BEST WRITING
الفُضي قُدُماً
MOVING FORWARD
Daft Punk and The Chemical Brothers, two of my bucket list music acts, have graced the music scene for decades. I was fortunate to witness The Chems live, thankfully. Still, the former act formally split up this year, leaving my bucket list dream hanging. Nonetheless, I mentioned these acts for the one reason I enjoy them apart from their music: their use of light and projection displays in their live performances.

Light as a medium has the power to illustrate our minds visually and is what drives us every day. But how you create something routine and omnipresent into something artistic? That is the challenge that I guess visual artists take. I, for one, am always on the lookout for such visual installations wherever I can find them. My journey as a photographer is not just to click but to see beyond the camera lens. I have never been a fan of finding the correct settings or worrying about expensive equipment. Eventually, as a photographer, you realize you capture first with your eyes. Keeping that in mind, I had ventured for my photography escapades on 10 February 2021.

Going around The Pearl earlier, and then Msheireb Downtown in Doha, I just kept looking around, taking pictures here and there. What met my eye, of course. I had heard about “Crystallation” via social media, located at Sikkat Al Wadi in Msheireb Downtown Doha. It’s an interactive installation featuring seven gates geometrically aligned to create a mesmeric feel in the shape of a tunnel. Visitors can contribute to this installation by purchasing glass crystals that they can hang wherever they like.

When I came upon Crystallation, I found the tunnel empty enough to take the picture I envisaged: a tunnel glistening in the dark of night. Illuminated tunnels, I’m sure, are nothing new, but this one just hit differently.

This picture is the perfect metaphor for the year 2021. Last year in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had brought the world to a halt. Empty roads, safety protocols, the looming worry of who will fall
victim to the disease. STEM, however, coupled with human will and togetherness, has put the gloves back on to turn this around. With increased social cooperation and thanks to the availability of vaccines, we enter 2021 filled with hope, optimism, and a chance that maybe this might lead the long road to a new normal. Perhaps one that is mask-less. The way I see it the photo is this: a light shining a ray of hope into tomorrow.

All the people around us, our loved ones, friends, families, colleagues, both in the community here at TAMUQ, the various EC campuses, the State of Qatar, and everywhere worldwide are all striving to enter the tunnel of 2021 in that spirit. The togetherness of everyone to hear stories, the desire for change and the fight for the injustices people face globally unites us more than ever as we progress through this year.

I hope while reading this edition of Best Writing, you will relate to the stories. Despite our individualities, our shared experiences will allow us to find the light and move forward toward a better tomorrow.
About the Title

When the Best Writing committee brainstormed for the theme to this year’s edition, I thought “Moving Forward” would be engaging because this is what we have all been trying to do since the global pandemic started—to move forward. When the corona virus emerged last year, the world came to a halt and it upended our day-to day lives. Through it all, we learned to adapt. We have accepted the fact that this virus is not going away soon. With the virus around us, our lives now revolve around uncertainty, yet we are all trying to make the best of what we have, do the best we can to keep going, and move forward with our lives in what we now call the “new normal.”

—Vanessa Lina, Center for Teaching & Learning
Dear Readers,

Welcome to the eighth volume of Best Writing, the annually published anthology of the writings of Texas A&M at Qatar's students, staff, and even a few faculty. Eight is the number of notes in an octave, legs of a spider, and bits in a computer byte. The number eight is considered to be a lucky number of prosperity in many Asian cultures, and in Islam it indicates the number of gates in heaven. In literature, the number eight has been associated with the desire for harmony, balance, and completion. It is the only positive Fibonacci number, other than 1, that is a perfect cube. When turned on its side, it becomes the symbol for infinity.

According to a form of numerology known as Angel numbers, the number eight “represents the balance between your physical, mental, and spiritual being” in this journey we call life. At every stage in this journey, “you are entitled to take steps and make decisions to move forward,” [emphasis added], counsels one interpreter of numerology who goes so far as to claim that the “Number 8 is what helps you make those decisions” (Padre, 2020).

Regardless of whether you find any of these diverse associations with the number eight applicable or entertaining, one thing is true: we all longed to move forward this past year, to put COVID-19 in the rear-view mirror. But COVID-19 refused to recede to the degree and with the speed that we would have preferred, and so we found ourselves in yet another year of the seemingly endless uncertainty of teaching and learning and caring for others during a global pandemic. This also extended the sense of isolation and feelings of overwhelm experienced by many of us, leading to frustration, exhaustion, or even despair as we tried to manage our expectations, conserve our energy, and pace ourselves for an invisible future.

Yet, as we acclimated to this “new normal,” I trust that each of us has had at least brief moments of raised consciousness when we became aware of our choice to decide how to respond to these fluctuating daily challenges. But if you plotted on an x-y graph the effectiveness over time of the COVID-impacted decisions you had to make this past academic year, would you see straight lines with positive slopes and clear trajectories? Probably not. However, there is something to be said for the resilience, tenacity, flexibility, and ingenuity demonstrated by the students, staff, faculty, and family members who make up the community that is TAMUQ. The experiences that each of us has been through this past year—and
the internal dilemmas accompanying these external realities—might not lend themselves to linear graphing, but they DO make for interesting moments to write about. I frequently tell my students that the things that make our lives more difficult—the obstacles that seem to separate us from our goals and dreams—are actually GREAT topics to write about!

And the best place to begin when writing your story? It can be the hour or day or month BEFORE we make an important decision, the moment of much mental turmoil as we are deciding who or what or how to be. Yet nothing is more enticing to a reader than this: to be invited into the gut-wrenching internal journey of another as they are navigating one of life's more important decisions. “If you have the guts to write about it,” I tell my first-year students, “then I will find the guts to read it.” We could do worse than to follow Hemingway’s advice: “Write hard and clear about what hurts” (qtd. In Goldberg, 1990).

If you read this entire 8th volume, you will encounter the courage of many fledgling writers midflight as they share snapshots of their lives and the beginnings of their writing journeys with more than just their teachers and classmates. Despite the social distancing that pandemic precautions have required of us, we are still human beings who need to feel that our words are heard. Writing is one way of satisfying this need while connecting us to a community that many of us have felt deprived of. In this way, writing can lead to healing, which all of us could benefit from in a fractured and fearful world.

It is perhaps not coincidental that there was an increase in poetry submissions for potential publication in this year's volume. In times of uncertainty or upheaval, (and the second year of a pandemic would surely qualify as one of these times!), we often look to poets to help us make sense of the changes we are undergoing. My definition of poet includes anyone who pays close attention to their choices and usage of words, and for years now, I have been calling every student in my writing courses a “poet-engineer.” But if being an engineer means to focus on finding solutions to problems in order to aid humanity, then perhaps all of us—students, staff, faculty, and our families—are “poet-engineers”—acting both as artists who inspire and practitioners who enact the changes we'd like to see.
In addition to the many poems in this volume, there are also numerous stories. And there is little reason to read someone else's story if there is no struggle or conflict. If you read all of the pieces in this volume, you will begin to see patterns in the struggles that students, staff, and faculty have written about. Sometimes these struggles are specifically described as the writer re-creates a scene to give the reader a feeling of either being involved in the action or being a sacred witness. And sometimes the conflicts are merely alluded to—often with an internal dialogue between the writer’s desires and an internalized voice representing a different generation, culture, community, value, or point of view. These can be “iceberg” pieces where a reader may sense that there is something profound at stake for the narrator, even if the details are not always floating on the surface. Poems are also often icebergs in this way, conjuring up pain that often goes unnamed. When asked by a reporter why humanity needs the art form of tragedy, writer and philosopher Maggie Nelson said this: “We need tragedy because we are full of rage.” When asked why we are full of rage, Nelson quipped, “Because we are full of grief” (2021).

To move through the tragedy of this pandemic without experiencing any loss is highly improbable if not impossible. If you didn’t lose a loved one, then you still may have lost time, hope, celebrations, and progress towards your dreams. Writing is one way (and in my biased view, the BEST WAY!) to feel our rage, dip into our grief, and then move forward. In the stillness of the pandemic, I have learned to listen to a quieter voice within, one that has been telling me for a while that it is time for me to let go of leading Best Writing, signaled in a frequency that I have finally tuned in to hear. I am honored to have had the privilege of learning from all the writers and readers represented by the series over the years. It means the world to me that you have trusted our community with your stories and words. I have no doubt that I will be leaving Best Writing in capable hands with a creative and caring committee led by Sahar Mari and Dr. Mary Queen. In the meantime, you can count on me to keep reading and writing and supporting this series from the sidelines, cheering for every writer’s right to be heard.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mysti Rudd, Liberal Arts
Introduction from Co-editor

Last year, Dr. Rudd officially asked me to be the co-editor of this wonderful publication. I felt excited, honored, and a little intimidated. Although I've been part of the publication since its inception in 2014, serving as the co-editor this year has been a growth step for me. Remembering how this publication started puts a smile on my face. For those of you who don’t know the story...

It was Monday, 20 Jan. 2014, I was working as the Branding and Production Coordinator in the Office of Marketing and Communications when I received a flattering email titled “student publication project for TAMUQ” from Dr. Rudd. In this email, she introduced herself and explained what the abbreviation “TAMUQ” means—not knowing that I was sitting in my office located in the stairwell below her. Dr. Alan Weber, whom I’ve previously collaborated with on Weill Cornell Medicine’s student publication, had recommended me to her. Dr. Rudd had just received the necessary funding to make this project a reality, BUT the publication had to be printed and published no later than 30 June that year. I could tell how passionate and thrilled she was about the project and how determined she was to make it happen within this very tight production timeline. It was truly an ambitious plan since at that point in time no student writing had been collected. Needless to say, everything came together (at the last minute) to create the first edition of this student anthology, which was lavishly celebrated. Each year since then, the process gradually improved, the layout became more sophisticated, and the publication has grown into the tradition it has become today.

It has been a privilege to be part of the Best Writing committee for the last couple of years and having served in various roles, I learned deeply about all the parts that need to come together for this successful publication. You may wonder what we consider a “successful” publication: It is the coming together of members of our community who recognize and want to magnify the power of the written word. I’m humbled by the courageousness of all the writers who’ve contributed to this year’s publication — it is not easy to write, and it is not easy to publicly share one’s writing. Thank you to Dr. Mysti Rudd who has trusted me to carry this publication forward. I know Best Writing won’t be the same
without her, yet I hope to continue honoring the stories that will be shared in the future.

I am excited to move forward with the new co-editor, Dr. Mary Queen, who I know will bring a fresh perspective and new ideas. And of course, I am keen to continue working with the fantastic Best Writing committee without whom this endeavor wouldn’t be possible. I am privileged to co-lead the Best Writing committee which is not just a group of people who share the love of reading and writing, but a deliberate team comprised of students, faculty, and staff at TAMUQ who are dedicated to amplifying the voices of our community.

Sincerely,

Sahar Mari, Center for Teaching & Learning
Acknowledgments

We are indebted to each and every one of the students, staff, and faculty who submitted their pieces for potential publication in this year’s volume. Without your willingness to do the hard work of writing and revising, 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 new ideas, fresh perspectives, and creativity provided by the 2020/2021 Best Writing Committee composed of four undergraduate and three graduate students, five staff, and three faculty members:

Aljawhara Althani, Class of 2023  
Midhat Javaid, Class of 2020  
Murtaza Khan, Class of 2016  
Rinith Reghunath, Class of 2021  
Sara Al-Banna, Class of 2022  
Sara Amani, Class of 2019  
Van Balaoro, Class of 2022  
Ira Setiawan, Library

Olena Snitko, Liberal Arts  
Dr. Mary Queen, Liberal Arts  
Dr. Mohamed Fadlelmula, Petroleum Engineering  
Dr. Mysti Rudd, Liberal Arts  
Sahar Mari, CLT  
Shauna Loej, CLT  
Vanessa Lina, CLT

The cover photograph contest winner, Murtaza Khan, was chosen by the following committee:

Olena Snitko (co-chair), Ira Setiawan (co-chair), Neha Rashid (Marketing & Communications), Shaun Torres (Library), Reem Selo (VCUarts in Qatar), Mowad Al-Aradi ’19 (former student), Cheryl Garcia (Business Operations), and Srinath Iyengar (Executive Office).

A special thank you to Lesley Kriewald for diligently reviewing the manuscript and providing editorial suggestions. We were so fortunate to collaborate with graphic designer, Jawad Hamdan, who infused this year’s Best Writing with new, bold ideas illustrating this year’s theme: Moving Forward. We hope to work with him again!

Thank you to all members of the Best Writing committee for serving on the committee, promoting the initiative, reviewing submissions, and helping with the launch party. Special thanks must be given to Olena Snitko and Ira Setiawan for serving as project managers who kept track of all files and organized the systematic review of submissions. We couldn't have produced this volume without you! Vanessa Lina was instrumental in stretching our budget, scheduling meetings, organizing the launch event, and even coming up with
this year’s theme: Moving Forward (see “About the Title” penned by Vanessa.) We are grateful for the talent of graduate student Murtaza Khan who not only took the cover photo, but also wrote a beautiful piece about it! Aljawhara Althani deserves recognition for meticulously recording and distributing meeting minutes. She also helped make many design decisions, along with Dr. Mary Queen, as they served on the subcommittee led by our CTL graphic design expert Sahar Mari. Dr. Mohamed Fadlelmula became the first engineering faculty member to join the Best Writing committee, and together with Dr. Mary Queen, they recruited faculty to participate in this volume (see final chapter). We also want to acknowledge CTL staff members Shauna Loej and Sara Amani for offering their assistance wherever it was needed, including recruiting and coaching student speakers for the book launch event. Former CTL writing tutor Van Balaoro (’21) did an amazing job as master of ceremonies at the 2020 virtual book launch, and we thank him for adding heart and humor while veering out of his comfort zone in speaking in front of such a large audience.

We are grateful to Dr. Bilal Mansoor, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, for advocating for this publication as a collaboration with the Liberal Arts Program. We value the creative autonomy and generous sharing of resources provided by Dr. Joe Ura, Program Chair of the Liberal Arts Program. We hope this collaboration continues to grow, producing benefits for the university as a whole. Over the years, the Best Writing series has been made possible due to the continued funding provided by the Deans, and we greatly appreciate their enthusiastic support of this student-centered endeavor.
Dedication

The 8th volume of Best Writing is dedicated to all the students, staff, and faculty at TAMUQ who recognize the power of the written word and have used it this year to become mindful of the present and imagine a way to move forward. We continue to be impressed by your creativity, commitment, and courage in the face of numerous challenges in this, the second year of the pandemic.

This volume is also dedicated to Mike Rose (1944–2021). Mike dedicated his life to the teaching, tutoring, and studying of writing, championing the thinker and writer in each and every human being he met. In Lives on the Boundary (1989), Mike brilliantly interwove his own educational struggles with the stories of the students he first tutored at UCLA’s writing center. The reverence and respect he held for his students, colleagues, and research subjects will continue to have a ripple effect through the many stories he has left behind for us. Thanks, Mike, for living up to your ideals, thus giving the rest of us—whether teacher or student, researcher or writer—something to reach for.

And to all those who dipped their toes in the pond of grief and then found a way to move forward. The stories we tell about our loved ones is one way of keeping them alive. May we all experience the healing that writing down our stories can provide.
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CHAPTER 1

Writing About Learning
The second essay we wrote in English 104 was a narrative, which was my favorite to write. The assignment gave us the choice to write about a literacy, an event that changed your life, or a silence you have regretted. I was so excited because I knew it would be an interesting assignment. Even though it was my favorite, my first drafts certainly didn’t turn out the way I expected them to be. I wrote my draft and felt like it was finished and ready to send in. Nor did I realize that this was not the matter. After getting feedback, I noticed my paragraphs each had their point and were not connected. When I rewrote my second draft and made some changes based on peer feedback, I got better feedback and a good sense of what my essay should sound like and what information I should include. I liked writing this essay because it enabled me to think about something I have an enthusiasm for.

After rereading my third draft, I submitted it. Lamott believes that revising is a vital process when writing your drafts. Initially, I read through the entire essay searching for an irrelevant point that is not connected with the others; Lamott also describes the third draft review as “the
dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it’s loose or cramped or decayed, or even, God help us, healthy.” This means checking every single line to make sure that everything is right and that nothing is wrong with it. I even assured that each point was clear enough for the reader to understand what I was trying to reach. Rereading my essay, I think that my writing and reviewing methods are interesting, yet it’s like the writer’s method. I feel that my way of reviewing has improved as well as my writing methods. I am satisfied with the last draft I did, and I hope that for my future drafts, my ideas become more organized. The last thing I would say that I got inspired while writing my drafts is this quote by Judy Zorfass: “If you don’t have the first draft, then you can’t have a second draft.”


My Safe Zone

I used to dislike reading. I believed that there was no chance that reading could give me the same experience as different activities that I could be doing, such as swimming, coloring, or playing board games. Moreover, I was partially correct: reading would never substitute those things, but it might be something different and exciting by itself. After I read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl, my perception of reading was changed. For perhaps the first instance, a story was interesting to me, rather than just a collection of words on a page that I was asked to read. It was indeed a new story that I can be a member of, so all I would have to do to be inside was to read.

My mother consistently encouraged me to read for at least one hour per week, which meant that I could split it among the week and choose one day off. She believed that reading could improve my writing skill and help me understand my subjects better when studying. Both of my parents loved to read, and each of them had their own collection and taste in books. When I was twelve, the four of us, including my youngest sister, would visit Jarir library every month during the weekends, where my parents grabbed some books every time, but I found it challenging to figure out the one I think I might want. It fascinated me how they could go through hours simply sitting, reading a book. I thought it is a waste of time, and thus when the time arrived for me to sit and read every week, I would start to think of excuses to consider not to read. All of my complaints were useless; sometimes, I might use my homework as an excuse or state that I had a quiz to study for. My mother never let it pass; however, I would grab my story and force myself to read for some time. Typically, I just spent around twelve genuine minutes reading before becoming interrupted by my toys lying around my bed, which were more exciting than this book.

The second month came, and it was time to revisit the library. This time I picked the book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. To be honest, I picked this book just because it had the word chocolate; however, this book transformed how I observed reading. A new week started, and so I started to read for an hour for that week, sitting quietly in my bed with the new book I picked on my lap. As I started reading, nothing was that unusual about it from
previous books I already read until I found a new experience. As I kept reading, I was getting thrilled or anxious for the protagonist. I was wondering who might get the golden ticket or who will get in the gum machine. I continued to read at a faster speed since I wondered if the protagonist will get the golden ticket from the chocolate bar his grandpa bought for him or not. It was the first time I wasn’t getting interrupted by all the toys around me as nothing else was competing with the book. I had no idea when my twelve minutes ended, and the reason behind choosing twelve instead of fifteen minutes is that I prefer even numbers over odd ones. I kept reading without stopping for a second just once my sister came into the room telling me that she wanted to play. As soon as I stopped playing with her, I returned to complete the reading, but I didn’t finish it because I felt sleepy. So, what I did was that I started to set some time during the week to continue reading it. Once it eventually finished, I decided to read other books written by the same author, Roald Dahl. I genuinely love fictional stories; they enable me to discover things that I would most likely be unable to discover in reality. A book turned into a motorbike that I could ride on that would drive me through time and to new places, and that’s incredible.

By the time I was in high school, the selection of things to read raised exponentially. I started to read articles or even some writings from a magazine my mother had recommended. At that time, reading started to be my safe zone where I would come whenever I was stressed or tired from the load of work I had to do for school. Once I began to read for a few minutes, all of the stress and tiredness would escape and start all over again with new energy.

Growing up enjoying reading has genuinely changed my perspective of books and simply how unpredictable they are. It took me a while to understand this. I found that when you’re reading, you don’t waste your time but in fact what is happening is that your way of thinking changes, your word bank expands, and at last you are getting a free consultation without the need to talk with others simply you’re just getting it from the smooth pages flipped by your hands. Reading might give an opportunity for someone to revisit events or go on some entirely new journey.
I realized that reading was just an incredible relief and that in itself was amazing. After I started reading, reading became my source of knowledge, energy, and my only way to get to my safe zone, far from my busy real life.

Fatima Ali is a Qatari student majoring in electrical engineering. She enjoys writing because it allows her to share her emotions and enhances her feelings in a unique way that can only be achieved via the idea of inserting words together on a page. She finds this to be an experience that cannot be replaced.
CHAPTER 1 | Writing About Learning

Majed Saeed Mubarak
The Walk of My Week

I remember being in a library so colorful with words and feeling eager and, in a weird way, interested to read everything my eyes could see. I don’t know when or how or why I became interested in reading, but I know that I fell really hard. Every Thursday back in grade three when I was eight years old, Ms. Shihara, a young Sri Lankan teacher who loved to wear vibrant colors and possessed a vivacious personality, walked us to the school library. It was one of the few lessons that involved leaving our classroom. By every Thursday, I’d have read everything new that they stuck on our classroom’s walls, from definitions and phrases to human anatomy and Islamic foundations and principles. That’s why I always looked forward to the library lesson. As soon as we left the classroom on Thursday morning, I started reading what was hung in the corridors on the walk of my week. I read as fast as I could so that I wouldn’t fall behind in the classroom line.

My class, grade 3B, finally made it to the library. At the beginning of every library lesson, we had to read (out loud) whatever was assigned to us the previous week. And now the highlight of my week, returning the book that I picked out the previous week and picking out a new one. Ms. Shihara always assigned the same book to all of us, one of those books that had two or three sentences and a big picture on every page. We could also take a book of our choice home for the week, and I always capitalized on that opportunity. Although Ms. Shihara would monitor our choices so that she would make sure that the books we picked weren’t too hard for us to read, she always let me pick almost any book I wanted. I remember I picked out *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl once. That’s when I knew I had a “thing” for reading.

However, I didn’t have a relationship with writing until I was fourteen when I changed schools because I never really liked my old school’s way of teaching. The environment and the administration were just terrible. They would simply pick a former teacher, who was not, in any way, shape or form fit to lead or manage a school to be the principal. Over the summer before I changed schools, I told my mother, “This school isn’t going to get me anywhere further than this; I need to change schools.”
She replied, “The process of transferring schools is going to take a lot of time; there'll be a lot to get used to, and you haven't even thought about your brother. He's not ready for a change this big yet.”

I replied persistently, “Mohammed will be okay. He'll learn how to meet new people and with the passage of time, he'll be much more comfortable in the new school. I'll get all the transfer papers from both schools and I'll fill everything out for me and Mohammed. I just need you to sign them.” Although she wasn't fully convinced, she finally agreed.

We had just started grade nine and I was going through a rough time because I was in the process of getting used to my new school. I struggled being the new kid and getting looks from everybody, so I used to write down everything on my mind in my notes, and I felt much better right after. It's like an instant treatment for a heavy chest. Every time I felt I couldn't take it anymore, I spat everything in my brain on my notes, and it got me through that time. Some time had passed, and as to repay writing and to show my love for it, I started writing even when I felt really good.

Towards the end of the first term in year ten when I was fifteen years old, I started watching an outrageous number of movies and TV shows, all in English because I wanted to improve my vocabulary for an upcoming exam. For every word that I heard and didn't understand in the shows and movies I watched, I would look them up and write them down in my notes with their definitions. By the time I was done watching all of the shows and movies I wanted to watch, I had filled pages and pages with words and their definitions. It was an unorthodox way to learn, but it thankfully worked for me as I got an A on my English exam. My friends would ask me what a word meant, and I always gave the answer closest to the dictionary definition, so I got the nickname “The Dictionary”. As I did this more and more, I stopped limiting myself to TV shows and movies, and I started looking up any word I read or heard and didn't understand, whether that was in the dentist's office, or if our principal was lecturing me for getting in trouble, I added the word to my notes and wrote its definition right next to it. I learned so
many different words, such as egregious, sputum, negate, flippant, totalitarianism and orthodontics. Doing this had a positive impact on me because it meant that I could express myself as accurately as I can with the broader vocabulary I attained. It was probably the most effective way of improving my English.

After that English exam, I stopped writing in my notes even though I didn’t start doing it just to get a good grade. I did it because I have a passion for learning new concepts and new ideas. Words were just my way of pursuing that passion. That’s what literacy is to me, feeling the need to learn and understand something new.
This research report was the final project of my ENGL 104 class. I chose the topic of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic because when I started university in the fall as a freshman, I struggled with virtual learning for quite a bit of time. And even though I eventually figured it out, I know many of my peers still struggle to adjust to it. I thus chose to spend my semester studying how undergraduate students at TAMUQ have successfully adjusted to virtual learning to stay productive and motivated.
Virtual Classes: An Ethnographic Study of How Undergraduates at Texas A&M at Qatar Have Adjusted to Virtual Learning

Introduction
When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Qatar on March 10, 2020, schools and universities were immediately closed in response, and thousands of students were forced to switch to virtual classes. This switch was without warning and as a result, students were shocked, causing many adverse effects to how students learned (Blum). With no prior warning, these students were forced to adjust to virtual classes on their own and as a result, education had changed dramatically.

Most students did not adjust well to virtual learning, and globally, over 1.2 billion students were out of school (“The COVID-19 Pandemic”). Both teachers and students had to quickly adjust to the change to keep up. At Texas A&M University Qatar (TAMUQ), undergraduate students were suddenly in a tough spot. Not only did they have to adjust to this new style of university without preparation, but they also had to deal with full-time learning in a new environment very different from being on campus for most of their days and no longer seeing their friends between and during classes. Instead, they had to sit in front of a screen all day and much more, all while attempting to stay motivated to keep going. In this research, I will be studying how students at TAMUQ have adjusted to virtual learning and what they have done to keep themselves motivated while preventing academic procrastination (Steel).

Context of the Study
Your alarm is blaring, screaming at you for the fifth time to wake up, and you finally do, groggily pulling off your covers and rolling out of bed. Class starts in ten minutes and you are left with a tough decision: ten more minutes of sleep or beginning to get ready for class. You choose sleep, setting an alarm for ten minutes and crawling back into bed. As your alarm rings once again, you finally get up and log into zoom, minutes late as the professor has already started. You missed the announcement made and text your friend for an update. Still in your pajamas, you carry your laptop over to bed and prop it up on a pillow as you cover yourself
with the sheets to get cozy. The professor is starting a new chapter in calculus, but you are too comfy to realize this as you drift off to sleep once again in the warmth of your covers.

You wake up after your short nap when you hear the professor calling on you. Panicking, you unmute, attempt to answer and mute again. With your camera off, you are free to do as you please, so you spend the rest of class scrolling through social media, texting your friends, and watching random videos. As class ends, the professor announces the next assignment you have, due in two weeks. Scratching it down on a piece of paper, you get up to make yourself some coffee.

Your next class starts in three hours and you know you have a quiz. Yesterday, you promised yourself that you would study before class, but right now, you don’t have the motivation to do so. Deciding that breakfast is in order, you get up to eat. An hour later you’re done and ready to finally change out of your pajamas.

You have an hour until class starts, so you pick up your books to read through your concepts in an attempt to prepare for the quiz when your phone lights up. You got a text; one reply and you’ll study you promise yourself. You put your phone down as class starts and do your quiz.

After class you watch a movie, then walk around your house for another hour, more coffee, some lunch, and finally dinner. It’s 10 p.m. and you have an assignment due at 12 a.m. At 3 a.m. you crawl back into bed, and when you wake up the next day, this routine repeats.

This was how I spent my first months at TAMUQ as I struggled to adjust to university and online learning combined for new freshmen. Breaking some of these habits is still a challenge as I continue freshman year of college, and this is why I decided to conduct this study. In this research paper, I am going to demonstrate how the undergraduates at TAMUQ have been affected by virtual classes and the changes they have had to make to the way they learn during the pandemic. I will also be researching the successful strategies they have employed to
keep themselves motivated and ready to learn. I believe that this research will be a great source of information for the TAMUQ students who are still struggling with virtual learning, especially the freshmen.

**Research Questions**
In this study, I aim to answer the following questions:

1. How have the returning students to TAMUQ changed the way they learn when classes are virtual?

2. What changes can freshmen adopt to keep themselves motivated and prevent academic procrastination?

**Methodologies**
This study aims to understand how the switch to virtual learning has affected the way TAMUQ students learn and thus my primary data came from the current undergraduates. This study was conducted on the sophomores, juniors and seniors only, because the freshmen were not present at the university when the pandemic first hit. Thus, the upperclassmen are more likely to have had a trial-and-error period where they discovered what works and what doesn’t. The primary data for my research was collected through the following methods.

**Survey**
I circulated an online survey to the upperclassmen of TAMUQ to get consensus on the issue. The aim of this survey was to understand how students felt about virtual classes and to get a general understanding of how they have changed their learning style with online classes. It also aimed to get their recommendations on their tried-and-true methods of making the best of online classes. This survey was sent out to upperclassmen (sophomores, juniors and seniors) and was distributed to them through my supervisor. This survey consisted of six questions (see Appendix A) and also was used to find participants for my interview. From this survey, I received forty-seven responses with eleven volunteers for an interview.
Interview
To get an in-depth and personal view into how students have fared with virtual learning, I conducted an interview with one sophomore, one junior and one senior. Interviews would give me the greatest chance of listening to what the undergraduates would have to say, not only regarding the questions I had asked but also on how they have fared during the pandemic with virtual learning. I selected my interview participants using the purposive sampling of the volunteers from my survey. I picked participants based on their answers to question six of the survey (see Appendix A). I asked each participant seven questions but occasionally added spontaneous questions when a participant was passionate about what they were talking about (see Appendix B).

I also needed a professional opinion on my research question, so I contacted subject matter expert Dr. Steve Wilson, the counselor at TAMUQ, for his professional advice on how students can adapt to virtual learning successfully. I conducted this interview because he has been talking to students before and after the university switched to virtual learning and thus could give me an idea of how all students have dealt with it. This interview was conducted over Zoom and consisted of seven questions (see Appendix C).

Hypothesis and Anticipated Results
I expect that students would be more motivated to work on campus and would have started procrastinating more when attending classes in their homes. I expected that the sudden change in environment would have negative effects on students, which would have initially caused them to struggle to adjust. However, I did also predict that over time they would eventually adjust to their new conditions, especially because being in college, it is likely that they are always trying new things, attending new classes each semester, with different professors and classmates.

I also expected that students would be more likely to pay attention to the lecture if they turned their cameras on; however, I also believe that being forced to turn on their camera would make some students uncomfortable and hinder their attention to the lecture. From my experience, I believed that social media would be one of the greatest distractions to students during their Zoom
classes, compared to their environment and other distractions because of how addicting it is during this modern age.

**Discussion and Analysis of Survey and Interview Results**

The results of my survey showed me that a large majority of students, 59%, have started procrastinating more during virtual classes, which I believe is a very predictable percentage. I further found that 52% of undergraduates are more motivated to learn on campus compared to on virtual classes, just as I had hypothesized. However, what was shocking to me was that 46% of students found no difference in their motivation on and off campus. I expected far more students to not be motivated than what was observed. When I asked my interview subjects the same question, they all elaborated to state that initially, because the shift from on-campus to virtual classes in March was sudden, they were very unmotivated to work and procrastinated often. However, as the fall semester started, they had enough experience with virtual learning to become comfortable with it. Some even mentioned that they are now procrastinating less than they ever have.

One change my interview subjects all mentioned that they didn't expect was to have less sleep. They mentioned that this increased productivity resulted from the fact that they were barely sleeping, something I never predicted because I had assumed that they would have more time than ever to sleep, but ironically, I found that they weren't using it. When I interviewed my subject matter expert Dr. Steve Wilson about this, he mentioned that the lack of a change in an environment played a large factor in this. Students were sleeping, attending lectures, studying, doing exams, and relaxing all in the same spaces, and thus when they wake up and attend lectures in the morning, they are likely to be in this headspace for the rest of the day.

Both the surveys and the interviews showed a general dislike towards virtual classes. They mentioned that Zoom classes in particular were exhausting and that if they had to choose, they would try to choose asynchronous classes. They did however mention that if a class was historically hard, they would pick classes that also had a face-to-face option.
Secondary Sources
After I finished my primary research, I sought to strengthen my data by looking at previous research on how the sudden switch has affected students, the changes they have been forced to make, and what changes others have adopted to make virtual learning a successful experience.

A research conducted among universities in Romania showed that approximately 70% of students did not have prior experience with online learning (Maier et al. 318). So, when universities switched to online classes when lockdown began, universities were more focused on course continuity and not on implementing the best practices or innovative methods for online classes. This was mostly because professors too were adjusting to this new method of learning and in a short span of time had to change their teaching styles. Students had never experienced this new environment they were in and had to adjust to this while cooperating with their professors and peers. Students were also now experiencing learning in a fully online environment, and thus the research showed that universities offering technical degrees, like engineering at TAMUQ, found this switch greater as hardware facilities such as laboratories where no longer available to students (Maier et al. 318).

Their study also revealed that student motivation to do well in courses was depicted as one of the major issues with online learning, much like what was observed at TAMUQ where students showed a great dislike towards online learning (Maier et al. 319). In a study looking into online learning and academic stress, students were found to be more stressed with online classes as there was a lot of uncertainty surrounding them about how they should be working to succeed (Moawad 105). Another change that students had to endure was the lack of human presence with online learning. In an article written by Susan Blum, a professor at the University of Notre Dame, she stated that humans are used to each other’s presence, so when they unexpectedly no longer have this, there is very likely to be awkward sciences and interrupted conversations during virtual classes (Blum).
Results and Discussion
Using the results of my survey and interview along with my secondary research, I was able to compile all the successful strategies that student at TAMUQ can use to stay motivated and prevent academic procrastination.

Before class, students found it useful to change into a new pair of clothes and out of their pajamas. They spoke about how this helped mimic that feel of them getting ready for class as they normally would have and thus helped them simulate their normal routine.

Another successful strategy that students at TAMUQ used to create that college environment was to dedicate a space in their homes to attending lectures and studying. In an article written by Maryville University, it was suggested to find a designated space to learn that would replicate their campus environment, and thus students found that strictly using that space to study helped them stay motivated. This meant that they did not take breaks, sleep, and use social media in this area. Students also found it helpful to have all their essentials around them, including drinks, snacks, stationery and anything that would give them reason to get up. This ensured that they would not feel the need to get up because they found that once they got up, they immediately found anything and everything distracting.

During class, most TAMUQ students found it successful to stay off social media as one text was enough to spiral them into an hour of scrolling. Students suggested that this would be easier to do if they turned off their phones, switched to airplane mode or downloaded apps that blocked their use of certain apps for set amounts of time.

Another strategy that students found to be useful is to record their lectures. This, of course, had to be done with the lecturer’s permission and was a habit students said they would like to carry into life when classes are fully on-campus. They found that this way they could review what was done in class before exams and such, a practice that had greatly helped increase their productivity.
Some also mentioned actively registering for asynchronous classes at they could access the lectures at all times.

Turning on cameras was a change that had varied results. Some students found that turning on their cameras helped ensure that they weren’t distracted, as they couldn’t get up whenever they wanted and were forced to pay attention. They also mentioned that this helped them understand concepts better as they felt as though they were in a classroom and could better communicate with the professor compared to without their camera on. However, other students found that turning on their camera distracted them from the class. They mentioned becoming stressed and anxious as everyone could see their face and they couldn’t move or be relaxed. Because of this, they found that they were paying more attention to their cameras and themselves rather than the lecture and its contents.

Post lectures, students came up with various new techniques to stay motivated and prevent academic procrastination. They learned that working in their designated study space when they attend lectures helped put themselves in that study headspace and imitated how they would work, for example, in the on-campus library (“Adapting To Virtual Learning”). They also found that as they would not be seeing their classmates and professors outside lectures, they were initially missing assignments as they did not have anyone to remind them to finish their work. They found that it was very easy to miss zoom meetings and such and thus started using calendar notifications for all their work. Students found themselves looking into study techniques and one that was very popular was the Pomodoro technique that has greatly helped increase productivity for many students.
Conclusion
This research helped me answer my research questions of how virtual learning has changed the way students learn and how students have successfully adjusted to virtual learning. After analyzing the data I collected, I can definitely conclude that many students have very successfully adjusted to virtual learning. I can also very strongly recommend these tried-and-true methods of staying motivated and preventing academic procrastination have helped me as a freshman in the weeks that I have employed them.

If I were doing this research again, I believe that I would use more detailed survey questions. With the fear of contributing to survey fatigue, I found myself asking for as little description as possible, something that would have adversely affected me if I did not have interviews. I also would have sent my survey out to the upperclassmen at an earlier time in the day as mine was sent out at 10 p.m. and resulted in a lot of wasted results. The text boxes were either empty or filled with information that wasn’t relevant to my research by the people who filled it out in the night, and I had received more useful information the next morning.

I believe that further research can be conducted on this topic because it is evident that the next semester is likely to follow a partly virtual format, and it will be interesting to further evaluate students’ willingness to use virtual learning in the future. It would also be interesting, once TAMUQ becomes fully on-campus, to gather the takeaways students have from online learning and determine what techniques from virtual learning they are open to carrying on to their future.

Amna Cassim is a chemical engineering student, Class of 2024. Quoting Oscar Wilde, “It is what you read when you don’t have to that determines what you will be when you can’t help it.” She believes that perseverance is the way to move forward and conquer your fears.
"A Professor Explores Why Zoom Classes Deplete Her Energy (Opinion) | Inside Higher Ed.


Appendix A: Survey questions
1. What is your class year?
2. Would you say you are more motivated to learn in on-campus classes compared to virtual classes?
3. Have you been procrastinating more or less often during virtual classes?
4. How often do you –
   a. Turn on your camera during virtual classes
   b. Attend class while in bed
   c. Use social media during virtual classes
   d. Contribute to virtual class discussions
5. How would you rate your productivity levels comparing the following –
   a. On campus
   b. Virtual
6. List the changes you made that helped you the most in learning how to succeed in virtual classes?

