About the Cover Photo

It was late on a Saturday afternoon; the date was 7 March 2020. I came to campus that weekend to study with some of my classmates and prepare for the impending “midterm-season.” Little did I know, the semester wasn’t going to play out the way anyone expected.

We took a break from our studies and crossed the street to the farmer’s market; Ceremonial Court was bustling with people—as had become customary on Saturdays. We bumped into a couple of our classmates, one of our professors, and even old friends from other universities in Education City (EC). It was a nice crossing point for the larger community of EC and a refreshing break from the stress of academics.

The weather that day was kind, as we were still making our way through spring and the heat hadn’t kicked in yet. As we finished having our lunch, I stood a little longer in the hallway of Ceremonial Court and took a picture through the white beams of the water and the Qatari flag that waved over everything.

On the Tuesday of that same week, we started our online Zoom classes, and life wasn’t exactly the same anymore. Classes were no longer conducted on campus, study groups were now a series of Discord calls and WhatsApp messages, hanging out with friends was a combination of Netflix and screenshare, and going for a walk was a trip around the backyard or the dining table. Everyday life was starting to look a lot different.

I look back at this picture with nostalgia, but I still remember that regardless of this new normal, our community is as connected as the white beams that build this hallway. From the Aggies of TAMUQ, to service staff, to our professors and TA’s, to the other EC campuses and even to the whole of Qatar, our communities are connected and so are our stories.

As you read through this book, I hope you find the frame that connects our stories, whether it be through creative work or research or literary narratives. Together, this collection composes the story of our community.

Sara Al-Banna, Class of 2022
Dear Readers,

Welcome to the seventh volume of *Best Writing*, Texas A&M at Qatar’s annually published anthology of undergraduate student writing. In 2014 *Best Writing* began when a proposal submitted by a Liberal Arts faculty member (that would be Mysti) was funded by a special Dean’s Initiative. At the time, there was no guarantee that the publication would be a success nor that it would turn into a series.

From our roles as teachers of first-year writing at TAMUQ, we have been joyously and repeatedly made aware of the talent and earnestness of our “poet-engineers,” or engineers who recognize and deeply care about the power of words. However, we were not sure that first year whether many of our 500 or so undergraduates, all majoring in one of our four engineering programs (chemical, electrical and computer, mechanical, or petroleum) would risk exposing their writing to an audience beyond their teachers and classmates. Not only would they be sharing pieces written for courses outside their majors, but for most of them, they would also be submitting pieces written in a language other than their mother tongue.

We were so nervous that first spring about not having enough submissions to fill a whole book that we arranged to hold a drawing for all students who submitted pieces for potential publication, giving away iPads to the three lucky winners. But we needn’t have worried; from those just starting out in English foundation courses all the way to those who had recently graduated, TAMUQ students rose to the occasion and risked sharing their emergent writing with the world. As the founders and co-editors of *Best Writing*, we couldn’t have been prouder of our students’ commitment to creating a writers’ community at TAMUQ.

Six years later, it seems we had forgotten the lesson of the first volume, and once again we were worried that we wouldn’t have enough submissions to publish this volume. In the middle of March, typically the busiest month for promoting the Best Writing project, courses went online due to safety precautions for COVID-19, and nearly everyone in the TAMUQ community—students, staff, and faculty—found themselves putting in extra time and energy to make this transition as smooth as possible. Many students were so busy trying to keep up with their coursework that they didn’t have time to attend the *Best Writing* Studio Series for Students to compose new P.O.W.s (pieces of writing) or dust off old assignments for potential publication. Therefore, the *Best Writing* committee decided to extend the deadline and added a new call for students, staff, and
faculty to contribute to a special chapter dedicated to p.o.w.s about the pandemic. Several students were thankful for these adaptive responses by the committee as this gave them the extra time needed to be able to contribute to this volume.

TAMUQ staff also responded positively to the special call for writing about the pandemic, attending numerous sessions of the Best Writing Studio Series for Staff even though it added to their onslaught of weekly Zoom meetings. During these meetings, a sense of trust and community began to form when attendees took the leap and shared passages from their first drafts with the entire workshop. Even after the last session ended, participants continued to support and encourage one another to keep shaping their pieces, culminating in many of the workshop attendees submitting a record number of staff pieces (12) for this volume. We are pleased to include the experiences of staff as they are integral members of TAMUQ who have gone to great lengths to help students and faculty stay connected to our community during this time of unprecedented disruption in teaching, learning, and meeting. Faculty also responded to the special chapter call by sharing their experiences of adapting to online teaching. Although student writing will always be the central focus of the Best Writing Series, we encourage you to read these pieces by professors and staff as they give powerful glimpses of the challenges and resilience that many members of our community have undergone during these extraordinary times.

Nearly four months before COVID-19 became part of our daily conversation in Qatar, in a prescient moment, one member of the Best Writing Committee (that would be Amy) suggested that “Connecting Communities” should be the 2020 theme. The committee then voted to accept this theme long before we imagined the ways that COVID-19 would disrupt our typical ways of forming community. No longer would we be able to gather in groups where we could respond to the physical cues of teachers and students in a classroom or conference room, sharing our humor and humanity in ways that had previously gone far in creating community. Days were soon filled with Zoom after Zoom, which quickly became the primary (if not exactly satisfactory) way for us to connect to the communities of our courses, our departments, and even our friend groups.

The shock of this transition—plus the thirst for connection to others—led many of the writers in this volume to reflect on an unfamiliar loss that fluctuated from a vague sense of uncertainty to an acute sense of panic or doom—and everything in between.
As the American “clown” physician Patch Adams has repeatedly pointed out, human beings are hardwired to help one another, and when we don’t participate in building community, we often feel anxious and unfulfilled. We can try to fill this void with shopping, eating, drinking, or binge-watching, but these behaviors offer only temporary escape from the nagging feeling that what really makes life worthwhile is our connection to others. Esther Perel, the famous relationship therapist and popular online host of “Where Shall We Begin?” distills this philosophy to the following quip: “The quality of our relationships determines the quality of our lives.” In other words, feeling connected to communities is what gives our lives meaning. And writing about our relationships allows us to reflect on them, turning them over in the sunlight, trying to make sense of the feelings we experience with the thoughts and beliefs that engender them. Many pieces in this volume show the writer examining a relationship in a new light.

Reflection is an essential tool in reconciling inner thoughts with lived experiences and a perceptive reader will find bits of reflection in many of the pieces in this volume—not just in the headnotes to each piece. But some of the pieces in this volume are clearly driven by the needs of the writer to make sense of conflicting forces, and these include Nadine Elkholy’s deceptively playful “The Editor and the Perfectionist” (p.201) and the anonymous piece “Don’t Ask Me Where I Am From” (p.85), which appropriately complicates the notion of home in a transnational place such as Education City. Fatimah Khan’s blatantly and poetically titled “No Comfort to Be Found” (p.259) contrasts her internal battles before and after the switch to online learning, longing for a return to normal that she currently cannot foresee. Perhaps no piece in this volume shares the concerns of its author more directly and earnestly than Ismail Mostafa’s “COVID Diary of a First Semester Student” (p.261). Having begun his education at TAMUQ mid-year, Ismail was in the building for only seven weeks before all his courses moved to Zoom!

Much to your probable relief, not every piece in this volume is about the pandemic. Many of the students published here are engaging in their first “real” research projects that required them to conduct primary research as well as consult secondary sources. When given an assignment such as this, students are often allowed to choose their own topics, and Janessa Paderes took advantage of this freedom to explore veganism to see if this was a community she cared to join (p.171). Ahmad Hammoud studied the community of the residents of the male dorms in Education City. As an international student and a resident of the dorms himself, Ahmad was particular interested in how these students formed social bonds
so quickly across a variety of cultural differences (p.25). Other TAMUQ students teamed up in groups to study real-world problems facing communities in order to propose innovative solutions. Several of these research projects focused on the immediate community of TAMUQ, such as “Diversity and Education-related Effects of Brain Drain at TAMUQ” (p.89), while others tackled wider problems as outlined in “The Glass Ceiling Effect on Careers of Female Engineers” (p.177). Hadear Hassan’s ambitious research paper “Plastic and Environmental Sustainability” (p.161) even goes so far as to tackle a problem facing the global community.

If you read all the pieces in Best Writing 2020, I am convinced that you will come to know the communities of our students in ways that cannot be achieved in the classroom—and definitely not in the “Zoom room.” If you require further inspiration to read this volume, start with “Three Reasons Why You Should Read This Book” (p.1), adapted from an inspired speech delivered at last September’s book launch by recent graduate Ghaith Glaied. In addition to Ghaith’s engineering-centric reasons, I would add this: Best Writing 2020 gives you a front row seat to the desires of these writers (students, staff, and even a few faculty) to contribute to the shared community that is TAMUQ. While reading these pieces, I hope you will recognize the vulnerability required of each writer when they signed up to share their thoughts, words, and beliefs with a larger audience. As the co-editors of Best Writing for over seven years, we have often been proud of the courage demonstrated by the poet-engineers published in this series, but this year we are particularly moved by their efforts to make sense—and art—out of the many obstacles facing them, often writing about difficult-to-talk-about doubts, such as choosing the right major . . . or the right university . . . or the right partner . . . or the right professor . . . or the right friend . . . or the right place and time to time reveal an internal struggle or take an unpopular stance.

Six of the pieces in this year’s volume are published anonymously, but they just might discuss issues that relate either directly to you, dear reader, or to someone you have known in the past or will love in the future.

In the midst of this difficult year of the pandemic, we sincerely hope that reading this volume puts you in a reflective state of mind in which you are able to experience a sense of gratitude for the many communities you have belonged to. As scattered as we may seem to be right now, unable to even schedule an annual gathering to celebrate the writers published in this volume, we are still one community, relying on each other as we are called to respond to a rapidly changing environment with resilience. And some members of our community are even called upon to engineer solutions to
problems posed by the virus. In “Aggies Responding” (p.295), one of the final pieces in this volume, student researcher Haseeb Bajwa chronicles the efforts of mechanical engineering faculty and students in addressing equipment shortages by designing and 3-D printing face shields which were then donated to Qatar Red Crescent. “The deadlines motivated us when we ran out of energy,” Haseeb writes, “and the will to help people pushed us through every mental challenge” (p.296). It is only fitting that we give the final word in this volume to Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi, our most frequently published poet-engineer who just graduated in the “Class of COVID 2020.” Veering from his favored genre of Arabic poetry, Ahmed writes a brief reflection on the pandemic in which he remind us that “holding a pen is much more powerful than holding a weapon, and engineers’ weapons are their minds” (p.297). I hope Ahmed is right . . . and that we all keep writing.

Until next year,
Dr. Mysti Rudd
Dr. Amy Hodges
Founders and Co-editors
Acknowledgments

We are indebted to 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 others, the Best Writing series published annually by Texas A&M at Qatar would not be able to continue.

We greatly appreciate the time, synergy, creativity, and laughter provided by the 2019/2020 Best Writing Committee composed of eight students, five staff, and three faculty members:

Sara Al-Banna, Class of 2022  Esra Sharab
Salma Aboelmagd, Class of 2022  Beth Caerlang
Shurouq Al-Siddiqi, Class of 2020  Shauna Loej
Abdulla Al-Tamimi, Class of 2020  Vanessa Lina
Van Balaoro, Class of 2022  Sahar Mari
Zeina Barghouti, Class of 2021  Sherry Ward
Ghaith Glaied, Class of 2020  Amy Hodges
Midhat Javaid, Class of 2020  Mysti Rudd

We also wish to acknowledge the talents of the student photographers whose work is featured on the front cover and in the chapter dividers:
Sara Al-Banna (Front Cover and Chapter 4: Thinking Outside the Box)
Al Jawhara Al-Thani (Chapter 1: Beginnings)
Taif Almeflehi (Chapter 2: Illuminating the Way)
Murtaza Khan (Chapter 3: Reconsidering Place and Chapter 6: Connecting Communities)
Sarah Morshed (Chapter 5: Confronting Challenges)

The cover photograph contest winner, Sara Al-Banna, was chosen by the following committee:
Esra Sharab (chair) Dr. Nayef Al Yafei ‘09 Dr. Bilal Mansoor
Dr. Brittany Bounds Sara Amani ’19 Ahmad Jichi ’11
Alia Fakhr Yasmeen Suleiman (VCUArts Qatar)

For the fourth year in a row, graphic designer Salma Hamouda has shared her talent with Best Writing through her expert layout and creative graphics illustrating this year’s theme: Connecting Communities. We feel fortunate to have been able to work with Salma one last time before she makes her way to the U.S. to work on an advanced degree at University of Houston. We also owe several big thank yous to Sahar Mari for attending to all-things-to-do-with-design for this project, including serving as liaison to Salma, plus
updating our website and overseeing our digital signage. Multi-media consultant Esra Sharab did a beautiful job marketing our theme this year.

A big thanks to writing consultant Beth Caerlang for coordinating the submissions review process, communicating with all the authors, and organizing the editing files into the final manuscript. Thanks also to writing consultant Shauna Loej who helped Beth with this process. Administrative Assistant Vanessa Lina generously lent her expertise in keeping track of the project budget, arranging meetings, and organizing events. We could not have completed this project without the reliable and continuous help of all three of these CTL staff members.

Finally, we express our appreciation to Dr. Ashfaq Bengali, Executive Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning which has housed the Best Writing project for the past five years. We are grateful for the staff hours, the creative space, and the financial support you have provided this project in your tenure as director. Best Writing has greatly benefited from the collaboration that you have encouraged in the CTL, creating an invested community that has served as a safety net for all the wonderful projects and innovative ideas that we have tried to actualize. We hope that you continue to read and enjoy Best Writing all the way to Volume 23!
Dedication

To Dr. Amy Hodges—or “Amazing Amy” as many of us like to call her:

From the first volume of Best Writing published in 2014 to the seventh volume you are now reading, no one has championed student voices at TAMUQ more than you. You have exemplified the ethics of inclusiveness, the spirit of advocacy, and the patience that comes with understanding that learning to write is a longitudinal journey for all of us. You have taught us that the only acceptable definition of a “good” writer is one who keeps trying, and for that as well as the many other gifts of time and love that you have shared with us throughout the years, we are eternally grateful.

May you bask in the love and respect that you have earned through your dedication to community literacy as well as your mentoring of so many individual writers—whether they be undergraduates, graduate students, staff members, or faculty—you rarely, if ever, said no to anyone asking you for feedback on a draft, no matter how busy you may have been. Please know that the beauty, diversity, and aspirations of the Best Writing Series would never have been possible without you. We wish you deep connectedness in the new communities you are joining or creating as you progress on your teaching/learning/writing journey.

To all the writers who submitted pieces for publication:

It takes courage to share one’s writing with the world, and each volume of Best Writing exists because enough members of TAMUQ were willing to take this risk along with you. Thank you for trusting our community with your stories, your searching, your reflecting, and your meaning-making. It is a privilege to bear witness to your honesty and openness in the middle of this pandemic. And we hope you keep writing—chronicling this time in history to show Aggies of the future just how resilient we have been—and that they can be, too.
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Dear Reader,

Thank you for showing interest in reading this book. The book you hold in your hands is special. Through its pages you will find fragments of the souls of the people who wrote it. Please read it. You will experience the magic of authentic writing coursing through your very being. If you’re still hesitant, I will share with you three powerful reasons why you should read this book.

Reason 1: This book is a vision of our future here in Qatar.
In the first three years of attending Texas A&M in Qatar, students are taught how to understand, apply and analyze information in science and engineering. We were taught how to solve complex problems. It was very important for our education. but It was difficult. In most cases, these problems were very abstract. So we often ended up asking ourselves, “Why are we even doing this?” For those of us who felt this way, Best Writing was a way to share with the world our hopes and frustrations—to cry our sorrows and chant our hopes for a better future. Surprisingly, during the senior year of Texas A&M when we learn about engineering design, we move from asking how to asking why. They tell us that if we don’t start with why our whole design will fail. I am reminded of a poem I wrote for Best Writing 2018 called “Future . . .” and I realize this is why I design; this is why I chose to work hard for that grade: to show the world that there IS a way towards a brighter future.

In line with this vision, In 2018 I founded a new organization in Texas A&M called the Leadership Club whose mission is to understand ourselves and one another. Having been involved with the concept of leadership for three years now, I have come to realize that every person has something important that they want to do, a why they want to explore, a “right thing” or path they want to pursue. I think that the world is built on the shoulders of those who believed in their paths prior to us. So this book could very well illuminate our future here in Qatar as it reveals the paths chosen by the many authors published in it. And as such, it should be considered whenever we write “need statements” of our engineering projects which encapsulates why we engage in them.

Reason 2: This book will sharpen your aim in life.
In life we go through many experiences, and depending on what experiences we go through and the way we interpret those experiences, we tend to create a model of life—the way we determine what and how we should do things to be better people.
This is graphically represented in Figure 1. In engineering terms, that model or function is a regression of the data we have, a “best fit”, so to speak, an oversimplified representation of reality given what we know. As Dr. Arun, our ENGR lab professor taught us, there is no “best” model because it depends on what we want that model to be. I think this is true of models for life as well. If we prioritize simplicity, we will have an oversimplified model like the blue or orange models in Figure 1. If we focus on certain experiences in particular, we may miss the big picture as illustrated by the purple life model.

We need to recognize that nobody has one “right” model for life. Reading this book helps us recognize other people’s models and correct our own. It helps us realize what it really means to be a good person. In Greek, the term for good person translates to Eudaemon, or “good souls,” to be accurate. In fact, according to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and many philosophers after them, Eudaimonia or achieving Eudaimon was the ultimate goal of philosophy.

If you read this book, you will better realize what it means to be a good person. And you will walk in the footsteps of all the philosophers who came before you—from Socrates all the way to Ibn Rushd and beyond. I believe this book is a raw manifestation of the human soul made possible by the freedom of topic, the persistence to communicate, and the courage to share.
Reason 3: This book will bring you confidence and fill you with hope.
If you read this book, you will recognize that you are not alone in this world. that others think of, and feel for many of the same things you do. In fact, the best feeling is recognizing that others care about the same things as you do, recognizing that they share and care for your why, your path, your leadership. When this happens, you will be reassured that the world is in much safer hands than you once thought it was.

Sincerely,
Ghaith Glaied
A fellow student
Beginnings
This was the first prompt I was assigned at university. It started as “Why Am I Here?” but then evolved into “I Am Here.” The change was directly related to the fact that I finally came to terms for why I am here. What was really hard about this prompt is the number of ways one can interpret here. Does it mean here as in Qatar? Or here as in TAMUQ? Or here as in English 104? The choices are virtually limitless. But I am satisfied of the way I interpreted here; it made the most sense out of the bunch. As an international student, here is probably Qatar, but for me specifically, here means away from my family and country. This piece included a personal conflict I had after I arrived at Doha while sitting alone in my room. As it is revealed in the piece, I had a much simpler and easier choice and that was to enroll at A.U.B. (American University of Beirut), but I chose to come here. Through the drafts I figured out why and how I chose “here”; essentially this prompt helped me figure out something I have been struggling with since the very beginning. Also, it made me realize that I am somewhat impulsive regarding my decisions, but that is probably a piece for another day.
I Am Here

How do you know which way is up when your whole life has been turned upside down? Why am I here in Qatar? I honestly do not know. Ever since I came to Doha and enrolled at Texas A&M, I have asked myself this question every time I sat down at a desk and lay down on my bed in my dorm room.

I admit that the first few days I regretted ever coming to Qatar. I left my family and friends back in Lebanon to ultimately come here and be like the first apple that has fallen from a tree. All alone.

I got accepted into the best college in Lebanon, American University of Beirut (A.U.B.), half an hour away from my home. I could’ve stayed in Lebanon and lived with my parents and my sister. It does not make sense, but there was something that pushed me towards the route of coming to Qatar and enrolling at Texas A&M. I do not know what it is yet, and I do not know why, so here I am trying to figure this thing out.

When I look back at my decision, my other options of staying in Lebanon would have spared me all the hassle. But there was something that made Texas A&M more appealing. I applied to colleges in Lebanon way before I applied to Texas A&M. I got accepted into A.U.B. long before I got my acceptance from Texas A&M, but when that decision letter landed into my inbox, and I read the very first line “Congratulations on your admission to Texas A&M university at Qatar,” I ran to the living room screaming “I got in, I got in!” My parents ran to hug me, congratulating me in the process, and though they tried to conceal it, it was apparent that their fear of my leaving them and going to live on my own was starting to turn into reality. They thought that I could not handle it. Maybe they were right.

The next few months were quite boring. I was busy studying for the Lebanese Baccalaureate, and through it all I kept saying, “You’ll be done soon; it is only a few weeks away.” After the tests I had a lot of time on my hands. I tried filling it by playing football with my friends, going to the movies, hanging out on the beach, all typical summer activities, but I did not feel like I was enjoying them. All I really was doing was waiting for the start of my first semester at Texas A&M.

It might seem weird to say that I had no reservations about the idea of leaving my parents and leaving my home, but it was true. I knew it would be hard to adjust and adapt, and I thought it would take only a couple of days or maybe a week, tops. Boy, was I wrong.
When my visa was late, my parents finally got their spark of hope that I would not be leaving them. At the time, I was fuming with anger. My parents tried to bring up the conversation of staying in Lebanon several times saying, “It is not bad here; A.U.B. is a great school, and you could still be near and visit us all the time.”

“Texas is a better school, Qatar is a better country, I AM NOT GOING TO A.U.B.” I said, shutting down the conversation instantly.

A few weeks later my visa finally arrived, I had to rush to the airport on the same day to get to Doha in time. I had placement tests the very next day of my arrival, so I did not have time to even scratch my head. I had to unpack, study for the math test, sleep, pick what should I wear, get groceries, eat breakfast, and rush to university.

That first week when I sat alone in my dorm room and called my parents, on the call I burst into tears, finally realizing what just happened. For several days I kept questioning myself, questioning my decision How could I possibly be this dumb? I will not be able to survive this. What was I thinking coming here? Should I just pack up and go back?

For several weeks I kept thinking of the reasoning behind my decision. It took multiple lone long walks at night and loads of homework to finally realize that I made this decision subconsciously to escape something. I wanted to escape my reliance on my parents, I wanted to show everyone that I could handle being away from home for several months without complaining, I wanted to show everybody that I am looking after myself. I wanted to go to a new country to find a place I can flourish and thrive. I wanted to explore this untapped and hidden potential that I knew I possessed. That is why I came to Qatar, that is why I left and that is why I am here.

Ahmad Hammoud is a mechanical engineering student, Class of 2023. Quoting Charles Bukowski, Ahmad is constantly confused by the lack of durability in human affairs. Ahmad would like to express his sincere gratitude to his family and aunt, as they were the ones who instilled in him his love for English. They both played huge roles in teaching him the basics of this language, making him the successful person he is today. Additionally, he wants to dedicate this piece “I am Here” to his twin sister, Maya.
I wrote this piece for my English 104 class as one of my first assignments, and I wanted to knock it out of the park. It talks about the events that took place before ending up in TAMUQ and explores an ultimatum between pleasing your parents or aiming for what you want. This is the story of why I am here.
Becoming an Aggie

“I’m going to pack my bags and study abroad,” I told myself one night at home during my senior year. I was ready to leave everything behind—the high school drama, the toxic friends, even the country itself. I felt like a total outsider in a country I was born in. Nothing could stop me. I had made up my mind and was ready to face the world as it came to me. But as time passed by, all this changed for so many reasons.

It was a long road ahead before I picked Texas A&M. I don’t remember hearing of this university until my cousin in Lebanon told me about it. I was never really sure what I wanted to study; I used to change my mind every second. My mother always put the idea of being a doctor in my head, but it didn’t stick. Whenever she saw me sitting with my cousin who studies medicine in Lebanon, my mom would tell me, “Yara, you should become a doctor. You’d have a stable job. What does a chemical engineer even do? Tell her, Zeinab.” And my cousin would reply, “Yara, medicine is the right way to go.”

I never had much of a choice when it came to the major I wanted. Being an Arab meant that I could pick between two things: it was either medicine or pharmacy. Around 11th grade I realized I wanted to become an engineer, and that is when I started searching for the university I wanted to attend. I realized I wanted to become a chemical engineer because I craved knowing more about the periodic table. I remember we had three different teachers give us chemistry lessons. Not a single teacher ever stuck, so I ended up watching a channel on YouTube called The Organic Chemistry Tutor. He was my savior who taught chemistry through videos. The tutor made organic chemistry seem like such an easy concept. I started liking the subject as it became really interesting to me. One thing I recall during chemistry class was that I didn’t pay attention because I was more interested in a chapter we weren’t covering. My teacher came up to me, closed the book, and lectured me about not paying attention.

I threw a lot of country names at my parents, countries that I wanted to study in. It was often on a Thursday night where I’d be at home, and I’d go up to my parents sitting in the living room watching an Arabic TV show. I would pop out of my room and say, “I want to go to Lebanon, Mama, your entire family is there. So, they can come check up on me.” My dad, sitting next to my mother, would reply with the occasional, “Your daughter doesn’t know what she wants to do with her life.” My mom would then say, “Whatever you want, if we can help out, we will.”
As time went by, the idea of leaving became unlikely; both financially and mentally it was better for me to stay in Qatar. Financially, studying abroad cost a lot of money for housing and tuition. Mentally, my mother wasn’t prepared for me to leave her. In Qatar I had everything, and I knew all the places here; after all I was born here. So, I decided to search for engineering colleges in Qatar. Of course, Qatar University (QU) was on the list but so was Texas A&M.

Everyone in my high school talked about Qatar Foundation (QF)—how it is full of events and it has a tightly knit community that it isn’t segregated by gender like QU. So, I started looking at QF’s facilities and got the chance to visit the campus in Qatar. As I entered Texas A&M, I felt secure because my uncle came with me. I went to admissions to ask about the university, and they were very friendly. I got invited to the events that admissions held where they told us more about the university, and for once I actually wanted to go there. It wasn’t easy trying to talk my parents into Texas A&M. Every parent in Qatar wants their child to enter QU as it was known for being one of the top universities in the Middle East and would lead to great job opportunities. QU was also known as competitive so that meant that it was really hard to get into. It is a government-sponsored university, which means that almost everyone in Qatar applies there.

In my final year of high school, I started applying to Texas A&M. I was really excited to do this and didn’t have a doubt that I would get accepted. I knew it was also competitive, but I knew that I had met the requirements they wanted. In the beginning of April, decisions were out and I had been accepted, but my parents didn’t want me to enter because of financial reasons. I called my friend Saif and cried my eyes out while telling him, “I got accepted into Texas A&M.”

He said, “Yara, I’m really happy for you! I know how much you wanted this.”

“Yeah well my parents don’t want me to study there,” I replied.

He reassured me that it was all okay, saying, “You still have QU to look forward to.” He was right, my future was in the hands of QU now, and the decisions would come mid-summer which was nerve racking.

I will never forget that day—the day my luck changed for the better. My friends were nervous. More than half of Global Academy had applied to QU. Everyone was waiting it out. They sent an email stating that they would be out at 8 p.m. but the joke was on us they
were out at 2. We were asking each other on the group chat if they had gotten in or not. The unique process with QU is that you choose five majors and they pick the one they think suits you.

In the previous year, 4,000 girls applied to QU compared to fewer than 1,000 boys who did. It’s more competitive for the girls because priority goes to Qataris and then the students who were born in Qatar. If you weren’t born here or are from here, then good luck getting accepted in the major you want. You could have a 99.3 on your final report card and apply for engineering as your first choice, and they’d accept you into Islamic Studies, which is your fifth choice. I wish I made this up, but I’ve heard of and seen it happen to many. Even a person who wasn’t Muslim got accepted into Sharia (Islamic Studies) instead of sciences.

As I was looking at my QU acceptance, my jaw dropped in shock that they had accepted me into business and economics, the third major I picked. They rejected me in the major I wanted which was engineering. My bedroom door was open, and I could see my dad sitting on the sofa. I looked at him with a dull smile and said, “I got accepted in Qatar University, but they accepted me in Business and Economics.” For the first time I saw my dad feel sorry for me, but he couldn’t do anything or say anything. I told him, “Call Mama and tell her; I don’t feel like breaking the news to her.”

My mother called me that day and said, “It’s okay everything happens for a reason. This might be a sign from God to enter Texas. So, if that is what you want, then finalize the financial aid papers and go for it.”

For a brief second in my life I thought that everything was going in the wrong direction. Then I realized all I needed was patience and trust in God. I ended up in the Chemical Engineering Program at Texas A&M. Being a freshman isn’t the easiest. It’s a roller coaster of emotions. The workload is nothing like what we had in school, but as long as I don’t skip my classes, I’ll make it in this four-year journey.

Yara Soltan is Lebanese but was born and raised in Qatar. She is a sophomore majoring in chemical engineering.
His Choice

Early Tuesday morning was my first day at university. I was tearing up in the car on my way there; unfortunately, they weren't tears of joy. I have always been very self-reliant from a young age—all I ever wanted was to leave home and be on my own. After graduating from high school, everyone my age was going away to all these amazing universities around the world, and I had the same dream. However, due to cultural issues, my father thought it was best for me to stay at home and attend a university of his choice. My parents are polar opposites: my mother is willing to let me go and be independent while my father has the converse opinion. They say all fathers find it hard to let go of their daughters, but it's a shame that it limits girls from reaching their maximum potential.

As I was driving to my first day of university, I realised the main reason I didn't want to go to a university in Qatar was because I've lived here my entire life and just wanted a change. I want to experience the thrill of being in a completely new place by myself. For now, there's nothing I can do; hopefully the future holds something exciting for me.

I was on the phone with one of my close friends that day. I was crying, telling them that this wasn't what I wanted. They helped calm me down and gave me the best advice. To make sure I was okay, they kept texting me throughout the first day of orientation to check up on me, which I really appreciated.

As I wandered in to the university, I just knew it wasn't the place for me. There was lack of diversity and I had to dress and act a certain way to please people. It was also arduous to make friends as a large majority of the students there already knew each other, considering they attended the same high school. I was hoping there would be a vast quantity of students; instead it was the opposite. Therefore, my options of friends felt very limited. Even though I say that, I must admit that everyone I met was very nice—it was just that I didn't really hit it off with any of them.

The day proceeded and I realized it wasn't as dreadful as I assumed it would be. That doesn't mean I enjoyed it. I still felt very pessimistic, as it wasn't my choice to attend this university. I tried my hardest to look at the bright side; for example, the architecture was astonishing. The building had a brown marble-like exterior, and the same theme continued inside. The labs were state of the art, and staff were very welcoming. I completely understand why anyone would choose to
attend this university: it was a gorgeous building with incredible technology and resources. It just wasn't the place I wanted to be.

I exchanged a few awkward conversations with a handful of people, but there was no one I clicked with. The entire day I tried my hardest to keep a positive mindset, and to tell you the truth, I found that quite challenging. When I reached my house I exploded into tears, expressing to my dad how I felt, and he just said, “It'll take time.” I told him it would just be easier if I went to a place of my choice, but he just turned a blind eye to my opinion.

My father is not alone, many parents tend to be ignorant when it comes to freedom and self-expression of their sons and daughters—especially daughters. They try and have cookie-cutter children who check all the boxes. All I can do now is pray that I will enjoy my experience at university in Qatar and hope to meet some cool people I click with. I am going to have to get some tough skin to deal with it, and forever keep in mind that I will not impose the same restrictions to my children in the future.
I can speak for myself and many other people when I say that the moment we receive our university acceptance letter is when we truly feel like we are done with high school. It is such a bittersweet moment yet still exciting all the same. This piece speaks about the moment I received the letter that would soon change a lot in my life. It was the highly anticipated letter that would tell me who I would become once high school ends. This piece is so monumental to me as it served as a wakeup call to start thinking of who I wanted to become as a person in the following years. Hopefully my story reminds you of the time you received your own letter and makes you reflect on the person you have become today.
It was the end of April, or was it the beginning of May? How can I remember every small detail, that may not even be important and not remember something as simple as the date? I don't know. But what I know for sure is what took place during that day. I remember it vividly, like it was yesterday. It was the day that changed my life forever. The day that ensured my future. The day I received my letter from Texas A&M university at Qatar.

I wish I could say that the story went in this fashion . . .

“It was a beautiful sunny day, when I came back home energetic from school to see an envelope with a big maroon logo of the university nested in the mailbox.”

But let's be real, we are in the 21st century, so we rarely use letters and the mail anymore. Everything is electronic now. More importantly, I was anything but energetic. It was the end of the year and senioritis had finally hit like a wrecking ball.

So instead of finding a white envelope with the Texas A&M seal, a loud shrilling ping, disrupting the silence in American School of Doha’s (ASD) huge library, told me that I had received a notification on my phone during lunch time. It was an email from Texas A&M University at Qatar. Knowing that it was the email that would tell me either good or bad news, the nerves started kicking. Don't get me wrong, I was excited, but knowing that in your hand lay the answer that will determine where you will be next year was nerve wracking. I'm sure I wasn't thinking about the clichéd envelope on the desk scenario in that moment when I saw the notification.

Wanting to experience my happiness or my disappointment with my family, I decided to wait until I went back home, instead of opening it then and there during lunch time. I don't know why I did this to myself; the waiting was making me ten times more anxious. I actually almost gave in and opened it on my own in the freezing library of ASD. But I held myself, knowing that it was worth it to see my parents’ and siblings’ reactions when I opened the email.

Time went by slowly and the more the clock needle moved, the more I felt myself become a popsicle. One minute felt like an hour. I’m not sure if it was because I was in school or because of the nerves of opening an email that can very well change my life, or maybe it was both.
At last, the loud noise of the bell signaled the start of my last class. Sitting in my final and favorite class of the day, calculus, I started reflecting on my last year in high school. I don't even know what brought this on. It's not like I wasn't doing anything in class that led me to this thinking. In fact, we were just reviewing our test results. Nonetheless, my brain started spewing thought after thought. I had worked hard and overcome so many bumps in the road. My goals were exceedingly achieved, even better than I had originally set. By the end of the year, I had excelled in all my classes and ended with an outstanding GPA. But most importantly, my greatest achievement, I got an 800 on the math section of the SAT, when the plan was just to get at least over 700. With these accomplishments in mind, a question arose in my head.

“Would it even matter if the answer is not the one I’m looking for? I already got accepted to University of Ottawa with a full scholarship, so it’s not like it would be the end of the world.”

“But Ottawa is so far away from my family!” I answered myself back. In that moment, for the first time, I regretted applying to only two universities. Not wanting to get way too far ahead of myself in negativity without even knowing the answer, I put my thoughts aside and listened to my favorite teacher, Ms. Caristo, a nice lady with short caramel-brown hair and beautiful blue eyes, speak to us about all the highlights of the year. She gave us an envelope with a personalized card and letter inside. The envelope immediately got me thinking of the mail I had received earlier in the day. Instead of worrying like the worrywart I was, I calmed myself and decided to enjoy the moment sitting on those blue classroom chairs that I’m surprisingly going to miss.

“Whatever Allah has destined for me, will happen. And it is, for sure, what’s best for me,” I told myself. This was something I always said to myself ever since I was young, and it’s a phrase that has kept me going all my life. It helped me when I was writing an exam, when I was waiting for a grade, when I was dealing with stress, and I knew for sure that this situation was no different. With this beautiful thought in mind, I willed myself to stay calm as I hugged my teacher in gratitude and left class to go back home. Finally!

But of course, my little brother chose that exact day to be late after school. Being the older sister, I had to wait for him as long as he took.

Seated on the electric blue seats in the reception area in front of the high school and middle school offices, I started reading a book to get
my mind off the email that could be accessed with only one press of the finger. I love my 12-year-old brother, I really do, but at that moment I just wanted to leave him behind in school. But of course, I didn't, and I waited for him as patiently as I could. Eventually, about 20 minutes after school ended, my brother finally decided to grace me with his presence, and we rushed to our school's gate number eight to wait for our driver.

Looking around for our driver, I finally found the silver Toyota. We got in and sat down ready to depart. We followed the long line of cars out from the gate. Another ten minutes later, ten minutes of my desire to press the accelerator, we finally were able to get on the main road for our home. Though, of course, there was traffic, so it took us another forty minutes until we got home. It didn't help that our house was located in The Pearl, one of the furthest places from school.

But I survived and we were finally at home, where my mom greeted us with her lovely smile and a kiss on our cheeks. After this standard greeting, I stepped foot in my room. Then and there was when I realized that my dad and sister were still not home and that I had to wait for them to come back. I was exhausted anyways so I just didn't bother. I think I even forgot to tell my mom that I had received the email we were all waiting for. I proceeded with my normal routine, refreshing myself and going downstairs to talk to my mom. Loving these talks I have with my mom, I forgot about the email.

The day went by as slow as a sloth. I spent the time talking with my mom and helping her prepare dinner, but finally, the time came when all my family was gathered up in my home's dining room to eat. My mom had made one of my favorite foods in the world, Pâté chinois, a delicious French-Canadian dish that is similar to the English shepherd's pie. In the process of nearing the spoon full of the delicious goodness to my mouth, I suddenly remembered the email I had received earlier in the day. Almost choking from not properly chewing my food before swallowing, I rushed upstairs to my room and tore my phone from its charger and proceeded to descend the stairs, almost breaking my ankle once or twice, all in the span of less than a minute.

In front of my family, I blurted out the two words, “It’s here.” With that, I proceeded to open the email and let out a loud breath of air. I didn't know whether I was crying or laughing, but all I knew was that right in front of me were the words that determined where I would be in the next few years: Congratulations, Noor!
Food forgotten, I could finally breathe, and my long-awaited wait was finally over. My family jumped on me to congratulate me. We spent the rest of the night celebrating and being happy about this new milestone in my life. My parents took my siblings and me out to eat at Haagen-Dazs and wherever our hearts desired. I couldn't be more grateful to have parents as loving and supporting as they are, and I know without them, I wouldn't have become the successful person I am today.

I was now Noor Hassan, the chemical engineering student at Texas A&M University.

Born and raised in Montreal, Quebec, as a native French speaker, Noor Hassan never thought that she would ever be writing English pieces and nevertheless actually enjoying it. Every piece of writing she writes uncovers a new part of her life. Arriving to Qatar when she was in seventh grade, Noor learned the English language, making her trilingual (speaking French, Arabic, and English). She loves art, interior designing, photography, traveling, and reading. She is currently studying chemical engineering at Texas A&M at Qatar and hopes to pursue architecture once she finishes her undergraduate studies.
This research was what English 104 was all about. This was it. Everything we ever wrote was in preparation for this. This piece formed my first ever experience with conducting research. The things I learnt about doing research helped immensely in furthering my writing and analytical skills. I was able to give a detailed picture of the dorm life by utilizing a survey and a number of interviews that contributed to my final findings. I analyzed data from the survey and the interviews while also using sources from previous researches on the topic to write this report. This research report was written in the IMRAD (Introduction, Methodologies, Results, Analysis, and Discussion) format, to give a full-scale picture of the community, and to provide room to analyze data fully, while also giving a neat and organized structure that makes it easier to just pick up and read.
Male Dormitories in Education City: A Culture of Interaction

Introduction
Several studies, especially in recent years, have been conducted to understand the mechanisms of interaction and forming friends in dorm communities (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2004). This has led many researchers to focus on the benefits of these interactions on academic performance, academic progress, and retention (Thompson, Samiratedu and Rafter, 2015) in an effort to understand the forces of interaction between dorm communities, as well as to explain the causes of such interactions. A main rationale that has been accepted as the basis for all social interaction in dorm communities is the “Propinquity Effect” (Festinger, Schachter and Back, 1950), which is a kinship between people formed from physical proximity, or a similarity in nature between things (i.e., like attracts like) (Festinger, Schachter and Back, 1950). Two people who live in the same area/region have a higher chance of interaction than those who do not. Also, geographic proximity between countries of origin and race form even greater determinants of social interaction than just common interests, majors, and family backgrounds (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2004). However, one research about the factors that facilitate formation of friendships in living quarters such as dormitories stated that the level of intimacy of these friends was not directly related to the degree of interaction between them (Yinon, Goldenberg and Neeman, 1977). Regarding the dorms, it is important to realize that there are other factors that determine social interactions.

The most common focus of other researches has been the benefits of social interactions in the dorms. It is widely known that human beings are social creatures by nature. An argument could be made that a large percentage of people are introverts and try to avoid social interactions as much as possible; however, every introvert experiences a certain degree of social relations, and moving to a new place like dormitories in a foreign country do take a toll on any person, and soon enough one would quickly realize that it is impossible to live alone. This interaction can also evolve into something more solid like a social bond. One of the most common difficulties a foreign student faces when moving to a new country is the difficulty in making friends (Gareis, 2011). There are many factors that contribute to this, whether it be the language barrier or the differences in culture, but what is especially intriguing in the Education City (EC) male dormitories is that such barriers form mere bumps in the interaction and relationship between students here.
Earlier research on the subject of social interaction in dorms showed that friendships and bonds form due to specific common interests and degrees of interaction like the “Propinquity effect” (Festinger, Schachter and Back, 1950). These researches mainly focused on common interests and common traits as the main factor of forming bonds and friendships. However, a side that many of these researches overlooked is the great number of friendships that form regardless of the factors mentioned like proximity and common interests, such as the friendships that have formed in the EC male dormitories.

Relationships between residents of the male dormitories in EC are quite reminiscent of the ones we see form between soldiers in the army. New recruits meet for the first time, live together, eat together and suddenly each one is willing to take a bullet for the other, and would risk their own lives to not leave one behind. This is what many refer to as soldier’s camaraderie which was the subject of many researches (Nevarez, Yee, and Waldinger, 2017). The camaraderie that forms between players on a sports team is also closely related to that experienced in the dorms. One such example is exhibited by the movie Remember the Titans (Yakin, 2000). Living in the dorms reminds me of these kinds of camaraderie.

In my study, I try to widen the perspectives of previous researches, and focus on the overlooked and uncommon factors of interaction between members of the male dorm community in an effort to improve on previous research and form a more accurate picture of the social interactions and bonds formed in the EC male dorms.

**Context of the Study**
When you first walk into Karam building at the male housing complex “Al-Janoubi,” you notice a big living room area. For the first instant, you think it is the only one of its kind, but then you would be wrong. Going up to the first floor, you notice the symmetry of the building. If you choose to go left, you will walk through a long hallway with rooms on each side. If you choose to go right, after taking a few steps, you will notice a weird smell that you might recognize as tea. This hallway holds the smell of all the cultures you can count. As you get closer and closer you finally arrive at the first corner of the pentagon-shaped building. It all becomes clear there.

At a round table sat a group of guys drinking tea from small cups. It looks like a traditional ritual. You ask them what is that they are drinking, and they reply, “Chinese Tea.” You take a closer look. You see the herbs in a weird pot being poured into these tiny round-bottom cups. The cups can only hold a sip or two of the “good-stuff.”
You take a glance at the guys around the table and you notice that everyone is different. You see two people who look Asian, two Middle-Eastern, two Africans, and two North Africans. They invite you to sit with them. You gladly accept.

They serve you with one of these cups filled with tea, and watch you take the first sip. You try to decipher the contents. It is tea, you know that for sure, but as soon as it touches your tongue, and as soon as the smell fills your nose, you finally understand that it is all about the setting and not the actual tea. It might taste bland and uninteresting, but as soon as you finish your cup, it gets filled again. And you feel complied to keep drinking. In the slew of the countless sips you take; you start to feel the urge to voice your opinion, and they all look at you eagerly to hear what you have to say. This goes on for a long time.

