that would solidify the student's retention of the material they had learned over the academic year. Although the institution of such programs seems far-fetched (since most students would much rather spend their only major annual vacation pursuing non-academic endeavors), what could possibly be more pragmatic is an awareness program that encourages students to occasionally review the material they had covered over the preceding academic year on their own. Speaking of my own experience as an engineering student, reviewing the major concepts I had learned over my three of years high schooling over the summer was immensely valuable to me as a mechanical engineering freshman.

Another factor that is often overlooked is popular culture and its influence on ethnic and gender-based barriers. The popular and widely disseminated
notion that women do not precisely fit into STEM workplaces and the general lack of female role models are the chief reasons that forestall women's progress in engineering majors. While there is no “quick and easy” solution to such problems, longitudinal measures could be devised to alleviate such obstacles. A slow but steady shift in the way the general populace views female STEM practitioners could be achieved by providing thoughtful support to women in STEM majors, thereby setting the stage for a larger number of women, by providing them with a reliable source of encouragement based on the experiences of former female STEM students.

Ethnic barriers are far more complicated however, as they are based on inflexible, deeply entrenched variables that are often beyond control, such as culture, religion, and folklore. Assuaging the fears some might hold that their traditions are held in low regard could potentially narrow such gaps. Although the remedy to such problems is something that is widely debated, ethnic diversity is often cited as the most effective pathway. According to Social identity theory, all people belong to certain “in groups” while they tend to view others as members of an “out group.” In an ethnically diverse environment, individuals have no clear in-group designation, impeding the formation of a out-groups, thereby giving individuals from different background a unique opportunity to form unique social associations, thus alleviating the extreme favoritism that limited in-groups create [23]. Consequently, individuals belonging to ethnic and cultural minorities would generally find a stronger force that binds them to their environment, relative to joining an environment with clearly delineated in-group lines, accordingly advancing their chances in succeeding in their chosen academic route.

Conclusion
On the basis of the data gathered, and the theories of Durkheim and Weber, an adequate conclusion could be derived: to succeed in attaining a STEM, or more specifically an engineering degree, certain elements should be present, the absence of which leads to potential failure and setback. Like the sides of a polygon, the failure of one side to hold breaks the whole structure under stress. Scrutinizing the case through the analytical lenses of Weber’s and Durkheim’s theories deepens our understanding of the case and provides support to the idea of a “functional triad” of effort, motivation, and comprehension.

As suggested, many different expedients could be followed to lessen the severity of the attrition rates. At the end of the day, however, it all rests upon the individual: being strictly determined to succeed would surely drive any individual towards reaching the end of their chosen path. Unrelenting perseverance, however, is a rare quality that only a select few do enjoy, accordingly setting all the aforementioned variables in motion.
References


Ahmed is a mechanical engineering sophomore at Texas A&M at Qatar. He was born in Alexandria, Egypt, and moved to Doha, Qatar, at a young age and has been living here ever since. His hobbies are listening to music, reading, and doing nothing.
Two years ago, I received a message on my WhatsApp with a list of answers. At the beginning I wasn’t sure what the list was for. After asking the person who forwarded it to me, it turned out that we had just all received an email to complete the Aggie Honor Code exam. Someone started spreading the correct answers around. At the beginning, I resisted and tried to solve the exam on my own. I didn’t score a 100% and the exam started to walk me through each slide. I eventually gave in and looked at the message I received and about 30 seconds later I was done. I defeated the whole purpose of the test.
The Vicious Cycle

As I was raised, I was taught that cheating is bad no matter what the circumstances are. If you cheat, you harm yourself before anyone else. That is all true, and I am not arguing against that, but I never looked at cheating from a different angle until recently. What if the environment that surrounds me encourages me to cheat? What if I see everyone who cheats gets away with it, and while I am not cheating, I am getting worse results compared to everyone else? (Not necessarily test results.) Why do I feel that sense of triumph when I give information to a friend in the form of “copying”?

Writing about this evoked my memory about my earliest cheating incident. I was in grade six and we were having a history exam. I hated history so much back then because we had to memorize dates, something that I am very bad at. I cheated on an answer to a question I wasn’t sure about near the end of the exam. My teacher caught me, and she asked me which answer I changed. The funny part is that my original answer was right. Why did I cheat in the first place? Looking back, I think the main reason was fear. I was afraid of even getting this one question wrong, I was pressured by the surrounding (whether by the teacher herself or my family) not to get a low grade.

In freshman year I witnessed a case of cheating in an exam. I acted like the “cheating police” and went to inform the TA. I didn’t rest assured until he found out everyone who cheated, and prevented everyone else from cheating again in the rest of the course (by changing the expiration time of exams on ecampus). Four years passed, and I no longer care. If I see someone cheating now, my mind will tell me “It is not my business.” But, I don’t think that passive reaction evolved by itself.

There is pressure everywhere. If there is a homework assignment where late submission is not acceptable (even though I am willing to do it late and lose those couple of points), what am I supposed to do? If all of my midterms (they should not even be called midterms because they occur the week before finals, but that is a different story) occur within the span of a week, while still having to submit homeworks, do projects, and write lab reports, I will either copy those or fail my exams.

My point here is not to declare that students cheat, or that there are many cheating cases witnessed by students that go unreported (just ask around). But I am trying to help the reader to see cheating as a cycle. Everyone involved has a part to do; we can’t blame it all on one party. We can’t blame it on the founders of Chegg, or the creators of the Aggie Honor Code exam.

As I am about to graduate, I want to send a final message to my professors. There is no problem if we don’t have a pop quiz or a homework submission in the same week as our midterm exam. Receiving a zero on a late submission will not
teach me to be punctual before going to the workplace. It will only stress me out even more and affect my performance negatively. Turnitin doesn't teach us not to cheat; it only taught us to be more creative with “rephrasing.” I think it is time we have different measures to solve the problem of cheating.
In my first year of university, I grew not only as a writer but as a person because I learned how to express my thoughts and ideas clearly and vividly by constantly improving my writing and critical thinking skills through various drafts and essays. I learned how to compose formal reports and essays by doing incessant researches about my community, Texas A&M Chemical Engineers. In fact, I chose to study this community because I am also a member in this community and my sister, who inspired me to choose this career path, was also a Texas A&M at Qatar chemical engineering junior so that drove me to discover more about the “behind the scenes” of this community.
TAMUQ Chemical Engineering Community Research

Introduction
This research project investigates why internships are important for all the engineers around the globe and what behavioral skills students must obtain to become fit for an engineering career. It also addresses how my sister, who is a TAMUQ CHEN Junior, obtained such skills, why TAMUQ CHEN graduates apply for internships, and what difficulties they encounter when balancing between focusing on university work and applying for internships. Feijoo, et al. explains the importance of internships and how they help the engineering graduate students expand the levels of their knowledge and their academic integrities [1]. This is the reason why chemical engineers tend to apply for internships because they become more competent, open-minded, and flexible. Those characteristics allow them to shift to different fields that are somehow similar to chemical engineering which makes it easier for them to adapt to any new environment or to new major studies, which slightly differs from their major, without difficulty. In fact, this is what Kasprzak [2] was trying to explain in her article, where she shows why the chemical engineers' contributions have such a great impact to our world of study and knowledge. In addition, she also clarified that the undergraduate chemical engineers apply mostly for industrial internships because those internships are one the most important factors for increasing the students' level of expertise as engineers and as individuals. Furthermore, it is important for them to meet all the industries expectations and requirements, especially the chemical engineers as most of their laboratory and hands-on practices will be conducted and performed in industry. Moreover, this is what Pearl Makhathini [4] tried to explain in her article. She interprets the importance of meeting all the industrial competencies because graduate students might have certain difficulties in adapting to a new environment or workplace if they did not meet the industry's expectations [4].

How can a student or intern succeed in an internship in an engineering industry and what are the issues that follow? This question is answered by Vittaldasa Prablu, [3]; he says that students need a supportive faculty that can guide them and help them achieve successful future careers [3], and according to Feijoo, et al., [1], applying for such internships and becoming successful interns will increase the students’ level of competence and knowledge of their fields when working in industries, companies, or certain corporations and organizations in the future. Furthermore, according to Pearl Makhathini [4], there are certain behavioral skills or can be referred to as “hard skills” that engineers must acquire to continue their careers as professional engineers such as communication skills, teamwork, leadership skills, proper attitude towards industrial and research work load present in the work place, and a good social adaptation [4]. Moreover, as Vittaldasa Prablu mentioned in his article, the faculty members must help the undergraduate students or more so, the undergraduate engineers, develop these required behavioral skills for them to be fit for an engineering career [3].
While I was in the process of researching for helpful sources, I found that there is no research that indicates how TAMUQ CHEN students seek out jobs and opportunities built on their field of assessment and academic work. Therefore, in this research study, I plan to investigate if the chemical engineering graduates in TAMUQ felt capable in acquiring jobs based on their field of study and if they did, what difficulties they encountered. Finally, for this community research, I also desire to convince the readers that my sister, who is a chemical engineering junior in TAMUQ, possesses the behavioral skills needed to become a successful engineer.

**Methods**
I studied this community day by day utilizing the following methods:

1. I conducted my first interview with my sister who is a TAMUQ CHEN Junior about her tactics in balancing between having a social life and keeping up with her university work life.
2. I talked to five TAMUQ CHEN seniors who gave me verbal advice about how to manage to go through four years of stress without breaking down.
3. I investigated other researchers’ findings in my secondary research about the impacts that internships can provide for not only the chemical engineers, but also for all engineers around the globe. I also desired to apply my findings in the secondary research to investigate the behavioral skills that are required for the students to become successful engineers.
4. Furthermore, I conducted a second interview with my sister in order to see if she has developed most of the behavioral skills needed to continue her career as a chemical engineer.
5. I also discussed with five TAMUQ CHEN graduate how balancing between applying for internships and keeping up with their university work is a very difficult task to accomplish. I asked if they were able to find jobs related to their fields of study and academic work.

**First Interview**
Interviewing my sister was the best decision I made because she knows how to manage her time properly, she studies the same major as me, and her care and love for me is endless. Enthusiasm was the first feeling she underwent when it came to helping me accomplish amazing things in my life like becoming a successful chemical engineer. The interview took place in my home in the afternoon. I have made some main points about her emphasis on the contribution of a work-life balance experience.

**Her Inspiration and Motivation**
For her, school was a building block into deciding her future profession and career as a chemical engineer. She performed experiments in her chemistry lab class and that inspired her to deciding on practicing hands-on and practical work. Such experiments included mixing an acid with a base which eventually forms a solid with a sudden color change. She described this as a magical
experience because it was past her expectations. By performing her chemistry lab experiments in TAMUQ, they reminded her of the first time she practiced a practical experiment in high school. This motivated her to continue to pursue her career as a chemical engineer.

**Her Commitment and Opportunities**
She is a person who takes full responsibility of her actions and her decisions. Chemical engineering is the pool she chose to dive in and swim until she reaches success and victory. Furthermore, I am inspired by how committed she is to her major despite all the hard work. This is because it was her passion from the beginning after she had discovered the aspects of chemistry and what majors are related to this subject. Weakness and vulnerability rarely strike her or take control of her because her mind is set on becoming a successful chemical engineer. She never considered changing her major because it clearly shows how satisfied she is with the road she chose to drive in and continue with till the end without encountering any feeling of regret or sorrow.

**Work Life Balance and Contribution**
She implies very important points regarding her imperfect work-life balance contribution which led to certain struggles and weaknesses in her life. For instance, she explains her struggle with avoiding test panics if she was studying only one day before an exam. Moreover, my sister mentions that she does not always maintain an outstanding contributions to her work-life balance schedule which eventually enables frictions in her time-management schedule. For example, if she studies for a test only one day prior, she will encounter a lack of concentration and focus that is followed by a lack of sleep. Nevertheless, performing presentations is a weakness that she finds somehow hard overcome due to her timidity in giving presentations in front of a large group of people. In the end, she says that it is normal for a person to have some struggles and weaknesses that he or she cannot overcome, just like her.

She mentions that having a work-life balance routine is hard to handle and that one must be very organized and open-minded to achieve it impeccably. Her schedule is filled with responsibilities and tasks but this does not mean that she does not have time for a social life or for fun activities and events. In addition, she is part of two organizations and events (SWE and PCC). Those events help her in gaining more experience in team work. She has time for those events because of her promptness in time-management. Moreover, she sets an alarm that reminds her of certain tasks she has to complete and for meeting up with friends. Therefore, she always makes time for friends and outings to release all the negative vibes to avoid the accumulation of stress.

Getting enough sleep and studying daily are her tactics and ways of surviving a very tough but an amusing four-year social and work life in TAMUQ. Speaking of work, chemical engineering in Texas A&M is tough, and it requires strong and attentive students who are willing to work hard unceasingly. This major
consists of interesting hands-on experiments and practical work but this does not mean that she could always sit back and enjoy her leisure time. By following her instincts, she notices that her brain does not absorb the material adequately when studying continuously without a break. This interprets the importance of why leisure time is necessary in her daily life. On the other hand, for my sister’s point of view, she believes that her brain should not acquire a diffused mode when it is time for a full focused mode because she would not be able to retain the material as she should be. A few years back, she had a midterm and she started studying for it the day before. Unfortunately, she did not perform as well as she anticipated, so from her experience, struggle and panic will take control of her if she does not take things seriously or leave them to the last minute. Despite the various and uncountable text messages and emails that she receives, those do not distract her from her unending studies. In fact, attentiveness and preparation are her mottos when it comes to having a well-composed work-life schedule.

**Inspiration**

My sister inspires me, not only because of her punctuality in achieving a perfect work-time balance as a TAMUQ chemical engineer, but also because of her great optimism in handling all the pressure without seizing to work hard continuously. Furthermore, from my perspective, I can sense my sister's genuine feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction in being part of a TAMUQ chemical engineering community as a true Aggie.

**Senior TAMUQ CHEN Students’ Advice**

While I was seeking advice from the senior TAMUQ chemical engineers, I noticed how similar their points of view were about achieving an excellent balance between leisure and work. For instance, most of them mentioned the idea of how students must not study for an exam before one day and should not leave the assignments for the last minute. Moreover, based on their experience, they explained how a student must not neglect the idea of having friends and going out because he or she will notice the increase of stress and melancholy in his or her life.

Nevertheless, this group of seniors mentioned that they had some weaknesses that are related to balance, such as procrastination. According to their clarifications regarding the effects of procrastination, it was a common issue for most of them, but in the end, they, the TAMUQ CHEN students, were able to get through this rough stage.

**Internships**

For my secondary research, I discovered that internships played a very important role in the engineering sector. This means that the engineers’ success is not only dependent on hard work, full commitment, and creativity, but also on having experience from internships where they gained high levels of expertise.
and competence in their fields of study and academic work. The process goes from being an undergraduate engineer in a university to an intern to a successful intern and finally, to having a professional engineering career.

Internships are important because they help the undergraduate engineering seniors expand the level of their expertise, knowledge and their academic integrities. How can internships expand the students' level of expertise, knowledge, and their academic integrities? This question is answered by Feijoo, et al. with the positive impacts that internships have on the students and why are they beneficial [1]. Their article provided evidences and proofs of his findings by showing how the internship organizations had benefited the students in order to help them obtain professional engineering careers in their future. For instance, according to his findings and researches, USC University in Spain offered a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering for the undergraduate students, those students were able to apply for internships in certain companies and organizations. It was found that the students have gained further expertise in teamwork, leadership, and the ability to adapt quickly in any new environment [1]. Therefore, internships are beneficial not only for the undergraduate engineers in USC, but also for the engineers worldwide. This is the reason why chemical engineers tend to apply for internships because they become more competent, open-minded, and flexible about the new updates and discoveries that happen in their fields of study. Those characteristics allow them to shift to different fields that are somehow similar to chemical engineering which makes it easier for them to adapt to any new environment or to new major studies, which slightly differs from their major, without difficulty.

This is the reason why chemical engineers tend to apply for internships, in general. Chemical engineers’ contributions have such a great impact to our world of study and knowledge [2]. For example, according to Kasprzak, Somnath Basu, the vice president of global engineering, shifted from being a chemical engineer, where he dealt with processes in the petrochemical industry, to an environmental engineer [2]. Therefore, this shows that chemical engineers, in general, do not find difficulties with adapting to new environments, shifting to new branches in the field, and shifting to new major studies that are similar to chemical engineering. To sum up, Kasprzak wanted to show what impact the chemical engineers have on our modern world today and how they can develop different and integrated skills that are associated in chemical engineering.

The undergraduate chemical engineers apply mostly for industrial internships because those internships are one of the most important factors for increasing the students' level of expertise as engineers and as individuals [2]. Furthermore, it is important for them to meet all the industries expectations and requirements, especially the chemical engineers as most of their laboratory and hands-on practices are conducted and performed in industry. Moreover, this is what Pearl Makhathini tried to explain in her article. She interprets
the importance of meeting all the industrial competencies because graduate students might have certain difficulties in adapting to a new environment or workplace if they did not meet the industry’s expectations.

Studies show that more than half of the graduate engineering students seem to be unsuited for an engineering career because of certain issues regarding behavioral skills such as leadership skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and teamwork [4]. This is due to the informal education of soft skills that includes proper attitude towards industrial work load in the workplace with a good social adaptation. Therefore, it is important for the students, especially the engineering students, to meet all the industry’s expectations and to have full acknowledgment and learning of all the competencies needed. If these students are willing to excel as engineers in all the engineering sectors such as in the research sector, environmental sector, and especially in the industrial sector, they should not only meet all the industry’s competencies, but they should also acquire all the hard and the soft skills if they are hoping to succeed in their future careers as professional engineers and to flourish in their fields of study.

Behavioral Skills
There are certain behavioral skills that engineers must acquire to continue their careers as professional engineers such as communication skills, teamwork, leadership skills, proper attitude towards industrial and research work load present in the workplace, and a good social adaptation [4]. Moreover, as [3] mentioned in his article, the faculty members must help the undergraduate students or more so, the undergraduate engineers, develop these required behavioral skills for them to be fit for an engineering career.

Becoming a Successful Intern
How can a student or intern succeed in an internship in an engineering industry and what are the issues that follow it? Students need a supportive faculty that can guide them and help them achieve successful future careers [3] and according to [1], applying for such internships and becoming successful interns will increase the students’ level of competence and knowledge of their fields when working in industries, companies, or certain corporations and organizations in the future. There are some issues that Vittal Prablu discussed regarding the idea of becoming a successful intern [3]. He mentions that it is important to have supportive faculty members, but what would happen if the faulty were not supportive as they should be? More gaps will accumulate and form in the students’ academic knowledge and education. Therefore, to become a successful intern, the faculties in the universities should anticipate in filling all the gaps that exist in the students’ academic lives. This is because these gaps provide negative impacts on the students’ work learning experiences and on their future careers when working in an industry or a certain company. Nevertheless, there should be a respectable and a virtuous relationship between the faculty members
in the industries and the interns so that the interns can gain an effective industrial experience without having to encounter problems and difficulties in performing industrial practices in the future.

**Second Interview**

I conducted another interview with my sister, who is a TAMUQ CHEN Junior, to know if she has developed the behavioral skills needed to continue her career as a chemical engineer, and if she did, how she developed those skills and what difficulties and challenges she encountered. Moreover, I desired to know if she applied for internships in certain companies or corporations, and if she did, what was her experience and did she benefit from them or not?

While I was interviewing my sister, I discovered that she has developed most of the behavioral skills needed to become a successful chemical engineer. Because she has done various projects that required teamwork, she became well-experienced with group work and listening to other people’s perspectives, other than her own, about a certain topic in a discussion or debate. Therefore, from these projects, discussions, and debates, one of the behavioral skills she has possessed, were teamwork skills as she had to negotiate a lot and share her ideas with her teammates. Leadership skill is a skill that she has not yet mastered since she is still in her third year, but because she plays a lead role with her friend in the WMP (Women Mentorship Program), she has developed some leadership skills, but she says that there is always room for improvement. Moreover, communication skill is a skill that she has, for sure, mastered since she did not only work with teammates whom are only chemical engineers, but also had to share her thoughts and ideas by negotiating with students that are part of the ECEN(electrical), MEEN(mechanical), and (PETE) petroleum communities. This shows that she had a lot of practice with communicating with people who have different perspectives and objectives towards approaching a certain solution for a difficult problem or dilemma. To sum up, during the three years that she spent in TAMUQ, she has developed teamwork skills, communication skills, and leadership skills.

To prove that she has developed those skills, I have attended the WMP program and I saw how her level of confidence has increased as she is usually a shy and a timid person, so becoming a wise leader was something new and somehow challenging for her. In fact, I did not expect to see her make decisions, by of course negotiating it with her partner, and watching her present and introduce in front of an audience was surprising for me because I know that she is not the kind of person who directly speaks what is on her mind. Furthermore, communication skills and teamwork skills are skills that she has developed while she was performing lab experiments, which required a minimum of two teammates, and doing projects, which required strong communication and teamwork skills since she had to brainstorm her ideas and listen to other people’s perspectives from different majors and fields of study.
Difficulties and Challenges
My sister has encountered some difficulties and challenges when she was playing a lead role with her partner in the WMP program. This is because, as I previously mentioned, she is usually a shy and a timid person, but also, she is not used to taking risks and making important decisions, even if it is with her partner. Being a leader is something that she finds difficult to cope with as she knows that if anything goes wrong with the reputation of the program because of the existence of a certain quarrel or an argument, she and her partner will be held responsible. Despite all of this, she likes her job as a leader, but she finds it somehow stressful and intense.

Internship Applications
Regarding the internships, she has applied for an internship, but she still did not get a reply yet. She seems excited and simultaneously worried because it would be her first time working in the industry where she will become an experienced intern that would benefit her for her future as a professional chemical engineer. Moreover, she will get to see what an actual job is and she will get to know what the chemical engineers actually work with in the industrial work place.

Discussion with Five TAMUQ CHEN Graduates
I decided to discuss with five TAMUQ CHEN graduates about how balancing between applying for internships and keeping up with their university work is a very difficult task to accomplish.

The five CHEN graduates said that balancing between university work and applying for internships was a very difficult and a challenging task. Other than the fact that they had to fully concentrate on passing all their major courses, they also had to be very committed to becoming successful and well-experienced interns, whether it is a research or an industrial internship. This is because those internships are extremely vital and important for them to pursue a successful career in chemical engineering. Furthermore, they said that for them to become successful chemical engineers, they had to become successful interns first to gain full expertise and knowledge in their fields of study, assessment and academic work. Lastly, one of them explained that the more they applied for internships, the higher the chance for them to develop all the behavioral skills required, not only to become regular chemical engineers, but also to become victorious chemical engineers.

Two of the five TAMUQ CHEN graduates said that they have found jobs that are related to their industrial fields of study and academic work. Moreover, one of them mentioned that he had the opportunity to obtain a master’s degree and that he already applied, in the UK, to obtain a Ph.D. degree in industrial engineering. According to the graduate who has applied for a PHD degree, he said that while he was temporarily working in an industrial company, he was still studying in TAMUQ to obtain a master’s degree in chemical engineering. He said that it was the best decision he made because he had not only gained
experience in industrial work, but he was also able to follow his ambitions and continue his studies as planned. Furthermore, the other two explained that they were still waiting for a response from the company to see if they are qualified for the job, as it is a strong and a very demanding company where fully committed and hardworking engineers are needed to complete the constant strenuous yet interesting industrial practices. Furthermore, they said that it was very difficult to have achieved such accomplishments as nowadays getting accepted in prestigious and industrial engineering companies is very challenging and simultaneously perplexing.

Concluding Words
Last but not least, TAMUQ CHEN students’ contributions to having a well-structured schedule for work-life balance is inspiring because they try not to show any negativity or anxiety when performing all these strenuous tasks. In addition, they believe that the memories they made and the accomplishments they achieved in Texas A&M will never be forgotten. This is due to their creation of a well-balanced and healthy lifestyle. Moreover, balancing between applying for internships and university work is also very arduous and difficult as both tasks require fully committed and well organized students to be able to succeed in both becoming a successful intern and a successful student. Nevertheless, my sister was also an inspiration to me as she has not only anticipated obtaining a well-structured work-life balance schedule, but her ambitions led her to apply for internships and develop all the behavioral skills needed to continue her career as not only a regular chemical engineer, but also a well-recognized and a successful chemical engineer. Lastly, to sum up, we TAMUQ students continue to learn how to manage our time, we continue to learn more about our fields of study, and we continue to learn how to improve our behavioral skills to not only succeed as future engineers but to also succeed as future leaders and life-decision makers.
Nadeen Issa is a chemical engineering student who found that the keys to her success at Texas A&M University were time management, getting enough sleep, having a social life (friends can help and learn from each other a lot especially from different majors), spending time with her family, and working hard daily (by at least taking one day off). Ironically, she found that a little bit of procrastination helped increase her level of focus and concentration when studying. She is a student who loves to sleep and watch Turkish television series at least once per week. Lastly, her dream is to invent or create something, using her knowledge in chemical engineering as her major source of creation, that would make the world a better place.

References


On 6 April 2019, Saad Moazam and Farah Ramadan gave a joint TEDx talk about the importance of understanding the value of time. They shared their experiences in discovering the value of time and what this journey entails. This is a transcribed draft of their talk.
It’s About Time

Farah: A sophomore and a super senior. An unlikely pair of friends. Time. An even more unlikely choice of topic. So, how'd we end up here?

Saad: Well, for starters, I wasn't even supposed to be here. I should’ve graduated last year and been at work right now maybe even halfway across the world. But time has a weird way of changing your plans for you. It's funny you say “super senior” …

Farah: It sounds cool, right? Like being at university for an extra year comes with superpowers or something.

Saad: The road to that title was much less glorious though. Two years ago, I failed a course, a course called Dynamics and Vibrations to be exact. It felt like my world was ending. My graduation was going to be delayed by a year. I would start a job a year later than all my friends. I would be frowned upon by the industry as someone who couldn’t finish engineering in four years. I would be considered a failure by everyone I knew. I was going to waste time, and this one setback would ruin my life. It's safe to say, I was exaggerating a bit.

Farah: Yeah, maybe a “bit.”

Saad: Anyway, all my fears, whether through personal or societal influence, had one common theme: time. As students and young professionals today, we constantly think in terms of how time is running out. Farah and I want to show you why a shift in our way of thinking is becoming more and more necessary.

Farah: You’ve heard it a million times. Time is precious. Time is valuable. Time is money. Time, time, time. And if you’ve come across any of these sentiments before, it’s more than likely that they’ve been followed by a tragic story of loss, near death experience, or terminal illness. Saad and I were talking about this a while back and stopped to wonder if maybe this was why so many people didn’t see how valuable time really is. Fortunately, in reality not everyone can relate to those stories.

Saad: And most people, including us, don't have PhDs in philosophy or any formal education involving the topic of time.

Farah: But you see, the thing is: we don't have to. Regular people like the two university students on stage right now can discover the value of embracing and taking time for thought, for personal development, for… life. Life has given each and every one of us the gift of time. Now, how you go about discovering it, well that can differ dramatically. While our experiences with time may not seem life-changing at first, the change in perspective that accompanies them most certainly is.
**Saad:** Your perspective on time and what you choose to invest it in is critical in defining the outcome of pretty much any situation. When it first hit me that I was going to be an undergraduate for an extra year, I considered dropping out for good, traveling to the U.S. to try and do the course earlier, and all kinds of other things. Not a single time did I look at my predicament as an opportunity. After many months of motivational YouTube videos and sleepless nights, I felt I was ready to make a fresh start, only to spiral back into the same old hole of misery, time and time again. Until one day, when I realized that the law of conservation energy applies to me just as much as it does to a spring.

**Farah:** Guess you’ve finally started to understand that Dynamics and Vibrations course, huh?

**Saad:** So I decided that I was going to spend less time and energy beating myself up over something that I had no control over, and truly begin investing that time and effort into my own personal development. So, what did I do? I decided to start my own company.

**Farah:** It might sound crazy, but knowing Saad, when he finds something he’s passionate about and sets his mind to it, he manages to invest his time in accomplishing even the most unrealistic ambitions. So, if he has an idea of a software that he thinks is missing in the healthcare industry, you can bet your bottom dollar he’s going to put his time into making it happen. And if everyone around him says it’s unrealistic, he’ll pursue it anyway.

**Saad:** Pursue it all the way to Italy. Yeah, one thing led to another and before I knew it, I was on a flight to Torino, Italy, to participate in the European Innovation Academy where I was lucky to meet like-minded individuals motivated to make an impact. So, we made it happen and started a company. From then on, my life took a positive turn and I started gaining self-confidence, and ever since then I have redefined how I look at my life and the role time plays in it.

**Farah:** I guess you could say Saad unintentionally discovered the value of time. But it doesn't always have to be that way; you can seek it out. I've always been a bit of an overachiever—

**Saad:** Yeah, maybe a “bit.”

**Farah:** Anyway, I often found myself biting off far more than I can chew and paying the price for it. When I was in 10th grade and eager to finish high school, I started thinking about university and how I'd have to work on being a competitive applicant. Soon enough I ended up dedicating almost all of my time to academics and, whatever time remained, I invested in extracurricular activities. IB courses were coming up in the next two years and the classes I would be enrolled in were demanding to say the least. “This is a great use of my
time,” I thought. “I’m really using my time to its fullest.” The thing is, I wasn’t. Yet anyone who knew me at that point would tell you that I was managing my time so well. But deep down I knew that valuing my time and investing time in myself, my happiness could prove to be far more beneficial than managing time the way I was managing it.

Saad: Absolutely. A lot of times, we, as students, tend to overwhelm ourselves with studies and ignore real learning opportunities. Does this sound well rounded? Does this sound fun? Does this sound healthy?