Appendix B: Interview Questions to Upperclassmen
1. Personally, how has classes going virtual affected you?
2. Have you started procrastinating more or less during virtual classes?
3. Are you motivated to pay attention to your virtual classes?
4. What habits have you formed to stay motivated during the pandemic?
5. What changes have you noticed in the way you learn when classes have been virtual?
6. What changes do you believe have been successful in ensuring that you are motivated and not procrastinating?
7. What changes would you carry on in your life after the pandemic is over and classes are fully on campus?

Appendix C: Interview Questions to Dr Steve Wilson
1. How do you believe that the pandemic has had an impact on the productivity of TAMUQ seniors?
2. How do you believe that classes being on zoom have affected productivity levels?
3. What psychological effects do you believe that the pandemic has had on students?
4. Considering that students have had to change the way they learn to adapt to virtual classes, what changes do you believe the students have had?
5. Of the changes that students are likely to make to the way they learn, what changes do you believe would in the long term be successful to them?
6. Of the changes that students are likely to make to the way they learn, what changes do you believe unsuccessful to them?
7. How do you believe that students will have to adapt when classes become face to face after a year of mostly virtual classes?
The piece of writing portrays how I felt throughout the semester dealing with each different course. Each course having its own dynamics, its own ups and downs, its own needs and benefits. The aim was just to describe my feelings by personifying the courses as reefs and myself as a diver. I just wrote down this piece on a whim. I was feeling stressed so I started writing to take my mind off things. I tried my best to portray what I felt. Even though it does not portray everything I felt, it provides a good representation.
Coral Dreams

I can see the coral reef. I was swimming in Shallow Waters and the reefs were at the bottom, deep in the ocean. Glistening and shining in the distance, each with its own glory, each one with a beautiful distinction like no other. Each reef had something new to see, to learn from, and a new dimension into the never-ending ocean. I started with a body full of energy, mentally and physically, together with a fresh pair of lungs. I slowly dove deeper towards the reefs that lie down in the distance. As I dove deeper, I started to get distracted by the beautiful fishes that I could see on the way. Each one having its own color too, drawing me along with them, something I could not avoid. I was just taking them in before reaching my desired goal: the reefs.

Suddenly, I started to lose breath. I had taken too much time looking at the fish. I had no more breath left to reach the reefs. It is alright, I can go back and try again. I went back up, gathered myself while barely floating near the surface. I dived for the coral reefs again, and this time did not make it even half as far. I had no energy, half a lung, and a confused mind: all underwater.

I can try again; I still have time to make it across the lake. Again, with another new breath, I tried again, not making even a small dent in progress. Floating at the surface, I felt like I had sunk. I had to make it across the lake before dark—but without reaching the reefs which I had come to see, everything was in vain. I wanted to dive deeper to reach the reef, but I feared that it was too late, and I would lose my breath. So, I let loose, floating in shallow waters, barely making it across the lake by dark.

A part of me is still diving deeper, trying to reach the reefs. I shall go back and join myself one day, and discover each reef, one by one.
This paper was prepared as partial completion of the Petroleum Engineering 336 course taught during the Spring 2021 semester at Texas A&M University at Qatar.
Inertial Effects in Multiphase Flow Through Porous Media

Abstract

The focus of this research is on the fundamental understanding of multi-phase fluid flow through porous media. In this research, the influence of inertial forces on the motion of fluid-fluid interface in highly angular pore geometries is extensively examined. This is of utmost importance when considering the wettability and pore geometry of the pore systems. The fluid-fluid interfacial dynamics was numerically simulated through convoluted capillaries at different contact angles and flow rates.

The Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulations were performed using C++ library called OpenFOAM (open-source platform). InterFoam (OpenFoam solver) was utilized to simulate the immiscible displacement through convoluted capillaries. The InterFoam solver computes the Navier-Stokes equations in pore space using finite volume method and employs the volume of fluid method to capture the fluid-fluid interface. The mesh generation was performed using SnappyHexMesh, which is a utility in OpenFoam for mesh generation process. The visualization and interpretation of the numerical results processed were executed using ParaView.

Through this study, we aim to demonstrate the strong influence of pore tutority and wettability on the inertial forces acting at the fluid-fluid interface. We quantified the magnitude of inertial forces as a function of pore angularity, wettability and flow rate. Our results shows that the fluid-fluid interfaces get highly deformed at neutral wettability and highly angular pore system. This deformation of interface can be ascribed to the strong inertial forces present at the fluid-fluid interface.

This research facilitates an additional comprehension of the interface dynamics at different wettability conditions. Furthermore, the novel aspect of this research is to analyze how pore angularity and wettability affect the inertial forces, which, according to our knowledge, has never been explored before. The results obtained from this work can be incorporated in the optimization of several industrial applications like oil recovery, fuel cells, carbon sequestration, fabric manufacturing and soil remediation.
Keywords: Multiphase flow; Sinusoidal capillaries; Porous media; Inertia; OpenFOAM

Introduction
The fundamental understanding of multiphase flow through porous media is important for various industrial and natural applications such as oil recovery, hydrocarbon migration and production (Wood, J. & Sanei, H., 2016), drying mechanics (Shokri, N. et al. 2008), hydrogen fuel cells (Litster, S., et al. 2006), fabric manufacturing, carbon sequestration (Krevor, S. et al. 2011), rain water infiltration and drug delivery. The pore-scale invasion protocols and the ensued macroscopic descriptions (capillary pressure and relative permeability curves) are strongly governed by the pore connectivity, pore geometry, pore tutority, pore size heterogeneity and fluid properties amongst many others.

According to wettability, the immicible displacement in porous media can be classified as drainage (when non-wetting phase is displacing the wetting phase), imbibition (wetting phase displaces the non-wetting phase), and intermediate wet (when both fluids have equal affinity to the surface). Haines jump (sudden jumps of fluid interface followed by fluid redistribution (Sun, Z., & Santamarina, J. C. 2019), cooperative pore filling mechanism (invasion of water-wet pores with water), and corner flow are considered to be the dominant pore scale mechanisms under drainage, intermediate wetting and imbibition conditions respectively. However, the recent studies by Bakhshian et al. (2020) shows that rather than the surface wettability, it is actually the synergistic impact of pore geometry and wettability that dictates the immicible fluid displacement in porous media.

Traditionally the effect of inertia is often neglected in investigating the motion of fluid-fluid interface through porous media and therefore the interplay of viscous and capillary forces is regarded to be the dominant factor. However, the studies by Liou et al. (2009), Rabbani et al. (2019) and Wang, Q. et al. (2013) shows that indeed the inertial effects can play an important role in controlling the fluid displacement. Understanding the effect of inertial forces in highly angular pore geometries is not as easy as it would be for the regular uniform capillaries. This further complicates the process of creating highly angular pore geometries for this study.
A simple sinusoidal capillary has been meshed and visualized using ParaView as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Computer Aided Design (CAD) that will be used to investigate inertial effects in sinusoidal capillaries.

The coherent description of how the wettability and pore geometry impacts the inertial forces is still lacking. This applies specifically to the industrially relevant case where the porous media is highly heterogenous in terms of wettability and pore geometry. Open questions concern the interplay of wettability, geometry, and inertial forces during local interfacial instabilities at the progressing front. The mathematical formulation adopted gets further complicated as can be seen from a similar study conducted by Orr, Scriven and Rivas (1975). They performed a study on menisci curvatures with the use of Laplace-young equations whose solutions were obtained numerically using the finite element method along with a few solutions adopting the use of infinite finite difference computations.

Different studies revolved around various methods and interface behavior, few of which have been discussed in Table 1 below. The demonstration of these experimental results has also been discussed along with the experimental techniques.
Table 1: Literature review on influence of inertia on multiphase flow through porous media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (Year)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Experimental Technique</th>
<th>Operating Parameters</th>
<th>Research findings</th>
<th>Research Gap</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rabbani, H.; Seers, T.D. (2019)</td>
<td>Inertia Controlled Capillary Pressure at the Juncture between Converging and Uniform Channels.</td>
<td>Two-phase multiphase flow simulations (using CFD) through converging uniform capillaries. ParaView was used for post-processing the results visually.</td>
<td>Different wetting conditions and varying angles of convergence with capillary wall. 3D flow domain. Strongly water-wet and Intermediate-wet conditions.</td>
<td>As orientation angle increases, the capillary pressure ($P_c$) essential to enter the uniform capillary tends to decrease. The $P_c$ curve at intermediate conditions is extremely non-monotonic which emphasizes on localized inertial control on interface morphology at junction. Narrower the juncture relative to capillary, then influence of inertia at juncture will be greater and hence, fluid-fluid interface enters the capillary easily.</td>
<td>Limited to use of converging capillaries and uniform channels whereas the study could have discussed about capillaries with non-uniform cross-sectional areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author (Year)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liou, W.; Peng, Y.; &amp; Parker, P. (2009)</td>
<td>Analytical Modeling of Capillary Flow in Tubes of Nonuniform Cross Section.</td>
<td>Comparative study between existing non-uniform capillaries with varying parabolic walls, simple and divergent sinusoidal capillaries. Adoption of Runge-Kutta method to solve the first order differential equations.</td>
<td>Varying cross-sectional areas, non-uniform geometries, and viscous flow of fluid. The slope angle of the bends is also considered as a parameter that potentially affects the results.</td>
<td>Viscosity decreases the rise of capillary interface but does not affect their velocity. The capillary rise velocity for non-uniform capillaries is faster for converging parts than diverging parts. Inertial effects help determine the initial rise velocity of interface and can also counterbalance the effect of viscosity. For sinusoidal non-uniform capillaries, the interface tends to skip the lowest equilibrium point and reaches another equilibrium height owing to the inertial effects.</td>
<td>Lack of description and emphasis on the flow regime and flow behavior. Wettability conditions is undefined.</td>
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<td>Author (Year)</td>
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<td>Czachor, H. (2006)</td>
<td>Modelling the effect of pore structure and wetting angles on capillary rise in soils having different wettabilities</td>
<td>Simple axis symmetrical model containing the inner-grain micropores was used to study the capillary rise movement of liquid in non-cylindrical capillary geometries. The simulation of meniscus ring was done on these different capillary geometries. The experiments have been performed on glass bead and variety of soils. Numerical integration of meniscus rate equation was carried out to determine the kinetics of capillary rise in the sinusoidal capillaries.</td>
<td>Different ranges of true contact angles and different shapes of capillaries (pore shape – wall waviness), effective pore radius were used in the study</td>
<td>Contact angle and pore radius defines the capillary shape. Calculated contact angle values spiked as a function of wall waviness. However, the pore radius showed decreasing tendency with respect to increasing capillary waviness. The values of contact angle are dependent on the pore structure (in this study it was the soil pore structure) as well as the interfacial forces. Non-cylindrical structures of pore spaces have a greater impact on the wettability/repellency as well as water flux in soils.</td>
<td>Pore tortuosity and pore space network was not taken into consideration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author (Year)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rabbani, H.; Joekar-Niasar, V.; Shokri, N. (2016)</td>
<td>Effects of intermediate wettability on entry capillary pressure in angular pores.</td>
<td>Two phase flow simulations were carried out in a greater range of wettability conditions, using the software OpenFOAM to study the movement of the 3D meniscus at varied angular pores in a single capillary channel. Investigation of fluid-fluid interface dynamics was done using the finite-volume based numerical simulations.</td>
<td>Constant flow rate boundary conditions and different wettability conditions were maintained to study the interface dynamics at angular pores. Simulations were performed at Cc of 10⁻⁷. Contact angles were kept same for advancing and receding times: θ = 60º, 10º and 45º.</td>
<td>The entry capillary pressure varied greatly across different pore geometries at same wettability conditions. When the angular pore was at θ = 60º, enhances the movement of meniscus further leading to reduced entry capillary pressure.</td>
<td>Ignorance of inertial effects in the movement of the meniscus in the capillary channel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author (Year)</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Experimental Technique</td>
<td>Operating Parameters</td>
<td>Research findings</td>
<td>Research Gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang, Q.; Graber, E.; Wallach, R. (2013)</td>
<td>Synergistic effects of geometry, inertia, and dynamic contact angle on wetting and dewetting of capillaries of varying cross sections.</td>
<td>Sinusoidal capillaries with different wettabilities were used to observe the effect of geometry of capillary on the capillary flow with respect to inertial forces and dynamic contact angle. Navier-Stokes equation was used to integrate the liquid volume. This would derive the main equation for wetting front movement in the sinusoidal capillaries within the cylindrical polar coordinates.</td>
<td>Varying contact angles (θ = 0º, 35º, 50º and 75º). Different wetting conditions: Partially wet, completely wettable. Capillary flow is going to be Laminar owing to the small Reynolds number.</td>
<td>Inertial forces reduces the capillary penetration and enhances the interface oscillation near equilibrium locations. The dynamic contact angle and inertia do not affect the equilibrium location of meniscus in uniform capillaries. Wettability decreases (increase in static contact angle) leads to wetting/ de-wetting hysteresis. Increase in the static contact angle enhances the effects of sinusoidal geometry thereby reducing the equilibrium locations.</td>
<td>Geometry of the capillary must be considered to evaluate the effect of hysteresis especially in a partially wettable porous media.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The focus of this study is on investigating the impact of wettability and pore geometry on the inertial forces through porous media. To do so, the fluid-fluid interfacial dynamics is numerically simulated through convoluted capillaries at different contact angles and flow rates. To achieve this objective, numerical simulations were performed through Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) flow simulations for different angles of convergence.
Theory

Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulations

Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulations were performed using C++ library called OpenFOAM (Open-source Field Operation and Manipulation). The solver used was InterFoam to solve the Navier-Stokes equations in pore space by adopting the finite volume method and also using the volume of fluid method to capture the fluid-fluid interface.

Numerical formulation details for simulating the two-phase flow in porous media were gathered from Rabbani, Joekar-Niasar, and Shokri’s work in 2016. For this, the mass and momentum balance of the incompressible and immiscible displacement in pores required the application of continuity equation (Rabbani et al. 2016).

From the continuity equation, we get
\[ \nabla \cdot \mathbf{u} = 0 \]  \hspace{1cm} (1)

Momentum balance equation is as follows:
\[ \frac{\partial \rho \mathbf{u}}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot (\rho \mathbf{u} \mathbf{u}) = -\nabla p + \nabla \cdot (\mu (\nabla \mathbf{u} + \nabla \mathbf{u}^T)) + \mathbf{f}_{sa} \]  \hspace{1cm} (2)

Here, the velocity vector \( \mathbf{u} \) is measured in m/s, density \( \rho \) is measured in kg/m\(^3\), pressure \( p \) is noted in kg/ms\(^2\), viscosity \( \mu \) is recorded in kg/ms and force due to the capillary forces at the fluid-fluid interface, \( \mathbf{f}_{sa} \) is given in kg/m\(^2\)s\(^2\).

The Volume of Fluid (VOF) method was adopted to model composite interfacial geometries (Gopala and van Wachem, 2008). The fraction of phases distinguishing every grid block is denoted by \( \gamma \), which is the volume indicator function. Equation 3 depicts the equations ruling this computation.

\[ \gamma \in \{(0,1) \text{ Interface}; \ [1] \text{ Fluid 1}; \ [0] \text{ Fluid 2}. \]  

Density and viscosity are the volume-weighted fluid properties at the fluid-fluid interface. These are then combined with the VOF equations discussed earlier to get:
\[ \rho = \gamma \rho_1 + (1 - \gamma) \rho_2 \]  \hspace{1cm} (3)
\[ \mu = \gamma \mu_1 + (1-\gamma)\mu_2 \quad (4) \]

The convective transport is obeyed by the volume indicator function which is represented in Equation 5 below:

\[ \frac{\partial \gamma}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot (\gamma u) + \nabla \cdot (\gamma(1-\gamma)u_r) = 0 \quad (5) \]

The units of parameters including viscosity, density and relative velocity of the two fluids is maintained the same as was done previously. Continuum Surface Force (CSF) describes the momentum equation for the surface force, \( f_{sa} \) by:

\[ f_{sa} = \sigma_{12} \kappa \nabla \gamma \quad (6) \]

Here, \( \sigma_{12} \) stands for the interfacial tension that exists between the two fluids: fluids 1 and 2. The unit for the same is kg/s\(^2\) and \( \kappa \) represents the curvature of the interface (m\(^{-1}\)). This can be calculated using the Equation 7 below.

\[ \kappa = -\nabla \left( \frac{\nabla \gamma}{|\nabla \gamma|} \right) \quad (7) \]

These governing equations are coupled together to determine the pressure, viscosity and volume indicator function.

**Methodology**

Using OpenFOAM for performing CFD simulations, the capillaries prepared were generated using CAD model and meshed. For this purpose, \textit{snappyHexMesh} was used as the 3D meshing tool from tri-surfaces. The geometry used by \textit{snappyHexMesh} is listed under the \textit{geometry} sub-dictionary in the \textit{snappyHexMeshDist} dictionary. The mesh generation was initialized using STL files and \textit{blockMesh} wherein the geometry was specified based on the tri-surface or bounding geometry structure given in OpenFOAM. This can be illustrated using Figure 2 which represents the meshing of the sinusoidal geometry with inlet flow rate as \( 8.6 \times 10^{-9} \) m/s and contact angle is 90° as visualized using ParaView. It can also be seen that the dimensions of the boundary the geometry enclosed within is 0.005 x 0.006 x 0.005 units.
Figure 2: Visualizing the meshed sinuosoidal geometry with flow rate as $8.6 \times 10^{-8}$ m/s and contact angle of 90° using ParaView.

The boundary conditions maintained throughout the simulations were constant pressure at outlet and constant flow rate at inlet. Additionally, the contact angles at which the simulations were performed were at $\theta = 45^\circ$, 90° and 125°. The flow rate mentioned earlier was set at $8.6 \times 10^{-8}$ m/s and the flow rates were further changed three times with order of magnitude lower than this. A total of nine simulations were run. It is important to mention that the effect of gravitational forces is neglected in the immiscible displacement of fluids. Table 2 below illustrates the plan for running simulations after the geometry is meshed, with their respective inlet flow rates and contact angles.

Table 2: Layout of the plan for running stimulations with varying flow rate and contact angles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simulation Number</th>
<th>Volumetric Flow Rate, $m^3/s$</th>
<th>Contact angle $\theta^\circ$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-8}$</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-9}$</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-10}$</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-8}$</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-9}$</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-10}$</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-8}$</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-9}$</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>$8.6 \times 10^{-10}$</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The simulations ran in order to achieve the objective consumed many long hours of time, which directed us to the use of supercomputers as they improved the efficient use of time for running simulations and visual analysis of results, unlike the regular computers. ParaView was then used to visualize each simulation and save the water saturation and curvature data.

**Results and Discussions**

The median curvature values, \( \kappa \), were used for plotting against the defending fluid saturation, \( S_w \), for all the simulations performed. **Figure 3** below illustrates the variation of curvature for the flowrate of \( 8.6 \times 10^{-8} \text{ m}^3/\text{s} \) at wetting conditions of 45°, 90° and 125°.

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3:** Visual comparison for curvature effect on different contact angles for constant flow rate of \( 8.6 \times 10^{-8} \text{ m}^3/\text{s} \).

It can be observed from **Figure 3** that the fluctuations occur between data points that can be explained based on the inertial effects in the sinusoidal capillary. The curvature, \( \kappa \), tends to increase with the increase in contact angles as expected. For contact angle of 125°, the values of curvature were predominantly around 8500/m.

**Figure 4** below shows the values of curvature, \( \kappa \), plotted against defending fluid saturation, \( S_w \), for constant flowrate of \( 8.6 \times 10^{-9} \text{ m}^3/\text{s} \) for the same contact angles.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4:** Visual comparison for curvature effect on different contact angles for constant flow rate of \( 8.6 \times 10^{-9} \text{ m}^3/\text{s} \).
Here, for the intermediate-wet conditions, i.e. the contact angle of 90°, is more focused around -8400/m. Moreover, the effect of inertia is more evident for the intermediate-wet conditions as can be seen from greater degrees of fluctuations.

Based on an overall comparison between the nine simulations, it can be concluded that with the increase in flowrate, the fluctuations of the data points become more pronounced due to the inertial effects present in the sinusoidal capillaries. This trend is observed even more in the intermediate-wet conditions specifically at higher flowrates.

Capillary pressure, $P_c$, is a function of curvature, $\kappa$. To compute the capillary pressure, which is the measure of pressure required by the non-wetting phase to displace the wetting phase across the sinusoidal capillary, the radius of the uniform sinusoidal capillary, $r_c$, was $7.1 \times 10^{-5}$m and the value of interfacial tension, $\sigma$, was 0.07N/m. Using Equation 1, it can be calculated that $P_c$ is equal to 0 for intermediate-wet conditions. As seen in Figures 3, 4, and 5, based on the high degrees of fluctuations of data points from 0, it can be concluded that the inertial effects are preside more in intermediate-wet conditions.

$$P_c = \frac{2\sigma \cos \theta}{r_c}$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

**Conclusions**

For this fundamental study, Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulations were performed on a convoluted sinusoidal capillary to study the effect of inertia on the motion of fluid-fluid interface in highly angular pore geometries. These were performed at different flowrates and wetting conditions (water-wet, intermediate-wet and oil-wet). The results show that the inertial effects are predominantly present in the sinusoidal capillaries for different flowrates and at varying wetting conditions. With the increase in flowrate, the effect of inertia can be seen to be more pronounced and localized at the fluid junction for the intermediate-wet conditions.
Nomenclature

\( P_c \) = Capillary pressure, Pa
\( \theta \) = Contact angle, °
\( K \) = Curvature, m\(^{-1}\)
\( S_w \) = Defending fluid saturation, fraction
\( \sigma \) = Surface tension, N\( \cdot \)m\(^{-1}\)

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Harris Sajaad Rabbani for guiding me through this research with proper feedback, invaluable knowledge, and for being a constant support throughout the course of this work.

Afsha Shaikh is a petroleum engineering student studying at Texas A&M University at Qatar and currently serving as the President of Tau Beta Pi Delta (Q) Chapter. She is an active undergraduate researcher working on three research projects, a Supplemental Instructor at the CTL, and also a student leader. She enjoys writing as she finds it to be an effective way to put forward her thoughts and hence sees it as a better way to share them with others in order to learn what they think and continue to improve.


I wrote this piece for fun one day when I was reflecting on my difficult senior year in chemical engineering. Many things have changed since I graduated, but I do value the things that have remained constant. I’m not a person who loves having a fixed routine, but drinking coffee is something I adopted during my undergraduate years and that remains constant until this day. It’s the small things that usually go unnoticed that I like to appreciate every once in a while.
My Constant

When I look back at my undergraduate life and reflect on all the good and bad times, all the long nights and stressful days, all the challenges that seemed impossible, all the days I showed up to the university in sweat pants, there was one constant in my life that helped me get through it all, and that was ... coffee.

I’m not sure how I would have pulled all the all-nighters or attended all the back-to-back lectures if I didn’t have AT LEAST one cup of coffee a day. Before university, I used to show up to cafes with my family and get incredibly confused by the menu. “What’s the difference between a latte, cappuccino, macchiato, and americano?” I would think, and then kindly ask the waiter to just bring me whatever he thought was not too bitter but not too sweet. Now, I can give a full lecture on the differences between everything on the menu at Starbucks, explain how many shots of espresso go in each drink depending on the size, and discuss the ideal ratio of espresso, milk, sugar, and water for each person’s taste. As a chemical engineer, I find that fascinating.

But coffee was about more than just the caffeine rush and energy levels for me. Grabbing coffee was a chance for me to take a break from the packed schedule and unwind with my peers; it gave me an outlet to explore and relax while still feeling productive at the same time. Whether it was finding an open pantry to make free Nescafé in or driving to an overpriced coffee shop, the time spent on getting coffee was a great stress relief. I’m writing this on the night of September 30th, incredibly excited that tomorrow is International Coffee Day. I can’t wait to go get some great deals at my favorite cafes and take my work there. For those of you reading, I know you’ll see this after the fact, but I hope you got lucky and were at a café at the right place and right time. If not, there’s always next year. Coffee is my constant.
Sara is a former TAMUQ student, Class of 2019, and currently a full-time Ph.D. student at Texas A&M University’s main campus. She is studying Interdisciplinary Engineering with a focus on Engineering Education. In addition, she is also working at TAMUQ as a Graduate Research Assistant, and a WCM (Writing, Communication, Multimedia) consultant for the Center for Teaching and Learning. During her time as an undergraduate chemical engineering student at TAMUQ, she worked as a peer tutor for writing and continues to help students with their writing in her current role as well.
This is the first time I have ever written a research report. This was extremely new to me, which made this extremely hard. To give you a context of how hard this whole research was, I changed my research topic three times! In the end, I settled on investigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Student Clubs in TAMUQ.

I have chosen this topic because it was original. At the time of writing this report, the COVID-19 pandemic was relatively new, thus research studies conducted on the pandemic would be very new, too. As this was my first time writing a research report, there are bound to be errors that would make professional researchers lose their minds. However, I can confidently say that this project has taught me a lot about the researching world. I am now able to understand the dynamics of a research project and how a simple research paper is the output of weeks (even months) of intensive work, all in finding the answer to a question! I received a lot of help from both my instructor and my classroom group, for which I’m very grateful.
How Have TAMUQ Student Club Leaders Adjusted to the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Introduction
The world has flipped upside down over the past eleven months. Countries have been brought down to their feet as the novel COVID-19 virus crept out of Wuhan and swept across the world like cancer. According to the World Health Organization, over 69 million cases were reported globally ("WHO") with many more to come. The virus has led to multiple devastating consequences in society, including but not limited to "food security, public health, and employment and labour issues" (Chriscaden). An area that has been vastly affected by COVID-19 is the education sector. School closures were enforced in 130 countries ("Education") to combat the spread of this virus. This has resulted in "social isolation" ("Adverse Consequences"), as face-to-face classes cannot be replaced by online classes in terms of sociality, which is an essential part of academic life. In addition, a survey conducted on one hundred undergraduate students at Altınbaş University, revealed that 50% of the sample reported a decrease in study hours and in their academic performance due to the closure of the university and switch to online classes (Iraqi).

This leads to my research question: If students' academic performance is affected substantially due to this pandemic, how will this same pandemic impact extracurricular activities that students carry out along with their academic studies? This has not been researched thoroughly. I aimed to choose a community small enough for me to complete this study; thus, I decided to conduct my ethnographical analysis on the Student Clubs in TAMUQ. This present research tries to investigate how student club leaders and members in TAMUQ reacted and subsequently adjusted to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was conducted from November 22 to December 9, 2020.

In this research, I refer to "the pandemic" as the time since the lockdown was initiated to all schools and universities in Qatar, which began March 9, 2020 ("Qatar Announces"). I first investigated the initial reactions of the Student Club Members to the changes made by student club leaders when the lockdown was first initiated. Then I attempted to examine how the student club leaders subsequently adjusted to the pandemic between the start
of the lockdown and the present day. Ultimately these changes will be evaluated to determine how successful these were.

**Methodology**

A survey was sent by the Program Coordinator for Student Engagement to all the leaders of the twenty-seven student clubs at TAMUQ. The purpose of this survey was to record the views of student club leaders on how they reacted to the initial changes that the clubs had to undergo in order to comply with the lockdown rules instated on schools and universities in Qatar. This survey also collected written responses from the student club leaders to expand on their views. Nine out of twenty-seven student club leaders completed the survey.

Another survey was sent to all student club members in TAMUQ by my English 104 instructor. This purpose of this survey was to record club members’ initial reactions to the changes instated by the student club leaders due to the pandemic. These results could then be compared with the student club leaders’ views on adjusting to the pandemic. Sixteen club members completed the survey and their responses were recorded.

Additionally, two interviews were conducted. The interviewees were chosen through selective sampling. One interview has been conducted on a student club leader, which was done mainly to gain insight on how they subsequently adjusted to the pandemic. The other interview was conducted on a student club member, to expand on her initial reaction to the initial changes, and what she thinks about her club now.

Finally, no secondary research has been conducted on this topic, as the COVID-19 outbreak is relatively new, and the lockdown was imposed very recently, thus it was almost impossible to find any thorough documentation on this topic.

**Results**

SCL: Abbreviation for “Student Club Leader”
SCM: Abbreviation for “Student Club Member”
Interviewee A: Refers to a Student Club Leader, who has attended an interview
Interviewee B: Refers to a Student Club Member, who has attended an interview

SCLs and SCMs Initial Reactions to the Pandemic (SCLs point of view)

Figure 1a shows that the majority of the SCLs think that their SCMs found it hard to cope with these policy changes, as the mean of the difficulty level that the SCLs think their SCMs face, is calculated to be 7.0. Some SCLs expanded on their answer, with one mentioning how their club had to limit the number of discussion sessions or come up with new ideas because “people are tired of Zoom.” Many other responses pointed to the fact that conducting online events was not something that SCMs really liked, which could highlight one of the reasons why SCMs found it hard to adjust to online events—they were simply not as interactive as face-to-face events. Figure 1b confirms that most of the SCLs found it stressful to manage the use of online methods to conduct their club activities, with seven out of nine SCLs indicating that they felt ‘more stressful’ in response to managing club activities.
SCMs Reaction to the Student Club Changes Installed Due to the Pandemic

Figure 2a reveals that the members do find it hard to adjust to these initial changes, as the mean of the Level of difficulty chosen by the sixteen SCMs is 6.2. This validates the data from Figure 1a. Figure 2b points out that fifteen out of sixteen SCMs consider club activities to be more difficult to carry out, with one out of sixteen SCMs considering the difficulty level of the club activities to be ‘unchanged.’ One of the respondents elaborated on these changes, stating that the lockdown has “significantly disturbed the way these orgs function” (org = organizations). Another responder, who was part of a new student club, stated that it was “hard to get engagement from the students with everything online, especially when our in-person welcome event got cancelled due to COVID restrictions.” These responses illustrate the fact that SCMs have reacted negatively to the changes that their clubs have undergone due to the lockdown.
How SCLs Subsequently Adjusted to the Pandemic

To get an idea on how SCLs subsequently adjusted to this pandemic, taking a closer look at the interview with Interviewee A proved useful. Interviewee A was used to promoting themes surrounding a certain topic using posters. When the pandemic struck, Interviewee A describes how his club started posting these posters via social media. He stated that promoting posters via social media is “much easier now, as compared to last semester.” This suggests that some SCLs subsequently adjusted to this pandemic by greater utilization of online services.

Interviewee B gave an idea on what her SCL has done to subsequently adjust to the pandemic by elaborating on how they came up with creative ideas to make the online events more fun and how they thought of “opening face-to-face exhibitions for two days, instead of one day, to prevent overcrowding.” This highlights that some SCLs investigated creative ways to make their club events more fun, whilst still retaining the same level of safety in relation to COVID-19.

How Successful Were the SCLs’ Ways of Subsequently Adjusting to the Pandemic? (SCLs Point of View)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clubs that were still able to achieve the majority of their goals during the pandemic</th>
<th>Clubs that had SCMs resign due to the pandemic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n = 9</td>
<td>n = 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![](Figure 3a)</td>
<td>![](Figure 3b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3a

Figure 3b
Figure 3a shows that five out of nine clubs agree that their club has completed most of their club goals, and Figure 3b illustrates that five out of the six clubs stated that club members have not resigned from the club due to COVID-19. Figure 3a and 3b both reveal that despite the SCMs’ negative reaction to the initial changes implemented by SCLs due to the pandemic, the SCMs have still taken part in completing the goals that the SCLs have installed. This highlights the strong connection SCMs have with the SCLs and with each other, which in turn could lead to a positive response by the SCMs, when it comes to how SCLs subsequently adjusted to the pandemic.

How Successful Were the SCLs’ Ways of Subsequently Adjusting to the Pandemic? (SCMs Point of View)

![SCMs opinion on whether their club has successfully adjusted to pandemic](image)

Figure 4 reveals that thirteen out of the sixteen SCMs agree that their clubs have adjusted to the pandemic. There were multiple responses that highlight their reasonings for their choice in Figure 4. One of the respondents stated that she was part of the SGA (Student Government Association), and “a lot of other day to day activities had to be cancelled or just made complicated,” thus the SGA resorted to “driving to people’s houses and dropping off their
event prizes there.” Another responder stated that “it was hard to adjust to this online lifestyle,” but two of the clubs that she was part of “have found a way.” All of these could indicate that, aside from the fact that they were not pleased with the changes instilled by the SCLs at the beginning of the lockdown, nevertheless, the SCMs were pleased overall with how their club had subsequently adjusted to this pandemic. Figure 4 and the responses agree with the SCLs’ views on the success of their clubs.

Positive Outcomes of the Pandemic
The two interviewees both brought up the positive effects of the pandemic. Interviewee A talked about how his club members liked the use of social media to promote the club's posters, stating that it was really “effective as some students started sharing our digital posters” and agreed that this was something that he learned to be more effective due to COVID. Interviewee B has also stated that “the ideas we came up with are more reliable than what we came up with before.” She went on to explain a positive effect that COVID-19 had on her club: “We are not really relying anymore on 'free food' so people can attend the event. We are literally making a fun event. So now we actually understand how to make a good event.” These responses prove that COVID-19 has in fact opened up SCLs and SCMs to the potential of using online services to spread information. Finally, these responses also establish the fact that COVID-19 has in-fact pushed student clubs in making events more entertaining through more creative means.

Discussion
After carefully analysing the above results, it is strongly evident that the pandemic largely had a negative effect on student clubs at the beginning of the pandemic, as the SCMs’ initial reaction to the online events were negative. Additionally, their written responses mainly pointed towards online events not being as interactive as face-to-face events. It was also clear that SCMs found it more difficult to partake in student club activities. After evaluating the reaction of the SCMs, the responses from the two interviews suggests that SCLs subsequently adjusted to this pandemic by the following:

1. Getting better at using online services that they started utilizing at the beginning of the lockdown.
2. Investigating creative ways to organize their club events whilst retaining the same level of safety demanded by COVID-19.

These methods of subsequently adjusting to the pandemic have been proven to be mainly successful, as most of the SCLs were still able to achieve their club goals, while not having any SCMs resign from their respective clubs. This could be attributed to a strong relationship between the SCLs and the SCMs. The subsequent adjustments to the pandemic have been further proven successful as the majority of the SCMs agree that their clubs have adapted to this pandemic. One additional fact that I have obtained through this research is that this pandemic had some positive effects on the student clubs as well. Both interviewees expressed how the pandemic had opened the student clubs to the potential of using online services to their advantage, and how it has forced the SCLs and SCMs to be much more innovative than in pre-pandemic times.

Moving on, this research has in fact confirmed one of my predictions, which was that the SCLs and SCMs have mostly reacted negatively to the initial changes implemented by SCLs. I also expected the SCLs’ subsequent ways of adjusting to this pandemic to be unsuccessful, but the research results have proven otherwise. Thus, this research has debunked my latter prediction, and I was able to understand the strong connection existing between the SCLs and the SCMs, which I previously thought to not have existed.

Finally, to touch upon what I think could have been improved with this research project, it would have been better if there were more survey responses as this would have helped the statistics to be more accurate. Also, it would have been beneficial to categorize the SCM’s club names, allowing a general representation of how student clubs in TAMUQ fared against the pandemic. Going forward, the creative methods that the SCLs utilized is something that can be explored in more detail. Finally, this research can be expanded to cover multiple universities, allowing a general representation of how student clubs across different universities have reacted and subsequently adjusted to this pandemic.
Ushara De Silva, a Sri Lankan, is the second eldest in a family of five. He finds that being the second eldest has its perks as he gets opportunities like being a complete annoyance to his brother. Ushara loves playing Minecraft, which his dad purchased for him when he was eleven years old. Now being a twelfth-level intellect, he didn't even start playing this game properly until he started university. He believes that was one of the worst mistakes he has ever made, so he decided to invest time in becoming a good 1.8 pvp player after being a D-tier (really bad) level player. After six months of playing Minecraft, he is proud to say that he is still a D-tier player.
CHAPTER 2

Dancing with Uncertainty
The past sixteen months have been a long and complicated journey for us all. We have had to face incredible challenges and navigate unfamiliar terrain. Throughout it, there have been people who have helped us and people who may have hindered us. There have been obstacles in our way and things that have helped us move forward. In the end, this is just one small part of the ultimate journey that is life. This started out as a metaphor for the COVID-19 pandemic, but I hope that when you read it, you can relate to any journey that you have taken and any adversity or challenge you have overcome and, most of all remember, you are never alone.
The Hallway

I set out along the path—
all was well and life was grand.
Maya and Ali came along as we sought a new hearth,
making the Journey anything but bland.
Then the tide shifted and
people cried out in despair
as the lights shut off or dimmed
and the long Hallway plunged into disrepair.

We searched for shelter,
hiding beneath the frame of a nearby door
as those around us went helter-skelter,
running in desperation and hitting the floor.
For weeks and weeks, we remained there--
clustered, confused, and trapped in a daze,
the world around us frozen and pale
till finally voices arose out from the haze:
“Hear ye, hear ye, emerge out of the blue
come and make your way
hold steadfast and true
to the end of the Hallway.”

We walked forward steadily,
trying to navigate the chaos and the din
naively thinking we were ready
with goggles of night vision
as advised to wear by the voices
while everyone around us stampeded
like a herd of wild horses.
Ali was the first to be bombarded—
thrown to the ground, his nose gushing red
while the voices urged calm and control
and Ali, Maya, and I were separated
like Lost soldiers on a doomed patrol.

For what seemed like millennia I was alone.
I made my way slowly, my eyes brimming with tears
and my ears ringing as if with the sound of a mighty drone.
Eventually, I fell to my knees, wanting only to give in to my fears,
to stay in this world of confusion and misery.
It was then that I felt the nudge and looked up to see her—the one with hair of fire and eyes of Lapis Lazuli—as she held out her hand and lifted me up in fervor.