Many conversations and opinions are thrown into the mix ranging from politics, cultures, traditions, history, literature, and many more. The teapot finally runs out, but one guy is quick to act and heats the water again. He drops a new selection of herbs. It tastes different, but you would not notice it because everything is the same with your surroundings.

You glance at the clock and realize it is 2 a.m, and you have to wake up early tomorrow, so you thank them for the tea, and more importantly, for the company. You bid them farewell, and go on your way. The others follow suit with some going upstairs, some downstairs, and some staying on the same floor, all swiping their cards to enter their rooms. You leave finally realizing what living in the dorms looks, feels, smells, and most importantly, tastes like.

This was why I wanted to conduct my research about the dorm community: to better understand the force that controls such interactions and how living in the dorms created a certain camaraderie between the residents.

I chose to study this community specifically because it became a part of my daily routine. Living in the dorms created a community that is not restricted to nationality, field of study, or place of settlement, but built upon common setting and propinquity.

I believe that this research will be a great source of information for incoming students, especially those who are considering living in the dorms. Usually the feeling of anxiety and the fear of leaving their families and friends, and coming to live alone forces students to hesitate ever coming to the dorms. So I hope this research will
provide a great reference to these students, one that will help them form a real picture of the environment and relationships in the dorms.

**Original Research Questions**

My study aims to find answers to the following research questions:

1. In what way is the EC male dormitories a place for building relationships and forming bonds between dorm students?
2. How are these friendships formed?
3. What are the factors that contributed to forming these friendships?

The target audience for my research report include the following: people living in the dorms, incoming students, and students considering coming to the dorms.

**Methodologies**

To carry out this research, I chose the following strategies to collect primary data and to get the desired results about my topic.

**Interviews:**

Conducting face-to-face interviews with residents from the dorms was the best technique to capture whether the residents share the same sentiments regarding the relations in the dorms. Also, the interviews provided a great way to meet the residents, observe genuine reactions to the questions, and get my questions answered directly from the residents. It was the most efficient method to collect data. I decided to interview six male dorm residents because most of them come from different parts of the Earth. One is a junior from Hamad Bin Khalifa University, two are seniors from Texas A&M University at Qatar, and three are freshmen from North-western University in Qatar. Notes were taken regarding the interviewees’ answers. I contemplated recording videos, but after some declined to do a video interview due to being camera-shy and uncomfortable when being filmed, I decided otherwise.

**Interview Strategies:**

When interviewing subjects for a research, even if you are friends you need to provide a comfortable environment for them to truly express their opinions and beliefs. I did that by beginning my interviews with level one questions and then progressively getting into the heart of the questions. I gave them an introduction of what we are going to do to ensure that credibility is established and maintained while also maintain the ethical standards of researches. So I always preceded my interview questions (see Appendix A) with the following script:
I believe I do not need a long introduction for you. As you might know, this interview is a part of my ethnographic research for my English 104 final project. So I chose to study the community of the education city male dormitories. I am mainly focusing on the cultural interaction as well as the factors that cause the formation of bonds and creation of friendships in the dorms. I want to study this weird force that control these interactions and its role in forming a camaraderie between students. So, in order to answer some of these questions I need your help. Please disregard our friendship in this interview, consider me as a stranger. We will start when you are ready.

Survey:
Another strategy I used an online survey I created through Qualtrics survey software. The survey consisted of 16 questions (see Appendix B). This survey targeted all students living in the male dorms and studying at one of the EC universities. The aim of this survey was to acquire a general overview of the thoughts of dorm students while also trying to figure out their views on the cultural exchange and social interactions in the dorms. In addition, the survey was one of the best means to get a glimpse of the role of the dorms in forming the bonds and interactions between students. The data collected was analyzed and treated to discern the stance of most dorm students from living in the dorms.

Hypotheses and Anticipation of Results
Throughout this research, my goal was to understand the major factors that determine the relationships in the dorms of education city, and how the dorms and its “Propinquity Effect” (Festinger, Schachter and Back, 1950) contribute towards building a camaraderie between residents. I anticipated that the most interesting part would be the stories and experiences that relate to my own experiences since the time I set foot in the dorms. This would also reflect the residents' personality while also gaining more insight regarding their opinions on the subject, and why things happen the way they do.

I expected to find that the majority of the residents had anticipated that getting used to living in the dorms was going to be hard, and that they would live alone without interacting much with the other residents. I also expected to find that this viewpoint would be changed completely when they spent a period of time in the dorms. Most importantly, I expected to find more about the bonds that are formed and relations created among residents. Maybe, for some students, the dorms created a new family of friends. Maybe it
created a new definition for family. Or maybe the dormitory was a big reason for their isolation. I hoped this research would unveil the perspectives of both anti-social introverts and social extroverts.

I discussed anticipated findings with some of the first-year students in the dorms. Some argued that students might get deprived of the emotional support they used to get from their families back home. It will create a great gap in their hearts, and form a huge burden on their shoulders which might put them in a state of depression and home-sickness as well as cause emotional trauma. On the other hand, some other residents argued that building new relationships with new people from different backgrounds and countries would alleviate the pain of living alone. They also argued that when forming such bonds with other residents, new memories and experiences are created that would all but make up for some of the emotional deficiencies one could face. I predicted that varying answers and opinions would be collected throughout this research which would make this research even more useful for incoming students.

**Discussion and Analysis of Survey Results**
From the survey responses, I can detect and deduce many answers that enhance the results of my research. The majority of the students are international students (and that the majority of the students’ expectations before coming to the dorms expressed fear and wariness based on their responses. When asked in questions 8 and 9, on a scale from 0 to 10, how comfortable do they feel practicing and sharing your culture, the results displayed a mean of 8.31 for both questions, which is a very positive result which means that most residents do not feel constrained to keep to themselves, but go above and beyond to share their cultures and practice these cultures. Moreover, when asked on a scale from 0 to 5 how familiar were they with certain cultures before and after coming to the dorms (Q10 and Q13), the results showed a massive improvement from which the mean for every culture mentioned increased from 2-3 to 9-10, which is a huge improvement that showcases the effect of the cultural and social interactions in the dorms.

To further confirm this sentiment, when asked how many cultures the student get introduced to during his time in the dorms (Q11), the mean was 6.15 which means every person who took the survey had an average of meeting 6 people all from different cultures. This also confirms the claim that cultural and social interactions in the dorms do take place and in a larger manner than I expected. The answers to the follow-up question “Are you satisfied with this number?” revealed that 81% voted “Yes”; but the more interesting result is those who voted “No” because this confirms the sentiment that even
though they did not meet as many cultures as they wanted, they still had a desire to meet more cultures which supports the fact that a very small percentage feel the need to isolate themselves.

When asked on a scale from 0 to 10, how likely are they to recommend living in the dorms to incoming students (Q15), the mean answer was 7.76 which is a very high percentage. This confirms that the majority of the students are happy with their stay at the dorms, and encourages incoming students to try it as it is an extremely unique experience that would result in making new friends and establishing a new family.

Lastly, when asked how did their perspectives change after staying a period of time in the dorms (Q16), the responses were filled with people expressing their delight at living in the dorms, meeting new cultures, making new friends, forming strong bonds, and feeling at home with a new family.

**Discussion and Analysis of Interview Results**

I interviewed six residents, and I got results that roughly confirm the data of my survey. From the interviews, I noticed two patterns and opinions about the dorms and the idea of living in the dorms, in which some residents had a stigma against living in the dorms and had a hard time coping with living in the dorms. As expressed by the first interviewee, a freshman at Northwestern University, “Coming from China there are a lot of traditions I felt like I cannot practice or cannot share because I fear being judged or made fun of.” He also added, “After I came here, I met a new girl and now she is my girlfriend, [but] there are some things I am restricted [from] doing because it is not a normal thing here.” By here he meant here in Qatar, because he felt that it is an Arab Muslim country and the dorms being here in Qatar was hard for him to adapt to the culture and traditions in Qatar.

On the other side of the spectrum was another Interviewee #2, another freshman from Northwestern, who expressed his appreciation and satisfaction with the dorm experience. “In Kenya I had a group of friends,” he commented, “and we called ourselves ‘The Banter-inducers.’ We would make jokes about any and everything. I thought coming to the dorms in Qatar that I would miss my friends and the banter, but I could not be any more wrong. I formed a new group with some of the guys here [in the dorms], and well, I do not feel like I’m missing anything. Life is great here.”

There was also the third interviewee’s situation when he first came to the dorms, which was that the only friends he will make are
going to be Arabs. He said, “I came here thinking, how can I speak to people I have never met? How can I share a living area with them?” But after a period of time, he changed his view, “Looking back at it, it was an idiotic way to look at things; I had many reservations because I was afraid, but after realizing that it is not like I had thought, I started engaging more with the community and I formed new friendships with a lot of diverse groups of people and that’s probably what the dorm community is all about.” So from the interviews we can deduce that the interviewees share the similar views as those expressed in the survey results.

Secondary Sources
To further enforce my research argument, I looked at previous researches that were done about dorms to enforce the argument of my research. The first source was “Intercultural Friendship: Effects of Home and Host Region” (Gareis, 2011) which pointed out how hard is it for foreign students to make friends in host countries and studied the effects of the differences in culture on the creation of friendships. This source expressed some of the same views on dorms and the host country as Interviewee #1 did.

The second source, “How are Friendships Formed” (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2004) spoke about how geographic proximity between countries of origin and race form even greater determinants of social interaction than just common interests, majors, and family backgrounds. This reflected Interviewee #3’s initial viewpoint. This source was a good starting point to prove that friendships do form regardless of the mentioned criteria.

The final sources were “Propinquity Effect” (Festinger, Schachter & Back, 1950) and “On the Relationship between Structure of Residence and Formation of Friendships (Yinon, Goldenberg, and Neeman, 1977). These were the most useful sources to describe the nature of the interactions in the dorms in EC They claimed that these interactions were due to propinquity which is a kinship formed between people living in close proximity to each other which is true on so many levels because the dorms have made communication and interaction between students much easier. Students can knock on each other’s door (as each student has his name printed on his door, so the nearer your neighbors are to you, the more ways you have to interact with them.

Conclusion
Concluding this research has helped me in finally answer the flaming questions I had before coming to the dorms. After analyzing the results, I can say for sure that the dorms are a special place littered
with interaction and interlocking relations. Through this research journey, I heard my personal story narrated by different people with a few adjustments here and there. I related to nearly everything that was said on so many different levels. I also realized that older students passed through similar situations as younger students. These results confirmed my expectations and anticipations. I was able to predict the general opinion of the dorm community just from personal experience and a few key points I noticed here and there. I admire the measures taken by Education City to ensure such interactions and bonds do form (for example making common areas and kitchens). This shows you that cultural and social interaction are encouraged and as my results have shown, they do have their benefits on the emotional well-being and sentimental levels.

I hope this research achieves its desired objective which is to help incoming students realize that living in the dorms is not what they are expecting, and that it is a much better experience than they might think. Also, regarding the students who might hesitate about taking the step of living in the dorms, I encourage them to take a leap of faith because my research shows that they most likely would not regret it. My main goal was to provide adequate and real information, gathered by myself about the life in the dorms as well as report on the interactions and relationships formed inside the dorms, to then let them decide on their own.

References


Appendix A: Interview Questions
1. How long have you been living in the dorms?
2. What is your major?
3. Did you find it hard to adapt to your new environment in the dorms?
4. Did you experience culture shock? How did you deal with it?
5. How comfortable are you with sharing your culture?
6. Do you feel like the dormitory is a great place of cultural exchange and interaction?
7. Do you feel like living in the dorms changed something in the way you perceive other cultures?
8. Do you feel a certain camaraderie toward your dorm neighbors? In what way?
9. Finally, can you describe living in the dorms in a word?

Appendix B: Survey Questions
1. Where are you from?
2. Which university do you attend?
3. What major are you studying?
4. Are you an international student?
5. What were your expectations of dorm life before coming to the dorms?
6. Rank your favorite places to meet people/friends in the dorms.
7. Rank the most common ways you share your culture.
8. On a scale from 0 to 10, how comfortable do you feel practicing your culture in the dorms?
9. On a scale from 0 to 10, how comfortable do you feel sharing your culture in the dorms?
10. Before coming to the dorms, how familiar were you with the following cultures?
11. How many cultures have you gotten introduced to while living in the dorms?
12. Are you satisfied with this number?
13. After coming to the dorms, how familiar have you become with the following cultures?
14. How did your point view of dorm life change after living in the dorms?
15. How likely are you to recommend living in the dorms to incoming students?
16. Please feel free to add anything you observed about the cultural interaction in the dorms.

Ahmad Hammoud is a mechanical engineering student, Class of 2023. Ahmad would like to mention his sincere gratitude to his family and aunt, as they were the ones who instilled in him his love for English; they both played a huge factor in teaching him the basics of this language, making him the successful person he is today.
NANCY
ABRAHAM
Beginning and Returning to Connection

Once upon a time, there was a queen bee . . . or was she an ant? Well, it does not matter. She had a vision of a mightier kingdom for her hive or colony, it doesn't matter. One day the queen was inspired, she did not know how or why, but it was a very clear and powerful vision. Her heart expanded out to the universe and with her antenna, she sent a signal asking for answers, “I am ready.” The universe sent down stars full of treasure, scattered across the lands in response to the Queen.

The queen sent her brightest out into the big world to find the stars and bring back the pieces of treasure. There were some that supported the queen and others who thought she was mad. She was on the brink of the unknown, bringing continuous prosperity to the land. The Queen was as much exhilarating as she was frightening. Her loyal subjects brought back the treasures, and she recognized that to gain the power of what lay in them, a balance of giving and receiving was needed. As all things in this universe, balance of the forces was essential.

Each treasure held a specific set of wisdom. The Queen knew in her heart that the survival of her kingdom was depending on this knowledge which will lead into the future for generations. She brought the wisdom of art, medicine, engineering, business, and political science. Each discipline required its own space. As her kingdom expanded, a grand spider emerged as the architect of the design. He spun and weaved all of the knowledge together in one location.

The spider web was strong and enduring which created permanence. Through storms and drought, the Kingdom of Wisdom remained safe and strong. Over time, each wisdom grew in scope with knowledge, research, diversity of pupils, and natural maturity of its trade. This natural growth created a distance. The spider web became a cobweb. One day, a storm was prophesied to be headed towards the Kingdom of Wisdom. Everyone in the kingdom started to communicate through the old web. As they cleaned the dust off, the web re-emerged stronger than before. They all worked together to save the wisdom from getting destroyed and becoming only a memory.

The Queen and her Kingdom of Wisdom have proven to be enduring due to the strong connection and unity of the web—a web of wisdom for generations to come. You see, this queen was no ordinary creature. As the bee, she created the impossible, and as the
ant, she worked diligently for survival. Knowing this great balance of wisdom within herself, she understood this as the key to peace and prosperity. She not only wishes it upon her subjects, but on all other kingdoms. Connection is woven one thread at a time.

Nancy Abraham
Human Resources
And Now I Am Here, Ready to Go Far Away Again . . .

As I take a step forward
I look back and then front,
I see a huge mountain that's not the same.
Each time I climb a step
the distance keeps growing.
When I look back at what I have written,
it seems far away
from where I am now.

I bull-crapped my way
all through high school.
Little they wanted from us,
little effort I put in;
a single exam they tested us on
a single day we spent on that.
It seems so far away
from where I am now.

Walking into the English 104,
I had great expectations and challenges,
but I had the eagerness to try.
Expectations got higher,
challenges became more difficult,
so I held the determination closer,
walked even faster towards them
because I had so much to give.

Struggles thinking about the first essay,
struggles writing the first draft,
brainstorming gave no help,
turning the pages of books was of no use,
for this is what high school
had gifted me.

Time changes everything;
able to write continuously,
able to think creatively,
making movies, working on research projects,
using our color pencils in university,
getting innovative with our writings,
drawing bicycles and ladders,
a climbing wall and a river,
this is what English 104
has gifted me.
From writing down first experience at university to writing down childhood memories, the class bought out my feelings, surprisingly enough since I had not talked about them; but my words had the power and they spoke for my sentiments.

Each piece of writing gave me the confidence, every suggestion boosted my energy.
I stand on the mountain with an angel on my shoulder
And now I am here . . .
ready to cross the mountain to go far away again.

*Beena Rani Debnath is a chemical engineering freshman, Class of 2023. She is passionate about writing, photography and dancing, and spends her free time doing them. Studying in Texas A&M University, she was able to get out of her comfort zone and achieve goals she hadn’t had opportunities to fulfill in the past. Likewise, she likes to express her feelings and emotions by writing diaries. According to her, writing is the only way that she can make her feelings and struggles known. In addition, writing helps her know more about herself.*
Being brought up in a bilingual household always meant that I would be faced with obstacles trying to learn two completely different languages while also finding a balance between them. This piece covers the experiences I've had as a “TCK” (third culture kid), and the struggles I've been faced with over the years as a child.
My First Language is Arabic

Growing up in a bilingual household meant that I would either write my first words in English or Arabic. I don't remember what my first words were, and which language they were in. I don't remember if the first time I read was in English or Arabic, or the first time I wrote was in English or Arabic. Although I can speak both languages fluently, my parents always told me and my sister, “يا بنات انتو عربي، فلازم تتكلمو عربي.” But I struggle to believe that, as I grew up in an English speaking country, and attended an English speaking school, which lead me to believe my first time both writing and reading must have been in English.

But I also had a constant reminder that Arabic is my first language, and that I should never lose touch with my Arabic side, as my parents are proudly Sudanese, and wanted to make sure that we carried their traditions and language forward. Coming back from school, me and my sister Heba’s first instinct was to speak English, but our first response back from my mother would be, “انا ما عارفه انتو وافد النقوش شنو، ما بتكلم انگليزي”, which translated to “I have no idea what you’re saying, I don’t speak English.” This was my mother’s way of enforcing the Arabic language into our lives, and forcing us to speak Arabic at home. We were never allowed to speak English at home, so that we can balance the two languages and stay fluent in both. My parents believed that our language was our identity, and so it was of great importance for them to teach us their language which they are proud of.

When I was a child, I remember desperately wanting to be able to read, as my older sister, Heba, was always able to read, and I felt left out, or that I was missing out in some way. At the ages of 6 and 3, my older sister and I always went to the grocery store with my mother. I remember not being able to read any of the products, which frustrated me as I wanted to be able to know what anything and everything was. I specifically remember running to the candy section, and grabbing any sort of gummy candy, as those were my favorites. I would skim the ingredients to try and get an idea of what it says as I wasn’t allowed to have anything with gelatin. But it always seemed impossible to find those words as I couldn't read; meanwhile Heba would find what she's looking for and leave me standing in the candy lane, which encouraged me to learn how to read.

Even though I don't remember much about reading as a child, one of my favorite memories was in my fifth grade class when my teacher Mrs. Orange would sit us all around and read us stories. She made us act out all the scenes in the books to help us imagine
how everything would be played out. One of these books was *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* where I played the white rabbit. This pushed me into reading many books as I really enjoyed imagining scenes. I remember going to the library twice a week, every Monday and Wednesday, and sitting in my little reading corner, to read all of my books when I had the time. I sat by the window, hidden by the book shelves, which gave me the silence I needed to read my books peacefully.

On the other side, Mr. Smith was the complete opposite of Mrs. Orange. As our seventh grade English teacher, he wouldn’t even try to make the stories interesting in any way. We would all just sit at our own desks as he reads the story to us with no excitement in his voice whatsoever. I would wait for class to be over as it felt very dreadful. As I grew older, our teachers started to make volunteers read aloud. As soon as she would ask, my hand shot straight up, as I enjoyed reading, even if it did make me feel a little anxious reading in front of others. Reading brought me joy, and was my source of entertainment up until I reached ninth grade, when I was assigned too many reading assignments.

The freedom of reading for enjoyment and as a source of entertainment changed quickly for me, and reading almost seemed like a burden. As a requirement for my English exam, I was given a never before seen piece, which I had to write an essay on. I remember when the exam came around, I kept rereading the piece, unable to make any sense of it. I looked around to see how far behind I was, and all that I saw were pens moving across paper all over the room. I started panicking and began to form an essay, not knowing at all whether I was answering the question correctly or not. After this experience, I disliked reading very much, and therefore tried not to take part in it in class. I never volunteered to read out in class, and stopped reading books in general.

Although I now live in an Arab speaking country, attending an English speaking school allows me to practice both languages on a daily basis. At age 18, my siblings and I have learnt that at home, we are to speak Arabic. However, if we do ever switch back to English, my mother asks, “بقیتو خواجه ولا شنو؟ اتكلم انجلزی”. My parents’ pride and love for their language has allowed me to accept that my first language is Arabic, whether I believe that it’s true or not.

*Ayaa Alidrissi is a Sudanese chemical engineering student, Class of 2023. She was born and raised in the United States.*
It is believed that the most insignificant decisions of your life can turn out to be the most important milestones of your life. This is something that happened to me about a year ago and that you will be able to identify with once you hear my story.
Stars That Shine Down Upon You

About two years ago, I was admitted into TAMUQ, which happened to be my last choice of universities where I was interested in studying. Being the only child of my parents, they were quite reluctant to send me abroad at a young age and suggested that I wait until junior year to transfer my credits to the main campus in Texas. I felt heartbroken and was not interested in coping with the university environment ever since my first day of orientation. I started looking up on Google for the best universities to transfer so that I could escape my unwanted fate as soon as possible. But then, something happened, something I call the “miracle” and that changed my life in no time.

In the fall semester of my sophomore year, I played the role of Orientation Leader for the incoming Class of 2023. This allowed me to get to know the incoming freshmen and guide them in adjusting to university life. Maybe I was looking for my own adjustment while helping them adjust to university life. I became really busy in Fall, serving as the president for an organization, a board member in three other student organizations, a student worker, a peer tutor at the CTL, an undergraduate researcher and most importantly, I had my academics to take care of as well. When the semester began, I had no idea how I would be able to manage my time at the university with all my course workload and organization involvement. But as I went with the flow, I was beginning to have the good days of my university life, days that were filled with gratitude and a feeling of fulfillment. This was the time when I got the opportunity to meet one of the most amazing people I met so far, Ms. Sabina in Student Affairs. She is very encouraging and one of the few people I go to when it comes to seeking any advice and not to forget, having great conversations. I can say that a few bits of advice given by her have changed my perspective towards life and have made me the person I am today.

I learned to balance my academic and organization involvement side by side while also taking breaks to get to know different people in the university. I got the opportunity to meet a lot of people through my role as the debate society president, one specific example being an event where I welcomed the President of Shell in Qatar. I was practicing his introduction when he came up to me and asked, “Are you nervous?” I told him that I had done this before and was feeling confident in doing so. After the event commenced, he came to me and said, “I guess you were right about doing this before; you have a confident personality and I wish you all the best for your future.” Those little moments of joy and appreciation made my day, and
inspired me to make my university days the better of the best. Every morning I woke up with excitement to attend university and live each day to the fullest. The semester finally got over with a blast, and I also got selected for the Student Leadership Exchange Program. I still remember Ms. Erin walking up to me to congratulate me on getting accepted for the program, and she told that she found my interview as one of the best interviews she conducted for the program, and that she was glad to get to know me. The fall semester ended, and I spent my winter vacation impatiently waiting for university to begin once again so that I could go back to my routine—the routine that has made me feel like myself after a very long time and which I can call on as something that drives me to become a better version of myself every day.

Now, there is one important takeaway from my experience and that is sometimes a few choices may not appeal to you at the very instant, but they can prove to be one of the best choices you might have ever made. Today I can proudly say that I have found my happiness in being a student at TAMUQ; being an Aggie is my identity now, something that cannot be taken away from me and something I feel I belong to. And yeah, I can say that the stars finally shone down upon me with all the blessings and gratitude I wake up with every day. As I write this, I am on my way back from the Student Leadership Exchange Program in College Station, waiting for the flight to land in Doha so that I can go and tell my friends at TAMUQ all about my wonderful experiences in main campus.

Ayesha Azimuddin is an electrical engineering sophomore, and considers herself to be the loudest and proudest member of the fighting Texas Aggie Class of 2022, “A-A-A-A-A!” She is passionate about learning new things and participating in activities such as meditation and traveling that help her grow as a person. Engineering is not her first career choice, but she is simply in love with the journey of becoming an engineer. She enjoys writing and carries her journal at all times so that she can write about her experiences whenever she feels like it.
This literacy narrative tells my journey in becoming the book lover I am today. When I look back at this piece, I see a memory that will never be forgotten, I see my growth as a person and my dedication to learn. This piece means the world to me as it uncovers a huge part of me that many may not know, and I am glad to have this memory written, set in stone. As Dr. Seuss once said, “Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory.”
Once Upon a Time I Hated Reading

Wednesday, the dreaded day in which we had to go to the school’s library and pick “un livre” to read for class. It was also the day I had to make up yet another excuse to my best friend as to why I didn’t read the “lucky book” she had picked for me to read.

Right before lunch, my redheaded teacher announced that we were going to the library to pick our millionth book of the year to read and write a summary about. Like ducklings following their mama, my classmates and I followed our teacher to the torture room. All the while, I was trying to avoid any eye-contact with Meryem, who was walking in front of me in line. Unfortunately, that didn’t last long and upon arriving to the small and colorful library of my elementary school, I met her gaze full of hope.

Oh boy! Here we go again!

“NOOR! Please tell me you actually read *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, please!” Upon seeing my guilty expression, my best friend sighed in annoyance and rolled her hazel eyes. “Of course, you didn’t.”

“I don’t know why you ask me that same question every week if you know I wouldn’t have read it,” I answered, annoyed from having to go through the same conversation each time we went to the library. I don’t know why she even bothers. No sane sixth-grader likes to read. Well . . . apparently, I was wrong and I had befriended a mad girl who actually likes reading. Ew! “It’s Harry Potter, Noor!” she exclaimed looking at me as if I had gone crazy. “How can you not like it? Hermione, Sirius Black, Ron. What’s not there to like?” She sighed dreamily, leaning on the brown bookcase that contained all the books of the Harry Potter series.

“Look Meryem, let’s be real: why waste my life reading stories about fake people’s life when I can have my own life to live? Instead of reading, we can make art and play sports. Now come along ‘chère meilleure amie du monde’, let’s go play soccer,” I replied with finality, right when the shrilling sound of the bell rung, already pulling my whining best friend out from the library to the fields of École Charles-Bruneau.

*When will she understand that I don’t like reading and I never will?*
If only I knew how wrong I was at the time. Because not even a year later, I went from a book-hater to a book-lover. Who knew? Definitely not the ten-year-old me! In fact, I'm sure if anyone had told her that a year later she would be seen carrying a book everywhere with her, she would have laughed so hard in their face and said with contempt, “you’re crazy!”

I’m French, French Canadian. Meaning I talk in French, I write in French, and most importantly, I read in French, so when I say books suck when they are translated, I’m not overexaggerating. And I think that’s why once upon a time I hated reading. Because reading a book that doesn’t convey its emotions with rich vocabulary is not a book you’d like to read.

To put it into perspective, imagine reading the word pretty instead of the word gorgeous; how would you feel? Gorgeous is a richer word that conveys a stronger meaning than pretty.

That was exactly how it was for me when I read a translated book. Believe me when I say this, because I read all of the Harry Potter books in both French and English, and if you’d ask me which one I liked better, I would answer the original version in a heartbeat. So as might be expected, I hated reading, as all I knew were French-translated books.

But that all changed thanks to The Selection series.

In the beginning of seventh grade, I moved to Qatar and was enrolled in an English school for the first time in my life. Put in mind, my first language is French, so it was not an easy transition. Needless to say, I didn’t have the best English in the world. I was that young girl with the French accent. I remember asking myself how this was going to work. I was fortunate enough to have parents who spoke English and made sure that even though we were in a francophone province, Québec, we were familiar with English. So, thankfully I wasn’t completely new to English. But knowing that being able to speak English was not enough, I decided to do something. Something that made me feel like I was committing a crime, like I was doing something against my nature. I decided to read a book. I knew that reading would enrich my vocabulary and my understanding of the language.

With determination, I went to the best book critic I knew who would be able to recommend to me a book that I would attempt to enjoy, my older sister, Hadear.
Dragging my feet to Hadear’s room, I knocked on her big brown door and uttered a sentence I never thought I would ever say, words that felt like acid in my mouth:

“Hadear, I need a book recommendation.”

I don’t know how long I stood there while my sister stared at me in disbelief. I am sure that this was a monumental day for my family. It was the first time EVER that Noor Ibrahim Hassan asked for a book recommendation. A book to read. A BOOK!

Still standing there at the threshold of her bedroom door, I waited for her to regain her composure. Finally, back to the real world, my sister gave me a beautiful book from her shelf. “Here, I know you’ll love it. It’s got your name written all over it,” she tells me with wisdom.

The book was honestly beautiful. It had a gorgeous ginger girl wearing an equally beautiful blue ball gown. It read “*New York Times* Best Seller: *The Selection*.” But that’s not what intrigued me. It was what was written on the top of the book that really drew me in: “35 Girls. 1 Crown. The Competition of a Lifetime.” Wow! What a phrase! All these questions started bombarding my head and in no time, I was excited to start. I was shocked. This was the first time I ever felt the desire to read. Without glancing at my sister, still mesmerized by the cover page, I muttered a thanks and went to my room to start reading.

I sat on my bed and held the book in front of me. The feelings were so foreign to me. It was as if it was the first time that I ever held a book. And in a way it was. This was the first time I actually focused on a book I was holding and felt ready to read.

Taking a deep breath, I flipped the hardcover to the first page of the book. I laid my eyes on the first sentence and I swear it was as if for the first time in my life, I felt like everything was clearer, as cliché as that sounds. I finally understood the power of words and the whole new life that came with books. I was in love. How can a book make me cry one moment and laugh the other? I was amazed. It was like I was the protagonist, America, and in a real-life competition. I was in a new world.

In no time, I was done with the first book. Then the second, and then the third and final one. Then and there I was confused about why I never liked reading or why I never gave it a chance to begin with. This book series is to this day one of my favorites, and I am not
ashamed to say that I have read it multiple times. And every time, I still get the same rush of emotions.

This was a start of something new for me. I went to the library more often and I was labeled as “the girl that always carried a book in hand” in school. I am proud to say I am a bookworm, and I am sure I will remain one for a long time, much to everyone’s surprise.

Books are my solace and my safe haven. They have not only made my life more interesting, but they improved my English vocabulary immensely. In fact, sometimes I find myself saying a word that I’ve never used in my life in the right context without noticing. It is safe to say that books play a significant role in my life and my journey all began when I accepted my sister’s selection.

Reference


Born and raised in Montreal, Quebec, as a native French speaker, Noor Hassan never thought that she would ever be writing English pieces and nevertheless actually enjoying it. Every piece of writing she writes uncovers a new part of her life. Arriving to Qatar when she was in the seventh grade, Noor learned the English language, making her trilingual (speaking French, Arabic, and English). She loves art, interior designing, photography, traveling, and reading. She is currently studying chemical engineering at Texas A&M at Qatar and hopes to pursue architecture once she finishes her undergraduate studies.
This piece of writing focuses on my struggles with writing and composing a first draft for my English 104 class. My main focus in this piece was my previous experiences with writing. It is almost a reflection of my thought process whilst trying to construct a piece of writing. Ironically, writing and publishing this piece makes me a writer, even though I discuss the challenges with accepting myself as a writer!
Blank Page Once Again

“Why am I here?” I ask myself as I enter my English 104 class. When my advisor told me that I would eventually have to take English 104, I thought why not take the course now and get it done and over with? When enrolling for engineering, I never suspected that I would be required to take English as a course. I've always hated anything to do with English lessons as I despise writing and can never see it as a form of enjoyment. For many people, English would be seen as a subject that helps to release emotions through writing about them, but that's not the case for me. I struggle to express my feelings on paper, and maybe that's because I don't like sharing my emotions in general.

“So your first homework assignment is to write a memo,” says my professor. I sigh and roll my eyes. Here we go again, I think to myself. Could this get any worse? I try to hide my irritation. I sit in the first row in class, at the end of the table to be as far away from the professor as I possibly can, wondering how long writing this memo is going to take. All I can think is, “How do I write a memo?” and “What is a memo, anyway?”

The last time I wrote an essay was back in 10th grade when I was forced to take English as one of my subjects. Along with the class came many requirements, such as writing coursework and memorizing poems, including “Ozymandias” and “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” We were also expected to write first drafts, second drafts, and third drafts, which was always a painful process as I don't enjoy reading my writing since all I do is criticize my own work. Taking A Levels meant that I got to choose three or four subjects that I wanted to focus on and study more in depth after doing my IGCSE's. So when dropping English became an option in high school, it was a big relief, almost like a weight was lifted off me.

As I sit in class at university, I wonder how I got to this point. “Why should English class be a requirement for an engineering degree?” I ask myself. Dropping English in high school might not have been such a good idea. Maybe it would have helped me to succeed in this class, but then again, I can't imagine what it would have been like to struggle through another two years of English in high school.

It's a Tuesday, and I walk into class. We start to talk about “today's buffet,” and then I hear the professor mention that we have two scenes to write for next lesson. My brows furrow. “A scene? How does she expect me to remember how to write that?” I mutter to myself while my professor continues to explain our assignment.
Where do I start? How do I structure it?

I sit in the library as I try to find somewhere to start, staring at a blank white page, waiting for an idea to pop into my mind. Words sway around in my head as I try to compose some sort of scene, but still, nothing comes to mind.

“Why should I even have to deal with this?” I think. But again, I remember to myself that my love and passion for engineering overpowers my hate for English and writing. Maybe my dream career isn’t worth it; maybe I should just quit engineering school and find some major which doesn’t require me to take English. But what can possibly replace engineering for me? Nothing. How am I supposed to find some other career that I am as interested in? My love for math and chemistry is what drove me to want to pursue a degree in chemical engineering. I don’t see myself in any different field, so I will be forced to work my hardest now to be able to achieve my goals later on in my career.

I make myself a cup of tea and sit at my desk at home. I begin to write what I think might be a scene, but immediately erase what I began with, leaving me with a blank page once again. After what feels like hours of trying, I finally find somewhere to start, and somehow sentences start to form easily. As the thoughts run through my mind, I quickly type them up to help me gain some sort of story.

Ayaa Elidrisi is a Sudanese chemical engineering student, Class of 2023. She was born and raised in the United States.
This is a narrative about the growing relationship that my brothers and I have with video games. This was an assignment for an English class, which required us to dive deeper into any literacy that we have been developing since we were young, which in my case, was video games.
Passing the Controller

Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick, the only sound keeping the deafening silence at bay, so close to waking my brother, Karim, who is a whole generation older than me. Between the four white, apartment walls, I hit my second, almost twin brother, Ryan, with a flamethrower, or should I say my Pokémon did. As we are not able to yell for fear of waking Karim, he lets his frustration out with a very heavy sigh, and I jump in excitement as his Pokémon is defeated. I sit back down on my eldest brother’s white bedsheets, clear my long, light-brown hair, which has not been cut since I was born, off my face and proceed to plan my next move on Ryan.

“Shh...,” Karim mumbles as he pulls his bedsheet over his head, annoyed at his brothers’ routine to sneak into his bedroom to play on one of two video game consoles every morning that they have a chance. The volume on the old television set in his room is already muted, but it seems that the constant ticking sound of buttons being pressed on the Nintendo 64 controllers is just as bothersome as having the volume maxed out. The controller, for some weird unknown reason, was designed like a pitchfork, which was a very unpractical idea, especially to a child like me; my hands are still much too small to hold it properly. Although, I still manage to use it with my baby hands by holding the middle prong with my left hand to have access to the joystick.

Ryan puts his controller down and quietly whispers, “Let’s change the game,” as he moves over to the dusty Nintendo 64 and pulls out the video game cartridge. He reaches for the black string-lock bag where we keep the different cartridges, drops Pokémon Stadium 2 in, picks out Diddy Kong Racing, and shoves it into the black console. Unsurprisingly, we are faced with a challenge. Very rarely do these dusty, old cartridges work seamlessly; they always require an extra push, and in this case, that push was a powerful exhale to get the dust out of it. Afraid of waking up the owner of the console, Ryan takes the cartridge outside to commit the deed as far as possible from this small, apartment bedroom. “PFFFFFF!” The irritating sound of air attacking the dirty walls of the cartridge is unavoidable. He returns to the room, tip toeing on his tiny feet to avoid any more noise, and carefully places the cartridge in the console and flips the switch. The signature green, blue, red and yellow N graces the television screen as it swirls before the game starts, and bingo bango bongo, we are entertained for another couple of hours.

I have a lot of memories from back then, when I was just a toddler, I do not know if that is normal or if I just a have a good memory.
Either way, most of them are of me discovering and playing new video games that Karim introduced me to. Video games have always been a massive part of my life. From helping me make friends to taking me to another world to distract me from things that are a little more negative, they have never failed me. When studying any language or playing a sport, consistent practice is essential to ensure that you do not lose your edge on the matter, and video games are no different. Similarly, just as when you do not have the time to revise the language or to train for a sport, your body assists you to naturally dive right back in because, luckily, it develops muscle memory as you use it to learn anything, and video games are just as hard to be forgotten.

This is not a story about some great feat that I accomplished in this field, but a narrative of a torch being passed on. A torch, which created and continues to create lifelong friendships, an immeasurable amount of good memories, another dimension for someone to be at peace with themselves (or to yell at the television; it is your choice, really), but most importantly, each game is an experience for the player. Whether it is an incredible experience or a very s***** one, every video game developer tries to tell you a story or immerse you in the world that they have created.

A game that succeeds at giving you an immersive sensation is one called No Man's Sky by the small, but well-known studio Hello Games. You are thrust into one of their trillions of unexplored, procedurally-generated planets with nothing but a mining laser and a crashed starship with instructions on how to fix it; these are all the tools you need to explore, make a name for yourself in the literal universe that Hello Games created, and to complete the main goal of the game, reaching the center of the galaxy (I have not even gotten close yet). You may have been lucky enough to start off in a peaceful verdant planet, but the exciting thing is you will never know what the galaxy has in store for you. The very next planet could blast you with a shivering blizzard or could be crammed with menacing sentinels—the galaxy’s robot security force—who are after travelers like yourself (see Fig. 2). The calm hum that plays as you run around a barren wasteland of a planet or even the silence when travelling in your starship between planets are all aspects of the game that draw you into its massive environment (see Fig. 3). In my opinion, one of the most appealing aspects of the game is the feature to explore, build bases and complete quests with up to four friends, which allows for fun, exciting, memorable times. The game has no extensive story to follow per se, but that does not matter as it is successful in the other aspects that make a great video game. Of course, I will not be able to list every detail about No Man's Sky, but
this is just a perfect example to help explain how video games are forms of art that can absorb players, similar to movies, music, and paintings.

On the other hand, some amazing video games are not meant to hand you a story to uncover or engage you in their beauty but are more focused on challenging your ability to play. Super Mario, for example, has the same generic story line every game: the evil Bowser kidnaps Princess Peach and Mario rushes to rescue her. The gameplay, on the other hand, is reimagined with every iteration and gets more challenging as you progress through them. However, as the years pass the graphics of the titles do become progressively stunning. I have had an innumerable amount of these experiences and have no regrets spending as much time as I have playing something that is often looked down upon by people of an older generation (the ones seen on the news who claim video games rot your brain and cause violent behaviors).

I like to think that the best games can be classified as an interactive movie; there must be a good story, similar to a good movie, which keeps you interested, but not just that, they should be matched with good gameplay, which is perhaps the most important part; otherwise, you would not even bother playing it, and finally it must have an enveloping universe that allows you to feel as if you are a part of that world. Video games that successfully accomplish all three create unforgettable experiences and are played for generations. A perfect example of this is The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, which is an old, timeless masterpiece released by Nintendo in 1998 on the Nintendo 64 (The Legend). The game still maintains its maximum score from multiple reviewers and is played today by many fans of the franchise; the success of the game even convinced the developers to create a remastered version of the game nearly a decade later on the Nintendo 3DS.

Everybody who has enjoyed these experiences has had someone who passes their torch onto them, and for me that was my eldest brother who had started his video game collection a few years
before I was born in 2001. He grew up as an only child for the first ten years of his life, so he was accustomed to playing by himself when he was at home; then within the span of two years, he had two baby brothers. Under the assumption that he was overjoyed to not be a lone child anymore, he introduced us to video games as soon as we had the ability to understand. In essence, video games were brought into my life much earlier than the average player; especially due to the fact that I am a full year younger than Ryan, so I had to develop slightly faster than he did in order to catch up and play with them. Karim shared his entire collection with us and taught us how to play every single game he owned. He taught us the essentials, like which Pokémon types are super effective against others, how to accelerate and use items in racing games, and even little cool tricks like how to find the legendary Pokémon, Mew. Even though he stopped playing games around eighteen, the age that I am currently, because he does not have the same interest in video games that he once had or even the time to play them, I still carry the torch that he passed onto his little brothers.

I remember when I was eleven, the same age my eldest brother was when I was born. Another normal day at school just ended, long and tiring, as usual. My brother and I were unable to stay another minute, so we rushed to our father’s car and jumped in. Surprisingly, my mother was in the car with him, which is not normal at all. Both of my parents glanced at my brother and me in the backseat with tiny, held-back grins on their faces. Instead of driving away from the school, they continued to pause and stared at us. And suddenly, my mom finally blurted out, “I’m pregnant.” As shocked as we were, we could not help but yell in excitement as one of our dreams was going to become a reality.

I was going to have my own baby sibling that I could watch over and set an example for just like my eldest brother continues to do for me. Honestly, I wanted a baby sister as I grew up without one, but thinking about it now, I am glad that Adam entered my life as my baby brother. There is a special bond that is made between brothers that cannot be achieved between a brother and sister; I will be able to have the same relationship that my Karim had with his two little brothers. It was not long before this little one was playing games either. I introduced him to video games and taught him the same way Karim once did for me, and by the age of four, he was already playing one of my online video games surprisingly well. He had no idea he was playing online or that he was even fairly decent at the game. I am slowly passing on the controller, as it was passed to me.
Works Cited


Rackan S. Mansour is a future mechanical engineer, Class of 2023.
During my gap year I learned so much about myself. This poem defines my inner thoughts throughout the years and how only I can change them. I can change them by making them positive. I wrote this poem to prove to myself that change is easy when you decide to hold your ground and accept the change. Writing is not an escape but is a shelter. That is why I write.
“I”

I was a kind hearted angel with no venom
I was a person of happiness until the light went out
I was here when the world was shaking then you pushed me back
I was a child of great brilliance
I was creative
I was smart
I was pretty but now
I am dumb
I am fearless yet I am fearful
I am evil but with you I am an equal
I am no one until I met someone
I am loyal until we were one
I am cautious yet I am the scapegoat
I am the one and only human still
I am nothing but filth and pain
I am changing and abiding
I am at peace with this place
I am insecure to this day
I am alive again when I get what I want
I am dying slowly each day I am here
I am a hard worker I’ll get through this
I am failing I’ll be through with this
I am here to stay
I am gonna leave
I am intelligent
I am structured
I am learning each day
I am achieving my goals
I will be a dreamer
I will be a kind hearted angel
I will be happy
I will be the smartest person
I will have a beautiful heart
I will change my life
In my English 104 course, the professor assigned a lot of writing tasks, and I hate writing. Well, I believed that I’m bad at writing, and never getting high grades on my writing pieces in high school and middle school abolished my confidence in my skills. My professor encouraged me to not get overwhelmed and to not let my view on writing affect my pieces. When I started writing this piece, I was surprised at how fun it is to write about something I am passionate about: reading. I had a lot to say about how reading makes me feel, and suddenly I was at my professor’s office almost every week to work on this piece. Ironically, writing about my love for reading made me fall in love with writing.
State of Euphoria

I first started reading in first grade where we would have kid's books assigned to us to read out loud to our parents as homework. After school, I'd go up to my room, sit on my small white wooden bed, and lean my back on the baby pink walls and practice for hours reading a ten-page kid's book that had one sentence on each page. I then would go to my mom's room, sit on the brown recliner opposite to her bed, and read her the book I'd been practicing for hours. Over the years I started to hate writing and reading because I felt obligated to do it; nobody actually showed me how beautiful it can be. It felt like a hobby that only nerds enjoyed.