Farah: Not at all. Yet at a time when I had so much on my plate academically and was busier than ever, I said to myself, “You know what? I’m going to learn to play guitar.” Soon enough, I bought a cheap basic guitar, dragged it to my room, propped my laptop onto my bed and typed “beginner guitar basic first lesson” into YouTube. It hurt my fingers and I was no good at it, but you know what, it made me happy. I went to sleep knowing I’d have to do my homework during lunch time because I’d just spent two hours trying to learn this new instrument.

Saad: I mean, you can’t really expect to pick up a guitar without putting something else down.

Farah: Exactly. You know, my family and teachers might call it poor time management but to me, I knew that making this counterintuitive decision to invest some of my time into an activity that enriched my life would be better for me and be a better use of my time. Time looks a lot better when you invest it in your happiness. Maybe focusing on appreciating time and using it to better yourself, be it physically or mentally, is more important that what we’ve defined as “time management.” Now, I’m not saying studies aren’t important. I still invest a very large portion of my time into studying, but what I am saying is that we should be having the discussion about how much time we invest in only one dimension of ourselves because we are so convinced we are “wasting time” otherwise—which just isn’t true. Playing the guitar made me happy because it was a real way for me to de-stress and be creative at the same time.

Saad: Why do we even take so much pride in being busy? It’s like we wear it as a badge of honor. When we say we have “no time” for something, that means we are so busy at life we can’t possibly do anything other than, well, be busy. But busy doing what? And for whom? A real turning point in my life was when I realized that I had the responsibility to decide what and when something was important, not those I was surrounded by. You know, I’m currently the President of the Student Engineers’ Council at TAMUQ.

Farah: It’s one of the top student-led organizations at our university. It used to be well known for having loads of fun events.
Saad: But I’ve changed it up a little this year. When I was elected as President, the first thing I did was to sit down and assess the things this huge student organization spent its time on. I found that all the student organizations were hell bent on beating each other at doing the best event possible. But was it really worth the time? I’ve tried to transform the Student Engineers’ Council into an organization with a unique yet universal purpose: growth—using our time for a sustainable, forward moving council. Maybe building a planetarium for TAMUQ is a better investment than just another one-time social event that another organization would host anyway. Now this may seem like an irrelevant or insignificant example, but it enabled me to realize that in the end, you’re the best judge of how well you are spending your time. I think there’s an unmistakable feeling of contentment that comes with spending your time doing something you consider worthwhile.

Farah: Plus, in addition to changing our perspectives, our experiences in discovering the value of time have also come with other benefits, kind of like a “happy accident” or “a useful byproduct” (for all our STEM professionals in the audience). Personally, I’ve been able to really challenge myself to be open to failure, which I have found to be another word for learning opportunity. So, what if I spend 5 hours instead of 6 studying for a test? I’ve also met and connected with some terrific people outside of my classes or study groups where I can decompress from studying AND I made new friends like (and it kills me to say it) this guy right here. You know, he also plays guitar and joined the student organization I founded called the Aggie Music Organization where we bonded over a shared interest in music. That’s right, that moment that led me to realize surely time cannot just be about one thing drove me to start investing my time in playing guitar and then led to Texas A&M at Qatar getting a Music Organization! My time revelation was a win for the Aggies.

Saad: So, yeah, maybe investing your time in yourself is the most profitable investment you can make.

Farah: Absolutely.

Saad: And maybe being a super senior did come with superpowers after all.

Farah: It sure did.

Saad: And maybe you should fail a course too.

Farah: Yeah . . . wait . . . what?

Saad: The benefits are endless when you understand the value of time. You can control it, or you can let it control you. But is it really that simple? And does it need to be?
Farah: Not in our experience. Our relationship with time doesn’t need to be so bipolar, because it is important to acknowledge that time cannot be stopped, but the way we are affected by it, and the way we respond to it is something entirely within our control. It’s easy to say that time is working against you. With the exception of extreme cases, this is rarely ever true. We leave you with this: Life has given each of us the gift of time. Invest in bettering yourself and your personal relationships to really make this gift meaningful.

Farah Ramadan is a second-year chemical engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar. She’s the President of the Aggie Music Organization and was selected Student Leader of the Month in March 2019.

Saad Moazam graduated in 2019 with a degree in mechanical engineering from Texas A&M at Qatar. In his senior year, he was President of the Student Engineers’ Council and also served as the Project Manager of the Shell Eco Marathon team.
Chapter 3
Belonging
The final sentence of this essay, “Unlike everyone who has a country to live in, we have a country that lives within us,” is what made me write this piece. It is what made me wonder about the reason behind my being here in Qatar instead of there in my mother country, in Palestine. A piece where I tried to translate all my feelings into words, where I knitted a story behind a “What if” question, where my dreams and pains were all unleashed. This is not just my story as a Palestinian, but it is the story of my Syrian brother, Iraqi sister, Yemeni cousin. This is the story of all Arabs who were forced to live a life that they did not have the chance to decide how it looks like: They do not have the chance to plan for a brighter future.
I have always wondered, “What if I was not here but there?” What would my life look like? What if I was born and raised in my mother country just as most everyone else? Would I still be the same person that I am today? Would I have the same passion and love for Palestine that I have now? Thousands of questions pop up in my head, but the question that pours salt into my open wound is this: What if Palestine was not occupied? This single question can unleash dreams and pains of Palestinians strewn around the world. Occupation is what made me move here instead of there; it is why hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are not there but scattered across a collection of countries.

I am not there because of the series of wars, injustices, poverty and loss that are happening every day in Palestine. I am not there because living safely was preferred over living under a storm of bombs. I did not get the chance to choose; my life was sentenced with expatriation from the day I was born. I was born into the hands of a family who has Palestine as a priority, a family who knows that our life is always on the edge. I was raised by a father who spent his life assuring us that we are capable to be the generation which Palestine is waiting for, and a mother who gave me and my siblings all she has from knowledge about the country that we have never seen. But, I also grew up in a country where I deeply know that I don't belong. However, being taught in a Palestinian school made my coping easier: I cannot deny that it helped me adapt to this displacement, but it will never make me give up finding a way back to my mother country.

People say it is impossible; they gave up on Palestine, they gave up on the cause that matters the most. They say that elders will die, and the younger will forget, but it seems like we Palestinians will never forget and will never give up; how could someone give up finding a way to return back home? They said a lot, and maybe they will never stop, but when it comes to Palestine, I never believe in what they say. Instead, I believe in my own dreams about freedom, the freedom which will allow every Palestinian to go back to the place where they always dreamed of living, allowing them to touch the holy land which they are forbidden to visit. I am talking about a freedom that will allow every Palestinian to be honored by praying in Al-Aqsa mosque and the Church of the Nativity for the first time in their lives. This freedom is not a gift; it is a right that we are banned from. Freedom is all I have dreamed of and wished for, knitting a story in my head about the day when Palestine will welcome everyone with open arms. I have spent many nights dreaming about all the changes that could happen if Palestine were not occupied.

If Palestine were not occupied, we Palestinians will not be standing at the edge of the Dead Sea from Jordan’s shoreline to steal a glimpse of the neighboring land, our forbidden home. If it were not occupied, there will not be refugees nor more than 60 Palestinian camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and elsewhere around the world. There will not be people whose only wish is to see the country where
everyone except them else can easily enter. There would not be a bloody history that has more than one catastrophe each month. We would have a Palestinian national airline whose planes would have embroidered wings; we would have buses to transport people from Jerusalem and Yafa to Beirut and Damascus. If I were there, I would be deciding whether I should live in Akka or Jericho. I would have the chance to choose to get my masters degree from a university in Yafa, the possibility of getting a job in Haifa, and in the holidays I would visit my family in Gaza. If Palestine was not occupied, poets would have nothing to write about except love and peace, journalists would not run around in bulletproof vests with helmets and cameras, and news channels would no longer have anything shocking to report.

If Palestine was not occupied, we would have the longest dabkeh row, a row that stretches from the river to the sea, and since we love setting Guinness records, we would definitely make this our proud accomplishment.

If Palestine was not occupied, we would not be carrying medals and necklaces that have Handala on them; Naji Al-Ali may not even draw him, or maybe he would, but in his drawing Handala would not be turning his back to us, his hands would not be clasped behind his back, and he would not stand barefooted. Instead, he would be happily looking at us. We would finally see his face, the pride streaming through his eyes as he carries our flag in one hand and raises his other to show the victory sign.

I am not there because my life was also occupied before I even got to open my eyes to the world. My life lost its freedom, and I grew up as a stranger in a completely different country. If we Palestinians were there, a lot of things that happened would not have had the chance to happen. I do not think I would be here in Qatar, in this specific university; I don’t think that I would have to write this piece and spill out all these feelings. I may not even exist because my grandparents would not have had to leave Palestine and my parents would not have had the chance to meet here in Qatar. But this life has taken the winds out of our sails since nothing went as planned. Our lives are not taken into consideration anymore, our martyrs and prisoners are nothing but numbers recorded in history books.

But we did not give up, and we never will. Maybe some of us have died, but they have transferred the message of freedom and right of return to those who are still alive, and this message will be passed on to those who are not born yet, moving from one generation to another until we and our forbidden home gain back the freedom we deserve. Until then, we will continue being unlike everyone who has a country to live in, for we have a country that lives within us.

Rand Alagha is a Palestinian Aggie who was born and raised in Qatar. She is a petroleum engineering sophomore, Class of 2022.
It is commonly perceived in the Arab region that international private schools are for the elite who could afford it and that these schools represent high academic stature. The following research paper examines this phenomenon in the Egyptian society. It explains how this mindset was implanted by the British and their motives for promoting their curriculum.
International Private Schools and the Egyptian Identity: A Phenomenon That Resonates Across the Arab Region

Egypt was once a destination for eager students seeking renowned education. However, this has drastically changed during the past half century due to the deteriorating quality of national educational programs offered by the country. This is where international private schools play a part. Egyptians who can afford such schools prefer to enroll their children in English-medium private schools under the name of better and certified curricula while knowingly risking the loss of these children's identity. The majority of these schools implement British curricula that utterly disregard the identity of the Egyptian student. The British, former colonizers of Egypt, targeted the elite community of the Egyptian society to establish cultural hegemony. Identity is the product of various complex factors. Language constitutes a major proportion of identity since it serves as the cultural vessel of a society. The process of identity formation begins from an early stage. The child is vulnerable and malleable meaning that the identity formed, be it created or imposed, could be shaped easily at this stage. The most influential and powerful controlled environment that has a great impact on shaping a student's identity is school. Identity formation in the context of school is closely tied to the language used as the medium of instruction. The identity of Egyptian students in international private schools is threatened by the excessive use of English. These schools serve the new imperialist approach of the British to destroy the Egyptian cultural identity through language.

Egypt's case is not one of a kind. The detrimental effect of weakening and to an extent eradicating indigenous people's cultural identity through the penetration of language is demonstrated in the case of colonized Algeria. Algeria is an ideal example for the study of the "language of the civilizing nation." When people acquire their colonizer's language, they conform to their colonizer's culture which greatly facilitates in the process of forcing the people into a hybrid, imposed identity. And as Fanon vividly describes the situation, "Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of his local cultural originality—finds himself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation, that is with the culture of the mother country" (17-18).

The French had a goal of not only political domination and economic exploitation but the elimination of Algerian culture. Colonial France established a host of administrative institutions to rule beyond its borders. The French powers presented themselves to the “barbaric” indigenous people as the carriers of science and progress. In other words, the agents of civilization. Their attempts of controlling the society were most visible in the field of education. They denied the Algerian his cultural identity through controlling the language, education programs, and methods of instruction. This revealed the most destructive aspect of the colonialist policy. Jules Ferry, Minister of Public Instruction in the 1880s, believed that the school was to be the most pacific and effective tool for
transforming a society and evoked the idea of the progressive “civilization” of the school through the teaching of the French language to the indigenous people. This prompted a whole new direction in education, resulting in a restructuring of the Algerian school along French lines and the eradication of the Arabic and Islamic roots of the conquered land in order to produce a human free from culture, and therefore easy to manipulate. Despite all efforts, the Arabic language was weakened and gradually lost its prestige (Maamri 2-3). As a result, within about a generation a new class of well-educated Algerians emerged. This privileged group was so deeply saturated by French culture that a new Algerian self-consciousness evolved.

The same ideology is being applied in the case of Egypt today through English-medium schools that weaken the Arabic language and culture of the students by creating internal conflicts and insecurities towards the students’ national identity. Language is not simply a medium of communication, but it is the repository of a cultural tradition; it is a way of living and an assertion that conveys a sense of identity upon its native-speakers. According to Fanon, speaking one's language, “means to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization […] a man who has language […] possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. Mastery of language allows remarkable power” (17-18).

It has been engrained in the Egyptian people’s perception of education that English-medium schools are of high academic stature. The number of languages offered in a school is linked to the quality of implementation of these languages and to the tuition value of the school. Four types of schools are found in Egypt: private, public, embassy schools, and national institutions (ElMeshad). International private schools in Egypt have become a primary choice by elite Egyptian parents. These schools follow a special curriculum for accreditation by international systems (ElMeshad). Parents prefer English and French-medium private schools due to the benefits of the high quality of education offered which increases the student’s competence in future job opportunities. This coincides with the fact that the Egyptian national education system is deteriorating. The students enrolled in private schools are mostly members of the elite community of Egypt since they are the ones who can afford to enroll their children in such schools that often charge hefty prices. Although the elite community does not constitute a large percentage of the Egyptian population, the total is still hundreds of thousands of students under study. It has become a prevalent phenomenon that the students in the context of English-medium schools use the English language excessively compared to their limited use of Arabic.

Social and economic class also affects the identity of language learners (Khatib 202). The students of English-medium schools often come from a specific class in the Egyptian community. That is to say, their parents and families have enough money and represent high social status in the society. “Although identity is conditioned by social interaction and social structures, it conditions social
interaction and social structures at the same time. It is, in short, constitutive of and constituted by the social environment” (Block 866). These students most likely share similar beliefs and attitudes towards English language acquisition. They establish their own community in which they interact in most social affairs in English with peers, siblings, teachers and sometimes parents who use English solely. Regardless of the fact that Arabic is the dominant language in their community, the higher socio-economic level of these students plays a role in detaching them from the surrounding Arabic-speaking community. In fact, they may not feel the need to interact with Arabic speakers entirely. Albeit the small number of children in this context compared to the Egyptian population, they are still an integral part of the society and their preservation of Arabic and the Egyptian culture is crucial for the continued socio-cultural development of the nation.

As mentioned earlier, these students established their own community where English serves as the dominant language of interaction. Arabic is therefore threatened by the excessive use of English. Language and culture are inextricably linked and, therefore, are meaningless if separated from each other. Identity is embedded in culture and language. There exists an intrinsic relationship between language, culture, and identity. Language is indeed the means to express an individual’s culture and identity (Leveridge). In this context, Arabic constitutes the cultural heritage that must be maintained in order for these students to preserve their identities as Egyptians. This leads to the need to examine the reasons why English has become so dominant to the extent that the students neglect Arabic, their native language.

English has become a world language and it is in many respects hegemonic. In other words, to become part of the world economy and to gain benefits of science advances, one must acquire the English Language (Gunderson 694). The process of globalization is growing rapidly alongside the spread of English. According to Graddol, there will be two billion people speaking or learning the English language within a decade. This is roughly 20% of the world’s population (9). Gunderson’s remark on the global stance towards the English language and the advantages of learning it is strongly evident in the Egyptians’ perception in acquiring the language. This attitude towards the language is a factor of colonization from when the British occupied Egypt. Language is the instrument of domination (Schiller 89-90).

The high profile that the English language managed to establish over the years has greatly raised the number of people seeking to acquire it. This number is increasing rapidly regarding children learning English at an early age (Graddol 100). This highly noticeable surge in the demand to learn the language can be attributed to the “international posture” of English in which it is defined as the will to work abroad, to communicate with people outside one’s nation and for international business purposes (Yashima 57). This could justify the drive of Egyptian parents to choose English-medium private schools over the ones
who teach the national curriculum. They want to reap the benefits of acquiring this language that seems to be the gateway to success and fruitful employment. English simply motivates the students to learn because they know that they have a greater chance of gaining the product of their efforts.

This phenomenon is a form of cultural hegemony. This elite community of students whom are educated in elite educational institutions are the ruling class. Gramsci developed his concept of cultural hegemony out of Karl Marx’s theory which states that the dominant ideology of society reflects the beliefs and interests of the ruling class. He argued that the consent of the people to the rule of the dominant group is accomplished by the spread of ideologies through social institutions such as the schools and the media. The latter institutions socialize the people into the norms, beliefs, and values of the dominant group. Hence, the group that runs these institutions controls the rest of society. There exists an international structure of power which has forced almost all societies into the current global system. A specific class is selected and is then provided with privileges such as better education, financial facilities, and connections with international networks. It is then pressured in an organized way to establish an internal cultural hegemony consistent with that of the global system (Schiller 71-73). The English-medium international private schools were implemented by the west (Britain and France) to force the Egyptian society into this form of cultural hegemony. By de-structuring the Egyptians’ elite and dominant class identity, they gain control over the whole society.

Egypt was under the British colonial rule for a period of seventy years. But even after their departure, they made sure they still had the people under their control. They penetrated the society’s culture through the weakening of language. They built schools that implemented the English language as the main medium of instruction which threatened the use and knowledge of the Arabic language. They are fully aware of the intrinsic relationship between language, culture, and identity. They used this closely-tied relationship to confuse the emerging generation about their identity and to build a false sense of belonging. The students walk in the classroom with their own identity. When acquiring the second language, they are confused and must absorb the culture and identity of that language. This is where the conflict of identity arises. As a result of the excessive attention given to the second language by the parents, the media and the school, the students begin to form a positive attitude towards the second language while building a negative one towards their mother tongue.

In a bilingual context, students who reject the identity of their language try to distance themselves from the community that speaks that language. In other words, they speak the language of the identity group that they have a positive attitude towards (Bucholtz 209, 212). Cultural identity is a complex term to define since it is not only based on ethnicity. Actually, sometimes people identify themselves with various cultures when they don't speak that culture’s language. However, in the process of acquiring a language, the concept of cultural identity
is crucial in the examination of the learning process and the language’s effect on the student’s culture. That is mainly because language, beginning at an early age, is the key constituent of identity formation of an individual (Weedon 97).

The revival, maintenance, deterioration and even death of a language depends on the attitudes of its holders towards it. Most importantly, the value and status of the Arabic language is also determined by the attitude of its people towards it. The students in these English-medium schools have a negative view of their language. Consequently, they try to associate themselves with the members of stronger group which are the west—the British. The British today represent power and global political and economic dominance. Arabic represents the third world, and this is why it is neglected in favor of English in international schools.

This elite class is so highly saturated in western culture that they form a new identity to themselves and assume a different level of self-consciousness. Unfortunately, this class controls the media and the pillars of the Egyptian society. The notion that acquiring English means superiority is deeply engraved in the beliefs of Egyptians. This creates the ongoing identity conflict of trying to imitate the stronger and much more powerful culture of the English language while struggling to escape one’s national identity by denying one’s native language. By giving birth to this new imposed identity on Egypt’s elite class, the British managed to gain access to controlling the rest of the society’s ideologies and identity.

In conclusion, the British penetrated the Egyptian community’s cultural identity through the implementation of English-medium private schools that can only be afforded by the elite class to establish cultural hegemony. These Egyptian students form a complex identity full of insecurities towards their native language which is the cultural vessel of their society.
References


Sarah Morshed is a cross-registered student at Texas A&M at Qatar majoring in computer engineering at HBKU. She loves how her degree enables her to spend valuable time and experience college life at multiple universities. She moved to Qatar in 2010, therefore, half of her childhood was back home in Egypt. This impacted her perspective towards life since it was a merge between her time in Egypt and her upbringing here in a culturally diverse community in Qatar.
I wrote this piece for an English 104 assignment. In this short essay, I commemorate the three "globes" that shaped my life in a quintessential way.
The Globes

It’s always the little unexpected things that send you off on directions you may have never thought of. I owe many of the decisions I have made throughout my life to a handful of dazzling days, days that are ascribed in my memory’s vaults. As a child I have had many memorable experiences, ones that eventually shaped my life and gave it its current form and structure. Looking back in time evokes many poignant memories, ones that seem like a bright beacon amidst the turbulent fluxions and fluxes of our lives . . .

It was a wintry December day with fog already building up, rather alarming since we had a flight scheduled later in the day. We hastily packed our belongings and rushed to the airport. It was a long trip to the airport. I was fairly worried; I had never been on an airplane before. What was it like? I wondered. I was excited, but equally anxious. Terrible visions filled my head, thanks to an episode of Nat Geo’s Air Disasters Investigations that I had watched a couple of days prior to the flight, behind the backs of my parents who thought that any fourth grader is too young to see such terrible things. My anxiety levels peaked once we boarded the airplane. I sat beside the window, and there was the wing sitting right beside me. Why is that a problem? Well, the darn thing kept shaking and that Air Disasters Investigations episode kept popping back and forth in my head. Eventually, after 30 minutes of stressing, the plane took off. Lo! I said, it was an exhilarating sensation. The ever accelerating plane engaged my heart. Upon reaching peak altitude, my mind was torn apart or in more colloquial terms, “It blew my little childish mind.” I had never experienced anything more moving and awe inspiring than the very first glimpse that I had of lady Earth from 3000 ft. For the next three hours I did absolutely nothing other than behold the sheer beauty of the view. Finally, the flight cruised over the City of Doha. I had never seen towers before, let alone through the clouds. It was a captivating sight to behold– unmatched, unparalleled. I could not stop thinking about what I had experienced on that flight for months to come. I made a pact with myself one night; I would one day become someone capable of constructing such a great machine- a great marvel and an instrument of awe in my eyes.

Perhaps it was that mid-air experience that propelled me unto the avenue of engineering, yet I can’t help recalling another day that left me with an array of indelible memories: the day I had my first acquaintance with what I like to refer to as the globe of bewilderment! A plasma globe, a little sphere that overwhelmed me with wonder and amazement. To me it seemed like a whole universe enclosed in an orb. Surely that’s nothing but the fantastical imagination of a child, yet again in my eyes, the little tiny iridescent tendrils of that magical sphere evoked in me a sense of boundless reverence. It inspired me to learn more, hoping that one day the clouds that clothed its secrets may part.

I still very distinctly recall the day on which I figured it all out. It was a typical 6th grade afternoon science class. “Noble Gases,” I read on top of the page. The
name looked rather interesting, but I never thought to myself that it would be the key I needed to remove the clunky chains that locked my understanding to a narrow vault. As we progressed through the class, I heard my teacher utter, “Noble gases when exposed to great electrical potential difference tend to glow and form little shiny spikes.” The gears started turning, the clouds were parting, the chains unraveling; “That’s it,” I said to myself in a low voice, fearing that my ecstasy and delight would draw the attention of my classmates and put me in an embarrassing position I was already known as the “Weird kid” amongst many of my classmates, the one who is always intrigued by the slightest and most futile of things; had my great “sense of discovery” been revealed, I would have become an even bigger “weirdo.” Science classes were rather boring for most students, so enjoying them was a rare oddity. They were just to my taste however; only during those few cherished hours can I have my “peculiar curiosities” come to life. I still had that scar on my left forearm from my nighttime experiments with wires and batteries, my arduous attempts to create the luminary that lights our nights- a light bulb. It worked; I came up with a mess of wires and batteries that could hold a spark light for a few seconds, and I was filled to the brim with childish pleasure and pride. I ran down stairs to show off what I put together to my parents, but I tripped and one of the naked wires strapped around my arm burned my skin.

Alas, I was put under the watchful supervision of my mom from there on. I never got to “Invent” things again, as I thought of myself—a lofty way to put it for a child barely past the age of ten. Although I can’t deny that perhaps my curiosity was a bit extreme, at the end of the day what killed the cat? Nonetheless, those moments reminiscent of Archimedes’ legendary “Eureka! Eureka!” shrieks of discover taught me the value of learning, persevering, and questioning until arriving at a reasonable conclusion. I can’t but stress how those three Globes directed my life towards certain avenues. The Globe that is our magnificent Earth showed me gorgeousness of unmatched splendor. The Light bulb taught me the true weight of being unrelenting and perseverant. The plasma Globe unfolded before me a series of seemingly unanswerable questions and had me search for an answer in a misty sea of possibilities until in due course I arrived at a solution. Those were all mentors to me, ones that despite their apparent dullness to many intrigued me with their inestimable qualities.

I was driven to the conclusion that I ought to become someone capable of constructing such great wonders, an engineer. They say, “Everything you see out of the window is either made by God or an Engineer.” That, to me, seemed a very pleasurable faculty to have. Perchance one day I will forge something that will carry my name beyond the limits of time—even unto immortality! Or as William Shakespeare concluded his 18th sonnet: “When in eternal lines to time thou growest, so as long as men can breathe or eyes can see, so long lives this and this gives life to thee.” Perhaps not so incidentally Shakespeare, my favorite poet, worked at the GLOBE theatre.
Ahmed is a mechanical engineering sophomore at Texas A&M at Qatar. He was born in Alexandria, Egypt, and moved to Doha, Qatar, at a young age and has been living here ever since. His hobbies are listening to music, reading, and doing nothing.
Young Taste

Dark times indeed. How hard times were back then in the 20th century. The sky was gray, and the oceans were cruel as they pushed the ships side to side, violently shaking them. Even the clouds themselves were too gloomy to pour rain onto the lands and feed the malnourished plants. We kids were kicking the puddles left from the neighbor’s hose running for too long, hoping this could bring out our enthusiasm, but alas, such wouldn’t happen. My eyes darted off to the sound of soil being hoed, and there in her abaya was my mother.

She stood hunched over reaching for the carrots on the other side of the lane, carefully pushing them further into the soil. I ran over to get my pink polka-dotted water bucket so I could pour some water on the thirsty and malnourished veggies. I could picture the lettuce hopping around gleefully, the potatoes clapping and the tomatoes “ring a ring a rosing” to the splash of water which would bring forth life within them at last. “Not too much habeebty,” my mother exclaimed. “You want to make sure each of them gets the same amount, so they don’t feel left out. Now come along for lunch.” She dropped her hoe to the side and grasped my hand with a strong but caring hold, escorting me into the house. I proceeded to sit on the floor covered by a massive white table cloth, anxious to see what mother would cook up this time. Some fataayir maybe? Or how about some molokhia or even my personal favorite: hamour fish.

A waft of spices fills the air with a strong but fragrant smell; it’s as if my nose was being hugged from all sides, not knowing which spice sticks out more. Mama reached for small bowls with different colored powders which she sprinkles at times and just pours at others. Every time one of the powders is added, the fire gets stronger or the steam given off gets more intense; I get worried that these reactions might hurt Mama. But before I could get up and check on her, she turned around with the bowl in her hand with a giant piece of what looks to be meat. “It’s lamb, it’s really good for you,” my mother says with a smile on her face. “I know you never tried it, but I hope you will like it.” Knowing I never dislike my mom’s cooking (as no one ever does to their own mother), I dug in full force. My tongue was immediately met with flavors to which I had yet to experience. Sour, sweet, salty and spicy swirled in my mind. The aromas filled my nose and boggled my senses, leaving me to accept defeat and let my stomach take over. I should’ve asked how she did it, but I didn’t.

That was 15 years ago, and now that I just entered the early stages of marriage, there was only one thing holding me back: I didn’t know how to cook. All those years of eating my mom’s cooking, never once did I ask her how she made it or how’d she learn it. Worry was on my back and it was weighing me down. I needed to know where the weight racks were and fast. Sooner or later my kids would grow up knowing their mother couldn’t cook which was something all mothers should know how to do, right?
So, I practiced, and practiced and burned things and froze things. Overcooked things and left things raw. Spoiled things and left things to thaw. Day in and night out, I would grunt and pout. My husband would walk in seeing me stressed out and pour me some chai or Arabic coffee. Stainless steels pans would crash, dishes would smash, and fire alarms would go off. Mama would visit to the sound of screams and shrieks while my husband would continue reading his newspaper, a daily routine he had no intention of interrupting. He knew that his interfering would only cause more pain than good. But after much sweat and tears, I baked my first cake, I roasted my first streak, I put together pieces of raw ingredients, herbs and spices into dishes my husband would come home early to get a taste of.

“Mashallah”—that word showed me that I had made it. The roadblock had been removed, the ribbon was cut, and the company was running. The sun rose as I peered at my clock, “5:31,” it said. I fell to the floor, gasping for fresh air and resting my head against the counter. My husband walked over and handed me my coffee, kissed my forehead, and headed off to his morning prayer.

Up until to this day, nothing made me prouder of my work more than my children coming home from school which was a few kilometers away or from university a thousand kilometers away to get together, laugh and talk about the other’s day over great food. God bless you mother, for providing me with your prayers throughout my struggles and for laying the foundation of cooking which has become a part of me. An “art” of mine. I shall continue to further elaborate on my dishes bringing out different reactions from my children’s faces and hope that one day, my hard work wouldn’t be in vain.
Through writing this piece I learned that my childhood was different than others. I grew up believing that I am a normal kid who enjoys video games, but my childhood was different considering I had lost something so precious to me at a young age. Challenges I overcame to write this piece include connecting my emotions with my past self and remembering all the time spent with Saad.
Phenomenal

Before fifth grade, I was always trying to “fit in,” and I would change and lose focus of who I wanted to be just to “fit in,” like most kids my age. In school, I’d misbehave, be as obnoxious as possible and seek attention from those around me, but that was not Hamad, that was some “character” developed by people surrounding me. This character had no ambitions, dreams nor hope. This character forged his personality and hobbies, but most importantly I would hide my avid love for cartoons and anime believing that it would ruin the image I had been trying to build as one of the “Cool Kids.” When I got back from school each day, I started watching anime from my father’s work laptop which he rarely used. The only reason I started wearing prescription glasses is that I binge-watched an anime called One Piece which had around 500 episodes at that time. I hid that, too, which was not smart of me, hiding something that made me different. When my classmates asked me why I wore my glasses, the answer was far away from the truth. Being different is what this younger Hamad was missing. It wasn’t until a cousin of mine named Saad became a cancer patient, serving as the catalyst that helped awaken my eyes and discover my soul and most importantly, become myself.