We continued again, cautiously, carefully, soon re-joined by Maya who brought with her a man built like an ox. Then others started to come, a whole cornucopia, and with the steadiness and ferocity of a battle axe we tamed the wild horses and cut through the chaos. At last we began to see again, free from the constraints of the night vision goggles and finally, when we reached the end, we turned together hand in hand and with truth, honor, and respect, shouted out at the top of our lungs, to all those still behind: “Come and make your way, hold steadfast and true to the end of the Hallway.”
This was my first project in the ENGL 104 course. We were asked to write a personal essay in response to the following prompt, “Why Am I Here?” in which we could define “here” as anywhere. I thought a lot about what to write and how to define my “here.” At the end, I decided that I wanted to write about “Where will I be in five years?” I really loved this assignment and I enjoyed writing about myself in the future; it was like creating a movie of myself in five years—visualizing my life, family and job. This essay is filled with original details and lovely scenes which will let you see through the future Amna and her life.
The First Sip

Time flies so fast without us noticing it, seconds become minutes, minutes become hours, hours become days, days become months, months become years, and years becomes decades and this happens as quick as a flash. It’s my second year in college and I am wondering, will I graduate with a good GPA? Will I secure my dream job? Where and what will I be doing in five years?

I am seven years old. It’s the first time I see my mum so sick that she couldn’t get out of the bed for two days. I feel so sad; she cares about us and when we get sick, she has a magic way to make us heal without pain. My mum is my secret doctor, so I want to be hers too. I want to help her, but I don’t know how. When I grow up, I want to become a doctor, wearing a long white coat with the stethoscope around my neck, helping people in pain to be cured just like my mum.

I am twelve years old. I wake up early every morning, brush my teeth, and get ready for school. I really love math classes and it’s easy for me to understand the logic behind each problem. My classmates always come to me to teach them how to find the value of x. I love explaining math, especially when my classmates say “Oh, that makes sense” or “This problem is not as hard as it seems” and my favorite, “I can solve any problem now!” I feel like a proud small math teacher. Because I enjoy learning and teaching math, I want to be a math teacher, teaching six-year-old students to find the value of 1+1.

I am seventeen years old now, old enough to know what will build a good future for me and what will not. Choosing a future job was the first step I took towards my future. I am in my second year of secondary school and I have to choose among four majors: medicine, engineering, and two literary majors. I do not hesitate or think for a second: engineering is my choice from the beginning because I really love physics and math. Besides, when I was chosen for IPHO (International Physics Olympiad), we had to study university physics and calculus at a young age. This competition had theoretical and experimental parts which I really enjoyed and it was all about engineering. However, I don’t know which engineering major to study in university.
One morning, I was walking in the school hallway heading to the classroom when my Physics teacher, Miss Suhair asked me, “Did you choose which engineering major you would study at college?”

“No, I still don't know, I don't mind any as long as I love it,” I said.

She told me that if I want her advice, she would say electrical engineering because “earth will run off petrol and gas and the world will be depending upon electricity, not only that but our lifestyle will change, we will be surrounded by electrical things. Electrical engineers are the future and the world will always want more electrical engineers.” As soon as she said that, my eyes sparkled; I want to be an electrical engineer!

And here I am, at Texas A&M University, studying to become a successful electrical engineer. But I still wonder what I will be doing in five years? Where will I be? I keep thinking about that because I don't have stable dreams nor plans. My plans kept changing as I grew up, and I worry about what I will be doing in the future. In five years, I will be twenty-four years old. At that age I will graduate from university with a bachelor's degree, hopefully with lots of experience and skills that will help me in my dream job.

When I think of my future job, I would really love to work at QP (Qatar Petroleum) first because it is one of the biggest companies in Qatar, not to mention the good amount of salary employees are given and the equality the company values. In the future, I see myself working at QP in a friendly environment and respectable job. I can picture myself sitting in a black-wheeled executive chair, behind a long desk filled with project papers scattered everywhere, covering how to manage electrical maintenance implementation programs. And in the corner of my desk there is a cup of coffee, its steam rising to the ceiling, waiting for me to take the first sip.

Being well-educated with a successful career are not the only things I imagine having in five years. I also see myself married to a wonderful man. Someone who encourages me, someone who's got my back, someone I trust with my life, and a great father to my kids. I would really love having five children, two boys and three
girls. Five years is not enough time for that but maybe one day this moment will come. We will be living in a big house consisting of three floors, seven bedrooms, and a broad living room with blue sofas at the corners of the room. Maybe we'll have a swimming pool and a garden too, filled with red rose bushes, lavender shrubs and apple trees.

Some may say that I'm greedy for wanting both a successful job and kids. Maybe I am being idealistic rather than realistic. I understand that it takes hard work and patience to be good at both, but in many ways I believe I can make it happen by setting plans and organizing my time for both. I may have a maid to help with the housework like cleaning, washing and cooking so I could enjoy my time with my family after work: helping my kids with their homework, playing with them and reading them bedtime stories.

Many unpredictable things may occur and change my plans. However, I need to build steps for the ladder that I will be climbing in five years, to get to this point in the future where I will be happy, proud and pleased. Nothing comes on a silver platter; hard work, determination and time are needed to reach the vision and goals I have set for the future. As I sit here typing this, I ask myself, “Do I have what it takes to reach there? Will I eventually make it?”

Amna Al-Najar is a sophomore majoring in electrical engineering. She likes writing because there are no limits of words that we could write compared to the words that we speak. While writing, she feels free to go beyond, to write as many words as she wants and about anything that comes across her mind.
This piece was one of my first submissions for ENGL 104. This essay required us to define the word “here” based on our own experiences. The choice of defining this word is limitless. For me, I defined “here” as the following: 1. Why am I at Texas A&M at Qatar? 2. What are the consequences that led me here? 3. What made me an Aggie?
Are You Sure about This?

Am I the one who did this to myself, or is it my inescapable fate? We all are responsible for the decisions we make. However, sometimes we got forced to take certain decisions that most probably aren't called decision-making since you are not deciding whether to do a specific thing; you are forced to. In other cases, you get the power to choose what is right and wrong. Much like deciding whether you would like to continue studying after high school and attain a bachelor's degree or ending your education journey right after school is something you got to choose for yourself.

I was sitting alone in the university's library after hours as all students had already gone home. It was late in the afternoon. No one was there except the librarian and me. The librarian seemed busy doing her work, so I tried to be as noiseless as I possibly can. I opened my laptop, trying to catch up with my assignments. I worked for two hours non-stop. Several minutes later, some workers entered the library to clean it. The workers made me realize that it was already late, and I needed to take a rest for now.

At this moment, I asked myself several questions: Why am I in this university? Why am I a student? What are the consequences I faced in life that lead me here? Were they related to my own choices, or the people around me made me choose this specific university?

It all began during the most stressful days back in high school when we were applying for universities and waiting for their responses to either get accepted or not. All my classmates started applying together to go to a specific university. I was the only one who decided to apply to Texas A&M as I had my eyes on it for a very long time. I've always dreamed about being a member of the “Aggie” family. Being an Aggie means that I have the six core values: excellence, integrity, respect, leadership, loyalty, and selfless service (Core Values). I first discovered Aggies when I was applying to Texas A&M University. At first, I thought it was just the university's mascot name. Then I found out that it's much more than just a name. It's an identity by itself.
I began doing all the work on the application process myself. Sometimes, I would reach out to my school advisor to get some tips in writing an excellent personal statement. It was stressful, and I had tons of doubts about the decision I am about to take.

People often say that the first step is the hardest. I didn't know what they meant by that until now. “Are you sure about this?” I kept asking myself, but sadly I didn't know the answer to that question. I was lost during the time I started applying for universities. It was a tiring afternoon as I just got back from school and needed some rest. Several hours passed, and then I woke up from my nap. I checked my phone to see the time, thinking that I overslept. “You received an email from the Texas A&M administration office” was the first thing I saw on my notifications bar. I took an intense breath and closed my eyes as I clicked on the email I received.

Rejected was the first word my eyes came across. I felt so bad and I started telling myself that maybe this is not my destiny or perhaps I won't fit in this university. I had some tough days when I was so insecure about myself and my abilities due to my rejection letter. I stopped considering myself smart, and my hyper studying level started to fade away. I was no longer interested in studying. I thought studying was a waste of time since I already got rejected from the university I worked hard to be a part of.

“Why them and not me?” “What's good about them and not good in me?” These questions were stuck in my head for a long time, causing me to lose my self-esteem. My sister and I were sitting together having our afternoon tea in the living room.

“Are you okay?” my big sister asked. It was after she heard I was rejected. She noticed how I was losing it slowly, and she was there for me to help me get back on track and gain my self-confidence once again.

“Yes, I’m fine; why?” I replied.

“I want you to understand that academic life can be stressful sometimes, but it's a never-ending journey. What happened isn't
the end of life; you have tons of other opportunities that are still open for you. God closes one door to get ready to open other doors with greater opportunities. Just be patient and have faith,” my sister said. I listened quietly and was repeating everything she said in my head. It felt like God had sent her to me to help me stand up again.

My sister convinced me to join the Academic Bridge Program, which will help me continue studying for a year and give myself another chance with Texas A&M University. So, I did. And this part answers my question, “What are the consequences I faced in life that lead me here?” This step I took was a new beginning for me. I met lots of wonderful people from classmates to professors. It was such a great experience that lead me to a greater one.

I did apply again for Texas A&M, but this time it was different: I got in! The feeling I had when I found this out can't be expressed using words. I was literally on cloud nine. I challenged myself and took the road less traveled. I worked so hard, and there have been some ups and downs in my journey, but in the end, I got what I wanted. Even though I got it a year late, but the feeling made up for everything.

Al Anoud Al Emadi is an electrical and computer engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar. She finds comfort, peace, and joy within her inner thoughts which lends itself to writing. She believes that “Once you start, you can't stop,” and this is how she defines writing. It was and still is hard for her to express her feelings and thoughts out loud. Instead of keeping everything bottled inside herself, Al Anoud chooses to write and feel free.
CHAPTER 2 | Dancing with Uncertainty

Anonymous
Pieces of Me

I have been through ups and downs in my life like any normal person. Life is not a straight path as people perceive it. They always associate success of others as a linear path. It is like seeing someone walking far ahead of you in a road that you all share. You look at your own road with bumps and holes, sometimes unable to advance without the aid of others. Even with help, you struggle to pass over the hole. You look in front of you while struggling to get over this measly hole, even if it means going to another path in search of your path of success, while you watch another person elegantly moving through the road like a knife through butter, moving like the calming waves. What I am really trying to say is that people have been through a lot in their lives and some downs in life are unique and could affect one’s path.

One of the many unique instances in my life was studying through COVID. At first the toll had not yet taken effect on me. This may be because of my genuinely enjoying the courses that I have taken the first semester. But its severe side effects really started taking affect through the second semester.

Every day I felt helpless, lost and had nowhere to run. The place where I felt safe has been taken away from me. The place where I would relax, wind down and put my mind back to ease has become the very place that is filled with hatred or stress. I felt trapped in a room with my worst fears. Waking up every day would be a struggle; everywhere I looked I was reminded of my stress. The walls of my house screamed at me, forcing me to be constantly on guard for university.

I was cornered in the very place I called home. All the five senses that I felt in my own home would put me in a state of paranoia, putting me in a constant state of fear. And that fear in turn would make me stay up at night, unable to sleep, struggling through my thoughts, fighting a battle that couldn’t be won. Feeling helpless and no one to turn to, I took sleeping pills thinking that this would at least make the quality of my sleep a little better. Well... not everything always goes according to plan. The sleeping pills would make me feel tired, but they never stopped the thoughts or the anxiety I had. Even when I was tired out of my mind, I struggled to sleep. And when I do get some sleep, I sleep for a while and wake
up. This would repeat five to six times a night before I would finally decide to wake up.

Then my hardest time in my life took place: the continuation of my bottled-up depression. All the things that were happening to me were as if someone poured gasoline all over me waiting for something to ignite it. Waiting for that little spark that could create a fire as massive as a house. I went through a phase of not wanting to talk to anyone because of the sudden surge of negative emotions. The house that I have created, the happy place that I have always gone back to, has been burnt down to ashes in the blink of an eye. I was devastated. The memories it held, the times it helped me go through my troubles, all played like a movie in my mind.

The feeling that it was all gone broke me. It was nothing like any other wound; it is a wound that cannot be fixed by medicine no matter how developed we are in medical science. My heart stabbed by my own mind, a wound that lasts a lifetime. I lost my house, I lost my sight, and eventually I lost my mind. I sat there endlessly crying looking at my burnt down house, reflecting on the things that happened, trying to rebuild my childhood home, avoiding people’s kindness, picking up the rubble left behind, digging through the rubble trying to find the pieces that defined me, trying to put together what has been left of me only to find something missing. I kept searching, but to no avail; days and days went by, and all I had was an uncompleted story of my life. I tried my best to not give up because who would want to read a story only to end up in a cliffhanger? Hell, it was not even a cliffhanger—it is worse than one.

The descriptions suddenly stop at an unusual place that would leave you wondering the well-being of the writer. I dug and dug and dug, until I succumbed to the help and kindness that was constantly offered to me through messages, through phone calls and meeting up. The help that would have seen me through these horrible times with ease. Through talking to them, I realized that people saw me different than how I saw myself. I recognized that I was tunnel sighted when I saw myself negatively, always blaming myself for things that weren’t in my hand. While others saw the bigger picture, the overview of the situation, with a neutral mindset, trying to fix what wasn’t meant to happen. All this time, I have found all the
pieces of myself, but to find the missing pieces that were in my heart, no one was able to except my dear friends. May we cherish our dear friends deeply and never let them go. Until it is time for them to finally let go.
In his English 104 course, Yousuf Darwish learned a lot about the power of writing. He believes that it is evident that writing is one of the most powerful forms of communicating ideas and perspectives. In this research project, he was able to combine everything he learned throughout the course to use in his ethnographic study. Yousuf chose to study about people’s perceptions of their chosen major as he acknowledged the importance of listening to fellow students’ opinions. He maintains that the effort he put into this research was useful for both himself and others who are struggling on their journey to select their major.
Academic Major Perceptions: A Study of Students’ Journeys in Choosing Their Majors

My Question
Sitting in the classroom receiving my degree plan, I start to get nervous. It is a decision that will plan the path for my career. A difficult decision to make. *Am I the only one going through this?* I start to wonder and look around me; all I sense is silence in the class which is worrying. I see how determined and focused everyone around me is. I begin to think deeply, *will I pursue this major and sign the degree plan or should I ask for more time to analyze this? Am I the only one feeling this as if I were a feather on air?* I start to ask around and attain as much information as I possibly can as I do not want to regret this, and it is the most efficient way to make my decision. I ask friends and upper classmen for more details about every major. Therefore, researching this community of practice is relevant to me as well as to other first year students who are wondering the same thing.

The main reason why this topic is important to me is because I am not sure which major would fit me best, and I learned that talking to other students to get their advice and thoughts about their major selection journey was vital; therefore, I thought this project was the perfect chance for me to get information from many students by creating a survey for all the undergraduates and graduates.

My research question revolves around this question: “*What can first-year students learn from other TAMUQ students about how they chose their major?*”

I consider myself emic for this research project since I am part of the TAMUQ community. I have vivid insight on students’ journeys in selecting their major as I have talked to a couple of students who have been at TAMUQ for a while. However, since this research project is mostly based on people’s opinions as they all come from different backgrounds, carrying out this research project would allow me to acquire a wide range of results and advice from more undergraduates as well as graduates so this can allow me to make a valid assumption on what most of the students lean
towards when selecting their desired major. This information can also significantly help other freshmen who do not have a lot of knowledge or who do not know people who can guide them towards the right path as not all students know what the future holds in their fields.

**My Research Process**

In the process of choosing a community of practice to study, it was quite straightforward that this topic about major selection was the best choice for me as I found this as an opportunity to get more information from other students at TAMUQ who have more experience. The problem that has surfaced when choosing my original research question was that there are a wide variety of questions that can be used to conduct my research; however, I was looking for a research question that was not too generalized and at the same time not too narrow. For instance, at first, my question was, “Why have students at TAMUQ switched their majors?” which after a thorough scope and valid predictions, I came to the conclusion that only a few students would answer my survey as it would target only a small minority. If I received only a few responses, I would not have enough data to support any claims I make. I decided to brainstorm a sketch of a map to see what I can come up with and asked my professor for her thoughts about the research question and then finally made the decision to change my question to, “What can first year students learn from other TAMUQ students about how they chose their major?” This targets not only undergraduates but even the graduates allowing me to grasp as much information as I possibly can.

While creating my survey (see Appendix A), I made sure to add a follow up question for students who have changed their major by using display logic. This made it easier to get more students to respond to my survey, and therefore I got constructive responses that helped me understand more about majors and other people’s thought process in choosing their major as it is important to have an open mind to different thoughts that other students have. I also carried out this research to guide other first year students who are unsure of their major or want to switch but have limited information to base their decision from. As E. St. John said, “There is, perhaps, no college decision that is more thought-provoking,
What I Have Learned

According to one study, more than 50% of undergraduate students change their major at least once during the course of their education (Brooks, 2012). Some students change their majors two to three times (Ronan, 2005). Another study concluded that many eighteen-year-olds are not yet certain what they want to do or who they want to be (Selingo, 2014). Chambliss and Takacs (2014) found that faculty members play an important role in determining students’ initial choices of major, frequently via an introductory course in the discipline as well as positive or negative experience. “Students must feel that they belong in a chosen program and they must feel that they are achieving positive results. If the two criteria remain positive, the likelihood of eventually changing majors can be minimized and success can be more likely” (Conklin, Dahling, and Garcia, 2013). Another study found that negative grades are a factor that increases the likelihood of changing academic majors (Dunwoody and Frank, 1995; Zafar, 2011). “Students originally choosing a major with a lack of knowledge about the specific field” [...] “causes them to make quick and uniformed decisions” (Firmin and MacKillop 2008).

Students might also base their choice on the experiences of friends, family members, and parents (Hoover, 2011) and later decide to change their major. “Many college students experience intellectual change and growth as they progress with their education and as a result, begin to take courses that they have become truly interested in and eventually decide to change majors based on courses they have taken” (Ayotte and Sevier, 2010; DeMarie and Aloise-Young, 2003; Dunwoody and Frank, 1995). Only 30% of graduating seniors will major in the same field they selected as freshmen (Willingham, 1985). Lounsbury and colleagues (1999) found that students who were more conscientious, more agreeable, and more emotionally stable were more likely to be decisive in their career choices. “Roughly one out of every three college students change their major at least
once during the first three years after their initial enrollment, and approximately one in ten college students change their major two or more times during that same time period” (National Center for Education Statistics 2017). Students who choose to stay within a college major that is not a good fit with their interests face their own set of potential negative consequences. “The transition for first-year students can be so stressful in itself, that the thoughts of academics during that stage become secondary. Hence, a lack of guidance and experience with choosing a major, as well as competing concerns, might help to explain new students’ caution” (Thompson, 2008). In a 2006 Canadian study, researchers followed 80,574 students in eighty-seven colleges during a five-year period and showed that good grades are related to having a major close to one’s personality (Jones, 2012).

I created a survey (see Appendix A) which was sent out by my English 104 professor to all the undergraduates as well as graduates at Texas A&M at Qatar. This has allowed to me to get a decent amount of interesting and insightful information for my research. One interesting result that I received was that out of the 91 students who participated in my survey, only eight students (8.8%) have switched majors which was eye opening to me; I had initially predicted that at least 15% would have switched major solely based on the fact that for the first year, all students are required to take the same courses, allowing them more time to reconsider their major and plenty of time to reach a final decision as it is not at all an easy decision due to its great influence on the rest of a student’s career path.

According to my survey, most of the students who have switched majors have switched from petroleum engineering. However, this cannot be used as an official claim as it is not enough to conclude which major most students have switched from because there are hundreds of students at the university so the claim would have to be checked by having more students taking part in the survey and then this would give more support to the claim as only eight students have switched major solely depending on the survey.

I asked the students taking my survey to provide advice to first year students on switching majors. The common pieces of advice
students have given was to do a lot of research on the majors that are available at the campus and to talk to professors and upperclassmen. Also, they have said that it is very important to be genuinely interested in your major. I also asked students to suggest tools that would have helped them choose their major or ease the process, and most of them stated that if more details about each major were provided at the beginning and if there were videos that students can watch to learn more about majors, it would have limited regret.

I personally decided to carry out this project as it is of great value to me as well as other students and it can hopefully help others make their decisions. Additionally, researchers have stated that negative consequences arise when students feel like they were forced or do not have any interest in their major, so it is important that every student has the luxury of having the chance to listen to what others have to say regarding this and to make the most out of the available resources along with choosing a major that suits them and not letting other people directly influence their decision. At the end of the day, it is a time consuming and hard decision to make as it is one of the most important decisions that students will have to make.

From interviewing the university's academic advising department (see Appendix B), I learned that they estimate that five to ten people change majors every academic year which I found very surprising as it was lower than I expected. The advising department also indicated that students switch majors based on their assumption of job opportunities/prospects in each field or even more so based on the sponsors desires (for Qatari nationals). Students who changed majors mostly did so after their first year at the university, according to the advising department. For students who are unsure of their major, they recommend finding out if there are opportunities that fit their skills and desires or visiting the Career Services office within the university for their advice on the right major for them as well.

**What This Means to Me**
Through the process of this study, I have personally learned a lot. I have learned how important it is to talk to students and
faculty about majors and how it will negatively affect you if you do not seek for information. The idea of experience sharing is key to success and would limit any regrets in the future as one would be fully aware of what every major offers in terms of options like careers paths and job opportunities. This research, in my perspective, was very useful to me as I have evaluated people’s responses thoroughly because I was very interested in the outcome of this research. The number of students who have responded to my survey were remarkable as I did not think many students would have the time or patience to complete the survey. Many students have taken my survey seriously, easing the process for me. The knowledge that I have gained will not only influence my personal decision in terms of picking a major but can eventually provide some sort of guide for other freshmen.

Reading through articles, blogs, and many more credible sources, I have also found beneficial information, as I surprisingly discovered that the research that I have conducted was done by many experts in the United States; it is a widely discussed topic of interest, especially in universities that offer many different departments for majors. I also found it interesting how grades can affect one’s decision of switching a major. I initially based the decision making on students’ desires and perspectives, but from researching deep into this topic, it seems to be much more than this and different factors play a role in a person’s major decision process depending on circumstances.

Since the survey was sent to a fewer amount of people compared to the Texas A&M main campus, the switch in majors was rare, as the choices in the campus in Doha are limited when comparing it to the main campus due to the size and departments they offer. Thus, I personally think if the same survey was sent out to the main campus, not only would I get a lot more responses, but also it would have allowed to me attain a wide spectrum of opinions and advice which would have been more credible as well. The experts who have previously carried out similar research projects like mine have reached similar conclusions, and my assumptions have somewhat matched what they have concluded from their research.


Appendix A: Survey Questions for TAMUQ Undergraduates and Graduates

Are you a male or female?
What year are you in?
What is your major?
Briefly explain why you have chosen your major:
Have you changed your major since joining TAMUQ?
What major have you switched from?
When did you switch your major?
What are the main reasons you switched your major?
Do you regret changing your major?
Were you sure of your major when you entered the university?
What missing piece of information do you think would have helped you choose your major, if you knew it before joining TAMUQ?
What qualities do you think that a freshman would need to excel in your selected major?
Job prospects were a large factor in choosing my major.
Please explain your previous answer
What advice would you give current first year students who are considering changing their major?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Academic Advising Department

How many students per class (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) have switched majors in the last 5 years?
Do you have an idea about the primary reasons why students changed majors?
How many students in the last 5 years majored in, chemical, mechanical, electrical and petroleum engineering respectively?
Thinking back in the last 5 years, from which major to which major is the most frequent switch and why?
When do most students switch majors? first semester? second semester?
Do you have any advice for first year students who are doubting their choice of major?
Helping has been my nature since childhood. Whenever I hear or see someone who needs my help, I do it without the knowledge of the second person. Sometimes I have helped with money, and I usually help my friends or family members with solutions for their problems. They always said that I was their life saver. That's the reason I could write a story about a young boy asking for help. Imagination takes me to another world. I imagine things which I personally cannot do because maybe they are out of my range, but imagining what I want doesn't cost a penny.
My Nightmare

I heard someone calling me, the voice not specific enough to recognize. I felt that the place was somewhere underground and quite dreadful. My eyes were open but it was useless because nothing was visible. I opened my eyes wide and tried to check the surroundings. I was confused and lost but someone's voice calling for help was ringing in my ears.

To start with, I didn't know where I was. I told myself, “Stop panicking and acknowledge the place.” I had goosebumps and my legs were shivering, but I tried to stand still. Suddenly, I remembered that I had my mobile phone in my bag. I took it out and flashed the light and tried to acknowledge the surroundings around me. First of all, I realized that I was in a cave. I had a doubt about my vision because nothing was visible. Everything was a blur and smoky. I started walking towards the place where the voice was coming. The spider webs made me irritable and scratchy. What made me forget all this was I could hear the voice clearer and closer. “I am closer to my destination,” I said, and this gave me more energy to proceed. “Is anyone here? Speak out!” I commanded as I stepped a few feet forward. I stomped on something and it stuck to my shoes, the horrible stinking smell blocked my senses. I focused my mobile torch on my shoes and saw a dead rat. I couldn't stand for a second, but the lilting sound I heard saying “Help me” made me forget everything. Slowly I moved towards the place where the sound came from, and I focused my mobile torch to reveal a horrible scene.

A little boy in a hole in the cave. What's next? I thought. My senses stopped working as I saw that scene. I stood straight with a wide-open mouth. I tasted something salty—my sweat flowing down my face. Once again, the situation made me remember that I was in a cave and it was very hot. I couldn't imagine how the boy survived so long. I bent down towards the boy and tried to pull him out, but my hand couldn't reach him. Then, I heard an inner voice telling me “Use your brain.” This caused me to remember that I had a scarf in my handbag. Immediately, I took out the scarf and threw it down towards the boy and told him, “Hold on.” The boy was active enough, and he held the scarf as I slowly pulled him up. I was shocked to see him. He was just six or seven years old, and I couldn't understand how he reached here. He was in an exhausted
stage. He looked hungry, thirsty, and tired. I had a water bottle, which I gave him to drink. He drank the whole bottle and still he was thirsty. The boy looked so cute with soft black hair. He wore blue shorts and a white t-shirt. All his clothes were muddy and smelly. I wanted to ask him many questions, but I noticed that he was very tired. I was trying to carry him, but someone trapped me and told me “Wake up, it's time to go to school.” I sat up straight in my bed, looking for the boy. My mom asked me, “What are you looking for?” I said nothing. It took time for me to realize it was a dream. A dream which must not come true.

For more than a week, before I went to bed, I thought about the dream I had. I consider that it was not just a dream, that maybe someone somewhere really needs my help, and I am unaware. To this day, I still feel I have some kind of relationship with that boy in the cave, the one in need of rescuing.

Shaikha Mohammed Al-Kuwari is a person who lives with confidence and dies for honesty. She was born in Qatar on the 27th of July 2002. Writing was her passion from childhood. Even though she studied in an Arabic school, she always dreamed of learning in a foreign university. Whenever her teachers assigned her essays, she confidently wrote them herself; she always tried to write things that came to her mind. Once, she took her elder sister’s help for an essay; when her teacher asked her, she agreed that she took her sister’s help. The teacher appreciated her honesty. She thinks the best thing in this world is writing; it is something where she can share her feelings with others. Many items are not said; they are only written. In the beginning, her writings were not that good, but she didn't lose confidence and kept on trying. She knows her writing will improve day by day. The hard work she did in the past years enabled her to stand as a writer today. She is studying in Texas A&M at Qatar only because she took interest in writing skills. She always imagined stories and tried to frame them into natural ones. Her dream is to become a writer, but she never expected that she would achieve this credit so fast.
I wanted to capture the experience of a person stuck in a dreary and dull routine and take her to a beautiful realm in which she could explore, flourish, and become the person she always dreamt of being, a place filled with endless possibilities and happiness. I wanted to escort her to a destination where she will be shocked and surprised by the beauty of the setting and how people lived differently than she did. As she explores this new setting, she finds out more about herself and her capabilities for doing many things at once, rather than being stuck and labeled doing one thing when she has other passions as well.
I Wonder

It was April 2, 2020. I took the bus to an unknown destination. What can I say? I felt spontaneous and felt the need to get away. The anticipation and suspense of visiting an unmarked destination intrigued me. I desired to live in a world of fantasy filled with undiscovered desires. I have nothing to lose nor to give.

I flopped myself over the cold window seat on the train. I was battling my clashing thoughts. A lightning bolt struck my brain with the bewitching imaginary world of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It was one of my favorite reads as a kid and inspired my reckless decision. You might be wondering what my goal is: my aim is to explore the world and find a better living environment. I lived in a monochromatic world where everyone wore the same color, went to the same workplace, ate the same lunch and slept at the same time. I lived in a bland world where everyone was a victim of social conformity—a food-chain hierarchy placed by those in command that destined my life. I dream of a world filled with peculiarity instead of this routine. I left my life behind in hopes of finding an individualistic community. A place where expressing individuality was embraced instead of looked down upon.

The train cabin was empty, so I decided to walk around and acquaint with some people to guide me through my journey. I tiptoed down the aisles with piercing looks towards interesting matters. One of the cabins was filled with a rainbow of colors as if a unicorn vomited on it. Ravishing textiles of different tones and textures hung from corner to corner. Upon me stood a bewitching lady with a pearly smile. She gestured her hand, asking me to go forward to another cabin. I smiled at her and excitedly went ahead. She was as tall as a giraffe and as graceful as a gazelle and as thin as a breadstick. Her glasses extenuated her round and large eyes, and her hair was filled with the paint she used. “How unusual!” I thought to myself.

I continued my journey down to the other cabins and found myself in one that was filled with the most beautiful dresses. As I came forward to grab one, the herd of designers dropped their textiles and threads with shaken faces. They were all wearing the same clothes as Oompa Loompas. I was taken aback by the gorgeous area. It was indeed peculiar. A heavenly smell of fresh
cotton candy and warm vanilla filled the air. The walls reflected the stunning blue sky. The sun hit the dresses from the window as it rose slowly, creating sparkles like fine diamonds from the blue ocean outside. The dresses were sewn to perfection. I wrapped one around me as one of the designers tightened the corset. I was shocked at the beauty of the dress and its glamour. It was made with a light silk lilac and the corset was embedded with sparkling diamonds. The train of the dress was the right length, just gracing the floor. I got shivers when I put it on. I never felt such feelings that caused me to tear up from the beauty of it.

The third cabin was filled with nerds. They had walls filled with mathematical equations like an Einstein den. They were solving a question that I assumed I knew how to solve. They saw me in my dress, so they denied my help. They judged me by my cover, which cause me to feel horrible about myself. I grabbed a piece of paper from the floor and solved the question. One of them looked at me shocked and his face lit up. He smiled so widely, and he reminded me of the guy from McDonald’s. His face was pale white, his nose red and his hair was fire itself. He embraced me with a hug so tight that I couldn’t breathe for a whole minute. I felt my lungs dry up; my face was filled with sweat dripping from the heat of his head. He finally let go and I came to life again. I’m smart and I love fashion and art. “Where should my place be on the train?” I wonder.

The last two cabins I visited were designated for music and dance. I stepped into the musical cabin. A heavenly tune charmed me into playing the guitar. The instruments were a work of art. They were large and produced magical sounds that made my heart beat match their melodies. My mind was in such a trance as I stayed back and listened.

Lastly, I went through to the last cabin which was filled with beautiful ballerinas. I entered, and they were all standing like flamingos. I grabbed my ballet shoes from my bag and decided to dance with them to the charming melodies of the cabin next door. They gestured their hands in my direction, asking me to show them what I could do. I did a triple twirl. Dancing to the music reminded me of my past. I had to choose either music or
dance even though I didn’t want to. “Why should I be labeled? Why could I not do all that I wanted?” My past world was a place where everyone was assigned a position, so I complied and chose dance. “Why can I not be divergent?” The next thing I noticed were hands on my waist, and I was suddenly on top of the train.

The crisp cold air hit me, and for the first time I felt alive. It's like my soul was reborn all over again. There’s a whole new world out there. It was picturesque with a breathtaking view. I felt my body shiver from the gorgeous weather. The flowers and trees danced in all directions. I spread my arms out to take it all in, and the next thing I noticed was that the train was going through a huge tunnel. I quickly gasped and ducked down. I saw what the tunnel looked like when the train was inside. The rails moved in the opposite direction the train was moving. I felt like I was on a roller coaster. I've never been through such an adventure! I looked at the ceiling amazed and excited for what I would see next.

I sat at the top of the train thinking about where I should land. I saw some gorgeous green trees, and so I jumped off. My landing was not smooth though, since my clothes got filthy as I fell on the ground, and my knees felt broken for a moment. Nevertheless, I got up, ignoring all the negativity. It is my time now!

The grass was damp, so I decided to take off my dancing shoes, and I undressed to wear my dancing clothes instead of the designer dress I had on. I felt the damp soil under my feet for the first time. The rush of positivity filled me. Spits of rain fell on me like a drained pipe and eventually showered all over me. It was my first time seeing the rain. I moved to the music the rain made, and I danced my heart out. All the years that I’ve been captured felt worth it. My dreams are happening. I'm exploring! I'm seeing the beauty of the world: the sun, the grass, the trees, the flowers, the incredible and scenic views. The forest was even more breathtaking than I remembered it to be.

As I walked around the forest, I saw some incredibly colorful lanterns everywhere. My jaw dropped from all the beauty my eyes were witnessing. “I want to stay here.” I touched all of them, and they sounded harmonic as the music coming from them was
impeccable. My clothes were wet, and my body was shivering, but I didn't care. I wanted to feel all these things that I didn't feel before. I wandered for too long, and now it's a reality. I felt the adrenaline all throughout my body from the amazement of the place. I ran and ran until my feet could no longer carry me through the green forest; I wasn't scared of thorns or wild animals. I just wanted to be free!

I'm walking towards a cliff until I reach the end, “Shall I do it?” The rain is pouring again. “Wooooo!” I shout, looking at the sky and the view in front of me. I wonder what this place is. I wonder what it will hold for me. I wonder if it's time to let go and move forward in my life. I wonder if there's finally something waiting for me, a new place, a new home, a new life.

Oh, I just wonder.

Maha Al-Mulla is an electrical engineering student, Class of 2024. Writing grants Maha the opportunity to dive into a realm of imagination. Her passion for traveling, discovering new places, and taking on adventures assisted her in building the scenery that was showcased in the text. Maha's obsession with fantasy stories and movies influenced her in building the storyline she always dreamt of writing. Creative writing has always been her favorite genre since she feels like she can truly express the ideas for the theme and the setting with no boundaries or limits.
A Road Trip

I look down at my bare skin
with my eyes running along the roads of my body.
I stop at the indented streaks,
jump over bumps that rose due to puberty,
roll over the tires aligned on my torso
and slide along the long strands that decorate
my limbs.

Amused, I feel nauseous.
But just like at the end of a
rollercoaster ride,
I anticipate riding again.
I am not sure whether you feel the same,
and that scares me.
So, I stop and glance at the
massive structure,
cursing at its imperfections,
demanding how I need it to be.

Defeated,
I cover myself with a strand of cloth
disposing the joy I have received,
because it isn’t enough to satisfy you,
even when I know this isn’t your business.
CHAPTER 3
Succeeding Eventually
Fatima Ahmad Abuhaliga

The process I was going through writing this poem was analyzing myself and how people think about moving forward. To me, moving forward is almost remembering how you got to whatever point you are in and looking for a purpose. However, most times finding your purpose is not as easy as finding reason. So I searched deeply to find out how people can find their purpose and if it is truly all they need to live a peaceful life. And, in fact, having reason (as in something that gives you questions and understanding) is sufficient enough.
Fixed Forward

I look back to what I had
and think of all I can
today and tomorrow.
Both start the same but end up on bad terms.
If moving forward was my mission, then why can’t
I go forward?
The past will always be there for us,
but now what will we become?
Are we here for nothing?
Or are we here for something?
Is it my destiny or what is destiny?
If you don’t find your purpose, then try to resurface:
a life with no purpose is better than a life
with no reason.
“Take a look ahead at what you will have,”
says the girl with a gray-booked cloud.

Fatima Abuhalija is a twenty-year-old Qatari woman studying electrical engineering. She loves writing because it feels like home to her. When she writes, she feels as though she can express herself better than speaking, and whatever she needs to say is said perfectly through writing.
Failure is a very scary thought to most people, including myself. However, after experiencing a failure, I realized that failure is the secret to success. When we fail, we grow and we learn. Knowing where you went wrong will teach you what you need to know to do things right. This piece discusses a moment in my life where I felt like a failure and how I took that as an opportunity to flourish, valuing the lesson I learnt from failing. I hope this piece can help someone see that even though it may feel like it, failing isn’t the worst thing in the world.
My First Failure

When I joined college to pursue mechanical engineering, I knew that I would enjoy my classes thoroughly and hopefully excel in them. I had succeeded in my high school education effortlessly because my parents always inspired me to be the best in what I did. On the last Sunday of the semester, the university sent an email to inform us that the faculty will post the results the next day. I knew that I had procrastinated in the beginning of the semester, especially since it was my first semester at university when I was still figuring out how everything worked, so the announcement made me anxious and worried. On seeing my results, I felt demoralized that I just about managed to fail my calculus class out of all classes. Me, the girl who was always great at calculus in high school, the girl who was used to only getting A’s. Anger, denial, and frustration filled my mind.

I had failed my first class ever, which came with a lot of negative impact on me mentally as well as shock from my friends and family, who continued to support me regardless. My father was also an engineer, so he knew the struggles that came with engineering classes, and he told me that he, too, failed a class in his first semester of college which helped improve my mood. Yet I couldn’t help myself from thinking I was always the top student in my high school and never had unsatisfactory results or had to talk to my teachers about my grades. Immediately after checking my grades, I felt like dashing to the department and giving my professor an explanation since I was sure I had a valid reason for my poor performance that didn’t reflect my abilities.