The first “real” book I ever read was in third grade. My teacher, Mr. Thomas, took the class to the library and asked us to pick a fiction book that we would write a book report about for the next three weeks. I wandered around the huge library full of thousands of books. After looking for a couple of minutes at the colorful spines, I got bored and glanced around when a book on the desk caught my eye. I picked it up and inspected the cover: it was titled *Horrid Henry* and had a boy holding a paintbrush and a can of paint. It looked like a children's book, so I decided to just go with that one. I took a seat on a blue bean bag, opened the book lazily, and began to read. The lesson finished, and we had to go back to class; however, I was very intrigued by the book and decided to continue reading it at home. I was extremely entertained by Henry’s rebellious actions, and I enjoyed writing my book review. After that, I went back to thinking that reading books was “uncool” until 7th grade when everything changed.

My parents decided to take our family on a road trip to Mecca and teach us more about our religion. The trip would take fourteen to sixteen hours. I thought what better way to spend it other than reading and listening to music. A week before our trip, I installed an app called Wattpad and downloaded some books I thought looked good. I decided to start reading them right away. The first book I read was called *Nightmares of Caitlin Lawyer*. I sat on the couch on a Sunday morning, my first day of spring break and the moment I started reading, I didn't want to stop, not even to eat lunch or dinner. When it was time for bed, I hurried into my room and stuffed my phone under my pillow. My mom came in to say good night, and anxiety filled me; what if I get caught? She kissed my forehead and told me she loved me; meanwhile, my heart was stuck in my throat. Once she left, I relaxed and started reading again. A couple of hours later, my eyes burned and my body craved sleep, but my mind craved reading. I kept reading until Tuesday night. I was on the
last three chapters, still lying down on the couch; my hands were sweating, my heart was racing, my mouth felt dry and I jumped and sat straight up. The book was reaching its end, and I felt like I was the girl herself running away from the stalker who had kidnapped her. As I kept reading, I had to stand up from the excitement and anxiety. I could hardly breathe, and then finally the police came in and helped the girl in the last second; the end. I sighed in relief and sat back down. My breathing was irregular as if I were running a marathon. I was in a complete state of euphoria. This was the starting point that ignited my passion for reading.

Ever since then I’ve become more or less addicted. I would read 24/7, and in the span of two years, I read 98 books! It usually takes me around a week to finish one. This had a huge impact on my vocabulary, writing and speaking. Recently, I’ve tried out audiobooks. They aren’t as good as reading ebooks, but they are very convenient. I can listen to audiobooks while doing chores or while I relax in bed, and sometimes reading a book puts a lot of strain on my eyes, especially at night when it’s dark. I’ve listened to two audiobooks so far, *Looking for Alaska* by John Green and *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. Honestly, both books are amazing regardless of whether I read them or listened to them. I really enjoyed *Looking for Alaska*’s main character’s obsession with a person’s last words, and how heartbreaking it was when the girl he’s in love with dies. *Life of Pi* is an extraordinary book. The symbolism in the book is outstanding. The writer’s portrayal of Pi as two characters was smart, but only revealing the symbolism at the end is even smarter; the lion symbolizes Pi’s survival instinct, but readers won’t know that until the last few pages of the book, which is pretty interesting when the reader links two and two together. Additionally, the author wrote about many philosophical ideas in this book, but my favorite one has to be, “Fear is life’s only true opponent. Only fear can defeat life” (Martel, 2001, p.93). At first, I was hesitant to read these books because they aren’t really the type of books you’d catch me reading. I love books that are about assassins, drug lords, or supernaturals. Neither of those books had that, which is totally out of my comfort zones; however, I’m glad I read them because I’m not as afraid to try different genres of books.

My love for reading grows with each passing day; however, I’m hoping that I’ll marry someone who will understand this love and understand that I’ll always love books more than him. I hope I marry someone who loves books as much as I do because I need a lot of book suggestions judging by the rate I read books. I hope my children inherit this love, because reading books is the closest thing mankind has gotten to teleportation and time travel; I can teleport
to 1950 Paris and have a whole encounter with my lover or travel to one of the allies in New York where I bumped into a werewolf who then turns out to be my mate AND A DRUG LORD (I don't know about you, but having a werewolf-drug-lord boyfriend is the coolest thing ever, don't argue with me on that). And I can do all this without leaving the safety of my bed.

I want my children to experience the thrill of being in another place and time, along with the surge of anxiety that comes with trying to hide their phone/book under the pillow at night; I always wonder if they'll be as good as me at hiding their stuff at night. I really hope they, like me, experience a rush of energy surging through their bodies every time a story reaches its climax.

Loujaïen Elsherbiny is majoring in computer engineering at HBKU. She enjoys playing sports such as swimming, basketball and tennis. She has a blue II in taekwondo. In her free time, she reads fiction books. After taking English 104 in Texas A&M Qatar, she started picking up writing as a hobby.
This piece is a little twist in on “How to Be Good,” a prompt given to me in an English class. Instead of writing about what I believe makes a good person, I felt it more suitable to give advice about how to make yourself feel good.
It’s All in Your Head

I keep myself sufficiently happy, positive and cheerful by remembering these six words: *it’s all in your head*. A difference in mentality can get you so far in life, and there is no reason to allow negativity to devour you.

**The bigger picture.**

If surrendered to, the littlest inconvenience can eat away at your happiness and spoil a perfectly fine day. Any annoyance that will not be an issue in the next five to ten minutes is not worth your time and energy. S*** happens to everyone, even the happiest of people, but thinking about the situation less negatively (more positively might be a bit of a stretch) helps in the long run. The weight of insignificant complications stack on top of each other and will eventually have a negative impact on your state of mind if left unattended.

**The more, the merrier.**

There are different activities that give different people a relaxed and peaceful state of mind, activities that make people happy. The more activities you do for joy, the more potential happiness you will create. If you have ten things that you like to do to make you happy instead of five, for example, that is double the amount of potential happiness that you could have. So, try searching for more things to do in your free time; make a list for yourself. You will have more activities to enjoy spending time on during your waking hours, which means that more time in your day is occupied with positive emotions.

**Laugh.**

This is one of my favorites as it is the greatest indicator of happiness. Laughing is an act every human performs (some animals too). People laugh at different things depending on their sense of humor, and one of the saddest sights is watching people repress their impulse to laugh because a tiny aspect of the joke was “lame” in their opinion. Why prevent yourself from performing an action of maximum positivity? Open your mind to different senses of humor and try to understand the different contexts in which a joke is made. Adjusting your focus will enable you to truly appreciate jokes and look at comedy—from comedians or sitcoms on television for example—with a different perspective, which in turn will make you laugh much more; this is a good way to keep yourself cheerful.

**Risk it all.**

Okay, maybe not “it all,” but just enough. Try doing something every now and then that you would not naturally do (with constraint of
course, and see what is out there for you. First, there is a refreshing rush of adrenaline that follows an action that required you to go out of your way and try something new, a high that you may want to habituate. Second, it might sound cliché, but you never know what positivity might come out of your new venture, a new lifelong friend? Future significant other? New usual at your favorite restaurant? Who knows!
Love Poem: 2019

حجبيتك بدموعي من مافهمك للسان
ورسمت كل الشوارع المر بين اسمك
خاطر من اشتاق احول الخطوط الحان
واخلي كل نبض داخلي يجري بجسمك
من شوقيك لك حتى الحلم اقضي سهران
شعور الخوف عندي أصحى من حلمك
كلامك ماي صافي و طبيعى طبع بستان
الوقت كله اشربتك واضلح حاور بطعمرك
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الوقت كلا
Home is not where your parents come from, where you were born, or where you were brought up for that matter. Home is where you were meant to be, where you belong. The idea of Home is a state of mind and not necessarily a piece of land. Home is a deep feeling of peace, purpose, and connection. Home can be catapulted to the front-lines of your consciousness by a beautiful sight of nature, a familiar scent of a warm meal cooked by your mother, or a sweet smile by a loved one. Home is a safe state of mind, where you can let your psyche float without fear, worries, or apprehensions.

The search for Home is why we traversed lands, mountains, and oceans. Home is why we voluntarily choose to travel across the world, outside of the physical comfort of a familiar place. Home is a journey that starts and ends within us. A potentially life-long voyage that is oversimplified to avoid facing the dormant desire for identity and belonging. Unfortunately, consensus confined Home for us with artificial borders that we had no say in choosing.

Living in a big city means you will come across people from virtually every corner of the globe and witness the different routes each family took to get here. Naturally, people are curious when they meet you and inquire about your country of origin. However, I always dreaded that question because I struggled to give a simple yet honest answer. Do I assume the identity of my parents? Do I identify with the front page of my passport? Do I claim the land in which I was born? Do I identify with the country where I grew up and matured?

These questions are highly personal, and I do not claim to have the definitive answer for everyone. But from my experience of living and studying in a few countries so far, I found the idea of Home to be dynamic and immaterial. It became clear to me that this concept was highly dependent on a feeling of belonging and acceptance within the community. How can I explain feeling attached to a place and a community that I don't officially “come from”?

This experience got me thinking, could this be why movies and songs glorifying patriotism attract us? Do they ignite a dormant flame within us that yearns for acceptance and belonging? Is this why we get riled up and unite in cheering “our” team in international sports yet fail to overcome political differences to mitigate national disasters?
Having said all of the above, some of us can—and will—resolve these concepts symbolically or literally with a single place. But for those who cannot put their finger on specific GPS coordinates that represent Home, how do we respond to “So . . . where do you come from?”
Through taking the course INST 222, we discovered the importance of diversity and its impact on our daily lives as students in an American university with a diverse multicultural student body. The education in this institution is influenced and shaped by professionals from all over the world. We were highly interested in the causes and effects of brain drain in TAMUQ and that pushed us to look deeply into this topic.
Diversity and Education-related Effects of Brain Drain at TAMUQ

Introduction
Ever since the 1940s, the movement of people across their home countries in pursuit of better opportunities has led to a decline and gain in the skilled workforce in the source and host countries respectively. This phenomenon has been collectively referred to as brain drain: the migration of skilled human resources for trade, education, etc. (World Bank, 2000), and it has drawn ample attention in the past few decades due to a sharp decline in the economy, political stability and an increasing disparity between the rich and poor in several countries from where most people tend to emigrate. This phenomenon stems from a number of diversity factors from the wide gap in schooling to regional conflicts with religion and other types of social classes. This research paper dives deeper into the diverse sets of teaching styles, economic backgrounds, and other dimensions of diversity-related effects of brain drain. The influx and outflux of people to and from various regions causes a shift in several aspects of diversity such as tolerance towards other cultures, assimilation, and pluralism. In most cases, the outflux of skilled workforce has been a bane for the many source countries. This paper aims to study the effects of brain drain on diversity and students' learning experiences, specifically, at Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ), analyzing how it affects the teaching style and research in engineering by targeting the faculty (professors), and to observe how it affects their viewpoints and perspectives based on their experiences at the diverse environment of TAMUQ. This paper hypothesizes that the diversity of TAMUQ is directly affected by brain drain; therefore, to verify and observe this effect, data collection was conducted through surveys and interviews. This research holds importance as it would help better understand how the subjects of brain drain (faculty at TAMUQ) view the phenomenon of brain drain, themselves, and their working environment whether positively or negatively from the social, professional, and academic aspects of the teaching environment with the aim of answering the question, “How does brain drain affect diversity in education at TAMUQ?”

Literature Review
The phenomenon of brain drain is prevalent in most of the countries around the world and continues to issue concerns for governments, societies, and organizations. The shortage of engineering professionals in their home countries and their migration to serve the host country causes a lack of skillful labor in the home country, hence giving rise to other concerns such as economic decline and lower national growth. As mentioned by Wongboonsin, “The awareness of brain drain raises questions concerning how...
to integrate brain drain into the country’s economy to become a high-income nation. Migration is one of the most enduring features of human experience” (2004, p.12). The migration is not limited to skilled workers but also affects professional workers, as pointed out by Essam and Gillian, “The developing countries are often related with industrial dependency and do not yet possess the methods of analysis services and research which are the greatest users of engineers” (1986, p.11). Understanding the global movement of teaching professionals in an engineering school is necessary to find the root causes of brain drain which will aid in the crucial steps to revert this phenomenon and promote brain gain in the home countries. One research paper describes the international work migration with brain inflows and outflows from one country to another, arguing that the brain losses should be compensated by the respective brain gains. The findings of this research paper are based on converting brain drain to brain exchange, highlighting that “the extent to which this brain mobility could cause the loss of cultural and social capital between the sending and receiving countries is a matter of debate” (David, 2012, p.25).

Most of the previous research findings suggest that the viewpoint towards brain drain is often flawed as mentioned by Ewers (2007) and articulated by Zhang: “Much of the relevant literature places greater emphasis on the perspective of organizations and governments with a tendency to overlook individuals” (2003, p.27). This is an important element to consider, bearing in mind that well-educated and highly-skilled migrant workers could demonstrate their own sets of reasons for migration. Understanding the migration intention also gives an idea about the various aspects of diversity in a multicultural world and the extent to which it influences their decisions. A research paper that addressed this problem in Malaysia mentioned that “for the country to fulfil its vision to become a high-income economy by 2020, it will be important to give insights about the underlying factors that lie at the heart of individuals’ migration decisions” (Jauhar, 2014, p.21). Jauhar analyze the factors that could possibly support the migration of engineers around the world, including social welfare and human security. A major finding of the research was that job and pay satisfaction, human security, and social welfare were found to not be significant factors affecting the migrant intention of professional engineers in Penang, which suggests that there are more factors that affect the migrant intentions to serve as beneficiaries to the host country.

The results of most of these research papers suggest that job engagement and organizational engagement are significant in determining migrant intentions of engineers, which serves as a
pull factor for the migrants. Apart from financial gains, there is limited research on the aspects of diversity that are influenced by the outflow and inflow of migrants. The cultural turn is nowadays simultaneous to the greatest market enlargement, globalization, which confronts institutions and people who are involved in brain drain with new situations, characterized by the meeting of multiple cultures and by the need of intercultural understanding. Globalization obliges us to elucidate multiculturalism and interculturality, as the outflow and inflow of people from different cultural backgrounds serves as an opportunity to study the various elements in the host country and the home country that impact their understanding about living in a diverse multicultural society.

From the knowledge acquired regarding living in a multicultural society, and the various phenomena that occur with implications that are far wider than perceived, there is a possibility of a correlation between brain drain and its effect on diversity in both the host and home country. With a thorough study, analysis, and supportive evidence, our study highlights the various aspects of diversity that get impacted by the individual decisions regarding migration.

Methodology
This study aims to understand the impact of diversity on the teaching strategies, research approaches and cultural preferences of TAMUQ faculty as representatives of brain drain. Moreover, the study briefly tries to understand TAMUQ faculty's perception of brain drain and what causes it in their individual home countries. Finally, the study provides insight into how members of brain drain among TAMUQ faculty in this study perceive the diversity of TAMUQ's students in their learning experiences. The study looks into the adaptations of TAMUQ's faculty to teaching a diverse student body. It also tries to subtly address the issue of brain drain itself by lightly examining the reasons causing the immigration of skilled people from their home countries.

The faculty of TAMUQ come from a myriad of backgrounds, hence creating a diverse microcosm in a small place. Studying the reasons behind the emergence of highly-educated individuals, their views on the diversity of the student body, and its impact on their teaching strategies provides insight and creates a pathway to achieving the goals of the study.
Survey:
A survey was created and distributed to the faculty members of TAMUQ. The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of ten questions that aimed to understand the faculty’s opinion on the impact of diversity on the learning experience of the students at TAMUQ. Moreover, the survey aimed to gain insight on the faculty’s perception and opinion on brain drain.

Interview:
An interview, consisting of seven questions, was conducted online by sending a document to ten TAMUQ faculty members. The interviewees were chosen to be ten professors coming from different countries and teaching different courses, in order to obtain different perspectives from members of brain drain. The interview aimed to discover new dimensions of the effect of diversity on the professors’ teaching styles and perceptions of brain drain and its causes. The interview also asks questions on the faculty’s opinion on the impact of diversity on the educational experience of the students.

Data Analysis:
The survey responses were transformed into charts and percentages and were analyzed by comparison of the answers. The analysis included separating responses from participants based on their ethnicity and the economic standing of their countries. The data was analyzed based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. The interview was also analyzed based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and the responses were interpreted based on the participant’s country’s economic standing as provided by the OECD. The analysis of the interview responses included highlighting some of the similarities and differences in the respondents’ opinions.

Findings
Brain drain has always been a diverse term with ambiguous meanings defined uniquely by every person who has been through it. This phenomenon has been around for a long time, as migrating can offer new and better opportunities as well as teach people how to become more aware of different societies and cultures around them that they might have been strangers to. Reflecting back on the research question which aims at identifying the educational and diversity effects caused by brain drain, the results gathered from the survey and the interviews conducted are presented and discussed as follows.
Survey:
The survey was presented to all faculty members as a way to give us a general and broad insight on the topic. However, the interview was only presented to a few professors picked by the students. This was adapted in order to have a more in-depth perception of their experiences regarding brain drain and what they went through.

Chart-1: Graph showing the results of the survey question “What is your opinion on brain drain in TAMUQ?”

First, an interesting and unexpected fact about the survey was that the majority of respondents were from the U.S., an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country that usually consists of a playground for the immigration of skilled work forces on its lands. This opened a new perception to analyze and ensured a greater insight that the students researchers were not anticipating.

For the question presented above, as shown in the Chart-1, 57% of survey respondents believe that brain drain does indeed cause a loss of skillful people in the home countries. Moreover, most of the respondents who selected this option also believe that it is a necessity for better opportunities. This information shows that sometimes even though you do not want to leave your country but rather benefit it with your knowledge and skills, the opportunities available in the home country are not enough to develop professionally and personally. Yet, the acceptance of brain drain by choosing the option mentioned above (loss of skillful people for the home country) may reveal a hint of resentment for the situation of leaving the home-country. Furthermore, this question can open doors for self-realization about the topic of brain drain and how it
affects the home country for each respondent. This brings us to our next survey question, presented in the following chart:

**Chart-2**: Chart showing the results for the survey question “How likely will you return to your home country within the next five years?”

If the two options “Very unlikely” and “Unlikely” were to be combined, 42.86% of survey respondents wouldn't consider going back to their countries, while 29% chose “Neither likely nor unlikely,” inferring that they do not have a clear mindset and preference of what the future holds. They would not mind migrating to other countries or going back to their own. Based on the comments left by these respondents, the majority of decisions are influenced by past experiences and situations or even sometimes current situations that make us aware of our past experiences. In other words, the decision of going back to their home countries or not depends most of the time on their past experiences in the home country: discrimination, lack of opportunities, governmental control, and so on. Some may have experienced these negatives previously when in their home country, or they may be responding to what is shown and heard on the media creating a mindset of fear and disorientation.

An interesting fact in this survey was that 70% of respondents were from OECD countries and origins, which are countries that people usually tend to migrate to and not vice-versa (referring back to what was mentioned earlier). This helps us reflect on the idea that brain drain does not always happen for economic reasons as usually assumed by the origin of migration. In addition, this statistical information proves that brain drain does not only occur
from countries of poor economic state but can be due to other reasons discussed in the interview section below. Thus, brain drain in this case becomes essential for extending one’s window to grow professionally in the field of engineering and teaching. It grows exponentially when the foreign host country is opening up to different cultures and serves for better financial stabilization.

A list of questions was then presented on how living in Qatar changed them professionally and personally respectively. 80% confirmed the change professionally and an average of 60% affirmed on the change personally. These sets of questions were important to reflect on the scope of coming to Qatar as a way to learn culturally while conserving their own backgrounds and rising in their profession. Yet, based on these statistics, we can see that the majority of the respondents are more resistant to change personally as they value their own cultures, traditions, and identity. This conclusion aligned with what the conductors of this survey believed they would find. Thus, the main goal of the question was to check how living in a certain culture for a decent amount of time can change some of your perspectives and make you change as a person in terms of adopting some traditions from the host country and investing in them yourselves. A small percentage noted that it had changed them and helped them evolve personally. This minority could be due to the respondents’ enculturation as they have emerged into their own culture and may not see the need in “assimilating” in small doses into a new culture.

Nevertheless, the respondents all agreed on the following question: “How does the multicultural environment in TAMUQ affect the students’ educational experiences?” The answer was “100% positively affects.” The optional comment box also revealed an interesting realization of one respondent that can be rephrased as the following statement: Qatar and the existence of diverse cultures as part of its community serves in helping each student reflect on their upbringing by comparing cultures, beliefs and so on. This realization might not necessarily always be positive, but it offers an extended perspective of everyone around us and their different cultural backgrounds that will metamorphize into a highly positive effect in the sense of accepting our own culture while learning about other cultures in the long run.

Interview:
As for the interview questions (see Appendix A), the answers provided can be split into two themes: small power distance/individualist countries and large power distance/collectivist countries. Before diving into interviewees’ responses about their
teaching experiences and whether they had to assimilate/integrate their strategies to fit in with the students, some terms and concepts are defined below.

Large or small power distance is a dimension of Hofstede's cultural dimensions that refers to the degree to which power is distributed unequally. In large power distance cultures, significant inequalities among people are both accepted and expected. On the other hand, small power distance cultures play down the importance of inequalities in power and wealth as much as possible. Moreover, individualism reinforces people's reliance on self, and encourages a greater concern with one's own interests. On the other hand, collectivism reinforces a greater reliance on the group, and a greater concern for the welfare of all involved (Hofstede, 2015).

For the interviewees originating from a collectivist country, their adaptation was a bit easier since Qatar is a collectivist country as well, thus it offers a common ground for implementing the same conditions with different contexts. Nevertheless, one of the challenges faced was the following: the very high diversity in the classrooms forced several alternatives to teaching strategies that fits all and would be comfortable for all. As for interviewees originating from individualist countries, it was slightly more challenging since they are used to having everyone in the classroom dependent on themselves and on what is given in the lecture without the need to enforce discussions and work as a team.

Yet, interviewees agreed on how different each teaching environment is from one another and how it solely depends on the context of the experience. Thus, even in the same country teaching experiences can be very different. An example was on the basis of coeducation and how it affects the students’ learning experiences and the professors’ way of providing information. This example was presented as a comparison between TAMUQ and Qatar University by one of the respondents; although in the same country, some restrictions can make them very different in terms of required teaching methods and needed skills.

Most interviewees agreed on one thing: teaching is “context-driven.” They all had a common ground in this answer, mentioning that it does not primarily depend on them but rather the students, their feedback and how they perceive things, the place or the surroundings (environment/country), and the student body itself such as their academic background, motivation level, and future goals. They adopt this method to “meet their [students’] linguistic and cultural needs” and ensure inclusivity and understanding in a
multicultural society such as TAMUQ’s. Moreover, this also tightly relates to the survey question regarding the change professionally, which shows how professors are positively aware of their diverse surroundings and students’ needs.

One important thought was provided from one of the interviewees which contradicted with the rest as for the conclusion stated above. The statement is the following: “I still lecture pretty much the same as I did when I taught American students in the U.S. However, I had to adjust expectations.” When asked whether they changed or assimilated their teaching strategies based on the environment they were teaching in, the response was that the only thing that changed was not to expect the same outcome from students coming from a certain background, while remaining with the same teaching strategy. The message evoked by the professor was that students here usually come with a knowledge of English as a second or even a third language. Hence, they express struggles in adjusting to reading assignments and critical thinking exercises that aim to view the bigger picture of things in order to analyze and read between the lines. This can be seen especially in liberal arts’ courses which constitute a big part of an engineer’s future in the workplace and thus requires the professor’s action in finding alternative ways. Thus, with the change of expectations comes a change in assignment selection to match the students’ learning capability by not pressuring them into things they weren’t familiar with.

A thought-provoking aspect about TAMUQ is that it constitutes a common ground between America’s culture and Qatar’s culture. In other words, it represents a mix between small power distance (US) and large power distance (Qatar). “Education City with its six American branch campuses seems like it is outside of either country, with its own culture that requires local students and expat professors alike to be sensitive and flexible as they figure out how to adapt to ways of being neither totally familiar nor fully foreign.” In these terms, professors don’t feel like they have to express complete authority like in large power distance countries due to the small class ratios and the different cultures imposed in each classroom setting. Nor can professors maintain complete flexibility to the students by integrating more of a laissez-faire leadership opportunity in small power distance countries.

It’s also important to note that the insights for the interview came from professors of various backgrounds teaching different subjects so that it would complicate the analysis and make the impact fuller via taking all possible sides of this subject. And consequently, an important question must be asked based on this thought: How
different would a liberal arts professor’s response be from a science professor's answer in terms of dealing with assimilation and the diversity of the students—especially in social interactions and the different teaching styles adopted? This question is important to ask as a way to further analyze diversity contexts and the effects from brain drain when more differences are involved (liberal arts vs. science).

Based on the interviews, we can observe that liberal arts professors emphasized how they chose to change their teaching methods based on the context of TAMUQ specifically and living in Qatar generally. These changes mostly involved writing assignments, writing important information on the board and not only oral transmission, assigning people to discuss subjects in their office, reducing the number of reading assignments to focus more on technical and analysis skills, and lastly, adapting assignments based on the students’ cultural and religious backgrounds. As for the science program professors, their focus was less on changing their teaching strategies based on different audiences, as they expressed that academic goals for each course are not changed. However, one science professor did note that “the methodology to serve the purpose should be adjusted to incorporate students' academic needs, [using] available technological resources [that can take into account] the diversity factors that can be incorporated in the learning process.” This analysis shows that even a different aspect of a profession can change the attitude to the same subject (teaching) in the same context (brain drain).

For the people coming from OECD countries, their reason for brain drain synthesized from their responses to the interview questions was mainly because of competition since everyone has access to high education and thus the workplace can be challenging for getting decent jobs. However, for people coming from non-OECD regions such as North Africa and South Asia, their reason was the lack of opportunities in their home countries which forced their migration. This is due to the difficulty in the self-improving environment created by the home country. Most of the interviewees expressed that their home countries are very multicultural with the lack of governmental acknowledgment of the several cultures present there. This lack is represented with militancy in national customs and traditions.

Before conducting the survey and interview, the general assumption was that the findings would indicate that economic reasons are the main drive behind why people leave their source country: namely, to find an improved environment and atmosphere for them and their family as well as to further grow, mature and discover their own
strengths and weaknesses. But after presenting the results shown above, the main drive can be shifted to mainly financial-personal reasons, regardless of the economic standing of the home country like in the cases when people go to very cold or very hot countries combating all-weather barriers to get better financial stabilization (salary).

Conclusion
It is well established that the 21st century has witnessed an immense level of brain drain from a large number of countries all over the world. With that, the attention of the issues it attracts has also increased since people are becoming more aware of the positives and negatives that brain drain causes. From recent findings of the conducted survey and interviews, it is notable that brain drain’s main negative aspect is the loss of skilled practitioners in the home country due to economic reasons and it being the most impactful driving force. Yet, brain drain plays a major role in providing a diverse environment that allows the inclusion of people and their different backgrounds. For instance, the presence of diverse cultures, traditions, languages, and religions all interact in a learning process for each individual. Our goals of developing our diversity consciousness and becoming more aware of not only the differences in our styles but also the chances of gaining and learning from them can then be achieved.

One important response that was shared among survey respondents and interviewees is that the multicultural environment, created by brain drain, does not set a drawback and rather enriches the students’ learning experience. Higher education institutions recruiting students, staff, and faculty from various backgrounds creates an atmosphere that embraces differences where a chance to learn and improve in terms of being diversity conscious is provided.

It can also be seen that several factors play into the cause of the brain drain of faculty at TAMUQ, and the central being unsupportive, discouraging governments. The poor management from those in political power built the foundation for job discouragement which resulted in the intentions of skilled individuals to migrate for a better living environment and greater opportunities such as in the fields of research and financial security/ satisfaction. In addition, an interviewee elaborated on how the government adopts an assimilated system as opposed to a more pluralist-adapted lifestyle, thus rejecting the diverse sets of dimensions existing in the country. This can easily lead to brain drain since those who feel excluded will look elsewhere to shine and improve upon their skills. Brain drain involves the migration of mostly Africans, Arabs, or
South Asians to other countries with a relatively healthier economy, offering better opportunities for success. On the other hand, it was equally interesting to study the case of people who do the opposite; depart the US and/or OECD countries for less developed places. The ambition to visit these host countries may not only be associated with discovering the culture but can also be to benefit the host countries with their professional experiences by conducting skills-training workshops and learning strategies for students. Moreover, more recently, and as proved by the interview answers, brain drain can be caused due to their countries’ lack of offering of several, specific research topics. Conducting this research sheds light on a highly relevant topic that affects people daily and now can be better conveyed to people involved in brain drain. In a multicultural society, people tend to be brought up together which lessens the fear of the unknown that is associated with staying abroad. Therefore, taking this subject into consideration is essential as we live in a multicultural society.

References


Appendix A

Interview questions:

Q1 Have you ever felt the need to alter/adjust your teaching style because of the differences in the teaching environment around you?

Q2 If yes, how? Did you integrate/assimilate?
Q3 How different is the teaching experience in TAMUQ compared to other teaching experiences?

Q4 Tell us about your social interactions in TAMUQ, a diverse workplace, with your colleagues and students.

Q5 Tell us about how brain drain affected your perception of your home country.

Q6 How does diversity impact education in your home country?

Q7 How different is it in the host country?

Survey questions:

Q1 What is your gender?

Q2 What is your racial or ethnic identity?

Q3 Which Citizenship do you hold? (if more than one please specify)

Q4 What is your opinion on Brain Drain in TAMUQ? (Select all that applies)
   • It is a necessity for better opportunities
   • It is an opportunity for learning and adapting in multicultural societies
   • It is a loss of skillful people for the home countries
   • It helps us grow and develop responsibility
   • Other (please specify)

Q5 How long have you stayed in Qatar?
   • 0-3 years
   • 3-5 years
   • 5-8 years
   • 8-12 years
   • 12+ years

Q6 How prevalent is the brain drain of teachers and researchers in your home country?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Q7 How likely will you return to your home country within the next five years?
   • Very unlikely
   • Unlikely
   • Neither likely nor unlikely
   • Likely
   • Very likely
Why or why not?

Q8 On a scale from 1 - 10 how do you think living in Qatar (a multicultural society) changed you professionally?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q9 On a scale from 1 - 10 how do you think living in Qatar (a multicultural society) changed you personally?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q10 How do you think multiculturalism in TAMUQ affects student’s educational experience?
   • Positively affects
   • Negatively affects
   • Somewhat affects
   • Doesn't affect
Please elaborate
Ayesha Azimuddin
Ayesha Azimuddin is an electrical engineering sophomore and considers herself to be the loudest and proudest member of the fighting Texas Aggie Class of 2022, “A-A-A-A-A!” She is passionate about learning new things and participating in activities such as meditation and travelling, that help her grow as a person. Engineering is not her first career choice, but she is simply in love with the journey of becoming one. She enjoys writing and carries her journal at all times so that she can write about her experiences whenever she feels like it.

Fatma Ahmed
Fatima is a chemical engineering major graduating in 2022. Born in Egypt and raised in Qatar, she was always surrounded by people from many different nations and with diverse backgrounds. Their influences, evident in her life to this day, drove her to be more aware of her environment, and they have shaped her being as she continues to be curious about learning the many differences of people around her and adapting to living in a multicultural society.

Hana Abdalla
Hana Abdalla is an electrical engineering student at Texas A&M University at Qatar, Class of 2022. Besides her interests in engineering, she enjoys admiring art pieces, reading, and communicating her thoughts through writing.

Aysha Melhim
Aysha is a chemical engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar.

Noor Mubarak
Noor Mubarak is a chemical engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar. Morals and principles are sacred to her. Throughout the INST222 course, Noor had to re-evaluate her principles and readjust them to be more inclusive of the wide diversity spectrum that she encounters on a daily basis. She values the concepts that she was taught and considers the class as a good experience that nurtured her growth and made her mature in many ways.
This piece’s prompt was to ask myself, “Why am I here?” I’ve wanted to write this piece for such a long time because I wanted to tell people my goals, and then maybe they’ll be inspired to do the same. My goal in life is to make people happy and be kind. It sounds so cliché, but it’s the truth. There are people out there having such a bad quality of life, and if I can help a couple of people, then I have achieved my goal. If everyone helps two or three people around the world by contributing to their lives somehow, the world will TRULY be a better place. The smallest of actions can make people happy. In Islam, smiling to someone is considered charity. Smiling to someone else can make their day, so don’t forget to smile! This piece will always be with me for the rest of my life. I will keep editing it as I grow, because I think the more I experience the more I’ll have to say on this.
I like to believe that I play a huge role in my family; I’d maybe go as far as to say that I’m the backbone of the family. A lot of things wouldn’t be possible if I weren’t there. Regardless, I think I’m here for a bigger purpose. During fourth grade my English teacher asked the class to write and reflect on what we wanted to do with our lives, and how we can make it worth living. I refused to write about my true goal that day for the sole reason that I believed that if you talk about your goals, they are less likely to happen. I am now a lot more mature, and I believe that if I work hard I’ll achieve my goals regardless of whether I tell others or not. It’s about time to tell the world about my ambitions.

After wondering for years about why am I here in this world, I came to a solid answer: I want to provide a better life for the less fortunate, specifically people who struggle financially. I want to give them basic necessities, so they can live a good life just like the rest of us. They are humans just like us, and they deserve to have a good life.

Growing up, I was a mature kid aware of what’s happening around me. Ten-year-old me would sit in front of the TV and watch the news with my grandpa in my grandparents’ living room with dark brown wooden floors, dark blue walls and furnishings, and a bulky television. The news was usually about politics and how the government plans on developing Egypt and achieving self-sufficiency, but all the business deals and the developments happening in the country obviously only helped the rich get richer. I concluded that politics is just a front for businessmen to justify stealing from the poor, and there is nothing we could do to stop it.

My grandma was a teacher and often took ten-year-old me to work with her. On our way to her school, everywhere I looked I saw old homeless men begging for money at the traffic light, old women sitting on the sidewalk looking at every passerby and calling out a prayer for them, hoping they’d give some spare change in return, and kids my age selling roses along the Corniche to lovers. Where were our taxes going? Where were all those developments our president kept promising? At that point I knew that politics was a game and realized that sadly only poor people paid the real price, and that it was up to us, normal members of the community, to help the poor as much as we can.

Don’t get me wrong, I didn’t fantasize about ending world hunger, but I wanted to believe that I could help a great amount of people. I
formed a foolproof plan: study hard, choose a career path I'm good at, get my bachelors, get a higher degree (if possible), find a job, save up, and invest. Once I start getting a large stable monthly income, my big plan starts. I'd go around the world and help the poor when they least expect it, such as building a house for a homeless man I met at the mall parking or paying off a poor woman’s medical bills or someone's student loan.

I am no longer 10 years old, but eight years later, I still want to be that light at the end of the tunnel. I want to be able to help every stranger I meet on the streets begging for money. I don't want to just open my wallet and hand them cash, but give them a house and find them a job or give them an opportunity to start their own business. Giving cash to a poor person is like pouring water on the sidewalk on a hot summer day instead of watering the plants. The poor person will easily spend the cash and go back to begging. I want to help them in a way that will set them up financially for the long run and won't have them begging again.

Even if I don't succeed in making enough money to help others, I can still make an impact like the one in the butterfly effect. It's an idea that states that a small change can make much bigger changes happen. This term comes from an analogy where a butterfly flaps its wings in Chicago and a tornado occurs in Tokyo; such a small act can eventually lead up to a much bigger impact.

If everyone could adopt this mentality, we can make big changes. If everybody puts a drop in the glass bottle, it will eventually fill up. We might not be able to see the impact we have on the world because it is so small. Some might think that their lives are pointless and question their existence; however, I think that this idea is extremely close-minded because everything you do matters. A simple example as to why every human matters is that a human breathes in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide, which plants breathe in, therefore contributing to the environment. Regardless of what some people think, everybody has a role in making a difference.

Loujaien Elsherbiny is majoring in computer engineering at HBKU. She enjoys playing sports such as swimming, basketball and tennis. She has a blue II belt in taekwondo. In her free time, she reads fiction books. After taking English 104 in Texas A&M Qatar, she started picking up writing as a hobby.
The financial crisis has affected many situations to the point where the ratio between savings and spending has increased. I continuously wondered if that ratio had an effect on charity and decided to conduct a small research within the Qatar community to confirm if donations has increased, decreased, or stayed the same since the financial crisis in 2008. I have decided to share my findings with you, and I hope you enjoy this piece.
Are Charities Affected by the Financial Crisis?

Abstract
Non-profit organizations have been affected by the financial crisis. Many donors are unable to keep up with their donations as they need finances for themselves or their families’ well being. Two different types of studies were conducted to identify if charities have been affected by the crisis and if the discipline the charity focuses on has impacted the donations it receives through these economically difficult times.

Introduction
Once upon a time before the financial crisis stormed unannounced in households, people were casually donating to charities. Worldwide, the money donated to charities was never questioned. If you look at the research papers on charities, almost all of them start to point out the problems during 2008 and after. Previously, they acted as reminders for business and individuals to sacrifice a percentage of their income to help out the underprivileged. Awareness of the less fortunate was also seeping through social media sites. Many celebrities were advertising charities they donated to along with the discipline the charities were focused on via Facebook, Instagram and many more websites.

Now with the financial crisis and the population migrating their attention to the lack of job security [2], it became difficult for these stakeholders to maintain their typical donated amounts. Recent studies have predicted that 26% of stakeholders are arranging to reduce their donations [2]. For example, looking at hospitals, which are the largest non-profit organizations [1], the research found that they were cutting their losses and shutting down services such as trauma and alcohol and drug treatment centers [1]. This aided many hospitals in withstanding the economic waves. So which charities will not be affected by the cuts?

However, it is not easy to determine which charities are forced to survive. Since charities have value to societies, many stakeholders are avoiding the reality that some charities will need to survive without their financial support [2]. Thus there is little to no data on how different charities are affected by the financial crisis because there aren’t any records that indicate the type of charities and how they are affected by the stakeholders’ choices.

In this research paper, I am going to demonstrate how different types of charities were affected by the resonating 2008 financial crisis. To conduct this research, I focused on two different types of
charities in Qatar: Qatar Charity and Qatar Red Crescent. The first is focused on assisting children trapped in conflicts or natural disasters [3], and the latter is focused on improvements in the living situations of third world countries [4].

First I will discuss the methods undergone to collect data, followed by the results of the research, and finally conclude with a discussion on how these results relate to the research question: “How are charities affected by the financial crisis?”

Methods of Data Collection
To help answer my research question, I opted to do an observation study near the charity stands. I set up a chart and counted the number of people who visited the charity stands for three days. I collected data between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. as this was the usual time the malls were busy. I selected Qatar Mall as my desired location mainly because it had a limited number of charity stands for my two chosen charities, making it easier to observe the number of people donating. Please see appendix A for a sample of the observation study created.

The reason I have chosen an observation study was to examine customers in their natural habitat [5]. Influencing factors such as social media sites and “appearing on TV” are eliminated, leaving behind potential donors free to wander around. Only then can we establish that the people who end up donating are not under any media influences, just their intentions.

In addition to the observation, I also conducted a survey consisting of seven questions, distributed to those donating at the stands. The questions were mostly asking if their donations had changed compared to the past and why. Please see appendix B for a sample of the survey.

I created the survey to help reduce the biases that may have occurred from the observation because I would have more control of the environment [5]. Observations such as time of year wouldn’t have that much of an effect.

Furthermore, I believe surveying is a more confidential way of collecting data since those who are answering are kept anonymous, which is one of the ways bias is controlled. This idea is further validated by DeFranzo, S. E., who states that survey takers are more likely to answer truthfully if their identities are kept a secret [6].
Results and Discussions

1. The Observation Study
The results of the observation study of 2 specific charity stands at Qatar mall can be seen in Figure 1.

1.1 Qatar Red Crescent versus Qatar Charity
Figure 1 shows that, on average, there were more donations to Qatar Red Crescent than there were to Qatar Charity. This may be due to the strategic locations of the two different charities. Qatar Red Crescent was located near the grocery store, whereas Qatar Charity was located near the main entrance of the mall. Qatar Charity was overlooked by many people who entered the mall as they probably had a to-do list to fulfill, and donating did not reach the top position. Qatar Red Crescent was perhaps stopped by more often after people paid their hefty grocery bills and remembered the less fortunate who were unable to afford any meals. Furthermore, we can presume that more people were supporters of assisting children in terrible times compared to helping better the lives of current living situations in underdeveloped countries. We can speculate this by the higher number of people who visited the Qatar Red Crescent stand.

1.2 Observation of People Donating
Another aspect that can be noticed in Figure 1 is the number of people who donated. On Sunday, a total of 95 people have donated compared to Monday where only a total of 42 people donated. The donations rise again on Tuesday to a total of 66 people. There is a significant drop between Sunday and Monday. It can be deduced
that more people were present in the mall on Sunday. This was because of their many events and “last day offers” at the mall. On Monday, the mall was emptier than usual. Many factors can play a role such as the weather or other events that were going on in the country. On Tuesday there was a rise in numbers. This did surprise me as I assumed Tuesday was during the middle of the week and there would be a further decrease in numbers. More days are needed to be observed to identify if this was an anomaly or a recurring habit.

1.3 Conclusion of the Observation Study.
Overall, the number of people donating totalled below 100 on each of the three days. Comparing it to the number of people visiting Qatar mall which is filled with hundreds of people, only a small percentage were recorded. It would be too big of an assumption to assume that the number of donations decreased based on the gathered data from the observed data. Unfortunately, neither Qatar Charity nor Qatar Red Crescent has released information on the number of people who donated daily or the amount donated. To justify the decrease in donations, more data needs to be recorded periodically to justify this statement.

2. The Survey
A total of 5 surveys were given out to random strangers, and their data is summarized below. Please see Appendix B for the surveys.