After every school day, I’d have lunch with my family, then run up the stairs to the living room and have my hands on the laptop to watch one episode. If my mother had enough of me sitting in the living room, she would take my father’s laptop away from me, so immediately I started running towards the door, and my mom stopped me every time. She knew why she wanted to stop me, but being young and dumb, I couldn’t notice anything wrong. Everything that was going on in that family, I still couldn’t notice. How would parents react if they had a child in high school that was diagnosed with cancer? I bet it was traumatizing for Saad’s parents and my mother being the aunt of that child. It was so ignorant of me to just rampage through the door of their house wanting to play, not knowing anything of what had happened. I would go to my uncle’s house to play with Fahad and Saad, the two brothers who made my childhood. Fahad and I would either be playing hide and seek or playing flash games on their computer. If Saad was available, he joined us. I really enjoyed his presence with us. Saad would always comment on how Fahad and I played video games, making jokes on how bad we were. Whenever we played hide and seek with Saad, if he was about to catch me, he would turn around and run towards Fahad. I took it as something special to me as he wanted me to enjoy my time with him, and I felt that I was different to Saad. Even though people Saad’s age would normally make fun of him for playing with us kids, it didn’t matter to him; he would do whatever he wants as long as it’s enjoyable to him and people around him and that made him different. Every time he was unavailable, I’d be confused, wondering what he was doing. He didn’t have school, being fifteen years old, I’d imagine him not having any responsibilities. I thought that there was nothing wrong with Saad as all my memories of him were positive, even being a cancer
patient, with no school, and no worries from the way he smiled. Usually, people with cancer looked anxious or depressed, but Saad wasn't like that. He was phenomenal.

As time passed, Saad's sickness got worse, his father decided to treat Saad's illness in Hamburg, Germany. Back in 2009, Qatar didn't have the technology and the professionalism in hospitals as it does in 2018, so Saad had to leave his household. Without understanding their situation, I was saddened to see Saad go because it meant that Saad wouldn't be able to play with Fahad and me. His parents had to travel back and forth to Germany to accompany Saad, so his mom had to quit her job as it was difficult to handle, having a family and a child that's being treated out of the country. My mother and I decided to visit Saad in the hospital where he was being treated. He still had the same smile he had even going through a tough phase in his life.

One day, after school, Fahad and I were in his room where all his games were and we continued to play, not knowing anything of what would happen that day until we saw his mother crying. Fahad went on to question his mother, and she came up with a fake story on how a needle got into her foot. Fahad and I saw it as a temporary sadness; we did not know that at this moment, a mother has lost her child. Later on that day we saw my mother with a look of sadness in her face when she was with Saad's mother, standing with her. I saw it as an act of help because of the needle that got in her foot and helped her treat the pain, but I started to doubt that there was a needle in her foot because there were no bandages, medicines, or other signs of her foot being treated. I began to worry and think about what could’ve happened to her. It seemed to me that Fahad was also unaware of the fact that Saad has passed away. My mother had to ask us to go somewhere else other than their household, saying this in a different tone, a tone I had never heard before. Fahad and I decided to go to my place where we began to wonder on why his mother wasn't bleeding or why there didn't seem to be anything wrong with her leg. We both looked demoralized as we couldn't figure out that something worse had happened. After we both got bored from doing nothing at my place, we went back to Fahad's house, where Saad had lived. We came back to a setting that is impossible to forget, all the family members were sitting together, mourning Saad's death, but us younger ones still didn't know anything, not Saad's death nor his sickness. There was tension in the living room downstairs, the air felt heavy with dread and grief, and all were quiet. We went upstairs where we found his mother still crying, mourning Saad's death. Fahad and I immediately exchanged glances and decided not to disrupt a grieving mother, but we confirmed the doubt we had that it wasn't a needle in her foot; it was something severe.

After that, Fahad’s sister separated us and asked me to leave. I returned back to my house across the street. I walked with my head down, thinking of what could’ve happened. It didn't come to my mind that Saad his died. After going back home, I overheard a conversation between my sisters about how the
ambulance arrived at my uncle's house and my uncle was talking to the nurses in the ambulance. I was flabbergasted to hear that Saad has passed away. The news couldn't come to my senses. The one person I looked up to has died. He had accepted how cancer changed his life and had continued to smile. I still couldn't allow it. I went on to tell Fahad about what happened, only to find him crying in his room. I was at a loss of words, and couldn't speak with Fahad as he had lost something so precious to him. I decided to leave him for the day and go on to pray at the mosque, shedding my tears of sadness for Saad.

I have always looked up to Saad because of how he had accepted that he is different. I needed an example of a person who swam against the tide, and it was him. He helped me discover myself as a person and overcome this “character” that I had created. After Saad's death I understood more about life and why it's wrong to be someone else. You can lose people who are precious and people who play an important role in life. Nothing lasts forever, so enjoy every moment of your life to the fullest. Negativity is unsuitable for people's lives; being positive and optimistic is what Saad was best at. I couldn't imagine myself going through what Saad went through and still smiling at the end. The lessons I learned from Saad are valuable to me, teaching me how I should be my best self and not change my personality for the sake of other people, allowing me to smile whenever life pushes me down. I'm grateful for Saad's ability to stay positive during his times with cancer.

This is to you, Saad.

Hamad is a mechanical engineering freshman at Texas A&M at Qatar. He is 17 years old, and was born and raised in Qatar. A passionate video gamer from a very young age, Hamad is an avid believer of Esports and its future. The Warcraft series is one of his all-time favorite video games.
In my ENGL 104 course, we were asked to do a research about a community we chose. I chose anime as my topic of interest as I’m a huge anime fan and thought it would be fun collecting information about the popularity of anime in Qatar. Through my research, I had a hard time getting information from sources about anime in the Gulf region. Therefore, I conducted a survey in Texas A&M at Qatar about the impact of anime in Qatar. From the collected results I was able to come up with this amazing research paper that talks about the effect of anime in Arabic region.
Anime Soft Power in the Arab Region

Research has shown that anime is a universal phenomenon [2]. The popularity of anime in the western part of the world began in 1963 [1]. For example, an anime with the name of Tetsuwan Atom (famously known as Astro Boy) made a lot of success in the sixties in the US [1]. It caused other Japanese animations to reach the west [1]. The first anime series targeted children, but some anime companies at that time made huge mistakes by aggressively adding violent and inappropriate content in shows meant to be for children. That changed the public concept of anime and thus made a huge drawback in its reputation [1]. Despite those issues, according to an article from Menafn newswire, in the 90s animes had a rise in their popularity and merchandise due to anime/manga becoming a big market to invest in; that resulted in anime popularity still skyrocketing in the present [1] [3]. That popularity resulted in the anime finding its way to the Middle East. The question is how anime became popular in the Arabic region, considering that there exist large differences between the Arabic and the Japanese cultures. This study aims to answer this question through interviews and survey analysis of the Arabic society and with references to other studies and sources. With my findings, I was able to understand the rise of anime popularity and the Japanese influence in the Arabic region regardless of culture difference between Arabic and Japanese nations.

Anime and Soft Power

Joseph Nye Jr, an American political scientist, defined power as the ability to influence the behaviors of others to get a desired outcome. He categorized it into two types: hard and soft power. Hard power happens when a country uses its military and economic power to force other nations to cooperate. On the other hand, soft power is the opposite of hard power. It’s defined as the ability to influence social and public opinions through showing cultures, traditions and powerful political and non-political organizations [5]. An example of soft power is the advertisement of some merchandise between shows that attracts the audience to purchase a product. I found out through my research methods that anime can be considered as a soft power, because it helps attract people toward Japan and its culture. From my perspective, I think Japan is very advanced country in technology. For example, Japan has many great companies well known worldwide like Samsung, Sony, Nintendo and Toshiba. This can be a Japanese soft power as it seems to the eye of many people that Japan is a very futuristic country.

The First Method: Interview

This project is for my English 104 course. I have been asked to do a research about a community, and my choice was the anime community. Anime is Japanese animated shows that got popular worldwide. Therefore, I created some questions to ask TAMUQ students about anime and how they think anime became popular here in Qatar. I used the answers that my interviewees provided to explain the public opinion on how anime became popular.
Mikasa and Bubbles are not the real names of my interviewees, but I will keep them anonymous throughout my research. I met both Mikasa and Bubbles in a prep program, where Mikasa was a high school student who volunteered in the program as an instructor, and Bubbles, like me, enrolled in this program to prepare us for university math. However, I knew Mikasa at the prep program because we used to chat a lot and play bowling. Nevertheless, I got to know Bubbles more when we entered our first semester. We chatted about different topics. I chose to interview Mikasa because she told me once that she knows about anime, but I picked Bubbles randomly. I didn’t know that she knew about anime which was surprising for me and made my interviews more interesting.

To start with, I asked Mikasa and Bubbles about their opinions on how anime became so popular in Qatar. From Mikasa’s perspective, anime is in every child's household. The majority of kids in Qatar grew up watching a kid's TV channel called Space Toon. This channel translates (dubs) Japanese anime shows into Arabic. This experience was also backed up by Bubbles. I was surprised that they both related anime to the cartoons we used to watch as kids. Furthermore, according to an interview in the Gulf-Times with Qatari artist Kholoud Al-Ali, she said, “my generation witnessed the height of anime’s popularity where children love to watch their favorite shows and characters on national television” [4]. I think it is amazing how the translated (dubbed) shows made us continue watching them even as we became teenagers or adolescents. I believe the reason why many people still watch anime is that it attracts them with the diversity of plots and how these drawings play a major role in this attraction. Moreover, it is another kind of entertainment like the TV shows but animated. Additionally, Kholoud al-Ali described the growth of the anime community in her interview in Gulf-Times: “It is very famous here, but when I was young I thought I was the only one who’s obsessed with anime, but when I grew up I found out that the community in Doha is huge” [4]. What I understood from my interviews and sources is that most people in Qatar are still fond of anime as adults, due to the exposure in childhood.

Then I asked some questions about the influence of watching anime on our culture. Bubbles and Mikasa both told me that they would like to go to Japan and see whether the culture that is presented by anime is the same in real life. They would also like to try the Japanese noodles which, to be honest, I would like to try, too. In addition, Bubbles said that she is interested in learning the Japanese language because she wants to watch anime series without any translation (subtitles). However, Mikasa isn't intrigued to learn Japanese due to her belief that Japanese is a hard language to learn. I went deeper with my questions and asked them about what they would like to do in Japan. Mikasa showed excitement about visiting Akihabara, where she can buy manga (similar to comics). Nevertheless, Bubbles wants to go to Japan so she can learn more about their culture like how they eat, talk and dress, because she was impressed by the way the culture is shown on anime. Similarly, I share the same feelings about visiting Japan but for a different reason. I want to travel to Japan because
I want to play their version of arcade that seems a lot more fun. At this point, I can see the effect of soft power of anime is noticeable on Mikasa and Bubbles as they showed an interest in knowing more about the Japanese culture. This may be because anime producers made their culture more appealing in the eyes of viewers: for example, in anime they represent their food with some kind of aura around it with hot smoky steam that comes out of the food. I also like the way they dress up in bright colors and talk with each other with respect. Those effects have made people like Mikasa and Bubbles interested in buying anime products or even a ticket to visit Japan.

Nevertheless, does anime soft power have some consequences? The answer is yes, as fans can experience this soft power while watching anime because everything that relates to Japan or the Japanese culture looks spectacular. Anime doesn’t show the full image of Japan as it’s generally known that all places have good and bad things about them. On the other hand, anime could change the behavior of the viewers positively or negatively. For example, if an anime shows the good Japanese tradition like how they respect the older and give them everything with two hands, the viewer might start doing similar things on their behalf. A study on children watching anime showed that they increased in social relations with others, communicated well and were more interested in arts and languages. In addition, it can teach children good values such as honesty and accountability. Yet, it can also lead them to be obsessed with anime, distracted from their studies and to have bad behavior [10]. Although, some article shows the dark side of the Japanese culture [11], others show the opposite, an example of a good side of Japanese people with either traditional or contemporary Japanese culture [12]. Despite that Japan has those two sides, my interviewees seem to see the good more than the bad side, because of anime soft power.

Subsequently, in the interview, I asked Mikasa and Bubbles about the type of anime genres they watch. Bubbles said that she likes the anime that is similar to the Middle Eastern TV shows; however, the main genres that she usually watches are comedy, drama and romance. On the other hand, Mikasa said that she likes mystery, action and adventure anime. Mikasa shocked me because I thought, as a girl, she would watch similar genres as Bubbles, not the genres that are associated with boys. Furthermore, both of them told me that they always go with what people recommend for them. Mikasa also mentioned that she isn’t always interested in long anime series. She likes some of them but prefers short anime due to the long-time an anime consumes to finish. I can clearly say that people usually go with what they like, dependent on how much time the viewer has, the type of genre, or even the voice acting—which it is familiar, weird or funny. Moreover, viewers may listen to what others suggest and gender and age don’t determine the genre an individual likes.
The Second Method: Survey
The purpose of conducting the survey was to get some additional primary research about anime in the Arabic region due to the lack of information in this region. The survey was sent to TAMUQ students on 13 November 2018 and had 89 respondents.

At first, the most helpful data that I got was the age in which TAMUQ students started watching anime. The results were amazing. Above 50% of survey respondents used to watch anime before 9 years old as shown in Figure 1. The follow up question was related to the previous one. I asked if the students knew about anime when they were between 9 and 16 years old and what media they to watch anime. 58.54% of survey respondents who knew about anime between 9 and 16 years old watched anime using TV. The result was expected as in older households, children were not allowed to use many electronic devices as the new generation does. However, I wanted to know what really attracts these young audiences to anime. Therefore, I asked, “What are the factors that attract someone to anime?” The responses showed that 44.19% had chosen characters as the most attractive factor. However, while looking through the answers for the ‘other’ category, I noticed that many TAMUQ students have written characters again with other choices like, plot, emotions, action etc. As illustrated in Figure 2, I concluded that characters are the most attractive factor in an anime.

![Figure 1: A chart shows the ages when TAMUQ students started watching anime.](image-url)
Secondly, I found interesting answers that indicate the Japanese influence on TAMUQ students from watching anime. In the survey there were three questions related to this manner. The first question discussed how anime is still fun to watch despite the differences between the Arabic and the Japanese cultures. 64.77% of survey respondents strongly agreed that anime is enjoyable even though they don’t have the same beliefs and traditions. The second question asked if they would like to visit Japan just from watching anime. 44.83% indicated they are interested in going to Japan due to the impact of soft power of anime on TAMUQ students. For example, I have watched lots of anime and in most of them they featured a big tree with pink beautiful flowers called Sakura, and it was so beautiful that I thought it is only an illustration from the anime writer’s imagination. It was only until recently that I discovered that this tree is real and is called Cherry Blossom, one of the most attractive things to see in Japan. This tree made me feel more eager to visit Japan. This is one of my reasons that made me interested in visiting Japan and each one of TAMUQ students have their own reasons to buy a ticket to Japan just from watching anime.

The third question highlighted the language in which TAMUQ students watch anime. The result was shocking as 73.75% of survey respondents like watching anime with Japanese language but with English or Arabic sub-titles as shown in Figure 3. It may be because the Japanese voice acting makes the audience more engaged while watching and other voice acting doesn’t match the Japanese. I dug deeper into this point and watched two videos that showed two voice actors, one being Japanese while the other was American; the Japanese actor was able to better portray the emotions of the character, and the lines he was speaking matched the feelings of the character in the scene more adequately than the American actor [8] [9]. Those answers showed me how TAMUQ students are affected by watching anime as they want to know about the culture, visit Japan and may be learn Japanese language.

Figure 2: A chart shows what TAMUQ students think is the most attractive factor in anime
From the two data collection methods, I figured out some points about anime that are connected to other sources that I studied. Firstly, an early exposure at a very young age has created what I like to call an anime fan. Combined with the fact that the majority of older household parents didn’t allow their children to use electronic device a lot, this has led some TAMUQ students still watching till this day. Similarly, worldwide anime generates it fans from a young age as a 23-year-old Alisha from UK described her childhood with anime: “I’ve been into anime ever since I was a kid. I got teased quite a bit, but now it’s become more and more popular—it’s great! I’ve now been getting everyone I know to watch different kinds of anime” [6]. Secondly, there is a very noticeable influence of the Japanese culture on TAMUQ students as the majority of the students are interested in visiting Japan. They want to explore the Japanese culture that has been presented in anime with eagerness to learn Japanese language. French student Victor Saint-Jean described anime and manga as a path to Japan: “they are a fantastic gateway to Japan” [7]. Additionally, he showed an interest in visiting Japan because of anime and manga. “As a kid, I was used to fantastic universes, for instance in anime like Yu-Gi-Oh! Then I read a manga called 20th Century Boys and it was the first time I saw really what Japan was, the reality,” said Victor [7]. Moreover, he describes how this “story of a shattered dream in the 70s” plunged him into a new world and led him to apply for the only high school in his region that offers Japanese courses [7]. Finally, the factors that made anime so popular is the combination of unique storylines and very innovative characters that attract young and old audiences to anime. This idea was backed up by Farah. According to her interview with Sheila, a student from UK, Sheila said, “What attracts me about Anime is that there's always such a variety of plots, setting, characters and genres. There's something for everyone, regardless of age, gender, race etc. Anime shows versatile characters with complicated backgrounds and development, which is always attractive to watch” [6].

Figure 3: A chart shows what language does TAMUQ students like to watch anime
Taking everything into account, anime has advanced and is still advancing significantly over the numerous years. It has increased significantly more consideration from individuals at various ages everywhere throughout the world. Now anime has risen to be the top genre of animation.

References


Majed Aref Al-Saad is 20 years old and a Texas A&M at Qatar electrical engineering student. His hobbies include playing basketball and football, and he is currently playing basketball in Qatar Sports Club. Unfortunately, in all six seasons that he has been playing with his team, the team couldn’t reach any high ranks in the youth’s league although the team as a whole tried very hard. The highest rank they got is third place in the 2015-16 season. That is a small overview of who he is as an athlete. In his academic life, he enrolled in the Academic Bridge Program (ABP) in the hope of being admitted in one of the Education City Universities. He graduated with the ABP diploma degree.
The following is a rhetorical analysis essay on Leila Ahmed’s “On Becoming an Arab.” This piece of writing is close to my heart since I could highly relate to the Leila Ahmed’s words. I am an Egyptian born in Egypt. I can still remember each morning in school where we all repeated “Hail the Arab Republic of Egypt” three times. The word Arab was so deeply engraved in our identity that I did not dare to question it. Leila Ahmed asserted her disbelief in a way that inspired me.
On Becoming an Arab

Egypt, the gift of the Nile, a region of turmoil and political disputes which makes it quite difficult for Egyptians to get a clear grasp of their identity and place in the world. The twentieth century was the defining century where major fluctuations orchestrated by the West, especially the British, shaped the Egyptian identity of today as an Arab nation. In Leila Ahmed's text, On Becoming an Arab, the political turbulence and corresponding geographical changes forces the Arab identity on Egypt. Ahmed employs the rhetorical appeals of pathos and logos effectively to theorize the identity fomented by the Europeans and its consequences on her as a postcolonial subject living in England.

Ahmed first sets the stage by reciting an anecdote from her childhood where the trigger for her argument started. It was the year of 1952, “the year of the Revolution,” when Ahmed was only 12 years old but could already feel the implications of her new identity. Her teacher, Mrs. Nabih, “struck [her] across the face” for being an Arab who cannot read an Arabic passage correctly. Ahmed is furious and disagrees by stating the she is an “Egyptian” and “not an Arab.” She then uses this incident as an analogy to link what her teacher did to her with the government’s nationalist rhetoric on the Egyptian people through media. As Ahmed describes it, the propaganda was “unpleasant.”

The new imposed Arab identity redefined the social structure of the Egyptian community. Before that, Egypt maintained a pluralist society that embraced its Jews, Copts, and Muslims altogether. Ahmed states that the people implicitly excluded by the new redefinition were the Jews of Egypt. This exclusion was a preamble to the war on Israel and urged Egyptians to take sides with Palestinians—the Arabs. According to the author, this new identity “proclaimed openly our [the Egyptians] opposition to Israel and Zionism.”

Ahmed traces the origins of this Arab nationalism. She tries to unravel it by digging deep into her past and her country’s history. Therefore, she embarks on research but realizes that finding a satisfactory answer is not that simple. As she asserted, it felt like she was in search of “some esoteric secret.” Leila discovers that the story first arose in Syria back in the nineteenth century when a group of Syrian men who attended French missionary schools used Arab nationalism to mobilize Christian and Muslim Syrians against the Islamic Ottoman Empire. In that era, the Egyptians were busy disposing themselves from the British and, hence, had no interest nor relation to this strange Syrian idea of “Arab.”

The idea of “Arab” was not consistently present, but it emerged when needed by the British and French to mobilize people towards fulfilling an intended purpose of theirs. They utilized it after World War I to dismantle the Islamic Ottoman Empire. Ahmed states that the fact that the “Arab Revolt” was led by T.E. Lawrence, an Englishman, makes it obvious that the British promoted Arabism for their political interest of bringing the Ottoman Empire to “its
final dissolution.” The Egyptians were still out of the Arab picture. Moreover, the “Arabs” were fighting alongside the British who are Egypt’s oppressors. The Egyptians were portrayed as praying for the Turks to “emerge victorious.”

Along the next few paragraphs, Ahmed continues to prove that Arab nationalism emerged to “oppose the Islamic Empire” and that Egypt was never at all Arab but was excluded from the Arab community at first. She quotes Mostafa Kamel, leading nationalist of Egypt back in the day, who denounced this “Arab” nationalism as an idea “fomented by the Europeans” with the objective of destroying the Islamic Ottoman Empire which was the only hurdle in the way of the British and French gaining full control over the Middle East.

Ahmed then moves on to Egypt’s history with the Jews and its relations to Zionism and the Palestinians. She stumbles along some “mind-blowing facts” which ultimately shift her understanding to Egypt’s relation to the Arabs. She discovers that Zionism was overly present in the Egyptian community. She states in a tone of disbelief that “it was okay in Egypt to be a Zionist” and that there were “Zionist Associations in Cairo and Alex then.” According to Ahmed, it doesn’t stop here and there are more “such extraordinary facts” about Egyptians’ relationship to Zionists and the Palestinians.

Ahmed continues to examine the pluralist society that once existed in Egypt to further disprove this newly introduced Arab identity. Egyptians were granted equal rights according to Article 3 of the Constitution of 1923 “without distinction of race, language or religion.” Moreover, these principles and “commitment to Egypt as a multireligious community” were furthermore made clear in the composition of the government of Saad Zaghloul, Egypt’s first elected prime minister, where “Jews as well as Copts served in his cabinet” and will continue to do so for decades ahead. The writer concludes from this information that the country’s political leaders were “deeply committed to the goal of preserving Egyptian society as a pluralist society” and that the Jews were integral parts of the community of Egypt and its “political and cultural leadership.”

Ahmed pieced this history together during her time in Cambridge. She discovers a lot about herself and could feel something changing. It is in the west that she is treated as a postcolonial subject and is forced to live under the false label of an Arab. It is in the West where she couldn’t escape from this identity haunting her every day. It is in the West where she had to hide her Arabic newspaper while shopping so people wouldn’t react to her in some “bigoted fashion” when they find out. It is her sole objective to see things clearly, not of betrayal to the Arab community, that prompted her to free herself from this enmeshment of lies and falsely constructed Arabness by the West.

The author links this Arab identity to the Palestinian cause. She argues that it was used as incentive to mobilize Egyptians’ support for the Palestinians.
Ahmed focuses on the thirties where she claims that the shift of Egyptian attitude and perspective changed towards the Jews in Egypt and the Palestinians—the Arab. As believed by Ahmed, the most important influence in “publicizing the situation of the Palestinians and mobilizing popular support for them” were the Muslim Brotherhood. However, out of the government’s commitment to Egypt’s pluralist society as mentioned earlier, the government was attempting to suppress these “inflammatory pro-Palestinian activities” and keep Egypt out of direct involvement with the Palestinian issue. Regardless of the government’s attempts, Egypt began to align itself as Arab by the end of the thirties due to the popularity of the Palestinian Cause and “the growing influence of the Brotherhood.”

Ahmed circles back to her childhood memories. She recalls certain events from her childhood and examines how she felt about them and how her parents’ reactions to current events at the time influenced her. She describes the “somberness” in her home after Al Na‘rashi, the prime minister, was murdered by ‘them’ which refers to the Muslim Brotherhood. This was followed by the retaliation for his murder when Hassan Al-Banna, founder and leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, was “gunned down.” Leila could feel that her parents disliked the brotherhood in general.

Her family also were not fond of King Farouk who “ordered military units to cross into Palestine” but not out of sympathy instead for his own political ambitions. Ahmed continues to get back to her argument and draw the Palestinian cause into the picture. She argues that Al Na’rashi, Al-Banna, and King Farouk all used Arab nationalism to reap political benefits.

Where are the British and French in all this while on the other side of Egypt there was a major force or alliance forming among Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan? The British didn’t want that. Although Egypt was independent by 1945, Britain was still in control. Therefore, the British suggested that there should be an “Arab League” where Egypt, the richest and most powerful at the time, would take the lead. This Arab League also served King Farouk’s political interests and, hence, an Arab League was created. As Ahmed asserted, Egypt “for reasons of regional strategy, officially becomes an Arab country.”

From the author’s tone, it is demonstrated that she loathes the European definition of the word Arab and how they made it “hollow” from within. She uses repetition of the phrase “They [Europeans] defined us…” as an element of rhetoric to capture the audience’s attention and convince them that this definition is absolutely and unquestionably false. She states the detrimental effects of this newly hollowed definition and how it undermined Egypt from a land of civilization to an “Arab” state. She describes the “cargo of negatives” that this word Arab inflicts on her while living in England. Ahmed plants feelings of anger in the reader when she recites a situation she encountered on the bus: an English extremist who spits on her when he finds out she is Arab. She concludes
by stating that “anger”, according to Nasser the former president of Egypt, was the key emotion to the formation of the nascent identity as an Arab.

In conclusion, the regional strategy of the British forced the Arab identity on Egypt. The Egyptians were defined as Arab to serve the British and French’s political interests. The rhetorician builds a strong argument throughout the passage. She utilizes powerful appeals to pathos and logos backed up by historical facts and events which add credibility to her argument.

References

This poem is a piece that any individual can shape, for each of us holds a collected accumulation of memories and moments that mold who we are, that make us ourselves. In “I Am From Memory” I have used my memories to present what has shaped a large part of who I am in words. These extracts and recollections range from my younger childhood to beyond adolescence, and regardless of the placement of a full stop after each sentence, in reality, the piece is yet to be complete.
I Am From Memory

I am from memory,
from inky squiggles and sudden photographs,
from the cozy embrace of glimmering trinkets
and the shine of golden snippets through still curtains.
I am from the reborn bonsai on my windowsill,
the glorious green and pastel of mother’s garden,
the arch of mango trees that no longer exist
whose swaying limbs shone light on a younger me.

I am from well kept history and mighty men,
from sloppy decisions and second-hand consequences,
the outcome of fate and unknowing decisions.
I am from righteous parents and joyous siblings,
an abode in which the truth is told
from a smaller circle of candor and care.
I am from listening first and always doing better,
from not looking back too long,
presenting all you can in genuine gesture
and thinking for more than myself.

I am from a path carved into mountains
by the darers and commuters before me.
I am from the disregarded and underestimated
from the possibilities and secrets of the unknown.
I am from builders and adventurers,
from a steep path unlike those around it
and I am only at the foot of my mountain.

Sara considers herself to be a collection of experiences and interactions. A young girl who spent her childhood in her grandfather’s backyard. A teenager who found comfort in expression through writing, reading, and photography. The first female engineer of her family. A petroleum engineer of the Class of 2022 who still has much hidden up her sleeves.
I have always known that there was something holding me back from achieving great things or accomplishments, but I never knew what it was. Going on the ASLE trip was a turning point for me because the trip was simply an eye-opener and a game-changing experience. It has opened my eyes to new horizons and ideas. It was indeed a difficult experience that required patience and focus. But it was worth it because I learned a valuable lesson in the long term. I am very grateful for having Ms. Erin Wehrenberg as the person in charge and chaperone, and Lolwa and Jawaher, my best friends and my favorite people in the entire world. I wouldn't have made it through without these amazing people.

This piece is dedicated to the participants in the Aggie Service Learning Experience, 2018.
Traveling Outside My Comfort Zone

On 11 May 2018, I went on a trip arranged by Texas A&M University at Qatar to northern Thailand. The purpose of the trip was to provide a selfless service through building a home for an old man, assembling and painting wheelchairs for children with disabilities, and re-brushing the walls of a school. The trip was nine days long with four of those days being service. This trip was a big challenge to me on a personal level because I have never done something similar in my life. It was my first time traveling without any of my family members, and it was my first non-vacation trip. I felt like I was taking more than I was giving back to my community and this is what encouraged me to join the ASLE.