I began to look through all my past exams and quiz results. I thought that since I was so close to passing, there had to be a way for me to convince my professor that there must have been some mistake. I sent my professor a very thorough email detailing all my grades and telling him I was a freshman in my first semester taking Calculus 3, which is meant to be taken by sophomores, hoping maybe he’ll pass me after reading my desperate email. My professor replied to my extremely long email with three brief lines telling me to come to his office the next day. I was dreading facing my professor the next day; it was supposed to be my winter break but there I was going back to university after an extremely long and rough semester. On reaching the department lounge,
I saw my professor's office with a long line of students waiting outside. I thought I can't be the only one that failed then why else would students be there after the semester was over, and that helped improve my mood. When it was finally my turn to enter the professor's office, he welcomed me in and told me to take a seat. My heart was racing, and I knew that there was no way for me to change his mind, so instead I asked him why I failed. I explained to him that I have never failed a class before and that I needed an explanation, since failing that class significantly lowered my self-esteem.

The results were not unfair or mistaken; I had scored a low grade, and now I had to learn from it. My professor gave me some great advice on how to practice problems when I retake the class and reminded me that there is no shame in asking for help. He told me to take advantage of professors' office hours since not many students do. Possibly the best advice he gave me was to not make the same mistake many students make when retaking a class: not get too comfortable, thinking I already know the material. I took that advice very seriously and made sure to start my next semester with a plan.

When the next semester began, I was very enthusiastic about taking Calculus 3 again because I was ready to lead the class academically as I did in high school. I felt encouraged to have a second chance to prove that I was ready to be a mechanical engineer. I was always excited to attend my lectures. Additionally, I contributed significantly during group work because it would help me better understand the course material and I would pass my examinations when the same question is in my test. Before I sat for my final exams that semester, I was confident that I would score the best and make both my family and my professor proud.

Upon failing exams, I felt angered, frustrated, and in personal denial, and I could have easily given up. I did not understand why I failed the exams because I initially blamed my professor for the low grades. I confronted him because the idea of failing my end-of-semester examinations left me hopeless. However, what encouraged me to engage the professor is that I could not forego my dream of becoming an engineer or failing to proceed
to the next semester. I had and still have a great vision and focus on my engineering career. Since that day, I have always taken my assignments and reports seriously, and I always double-check instructions to understand the work's expectations.

Aljawhara Althani is a mechanical engineering sophomore, Class of 2023. She likes to read and write in her spare time. Writing was never a passion for her, but after she was introduced to journaling, she fell in love with writing.
Being stuck in a rut, not knowing what to do and hoping someone would come and get you out is the longest waiting game an individual could ever experience. Sometimes we forget to rely on the most dependable person, ourselves. This was written at a time when I recognized and understood that to change the situation I am in, it has to start from within.
I WAITED

For what feels like an eternity
for somebody, anybody
to save me ...
I pleaded.

And then I realized
no one is coming;

I AM ALONE.

By His mercy
it came to me—
I AM WHO I WAS WAITING FOR.

So I decided to rise,
I will save us, my روح
It is you and I, always
SO I RISE

for me,
myself,
I strive to get better
and rid myself of my vices
to be able to better serve
my Rabb, my Creator
my Creator who will guide me from the dark,
from darkness of black
to pureness of white
AND BRING ME TO HIS LIGHT.

It is just you and I, my روح
SO WAIT FOR ME.

RER1991 is a passionate and unique individual, born in Aceh and raised in Qatar. She is a full-time dreamer with a hyperactive imagination and loves to tell stories. She is a proud Aggie engineer working toward her dream one step at a time with the support of her sister and parents.
Out of My Cave

“Why did I get here? Why did I get? Why did I…” The trip was very long, almost seventeen years in the making. It took hard work and consistency to get here.

Here begins my story: I am a student at Middle East International School. I am fourteen years old, and my life is typical, boring even. I go to school every day to come back to my room to study, sleep, and repeat. In school I am the shy, silent person, who sits by himself in the cafeteria. I feel better when I am alone, more comfortable without taking energy to socialize with people. I have friends, but we are barely on a first name basis. All I could think about is when does this cycle end. “I just want to get over school!” I would wonder in my bed for countless nights.

Fast forward to 2018. I have just turned fifteen, but I still suffer from the same cycle of when I was a fourteen-year-old. But something has changed: I started making my own decisions. I was able to do so because my parents gave me the freedom of choice, which played an important role of how I got here. For example, some days I can go and come back from school by myself and I study all by myself. Things like these are what make me independent.

My parents are my role models. My father is short, tanned, with long black hair and a mustache with a beard. And I do not mean long to his ankles, just long for his age. He is social, he likes to talk and laugh with people. My mother is also short, light-skinned, with long hair too. She is short tempered, but considerate, and she can be very organized. They are both open-minded and hard-working parents. One night I walked into my parents’ bedroom right before they went to sleep. “Mom, Dad, I want to move to an online high school,” I said.

“What IS THAT?!” my mom replied in a harsh tone.

My father listened and tried to reason with me while I kept trying to convince my mother. I explained what it is, and I showed them the research that I had done about this online high school. Still, they were not convinced with the idea. I was not surprised, because it is weird when someone says “online high school.” I kept
on pushing this concept further until I finished my eighth grade, often hinting at how I was suffering at school.

“Ah, I am so tired of school, I wish I can graduate earlier,” I complained to my parents on several occasions. I used to say this in a jokingly and serious manner all at the same time. I never complained about how I was lonely because I did not think it would be helpful. I knew that things like this are not in their hands, but in mine.

After I finished eighth grade, my parents started seeing the advantages of online high school. They became more convinced and leaned to “experimenting” with the online high school I had chosen. “Yes, you can try, but if this doesn’t work out, blame yourself,” they agreed.

“Fine, I am still taking the risk,” I insisted because I was so sick of school.

I signed up to Penn Foster Online High School (PFHS) which I attended at home, in Qatar. It was a mix of lectures, readings, and everything we do today, in the COVID times. Consequently, I had to take on a variety of challenges: motivation, self-discipline, time-management, and meeting new people. For example, to go through a course required a lot of hard work. It is not like traditional school, where attending class almost guarantees your passing grade. I had to wake up, make my deadlines, and make sure that I am not missing anything. At this point, my academic life seemed to be turning around, but my social life was still taking a downturn.

To fix this, I signed up for many volunteering programs and extracurricular activities, which for me, was definitely not inside my comfort zone. I am an introvert at heart, and not a fan of talking or meeting new people. I would rather have a dinosaur eat me! But this is where I started to come out of my cave.

I joined the Ajyal Film Festival, which is only for a week, but it is the most exciting event that I have EVER attended. I was a juror with many others. We would watch movies, and at the end of the
week, we judged them. This allowed me to meet new people, some of whom I am still in contact with today. One of the people I met there, Ibrahim, turned out to be my brother’s friend.

“OMMAARRR!” I heard screamed from the end of the hall. I looked back to see a tall, skinny person shouting my name as he was approaching me.

“Yes, that’s my name,” I replied awkwardly.

“I am Ibra, your brother’s friend,” he said.

“Ohh... Ibra, yeah, I am not sure I know you.” I was never this confused before. After that, we became really good friends. Moreover, I finished online high school on a good note, graduating with a good GPA. I applied to universities in Qatar and got rejected. By all of them! I was disappointed for some time because I blamed my high school studies. What if I had listened to my parents? What if I had never gone to an online high school?

After the smoke of rejection cleared, I got an opportunity to study in Cyprus. I majored in biomedical engineering for a year and tried my best to not regret anything as I lived in Cyprus for a year. I just went with what was available to me at that time.

My freshman year was supposed to be the “golden year.” Instead, coronavirus knocked my door down and decided to ruin it. My first semester in Cyprus, I got to meet more new people from various cultures and traditions. I was doing well academically and my social life was turning; it was truly what I wanted from a university experience. I lived on campus in a dorm. Every day, I would wake up to attend my classes. Over some of the weekends, I hung out with people I met through my major. Some other weekends, I stayed in because of how much work I had to put in. Overall, I would say I seized the opportunity of living a new life.

Two weeks into my second semester, and you can guess what happened. Quarantined for a few weeks, I was unable to do anything but Netflix. I mean who did NOT do that? I managed to finish my second semester virtually and then traveled back to
Doha. I thought my stay in Doha would only be for a few weeks, but coronavirus allowed me to stay and study online for my third semester (again!).

Now that corona is the new “normal,” I decided to apply to Texas A&M University at Qatar. Ever since I returned to Doha, thoughts began coming to me that I should re-apply and take my chances. I was hanging out with Ibrahim in the garden that my father made while I was away. “Let’s apply to Texas A&M together, for the f**ks of it!” Ibrahim suggested.

“Why not? Let us do it!” I was excited. I stared dreaming of what would happen if I studied in Qatar.

So, we both applied, and now the waiting game starts. We had to wait for two months to get our decisions. During these two months, I was still attending my university classes online. The day the decisions came out, it was early in the morning, I have no clue as to why I got up early. I had no classes in the morning that day, but somehow, I woke up. I checked my phone and saw an email notification waiting for me with the subject, “TAMUQ Admissions.” I was so afraid; I did not want to read it because I had painted an image in my mind and did not want to spill a monochromic color all over it.

“I am not going to open it, I am not going to, I am not going ...” I opened the email.
Omar Al-Khateeb, a Jordanian Aggie, was born and raised in Qatar. He is a petroleum engineering sophomore who will graduate in 2024. He wrote this piece to share his educational experience so far. This was the first time he wrote a piece like this, and he believes that you can achieve great things when you go outside your comfort zone.
This story is from a chapter of my life, recounting an experience that led me to the path I am on now. It was one of the first instances I had experienced electrical engineering, but it also tells a story of my personal growth. The writing was done as an assignment, but since then it has undergone many revisions. Lots of time and energy have been put into making this story enjoyable to read.
**Level – Up**

It was December 2018; I was still in school, learning school stuff when Mr. Vasil approached me. I didn't know him very well. All I knew was that he was our school’s lawyer. He said, “You know there is going to be an open day at the school soon, right?”

“Yeah,” I answered, wondering what that possibly had to do with me.

“Well, I have an idea I want to share with you,” he said and invited me to his room. Mr. Vasil showed me a cardboard box with nothing on it, and next to it was a fluorescent light bulb. I already knew what was going to happen; the fluorescent light bulb has a mercury gas inside of it, when the electricity passes through it starts to shine. The catch is, electricity doesn’t need to travel from one end to another because you can do it locally. This meant Mr. Vasil was going to bring his bulb near the box, where he was most probably hiding a Tesla coil. He did it, and it lit up like magic, but still, what did any of this have to do with me?

“Remember that Open day? We have it next Saturday. I was thinking of making a stand near the entrance to show this off to parents somehow,” Mr. Vasil said. It was a great idea, to be honest. He was considering drilling a hole in a stump and showing the box there, so when you would bring the bulb near it, it would glow. That whole metaphor was messed up from the beginning, I mean, doesn’t that just scream: YAY, dead trees!? Anyway, that didn’t matter, because there was no way we could drill a hole so big in a trunk that it would fit the entire box. We had to design a new one, and by that I don't mean take the Tesla coil out, fit it in a smaller box and call it a day; no, the coil and all of the components were glued shut. There was no way we could remove them without damaging the whole thing, so we would have to make a new one. If we tried taking it out and somehow damaged it, we might have been unable to repair it before the deadline, so having a backup was a nice idea regardless.

I met Mr. Vasil near a café the next day. He brought every component and tool that was necessary to build a Tesla coil and gave it to me. The stuff there was just amazing to my teenage eyes: soldering iron, bundles of copper coils, alligator clips, PVC
pipes and all those little electrical components. It honestly felt like a shady transaction when he gave those components to me. I volunteered to build it myself as I didn't want to waste his time, plus I had lots of mine to occupy.

I brought everything home, got up to my room and started unloading it on the floor. It was exactly like opening a new LEGO box, with a bit more complicated shapes than squares and a lightsaber. I unloaded everything and stared at it for a solid five minutes. I had no clue what to do, absolutely no idea. So I did what any sensible human would do: I looked it up on Google, hoping I'd find something. And I did, I looked at every single video I could find, which was a lot. After going through the great archives of the internet, I felt ready as ever, so I started working. The steps were simple enough: coil the copper wire on a PVC pipe, connect transistors' 1st 2nd and 3rd legs to coil, battery and secondary coil, which was around the main copper coil, flip the switch and bring the bulb close to coil, so it can light up (Tesla, 1890). It seemed simple, but let me tell you this, it took me the entire weekend, plus Monday through Thursday to finally get that thing to light up! The journey was torturous: I burned my fingers while soldering on two separate occasions, my eyes were genuinely hurting from so much squinting to match the damned cables together, my room was a mess, and everything was going south. The problem wasn't that I didn't copy things from YouTube correctly; no, I did everything they told me to, the hardware was working properly when I tested them separately, everything exactly where it should've been, but the toxic mercury-filled, light-emitting device and his evil antenna robot friend were refusing to cooperate with me. I felt betrayed by the science; all my heroes seemed like liars and deceivers. I hated physics and I hated Tesla for making me do all this. What tilted me the most was how calm Mr. Vasil was; why didn't he seem bothered at all? Why wasn't he as frustrated as I was? I understand now, but I would have never understood it back then.

Late Thursday night at 2:45 a.m., I was able to light the fluorescent light bulb wirelessly, a scene that melted my heart. All the hard work, all the frustration was finally worth it. I felt a sense of pride because I finally did something myself, without my teachers, or parents, or grandparents. I felt grown, the soldering iron wasn't a
Nikoloz Vashakidze is a second-semester freshman studying electrical engineering. Georgia is his homeland, but he recently moved to Doha to attend the second semester in person at TAMUQ. He liked the parts of the city that he got to see during the drive from the airport to the hotel, so he is excited to see what else Doha has in store for him.

jedi’s weapon of choice, it was a serious tool for serious occasions; my Tesla coil didn’t feel like a LEGO building anymore, it felt like a real circuit, which I made. I laughed a lot the next day. I was happy with myself because the work I put in spoke for itself through all the “wows” and pictures I got with parents on Saturday. There was no need to say a word about my work when the magic was happening right in front of me.
CHAPTER 3 | Succeeding Eventually

Amna Saif Al-Najar
“Keep trying, you need to trust the water.” After hearing these words from my brother, I kept wondering, *what does he mean by that?*

My first experience with swimming was in my aunt’s swimming pool. I was six years old at that time. I was sitting on the edge of the pool, watching the white ball flying from the right side of the pool to the left as my elder cousins played pool volleyball. My sister passed by wearing a giant swimming tube and accidently pushed me inside the eight-feet depth of the pool. I was flapping the water with my tiny hands, fighting with it in order to breathe. I wanted to scream “MUM!” but the water filled my mouth, and I coughed before I sank to the bottom of the pool. It felt like the water was dragging my feet to the depth of the pool. One of my elder cousins noticed bubbles, dived into the water, and thankfully pulled me back. I was coughing and spilling water on the floor until I could breathe normally again.

Since then, I never put my feet in a deep pool; I hated swimming pools. Sea and water became my biggest fear in life, especially the idea of drowning. I felt suffocated and stressed every time I went near a pool. And I never tried to swim again from that day, keeping a safe distance between me and the edge of any pool. Until I was twelve when we moved into our new house in which we live until now. We had a deep rectangular outdoor swimming pool.

My family was so excited to go down to the pool; I wasn’t. They were swimming and having fun while I was sitting at the table beside the pool in the hot weather. “Come one get into the pool!” my dad said. I shook my head no. All of my elder and younger siblings wore swimming tubes, put their goggles on, and jumped into the pool. Seeing them having fun, I was so jealous! I was sitting there in the burning weather while they were enjoying their time. I decided to make my first move towards the water. I sat at the pool’s stairs, extended my legs in the clear water and let the water tickle my toes. The water felt so nice and warm that I wished I could jump into it, but I hesitated.

Every time we went to swim at the pool, I just sat on the stairs wishing I could have fun as my siblings do. Each time I saw my
younger siblings swimming with no fear in the deep pool, I felt ashamed. “They are younger than me and they could swim,” I said to myself.

Until that one day, I didn’t know what happened and what got in my head to do it, but I wore the circle tube, took a couple of deep breaths, closed my eyes, and lifted my feet from the ground. I jumped towards the water while trusting the physics to float. I wiggled up and down for a few seconds before I found myself floating on the water. I opened my eyes and Ooh LaLa, I did it. “I am in the water!” I screamed happily with my loudest voice. Although at first I felt scared, I soon got used to it, and it was so great. This moment was so special to me because I finally overcame my fear of water.

I kept using swimming tubes every time I went to the pool. Day after day the fear of water was slowly transforming into a love. Hence, my next step was to swim without the help of the tubes. I started watching YouTube videos teaching how to swim and move my hands and legs accordingly, and this triggered my memory. When I was nine, I used to wait for my six-year-old brother while he was taking swimming lessons in the Al Ahli Sports Club eight minutes away from our home. I recall how the instructor was showing and teaching them how to move their legs. They went into the pool, holding a kickboard, moving their legs up and down continually while the instructor was shouting, “One and two, one and two.” They used to do it every day in the smaller pool as a practice before they jumped into the bigger pool.

And so I tried applying what I saw and remembered, I held the kickboard and was kicking the pool water with my legs, water splashing everywhere. I kept doing this exercise for weeks until I felt ready to do it without the kickboard and to swim freely. I tried it beside the edge so I could hold onto it when I felt like I was drowning. I flat-streamed my body in the water, and left my hands from the edge. Then I started to move my legs and hands. I was drowning slowly, so I pulled myself up. I tried to do it several times, but each time I did it I was still drowning. I was doing something wrong, but I couldn’t figure out what it was. I was frustrated and
didn’t want to learn any more. It was not easy as I thought it would be, and I wondered what is it that I am doing wrong?

One day when I felt that I had tried enough times and I wanted to give up learning, when my brother saw me he told me, “Keep trying, you need to trust the water.” A light-bulb moment came, “Oh, that’s why,” I said to myself. I will try one last time, so I wore my goggles, flat-streamed my body into the water one hundred times, took a deep breath and let go of the edge. But this time I trusted myself, believed I could do it and went on and moved my legs and arms, the next thing I remember is that I am on the other side of the pool, “OMG, I did it!”

I swam for hours that day, very happy and proud that I now can swim freely and confidently. I felt like a dolphin swimming and splashing the water everywhere. Down there, inside the water, I was in another world, a world where I could hear nothing but the sounds of bubbles and splashes.

Days passed, and I got even better at swimming until it became one of my favorite hobbies to do in my free time. Yes, sometimes I drowned, others I couldn’t hold my breath for long. But I kept going on, I trusted myself, and I trusted the water. Now whenever I feel stressed, angry or sad, I wear my swimming suit, put on my goggles, and dive into the water. There I feel relaxed, peaceful and calm. I’m floating in the water feeling happy.

Amna Al-Najar is a sophomore majoring in electrical engineering. She likes writing because there are no limits of words that we could write compared to the words that we speak. While writing, she feels free to go beyond, to write as many words as she wants and about anything that comes across her mind.
As every dream begins with a dreamer, my story is about a myth (Bo-darayh) from my Qatari heritage. As a result, I wanted to merge between both Arabic and English, especially, because Arabic is my first language and my country’s spoken language, too. I’ve always wanted to write a story like the ones I’ve watched in television and cinemas, but I didn’t know what to write. But thanks to my professor, Dr. Aymen Elsheikh, and Ms. Shauna Loej from the CTL, they encouraged me to participate in Best Writing. Just like how my story ended with a dream, I believe that my dreams have just started. Now, I’m accomplishing one of my dreams which is to be a published author in a book. As Walt Disney once said, “If you can dream it, you can do it.”
Out in the open waters of the Arabian Gulf, the seafarers are fast asleep after a long day of diving for pearls. These precious hours are key to recuperate before dawn arrives and they have to start all over again, a grueling cycle that keeps going for months on end. But in the pitch darkness of the night, a loud scream is heard, waking up one of the divers on board. He understands it to be an urgent cry for help by a drowning crew member, and he quickly jumps towards the direction of the voice. Diving deeper into the darkness, he meets his fate at the hands of Bu Draeyah, the monster behind the feigned cries.

وعندما وصل المجدمي (نائب القبطان) مرزوق إلى قاع البحر المظلم الهادئ، وإذا به يجد وحش كالحوت على هيئة إنسان، بدلاً من أن يجد غواص غارقاً ينتظر مساعدته من مرزوق، وكان بودرياه لديه ملامح مخيفة فكان وجهه كوجه الحوت ولكن لديه ذقن كذقن الإنسان. أما بالنسبة لجسمه فكانت لديه زعانف الحوت كنسر في البحار، وفي نفس الوقت لديه خمسة أرجل وثلاث أيدي لكي يسير على مساحة البحر، أما بالنسبة إلى مرزوق فكان يشعر بالخوف الغامض، وكانت نبضات قلبه سريعة حتى أنها وصلت إلى المحيط الهندي من شدة خوفه. لم يكن مرزوق يعلم إن كان ما رأاه حقيقة أم حلم، لأن بودرياه كان يتكلم بصوت ممزوج، صوت خشن ضخم وكان صراخه مشابه لصراخ الأسد. ولم يكن بودرياه يرى مرزوق ذو حجم كبير، بل كان مرزوق كالملهم المدلولات أميره الكبير. حاول مرزوق الهرب إلى السبوك (سفيحة شراعية) للحرب ولكي ينجو حياته أو على الأقل ليلاحظه أحد الغواصة، ولكن باتت حيلته الفشلة، وسرعان ما دفع عليه البحار بودرياه، وسلمه بأحتجاج عملية وقام بمسه ببريق ضخم ثقيل من الذقن الثني. فكان مرزوق ماتاً بسرعة في البحر، ولكن بودرياه قد قاده من النجاة من هذا الوضوء المخيف، لكن كان مرزوق يشعر بالخوف الشديد، والخوف الذريع، وشدة قلبه وشدة نبضه، وقد رأى مرزوق حجمه الكبير، ولكن كان مرزوق يشعر بالخوف الشديد، وشدة قلبه وشدة نبضه، وقد رأى مرزوق حجمه الكبير.

و بعد ذلك قام المجدمي مرزوق بأخذ السكين من الدين، لأنه ما عهده قطع يد بودرياه التي كانت تخنقه، وذهب من سجن بودرياه، وسج في سجته الفائقة خمسة مرات أخرى للنجاة بنفسه، وفي هذه المرة انتهت إليه أحد الغواصة، فقوزت الغواصة هارون إلى قاع البحر، لكن نجى صديقه، وعندما وصل وذا به يتفاجأ فنس عرفه بمرزوق ولن هذه المرة لم يكن فقط أصدافه، بل وجد صديقه يصارع الموت المحتم مع بودرياه، ويكاد يسمع في الأمثلة القرطبية "إي تعاونوا ماهيا"، ولكن كان هارون يشعر بالخوف الشديد وفي نفس الوقت لم يكن قادر على الهروب ولكنه صديقه في هذا الطرف، فكلت مبادلة برزو وقلت بودرياه أو لم يكتمل. فكانت أول خطوة هارون هي إما النجاة له وصدقيه مرزوق وقتل بودرياه أو الموت لكلاهما. فكانت أول خطوة لهارون هي تشتيت انتباه بودرياه ليذهب المجدمي مرزوق إلى الأعلى ليستنشق بعض الهواء لأن قدماً كانوا يستعملون الفطام (وهي أداة تسود الأدمغة للأخرين دخول الماء، تشبه ملاقاً للاسنان في زمننا هذا) ونجحت خطوة هارون الأولى حيث شنت انتباه بودرياه عن طريق سباحته باتجاهات مختلفة عكس مكان مرزوق، وما ساعد نجاح هذه الخطوة هي مرور فوج من الأسماك، ساعدت مرزوق بالتحفيز والحرب، وكأنها أرسلت من الله تعالى إشارة أن مرزوق مريض.
Furthermore, when Marzooq swam up, the captain (Al-nokhetha) saw him, and he called all of his crew to come and pick up Marzooq from the water. Marzooq's face was pale, as he was so tired due to the lack of oxygen. But at the same time Marzooq was worrying about his friend Haroon. He was speaking intermittently, trying to say to Al-nokhetha Mohammed to save Haroon, so he was repeating Harron's name while pointing to the sea. Then the crew began searching for Haroon, but no one found him. After that, Al-nokhetha Mohammed sent five of his crew because he didn't know what they would face in the deep. He thought that it might be a shark or Haroon might be stuck in the dense piles of seaweed. And the same story is repeated for the five of them: each was shocked and afraid of what he saw. But the fear didn't control them as what had happened with Marzooq who was alone because they were a group of six people fighting the deadly monster Bu-daryah. At the same time, Bu-daryah was scared too because he wasn't facing only one victim. But he was pretending to be brave, so they wouldn't defeat him.

Finally, the six divers were able to control this war because each of them had a knife with him; however, they were as one body in how they united to face Bu-daryah. They began the battle by giving the chance for Haroon to leave because he was tired, the same for Marzooq. Haroon understood their plan, but was refusing to follow it because he wanted to kill Bu-Darayh. One of the divers went behind Bu-daryah and cut his leg. At the same time, another one did the same, until Bu-daryah was left with only the one leg that Haroon had cut. The six divers went back to the ship (Alsnbook). Al-nokhetha Mohammed was happy to see them all back again, and he was excited to know how they killed Bu-daryah. So they told Mohammed the story and he took a deep breath and thanked God for saving his crew from Bu-daryah. On the next day, one of the crew was calling for Al-fajr prayer. Marzooq was sleeping and when they woke him up, he was covered with sweat. They were asking whether he is feeling pain or if he still has a fever, and he replied, “No, but yesterday I was dreaming of a scary monster that we fought called Bu-daryah.”
Fatma A. AlMohannadi is majoring in electrical and computer engineering, Class of 2024. She recently graduated from Al-Bayan secondary school, Class of 2020. Ever since she was a child, Fatma liked reading and writing. She inherited the writing and reading passion from her parents because her mother was a teacher and her father is an engineer and a journalist. She also credits them for her involvement in her two favorite hobbies today: debating and public speaking.
Abdelrahman Sameh Hassaan

I wrote this piece during my English 104 class. This is a piece that defines who I am now. I did multiple drafts to finalize my piece to its current version. In the first draft I added more details on the sports I was doing and less on the journey itself. To make the piece more understandable, I wrote more on the journey which helped me to be proud of the piece. In the beginning I didn’t feel like writing a piece that describes my past. But looking at it now, I am glad I wrote it as it defines who I am today. This piece plays a big role in my life, as it changed someone that I was unhappy with. I hope you enjoy reading my piece.
No Longer the Weak Link

Have you ever walked up to a mirror and detested what you see? Well, that is how I saw myself when I entered my secondary years. When I saw what was in the mirror, it was not the true me. An overweight figure looked back at me. I couldn’t even see my toes from how my stomach poked out; even my hands were heavy. Being overweight was bad to the point where I found it difficult to tie my shoes or walk up the stairs without feeling the urge to throw up. All these simple tasks were torture in my eyes. It was time to decide how to change my life. It was time to wake up and look at the mirror and start being proud of who is looking back at me. I was done blaming everyone because of what I have made myself become. It was time to admit that I was in this position because of me. I am here because I led myself here. My motto became to wake up every day with the mentality that “Today is my day, here we go again.” I wanted to wake up and be proud of what I wanted to achieve.

I found this amazing app that I downloaded that helped me in my weight loss journey with a plan of jogging for ten minutes and running for the next five minutes. This caused pain that I had never felt before, pain that made me mentally want to give up. Every time I kept pushing myself, the pain would get stronger, but I never quit. I kept going because I wanted to be able to make myself do something I didn’t like.

However, I didn’t see that much progress, so I decided to seek help and ask the person I knew who was made for this sort of topic: my PE teacher. “What I can do to help me in my journey?” I asked him.

“There is no hope for you to lose weight,” he responded. I was heavily overweight, and he didn’t want to waste his time with me. This speech didn’t break me; instead it pushed me even during the summer holiday to prove to him that I can change, to prove to myself that I can do anything. I knew I needed to upgrade my plan, so I decided to sign up for swimming classes. I also increased my jog to fifteen minutes and my run to ten minutes. After that I would ride my bike to the swimming center, swim for fifteen minutes, and bike back home. I knew this wouldn’t be enough to help me lose weight; I realized I needed to change what goes inside my body and when as I was inspired by an ad I saw on
YouTube. I downloaded an app that created a diet table for me to which I still follow to this day. After I felt comfortable with where I reached, I reflected on my progress as well as the effort that I put in, and I could not believe it! I still remember the day when I woke up and looked in the mirror and for the first time I was happy to see the progress. The sacrifices of saying no to my friends for hangouts combined with the early times I wake up, finally paid off, and I could see positive results. I was so happy that I was improving that I started to tear up with joy.

I entered the first day of school as a different man walking, a man I am proud of. I felt proud of my weight loss journey and decided to join a team sport so that I can get motivated to lose more weight. Training alone gets boring quickly, which leads me not to complete the full workout.

The first team sport I joined was “everyone’s favorite sport”—football. The coach of the football team was the one and only, my PE teacher! His mouth dropped when he saw me walking onto the field. He couldn’t believe his eyes that I finally came to a sports lesson.

To tell you the truth, football was the hardest thing I have ever encountered while on my weight loss journey; yes, the running was hard, so was the swimming and riding the bike but football is a different story. It required a lot of foot coordination, long training sessions, and a lot of running. I didn’t quit. I kept going, I practiced every night how to control the ball with my feet, how to run with the ball but each day got harder and harder. A good friend of mine saw me struggling and in his eyes didn’t see me improving if I stayed in football. With a straight face, he told me, “Buddy, football is not your sport.” I was frustrated with my friend for kicking me out of football. After a while when I cooled down, I realized that I was struggling to control the ball. After having another talk, he insisted that I try volleyball as my first team sport.

I joined the volleyball team expecting another obstacle in my weight loss journey. Honestly, I wasn’t as bad as I feared, but I had no support from my coaches. I begged my father to move me to another school. After an hour of convincing, he said yes. At first, I
was shocked as his answer caught me by surprise, but that's when I knew I had the support of my dad.

When I joined my new school, the first thing I did was talk with the volleyball coach and asked him if I could join, but I informed him that I am still learning the sport. His response was, “Are we all not here to learn?” and this reassured me that this coach will motivate me and boost my hopes back up again. Every day that went by, I trained to control the ball with my forearm as high as I can, at whatever the speed of the ball come at me. During the first game I had with my new team, I remember feeling cold that I would be left out and not playing. As I entered the hall, I felt like I was melting. I was notified that the first game we will be playing was against my old school; the sports hall went completely silent after I heard that. In the distance, I could see my old coach's eyes staring down at me like I am still the weak link. Ten minutes later the whist sound filled the hall, and the ball was launched into our court, flying towards me. The hall went silent as I prayed that I could hit this ball. The ball was over, and we get the first point. Overjoyed with what I have just done, I continued playing while smirking at my old coach. At the end of the game, we shook hands and when it was time to shake with my old coach, my heart raced wondering what he will say. “Good game, you played well you should be proud of yourself,” he said. I didn't expect that to come from his mouth, but this sentence surely boosted my motivation to keep going and continue with bettering myself. It convinced me that I was going down the right track.

Volleyball is a fun sport and all, but I wanted to get involved in a more physical sport and at that time the only sport that came to mind was MMA. Let us just say I didn't do proper research about what MMA was before joining. The training I had to do every session sure took my breath away, and by the time I would get in the ring, I would already be exhausted. This made me vulnerable to all the punches the opponent would throw at me, and I would come out with bruises around my face and body. Did I quit? No, even through all this violence and extreme training, I did enjoy it. After a few weeks, I adapted to the training, which lead me to have a better performance during the matches. This improvement made me love the sport more than I did in the beginning. I was no
longer a weird person who came to these training sessions just to get beat up, and I slowly got involved in a new group of friends. Going to MMA made me find myself and what I like in a sport. It developed me mentally to try new things even if I only had a vague idea initially about the topic.

How did I come across rugby? Well, at this point I was eager to try a lot of contact sports, but the only problem was I didn't know that many contact sports. However, one day after school all the students received emails about the new teams that will be included during this school year. The list included the usual sports: “Football, Volleyball, Netball, Basketball, Cricket” and a new sport was added this year “Rugby.” I remember going back home that day and searching about rugby. I watched matches online and what caught my eye was the amount of physical contact there is in fourteen minutes. I knew I wanted to be part of the school team. After the weekend, the first thing I did after entering school was to go and sign up my name to join my team. The hardest part at first was controlling the ball and passing the ball off with a spin. With practice and going to more of the school training, I became better at the sport and got awarded once for the best passes played in the game.

To this current day, I still play rugby but at a higher level. “How did this happen?” you may ask. Well, during one of my high school rugby matches, scouts for the national team came to watch us play. Honestly, my heart kept racing every time we made eye contact. At the end of the game, they approached us while we were having our team talk and asked my coach if they could talk to him and handed him a piece of paper. This piece of paper had five numbers (7, 12, 2, 1, 8) corresponding with the player's jersey numbers. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw my number! The five players were then asked to stay behind by the coach so that he could speak to us. We were asked if we wanted to play rugby under the national team. Well, that was a no-brainer for us. On February 19, 2015, I officially joined Qatar’s National Rugby Team.

I have now played many games in Qatar and outside Qatar under the national team. After the first season was over, I got the best news ever. “Abde, I want you to be the captain of the national team,”
my coach told me. I was in shock, but it didn’t stop me from saying yes. I couldn’t believe that all the hard work I had put in led me to captain my team. It has now been six years and counting since I have joined the national team. Now I see rugby as my second half as I put so much effort into being the best and staying up to date with the latest news.

Some might say, “How could you love rugby this much since it is such a dangerous sport?” Well, that’s what makes it fun! Coming out of a game with your knee bleeding or blood on your shirt that belongs to the opponent is a rush. I have experienced multiple injuries, all ranging from not so serious to serious, yet I continue playing it. There was a time where there were only five minutes left of the game and we needed one more try to win the game. I remember this day like it was yesterday. The crowd went completely silent; all that could have been heard were the players on the field. We were on the opponent’s side of the pitch, roughly a meter from the try line. Before I could get my hands on the ball, I was instantly on the ground. The ref called an illegal tackle resulting in a scrum, but at that point, my finger was dislocated from my hand. But I didn’t leave because there were only two minutes left in the match. The ball went in the scrum, and I got it. Not thinking, I dove for the try line and got a knee to the head. At this point the whole field was filled with the noise of the crowd, and I lay on the grass with a minor concussion and a smile for scoring that try. This was my very first injury in rugby.

My recent injury occurred in 2019 when I went to Malaysia for one of the tournaments. So far, the games were going well, and all was fun. During the finals, everything went sideways. In the first two minutes of the game, I sprained my ankle, but it was not my intention to quit so I just taped it up and sprayed deep heat and was back on the field. I finished the first half and felt my ankle burning but didn’t quit. During the second half, I got tackled by an opponent which didn’t end well. I smacked my head on the ground and because of the pain in my head I thought that was the only injury I got so I stood up and took a step and fell back on the ground. At this moment, I could feel the pain in my whole right leg. I couldn’t move. The medics rushed towards me with the stretcher to pull me off the field. My knee was badly bruised,
and it couldn’t be bent. I was rushed straight from the field to the hospital to get a CT Scan to see what was wrong. I stayed at the hospital overnight waiting for my results. When I received my news the next day, it turned out I had stage three ACL damage and a meniscus tear. Due to this injury, I was not allowed to play rugby any more until my knee heals. This broke me physically and mentally. My knee now needed surgery, but before I can do that, I needed to do physical therapy for three months, start walking again, and re-build my muscle. Only after that can I do the surgery. However, when the day of the surgery came, the hospital canceled it due to COVID-19. Until now I am waiting to do my surgery. Recently I got a call saying that the surgery can be done in November, but they are still not positive. The bad news is that after surgery I will have to wait another six months for my knee to recover, then there is a test to do and only after I pass the test will I be allowed to play sports again.

Even though this injury was a tough one, I am still waiting to pass this test so that I can play rugby once again, because to me rugby is more than a sport, it is the reason behind who I am today. Rugby didn’t just change me physically; it also changed me mentally. It has taught me to be more aware of my surroundings and to be grateful for everything I have.

Every night I think about how far I have come and the achievements I have earned. My view of rugby is not just a game where you score to win; it is where I can do something that I love, something that defines me. Finally, I can see a proud man who always has a smile when he looks in the mirror, a man who is not embarrassed about who he is. This man is me.
Abdelrahman Sameh Hassaan is an HBKU computer engineering student. He loves playing sports and hanging out with his friends during his leisure time.
The reason why I chose to research about this community was that I have perfectionist friends, and I know that their take on life is not easy, although they make it seem like it is. I wanted to discover if there are other people with similar behaviors. I wanted to see the psychological outcome of this research, and I hoped to find out more about their mental stability and health. I hoped my writing and my research could produce a positive change that I can try on some of my friends. Throughout the research, the topic became more important as I found later on after interviews and surveys that I myself was a perfectionist, and that pushed me to pursue the research as best as I could to allow myself to learn more.
Perfectionism: The Road to Failure

'You're not doing well enough in school!' my mother said, adding, "What are my friends going to say about me when they find out?" I got up to get going to school when I was greeted with an angry, frustrated, and disappointed look on my mother's face. I apologized and made my way out to the bus stop. Why am I never enough? I thought to myself.

It is lunchbreak. I am sitting alone in the cafeteria with a cheese sandwich that my mother packed me. I feel sad eating it. I can't get the image of her disappointed face out of my head. I am sitting alone on the big blue rectangular-shaped table. Children are running around, screaming with laughter and joy. I miss those days.