2.1 Analyzing Question 1
Looking at the results of the surveys collected, 4 out of the 5 responses only donated to charity when needed. The remaining person donated monthly. Based on recent studies conducted, it was revealed that donors who donated on a monthly basis were likely to donate 42% more than donors who donated on random times [7]. Based on my collected data, only 1 out of 5 people were already doing so. A majority of the records show people are less likely to provide periodic donations. Based on this, we can assume that fewer donations are given to charities in Qatar. However, this cannot be fully determined as we have not taken into account any online donations for this research study. To set up monthly donations, one would have to register an online recurring payment plan.

2.2 Analyzing Question 5
This then promoted the next question asking how the number of donations changed in the last two years. Ironically the same four people who answered “we only donate when needed,” said that their donations have decreased. The person who chose to donate monthly stated that his donation has stayed the same in the last two
years. This demonstrates a positive correlation between donating periodically and the amount of money donated. This still supports my conclusion that fewer donations are given to charities in Qatar.

2.3 Analyzing Question 6
When asking the four people the reasoning behind their answers in the previous question, their answers varied, but all pointed towards one thing: they all had other financial obligations. Some needed the money for living expenses, children's education, etc. [8]. The limited finances did leave multiple households crippled and in fear of the future. The candidates felt like they were placing themselves in financial instability when donating. They were more likely now to save money for a rainy day. The fifth person answered that they were donating because they came from a poor background, and now that they have the money they would like those around him to feel some kind of happiness. He could relate to the struggles of the less fortunate were facing. He was more willing to donate to make sure that those around him felt some financial benefits and that there were people here who cared about them.

2.4 Analyzing Question 7
The next question asked if politics or the media played a role in the amount they are donating. The fifth person answered yes. If it was brought to their attention there was a country suffering from a natural disaster or specific people who need money for surgeries or education, he would target his donations towards them because they would potentially need the money more. The other four people also agreed but for different reasons. They suggested that if a country is facing a political situation, they were less likely to donate. For example, when political situations like Boko Haram (a terrorist organization) in Nigeria surfaced and Nigeria was asking for donations to help fight these terrorist groups, the four participants would likely not have donated because they felt like politicians will exploit this money and use it for their own personal benefits rather than help the situation. Comparing their answers, you can definitely say that the four people are less willing to risk giving their money to corrupted countries because they are fully aware that their money may not benefit those who really need it. The fifth person donates regardless. This can suggest that charity funding has reduced as 4 out of 5 people are controlling and limiting their donations based on what they see and hear.

2.5 Analyzing Question 2 and 3
All five people stated that there was no specific charity that they donate to. This shows that the only important aspect of charity is that they are donating. It does not matter as long as it helps
someone in need. This statement then supports Wilhelm’s study that it is hard to identify which charities should not be given funding as all the candidates in this study felt that it is hard to say no to charity groups in need of cash.

2.6 Analyzing Question 4
Finally, the last question asked what attracts you to donate to charity regardless of your religion? There were many ambiguous answers given. I could not find any patterns among their answers, so I decided to drop that question out of my research.

Future Research
I would like to take this study further and collect data periodically for a couple of months. I would also like to record data in various malls. This would then establish a pattern and specify when and where people were more willing to donate. I also believe that a variety of charities should be involved in the next study to further justify Wilhelm’s study.

Conclusion
Overall, multiple evidence suggests there is a drop in the number of donations given to charities. Financial obligations are the most significant ones with many opting to save the money so they can benefit from it later. This, in turn, influences people to donate randomly rather than create a donation plan. Finally, media and politics played a role in the amount of money people donated. It has also stopped many citizens from donating to those in need for fear of corruption and the risk of their money being absorbed into the system without really helping those who needed it most.

References


Appendix A: Observation Study

Table for Observation of Qatar Charity and Qatar Red Crescent in Qatar Mall For Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of charity stand In Qatar Mall</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00pm-5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B

Charities Survey Questions:
1) How often do you donate to charity?
2) Is there a specific charity you donate to?
3) If answered yes to question 2, please specify the charity you donate to and why?
4) What attracts to you to donate to Charity (regardless of religion)?
5) Have your donations increased, decreased or stayed the same in the last two years?
6) Why did you select the answer above?
7) Do the politics or the media have an impact on how much you are donating?

Mariam Hassaan is a future computer engineer (InShaAllah). She loves to read during her leisure time. Most of the time, she randomly finds herself writing down her thoughts and ideas on paper. She rarely shares her work, but in this special occasion she found it a must to share her findings with you. When she faces a writer’s block, she usually ends up gaming her frustrations away.
VISHMI
MANDIRA SINGHAPURA
“Am I?”

“Am I a good person?”
is a question I always ask myself.
Good people are liked
but they find it difficult
to say no to others,
to request for what should be theirs,
to hurt another whether
intentionally or not.
They are expected to
forgive and forget.
They feel bad for
putting themselves first
despite the circumstance.
They overthink every action
with sorry being their favorite word.
For the time,
I was good to you,
I loved you,
all you saw were my difficulties.
But you never chose to like me.
So, I question,
“Am I a good person, after all?”
Media has become a major part of our daily lives. The same incident can be interpreted and sent out to an audience in multiple ways based on numerous factors such as the level of democracy in a country, the social background or even the past experiences of the journalist. Though efforts are taken to maintain the quality, honesty and lack of bias towards the information, the interpretation varies again when it reaches the ears of the reader. This research paper depicts two specific scenarios taken from the major event familiarly known as the Qatar Blockade. Each event is viewed from three different perspectives obtained by news articles published by the country facing the issue (i.e., the State of Qatar), a country directly in relation to the cause and the effects of the issue, (i.e., the Gulf Region), and a third perspective from a country that has no direct relation to the issue (i.e., the Western World). The research was conducted as a part of an International Communication course guided by Dr. Brady Creel.
Sovereignty in Communication

People must be “sovereign in deciding what to believe and in weighing competing reasons for action,” according to Thomas Scanlon (as cited in Ash, 2016, p. 75). Sovereignty is defined as the power or authority of oneself or government. This comes into reference with communication when an individual or group has the power to decide on what information to process and how to process it. Oliver Wendell Holmes, on the other hand, argues “that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself self-accepted in the competition of the market” (as cited in Ash, 2016, p. 75). Thus, it is denoted that the same situation when viewed from different angles will be interpreted in different ways. Pre-determined opinions, social influences, and family background could be considered a few out of the many influences placed on a writer when turning scenarios witnessed onto paper as words. This paper focuses on three variable viewpoints on two specific incidents in regard to the Qatar blockade.

On 5 June 2017, diplomatic and trade ties with Qatar were cut down by four Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Egypt. While Saudi Arabia shut down its land crossing with Qatar, the other countries obstructed any sea and air route connections. The blockading countries claimed that its neighbouring country, Qatar, supported terrorism related issues of Iran and got itself involved in internal affairs of other countries. However, the state of Qatar argued by saying that there is no sufficient justification to prove any of the statements put forward by the blockading countries. Qatar continued to disagree by stating that this situation was a “violation of sovereignty” and that measures would be taken to ensure that the crisis would not affect its citizens or residents (Al Jazeera, 2020). According to an Al Jazeera news article published on June 5, 2020, the roots of this conflict stem from tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia due to the supporting of different sides in the Arab Spring of 2011. This added onto the issue of Qatar backing up political Islamic movements including the Muslim Brotherhood (Al Jazeera, 2020).

After a long period of silence, the Emir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani first raised his voice via a televised speech about the blockade on 21 July 2017 at 19:00 GMT. This was exactly forty-six days after the placement of the blockade on Qatar by its neighbouring countries; thus, the lack of any verbal communication by the leader of the country led to a great deal of curiosity amongst the general public, the countries involved in the blockade, and the
entirety of the world witnessing the issue. As a result, the speech was interpreted in a range of ways amongst publishers across the world either questioning his silence or the future of the blockade, its consequences or the actions that would be taken by the blockading countries after the speech. To quote an important line explaining the context of his speech, the Emir states, “The Qatari people instinctively and naturally stood up to defend the sovereignty and independence of their homeland” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017). He further goes on to claim that “This is tantamount to a true moral test where our society has achieved great success, as we have proved that there are basic principles and norms that we observe even in times of conflict and dispute” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017). Moreover, he identifies the differences between the foreign policies amongst the GCC countries and focuses on how the opinions of the Qatari government are not imposed on anyone and the commonalities established on the GCC as a regional organization. He concludes his speech by saying, “Any solution to the crisis must be based on two principles: first, the solution should be within the framework of respect for the sovereignty and will of each State. Secondly, it should not be in a form of orders by one party against another, but rather as mutual undertakings and joint commitments binding to all” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017).

An article titled “Emir’s speech receives overwhelming support” published by the Gulf Times on 23 July 2017, views the speech as “wise, balanced, assertive of Qatar’s sovereignty and high ethical standards” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017). It denotes that the members of the advisory council say that the speech focuses on the “solidarity of Qatari people and their united stand against the blockade” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017). Moreover, it depicted the importance of resolving the “dispute without interfering in the sovereignty and internal affairs to the other states” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017). The article further captures the essence of the speech in terms of the “keenness of the Emir on the unity of the GCC family; a full assessment of the current situation; the call for self-sufficiency in food, medicine and other vital sectors, merchants and business being directed to start new factories and invest in food production; appreciation offered to the citizens of Qatar and its expatriates for their solidarity and loyalty; the identification of the importance of the freedom of speech and the free access to information; insisting of dialogues as the basis for dispute resolution and that bilateral ties must be based on mutual respect; and the affirmation of the transparency of the country in dealing with the situation” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017). The Gulf Times quoted Dr. Al Ansari (Dean of Islamic Law at Qatar University) as saying that the speech was “positive and highly erudite” (Gulf Times Editorial
He continued to say that the “Emir reflected the Qatari inclination for dialogue and good treatment of others” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017). Dr. Hassan (Professor of Law at Qatar University), on the other hand, described the speech as a “well-balanced, wise approach and laid a practical action for the better future of the county” (Gulf Times Editorial Board, 2017).

This article was directed mostly at the Qatar's population and the external viewers of the situation around the world and can be seen as a collection of positive perspectives of the Emir's speech as viewed by people of high reputation across the country. Gulf Times is a newspaper founded in 1978 to reflect events happening in the state of Qatar and overseas. It portrays itself on its official website as ‘truthful and accurate’ and identifies its column solely reserved for debate which represents the liberty of the public to allow the free flow of speech and ideas (Gulf Times, n.d.). Its publications are also viewed as ‘balanced, fair, honest and responsible whilst providing a sense of its commitment to the country by depicting the effort placed in "serving the country and its citizens" (Gulf Times, n.d.).

The article that provided Qatar’s perspective on the blockade was published on the front page of the newspaper with a title in large font right at the centre of the page, thus, grabbing the reader's attention if bought, or even flipped across the pages at a store or a library. However, it included no images to support the text perhaps due to the writer's view of graphics as unnecessary. An article regarding the Turkey president's Gulf tour is placed to the right of the article analysed above, with a close-up image of him. Thus, it is evident that the entire cover page of this particular edition of the newspaper consisted mainly of articles related to the blockade hence, signalling the vitality of the situation.

The second perspective on behalf of the televised speech by H H Sheikh Tamim, is extracted from a newspaper owned by a newspaper publishing company, Saudi Research and Marketing Group, which is based in Saudi Arabia and thus interpreted the situation from a blockading country’s perspective (“الشرق الأوسط - أخبار الشرق الأوسط - أخبار”). This article was published on the 22nd of July 2017 and states that the speech given by the Emir said that Qatar was “ready to dialogue to resolve a diplomatic crisis,” putting emphasis on how “any solution to the crisis must respect Doha’s sovereignty” (Asharq Alawsat, 2017). The article quoted the speech in parts where H H Sheikh Tamim said that the “country was subjected to an unprecedented campaign of incitement and siege” (Asharq Alawsat, 2017). It continued to declare that the speech delivered noted the “difference between Doha and the GCC on their specific foreign policies” (Asharq Alawsat, 2017). “Qatar was fighting terrorism..."
relentlessly,” the Emir said. Dr. Gargash, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, concluded that it would be “wise for Qatar to totally change its political orientation” (Asharq Alawsat, 2017).

The intended audience for this article tends to be the residents of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. As portrayed by a major country in the issue of the blockade, the perspective tends to lie in how the speech given by the Emir failed to meet the expectations of the countries. No doubt that they expected a dialogue from H H Sheikh Tamim sooner, but they may have been surprised or upset by the fact that the speech still did not seek forgiveness or sympathy, and served as a depiction of strength instead. This seemed to have caused a spark of disappointment in the eyes of the blockading countries as viewed by the article. The article is a translation to English whereby originally it is published in the native language of Saudi Arabia, Arabic.

A third perspective for this incident—and the most external one—was extracted from an article published on 21 July 2017 by AFP which is an international news agency located in Paris, France. It acquires credibility by being the world’s oldest news agency, originating in the 1830s. It has numerous branches all over the globe and news gets translated to multiple languages viewed by over 61.2 million people in various countries (France 24, 2020). This news extract summarizes the speech made by H.H Sheikh Tamim by quoting parts of the speech throughout the article. It starts off by noting that the Emir is ready to resolve the dispute as long as the country’s sovereignty is respected. It identifies Qatar as the “gas-rich emir state” and highlights the position which states that Qatar is understanding as long as the “sovereignty is respected” (France 24, 2017). The background to the issue is denoted as the neighbouring countries around Qatar, which are Sunni-ruled, cutting off ties with Qatar due to its backing of extremism and fostering ties with the Shiite rival, Iran. However, the article further identifies that Qatar denies this claim. After further quoting bits and pieces of the speech, the article moves onto explain the effects of the blockade to Qatar and to the Gulf region as a whole. It points out the current restrictions placed on Qatar such as the airspace ban and obstruction to citizens to travel from one country to another in the Middle East (France 24, 2017). The “13 Demands” emerge in the articles as the ultimate way to overcome the crisis. Countries such as Kuwait and other Western states are portrayed on a good note, identifying them as sources offering to help by providing highly-reputed diplomats such as Rex Tillerson touring the region with the aim of defusing the situation (France 24, 2017). Moreover, the changes to the anti-terror legislation of Qatar are depicted by Saudi as a “positive” step in resolving the crisis (France 24, 2017). The article concludes
by summarizing the two nominal lists of individuals and terrorist entities put forward by Qatar, including the decree signed by the U.S.-Qatar agreement to combat terrorism, which is later viewed by the blockading countries as “insufficient” (France 24, 2017). The final paragraph of the article quotes a statement by Gargash who advises Qatar to alter its entire political orientation (France 24, 2017).

Due to the fact that that article was published in the Western world, the audience includes a large population, ranging from the citizens in France to the residents in the blockading countries trying to understand the situation from a third person’s perspective as compared to the citizens of Qatar. The articles portray a great deal of information which does not limit itself to just the speech by the Emir, but rather captures the whole situation, thus providing the reader with sufficient background information. It seems unbiased due to the capture of the story from all sides including Qatar’s and Saudi’s which is understandable, since it does not seem required to back up either side since it is published in a country not directly involved in the situation.

Thus, in conclusion, it is evident that whilst the newspaper articles published in the state of Qatar focused on the entirety of the speech and the positive reactions from the public, the blockading countries provided a rather disappointing view as to how their requirements were failed to be met in terms of the stances made in the speech. An external perspective simply stated parts of the speech. Moreover, articles published by those countries summarized a series of events that occurred during that time period and did not focus on the speech as a full-length text. This denotes the importance of the speech televised by H H Sheikh Tamim on certain parts of the world than in others. The different articles noted above also show that the interpretation of the same situation based on where and when the writer jots down the details with a specific audience in mind, paving a clear pathway as to how the audience receives the message.

The second situation related to the blockade considered for research purposes in this paper is the Arab quartet issuing of “13 Demands” to the State of Qatar to seek an end to the Gulf Crisis. Here is a glimpse of the 13 Demands according to the Khaleej Times (2017):

1. Curb diplomatic ties with Iran and close its diplomatic missions there.
2. Sever all ties to “terrorist organizations.”
4. Shut down news outlets that Qatar funds, directly or indirectly.
5. Immediately terminate the Turkish military presence currently in Qatar.
6. Stop all means of funding for individuals, groups or organizations that have been designated as terrorists by UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, KSA etc.
7. Hand over “terrorist figures” and wanted individuals from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain to their countries of origin.
8. End interference in sovereign countries’ internal affairs.
9. Stop all contacts with the political opposition in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain.
10. Pay reparations and compensation for loss of life and other, financial losses caused by Qatar’s policies in recent years.
11. Align itself with the other Gulf and Arab countries militarily, politically, socially and economically.
12. Agree to all the demands within 10 days of it being submitted to Qatar.
13. Consent to monthly audits for the first year after agreeing to the demands.

The list was handed to Qatar by Kuwait and a news source from Reuters claims that Qatar denies any support for terrorism (Reuters, 2017). This specific incident was covered by various newspapers in a range of perspectives. In an article published by the Gulf Times on 25 July 2017, providing its viewers with an insight as to how the state of Qatar views the enforcement of the 13 Demands, it states that the demands were more or less a way to limit Qatar’s sovereignty and require outsourcing of its foreign policy. Although officials have noted that the demands are being reviewed, terms such as “unrealistic”, “unreasonable” and “impingement” were used throughout the article to describe this issue (Gulf Times, 2017). Moreover, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Thani (The Director of the GCO) focuses on the words spoken out by Rex Tillerson (U.S. Secretary of State) saying that the list produced ought to be ‘reasonable and actionable’ with “realistic and measurable” demands and identifies that the 13 Demands issued fail to meet the criteria (Gulf Times, 2017). As seen by the Qatar’s ambassador to the United States, the list is a way of “punishing Qatar for its independence” (Gulf Times, 2017). The article further elaborates on the 10-day timeline Qatar was given in order to comply with the demands and a gist of a few demands included in the list. It goes on to claim that if Qatar fails to meet the list within the time period, the state will be “divorced” from its neighbouring Gulf countries and, according to Gargash (the UAE State Minister for Foreign Affairs), the demands are required to be taken seriously (Gulf Times, 2017). He also seeks European and American guarantees

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to implement an accord with Doha in case the state follows a path of wisdom. Al Jazeera views the demanding of the shutting down of its station as an attempt to silence the freedom of speech in the region and the suppression of people’s right to information, as said by a broadcaster quoted on the Gulf Times article (2017). The demands are further visualised as a “gross violations” of basic right by the Human Rights Committee of Qatar (Gulf Times, 2017). The article concludes with the words of Gargash which identifies that the current situation between Qatar and its neighbouring states does not require the interference of European mediators (Gulf Times, 2017). Rather, it is their duty to enforce pressure on Doha. It also directs Turkey to continue its role in providing mediation efforts through dialogue in order to put a halt on the issue; despite Turkey trying to remain neutral, the current situation seems to pave a pathway to back up Qatar. Lastly, it views the siege on Qatar as a mistake on a humanitarian level (Gulf Times, 2017).

Published during the core of the crisis, this article tends to weigh its pros towards Qatar thus supporting the origin of its publication. Extracts and quotations from reputable leaders around the world are inserted in the text, thus providing a one-sided image to the reader and the positive image of Qatar. Although the content may be true, the viewers fail to grasp an overall idea of the situation from all possible directions. The directed audience for this extract is mainly wound around the public population residing in Qatar, plus some viewers in the blockading countries. This portrays a general idea of the positive image the country is trying to maintain amidst the chaos.

The blockading countries’ view for this topic is provided by an article by the Saudi News Gazette titled “Qatar says GCC demands ‘made to be rejected’ as deadline looms,” published ten days after the demands were sent out, or in other words, the last day of the timeline provided to Qatar to accept the demands, 2 July 2017. Being published in the morning, the article states that no signs of acceptance to the demands can be seen by Qatar before midnight, thus there seems no end to the Gulf crisis (Nagraj, 2017). It quotes statements from the Qatari Foreign Minister who says that the “Arab ultimatum was aimed not at tackling terrorism but at curtailing the country’s sovereignty” (Nagraj, 2017). The article extracts a large portion of the speech conducted by him in Rome on the current issue and the ability of Qatar to engage to discussions about the demands rather than completely rejecting it (Nagraj, 2017). It focuses on the further sanctions implied by Qatar’s perceived failure in accepting the demands within the allocated time period and takes a brief look at a few on the demands provided on the list (Nagraj, 2017). The further sanctions, according to Gargash, the UAE Minister
for Foreign Affairs, include but are not limited to the removal of Qatar from the six-member alliance. The article introduces the reader to the Western-backed body, formed in 1981, due to Iran’s Islamic Revolution and the outbreak of the Iraq war by the Gulf countries, in its concluding paragraphs (Nagraj, 2017). This article ends by listing the consequences experienced in Qatar due to the crisis such as the lack of food imports and the travel ban with a further note on how it has failed to disrupt the energy exports from Qatar (Nagraj, 2017).

A closer look at the above-mentioned news extract shows a slightly biased opinion considering the article originated from a country closely linked to the situation. It identifies the pros and cons of the way Qatar handled the situation and quotes a few words from the an official who acts as the interlink between the state of Qatar and the outside world, thus serving as a credible source to the readers, encouraging them to trust his words. The target audience for this article is generally the population in Saudi itself, giving them a generalised idea of the current situation as well as the residents in Qatar who are trying to understand the outlook or the perspective of Saudi to the crisis at hand.

The final article used to obtain an external perspective was published on the 23rd of June 2017, titled “Arab states send Qatar 13 demands to end crisis.” A further look into the source of the articles proved that the original text was published by Reuters, a multimedia news provider which was founded over 150 years ago. It claims to have remained true to the Trust Principles of independence, integrity and freedom from bias. The news is known to reach over a billion people daily covering many languages globally (Reuters News Agency, n.d.). This article paves it pathway by identifying the list of demands as “steep” and focusing on the insisting of the blockading countries to “shutter” al Jazeera (Reuters, 2017). The state of Qatar is also referred to as the “Persian Gulf neighbour” unlike any of the previous articles (Reuters, 2017). Amidst providing a detailed summary of the list of demands, including the closing of the Turkish military and the announcing of severing ties with terrorist, ideological and sectarian organizations, it moves on to identifying the reasons as to why Qatar may fail to imply with accepting the demands (Reuters, 2017). A few reasons include the close ties between Qatar and Iran accustomed with the sharing of the large offshore natural gas field (Reuters, 2017). It also elaborates on the vitality of Al Jazeera as a frequently viewed news source, denoting that it has drawn annoyance of the governments of the region for airing alternative viewpoints. The article finally concludes by stating that the state of Qatar strictly refuses to negotiate, thus the only
solution to the crisis would be the lifting of the blockade by the Gulf nations (Reuters, 2017).

The first article focuses on an event that occurred which created a great deal of discussion amongst all citizens of the Gulf region and the world equally after a long period of silence that followed the crisis, while the second article focused more or less on the consequences faced by Qatar. It identified the criteria (13 Demands) required of Qatar to follow in order for the situation to return back to normal. While the range of articles in relation to the first topic failed to depict any correlation and was slightly biased based on the origin of publication, newspapers related to the second article followed similar routes whereby the same set of data was paraphrased in similar forms. Different people understand and interpret the same text in multiple ways. Hence, it can be seen that information, despite being initiated from the same source, can reach its audience in different forms. Bits and pieces of data get added or removed along the way when communicated from one person to another through various forms of media in the present society. To effectively understand and interpret information from news sources, it is vital to understand where these articles originated and where they were written, edited and published around the globe.

References


Nivinya Hemachandra is a chemical engineering junior, Class of 2022. She was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Qatar at the age of twelve. During her free time, she enjoys reading, paper quilling, hand lettering or simply watching movies. Writing has never been her passion, but during her freshman year she discovered that writing helps you remember details that were thought to be of less significance but in fact, are quite worth noticing, while also serving as a form of expressing yourself. She likes to live by a variation of the quote, “Everything happens for a reason,” personalizing it to be “everything happens for good.”
Living in Qatar and being in such a diverse community, I had to learn English from a very young age, as most of us in this university have. I speak Arabic with some of my friends, while I speak English with another group of friends. I began to notice and feel like I have two personalities, each coming out when I speak a different language. This caused me to seek as much of a scientific connection as I can get between one’s depth of personality and the languages one speaks, exploring whether characteristics of a language really reflect back on the speaker. For example, is a French person more romantic given that they speak one of the most romantic languages on Earth? Finally, I would like to dedicate this piece to Dr. Luke Hingtgen as he was the one who guided me into writing this piece in the first place, and gave me the confidence to submit it to Best Writing.
Language and Identity: How are They Connected?

Language is one of the most fascinating mediums of communication that humans have developed since the beginning of time. Evolving over the years, there are several thousand languages spoken over the world today, and as globalization continues to take place, it is causing the intertwining of cultures and is taking people across the world, thus making a sizeable portion of people learn at least one language other than their mother tongue. A big question started to arise in the midst of this: does being fluent in more than one language affect one’s identity? This question captivated several people from diverse groups, like linguists and migrants. Although a substantial number of people do agree that speaking multiple languages affects identity, many fiercely oppose this way of thinking. While several factors play into identity formation, language does in fact impact it by creating merged cultural values as well as exerting influence on social.

Producing cultural values can be described as varying and unique from one individual to another, and language plays a huge part of it. Culture can be defined as an “integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations” (National Center for Cultural Competence). This definition certainly suggests a correlation between language and thoughts and everything that follows the two, like communication and beliefs, in relation to culture. Following the same line of thought, according to Nedeva, when learning a foreign language, cultural proverbs are often a window into the culture of which that language originates from (106). This also proposes a very close connection between culture and language. Therefore culture, thought and language are all very interconnected. To further affirm this, it is worth mentioning that a lot of classes where foreign languages are taught have started to also teach students about the culture that language comes from, as it makes it easier for students to understand contexts surrounding the language and is even becoming considered one of the most important aspects of teaching a language (Chapelle). This shows that the cultural narrative and discourse takes on a big role in each language. An instance of this could be seen in more historically patriarchal cultures, where words are often a lot more gendered, like in Arabic. For example, the word student is used for both genders in English, but Arabic used different words depending on whether one is describing a male or a female.
This leads to the next question about language and identity: does being fluent in more than one language cause one to think differently than they would have if they spoke only one? And how does this impact their position within the culture and society they live in? The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was a concept created in the 1930s by Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir, where they suggest that human thought is molded by language or vernacular speech (Regier and Xu 1). This theory, however, has undergone continuous controversy since it was published, as previous studies have offered conflicting evidence that language influences humans’ cognitive abilities. In order to give the hypothesis credibility, Regier and Xu propose a model of probabilistic inference, which could be used in future studies to mitigate the effects of researcher bias on the hypothesis (8-9). If we accept the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, we can argue that speaking more than one language fluently can create incorporated cultural values that a monolingual may not possess, or at the very least it can make one more open to foreign ideas than they would be if they only spoke their mother language. Moreover, Layek argued that as one transforms from one language to another, it affects not only how they think, but the way they perceive and react to things that they deal with on a normal basis within a cultural notion.

In turn, having merged cultural values as an extension from speaking multiple languages can be a double-edged sword when it comes to identity formation, or in a negative case, identity dissolution. One of the perquisites that come with coalesced cultural values is that a person is able to accept foreign ideas, even if they might sound outrageously impossible when monolingual. This can be seen in a recent study published in *Psychological Science* where bilingual children or even kids regularly exposed to a foreign language were able to understand underlying meanings behind commands and were able to communicate with adults better (Kinzler). This is considered as a positive aspect of knowing multiple languages because in addition to its scientific and medical benefits, it also gives one the ability to break out of traditional ways of thinking.

On the other hand, the same thing that makes speaking different languages beneficial might also be the very same thing that it makes it controversial. It is fair to say that language is the origin of cultural globalization, or at least how it starts, which can cause the loss of the original culture of a person, or even a whole country or region. Salman and Alkhazalleh argue that cultural globalization has impacted the usage of the Arabic language in countries where it is the official language, affecting the manners that come with it, as people are more tempted than ever to speak English in schools,
workplaces, and at social gatherings. They further elaborate that what started with language has eventually expanded to include American and European consumption patterns (699). A simple example of the above is having American fast food chain restaurants like McDonald’s, or the spread of Western clothing brands all over the region. A good way to describe this process is invasion or imperialism through culture, where instead of a region and a population being invaded through their land with the use of weapons, they are invaded through their minds, that being a much more lethal weapon. For instance, North Africa still struggles to this day, around sixty-two years after independence from France, to restore the use of Arabic, even though the countries in that region identify as Arab countries, to the point where even though their official language is Arabic, a lot of their street signs are in fact, in French. The imperialization of the region by the French created a complex scene where, to the population, their traditions and roots is constituted by the Arabic language. On the other hand, the vulnerability of this authenticity is represented by the French language, as it can be regarded as how the Western mindset is accepted (Fahmi). To understand the extent of the “openness” that is being discussed, one can look at the constitution of Tunisia, a country in North Africa that was colonized by France for seventy-five years. Although approximately 99% of the Tunisian population identify as Muslims (United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor ), a substantial majority of the Tunisian constitution resembles its French counterpart rather than, say, Egypt’s, which is another country with a Muslim majority population. Thus, under the law, the people in Tunisia must follow the French “way of doing things,” like distribution of inheritance between family members, even though it contradicts their religion. Regardless of whether one approves or disapproves what the law dictates, it is quite indisputable that it contradicts the original culture of the people. This is very related to language because to apply these laws in another country with a Muslim majority that does not have the French cultural control over it would be outrageously out of question in the first place.

The issue of language being a “Trojan Horse” to cultures leads to other problems being raised. Portions of the people in a nation or region that are grasping at straws of what is left of their culture are prone to adopting extremist groups ideas that glorify the falsely created illusion of restoring that culture’s glory. A very recent example of this is the wave of extremist groups that keep rising around the Middle East, often using the slogan of “reviving religion and culture” to gain support. In order to combat similar issues, governments must consider how educational systems can integrate
the teaching and use of a foreign language in a country without its original culture being lost. It is not an easy task, as this has been proven very difficult to achieve, and only a few countries like Korea and Germany have been able to find a good balance in this regard.

As established previously in this paper, there is a strong connection between language and thought, as it has a control of not only the ideas one accepts, but how one chooses to handle it as well. This is bound to have a heavy impact on social interactions when people are fluent in more than one language. One form of how social interactions might differ for a multilingual is code-switching. Monica defines code-switching as “the use of more than one language in the course of a communicative episode” (qtd. in Hamamra and Qararia 126). Hamamra and Qararia also state that for some literary writers, code-switching impacts readers’ perceptions of their writing or dialogue (126). The above definition and argument could be used to further table the idea that a person would use code-switching as it could be an easier way for them to express themselves or a certain emotion they are feeling, or to describe anything in general. This is due to the fact that they would be able to use terms that might sound more descriptive in one language than in another. An example exists in Arabic and English when describing an overweight person. In English, one can use the words fat, overweight, or obese to medically describe a person who is overweight, whereas in Arabic there are eight words in total that one can use to describe an overweight person: four of them can be used for men and the other four can be used for women, and each word describes a different level of being overweight. Furthermore, there are several terms that are extremely difficult to translate from one language to another without losing the underlying meaning behind it. For instance, in Turkish, the word sensizlik literally translates to the state of being without you. It is perfectly translatable; however, it cannot be translated to one word in English, therefore it would be hard to use the English phrase as freely as sensizlik in poems. Code-switching is becoming one of the ways that several languages are evolving. For example, in many Arab countries where English is the prominent second language, it is mostly considered acceptable to switch back and forth between Arabic and English in one sentence. It becomes a part of a bilingual’s or a multilingual’s identity to collect the thoughts from the different languages spoken and switch between dialects swiftly just to express oneself or to deliver an opinion.

To conclude, language and identity are undeniably correlated and intertwined; therefore, speaking more than one language has several impacts on one’s identity. First, speaking more than one language can open a person’s eyes to multiple cultures, creating a new depth
of understanding of the idea of new concepts and foreign cultures for a bilingual or multilingual. This can be due to the theory that speaking different languages can cause a person to think differently than they would have if they only spoke one language, as proposed by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. This, however, can have both negative and positive impacts on the cultural side of a person or a society as a whole, because it may be hard to draw a line on how much foreign culture one will allow on themselves. Furthermore, speaking different languages impacts social interactions, which can be demonstrated by code-switching and why it takes place. The social interactions that happen around the context of code-switching prove to be a great way to enable people who speak multiple languages to express themselves appropriately.

Works Cited


Mayasah Karim Lami is an Iraqi raised in Qatar and privileged enough to be able to study in HBKU (Hamad Bin Khalifa University) as well as Texas A&M, as this has played a huge part in discovering herself in many ways. Mayasah really enjoys getting to know other cultures through travel, food, and, of course, language!
AHMED
AL-NOWFAL AL-TAMIMI
بيوم ولادتي قالتي شمينه ريحة ليل وهلهولة بيها غصنة ناي تضل تجينة سالتها عن السبب قالتي حييج يوم يابغداد احس بحرورة دموع تجوينة فمن هسه سميت كل شوارعي بغداد خاطر بصوتي صواريخ تستعين تواسينة ليومج مو ناسية نبوخذ وصلاح الدين واباع على صورج واديي الله مانسنه باقفلسطين قدوة لج تيجي عيون العراق خاطر كل العاداج بلبس أعدام تفنينة وداعت شهيدج الي سفة بدته كل بستان مثل عند الطفل وياه على هيج نربيئة مو كل العمر حتضليم ظل بوسط ليل ولاحدم لهم كل الأيام وماتدمو لينة شاخت نختنا صح بس انولد فسلاط تدهكم تمر وماتغر العمر لهم تضوفي وناكيفنا كل هالحبي بينا وبيبح باقفلسطين من نعشع حتى يتشديد الوطني تروينة

Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi is a mechanical engineering student, Class of COVID-20. He considers himself a multitasker who has the enthusiasm to learn and to keep challenging the challenges. A sentence he always reminds himself of (which he learned from his father, Allah Yrhamo) is this: “You can still write the words you want with a normal pen even if it was not crystal diamond.”
Thinking Outside the Box
This paper proposes a problem statement aimed at developing a user-friendly appointment booking mobile application to build a smarter city. This project was a memorable one as it acted as a tool that helped in transforming our idea into a solution. Throughout the process of creating this problem statement, many adjustments were made to ensure that our proposal was more coherent and unique.
Mobile-Assisted Medical Appointment Application for Patients of Hamad Primary Health Care Center

Purpose
Individuals are advised to undergo health check-ups regularly, not only when they feel ill or encounter a life-threatening disease [1], but also when they are completely healthy as one could look fit while developing a disease internally. In order to attend regular check-ups, patients are required to book appointments via placing a phone call, visiting the hospital, or by using an online application.

Patients who visit Hamad’s Primary Health Care Center (PHCC) often have to book their appointments by calling or going directly to the hospital. According to an article published in 2016, increased waiting time not only worsens the patient’s health but also lengthens his/her suffering, resulting in dissatisfaction with the service [2]. These current methods can be time consuming. Call centers or the health clinic staff are not available 24/7. Which means a person who is busy throughout the day won’t be able to book an appointment at night because the call services are closed. One could also forget their date of appointment if they do not have it written down somewhere. Therefore, for convenience, we present to you a more modern and up-to-date solution: a smart booking system which could aid in a quicker booking process for patients.

This paper focuses on addressing the current research on the problem we have identified while considering our potential stakeholders. It also explains the key elements of prototyping the development of a mobile application for booking health care services offered by Hamad Medical Corporation PHCC.

Objective
The goal of this project is to successfully prototype the development of a user-friendly healthcare mobile application that eases the booking system for patients. The application could not only benefit patients but also the healthcare providers. In order to execute such a goal, we aim to follow accessibility guidelines by making the application perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. Such a booking system would have numerous benefits for all potential users.

Research on the Problem Identified
In order to test our presumption, we have collected data by interviewing and conducting a short survey. This helped us to determine the problems our potential users (patients, doctors, and nurses) face regarding appointment bookings. We interviewed two
patients who regularly go to Hamad’s PHCC. In addition, we have conducted a survey in which 24 people responded.

Below is a list of questions we asked:

1. How do you book your appointments with the doctors at health centers?
2. How long does it take to book an appointment using the above method chosen?
3. If you use an online method, which website or application do you use?
4. Have you heard of Tabeebak or Q-clinics?
5. Which department do you mostly visit?
6. If you are a Hamad patient, would you use an online booking service to schedule an appointment with your doctor?

A higher percentage of patients (66.67%), regardless of which health center they visit, book their appointments by calling. In order to book appointments by phone, patients must dial 107. However, the service might be slow until one of the staff members at the call service department responds. According to the survey responses we received, the waiting time ranges from five to twenty minutes. Next, the patient is asked to provide their health card number. An appointment is scheduled after the patient asks for information about the doctor and his/her availability. The problem with this method is that the call service department does not operate 24/7; therefore, patients might not be able to book as they desire. In addition, they might not be available to wait. Meanwhile 25% of the survey respondents go directly to the hospital to book their appointments. The waiting time depends solely on how crowded the hospital is as the reception would be busy during those designated hours.

We also asked our survey participants “What improvements should be implemented to the current system?” The response was the reminder notification system. The primary health care centers send reminders by calling or sending a SMS message three days prior to the appointment date. However, if a client were to ask about their appointment date or has forgotten, they must dial 107.

Below is a summary of the responses from the survey:

- Patients wanted more reminders than they received from their current booking system.
- Patients would like to have more information about the doctor and their availability without having to call 107 for assistance.
• Patients wanted service 24/7 as opposed to the current system that might delay the patient's appointment due to closing timings.
• Patients wanted another method other than calling as it requires waiting.

Moreover, in order to choose a specific department to limit our scope, we asked our respondents to tell us which department they most often visit—whether it is a general or specific department. 79.17% said that they mostly go to the general department because at health centers patients directly go to the general practitioners and only then are they referred to specific departments, if needed.
To test the likelihood of the usage of the application, so we asked if the patients would book online rather than doing any other of the methods, and 90% of them agreed that they would like to book online, indicating that the vast majority of patients would be receptive to the idea of an online booking system.

![Pie chart showing 90% yes and 10% no for online booking](image)

*Figure III: If you are a Hamad patient, would you use an online booking service to schedule an appointment with your doctor?*

**Research on the Specific Solutions Identified**

The project aims to develop a mobile application which can be only accessed by patients who visit Hamad Medical Corporation's PHCC. It is a public institution which is under the government. PHCC already has an ongoing project on this which is still incomplete. There is no date published for anticipated completion; therefore, we have decided to implement our own features to develop a mobile application for the center [3].

![Image of the Patient Appointment System](image)

*Figure IV: Shows PHCC's update on their ongoing project on developing a mobile application for booking. It mentions the current way of booking an appointment; which is on call [3]*
In order to develop a mobile application, the team has carefully looked at the already existing online booking sites to mark their features & services. Below are three online booking sites which we have found during our research:

Tabeebak
Tabeebak.qa has many options to choose from. The website claims to have a mobile application designed for both AppStore and google play; however, the application is not anywhere to be seen once you look for it [4]. As a user, when one tries to book, all they have to do is write in their name, phone number, email (which is optional) and pick a time for their appointment. A proper credential like QID is not required and no confirmation is sent after booking.

While looking at what the site has to offer, we found Hamad's clinics in their options as well. However, the booking process did not seem to be very professional since booking an appointment requires very little information about the patient, which is the patient’s name, number and time of appointment. Our team decided to call the customer service of this site to know more about how the site is linked to Hamad. Upon calling we learned that they do not have any links with Hamad but all the other private institutions work fairly well with them. Once the user books a slot, the private clinic calls the user sooner or later for further procedures.

Although the site contains many features and services, the site does not seem user-friendly because of its complicated navigation. One of this website’s strongest characteristics is having numerous options for patients. Nevertheless, the website can be confusing as a result of the lack of organization in the booking process. As you can see in Figure V, there are many options that users can choose from. The search engine works in various ways: the user can directly search for doctors, search for clinics, search for nurses, etc. The site also has other built-in services like online consultation, book health check as shown below.

![Figure V: Tabeebak’s home page [4]](image-url)
As explained in Figure VI, once the user clicks any of the search options, the site directs the user to an appointment booking page where the user can select a specialty, location, and insurance. Also, the user can directly search for the clinic he or she wishes to be treated by. Furthermore, they can pick a doctor (depending on if they were searching for a doctor) and choose one of the available slots.

Figure VII guides the user to search for a private clinic and look for more information about the clinic, then Tabeebak shows that as well by giving a brief description about the clinic with its opening & closing hours along with the doctors available at the clinic. Furthermore, the site claims to have a live-chat option but it cannot be seen anywhere on the site. The only way to contact them is by calling their number or by sending an email.

Qclinics.net is still under ongoing maintenance which is why it is not online yet. The site is also working on developing its mobile application. Some of the technical features of this website that follow the accessibility guidelines match those in Tabeebak; however, the
Aster.qa is a website created for the Aster private hospital which means it is for patients who are members of that health center only. Patients can book an appointment by logging into the website with their credentials. The credentials include a username and password for members who have already signed up. However, if you are a new user, the website asks for your name, QID, email, and phone number [6].

Figure VIII shows that the site is bilingual which offers the option to switch the language from English to Arabic and vice versa [5].
In Figure IX, we can observe that the booking process is lengthier than Tabeebak where Aster requires patients to have a membership to be able to book an appointment. If the user is a member already, he or she can easily login with their credentials and book an appointment with a doctor of their choice. The site is simple and fulfills the booking purpose. It also provides the background of each doctor which is a good idea because a patient might want to know more about the doctor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features &amp; Services</th>
<th>Websites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tabeebak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-friendly</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability to all patients</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability to book at public hospitals</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book by finding doctor</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book at desired health center</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book a doctor by insurance</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book by choosing service</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published a mobile application</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages other than Arabic &amp; English</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table I: Comparison of features of Tabeebak, Qclinics and Aster*

**User Needs Based on Research**

Our potential stakeholders are hospital staff such as doctors, nurses and receptionists as well as patients.

Below is a list of questions we asked a doctor and a nurse:
1. Who makes the schedules?
2. What number do your patients have to dial to schedule an appointment?
3. How long does it take to check a patient?
4. Which department is the least/most visited?

Doctors must be able to view which patient has booked an appointment with them. Nurses must be able to check as well.
because patients need to have a quick triage check before talking to the doctor. Receptionists must be able to check in order to direct patients in times of confusion. Moreover, from our research, we have decided to focus on the general department rather than a specific department because patients visit the general department first. We also wanted to know more about how the doctors’ schedules are made and based on our interview with a doctor, we found out that there is one doctor who makes schedules for all the other doctors at the health center. The doctor tries to be fair by distributing work among the other doctors equally. There is one doctor for the doctors in the females’ side and one doctor for the doctors in the males’ section. The doctors are our potential stakeholders so they must have knowledge on how to use the application.

**Design Constraints**
All potential users agreed that accessibility of services was important to them. Thus, our application should meet the goals of accessibility and ease of use, which is why we chose the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) to measure how accessible our proposed app is.

WCAG is built around four principles: Perceivable, Operable, Understandable, and Robust [7].

1. **Perceivable**—so that people can see the content or hear it [7]. According to W3C [8] this requires that:
   - Color is not used as the only way of conveying information or identifying content.
   - Default foreground and background color combinations provide sufficient contrast.
   - When users resize text up to 400% or change text spacing, no information is lost.
   - Text reflows in small windows (“viewports”) and when users make the text larger.
   - Images of text are resizable, replaced with actual text, or avoided where possible.
   - Users can pause, stop, or adjust the volume of audio that is played on a website.
   - Background audio is low or can be turned off, to avoid interference or distraction [8].