Everything began on the first day upon arrival. We stayed in Chiang Mai city at The Park Hotel. It was an average ranked hotel. I did not like it though because it was not the kind of hotels I usually stay in during my travels. I tried to get some rest after this long flight, but it was a big fail since my roommates were Lolwa and Jawaher, the loudest girls in the universe/galaxy. We woke up early the next day to head to Camp Lodge, where we were going to stay for a couple of days. I was jet-lagged and woke up with a bad headache.

I got on the bus for a long, five-hour drive on a curvy mountain road. My head was constantly bumping into the window every time the bus made a turn. As we arrived to the camp, I ran to check out the place I was going to call home for the next couple of days. I was in a huge shock when I saw my room. It was a small cabin with no air conditioning system, insects were all over the room, and there was barely enough space for the luggage. I whispered to myself, “How am I going to survive this?” I found the first few days of the service learning experience to be difficult. I was not able to adapt in my new environment until the very last days. I was surprised to see almost everyone else adapt so quickly.

The first few days of the service learning trip were difficult. I did not expect the amount of work nor was I mentally prepared for the challenges. On my first day at work and as we arrived to the workplace, we were divided into three groups as there were three tasks to be done; building the house, re-brushing walls, and assembling wheelchairs. I picked the group that was building the house. The job was easy and enjoyable at first, but then I was exposed to the sun for a long time and my skin allergies started acting up from touching the paint. I started getting very upset about the amount of work. The weather was hot and humid. I got dirt and mud all over my clothes. Thus I decided to stop working and went to get some rest inside the bus. The bus was the only place where there was air conditioning. I went back to the house and worked until it was lunchtime. I had my lunch in a classroom with the rest. I had noodles for lunch, but I hated it because the food tasted weird. After lunch, I thought we were done but we still had four more hours of work. I was feeling dizzy so I did not finish working.
After work we went back to the camp where we had a 30-minute reflection meeting to talk about work and how we felt about the first day of service experience. I did not want to participate since I had a terrible experience. Nevertheless, all participants had to say something, and when it was my turn to share, I spoke with a bad attitude and complained about how my day went. I went back to my room when the meeting was over, and I cried. I wanted to go back to the common area where everyone was hanging post-meeting, but I felt like everyone was mad at me because I killed their mood. I stayed in my room until I fell asleep, and that was basically my first day of service. The same scenario continued on the second and third day of service. I hated every single moment of work.

The fourth and last day of work was the turning point as I started to adapt in my new environment. I woke up the next day rested, energized, and ready to work. I had scrambled eggs and pancakes for breakfast, and it was delicious. I got on the bus and we were headed to work. I tried to be positive and enjoy my last hours of selfless service. I picked the group of assembling and painting the wheelchairs since this task was slightly easier than the rest. I was working indoors so I was not really tired, and I actually had fun working. I consider my last day of service as a success. I was thrilled and I couldn’t wait till the reflection meeting so that I can share my feelings of how I was satisfied and proud of my work.

On the last reflection meeting at the camp, specifically at the end, we had a small closing ceremony where everyone gets a paper plate that had something written on it. Mine was labeled “most growth out of comfort zone.” This was the moment when I realized that my comfort zone is what was holding me back from having fun. I could have enjoyed the selfless service, but I did not because I was not ready to get mud all over me, I was not ready to try different food, I simply was not ready.

Ever since I got back from the ASLE trip. I promised myself to follow the concept of leaving my comfort zone more often to be a better person. I believe the trip was definitely not a bad experience. It was just different than what I normally do. Regardless of the challenges every day of the service, I learned something new that added value to my life and made me grow as a person. If I had the chance to do it over, I would definitely go for it. I did not expect the hard work and the heavy labor. However, I learned some valuable lessons that made me more appreciative of my life.

Latifa Shaheen AlSubaey is a junior student at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She is majoring in electrical and computer engineering. She wrote this piece because she wanted to share her Aggie Learning Service Experience with the readers. This was her first time doing selfless service. Latifa describes the experience as something challenging at first but enjoyable towards the end. Latifa also wanted to prove that great things are waiting outside of the comfort zone.
I Can Be Successful, But What Will the Society Think?

Last summer I went on a boat trip with my friends at the Pearl. The trip was three hours long. I had so much fun because I had never done something similar before in my life. I simply had an amazing time. The weather was so hot and humid, but it was totally worth it. Some of my friends jumped in the sea. However, I did not because aside from the fact that I cannot swim, I think swimming in deep water is dangerous and scary. I dipped my toes in the water, and it felt exhilarating/refreshing. There was food, music, swimming, and picture-taking. I am so glad I did that because I had fun and felt closer to my friends.

Going on the trip, I did not take my parent’s permission to go because I assumed it was a normal daily activity that does not require any sort of permission. When I got home after the boat trip, I wanted to share with my parents my great experience at the sea. But, as soon as I shared the details about the trip, my mother and father got furious about it and they made a big deal over how I just “ruined my future.” I was so shocked that I did not react. All I was thinking about in that moment was how could going on a boat trip could possibly affect my future? It was a puzzle that I was not able to solve. I tried to explain to my parents that I did not do anything wrong nor violated any rules. I asked my mother about the reason behind her sudden anger, and she kept on saying that what I just did could have ruined my chance of getting married and having a future.

I was very confused, and I asked my mother for some clarifications on how exactly I ruined my future and how is it related to marriage. She explained that for a woman in my society, engaging in similar activities such as going on a boat trip with my friends without a parent or a guardian is against the Qatari social norms, and so this can give me a bad reputation for not being an obedient girl and therefore nobody would want to marry me and I will end up alone. My mother added an example to clear my confusion by saying that for instance, if the boat had broken down or maybe if I was injured, the police will come to report the incident, and my name will be all over the news in Doha for being in the middle of the sea without a guardian to watch over me. Thus, I will get a bad reputation for not following my society’s rules. Basically, my parents were afraid of how my society will react if any incident had happened to me on the trip. My parents barely mentioned anything about my safety or anything else; their main concern was about what the society will think. Nonetheless, I don’t blame my parents for having this kind of mentality because they are just following the social norms. I blame the society.

The idea that I am trying to deliver here is that my society’s objectives for women in terms of the culture and traditions are holding women back from standing up or at least from having a normal life. I think that people in my society are terrified of social judgments on women because obviously, a woman
holds the reputation of her family. It feels like as a female, I am living in the
1900’s while males in my society are living in the present, and this is due to the
gender discrimination towards females. I think there is a huge injustice towards
females in my society that comes from traditions.

I went on a school trip a few years ago arranged by my school to Morocco. That
was the only time I traveled without any of my family members or in other
words, without a guardian. I was surprised when my parents agreed to let my
go on the trip. I asked my mother the reason she and my father allowed this,
and she explained briefly that the main reason I was allowed to go on this trip
is because there were some other girls coming on the trip too, and if anything
happens to us, I wouldn’t be the only one affected. Also, some girls from the
ruling family were coming on the trip and since nobody dares to speak badly
about the ruling family, I would be fine. In addition to that, if anything happens
in Morocco, there is a slight chance that people in Doha are going to find out
about it since it is geographically far. I can simply do anything, as long as people
do not know about it.

In a similar situation, I have always wanted to study abroad and be an
independent woman, but my parents are totally against this because I would be
alone in a foreign country without a guardian to watch over me like a little child.
Another example of how my society pulls women back, I have a brother who is
four years younger than me, and my parents treat him differently. He was able to
travel by himself at the age of 15 with an exit permit from my father. Meanwhile,
I am 25 years old and eligible to travel by myself by the law of the state of Qatar.
Nevertheless, my family will never allow this until I get married. Besides, my
brother got his driving license at the age of 18 while I am not allowed to drive a
vehicle because what will the society think?

Despite the developments in policies aimed at ensuring gender equality and
women's empowerment in Qatar, the society adds a number of unnecessary
restrictions on women. Women are still tied down by the culture and traditions
that make it harder for them to be an effective element in achieving the Qatar
National Vision of 2030. With Qatar being a country of a small population, I
think women can add a great value to the community. I think what measures
equality is if the culture is giving women the same opportunities as men. As
long as it there are no violations or breaking of the law. I think we need to raise
awareness towards gender inequality in the society to be a powerful nation.
Women have the potential to be successful and are capable of achieving their
goals. We are trying to make it through with the best possible outcome, so we
need to overcome the unnecessary boundaries that have existed for a long time
for no obvious reason. There are many ideas that I want to achieve, and stories I
want to tell, adventures that I want to accomplish which I think I am capable of
achieving. I can be a successful woman who inspires/influences other women.
But after all, what will the society think?
Looking Through the Window

It’s the spring of 2019, four months since my freshman year of college started. After a long day of fasting and sprinting from one class to another, I am finally in my friend Yousef’s car heading to eat at a burger restaurant. My friend Ahmed hasn’t been talking all day long, something is up with him. His face is down in the dumps, he is silent. “Ahmed, you haven’t been yourself all day long, what is wrong?” I ask him.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he responds.

I don’t understand, why would he not share it with me, why would he rather stay bent out of shape with his thoughts and feelings? We are in the restaurant, the newest single by Ariana Grande is playing in the background while families are entering and exiting. I put my hands on the table and ask him, “Why don’t you want to talk about it? You will feel better if you do, I promise.”

He is sad with eyes on the verge of tearing, sitting opposite to me in the restaurant looking through the window. I wonder what he sees.

I am in the car now listening to CBS radio, it has been 10 minutes since I entered the car and neither I nor the driver have spewed a single word. I am listening to the same song by Ariana Grande, thinking Should I have pushed him more to talk? Did I make it better? Should I have said this and not said that? The driver turns into an alleyway leading up to my house, I pay him and thank him then exit, heading into the apartment. I am not greeted with smiles but with two worried parents interrogating me. My mother then asks if I prayed. I say yes without thinking; I don’t know if I even did. I am in bed getting ready to sleep when I see a fading image of a little kid crying on the bed.

I am 7 years old, and I just came from middle school. The roads are busy today, so I will be coming home later today which makes me feel relieved. The bus pulls up next to the bean shop, so I know I am home. I immediately run up the old decrepit concrete stairs with spider’s nets on every corner of every wall. I can’t wait to tell mommy about the pyramids I learned about today.

But before that I go to my grandmother’s room where she stays with my sister and I give them both hugs and kisses. I then go up the stairs to my family’s apartment. My mom is cooking in the newly painted kitchen, the pink paint was unsightly, and the smell of the paint stains the smell of the beautiful cooking she is making. I am looking at mommy, but she still hasn’t noticed me. I go near her and try to hug her, but I ended up just hugging her leg which startled her, so she slapped and pushed me on the ground. I don’t understand.
An hour passed and I am now in my room looking through the window. The apartment we lived in was a mirror of the apartment in front of us, same number of stories and same ugly red-brick exterior. I am looking down the streets from the 7th floor and even though I have always been afraid of heights, I enjoy looking at streets and the people, I enjoy observing their differences, their clothes, their skin color, their hair color. I wonder what the world is like down there. I see my friends whom my mom told me that I can’t play with anymore because they are “street trash.” I see them playing and smiling without a care in the world. I see our 1984 white Peugeot collecting dust. I look up, and I see the sky filled with all shades of blue and white; I see all sorts of animals in the clouds. I see beauty everywhere. Everything looks beautiful, I have never seen this before. I enjoy the sights for hours to come. I lose track of time and then I hear the call of prayer of al maghrib, the peaceful voice of the muezzin is interrupted by mom shouting, “Did you pray? You didn’t pray, did you? Didn’t I tell you to pray?”

My heart skips a beat; I am terrified, I expected a shouting, even some beating, but what is about to happen is far worse. The more she screams, the more anxiety I feel. I am scared stiff. I can’t say a word and she becomes furious that I am ignoring her. She squeezes my right hand and pulls me to the kitchen where she was boiling water in the sauce pan. I am afraid and crying; I don’t know what she will do. She puts my hand over the fire. “It’s burning, Mommy, please stop,” I scream and scream as loud as I can, but mommy wouldn’t stop. She pulls me by the hair to my room and locks the door as she continues to slap every part of my body. I don’t understand why mommy hates me. What did I do wrong? I shouldn’t have made mommy mad; is it my fault? I don’t understand. These were the last thoughts I had before I went to sleep.

I am now nine years old and my eight-year-old sister’s cries just woke me up. My mom just woke her up from bed and put her in a cold shower for getting bad grades. I am in my bed crying, I want to stop her but I am scared. I am crying hearing my sister crying. I want it to stop. I collect what little courage I have and go out to the living room where I see my mother, who is supposed to love us unconditionally, threaten to make my sister sleep on the roof with the rats. I can’t take it anymore. I stand in front of my mother trying to protect my sister. My legs are shaking, I am terrified. I want to protect my sister. All the bravery and manliness just disappear in a moment when I start begging and pleading my mother to stop and let her live with us. I must protect her were the words I kept saying to myself, I have to protect her again and again and again. I don’t know why mommy hates us, what did we ever do? Why wouldn’t anyone save us? Why are we rejected by everyone? Why are we unwanted? I don’t understand.

I am now 16 and have been in high school for almost one year. I have to stop feeling sorry for myself. My grades are the most important part of my life; if I get good grades, I can turn my life around, all the years of waiting until the night of the exam to study have to end. My teachers are being supportive, they believe
me, they think I am smart and hardworking. For the first time I have people who believe in me, and I will not let them down. I see my best friend since middle school smoking and taking drugs in the school, but I can't be like him, I have to be better. I now have friends who value what I value, who support me when I need it. I am grateful. So, what if I used to get beaten mercilessly when I was a child? That doesn't change what I have to do. I can't live my life feeling sorry for myself.

I am now in my room, on the bed with one leg over the other and the laptop on my stomach beginning a piece of writing for my English 104 class. Every piece of writing is motivated by a particular purpose, so why am I writing this piece? Do I want sympathy? Maybe. Do I want to impress the professor? Maybe. Do I want to be the best version of myself I can be? Yes, definitely.

A week after hanging out with my friend Ahmed, he told me that the issue he was going through was fixed, and I knew this was true as soon as I saw the smile on his face. I live on the first floor, and when I look through the window, I see parked cars and no people, but I couldn't care less. Because I have all I could ask for and more. Being able to care and cry for others are literacies I had to learn, for they are what make me different from anybody else. My mother is my literacy sponsor; she is the reason I care for other people, and she is the reason I am writing this essay.
This piece is an introduction to a research paper on the challenges and strengths that face autistic people. I wrote this piece in my freshman year, and it was an assignment in which I had to use C.A.R.S. model (Creating A Research Space) to create an introduction for my research in a more technical and professional way than normal introductions.
Research Introduction: The Difficulties and Hidden Resources of People With Autism

Recent studies on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have shown a strong interest in understanding autistic adolescents’ behaviors. In Australia, 99% of all current autism research focuses on childhood and adolescence (Wong, Donnelly, Neck & Boyd 2018). Researches have concentrated their studies on people with autism within this specific range of ages to clarify the challenges they face as well as to raise awareness about how this period could be much harder for them. Paradeep, a man who was the subject of a case study in 2015, stated that he has physical difficulties, such as problem with his body’s movement and agitated movement of hands (Thakur and Varmani 2015). Furthermore, a former research that studied the effect of ASD symptoms during adolescence on high-school students found out that sometimes they perform self-injurious behaviors (Schall and McDonough 2010, qtd. in Hedges, Kirby, Sreckovic, Kucharcyzk, Hume and Pace 2014). A recent research has insisted on showing how autism can be positive by studying their strengths and getting out the positive side from their challenges. What they found is that although people with ASD are all different, they all display persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction (Wong, Donnelly, Neck & Boyd 2018). Moreover, an article that was about parents’ experiences of living with an adolescent diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder discussed another physical issue that face autistics which is feeling uncomfortable with any kind of physical contact with people (Mount and Dillon 2014).

Beside the physical challenges, those with ASD also have some emotional issues such as resisting changes and being exposed to depression and anxiety (Schall and McDonough 2010, qtd. in Hedges, Kirby, Sreckovic, Kucharcyzk, Hume and Pace 2014). Parents have experienced some challenging behaviors from their sons or daughters, and it is usually because they are emotionally oversensitive, and they cannot express their feelings normally. For instance, they tend to express the following behaviors: crying, shouting, physical assault, throwing items, barricading themselves in their bedrooms and refusing to co-operate (Mount and Dillon 2014), and tending to do some externalized behaviors such as aggressive outbursts (Davis and Carter 2008, qtd. in Mount and Dillon 2014). Another point is that sometimes they suffer and get annoyed from sounds that are considered normal for other people. For example, Daniel Tammet who was an interviewee for a Psychology Today article stated that he was annoyed from brushing his teeth because of the brush's noise, and then he started using an electric toothbrush which sound is repetitive on a single tone and it doesn't irritate him (Kaufman 2009).

Beside all the challenges they have, those with ASD also have many mental abilities which can be enhanced and improved. For example, Paradeep has a strong and outstanding memory and was an eager and very hardworking student. As a result of the continuous help, encouragement and support that
was provided to him from his family members and school teachers throughout his adolescence, Paradeep successfully managed to do some basic tasks such as writing his name, identifying numbers and understanding the bus route. As the support continued to be provided, he improved and achieved several important goals of functional reading and communication and a big improvement in his math skills. Paradeep then transitioned into the work field as an employee in his school’s office. His biggest strength is that he does not tire of repetitive work. He is very careful and meticulous regarding where he keeps things. He is responsible, helpful, accountable and has an excellent memory for his work (Thakur and Varmani 2015). While Paradeep managed to find a job, 55% of young adults with ASD in the first six years after high school were found to have never worked, not even one paid job, other than home-based work, even though the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities points out that the legal capacity and equal recognition before the law are inherent rights that persons with autism enjoy on an equal basis with other members of our societies (Wong, Donelly, Neck & Boyd 2018). Additionally, educational and psychological journals have also highlighted the importance of the collaborative working between families and schools in order to get the best outcome from the adolescents with autism (Mount and Dillon 2014). Another example of improvement is Tammet, who became a mathematical and language expert. He found out that numbers are what he is interested in the most, and his curiosity couldn’t stop him until he became superior at math. He also became a writer who has 3 published books, a reader who reads to understand people’s emotions, a traveler and a person who is full of confidence in social interactions (Kaufman 2009).

Earlier researches have demonstrated that autistic people have both difficulties and strengths. However, they didn’t cover all the points that an individual with autism could have, especially their strengths. In an alternative study, instead of identifying the two broad characteristics of people with ASD as deficits in social interaction and repetitive behaviors, interests and activities, some researchers (Pickavance, 2014; Lorenz & Heinitz, 2014; Harrop & Kasari, 2015) believe autistic restrictive and repetitive patterns of behavior can be seen as strengths because those with ASD think and focus differently (Wong, Donelly, Neck & Boyd 2018). If it is about a work-field range, I believe that the repetition they do in a specific task can simply perform a transformation from a normal employee to a professional one who works with continuous love and great passion, especially if they were curious about that task. In this paper, I will widen the range of thoughts that have been made on autism by covering more uncommon, often hidden challenges and strengths.
References


Many freshly graduated engineers would tell you the story of an infinite loop they get stuck in once they decide to join the workforce after graduating. Unexperienced engineering graduates want to be hired in engineering companies to get experience. Engineering companies want to hire experienced engineers. However, in order for an unexperienced engineer to become experienced, they must be hired first.

Could it be that experience is the most important quality an engineer could have? What are the advantageous attributes that experienced engineers are bringing to their workplace?

These might be good questions to understand the reason behind most employers’ growing tendency to raise the experience requirements on a job offer. However, better questions that could break the loop in favor of the two parties are the following: What are employers missing out on when they seek experience exclusively? And, what does a freshly graduated engineer have that an experienced engineer probably lacks?

In this piece, I attempt to address these questions as well as other aspects that gave rise to the experience loop, including the role of the educational system, and the advantages of shifting towards a creativity-oriented perspective.
The Ideal System: Experience Is Overrated

A long experience in the field of engineering is generally regarded as a favorable quality that ensures efficiency and minimizes the probability of making mistakes and propagating errors. However, experience can be a double-edged sword and comes with a crucial disadvantage reflected in the decreased chance of innovating and thinking outside the box. Even the most experienced engineers might stumble upon brilliant ideas by less-experienced and novice young engineers. That is because as their experience develops, they tend to know which path to take almost subconsciously in order to solve a certain problem. This scenario implies an advantage of experience which is efficiency but also a hidden disadvantage resulting from their inability to see alternative paths and multiple solutions to a certain problem.

What should be demanded from students is not that they memorize formulae and perform operations flawlessly and in the shortest possible time because that is what we develop computer programs for. The true objective behind an engineering education should be to orient students towards advancing the already existing solutions of certain fundamental problems in engineering and taking advantage of their fresh look and perspective which gradually deteriorates with experience and could possibly limit creativity.

Employers should realize that their future employees' success cannot be based on the increasing demand for longer experience. The true asset to look for in a candidate is potential. As engineers, we tend to dislike broad concepts and terms such as potential which do not directly imply a certain set of observable traits. Therefore, I shall clarify that what is meant by potential in this context is the candidate's preoccupations and priorities as well as motives in terms of how they regard their career goals. A candidate with potential should not only strive to demonstrate their ability to perform tasks in a timely manner, having memorized as many formulae as humanly possible and accumulated as many traditional problem-solving techniques from previous experience, but they should also be able to identify a desire and an effort towards finding alternatives and advancing existing methods and processes. Similarly, educational institutions should train future engineers to take advantage of their lack of experience which alleviates the burden of a limiting traditional view. This requires that the educational system puts more emphasis on innovation instead of replication.

This approach can have many direct and indirect advantages including a subtle consequence which is minimizing cheating. Students might feel more compelled to cheat if they are faced with an unrealistic load of repetitive tasks earning them credit for being able to perform numerous iterations with the least amount of error without the use of technology which already does that. This prehistoric approach exhausts a significant amount of their time which can be used otherwise to think creatively and reflect on their knowledge of
basic and advanced concepts. If engineering is to be advanced, we must stop worrying about improbable scenarios placing engineers in deserted situations where technology is out of reach and operations should be performed manually. Instead, it makes more sense to encourage engineers to be resourceful in terms of taking advantage of technological advancement which was meant to allow professionals to use their time in more beneficial manners including observation, critical thinking, reflection, and innovation. If students are faced with tasks requiring them to present unprecedented ideas regarding a certain topic, chances are that cheating is not even an option.

Malek Helali is a chemical engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar graduating in May 2020. Besides her interest in applied science, she enjoys literature, arts, and languages. She believes that a comprehensive approach towards education through minimizing the distinction between natural and social sciences is key to self-development and the advancement of humanity.
Soon after she began primary school, a horrible twist of fate occurred. The only thing she knew after this was feelings of anxiety, fear, dread, and frustration. All she wanted was a peaceful life with James. Our heroine was thoroughly depressed. She suffered intolerable emotional pain and severe remorse. These feelings darkened her mind with suicidal thoughts for the rest of her life. She wishes for death as an end to her suffering, and every day that passes makes it harder to live. She wishes that she had never been born. She knew it was completely unforgivable to think about taking her own life, but still she desired it. She believed she was a burden to anyone who cared about her. One day she meets someone who makes her wish become true. What is going to happen to her? How is her sad miserable life going to end? Start reading and find out! This is a fictional story, and if you would like to see more of it, let Dr. Amy or Dr. Mysti know.
One Hour Apart

Chapter 1

I often wonder if there is someone out there kind enough to kill me . . . and I wonder if hell is better than here. It's getting so hard, I feel so empty, there are a billion screams caught inside my throat, but I keep my screams locked in, my eyes bawling like an endless waterfall. It feels like no one will ever care about us again. I know my feelings are not normal, so I researched my symptoms on the Internet and they indicate that I am suffering from a very deep depression along with anxiety. Why do I feel this way? It's as if life is always against us!? Everything is dull; everything looks so bleak and black. To never experience peace is destroying me. I thirst for a different life. The only good thing in this world is my younger brother, James. I don't know what I'd do without him. He's the only reason my lungs still function, and without his existence I doubt that I would survive; I would not gasp for air. I believe that was the point when I decided to leave this world.

_No power, no king, no magic, no sword or gun is ever more fatal than words._

Knives may cut and kill, but words stab you, they stay in your flesh forever like thorns . . . causing you mental scars. This was my life when my parents were still alive, and things continued after they were gone. Going to school was like going to a hell hole. I never looked anyone straight in the eye at high school. I knew there was no point; they all averted their eyes when they saw me. My father died in a car accident. He was a drunk driver. Can you imagine how life sucks when your own mother walks into your classroom and slaps you in the face in front of your classmates? The whispers and snickers were like razor blades to my ears. The way my parents used to treat me made my personal life a scandal! I wonder what they were thinking? My parents made my life hell every single day in every possible way. This is a vicious world that digs into other people's lives with needles.

Life is so lonely, school leaves me feeling isolated, surrounded by fake laughter, students casually back-biting anyone who is different. The pain is always a whisper away when I'm in the classroom; I don't even feel that it's safe leaving my house . . . I heard a voice calling my name. I woke up hearing James, my brother, banging on my bedroom door, “Hurry and wake up, Jane, we're going to be late for school.” I woke up with a jump and tripped over my blanket. I rolled over with a groan, rubbing both my eyes, wondering if today would be the beginning of a new dramatic episode.

I regained my balance and returned to sit on the bed, I started wondering Who am I? Why am I alive? I wanted a convincing answer but failed to find one. I trembled in my skin, feeling cold while I prepared myself for school still half asleep. Afraid to face the outside world, I'm used to being caged in my grandfather's house, only allowed out for school or to visit the doctor. I dropped James off at his school, motivating him to work hard and stay focused. Knowing
that I’m the last person who should be handing out that advice, I left him in his classroom. On my way out of the school, I saw a boy sitting under an old ladder in the playground. For some reason I felt sorry for him. I guessed that he, too, was being forced into a place that he didn’t want to be in; he looked so young. I resumed my first day at school counting the minutes and seconds until the bell went off. I could not wait for the day to end. It was just another boring day in my life. The bell rang . . . it’s home time.

I quickly ran to pick up James. I rushed all the way to his classroom, but a strange feeling overtook me, shaking my body to the bones. Something is telling me to stop; something is pulling my feet in a certain direction. I stopped walking as if paralyzed; I need to be wherever my heart leads me. I am being drawn like a magnet to something I don’t know and can’t see. I look around me, turning my head from right to left, searching everywhere. What is this strange sensation? I ask myself, and then at that second, I saw the boy again, the one who had been sitting under the old ladder. He had the most strange expression on his face, gazing at me as if I was the only person in the world. Without realizing it, my feet were already dragging me towards him. My heart was beating so fast. Why was I feeling so afraid? Why was I feeling so nervous since he’s just a child? “Oh my god, what am I doing?” I said under my breath. I felt as if something was waiting for me. I held my breath 3, 2, 1 . . . I found myself standing in front of him, and our eyes met.

“Hi there” I said smiling, trying to hide my unease. “What are you doing here? Are you lost? Where are your friends?”

“I have no friends,” replied the boy.

“It’s okay not having any friends. I don’t have friends and life still looks beautiful from my perspective,” says the one who thought of committing suicide. “Do you want play with me?” I asked.

“Sure,” he replied.

“But what if your parents come to pick you up and they don’t find you?” I asked, concerned.

“No, it’s fine. My parents work the night shift, so they’re always late when picking me up from school.”

I said, “Let’s go to the park near my house where we can all play together, but first I have to pick my brother James up from his school.” Something felt suspicious, something felt wrong, and this felt all too casual. No, I sensed something was not quite right. I had a premonition that something was about to unleash itself upon me, as if my life was about to unravel.
James was so excited when I picked him up from school and told him that we were going to the park with a friend to play. James was jumping with happiness, for him it would be a respite from home, a change from being caged up there until the next day. We were going to be free even if just for a split second. Not being watched by our grandparents for a while, not having them monitoring our every move was such a relief.

Chapter 2
We all went to the park. James raced straight to the swing to play, but the boy stayed still. He didn't move. “Winston,” he said.

“What?” I asked.

“My name is Winston.”

“What is your favorite game?” I asked to break the silence that had arisen between us.

“My favorite game is leaving my body. Do you want to play that game with me?” asked Winston while smirking and glancing at me. I didn't respond. “You see, that is why no one wants to play with me,” he said.

“No,” I replied, “I want to play that game with you.” How I came to regret that decision. If I had only known what was awaiting me, I would never have played his game. What could Winston, at such a young age be able to do? How could anyone leave their body? Things got weirder when he told me the rules of the game.

“There are rules,” he said in a serious voice while staring at me. It felt as if his eyes could see right through me, right into my soul. Winston went on to explain the first rule, “When you are in your bed, focus on the ceiling, close your mind to everything else and just stare at it. Eventually you’re going to fall asleep without realizing it.” While Winston was telling me the rules, I started to feel light headed. A strange sensation was washing over my body. “The most important rule is to return to your body within one hour,” Winston said while walking away from me and disappearing out of the park.