We begin the second semester of school. I had just finished the first semester with an A+ score. I am not happy about it, but gladly my mother is. I don't see the angry face anymore, and I haven't been compared to anyone recently. I am not happy about it. Moments later, my math teacher approaches me and asks, "Hey Sweetie, are you okay?"

"I am okay, why wouldn't I be?" I respond.

"You look a bit upset, is it all going well? Good job on that A+ by the way!"

"Oh, thanks. Yeah, I am okay," I say for the second time.

Why was he questioning me? I don't think I look sad. I give off such a good image on the outside. I guess it is because I was sitting alone, and he thought I needed a friend. Sweet!

I am now in my first year of college. I have a 4.0 GPA and am doing extra-curriculars. I have been studying so hard and for so long. It is my first year of college and I am exhausted. At least my mother is happy.

I made so many new friends! They are really cool and fun to hang-out with. I like them a lot. But what if they don't like me? What if they are using me for my intelligence. No, they like me because I
am a fun person. But what if they talk about me once I leave the table? Am I good enough for them?

I cry every night. I study and I cry every night in my small matchbox-shaped room. My purple wall calms me down. I glance over to my painting of sea-turtles. Sea-turtles swimming to the surface. There is a weight on my chest, and I don’t know how to get rid of it. I am slowly losing my appetite, and my grades are dropping. My mother’s angry face makes a come-back.

I eat once a day now if I force myself to. I have lost over 10 kgs. My face looks tired, but happy. I start wearing makeup to college—I look okay. My grades are good, and I look skinny enough to become a model. At least my mother is happy.

**Introduction**

Perfectionism is defined as the need to be or appear perfect and is usually viewed as a positive trait rather than a flaw. It is a high-risk reward trait that could lead to “perfect” results or no results at all, nothing in between. Many people, including myself, are perfectionists without knowing that they are. We were raised to please others, and our behaviour reflects parental narcissism. At the start of my research journey, I did not consider myself a perfectionist nor did I think I was one until I interviewed Dr. Steve Wilson, our school psychologist. I found out a whole lot of information that led me to this conclusion and might I say, he was correct. My main purpose in this research is to reach out to perfectionists in TAMUQ, as well as finding some reasons to why they act the way they do.

**Original Research Question:** What are the factors and main influences that have caused students to become perfectionists?

**Methodology**

In this research, I chose to use two primary research sources. I conducted an interview with Dr. Steve Wilson via Zoom and used that information to craft questions for my survey of students.
Interview
Dr. Steve Wilson was asked to be interviewed by me virtually via Zoom because he is a subject matter expert on perfectionism. I sent him an informed consent form briefly describing the topic of research, a statement of consent that he could either agree or disagree to, and a consent request for me to record the interview for transcribing purposes. I also attached the seven questions (see Appendix A) that I was planning on asking him during the interview just in case he wanted to prepare ahead. He provided me with lots of important information to help fulfil my curiosity. However, I was too nervous to start recording because he did not sign the form until after the interview was done; and I was shy to ask him for permission to record because as soon as we began the Zoom call, we started the interview right away so instead, I took notes for each question asked.

I began the interview by thanking him for agreeing to be questioned on this topic, then asking him level one questions, then moving on to slightly tougher questions. I needed to make my participant comfortable talking, and not dive into questions that would require long answers from him or ones that would trigger a discussion between us.

Survey
I sent out a survey to all students of TAMUQ via Qualtrics with my English professor’s help with emailing the link to everybody, including graduate students, because I think it is the easiest and fastest way to gather information. The survey was meant to help me discover if the TAMUQ community is aware of what student perfectionists are, and if there are others like me or even more extreme perfectionists in the university. The point was to find out what caused them to be perfectionists, and if they knew whether they were perfectionists or not. The survey consisted of nine questions (see Appendix B), and I tried to make them as easy as I could. I was able to receive eighty-seven responses in just forty-eight hours, which was great, and I am very thankful for that.
Discussion & Results

Interview
Because I conducted the interview before creating the survey, I had no primary information whatsoever on my topic. Nonetheless, Dr. Steve was able to give me an overview on the topic and included many examples, just so that I can understand well the context of his answers. Though it took me many tries and many doubtful moments to come up with questions, Dr. Steve in fact liked my questions. I was surprised, because I thought they were “too much,” but instead, he told me that I sounded like I knew what I was talking about, and that I had a wonderful topic, which made me have a little bit more faith in this research project.

What I gathered from Dr. Steve was just like what I had in mind. Perfectionists tend to set for themselves unrealistic and unattainable goals, then proceed to fail, which then leads to many mental and emotional difficulties. Feeling the need to constantly please people and acting how they would want you to act is mentally damaging over time. This can eventually lead to developing eating disorders or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Perfectionists appear perfectly normal to outsiders, but in reality they feel really bad within themselves. Dr. Steve believes that these mental difficulties are at the core of perfectionism, and that being perfect does not mean being well-adjusted. Students who are perfectionists struggle with lots of anxiety, depression, and confusion as they put themselves in a position to be anxious, then face failure, then get depressed about it over time. This results in self-criticism and overwhelm, which is not healthy.

Another point Dr. Steve discussed was family and culture. Most people end up becoming perfectionists because their families create unrealistic expectations for them. The culture we live in sometimes gives us conflicting messages. There could be a lot of pressure built up on a person to appear a certain way because of a successful family member, and they would want to keep up with the “tradition.”

Along with his wonderful answers, I was able to receive amazing pieces of advice from Dr. Steve which not only helped my survey
and research but also helped me personally as well. For us to be well-adjusted, we need to accept that we mess up. As important as it is to set high goals and have high standards, we must not push ourselves beyond our limit because that will just lead us to fail. The statements, “If I reach perfectionism, I will escape the self-loathing and criticism,” and “I will be happy if I reach my goals,” are NOT true. It is like you are putting a high voltage lightbulb in a lamp that is not designed for such high voltages—it will burn out. Our worth and value don’t come from what we achieve, and we must learn that we are enough as we are. These are important truths I learned from Dr. Steve.

Survey
Out of eighty-seven survey respondents, 68% were female respondents and 31% male, along with 1% who preferred not to say. There were almost equal amounts of respondents from freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior students, although the majority were freshmen. I am assuming that was because they knew how urgently I needed their responses. One thing I was happy about was that almost everyone knew what perfectionism meant before I defined it when I first introduced the survey, so I felt like I was being heard. I then proceeded to asking an agree/disagree question for three statements (Appendix B, Q4). This question proved Dr. Steve correct. A lot of people develop their perfectionism because they were taught and raised to please others and push themselves beyond their limits to fit in with their family or culture. I made sure to include a COVID-related question because in the midst of a pandemic, people’s sanity and mental well-being (especially fellow perfectionists) worsens, which can hurt them academically. Over 60% of responders agreed that their time management abilities have worsened during the pandemic and are struggling in their first semester of school. About 77% of respondents chose a number on the scale between 5-10, that they consider themselves perfectionists. Sixteen respondents chose a number on the scale between 1-5, that they do not consider themselves perfectionists.

One question that brought me closer to my conclusion was a question that I gave multiple choices to, and a free write option (Appendix B, Q7 & Q8). Many people do believe that perfectionism
leads to successful people, although the free write answers quite contradicted this. People had varying answers, but similar ideas. I am sure that if they saw each other’s answers, an argument would have been created. The majority agree that being a perfectionist is good if the person can handle it well, without letting it mentally destruct them. It is important to care about your work and be the best you can, but you can achieve that without outdoing yourself to the maximum, to the point where you burn out and are drowning with missing responsibilities. Some answers were very thoughtful, and this showed how much the community we live in cares and is aware about these things. Four written responses of survey-takers are included below:

- “Perfectionism takes way much effort and time. It makes a person concentrate on every small detail, not taking into regard how important it is. It is not a flexible method of living and approaching things, as it takes 100% of your effort and takes a lot of mental energy. It doesn’t guarantee success either, because being successful also requires being flexible and easy-going.”

- “Perfectionism is good if you know when to stop. If perfectionism will lead you to miss other deadlines to submit one perfect task, then perfectionism will lead to long-term suffering instead of success.”

- “Success comes from knowing when to move on or asking for help instead of wasting hours and hours ironing out insignificant details.”

- “In my opinion, perfectionism can often hinder progress instead of helping it.”

I was also able to receive answers contradicting this, and I believe that these are from the same survey respondents who do not consider themselves perfectionists. One reason is that they glorified the idea of being perfect—believing that having the ability to stay in control of things and always being good at everything leads people to success. They have a somewhat incomplete idea of perfectionism or its side effects and seem to hope to have similar
mannerisms to them. Some examples of these responses include the following:

- “Perfectionism can definitely lead and push people to be successful, as it motivates them every day to do as well as they can on several tasks.”

- “Yes, I believe that [perfectionism] helps the person actually put their maximum effort to achieve the goals that they set for themselves. It drives them to continuously better themselves.”

- “I like how they [perfectionists] have a plan for everything. I really hope that I can manage my time the way they do sometimes.”

- “Feeling good about yourself is always key to success.”

In our community, we must find a way to stop praising perfectionism. Being a perfectionist may be good at times, but over time, it gets exhausting and draining. It plays with one’s self-esteem and may cause people to later become protectionists.

My last question on the survey was more of a question to help me than the research. I asked students to give me advice in an optional free write. There was no word limit, I just wanted genuine advice, and I got it. Reading the responses, I got emotional. I was not expecting anyone to fill out this question, but it seemed that people love to give advice and talk their heart out. I will share some of the responses I received just because I think they deserve the recognition:

- “I think it’s okay not to be perfect. Like I know it’s cliché, but like I think sometimes the times you give to making something perfect, you can improve more on how to make your outcome qualitative. Look at the big picture. Think whether this perfection of a certain task will help you in your future. Think whether it is necessary. Think what tasks you focus more on being perfect and ask if there is a reason for it.”
• “Is appearing perfect worth the cost of mental health?”

• “Understand that when you’re trying to be perfect in one aspect, you are being quite imperfect in another. You will never be perfect in all aspects of life. Just put in an adequate amount of effort into whatever you’re working on, and then, let it gooooooo! Move on!”

• “It is important to know your limits. Your mental and physical health comes before your studies. Find a balance because taking breaks that are way too long will only cause you more stress later on. Starting early is ALWAYS worth it. You might not always get the grade you want because no one expected a global pandemic.”

• “It really is a beautiful and rare thing. I just want you to ask yourself when you are having a hard time: Why am I doing this? Am I happy? Am I pushing my myself beyond my limits? It is good to push yourself, but there will come a breaking point that will feel like your lowest. Then you will slowly see yourself giving up. Which is unfortunate, but it’s true. Just gradually warm up to the idea of ‘I am doing what I am capable of doing and I’m trying my best.’ This has gotten me through many obstacles in the university. Do your best but don’t go beyond your limits. Good luck and enjoy your time when you can.”

• “If perfectionism is negatively affecting your mental or physical health, then I suggest you work on realizing that you can’t be the best at everything and that being good is enough. Instead of pressuring yourself to do exceptionally well in something you know is just not for you, put this effort instead in a category that you are already excelling in and in something you enjoy doing. Remember always NOT to compare yourself to others, instead compare yourself to your previous self (you in the past). Success is relative only to you and not to others.”
Secondary Resources
For my secondary research, I was able to find three sources from Google Scholar (originally found from TAMUQ online library) that gave me more insight to the topic.

The first source was “Perfectionism: Theory, research, and treatment” (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). This source focuses on the side effects that comes with perfectionism, from stress, anxiety, and depression to adjustment difficulties and clinical disorders. It supports the data I gathered, and proves that along with perfectionism comes mental and emotional difficulties.

The second source I used was “Perfectionism and performance” (Stoeber, 2012). Here, the author discusses the effects of perfectionism academically. He said, “students with higher levels of perfectionistic strivings show higher exam performance, higher individual grades, and a higher GPA than students with lower levels of perfectionistic strivings.”

The last source I consulted was “Perfectionism, attachment, and adjustment” (Rice, Mirzadeh, 2000). This source mainly combines ideas in both previous resources and relates them. The authors discuss the effects of perfectionism on mental health and academics, along with emotional withdrawals, (i.e. attachment). Although I did not include a lot of data about emotional difficulty in my research, I believe these sources helped me gather my thoughts and discuss other factors that create the perfectionism mentality.

Conclusion
To conclude this research, I finally got the answers I wanted, and it wouldn't have been possible without Dr. Steve, my English professor, and the students who took my survey. Perfectionism lies within us all in some shape or form, and the only way we can get through it is by setting boundaries for ourselves and knowing our limits. No one wants to drown, whether academically, mentally, or emotionally. I have learned many things throughout this research project that helped me, a perfectionist, quite a lot, and I'm thankful to everyone who participated.
Hiam Al Mallah is an aspiring chemical engineer. She believes the H in HCl stands for Hiam. In her free time, when she is not organizing her at-home mini chemistry set, she uses a pink feathered pen to write stories. She tends to put her thoughts and emotions into writing, though she usually refrains from sharing. All this energy and thought were put into her first semester’s English 104 class, where she was freely able to express her feelings without hesitation or discomfort, and here is where she has built up the courage to share them.
Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What do you think it means for a student to be a perfectionist in school/university?

2. From your point of view, what are some problems you believe that these students face most of the time?

3. Have you ever met a student in this institution with such high standards, what are they like?

4. Based on your experience, what do you think influenced this behaviour?

5. Do you think the student’s country culture or family history has an impact on them developing this characteristic?

6. Since you are surrounded by faculty members, is it possible that they are facing similar issues?

7. In your opinion, do you think this behaviour is a seed in developing mental illnesses (i.e., OCD, OCPD, ED)? And how do you think we can stop that from happening in the younger generation?

Appendix B: Survey Questions

1. I am... (female, male, prefer not to say)

2. I am... (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Grad Student)

3. Did you know what perfectionism meant before I defined it? (Yes, Maybe, No)

4. How much do you agree with the following statements? (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree)
   - My family or culture pushes me to be what THEY want me to be.
   - My time management skills have gotten worse during COVID.
   - I am rarely satisfied with how I do on tests.

5. To what extent do you consider yourself a perfectionist (scale from 1 to 10)

6. Do you know anyone who is a perfectionist? (Yes, Maybe, No)

7. In your opinion, does perfectionism lead people to be successful? (Yes, Maybe, No)

8. Feel free to explain your answer to the previous question. (optional free write)

9. What advice would you give me, a freshman, who struggles with perfectionism? (optional free write).
I have been told that writing, when in despair, helps you come to terms with your emotions, but I always find myself at a loss of words to explain them. That’s when I resorted to writing poems. I didn’t have to say much to make sense, nor did I even feel the need to make sense. My diary is like my canvas where I paint my thoughts with words. And like most art, I believe poems should be perceived as the same—with no explanation to influence the reader’s mind, only the emotions buried within the poem itself.
Can’t

You try to make them happier
to hurt yourself a little more;
you live a little longer
to die a little more.

To wipe off your tears,
you cry a little more;
you paddle a little fiercely
to drown a little more.

You believe in love
to lose heart a little more;
you breathe a little heavier
to ruin yourself a little more.

To scar your flaws,
you add a little more;
to deny their help,
you lust for a little more.

You feel you need a person
to know they need you more;
you live a little longer
to die a little more.

Hayyam Tariq Iqbal, a mechanical engineering student, is expected to graduate in 2023. She hails from a military family and has spent most of her childhood in Pakistan. She is an avid supporter of various humanitarian causes and often takes up the pen rallying for them. Her journey at Texas A&M has brought a whole new outlook of life for her, and she proudly acknowledges the influence that her family, the one she has made at Texas A&M, has had on her attitude. While she sees it as imperative to bend according to the need of the time, she is also very ambitious about her studies. With the numerous opportunities provided by TAMUQ, she has immersed herself in science, research, debates, and arts to satiate her need for discovery and self-awakening.
I took this picture during the summer holidays in July 2020 while I was on a trip to London with my family. I had always wanted to visit “Still Water,” a unique statue of the head of a horse, and so I decided to check it out since we were nearby. The moment I saw it I was amazed by the engineering marvel behind the design depicting the capabilities of art and science in a single structure. Such a heavy stone-made structure standing with minimal contact with the ground means that it has been sculptured and positioned with the center of mass able to hold firm with only a small base. This sculpture provides a quiet contrast, a moment of silence and contemplation just a few minutes from crowds at Oxford Street.
This is a photograph of my parrot staring at the window, captured at a time when we were not allowed to leave our house due to covid. Feeling lonely at home, I decided to capture a few images of my Amazon parrot. I am fascinated by wildlife, and I hope I can someday visit the Amazon rainforest to witness these beautiful birds in their natural habitat.
I was sitting inside my room and looking outside the window when I noticed how beautiful the sky looked. I decided that I needed to capture this moment, so I went up to the roof and took a couple of pictures. As I was scrolling through the pictures later that day, I saw that I had captured a bird flying through, and I was amazed at how great the timing was. I’ve always loved taking pictures of skies, clouds, and beautiful sceneries; it brings me a form of peace and comfort.
I took this picture on a crisp winter morning when I was in Isfahan visiting family members who are the closet to my heart. We spent the day at a bird and butterfly garden and had a great time enjoying the beauty of nature and each other’s company. Usually the air feels polluted during the winter season, but that morning the sky was blue and clear and earth’s colors seemed to be just a bit more saturated; I could tell that it was going to be a good day. It was only fitting to take a momentary pause and gaze in awe ... and that’s when I looked up and captured this photo.
For quite some time, I have craved to see the sunrise in Qatar. The western coast of Doha is perfect for such an occasion. After many postponements, I planned with two of my friends to take a Thursday off and witness the sunrise at Al Wakra Beach. We initially had breakfast and then waited as we witnessed the Sun slowly rising towards the horizon over the hours. Waiting for the water to slightly warm up, barring the morning cold, we finally immersed in the sea water, and I decided to take my camera out for the occasion of storing some good memories with my two great friends.

I feel this photo is simple? and I’m glad I could artistically capture the ambience that this image could invoke into so many scenarios. A beachgoer will feel it is that typical sunrise good vibes sort of picture. This image can also show the hope and despair of someone, but to me personally, I think the image shows the state of mind of many people in our current times. I feel someone standing outside the unknown ocean is just basking on what’s there to come for them. For example, in these times of COVID, no one knows how long this pandemic can go on. As an engineer graduating in a volatile job market, this is the plight you might feel as you start thinking of where you are actually headed in your career. For different people, there are different stories for the way they see it, and I wanted to capture all of their ethos in this photo frame. So the story I want to tell with this is the story the person wants to feel in this picture, I’ll let that be open to interpretation.

I started my photography journey from simple geometrically aligned pictures on Instagram, mostly My love for movies introduced me to the art of cinematography, and then photography for me was never the same. I would look into the nuances of each picture—what it wants to say and what it means in the broader prospect, realizing that every shot matters. I would plot this photo at the most recent development where I feel any photo can be turned into a slightly tragic if not darker narrative. This is my ode to cinematography, what a single frame could invoke in a viewer, just like a movie’s poster, and I feel this photo is a reflection of how far I have come in this craft.
A lighthouse in its traditional sense acts as a beacon, a navigational aid to those adrift in their voyage wherever they may be. The lighthouse is a spark that calls on the Act of Pursuit, a sign to seek and explore unknown terrain. This image, by extension, calls on the viewer to pursue the things that set off a spark within themselves.

To put it simply, the message of this lighthouse is to have the courage to pursue what brings you joy. One of the grandest and bravest things we can do is to find the courage to pursue the things that make us happy, the things that make our heart ache and our senses tingle. “Take the path less traveled and marvel at your discoveries,” is the message of this photograph.
I usually capture images of nature, but after running out of ideas, I had to transition to a different domain. This image marks the beginning of my obsession with photographing abstract things. It was captured in a ten-second exposure of my keyboard while zooming in. As an electrical engineer interested in programming and computers, the discrete exposures of the picture capture the essence of the discrete digital world.
This photo was taken at the QF (Qatar Foundation) Student Center. I was hanging out with my friends on the sofa when I looked up at the ceiling, and it mesmerized me. It has both the symmetry and abstract lines and shapes from the wooden finish. A normal human eye might not immediately notice the ceiling lights are not just a slab of light since they would be bright enough that the wooden slices would be covered with the light. But with a camera, it can capture everything perfectly, exposing the lights properly. I want people to appreciate all the architectural beauty around us. I am only a hobbyist photographer, but I hope I can continue to portray beautiful architecture in the future.
This photo was taken during the rare ‘ring of fire’ solar eclipse of 2019. It was the photo I spent the most time preparing for, since witnessing such a magnificent event is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I might never experience it again. Being there in person was frankly terrifying; wildlife were in a state of emergency, and the weather was bone-chilling, but it was all worth it.
Nature has always been my escape, whether it be the ocean, the forest or mountains. I was walking along the Corniche, admiring how peaceful the ocean was and how beautifully the sun was reflecting on it; I knew that this moment had to be captured. I believe that the ocean can cure all bad moods and bring some serenity to one’s life. This photo was taken early on in my photography journey using my first professional camera.
2020 was undoubtedly a hard year for many, if not all of us. For me personally, atop the uncertainties and anxiety brought about by Covid-19, there were other contributors to why my 2020 was a challenging year. I learned many things from the experience as my eyes were opened to a plethora of blessings that I normally take for granted. Through covid-19, al hamdulillah, I was given the opportunity to recognize and acknowledge those blessings personally and professionally. In addition, I was able to rekindle the light I had for many dormant hobbies which otherwise would have forever been kept on a dusty shelf in a corner. One of the hobbies I relit was the joy of making things with my own hands, including drawing/painting. I experimented with shades of dark and light, and a part of me thinks the color choices were influenced by my state of mind at the time: blue, black, grey, and white depicting the journey from turmoil to tranquility to hope. I hope the illustration evokes such emotion as well. The turmoil represents the uncertainty and fluid conditions of covid in Qatar; tranquility and hope are present because I painted this when Ramadan was just around the corner.
This film was produced for a course project. In Music 201, we looked at the importance and impact of music on Black and Native American communities, focusing on the role of music in anti-racism and anti-slavery resistance. For our project, we decided to apply the concepts we learned to the context of the Middle East, specifically to the case of Palestine. We looked at how music was and continues to be instrumental in giving Palestinians hope and empowering them in their fight for liberation. The experience was really fun and interesting for us as we learned about the impact and major role that music has in liberation struggles everywhere, giving people a sense of hope and unity.
Palestinian Music video

https://youtu.be/ffPHbHJVSKY
CHAPTER 5

Honoring Communities
You Are Not Alone

The injured world is shrinking. Fiberoptic sutures constrict, drawing together gaping wounds in continents. They coil around cities and branch through oceans; a cold, clear carrier of warm, white waves. The stitches throb with the pangs of change and the rich ichor of the world oozes through the cracks. But it is healing.

And you are not alone.

Streets and hallways have cracked like empty veins, disused and empty, they fall into dust. No one mourns them. No one can. Instead we mourn for our families, and our freedoms, and ourselves. We mourn for routine; for safety; for certainty. Our rage and our fears are screamed only into the silent darkness of our own minds.

But you are not alone.

Songs are told and stories are sung by the flickering lights of diodes and pixels. We gather in apartments and shops and palaces and shacks; each individual but all together.
Billions of pinpoints of light in a dark night sky, connected by words and pictures and time and hope.

We are not alone.
Attending university in the country I grew up in made me curious about people who study abroad. This is why I decided to conduct this research. The purpose of this research project is to learn how international students adapt to a new study environment in order to succeed in their academic life. The ultimate aim of this project is to provide insights about being an international student to TAMUQ students who are hoping to study abroad.

I really enjoyed writing this research paper, as it helped me view university life from different students’ perspectives as well as learn a lot about the different experiences and challenges faced by international students. When I asked my professor to send out the survey for the first time, I remember telling her that I didn’t think many people would respond or even be interested in taking part in this research. However, this wasn’t the case at all. Many students took the time to respond to the survey and even volunteered to be interviewed.
International Students at TAMUQ

Introduction
It was a sunny morning in August. She woke up from her cozy bed, put on her slippers and went downstairs to make breakfast. She prepared fried eggs and bacon as well as an espresso and sat at her dining table to eat. Today was the day she is leaving to study abroad. Tons of emotions were inside her. She felt anxious, but also excited for her new chapter. She ran upstairs and made sure everything was packed in her purple suitcase. She put on her grey hoodie and sweatpants and was ready to leave. As she walked outside her apartment’s door, she took one last glance and thought to herself, “Wow, I really am gonna miss this place, huh!” She waited for the cab, and on her way to the airport, she stared out of the window at the beautiful city. The tall buildings, public parks, and her favorite restaurant, all passing by her eyes. A wave of sadness hit her when she realized that it would be at least four more months until she would return back home. After arriving at the airport, she stood outside, felt the breeze as she inhaled in some air, and mumbled to herself, “Well, this is it, to many more adventures.”

That is a glimpse into the feelings of one of many international students who are going through the same thing. We, the non-international students, would never understand those feelings as we are continuing our educational journey with our families standing behind us and providing us with their direct support. Growing up, I have always dreamt about studying abroad, somewhere around the world, somewhere I have never been to before, and starting a new life all by myself. However, the thought of having to continue alone without having my parents nearby made me hesitant. As a result, I decided to continue studying in the country I grew up in, and fortunately, I got the opportunity to study at Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ). However, the thoughts of studying abroad, growing, and getting out of my comfort zone never left me. Luckily TAMUQ provides its students the opportunity to study abroad in College Station, which provides not only the opportunity to learn, but also to experience new cultures, languages, and traditions. Due to all of this, I decided to conduct this research. I wanted to learn from the experiences of the international students at TAMUQ and how they adapted to a whole new environment. In addition to that, this research
will enable me to help students at TAMUQ who are hoping to study abroad and give them an insight on what to expect as an international student.

**Original Research Questions**
This research study aims to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What can be learned from international students at TAMUQ about sacrifices they had to make in order to help other TAMUQ students who are hoping to study abroad?
2. What are the challenges faced by international students when arriving to a new country?
3. How long does it take international students to adapt to moving to a new country?

The target audience for my research includes all TAMUQ students who might study abroad at some point in their lives at College Station or any other university.

**Methodologies**
The sample of the current research is composed of international students who are currently studying at TAMUQ. In this research I used two data collection methods: a survey and an interview. I started out by sending a questionnaire to the international student body which was made up of thirty-nine students. I received responses from twenty-two international students (sixteen males, and six females) for a very impressive survey response rate of 56%. The survey, which was made up of thirteen questions (refer to appendix A for the questions), was sent out to be completed between November 16 and December 8, 2020. The survey was conducted using www.qualtrics.com, which provided complete privacy to respondents’ answers. Moreover, the survey was anonymous in order to allow students to answer truthfully and share their honest opinions. The data was also calculated using www.qualtrics.com. This was followed by an interview with four students to gather more information about their individual experiences, hence enhancing my research. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to conduct face-to-face interviews; therefore, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom.
Survey Results
According to the survey, thirteen students said that they didn’t visit Qatar before deciding to study here, and six students said that they didn’t know anyone in Qatar. Of course, moving to a country that you have never been in before nor know anyone can make the moving process even harder on the student. When asked, “What was one thing you were worried about when you first arrived?” 27% (6/22) of the survey respondents said they were worried about making friends. Although the answers to this question varied, fear of not being able to make new friends, having language barriers, and facing difficulties with adjusting to living alone were the most common answers among students. Furthermore, only four students said that they faced a cultural shock, compared to eighteen students who said they didn’t, or weren’t sure whether they faced a cultural shock or not. When I looked at the countries that the four students said they resided in before moving to Qatar, I found out that they come from countries that had a completely different culture than Qatar, which explains why they felt that way. The countries these students came from included India, South Korea, and Pakistan.

Moreover, studying abroad makes students feel a blast of emotions. In one of the survey questions, students had to choose the emotion they felt when they first arrived to Qatar. There were a variety of answers to this question. The question had the option of multiple responses; therefore, it gathered thirty-eight responses, and of these, fifteen students said that the initial feeling they had was excitement, while ten students said that they felt anxious, compared to only two students who said that they felt sad. The last question of the survey asked the respondents to give advice to other TAMUQ students who are hoping to study abroad. These are some of their responses:
- “It’s really an amazing journey and a good chance to improve yourself so don’t miss it”!
- “Travel in groups of friends and don’t be afraid to adventure.”
- “Take it step by step, you’ll make friends every step of the way.”
- “Travel of any kind opens your eyes. You learn things you never knew you never knew.”
• “I encourage them to go, although the first days may be difficult to adapt. But there will be lots of experience and very little regret.”

• “Your motivation to make friends is not what drives the action, but it is rather the result of action, so you have to take a few steps to make yourself comfortable. When I first came to TAMUQ, I used to strike up a conversation with almost everyone I held a spot with for even a few seconds. There came a point only around one month in, where every face seemed familiar and was someone I had spoken too, or said hi to, or said a random joke to while waiting for something and so on. Now I no longer feel like an outsider at TAMUQ but rather a resident of the space. I suggest that a good and positive start will go a long way. One of my favorite quotes is, ‘There are no strangers here; Only friends you haven't yet met.' William Butler Yeats.”

Considering all this advice, I can confidentially say that studying abroad is worth it despite the challenges. It is an eye-opening and a unique experience that everyone should try out.

**Interview Results**

The results of the interview varied depending on each student and their individual experiences. Student #3 said in the interview that having friends in Qatar made the whole moving process easier and less stressful. Student #4, on the other hand, mentioned that they felt “stressed out” and worried of moving to a country where they did not know anyone there. One of the interview questions asked whether the student has been independent before or not, for example, travelling alone, or being away from their parents for a long period of time. Student #1 said that they have been away for a summer camp several times which helped them get used to the idea of being responsible for their self. In addition, Student #3 spoke about an experience where they travelled alone for a learning opportunity that was held by their high school. They mentioned that this experience really helped them when they became an international student, as they were able to carry their own responsibility and didn’t feel the need of any external help. In contrast, Student #2 and #4 said that moving to Qatar was their first ever experience where they left home and had to be alone for that long. They both said that in the beginning, it was
hard to adjust until they made friends, and eventually everything became easier. Another struggle that international students face is language barrier. Although TAMUQ is an American institution and the language spoken here is English, students usually speak the country’s native language when communicating with one another. Student #2 said in the interview that they sometimes felt “left out” when a group of students were standing together speaking in Arabic and the student had no idea what they were talking about.

Secondary Sources
To make my research argument stronger, I looked up previous researches that have been done on international students. One of the sources was an article titled “Responding effectively to the mental health needs of international students” (Bradley, 2000) which pointed out the language difficulties that international students face when arriving to a new country. This source demonstrated similar perspectives on language barriers as Student #2 described.

The second source, “International Student’s Challenge and Adjustment to College” (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015) highlighted a very crucial point: the difficulty of adjusting and making new friends. This research mentioned that feeling lonely is one of the main reasons international students find it hard to adapt. This was the issue faced by Students #2 and #4 when arriving to Qatar. This source helped prove the difficulty faced by international students when arriving to a new country.

The final source, “Development of an acculturative stress scale for international students: preliminary feelings” (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994), sums up the main difficulties faced by international students. These difficulties include feelings of uneasiness, anxiety, loneliness, depression, difficulties in adjusting to new food or cultural values, and language difficulties.

Conclusion
Conducting this research helped me learn more about international students at TAMUQ and all over the world. I believe that this research will benefit the students at TAMUQ who are hoping to study abroad just like it benefited me. Before
conducting this research, I was pretty sure that I would receive a variety of results depending on each student’s individual experience. Although this was the case, I was still able to notice the patterns in the responses. For instance, I noticed that students who came to Qatar already knowing someone were not as anxious as other students who knew no one. I also noticed that students who experienced independence previously did not have a hard time adapting compared to students who never left home. These results confirmed my expectations as I was confident that travelling alone for the first time and being in a new country without knowing anyone is intimidating. I also learned that despite all the challenges and hardships that we might face at the beginning, the experience of studying abroad is totally worth it. It is an opportunity to get exposed to new people and cultures, as well as grow and get out of your comfort zone. Finally, I hope this research fulfilled its purpose. I understand that moving to a new country is not easy, but after conducting this research, I encourage every student to go out there and give it a shot. It might be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. You never know!

Ghada Abdelrahman is majoring in chemical engineering at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She earned the black belt in Taekwondo when she was 14. In her free time, she likes to bake and try out new recipes. After taking the ENGL 104 course, she started to enjoy writing and has taken a huge interest in it as it made her believe that she is a better writer than she previously thought.


Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What is your gender?
2. Which citizenship(s) do you hold?
3. In which country did you reside before Qatar?
4. What is your major?
5. Which year are you currently in?
6. Did you visit Qatar before deciding to study in it?
7. When you first came to Qatar as an international student, did you know anyone in the country?
8. How did you feel when you first arrived?
9. What was one thing you were worried about when you first arrived?
10. Have you experienced any form of discrimination or racism during your time at Qatar?
11. Did you experience a cultural shock?
12. How did you find adapting to Qatar?
13. What advice do you have for TAMUQ students who are hoping to study abroad (e.g. College Station)?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in Qatar?
2. When you first arrived, what were the challenges that you faced?
3. Do you consider yourself as an outgoing or a shy person?
4. Have you ever been independent before? (e.g. Traveled alone or lived alone)
5. What were you expecting when you first arrived?
6. Did you come alone or with a friend?
7. Did you find it hard to make friends?
8. Do you regret taking the decision of studying abroad?
9. Finally, what advice do you have for TAMUQ students who are hoping to study abroad?
Ethnographic Study of the Community of Special Needs

Reflection:
In today's society, it is, unfortunately, very common for people to look down upon the special needs community. Some factors for such mindsets can be due to lack of knowledge, lack of exposure, or false stereotypes that have been placed upon this community. Unlike the people who look down upon the special needs people, I have a very soft spot for them, so after witnessing the mistreatment of multiple special needs kids (both inside and outside of Qatar), I knew that some change had to be made. I have witnessed families who try to hide their special needs child away from society (due to feeling embarrassed or ashamed). I have also witnessed some parents hitting their children when they show poor behavior in public (when it's completely out of their control). The following piece is an ethnographic study on the Special Needs community, and I hope that along with the research that I have conducted, these negative stigmas around people with disabilities can be changed so that everyone can learn to be accepting of one another.

I Introduction
It is the summer of 2018 in Tehran, Iran. My family and I, along with my aunts and uncles, had decided to go to the cinema to watch a new funny movie recently released. Like any typical Friday night, the mall was packed, and we were only able to gather enough seats after asking the random couples around us for their extra chairs. After finally finding a small table in the corner of the food court, we began to eat. My twenty-four-year-old cousin, Mohammad, instantly finishes his entire 3-course meal in a total of five bites, jumps out of his seat, and starts examining the room. He snatches his four-year-old niece's balloon, and he begins to sprint and skip around the entire food court before anyone has a chance to stop him. He jumps around and dodges his way between the hundreds of people who were trying to eat, and as he's doing this, he's twitching, blinking aggressively, and shaking his head. From time to time, he also blurts out random dialogues from movies (some of these dialogues could be considered inappropriate if used at the wrong time).
Everyone's faces begin to turn towards his direction, and I can see their eyes following his path as he continues to run around the entire room. A full-grown, twenty-four-year-old man is seen to be acting like an eight-year-old boy, and people can't tell if this is because he's a normal man who's choosing to act this way or if it's because he has a mental problem. Regardless of the condition, though, they're confused, and they're scared. They continue to stare and judge, and the looks on their faces reveal that they feel extremely uncomfortable about it.

Eventually, after I catch up to him, I hold his hand and try to walk him back to our table so that people can continue to eat their meals in peace. With my broken Farsi, I try to explain to people how my cousin has autism, and from their faces and their tone, I can tell that this discomforting feeling doesn't allow them to feel safe. As mentioned by Mireille Krischler, "once a person is classified as having a specific special educational need, this person will likely have to deal with [...] society's stereotypical beliefs concerning this need" (Krischler).

Although these situations don't personally bother me (since I have a cousin with autism and an aunt with Down Syndrome), I've always wondered how it must genuinely feel for the parents or siblings of the special needs kids who deal with this every day. Children with special needs are one of the most "socially excluded" groups, and as a result of such negative attitudes, their inclusion into today's society is hindered (Krischler). I've wanted to know what it feels like to put up with the negative and judgmental looks that are constantly given towards these children, but from an even wider aspect, I've always wanted to learn why this negative attitude exists, where it roots from, and how it could be changed in order to create a more positive, equal, and inclusive environment for the special needs kids and their families. So, I set out to find my answers.

The question that helped guide my research this semester is the following: "What can I learn from the special needs community about building a more positive and inclusive society in order to improve the discomfort levels of the TAMUQ community?"
I've personally had a good amount of exposure to the special needs community, and I've been raised in a family that has a big heart for the special needs community and welcomes them with open arms. We've been involved in countless events that have advocated and raised awareness for them; however, along with the awareness that's been raised, I've also, unfortunately, witnessed the negative attitudes and judgments directed towards people with special needs. My plan with this research project is to educate people about this ongoing issue and advocate for change.

There are a couple of results that I was expecting to see:
1. I expected people to admit that they feel discomfort when confronted with a special needs child.
2. Some people may agree that they aren't fully educated about the Special Needs Community and the offered resources.
3. Some people may admit to not having the best knowledge of handling such situations properly.

II Methods
When I was first looking for a topic to research, I tried to sit and brainstorm about things that matter to me, and one of the first topics that first came to mind was the special needs community. This topic came to mind because, in my family, I have a cousin who has autism and an aunt who has down syndrome, so I witnessed the way they're looked down upon within the community first-hand. This always bothered me because I felt that it was unfair treatment towards the special needs kids over something that they have absolutely no control over.