2. **Operable**—so that people can use the web by typing or by voice [7]. This requires:
   - Functionality to be available for keyboard as well.
   - Users must have enough time to read and use the content.
   - Content does not cause seizures or physical reactions.
- Users can navigate, find content and determine where they are.
- Users can use different input modalities beyond the keyboard. For example: Buttons, links, and other active components are large enough to make them easier to activate by touch; Components are designed to avoid accidental activation, for example by providing undo functionality [8].

3. Understandable—so people get clear and simple language [7]. This requires [8]:
- Texts to be readable and understandable which includes: identify the primary language, the content must use clear and simple language, provide definitions for unusual words.
- The content appears and operates in predictable ways. Example: Significant changes do not happen without the user’s consent, Navigation mechanisms that are repeated on multiple pages appear in the same place each time.
- Users are helped to avoid or correct their mistakes which can be helped by giving descriptive instructions, error messages and suggestions for correction [8].

4. Robust—so people can use different assistive technologies [7]. This requires the content to be compatible with current and future tools by ensuring markup language (computer language that uses tag to define elements within a document [9]) can be easily interpreted and by providing name, role and value for non-standard user interface components [8].

By carefully looking at the four principles mentioned above, we have come up with the following design constraints for our app:

- Users must be able to book an appointment in four clicks or less. This means the user must be able to navigate easily with the use of clear and simple language that could help them make the right choices.
- Users must also be able to cancel an appointment in four clicks or less. The application must be able to monitor the time before the user tries to cancel a booking (as they are supposed to cancel 24 hours before the day of the appointment).
- Users receive more than two reminders. As a developer, it is important to keep an eye on the retention rate as a higher retention rate means people are more loyal to the product and sometimes this loyalty can just be
encouraged by sending push-notifications [10]. Therefore, the application will send timed push notifications meaning it will be integrated with a calendar and will send notifications the user has an event planned which in this case is their appointment with the doctor [10].

- The user should have an appointment history that they can view at home.
- The application must be understandable and easier to deal with. Instead of a descriptive instruction, a tutorial can be provided which will help to guide users. It should include proper contrast of colors, video clips that explain everything visually without the need for audio, and subtitles which would be for people with hearing and vision disabilities. They should be able to ask for translated audio as well.
- The application must be multilingual where one can choose from English, Arabic, and Urdu.
- The application would be 100% free for installation for the patients which can increase the retention rate. It is compatible with both IOS and android devices.
- The application must have a built-in feature where users cannot click on a time slot when it has already been booked. They must also be able to see if a slot is booked or not.

Proposed features of our application
- Unique such that customers are attracted to its functions and it includes different options than the already existing booking apps.
- Easy to access and use. This will ensure customer satisfaction as they will start depending on the app for booking.
- Connection to the WIFI: booking appointments requires WIFI. However, the reminder system will not require an internet connection.
- Less available memory: minimizes the amount of memory that the application uses.
- Budget-friendly for our users; however, enough to attract investors. Our version of the app is approximately 72,455.90-111,960.75QR. [11 &12]
- Email automation/reminder notification: the app will send confirmation as notification and through email.
- Live chat: Patients have the chance to communicate with the individuals responsible for the booking if any issue occurs.
• Provides information about the doctors and displays their schedules.
• Feedback: Patients can always give their opinion to improve the application.

Goals of the Prototype Application
1. The main objective of this system is to ease the process for patients to book appointments in many ways, including the following:
   - Allowing patients to choose their own doctor to check up with, depending on the timing and the routine of the checkup.
   - Patients also will get the chance to view the profile of the doctors which contains a brief background about the doctor, making it easier to research the doctor beforehand.
   - The user will get the chance to have direct messages with their health care providers such as doctors. That would be done via the live chat feature.
   - Patients will be able to look at all available appointment timings in weeks prior, which makes it easier for patients and gives them a sense of control as well as providing more transparency.
   - Patients can book anytime they want as the application would work 24/7, which is a better solution than calling at specific timings, thus encouraging patients to rely on it for booking future appointments.

Figure X: Schedules’ layout [13]
2. It is beneficial for the health care givers as it would:
   - Help in decreasing no show rates, sudden cancellation of appointments and late appointments. One main way that this application will ensure this is by sending constant reminders to patients that will not require the usage of WIFI, prior to the time of the appointment: three days and one day before.
   - Not waste doctors’ precious time. By conducting an interview with a nurse in HMCC, it was mentioned that each patient visits with the doctor for about 40 minutes on average. Therefore, that was taken into consideration and hopefully the easy and accessible application will ensure doctors’ timings and not waste their time off.

References


I am standing.
But is it the same place I used to be,
in your life?
I don't know who moved,
was it you or me?
You are sitting across from me
engrossed with the food in front of you,
giving me the same attention
you give it.
I see her enter,
into our moment,
without permission,
without regard.
I watch where she stands.
I guess,
a lot closer to you.
Just then,
I know she stands where I used to.
And in a flash,
It's me asking,
“Is it okay if I stay here?”
when this moment was mine
from the beginning.

But what’s the use of moments
when both of us are just standing
on our own
with people in between.
This work was written for MEEN 381, the Mechanical Engineering Seminar class. The professor gave us the option to choose any topic as long as it was related to our major. I chose sustainability because it is one of the most important topics in my opinion. As future engineers, it is important for us to know the severity of the problem and to be motivated to make a positive change.
Plastic and Environmental Sustainability

Plastic consumption and pollution have become a recurrent discussed topic in today's news; therefore, it is important to have an understanding of the severity of this problem and to understand plausible solutions in order to be proactive. Plastic pollution has an increasing number of negative impacts on oceans, nature and wildlife. Plastics cannot be decomposed in nature because most plastics are polymers with long chains of monomers (carbon-carbon bonds). Nature has simply not seen anything of such composition and therefore cannot decompose it as it does organic matters [7]. A simple solution would be to create plastic out of peptide bonds which would make it biodegradable, yet the downfall would be the product having a short life span. This makes the carbon-carbon bonds plastic more beneficial, economically speaking. It is critical to understand and improve plastic waste management in order to decrease plastic pollution. This paper will delve into the problem of plastic mismanagement and propose possible solutions of fixing this problem such as repaving roads from plastic, eco-designing of plastics, and fungi packaging.

Plastic World Production

In order to be able to implement the most effective interventions to reduce plastic pollution, it is essential to understand the magnitude of the problem. The graph in Figure 1 shows the global plastic production from 1950 to 2015. It can be observed from the graph that there has been a massive increase in plastic production since the 1950s. Since then, the amount of plastic has increased by 200-fold, making the production of plastic in 2015 around 350 million tonnes. Out of this amount of plastic generated, 55% of it has been discarded.

Figure 1. Global Plastic Production [4]
Plastic Disposal Methods
There are three methods of disposing the plastic produced: discarding, incinerating and recycling. Figure 2 illustrates the ways plastic was disposed throughout 1980 to 2015. The grey area represents the amount that was disposed. It can be observed that in 1980, almost 100% of the plastic disposed was discarded. If we extrapolated this data based on historical trend to 2050, incineration and recycling would increase to 50% and 44% respectively while discarded waste would decrease to 6%. These are only assumptions and are not based on any concrete projections.

![Figure 2. Global Plastic Waste by Disposal](image)

Sector Use of Plastic
Another way of decreasing the amount of waste is to understand the industrial production and uses of plastic. This understanding can help with reducing the future generation of plastic. Figure 3 represents the primary plastic production by the industrial sector in 2015.

![Figure 3. Plastic Production by Industrial sector in 2015](image)
Figure 3 shows that the leading sector in plastic production is packaging. This sector produces over 146 million tons of plastic. The next leading sector is building and construction in which plastic is extremely valuable for multiple uses of its properties. Plastic is an ideal construction product due to its long-lasting performances. These qualities once understood can help us find sustainable ways to reuse plastics.

**Mismanagement of Plastic Waste**

A rising issue with such high productions of plastic is the mismanagement of the waste. This brings a high risk of disposed plastic entering oceans and nature preserves. The majority of countries that have high income have good waste management systems and infrastructures. Countries like Japan, Canada, Australia and so on store their disposals in secured storages. These storages are secured therefore preventing high tides and winds from relocating the trash. These countries have almost no inadequately managed waste, contrarily to many low to middle income countries. Yet, they do contribute to the mismanagement problem since some citizens of these countries litter. Jambeck et al. (2015) estimated that around 2% of total plastic waste across all countries is due to littering. Countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have poor methods of managing the waste. Around 80 to 90% of their plastic is disposed of and inadequately stored, which increases the chance of pollution. Jambeck et al. (2015) also came up with predictions for the mismanaged plastic waste in 2025. In Figure 4, the map displays the mismanaged waste by country projected in 2025.

![Figure 4. Mismanaged Waste Production Projection 2025](image)
The data provided in the map are calculated by the total mismanaged waste created by populations that are within 50 km of the coastline. This proximity to the coastline makes this waste a very high risk for pollution. This projected waste management distribution does not differ much from the current one. A few observable changes are that the waste management in China will decrease by a few percentages, while India’s will increase slightly. The Middle East, North Africa, Europe and Latin America will maintain around the same amount of waste mismanagement. In addition, it can be observed from Figure 4 that South Asia contributes to around 60% of the worldwide mismanagement of waste.

Impact of Plastic Waste
There are multiple impacts that have been discovered that affect human life, the ecosystem and wildlife. There is no clear and concise evaluation of the full extent of these impacts yet, despite the numerous impact evaluations. A few impacts that affect the wildlife are entanglement, ingestion and interactions such as abrasions and obstructions. Entanglement affects a significant amount of sea creatures whereas they get entrapped in plastic waste. Ingestion is also a problem that has been noted for around 800 creatures worldwide [6]. This plastic ingestion greatly impacts the wildlife since it can decrease the capacity of the stomach creating a false satiation sense. Interaction is when the waste destroys the ecosystem, such as suffocating trees and coral reefs. In addition, microplastics are said to affect human health, even though there is not much evidence supporting that claim. This possible harm should still be taken into consideration since there are possible toxic effects. The three possible ones that have been discussed are the presence of the physical plastic particle, persistent pollutant that is observed by the plastic can be released, and the final one is the tendency of plastic additives to leach onto plastic. It is also important to understand that the issue of wildlife plastic consumption can also affect human health. When humans consume wildlife, they will also ingest the plastic in the wildlife’s body.

Solutions
Understanding the problem is very important because it portrays the severity of the issue and highlights the major areas where improvement is required. For starters, the industrial use of plastics gives a value to the waste generated by different sectors. Therefore, it is noticeable that the two important areas of improvement are packaging and construction. In addition, it is important to understand the source of mismanaged waste in order to find a solution to such a problem. In this case, solutions have to be found
and implemented in South Asian countries to reduce the amount of litter. This paper will delve into three different possible solutions to this problem, the first one being repaving roads out of discarded plastic. The second solution will be the eco designing of plastic products, and the final one is creating packaging out of fungi.

**Repaving Roads**

One new inventive way of using this discarded plastic is in repaving roads all around the world. Plastic roads have many advantages beside cutting the waste of plastic. In addition to being ecofriendly, this solution does not require a lot of time for construction. An average road made of asphalt can take months to be completed, yet with plastic roads it could take only days and future maintenance would be almost non-existent. In addition, maintenance will no longer be a recurrent issue that we face as we do with asphalt roads. In addition, the expected lifetime of such roads is going to be much longer and the price of producing the roads will decrease. Table 1 shows the numerical benefits of these roads compared to the asphalt ones [1].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Expected Increase</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expected Lifetime</td>
<td>3 times longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Time</td>
<td>70% faster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>4 times lighter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecofriendly</td>
<td>100% circular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Benefits of Plastic Roads [1]*

These roads made of plastic-suffused asphalt can help reduce the quantity of petroleum in asphalt. This also helps with reusing plastic waste that otherwise would negatively impact the environment. In addition to all those qualities, using discarded plastic is much cheaper than building traditional roads, therefore making production more beneficial for poorer areas. A campus sustainability manager shared this with the UCSD Guardian: “The recycled plastic product also has a lower embodied carbon footprint than traditional bitumen, preventing some greenhouse gases from being emitted and contributing to climate change.”

One company that is leading in this new research is called MacReber’s. The CEO of this company found his interest in this project after noticing the threat of plastic waste. The process to constructing those roads is by breaking the recycled plastics into three different types of pellets, created when plastic is compressed into smaller particles. They are then classified into different uses such as durable or pliable. These pellets are then melted and turned into bitumen. Bitumen is the petroleum-based binding agent that is found in asphalt. This conversion to bitumen is said to make the
presence of plastic completely disappear, therefore making their incorporation in asphalt very seamless.

The only known setback to this idea is the health consequence that can be brought by the consumption of microplastic. These roads have been criticized for a potential risk of spreading microplastic in the air [3]. The drawback of this spreading is that it will saturate the air, water and food we consume. In addition to this, they also attract pollutants once they are in the environment. They can collect industrial plant chemicals, agricultural pesticides, and greenhouse gas emissions. If solutions can be found for this problem, this project could be widely implemented across the United States and in other countries. It could help not only the plastic pollution issue, but also help countries deal with constructing new roads more quickly and efficiently.

**Eco Designs of Plastic Products**

The concept of creating plastic products with eco designs is ingenious. The simplest way of describing it is the tackling of the problem in early stages of production. This can be done by the incorporation of the environmental impact considerations in order to reduce the future negative impacts that it could bring. Ways to achieve this goal can be by materials reduction. Optimizing materials design and selections would in turn decrease the amount of waste. For this part of production, energy efficiency and less generation of scrap process can be selected [5]. Another way can be to include the disposal option to any part created in order for it to be recycled and reused. An example of this can be the Ras Abu Aboud stadium in Doha which was created and designed with the objective of it being recyclable. Each component in the stadium is recyclable. It is important for product designers to consider these factors when designing, yet these choices might not significantly influence big corporations’ decisions.

**Packaging Material from Fungi**

The most common way of packaging nowadays is with plastic since it improves a product’s durability and handling convenience. A new alternative has recently been highly researched: mushroom-based packaging. One company that has leading research on this topic is Ecovative Design. It creates packaging that is fully natural and compostable. The packaging can decompose in around 30 days if it is in the proper setting. It can also be reused if kept in a dry setting. The way this company manufacture these packages are by compressing agricultural by-products (oat hulls, hemp, cotton burrs . . .) into the desired shape. After they are sealed for a few days, mushroom spores are seeded in them. These mushroom
spores sprout a root structure that threads quickly through the desired object and binds it together. The final step is to treat the object with heat in order to prevent further growth of fungus. This new technique of creating packaging uses 12% less energy compared to plastic production [8]. In addition, it produces around 90% less carbon emissions [8]. This alternative to plastic production is innovative and ecofriendly; the only current drawback is how durable this material is in different environments. It is being heavily researched and could be the future of packaging. IKEA has already jumped on the movement of using this new way of packaging for some of their items.

**Conclusion**
The research shows that the increase of plastic production is generating additional plastic waste every year. This plastic pollution is increasingly causing a negative impact on nature preserves, oceans, and wildlife. It was also observed that even though high income countries have very good management of waste, they still generate the highest plastic waste per person. Nevertheless, the mismanagement of the waste is the main problem that procures an idea on the risk of plastic pollution. This is why it is critical to find solutions for this mismanagement in order to preserve nature. In addition, plastic has very unique properties. Plastic is versatile, light, resistant, and cheap which makes it valuable for a multitude of operations. One solution that was presented was to use recyclable plastic to repave roads. This has multiple benefits for the quality of the street as well as the environmental benefits to reusing plastic waste. In addition, for the massive amount of plastic production a year, there should be guidelines for eco designs. This would reduce the amount of waste that would need to be managed. There are many other solutions to this enormous problem that could be taken into consideration. Steps need to be taken urgently since projections of current plastic waste trends are only increasing.

**References**


Hadear Hassan is a mechanical engineering student, Class of 2021.
Although I’m the farthest from being a plant-based eater, picking this topic for my ethnographic research project (ERP) for English 104 was an example of how I attempted to condition myself into being vegan, which I unsurprisingly failed to do. However, as seen from this “CARS” piece in which I “Create A Research Space” for my topic, I wanted my ERP to serve another purpose. In spite of veganism’s rising popularity, the main issues and debates seem to be far from the spotlight. Delving into responses to the social stigmas of veganism plus exploring what hinders people from shifting diets together reveal the psychological aspects, not only of those within the community, but also of those who wish to be part of it.
Research Introduction: A Psychological Study on Veganism’s Social Effects

Introduction
His bulging eyes protruding as far as his nose, I thought I might have to catch them with my plate. “Is that an egg?!” he exclaimed, “Oh, the smell . . . I-I’m going to barf,” I cautiously looked around the cafeteria, making sure no one had heard him. I proceeded to take a glorious bite with melodious gag noises in the background. I’m quite accustomed to his vocal criticisms, but to be quite frank, I miss eating in peace. “I can’t handle the smell,” he continued, “I’m literally crying!” For someone so intolerant of what a non-vegan eats, I often wondered why he would join us for lunch everyday despite knowing we’d eat “disgusting” food. He seems to be psychologically influencing us by trying to stir up shame or guilt, I thought. It just seemed too repetitive to not be planned. Usually, his continuous blabbering would get old after the first five minutes when he proceeded to consume his animal-free lunch. I guess he realized by then that it is going to take a lot more for me to find eating animals disgusting.

Vegans have been often marked with various stigmas. These perceptions might come from stereotypical descriptions or from actual observations. Although there is factual evidence that the vegan diet has various health benefits, and vegans, as a whole, generally aid the environment, Bresnahan, Zhuang and Zhu state that “people who eat meat are often unaccepting of vegans,” (2016, p. 3). Moreover, several studies have overlapped in their conclusion that the most common stigma associated with vegans are the “disrupt(ion) (of) social conventions” (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019, p.1), such as that of “being able to share food with others,” (Bresnahan, Zhuang & Zhu, 2016, p.1). The knowledge of such aspects of a diverse society enables us to delve into the effects that these social stigmas have on vegans themselves.

Literature Review
About 50 million tons of resources have been extracted from the earth, with a 60% chance of increase by the following year (“Tons,” n.d.) Perhaps not coincidentally, recent studies have shown that there has been a surge of interest towards veganism within the past five years (Statistics, n.d.). A correlation between these two figures has not been deemed as coincidence, but as causation. As more people start looking at the statistics behind every aspect of consumption, action is taken in order to restore and decrease the depletion of resources. One of the most common ways people take
action is by reducing the consumption of animal products in a diet that is known as veganism.

**Barriers in Shifting Diets**

Vegans are deemed as healthier (Molsey, 2018) and are known to help “reduce greenhouse gas emissions, [have more] healthcare related savings and avoid climate damages of $1.5 trillion,” (Statistics, n.d.) Despite these statistics, a majority of the population remain meat-eaters.

A review on the psychological aspects of meat consumption shows that the benefits associated with a meat-based diet was a crucial factor when people considered a shift in diets. (Modlinska & Pisula, 2018, p.2) A main concern, according to their study, was reaching the amount of protein required in the absence of a meat-based diet. (p.2) In addition, it has been found that a lack of protein produced adverse psychological effects. Experiments done on rats showed that “a low-protein diet displayed changes in the control of appetite, distorted perception of palatability, and a preference for fatty foods,” (Modlinska & Pisula, 2018, p.2). In addition, psychological factors such as that of enjoyment, denial and rationalization are also involved. Because meat has been the most prominent diet for so long, people generally find it as a “desirable element of their diet and enjoy eating it,” (Modlinska & Pisula, 2018, p.8). Similar to old habits, a diet that has been sustained for a long time with minimum effort, cheaper and more accessible products, and a variety of delicious recipes, dies hard. Therefore, a tendency that most meat-eaters have is rationalizing their diets as “natural, normal and necessary,” also known as the three N’s of justification (p.8) A sense of superiority amongst the human race has also been a factor in justifying that humans are “naturally adapted”(p.8) to meat consumption as beings that are at the top of the food chain (Modlinska & Pisula, 2018, p.8). Most importantly, the denial of the suffering of animals is an argument that is intensely looked down upon by a majority of vegans. According to Modlinska and Pisula (2018), people tend to make a “mental distinction” between food on a plate and what it had once been—a live animal. This justifies why most people often care for and love pets, such as dogs, while they eat chicken, claiming that there are just some animals you can’t eat.

**The Vegan Stigma and Its Effects**

The notorious characteristics of vegans are rooted in their (debatable) “extreme” behaviors which are recognized by most non-vegans, especially meat-eaters. Knowing the stigma of the vegan community contributes great significance to how this particular community is perceived and how it affects its people. A recent study
shows that a certain “anticipated stigma” is present amongst non-vegans, specifically with eating habits (Makowski, Roxburgh 2018). It was conducted amongst students at Kent State University and specifically concentrated on the perceptions of vegans according to various focus groups based on dietary restrictions: vegans, vegetarians and omnivores.

Interestingly, fellow non-meat-eating vegetarians hold a notion that vegans have some sort of “air about them” (p.5) that seemed like they had a superior perception of themselves compared to others. This perception, according to Makowski and Roxburgh (2018) reveals that a person’s revelation about their vegan diet is seen as “pretentious and condescending” (p.5) to most vegetarians. This might have to do with the slight differences in their diets. The perception that they are looked down upon may be due to their knowledge that they are only a few animal products away from being vegan and are shamed by the fact that they have the inability to go full on with a plant-based diet.

A majority of omnivores, on the other hand, hold perceptions that mainly focused on vegans’ persuasive abilities rather than their overall aura. This could be because omnivores are more disconnected from a plant-based diet, so they view vegans as persuading them to convert rather than people who shame them into converting. The terms mostly utilized to describe vegans included “harsher terminology” (p.5) such as “rude,” “overbearing,” and “annoying.” One omnivore stated, “Every time I’ve ever met a vegan, they’ve like tried to convince me to become a vegan. They talk about how great it is . . . (that’s) the first thing they tell you,” (p.5).

Results from these studies show that the perceptions of vegans about their own diets tended to have “uniformly . . . positive descriptors” (p.4). In addition, when they were asked to give opposing descriptors, there was a shift in perception as they would state what non-vegans negatively thought of their diet. According to Makowski and Roxburgh, the “negative views [were not] derived... only from their personal actions but also the ideas and beliefs which they express in social interactions—in other words, why they eat the way they do” (p.5). They believed that the positive interpretations about their diet, such as being passionate were “negatively construe[d].” In contrast to what vegetarians perceived, vegans saw other groups’ misunderstanding as condescending and fearful of the vegan community’s ability to “take away [their] . . . ability to eat meat” (p.5).
While existing studies have clearly established the various stigmas associated with the vegan community and the perceptions of various groups, they have yet to address more interpersonal factors that are involved. The present research tries to clarify, in addition to other factors, whether relationships between vegans and non-vegans are affected through these stigmas and how their perceptions of each other are influenced by the each other’s diet.

References


*Janessa Sophia Paderes is a petroleum engineering major in the Class of 2023.*
This paper shows the struggles and challenges faced by women in the engineering field. With a strong group of four aspiring women engineers, we conducted a semester long research. Together we conducted a survey among students and faculty members along with a few interviews. The results of the survey and interviews were quite eye-opening as some of the responses were completely different from what we concluded from the literature review. We learned a lot about each other throughout this entire process. It helped us to establish strong friendship and trust amongst ourselves and become better team leaders. We hope that you all enjoy reading our research paper as much as we enjoyed writing it.
The Glass Ceiling Effect on Careers of Female Engineers

Introduction
Engineering is the creative application of scientific principles used to design, build, invent, solve and analyze problems as well as fascinate the world to look at itself from a new perspective. Anybody who has the potential to use the creativity they possess to come up with questions and ideas that can be used to make discoveries, changes, and edits in order to understand our surroundings better and make this world an easier place to live in can be termed an engineer. The potential of creativity is present in all, with differences in its type; but when discrimination gets involved with creativity, barriers and boundaries are made. The long history of gender-based discrimination has led to the creation of vast partitions in creativity, leading to myths like women are better at liberal arts or nursing, rather than building structures and scientific thinking, while men, the other way around. History judges women's assertiveness in accordance with their looks, characteristics and feminine qualities; these traditional and cultural norms put women in a position where they are expected to be good at only a certain type of work, mostly related to domestic and feminine culture. This conclusion that history made for women and her abilities has been proven wrong by many powerful, strong and intelligent women who broke boundaries set on women’s potential and achieved success in anything they wanted to do. Yet the world discriminates against women. Why?

Women over the years have played wonderful roles in the field of engineering. Although the field is dominated by men, women have shown quality performances at work and many have proven their abilities. Many women are appreciated for their work and recognized. But is our society completely free of the discrimination shown in terms of gender? If so, why is the number of women in engineering less than men? Why is it that the number of women entering colleges and universities of engineering are greater in number compared to the number of women working in the same sector?

Even though they are capable, women are underrepresented in the engineering industry and tend to leave the profession at a higher rate than men. Most women who earn engineering degrees either quit at an early stage or never even enter the profession. This research investigates why women face this struggle, how society influences women’s success in the engineering field, and how personal barriers affect women’s goals. The main focus of our research will be to infer and draw a suitable conclusion for these questions: 1. What are the obstacles to success faced by women in
engineering? and 2. Why is it that most women don’t reach more successful positions in the engineering field?'

**Literature Review**

The world has seen countless instances where men made groundless assumptions and underestimated women’s ability, and some of these instances are more famous than others. For instance, recently, there was the first all-women space-walk in 2019 [1]. In the article, the author points out that one of the excuses a NASA official had given as to why this all-female spacewalk took so long was because women’s physique made it harder to do a spacewalk. But many were quick to point out that physical features like height did not matter. In fact, what mattered was the astronaut having the right skill sets and ability to perform meticulous movements. What had hindered this project was the fact that proper suits to cater to their body type were not made. Similarly, in the Monty Hall problem, a famous female scientist called Marilyn Vos Savant had pointed out the correct answer to the problem, but her answer would seem wrong to a common person. She was singled out by thousands of men and had received many sexist comments [2]. These are a few examples where women face obstacles when they pursue their engineering careers.

Several studies have been conducted around the world to determine the number of female figures who climb up into important positions in the engineering field, and the imbalance observed when it is compared to the males in the same field. The researchers tried to understand the reasons behind the disparity and the barriers that inhibit the advancement of a woman’s career. But most of the research samples were of western populations as few have attempted to research the barriers faced by women pursuing a career in engineering in Qatar.

Kris De Welde [3] conducted a study concerning this topic but discussed the issue in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) field in general. This study conducted interviews at Carnegie Foundation University in the United States in order to point out the obstacles women face and its influence on the satisfaction of women pursuing the major. They sampled 28 students of the 1148 students in the university, and the sample contained disproportionately more women. The study listed the informal and formal barriers that women face when completing their Ph.Ds in STEM fields. It mentioned the notion of a “glass obstacle course,” which insinuates the unequal opportunities that a woman faces due to the gendered processes involved in a STEM-based workplace. This involved sexism, exclusion from the tight-knit group of men who
find it easier to work with other men, few female role models, and a difficult work-life balance. De Welde describes an instance where if a woman says something incorrectly, the rest of the men usually think that all women are dumb, and if a woman excels and climbs up the ladder, they attribute the promotion to her being a woman and not the woman’s skills in the job. Women in engineering also often don’t have enough female professors and mentors to look up to. A problem with this study was that the sample contained the whole STEM field and not just engineering. This can show a different result as engineering may be the major to have the largest disparity in the numbers.

Susan S. Bailey [4] discusses the fact that Engineering is the most male-dominated field out of the majors in STEM where women make up only 13% of the engineering workforce. This article tackles similar problems as the research journal discussed prior, but it talks about a far bigger sample of 700 students and also narrows the sample to only engineering students. The article points out that men and women enter engineering because of similar reasons: because they were good at math and sciences and wanted a well-paid and interesting job. But women, on the other hand, also wanted to become engineers to solve major problems and become “socially responsible engineers.” The article also sees that women are usually more doubtful of their problem-solving abilities and try to find reassurance from their professors and peers, even though they receive the same grade as the males in class. This makes them hesitant in speaking out and they go into their internships and jobs with the same expectations for feedback. But in internships, several of the women reported having been stuck shuffling papers while their less experienced male counterparts had legitimate engineering work. They often end up leaving engineering due to either the hegemonic masculine culture or not being able to experience the part of engineering where they can make a difference because they are stuck doing paperwork. Furthermore, in her research, Gita Ghaisi observes the imbalance in recognition of the research done by females [5]. Female researchers in the engineering discipline have higher impact factors when they publish their papers than their male peers, but the work does not get as much recognition from the scientific community.

With the help of statistics, the book *Why so Few?* [6] discusses the performance of females in engineering and the reasons why they do not advance further in their careers. The study shows that in high school, girls score higher, and take more credits in sciences than their male counterparts. But as they transition from high school to college, many young women turn away from a STEM career path.
The number of women graduating with a master's in sciences other than engineering has increased immensely, sometimes reaching 60% in biological sciences, but in engineering, it is merely a 19%. The number further shrinks as we get to the workforce where women only make 10.6% of the total workforce. Furthermore, men are 79% of the workers with doctorates while women are only 15%. It also shows that out of all the non-tenured faculty, women consist of only 17% and among tenured, only 7.3%. This decrease in number points to women stopping education or not going to the workforce as we go farther into the engineering career path.

On the other hand, in the Arab Gulf region, 60% of engineering students are women, and only half the number can be observed in western countries like the U.S. and Europe [7]. But as seen in the western context, after graduation women tend not to continue with their career and the percentage of women in the engineering workforce drops down. For example, the percentage of female students at Texas A&M University at Qatar is about 49.5% [8], but only 12% of the engineering workforce are women [9]. Dr. Sara Hillman from Texas A&M at Qatar investigated the opinions of female engineering students within the same university about the barriers they have faced in their careers up until that point [10]. She found that the female students needed “female only” spaces as that would encourage them to stay in the university and study, network, and collaborate with others. They also wanted to know what the work environment would be from a woman who has experience in the industry or from workshops from the company itself, and they would also like more female mentors and engineering professors. Most importantly, they wanted engineering companies to practice equal hiring and retention practices.

In the book *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*, the author recognizes that even though the number of women in STEM fields is increasing, this growth is dampened by sexual harassment [11]. Surveys conducted by The University of Texas show 20% of female science students had had some experience of sexual harassment from faculty or staff and about 25% of female engineering students have experienced sexual harassment. The book mentions the fact that institutions spend money and effort bringing in female students without making the environment safe and hospitable for them. Sexual harassment compromises women’s mental and physical health, which affects the willingness to pursue the field. The job satisfaction declines, they distance themselves from their colleagues and work, they start feeling more stressed performing their job, and hence there is a decline in productivity.
and performance. This decline can be due to the harassment they experience, the environment in their department, or the unresponsiveness after reporting the harassment. Some end up being bullied or harassed out of these fields. However, this research paper does not account for sexual harassment as a factor of female withdrawal from the engineering major.

**Methodology**

Research objective:
As the title suggests, through this research we wish to discover why women become victims of the “Glass-ceiling Mechanism” in the engineering industry. Our main purpose of is to find out about the obstacles to success faced by women in engineering and why the number of women entering the field is always more compared to the few who continue to pursue the career. Our research objective arises from three very important questions:

- How different are the current challenges faced by women from that of the past?
- How do men view the Glass Ceiling Effect?
- How can more women engineers be encouraged to pursue higher levels of engineering?

To find answers to these questions, we decided to analyze the opinions of TAMUQ students with the help of a survey. However, to get a deeper insight on the topic we felt that the views and suggestions of the faculty members will be of more value since the faculty members of the institution have more work experience in the field. Therefore, along with the survey we decided to conduct interviews with a few faculty members.

Participants:
The students of Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ) consisted of a very large portion of our research. These included Graduate students as well. Apart from this, we included the responses of the faculty members of TAMUQ and a few of the employees from different companies in Qatar.

Data Collection Strategies:
To gather data from the target individuals, we chose to conduct surveys and interviews. We created two different surveys, one for males and the other for females. We opted with this strategy because we were limited by the survey application. This way it became easier for us to distinguish between male and female responses. The surveys were sent out through emails to obtain the responses of the faculty members and the graduate students. The responses of the undergraduate students were recorded in the
survey via WhatsApp since most of the students were more active in this social media application. Both of the surveys were kept open until the 31st of March 2020. We were able to generate about thirty responses out of which fourteen were from males and sixteen were from females. Our surveys included fourteen questions, where the first five questions asked about very basic information like the participant’s gender, designation at their respective jobs, years of experience in the industry and their highest level of education. The rest of the survey included Likert scale questions which required the participants to choose one of the responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This was done to get a holistic view of our participants’ opinions and their level of agreement. These questions were formulated with the help of the conclusions drawn from the literature review. Moreover, the data obtained from the Likert scale questions were easier to analyze. We believe that our surveys helped us to figure out the answer to our second research question since there was a drastic difference between the male and the female responses about the Glass Ceiling effect.

The interviews were initially planned to be conducted personally. However, due to the limitations put forward by the COVID19 pandemic, it was carried out through emails as well. We emailed one female TAMUQ faculty member, one female engineer in TAMUQ, one male undergraduate student and one retired male engineer from Qatar Petroleum. We chose this combination of interviewees because we figured that this would result in different opinions from the different sectors in the industry since these individuals have experienced four different levels in their respective engineering careers. Our interview responses to the first and third research questions gave us a deeper insight into the development of female participance in the engineering industry and enlightened some of the societal and personal barriers due to which women refuse to pursue higher degrees and move forward in engineering.

Data Analysis
The Surveys:
As mentioned earlier, the survey contained fourteen questions. The graphs below show responses to three of the first five questions in the survey. It can be observed that the orange part of the graph represents female responses and the blue part of the graph represents male responses.
Fig. 1: Gender breakdown of the total number of survey responses

Fig. 2: Engineering work experience of males and females

Fig. 3: Existence of women engineers’ support groups
From Fig. 2 we can see that most of the females have a work experience of fewer than two years. However, some males had above ten years of experience in the industry and unfortunately, there weren’t any women in this category. Fig. 3 shows the awareness of male and female employees about the any women’s support groups present in their companies, to which 80% males and 60% females voted yes.

Fig. 4 below displays the answers to question six, the first Likert scale in the survey.

![Fig. 4: Responses to survey question 6](image)

In question 7, we asked whether the organizations encourage their employees to grow their careers and a majority of both males and females agreed.

![Fig. 5: Responses to survey question 7](image)

When asked about the dilemma between family and work-life in the next question, the numbers of males agreeing was more than females which was a very unexpected result. However, an equal number of females gave a neutral response when asked about whether they are appreciated for their contributions at their workplace. Figs. 6 and 7 display these responses.
Fig. 6: Family and work life dilemma

Fig. 7: responses to survey question 9

Fig. 8 shows that the answers to Question 10 and 11 provided similar gender-balanced responses when asked about equal work distribution and support from superiors.
Fig. 8: Responses to survey questions 10 and 11

Fig. 8 shows the response to questions 12 and 13 regarding whether men in the industry exhibit any biased behaviors towards women for assigning tasks. Female survey respondents mostly agreed when asked about their colleagues but disagreed when asked about their superiors.

Fig. 9: Response to survey questions 12 and 13
Finally, in question 14 we asked whether both male and female opinions are considered in official meetings and a majority of both males and females responded neutrally (see Fig.10).

The Interviews:
There were four interviews conducted by the members of the group as mentioned earlier. Through our interview questions, we found why women tend to leave engineering after graduation and why most of the women even today are confined to pink-collar jobs. We also discovered whether there are any specific obstacles involved and whether any affirmative action will be able to close the gender gap in the engineering industry.

We had originally planned to interview two female professionals and two male professionals; however, due to the present COVID situation we were not quite able to do so. Therefore, we had to make some changes in our interview strategies. We were able to interview one male student, one female professor, one male retired professional, and one female engineer.

Our first candidate in the interview was a junior at TAMUQ. He noticed that most of the female engineers tend to leave their careers as soon as they bear children. This was what we assumed initially because women have always faced a dilemma between their careers and families. He also mentioned that changes have occurred over the years, but the number of women in blue and white-collar jobs is still less than men. Women are still preferred in pink-collar jobs. For instance, we can observe that most of the nurses and teachers are still women and most of the CEOs of multinational companies are still men. However, he mentioned that sometimes women are limited by certain societal barriers. He explained this by giving an example of his friend who remained focused on her career, and she
ended up getting a PhD in engineering. But it affected her family life since she wasn't able to get a husband to settle down with because most of the men considered her to be “too qualified.”

Our second interviewee was a retired engineer. We figured that since he has spent decades in the industry, he would be able to give us more information about whether or not the industry has changed over the years. First, he mentioned how previously, in some parts of the world, parents sent their daughters for higher studies just to get a proper suiter. Once they finished their studies they were immediately expected to get married and start a family. Hence back then, women were not even able to start their careers in the first place. He also mentioned something new which we did encounter before. He informed us that due to the advancements in technology, a lot of work that required physical strength is now done by machines, hence women are able to engage and provide their input in the physical work activities as much as men. He also acknowledged that a lot of women he worked with pushed themselves beyond their limits. When he joined the industry as a young engineer, it was still a male dominant environment, and he hardly had any female colleagues. The number of women in the workforce back then was a lot less than the women in the workforce right now. Women engineers in his department heard phrases like, “You can’t do it,” or “You think you can handle that?” very frequently. Their senior officers did not allow them to do certain tasks just because they considered them to be “Not safe for women”; it did not matter even if the woman was completely qualified for it. Most of the companies tend to not hire a perfectly qualified woman due to the reasons mentioned above. They did not realize that by doing this they were missing out on creative and innovative ideas that women could provide. Back then, it was very hard for society to accept a woman in a male dominated profession like engineering. He concluded that over time, these gender discriminations have decreased to a certain extent. However, they have not been removed completely. Even today, the number of working women engineers are less than fifty percent. He believes that “the day that the ratio will even out, this problem will not persist.”

The next interview we conducted involved a female professor in TAMUQ. To our first question, she responded that if women are supported by their friends and families then they will be able to pursue their careers without any hesitation. Some of her responses were, however, contradictory to that of our male interviewees. She believes that most of the women at present have come a long way. She mentioned that she personally did not face any obstacles in
pursuing her degree. However, one of her friends got married and had kids whilst being a student in university; which eventually caused a delay in her graduation. She gave a more comprehensible reason for the need for women to work harder than men in the industry. For instance, she mentioned that women struggle to find a balance between work and family lives. This makes them feel exhausted and reduces their leisure time. According to her, the one thing which did not change so far is the fact that the number of female students is still much more than the number of female workers. She concluded by saying that women always need the support of their families to succeed in their careers. There are companies who “are biased and prefer to hire men,” but there are unbiased work environments as well. She believes that allocating certain opportunities or places for females might help some women to achieve their dreams and successes in their respective careers. However, “the only thing we can state is that competent people should be supported so they can achieve managerial positions no matter to what gender they belong; otherwise, businesses and corporations would become inefficient and unproductive.”

The last interview we conducted was with a female engineer. Her answers were more similar to the female professor’s. She too agreed that the number of female engineering students have been always higher than the number of female engineers in the workplace. However, she mentioned that in a competitive field like engineering, the workload is not gender-specific; both males and females are required to work hard and at the same pace. She also mentioned that she did not face as many obstacles as she could have in her career since she always had the support of her family and co-workers.

**Findings**

With the help of our results from the surveys and interviews, we were able to get a clear idea about the past, present and future of the “Glass-Ceiling Effect.” Some of our assumptions were proven to be true, and some weren’t. For example, we predicted that only women face challenges in managing private and work-related responsibilities, but our survey showed that an equal amount of men feel the same way, too. Men are quite aware of the pressure the society puts on a woman; however, they are not quite aware of the personal barriers women face. In certain parts of the world, women are expected to exhibit more feminine qualities like taking care of their family members and showing emotional support. Hence, countries belonging in this region mostly educate their women in the hopes of getting them settled in a better marriage. However, there
are developed countries who are more open towards women showing masculine qualities like independence, strength etc. These countries have a good number of unbiased engineering companies.

A lot of responses in the survey were neutral. This could be due to limited responses or the fact that the survey included the responses from people living in a socially diverse country like Qatar. Perhaps a lot of the issues did not cause any drastic effects and were handled very well by the professionals.

There are people who still believe that the engineering field (which involves the application of complex theories to find solutions to real-world problems) is not meant for women even if they are more qualified than their male counterparts. Some companies reserved special spots for women, but whether this is a good practice remains controversial. The need for women to have support groups and special allocations itself can be considered to be offensive since men never require such benefits.

There are places where the work is distributed equally among male and female employees based on their qualifications and experiences. This was something which was not observed in the past where women were constantly bothered about perceptions of their ability to contribute as much as men. There are certain international companies where there is no sign of gender discrimination or any sort of biased behavior.

There is a considerable increase in the success of careers of women who were always supported by their families and were a part of a healthy workplace. It can be observed that women engineers have indeed come a long way. The amount of discriminations faced by them now is much less when compared to a time when women could not even become students in the engineering field. During that time women were strictly restricted to pink-collar jobs. The society back then believed that science and math are not for girls whereas in today's world the number of women majoring in these fields is much higher than that of men. Women were eventually able to overcome these challenges. The issue is that these challenges never stop coming; before it was about entering the field and now it is about continuing in the field.

**Conclusion**

The results garnered from the surveys and interviews provided great insight into the opinions of TAMUQ students and faculty regarding the disproportionality of men and women in the engineering field and the likeliness of a glass-ceiling hindering women's success.
First, our findings show that in general, women working at TAMUQ have higher qualifications than men. Nevertheless, men have spent significantly longer in this field. While the women engineers surveyed have spent no more than five years in the industry, some male engineers have crossed the ten-year mark already. This shows that at TAMUQ there is a significant disparity between the number of female engineers graduating and the ones that are continuing to work in the industry—and this is a reflection of the education to job ratio of women engineers worldwide.

However, this disparity is not due to a lack of encouragement from the university or due to any form of exclusion targeted at women here as both men and women unanimously agreed that this institution encourages them to expand their careers. Also, we found that women engineers in TAMUQ do not have any extra pressures placed upon them that their institution does not expect from all its employees. Therefore, there must be other social structures that systematically burden women to stop pursuing their careers after acquiring their qualifications. Our results identified that one of the main reasons women leave their careers is due to bearing children and the responsibilities that follow. While men can also assist, females are often recognized as the primary caregivers of the family. And family is commonly prioritized over careers in a female's context. Moreover, women in particular experience extensive pressures placed upon them by society—to be a good wife, a good mother, and a good homemaker—all contributing to emotional and psychological stress. On the other hand, our interviewees also pointed out that the prevalence of sexual harassment at workplaces is also a common fear females face which could be yet another reason we see fewer of them at workplaces. However, it is worth noting that that many don't get educated for the purpose of finding a job. Some do it to find a better suitor while some others fear overqualification may make them less appealing to men looking for marriage.