When I reached home, I kept rewinding the scenario that had taken place in the park. What did he mean? Return to my body? Who said I was even going to leave my own body? I kept thinking about it. Eventually I went to bed, I did what Winston said, not really believing that something would happen to me. Slowly I drifted off to sleep. The next day when I woke up I felt as light as air and then I noticed my bedroom door was open, very unusual.
I reached for my bathroom door and it didn’t open . . . James is calling me for breakfast, I went downstairs. James was still calling me “Stop shouting, I’m here,” I said, but he continued to shout my name. James then went upstairs saying that I was a heavy sleeper. It felt strange; he hadn’t even noticed me even though I had been sitting right in front of him. James came downstairs, angrily saying that I was still asleep! At that point my head began to spin. My eyes were wide open. My whole-body was trembling, I ran upstairs to my bedroom. My breathing was so heavy, my chest rising and falling, I was gasping for oxygen. I reached my room, I saw the impossible. My legs went numb. It’s hard to stand when what you see in front of you is your own body lying on the bed. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I couldn’t say a word. I felt a scream clawing its way up the back of my throat. I stepped forward to touch my cheek, to see if this was real. Was I becoming insane or was it just one of my nightmares? My hand passed straight through my face; I could not feel my own body, I could not feel anything. I was terrified; feelings of confusion and fear devoured my soul. I started crying, then turned to face the mirror but, to my horror, there was no reflection.

I felt weak, abandoned and, so lonely as I saw James walk to school without me. I just couldn’t do a thing, and then I remembered something . . . Winston. He is the one responsible for this, but then I asked myself, “How, he’s just a child?” Still he wasn’t an ordinary child with those eyes, the way they looked into my soul, the dark energy that seemed to surround him. I started to think that Winston may not be of this world. I knew I had to find him again, without further thinking I ran to James’ school, my only aim to see Winston. He was responsible for what had happened to me. He was the one that had empowered me to leave my own body.

I reached the school, he was not under the old ladder. I scanned the children’s faces in the playground, but he wasn’t there either. I entered the school running up and down corridors, looking into every classroom, furious at him for what he had done to me. Finally, I found him on the third floor sitting in an empty classroom. The room was no longer used as a classroom. It had been converted into the school stockroom, full of broken furniture. “What did you do to me Winston?! Why did you do this to me! Answer me. I know that you’re the one responsible for this.”

He looked me straight in the eye and said, “I did nothing but grant you your wish, something that you had been seeking for a long time.”

“What do you mean seeking?!” I said, looking at him nervously.

“You are the one who always wanted to be free from your depression and your gloomy reality; you wanted to fly, to discover things that you thought you could never experience in your life. You see I’m not a child, I’m a spirit that came from an unknown dimension. I have watched you for a while now. Your life interested me, you were my prey, watching you made me see that you deserved the chance
to change your life, leave reality and escape to a virtual world,” he smirked. “You should thank me, now you can go wherever you want, whenever you want, you no longer have to be concerned about anyone knowing who you are, or about you.”

I stood in front of him for what felt like a lifetime. I realized that he was right; I had asked for this every night before I slept. This is what I wished for every minute of every day. I always wanted to live in a virtual world. I hated the reality of my world. I hated the fact that I was even alive, so what difference does leaving my body and living like this make? I would accept my destiny and start the first part of a new journey.

“What time did you leave your body?” Winston asked.

“Huh, I believe I woke up at 6:30 am, why are you asking?” I said worried.

He glanced at the watch on his left hand. “Jane, what did I tell you was the most important rule of this game? It appears you don't play by the rules, you must return to your body within an hour. The time is now 7:28 am. You have run out of time to return to your body, and you will never be able to go back to you're the home of your previous life. You will never get the chance to walk James to school again. Your brother is lost to you forever.”
“Engineers are problem solvers.” This must be the most generic and widespread statement about engineers that is reiterated by both engineers and non-engineers alike. Whether this is referring to solving equations on a math problem, or to every family’s perception of an engineer being capable of fixing broken electronic appliances in the household, it seems that engineers have earned and accepted this label for quite some time. While this statement could have been true for the past 200 years, it seems that we might have to update it for the post-globalization era. It should now say that “Engineers solve their societies’ problems while being other societies’ problem makers.” Our globe’s most pressing issues seem to have originated from some form of technological advancement or another, all made by engineers. However, the reason why these issues don’t seem very pressing to everyone is that they are being created as a consequence of the luxurious development of some societies at the expense of the deterioration of other disadvantaged societies. As engineers, we are ethically required to take responsibility for the consequences of our creations while they are being made, used, and disposed of.

In this piece, which was written for my Engineering Ethics class, I argue that the most critical global challenge for engineers is addressing the impact of their products and services on the invisible communities that have to suffer for privileged societies to prosper.
The Most Critical Global Challenge for Engineers

Engineering has become a globalized profession in this era of rapid technological development, expanding beyond geographical constraints. Engineers in international organizations manufacture products targeting a global audience and utilizing a design processes that can be executed thousands of miles away from their companies’ headquarters. Engineering companies in developed countries are increasingly seeking to minimize the costs of production and maximize their profits by establishing factories in less developed countries where the overall working and safety standards are significantly less rigorous. Consequently, the reduced financial costs of production have resulted in increasing deterioration of the health conditions and standards of living of the workforce in under developed countries.

The most critical global challenge for engineers is the impact of their ability to manufacture profitable high-end products for the members of their relatively wealthy communities in faraway factories lacking health and safety standards and exploiting thousands of humble laborers. This impact is considered to be the most challenging because its effects cannot be directly observed by the engineers causing it. Unlike challenges that have a propagating effect that would eventually harm the engineers’ societies such as environmental pollution and the drainage of natural resources, the deterioration of the living conditions of overseas workers might remain permanently intangible and invisible to developed societies. Therefore, it is less likely that the engineers in these advanced societies will feel pressured to limit the harm that they are inflicting. This does not, however, make the issue any less unethical or alarming.

The ethical responsibility of engineers is to ensure that the commodities that they offer to their communities for financial returns do not put other communities at an unfair disadvantage. Furthermore, engineers must become more aware of the damages and losses associated with their profession not only in terms of financial figures but also in terms of human lives endangered beyond their own geographical borders.

Engineers should realize that the exploitation of foreign workers to achieve increased financial profit is unethical because they would not want to be exploited in the same way themselves if the roles were reversed. Engineering companies conducting the manufacturing process of their products in underdeveloped countries while endangering the wellbeing of laborers would not want their practices to make headlines on news outlets, and this proves the unethical nature of these practices.

Malek Helali is a chemical engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar graduating in May 2020. Besides her interest in applied science, she enjoys literature, arts, and languages. She believes that a comprehensive approach towards education through minimizing the distinction between natural and social sciences is key to selfdevelopment and the advancement of humanity.
Coping with failure is difficult. You feel ashamed and embarrassed. You dread it. You fear it. You never want to experience it again. But once you realize that the only way forward is through making peace with it, you build up the courage to try again. This piece was inspired by my journey of learning how to remain undefeated in the face of adversity.
With rationality,  
I can code,  
I can calculate,  
I know how to run commands;  
but my anxiety is the bug in the system,  
delaying every step.  
Rationality tells me that pressing ‘run’  
has no negative outcomes;  
I either succeed or  
I find a mistake.  
But my heart starts to palpitate,  
and the fear of seeing red  
prevents me from discovering  
my fate.

Curiosity overtakes,  
I finally decide to try,  
but the outcome is demoralizing;  
there is an error in my code.  
Rationality suppressed;  
disappointment prevails.  
If trying leads to failure,  
I don't want to try again.

Time passes, reminding me,  
that fearing failure won't get me anywhere.  
So I suppress my fear and learn from my mistakes.  
I improve my code,  
press “run,” and with bated breath,  
I wait.  
“An error has occurred while executing code” pops up again.  
The inevitable feeling of disappointment starts creeping in;  
this time, it is pushed away.  
If each failure teaches me something new,  
I’ll be damned if I don't try again.

The third time is not the charm,  
And neither is the fourth or the fifth.  
I lose track of the amount of times I see “error,”  
But I am filled with determination each time I see it  
Because each time, I know  
that I am one step closer  
to success.
To an outsider,  
it may look like I keep running  
my code to no avail.  
Little do they know,  
each failure is a gain,  
And the feeling is so much sweeter,  
When I finally fail to fail.

Fatimah Mohammad Khan is a chemical engineering student, Class of 2021. She is an introverted individual who finds ease in communicating her thoughts and ideas through writing.
This self-portrait was the final project for my Literature and Other Arts class. We were instructed to express ourselves with this project and try to merge STEM and arts together to create our self-portraits. I decided to go for a picture as it provided a multitude of options on setting, mood, and replication of people. Thinking of the defining moments of my life was hard to replicate in a photo, and this project really helped me think outside the box to make everything possible.
My Self-Portrait

Artist’s Statement
My first semester at TAMUQ was quite the norm based on my expectations, except for one class. When I was talking to Phylicia, my advisor, on my first day at university, I was incredibly tense. I just kept saying yes to whatever she said. When I walked out, I realized I just signed up for a literature class when I could’ve literally taken anything else! But obviously I didn’t want to act like a freshman and ask what she was doing.

Contrary to my belief, every lecture was something different, and it really pulled me out of my comfort zone every time. Our final “exam,” per se, was to create a self-portrait for the STEAM showcase. I love to capture meaningful moments, and this was a great excuse to do so!

I think what makes a person who they are, are the crucial moments which play a pivotal role in their life. Consequently, my self-portrait is based on 3 defining moments of my life all combined into one picture.

Possibly my most vivid memorable moment has got to be Arsenal FC winning their first trophy in a decade. It was an insanely tense match, which made it ever so sweeter. Having supported Arsenal since I was 11, I remember walking into school the next day with such sass. It’s weird how a club can add so much value to your life; this is when I realized my how important the things I cared about were.

The middle of the picture represents a tough period in my life. My uncle and Grandfather had just passed away in the space of a couple months, and there was an eerie atmosphere to my life at that time. I think it is important because it was the first real hurdle in my life, and it took a lot of time to get over. These are the moments which make me look back and be grateful for all that I have. It also left my preteen thoughts of “I don’t need friends and family” in tatters, which was great to know sooner rather than later.

On the far left of the picture, I tried to capture the position I found myself in so many times over the final years of high school. This was the time I decided I wanted to pursue something in STEM, not necessarily because of my “love for engineering” but because it was something which allowed me to grow and get out of my comfort zone.

All together these moments worked as a life lesson, and they shaped me into who I am today. Such defining moments have had a lasting effect on my life, and when I look back I feel proud of the experiences I have gone through.

For a self-portrait, it was critical how I dressed and used colors in the final image, hence, a lot of color is included in the final product with the use of LEDs.
To discuss the making of this picture, I didn’t plan my project well at all. A Samsung Galaxy S8 was used to take all photos and this was my little sister’s first photography session. All the pictures were combined using a couple of apps to polish it up into a final image.

Muhammad Ali Arif is a mechanical engineering Class of 2022 student. He has experimented with his creative side but hasn’t stuck around with a specific medium. Recently, he has been heavily invested in Pakistani 90s music.
Cave of Gratitude

How many of you remember the old cell phones which had keys on them? Do you remember texting with those phones where you have to keep tapping the keys to get the letter? If I were to type “LOL,” I would have to press “555 666 555.” Then, came iPhones which revolutionized cell phones. I was nine years old when they came in the market. I always craved for one. It was fascinating—it was touch screen, camera, no keys, and most importantly, it had a bitten apple on its back. Nine years later, when I started my school at TAMUQ, my craving for iPhones raised. I could see bitten apples not only on phones but on laptops as well. I know I am not poor, but there is just too much luxury around me. Then I look at my phone and say, “I wish I had one.”

One day, a friend comes to me and asks, “Hey, you have a charger? My phone is dying.”

“Yes, but it’s in my bag and it’s down at the first floor.”

“Can you please get it? My phone is dying”

Since I am such a people pleaser, I take the trouble of going down to the first floor, get my bag, get on the elevator again. People in TAMUQ will understand. When I take an elevator at the first floor to go up, it magically goes down to the basement. Then, the lift goes up and stops at the first floor again, and a person enters with the look, “What were you doing at the basement?” The elevator stops at the second floor; someone enters. Looks like everyone wants to go up at the same time as I do. Finally I come to the third floor. And I hand him the charger.

“Oh no, not this one. I need an iPhone charger.”

“OH MAN, why didn't you tell me you needed that one, I wouldn't have to go through all that hassle.”

“Oh, don't you have an iPhone?”

“I wish I had an iPhone, it has a bitten apple on its back.”

Have you ever wanted something in your life that you could never have, but your neighbor or your friend or people around you have it all the time? Did it make you unhappy? I was not unhappy, but I was unsatisfied. I felt I was missing something. Until I learned an important lesson: a lesson of gratefulness. Everyone tells you to be grateful, but it's not easy. It's much easier to complain. It's much easier to look at people who have things that you don't. Only when you look at your life from “another side,” do you learn how to be grateful. I will share with you my journey of how I reached the other side.
I was among the group from our university that traveled to Chiang Mai, Thailand, for a service-learning experience in the summer of 2018. In the course of our trip, we built a house for a paralyzed man in a local village. It was not an apartment, rather a house in a village whose roof was made out of bamboo. We assembled wheel chairs for a local hospital, and we painted walls of a local school. The school had a small playground, 2 or 3 classrooms, one computer lab, and lots of cute and happy children. We didn't know their language, nor did they know ours. Yet we communicated through the language of love. We played football, we danced and sang together, and we had lots of fun with each other.

In the trip, I felt our biggest accomplishment was to complete the house for the paralyzed man. I felt proud of myself and our group. And then our tour guide revealed that there are more than 100 homeless families in that village. I was stunned! All that accomplishment suddenly seemed nothing to me. All my strength was used to build just one house out of a hundred. I wished I had some sort of super-power that could magically build houses for all those families. But then what? What about the other millions of homeless people? What can I possibly do? Nothing.

Regardless of how many people you help, you cannot help everyone. The least I could do by keeping those children in mind is to be grateful of my health, my shelter, my parents, my education, and everything in my life. By seeing those children smile in their small schools, I felt I had no right to complain about my life. This feeling of gratitude makes me look to my phone like a blessing, and never did I crave for an iPhone again.

But phones are a privileged example. Let us think about the small blessings in our lives. The reason I call them "small" is because we take them for granted. We understand their worth only in the hard way. One morning, I woke up to brush my teeth. I entered the bathroom, opened the tap, and there dripped only a few drops of water. It was found that the plumbing system in our building was damaged. The repair went on for two days. Our source of water for those days was my neighbor who lived in the building across the street. So I carried the bucket, walked across the road, climbed up the stairs all the way to second floor – easy! I filled the bucket, climbed down the stairs with the bucket, walked to my building, climbed up the stairs, and I couldn't feel my hands anymore! We just walk into washrooms without ever imagining that we won't find water. But on those two days, I had to think how much water I would use from the bucket that I carried. I was always taught about the importance of water, but only when I was deprived of it did I realize its worth.

Do you ever consciously think about the fact that you have access to clean water? I never did. See, we are all so lucky to have this resource that we don't realize it. And it's not just water. We have everything. The problem is we forget what we have. Unfortunately, life moves so fast that we don't get the time to
pause and contemplate. We are all busy people. We have so much to do and so much to achieve. Only if we take the time to pause and look closely at our lives, we can find so much happiness out of gratitude.

I am glad I got the chance to reflect on my blessings when we visited a cave back in Thailand. Now, I always imagined caves to be like those in Batman. I thought I could just walk into a cave and see some bats. Surprisingly, I had to crawl through the opening. It was very dark. When I pointed my flashlight at the top, I could see bats high up at the top, and they did nothing. The bats didn’t impress me until my friend reminded me that bats cannot see. We kept walking over rocks with our flashlights, making sure we didn’t trip and fall. We crawled through narrow paths and saw deadly insects.

Then, we came by a canal of water flowing undisturbed. Our guide asked us to sit on the moist rocks and switch off our flashlights and stay quiet, just so we could appreciate the blessing of our eyes. All 13 of us switched off our lights. It was pitch black! I was horrified; it was so dark that I closed my eyes to escape the fear of darkness. Closing my eyes was less dark than keeping them open. Now, I could enjoy the quietness. With quietness, there was the soothing sound of water flowing through the canal. I took this moment to appreciate how blessed I was to have eyes to see our beautiful world. Not only did I think of my vision, but everything good about my life flowed into my mind, just like the water flowing through the canal. I felt thankful that I woke up healthy; I felt thankful that I have clothes to wear and shelter to rest under; I felt thankful to my parents who raised me to what I am today; and I was thankful to God. The tour guide asked us to switch on the lights. I felt light hearted, I felt peaceful, I felt happy. On the way back, I bumped my head against a wall for which I am not very thankful.

But coming back to reality, life is hard and life is fast. I am an engineering student. I have two midterms next week. I have a 15-page report due for which I haven’t even started. But now, I don’t need to go back to the cave to feel grateful. When I wake up, I recite the dua or the prayer, thanking God to bless me with a new day. Every night, before I sleep, I recite the prayer to thank God for making it safely through the day. Ever since I started doing this, I found myself to be content. I complain less. I have become selfless and I am becoming less materialistic. I do this every time.

Maybe you can do something else. You can do something as big as going to a cave or you could just stay at your bed, pause, look around and feel the gratitude.
Writing has helped convey a side of me that would otherwise be contained, and for that I am grateful. I was in a very dark place when I wrote this and as I do not feel comfortable sharing how I feel with people, I thought I’d express it through writing. It went through a lot of editing and revision before I liked it enough to even consider sharing.
My One Wish

When I die, I do not wish you to mourn for me:
specks sprinkled from the cup of creation,
the dreams and hopes of history,
the witnesses of wishes made by humanity
and crimes of love and insanity,
the witnesses of my last breath,
the witnesses of pride and lust,
the witness of us turning to dust,
the witness to your tears which I wish could be held

because the stars will die, and new stars will be born,
and the planets will die, and new planets will be born,
and I will die, but I will not be reborn.
My death will be but one of endless losses as I join the great cosmos,
and even if one day the cycle of death were to cease,
I know I would be at peace
if you fulfilled
my one
wish.
MUHAMMED
ZAHID KAMIL

I have always wanted to write something that reflects what I think. This piece depicts how I perceive the world and everything around me. I believe that we should always try to treat people with respect and kindness even though it can be hard sometimes. Therefore, I wrote this piece (hoping to get it published) to ensure that I have kept a promise to live by as seen by the public eye.
My Everyday Questions???

In high school, a new principal arrived and made a statement. He always dressed in a white suit and was always clean-shaved. He stood outside the school greeting students every day in the morning 7-8 a.m., and if you were late, you would have to go through the security guard and end up in his office giving a reason as to why you were late. I hated him, and so I would impersonate him. I didn't like the fact that someone would come and change rules. I didn't like change. He wants to change the way things were. Who likes change? No one does, unless it benefits you now or later. Still, even today I don't like him. He would say three things: “Smile within 3 meters of someone,” “If there is a will there is a way” (quoting Henry Ford), and what else? Oops I forgot. I didn't realize all of that would mean so much to me until I came to this university. During my first few days I see a person with a pony tail and a suit, smiling and greeting every single person, be it laborers, cleaners, security guards and obviously students. Everyone was given the same amount of attention, a smile and the “How are you?” question. I asked myself why? Why do you people do this? Is it a common courtesy to ask how you are and move on? Do people really care and want to listen when they ask how are you? Or is it something you just say to move on? I'm actually curious.

Thinking back, everyone loved this guy, and I had no idea who he was? Honestly, no I didn't know but I thought he really looked cool with the pony tail. Then, I found out he was the dean. DAMN! He sets an example, and it was just his common courtesy that he would generate a smile. Who knows when things are going crazy for him, or he's in a hellish situation, or busy and who knows what he is going through on a daily basis? No one does and this is how we should see everyone else. Just like that, I started seeing everyone else smile as well. I never thought it was a 'thing' to follow or am I just oblivious to the fact that is how you behave in a university or in a society. I realize that the Dean and others follow what Dale Carnegie said in his book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*: there are seven needs (health and preservation of life, food, sleep, wealth, life in the hereafter, sexual gratification, well-being of our children) and the last one is the need to feel important. Everyone wants to feel included, important or noticed, and doing these simple task makes others realize that they are valued in this life.

Although people cannot touch too many lives, they can start by acknowledging people around them. I try my best to do follow this act to acknowledge others. I try hard to smile to the security guard every morning no matter how groggy I am, even though I still hate the fact that she asks me to show my ID every single day. Like you don't know me? You know I am a student. What's the point? Ask someone new who you cannot recognize to show you their ID. It would save you the trouble and all you have to do is acknowledge – like the security guard in the afternoon (Everyone loves him). Still she continues to do this. Even though this is super annoying I still respect her for the fact that she stands up and
says, “Thank you.” To do that 6 days of the week (yeah, she is here on Saturday as well), and greet students and REQUEST the ID isn't easy. But I always ask myself what I do if I were in her place? I wouldn't care less and recognize people if they are students or not. I would be working from 6am-4pm 6 days of the week and what else? Make food the day before and run to catch the bus to go back home. I am not here to say that I am blessed and that being a security guard is a derogatory job, but it doesn't seem all that. You can still live a little and laugh a little. The environment around her is still nice. The security guards and cleaners are friendly to talk to.

But, what do we see? Money is a problem, the fact of being powerful, testing your pride and proving your identity is all a problem. I continuously think that if I were in their place I would not just be watching random videos online; I would start learning from it. Learn something, be it coding, reading, acquiring knowledge to step myself out of this place. But how cruel is my heart to think such things like I am so much better and making the best of my life. Instead I am born into this world as the highest level (LEVEL 4 – earning above $32 a day) like in Hans Rosling's book Factfulness. It touched me when the author said that to be reading this book you have to be in Level 4. The book also opened my mind that the world is becoming better even though we still think it's becoming worse. We are making the world a messed up place. Not the people in the village and living in rural areas. We come up with the rules, and we decide whether we want to wage war or not to obtain more money, pride, land and other resources. For example, in the Sri Lankan war, the Tamil Tigers wanted to occupy half of the island. Who pays the price though? Not us; instead it’s the people who are working their asses off to make a living and end up being the casualties of a dirty war. I have seen how they live. They actually live a blissful life. Why are they sacrificed first? Power and identity pretty much defines their future but only if they let it. They do not fight for money, nor do they fight for land; instead they help each other and GENUINELY care about one another. From my experiences, I believe that money doesn't buy happiness because if you have been greedy your whole life, then you have no one to share it with. We are so competitive, so untrustworthy and big backstabbers so much of the time that we think that we deserve better lives than others. Maybe it's only me—who else has this kind of weird thinking going on, believing that we dictate what goes around also comes around.

Then again, the rich people are the ones who worked hard to be where they are. Some make more money and keep going at it, and some donate the money to charity. The best is someone like Bill Gates who realizes that a good system or a good community is an educated one. However, students like me aren't rich now, so how can we donate? I think that smiling, acknowledging someone and genuinely caring about someone is charity. Take for example that you smile at a person who is having such a bad day or even worse, someone who is suicidal. He or she might be thinking like me, which is that the smile was out of courtesy and generated from the environment. Or, he or she might be thinking, hey, I
actually matter. I am not invisible anymore. I am valued in this world and I got to do something better with my life. Who cares how many problems I have? My problems are not the world's current problems. They are nowhere near. There are people who are far worse than me and all I am doing is gloating about it. Instead, let me do something about it. Let me speak to someone who is considerate (that's why we have a therapist in our university), or let me move on and do something to change my current situation. Yes, comparing your problems may not be the best solution, but reading Dale Carnegie's book *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* explains simple methods to overcome worry. This is actually hard; even though I read it, I still worry a lot. Words seem easier than actions (as I continuously ponder).

Moving on, I believe that another act of charity is helping one another in terms of classes or giving life advice. The problem of giving advice is that it is so much easier to tell someone than to listen Therefore, I believe helping someone to learn and graduate or pass an exam is equivalent to charity because you are giving your time to help that person. However, genuinely helping someone is actually the pure form of charity because you expect nothing back, but I believe this is very hard to attain. You are always more willing to help someone if he or she has something to give back.

What does genuinely helping even mean? I think it floats around the area where you want to help them so that their future will look brighter. That is your end goal and that is your reason as to why you are helping him or her. Thinking about this is pretty hard to manifest. For example, I want to help my friend so we cheat in the exam so that he can achieve the better letter grade and improve his cumulative GPA. Or, I do not help him during the exam and he realizes his mistake for not studying thoroughly that will prevent him from further failures. The same can be said about the professors. Do the professors give a student an A so that the student's GPA will improve and he or she will get better job aspects (yeah every letter grade in every subject is worthy to be mentioned)? Or should the professor teach the student a lesson by giving what the student deserved? Which one helps more towards the long-term goal? Many would say the latter, but I would say both are equal. This is because it all depends on how the student reacts. If the student feels blessed and thankful enough to be motivated to study for his or her future subjects that will prevent further situations (like the above mentioned), then the professor was right. However, if the student realizes that he or she did not deserve their grade and received a better grade than he or she deserved by comparing their work ethic to that of the other students and receiving the same letter grade, then the student does not value effort. A similar reasoning applies to the professor teaching the student a tough lesson for their future courses. These are tough choices for anyone to face, and this is how you define if a professor or a student is mean or isn't. I always ask myself these questions. Should I or shouldn't I? Some would say that the public perception of you as a mean person doesn't matter, but then again when you are in dire need
of help, who will you turn to? I do not know how this would apply to professors giving letter grades, but I think the student’s evaluation will be the pathway for students to attack.

Applying the same belief to help others in the long term goal is also to ACTUALLY give charity to a stranger. The problem arises when you have friends, family and social media advising that the money you are giving to the poor people will be spent on drugs and alcohol. The media also showcases some incidents on how some people fake injuries or have an amputated arm or leg to get more money through penetrating your emotions. Then in another instance all the money that you are giving to little kids are eventually ending up in the pockets of the drug lords (i.e. Slumdog Millionaire). But still we all want to help them? How am I sure that the money I am giving is to be used for good? For the betterment of the individual or for the worsening of the individual or the underlying corrupted society? However, for me, I almost end up giving money because I look on the positive side when it comes to actually giving charity.

To end, I continually look to help others because according to the book Drive by Daniel H. Pink, there is a purpose to what you are doing. You could contribute to a much wider audience than just helping the people around you. Help random people, say hi to random people and speak to random people without being perceived as an awkward or perverted person looking to gain something instead of actually starting a conversation. Looking at myself in the reflection of my computer, I recall Maya Angelou’s famous words, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Muhammed Zahid Kamil is a third-year electrical engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar. He is a proud Sri Lankan and has an Instagram page, origami3d_iot. Zahid is just looking for ways to find purpose in his degree and to always see the bigger picture in what he is doing.
In my story, insanity wasn’t an outcome of love. You could say it was totally the opposite, love was the infection that came to the insane person writing this. Throughout my life, I was impulsive and overenthusiastic in all the actions and decisions that were built on my beliefs. Starting from small actions like watching a football match of my favorite team to big ones such as risking my life for my views, I never used logic as a judgment. I was always ready to sacrifice whatever is needed, but never give up or deviate from whatever I aimed to do at the beginning. However, I did the contrary to my nature only once, which was the case in this story. I gave up because I found out that trying more is ruining the goal I aimed for at the beginning. Although I don’t have any of the feelings mentioned in the story today, I feel thankful to the experience that made me stronger. When I decided to publish the story in Best Writing, I thought of publishing it anonymously to avoid any sympathy or judgments. However, the insane child inside me refused to. He refused because he was sure that the story won’t end over here, so he thought that it’s the right of the readers to know the story until the end. To the insane child inside me, this piece of writing is dedicated to you.
العشق المجان

لم يكن في مخيلته يوماً حياة بدونها، وحدها شكلت كل أحلامه، وحدها من البشر من كان يقدرها تحميل الأحلام إلى واقع: بين كل الأفواج المزاحمة والجماع الغفيرة التي ظلت تحاصره، كان لا يرى سواها، وفي حال لم تكن بين الحضور كان يرسمها على وجوه العابرين على نار العشق التي ملأته تهدأ قليلاً، حدث نفسه يوماً:

لِمَ هذا الهيام؟
ما هذا البلاء؟ لم أراها حوريةً بين باقي النساء
أهو مسٌ من السحر؟
لا، السحر لا يمكنه العبث بالقلب.
على ما يبدو أنها اختطفت قلبي أثناء نومي لتبديله بيننوع يضخ في دوا، عشقها والآثرين.
ومع كل هذا العرام، لم يفكر يوماً في أن يشعرها بذكرٍ يمكن بقلبه يحمل من مشاعر تجاهها، كان متفقاً أن لا تتحمل وهج عشقه لها، تخلو دائماً من الواجهة، ولكن كيف لم تدرك أن بحر قلبه ومن دماغه، حاصرته كما يحاصر الأمل صاحبه، ومع هذا لم يفلت من القلوب. لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، لا، ليلة معاً:

سَأُضمِرُ وَجدي في فُؤادي وَأَكتُمُ
وَأَسهَرُ لَيلي وَالعَواذِلُ نُوَّمُ
اسعد من مجنون ليلى، فما كان جواب ابن اللوح إلا:
يقولون لو عزت قلبي لا روعى
فقتَ وَفِلِ للعَشاقيَّينَ قَلُوبٌ
olisarar

هرب مسرعاً إلى الحاضر الجديد قباني، ترجاه أن يدله على أي دواء يشففي عنة، ابتسم نزار ساخراً وقال:
ما أسخف العُشّاق لو هُم تابوا
أراد العزة من مجنون ليلي، فما كان جواب ابن اللوح إلا:
يقولون لو عزت قلبي لا روعى
فقتَ وَفِلِ للعَشاقيَّينَ قَلُوبٌ
olisarar

هذا أدرك أن الطول الوسطي في العشق لا تقول إلا إلى جموع، لاجئ ذلك قرر عدم الاستسلام والحاول حتى آخر قطعة لم يتبين بها، ظل برك السكرام والحوج قبل أن يجدتها كي لا يبادوا أثبها كما في المرات السابقة، إلا أنه وحيداً راحاً نسي حتى كيفية الكلام فبدى أكثر بلاغة من المرات الأولى، أشطب على مجدداً وقال:
قدى أن تنسي ولنعد كما كنا قلبي حين
لبيتي أستطيع، ولكي تحت رمال الهيام فين
صدقن هذه طبيعة الإنسان، فالنساء لن
لاجع عيني نسيت النسيان
ستجد من هي الأبهى مني، وهذا يدين!
وحدك جوريه بين نساء العالمين
تجعلني أعاني ولن تكف حتى تكون حريما أو تكون من الهالكين
هنا رفع رايته البيضاء وأقسم أن بلغ قلب السقيم فويله لقد أذاها؛ ولا عقب لهذا الجرم في عرفه إلا أن يكون من الهالكين.
نزع فؤاده من صدره ليجعل حبره الدماء فيكتب رسالة الرحيل:
حبيبي...
إن هواك في قلبي نار لو تسربت لأشعلت الدنيا ولكن أبكت أي نسيم، ولاتني مؤمنة تمام أن كل الحلول الوسطى في العشق لا تحل إلا إلى الجحيم، أثرت أن يفني قلبي لأشفق من هياكل الدائم المستديم، بدي سيدفني قلبي، وللتنهث نار الحرام الكون بعيدا أو ليذهب إلى سعيرا، ولا أكرر، فقد أن اقتلع مني وأقفل القلب بالشرابين، كل المصائب عند نعيم، ساختتها خلف دانها وصاصرت أحبك في تزديه دابياً: من؟
عند منارة الخلد واري الرومال فوق قلبي، مزق رسالته ألف قطعة، ثم أطربها كي تشهد الدنيا نهاية العاشق المجنون، تعاطفت مع حاله الرياح وحملت بعضها من قطع رسالتة الممزعة إلى صاحبتها، لم تدري من المرسل والرسل إليه، إلا أنها قرأت بعضها من محىها فتنحست وقالت:
ليت لي بخيل كندا، ولكن لم يعد في هذا الزمان حبيبٍ وفقي آمن!