After picking my topic, the next step was to plan out how I would do my research. The most challenging part of my entire project was trying to find people who would be comfortable enough to be interviewed over such a sensitive topic. If I failed to find anybody in Qatar, one of my back-up options was to interview my cousin's mother, but if I were to do that, then I would've had to translate/transcribe the entire interview into Farsi. I did not want to do that because I knew that part of the interview would get lost in the translation, so I searched for people to interview
within Qatar. Thankfully, one of my friends offered to help. I have a friend who has a brother with dyspraxia, and his mother has been incredibly involved within the special needs community in Qatar. She has sent her son to many different centers and therapists inside and outside of Qatar, she's well-informative on the subject, and she is currently in the process of opening her own special needs center as well. When I asked her if I could interview her, she was extremely supportive and kind enough to agree. She even suggested that I meet her business partner (for opening the center), who’s a specialist in special needs and has a son with autism. From this hour-long interview that I was able to have with these two lovely women, I was able to get the perspective of special needs parents, a special needs specialist, and of people who were planning on opening their own center as well. The most challenging part of my entire project turned out to be the biggest success!

For my project, I also created a survey, and with the help of my professor, it was distributed to all of the members at Texas A&M University at Qatar, including students, staff, and faculty. The survey included a mix of multiple-choice questions, likert-scaled questions, and some optional free-write questions. My survey also turned out to be a huge success because I received a total of eighty-three responses, and many people actually took the time to write and respond to the text entry questions.

Finding sources for my secondary research was also relatively easy because the special needs community is a widespread topic. The resources that I was able to find on the TAMUQ library website were beneficial, and I was able to find some eye-opening information.

III Results
From this research that was collected, there were some surprising and some expected results that were obtained.
“I am knowledgeable about the resources for the Special Needs Community in Qatar.”

In the graph shown above, it is evident that most people who took the survey disagreed with the statement about being knowledgeable about the special needs community. These results show a lack of awareness about Qatar’s special needs community, and this limited knowledge shows that the issue actually exists (Amani).

“Having a disorder/disability prevents the person from living their life to their full potential.”

In Fig. 2, it is shown that most people agree with the statement that having a disorder/disability prevents the person from living their life to their full potential (Amani). While this statement may be debatable, many survey-takers provided reasonable explanations as to why they agreed with the statement. One of the students who took this survey wrote, “I don’t think anyone can live their life to the fullest while constantly aware of the tough circumstances they’re forced to live under. I also can’t imagine it being easy for them to interact with others, mainly because not as many people will be patient enough to form a friendship with someone living with such conditions, as unfortunate as it is” (Amani). A staff member at Texas A&M noted that “everyone’s ‘full’ potential is different in my opinion. Someone with autism might
not have the potential to be CEO, but a functioning autistic person might. I believe this is also true for people without a disability—sometimes people's choices affect their reaching full potential—not only disabilities” (Amani). It is evident that this question is a debatable topic, but survey respondents' explanations showed some form of understanding as to why they selected their responses.

Fig. 3 shows the responses to the following survey question: “With complete honesty, on a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you with the idea of being related to someone who has special needs? (1 being very uncomfortable and 10 being very comfortable).”

The graph shown above is what stood out the most to me. It was quite surprising to find such a high percentage of people claiming that they'd be extremely uncomfortable about the idea of being related to someone who has special needs (Amani).

Some of the takeaways from the survey were further elaborated on in the interviews that were conducted. The interviews were done with a Qatari mother (who has a fifteen-year-old son with dyspraxia) and a Malaysian mother (who has a thirteen-year-old son with autism). When the topic of negative stigma was mentioned, the Qatari woman brought up an interesting story
about an encounter she had with another Qatari woman. A lady once came up to her, pulled her aside and told her, "I need to tell you something, but don't tell anybody! I heard that you have a son with learning difficulties. I think there's something up with my son, but please, please! Don't tell the rest." The woman who was being interviewed mentioned that, unfortunately, for some people, it is still considered a shame. Not to all, but some (Interviewee #1).

In fact, the two women who were interviewed mentioned that when they open up their own center, one of the things they definitely plan to include is to offer workshops for all household members to attend, such as parents, siblings, nannies, drivers, etc. That way, everyone in the family can become educated and learn how to cope and deal with such situations (Interviewee #1 and Interviewee #2).

During the interviews, they also mentioned that one of the best ways to alleviate the negative stigma is through education, awareness, and exposure. If people start to become educated, especially from a young age, they will learn to accept differences sooner, and one of the best ways to become educated is through exposure and through the process of integrating people with special needs into our society (Interviewee #1 and Interviewee #2).

From the secondary research that was conducted, numerous interesting points were obtained as well. In a journal written about school inclusion and education of children with special needs, the author, Alois Ghergut, states that some factors that influence the attitudes of teachers towards special needs students are "the nature and severity of children's deficiency [and] the existence of human and material support in school and classroom [...] have a decisive role in ensuring the success of inclusive practices" ("School Inclusion" 70). Educators in main schools are more likely to accept children with mild deficiencies than those who have severe deficiencies, and one of the reasons for this is behavioral issues ("School Inclusion" 71). Ghergut mentions that "The presence of students with behavioral disorders integrated in mass education will significantly influence the level of tolerance, discomfort, and insecurity among teachers who work with them" ("School Inclusion" 74). However, one of the factors that have proven to
increase inclusive attitudes is offering more support services in the education system. This allows the teachers to feel more comfortable and be willing to offer support to the special needs kids, knowing that they’re not alone in this.

According to the journal article, “Mixed Stereotype Content and Attitudes toward Students with Special Educational Needs and Their Inclusion in Regular Schools in Luxembourg,” when people have negative attitudes about certain people, “they tend to avoid or minimize contact with that person, thereby reducing the opportunities to have positive experiences that could potentially change their perceptions” (Krischler). If such attitudes from the public community were improved, the chance of integrating special needs kids into our daily lives would be easier. However, when these circumstances are not worked on, the children with special needs along with their families are the ones who are affected the most. According to Krischler, some parents worry about their children getting bullied or rejected by their peers when they’re sent to school. For this reason, some parents feel uncomfortable about sending their children to public schools.

The struggle of feeling included within the community is further amplified in collectivist cultures, such as Arab cultures. In these types of cultures, family honor is significant. Therefore, a certain individual’s situation is known to "reflect on the entire family" (Al Khateeb et al. 237). According to Jamal Al Khateeb, "Parents experience a series of reactions (e.g., shock, denial, disbelief, anger, guilt, stress) upon the diagnosis of a disability in their child. However, because the Arab culture’s view of disabilities (as a negative stigma) influences the parents, they can be more devastated than parents from other cultures to learn that their child has a disability" (Al Khateeb et al. 237). This shows how people with disabilities are viewed even more negatively within collectivist cultures than in other communities; therefore, raising a child with disabilities in a region such as the Middle East imposes a different level of challenges than may not be present elsewhere. Due to this, some Middle Eastern parents feel inclined to hide their children and/or be unwilling to take their children for necessary services such as early childhood intervention. The impact of negative stigma
upon the families of special needs children could greatly impact the child’s development throughout the future (Al Khateeb et al. 243).

Since it is quite common for Arab families to experience stereotypes, there can be many services offered not only for the child but also for the families of those who have special needs, which is why the ladies who were interviewed mentioned that they plan to offer counseling sessions for all household members (Interviewee #1 and Interviewee #2). These counseling sessions can encourage people to “think of methods to overcome obstacles they may encounter as a result of this stigma” (Al Khateeb et al. 243).

Furthermore, some other factors that can help to build more positive attitudes (specifically in schools) are "access to training programs and opportunities for direct interaction with children with special needs (...), support services, school environment improvement, planning opportunities, school leadership focused on the principles of inclusion, and equal chances to access education for all children" ("School Inclusion" 73). As the interviewees mentioned, becoming more exposed to people with special needs will help bring more positive attitudes, leading to a higher chance of acceptance/inclusion. This will allow families to become more comfortable with their situations and encourage them to become further involved in seeking intervention programs (Al Khateeb et al. 238).

An example of how the community can help build a more positive society is through children’s literature. Children's literature is a powerful way of sharing stories and teaching the younger generation about important life lessons (Avagyan et al. 157). It allows the readers to change their mindset towards children with disabilities and look at them from a more positive perspective.

Even though there has been some positive and beneficial action taken towards fixing this world-wide issue, there is still room for improvements to fix this negative stigma. By addressing these attitudes and attempting to provide potential solutions to them, our world can help build a more positive and inclusive society for all.
If there were more time to explore and research, I would have definitely considered looking further into the quality and quantity of impact these solutions could have on our society.

IV Reflection and Conclusion
There were many things that I was able to learn over the course of this project, but one of the most important things that I learned was empathy interviewing. For my ethnographic study, I chose a relatively sensitive topic. I had to be aware of my word choice and how I decided to phrase my questions when I was conducting a survey and interviewing parents of children who have special needs. In addition to that, something else I learned (that I had never done before) was how to create an Informed Consent Form. I spent a good amount of time drafting my consent form to ensure that all of the important/relevant information was included. These two things that I learned will most definitely help me in the future as I continue to conduct more research studies.

When looking back at my hypotheses that I had written, it seems that I received the results that I was expecting to see. From the conducted survey, people admitted that they felt uncomfortable when confronted with someone who has special needs, and this was further shown in the anecdote that was shared by one of the interviewees. From the survey and the interviews, I also learned that people aren’t fully educated about the special needs community nor aware of the available resources. Many students/faculty/staff members at TAMUQ also agreed that they didn’t have the best knowledge for how to handle/deal with such situations properly.

With this information that I have obtained through the research, I hope to advocate for change and justice in this world. Even though I was already aware of many of these issues, I discovered many aspects through my secondary research that I had never even thought of before. It really made me realize how truly significant this matter is.

If I had to compare this project to a traditional research project, I would definitely prefer this one as I had to conduct primary research. I really enjoyed the process of sending out surveys to
my peers and conducting interviews because I actually got the opportunity to conduct the research myself. Instead of reading through dozens of articles, I got to use a mix of resources. I had an amazing time meeting these two inspiring women, and I felt accomplished when I saw that eighty-three people responded and actually took the time to write answers for my survey. It was truly a pleasant experience, and I got to learn a lot more about the special needs community by conducting this research.

Mona Amani is a freshman studying electrical and computer engineering at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She was born in Houston, Texas, but is originally Iranian. She is eighteen years old, and some of her hobbies include oil painting, playing piano, and playing tennis. She loves traveling to different countries and enjoys outdoor sports as well.
CHAPTER 5 | Honoring Communities


Interviewee #1, and Interviewee #2. Interview. 19 Nov. 2020.


Appendix

Survey Questions:

Studying the Community of People with Special Needs

Howdy! I am inviting you to participate in a research study about the Special Needs community. In today’s society, some people with Special Needs tend to be looked down upon and judged. The purpose of this study is to learn ways to mitigate that negative stigma in order to build a more positive and inclusive society for everyone to live in.

I am a...

☐ Student
☐ Faculty
☐ Staff

My gender is...

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Prefer not to say

Do you know someone or is there someone in your family who has Special Needs (it can be a family member, a friend, etc.)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If you don’t mind, please specify who they are and how you’re related to them.
CHAPTER 5 | Honoring Communities

<table>
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<tr>
<th>To what extent do you agree with the following statements:</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I am knowledgeable about the resources for the Special Needs Community in Qatar.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I am familiar with the Autism Spectrum Disorder.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Having a disability prevents the person from living their life to their full potential.&quot;</td>
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(Optional Free-Write): Feel free to explain any of your responses to the questions above.

With complete honesty, on a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you with the idea of being related to someone who has special needs? (1 being very uncomfortable and 10 being very comfortable).

![Comfort Scale](image)

(Optional Free-Write): Feel free to elaborate on your response.

Have you ever been in a situation where you've encountered someone who has special needs and felt uncomfortable or did not know how to act?

- Yes
- No

Are you open to learning some positive ways to interact with people who have special needs?

- Yes
- No

Please feel free to describe an encounter you've had with someone who has special needs.
Informed Consent Form:

Studying the Community of People with Special Needs

Student Researcher: Mona Amani  Faculty Advisor: Dr. LeeAnn Rudd

Purpose of the Study:
I am an undergraduate student in English 104 at Texas A&M University at Qatar, and I am inviting you to participate in a research study about the Special Needs community. In today’s community, some people with Special Needs tend to be looked down upon and judged. The purpose of this study is to not only address the issue that needs to be resolved but also to learn ways for how we can mitigate that negative stigma in order to build a more positive and inclusive society for everybody to live in. You are being asked to participate because I would like to learn more about the special needs community, and your experience as a mother of a child with special needs makes your perspective crucial to my study.

Please note that involvement in the study is voluntary, and if you decide to take part in this your identity will remain completely confidential. Furthermore, if you decide to opt out of the research, you can leave at any time and it will not be held against you. Any data that you have provided up to that point will be deleted and not used for further analysis.

Who Can I Talk To?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, please contact me or Dr. LeeAnn Rudd.

mona.amani@qatar.tamu.edu or leeannrudd@qatar.tamu.edu  (+974 6655-4879)  (+974 4423-0655)

Statement of Consent:
I agree to participate in this study. The procedures have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered.

☐ I allow for my voice to be recorded and to possibly be used in a research project.
☐ I allow for my voice to be recorded, however I would not like it to be used for anything except transcribing.

Participant’s Name: __________________________ Date: __________________________

Participant’s Signature: __________________________

Thank you,

Mona Amani and Dr. LeeAnn Rudd
**Interview Questions:**

**Interview Questions for a Special Needs Center:**
- Can you please explain what your center offers (what they do for the students, how the school is run, what the therapists do, etc.)?
- Do you offer workshops/sessions for the parents of the special needs kids as well? If so, please elaborate on what types of content it covers.
- Do you feel like these negative attitudes and thoughts towards people with disabilities may have an effect on the COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE? (to what extent do you believe the Middle-Eastern society looks down upon the people with special needs? How do you deal with such stereotypes and biases?)

**Interview Questions for a Parent of a Child with Special Needs:**
- Can you tell me a bit more about you and your family? How many kids you have, your lifestyle, etc.?
- Can you tell me more about your child who has special needs? What is the exact condition that he has? Could you tell me more about what it is exactly? How old was your child when you found out about his condition? Does he have any special abilities?
- As a mother, how did you feel when you found out about his condition at first? How have you overcome that feeling?
- Are you sending him to any specific centers/therapists to help him with his condition? Could you please elaborate on them? What do they do exactly? What does his center offer (ex: what they do for the students, how the school is run, what the therapists do, etc.)
- Do you feel like these therapy sessions he has gone to helped him? To what extent?
- Do the centers that he attends offer any workshops/sessions for the parents of the special needs kids as well? If so, please elaborate on what types of content it covers. Have you ever attended any?
- Do you think that it is normal (or okay) for parents to feel embarrassed or even ashamed of having a child who has Special Needs? Why or why not?
- It seems that the general public community tends to look down upon people of special needs, and they tend to have a negative attitude towards the topic. Do you feel like these negative attitudes and thoughts towards people with disabilities may impact the parents of those who have disabilities?
  - Do you feel like these negative attitudes and thoughts towards people with disabilities may impact their child? (whether it’s their development, their feelings, etc.)
  - How do you think these negative stereotypes and attitudes can be changed in order to build a more positive and inclusive society? (What can parents learn, what can the community learn, etc.).
This was a writing for my ENGL 104 class. This piece of writing is a research on how introverts can thrive in social settings. Since I was facing this difficulty, I thought it would be great to research on how other introverts at TAMUQ coped with this environment. What was concluded with this research was that even though your personality does not change much over time on the introversion and extroversion spectrum, it is still possible for introverts to learn a few skills that extroverts possess. And as said by Tim Notke, a high school basketball coach, “Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard.” Thus, working hard brings success in any field.
Introverts at University

Introduction
Many regard introverts as shy; in fact, the accepted definition by Google also corresponds to classifying them as shy. However, introversion is a preference whereas being shy stems from being socially anxious. Shy people tend to be fearful of social interactions whereas introverts are not fearful; rather, they are uninterested or could have their energy dwindled when with others (Whitten, 2001).

The terms introvert and extrovert were first introduced in 1921 by Dr. Carl Gustav Jung (26 July 1875 – 6 June 1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, as a way to distinguish between people who feel more connected to their inward thoughts and feelings and those who focus more on the external world (Jung, 2009). The introverts at a university who make up a community is rarely researched about. Thus, the discourse community I have researched includes introverts at a particular university. Due to the pandemic, I could not have researched on introverts from other universities; thus, this research was only conducted on introverts at Texas A&M University at Qatar. This discourse community consists of introverted students who are pursuing their higher education at TAMUQ. The most accurate modern-day definition, which is accepted by psychologists worldwide, of an introvert is, “a person who loses energy in social interactions” (Forleo, 2013). I belong to this community as well. However, it is not a community one chooses to belong to; instead, it is innate. Nevertheless, it can be changed slightly depending on the experiences we have in our lives.

Be it introversion or extraversion, both are a part of a single continuum; thus, being high in one necessitates being low in the other. This classification is extremely crucial because all comprehensive models of personality include this concept. For example, the Big Five model, Jung’s analytical psychology, Myers–Briggs Type Indicator, DiSC personality profile, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, Hogan Personality Inventory and many more. However, Jung also believed that you are more dominant towards one trait, but you can also possess qualities and skills of the opposite.
Introversion is described as a tendency to be more pre-occupied with one’s own self, and introverts are typically regarded as reserved and thoughtful. Introverts often dwell in solitary activities. They believe time spent alone is more rewarding than being in a socially stimulating environment.

Now, let us have a look at the research question: **How do Introverts persevere in a university (TAMUQ) that is socially demanding?**

**Methods**

**Survey**

The survey was conducted via email. A set of questions was first prepared and then Google forms was used to send the link out to all TAMUQ students. There were twenty-one respondents. The main audience for the survey was introverts. This can be confirmed by a graphic illustration of the very first question of the survey (see Figure 1). However, rather than first distinguishing whether a student is an introvert or not, it was sent to all TAMUQ students. Extroverts were given an option as well to answer the survey according to what they have observed about how introverts behave at TAMUQ.

![Figure 1. Determining whether the respondent is an introvert or extrovert (Tahir, 2021).](image)

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The responses came from a wide variety of students, depicted in Figure 2. This confirms that the results were representative of the student body as students from different cohorts completed the survey.

The survey was conducted because it was a very efficient way of recording responses and carrying out the research.

The complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A. To ensure that even extroverts could answer the interview questions, extroverts were told the following: “You can still complete the survey on behalf of another introvert or from what you have observed about introverts”.

**Interview**

The request for the interview was made in the survey itself. At the end of the interview, I wrote “If you are up for an interview through email, please let me know by emailing me at _______. The interview will be conducted solely through email and I will ask you 4-6 questions and you can respond back through email.” Only one person requested the interview. All of the interview questions were open-ended. See Appendix B for a list of all the questions that were asked.

An interview gives you a better understanding of how and why things are the way there are. It is absolutely critical to conduct
an interview while researching about a topic because you get a picture of the topic from a different perspective. In a survey, the respondents do not have an opportunity to counter questions or represent their argument. It is only a set of simple questions asked by the surveyor. The interviewee is a senior student at TAMUQ. Therefore, he was very explicit in answering the questions and it proved to be a good piece of qualitative data. The answers to the interview can be found in the results section.

**Results**

**Survey**

Being an introvert myself, I found the responses to the survey to be quite what I had expected initially. As most of the questions were open-ended, I got much more a wide variety of qualitative results – thus, there was a huge list of responses that were received. When asked “How long do you usually stay on-campus? (before the pandemic)?”, there were diverse answers. However, the answers were related to the second question (“On a scale of 1-10, how strong of an introvert will you call yourself?”) and the sixth question (“Do you think your introversion has changed after spending time in such a socially demanding environment? If so, how, and why has it changed?”). If the person is a strong introvert and they would be spending much less time on campus or would only stay there for their classes, then it is very unlikely that their introversion would change over time. Whereas, if a student is moderately introverted and would usually stay for quite long on the campus, then it is very likely that their introversion would change for the good and they might gain some characteristics or skills of what an extraverted person might possess.

Next, another interesting conclusion from the survey was what introverts did if they felt their energy had drained due to social interactions and how they would try to retain it. A similar question was asked about regaining their energy after having a day filled with social stimulation. This question was asked because a social interaction is likely to drain an introvert’s energy. Thus, to know how they retain their energy this question was asked. The most common answers, if they were at the university included the following: they would study in the library, just use their phones,
pretend they are busy or just be lost in deep thought. Similarly, if they are at home and do not have any classes left for the day, then most of them claimed that they would go to sleep instantly. However, many also said they would either just binge watch a show on Netflix, watch something on YouTube, or listen to some mood boosting music. Their answers to both the questions are depicted in word clouds in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Answers to the question “If you are feeling tired because your energy has drained due to socializing, thus how do you recharge yourself?” (Tahir, 2021).

Figure 4. Answers to the question “When you are not in the mood to carry out social interactions, what do you usually do? Considering the fact you are at the University and cannot leave as you have a class?” (Tahir, 2021).
To add to this, there was a relation between the sixth question (“Do you think your introversion has changed after spending time in such a socially demanding environment? If so, how and why has it changed?”) and the last optional question, (“Any comments?”). Those who thought their introversion has changed and that they did gain a few skills that extraverted people have, said commented that they would like to be approached first rather than the introvert trying to initiate a conversation. This shows that introverts might be interested in conversations, but it takes a great deal of energy to go first.

The fact that an introvert will not go greet someone first was confirmed by the fifth question on the survey (“How often would you greet someone you do not know (or barely know) in a day at TAMU-Q? And what do you think is the number of times that an average extrovert greets someone they do not know in a day at TAMU-Q?”). Most responses to this question indicated that introverts barely or rarely greet someone first. In fact, some went to the extent of saying “never.” However, if someone was not a strong introvert, then they would occasionally greet someone first. Their guess for an extrovert was around 4 or 5 times on average. Figure 5 shows whether the respondents were strong introverts or not.
The answers to the fourth question, “How long do you usually stay on-campus? (before the pandemic)” were very different and ranged from people saying, “just for classes” to some even saying, “more than 12 hours.” Their answers are depicted in a word cloud in Figure 6. The most common answers were “8 to 9 hours a day” or “just for classes.” However, one trend that related with the 2nd question’s answer (“On a scale of 1-10, how strong of an introvert will you call yourself?”) was that, if a person was a strong introvert, they would only come to the campus just for classes or if they would tend to stay longer then they would just sit in the library. On the contrary, if they were not so strong introverts, then they would tend to be on the campus for more than 7 hours.

Interview
The interview was conducted because it gave richer qualitative data than the survey. In answering the first question (see Appendix B), the interviewee mentioned the problems they initially faced. They faced difficulty in managing time and socializing. They said the best way to socialize is through group projects and through student organizations. However, they agree there’s a lot of space for introverts on campus as well if they feel the need to recharge themselves. Another thing they would do if they felt like socializing is that they would sit in the library and go around the cubicles to meet other students. Even though they are in their senior year, they can still be overwhelmed if they are surrounded by a lot of extroverts. In answer to the last question, the interviewee said that they believed that most introverts thrive in
one-to-one conversations and don’t feel overly socially stimulated by those conversations. Therefore, for introverts looking out for friends, they recommend that they should approach potential friends individually and have one-to-one conversations with them. See Appendix C for a complete transcription of the interview.

Conclusion
The survey had a few open-ended questions which provided a better insight to their answers rather than just asking straightforward yes or no questions or close-ended ones. What was concluded from the survey was that introverts do not tend to greet new people first; rather, they would like the other person to come up to them first and greet them. Most introverts are day dreamers; thus, being unable to concentrate for longer periods of time or having their minds wander every now and then is a problem they face very often. This is why some of them end up staying for more than eight hours on campus. Jane Fickle urges these introverts to “Write down your goals” (2019, Ch-8). This makes the introvert more conscious of their list of tasks and does not let them procrastinate as much. The claim that writing your goals always works is backed up by research from Dr. Gail Matthews, a psychology professor at California's Dominican University. To see the effect of writing down one’s goal, she conducted a study on 267 people. To make the research was unbiased, she made sure all of them had distinctive backgrounds. She then divided them into two groups: one would write down their goals, and the other would not. What was concluded by this study is that those who wrote their goals down had a substantially higher success rate in accomplishing the goals than those who did not (Finkle, 2019).

And for introverts who do not like to interact or indulge in social conversations or be active on campus, Finkle further states, “It is equally self-defeating to shy away from discussing work problems with supervisors or colleagues. Make sure that you become a known quantity, or you will likely lose out on deserved recognition” (2019. One way to increase your value and gain that recognition is to become a problem solver. This could be extremely helpful for introverts because most introverts are intuitive by nature. And thus, coming up with ideas and solutions will make them the center of attention. However, introverts should also try to step out
of their comfort zone to deal with conflicts because most problems between peers or staff require passing through a great deal of conflict before the issue can be resolved.

Introverts don’t love to learn when they are feeling a bit tired or have drained out of energy. Studying for university courses then can be tiring; however, they could try to learn something else. Finkle encourages introverts to keep on learning new things. In fact, they should commit to lifelong learning. She says, “A training program may not seem exciting to you—it may even intimidate you—but sign up anyway” (2019, Ch-8). This is because that training program might help you in your university projects and will increase your efficiency of work. And it also helps you in a professional way – as in being good for your résumé. Keep an eye out for seminars, conferences, and webinars that can help you gain significant professional knowledge. These trainings can be refreshing as they decrease the stress from a course’s workload.

The interview was conducted with only one person; thus, the data provided may not be representative and cannot be generalized. Since introverts can very easily connect with their inner selves, the interviewee encouraged introverts to first check whether going out of their comfort zones will wear them out. As the interviewee also admitted that they had problems scheduling and managing their time, thus for them, too, Finkle’s suggestion to write down their goals can do wonders.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank all the students who had taken time out of their busy schedule to complete this survey and especially our senior student who even managed to show up for the interview. An interview through email takes quite longer than a face-to-face interview. I would also like to thank my instructor, Dr. Anne Schmalstig for her reviews on the first draft and also my peers’ review on my first draft.
Abdul Raheem Tahir is a proud Aggie majoring in chemical engineering, Class of 2024. Abdul is a Pakistani but was born and brought up in Qatar. Ambitious and driven by a passion to learn new things, Abdul loves all kinds of sports and adventures.


Appendix A: Survey Questions
1. Are you an introvert?
2. On a scale of 1-10, how strong of an introvert will you call yourself? (1 being the lowest - an ambivert - and 10 being the highest)
3. Are you a Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior or a graduate student?
4. How long do you usually stay on-campus? (before the pandemic)
5. How often would you greet someone you do not know (or barely know) in a day at TAMU-Q? And, what do you think is the number of times that an average extrovert greets someone they do not know in a day at TAMU-Q?
6. Do you think your introversion has changed after spending time in such a socially demanding environment? If so, how and why has it changed?
7. When you are not in the mood to carry out social interactions, what do you usually do? Considering the fact you are at the University and cannot leave as you have a class.
8. If you are feeling tired because your energy has drained due to socializing, thus how do you recharge yourself?
9. Anything else you would like to mention about yourself that would help me in drawing conclusions about introverts at TAMU-Q? (optional)
10. If I were to use your answers for a research paper, would you like to remain anonymous, or no?

Appendix B: Interview Questions
1. What challenges did you face when you first joined the University and how did you cope with them?
2. What would the ideal campus life look like for you (for e.g. How many students in each classroom, extracurriculars)?
3. How well did you get along with other introverts at the university? Were the closest friends you made at the university extroverts or introverts?
4. Now that the classes are online, do you think it has benefited or harmed you in any way?
5. What would the ideal day look like for you? You could share a timetable as well. Considering you are still at the university?
6. What advice would you give to an introvert who is working on his social skills so that he can carry out smooth conversations with any number of people? (optional)
Appendix C: Complete Transcript of Interview

Q: What challenges did you face when you first joined the University and how did you cope with them?
A: Till grade 12, I had 9 classes of 40 mins each with two 15-minute breaks in between, every day. On my first day of uni, I had only one class at 2 PM in the afternoon. On some days, I didn’t have any classes. This transition of moving to a more fluid schedule was challenging in time management. I couldn’t figure out to when to study, or when to do homework. Also, after classes, I would simply go home because I didn’t know what to do. I wouldn’t hangout with friends after class. Most friends I made in freshman year was through student organizations and group-work for projects. I was never shy in talking to people for course related or organization related stuffs. It was the best way to make friends for me because I would mingle with others in planning, managing, organizing, and rehearsing for events. If there was no work from student organization or group, I would simply go home after class because I felt I did not fit in with people whilst socializing.

Q: What would the ideal campus life look like for you? (for e.g. How many students in each classroom, extracurriculars)?
A: I am not sure how to answer this question. I think I have had an excellent campus life, and there’s really nothing for me to complain. Whilst there were moments when I felt overwhelmed by the active extroverts, I believe there is a place for introverts in this campus and thrive.

Q: How will did you get along with other introverts at the university? Were the closest friends you made at the university extroverts or introverts?
A: I think I go well along with the introverts. I spent a lot of time in the library in my second semester. The library is like a lounge for introverts. In between studying, I would stand to take a break, go around cubicles and talk to people and get to know them. It was a great way to come out of my comfort zone and also make others comfortable in talking to me. We shared our worries for courses, midterms, and projects. It was fun. I was also a tutor in the CTL from my sophomore year. A lot of the tutees were introverts, and it was a great opportunity for me to speak to them, improve my confidence, and also get to know them. Once I establish a friendly connection with my tutees, we seem to always talk when we meet in the hallways or couches or in the library. Keep in mind, as a senior, I still don’t feel confident in the lounge because that’s where most of the extroverts hang out. My closest friends are mostly introverts. I can think of only one extroverted close friend. Whilst I have many extraverted friends, I don’t socialize as much with them because, first, I don’t usually hangout often outside campus, while extroverts tend to go out every other day. With my close friends, I hangout once or twice a week. I became close to my extroverted friend because I have spent a lot of time with her in course work, projects for 2 years.

Q: Now that the classes are online, do you think it has benefited or harmed you in any way?
A: It has done a bit of both. Online classes have made me more productive. I don’t spend time driving, walking to class, and saying hello to everyone. I just wake up from bed and turn on my laptop. However, when the semester becomes overwhelming towards the end, I sometimes wish that I could speak to someone and vent out my miseries, or at least listen to someone else’s miseries. Although I am an introvert, I thrive in one-to-one conversations and before the pandemic, I always engaged in such conversations with so many people in CTL and library (not lounge though – it’s not a very one-to-one kind of place). I missed such conversations with people.

Q: What would the ideal day look like for you? You could share a timetable as well. Considering you are still at the university?
A: Umm, class from 10 AM because I like to sleep till 9 and one hour for breakfast. Class ends at 4 PM. I take nap and then work/study. Hangout with friends on Thursday evening. And maybe have lunch together or snacks together in between class/work.
Q: What advice would you give to an introvert who is working on his social skills so that he can carry out smooth conversations with any number of people? (optional)

A: Well, I am not sure if I can still carry out smooth conversations in a group of more than 4 people. It gets much harder when the others are close to each other, but you are somewhat just there. The question you want to ask yourself is, “Is it really necessary? Do you really need to converse with any number of people?” You must answer this by yourself. How I try to go around this is, I like to engage more on one-one conversations. That helps me connect with the other person in a deeper level. If you do that with multiple people, and if those people are in a group, I can somewhat have good conversation to that group. With all my closest friends, I started by having a one-one regular conversations and that helped me in understanding them better. I like the way I am, and I have accepted my introverted nature. You must also accept yourself for who you are and not get overwhelmed to be who you are not.
There was no big idea or theme that came to mind when I wrote this story. It was just meant to be a comedic short story and yes, while it is set in a real place, this story is fiction, with only very slight inspiration from reality. Looking back on it now, I think you can see that this is a story about friendship and overcoming challenges and the rewards you get when you do. I wanted to try and capture different aspects of graduate school from the academic to the social and professional development with a couple of jokes along the way. I hope you enjoy reading it, and hopefully never find yourself about to miss your flight or lose your boarding pass.
Quagmires of Doctoral Level Proportions

Picture this: You’re in the airport, you’re running across the terminal trying to make it to your gate so as not to miss the flight. You run past Givenchy and Gucci, Dior and Armani, Tiffany and Lancôme. Out of the corner of your eye, you spy a WHSmith, a Subway, and a Starbucks. An electronics store sells world travel adapters and iPhone chargers. A black Porsche Cayenne bedecked with a colossal red ribbon stands on a slowly revolving pedestal, a lottery for everyone to win but that no one will win. Your backpack thuds on your back (thump thump thump) while sweat trickles down your forehead burning your eyes. Your carry-on is dragging behind you, skittering left and right as you desperately try to maintain control. Finally, you get to the gates!

You continue running, looking ruefully at the moving walkway currently shut down for maintenance. A1 passes by you, A2 is now behind you, A3 in your rearview, A4 and A5 no longer ahead of you. Past gate A7, you follow the corridor as it turns left then you stop right in your tracks, your carry-on bag slamming right into your shin. You jump up and down, massaging your foot and stifling the swears wanting to come out of you while looking around in confusion. There are no gates. You’re standing in the middle of a food court! Is the KFC supposed to take you to your plane? Maybe the Pizza Hut or the McDonalds?

You’re still looking around when the loudspeaker blares with that one announcement you do not want to hear:

“Passengers flying on Qatar Airways flight 0889 to Doha, please head to gate A9 for boarding. Please head to gate A9 for boarding. Boarding will commence shortly. Thank you.”

You’re desperate now, looking around, your head shaking like an out-of-control bobblehead. Then you see it, the light at the end of the tunnel. At the edge of the food court, next to the Royal Tandoor, right where the airport curves left: an escalator, one that actually works, headed downwards to an open area. Outside the window, very clear in the daylight, a vehicle of the sky with an Oryx proud on its tail. A sign next to the escalator proclaims Gates A8-A10 below. You shake your head and laugh as you jog over to
the escalator, your shin still stinging from its earlier battle with your carry-on.

“So, you made it to the gate then?” asked Philip. He took one of his wedges, dipped it in the Spizy Sauce and ate it in one bite.

“Hold on, bro,” Ahmed replied, “Story’s not done. So, there I was headed for the gate. Alhamdulillah it was right next to the escalator when I go to get my boarding pass out of my pocket and it’s not there. I was nervous before, but now I’m fricking terrified. I do a full pat down, you know ‘Extra Security Check’ style, but it’s not there. I’m about to have a heart attack when a man pats me on the shoulder. He has my boarding pass in his hand, says he saw it fall out of my pocket beside the escalator. He had a thick French accent so I missed some of what he said but I think it went something along the lines of, ‘You need to be more careful when you travel; things can go wrong any time. Remember Murphy’s law, young man.’ So anyway, I thanked him, took my boarding pass and left. By that time, it was my turn to board, so I did, and now I’m here. The end.”

Philip whistled appreciatively. “Hell of a story, still you made it to the gate at least.”

“Yeah, it was a real quagmire I got myself into.”

Philip burst out laughing, nearly choking on his drink “Quagmire? Quag-mire? What the heck does that even mean?”

“You know, quagmire: a mess or a complicated situation.”

“Oh, I’m sorry Mr. Fancy Pants, although I thought you got to the airport early, how did you get into your quag-mire and almost miss your flight?”

“Man, you have no idea.” Ahmed shook his head, massaging his temple as though the memory was giving him a headache. “I just got past security when my phone buzzes and I get an email. I open it, and it’s a forward from my supervisor. Apparently, the journal rejected my paper. I sat down at one of the chairs they leave so
you can put your stuff and wear your shoes in peace, and I opened the original email. Bro, it was brutal. There were three whole pages of reviewer comments. ‘Your paper is not well structured, your figure captions are too small and illegible, your discussion section is lacking, and your conclusions are too simple.’ I sat in that chair for what must have been half an hour reading through all the comments, looking back at the paper we submitted and trying to process. I tried to call my supervisor a couple of times but he didn’t answer. Then I looked up and realized I was running late. It didn’t help that this airport was way too big and my gate was on the other side.”

“Sorry to hear that, buddy, no Inshallah you’ll fix the issues and it’ll get published.” Philip paused. He took a sip of iced tea while Ahmed finished his burger surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the Student Center during the mid-week lunch hour. They watched the line to Papa John’s triple over the course of one minute. A loud blending whir filled the hall, rising above the melee. Someone had ordered a milkshake from Elevation Burger.

“You know, I think I know what you have to do to get your paper accepted,” said Philip.

“What?”

“Just use the word quagmire. Put that in a sentence and the editors will be begging to publish...”

“You son of a-”

“And hang on, what was that other word from a couple of days ago? Oh yeah, Matrimony. Those two words will get you right in to the journal. Hotly cited paper. Quagmire & Matrimony.” Philip snapped his fingers like he had an epiphany: “The Quagmires of Matrimony. There you go, just put that in and you’re golden.”

“Hah ha. You’re hilarious, as usual. Come on, let’s go. I have class.”
They returned to TAMUQ, taking a moment on the way to chat with two Petroleum Engineering students they knew who were headed for a round of bowling over at the arcade. As they crossed the street, the September sun beating down on them, it was Philip's phone that buzzed; Philip who received an email that was not good news.

“Oh my God, not again,” he shook his head in frustration.

“What is it?” asked Ahmed.

“It’s the GSA president, he’s calling another strategy and brainstorming meeting tomorrow, I swear the guy has nothing else to do but torture us.”

“Man, don’t whine, you signed up for this, now take it.”

“Yeah I know. I thought this would look good on the resume, you know. But this is overboard. Sometimes I wonder if this guy thinks he’s Obama or something, not some random Ph.D. student with way too much free time.”