However, it is important to acknowledge significant progress has been made regarding this issue. Although women in the past lacked the freedom to work at all as per instructions from dominating male figures in their families such as their fathers or spouses, today it is more of a choice—whatever the influences may be. This shows progress as it was not that long ago that in many parts of the world female education was no more than an investment for the marriage market. Families understood that educational attainment of a woman could raise the prospects of marriage with an educated spouse and thus raising household income upon marriage. Therefore, particularly in Asian/Arab cultures, women
were encouraged to attain educational qualification without an aim to work in the future. According to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory, this could be due to their collectivist culture which does not expect women to earn in order to support themselves. Males are considered the breadwinners of the family.

Furthermore, the majority of physical work that could have restricted women in the past has already been automated by technology and machines. Therefore, employers who have historically quoted the physical safety of women as their motivation behind assigning work differently for men and women do not need to worry about this aspect as much today.

Finally, bearing in mind the notable advancements that have already been achieved, the women at TAMUQ continue to have hope that the path will clear up further for them in the future. They identified that setting up a certain percentage of reservations for jobs would help them achieve their true potential. They also believe that if women receive the right amount of support from their family along with opportunities from their employers, the glass ceiling can be shattered.

References


**Appendix A:**

Survey Questions:

1. What is your designation in your organization?
2. What is your highest level of education in engineering?
3. For how many years have you worked in the engineering industry?
4. Do you have a women engineers’ support group in your organization?
5. Rate the following on the basis of five options: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree.
   - My job demands a degree of overtime work that interferes with my private responsibilities
   - My organization encourages me to grow professionally
- I often feel that I have to neglect my private responsibilities in order to advance my career
- I regularly feel appreciated and acknowledged for my contributions at work
- I regularly receive support from my superiors and colleagues in the organization
- Equal opportunities are shared for a particular task-oriented job so that each individual can shine better in their field
- The male engineers in my organization are generally biased in that they would give preference to other men when a serious task is assigned
- The male engineers in my organization would generally think that women are only good for certain engineering roles
- As a woman, I often feel excluded from work-related discussions that take place outside of the boardroom
- Often in official meetings, only males are encouraged for decision or suggestions.

6. Have you ever considered leaving the engineering field because of the reasons in Q5?

Interview questions:
1. Do you think women tend to leave engineering or not pursue it? Why? Why not?
2. Are women still confined to pink-collar jobs of some sort, even if overqualified for it? Explain.
3. What experiences did you or someone you know have while pursuing engineering that were obstacles to getting a degree? Or even at work
   a. (Work environment, familial pressure-mom and dad, future family responsibilities)
4. How much harder do you think Women have to work to achieve the same thing due to these obstacles?
5. The ratio of women to men in an engineering university is still more than in the workplace. Was this an obstacle in moving up in your career? How?
6. Does allocating special spots and opportunities for women in this sector give the chances of levelling the playing field? If yes, How? If no, why not?
7. Can there be a comparison made between the glass ceiling effect on women and racism? Elaborate why or why not.
Zinia Jalal
Zinia is currently a senior in HBKU’s College of Science and Engineering. This paper was written when she was in her junior year. As a young girl, she always heard about how engineering was considered a man’s job. This comment caused a dilemma in her head considering engineering as her career. However, with the support of her family, she chose ‘engineering’ as her profession. When she joined the university, she observed that a majority of the student body included females. She immediately felt a sense of freedom to know that what she heard all her life was not completely true. She believes that professions cannot be divided based on gender. After spending three years in this university, she felt that she had enough experience and skills to conduct a research about the barriers faced by women as engineers. This research provided a platform for her to explore whether there are or had been other girls like her. She wanted to discover how far the society has come to accept women as engineers. This paper is for all those women out there who aspire to have a career in Science and Engineering.

Fathima Hakeem
Discrimination, be it social, political or institutional, is something that all women, across borders and cultures, have had to endure. Growing up as an Indian girl, Fathima had observed in her community that women had been questioned and shunned if they stepped too far out the line; they are often left to defend their dreams and aspirations on their own. In her first year in TAMUQ with its rich multicultural society, she realised there is a lot for her to learn from other cultures. Therefore, she sought for her colleagues’ individual experiences on this matter. She wanted to know whether they have had to make any compromises to choose this male-dominated career and whether they expect to face any hurdles in the future due to their choices. Fathima was inspired by her social circle to conduct research on this topic as she wanted to learn about their perspectives as many have progressed significantly more in their personal and professional lives compared with her. She also wanted to understand the best ways to tackle such scenarios if and when she is forced to confront them. She would like to find out when is it right to object, when is it wise to remain silent, and so on.

Aisha Hussain
Aisha wrote this paper with her team mates for a course in her junior year. She initially did her part in this paper to pass a course in a busy semester and chose a topic that she was vaguely interested in. She knew women in engineering were few in number, but she never investigated to what extent. She also had made assumptions regarding the work environment for women, many of which were proven to be wrong through this paper. As a woman and an aspiring engineer, she wanted to know what awaits her in the future, and how she can contribute to positive change. This paper helped her to broaden her knowledge, and she hopes to broaden those of others. Engineering, to the best of her knowledge, is the best way she can contribute to the world. She also doesn't mind being a part of history where women stand equal to men in the realm of engineering.

Inas Hussain Mahir
Inas is a sophomore at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) studying computer engineering. She can barely code, but she believes that she will get there soon. “She is currently working on a technology that could change the world forever in the form of a device that would alter the very idea of human-computer
interaction. The design of this computer is highly elevated from the basic imaginary approach to what a computerized system must look like." (Actually, this part of her bio is how she hopes to introduced herself after a couple of years. For now, she is not really working on any futuristic technology). Inas participated in this research through the course INST-222. She took this course because it sounded important and like something that would make her more intelligent. Eventually she started to really enjoy the course. The research was a big part of the course, so she and her team and wanted to give their best. In order to do so, they had to find a good topic. Since they were all females the topic, “The Glass Ceiling Effect in the Careers of Female Engineers,” caught their attention pretty quick. Choosing this topic turned out to be the best decision they took that semester, not only did they do the research for the course but they were also able to learn a lot more for themselves that would definitely come in handy later on. The topic was very relatable, and most of them were able to get closer to the topic at a much more personal level which also led to the team to understand each other. They were very impressed with their research although the result they obtained slightly surprised them. Overall, she had a lot of fun, learnt so much, and unlocked many lenses through which she can observe her surroundings.
Confronting Challenges
Writing is a complex journey that can only be explored through writing. I never truly understood this until I decided to observe how my writing process developed during the English 104 course. After that, the words flowed through as if there was someone telling me a story about myself that I never knew existed...
You are now entering the mind of a workaholic: a cramped office with towering stacks of half-finished reports and unread novels iced with an even layer of dust. Two adjacent desks hold polished golden name plates reading “The Editor” and “The Perfectionist.”

The Editor's desk chair is empty. Her metal framed rectangular glasses lay neglected on the wooden office floor, with the end of a rope set down nearby. Your eyes follow the rope until they reach a slim woman in a pressed navy-blue business suit, her chocolate-brown hair spiralled in a bun so tight that the veins on the sides of her forehead are bulging.

Or maybe her veins are bulging because her mouth is taped shut, and she’s struggling to free herself from the snug coil of rope that has her captivated on the floor.

Wriggling like a caterpillar desperate to free itself from its cocoon, The Editor tries her best to get The Perfectionist's attention. But The Perfectionist is either oblivious to The Editor's agony, or contented by the circumstances. The Perfectionist's perfect posture never shifts. Her modest smile never wanes.

A large musty bookcase stands in front of The Perfectionist's desk. You spot the worn-out trainers amidst cobwebs and dust bunnies. A figure is curled up in the bottom shelf. A head peeks out. Upon the realisation of The Editor's immobility, the figure's eyes widen and glow. With a quick scan of the office, the figure begins to climb out, stretching one scrawny leg at a time. Slowly and cautiously, the figure stands up. Then, he frantically brushes off several years' worth of dust and dirt that cling onto his disheveled clothes.

He briskly walks over to The Editor's desk. As he approaches, he hears a grunt. He meets The Editor’s squinting eyes as she lies on the floor, paralyzed.

For once, The Editor can't send him back. She has no power over him; she is crippled on the floor. She is frail.

The opportunity could not be missed, and he knows it. And so, with a triumphant cry of freedom and a simultaneous muted wail of horror, The Editor's name plate flies across the office, colliding with an elevated stack of paper that was barely balancing, transforming it into confetti.
He opens The Editor’s desk drawer and rummages through sticky notes and pens and staples boxes. Eventually, his hand emerges with a plaque made out of cherry wood with the words “The Writer” carefully engraved into it in Edwardian script. He sets it at the front of the desk, slightly off centre, where it originally belonged.

The Perfectionist stiffens slightly, but doesn’t move.

The Writer sits down at the desk chair. He fishes out a scrap document that had been abandoned because of a typo that The Perfectionist spotted. Turning the page onto the blank side, The Writer picks up a pen. He looks around the office, remembering this view that he had once been so used to, the view that invited creativity despite its plainness.

A glimmer catches The Writer’s attention. His head darts towards the floor to find The Editor holding a pocket knife, chipping at the tough rope that constrains her.

He realises he doesn’t have much time. He has to get something down on paper, fast, before she was free, before her authority dominated him again, sealing him away and taking over the office. He feels a surge of urgency, the sudden need to write and then to write more, to keep writing and to never stop. He doesn’t know what, or why, or how to write; he just knows he has to start. And so he does.

Whether or not The Editor muted The Writer before he came up with anything is one of the subjects currently under investigation. It is rumored that The Writer has taken several opportunities after this incident, sneaking out of his prison without The Editor knowing. Enclosed in this book are the documents that have exited the office; it is up to you to decide who the author of each document is.

_Nadine Elkholy is a mechanical engineering sophomore who enjoys questioning everything about life. Her curiosity seemed to blossom most in physics, which led her to the path of engineering._
In this piece, I discuss one of the most traumatic periods of my life. This piece gives off an ambience of fear and sadness, but somehow also provides a dash of hope. Writing this essay allowed me to finally face my fears and push past the difficulty of discussing them. Choosing to write this story gave me an outlet to show that in every bad situation, a little light will always shine through. I hope that my courage to write this piece and share my story will allow others like me to talk about their struggles and face their fears.
On a Friday evening, in a restaurant surrounded by people talking, suddenly my mom pats on my back to make sure everything is okay with me. Her hands slowly started feeling my spine, and that is when she said, “Why can I feel the bones in your spine?” But we both thought that it was normal.

The following day, I felt that everything around me was dull and the atmosphere was suddenly dingy. I had a flu so my mom took me to the hospital and that is when everything started falling apart. The doctor who was checking up on me took a look at my back, and I will never forget the look on her face. Her smile disappeared and she started nodding her head, her facial expression giving it all away. “Your daughter has scoliosis,” she informed my mom without looking at my face. I was getting worried. Thoughts all over my head and questions started forming. My brain couldn’t handle the pressure and was going to explode. One question came out of me though, “Am I going to have to go through a surgery?” Her eyes met mine with her pupils slowly widening, her lips shrunk down, her eyebrows looked concerned as her entire facial expression replied to me without using words. I knew that I wasn’t going to like the answer. How did this happen? Why, God? I wanted to travel back in time . . . It was a moment of shock. Devastation. Misery.

After a couple of months, the doctors suggested wearing a back brace to help adjust the curve in my spine and therefore avoid going through a surgery. However, after four months of wearing that plastic annoying and life-wrecking brace, it was all for nothing. Twenty-two hours every day had gone to waste. The pain. The suffering. The melancholy.

After weeks of research, my parents decided we should go do the surgery in Germany. I didn’t know what or how to feel about my situation. Everywhere I went, frightening thoughts leaped into my head. Thoughts of me dying. That bothered me but not as much as how my parents would feel if they see me suffering and in pain. I wished things were different, but life isn’t as perfect as we want it to be.

When I first walked into the hospital a day before the surgery, everything around me felt fine, and I wasn’t scared at all. Once I entered a room to take a blood sample, I asked, “Is this the only blood sample you will be needing?” Then the nurse exclaimed in a warm tone, “Hopefully.” Hopefully to me sounded like yes which made me happy. Later they transferred us to the room I would be
spending most of my time in. In that room, there was a painting of a rainbow, which seemed to be painted by a hopeful kid. It had its many flaws, somewhat like me, making it all the more meaningful. Hope. It filled my life with colors just like the rainbow drawn—colors of laughter and joy. Looking at it made all the negative thoughts disappear.

The doctor entered the room with paper forms in his hands. He told my parents the consequences I might face during or after the surgery. The possible outcomes were very terrifying for my parents; however, I was still calm and didn’t think much about it. All I could see was my parents’ facial expressions while reading the forms, which included my getting into a coma, paralysis, anemia, and worst of all death. Even though they were supposed to worry me, I wasn’t even slightly affected. Instead, deep inside I felt useless in this life; I felt empty.

The day of the surgery was a nightmare for my parents. It was an eight-to-ten-hour procedure. Nurses came to take me to the preparation room and that’s when it hit me that I am actually going through with this. While they were escorting me, everyone around me was staring. The hospital suddenly became freezing. My parents were talking to me, but all I could hear was the sound of the wheels on my bed moving and squeaking, making me feel uncomfortable and scared. Finally, when we arrived to the preparation room, they covered me in a yellow blanket that made me feel warm and cozy. Until they wrapped me with two belts which made me feel trapped. That moment was the scariest in my life. I couldn’t move, and for some reason I couldn’t even talk. I was trapped both physically and mentally. After a while they took me to the surgery room where the doors went shut. My parents weren’t next to me anymore; there were no hands to hold on to. It felt like I was in a dark hole underground unable to escape from it. I was surrounded by nurses all wearing blue uniforms and masks. They applied stickers to monitor my heart beat, then one of the nurses told me while applying an oxygen mask, “Count to ten.” I started, “One, two, three, fou . . .” After three everything around me went blurry, then suddenly black.

I woke up with tubes coming out of my mouth and needles all over my arms and neck. My parents were talking to me, but I wasn’t listening to them. All I could really hear was the sound of the heart beat monitor. Everything around me was grey, and I felt nauseous. Visiting hours were over, so I watched my parents leave. I couldn’t sleep, but one of the nurses told me that if I ever feel pain to press a specific button. That button helped me sleep, and when I slept I
entered another dimension where everyone was happy with nothing to worry or think about. Until one of the nurses woke me up to take a pill. I thought I would swallow a pill with a cup of water; however, it wasn’t water. Once I swallowed the pill with whatever was in that cup, I needed to vomit. That was worse than being injected with multiple needles. I really hated that nurse after that. Later that day, I was transferred back into my room feeling awful. Dreadful. Odious.

A week later, my physiotherapist tried helping me up to attempt walking for the first time. That didn’t go very well. Once I stood up, I suddenly felt tired and then everything around me went blank. My hemoglobin had dropped to 6.3, when normally for a teenager it should be between 12 and 16. I remember lying in bed looking at my parents’ worried faces. Their eyes were empty as they tried to hold back tears so as to appear strong. But I could see through them; I felt the rain of their tears, and I slowly started tearing up.

The following week, the doctor came to check up on me and said, “You are good enough to leave now, we just need to do one last X-ray scan.” In my hospital room then everything around me was happy. I was excited to finally be able to inhale some fresh air and get the hospital smell out of my system. They took me to the X-ray room to make sure everything was fine. I will never forget that day. I was standing waiting for the doctor to adjust my back and that is when everything went black again. Into a new dimension, filled with darkness and no light to reach out to, not a single sound, death. I woke up with my mom and doctor holding me up. The doctor then informed us that I wasn’t fit to leave and that I had to stay for two more days. While they were escorting me back to my room on a wheel chair, the whole hospital felt gloomy and dull; everyone was staring at me which made me feel uncomfortable and abnormal. All the walls changed color from white to black in my head.

Finally, the day of my departure came and I was extremely excited and hopeful. Walking through the hallways of the hospital, everyone seemed happy around me. Smiles all over their faces, the walls were back to white and seemed like they were smiling at me. The painting that gave me faith was still there standing alone. I looked at it one last time and drew an image of a happy family in my head surrounded by a colorful atmosphere filled with joy. Walking to the exit door, happy faces surrounded me. Once I got to exit, the hospital smell slowly started fading away, and I finally saw the environment as it was supposed to be: trees all around me, and I could finally breathe. Everything felt normal again. I was free.
Yara Elgazar is an electrical engineering sophomore. Prior to the experience depicted in this story, she had always been in good health her whole life, having never broken any bones or gone through any surgical procedures. She never thought that she would experience something like this until she had a surgery. Her surgery has led her to grow a stronger connection with her parents and made her realize how important her family is in her life. This experience helped her truly know the depth of her parents’ love for her. She believes that young adults should not take that love for granted, but should hold on to it because it is the most powerful thing in the world.
Failure is not a choice; now, it seems so far.
Do I surrender to the voice whispering “Give up your star”? 

What is the fight for again? I’m done. My passion is missing, all gone.

But isn’t it worth it to remember, the journey along the way— in the strong winds of September, and the burning sun in May?

And now, eventually covered in dust, I open my eyes to the person I trust.

Mighty fire, give me your all in this endless maze, regardless of the times I fall, for on my star I fix my gaze.

The passion boils as strong as ever, and my star dazzles forever.

It is not hard; it was me who fought for the crown. I might have been scarred, but nothing can slow me down.

Leen AlNouri, Class of 2022, is majoring in electrical and computer engineering. Her hobbies include writing and drawing.
This piece is dedicated to the memory of all those who lost their land, home and lives in Palestine, to all those children who have not had the chance to live a peaceful life, and to those who are still suffering from the violent oppression by the Zionist entity. They said “The old will die, and the young will forget.” We Palestinians are still here, still fighting, still standing with all insistence to get our country back. Palestine WILL be free, from the river to the sea.
The Keys to Our House

As a Palestinian, I have always been told that Palestine is a beautiful country with a rich culture and heritage that links everyone together. Everyone lived in harmony and peace, and they relied on agriculture to get their food. They grew olives, beans, pumpkins, figs, grapes, zucchini etc. My grandparents were born and raised in Ramallah with this culture. They would tell me stories about how my grandmother, Siham, used to grow olives and figs in her backyard, and how my grandfather, Hassan, would help his father in building houses.

They would also tell me stories about how it all changed in 1947 to 1949 when the Israeli forces took over a big part of Palestine and forcibly kicked out about 750,000 Palestinians, calling them refugees. This is called “The Nakba,” which also destroyed more than 500 villages and changed the name of cities and villages to Hebrew instead of Arabic. Palestinians still had hope of getting their country back. 19 years later in 1967, Israel carried out a second wave of expulsions of Palestinians without any hope of returning back this time, they were forcibly displaced and got called bailers or emigrants. This is called “The Naksa.”

I recently realized that I had never asked my grandparents what they went through at that time. So I asked them, and they told me the story that I am about to tell everyone as I am sure that a lot of people have heard the historical part of it, but no one knows the details and struggles that the Palestinians went and still go through.

On 5 June 1967, my grandmother was twenty years old when Israeli forces came to her village and told her and her family that they had to leave their house and their belongings, as they wanted to search each house that might be hiding members of the Palestinian army, Hamas. They took their house keys as they were told it will only last for a couple of days to a week. My grandmother, her two brothers, as well as her aunt walked ten kilometers from Ramallah until they got to her uncle’s friend’s house, Ibrahim in Beit Luqya. They all shared one room, and did not bring any extra clothes or extra food with them. Ibrahim had a bag of flour in his house that they made bread out of all the time, but they used it wisely knowing that this bag of flour could last for ten to fourteen days, maximum.

Two days passed by with no news of whether they should go back to their house or not. After a week they were ready to return to their house, as they had had enough. While they were walking by the narrow roads of their village, everything was different. The forces have destroyed all the houses, some were destroyed by bulldozers
while others were destroyed by mines. But my grandmother kept reassuring her siblings that their house would still be there.

As they walked closer to their neighborhood and approached their home, my grandmother was so happy to see her house, only for a few moments later to look at this huge explosion of their house. Everyone stood in silence with terrified looks; their house, their memories, their childhood everything had blown up in front of their eyes. My grandmother was standing there with her house key still in her innocent hands. People next to the place of the explosion got injured and nobody knew what to do or how to help; everyone was frightened. They had to go back to Beet Luqya and stay in that small room until they could figure out where they can go.

In the meantime, on 6 June 1967, my grandfather Hassan and his brother Mohammad were 21 years old. Being young men, they were considered the perfect age to join the Palestinian army, Hamas, and therefore the Israeli forces’ goal was to take captive of all the male youths they thought would be the dangerous ones—which is exactly what happened with Hassan and his brother and many other young men. They loaded the men in pickup trucks, around 45 men in each car, and so they were all on top of each other. Hassan and Mohammad were terrified. As they were walking in the hallway of the jail, on their right they could see young kids getting beaten up by women who were in the Israeli forces, and they both knew that their turn was next. Once they got to their cell, they were beaten with sticks, begging for the beating to stop, but to no avail. The forces were taking turns in beating them up; each Palestinian would be beaten by groups of men and women for two hours, and then they moved to the next person in line. They made sure to bring women most of the time as this would make the men feel more embarrassed and ashamed.

Their innocent screams were shaking the jail, but no one was listening. Their voices were so loud everyone outside could hear them, yet the forces refused to stop. The beating was nonstop; it did not matter if it was day or night. Three days later someone agreed to hear their side of the story: their father was in the Jordanian army therefore they were obligated to fulfill this legacy and join the Jordanian army so it would be impossible for them to be in Hamas. And since the Israeli army focused on men joining Hamas, they believed them after seeing their IDs. The forces promised them that they will get their freedom back and will let them go. My grandfather and his brother were so happy and could not believe it; they would finally get to go back to their house and this torture would be over. But all their dreams were crashed when they were they must stay for
a month. This is the injustice they went through, but no one helped or moved a limb. They were some of the lucky ones whom the forces believed, but other Palestinians kept getting beaten up, and some still are!

A month later when my grandfather and his brother were let out, they wanted to go back to their family. They were also lucky to find their family alive living in a small place, in which they lived in for about a year. They were happy to be free and to be declared innocent by the forces.

After a year, my grandparents’ families decided to move to Jordan as it was the safest place. Although it might sound that walking to Jordan is very far away, it was actually very close, and most Palestinians would often spend weekends in Jordan. My grandfather, for example, would visit his father in the Jordanian army every weekend.

Years passed and both of my grandparents ended up living in the same city in Jordan, so my grandfather went to Siham’s father and asked for her hand in marriage. Her grandmother refused and stood in the way, but her father was okay with it. My grandfather kept trying and they finally got married and had their own house in Jordan. Years later they had my mother and her brothers. They are still living there with the keys to their old house in Palestine hung on the first wall you see when you enter their house.

Reem Almajdoubeh is a petroleum engineering sophomore at Texas A&M at Qatar.
My Sand Clock

It's true; life really is generous to those who pursue their destiny.
—Paulo Coelho

She sneaked down the stairs in the middle of the night, wearing a blue satin nightdress, tempting the sky, she sat on her knees, carried her faith in her heart, looked up and prayed for the first time in her life. “Help me,” she said with sincere tears and a beating heart, “send me a sign, I need a direction.” Then the magic happened, and the sign came in no time. That was the moment when Julia Roberts, in the movie Eat, Pray, Love turned her face to her husband in the middle of the night and said, “I want a divorce.” That was my first “Aha” moment.

I finally had the courage to flip over the sand clock, an item I've always considered as a decorative artifact kept on the nightstand next to my bed. In no time a new chapter in my life began with shades of blue and sometimes black, but definitely not gray. I thought about the trinity of life, the balance that I lacked for so many years between body, heart, and soul. The effect of the past two decades was quite harmful: the lack of sleep, the fear, the numbed and tamed soul. Nevertheless, I sensed that the new sand grains would provide the magic and heal me in no time.

I left it all behind and drove my car to my new home in Al Areen, a compound in one of Doha’s new neighborhoods. In Arabic, Al Areen means the lion’s den and somehow that uplifting name made me think of what a protective role that flipping of the sand clock forced me to take. A pickup was driving ahead carrying all my belongings: my life, my memories, my son’s little bicycle, his toys, our swing, and my grieving sofa. We arrived after a twenty-minute drive, or maybe, more accurately, after twenty years of loss. I was feeling scared yet happy, excited yet confused. I then looked up and smiled; I knew God is watching over me for he’s always been my support and my strength. Another sign to cherish, another “Aha” moment.

She dwelt among the ancient paths of Italy, wandering around the romantic city, learning the wild language, and healing her body with colorful pizzas and pastas sparkled with basil and cherry tomatoes. She enjoyed the infamous Italian cuisine and sipped the magical espresso. She was in heaven meeting new and interesting people, including her own self. With a few more pounds gained, she traveled to India, longing for some food for the soul, seeking purity and forgiveness. She needed to forgive her ex-husband to free herself from the grudges that she carried in her heart. She left India to Bali
feeling stable and content, looking for her heart in the beautiful green valley of Abud. There she met the fortune teller who unveiled her new destined love that was waiting for her in a country far away.

“I need to let go, and I need to clear my heart and set it free before it may ever be occupied again,” a loud inner voice traveled from my mind to my heart as I carefully watched the sand grains in my time clock slowly shift from one chamber to the other. The journey of forgiveness had begun, and it was not easy for me nor was it a quick fix—taking three long years. A lot of work and effort was put into that healing phase, starting with self-development and ending with a Life Coaching and a Practitioner Counseling diploma. The butterfly was ready to leave its cocoon and fly up in the sky, reaching to other people, jumping from one flower to another. I lent my hands and ears to those in need, and that was my ultimate cause of happiness. I then realized that that was the real freedom and not the divorce itself. I was able to stand up and rise again despite the all opposing and harsh winds in my face, but the winds of fortune were stronger and finally prevailed. The addiction to pain was gone; I safely reached the welcoming shores of my new destination and immediately marked a new milestone with my own hands on the golden beach of my life.

As the sand grains kept slowly dropping from one chamber to another for five years, my destiny crossed with the right man who ironically wasn’t even living in the same country. I was then blessed to have him as my husband for the rest of my life. He took me to Bali for our honeymoon, and I visited the very same fortune teller in Abud. Like Julia, happy and content of what I had achieved in terms of fullness, my sand clock and I stood to celebrate the beauty of what life has to give.
Part of Me Always Knew

Throughout my entire life I have wondered whether the “right guy” is out there for each and every one of us, and now I think about how silly it sounds and that there is no such thing.

In my junior year in high school, I fell in love, and I really wish I hadn’t. It is both the worst and the best feeling ever. He made me feel good even though he wasn’t really always that nice to me, treating me badly most of the time. He would talk to me only when he wanted to and called me annoying when he wasn’t in the mood for a chat with me. He made me feel horrible about myself, and I started questioning my personality. He blocked me every time he argued with me, and I would end up texting him and apologizing even though it was completely his fault. I remember when he called me a b**** and blocked me for three months straight because I called him a kid for acting dramatic and taking a situation seriously when it wasn’t that deep. But having him around made me feel good in my head because being in love with him just made me want him more every day. I was mentally attached to him and couldn’t let him go despite my crying on nights when he didn’t text or acknowledge my existence. However, the best thing about being close to him was when he introduced me to his friend, Adam.

I honestly don’t know where to begin. Our first chat was through a phone call and I will never forget how great it was to talk to him for more than two hours straight. We were laughing for most of the call and talked about our likes and dislikes. Hearing him talk without even knowing what he looks like was more than enough for me. Talking to him on the phone for the rest of my life is more than enough to satisfy me since I felt comfortable sharing everything about my life to him. He made me feel alive and that I have a purpose in this life.

The first time I saw Adam in person was one of the best nights of my life. I met him at a party hosted by a mutual friend, Diana. Surprise was drawn on both of our faces since the meeting wasn’t planned. When I first saw him, my whole body shrank, and I could feel my hands getting clammy and my heart started beating really quickly. Not only could I feel my heart beats, but I could hear them too. He was wearing ripped light blue denim jeans with a creamy white top and a Hermes black leather belt. What really fascinates me about a guy is when they have good taste in fashion, which is a bonus for me since that is all I talk about. Once he got closer to me in a room filled with people dancing and singing, everyone around me went silent and all of a sudden, they disappeared except for him. I was
slowly running out of breath. His hazel brown eyes sparkled and his long curly brown beautiful hair was tied in a bun. Every detail about him was perfect, better than I imagined. He came running to me and every single step he took made my heart beat accelerate. His arms were suddenly wrapped around me softly and then he squeezed me so tightly I almost couldn’t breathe. His smooth face lightly touched my right cheek, and that’s when I thought I was dreaming. I will never forget that moment. Most of our outings were in a café where the vibe was really perfect and our conversations were never ending. The café was crowded most of the time but it was our spot where we talked about everything and nothing, filling me with laughter and joy. I really thanked God that he was around most of the time in my junior year. He was my best friend.

During senior year... well things didn’t go as expected. Our mutual friend wasn’t really our mutual friend anymore. So we kind of drifted apart. We only met twice throughout the entire year, which saddens me every time I think about it. Our friendship was so pure and great. Why did things have to end badly between us? Why did we drift apart because someone else isn’t friends with him anymore? What does that have to do with me? Everything really got messed up in my head. I kept asking myself questions, thinking about how it might’ve been my fault. Nothing really brought us that close again.

By the end of senior year, I had totally forgotten about him and I enjoyed the year while it lasted. Until I saw him at his graduation. He looked so different even though it had only been a couple of months, but seeing him sitting on that chair on stage, laughing with his friends waiting for his name to be called out was an amazing feeling. An angelic smile spread all over his face like melted Nutella on a perfectly cooked pancake always changes my mood and makes me feel like I’m in heaven. When they called out his name, we all cheered for him, and I saw that smile again. The smile that kills me. The smile that I will never forget. The smile that kept me alive.

We thought about catching up before he left for university abroad. I thought it would be normal and nothing extreme would happen. I obviously thought wrong. Seeing him just brought back all the memories. We met up at Lagoona Mall and kept walking around the outdoor area. Talking for hours, we both realized that we had made a mistake distancing ourselves apart that year. I was devastated and torn apart. The thought of him leaving gave me chills and a minor panic. How will he not be around anymore? How will I survive? What if he forgets about me? My brain felt like it was going to explode because of my thoughts. The day I saw him to say goodbye will always remain a memory, both a good and bad one. We met up at a
quiet café in an outdoor area, recalling memories from last year, and that is when it hit me that he is not going to be here anymore and the only person who makes me feel like I have a purpose in this life is actually leaving. Saying goodbye to him was the hardest and most painful part. We both stood up, and I stared at his beautiful hazel brown eyes that changed color when the sun struck. His staring at me for 2 full minutes made me shiver from the inside. He wrapped his arms around me, and I could even smell the cologne I bought for him. At that moment I just wanted to stay there forever.

I was in an Uber surrounded by black shielded windows and the whole area was dull and depressing, as well as the songs I played. The lyrics of “Falling” by Trevor Daniels: “My last made me feel like I would never try again, but when I saw you, I felt something I never felt” really hurt. I cried the whole ride back home alone, and I have never cried as much before. The feeling was disgusting. The idea of him being in another country and not being around me or not being able to hug him and see those angel eyes anymore really crashed my brain. Even when we stopped talking senior year, I wasn't that sad because I always knew he was around Doha with his friends. I thought that one day everything will be resolved and go back to normal. Now that he is actually leaving everything was going to change. Part of me always knew that.

I was right. His leaving did affect our friendship. At this point I just started questioning everything. “Why, God, why did he have to leave?” After he left everything went dull. His presence had ignited every positive side about me. Having him around was always fun, and now all I do is think about him everywhere I go, but mostly at home before I sleep since no one is around to distract me. I thought about our two a.m. calls, the way he looks at me, his hair, his eyes, everything about him is perfect. He always manages his way into my thoughts when I am at the university. While listening to my calculus professor giving a lecture about volumes, at first my eyes and brain are focusing on the white board and the black marker integrating formulas, but then he finds his way into my thoughts. It is frustrating and annoying. I want to enjoy my time at the university without having to think about him.

Why did he stop texting? Why wasn't he checking up on me? Why do I have to keep checking up on him when he doesn't really seem to care about me anymore? I really miss him. I miss him so much. Around him I could be myself and talk about anything that bothered me, and I never had to pretend to be someone else. He always boosted my confidence and never let me think less of myself. He really brought out the best in me and always kept me going. I trusted
him with my life. He was the only guy who really and genuinely cared about me. He would check up on me when he realized I was acting weird through text or not talking to him at all. I was always comfortable sharing things with him. He was like a safe place to me.

Now that he is gone, I have nothing to look forward to. Well, I have my education, family, and friends; however, I don't want to continue my life as a normal person since a part of me is missing.

I hope he texts me again. I hope he checks up on me like he used to. I really wish a lot of things were different, but part of me always knew.
The Moment

It’s already way past 4:30 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon and she knows she should feel excited to call it a day, go home, enjoy the weekend. But this isn’t the case for her. It has been a long day and her body and mind are exhausted—she knows the longer she delays going home, the worse it will be. So, she gathers her things, she once more checks on the plants in her office and switches off the lights, which she knows will switch back on as soon as the door swings closed, but she does it anyway. The hallway is mostly deserted, and she walks past her coworkers shut doors who left hours ago—much more eager to get out of the building, to go home, to go out, to have fun. Not her.

She makes her way to the elevator hoping she won’t run into anyone to avoid having to exchange pleasantries. She doesn’t particularly like small talk, these types of conversations feel forced and more about acknowledging the other person’s presence than anything else. Regardless about how she feels she still engages in them because she doesn’t want to be that person. Putting on a smile is especially difficult for her at the start of the weekend. Mentally she runs through possible answers to what she anticipates someone might ask about her weekend plans. She dreads this question. She stopped planning—there is no point. Even though she won’t say it out loud and there is only a teeny-tiny part of herself who admits this, but she lost the willingness to try. She doesn’t want to carry on like this—this has been one of the most difficult revelations she has come to. Am I admitting to failure? Failing at life? But what do I have to lose? If I don’t do anything now, what is the point of my life?

She gets to the elevator and presses the button located to its right on the blank white wall. No one is in sight. She is relieved . . . but not fully because she still hasn’t made her way to the parking garage. Ding—the elevator doors open. No one is inside. She rushes in and presses the “0” button quickly, the doors close. She holds her breath praying that nobody else will ride along with her. She feels the velocity and vibration of the elevator and then again feels a burst of relief when it doesn’t slow down to make a stop at any of the other levels—she knows she is going straight to the basement.

In a few quick steps she reaches her car which is surrounded by emptiness. She gets in and closes the door shut—she is pleased. She exhales. She relaxes when going through the instinctive motions of settling herself in this safe place. A place of freedom, solitude, and control. She plugs in her phone to connect it to the car’s audio system to listen to her favorite music on her ride home.
Unconsciously she buckles her seat belt, checks her surroundings and drives towards the exit. As she drives up the ramp, *Ain't No Sunshine* starts playing and she turns up the volume. Although she is tone-deaf, she sings along. She doesn't listen to the lyrics but mindlessly repeats them. The song becomes her anthem. *I know. I know. I know.* She knows. She sings at the top of her lungs because then she doesn't have to process her thoughts, her feelings.

There are more cars on the road than on other workdays it is Thursday after all. She doesn't mind the traffic—on the contrary, it prolongs her journey which means she gets a few more minutes to herself. But home is not far.

Within a few minutes she reaches her compound, she lifts her hand to greet the security guard who waves her through. As she turns towards the driveway leading up to the house she slows down and notices his car. Mechanically she swivels the steering wheel to park to the left of his car, switches off the engine, unplugs her phone and inhales deeply—bracing herself. As she grabs her purse from the backseat, she puts on a smile and walks towards the entrance. She smiles even though she knows, no one is at the other side of the door to greet her. She hears *Daniel Tiger* running on the TV in the family room. As soon as she turns the keys to lock the door, she hears her husband call their daughter’s name, “SARAHHHHHH. It's time to have dinner. Switch off the TV and come!”

She kicks off her shoes and leaves them next to the shoe rack, she intuitively places her purse next to the staircase, its usual resting place until after dinner. Before entering the kitchen, she escapes one last time to the restroom to wash up and takes a long look at the mirror. She doesn't recognize the person looking at her. *Who is this stranger? Where did she come from? Why is she so sad? Why does this other me feel so small, so alone?*

In the hallway she runs into Sarah who seems overjoyed to see her. She bends down to her level, opens her arms and embraces her tightly. This feels so good, but it also ends so quickly. She appreciates the moment—she knows this is the most affection she will be given today. She looks at her daughter's face and sees the stories bubbling up underneath the surface. But Sarah is catapulted into her place by the voice that orders her to *sit down for god's sakes.*

She enters the kitchen and monotonously says “hello” as she does every day; it is not reciprocated. He is on the phone talking to someone else—not another woman—but someone he works with. He hustles to get the food on the table, which he lovingly prepared.
and proudly shows off. She sits down in her seat to Sarah’s left. She watches as he shuffles more and more vegetable cannelloni onto her plate, more than she should or even wants to eat. She wants to say “Stop. That’s enough.” but she stays quiet. What is the point? He is still preoccupied with the phone call and is more concerned about arranging the pasta rolls on their daughter’s plate. She silently picks up her cutlery and starts to eat. She looks at her plate and intently focusses on maneuvering parts of the cannelloni stuffing onto her fork because she doesn’t want to look at him. At one point he casually asks, “how was your day?” Without looking up, without hesitation, without having to think, she responds fine—the word, the lie, easily rolls off her tongue.

He doesn’t read between the lines and is already onto the next topic, complaining about a late delivery, which will delay an imminent product launch. Problems always seem to find their way to him. He asks her for advice on what to do next. What he should do to fix this. His questions, he doesn’t realize are rhetorical. He never waits for a response or an answer. She has known this for a while, so she stopped making an effort to contribute to the conversation—it hasn’t made a difference. So, she sits there uncomfortably, enduring his monologue, eating away at the pasta rolls in front of her, which at that moment are the only comfort she has.

Every now and then, Sarah attempts to say what has happened in her world . . . but her attempts are shut down by “Show some respect. Can’t you see that your parents are having a conversation right now.” She cringes inside. Shame rushes through her body. “I am betraying the person I am supposed to protect.” Yet again, she doesn’t say anything; experience has taught her it’s better to let this go now than to make it worse by disputing his statement. A few more minutes and they—Sarah and her—can go upstairs and be on their own.

In Sarah’s bedroom she and Sarah get to be the people they want to be. Eagerly Sarah tells her about how she balanced and rolled herself off an old tire on the playground today. Then it’s time to start their nightly ritual of washing up, brushing their teeth, reading a bedtime story, saying a prayer and lastly expressing gratitude for a happy moment from that day. They come together for an extra-long loving hug and two kisses, one on each cheek, before they tell each other “I love you, sleep well and sweet dreams.” She turns towards the door and before reaching the threshold, she lets the “happy” mask fall off.

In her bedroom, she curls up on the left side of bed taking up a third of the mattress—trying to squeeze herself as close to the edge
as possible. She switches on her laptop and thoughtlessly opens Netflix. She presses play on what is coming up on her list. She is not interested in watching but if she doesn’t occupy her mind with something, she has to talk to herself. She doesn’t want to have that conversation with herself. Not today. She doesn’t want to face reality, she wants to drown the tiny voice within herself because she knows when she starts to listen, she will have to muster up the courage to make a change. So, she tells herself: My life is not bad. God damn it. Be grateful. Again, she tells herself: Be thankful for what you have and be happy with your life. Then the voice that has been quiet for so long hesitantly asks “BUT TILL WHEN? How long do you carry on? How long do you intend to keep pretending?” She shuts the computer and decides to listen to the voice today. If today isn’t a good time, then when? She decides it is never the right time, so she might as well take a small step towards what she secretly has known for so long—she decides to listen.
Lost and Found, Again . . .

As I sit here to reflect on the past four years, I cannot help but think how this piece brings me full circle. I wrote my first Best Writing piece during my first semester at university and I write this last piece during my last semester in undergrad. My first year here was filled with great uncertainty as I adjusted to a new environment, but slowly as the years grew onto me, so did my accessibility to all the things I have received from my time here. I was blessed with opportunities and experiences like nothing I had seen before. It was like I was unlocking level after level as the semesters progressed.

For me, having been a transfer student, and having to start all over again, had left me in a depressed state even though I was determined to make it really count this time round. I mean it really is not an everyday affair that you get to start your life at university all over again.

I started my journey at TAMUQ very lost and in many pieces, confused. Over the years I picked up the pieces of myself and started to find myself as the puzzle inched to completion. I knew that this was not a puzzle that was supposed to be complete by the end of my degree like it is some senior design project. This half-completed puzzle is the mere foundational project to help my journey inwards, throughout life. This for me couldn't have been possible without the constant self-reflections I had about my purpose, my growth and myself as well as learning and building a strong understanding and consciousness of God, Allah, for without Him, I wouldn't be where I am today.

I was in the place many of you are and I have left it feeling a lot more whole. No one in this world will share the same journey as you. I have felt lost so many times, that being lost has become a well-known feeling to me, but the journey goes on and I continue to find myself again and again. The journey is not supposed to end, but rather, it's supposed to evolve and morph into a multitude of things as you walk across life. Its okay to feel lost and confused at many moments in your life so long as you don't stop working on yourself, for an opening is on its way and things will start falling into place beautifully. Trust in yourself.

As I leave TAMUQ, an Aggie alumni forever, I am leaving this small piece of me here through Best Writing, because not only did TAMUQ play a significant part in my life, but I, too, have been a contributor to life at TAMUQ.
As a member of the proud Class of 2020, I do thank my professors and this university for providing me with so much—for allowing me to be in a place where I was able to discover myself and my potential. It is truly a place in which I was fated to be.
I posted these reflections on my socials as a way of venting off to “someone” as I've been through some low points. The purpose of this compilation is to tell people that not everyone is not as happy or bright as they may seem at first. And to those who are going through a tough period: it will get better, take it from someone who has been so low and on the brink of death before having to turn to toxic means of distraction that led to further self-destruction such as excessive use of meds to feel numb. This ain't a contest, but the point is that it WILL get better, eventually. However, the past two weeks have been some of the most unproductive weeks in my life, because of personal issues that literally rendered me dysfunctional. It's okay to be unproductive (at times), but it's NOT okay to walk down the path I did back then.
Remnants of My Past

I'd like to share some relics from my past. Anyone who has gone through tough times may appreciate these bits and pieces.

December 2019.
Deals, Friendships and Life. Self-documentation on a business portfolio. Since I was in high school, I played CSGO during my free time. From this game emerged a newly created synthetic economy. I got interested, delved into the market, and spotted an opportunity to make some money on the side. People paid real money for intangible items, and I found that hilarious, but I understood the market and why people buy such things—mostly for social status and show, but rarely ever as an investment.

Early 2014.
Having started from almost nothing, I worked through nights negotiating deals with other traders on items valued in the $50-$100 ballpark. It took a lot of time to understand the market, a lot of practice and skill was required to succeed in this arena. I used this time to focus on honing the craft rather than make a profit.

After building a large network of clients by doing small-time trades, I turned to higher-end rare collectibles valued in the thousands of dollars. Profit margins made in this area have exceeded 90% and often involved information asymmetry exploitation (known as “sharking” in the biz, don’t look at me like that, it’s about the survival of the fittest :/). I reached out to my network to target potential buyers and to maximize profit based on sentiment, which often requires a fair amount of experience in the field and strong negotiating abilities.