Omar Deyab Deyab is an Egyptian mechanical engineering student, Class of 2022. To him, writing isn't only about expressing ourselves, but also about keeping ourselves alive. He always believed in the phrase that said, “You are nothing but a number of days, and whenever a day passes away, a part of you passes away.” However, as his few days were flying by one after another, he lived many experiences that he didn’t accept to fade away. Writing was the only thing that he found to make his stories immortal, and not simply vanishing as time goes on. He loves writing because writers live the most!
I developed a love for talking about stuff that people don’t want to discuss in public. I am not sure if that is a good thing, or if I am just seeking attention. Hopefully I am not. I seek the pages to write my thoughts, the thoughts that get depressed by family and surroundings. But I think it is important that our parents give us the chance to discuss our minds freely, then so many problems could have been avoided. Only then we would listen to their advices, rather than seeking help from “Google” or strangers. In the following piece, I talk about my experience with online dating in the Arab world.
Lately I have been thinking a lot about love and marriage and all the fuss that comes from relationships. Probably that thought was a reaction from society’s expectations of my getting married because I am in my twenties. I need to figure something out before my expiration date in 2026 (when I turn 30).

I always hear that love won’t come to you if you are looking for it; nevertheless, I thought it would be a good idea to start meeting people (well, not people, but men) to ‘study’ them and discover what traits I like in order to shape an idea of the kind of man I could possibly tolerate.

So I relied on the worst media and probably the worst way that I could think of, which is online dating. I don’t want to name a specific app, but there is one that is very famous right now and I am sure you will recognize it. I don’t know what made me start using it in the first place. I think curiosity outweighed all the other factors. But also, I felt like I am not meeting any new people in my life, the world is small, I don’t have any family friends or acquaintances close to my age, and half of the people that I knew from high school are still around. So I found myself coming up with a cheesy biography and setting some rules for myself:

1. No swiping right if the guy doesn’t have anything written in the bio.
2. No swiping right on any people that I know in real life already (yes, you will see profiles of your classmates and people that you know). If they liked me in real life in the first place, I probably wouldn’t have reached this point.
3. If I get a match, I will wait for the guy to text first (I am not going to do everything for them).

Unfortunately, like many other experiences in this part of the world, it is ruined by “cultural norms.” Most of the guys on online dating apps think that those girls are for hook-ups or someone they can take on a Thursday night to the bar. I got disappointed by that. Simply because I have a profile and I want to meet guys, it directly implied (to most of them, but not all) that I am open for anything. Why can’t I just be a normal girl, who still wants to keep her values and beliefs intact and have a respectful conversation with someone? I heard things like “We can watch it together at my place” and “Let’s go to the club” other than trials of physical contact on the first date. I don’t want to judge girls who will accept such offers; it is just not what I was looking for.

I want to confess that I ran my own little experiment (without an IRB!) and apologize in advance in case you were one of my test subjects. First, I started an account with a name different than my real name to keep a level of anonymity. Until, Ouch, I saw a profile of someone I know (I didn’t think of that possibility before it happened). Then, I wanted to test the effect of the level of “physical appearance” versus “liking.” I created a second account with a fake picture of
some girl (thanks to Google images) and compared the level of liking to my original profile based on the number of superlikes. The average rate went up from two superlikes per day to 4.5 superlikes per day. Wow! Almost double—if only these guys realized that it is a fake account.

Another experiment came to my mind after that, which is to discover what the guys see on the other side. I created the fourth account with a guy's name (I named him Ali in case you are curious). I got a random picture after googling ‘Italian guys.” I started swiping left and right as the Italian Ali to see what other girls on the portal look like.

Nevertheless, girls, I don’t want you to worry. There are sooo many men out there, and the majority of them are desperate to be with a girl (at least that’s the feeling that I got). No pressure if you feel like this guy is not good for you. Swipe on. But I don’t think it a good idea to find a husband or someone for a real commitment there. Maybe it worked out for some couples (I never heard of anyone who got married of this app though). Also, think about it this way: do you want to tell your kids that you met over an application? To me that is a definite No!

Overall, online dating is a great way to meet people. I met a range of personalities that I don’t think I would have met anywhere else in my daily interactions with people. And every now and then you would stumble upon a respectful guy (for me that ratio was 1/8). You just have to do it with extreme caution while keeping in mind that many guys out there are looking for fun, and they hold no respect whatsoever for you. Also, be prepared to see the profiles of a few familiar faces, and that they might be judgmental.

For me, I decided to end the experiment after only one month. Enough swiping for now.
Why is serenity stirred within you?
When the morning feels like night, when the birds refuse to fly, when the days taste like water. The only welcoming door becomes the door of longing.
يا ماذا يتصرف عندك السكون؟
ماشي بضرب اظلم نص النهر
اطلع الشمس مطولة جديتها
تأية بالجسد ادور على الروح
الوين يلي وياها بسيرة اختمتها
غمضت تذكرت رحيق الأيام
حتيت للتشوش وجهي حنتها
اهواها قد شهقة نفس غرقان
يمام بسهر لوانته سواد كلثمتها
خططت حتى لانبقال عليّ ميلول
وانته داري وية المطر نزلتها
بالعائد شوقتها بيا وجه تنشف
وهي بشوف عيونك تشوف زقفتها
ماكو طير يحب يضل مسجون
شلون معبرة سجنى وهمجتها
بعيد العافية الله لغيري لانبطيح
وحياتي تصبح طعنة ملكي كتبتها
مو بس الغيم يبطير بلايا جناح
جروحي الوراق الطائرة ربتها
السوالف بلباج كلها مال حياي
الناس كشل مو حلوة صحبتها
فرحة المجنون مو من يطلعوه
من مجنونه تحب وياه عيشتها
يلوب: يعاني --- خلت: اختبأت --- حياي: أفاعي
Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi is a mechanical engineering student who is originally from Iraq. Ahmed is currently a student at Texas A&M at Qatar, Class of 2020. He is a street fighter, a goalkeeper, a businessman, and a poet. Ahmed is very passionate about politics.
I was able to do many firsts in my writing career in this piece. It was the first time I ever interviewed someone and wrote about them. Choosing my dad was particularly great because I didn’t know much about his past prior to interviewing him. Learning about his past turned out to be very fruitful for I learned a lot from his 68-year experience of living.
Swimming Against the Current

Being born and growing up in Qatar, I have always had a superficial view of what my father's life was like growing up in Syria. It was just a subject that was not brought up many times in our family. My father is 68 years old now, and throughout the years, he has lived through many hardships which have made him wiser and more experienced in the art of living. I knew I could learn a lot from my father, and he has already taught me so much both directly and indirectly. Ever since I was little he has always emphasized the importance of education in making a person successful. My father made sure that my siblings and I would get the chance to attend school and have the option of pursuing a higher education at world-class universities around the world, even though his financial capabilities as a high school English teacher weren't very high. I am the youngest of 6 siblings, all of whom were able to pursue degrees in top level universities. I have 4 brothers and 1 sister; among them is a neuro-radiologist, a surgeon, a computer science undergrad, an English teacher, an electrical engineer, and finally me, a chemical engineering undergrad student.

For us to get to where we are today, my father had to sacrifice a lot. Back in Syria, my father had to deal with some very tough working conditions. In 70’s Syria, teachers were underpaid and overloaded, making the job of a teacher extremely grueling. A teacher would get paid barely enough to make ends meet and wouldn't be able save up any money for a rainy day. In the 1980’s my father and mother decided to take a leap of faith by immigrating here to Qatar. They believed that seeking a better life for themselves and their children was worth the risk of entering a new country that they knew relatively little about. It was hard for them at the beginning, for Qatar wasn't as established as it is now. Twenty to thirty years ago there were no skyscrapers in Qatar, there weren't even any highways. Qatar was basically a hot, humid desert surrounded by water, and no one wanted to live here. However, the newfound wealth from oil made it bearable for some people to come to Qatar for a chance to get a decent job. Settling in a country like that was quite challenging for my parents. Competition was high and there were teachers from all over the Arab world flooding into Qatar. This meant that in order for them to make it, they needed to stand out from others and show what they can bring to the table. My father had to work very hard, but he was no stranger to that. His hardworking nature and perseverance that he had acquired throughout his life must have been quite noticeable for him to have made it in Qatar. Back then, many of the teachers who came to Qatar ended up leaving the country because they couldn't adapt to living in an environment that was so different from theirs, living in a new country with a new culture, facing a new set of challenges.

I already knew about some of the struggles that my father had to go through, but I still wanted to know more. I wanted to sit down with him and interview him about his past. What was funny to me is that I couldn't get a chance to sit
down with him even though we live in the same house. I have been so busy with university work lately that I rarely get to go home and see my father, so I called him from university and interviewed him over the phone. I asked him questions about his past in hopes of understanding what has shaped him to be who he is today, seeking to learn from his wisdom and experience.

My father and his siblings were brought up in a pretty poor family, and both of his parents were illiterate, showing that education didn't play a very big role in his family. Just like me, my father was the youngest out of six siblings. His siblings grew up to become very different than he was, as he was the first person out of his family to go to college. His sisters didn't go to school because in Syrian society back then there were very clear gender roles that dictated how people lived their lives. Women mostly wouldn't go to school as it was viewed unnecessary. That was mainly due to the fact that when a woman would get married it would be the man's job to provide for the family and the woman's job was just to stay home as a housewife. Even for the men in that society, not many people pursued an education. Many men would just pursue the crafts that their fathers did. They wouldn't look at education as a good investment for the future, and they would consider it a waste of time and money, and so my father's brothers never went to college after finishing school.

When my father was little he was a very curious boy. Unfortunately, the world he was raised up in Syria was very narrow and didn't offer much to quench his curiosity. When my father reached elementary school, he was introduced to the world of reading books by a teacher who had a huge positive impact on my father's life. He considers this teacher to be his most influential literacy sponsor. This teacher used to recommend and supply books to his students. For many of these students, my father included, these books were the first books that they have ever read in their lives. Reading different kinds of books offered material that fed my father's curiosity in a way that the world around him was never able to. Through reading he was able to explore worlds that were way bigger than his narrow, small world, and that made him fall in love with reading. My father continued to read as a hobby and he kept that hobby alive as he grew up. In his teenage years he became a frequent visitor to the public library of Damascus. He started reading different genres than the ones he started off with and he became more interested in reading autobiographies of successful people such as: (Alaa al Deen) Waqfeh Qabl al Monhadar—(Ahmad Ameen) Kitab Hayaty—Rihlaty al Fikriya (Abdulwahab al Maseery)—(Yehya Haji) Knaset al Dukkan—(Silvador daley) Ana Wa al Soryaliya. He felt a kind of relatability to these figures as most of them started off in a poor family just like he did. He also noticed a recurring pattern in these characters: education played a major role in all of their successes. He started believing that if these people could make it out of a poor upbringing through education, then so could he. This gave him a kind of reassurance, a hope for the future, and it also helped set his mind on pursuing university later on in his life.
My father was different from others in his community. From early in his life he chose not to submit to his society’s traditional view of education. He knew that education was one of the main factors in making a person successful. In many situations in our lives we choose the easier and more comfortable route, but my father didn’t choose that. For him, pursuing an education in such an environment was the most uncomfortably challenging thing he could face, taking into consideration that he didn’t come from a rich family or a society that supported education. My father had to prove not only to himself but also to others that he really wanted to achieve his goal of attending university. He had to take up a job as a tutor while studying so that he could pay for his tuition fees. In his second year of university, he was top of his class and was given a scholarship. He then went on to graduate from the University of Damascus in 1972, becoming the first English teacher in his community.

My father always believed in making the change in your community with your own hands. Right after he graduated, he took a job as an English high school teacher, and at the same time he went on to teach students in his community for free in illiteracy eradication programs. Being the first English teacher in his community, he became a role model to his students. He was able to inspire his students by showing them that they don’t have to conform to their society’s norms and that if they set a goal that they believe in, they too can achieve it. His elementary school teacher inspired him to have a positive impact on his students just like that teacher had on him. He wanted his students to actually enjoy talking in English, and so he would speak to them in English at all times, even outside the classroom. He wanted to give his students a person they could practice their English with without being judged, and he wanted them to feel more comfortable in using English in everyday life. His students used to enjoy this a lot, and some used to frequently visit his office just to have a chat in English, something that they wouldn’t be able to do with many people in the community.

To this day my father stays in contact with many of his students that he has taught both in Syria and Qatar. I recurrently see my father get approached by his students when we go out in a public place. They kiss his head as a sign of respect and then they proceed to talk in English. I was very surprised at how invested my father was in his students. Even though he taught some of these students a very long time ago, he vividly remembered them and would jump straight into a very deep conversation. You could just tell that the bond between my father and his students was special. They viewed him as a father figure, someone who has taught them way more than just English, someone who was their friend.

We could all have very high hopes and aspirations for the future, but sometimes reality overwhelms these emotions and doesn’t allow them to manifest themselves. My father had higher aspirations than just getting a degree in English. He had seen what it is like to be poor and looked down upon in society.
When he was in high school he wanted to become a doctor. He had a very good visual memory and believed that he would make a good doctor. He just liked how high Syrian society praises doctors. Reality struck, and there was no way he could afford paying for his tuition fees to study medicine, and so he was forced to pursue another major. He also wasn’t able to afford pursuing a higher education due to the fact that he had to work right after graduating to help support his family and himself. His ambitions became dreams, unreal and impossible to reach. Still, my father chose to swim against the current so me and my siblings can swim with it. All the opportunities that were given to us came from a vision that my father had, a vision that came out of being let down. He wanted us to have what he never had, a better chance at life, an opportunity to fully pursue our goals. When I asked my father if he is happy with how things are now, he said, “It would have been nice to achieve the goals I had initially set out to do, and I am pretty sure achieving them would have made me happy, but I found myself finding great happiness in seeing you and your siblings grow to become who you are today, and I am very proud of all of you.”

I believe I have learned many lessons from my father’s early life in Syria. I learned that a person shouldn’t let his environment shape who he is and that if you really believe in your goals, nothing can stand in your way. My father has also taught me how to be resilient, seeing that so many factors should have shaped him other than the way he ended up, he chose to be resilient and shaped himself the way that he wanted to, the way that he believed is best. At the end of the interview, my father closed with these remarks, “If you believe in something, you should remain steadfast until you achieve it no matter how much opposition you face from others. Success loves resilient people.”
This poem is dedicated to all the people who leave their families and homeland behind, going to a distant place in hopes of making a living.
Heroes

A man, he walks.
Following the path taken by heroes,
Headed to a land he knows nothing about.
Heard he has, of the city of wonders.
Of the land that glows like a million suns
Of magic temples that turn rock to gold
Of Treasures that lie waiting to be discovered
Heard he hasn't, they lie buried,
Too deep within the ground for his hands to reach.
The fabled land of the heroes, he has been told,
Is a land of rainbows.
Little does he know,
Of the storms that await him there.
He moves forward,
Following a path that is unyielding
Traversing Forests,
Crossing valleys,
Wading rivers,
He reaches the land of the heroes.

Alas, there he finds not the rainbows he hoped for,
Nor does he find the treasures that he sought for,
He hears voices, strange utterings in tongues he knows not.
He sees things, creatures unknown.
The men here,
They have tamed the elements,
Fire they put in a box,
Light they store for night.
The heroes he sees here,
In this strange land he has traveled to
Are not gods radiating with light,
Nor are they men of might.
They are nothing but mortals.
And now he too is one among them.
A man amongst the many who took the journey,
A man amongst the many who wanted to be heroes.
And he stays,
For he is stuck,
Somewhere between a hero and a mere mortal.
What he is, he is left to wonder.

Gibin George is an electrical and computer engineering student, Class of 2022. He doesn't think Justin Bieber is that bad. He also thinks that heroes don't always come in capes. Gibin is a man of mystery.
A Strong Wind

Baghdad, Iraq. One religious holiday out of many. Roads were closed, and thousands of people were walking to a shrine as a ritual. Food, drinks, and services were handed out as a thank you to all participants.

Even though it was more of a sad religious event, my friends and I went to a closed highway nearby and enjoyed our time. That year, everything went on as usual. I don't quite remember, but for some reason, all of my friends went somewhere. I was alone, on the street, walking back and forth, looking at people.

Then, a sudden strong wind pushed me back. I couldn't hear anything. I saw people running away. My eyes closed for a moment, and when I opened them, I saw fire, blood, and people screaming everywhere. I could smell flesh burning and feel tiny things going incredibly fast by me. I asked myself while my tears were forming, “Is this real? Am I dead? Am I not going to see my family again? Am I not going to play with my friends again?” Something warm went into me as my body ricocheted. I fell on the ground, but I felt no pain. I freaked out, “Now I am dead, I should have escaped!” I blamed myself. These few seconds felt like years. I wanted to scream, but I couldn't. I lay on the ground, waiting for a human to help me or the angel of death to take me away. My breath was shortening., I saw a figure standing next to me, a man who seemed to have come to rescue me. He stood there looking at me. He kneeled and put his hand on my face, “This is it,” I told myself. He smiled like he heard my thoughts and closed my eyes with his hand. Now I am asleep, maybe for eternity.
Chapter 6
The Beauty of Words
I write because I want my writing to resonate with the reader; I want to be able to inspire you by offering a well-structured argument that works your mind and opens your heart. Nevertheless, garnering these skills requires more than writing mindlessly every thought that pops in your head. Instead, you must put your soul in every single word. The better writer in me can transmit his ideas like waves: smooth and elegant. I see what I have written so far, and I am excited to see my destination, where my writing will take me and where will it take you.
Jumping Into the Chaos

It is my first day of elementary school in a building that looks like it's about to fall on itself. The large black entrance door has been collecting dust for ages, cracks in the windows are visible everywhere, and the classroom's chairs have nails popping out waiting to pierce a poor kid's behind. I enter the school holding my mom's hands tightly, looking at all the boys and girls running around, jumping, and screaming of joy. Overexcited, I rush into the midst of the chaos loving every second I spend making friends and playing in the playground until I could no longer breathe. I go out looking for my parents and not finding them, I panic, thinking the worst, *Have they abandoned me?* were the thoughts rushing into my head. *What am I going to do in this big world? Where will I sleep, where do I get food?* I search and search and I find them nowhere. Maybe they went home and forgot about me, I follow the herd of kids rushing to the big yellow buses and while everyone was chatting, laughing, screaming and even crying. I was on my seat thinking the worst *maybe my mother is still in the school looking everywhere for me.* I look out the window and I feel this nostalgia. *I know this park. I know this tree. I know this mosque* I say to myself. I recognize the brick house, and then the bus stops. As soon as I exit the bus, my nose catches the smell of the neighbor's trash burning, and it fills me with relief. I run up the stairs and I can hear my parents laughing with my cousins and I remember thinking *Oh they better have a good excuse for leaving behind and I am not going to fall for "I was abducted by aliens" shtick again.* As I go up, I smell the most beautiful smell ever, *mom made rice, potatoes and meat, that's my favorite food.* I see molokhia after opening the door and although I was disappointed, I still like molokhia. In the end. Nothing could and can change my mood like a piece of meat next to a bowl of molokhia.

I am a 16-year-old high school student, and the older I get, the more I admire the bravery of that little kid who jumped into the chaos with nothing but fear in his heart. I have a group tutoring session with my Arabic teacher. We sit in a small group of five students with everyone hoping that their writing isn't going to be read aloud by the teacher who had two PhDs, one in Arabic and another in clever insults. Writing for him is terrifying. My hands are shaking as my consciousness searches every corner of my brain looking for a novel sentence that will delay my chastisement. "No wonder you are quiet. It's not that you are smart, it's that you can't say anything." Those were the words that turned my face red and my eyes wet. *Maybe I don't have nothing to say, maybe I am quiet because I have nothing to say. Why should I write when my words are worthless?* I put down the pen and paper. I was asked to write an essay for an English exam. I am sitting at my table looking through the paper, and then I read the question, I am asked to write an essay about technology, but my body is in shock. The voice of the professor saying *you have nothing* is playing on a loop inside my head. I remembered the little kid who jumped into the chaos, I remembered that bravery is writing when you are scared and hurt.
Weeks have passed and I hear the high voice of the little kid shouting WRITE, WRITE, AND WRITE. Writing didn’t stop the hurting, but I wrote. I felt my soul poured into every word; I wrote in a diary about what made me happy and laugh, what made me sad and cry. I wasn’t ready to leave this forbidden art.

It has been two days since the start of the second semester. I am asked to write about why I am here but my words are not coming out. How can I, with eighteen years of experience have nothing to say? Was my Arabic professor always right? I remember the little kid, but now the sounds of the keyboard clicking is what I hear. I am jumping into the chaos. I am writing for the little kid, for myself and for anybody reading this. I am writing because it’s what that little kid would do.

Ahmed Mohamed is a chemical engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar. He likes pretty much everything. For example, he can force himself to listen to his best friend rant about the strategical mistakes done by Alliance in WW2, and change the topic almost instantly to poetry and his non-existent love life. To this achievement, Ahmed likes to challenge himself because he believes it’s how you can be the best version of yourself. Ahmed doesn’t do sports because they make him tired. He enjoys tutoring his friends. There is nothing he likes more than hanging out with friends and cracking jokes that have a 43% chance of landing.
I thought we all had the same definition for the term art, but apparently we do not. I asked my friends about their own definitions, and one of them caught my heart: “Art can transfer feelings, ideas, and thoughts. It’s a mirror to the soul. It is a way of communicating, but in a more spiritual form.”—Nada Sameh

Searching for someone’s art was one of my ENGL 104 class assignments. It took me a lot of time to decide what art I wanted to search for or whose art I was curious about. There were no limits and that made it hard. Although I always complained about restrictions, this assignment made me realize that I didn’t appreciate the restrictions I had always had. Finally, I decided to search about my mother’s art, the art of raising a child. I had to interview my mother as that was the task associated with the assignment. It was weird and funny interviewing my mother, especially when she answered some of the questions with, “You already know the answer to that.”

This essay made me appreciate my mother even more and value the love and support that she planted in me since I was born, which helped shape the person I am today. This piece revealed to me some aspects about my childhood that I never knew before, and made me wonder, “Will I be like my mother one day?”
My Mother Was My Kindergarten

Nine months of pregnancy, painkillers, working late, insufficient sleeping and much more, are just a few examples of what parents go through before their kids see life. Once their babies are finally born, they welcome them with warm hugs and a lot of kisses, and all of that pain eases away. Yet, they can’t simply relax. The pregnancy journey ends only so that the raising journey can start.

My lovely parents, my loving caring mother and strong protective father, are the heroes who raised me. My mother specifically, with her dreaming eyes and radiating love, was there for me since the first second of my life. She raised me, and of course my sisters and brother as well. I believe that was not an easy task, and that inspired me to dive deeper, and search about how my mother handled that. I am the second child, so I have an idea about the following kids, just not how the raising adventure started. So I interviewed her to find out.

My mother admired girls and was delighted to know after a few months of pregnancy that her first baby was a girl. She waited eagerly to meet her and had a card from a bookstore with a picture of a small beautiful girl placed next to her bed, which she contemplated throughout her pregnancy. Finally, in 1995, her first baby rose and shined.

Since my father was in Qatar by that time, he used to send my mother, who was in Egypt, around 300 EGP monthly because she wasn't working. Back then that was a huge amount, so my mother planned carefully to balance between the house needs and her kids’ need, and most importantly save. Nevertheless, my mother wasn’t left alone with her first child. Her parents, along with my father’s parents, were always there for her. A one-minute call was enough for them to be at her place, helping out with whatever the issue was—whether the electricity shut down, grocery supplements were missing, or her child was crying. Surprisingly to me, raising a child wasn’t that new to her.

My oldest aunt had kids by the time my mother was in middle school and lived one hour away. Therefore, my mother used to visit her occasionally and helped in taking care of her small children because she grew up with the belief that she should always help as long as she can. That was my mother’s first encounter with kids, and she learned a lot out of that. When it was finally my mother’s turn, she had a concrete idea about how to deal with kids and applied what she had learned. She knew how to change their diapers, carry them, when to feed them, and how to sense if they were sick. If the latter was the case, my grandfather would take her in a tuk tuk (Egypt’s three-wheeled vehicle), drop her by the doctor’s clinic, and wait for her.

In addition, since our house was exactly in front of my grandparents’ house, my mother went there every morning to help prepare the breakfast. My mother recalls her neighbors, who always took advantage of the time spent preparing
the breakfast to invite my older sister (Aya) over. My mother assumed that they spent time playing, but later she figured out the truth.

One day, the neighbors came along with Aya and asked her to go ahead and tell mama. My mother was confused, but that lasted for only a few seconds as the 3-year-old Aya started counting from 1 to 10. They also told her some words in Arabic, and Aya was able to immediately say the corresponding words in English, for instance: نجمة (star), سيارة (car). My mother was amazed! She never knew my sister would have been able to learn such things at such an early age. After all, it was her first girl. She couldn't forget the favor her neighbors did for her as they helped her discover Aya's abilities, and drew her attention to this astonishing fact. Since then, my mother started working on improving her only girl's education level.

My mother then told me how she did this. “I started teaching Aya the Holy Quran, and after she learned some verses, I recorded a tape to send it to your father. Along with that, I recorded all the new vocabulary she knew in English, the counting, and anything she learned. He had no idea about Aya's learning mission, since I didn't inform him. And as expected, he was highly surprised. Instead of showing his amazement through sending a handwritten message as usual, the moment he heard the tape, he immediately called.” My father was extremely happy, and because he wanted Aya to be even better, he encouraged my mother to bring a Sheikh to teach her the Holy Quran. Aya didn't go to kindergarten because my mother was her kindergarten.

However, our house was exactly in front of the house of my father's parents, not my mother's. So, my mother used to visit her parents' house 3-4 days per week. My grandfather enjoyed Aya's accompany very much and took her with him everywhere and taught her new things by making her interact with them in real life, for example taking care of a chicken and most importantly buying her ice-cream from the supermarket. He never rejected/refused to get her anything she wanted. “Aya once wanted Kanafeh (a traditional Arab dessert). Although it was late, my father went and bought it for her, came to our house personally, and took the stairs to the 6th floor where our apartment was (since we didn't have an elevator) just to meet her wishes.” My grandfather was always there for my mother. He would take Aya and play with her if she started crying. He instantly took her to the doctor if she got sick. He cared about her studies. He helped my mother a lot with her raising journey. That made the raising task easier for my mother and added to her knowledge.

At home, where most of the raising took place, my mother focused mainly on teaching Aya to differentiate between what's right and what's wrong. Moreover, she emphasized the importance of Aya following and obeying whatever my mother says. Aya was always rewarded when she did good things as mentioned before, so to balance that a punishment should take place when something goes wrong. “I remember one of the times, I was in the kitchen along with your
other aunt’s twins and Aya. I heard a word and told Aya never to say that word again. I told her if she did, I would punish her. It was only a few minutes later that I heard her saying it outside the kitchen. I was very mad. I went and hit her, and she started crying. Because she was very quiet and was taught not to disrespect me, she didn’t say a single word. It was only afterwards that she told me that it wasn’t her. Actually, it was one of the twins who said that. The reward-punishment treatment went very well, so I adopted that.”

Nonetheless, my mother didn’t ignore Aya’s social life. She always allowed her to go out and play with other kids; however, studying came first. That way, Aya grew on both levels simultaneously, socially and academically. “Your uncle enjoyed taking pictures with her. Your grandparents enjoyed playing with her and taking her in their trips. Whoever was the person, she always followed what I taught her. That’s why everyone who saw Aya admired her, ranging from the youngest to the oldest, because she was friendly, thanks to her good social skills.”