“You know I don’t think you appreciate what the GSA is doing for grad students.” He held open the door so Philip could enter, the duo displaying their ID cards to the security officer at the reception. “You guys helped students get their contracts on time, held a guest lecture that nearly the entire university attended, helped new students navigate the building and bureaucracy, your events brought everyone together. Everyone loves your newsletter and your student engagement. Faculty and staff have all said how impressed they are with this; you guys made a real difference. Trust me I know, where I did my master’s, there was no GSA and grad life was s***. Besides, yeah, your president is a bit weird, but the rest of the board are cool, aren’t they?”

“Yeah the rest of the board are great, they know their stuff and they’re great people.”
“Ok, see that’s better than nothing. You signed up for this, you’re in now, you can either whine and moan about it or try to get involved and make a difference. And that, my friend, is your quagmire to unravel.”

Philip didn’t reply but mumbled something under his breath as the two separated, Ahmed headed for class and Philip to his office. Choosing to trust his friend, and realizing he really did have nothing to lose, Philip decided to try to put in the heart and give GSA a chance.

The change didn’t come immediately, it was subtle, creeping up on him like a serpent slithering towards its unsuspecting prey. It crept up and took hold until one day, sometime in January, he had an enthusiasm to rival that of the president he had complained about all those months ago. He was all in. In fact, come election season in April, Philip ran for president, and won. He would, in fact, go on to become the only graduate student to lead the GSA for two years in a row and the one who would do what many others before him had failed to do: get the GSA a permanent corporate sponsor.

As for Ahmed, well, he did his own thing. He was able to meet his supervisor and together the two fixed his paper which was submitted and accepted for publication six months later.

The friends graduated together, each ready to pursue his own life. And as it so often does, life took each friend on his own path. Separated by distance, Philip and Ahmed lost touch with each other, exchanging an occasional Facebook or Instagram birthday message and little else. Until one day, when life returned with one of its twists and turns, and the friends were re-united during an annual conference. Meeting up for the first time in the buffet line if you would believe it. It had been many years since their last encounter and the duo had a lot to catch up on. One was a professor, the other a VP of research and development. They talked about their careers and accomplishments, showed pictures of their families, and talked about current events. Of course, as is inevitable in all such reunions, their words also went back to those wonderful times at university, the ups and downs, they reminisced about classes and professors and the GSA. They talked
about successes and failures, all the challenges they faced and the quagmires they had found themselves in and had to work out of, Quagmires of Doctoral Level Proportion.

Jack Altwal is a Ph.D. candidate at Texas A&M University and Research Assistant at TAMUQ. Prior to this, he earned his bachelor’s in chemical engineering with a minor in chemistry from TAMUQ. He has served as the vice president and president of the Graduate Student Association at Texas A&M University at Qatar. He enjoys reading, watching movies, and hanging out with friends.
Most research treats the deaf community as an abnormal community, but who classified talking as normal? If we can speak using the English language or another, so do deaf people but using sign language. What if the answer to removing the barrier is simple? Old research focuses on getting the deaf community to merge with society, but why does society not integrate with the deaf community?
How Can Members of the TAMUQ Community Be Motivated to Learn Sign Language?

Introduction
Sign language is a communication system for people who cannot hear that uses hand and finger movements (“sign language”). The number of people who know sign language is minimal, especially considering that some households have a deaf child, but not all the people living in the house know sign language. When we go to coffee shops and retail places in Qatar, it is rare to find someone capable of communicating using sign language. This is one of the aims of my study, which is to improve the living standards for the deaf culture and allow them to experience a normal life.

The main point that made me want to do this research is that I am one of the people who could benefit from this research. I do not know sign language, and I want to find ways to be guided and motivated to learn it. Hopefully, one day I can be fluent in sign language and motivate others to become fluent, too.

When I started this research, I thought that the people at TAMUQ interested in this topic would be a small minority or only the ones who are related to someone with hearing issues. I expected that the audience for my research would be very small, and not many people would provide ideas on how to motivate our community to learn sign language. Adding to that, I anticipated that the number of people who know sign language is minimal, as it is not widely spread.

One previous research done on this issue was about the communication problem the deaf community faces, starting from the whole society around them and narrowing down to their family. A study was done by Ghent University of “parental strategies used to communicate with their deaf infants” (Beatrijs).

In an article in *Social Work in Mental Health* under the title, “No one is listening: Members of the Deaf community share their depression narratives,” a deaf adult stated the following:
“I have one garbage can, and now two; both are full, but I have no way to empty them ... Now I have three and four” (Bone, 2019). He described the desire to communicate as a garbage can, and he cannot empty it if no one understands him.

These are just a few examples of the many researches you can find that look deeply into how to solve the communication barriers between the deaf community and the hearing people. Some research treats the deaf community as an abnormal community, but who classified talking as normal? If we can speak using the English language AND another language, so do deaf people—but using sign language. What if the answer to removing the barrier is simple? Prior research often focuses on getting the deaf community to merge with society, but why does society not integrate with the deaf community?

My research aims to find ways to motivate the Texas A&M at Qatar community (TAMUQ) to learn sign language. It the first step in spreading sign language in our whole society. By having more people who know sign language, many problems can be solved, and one of the most important ones is the communication problem with the deaf community. The benefit of hearing people learning sign language will not only benefit the deaf community, but it will be a massive benefit for the learners as well. Research was done to investigate differences in functional brain network topology between deaf and hearing individuals. That proves that knowing sign language and practicing and using it for at least a year can activate some brain regions (Sinke et al.).

Research Questions:

- How can members of the TAMUQ community be motivated to learn sign language?
- How many members of the TAMUQ already know sign language?
- How interested is the TAMUQ community in learning sign language?
- What are the best ways to motivate members of the TAMUQ community to learn sign language?
Methodology:
For the primary research, I relied on two qualitative data-collection methods: interviewing and surveying members of the TAMUQ community, including students, staff, and faculty.

Survey
The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of sixteen questions. The first three asked about demographics including gender, age, and whether they were student, staff, or faculty. The other questions aimed to find out the number of people who know sign language in our community and the number of people who are interested in learning it. Moreover, some questions were created to understand why hearing people learn sign language and what ideas that survey respondents suggest for motivating the TAMUQ community to learn sign language. The survey also helped determine the number of people who have or may have a hearing issue.

The survey was completed by 151 people in the TAMUQ community including students, staff, and faculty. The survey data helped to assess to what extent sign language is known in our community and whether further research is highly needed or not.

Interview
From the survey, eleven people interested in the topic volunteered to be interviewed by providing their email addresses. Using the purposive sampling method ("Purposive Sampling 101"), three interviewees were chosen, one from each category: student, faculty, and staff. Two of them were female, and one was male. Only two interviews were completed due to communication problems.

Interviewing was the most appropriate option to get direct feedback and see the interviewee's point of view. Conducted via Zoom, each interview included six to seven questions (see Appendix B). The target was to find out if the interviewee had tried to learn sign language before, wanted to learn in the future, and what thoughts they have on hearing people learning sign language.
Discussion and Analysis of Survey Results:
The survey results supported a small part of the expectation but also proved different aspects in other areas. Most of the answers were from the students as they make up a massive percent of the community of TAMUQ. As expected, the number of people who know sign language was a minority: only 5% of 151 survey respondents. This shows that there is not much awareness of sign language in our community. When those who know sign language were asked why they learned it, there were different answers. One of them learned it because he is related to deaf people. Others thought it is essential to communicate with deaf people because they are part of the community, which is the same aim of this research.

On a scale of 0 to 10, when survey respondents were asked how important it is for hearing people to learn sign language, (see Fig. 1) results show that the mean was 7.05, which is a good indication as most think it is crucial to learn sign language. When asked on the same scale whether our society is built for the deaf community, the mean of the data was 2.8. This proves that we need to develop our society to be more friendly for the deaf community and also shows why my research is highly needed.

To find out the most beneficial and useful way to motivate the TAMUQ community to learn sign language, survey takers were asked to rank four suggestions: share information on social media, share poster with some sign language words, hold lecture about the deaf community and sign language, and hold lecture about the deaf community and sign language (see Fig.2).

Most of the respondents chose share information on social media as the best way. I think this is most reasonable because social media can reach a huge number of people at the same time and most people use it. The numbers for share poster with some sign language words and hold lecture about the deaf community and sign language were nearly the same. Lastly, hold an event with both deaf and hearing communities was ranked last by most survey respondents. An event would be mostly practical after having a TAMUQ hearing community who knows sign language so they can then practice and use it.
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Discussion and Analysis of Interview Results:
The first interviewee was an English Professor at TAMUQ. To test how we can relate sign language to people's careers, I asked if similarities between sign language and punctuation and grammar in the English language would make her eager to learn it. Surprisingly, her answer was no, as her intuition in teaching English is to help generate ideas. From her past year teaching, she worked with two deaf students, and when asked how she felt, she replied, “I wish I did know sign language because the more I can reach students with different needs, the better.” This is one of the goals that I would want to reach from this research: providing the deaf community with a friendly environment. Delving into the interview, she mentioned that from a teacher's perspective, it is essential for hearing people to learn sign language because she thinks that deaf people are not provided with the environment they deserve as much as others. It would be helpful if their classmates could help by speaking sign language. And, as she mentioned, “We can be more inclusive and more open for students with different needs.”

The second interviewee was a student in TAMUQ. She said that the main reason for her to start learning sign language was just for fun between her and her friends. But then she began to take courses for ASL, American sign language. As she said, “I do not want to be put in a position where I need to use it, but I cannot.” When I asked her about her opinion about hearing people learning sign language, she said that alongside that we might need to use it to communicate with a deaf person. She added that we might be
blessed with a deaf child. She also said that deaf children mumble, not using their voice but their hands if you teach them.

I asked both interviewees how our society can be more considerate of the deaf community. One of them said that our country has already done what they can, but not many hearing people are trying. They both suggested different approaches as adding posters near restaurants or coffee shops with introductory words such as “water” and “food” with both the sign and the word (in Arabic and English) under a picture to help people learn the correlation. Another approach is to open these discussions in classes to spread awareness and make others aware of these topics. Lastly, in my point of view, it would be very helpful, since we are taking online classes, if they would include subtitles or written transcripts.

The challenges we could face, as one interviewee said, is that this is not a profitable project: some money will not be returned, and the results will need a long time to show. Moreover, one interviewee said that we may have unintended racism while trying to help the deaf community by making them feel different.

Conclusion
I was not expecting the results I got and the number of responses, especially that the number of people who were interested in this topic would be so large (151 survey responses). From the results, there are different ways to motivate the TAMUQ community, the most popular one being to share posts on social media to raise awareness of sign language. Texas A&M University at Qatar can start this step by opening an account on social media with informative posts as a start-up. Hopefully one day, after we have created a group of hearing people who speak sign language, we can host events with both deaf and hearing people to use sign language in real world situations. Other than that, we can require subtitles to be used in online learning platforms to make them more suitable for deaf people.

I was able to reach the aim of my research as I opened discussions on this topic through the survey, interviews, and the publication of this report. I have introduced the issue to the people at TAMUQ which spread awareness about the importance of learning sign
language. I hope that I can continue to study to find the most approachable way to help motivate more people to learn sign language.

Ghalya Al-Emadi, a rising sophomore, is majoring in mechanical engineering. Writing is not something she enjoys, but the satisfaction she gets when reading her whole piece makes her eager to write, even when the pieces are not perfect.
CHAPTER 5 | Honoring Communities


Appendix A.

1. Your gender
   a. Male
   b. Female
2. Are you:
   a. Student
   b. Staff
   c. Faculty
3. Your age
   a. Less than 18
   b. 18 to 25
   c. More than 25
4. Do you know sign language?
   a. Yes
   b. No
5. If yes Why did you learn sign language?
6. If No Do you plan to learn sign language?
   a. Yes
   b. No
7. Are you related to someone deaf or have hearing problems?
   a. Yes
   b. No
8. if yes How you are related
   a. Sibling
   b. One of the parents
   c. Husband / wife
   d. Friends
   e. Other family members
9. Have you heard of ASL?
   a. Yes
   b. No
10. How important it is for hearing people to learn sign language? (scale 1-10, with 0 not at all important, and 10 extremely important)

11. Our society is built for deaf community (scale 1-10, with 0 definitely no, and 10 definitely yes)

12. It is important to have employee that speaks sign language. (scale 1-10, with 0 not at all important, and 10 extremely important)

13. How to share awareness about sign language (you can choose more than one)
   a. Hold an event with both Deaf and hearing communities
   b. Hold lecture about deaf community and sign language
   c. Share poster with some sign language words
   d. Share information on social media
   e. Other

14. If other, What suggestions do you have?

15. If you are interested in the topic and would like to be interviewed, please leave your email to contact you.

Appendix B

Questions for Interviewee One:

1. Why are you interested in learning sign language?
   a. Do you plan in learning it one day soon?
   b. How are you planning to learn it?

2. Do you have any stories or situations that happened to you that made you want to learn sign language?
   a. If yes, what happened?
   b. How did it change you?

3. Do you think it is important for hearing people to learn it?
   a. Why is it important?
   b. How would it help the deaf community?

4. In what ways can our society be more considerate / friendly/ inclusive for the deaf community?

5. What are the challenges to making our society more deaf friendly?

Questions for Interviewee Two:

1. Sign language is a language that has grammar and punctuation; doesn’t this make you want to learn it as an English teacher?

2. In the past year teaching, did you work with any student or staff who has hearing issues?
   a. If yes, how did you feel about it?
   b. How do you think you’ll feel if one day you have to work with someone who is deaf?

3. Do you think it is important for hearing people to learn sign language?
   a. Why it is important/ why not?
   b. How would it help the deaf community?

4. What are ways our society can be more considerate / friendly/ inclusive for the deaf community?

5. What are the challenges to making our society more deaf friendly?
Ira Setiawan
Library
What Will it Take to Heal?

That Was Then
In Indonesia, people would shout at me, “Hey Chinese, go back to your own country. You do not belong here.” Whenever I would travel abroad, many never suspected that I was from Indonesia. The closest geographical guess was usually the Philippines. A number of them would look surprised when they learned that I am Indonesian. It would be followed immediately by “But you look Chinese?”

When I came to Qatar, it was no different. “Are you from China? Korea? The Philippines?” It’s surprising that no one has guessed that I am from Indonesia. Whenever I would disclose that I am Indonesian, I would get responses like “but you look Chinese” and “but you are not wearing a hijab.” People would immediately associate my identity with being a Muslim because of the fact that Indonesia is known as the largest Muslim population in the world. Sadly, some would think of Indonesians as kadama (housemaid) because there are many Indonesian women working as such in the Arab region. Interestingly, I had a few occasions when some people would simply say, “I have kadama from Indonesia” after knowing I am Indonesian. I would turn my head to the opposite direction, pretending I was fixing my hair as I murmured “so what?”

A few times, I went out to have a meal with my children in a restaurant. One waiter remarked, “Your boss is very nice to let you eat in a fancy restaurant.” I would often feel offended, but after years of struggle and learning that I have no control over people’s comments and attitudes, I mastered the art of ignoring such offensive remarks. However, there were some occasions when I would feel irritated and want to shout, “Mind your own business!”

The Past Never Leaves Us
A loud voice from inside the house followed by heavy footsteps startled me and my cousin Wawan and our friends Anto, Wita and Narni, disrupting our enjoyment as we were playing in the garden of my cousin’s house. “Ahok, Ahok, Ahok!!!!.” It was our grandfather’s voice. He was calling Wawan. We were all surprised and scared. He walked toward Wawan and Narni who were sitting in the corner of the garden. I could tell from their pale faces
that they were nervous and terrified. We held our breath as we watched my grandfather walk towards Wawan and grab his t-shirt and slap him. “Don’t you dare date a huana!, my Grandfather furiously warned him. He then turned to us and ranted, “You all go home now except you!” His finger was pointing at me. Wawan was trying to hold his tears, and I knew that he was angry by simply looking at his red face and frowning mouth. At that point, I was certain that Wawan was in agony. He was mad and sad but could not say or do anything to defend himself or Narni, his girlfriend. I felt so bad for Narni who had no idea what was going on. She was not moving. Wita held her hand and they both walked away.

Engkong, our grandfather, took us inside the house to sit with a few other elders including Wawan's parents. I could not really understand what they were talking about and why Engkong had acted rudely. I was full of anger because I could not understand what had just happened. “What is wrong with all of these old people?” I mumbled. Wawan and I were sitting in front of them pretending to listen to every word they said. The conversation didn't make sense to me. I simply nodded just to end it. That slapping incident didn’t stop my cousin from dating Narni, a huana girl. Likewise, we continued to play and had fun with our huana friends.

I did not understand why they would give us so many warnings about huana, the native Indonesians. “Aren't we supposed to interact with them without reservation?” I often wondered. “That's what I learned at school and church,” I reasoned out. I recall memorizing for my history class Indonesia's five principles which includes “unity in diversity.” At church, I had to memorize the verse that says, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” but at home, we were told not to date or get close to this friend, that friend? All these cautions were so confusing for a fifteen-year-old girl.

**History as Tragedy**

Three years after Wawan’s incident, the May 1998 tragedy happened. I was in my freshman year of college. It was a period when the nation protested against the authoritative regime of Suharto who had served as the President of Indonesia since 1967 and also against the economic crisis that hit Indonesia very badly.
The protest toward the government turned out to be a violent one that was targeted towards the Chinese-Indonesian community. Many Chinese homes and shops were looted and burned. A number of people were tortured. However, the most horrifying scene was when many Chinese-Indonesian women were raped and tortured.

My cousins, relatives, and a lot of young Chinese Indonesians were very shocked and perplexed. Then we started being maligned by some people on the streets, “Hi Chinese, go back to your own country. You do not belong here.” The Indonesian community does not recognize the Chinese-Indonesians as part of the society but rather as strangers in their own country.

Because of the May 1998 incident, some of our huana friends did not want to hang out with us. However, a few have stayed until today. This tragedy was a shocking blow for me. It made me question my sense of identity and citizenship as Indonesian. I was born in Indonesia, speak the Indonesian language, and learn and live like the rest of the Indonesian population but I am still NOT considered as Indonesian?

**Tragedy Spreads like a Stain**

After May 1998, I was able to understand and follow our elders’ orders. Wawan no longer dated the huana girl. There were a lot of questions hanging in my mind, but I was not allowed to speak about it. The rape and torture cases created a deep shock and trauma in many members of the young Chinese-Indonesian generation, including me. I was told to move forward. Yes, some of them had moved forward by being quiet; some of them left the country. Some of them like me who did not have the option to leave the country stayed with fear and built walls around us to protect ourselves from further insults. Others find comfort in their religious affiliations. A few of them became activists aimed at improving the depressing living situation of ethnic Chinese community. Some never healed.

The fear of May 1998 had caused many of us to have different perspectives about being Chinese Indonesians. Prior to May 1998, the younger generation of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, including
me and all of my cousins, never had this violent experience. We couldn't understand why our grandparents told us to not date a huana, why Engkong slapped Wawan when he got caught dating Narni, why the elders told us to limit our interaction with huana. For us, all of those advices and restrictions were non-sensical.

However, the May 1998 tragedy had helped us to understand their foolish injunctions and the outraged reaction when Wawan dated Narni. The elders recounted that it was not the first horrible experience for them. Some of them had experienced the 1965 violence when the Nation was against the Communist ideology that grew rapidly in Indonesia at that time. Our grandparents experienced the violence toward ethnic Chinese during the colonial transition from the Dutch to the Japanese colonial regime. It traced back to many violent incidents against the Chinese-Indonesian community during the Dutch Colonialization hundreds of years ago.

The May 1998 tragedy had forced the younger Chinese Indonesians like me to question our identity as Indonesians. It acted as a trigger point for us to ask, “Who are native-Indonesians? Who are Chinese? Who am I? Am I Chinese, or Indonesian? These questions have been haunting me for years.

**Reconstructing the Past through Education**

Finally, I had an opportunity to leave Indonesia, which opened up a bigger world for me. In 2005 I was fortunate enough to take part in the exchange student program between my home university, the Gadjah Mada University and the University of California, Santa Barbara, in their Graduate Religious Studies program sponsored by the Henry Luce Foundation. That opportunity led to another one. I was able to pursue theological studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley through their scholarship program.

My time at Berkeley introduced me to postcolonial theory, the issues of identity construction, and the complexity of race, gender and sex. It introduced me to a variety of books and authors who shared their journeys about the various discriminations and oppression they had encountered and the constructive transformation they had undergone out of their painful
experiences. I was able to listen to other people’s stories of discrimination, oppression and trauma and to meet with 1965 and 1998 Chinese-Indonesian survivors who sought asylum in the U.S. The books I read as well as the people I met changed my perspective about Chinese Indonesians.

I became inspired to write a paper on the identity of Chinese Indonesians after May 1998 for my postcolonial theology course. I attempted to describe the tension, the fear and trauma not only with sentimental feeling and the ghosts of the past, but also with a more logical and objective viewpoint. I wanted to find out why native Indonesians couldn’t live peacefully with Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesia. I know I was not only looking for answers to satisfy my curiosity. I was trying to make sense why the May 1998 tragedy had to happen. I wanted to find a sense of belonging and come to terms with my identity as Chinese Indonesian.

After reading about Chinese-Indonesians and Indonesia’s history and being enlightened by postcolonial insights, I recognized that our grandfather’s incident with Wawan was a performance of colonial inheritance. It was during the Dutch colonization that the ethnic classification of Indonesian society was made. The Dutch with its divide and conquer strategy, classified the society into three groups: 1. the elite Europeans, 2. the foreign Orientals such as the Chinese, Arab and other Asian population, and 3. The native Indonesians or indigenous people. These three groups had their own privileges and were esteemed and treated differently. These classifications created conflict and jealousy between the ethnic Chinese and the native Indonesians.

My grandfather built his identity around these classifications and perceived the native Indonesians as deviant, dangerous and not part of his Chinese group. Likewise, the native-Indonesians also viewed the ethnic Chinese as deviant, dangerous and not part of Indonesia. This awareness helped me to understand the tension and hatred between the Chinese-Indonesian and the native-Indonesian. Both sides were informed by the historical experience and the narrative that had been built around their identities. The postcolonial insight served as a medium for me to question the
legacy and impacts of colonialism in the contemporary Indonesia. On a personal level, it stopped me from searching for my identity as either Indonesian, Chinese, or Chinese-Indonesian.

This is Now

I moved to Qatar in 2008 to join my husband. I thought I would experience fewer incidents of racial discrimination. However, I got cut in line several times in the grocery cash registry but the cashier allowed it to happen because of the other person’s nationality. I had to wait a long time to get a table in a restaurant and the waiter did not even acknowledge me but when I went with my white friends, it took only a few seconds to get a table. I was not allowed to enter a restaurant because I was wearing jeans, but my white friend had no problem at all. Well, there were many other incidents worth exploring in another piece.

These experiences reminded me of my identity struggle as Chinese Indonesian. The incidents in the grocery store and the restaurants showed me who the privileged and less privileged are, who the superior and inferior are, who are able and less able, who the elite and the laborers are, and who the powerful and the powerless are. The more I experienced these racial discriminations, the more I questioned myself about my own perception regarding racism. I asked questions like, “How do I see people?” “Who can be part of my circle?” “Who cannot be part of my circle?” “Am I afraid of other nationalities?” “Do I look down on them?” “Do I look up to them?”

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic that hit every one regardless of their economic status, privileges, race, gender and religion. It brought me to a realization that I should not be trapped in my identity struggle. Those questions around identity issues that have been bothering me should not be in my priority list at the moment. The pandemic with its plain and hard lesson has shed light on human interconnectedness and shared responsibility regardless of our identities. This invites me to move beyond the identity binary of native-Indonesian vs. Chinese Indonesian, native vs. non-native, white vs colored person, Arab vs. non-Arab or any binary identity concept; instead I should see people as global citizens with shared responsibility and accountability.
While I am not sure of what the post-pandemic world will look like, I am certain that I will encourage myself to contribute to this shared responsibility by respecting and treating others equally ... regardless of their identities.

1 This writing is the development of my topic at the first Education City Human Library event on March 24, 2021. TAMUQ and CMUQ Library collaborated to organize the human library event in Education City. Human Library™ is a program administered by the Human Library™ Organization based in Copenhagen Denmark. See humanlibrary.org for further information.


Mohamed Khalid Ahmed

This poem is simply a message from someone who grew up seeing the suffering of his people under a corrupted and criminal regime while being away in another country. This message is to his beloved country and people who were and still are fighting against oppression and corruption, against state violence, and the absence of basic human rights. I wrote this poem in June of 2019 when the Sudanese revolution was undergoing one of its hardest times after the heart-breaking 3rd of June massacre. At this time, people were literally fighting against pure military power that killed hundreds of their brothers and sisters. They were fighting this terror with 100% peaceful protests. This poem was a message for them that we will win, and we will build the country that our martyrs dreamt about.
على من عشقتنا سلاما لاحدود له
وعلى المعشوقين في الدنيا السلاما
على من يرى ولا يرى الدنيا إلا يحيه
على الشاهرين في وجه عالمهم حساما
على ين إذا ما اضمرت سفرأ
بكي القلب حتى استعطف الحجرا
يا أيها الشعر يا فردوس عزلتي
يا قاتل الصبر في الجلدين ازمانا
اذكر التيه إن التيه حاكمني
بعينيك اللتين بها الويلان ما ناما
فادأ للعشق افديك يا سكني
تورين القلب للسكارات ازمانا

بلادي
هي الحبيبة والرفيقة
عيونها الخضراء سهول ذات زرع
تواري كل حزن
وتبعث في القلب الحنين

بلادي
هي الصديقة والعشية
هي الحقيقة في سراب
تخالج كل روح
وترسل للقلب الشجون

بلادي
بلاد الموت
بلاد القهر
موت الموت فيها في الدقيقة ستين مرة
وبعث حيا بعد حين

أصلي
أصلي كلما مررت بشارع
وزادت شيخا طامعة في السن
يرسل صوته عبر السماء
ينادي زبونا
طامعا في بضع رزق
يشتري منه الطعام
للجياع النائمين

أصلي
أصلي كلما مررت بشارع
ورأيت في نهايته المواكب نحو القنابل تتدفع
لا تعرف الخوف
لا الخوف يعرفها
وكأنهم في خيام وعذوة أزلية
منذ آلاف السنين

فلتحيا نضالات الشعوب
وليسقط الظلمة
ولتشمر الشمس الجليلة مرة أخرى
على أبناء جلدتنا
بالنصر الذي طال انتظاره
وليتين الفجر
بالنصر المبين
Mohamed Khalid is a junior ECEN student, debater, poet, and most importantly, a human. He started writing and continues to do so because he believes we all have a duty to stand against the current world—a world where profit and power are the only pursuits of everyone, a world where the suffering and agony of people are ignored for the sake of mere profit. This is why he writes to share this point of view with others and to take part in the ongoing struggle to make this world a better place for all humans, not just one or 2% of them.
CHAPTER 6
Taking a Stand
Anonymous
“It’s fine!” I say,
when it’s not.
“It’s not fine!” he screams right back at me.
“No, no it is!” I yell,
ot at him but at myself.
I convince him I have a plan B,
that I am working hard at it.
But I want to say,
I pray for plan A,
everyday
under my breath.

I utter those words so fast,
as if I don’t mean them
because living in them is miserable.
So miserable, tears shoot off my eyes
onto my cheeks.
But sometimes, I think about it,
cry myself to bits and go to sleep.

I read somewhere a girl thinks
about her wedding at the age of thirteen.
I want to, as well,
but what if it’s just me standing at the altar?
So I don’t imagine how mine will look
I just know I want two kids,
a boy first to look after my girl.
I don’t know their names
neither do I know the kind of family I want to build.

I grieve at the thought of not meeting him,
when he has no name,
no personality,
no attachment to me.
I cry because without him all I will do is “not know.”
So I choose independence,
self-sufficiency over him.
simply because if I am not
lucky enough to meet my plan A,
Plan B has acquainted me.
This essay was my second submission for ENGL 104. It was a personal narrative response writing. I decided to write about my personal experience with silence. I was inspired by Audre Lorde’s piece, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.” As I was reading her essay, I came across the line, “Your silence will not protect you,” and I kind of felt as she was talking to me. The first voice I heard in my mind was this: “Al Anoud, you’ve got to speak up. Your silence will not protect you.”
Say Something

“You’re still young; you don’t have the power to speak up,” I whispered to myself. Not only today but many times in my life, I wished I could speak. I always wanted to do something, speak up for myself, express how I feel, and stop what annoys me, but the nightmare of silence is growing and growing inside of my body. I have no control over it. So, I decided to keep everything to myself.

During my years of staying silent to respect others, I have been disrespected and poorly treated by the ones around me. Thoughts coming and thoughts going. “Am I the problem? Am I doing this to myself?” I thought once after an incident that made me want to fight silence.

One day I got invited to my uncle’s house, which feels more like my second home as I grew up there and have been there for most of the time in my life. My uncle adored me as much as he valued his own children. I was invited there because my cousin gave birth to a little boy and wanted everyone to meet her son. I went there so excited to meet the new member of the family. I arrived at 7 pm in the late-afternoon. I parked my car and walked towards the house with excitement. As I entered, my uncle’s wife was waiting beside the door with a big smile on her face. “Welcome dear, your cousin is waiting for you in the living room,” my uncle’s wife said. Then I walked into the living room behind her with a smile drawn on my face.

I entered the living room, and it was full of guests—from people I knew to people I was seeing for the first time. I went to greet them with joy and love one after the other until I reached a lady whom I had never seen or met before. She was beautiful with long black hair tied backward and upturned dark brown eyes. She was the only guest who didn’t have a smile on her face. I came closer to her, wanting to give her a warm first impression.

As I reached out my hands to shake hers, this lady simply turned her head to the other side and acted as if no one was there waiting to greet her. I was confused at the moment. “Did she see me? Maybe she didn’t? Maybe she didn’t mean to ignore me?” I moved on to the other lady to greet her.
However, deep inside me, there was a voice screaming, wanting to say something, and wanting to show the lady that what she did is totally unacceptable and rude.

But this voice didn't have the power to be spoken neither to be heard. I was the only one who can listen to this voice and have a conversation with it.

“Say something,” the voice screamed at her.

“I can't,” she replied

“Treat her like the way she treated you.”

“I can't; it's not who am I.”

“Say something before you regret it for the rest of your life.”

“What I will regret is if I DID say something.”

A couple of minutes later, my cousin woke me up from my deep thoughts. She came to ask me if I would like to have some tea or coffee. “No thanks, I'm fine,” I replied back with a soft voice that could barely be heard.

Time passed, and it is finally time to go home. I go back with an evil aura covering my whole body. I can't get over it. The voice inside me is getting much more vital than I am, and it is starting to spread its power all over my body. I want to say something and stop it from what it's doing. But I can’t. I am much weaker than it.

You might be wondering, dear reader, why I am overthinking this. Or maybe why I took it so personally. I can’t answer your questions because you haven't experienced what I did. But what I can assure you is I've tried all ways possible to get out of my “silence zone” but haven’t been able to yet.

My inner voice will continue telling me to “say something” until I finally obey its orders. I don't want to be remembered like this:
She was such a caring person who cared about others’ feelings a lot. She thought thousands of times before saying anything, hoping not to hurt anyone. Her heart was so pure for this world. Sadly, the people in her life weren’t as kind as her.

To this day, I am still working on trying to figure out how to fight my silence. I am still trying to learn how to treat people like they treat me. It is hard, but it is what I have to do or else I would be treated badly for the rest of my life. If I haven’t found a way to stop it, it will continue growing. As it grows, my sadness and bad days will also grow.

Al Anoud Al Emadi is an electrical and computer engineering student at Texas A&M at Qatar. She finds comfort, peace, and joy within her inner thoughts which lends itself to writing. She believes that “Once you start, you can’t stop,” and this is how she defines writing. It was and still is hard for her to express her feelings and thoughts out loud. Instead of keeping everything bottled inside herself, Al Anoud chooses to write and feel free.
CHAPTER 6 | Taking a Stand

Wardah Shan
The Brutal Reality of Irresponsible Breeding

In a world where pets are increasingly being viewed as accessories, they are loved and accepted when they are cute and convenient, then abandoned and discarded once they are no longer so. It's no surprise that animal rescue shelters are becoming overcrowded with animals far beyond their capacities, so much so, that they are left with no choice but to euthanize some of the less adoptable ones. Undoubtedly, this sad reality is mainly the result of irresponsible breeding where owners selfishly breed their pets, particularly cats and dogs, without any regard to the consequences that these actions may have. Many of these irresponsibly bred kittens and puppies end up in shelters or worse, on euthanasia lists. While animals have historically been domesticated and bred for survival purposes (like security, food or farming), this has now started to become a hobby. In fact, every year, 1.5 million animals are euthanized in shelters in the U.S. (ASPCA) which shows how urgently this issue needs to be addressed. Fortunately, the solution to this complex issue is quite simple: we can significantly reduce the number of animals coming into shelters by spaying and neutering our cats and dogs.

Selective breeding in the past was originally done to produce dogs that would be better hunters or herders (sheep dogs) that were less aggressive than wild dogs so they could be tamed enough to aid with the hunting and herding of hunter gatherer societies (Briggs). Similarly, cats were domesticated as they preyed on rats and mice, making them an effective tool for pest control. Eventually, as humans become more dependent on the techniques employed by modern agriculture and reliance on animals was significantly decreased, breeding became more of a mix of scientific lab experiments and genetic engineering to produce cats or dogs with ‘desirable characteristics’ that would make them better pets (Saletan). Although dogs are still bred for hunting and herding purposes, these are no longer the sole reasons. Human greed has extended to breeding to produce the cutest, friendliest or fluffiest. William Saletan put it best when he wrote, “In the course of engineering dogs to look, feel, and act as we wanted, we ruined millions of them. We gave them legs so short they couldn’t run, noses so flat they couldn’t breathe, tempers so hostile they couldn’t function in society.”
Evidently, there is no doubt that the wide variety of breeds in cats and dogs, be it Persian cats or golden retrievers, is a result of human interference and these breeds are, essentially “man made”—not a result of natural selection (Briggs). This act has left several, if not all, of these animals to become incredibly dependent on humans for survival. Think of a Persian cat. Would it be able to survive in the wild? Or on its own in general? Probably not. Its fur would become easily matted as a result of all the knots that would form from all the mud and tree branches that they would be exposed to and grooming itself would become painful for the cat. They would become more prone to infections and parasites as a consequence of their inability to effectively groom themselves. Additionally, their temperament would be another problem; most house cats, despite having the instincts to hunt, don’t necessarily know what to do with the kill. They may not recognize the real reason behind hunting beyond it just being a game since in domestication they would just have been fed Whiskas cat biscuits by their owners; therefore, there was no need to catch and kill for food. The same long fur and sweet, relaxed behavior that we humans value so much will become the exact reasons the cat can’t survive. Clearly, these beautiful breeds have come at a great cost—one that the animals have to pay. For example, I once had a beautiful Persian cat that I looked after for a few days and while it was obvious that she was smart and a quick learner when it came to house training, her ability to confront another cat was virtually nonexistent. When faced with a feral cat outside my door, while he growled and hissed at her, she hunched into a little ball, clearly petrified and totally helpless despite being twice the other cat’s size.

Several pet owners refuse to neuter their pets because they want to breed them once. They do not see the harm in doing so because it’s “just once,” but what they don’t realize is that “one unspayed female cat and her offspring can lead to 370,000 kittens in seven years” (PETA). As overcrowded shelters have proven time and time again, there just aren’t enough homes for these 370,000 kittens. It is almost certain that some of them will be abandoned at some point as the breeder fails to find homes for them all and is unable to care for them. This is the reality of pet overpopulation.
Another reason that people do not sterilize their pets is because they would like to keep one of the kittens or puppies. They think it would be “cute” to have a “mini” version of the pet they so love (Stilwell). Once the litter is born, they will pick out the cutest, healthiest looking puppy from the litter of five to six (cats have a typical litter of four kittens). But what about the rest? Eventually the family realizes that looking after one newborn kitten is expensive and time consuming, let alone four. If the little ones are lucky, the owners will give them away to friends or family who will provide a loving home. But of course, this is not often the case. They might just be abandoned as the Zero Stray Pawject explains, “Puppy litters that, after initial efforts to get them adopted fail, are abandoned. Municipal trash collection points are common repositories of unwanted puppies” (Greece). This is all simply because the owners realize only too late the commitment required to raise a litter, leaving the animals to bear the brunt of the consequences of their owner’s selfishness.

Some organizations like the American Kennel Club encourage owners to breed their dogs claiming that if they do not do so, rare breeds like Dalmatians could potentially become extinct and in that sense, there is a need to “carry on the bloodline” (Stilwell). In her article “Reasons to Breed” on the American Kennel website, Jan Warren Linne attempts to persuade owners of ‘rare’ dogs to breed them in order to make these pets more accessible so more people can get their ‘dream’ dogs. By using the adjective dream, the dogs are made to sound almost like a luxury accessory rather than an animal and living being, putting the desire of people above anything else. It also calls this breeding “noble” as if it’s an almost sacred duty and responsibility that should be highly respected when the breed is one that is not as commonly available in the attempt to prevent such breeds from dying out.

While this is true, it is crucial that this job is only left to professional and responsible breeders. Although Linne briefly places an emphasis on “responsible breeding” and touches on some of responsibilities such as “health testing” parents, pair evaluation and puppy socialization, there is only one paragraph in the article that mentions exactly what responsible breeding is, and because the points are so briefly and vaguely mentioned, this
is made to look like an easy task that anyone can do. This lack of detail in the article makes it less reliable because it becomes more of an opinion piece where the author is biased and therefore unable to provide an objective and factual argument (AKC). What it fails to acknowledge is that the whole reason that health testing and evaluating prospective parents is important is to ensure that the resulting litter will not be compromised by genetic defects. The puppies (or kittens) then also need to be vaccinated, socialized and cared for until they are at least eight weeks old. Additionally, a responsible breeder’s job does not end with selling the litter. They need to keep track of the owners who buy the puppies and ensure that they are well looked after. Clearly, this is not a task that the average dog owner is capable of, and therefore this is a job best left to the professionals.