2017-2018.
Because I suffered from mental health issues and went through a blackout phase, I stopped actively trading in 2017 prior to complete retirement in the summer of the following year. This was done in favor of allocating more time to studies and self-improvement, as having to keep tabs on so many clients from very different time-zones did quite a number on my daily functions.

Today.
Looking back on it now, this has been a great learning experience (despite having some negative impact on life and studies). I’ve made many friends and connections all over the world throughout this journey. I now have friends from Sweden, Norway, Russia, Denmark, Romania, Germany, U.S., Canada, Russia, South Africa, China, Japan,
the GCC, Bolivia, Brazil and the list just keeps going. People from all cultures and backgrounds, young and old. I have met some of the most amazing people and been badly betrayed by others. I have hung out with guys on Discord/TeamSpeak and played Cards Against Humanity (online) with others. I lived through the drama between trading groups, had two of my trading partners die in tragic incidents, manipulated a niche market, witnessed the crypto bubble, and made loads of profit.

It all makes for a life-changing experience. It was no easy task, neither was it a smooth-sailing journey or one without risk, loss, blood and tears. Okay maybe not blood, but definitely losses and tears.

Post 2: Publicly available excerpts of my recovery journal. Viewable via personal IG Story Highlights.

December 2017 – January 2018
“Somehow survived a bad car crash, will be back here soon.”
“I don't share this kinda stuff often, but I think it's a good thing to do”
“I've been having issues that has greatly affected me mentally and physically”
“Since the age of 9, I've been subject to continued bullying, discrimination and abuse.”
“Things went to the worst afterwards, and I'm not willing to describe what happened to me at that time out of fear for consequential mental breakdowns, which I've had a lot over the past 3 years.”
“I've developed extreme hatred towards those who scarred me for life as a 9 or so year old child. And I've been contemplating my past not too long ago.”
“I have my own history of suicide attempts, family issues and runaways.”
“But I've been diagnosed a couple of months ago with severe depression, PTSD and I'm currently being diagnosed for ADHD. I'm currently undergoing a long term treatment that could last for years and I'm not certain of its efficacy.”
“I'll try being more open about this now, for it may have a positive effect on my mental health. Cheers.”

Post 3: Public statement regarding recovery. 20 May 2019, 5 p.m. AST. So far, my life in the transition-to-adulthood phase has been pretty rocky to say the least. That is, it has been going downhill since I got admitted to university back in 2015 all the way through to the middle of 2017 - with that year being the year where I hit rock bottom -. I won't go in depth with what caused it but there has been several stress factors (non-university related) and the uni life just didn't help it at all and was acting as a catalyst to self-destructive
behavior instead. In short; I am familiar with the root of it all, but there is no way to get rid of it.

I tried hearkening at every advice that came in my way, and the problem is that most people don't know the core of my problems; the demon that I've had to fight for at least a decade now.

At some point in the early summer of 2017, the toxicity from within has started to severely affect my relationship with the people close to me and I wasn't functioning normally anymore. Soon after, I broke down, pushed everyone away and created a void between me and everybody else.

A couple of weeks after, I sought help, and decided to *invest in myself* and went for a major change in mindset. It took baby steps I guess, starting from Project PH03N1X; a PC setup project I worked on since I was a kid. Later on, I went out and traveled around the world, from Europe to Malaysia, where I've linked up with old friends, online business partners, and family members that I haven't met in several years. And I'd like to thank my dad for helping me get the chance to live through these experiences.

Fast forward to Q2 2019, I'm feeling better than ever, the fight is far from over, but the air is much clearer now. A major storm has passed, and I am still standing. To all the people who have supported me and been there for me when I needed them most, thank you.

Looking back at how I was two years ago vs. now, I could easily say that it has been one hell of a ride and I've come a long way, yet I still got a lot to learn and explore.
Bless you all.

Life was trash two years ago, now it’s (a wee bit) chill, cheers.

Epilogue
Continuation of Post 2 (Publicly available excerpts of my recovery journal).
September 2019
“Finally came through withdrawal. Been clean for a couple of weeks now.”
“After 27 months of being drug dependent.”

Selman Tabet is an HBKU computer engineering student who first joined TAMUQ in the Fall 2015 semester. He is also a retired trader and a music enthusiast. Selman is into dark humor, video games, technology, and memes in general.
She has crept into my being as whispers never to be ignored. She has been an abiding companion despite my adamant resistance. She has hidden in the deep recesses of my soul, ready to squash my faltering confidence during the pivotal moments of my life. She has known how to destroy the spark of confidence in me. For that, I have treated Her with utmost disdain. I would definitely obliterate Her if I had a choice, but She has run through my veins, giving me mental and physical distress, making me disbelieve myself. I can't remember how many times She extinguished my flickering hope. However, I have a perfect recollection of a few occasions when I couldn’t do anything but go head to head with Her.
Close Encounters

“You’re not beautiful.”
I remember noticing Her innuendos when I was a teenager. I am sure She noticed that I started to be conscious of how I looked and that I was longing for someone to appreciate me. Not my father, mother, brother, sister, or friend, but SOMEONE! I think it’s what most teenagers would wish for, or maybe it was just me. However, She kept reiterating the statement, “You’re not beautiful.” Not only would she tell me that I was unappealing, but she would also make me feel very conscious about my skin color. I guess she knew I had this obsession with lightening my brown skin because she would see me steal my mother’s Papaya whitening soap from her small cabinet.

Ridiculous as it may sound, I struggled for years to look in the mirror because I was avoiding Her intimations that I wouldn’t find someone special who could appreciate me. Unexpectedly, at the age of fourteen, a rare opportunity came my way when I attended a social dance organized by the church where I belonged. Although I was anticipating that no one would dance with me, I still participated in the social because I would see my friends there. As I was sitting with my head bowed down because I didn't want to pity myself for not having an invitation from young men to dance with them, I avoided their gaze. Then I heard a cheerful voice, “Can I dance with you?” When I raised my head, I saw a knight with shining armor who could sweep me off my feet and save me from feeling isolated and lonely. That night made me realize that I could be worthy of someone’s attention, care, and love. That night, he treated me like I was the most beautiful young lass he had ever met. That night, my self-doubt dissipated. I felt victorious.

After a few months, we became sweethearts. His love for me boosted my morale. His soothing and sweet words made me feel treasured, which eventually drowned Her voice. I became more comfortable looking in the mirror. And I had started appreciating my brown skin. “Don’t worry about the scars that you have on your legs. They are your treasures,” he would console me whenever I complained about not being able to wear skirts without wearing a pantyhose. I couldn’t believe that his arrival could give me the mental strength to overpower Her. “You failed!” I grinned with sheer satisfaction. I felt so good that I lived confidently for a while. My exhilaration, which came from being in love and being loved, caused Her voice to become less distinct by the day. I confess having her muted was liberating and magical. I thought I would live peacefully for long, until she broke her silence again, with more disturbing comments.
“You’re too ambitious!”
While some of my fourth-year classmates had already taken college entrance examinations even before our graduation, I resigned myself to having a high school diploma knowing that getting a college degree would be farfetched. “You’re poor. You’re too ambitious in aspiring for a college degree. Your parents didn’t even finish elementary, and your sister was just a high school graduate,” She hinted to me. For a person like me who grew up in a slum and who had already accepted my ill-fated life, I never challenged Her judgment. Just like my elder sister who immediately looked for a job after her high school graduation to help our parents with household expenses, I had no reservations charting the same path.

However, a month after my graduation from high school, I saw a glimmer of hope when my sister told me that she would send me to college with the condition that I would choose a state college or university only. She confessed that she wouldn’t be able to afford to send me to a private institution because of her meager salary. While she was talking to me, I could see her earnest desire to fulfill her dream of having someone from our family obtain a college degree through me. I couldn’t believe that she had more faith in me that I had in myself. My heart leaped with joy, realizing that I could be the first member of our family who would have a college diploma.

As soon as my sister and I finished talking, I immediately gathered information where I could enroll. At first, I visited Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila because I wanted to have an AB Journalism degree. I wanted to be a newscaster or a news reporter. Sadly, the university had already stopped accepting examinees for the entrance exam. I had no choice but to go to the Philippine Normal University, a premier teaching institution, to inquire. I didn’t want to be a teacher, but I had to get in to pursue my dream of being a professional. While I was in the queue waiting for my turn to register for the last scheduled entrance exam, She questioned, “How can you pass the entrance exam? You have limited exposure to English. Your math skills are horrible.” There She went again as if I didn’t know what She was trying to tell me. I knew that I didn’t have the needed knowledge and skills to tackle the tedious college life, but I didn’t want to give up on my dream nor my family’s. Despite Her incessant innuendos, I bravely took the entrance exam, even with very little hope of passing it. It was a make or break moment for me, I thought. I couldn’t remove from my head the fact that my family’s financial welfare in the future would heavily depend on me. Knowing that I should do well was terrifying. I was hoping against hope that I would make it.
After two months of restlessness waiting for my entrance exam results, I finally received a letter from the university informing me that I passed. “Wow! It’s unbelievable that I got in,” I blurted with tears of joy. I saw the glistening yet misty eyes of my mother and sister as I read the letter to them. At that moment, it dawned upon me that my college education was indeed a family affair. The voice that usually came to destroy my faith was suddenly hushed. That day helped me gain greater resolve not to listen to Her, but to believe in myself.

After four long years of tedious college work, I finally graduated with distinction, making me think that my vengeance for Her biting remarks was sweet. Months later, I passed the Philippine Board Examination for Teachers. I felt my streak of luck had finally come. I got employed in a science high school. The school gave me lots of opportunities, which made my teaching qualifications robust. I coached students to join journalism contests, and they won several of them. I conducted in-service journalism training for both students and teachers. I felt I was ready to rule the world with all the good things happening in my life. I thought nothing could ever squash my high spirit and my growing confidence until I had to make a life-changing decision in 2009.

“You’re incompetent.”

In February 2009, I left the Philippines to be with my husband in Qatar. As soon as I stepped out of the airplane, I immediately recognized that She was with me. I couldn’t conceal from Her the fact that I was carrying my luggage full of self-doubt and uncertainties. Like the Taal Volcano, which became dormant for quite a while, She exploded and spewed anxiety and insecurity, causing me to be physically sick for four months. I tried to silence Her by telling myself that I would be just fine. She would always remind me of the glaring truth that I wouldn’t get teaching opportunities in Qatar because of my nationality. I remember telling my husband my willingness to take any job, so we could financially support our family. I finally got hired by Qatar Foundation for an admin assistant position. At that time, I put aside my intention to be part of a school or a university. “You won’t be able to practice your profession here. You are incompetent to teach English because you are not a native speaker.” I acknowledged Her point as I would usually see advertisements for English teaching jobs requiring applicants to be native speakers. Whenever I would see the phrase “native speaker,” I knew I had lost my chance already. My growing fear of not having a native-like pronunciation engulfed me, making me avoid long conversations with native speakers. Such a requirement stuck in my head, making me feel that the career I had built in the Philippines for years became
irrelevant and useless. I realized that all the good experiences which I had and the trust and the confidence of my colleagues and superiors for more than twenty years could only be appreciated and revered in my home country, the Philippines. I felt frustrated, depressed, and defeated.

“Bring it on.”

Working for more than three years as an admin assistant, I had already settled my feelings about not applying for any teaching job and simply enjoying my time doing admin work. Nonetheless, I felt a renewed desire to pursue my teaching career when I saw an advertisement from a newspaper for a Filipino teaching position in a Qatar government language school. Without hesitation, I applied for it. In my mind, being a Filipino native speaker and a teacher might qualify me for the said job. Before the Canadian manager and the American director started interviewing me, I heard Her distinct voice again. “You don’t have any teaching experience in Qatar. You won’t get the job.” At the interview, I didn’t get any clue whether my answers to their questions were the ones they were expecting. What I recall was I simply responded to their questions to the best of my ability using the experiences and the knowledge I gained when I was teaching in the Philippines. After two days, the director called me to inform me that they would like to get me on board. During my teaching stint at the language school, I got my TESOL and CELTA certifications to rebuild my confidence in the English language and to silence all the doubts I had accumulated about my teaching skills over the years. I thought getting these two certifications could add to my teaching qualifications.

After finishing my contract at the language school, I applied for a Training Specialist position at Texas A&M University at Qatar in 2019. “You won’t get it. You will mess up your interview,” She resurfaced. She knew that I had an uncontrollable fear being interviewed by Kelly, who was then the ASC Manager, and Dr. Mysti, the ASC director, both English native speakers. I was not sure if Kelly and Dr. Mysti noticed that I was too scared to speak the English language I had known for years for fear of being judged by them. I got confused with what words to use; I couldn’t even explain in detail how I guided my students in writing their compositions. I stammered a lot of times. After the interview, I felt I failed again. I recall feeling doomed. I lost it, I told myself.

That feeling of lost opportunity dragged on for a month or so until I received an email from Kelly informing me that the university would be hiring me. The news was surreal. I couldn’t contain my happiness, and I felt victorious over the voice that kept telling me that I wasn’t
good enough. The next three years of my stay at TAMUQ brought more opportunities for professional growth for me. I travelled to Lebanon to receive my “Most Outstanding Tutor Award.” I had three published essays at Best Writing Series. I couldn’t thank enough the two mortal angels who came my way and believed in me in October of 2016. Because of them, I was able to realize some of my dreams and aspirations in life. Their decision to hire me on that fateful day didn’t completely silence the voice of inadequacy in me, but it helped me to deal with it. It has become less audible than before. Yes, I can safely say that I am living a more fulfilled and contented life now. Nevertheless, I know that She has no plan on abandoning me. Hence, to Her, I say, “Bring it on.”

Erlinda “Beth” Caerlang is a writing consultant in the Center for Teaching and Learning at Texas A&M University. She finds writing personal essays not only as a form of art but also as a cathartic activity that helps her handle her sadness and depression. Through her stories, she hopes to inspire other people in writing their own and sharing them with others.
This poem is for my Aggie classmate, my friend, and my brother who experienced a stroke that prevented him from continuing his studies in TAMUQ. Ali is insisting to come back stronger to TAMUQ even though he has been a way for more than four years. I wrote this poem in 2017 to display the war that happened between his health and the stroke and to encourage him to keep moving forward to write his bright future with courage.
To My Aggie Classmate

to my classmate in hospitals of darkness

to the cavalry of the storks and nightmares of the souls,
to the bearer of the sword of glory,
my brother Ali Mossad,

i heard in a leafy branch in the days of youth,

it was torn by triumph and beauty,

its roots were green and nothing reached him,

and its companions were absent and time was wasted,

in the dirt of love was linked to all

in his heart was his son's dress,

he lived for his days in the middle of the night

with love his soul and his light was celebrated

against the nature's right days with black lines

in the light they lived a night in the morning of its marks

and he held his morning from God's mercy

people's speech was a storm that blow with its will

in the morning you would not have had a breath of it

the sky was named and the shadow was like a wound

and the moon turned and turned on its hooks

why do people punish his body and his body, what has happened to him?

it had to be turned to the winds and there was no refuge for it

sharpened as a crooked blade

and a sheikh to shed its dates

aged from the new and cut the autumn leaves

it is gnawed by the sick and is announced and he announced his death

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Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi is a mechanical engineering student, Class of COVID-20. He considers himself a multitasker who has the enthusiasm to learn and to keep challenging the challenges. A sentence he always reminds himself of (which he learned from his father, Allah Yrhamo) is this: “You can still write the words you want with a normal pen even if it was not crystal diamond.”
Connecting Communities
“Gosh, she said the instruction loudly, commanding us to do the exercises,” I told myself. The tiny pen in her hand felt as powerful as a baton. I was sweating and found myself fidgeting. “First, do this in five minutes. Second, third and fourth.” We, the ten people who attended her session dutifully did the steps she had given us, like soldiers obeying their leader. My mind tried to give a name to the feeling I was having. Was it fear, anxiety, anger . . . or excitement? “Just write!” She made the exercises uncomplicated. She made writing sound easy. She encouraged us to express our feelings during Covid-19 through writing. It was a very difficult task for me to express myself. It put me in a vulnerable position as I was afraid of other people’s judgmental opinions and reactions.

I am happy that this meeting was online due to COVID-19. No one could see my shaking feet and sweaty hands. The online meeting could not capture what a nervous body did. I guessed her pen acted as a magic wand, and I dutifully worked on the exercises with sweaty fingers stroking the keyboard.

**Exercise #1: Pick Your Topic**

“Write 10 topics that come to mind since the pandemic started. Don’t think, don’t analyze, Just write!” she said confidently. I wrote whatever came up in my mind, which was only eight. Then she continued giving instruction. “Now, put your topics in groups.” Without delay, I followed her instructions. I divided my topics into four different groups. “Now pick one that is closer to your heart and you want to talk about,” she added. I picked one.

**302 P**

It was a quiet day for the library. The students were on winter break. Spring semester was going to commence in the next two weeks. A big, almost bald man walked in front of me. He walked up through the stairs. I could hear the air conditioner make a low humming noise. He stopped and pointed out to me, “Here is your office.” 302 P is a 3 x 2.5m rectangle-shaped carpeted room. He opened the door for me. I saw two sets of office desks. One was colorful and bold. Several interesting books were displayed on the shelf. One wedding picture showed two persons madly in love with each other. A picture of a handsome boy with sharp black eyes brought warmth to the room. A computer and a set of supplies were placed neatly on the desk. Achievement plaques and certificates were glued to the wall.
The other desk was empty. Stacks of paper sat in a corner. There was no computer, no telephone. One white blackboard hung on the wall behind the chair. The brown L-shaped table looked huge without anything on it. I guessed that was mine. Suddenly, I felt connected to the emptiness of that space.

**Exercise #2: Write the Beginning**

“Now, write the beginning. Your topic does not exist in a vacuum. Give your readers a context. Write, write, and write,” she said firmly. Her confidence in giving instructions and her confidence in each one of us during this online session helped me a lot as I thought to myself, “I am not a writer.”

**1 January 2017: First Day on the Job**

My heart raced. My hands were shaking. I tried to hide my shaking hands under my semi-formal jacket. The elevator in the main entrance was broken. I followed the security guard as he walked up through the stairs. He was quiet and walked firmly. The stairs did not help to ease my edginess.

Suddenly a loud banging hit my ears. “Crap, this is not helping,” I told myself when I noticed construction work in the library area. When the security guard opened the glass door, the sound of a drilling machine acted as a knife cutting my ears deep inside. The dust particles showered the area, tickling my nose. The collective body odor of the workers generated a distinct smell that increased my edginess.

The security guard went through a small, plastic-covered area. He finally said, “Welcome to the library.” I did not have a chance to scratch my nose, shake the construction dust off and inhale the air that might help me get rid of the pungent smell. My eyes noticed the big, almost bald guy sitting at the front desk of the library. The computer in front of him looked very small. He was the only one in the library since the Director and other staff were still on vacation. He handed me the form that I needed to fill in, then showed me around the building and offices that I would need to visit for signatures. I felt a kind presence from this man, but somehow the beard had frightened me a bit. At the end of the day, he handed me a medium size cup of Costa cappuccino and with a big warm smile said, “Welcome to TAMUQ library.”

**Exercise #3: Write your plot and setting**

“Now, bring your readers to your world; invite them to your story, and walk them through your moments. Take them to your imagination. Write,” passionately she said. The virtual session did not
seem to bother her. Her passion is infectious. Her encouragement breaks the virtual distance between us.

7 February 2020: Three Years at TAMUQ Library
This is my third year working at TAMUQ library, minus five months when I ventured to try a new job. As a temporary library associate in the technical service area, I work closely with the technical service librarian, Shaun, the big, almost bald guy that I met on my first day and who gave me a cup of Costa cappuccino. Everyone in the library has trained and taught me in their area of expertise. However, I mostly ended up doing projects with or assisted by Shaun. This is the karma of the first day and a medium-sized Costa cappuccino. He trained me how to manage the serial collections, inter-library loan service, textbooks, and Oaktrust repository. He introduced me to Manga, comics created in Japan, online games and arts. If you have seen the library's front desk, you would notice art displayed there; this is all Shaun's doing. Remember the pencil art and the platonic shapes among many others? Yes, that is his.

I usually had many desk hours per week which allowed me to meet students and staff on a daily basis. These desk hours granted me the opportunity to meet various users of the library with their particular personalities and needs. Hissa engaged me with various non-engineering topics. One time she asked me to find resources on forensic psychology, and we ended up talking about CSI, NCIS and Bones. Ghida enlightened me about low carb diet. Jassim shared novels that he read, and I shared Murakami. And Beth regularly checked on me with her sincere smile and greeting, “Hi, dear. How are you today?” Brenda shared her vacation delights and sea-shell treasure hunt through geocaching. It became a daily normal to see Professor Brothers walk in to the library with his deep voice saying, “Hi, how are you doing?” Sherry with her big cup of Costa coffee and her particular voice often greeted me, “Hi, Ira.” Professor Wieslaw, who always waved and smiled at anyone at the desk, made me feel acknowledged. Professor Belic regularly checked out magazines. These connections, no matter how light or thick created meaning for me.

When I was not at the desk, I stayed at 302 P. Karina showed me the world of cataloging with its particular details and rules. She explained the process of receiving items and the procedures to follow. She introduced me to a variety of perfumes, fashions, online shopping, foods, and books. Never a dull moment with Karina. Nicole walked me through her work as public librarian, showing me how to deal with library fines. Everyone seems to loves making fines, but no one likes to pay them. Nicole always came up with interesting novels.
to read. I loved my conversation with her about religion, women and Harry Potter. She was always the one who rescued the library team whenever we needed a sugar rush to pump up our dopamine. The colorful jelly beans jar was always in her office. I liked it when Adam greeted me with his limited Indonesian, “Selamat pagi, selamat siang, apa kabar.” It reminded me of my home country, of people who were dear to me, and even some with whom I did not wish to interact. Adam’s greeting reminded me of my connection to “home,” whatever it meant. It pumped my confidence as a person of color at this institution. He walked me through all the administration process and my job responsibilities. He introduced me to Avoriaz and all about skiing. Adam also got us an espresso machine now sitting in our work room. Most importantly, he introduced me to Katherine Mansfield’s famous quote when I was about to decide to transfer to a new job:

“Risk risk anything! Care no more for the opinions of others, for those voices. Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth.”

It was this advice that encouraged me to try something new, to experience it and learn from it. It was worth it. I think from all his trainings and advices that quote will always help me to remember him.

What was once strange and unfamiliar became normal and familiar. Every encounter, each smile, each “Hi,” each wave, each conversation had created a connection filled with meaning. The job was no longer a job. It was a job rich with stimulation and connection. And it was in 302 P where I sat with all of that stimulation and connection. It was in 302 P that I pondered on the new meaning of connection and relationships created in this building. It was in 302 P that I hid from the pain of childhood memory. The memories always came without warnings, just hard strikes which transported me to my childhood home where I could hear loud shrieking noises and the smell of the alcohol, the cigar and the sweat that suffocated my lungs. My chest suddenly felt so heavy, I could not breathe nor move.

At such points, very often the smell of Karina’s perfume dissipated the unpleasant smell from my past. Her conversation in Portuguese intervened, her confident and firm voice when she talked to another person on the phone, brought me back to 302 P. Her suggestion on reading Eckhart Tolle’s *The Power of Now* helped to ground my journey, to reflect and to try my best to “live in the moment.” Tolle advised that “only the present can free you of the past, so deal with the past on the level of the presence.” He suggested that when the
past struck, be aware of your present and focus on your present moment whether you are in your office, at home, in the garden, or anywhere, realize that it cannot actually hurt you ‘again’ in your present moment. I know it is easier said than done. I failed many times and continue to fail and continue to try again and again.

But 302 P often saved me: the daily routine tasks, each encounter, each connection, each conversation has provided me a shelter both physically and mentally. It provided me with material resources and mental protection. The job and the interconnectedness had become a field of care for me. It had successfully transported me back to the present moment.

**Exercise #4: Just Write!**

“It is time to bring the reader to the climax, to the turning point of the story that will have great impact on the characters in your story. Yes, you can do it. Just write! We will deal with the editing and revising later on. For now, just write,” she emphasized, repeating “just write” to encourage us to finish the story. “Just write” was how I recalled all four of the writing sessions I attended with her, and “just write” was how I finished my story.

**9 March 2020: Going online!**

I was at the desk when all of a sudden the traffic in the library was very busy. I saw several important people, including my Director, heading in the same direction. It was fifteen seconds of foot traffic, then suddenly quietness. I looked at the clock and only one minute had passed. I looked at the clock again and only five minutes had passed. I engaged in conversation with Jowaher. She assured me that Inshallah, we should be okay. Finally, our Director returned and gathered the Library staff. “Starting tomorrow,” he said, “we will transition to online classes. Students will no longer come to the building. We are advised to do the same,” I stayed quiet while my mind was busy trying to comprehend what the statements would mean for me.

By March 12th, we were officially working from home. Adam, the Library director, was doing the best he could to organize our work, making sure that we would have the support to work from home, clearing up expectations and at the same time making sure that our mental health was also intact. The team members were very supportive of each other. In terms of work, it was clear and organized. My office desktop computer found itself a space in one of the corners of my house. I got all the resources and support I needed to be able to work from home. Work was settled for now! For now!
One thing was not settled. I did not know how to settle the disconnection from 302 P, from the smell of Karina’s perfume, from the conversations behind the desks, the mumbo jumbo chats over coffee, and the smiles over the toilet run. I am disconnected from the daily and routine distractions that had become so familiar. There was a big question mark. Who was going to transport me back to 302 P? To the present moment? Who is going to intervene when the memory of the past would catch and blind me?

The Cool Down:
I finished the essay. I wrote thousands of words! I submitted it to the writing workshop leader. It was her “just write” statement and the unfailing support that I received from my kabayan sisters that encouraged me to “just write” and finish it.

23 May 2020
It has been two and half months since I started to work from home. It has been two and half months that I had been disconnected from 302 P, from the daily tasks and routine, from every smile and wave exchanged in the library or over the toilet run. It has been two and a half months, and I am still adjusting to the new normal routine. It has been two and a half months that almost every day I receive new news: she got corona, she died, he got laid off, the children are frustrated, she is in quarantine, his salary is being cut, my mom refuses to stay at home, my dad is sick, his company started to lay off people, she got beaten at home. All this news changed into what-if scenarios for me: what if I got corona? what if I got laid off? what if . . . , what if . . . For two and half months I have been trying to fight the memory of the past alone without any of the helpful interactions that I could have whenever I was in 302 P. Crying, confusion, tantrums, anger, anxiety and uncertainty, all wailing together.

As I tried to complete these writing exercises for Dr. Myst, I found them painful; yet they have helped me channel a little bit of my worry, anxiety, and confusion into something worth trying, like finishing this piece. Sometimes the what-if scenarios have occupied my mind, distracting me from my present moment of fully functioning as a wife, a mother, an employee and a fellow human being during this unprecedented time. I have listened to people’s advice and read articles on how to deal with anxiety during Covid-19 by meditating, trying something new, reaching out to people, exercising daily, and zoom gossiping. I re-read Tolke’s *The Power of Now*, recalling my discussion with Karina about being in the present to help me deal with the current situation and the what-if scenarios that are going on and off in my mind. Still, I do not know the solution nor the best way to deal with this. When the memory of the past
strikes, I am still struggling to transport myself back to 302 P, on my way to the present.

Perhaps, just perhaps, what I can do is to try again and again no matter how many times I failed to be able to stay in the present moment. To remind myself that at this very moment, I am still breathing. I have shelter and food. I have my job. I have friends and colleagues who support me through this time. Most importantly, I have my husband and daughters who continue to encircle me with their love and genuine laughter—although I cannot lie, sometimes they can be very annoying in this 24/7 situation.

Tomorrow, May 24 is Eid Fitri. Perhaps, it just might shed some light for me. Inshallah.

Ira Setiawan
Librarian

No Comfort to be Found

The Battle of the Early Mornings
Each morning I try to wake up two hours before class in order to give myself enough time to get ready and then commute to university. It was the same monotonous cycle of waking up to the sound of my alarm annoyed, snoozing it at least three times before deciding that snoozing it one more time would be detrimental to my education. But sometimes I would cave. I’d snooze my alarm a fourth and maybe even a fifth time. Of course, this came at the cost of my breakfast. Ten extra minutes in bed meant that I had to leave the house hungry if I wanted to reach class on time.

The Battle of the Traffic Signal
Every morning I groaned as I approached the last traffic signal before university. It always irked me because it took way too long to turn green and when it did, it would only let around four cars pass. The traffic lights would deceive me. Once the car preceding me passed the signal, I’d think that I could too before quickly realizing that I had to hit the brakes if I wanted to avoid a hefty fine.
My To-do List:
• Wake up
• Get ready
• Eat breakfast
• Drive to uni
• Attend class

The Battle of Self-Isolation
Normality was cruelly stripped away from me by a global pandemic. I no longer had the luxury of complaining about waking up early and dealing with the notorious traffic signal. I was suddenly forced to live through my laptop screen. Every day turned into an undifferentiated cycle of online classes. Instead of complaining about a slow signal, I started complaining about the slow connection on Zoom. Instead of complaining about being forced to wake up early, I started complaining about not being forced to wake up early so that I could mentally prepare for class. Waking up ten minutes before class wasn’t a problem anymore. I could just eat breakfast during class and no one would ever know.

My Revised To-do List:
• Wake up
• Launch Zoom
• Make sure you’re on mute
• Make sure your camera is turned off
• Struggle to pay attention to your professor because you’re not being held accountable for checking your phone or taking a nap

The Battle of Uncertainty
As humans, we instinctively fear the invisible and intangible monster of uncertainty. There’s only a certain amount of online classes I could take before constantly starting to wonder when things will return to normal again. There’s no comfort to be found in the numbers of COVID-19 positive cases released by the Ministry of Public Health. There’s no comfort to be found in the fact that a lot of people aren’t taking social distancing measures seriously. There’s no comfort to be found in universities preparing for another online semester. There’s no comfort to be found in the pandemic not having a fixed expiration date. I’m certain there is an expiration date, I just don’t know when.

Fatima Khan
Chemical engineering student, Class of 2021.
COVID Diary of a First Semester Student

9 March 2020
It all started on a Monday. I opened my phone to a message that my father posted on the family WhatsApp group. The message stated that from this day and for the coming days, all schools and universities (public and private) will be closed until further notice due to the coronavirus outbreak. This was in correspondence to a sudden and great increase in the number of coronavirus cases in Qatar. When I read the message, I was excited and happy as I thought that there won’t be any classes at all. I thought that this was it for the university and that we are going to have an unlimited vacation. After a few moments, I started realizing that they can’t just close the university, and I started thinking about how this could affect my graduation or studies. How will this affect my graduation date? How will this affect my career? I became scared that the coronavirus in Qatar might be serious now. Everyone around me seems to have different mixed feelings. However, I believe that the closing of the university is for our own safety and the safety of the citizens of Qatar and the whole world.

17 March 2020
One week has passed since the shutdown of all schools and universities in Qatar and the transition to online classes. I feel bored from sitting at home, I miss the university environment, and I also miss my friends. I remember how I used to stay till 10 pm in the
university almost every day, not just doing work, but also enjoying the moments with friends. I miss waking up at 6:30 in the morning, taking a shower and heading to the metro station, so that I could arrive to school thirty minutes before class to hang a bit or maybe catch up on work. I miss going with my friends to Al-Naimi cafeteria for a sandwich and some karak. Now my days consist of just staying at home and attending classes online. However, I always remind myself that it is for my own good and most importantly, for my family’s safety, as this is what I worry about the most. If you don’t care about your own safety, the least you can do is to not harm others.

25 March 2020
I’m kind of stressed this week. I have a lot of homeworks and assignments due from a lot of subjects. And these days I am starting to think more about how this situation will affect my grades: will it have a positive or a negative effect? Another thing I am worried about is summer school, because it seems like summer school is going to be conducted online too, which is sad. I don’t know if I can handle staying at home in the summer, not just that, but also studying. It is good that the university is allowing students to change to s/u (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) instead of the normal letter grading system, but I don’t know how it will affect my financial aid or my transcripts. At the end, what the government is doing is for the best of all of us.

31 March 2020
It is a difficult time for the whole world. But what can we do? It has happened and now we must accept it and do whatever to stop its spread. I believe that if everybody follows the safety rules, we will get through this. Some people think that they are strong, and that if they get the coronavirus they will fight it easily, but what about other people? What about your family and friends? Aren’t you scared that you might transmit the Virus to them? What if you become the reason for their death?! You surviving the disease doesn’t mean other people will survive it. Don’t be selfish, if you don’t care about yourself at least don’t hurt other people. You may be a healthy young man, but what about your father and mother? That is what worries me the most; I don’t want to be the cause of my parents getting ill, and that is why I avoid going outside and follow the health procedures. In fact, I don’t remember going outside other than the weekly trips to Carrefour for food and other house needs. I believe that coronavirus is bad, especially when we see people die, simply because there aren’t enough beds or rooms in hospitals to accommodate them like in Italy.
This is a test for us, a test for humanity, to see how can we fight this and whether we will finally unite to defeat the coronavirus. It’s amazing how we landed on the moon, photographed the black hole, and invented all this stuff, but it is still difficult for us to defeat a small invisible tiny virus. It always amazes me that with all the technology we have, we still don’t have a cure in the market for this tiny thing. Or do we actually have the cure, but companies don’t want to release it until the number of cases increases more?! Nobody actually knows since news is all over the place and each source has a theory. It seems like everyone has become an expert in medicine and infectious diseases. However, what we know is that if we unite we can destroy this Virus, because we have done it before and we can do it again. We have been through a lot as humans and we have always been able to survive. We have been through wars, plagues, Hitler and more, so a simple virus wouldn’t be able to destroy us, or can it?

The best thing we can do know is just wish everything could be over, stay in our homes, and follow the guidelines set by official health organizations all over the world. Remember that there is always hope. People all over the world are healing, people are fighting. Doctors are fighting day and night just for your health, some aren’t getting sleep at all, so please don’t be stupid and waste all their efforts. And do not just concentrate on the deaths, don’t forget that people are also healing, there is no place for negative energy at these times. You have to look at the dark side along with the bright side. Hope is only thing that keeps us surviving, we hope to live to our nineties, so we take care of our health; we believe that we could be something great one day, so we work hard; we hope, we believe, we survive. We hope that this situation is going to end, we believe that we as human race should be able to destroy it, and therefore we are hopefully going to survive. China, which was the location zero, and the country where the outbreak has started is fighting the Corona fiercely, and has enforced very strict procedures, so the number of Corona cases is decreasing every day, China is very near to completely destroying the COVID-19. If china was able to do it, then we can all do it.

2 April 2020
The COVID-19 or as they call it the “coronavirus,” has now become a pandemic. This virus that started in Wuhan, China in the last months of 2019 has now spread to all parts of the world. All we hear today is news and updates about the virus; it seems that our lives now are revolving around this invisible non-living deadly creature. The world is at war with the virus now. Everyone is frightened. “When will this outrageous infection stop?” people are wondering. Doctors all
over the world are spending their days and nights on the forefronts. Imprints of masks and goggles are marked on their faces. Sweat all over their body, their eyes bursting from sleep deprivation. These heroes risk their lives each day for our health. In return, what do they get? People gathering around cafes and parks. While the world is fighting over medical masks and sanitizers, Americans are fighting over toilet paper.

In these times, some annoying creatures have appeared. Creatures you wouldn’t want to come near to. All they do is repeat these statements: “I am young, I’m healthy and I will not get the coronavirus, and if I get it then I will fight and destroy it easily.” Don’t these ignorant people know how infectious diseases work? Well, it’s simple: if you have the virus, people around you are prone to it. In these times, we are in no need for selfish acts. If you don’t care about getting infected, others do, and you don’t live in this world alone. How would it feel if someone dear to you dies due to your ignorance? Patient number 31, a sixty-year-old woman, has put South Korea into danger by practicing her normal life, attending church and meeting friends at hotels. This woman who has been infected by Corona led to the infection of hundreds, even thousands of people. Today South Korea is paying for what the woman has done.

Man has landed on the moon. But a single virus has destroyed great economies, toppled currencies, and put billions of people in lockdown. Could it be possible that a cure is available, but not released until cases increase? Is this the end of humanity as we know it? “This is how earth is paying us for all the damage that we have done,” some might say.

We live because we hope. And we survive because we believe. We hope that this gets over and we believe that if we all unite we could defeat it. Hope is what keeps us alive, we have nothing but hope now. But hope alone is not enough.
3 April 2020
The thing I am most scared about right now is my parents or someone close to me getting sick. They say that old people are more prone to the virus and have a bigger chance of dying from it. However, it was found that this is not completely true, as many of the cases around the world are actually from the youth. This may be due to youth being more active in social life than the elderly or that they take fewer precautions, nobody knows anything for sure. Some people may be more prone to the corona virus than others, this is due to many factors, which are not completely known. That is why people should not only care about themselves, but also about the people around them. That is why I try to follow the safety rules and procedures as much as I can. Some people think that because they are young and healthy, they will not get infected and if they do, they will fight it easily. This could be true, but what about the people around them? What about their family and loved ones? Aren’t they scared that they might transmit the virus to them? Aren’t they scared of being the cause of their death?

17 April 2020
At the beginning I did not like the idea of online classes. I didn’t know how it would work; how will we be able to understand some
professors online, especially if it is difficult to understand them in real life? And how will the professor be able to cover his material online? I thought that this system is not going to work and that university material cannot be ever covered online because it would be too difficult for the teacher and students. But different professors came up with different approaches to transporting information to us students. Some decided to just carry their classes on Zoom same as a normal class would go and everyone one would be in the comfort of his own home. Others decided to post materials for the students to look at it whenever they want or post videos of them teaching a certain topic for the students to go over anytime they wished to. 

Even though I did not like the online system at the beginning, I soon realized that it was the same as normal classes, and even better. I mean I get to stay at my own home, most of the times attending lectures from my bed or while lying down on a couch, which is just amazing. Some students put lectures on record and go to sleep; they then go over the lecture later.

I think that I’m learning more as I now have to study almost everything by myself, which I think has increased my knowledge. In the beginning, before the online classes, I didn’t have to study at home on my own because I would simply get everything from class. Now I have more time to study and more freedom, as I am a person who likes to study at night when everybody is asleep, and the house is quiet. However, I would not want this to continue anymore, as I am getting bored. I am planning on taking a summer semester, but I am concerned because it seems to me that it is also going to be online, which is sad. I do not want to spend my summer at home, not just that but also studying! I was against the closing of the university at the beginning because I thought that there weren’t a lot of cases in Qatar and that the situation is under control; I thought that the Corona thing is not that serious. I now understand that all these decisions are for our own safety, and that if these decisions weren’t taken, the number of cases could have doubled in just a few days. I thank God for that.

Ismail Mostafa
Electrical engineering student, Class of 2023
(Ismail joined TAMUQ in January 2020, and therefore he had only been in the engineering building for seven weeks before courses went online due to COVID-19.)
The After

The cruel trick of fate brought us here, to this unprecedented picture, locked in our houses, unaware, uncertain, frightened yet numb. Being forced to stay at our homes by the government or by the love for the ones we want to protect or simply by the compulsion of common sense, is only a part of the misery. This isn't a story about productivity nor is this a comparison of my accomplishments, if any, to become ennobled or degraded. This is a story of suffering paving a path to make the most dauntless individuals.

Doctors and nurses are our new Batmen and Robins; you find them patrolling the rooms of every hospital fighting our common enemy—COVID-19. The doctors, unfocused on the risks they are putting their own lives through, are treating the patients even though they themselves suffer from the scarcity of personal protective equipment (PPE). While the virus deteriorates the mental health of its patients, the psychological impact on the doctors—especially when they lose a patient—is even more incomprehensible. We can be their heroes by staying at home, and to pay tribute to them, my co-researcher Haseeb and I have been endlessly scrolling through research articles to design effective and helpful PPE for them and the general population. We looked into a number of methods to disinfect N95 masks and to design 3D printed face-shields, nasal swabs, door openers, valves, and ventilator splitters.

Coronavirus hit in too many ways, and I too, personally have a huge qualm with this virus. I won't forgive it for the fear it gripped over my heart when my dad caught a high temperature. He did not show any other symptoms, which calmed us down until his body started aching, aching to the point where he could not sit to eat his meal on the bed. We ran to the hospital that day, my dad stumbling from the car to the door himself. My two sisters and I covered shifts for three days before we decided to burden our heroes. Mama would make food and we would take it to him, massage his back, check his temperature, apply cold-water pads where his joints heated up, and repeat. It wasn't enough; he was aching in pain and we were aching for help. The nurse took a painful swab-test for the virus and the doctors refused to treat him till they would get negative results. A day later they informed us about the negative result, praise be to the lord, and allowed my dad for a checkup and a bed in the health center to be admitted only to take the corona test again and send him back. I would not like to accuse our saviors; I trust them to know which patient needs them more. Today, he got called to the hospital again as the results were negative and they took an X-ray, diagnosing
him with a chest infection. The doctors will say more about it if he still has a temperature four days from now.

This virus has wronged most people, if not every person, and compromised their health in so many ways, be it the coronavirus patients themselves or by the over-crowding of the hospitals, leaving no room for other patients and what not. But the thing about struggle is that it molds individuals into the strongest people and suffice it to say, everyone has struggled with the pandemic and been impacted by it in some way. This has left us only one chance: to grow together; if we do not maintain pace with change, we may lose our courage to rise as more powerful people.

You can imagine my horror when my father’s conditions worsened day by day and there was nothing that I could do, especially as an asthmatic patient. Seeing him sleep and spend his day all alone, hurting every minute of every hour of every damned day, was more than I could handle and worse than he could bear. He could have really used a hug or his family chattering and giggling around him, but the circumstances didn’t allow for it to happen. These sad times fill me with rage and grief, and all I can say and pray is that I hope it goes away.

Hayyam Iqbal
Mechanical engineering student, Class of 2023

The Process

March 11th, the day after spring break, I got out of bed ready for an exam I had to take.

Then early afternoon a message began to circulate: Classes have been cancelled and there’s no fear to reciprocate.

The reason why became irrelevant—not knowing that soon this ruling will be indefinite.

It took some time for knowledge to spread, but the coronavirus was something to dread.
With the spread on an exponential rise, 
there was a lot we had to compromise.

As an extrovert who rarely stays home,
I found myself outside just wanting to roam.

The birds seemed happier
and nature seemed healthier.

Some claimed that earth was healing
but I kept wondering how those infected were feeling.

I felt helpless and small;
there was not much we could do at all.

We now lived in a world where we stay away
or the ones we love will have to pay,

where expressing love is forbidden
and we are ordered to stay hidden.

Hours began to lose meaning, and days were looking grey
as the motivation for productivity withered away.

Longing was now the recurring daily theme;
This caused my mental health to stray downstream.

I searched for a strain of hope
which I desperately needed in order to cope.

I found it in the beauty of adaptation
and the rejection of temptation.

Being quarantined taught me appreciation—
I now knew what mattered and needed no affirmation

Instead of being afraid and pessimistic,
I became grateful, no longer materialistic.

Soon things will go back to the way they were
and the world will finally have a cure.