While my mother was telling me this last Saturday night, I thought about how difficult it was for her to raise the first child without my father in Egypt, and that all of that tiredness will fade away as she gets to Qatar, but my mother corrected me. “I wasn’t alone. Everyone was supporting me and around me. Your grandparents, uncles, aunts, everyone. Actually, the real challenge didn’t start until I came to Qatar. Your father’s first shift started early in the morning. He then comes back home at the lunch time. He’ll take a quick shower, have lunch and then get a nap. After that his second shift starts, and thus, he only saw you and your sister in the morning before school, and at lunch time. He was really busy trying to provide us a living, and I couldn’t make him even more concerned. This is where I truly had to handle everything alone. I had to run here and there, trying to get you and your sister into schools. I had to go back and forth between the school and other institutions to get papers from here and there to complete your files. I didn’t have a car, I didn’t know anyone to pick me up because I was new in Qatar, so transportation was always a problem. Getting you into schools was never the end of that. Whenever there was a school meeting, I had to work my fingers to the bone to attend them in order to be up to date with your academic life. I walked for miles before I finally found a taxi. Same applied when you had an appointment in the hospital or had a class in the Quran center. Your father depended on me solely when it came to raising, and it was a bit, maybe very, hard. I had to teach you, feed you, take care of you, cook, clean, make the laundry, stay up if you get sick, and everything alone. Yet, I didn’t complain, never told your father if anything went wrong. He just saw the outcome, his obeying, literate girls, and he was very satisfied. Nowadays, I guess you can see why he is surprised with what’s happening with your youngest sister. He never witnessed any of what was mentioned above when it came to raising up a child, it’s his fist time seeing them in real life. He always appreciated my efforts, and making him satisfied made me also satisfied. Anyway, the location wasn’t the only change. When I came to Qatar, you came to life. Therefore, not only did I have no one around me to help like I did in Egypt, but also I had 2
girls with a difference of almost 5 years in age. Of course, raising your sister helped in raising you and avoiding the past mistakes (which rarely took place), but also it meant extra work and less support.”

That last part made me wonder if having to raise two kids at different ages and at the same time was a new experience, something hard, something unforgettable. But before I could realize, my mother was answering that. “Talking from a different perspective, raising you was a bit easier. I taught Aya how to take care of herself, and since I started teaching her early enough, by the age of 4 she was able to read and write in a really good way. Thus, that qualified Aya to be independent. As a result, I didn’t really have to spend a lot of time teaching her as she got older, and that helped me a lot since it gave me extra time to teach you. Remembering the coincidence that happened with the neighbors and Aya, I started teaching you early as well.” Like Aya, I never went to kindergarten, for my mother was my kindergarten, too.

My mother’s main aim was to raise independent kids who were able to fulfill their needs. I believe she was very successful in doing that. One proof that she raised and educated us in the best way was in primary school, where we began studying completely alone starting from the 3rd to 4th grade. We would only go back to her if we were stuck in a bad way. Our grades, personalities, and success in life reflect her success in raising us. I truly can’t thank my mother enough, my hero, for what she did to me, and still does. I’m eagerly looking forward to becoming a powerful mother like her.

“My name is Ebtihal Youssef—an aspiring chemical engineer. I enjoy quoting myself so that I don’t have to cite others” (Youssef, 2019).
This piece embodies the reflections of an event that elevated some of the aspects of representation that I hold dearly today. Before writing this piece I hadn’t had the opportunity to truly reflect on the events of that day and it’s exciting to think of it looking back now. And despite the fact that the contents of that poem remain a secret, the impact it carries is hidden in the events of my recollection.
Inheritance

I sat uncomfortably in the chair of the A320 while my thoughts raced up and down the aisle, designing all the conceivable scenarios in which I could possibly lose the paper I had so carefully folded in my books, stowed with the rest of the luggage in the airplane’s underbelly. Despite it obviously being packed safely, my fingers yearned to hold the single page of scribbles in my hand all the way to the doorstep of my grandfather’s house. In a mere 45 minutes after take-off, the plane hit the asphalt again with an impact that replaced all my previous thoughts with an eagerness to see my family.

In a blur, we stepped off the plane and grabbed our luggage. On the other side of the sliding glass doors, we met my uncles and aunts at the arrival terminal, exchanging eager greetings and passionate embraces. With a series of car door slams, we were driving to my grandfather’s house through the weekend traffic. As we approached the house that shrank with each visit, we were greeted by the tangerines peering over the wall and the waving mango trees. The double door creaked under its own weight and let us in, and as we passed the framed walls, the carpeted floors, and the iconic fish tank, we finally reunited with my grandparents over a warm meal of tikka and bacha. Despite my eagerness to outlive the night and stay up with the adults to hear stories that spanned the timeline of our last visit, I couldn’t help but nod off on the living room couch, which ultimately led to me being told to go to bed and enjoy all of tomorrow instead.

The next morning I rushed to meet my grandmother downstairs and join her in having the ceremonial milk tea with a plate of rusk biscuits. I found her as my memory knew, sitting on the sofa in front of the parted window curtain with a crossword magazine and a pen, filling out the words methodically. It fascinated me, how swiftly she got through puzzle pages and how dedicated she was to this piece of paper. I watched, mesmerized, sipping the hot tea as my grandmother who had chosen to conclude her formal education with middle school waved her pen around, explaining how the different puzzles were solved, from sudoku to crosswords, word searches, and the sort. As she finished up the page, she passed her pen to me, nudging my curiosity forward to try the task for myself. I sat and scribbled on the pages, leaving my tea to turn cold as I raced through the puzzles until the rest of the house was at the brink of waking up and it was time to make breakfast.

After the family sat cross legged on the floor of the majlis and scooped the plates clean of the wondrous feast of shakshouka my grandmother had prepared, each family member ran off to tend to their daily errands. My youngest uncle and aunt each excused themselves to work, and my parents headed out to the Friday market to roam the endless colorful stalls for groceries. Seeing my grandparents seated casually in the living room, I saw my chance and dashed to the luggage where my books were still waiting for me. It took me a while to actually find
what I was looking for, but when I did, I held it high as if looking at it through the falling streaks of sunlight would make the moment even more magical. With it in my grasp tight enough that it wouldn’t flutter away and carefully enough not to wrinkle it, I sat by my grandparents and presented to them my finest and first work of Arabic poetry. It spoke of who I am, where I come from, who my people are, where we are headed, what the world holds for us, and what that road is paved of. For a second year teenager, it was most controversial and extremely unexpected. I had preplanned this performance since I had so secretively written and rewritten it at school. There were very few individuals whom I found comfort in sharing this piece with: I have shown my Arabic teacher who I have come to trust and even exchanged reading recommendations with; I have told my parents who I knew would not hold back their feedback to ensure the betterment of my writing; and now, I show my grandparents, the ancestors of this work.

In my mind I knew my grandfather too was a poet. He had told me in my previous visit that he had even been in the papers a few times which further raised my anticipation of this moment. As I read the final lines of the piece, I couldn’t help but smile shyly in anticipation before looking down, shrugging a quiet “w bas” before sitting on the couch space between them. They were both exceptionally pleased. My grandmother pressed my shoulder into a tight embrace, planting a kiss on my forehead while my grandfather patted my shoulder with his eyes twinkling in a contented smile. My grandparents were proud of my work and insisted to have a copy that still lies with them in a box of memories somewhere. Later that day when the rest of the family had come home, my grandparents continued to shower me in their affection, boasting to my uncles and aunts about my writing and how promising it was.

I believe that more than showing my grandparents what I had made, in truth, I was demonstrating its impact to myself. I was judging my audience’s reaction and sizing myself up as to whether or not this creation of mine was what I saw it as, and it was me testing my writing capabilities. I had settled my confidence when I first presented to my parents, for they are the two loving individuals whose opinion truly matters to me. Showing my grandparents was a daring step to further see if my words can relate and touch those older than both me and my parents. I wanted to see the reflection of my work in the eyes of those who have possibly seen and been through larger things, those who have been challenged by similar things in a different time, and who see through a wider lens of history, to reflect on what the words I collect on paper can mean in others’ eyes.

My grandparents may not be masters in the arts of older poetry nor crossword puzzles—neither am I for that matter—but they are reflections of who I am and are stitches in the embroidery of who I have become. Even now I have cold-store magazines strewn around my room from around the world, countless mountains of books that I’ve collected over the years, and notebooks I have scribbled into whenever my mind could think of worthy enough lines to register. These books
are always with me, as I make it a statement to always carry a tool to write with and something to write into. This single edge of the Rubik's cube of who I am is one of my favorites, the way I express myself, for it joins two aspects of myself: the poetry and word puzzles; this is my inheritance.

*Sara Adnan Albanna is a petroleum engineering freshman of the Class of 2022. Sara finds great comfort in the diverse emotion that can be portrayed through the manipulation of language and has been exploring these possibilities for a long time coming.*
KHALED
ALI BODASTOUR
Tell Me What You Want

T’was a normal day of winter 2008. I was doodling all throughout third grade as the teacher blabbered on. I don’t remember what the subject was or what we were learning that day; the only thing I knew for sure was that I didn’t want to stay here any longer. Coughs and rasps, knocks and taps, laughs and claps.

I felt a slight nudge. I lifted my head, taking looks to my left and right as to where that nudge came from. I lowered my head and continued with my scribbling. A few sounds of what appeared to be giggling ran through my head. A push was felt this time, and I jolted my head up only to see the teacher staring back at me with that same look he always gives.

“Are you finished?” he said as he tapped his feet to the ticking of the clock.

The giggling wasn’t from my head; rather it was the sound of my classmates at the sight of me making a fool out of myself. The feeling of everyone’s gazes fixated on me and stuck like glue.

“I’ll see you after class, like I always do, “Sparky,” Joseph, the teacher, said. “Sparky,” in Joseph language, was a name given to a student incapable of staying put throughout the lesson.

Two hours passed by as I shuffled along the hallways, slouched over while peering into the long abyss. As I walked along, the other kids stopped their conversation and turned in my direction, whispering words which I guess were about me. “This is his fifth time this week,” was what I could make out from Dana’s faint voice. She was a slim, pale girl with cheeks as red as roses, her hair long and elegant like that of a doll. She always made that face whenever I got into trouble, and this time she decided talking about it was a good idea. That face which says, “I know how to rub more salt into your wound, dear friend.” It consisted of three stages: stage one being the cheeky grin, followed by the flick of the ponytail, and a personal “favorite” of mine, the tilting of the head.

“Hey Khaled, what’d you do this time?” she said as she skipped alongside me.

I paid no attention to her as I lifted my hood down my face, hoping to mask my identity from those who would bring me nothing but misery. She smiled and ran off giggling to her friends who were waiting for her at the cafeteria. A few glances were thrown back towards my side from time to time, and they didn’t give off positive vibes.

I continued my five-hundred-mile walk only for it to be over as I bumped into the designated room’s door. I knocked and waited entry. The door creaked open, and a shadow loomed over me, consuming my very soul as a familiar face arose. “Mr. Josef,” a large man said. His hair was as white as snow, his skin tanned with
a face that looks as if it was made of putty. I followed him to my reserved chair. Reserved being it was the only chair in that room. If anything, the chair was the only thing in the room. There were no windows, no tables, no bins or even books. The only thing to pay attention to was the light bulb swinging overhead which looked as if it was going to drop any moment. But that has been the case for two months now, and it's still there. It might as well stay there seeing as it's my only form of entertainment here.

Throughout this time, I kept my mouth shut about all this to my parents, my mom most notably. English writing was something that my family valued, and it so happened to be the lesson I gave the least shit about.

My dad walked into my room grinning as the sound of the TV blasted out the cheers of thousands of people with a person yelling through the mic about a ball going through the net. He took off his headpiece and told me something I remember to this day. “Son, writing is important to me. To us. You want to know why?” I shook my head in anticipation. He cleared his throat as he played with his beads, signifying that this was a very important matter, and then he said, “If you can't write, you can't tell me what you want.”

Night after night, I pondered the meaning of that sentence and how significantly it made me think. I would stare at my doodles in class with a blank expression on my face, thinking of how this has caused me all this trouble. I ran home as soon as school ended, busted open the door and entered my room, tossing my doodle book across the room. I huddled myself in the corner as tears flowed down my face, thinking of how much my life has been affected because of a bunch of scribbles and gibberish on pieces of paper. Darkness surrounded me, my mind clogged up and my breath tightened. The sound of the door opening was heard, but I ignored it and focused on what has become of the present. I felt a warm cloth wrap around my body, so I peeked up and noticed my mom smiling back onto me. She moved my hair away from my face and kissed my forehead with passion that set my soul at peace as if by magic. I tried to speak, but nothing came out. “Ssshh, don't say anything,” she says with a soft voice. “Show me.”

She handed me my doodle book with all its scrunched-up pieces and clutter. I flipped a page and began sketching. I handed her a finished picture of a man in the shape of a devil with the title “Mr. Joseph” underneath it. My mom then took the doodle book, and I watched in amazement as she sketched something beside it—a little man on a pedestal with a smile on his face, standing above Mr. Joseph with the title “Khalood” above it. She looked into my eyes and lit them up like a starry night with one sentence: “You don't need to write for me, because your eyes tell me everything.”

The air within my soul diffused throughout the cages of my ribs. It felt liberated and expanded to a horizon for a minute which felt more like eternity. My lungs
freed themselves of their captivity and my emotions let loose. Tears overflowed like a dam bursting, sending an emotional outcry. I tried to spout out words to show my gratitude, to tell her how hard it has been and what lay behind all this. But my feelings got the best of me, and I surrendered myself to them. And I didn't mind it one bit.
Whenever I go over this story, I realize how small things can really make a huge difference. Basically, all the small incidents included in this literacy narrative shaped the man I am today. Unfortunately, I didn't recognize how crucial they would be in my life at the time they occurred. That's why when I was assigned to write this literacy narrative for ENGL 104 I didn't know that I would get attached to it that much. But now, I feel that it's part of me written on paper. This piece of writing is dedicated to all those who created these small incidents in my life, who, unfortunately, I didn't have an opportunity to thank. This piece is dedicated to all of those, who I'm certain won't be reading it.
Power of Words

Our love to our homeland leads us to jail, dad?!
- Be strong!
Our culture is the origin of our plight, dad?!
- Be virtuous!
The poetry's music really hurts them, dad!
- Keep warbling with it, and fear no one but god.
—Ayman Al-Atoum

With this conversation between a detained poet and his father, my life was changed. Through it, I started reading novels and writing literary works. Although it might seem exaggerated or unrealistic to many, it's just precise for me. My journey with reading and writing shows that normal incidents to some people could be influential and inspirational to others.

Everything started when one of my friends on Facebook posted a photo of this dialogue on his news feed; the discourse really ravished, engaged, and thrilled me as I thought that it could have occurred between my father and me but in different words. And as my habit when encountering a quote or an interesting piece of information is to look for its origins, I sought to find the author of this conversation and the context he used it in. Fortunately, I located this conversation in a novel called Ya Sahibay Al-Sijn or O My Fellow Prisoners by the Jordanian author Ayman Al-Atoum. The passion this conversation founded in me made me eager to read the whole novel. On the 23rd of June 2016, I started reading a novel for the first time. In my first moments of reading, I felt that I was someone who couldn't swim but was thrown in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean to look for a treasure. I literally couldn't understand a whole sentence. However, whenever I thought of giving up, I always remembered how the author's simple words in the conversation were able to evoke my emotions this way. I kept believing that this novel holds a part of me. I had faith in the words, and illogically I kept trying. I spent hours suffering while reading each page, but with time the novel accepted me as one of its followers.

The novel was an autobiography of the Jordanian poet Ayman Al-Atoum. In it, he narrates his experience in prison after reciting a poem at an event. In that poem, he satirized the Jordanian government and king for signing the Israel-Jordan peace treaty. He then tells his experience in jail and how he refused to get out from it by writing a poem glorifying the king as a form of an apology, and my masterpiece from the novel was a part of a conversation between the poet and his father when visiting him in jail.

After reading the novel, I partially recognized why I had got so emotional about the author’s words. I knew why his words were received by my brain as if it came from my heart. It was because I felt that the author and I shared a similar part of our different stories. We had a similar identity, but different experiences. Both
of us loved his country, believed that it deserves sacrifices, and were punished because of that patriotism. However, he was punished by prison, and I was punished by getting exiled. Furthermore, the author’s relationship with his father as his role model was the same type of relationship between my father and me. Both of us saw our fathers as the hero, the teacher, the doctor, and the brother. All these common emotions were embodied in that conversation which explains why I had fallen in love with these words from the first sight.

My successful experience with the author encouraged me to read more and more of his novels. Through his writings, I witnessed the tragedies of the Syrian prisons, participated in an Al-Yarmouk university sit-in, prayed in Al-Aqsa mosque, and lived with him the insane love through his novel *Taste of Death*. I remember how I used to project his words on my own love story to feel it the same way the main character did. However, after reading most of his works, I became afraid that I was just limiting myself to his writings. This fear led me to read works for other writers. I read for other Arab, English, and Norwegian authors; they were special on their own, but no one made me feel that his writing was designed to satisfy me the way Al-Atoum did. It was a Catholic marriage between my emotions and his words.

I wanted to generate my own. Instead of looking for words that can evoke my emotions and describe them, I aimed to produce them. Everything started with a short letter to a girl whom I loved. Even though it was never sent, it described my feelings towards her. This way, I continued writing short unsent letters describing my emotions. And with time, short letters turned into long ones addressed to many other people. I wrote to my father, old friends, and to the people who I love or miss most. This allowed me to feel their presence in case they were away from me in one way or another. However, all these forms of writings never saw the light; they were just in hidden papers and in my heart.

Everything was going this way until one day a friend of mine saw me reading and said, “I’m always seeing you reading but never writing. Haven’t you ever tried writing?”

I replied, “I do write, but I’m just keeping it for myself.”

He responded, “Then why are you writing and to whom?”

As both questions may seem simple, they took me a huge amount of mental effort to answer them to myself. *Why am I writing and to whom?* I know exactly to whom, but why, if no one is receiving or interacting with it? Maybe I’m writing to mitigate myself from the flood of emotions and pain, maybe to always feel the proximity of those far people whom I miss, or maybe because I got used to this. And until now, I never had a certain answer. But, why am I not publishing this for everyone? Maybe because I’m that guy who prefers to keep his emotions for himself rather than sharing them. However, that could mean in
one way or another that I am selfish as I’m not allowing people who have similar experiences to taste and project my words in their own lives, as Al-Atoum’s words had done to me. To avoid feeling this way, I started publishing some of my words on my social media accounts to measure their impact and effectiveness. Thankfully, most feedbacks were positive, and one of the impressions that flattered me was from my Arabic teacher who said, “You write better than most of the Arabic teachers.”

As time passed, my skills in writing were advancing. I started writing articles about various topics, mostly political, posting them on my Facebook feed. I always had a good feedback; however, they didn’t have any impact. They were just ordinary reflections on certain topics. But I got a chance once to have a bigger impact when my Arabic teacher, the one who praised me for my writings, came and invited me to participate in a local article-writing competition held by the Doha Center of Media Freedom. It was a gift from the sky to me because this competition would really measure the effectiveness of my words. But as the journey of high peaks includes many obstacles, I didn’t get the support I needed from the school. No training sessions or revisions of the articles were offered to me. Moreover, I later knew that my Arabic teacher would be participating in the same competition by the name of a student. It didn’t stop here; I learned later that many teachers were participating the same way. That bothered me much as I thought that this would under-estimate my writing and wouldn’t be a true test for my skills. However, as there was nothing to lose, I participated. I was given a bunch of books to read on how to write an article. I rejected to do so, as I thought that the words written should get out of one’s heart in a form that just suits the context, and it is nonsense to make it more complicated. Out of three topics to write about—1. the right to know what’s going on, 2. the effect of rumors on the society, and 3. hate speech—I chose to write about hate speech. I chose that topic as I felt that it’s one of the main causes of the conflicts we’re living in the Arab world and in the Middle East. With a literary language, I wrote about the reasons, impacts, and the forms of hate speeches. I included as well real-life situations and examples, showing how conflicts could have been solved more easily if hate speeches weren’t there. I submitted my article with no proofreading as my teacher thought that I had no chance to win this.

On the day of declaring the first three winners of the competition, the student, who my teacher participated by using his name, and I went to the final awards ceremony. During the ceremony, all participants had doubts and thought that they will lose. However, I had faith in my words; I knew they were true and I knew they are powerful. They started announcing the winners with the third place. They mentioned the title of the article; however, no one went out to receive the award. This made the organizers say the name of the participant, at that moment the participant realized that he once wrote an article with this title! The second place was for the article of the student who my teacher participated in using his name. At that moment, doubt started penetrating me. Could I ever be the first? Is it possible that my un-proofread article won this? While being
killed with skepticism, my article's title was announced as the first place! I won this and my words triumphed! That gave me more faith that my words can cause change and have impact. However, as much as I got proud of this was as much as I got scared. I never wanted the destiny of the first author I had read. But that fear didn't last long. I kept warbling with my words and feared no one but God as the father advised his son, the poet.

In less than two years, my literary skills have developed enormously. Thanks to everything that made me present in that place. Thanks to my country and to the Arabian homeland, living in them formed my identity, thoughts which later generated all my writings. Thanks to Al-Atoum for his writings, for they were the thing that set me on the road. Thanks to those whom I wrote my letters: your love was inspiration. Thanks to the friend who made me accept publishing what would be useful to people from my writings. A huge thanks to the one who shared the photo of that conversation on his news feed, although he ironically deleted that photo from his timeline. He gifted me a treasure without knowing its value. Maybe he hadn't tasted the words the way I did. What could be transient for some people could be life-changing to you.

Omar Deyab Deyab is an Egyptian mechanical engineering student, Class of 2022. To him, writing isn't only about expressing ourselves, but also about keeping ourselves alive. He always believed in the phrase that said, “You are nothing but a number of days, and whenever a day passes away, a part of you passes away.” However, as his few days were flying by one after another, he lived many experiences that he didn’t accept to fade away. Writing was the only thing that he found to make his stories immortal, and not simply vanishing as time goes on. He loves writing because writers live the most!
Elusive Horrorphilia

You ever have that feeling when you’re so scared your head goes numb? The feeling of adrenaline rushing to your head, or the feeling that anything could be hiding in that corner, behind you, or under your bed? Well, that was my kind of high, and I couldn’t get enough of it.

During 4th grade, I got a hold of a random book I managed to pick from a bunch of shelves conveniently (and aptly) named “horror fiction” in a mall bookstore. The book seemed intriguing; the cover picture was of a kid and a grotesque, canine-like creature standing side-by-side. This cover took me aback, as I’ve heard of such stories about creatures of the night, and I could tell that this was one of them. I felt shaken, but intrigued at the same time, so I flipped through the pages and started reading. It was about two boys who ventured into the forest late at night and fell on unfortunate circumstances, with one ending up turning into a “sigbin” (1). I’ll spare you the details, but the book seemed interesting enough to me that I asked my grandmother to buy it for me, and she happily (albeit reluctantly, considering the fact that she knew I was a timid kid) obliged. Later that evening, I read the book in the dimly-lit mall parking lot as my relatives and I waited for my parents to pick us up. I just couldn’t wait for proper lighting to present itself as I was too eager to know what happened next. I found myself resorting to what little luminosity the street lamp provided me. While my brothers and cousins preoccupied themselves by playing “tumbang preso” (2), I was sitting near the street lamp, too focused on my book to notice anything. My brother had to tap me on my shoulder to declare that our parents had arrived. This was when my passion for reading started. You would often find me reading a book provided I wasn’t out getting into trouble with my friends doing childhood stuff. I’d read as much as I could, when I could, where I could. I’d often spend hours with good books, and I was as attached to them as people are now to their phones. I even had books getting confiscated because I was reading them during class (I still loathe my math teacher for losing the book he confiscated from me).

I loved the sudden surges of fear that crept onto me as I read books. The amount of reading I did with horror fiction gracefully blended in with my fear of the unknown. Since being a kid means that you’re as gullible as, well, a kid, I read them under the notion that they were indeed true. The stories themselves possessed some degree of verisimilitude, and boy was I scared to leave my room at night. It was always about the supernatural. I found the typical love story too cringe-worthy for my taste. I even found famous fiction books like Percy Jackson and Twilight too boring despite most people thinking otherwise. Horror fiction

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(1) Sigbin — A cryptid in Philippine mythology with characteristics similar to the infamous “chupacabra.” The sigbin, however, feeds on small children instead of goats. (2) Tumbang preso — a traditional Filipino game with similar rules to “Duck on a rock,” except the “duck” is usually a can or a tripod of slippers placed on the ground.
was where it was at, hence, I read supernatural books the most. I would often find myself borrowing books on such topics from my friends. My go-to books were from the *True Philippine Ghost Stories* series. I’d borrow these books from my cousin, who was also my classmate. I’d keep them with me for days on end, since she had already read them. I also read countless gems from other authors, like the *Goosebumps* books from R.L. Stine, and I even read a story titled, “The Dunwich Horror,” by the man, the myth, the legend: H.P. Lovecraft. My parents wouldn’t buy me such books since they knew I was quite a timid kid when it came to ghosts; they failed to realize that my chicken-heartedness was the trait that made those books really special. The genre gave me a feeling I could relate to: a feeling of fear.

Fast forward to 2011, I moved to Qatar. This meant that I would leave my friends (and their books) behind. Since my parents were still adamant on not getting me such books, I had to resort to online forums to get my adrenaline fix. It was at this time that I found the holy grail of the horror genre: Reddit (3). Back then, my phone was primitive compared to the technology at the time, so I had to resort to using my dad’s iPad. I’d spend hours skimming through Reddit’s “nosleep (4)” subreddit (5). I’d read the stories that got the most votes, since they were usually the best, but then I’d go deeper and find an overlooked story that has more thrill than what’s on the front page. This time, my adrenaline-filled reading journey had an interesting addition: the serendipity of finding an intriguing story within the forgotten corners of the subreddit; it felt like digging up a long lost jewel, a precious artifact of a forgotten era. It was during one of my daily fixes when I read stories that were so immersive that it became an impossible task to close the browser. These stories were all attributed to one author, the person with the username *inaaace*.

*Inaaace’s* stories were the bee’s knees of the subreddit. The guy was nothing short of legendary when it came to the praise his works received. He’d appear on the front page the most, and I’d always open Reddit expecting to see his name first. One of my favorite stories of his was about an isolated Bosnian village during World War II. During the course of the story, the villagers encountered a massive decline in their food stocks as enemy soldiers ransacked their village and robbed them of most of their possessions. Soon after the soldiers disappeared, mysterious deaths began happening around the village. These deaths were too grotesque to be done by humans, and the people usually died in strange ways. One such way was when an entire family died, but their bodies were placed in such a way as if they were having a nice dinner (which was weird considering the village’s relatively empty food stocks). The corpses, as *inaaace* described, seemed happy.

(3) Reddit—a website dedicated to discussions, news, and content sharing.
(4) Nosleep—a subreddit dedicated to stories related to the paranormal. These stories could range from cryptids, to poltergeists.
(5) Subreddit—a forum in Reddit dedicated to a certain topic. In this case, the subreddit’s name is “nosleep.”
Once I even binge-read the stories on his profile, and I even finished all of them and wanted for more. It was during this time when inaaace revealed that he would consider writing a book. Being a fan of his work, you could say that I was ecstatic at the news. I’d scrounge up all the info I can about the book’s release, about what to expect. Basically if it was anything related to the book, I was all over it. I was nothing short of desperate when it came to getting the book.

When inaaace finally released the book, I felt the rush of joy creep into my every vein. I pictured myself walking in a gilded hall, angels to my sides singing melodies of euphoria and jubilance. Their angelic voices echoed and resonated throughout the hall, pushing the acoustic capacities of said hall to its limit. Their faces comprised of pure, immaculate innocence that evoked from me a feeling of paranormal comfort. At the end of the hall was a gilded altar that consisted of a mountainous pile of books (imagine the Iron Throne in Game of Thrones, except it was an altar and the swords were books), and atop the altar sat inaaace’s book. As I inched closer to my very own holy grail, the object I sought for a very long time, I felt a sharp pain at my sides. I surveyed my surroundings and discovered to my horror that the angels had turned into harpies. I had been stabbed by one of them, and I fell to my knees. The angels who were once pristine images of uncontested beauty were now beings of darkness, their faces twisted to the degree of their betrayal. Their once angelic voices were soon drowned out by their sadistic and malevolent cackling, and I was the object of their humor. I snapped out of my daydream when I came to a painful realization: my parents would never buy me this.

Since we moved to Qatar I rarely asked my parents to buy me things, and when I did, they usually obliged. This, however, was an exception. No matter how much I brought it up at the dinner table, no amount of convincing would be enough for my parents to buy me the book. “You’d scare yourself to death,” they protested, “If you didn’t, you’d end up scaring your brothers with such stories.” I was defeated. The moments of joy fletted and were replaced with nothing but moments of dejection. I reluctantly accepted the fact that I wasn't going to get the book, and I tell you this: it felt awful; it felt as if I tried to win something I always wanted and failed miserably, that I tried to swim against the tide despite knowing that the game was rigged from the start. I never saw Reddit the same way again, and I felt my love for reading falter. It was as if I was shot from a cannon and collided with a brick wall. I felt that my reading days were behind me. Whenever I open up Reddit, I see inaaace’s name, and internally weep at the fact that I’m not getting his book. I stopped going to Reddit frequently after that, as I had lost my interest.