Karima Ramadan
ECEN Class of 2020
Not Ready

It is almost past midnight and her eyes are still wide open. Lying on her bed, she stares blankly at the ceiling, wondering what lies ahead. Her husband broke the news to her a few days ago about an imminent job reduction in their company. What will happen next? Is it time for us to go home? What are we going to do if my husband loses his job? These questions keep playing in her mind. The world is in crisis and what she thought to be concrete has suddenly become shaky. Four months ago, everything was clear to her. She had plans. She knew where to travel next, when to start with the construction of their dream house, how many more years they will stay in this country. Because of the pandemic, suddenly, things have become blurry. Worries begin to engulf her, keeping her awake at night. Endless questions of “what if” and “how will” often stream into her consciousness. Although she always knew that eventually her family would have to leave this country they have called their second home, she’s afraid this may happen very soon. Though she and her husband have prepared for the inevitable, she still feels apprehensive.

Why does she feel this way? Probably because she is truly not ready. She is not ready to give up the convenient life this country has provided for her. She is dreading the day that she and her husband would lose their jobs and no longer have the financial capability to buy what she and her family want, to be able to travel abroad and collect memories, to provide for her parents’ needs, and most of all, to afford a comfortable life for her children.

Working abroad has given her opportunities to help her parents and siblings. Her family back home relies on her financially. Every time her parents would be hospitalized, she would always carry the burden of paying all of the hospital expenses. She never complains about it because it is her only way to compensate for her absence, for not being able to be there physically to take care of her sick parents. In fact, moments like this reminds her how blessed she is to be earning well, able to share her blessings with her family.

Life in her home country is difficult. There are not many job opportunities particularly for people who are already in their forties. Although she knows she has the skills and experiences to easily gain employment, she is still less than confident. They have been living in this country for almost eleven years, and returning to their home country means starting anew. She is afraid that she and her husband would not be able to sustain the kind of life her kids have been accustomed to. The life they were used to.
She is not the only one feeling uncertain at the moment. Even a country like Qatar, which was once hailed as the richest country in the Middle East, is now starting to feel the blow of this pandemic to its economy. The crisis has changed the course of the world. Everyone is feeling its impact. Many people are now losing their jobs and some have no choice but to leave the country empty handed. Her current situation is way better than others. Why then worry? While gazing at her kids who are soundly asleep in their room, a sudden feeling of gratitude to God permeates her soul. She begins counting her blessings. She and her husband still have their respective jobs. Her family is healthy and they have enough savings. If the situation will require them to go home, they will be okay. They may not have a huge sum of money in their bank account, but they have enough savings to start a decent life back in their home country. They just need to learn to give up some things they’ve been used to and they will be just fine. She has faith and trust in God that everything will be according to His plans. He will provide. At her bedside, she gets on her knees to pray. Just as she finishes her prayer, a warm feeling of peace and comfort abounds her. She refuses to look at the clock, putting everything including the passing of time in God’s hand. As she closes her heavy eyes, she whispers to herself, *All will be well.*

Vanessa Lina
Center for Teaching and Learning

**My Coronacoaster**

My COVID-19 experience can explicitly be summed up in one urban word—a Coronacoaster; described appropriately in a popular meme as a noun that refers to the ups and downs of the pandemic. During the initial days I was enjoying not having to wake up early, and I celebrated the freedom of being able to shift my schedule to begin my day at 12noon and end it at 5 a.m. However, I soon started realizing just how much I missed seeing my friends and how much I depended on being around working colleagues to find the motivation to get things done.

Eventually I separated my 437 sq ft dorm room to include a “work zone” and “recreation zone,” so I could both focus and relax inside
my studio apartment, which I previously used mostly for sleeping after having worked late hours in the university. On a different matter, I did hit the realization that my significant reduction in movement and simultaneous increase in consumption of snacks (from the shear lack of better things to do) had me gaining weight, fast.

The long hours spent indoors confined to a small area continuously for days made me think about going outside. Even with the new social distancing rules in place, I could still move about within the Education City boundaries without getting into trouble with the law and risking my safety—an amenity that people living outside EC did not have. This realization, along with a friend who is a sports enthusiast and the delayed summer weather, motivated me to separate time for running two to three times a week. I started off barely able to hold a steady running pace for over 3 minutes, alternating between walking and running for a fixed running route: starting at Shamali housing complex, running by gate 2 to the Qatar National Library and completing the route by returning from the Ceremonial Courts side. By steadily increasing the duration of my running segments and consequently reducing the walking segments, I was able to run a twenty-minute stretch in my fifth week. After that I worked on improving my pace and covering the same distance in a shorter time.

Three months into self-isolation, I am glad that I’ve built a much better running pace than I’ve ever had before. I am now able to cover a 3km distance in roughly 19 minutes significantly improving my running pace from 7.4 min/km to 6.3 min/km. This period has let me find time to bake, workout, connect with old friends and cousins and discover a new liking for drawing portraits. While I’m afraid I’ve forgotten how to interact with a group of more than three people and may have to reconfigure my social skills, I am looking forward to getting back to TAMUQ and returning to a life as close to the old norm as possible.

Iresha Poonahela,’17
Graduate Research Assistant, ECEN
“I Am”: A Star in the Pandemic Movie

Scene 1: “Dum-da-de-da; Do, do, do, do, do; coming down, dripping candy on the ground . . .”, “I wake up, flawless” . . . at 5:15 a.m. Shower, wake up the kids, get dressed, yell at the kids, take the kids to school, and get to work.

**Colleague:** A virus has been killing people in China.

**I Am:** China is so far away. Viruses are a part of life. It must be due to over population and pollution. It will run its course and all will be back to normal.

Scene 2: “Dum-da-de-da . . .”, “I wake up, flawless”—kids, car, school, and work.

**Colleague:** China has quarantined a large section of its population. The virus is spreading and starting to impact airports; it’s traveling first class around the world. Fear is mounting and visible on the mask-covered faces that fly.

**I Am:** It’s just a virus. *(I will be traveling soon; I should be fine).* I never liked seeing those people walking around in masks, this always freaked me out. Even when I had to wear a mask to visit family in the hospital, I prefer to just stay far away from the patient or not visit at all. I get claustrophobic, no way will I wear a mask!

Scene 3: “Dum-da-de-da . . .”, “I wake up, flawless”—kids, car, school, and work.

**Colleague:** I Am, you can’t travel to Italy in three weeks. Italy has been taken over by the virus and people are dying.

**I Am:** Being stuck in Italy is not a bad idea. I will just take my laptop in case. *(I can’t leave my kids in this uncertainty. They can stay with their father, but for how long? And what if he gets sick?)* An Extra week in Italy is sounding really good. It’s just a virus, no big deal. By the way, this feels like a movie when disasters start to emerge. *(But is it no big deal, I Am?)*

Scene 4: Weekend, wakes up slowly, not so flawless but in good spirits.
Friends: Let’s meet on the Corniche to celebrate a friend’s birthday with a walk. Costa is still open, then we’ll go for breakfast.

I Am: (Arrives at the Corniche. What a beautiful sun rise, but very few people are here. Very strange feeling, this is just a dream. A lovely day with friends, coffee, nice long walk, spontaneous dhow trip, and delicious breakfast. Something in the air does not feel right. Everyone is talking about this virus; it’s like one of those scenes in a movie leading up to a catastrophe—friends eating and having fun, then the sky starts to fall on them as they scatter in panic and fear.

Scene 5: “Dum-da-de-da . . .” , “I wake up, flawless”—kids, car, school, and work.

Employee: Did you know that QLM health insurance will not cover individuals who get the virus?

I Am: That is ridiculous! I will contact them and take care of this issue.

QLM: The Qatar government requires all virus patients to go to Hamad Hospital.

I Am: (Panicked. So many employees did not process a Hamad government medical center card. I need to run the reports, check everyone’s Qatar ID in the system for an existing Hamad card, then send out an email to those who are eligible but do not have one. It will take a while for over a 900 employees and dependents to check.)

A Colleague: Prepare required Arabic letters for employees to obtain the Hamad cards and work closely with them.

I Am: (This is getting overwhelming and fast. I also have employees who need to be here, should I get them their tickets? Another employee who is leaving, not sure if his shipment will clear. I am convinced that I am in a movie, where are the cameras?)

The Same Colleague: I Am, Hamad is not issuing any more cards. They have shut all administrative tasks to save space and man power to handle virus cases.
I Am: (I Must be dreaming, for sure I am. Someone pinch me please, ouch! Still in the physical body it seems. Cameras must be rolling somewhere in the sky.)

Scene 6: “Dum-da-de-da . . .” kids, car, school, and work.

Email from Kids School: School will be closed till further notice.

I Am: (The plot thickens, of course it does, and the world is on the verge of ending. I have been meaning to go shopping, now I need to make sure we have enough food. I will go to my trusted grocery store after work.)

(At the trusted grocery store, a mob of people enter, lines on every cashier, no hand sanitizers, no rubbing alcohol left on the shelves, and the look of confusion on everyone’s face.)

I Am: I had a flash back to College Station when Hurricane Katrina was about to hit. Sam’s club was out of water bottles as I saw bare shelves up to the ceiling.

(A cashier is yelling at two men who are trying to cut in line. One of the men came from behind her with his receipt for buying items in another section that needed to be paid for. She was frustrated and enraged, it showed in her voice and shaking body. The manager intervened and held the cashier from crying.)

Cashier: (looking up at I Am) I should have been home over an hour ago. We can’t leave now and I am tired.

I Am: I am so sorry, it is because they closed the school. Everyone is panicking now with uncertainty, this has gotten real. I hope you get to go home soon and rest, this you deserve for sure. (It’s dooms day, brace yourself, cashier. I prefer to go first when the time comes, to avoid cleaning up dead bodies. Yuck!)

Scene 7: “Dum-da-de-da . . .” kids wake up and login, breakfast, coffee, go to work.

I Am: I don’t think we should be going to work. My kids all have respiratory issues during a good old fashion cold or flu.
Work: Time to set up a home office.

I Am: (This must be a dream come true, working from home finally. I am surprisingly stressed, not sure how the kids are managing school. Do we have enough food and water? I need a desk top and monitor, I can't function on a laptop for long. I need to get the work stamp, make sure I have enough ink in my printer, get the letter heads, envelops...what else would I need? This is madness).

Boss: You all can go get what you need to work from home indefinitely. We are not sure how long we will be able to access our building. Make sure you show security your items and inform me.

I Am: (Later that night. Everything is so uncertain and I feel safest in Qatar with my children. I canceled my trip to Italy, but hope to travel in eight weeks to the U.S. for the conferences).

Scene 8: “Dum-da-de-da . . .” kids wake up and login, breakfast, coffee, work from home.

Dean: (at Town Hall meeting) You and your family's safety is our concern and your primary duty.

I Am: It's amazing how quickly we all got set up at home and no one made a fuss. I am proud of our TAMUQ community. Gig'em Aggies! I am a two percenter, but I do feel the pride.

Dean: (at Coffee Break meeting) How are things going? (Those who were not shy talked and everyone listened. New babies were shown and a house pet was showcased.)

I Am: (I love this coffee break via Zoom) normally everyone is huddled in their comfort zone with the same people. Now we all get to take time and truly connect. I feel an amazing bond and a new appreciation to my TAMUQ family).

Main campus: Non-essential travel is no longer permitted.

I Am: (Things are getting serious, the U.S. conferences are talking about canceling. My kids, my work, our security is in Qatar means I had to cancel my flight, hotels, and conferences.)

News: Qatar has restricted entry to Qatar nationals only.
Colleague: We have employees stuck outside and we can no longer make any new immigration requests.

I Am: New employees will be unable to make it on time. I am even more concerned about faculty who need to teach during the fall semester; this is a nightmare.

Scene 9: “Dum-da-de-da . . .” kids wake up and login, breakfast, tea instead of coffee today, work.

News: People are terrified and losing their jobs. Desperation is starting to rise, while others are in denial. A man in Lebanon stated that he could not be blamed if he killed and stole food for his family. Tribes and poor, uneducated families are selling their daughters for money.

Friend: Abuse is rising since the victims are stuck all day at home. There is a community that will start to provide resources to the needy. We need your help, I Am.

Dean: (at another coffee break meeting): We are all safe at home and people need to remain at home all over the world.

I Am: People will die from crime and starvation before dying from the virus. Globally, events that mandated quarantine have shifted death onto the poor while the wealthy wait comfortably at home.

News: All must wear masks while grocery shopping. It is also recommended while outside at all times. Social distance is critical, while police are stopping cars to educate the public.

I Am: (My mind is complexed with my thoughts and my heart is torn. Not everyone is safe and has the financial ability to sustain this blow. They would rather risk their lives and go to work. We all will have to get the virus and develop immunity—there is no other way. We are just slowing the end down to allow enough respirators in saving as many lives as possible.)

Friend: A lot of families in Qatar are in need. We are buying food, formula and other baby items, delivering them weekly.

I Am: Here is some cash to help, and I will keep helping as I can.
Another friend: I have collected groceries to help a lot of drivers who are not making any money at this time.

I Am: (As much as I am grateful for my situation and those I love, my heart bleeds for those in need. I see the true heroes rise out of compassion in our communities and hope it is the heart of humanity that will carry us to the future. This movie is awfully long.)

Scene 11: Still unwritten

Nancy Abraham
Human Resources

A Constructive Pause

It is 7 in the morning on Sunday, March 1, my first day back to work. I have on my work clothes, I've had my coffee, and I'm ready to go. And then he drew a charming, shy smile on his face and looked at me with his shiny eyes as if he wanted to say, “I still need to spend more time with you. I wish if you can stay.” We were both busy falling in love with each other. The bonding experience is a two-way street: my voice is the music to his ears in the early morning; at the same time, touching his soft hands exudes pure happiness to me.

I jumped into my car, turned on my radio, and selected Feirouz morning songs from my playlist. Why Feirouz? Because her songs and her magical voice stimulate my emotions and ignite the extinguished memories of my childhood. They take me back to my small, pure village in the early morning, where people can smell the jasmine flowers all around the neighborhood, feel the fresh breeze caressing their faces, and enjoy the birds’ sounds that make their hearts dance.

The joy of restoring my magical memories did not last long as a silent conversation suddenly crushed my mind, bringing me back to reality: How will I manage to keep awake all night with his constant cries and to be productive the next day? How will I cope with housekeeping duties and the kids' studies? The most important thing, how can I
leave him alone? How will I find my way forward? This conflict left me puzzled, frustrated, and confused; simultaneously, I was excited to resume work, expand my wings, take off like a jet, and achieve with confidence. When I re-joined TAMUQ after my maternity leave, I was happy to hear the students’ voices in the hallway and feel their motivation after catching their breath during the spring break.

It is Monday, March 12, and our entire university is going ONLINE! Yes, starting today, all staff are endorsed to work from home. Classes, meetings, and workshops will continue remotely. “When you leave today, please take with you anything you think you might need to be able to perform your duties from home,” announced the dean’s office.

I thought China was so far away with 3,201 miles of air travel distance between us. How could this pandemic expand to Qatar? I assumed that after a few days, things would return to normal! Unexpectedly, all flights have been suspended. Schools, restaurants, malls are all closed except pharmacies and markets in response to coronavirus. COVID-19, a virus of 0.1 microns of size, threatens human lives and their existence. PPE, hand sanitizers, and antiseptics seemed to be out of stock! A total lockdown of some areas, everyone is afraid to leave the house even to go to the market, fearful of carrying back the virus and infecting the entire family.

People are increasingly worried about the financial and employment situation due to business shutdowns. Students, learning remotely, felt disconnected and emotionally affected. Working from home seemed to be fun at the beginning, but not for a long time for an interpersonal employee like me! After two weeks, I started experiencing discomfort and stress due to isolation. I faced sleeping difficulties, unexplained headaches, and body pain. I am that interpersonal employee who cannot tolerate being disconnected from their surroundings. I suffered from missing the interaction with my colleagues and my friends.

I am usually an optimistic person who always looks at the bright side of things, at the full half of any glass, and so I was unaccustomed to these new feelings.

I still remember that end of that day in April when I was exhausted from successive Zoom meetings, homeschooling, following the daily COVID statistics, and hearing the bad news from back home. Sitting on my couch, drowning in my confusion, and the uncertainty of what is coming next, I came across a video that my friend shared on Facebook. It tells a painful story that is much worse than
mine. I looked around and compared the undeserved bad things happening to me with the good things happening to me. I noticed that I have no reason not to benefit from this time to make the best of it. I need this mind-shift to push myself and acquire new goals. At that moment, I decided to change this time of uncertainty to an opportunity for myself to modify my behavior and overcome all negativity. I sat with myself and examined my inner thoughts: Why do we humans have this anticipatory sorrow, going into the future, and imagining the worst? Why don’t we come into the present and try to live each moment positively? It is relevant that coping with stress will make the people I care about, as well as myself, stronger.

“STOP, slow down, young lady! “ I ordered. “Enough of being this hamster constantly turning the fast-moving wheels. Life’s wheels will keep turning speedily, and days will fly by fast, but are you enjoying them?” I asked myself pointedly. Yes! I will turn this quarantine into a retreat. I will benefit from this period of solitude for self-reassessment, a time to reconsider my weaknesses and find new ways for future enhancement.

I looked around and realized what matters in life. I discovered that health is the most precious thing that a human owns. For the moment, I'm spending quality time with my kids and trying to be more engaged with their homeschooling and activities. I am trying to have balanced meals and take care of my health. Even though I still need to train myself to make time to unwind, I am determined to “keep work at work when working from home” for better mental and physical health. I will work on managing my emotions to adapt to difficult people and circumstances so that they won’t affect my days and nights. I learned that sometimes we could not control circumstances, but we can control how we react. We all need to build resilience by focusing on our power and change the outcome of the situation.

On that Friday night, when he completed his first six months of living, I realized that life had heard his silent wishes and his inner prayers that early morning of March 1 and offered us the best gift ever. I looked up toward the bright twinkling stars, smiled, and felt thankful for the reward that has been given me to strengthen my connection with him—hearing his musical rhyming giggles early every morning spreads healing energy to me. In the end, even the worst day can be made better by a cuddle and a smile from an innocent baby who surely loves me unconditionally.

Joelle Fadlallah
Center for Teaching and Learning
“Oh, my sweetie, I’m here for you,” I shouted. Extending my arms to give her a big hug, she came running towards me and held me tightly. Her hands were cold and her face looked so worrisome. There is something deep inside that was bothering her. I tried to cheer her up. “How was your day?” I asked. She didn’t reply. She seems lost in her thoughts.

This made me a bit uncomfortable. I have been watching her for a couple of days, and she does not seem to be happy. I felt she is missing something badly. Checking my phone gallery, I noticed she was not cheerful in any of those pictures taken a few weeks ago. “Hmm,” I wondered, “how will I find out what is disturbing her? She means so much to me, she is my world.”

That night as I held her, she was boiling; her temperature seemed so high. I took a reading and it read 38.9! Oh, that was scary. I fed her, gave her medicine, and made her sleep comfortably on my shoulder singing softly until she fell asleep.

“She is too young; should I have waited a bit longer?” I asked myself. Yes, she is my three-year-old beautiful daughter. She is my angel. It was the first week for her to be away from home and her comfort zone. As a working mother, I thought maybe it is the right time for her to interact with other kids of her age. I checked her bag, no more activity from her school for that day, even the school app had only one picture of hers taken in the class, and of course she looked so dull.

I think back to a few weeks ago when I decided to send her to a preschool and asked her how she felt about it. She was so happy to choose her school stuff—a new school bag, a lunch box, and a nice pair of shoes. I enjoyed very much seeing her so excited!

But soon her cute face looked so dull when I left her at school, and her enthusiasm completely vanished in a week’s time. She missed home and mom very much. Every morning, her first question for me would be, “Are you going to work today?”

Everything changed again due to the COVID-19 situation. I started working from home like many of us. My daughter was the happiest in the world.

She saw me at home 24/7. Her enthusiasm for learning was at its peak as her school went online. I became her teacher, too. She
enjoyed every bit of learning, crafting, painting and playing at home because she was receiving maximum attention from me. I felt like I was in heaven seeing her laughter! This is what I wanted to witness. The world is suffering, but her world has become the happiest place!

Anonymous

What Are You Doing in This Lockdown?

This is a very rare experience. A type of world crisis I don’t think anyone expected in their lifetime. I certainly did not see this coming. Last time there was a worldwide pandemic was in 1918. The Spanish Flu, with over 500 million cases, lasted two years. However, this may be an unfair comparison because we are in a more medically and technologically advanced state. I do want to emphasize that a big part of this world is quite lucky as we get to spend time at home for the COVID-19 lockdown. Whereas back in 1918, the theory of germs had only been accepted thirty years prior, and the general public was still learning about it. So the only thing people did was toughen up and keep working so they could provide for their families. There are still many around the world doing this, as their work can’t be done virtually.

Roughly eight weeks have passed since the lockdown was implemented in Qatar, putting an end to many healthy and even unhealthy activities. For instance, enjoying the sunlight outdoors, socializing and having a cup of coffee or eating together. The regular evening football sessions nearest to home, then ending up at one of our friend’s houses to play video games. Reminiscing these memories of activities we took for granted will make us cherish them again. Just the aroma of fresh cut grass and the smell of pavement after a rainfall lightens my mood now. Has anyone noticed how lovely the weather has been while we have been indoors? Or is it a hint of delusion because we want to be outdoors so badly? As much as the outdoor world is missed, the benefits of being indoors shouldn’t be disposed of.
“It’s not about the destination; it’s about the journey.” The journey is crucial right now. The destination, being the end of COVID-19, will come inevitably; so it is really about what actions we take during this time period. We can come out of this lockdown mentally and physically healthier, or the opposite. A healthy mindset would be to avoid procrastinating from doing work and activities till the pandemic ends, and instead to take control of our actions in the present. For example, if the gym is closed, we can either give up exercising or we can improvise and find a spot to use at home. This is a very obvious example, but the moral of this is that we can always find a solution to a problem. In addition, we are forced to eat homemade food, which is a lot healthier than eating out. This is a great time to focus on our diets as we have more time to think and prepare our meals and drinks. Similarly, we can improve our mental health and wellbeing. We all have access to the internet and loads of time in our hands. This is a golden opportunity to reflect and either search for new hobbies or focus more on our current ones. We can further maintain this by spending more time with our families. During our normal hectic schedules, some of us reached home at night after our parents were asleep and then left for university while our parents were at work or before they were awake. We had no quality time together, which can make us forget what we should be grateful for at times. This exceptional time period is perfect for forming stronger bonds with our family or to repair those damaged ones. This can be done by something as simple as regular conversation, playing board games, or just watching a movie together. Anything that sparks a mutual interest and stops us from staying in our rooms all day. We are already in a physical isolation, which can lead to a psychological one, causing us to become unhappy.

Being unhappy for no reason at times in this lockdown is a real thing. At the beginning, everyone was talking about how this pandemic is affecting them. I thought that since this is not negatively affecting me in a physical way (e.g., unemployment or having the virus itself), I thought I was all good. But boy was I wrong! We can't forget our mental health! Staying home like this for a long period of time can be mentally detrimental for us. That's because we aren't outdoors and this may lead to self-isolation to the point where we don't speak to anyone, which leads to unhappiness. This actually happened to me.

I started to feel this way one and a half months into this lockdown. All I did in my day was watch Netflix, eat and sleep. This led to a type of laziness where I didn't feel like talking to any of my friends or getting out of bed, which made me feel lonely. It was a vicious
cycle where my laziness prevented me from interacting, further intensifying the feeling of loneliness. The way I pulled myself out of this was when my closest friend knocked some sense into me.

My friend and I always commiserate on our last day of finals. However, this time I couldn’t get myself to call her because I wasn’t in the mood to talk, and I just wanted to relax and do my own thing. So I messaged her saying that I didn’t want to call. What she replied with really impacted me and helped fix my mindset.

“What have you been doing in your day that is keeping you this occupied? I’ve been through this as well, and I know what you’re feeling. The only way to get out of this is to force yourself out of that bed and make some sort of schedule to do something productive. Watch videos that make you feel motivated so that you can get OUT of that bed! Play video games if you need to. Every morning, get up and make your bed and only get back into it at night. I’m calling you right now so you better pick up.”

From there onwards, we caught up with each other on call after call, and I did catch myself feeling a lot happier. Listening to her talk about how she has been exercising and drinking lemon detox water every morning sparked something within me. It made me realize that I have to keep making an effort in interacting with others, which keeps the optimism and happy feeling alive. I also noticed that I had begun to live an unhealthy life, and a lockdown should not be an excuse to stay in bed all day.

Therefore, I incorporated a regular exercise routine in my day. Along with this, I do other activities like reading more books now that I have more time, and I have also been playing new video games, which are very addictive! I’ve been taking care of my diet, having dived into the cooking world which takes up a healthy amount of my day and is very informative. Furthermore, I’ve been paying extra attention to my mental health and healing. I’m personally doing this by trying to be more spiritual. This can be also done through yoga or other ways of meditation. All these small changes into my daily routine have positively impacted my life and I will reminisce on them once the pandemic is over and try to keep my schedule as similar to this as I can. In addition to that, I find that one of the best ways to clear my mind and have a more peaceful sleep is through cleaning my room and having a tidy surrounding.

It has been a few weeks now that I have been keeping myself busy in a healthy manner. I have been keeping active with the Engineering
Enrichment cycle 2020 from the Center for Teaching and Learning, and even writing this response is one of the ways I have kept my mind running and stayed productive. I can truly say that from the biggest to the smallest changes I made in this quarantine, I am a better version of myself now, and I feel happier again. Those negative feelings are long gone but they can revisit me, so it’s crucial for me to lead a healthy and active life!

There is always a rainbow after the storm. This will end! Until this period ends, we should follow the rules and pray for all the individuals who are fighting this pandemic for us. The least we can do is help them by staying home. Enjoy this “stay at home” time and use it wisely as this time may never come again and will always be remembered. It will even be missed when we are on our way to the next class or getting ready to leave for work. As the saying goes, “You don’t know what you have until it’s gone.”

Saba Hanif Khan
Petroleum engineering student, Class of 2023

Grading in the Time of COVID

I’m just glad to say I’m so thrilled that I finally graduated. I’ve always postponed weight-loss because of uni. Now that I have all this free time, I decided to get back at it but ended up spending all my time in the kitchen. It started out with healthy recipes but now it’s so hard for my parents to kick me out of the kitchen. I’m not gonna lie—some days the food was way too salty or way too healthy to the point it was bland, but my dog is always there to support me. This girl never leaves a trace on the plate. I want to stop cooking but there’s more to learn and recipes I need to master. To counteract all the food I’m eating, I just got back to jogging. Let’s hope I get to the state where it’s hard to kick me off of the treadmill.

Mai AlShakhs
Electrical and computer engineering student, Class of 2020
A Day in the Life of a Staff on Lockdown

Beginning on March 12, 2020, working from home became my new reality during COVID quarantine, but I soon fell into a routine:

7:30 a.m. Morning and work time.
I ‘commute’ from the bedroom to the kitchen for breakfast and then the living room for work (Not being able to see students in person is the worst part of this work-from-home reality. I miss them.)

12 p.m. Lunch time.
I did not cook in pre-corona times, so it is a little challenging now. The result of the things I make is not entirely edible, let’s just put it that way. I must explore the culinary world now. And maybe I can even have a little cooking show. Ha ha.

1 to 5 p.m. Work time.
It should be called “screen” time. Hours and hours of screen time. And then there is Zoom. Lots and lots of Zoom.

5 to 7 p.m. Learning time.
My favorite part of quarantine (apart from spending virtual time with students) is learning about different things: environmental sustainability (how cool is it that startups now are developing curtains that can improve air quality in your house and recycling used gum to make cool sports wear? I will have a pair of those gum shoes, please.), educating via social media, social entrepreneurship, practicing Khaleeji, drawing portraits, designing traditional nomad carpets and minimalist dresses. Maybe one of these will be my next career!

7 p.m. Dinner time.
New dilemma: food delivery creates plastic waste, but my cooking might jeopardize my stomach’s ability to function. This is more than a little challenging. I totally should have gone to culinary school.

8 p.m. Workout time.
I follow Boho Yoga on YouTube; excellent is an understatement.

8:30 p.m. Family and friends connection time.
Living alone has never felt this lonely before (I miss my mom). Oh, and thank you, my house plants, for being my best company during this time. You are appreciated.

9:30 p.m. Rest time.
Thanks, HGTV, for my new passion: home renovations. Now I just need to find a home to renovate.
11 p.m. Sleep time.
I count my many blessings: safety, security, health, family, friends, job, students, opportunities. I realize every day that we must change our selfish ways as humans before Nature can allow us back into the ‘normal’ world.

Sabina Uzakova
Department of Student Affairs

Connecting and Letting Go

There’s nothing like a global pandemic—and the isolation it brings—to make you take a good, hard look at your priorities and your life choices. In the Before Times, it was work hard and play hard, and “play” usually meant “travel” for me. COVID didn’t change the work part for me; I still did—and do—lots of that. But with travel off the table, what was a girl supposed to do with her spare time? Not that I had that much spare time at first. The first two weeks of working from home were busy: Things were changing so quickly that we were writing and communicating and planning how we were going to communicate pretty much nonstop.

Once I settled into my new routine, though, I felt . . . lost. We’d gotten through the transition to remote working, and it was time to get back to my regularly scheduled programming. But all of my projects for the spring were canceled and I didn’t know what to do with myself. I was adrift when I needed more than ever to be grounded. I found myself wanting to escape, but I couldn’t.

Instead, I looked inward. What was it that I felt I needed to escape instead of examine? Introspection is hard, and I guess that’s why I don’t like to do it, especially when I’m pretty sure I know what I’ll find and I know I won’t like it. As a student and teacher of yoga, I start every practice by reminding the class to let go of judgment, expectation and competition. I won’t get into the messy details, but what I found by turning inward is that I haven’t been living my yoga, and it showed in how I communicated and connected with others,
especially with myself. It was time for me to start living that same reminder I give students in my class: *Let go of judgment, expectation and competition*. So while some folks used this time to pursue new hobbies or side hustles, my time in isolation has been one of communication and connection with those around me and with myself. What was once second nature to me now felt foreign and weird, but that's why it's called practice.

I took a deep breath, stepped onto my mat and . . . let go.

**Lesley Kriewald '99**  
Marketing and Communications

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**Isolation**

In a world where to touch is to hurt, it's hard to avoid getting disconnected from reality. Quarantine started off on a high note with motivation and a need to explore my passions. I managed to complete my last semester with the best grades of my university career. But everything that goes up must come down, and slowly but surely the isolation began to take a toll on me. My insomnia gave me a lot of free time in the day that I spent doing the bare minimum. I stopped calling my friends because I did not think there was anything new in my life to report, and I wanted to avoid questions about my future since everything seemed unstable and undetermined. Days lost their meaning and time seemed redundant. I felt trapped in an endless loop of emptiness with no direction. As an extrovert, the isolation began eating away at my mental health. I started walking to distract myself from toxic thoughts and have some time to appreciate nature and my surroundings. There was no hope of travelling to see my family, and the news did not seem promising.

After some time, I faced a massive betrayal from a person I valued, but my response to the situation shocked me. I was expecting pain and heartbreak, but instead I saw the response of my friends and the way everyone was calling and checking up on me. This awakening
made me appreciate the pure and loyal hearts I have in my life and reminded me that I am never alone no matter how distant I get. The rules eventually became more flexible, and my friends often passed by to see me outside the dorms. Although there was still a physical distance between us and a mask hiding our smiles, things began looking up. I contacted several companies and heard back from a few. The quarantine challenged me to severe extents and helped me grow in ways I am yet to identify. They say everything happens for a reason, and this reason is becoming more evident by the day. Isolation is not healthy, but everyone needs to appreciate the small moments in life and find their own path to self-discovery.

Karima Ramadan
Electrical and computer engineering student, Class of 2020

Wait for it . . .

Viral trends under quarantine seemed magnified. For example, references to Tiger King infiltrated all types of memes and social media posts. And then the cycle moved on . . . to the Ghana dancing pallbearers, who took the world by storm. This group of African men is shown dancing with coffins to put the victim of death to his grave in celebration. Brilliantly, someone realized that their videos work harmoniously if coupled with another video that appeared likely to end in impending doom (shooting a tiger, hurtling down a ski jump, and other botched feats of strength). Their videos with their iconic dance moves and EDM track have been replicated all over the world, from Peruvian police dancing with a COVID coffin to the pallbearers appearing when Mario dies in a video game. The dancers became the model meme for COVID—one that allowed us all to laugh in such a somber moment. Their message became, “Stay at home or dance with us.”

These dancers seemingly broke into conversations and living rooms across the world, including my online class. I had only one brave student willing to turn his video camera on for class, and he kept us all on our toes with his choice of background video, which sometimes included troops marching through France and at other
times illustrated infestations of massive coronavirus germs. During one Zoom class, another student who had changed his background to an image of the virus announced, “Wait for it . . .” so we knew something special was about to happen. And then the mic dropped. The pallbearers danced into the student's background, and he nearly rolled out of his chair laughing. I was rolling with him. It was a moment of reprieve that brought everyone closer together and gave us a chance to laugh again. Together.

This was definitely one of the highlights of the semester for everyone on the Zoom call. Online classes make it difficult to create community, but it’s moments when students shine that reminds us why we do this. So, please, everyone, turn on your cameras!

Dr. Brittany Bounds
Liberal Arts Professor

Continuous Learning During COVID-19

Continuous learning means a never-ending increase of knowledge and learning. Constant learning is the way of adapting to altering environments and new requirements. As a professor, teaching is a two-way exercise. A professor should be inclined to learn from their students as well as to inspire them. Each day of teaching is a different day.

For the last two years as an Engineering professor, I have had the opportunity to visit the first year’s English 104 course. During these visits, the students were asked to prepare a list of questions to interview the Engineering faculty about the importance of writing and communication for their professional careers. The freshmen are also asked to complete a reflective writing activity afterwards to assess the impact of the visit. Surprisingly, they realized that writing and communication skills are very important for engineers, especially since we are asked to write research proposals, monthly reports, and emails. It also inspired them to look at writing as an
essential skill for their careers. The continuous encouragement and emphasis on writing skills have proven to be instrumental in developing well-rounded engineering graduates who exhibit both technical and professional competence.

So how can professors learn from undergraduate students? Being aware of what students are doing and learning in places other than the courses we teach can allow us to learn and discover more, sometimes having a greater chance of success than conventional methods of learning. The commitment to continuous learning is modeled effectively when students can provide the primary contributions. This type of a more profound learning process will carry through to the workplace environment and expand to others. A recent example of a significant learning experience from student to teacher took place during the transition to online teaching after the second week of March 2020. After two lectures, one of the senior students, Rashid Almusleh, recommended that I give the lecture in the same way as a face-to-face class. He introduced and taught the use of an app on the iPad to make class delivery better. It was great advice and made the rest of the semester go smoothly.

Dr. Albertus Retnanto ’96
Petroleum Engineering Professor

Search in the Shadow of COVID

On an early March morning, a Texas A&M flag flew in slow motion under the overcast sky. I walked out of a hotel to attend my student’s dissertation defense in College Station, Texas. Thousands of miles away, an infectious disease called COVID-19 was ravaging the Chinese city of Wuhan, while cases of infection were increasing in dozens of other countries. On various media platforms, tussles about COVID-related truths were everywhere, from conspiracy theorists’ claims of the coronavirus’ origin, to politicians’ accusations of their opponents “weaponizing the virus,” and experts’ contradictory opinions about wearing face masks. Little did I know at
that time how COVID-19 would impact my experience as an educator when it hit the country where I work and live—Qatar.

Three days later, I returned to Qatar. COVID-19 infections had begun to explode in Europe, and we began to prepare for teaching classes online. In about a week, the Ministry of Public Health would issue an official mandate for all schools and universities to teach classes online. From then on, online teaching and learning activities continued until early May, when the spring semester ended.

One of the difficulties of teaching online classes was controlling the exam and test taking process. Late March, my class had a midterm exam online via Zoom. While grading, I discovered unusual similarities in several students’ exam papers. Determining whether the students violated exam rules was exceptionally difficult because this was an exam in which I could not have a full view of the students’ actions. Eventually, I was convinced by a probability analysis that a violation had indeed occurred. The students confessed when presented with my analysis and my conviction. They each received a zero for this midterm exam—the standard punishment for such a violation, but I then gave these students a make-up test with a grade penalty. I wanted to achieve a meaningful outcome from an otherwise despairing incident. This would require certain truths to be recognized and forgiveness to be given, so that there could be reconciliation between the people involved.

Helping my students establish the respect for truth and the ability to approach it is my utmost goal as an educator. However, truth is often not a convenient thing. For students, getting a higher grade by dishonest means may be easier than remaining genuine and
receiving a lower grade. For communities around the globe, truth may be something that threatens their national pride. For political parties, truth may be a hindrance to their grip of power. The list goes on. But at an individual level, I believe what C. S. Lewis has said: “If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth—only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair.”

A Professor

Awake at 2 a.m.

Many have had trouble sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am no exception. In this short piece, I share with you some of my thoughts and worries that have kept me awake in the middle of the night during spring 2020.

What if my mom dies?
What if we have to be quarantined?
How can we travel home?
How can I collect my data?
What if my father dies?
How can I do the English placement testing?
Will my salary be cut?
How will this impact Mia’s development?
How can I meet the deadline for this article?
Am I really turning 40?
Do I need to order more masks?
What if Hamdy gets sick?
How should I organize my syllabus for the fall?
What type of bread should I bake tomorrow?
Is the government spying on me through this app?
Who will take care of Mia?
Will my grant money be taken away?
Is the data accurate?
How can I network before going up for promotion?
How can I make breakout rooms on Zoom?
What if my grandma dies?
What if Trump wins again?
What if Biden wins?
Will Mia’s school be online in the fall?
What if I lose my job?
Who will take care of our animals?
What if I have another miscarriage?
How can I be an anti-racist?
Should I extend my tenure clock?
Should I delete my FB?
When can we see our families again?
What can I write for Best Writing 2020?

Dr. Sara Hillman
Liberal Arts Professor

Before and After

What stands out most to me about my own and other’s responses to COVID-19 is how it has changed our views of our pre-COVID lives. For the first few weeks after the outbreak, we were frantically searching for ways to cope with living in a world of “isolation.” What I’ve seen in myself and others in recent weeks is a realization of how stressful and busy life often was before this, and I’ve had the conversation five or six times about the new anxiety of returning to a busy, overcommitted schedule in the near future.

As a psychologist, my goal is often to assist others in being more intentional, aware, and respectful of their internal experience rather than simply reacting to life. The positive change I’m seeing is an appreciation for a slower pace where people are finding more value and meaning in things such as cooking a homemade meal, uninterrupted conversation with loved ones (both in person and through video chat), or a good movie on the couch. For years, many of us have bounced back and forth between being too busy and being bored. Having to accept a life emptied out of most or all external commitments for months has led to a great sense of peace for many, but not all of us.
For now, I’m staying busy with work and engaged with life, but without the overcommitted schedule and crazy traffic. The dog loves that I’m home all day, and I’ve especially enjoyed the extra time with my children. And, I’m barefoot most of the time! I regularly ask myself this question: “How could the COVID lifestyle help create a better post-COVID world for myself and others?”

Dr. Steve Wilson
Student Affairs

Aggies Responding

COVID caught the world by surprise; its monstrous rate of transmission made it possible for it to reach every continent in a matter of months. As the virus rattled its way through Europe, America, Africa and even Australia, countries were distraught with China as they suspected that the infection and death rate, which let the virus go beyond China’s borders, were being buried intentionally for economic gains. This birthed conspiracy theories, ranging from a gamble of a million deaths—a biological warfare of sorts—to a bidding game on ventilators. These theories rose from the abysmal depths of politics, and due to its complexity, the full reality of these events remains unknown.

As COVID wreaked havoc across the world, averting its spread remained the core purpose; airports and borders shut down, school and university classes were suspended, and cities and towns went into complete lockdown. The chaos evoked panic as unimaginable conditions were put forth in the most-affected countries. People began panic buying and some started stockpiling essential supplies for financial gain. The number of jobs lost skyrocketed, and everyone was masked leaving behind no recognizable face on the streets. Thousands of COVID-positive cases were coming forward daily, leading to an immense shortage of PPEs (Personal Protective Equipment), bed space, ventilators and other hospital equipment. The economic impact of the COVID crisis was being compared to that of the Great Depression.
The financial uncertainty was not the only thing that was causing uneasiness; the fear of the unknown ushered it. People didn't fear getting infected themselves, but the thought of it reaching their loved ones, especially old parents or young children, was taking a toll on their mental health. Anyone could be carrying the deadly virus while being asymptomatic. The virus could be anywhere—in the grocery store, in the office, or even in your own elevator, and the fear was uncontainable.

News coverage of COVID was extensive and exhausting for the audience, and at times it felt like it's going to end at “survival of the fittest.” To mitigate the aftermath of COVID, scientists and researchers started to explore alternatives and in the interim our Mechanical Engineering Department of TAMUQ also jumped into action with faculty and students. We addressed the shortages and designed, 3D-printed face shields and supplied them to various charity organizations. We researched how to safely and effectively decontaminate masks so that they can be reused to help curb the huge medical waste produced by the hospitals.

Having a sister work at CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), the dangers and struggles of working as a frontline doctor without proper PPE became undisguisable. When COVID reached our shores, my classmate Hayyam Iqbal and I approached Dr. Bilal Masoor and offered our time and energy for his initiative, for which he assigned tasks to us immediately. The research became significantly important to us not only because it required our immediate attention but also as we, too, were unquestionably impacted by it.

We spent innumerable hours accounting thousands of online searches with hundreds of pages to read. We sat at the same spot every day to Zoom and discuss ideas and evaluate information just to come up with a solid idea to address the issues at hand. The deadlines motivated us when we ran out of energy, and the will to help people pushed us through every mental challenge including the fatigue caused by the increased screen time itself.

Looking back at the past three months, it gladdens me to know the difference we have made and the milestones we have achieved; it was an honor to be a part of a team which donated batches of face shields to Qatar Red Crescent. I proudly acknowledge the efforts of my mentor and my co-researcher for inspiring me to grow, even in these calamitous times. As a university student who spent ten hours or more outside of home on usual days, the dull-mandated work-from-home life didn't suit me well. Days upon days piled up and the
only achievement I found to be proud of was waking up sane which pushed me to realize that the problem wasn’t social distancing; rather, it was socially isolating myself. I took the encouragement from my colleague (who also always happened to keep a check on me) and took advantage of the time to work for what I love. Luckily, my interests fell in the same line as the purpose of my research, and I consumed my time in designing and developing prototypes for a scalable method of disinfecting masks. Growing meant more than the ability to bend according to the need of time: it was the hours I gave myself for a break, it was being able to accept what I cannot change, and it was changing what I could.

Haseeb Bajwa
Mechanical engineering student, Class of 2022

Graduating in the Class of COVID 2020

The COVID-19 situation proved that holding a pen is much powerful than holding a weapon, and engineers’ weapons are their minds. We proved that engineers, as honest problem solvers and compassionate people, can contribute a lot to the world from building hospitals to manufacturing mediation tools, and so forth. But we have to always remember that an “A” student could end in getting an “F” in life without morals. Morals are what make our community flourish.

Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi
Mechanical engineering student, Class of 2020
Many years from now, which of your stories about COVID-19 will you wish you would’ve written down?

Start writing now...