Nowadays, I occasionally scroll through Reddit, although the feelings of fear and serendipity are nowhere to be found. Losing the opportunity to get the book when I wanted it the most left a bitter taste in my metaphorical reading mouth, and I had since started losing my appetite. I also usually don’t have time to read anymore, so the part of me that loved reading lays dormant. Sometimes, I get
the pangs, the need to simply get a good story and sit in a quiet corner. I try to
get ahold of the urge as much as I can and enjoy the satisfaction of reading a
story, but the urge dissipates as quickly as it descends upon me. I still read up on
cryptids and other topics about the great unknown, however, but nothing feels
the same anymore.
This piece was an assignment for ENGL 104 course. I thought of sharing it with everyone so they can become motivated from it. The writing assignment was about my history with reading and writing and how I improved. I have chosen this case to prove that the word *impossible* does not exist and that everything is possible if you aim and work hard for it. Through this essay the message that I also wanted to convey to the students who are specifically registered in English foundation classes is that this foundation course will provide you with a lot of knowledge that will ease the process of joining the university’s academic aspect.
The Recovery of a Hero

Nine years ago, a child who was attending primary school ran around and couldn't sit in one place to read a childish story for at least 5 minutes because she hated reading. Yet, she had such strong English skills that everyone knew that about her inside the school and outside it. This girl was so pretty. Her blue school uniform fitted her perfectly. She wore her shiny black shoes, and she used to braid her hair and end the braid with a white hairband, which made her unique. This child was me.

My school was like a paradise where it had a beautiful garden that you can see butterflies flying around and people walking around smiling to each other. The school had 5 classes areas, each one a different color and a theme that gave the school a fancy look. In this paradise, I used to participate in some of the many activities, such as morning assembly which was done in English. I used to jump from one spelling bee competition to another just like a buzzing bee who loves collecting nectar. I was like a reference for my friends to translate words for them from Arabic to English for our tiny writing assignments. Even my teachers got benefit from me by having me act like a TV presenter, presenting their projects that were in English to show them how our education was. People around me always trusted my English skills, and I felt like I was their hero.

Outside school, my parents were very proud of me. My uncle used to joke with me about my grades since I used to get the highest grade in English every year not in school level only, even on the national level (SEC exams). He joked that I was born in a family whose father is American and whose mother is British. This joke made me laugh in a hysterical way because both of my parents are Qatari.

In my transition from primary to preparatory school, I went from being the big hero to losing my powers one by one. The main reason of losing my English powers is that the curriculum of the government schools changed from studying using English language to Arabic language. Studying in Arabic language after having 6 years of English teaching was a hard thing where I felt that I was lost alone in the desert, but we all got used to it by time.

As I reached secondary school, I didn't bother studying in Arabic. I felt that I lost almost half of my English skills from reading and writing. I am not “Google translation” for my friends anymore, I am not a TV presenter for my teachers' projects, and I lost the confidence that I had when I used to stand in front of everyone in morning assembly. I was sad for a bit of time because these skills built my personality that I was very proud of.

At that age, to be accepted in Texas A&M University at Qatar was also one of my dreams. By getting accepted into the university, I hoped to have the experience of studying abroad. Studying abroad was another dream that I had and Texas A&M University at Qatar could make it true where it can give me the same
feelings as I am studying abroad since its curriculum and environment are similar to the main campus. And graduating from this university will create vast opportunities for my future self because its certificate has a strong reputation around the world.

At first, I didn't see this as a big problem. I didn't give attention to losing my reading and writing skills until the last year of school when we started to prepare ourselves for university. At that time, I woke up from my nap, and I was shocked by how big the problem was. My English subject grade from being the highest grade became the lowest. When I registered for IELTS exam for the first time and I got 5 out of 9, I knew it was a very bad grade for someone who used to be a hero in the beginning. I started to think about how I was going to be accepted in Texas A&M University at Qatar as it was one of my dreams.

For these reasons, which is to make my several dreams true through this dream, I drew my path to learn English after I was smashed by the grade I got in the IELTS exam. I started to practice English for its sake. I got an IELTS tutor for 3 days before my next IELTS exam to give me some tips to pass it. I got 5.5 and at the last exam before closing registration, I got 6. I was disappointed that I woke up late, and I started wishing that Texas A&M University is going to accept me.

Two months later, I had unexpected call during my lunch time. The call was kind of weird where I have been asked about my name and my feelings. Then they surprised me by the big news that I couldn’t believe! I was overwhelmed with happiness and joy that this awaited news made me feel like I am flying in the sky: I was fully admitted and accepted as a student in Texas A&M University at Qatar.

As I started to attend classes in the university, I was registered in STLC which was English Foundation 2 since my English skills weren't fit for university level. I was really disappointed about my miserable situation. I didn't imagine that one day I would lose my English skills as bad as this. Yet, this was a turning point in my life.

In English foundation 2, the professors started to teach us the basics of English that we should and must know. They climbed the stairs with us step by step to strengthen our reading and writing skills. They used portfolio method with us to look over our mistakes and learn from them. At the beginning of the semester, writing assignments were the hardest for me and it used to drain my energy for a whole day to write 350 words only. Other than this, when I read, I used to take 2 hours to read 10 pages because I hated reading. And that level of reading and writing was stuck with me for the whole course since I didn't use to write and read at school as much as I did at university.

When I went to English Foundation 1, my writing and reading abilities increased, I started to feel things becoming easy, and I am pretty sure that this
is due to what I have learned in English Foundation 2. I believe that every time I face difficulties in doing something, this means that I am learning. And the difficulties that I felt in English Foundation 2 are gone in English Foundation 1. I started to write an essay assignment in half a day and readings started to become easier since I learned some tips on how to read an essay during this course and how to write references.

And now as I am currently in English 104, my writing and reading skills became even stronger. Even though only one month has passed, I learned that in reading assignments I should analyze what I have read to understand. In writing assignments, I shouldn’t care about having a perfect writing draft from the first time, and I should just let the words flow, show and display themselves in the writing assignments.

At last, I am sure that you want to know how my reading and writing skills are now, but don’t be shocked! I became a good reader where I can finish 20 pages in 60 minutes, and I became a good writer who wrote this draft in approximately 3 hours, ending up with nearly 1400 words. The skills of the big hero returned again with the help of the professors of the university who spend most of their time trying to benefit us. I was also helped by the people around me who encouraged me that I can do it.

Hanan Al-Ansari is a chemical engineering student, Class of 2021. She is a student full of dreams that no one knows about, and she is waiting for the moment when her dreams become a reality and speak for themselves.
ERLINDA
“BETH” CAERLANG

I believe in the power of prayer to heal the heartbroken and the distraught. Prayer is a potent cure to bring peace to the grief-stricken soul, a panacea that binds the wounds of the offended and the downtrodden. I never completely understood what it meant to wrestle with God until I experienced one of the most defining moments of my life.
Heaven’s Help

I will never forget how exultant I was the day I gave birth to my son, Abiel Lorenz. Knowing that I would soon behold and carry the love of my life in my arms made me look forward to a lifetime of pure bliss with him. That day, the excruciating pain of childbirth was more than bearable because an inexplicable joy enveloped me. After an intense and physically draining 12-hour labor, I saw the most beautiful being I could ever behold. There's no doubt I was the happiest mother that eventful day. Looking at him, I had already imagined what his life would be. While I was musing about my plans for him, the doctor said that my son had fetal distress during my 12-hour labor. She continued by saying that he contracted a serious infection, but didn't explain in detail what she meant by that statement. All I knew was that she dispensed vials of antibiotics to arrest it. The day I first held him in my arms, I suspected instinctively that something was wrong with him. Although I was still in trance because of the effect of the anesthesia, I was conscious enough to witness that he didn't cry nor jerk when the doctor raised him upside down. She had to slap his tiny buttocks twice to make him gasp for his first breath. I was relieved when he finally produced the almost inaudible whimpers. My maternal instinct gave me a sense that my little bundle of joy was not a bouncing baby boy. I asked my doctor with a faint and dubious voice, “Is he okay?” She responded reassuringly, “Yes, he is all well. He simply had a meconium stain from fetal distress.” Knowing she guaranteed that my son was at the pink of his health, I didn’t probe anymore and trusted her words.

Every day for five days, the doctor would see my son and check his condition. Every time I would report to her his feeding frequency, his sleeping pattern, and his urine color, she would have perfect answers to all my questions making me believe that she knew what she was doing, but little did I know that my son's clock was ticking. The morning of the fifth day made me apprehensive. I noticed that his arms and legs became rigid and his sucking reflex was gone. Although he appeared to be sleeping as usual, I felt something terrifying was looming, and I wasn’t prepared emotionally to come to grips with the reality that my son was unwell. Straightaway, my husband and I decided to rush him to the nearest private hospital.

The first time the female pediatrician laid her eyes on my son, she blurted out, “What did you do with your child?” Abiel's appearance stunned her. I deemed her question very offensive and careless, so I defensively countered with a firm voice, “He has an attending doctor since he was born.” I reasoned out in my mind, “Didn’t she know how much my husband and I protected our son from any harm even before giving birth to him?” As she was diagnosing my son’s case, I sat still, but my mind was inundated with morbid thoughts of losing my precious child. No words could describe the feelings of terror that suddenly enshrouded my whole being. When I asked her about my son's illness, she reluctantly responded, “Only a miracle can save your child.” From the look
on the doctor’s face, I could tell that something ominous was forthcoming. However, I was in complete denial. I wanted to turn the hands of time back to 12 September 1995, the day I gave birth to him so I could rewrite his life story. However, I knew I didn’t have a magic wand to undo what had already transpired. Thus, the only consolation I wanted from above was to let him live. I didn’t care anymore what physical and mental damages he would sustain. All I wanted was to be with him, to take care of him, and to see him grow. Whatever the doctor would tell me after didn’t matter to me anymore. In my mind, I would just accept in quiet submission my son’s unfortunate fate.

The doctor hurriedly instructed the nurses to prepare the operating room for my son’s blood transfusion procedure. The quiet hospital instantly became very busy like a marketplace. Nurses followed the doctor’s commands with agitation. For six hours, my husband and I waited outside of the operating room where the procedure was being done. Every time nurses would come out from the operating room, we would ask them for updates about my son. After a while, the doctor came out with my son crying at the top of his voice. My heart leaped with joy knowing that he survived all the pains that he had gone through. “He is a fighter,” I thought. Later that day, the pediatrician explained the cause of my son’s severe infection. She said that the antibiotic given to my son by the previous doctor was not the right dosage. Furthermore, she added that the excessive bilirubin in my son’s blood had already affected his brain. From her sullen face, I surmised that she was very sorry for us. She went on telling us that my son could suffer from a permanent disability because of his grave physical condition. As I was keenly listening to her explanation, I felt emotionally shattered. The fact that our aspirations for him were dashed suddenly due to the previous doctor’s incompetence made me furious. I kept rehashing to myself, “How could a doctor with many years of experience under her belt make such an unthinkable medical miscalculation?” As I rehearsed in my mind the irreparable damage that she caused my family, my enmity towards her escalated. I blamed her for being negligent and inept and for not dispensing the right dose of antibiotics to my son.

While all these negative thoughts occupied my frenzied mind, I received a strong impression to seek solace in prayer. I went to one of the vacant rooms adjacent to the operating room and poured my heart out to my Heavenly Father with all the energy of my soul. I begged him to lift the emotional load that had dragged me to the pit of deep melancholy. I cried in earnest desperation to grant me the serenity I much needed. I implored Him to help me understand the situation, the doctor, and the uncertain future that my family would eventually face. I pleaded to Him to wipe away the animosity, the remorse, and the hopelessness that had swallowed me up for the past days. I summoned Him to uphold and comfort me during my despair.

I don’t know how long I shook the heavens with my fervent supplication. All I knew was I felt an undeniable peace after I said, “Amen.” As days progressed, my
whole being had been encircled gradually with compassion towards the doctor. My view of the daunting future had become much clearer. I realized that my imminent challenge could be converted into an opportunity for spiritual growth. Though I couldn't fully grasp why this unfortunate event happened to my son, I trusted in God's wisdom. I was certain that He knew everything about my sorrow. “He will let me through it,” I pondered.

After his hospitalization for 12 days, he miraculously recuperated. However, he was diagnosed with cerebral palsy after two weeks. He became quadriplegic, making him totally dependent and disabled for the rest of his life. This heart-rending experience taught me to become more prayerful. I came to understand how prayers could alleviate the pains of a scarred soul. Through prayers, I was able to cope with all the anguish and grief of seeing my son not living up to his full potential as a human being. Though my heart has never stopped bleeding because of that awful incident, I believe that I have been continually receiving heaven's help for I have managed to live in peace despite that tragedy. Because I prayed earnestly that day, I was able to reap God's promised gifts of healing and tranquility.

Erlinda “Beth” Caerlang works as a writing consultant at the Center for Teaching and Learning. She considers writing as a cathartic experience; something that she would never get tired of doing. She writes because she wants to encourage others to see the beauty of life despite unexpected defeats and overwhelming challenges. Likewise, Beth writes because she wants to leave a legacy that will inspire other writers to continue creating extraordinary masterpieces.
Graduation with a Chance of Tears

Welcome to the graduation forecast. Now, let’s see what the university is like today. In freshman year it is sunny and breezy. There may be a thunderstorm in sophomore year as the tension is a bit higher. In the third year there is a chance of rain, and it is quite windy too. So stay in university and hold tight until you finish your project reports. The final year has the best weather when the sky starts clearing. The forecast concludes with graduation—with a chance of tears.

20 Credits: Rainbow in the sky
Freshman year starts with a breeze. You achieved what you have been working for the past twelve years. You made your parents proud by choosing engineering, and you see rainbows in the sky reflecting the bright future waiting for you. Courses are breezy. You have seen this stuff in school before. The content only though, not the reports. Some lucky bunch skipped those courses. Now they are going around showing off that they are sophomores by credit. You have all of the free time in the world, but you don’t realize that yet. Later you will forget what sleep is. But not for now; now it is still sunny, but beware of the storm ahead.

+30 Credits: Thunder Storm
Sophomore year comes rumbling. The rainbows in your eyes disappear. You realize that you might not be where you wanted to be. You experience a quarter-life crisis and the weather becomes 42. You start asking some existential questions. Why did I join this university? How did I sign up for engineering? Why am I becoming an engineer? Tension is building in the air. Your confusion is making the storm more severe. You try to calm down by studying abroad, going on a service trip, doing undergraduate research, and playing FIFA in the lounge. Anything to prevent the storm from becoming a tornado. The year ends with drizzling in preparation for the rain in the upcoming year.

60-89 Credits: Heavy Downpour
The drizzling from sophomore year leaves you waiting for rain. Everyone warns you about the amount of work that will pour on you when you reach your Junior year. And here we are using Q-drops as umbrellas. We wish for the sky to clear, but controls and heat transfer are making the droplets heavier. The cloud of internships bumps into the cloud of capstone project selection, and the sky doesn't seem like it will clear up soon. But even though it is raining, you still manage to Invent for the Planet, publish in Best Writing, present in the Industrial Showcase, and have a part time job on the side.

91 Credits: Clear Sky and a Ring
Congratulations on becoming a senior. You have survived the storm (almost). Gold and silver is decorating the sky. The Aggie ring was worth the wait. Seeing that eagle everyday reminds you of what you achieved, and the potential still unleashed. A few flurries are possible, carrying with them questions about finding your first job or filling your grad school applications. The capstone
project is still in the background, and demo day is approaching soon. Perhaps the only thing that is making this better is the countdown to graduation everywhere on the screens.

128 Credits: Graduation with a chance of Tears
Today, a high of 128 with 100% chance of graduating. Mainly happy, festive, and glorious. The weather only got better because we survived all the wind, rain, and storms. Hold tight, because you may experience more storms in life. You can't prevent bad weather, but you can prepare for it. Your diploma is your shield, and what you learned here in university is your survival kit. May your sky be always clear, and your future always bright.
“Life is filled with choices” sounds like a cliché, right? But it’s true. You wake up in the morning and choose what you’re going to wear or where you’re going to go first. Would you drink coffee first or maybe just orange juice? Should you walk up the stairs to your office or take the elevator? Small choices, that seem so finite to the series of events that may follow. Those were the choices I hung on to, finite choices; I made so many tiny choices all in the hopes to just get by life smoothly. Those choices worked, I was alive and healthy and cruising through life. My finite choices led me to Oman, yes Oman. I went on a student trip in May of 2015. This marked my first extraordinary choice. Let’s call this choice “the bang.”

Now for some background before the bang. In May 2015, I had just ended my freshman year in university. That year was filled with new experiences, new people and new developments. That year ended with me achieving a 2.6 GPA. In my perspective at the time, that was average, and that GPA fit well into my life; it supported my ability to maintain only finite choices. Now, that GPA was also accumulated through finite choices. For instance, choosing to drop two major courses and having a lower load. A load that led me to adding another year to my university years. You see, there was a trend: finite choices meant less work, less stress and less outcome. Although ultimately it was the easier route.

Now, what led me to the bang? What was the trigger? Someone close to me was telling me her grades and said she got a 3.0 GPA. See, that wasn't the trigger in itself, that was what led to a series of thoughts that worked as the trigger. Why am I not achieving this much? Why am I, a person who was the top of her class in high school, not achieving? Why am I sitting here with just a 2.6 GPA? And there it was, ladies and gentlemen, the bang. In Oman, in front of the ocean on a dark night, I broke down. To my left at the time was my friend Maryam. She explained to me that life is filled with choices, but the biggest choice is when you choose what type of choices you will take on a daily basis. Will they be finite or extraordinary (the bang)? Waking up extra early, going to the gym, having coffee and juice, working an extra hour, make bang worthy choices.

Now here I am, after the bang, after four years of extraordinary choices. I am graduating with honors from Texas A&M with an electrical engineering degree. But please understand, it wasn’t easy. You have to be willing to push through all the negative thoughts you hear, but also the ones you tell yourself intrinsically.

“Lolwa, you can’t do it.”

“Lolwa, this is not for you.”

“Lolwa, you need to get above a 3.6 GPA each semester until you graduate.”

“Lolwa, you can’t survive. Your English isn’t that good.”
“Lolwa, you can’t even be on the dean’s list for a semester.”

“Lolwa, you can’t get 4.0 in one semester.”

“Lolwa, just stop.”

“Lolwa, you are hurting your mental health.”

“Lolwa, sometimes quitting is something good.”

“Lolwa, Lolwa, Lolwa, Lolwa …”

The magical way to move past this is through the power of the mind. Now say this out loud, “YOU CAN DO IT.” Keep saying it, say it daily, say it every time you lose hope or faith. Say it at the best of times and the worst. Because you can do it, just like I did, just like so many in the world have done.

Now, set forth and make extraordinary choices that lead to extraordinary outcomes. Find your bang.
JAWAHIR
AL-TAMIMI
Class of 2019
The Final Words

After four, five, six, or seven years, 40 subjects, 400 experiments, 4,000 assignments, projects and midterms, and 40,000 hours of hard work, a human becomes a superhero. Those superheroes are called engineering students. We are the super heroes who survived the last few years of struggle to be great future engineers, and here we are today gathering to celebrate ourselves to officially be engineers. My name is Jawahir Al-Tamimi, and I finally can call myself a petroleum engineer.

It is a great honor and pleasure on my personal behalf and on behalf of the petroleum department and students to welcome you to the Suhoor evening to celebrate our great graduating engineers.

I want to thank the people who made us into the successful and well-rounded students and leaders that we are today. I am grateful for all the PETE professors, especially our big boss, the father of all, Dr. Albertus Retnanto. He always cared about education and made sure that we are not “button engineers” who simply “hit the button and get results.” I want to also thank the youngest professor in our department who kept a personal connection with each one of us. Dr. Nayef Alyafei was not only the faculty advisor for our batch, but he was more like a brother. Our faculty and staff put all their effort and time into making sure we received the best education at all times and pushed us to reach our full potential and in striving for our goals. If I thank all the professors in the department, this will take me a few hours, and I know you wouldn't like this. PETE Faculty and Staff, thank you all, you are the best!

I want to also thank my PETE Class of 2019 who made the sleepless nights in 122 memorable and enjoyable. We laughed together, we cried together, we suffered together, ate together, we were angry at each other sometimes, but most importantly, we made lovely memories that we will never forget. We were never colleagues; we were brothers and sisters—a family that lived in 122. We never had bad intentions towards one another, and we always helped each other. We were only 12 students and each one of us added to the experience. We literally spent more time together in 122 than I spent with my family at home. In the end, whatever happened in 122 stays in 122.

And finally I want to say gig ’em and congratulations to the Class of 2019!

One final word: DRILLING!
Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to speak on behalf of the Mechanical Engineering Class of 2019 today. Over the past few years, we have been lucky enough to be part of a process and journey that has led to us being empowered individuals today. I like to consider my own journey as a Mechanical Engineering undergraduate at TAMUQ as a testament to the wealth of knowledge and experience this institution has to offer. From writing reports to building cars, we have been exposed to such a diverse set of situations that we feel ready to take on any challenge without hesitation. Despite what you may think, we know very well that our faculty and staff members in the Mechanical Engineering department have played a pivotal role in our growth and development, so I would like to give all of them a huge round of applause.

When I first joined TAMUQ, I did not know what stream of engineering I wanted to pursue, and my fondness for mechanical engineering has grown over time. I think I speak for all my peers when I say that we have grown into a mindset and passion for solving problems, while gaining the skills and methods required to do so in the dynamic world we live in today. I have personally come to realize that engineering is so much more than applying equations to systems, sizing components or tweaking controllers. It is in fact, a way of thinking driven by innovation and the motivation to make the world a better place.

With that, I would like to end my speech by saying thank you to our faculty, staff, and students for doing justice to the field of mechanical engineering through their tireless and continued efforts to advance in almost every aspect of the world we live in.
Howdy!

Ramadan Kareem to everyone. I would like to thank you all for joining us to celebrate such a special day, and thank you to my batch for electing me as the student speaker for the Electrical Engineering Department. Let's have a round of applause for the coolest batch and department out there.

To begin with, congratulations to those Aggies who are graduating tomorrow: we made it, barely. To my ECEN buddies: yes, we might not have our own study room, but that did not stop us from being there for each other. You could be at the cafeteria for a snack, or sleeping in the basement, or hiding in a corner to cry by yourself, but you will always find one of us there. Personally, I found you all special in your own way; you were caring, kind, supportive and most importantly, competitive. You were all smart, like I can barely remember having a curve in any of our exams! Each one of you had your own strength, for example: Ahmad Al-Asfar would teach us before lab quizzes, Sawsan Shukri would help us understand homework, Ahmed Alkuwari would come up with new equations and theories, while Ali Ali was just there to make us laugh. You made great senior designs and companies will be lucky to hire you. You were the perfect batch; you helped me grow personally and made me understand why it is important to surround yourself with great people. I truly appreciate all of you.

I could thank you all night, but I believe it is my responsibility to also thank our support system. On behalf of the ECEN batch, I would like to thank all of our professors. We know you enjoyed seeing us suffer sometimes, but you are the reason why we stand here tonight. You prepared us for the world out there and treated us like your sons and daughters. Teaching Assistants, sorry we knocked at your doors every 5 minutes. You listened to all our questions and complaints without hesitation. You were the brothers and the sisters we needed. Then there are the hidden heroes, our lovely parents. I hope we made you all proud, and we promise to continue working hard. Mum and Dad, I love you so much and I thank you for raising a great kid like me. Shout out to my boys, my senior design group, Amir, Ali, Karam and our inspiring mentor since day one, Dr. Mohammed Ismail.

Sadly, I will have to finish this speech before Lolwa Almajid starts crying. ECEN batch of 2019, you went through so much to become engineers, so you deserve to be proud. This is a new page in our lives; let's make the best out of it and show everyone how amazing we are.

Congratulations everyone. Thank you and gig 'em.
First of all, thank you Zeinab Ataya for co-writing this speech with me.

Ladies and gentlemen, Can we start?

My name is Saoud Al-Emadi, chemical engineering undergraduate (alhamdulilelah), and my batch thinks I should be representing them for the Suhoor speech. Well, the day of the voting, I remember that I was in room 106, where all senior chemical engineers basically live. I went to my guys and said, “What’s happening?” and they said that I should run for the speech, and I was like, “Ah ok.” I told them that my speech will be a good deal about you guys, but I can’t promise how serious I would keep it …*giggle* Am I right, guys?! Now let’s dive deep into this.

In all seriousness, I would like to first thank TAMUQ for this opportunity and for the preparation of this amazing Suhoor that connects the TAMUQ community with their parents and relatives in one room. It is a great honor for me to be standing here in front of you to represent my Chemical Engineering Class of 2019. I would like to officially start by congratulating all my fellow students on finally graduating. I can’t believe we actually made it this far, especially after taking Calculus 1 four times.

Our years at Texas A&M University at Qatar were definitely not easy; they were tiring and honestly, somewhat traumatizing. Reaching this ultimate goal required a lot of patience, dedication, commitment, and many, many … mannnnnnnnnyyyyy … all-nighters. All these memories of us pulling these all-nighters, eating together, sleeping together and trying to crack out hard-to-solve problems as one big team sometimes (#Absorption column). However, we all know how it feels when you are done. You guys are officially done! And this is nothing but a start of new chapter in your life, and these memories we made will remain in us forever.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to our success and helped us achieve our goal. After Allah of course, first, the professors for the endless support and effort they put into shaping us to become successful engineers even after we slept in their classes. Speaking of professors, I would like to also thank Dr. Nayef for checking up on us in 106 from time to time, #respect. Second, the TAs and staff for the help they constantly provided us with and mostly those who let us sneak in a late assignment from time to time, and thank you Raid for not spoiling Game of Thrones on us, much appreciated. Third, my batch, for being there all the time, literally, all the time, for the help, love, support, and for the food. Finally, I would like to thank our family members, for being with us in every milestone we reached, including this. We sometimes also gain family members along the way, and I have gained a brother, whom I deeply love and respect. Thank you so much for being with me along the way, Marwan Al-Wahsh.
At the end, congratulations again to all the graduates for surviving this rollercoaster and finally becoming engineers. And remember, this is not the end of a journey, this is the beginning of one.

Thank you and gig ‘em, Aggies.
KELLY
WILSON
Manager of Student Learning Support Services
Learning Is an Act of Courage

In August 2010, I began working at TAMUQ as a writing consultant in a department that was called The OASIS. It was a part-time position, and I met with students a few hours each day to talk about their writing assignments and how they could develop specific skills to become better writers. The only background qualification that I had to do this job was a bachelor’s degree in English, which had required me to write a lot. Since I had so much experience writing, perhaps I could help engineering students with theirs, coaching them along and giving them feedback on things like structure, style, tone, and clarity of their ideas. After the first semester or two, I realized that coming to work each day was one of the best parts of my new expat life in Doha.

Although I enjoyed the face to face interactions very much, I wasn't really satisfied with the kind of help I was giving students. That's when I decided to go back to school and work on a graduate degree in teaching writing. Fast forward several semesters, and now with a Masters degree in English with an emphasis on writing center praxis, I began to work full time as a Program Coordinator, and the department was now called the Academic Success Center, or ASC. This was the start of something new, and even though it felt familiar because my day to day interactions with students were still the core of my work, I had taken on new and bigger responsibilities, including training the peer tutors and working more closely with faculty teaching writing intensive classes.

Together, with other ASC staff, we began to provide a kind of learning support for TAMUQ students that we all sincerely and earnestly believe in because we recognize that **students don’t learn well unless they are loved well.** Students have to know that they are cared for in order to take the necessary risks and suffer the inevitable failures that come with learning, especially the kind of rigorous and intensive learning required of engineering students. So we set out to create a place in the building where students could go to ask for help and not feel bad about or ashamed of what they didn’t yet know or haven’t mastered. We wanted to provide our students with a learning center made up of staff and resources that encouraged deep learning—a fundamental way of being that values knowledge and development of skills and creativity over grades and performance on exams that don’t quite capture what students have learned or are capable of.

By the time the ASC had morphed again into what we all know now as the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), I was promoted to Manager, supervising a staff of 18 people. Through a robust peer tutor program and writing and communication support services, I was working with students and faculty on how best to create a sustainable culture of deep learning and engaged teaching here at TAMUQ.
From those earliest days almost a decade ago to this present moment, my time at TAMUQ has been a journey of beginning . . . and beginning again. I can’t say that anything I have worked on has had a clear or clean ending; everything—each program, each project, every semester’s team of peer tutors, has organically evolved into something new, something needed and necessary for the situation at hand. That’s not to say there was no planning because I have always been very deliberate and intentional in my work and how I managed the student learning support services. However, being adaptable, flexible, and willing to change a well-thought out plan at the last minute is vital to fostering an authentic, meaningful, and vibrant culture of learning.

All of this culminates into the biggest part of the story of my time at TAMUQ, which is this: for almost 10 years, I have had the privilege to be part of and continue to push for the kind of community that values learning as a transformative experience and the expression of what it means to be alive and fully human. We are not tasked with producing engineering students who’ve aced all their exams and know every technical thing perfectly; rather, we are charged with encouraging and igniting human potential. And, it has been my experience so far that the best way to do that is to pay attention to what students need in order to thrive. Most often this requires me to stop what I’m doing, to sit and listen and offer compassion to a struggling student even when I don’t feel like it. It means facing whatever challenges or uncomfortable changes or uncertainty comes my way, keeping in mind that students by their very nature are always beginning again—deepening their knowledge with each new start. This is a daily practice of patient persistence for everyone. Some days I am much better at it than others. But every day, I am thankful for what I’ve built together with others in the CTL. I believe we have done right by our students and faculty by focusing on learning as an act of courage. I will take that gratitude, and much more, that is dear to me, on a new journey this fall to another university here in Qatar.

If I have learned anything in my career thus far, it is this: To be successful, we must be willing to redefine failure, for our sake and for the sake of the students we are teaching/tutoring/mentoring. We have to embrace failure—to see it, in all its various forms, as the courageous path to learning.