Linne also provides some of her own experience to connect with her readers and uses a conversational and friendly tone to appear more convincing so people are more likely to take her advice. She says, “I field many contacts a month from people looking for well-bred puppies” to convince people of the demand that there is for these rare breeds like her “Dalmations.” The use of the personal pronoun “I” indicates that she believes that it is a good idea to breed dogs making this a very subjective source as it encourages some readers to think about breeding their dogs as they see this as a potential money-making idea. She further goes on to give some friendly advice to “not let public pressure or even peer pressure keep you from doing what you love to do,” which sounds well-intentioned. The phrase, “what you love to do,” almost makes breeding sound like a hobby or a fun pastime which is further used to encourage people to do so. Besides, by saying that she “fields many contacts” requesting these puppies, she implies a potential for business where people can make money by selling these puppies due to the demand for them, which further encourages the readers to consider breeding their pets.

Unfortunately, the credibility of this source is questionable. Jan Warren Linne is a member on the board of directors for the American Kennel Club which is a registry of purebred dogs in the US that promotes breeding: in order to get a license for doing so, a fee needs to be paid to the organization. This is what makes
the information in this source not as reliable because of the financial interest that the author has (as she is on the board of directors and would want the company to do well financially). It could be that the wellbeing of the dogs may be compromised in the attempt to make a profit. Additionally, there are complaints received against the agency where some of the AKC-registered puppies sold at pet stores have had genetic defects or were sick which further reduces the credibility of the source.

In an Instagram post, PAWS, the local animal shelter in Qatar, expressed their anger towards local breeders after they had to put down a puppy that had been severely affected by the ‘selfish’ actions of an ‘ignorant’ breeder. They said, “There is NO place for breeding in Qatar…all the backyard breeders have done is interbreed and destroyed the health of the dogs they produce. Ignorance and greed has meant animals have suffered and it has to STOP.” This statement clearly explains why breeding is not the average pet owner’s job—it is not okay to exploit an animal’s health to make a profit which is what “greed” refers to in this case. Saleton agreed with this in his article, “Our Creepiest Genetic Invention,” where he wrote, “Nature invented sexual reproduction to diversify gene pools and dilute bad variants. By forcing dogs into incest (which we ban among humans, in part for biological reasons), we defied nature. We concentrated each bad gene in a breed, magnifying its damage: epilepsy for springer spaniels, diabetes for Samoyeds, bone cancer for Rottweilers.”

Sterilization does not only aid in reducing pet overpopulation, but it also has a range of behavioral benefits to it. For example, a neutered dog is far less likely to “urine mark” as an act of claiming territory, a frustrating behavior for owners. In fact, according to The Humane Society of the United States, neutering can “solve 90% of all marking issues even in cats that have been doing it for a while.” It can also greatly help with aggressive behavior as it leads to a decrease in the dog’s testosterone levels so they are less likely to get into fights and injure themselves, other dogs or other people, clearly saving the owner on vet bills and lawsuits.

Additionally, spaying has various health benefits like reducing the risk of pyometra which is a type of uterine cancer that can prove
fatal (The Humane Society). This is a crucial reason which proves the importance of spaying because not only does it protect the health of canine pets, but it also saves the owner financially in the long run. Spaying/neutering surgeries will cost “significantly less” than having to pay lengthy vet bills if the pets do develop such cancers (ASPCA).

Many animal experts including Victoria Stilwell, a well-known dog trainer with more than twelve years of experience, agree on the importance of owners spaying or neutering their dogs in order to reduce pet overpopulation. The message that she put across in an episode from her show, *It’s Me or the Dog*, sums up the problem perfectly. The episode featured Daniel, a dog owner who served as a model for many others across the globe, who wanted to breed his dog, Sasha. In her mission to discourage him from doing so, Victoria took him to a high kill shelter where he saw the potential consequences for himself. She used factual statistics like this one: “four million animals that are put down every year here in the United States.” This helped Daniel (and to a larger extent, the show’s viewers) to realize the magnitude and the gravity of the problem with the vast numbers of animals that are affected by irresponsible breeding. Stillwell revealed this fact when they have just been shown the cooler of euthanized dogs to emphasize how real the situation was. The fact that it was so full of garbage bags that contained these euthanized dogs was even more heartbreaking as it really illustrated the problem, showing that it was truly a reality. She then went on to say that “Sasha’s pups could have been one of them” while pointing at the bags in the cooler to give Daniel a reality check, finally convincing him to get Sasha spayed by affecting him on a more personal level as he was made to visualize his own dog’s puppies euthanized—a jarring image for any owner who loves their pets (Stilwell).

Imagine working at an animal shelter where you recognize the animals you are disposing of. Think of that energetic little puppy that you’d play with everyday, glassy eyed, dead in a pile of other unfortunates like itself simply because no one wanted to adopt her. That is a reality that some of workers at these shelters have to face where “sometimes when you’re loading up you may see a familiar face” (Stilwell) when emptying the cooler where the
euthanized dogs are disposed, leaving a vivid image that embodies this tragedy of the loss of friend or loved one.

What happens when the number of abandoned, homeless and unwanted animals far exceeds the capacity of shelters? The answer is simple; they are killed. And this will continue to be the reality until we realize that breeding is not the average pet owner's job. We must let go of our selfishness and leave breeding to professional, responsible breeders who ensure that the animal's well being is not compromised and that they are only homed to loving and committed families who will ensure that they are well cared for in the future. We can significantly reduce the 1.5 million animals that are killed in shelters every year. We must do what it is in the best interests of our pets and their health by letting go of our selfishness and greed—one spay and one neuter at a time.


This piece started as an entry in my personal journal about a year ago. At the time, I only had a couple of lines written under it (which didn’t make it to the draft submitted here). This final draft is a reflection on identities. First, there is the identity of the branch campus, which is a unique combination of the culture of the main campus, and the culture of the land on which the branch operates and the diverse body of students involved. I hope you can see the identity of the writer as a non-Texan, as a non-Qatari in Qatar, and as a woman coming through.
The Spirit of Aggieland من الدوحة، هنا تكساس

Don’t let the English part of this title fool you to think that you are about to read a patriotic piece filled with Howdys and Gig ‘ems.

*The setting: Texas A&M University at Qatar 2019 commencement*

1:33:00: “Please stand for the singing of ‘The Spirit of Aggieland.’ The words are on the back of your program.”

Oh, but they are not printed in front of me! Why does everyone have a copy of the program in their hands except me? I am experiencing an internal state of panic—and actually an external one too. Look at how yellow my face has turned. Look at that idiot getting on stage not knowing the words of the one thing she was responsible for tonight. The one reason she even got seated on the stage. What do I do now? I will just stand back a bit and close my mouth, trying to murmur a word or two of the song that I don’t remember.

1:34:41: “Please be seated”

That is it?! A total of one minute and forty seconds (I checked the live stream afterwards). I was hoping to talk more, and not just more but talk about something that I actually care about, not about a song whose name I don’t remember. Was it the Aggie War Hymn? No, the word “war” in the title doesn’t sound right.

You see, I didn’t get chosen as the commencement speaker. I didn’t have enough identities in me to become the speaker. The commencement committee was tormented between having a woman, because they didn’t get many of those in a while, or someone Qatari, because they also didn’t get many of those in a while. It happened that the Qatari person was a man. So it came down to gender representation vs. nationality. Oh alas, if I were a Qatari woman then I would have been chosen for sure.

To someone in the commencement committee debrief, I said, “I was surprised that the ‘Spirit of Aggieland’ lyrics wasn’t printed for me in the commencement book.”
“You are an Aggie, you should know the words by heart,” was the reply.

What I really heard was, *oh how dare you, you are an alumnus of this institution and didn’t know that you were supposed to say ‘We’ve got to fight boys’!* I didn’t reply. I should have at least said something like *please ma’am walk around the student lounge and stop a random student and ask them if they know the lyrics. Maybe then you will remember that we are not in Texas. Maybe you will realize that the maroon and white in the song should actually be sung to refer to the colors of Qatar’s flag and not to the ‘Farmers Farmers Fight, AY!’*. Thank goodness we at least sang the Qatari national anthem before the U.S. one in the commencement.

Don’t get me wrong, I hold no grudge towards the person who was chosen; he did a good job with delivering his speech. But what about mee? If my ego was so hurt, why did I then say yes to lead the singing of that song?

If you want the truth, I just wanted to sit on the stage. I served on this committee for a whole semester (or was it two?) and at the end, you expect me to just turn down the opportunity and let my pride and selfless service win? If I had done that, I would have sat with all the rest of the students. Which meant I would have probably ended up sitting next to this guy whom I had a quarrel with before, his name being next in the alphabet. It came down to sitting next to the guy I am pissed at, or publicly standing in the center of attention and singing a song that I can’t remember its name, lyrics, or know why it is even part of the commencement program.

Needless to say, I chose the latter. If time goes back, I wouldn’t have chosen either. I would have just asked to sit in a corner somewhere by myself (and wouldn’t be granted my wish for logistical organization reasons), or not attend the whole thing and save myself the QAR 300 I spent on getting my hair done.

For those of you who can’t read Arabic, let me tell you what the Arabic part of this title says. It says, “From Doha ... this is Texas”- *min ad-dawha, hona Texas*. On the 2nd of November 1956, Cairo’s
radio station was bombed during the *Tripartite Aggression-alodwan al thulathi*—so one of the radio reporters in Damascus declared “This is Cairo from Damascus” to symbolizes the continuation of the voice of the station beyond its bombed physical location. The response I was given when I said I don’t know the lyrics felt like someone is on my land declaring that it is Texas—well, not really my land, but it is more of my land than Texas is.

Back to 1:33:00, I wish I had spent less money to get my hair done, punched the guy who pissed me off, got up the stage and declared, هنا الدوحة.

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**Alaa Abdalla** is a former TAMUQ student who graduated in 2019 with a degree in mechanical engineering. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Tech studying the value of obtaining university degrees. Alaa loves writing as a form of creative expression and *Best Writing* was one of her favorite annual landmarks at TAMUQ.
This piece was a discussion response to an article that told the story of ten women taking leadership positions in STEM fields. My response was a reflection on the hardships that women, specifically Arab women, have to face when they choose to pursue a STEM career.
Women in STEM: A Student’s Perspective

The women in this article are all incredible for breaking the “glass ceiling” and challenging the societal role that women have been expected to play for too long. I guess the story that truly resonated with me was Aya Mouallem’s. We come from similar cultures, where women are expected to be in STEM for their bachelors and retire the sciences once they graduate. This notion angers me, especially when you factor in the high academic standards expected of girls.

When I applied to mechanical engineering, I wasn't naive of the fact that this particular major was notoriously male-dominated. However, I only truly grasped what male-dominated meant when our department organized a lunch for us with our faculty. Not only were the students overwhelmingly male, but I was shocked to find that we only had one female professor and one female staff member. I think my jaw dropped for a second.

The lack of representation among the people who supply us with most of our engineering skills is incredibly demotivating. I was never one to look for representation. I have always felt like if a human being could do it, then so could I, no matter how much harder it might be for me. But for some reason, the realization that not a lot of people looked like me felt like a slap in the face. Upon further research, I realized that the other programs offered by TAMUQ also experienced this lack of representation.

So, when I am left alone with my thoughts, I often wonder: will I be among the few who made it? Statistically, the answer is no. That stopped discouraging me when I decided that I will make and follow my own path.

Regardless of my decision, we have a problem that is deeply rooted within our society. We expect girls to focus on their schoolwork. Then as young women, our culture pushes us to major in fields that are extremely tasking. Finally, after we have sacrificed our “prime years” in the pursuit of knowledge and science, we are expected to quit. Only to be further expected to sacrifice our bodies and souls to a keeping up a household, bringing in income, raising children, and looking pretty.
I am thankful that my family is supportive of my interest in engineering. They usually don't mind my rambling about schoolwork for hours and they can't wait for me to get a job so I can start growing as an engineer! However, I am fully aware of the hardships young women have to face when they are raised in less accepting households.

Although I love engineering, I wholeheartedly hate its male-centered culture. I hope that I live to the day to see us change that narrative.
This is a classification essay about different personality types based on Zodiac signs.
Personality Types Based on Zodiac Signs

In our universe, it is impossible to find two identical people. Genetics, nationality, religion, and environment are always reasons for people's differences. But people sharing the same zodiac sign group can be identical in some characteristics and personalities. Every person has a unique personality that differs from one person to another. I have observed the differences in people's identities from knowing people from different zodiac signs. Zodiac signs can tell people's personalities and characteristics and they are classified into four main groups: Fire, Earth, Air, and Water.

To begin, the first group of zodiac signs is Fire. This group contains people with Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius signs. People carrying one of the fire signs are often forthright and honest. It doesn't matter to them whether or not what they're doing could harm you. They believe that candor is a virtue. However, many people get offended because others treat them with being too honest that some people consider it as a rudeness. Also, people carrying one of the fire signs are very bossy, high and mighty; they like to direct other people with commands regardless of their position and they always want to take others' roles. For instance, if a person from this category is working in a team, he/she usually likes to do and control everything. Moreover, people in this category often overreact toward people's different opinions in a negative way. If one of the team members have a different point of view, they react in a nervous way and never accept people's different points of view and they impose on others to conform to be like him/her.

The next group of zodiac signs is the Earth group. Taurus, Virgo, and, Capricorn are Earth group signs. People in this category seem to be down to earth. For them, being down to earth is a reason for being both successful in life and lovable. And people in this category are so generous; they enjoy gifting people and they don't care about the cost as they care about the content. They just do their hardest to see the happiness and blessing of others. Besides, people in the earth category are so cheerful and it is rare to see them depressed or melancholic. They like to spread positivity, take all people's negativity and replace with positivity. If you have a friend with one of the Earth signs, you are surely lucky because
you will never feel sad. You will always be gifted, and you will never have a negative thought or energy. Furthermore, Earth signs are independent. When they need assistance, they do their hardest to support themselves and they don’t depend on anyone. If they face difficulties understanding a certain topic, they immediately Google it and try to decipher it by themselves.

Further, the third category of zodiac signs is the Air group. The three signs of this category are Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius. This category is the people who are moody, rational, and helpful. People who have an Air sign are so temperamental. Their mood, feelings, and behavior change frequently. They always follow their mood, no matter how this might affect people's time and schedules. For instance, people who have an Air sign regularly cancel their plans with other people once their mood changes and this ruins people's time and plans. Moreover, this group of people is rational and they make intelligence-based decisions. They don’t rely on emotions and they know how to balance things out. They always follow their mind and not their heart. This is basically because they don’t really trust and value their heart as much as their brain. However, people with the Air sign are helpful and supportive. I know a Libra friend who was like a shadow behind me. Whenever I feel tired and give up, she advises me and encourages me to recharge my batteries to keep going. Although if they’re not in the mood, they would never care about you.

Finally, the last category of zodiac signs is the Water group. This category of people's personalities is those who are sentimental, friendly, and fictional. This category contains people having Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces signs. If a person is emotional, friendly, and imaginary this would be a person with a Water zodiac sign. I have many Cancers in my life and they tear up easily and within seconds because they are emotional. For example, when they receive gifts even if it was something cheap or simple, they cannot control their tears. For them, it is normal to get emotional just by expressing to others their point of view or by defending themselves. Furthermore, it is known that people in this category usually have a wide imagination. They are creative people because they use their imagination in their lives. Also, people in this category are so friendly and social. They are interactive with
people and they can make friends anywhere they go. They usually make you feel comfortable to tell them everything about your life. But, at the same time, they like to spend time alone and to be by themselves.

In conclusion, it can be seen that zodiac signs reflect people’s personalities and how they are different. The Fire element reveals how people are serious and how they see themselves as number one and the Earth element shows how people are grounded and unselfish. The Air element includes people who are sensible and unsteady while the Water signs represent the way an individual is a social butterfly and sensitive. From contacting people of different signs and elements, I gained an understanding of the differences in people’s identities. However, it is possible to have a personality type that does not conform to any sign.

Shouq Al-Musleh is majoring in electrical and computer engineering. She enjoys writing because it puts her in a good mood.
I wrote this piece for an ENGL 104 assignment in my freshman year. The book History of the World in Seven Cheap Things was and still is one of the best books I have read discussing capitalism and the future of the world that this system created. In order to fight capitalism, which resulted in a lot of the modern problems we are living in like racism, social inequality, the increase of wars, environmental issues, and much more, it is crucial to understand how it originally started and how it became the “norm” of the world.
The Cheapening of Nature as a Result of Capitalist Values

Whenever we start thinking about the world we live in, certain images start popping in our brains. Images of people working in offices, technology, supermarkets, banks, taxes and rents, climate change, deforestation and more, but how did our lives become like this and will it continue in the same manner? This is the main question that Raga Patel and Jason W. Moore tried to answer in their book *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*. In this book, the authors give another perspective and way of studying the world based on seven cheap things, which are nature, money, work, care, food, energy, and lives. They argue that the world we live in right now, with all the environmental and social problems like poverty and climate change, is a result of capitalism's usage of these cheap things to build its system. The purpose of this essay is to analyse Chapter One of this book, which is about cheap nature, and argue that the values of profit, knowledge, and humans were the main aspects of value that the authors used to explain how capitalism made nature a cheap thing.

Chapter One speaks about how capitalism changed the value of nature over time and cheapened it. Firstly, the writers introduced the difference between society and nature from a capitalist's point of view. Society in capitalism is a collective of thinking beings who had knowledge and power, and nature is the rest of the things “including other humans” who must be controlled and observed as a source of profit. This definition came from the two laws of capitalism, which classified objects as thinking and extended beings and placed most of human kind and nature as extended objects, while only white European man stood as the thinking being. Then the second law came to establish the right and the duty of the thinking beings to control and use the extended beings. This is the main reason why capitalists see nature including people who do not share or believe in their ideologies as a mere objects and value them based on the profit they can make from them.

The main three interpretations of value that the writers introduced were the values of profit, knowledge, and humans. First, the value of profit was the most obvious type of value discussed in the chapter. Capitalism at the end of the day only focusses on the net
profit they can make from everything around them. The value of profit appeared as a main purpose when they introduced the concept of colonizing the world in the early stages of capitalism. What capitalist's saw in their colonies was only the materialistic profit they can obtain. This was the justification for a lot of examples mentioned in the chapter like Columbus's description of one of the first colonies he discovered in terms of profit that could be made from selling the island's herbs for medical uses. Another remarkable example is Madeira Island, which became the home for the sugar plantation industry. When settlers came there, they treated every part of nature as a pure resource that can be used to make a final product, which then can be sold in the market to obtain profit. This operation caused the environment and the nature of the island to go through a massive extinction. This hunger towards profit will explain the other aspect of value, which is the value of knowledge.

“Knowledge is power”—we have all heard that quote before. However, can we take a few seconds and remember what power means in capitalism? Yes, it means only profit. Capitalists saw knowledge as a gate to know more, be more sophisticated, invent new technologies, apply those new technologies in the real world, and then increase profit. The role of the value of knowledge in making nature a cheap thing can be illustrated through two points; the first is the way that knowledge empowers humans to change and use nature, and the second is the way that humans value themselves based on their knowledge. The first point was crucial in the devolvement of capitalism. Since in order to control something you need the power to do so, the main purpose of knowledge, as both writers mentioned in the chapter, was conveyed when they were speaking about how capitalists were very interested about science in order to know more about nature in order to find more resources and learn how to extract them. Here I want to draw your attention to an important point, which is the effect of that type of observation of science in its value. When we consider the capitalist view for science and knowledge, we can see that they exclude anything that will not bring instant wealth, and therefore capitalists ignored environmental knowledge because it will only limit their abilities to use nature. This can be found when the writers spoke at the end of the chapter about
the great environmental changes which caused heatwaves that effected economies of countries like Iran and the frequent occurrence of earthquakes and storms due to capitalism’s destruction of the environment.

The second question that I asked was about the relation that capitalism established between humans’ value and their knowledge, as it will lead us to the most important aspect of value that the writers used to explain how capitalism cheapened nature, which is the value of humans. The change in the value of humans was established when capitalists made definitions for both savage and moderate. In a capitalist's point of view, as shown in the book, savage means being “wild.” This definition relates to the first rule of capitalism which I mentioned earlier about the difference between thinking beings and extended beings. The European capitalist saw himself as the “perfect” or the “chosen” human based on his own value for his knowledge and profit. Then this man started judging his surrounding sphere based on his standards and therefore saw everything in this world beneath him and in need for him to guide them. This idea shaped the whole interpretation between capitalists and the world they lived in.

In conclusion, capitalism’s own values assigned to profit, knowledge, and humans was the main explanation for capitalism’s rule over nature from the first colonial times up until our present days. This dominance caused a massive environmental crisis that is still affecting our lives and our future on this planet.

Mohamed Khalid is a junior ECEN student, debater, poet, and most importantly, a human. He started writing and continues to do so because he believes we all have a duty to stand against the current world—a world where profit and power are the only pursuits of everyone, a world where the suffering and agony of people are ignored for the sake of mere profit. This is why he writes to share this point of view with others and to take part in the ongoing struggle to make this world a better place for all humans, not just one or 2% of them.
This poem is the most creative piece of work I have ever written and is the first poem I wrote in seven years. While its direct meaning is about how a girl, whose first language isn’t English, keeps on going through taunts and mockery, to me it represents how I overcame my fear of public speaking. While the narrator talks about how she felt when she was enduring all of it, it mirrors how I felt when I messed up during a speech and how the people around me reacted. Because of this, I look up to the girl in the poem and believe that I wrote about someone who I have always wanted to be, and maybe one day will become.
Yet She Continued

They called her words broken - and fractured and scarred. Yet their mouths were filled with ‘Like’s and ‘Uhmm’s. Yet she continued, while they mocked her passion and intelligence.

Because while she spoke two, they spoke but one. She scared them, Her courage and will as she continued, ignoring their taunts. They understood what she yearned to say, yet stood still and laughed, with hidden cowardice. She knew that sound, the giggles and whispers, the scoffs and sneers, silent but not hidden.

Yet she continued, For her accent and words were all that were left, from a nation in ruins, a refugee in its midst. And she continued, thriving and brilliant, and tragic, because she was just a girl in a new world.

And as she strived to make a new home and life, they laughed, and yet she continued.
Amna Cassim is a chemical engineering student, Class of 2024. Quoting Oscar Wilde, “It is what you read when you don’t have to that determines what you will be when you can’t help it.” She believes that perseverance is the way to move forward and conquer your fears.
CHAPTER 7

Contemplating Reality
I wrote this while I was in a very bad phase mentally. I have heavily edited this submission to make it (relatively) free of things that have darker themes, religion or unparliamentary language.

As heartbreaking as this was to write, I am proud of this piece for being one of my very few that is not centered around romance but around the human experience and coming of age while trying to figure out the balance between fitting in and standing out. I meant to portray the struggles on youth and how we try to process the world around us into neat boxes that help us generalize how to deal with our environment. I like to think that these primitive boxes that we put ourselves in (as knee-jerk reactions directly for or against our upbringing) evolve significantly as we grow older. The starting point is important though, since we slowly start to realize what worldviews work for us and which ones don’t.
Theory in Progress

Hello. I'm nothing.
I think that some people created poetry and that some people are the reason it was created.
It's a theory I'm working on.
See, there's this thing that I want to set straight.
I'm the human version of a Monday morning:
dragged feet across tiles, boarded buses and screeching halts,
the ten seconds of sleep you catch before the ride is over.
It's the least romantic analogy you've ever heard.
That's me.

And in the end,
How can I be different
when I wake up to the same blaring guitar solo of my favorite band just like everyone else?
How can I ever learn to fly
when I spent my last three Sundays sawing off my own wings with a butter knife from the cafeteria?

I live for an idea.
An idea of an idea.
Like the way you think their eyes look into yours with unadulterated love
and their hands entwine in yours,
but all those years you spent listening to people stuffing expectations down your throat
has got you three seconds away from procrastinating the only real emotion you've felt in the past four years.
It's a theory I'm working on.
I like to think 1:26 a.m. was created for people to break or fall in love.
Sometimes both.

See, I've got it all figured out.
People want to be the 4 a.m. drive to the edge of nowhere with the people they love,
hands above their heads and turning up 'Somewhere in Neverland' on the radio.
People want to wake up to bathroom slippers angled away
from their beds
so their lovers can kiss them good morning and slip into them.
People want to believe one-stop towns and roads leading to
nowhere have some meaning in the existence that we lead,
like politics or the things you heard your parents yell at each other
on the bad days.
People want
to love and I—

I want to make 2:59 a.m. the new trend
of why I decided to write ink on the walls painted in blood.
I want to eat cereal out of the box and tell God I’m so tired of
doing my best.
I want to remember that Friday night where I said all the right
things in the right way, and she laughed me a painted sky.
I want to bite my nails till they bleed and understand
why my mother
loves the blues like she does,
or why she told my dad last summer that she finally learnt
how to fold the fitted sheets.
I want to catch shiny, happy memories in 5x7-inch borders and
hang them on the walls till I can’t see the cheap wallpaper that’s
been peeling off.

And God,
I want to break something today other than my own self,
maybe a heart.
maybe my own.
It’s a theory I’m working on.
CHAPTER 7 | Contemplating Reality

Vishmi Mandira Singhapura
A Shabby Place

My mother taught me
how to be good to myself;
my father taught me
how to be good to others.
If I had to choose one,
I will choose the former,
because if not for her,
I will choose others a million times over,
a tendency I am addicted to.

I told you my choice
over a cup of coffee,
and you asserted I was selfish.
It made me ask myself,
Why is choosing yourself so taboo?
Why is it such a bad move to make?
Why is it unattractive
when sometimes that’s all we want to do?

Maybe it’s our drive to be coined “good,”
to be the one giving.
But what is forgotten is this:
being good to yourself is goodness on its own.
Owning yourself shouldn’t be an excuse
to treat it with disdain.

This is why the world will always be
a shabby, impure place.
Even good people don’t display
what they have promised to preach.

Vishmi Mandira Singhapura is a rising chemical engineering junior. She likes writing poetry, watching Korean drama and spending time with her friends. She enjoys the depth life offers on simple terms.
This is a narrative that talks about the impact of leaving behind a place due to war at a young age and how it was a drastic change that left a scar in the narrator’s heart. This piece is one of my favorite pieces that I have ever written. I have never spoken or written about my childhood or experiences, so this spoke out volumes. Leaving a “home” is not easy, especially as a child, and I believe it is what created the void in me that I constantly try to fill, but with people instead of geographical places.
Home Is a Person

The sun was shining over Damascus. My mother sat me in the car seat in her 1995 Fiat as we drove off to my kindergarten. We arrive at the school where we are welcomed with balloons, music, bubbles, and cheerful teachers. Some kids were crying (I was one of them), and some were just having the time of their lives. My mother ended up leaving me with the teachers to go off to her college class. It is a small campus, with a set of slides and swings under what looks like a big beige umbrella, protecting us from the sun.

My class where I was greeted was mostly filled with the color red. All the girls wore pigtails with pretty bows, and all the boys had spiked-up hair (very fashionable in the 2000s). We started the day with some coloring and music, then of course nap time came and the kids instantly fell asleep. I, on the other hand, was still very frisky and could not help but stay awake. I watched the two girls beside me. I watched my teacher. I watched the door. The big blue door. I was scared of that door, thinking something scary would come out and eat me alive but it was just another classroom.

Two years later, I moved to a new, bigger school. I am in the first grade! I am wearing a grey dress with wool tights and black low ankle boots. My shoulder-length hair is secured with two pink hairclips at the front, and I have my Hello Kitty backpack. The playground is packed with slides and climbing walls and rods: every child's dream. I walk into the huge campus holding my father's hand, ready to make some new friends when I run into a friend from my kindergarten. We walk together until the bell rings and it's time to go to class.

I am now seven years old. Older age meant more fun and more activities I'm able to do. I am entered in math competitions, athletic races, dancing, music, drama classes, and art. It is my peak creativity point so far and I couldn't be happier with what I am doing. Third grade is when I developed most of my skills. But life didn't go on like that.

I'm just trying to fall asleep. All I can hear are ambulances and police cars' sirens. All I can see are the fires that are breaking out far away from my house. The loud noise of the sirens gets louder and louder as time passes. Moments later, under my apartment
building, I hear screaming. My parents run into my bedroom to look out the window to see what was going on. They have taken five men and their sons. My parents tell me to fall asleep and forget about it. I try not to think much of it, and I continue my daily school routine. I am only seven, so I don't really understand what is going on.

Three months later, I am in the car with my mother on the way to my grandmother's house to spend some time and see my cousins. We get stopped once, and they check the IDs. We get stopped again, and they check for hidden weapons. I am terrified of them. The way they are covering their faces. The helmets and the military uniform. The glares they give me and everybody else in the car. I arrive at my grandmother's house and almost forget what just happened on the twenty-minute drive which could've been just ten.

It is now December 2011. The situation is worsening and cities are starting to be completely destructed. Seeing this, my father has decided to make a quick move before it's too late. I never get to say goodbye to my friends or my teachers. February 2012, I am in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. I am here only because my grandparents own a house. My school is an international school, so two weeks into the move, I easily am ready to continue since it is practically the same system, although I get moved up a grade. My teachers took my P.E. and music lessons to give me extra maths lessons just so that I can keep up with the material. I surprisingly make a large group of friends, surprising because I had become pretty introverted after I moved.

Almost a year later, I move to Qatar. Again, I do not change schools as another branch exists there. My father gets a job, my baby brother finally gets into pre-school, and I am almost ten years old. I finally feel the responsibilities of being the eldest child coming my way. It is May 2013, and I arrive at the start of the third semester of fifth grade. I sit in class alone with two girls whilst they ask me questions about why I came out of nowhere. The teachers don’t seem to care much that I am new to the school and treat me like I have been a part of their class for years. A year later, my mother decides to take us to Syria for a visit. We are unsure of the situation, but we have to go back to see the rest of our family. The trip is
planned to be ten days long. We arrive and are greeted by my grandmother and my aunt and uncle, who drive us to their house in their small old-fashioned car. I see my baby cousins and play with them until my mom calls us for bedtime. Our first night goes well, but I keep getting flashbacks from the time before I left. Three days later, I am getting ready to go sleep again. The neighborhood is in utter silence. I hear loud banging sounds. Then I hear a whistling sound. In a matter of minutes, it all turns into chaos. No one sleeps that night, and since we are up anyways, we start packing to leave in the morning.

It is 2015, two years since my grandfather went missing in Syria, nowhere to be found. His siblings are trying to find him. My uncle has been struggling to find him. Nowhere to be found. Today we find out that he had been kidnapped and deceased for a year. I am doing a social studies project for my English class when I hear the news; I am sad but not surprised.

It is now 2020. Growing up in Doha for the past seven years has changed me more than I think I will ever change in the future. It is where I have made friends for the longest time. It is where I attended school for the longest time. It might sound like it is 'home,' but it really isn't.

Moving multiple times and living in situations that I may have not mentioned planted in me a seed of responsibility and possibly high fear and anxiety. It has definitely taught me how to talk to people, how to listen, how to deal with hardships, and how to provide help, as much as needed. Geographically, there is no place that I would call “home.” I have reached a point in my life where 'home' is a person: a friend, a family member, or a partner. That is sort of tough to have because people can switch up at any time and leave. Of course, the geographical home cannot physically leave someone; but the fact that there is no place to always go back to, no place to call home really stings.

There's always going to be this feeling of displacement in my heart, but I'm very thankful for where I am today and where I have reached in my life. I hope to one day find my person-home and visit my actual supposed “home.”
When you think about “here,” the first things that come to mind are Qatar, your room, and the part of the Earth you live on, yet “here” can be a completely different macrocosm for people with autism. This piece is inspired by a family friend’s unpublished book Messages That Will Never Be Read; it is a series of messages for her child with autism who lives in a disconnected reality. It beautifully portrays the effects of autism on children, their families, and the people around them.
Why Is He Not Here?

Here, where is “here”? Is “here” an alternate reality in the simulation that we have yet to discover? Or is “here” my 5x4 room on the second floor of the house? Questions fill my head as I stare at the family portrait hung on our white wall that’s covered with crayon drawings done by Ahmad, my brother. Questioning reality and existence is a familiar concept to me; god’s existence has always been a mystery that forced me to spend sleepless nights pondering “where is He?” as I questioned my beliefs.

2014. I relive the moment when I was twelve-years old, coloring my favorite animals in an adult coloring book, changing colored pencils every three seconds to blend in the colors. Strokes from the uneven pencil tips filled the creased paper. I was focused on perfecting the imperfect piece when I glimpsed to the left and saw my four-year-old brother sitting between two walls, whispering to himself repeatedly, “It’s okay … it’s okay … it’s okay … it’s okay.” I leaned my body in to get a better view of what he was looking at, and there was his spiderman toy, scattered around the Persian rug after being broken into small bits and pieces. His frustration over what had happened showed on his facial expression. He looked tense as if his world stopped at his fingertips and his innocence made me question the vandalizer of his property. The unease that had filled the corner he stayed in reflected how distraught he looked; he felt threatened by what had happened.

He can’t have done it, right?

2016. He is now a six-year-old. We were in the car driving back from a family trip to Bahrain. The car moved slowly between the lost deserts. Humidity from the weather fogged up the windows on the backseat, the last border checkpoint before entering the State of Qatar got closer every meter we passed. My mom was in the passenger seat getting our passports ready to ease the interaction as my dad started slowing down the car. The automatic window started rolling down as we waited patiently to get approved to enter by the border patrol officer verifying our identity. The air filled with discomfort when my brother was asked to be seen. My dad lifted my brother from the back seat and brought him on his lap where the officer had a good view of him. Without a beat, we saw a hand reach to touch my brother’s
left cheek, which caused a rush of rage good enough to scare the
guy away. The tantrum he threw was “exaggerated” over the small
incident that had happened.

Why did he feel violated over the smallest touch?

Is the officer to him a villain now? Is he even there?

2019. The door started knocking, snapping me from my dilemma.
The door opened only for me to get greeted by my mom
complaining about my brother ignoring her. “I have been calling
him for hours and he is not answering,” she yelled while anger
fueled her rage. The confusion that hit me impulsively pulled me
out of the room in silence to check up on him. “Ahmad ... Ahmad!
... Ahmad!!!” I shouted to the void of no response. The pleasant
sound of piano notes filled the discreet hallway leading up to
his room—the room he spends most of the time in. The door
opened, and my entrance seemed to not have bothered him.
His focus on perfecting his piano skills alternated his reality into
unacknowledging my presence, right? I rushed to him to remove
his headphones without skipping a beat. “Why are you ignoring
me?” I asked him in the sharpest tone.

The sudden change in his physical state baffled him, causing a
sudden rush of mixed emotions to run through his blood, leaving
him to drop on the floor and screaming at the top of his lungs
for help. “What happened?” I questioned him while his body was
on the cold marble ground, hitting his head repeatedly on the
hard floor. His screaming kept getting louder and louder, forcing
everyone to rush in to check on him.

“Leave me alone!!! I hate you! I hate you!” tears covered his young
red face as he exclaimed boldly with complete ignorance towards
my emotions.

Is that where he is?

He has always conveyed a pattern of behavior like this,
disregarding people’s emotions, ignoring when someone calls
him, overreacting to the smallest things and isolating himself
away from anyone and everyone. This is behavior that falls under the autism spectrum, but he’s not autistic, right? He has always seemed to be disconnected from reality, drifting into his own world. Living in a bubble that none of us could enter, a bubble that takes him away from us, a bubble where he is not “here.”

Years have passed since his diagnosis, and I am writing him messages that will never be read. I am often caught pondering about the day that our worlds will collide, a day that I will finally be acknowledged by him and get answers to whether I have ever made it “there” with him. Hopelessly hoping to see how his eyes view me, his mother, god, strangers, his friends; I believe the universe will one day unite us, and his “here” will at last be here.

Khaloud Al-Buainain is a Qatari computer engineer from Hamad Bin Khalifa University. She grew up with her mother working with children with disabilities, which helped her acknowledge their struggles to live everyday life. She is passionate about making change and living in a more inclusive and accessible world for everyone.
Vishmi Mandira Singhapura
Behind You

You walk in front of me
at your own pace
to your own rhythm of lefts and rights.

I walk behind you,
gazing at the pattern your legs form.
Then I gaze at my own pattern,
noticing we don't synchronize.
We are mutually exclusive.

My sixteen-year-old self
would have adjusted to your rhythm—
be it uncomfortable, too fast, or too slow.
I would have tricked my brain into thinking
that even if we vibe for a second,
we are destined.

But now,
I continue to walk at my own pace
despite our separate destinies.

It takes strength to accept you cannot have something,
even though it’s in front of you.
And today I am proud to say,
despite having the choice to follow the path you chose,
I will be walking the opposite way.

Vishmi Mandira Singapura is a rising chemical engineering junior. She likes writing poetry, watching Korean drama and spending time with her friends. She enjoys the depth life offers on simple terms.
Play with Grasshoppers

I remember when I was a five-year-old, in the mountains of Lebanon, playing the courtyard in front of my grandmothers’ home. One day I chose to wash my doll’s clothes by squatting down on the ground in front of my toy washing machine that we brought from the U.S. It was an amazing machine, just like the real thing with a bit of soap mixed into the water and a button to push to spin. Looking back, it was a more modern machine than most households in Lebanon had at the time. A majority of the homes had the big drum machine with a two-roller contraption on the top. Once the clothes were washed in the drum, they had to be put in between the two-roller contraption while turning the handle to squeeze the water out before hanging them to dry. The five-year-old me loved to watch the water squeezed out of the cloth, but the older woman in me looking back would have regretted it, just like the women in my family back then.

While washing my doll’s clothing that day, I may have looked like a “typical girl” playing. But on the outside, I looked like a “typical boy” with my light brown, short curly afro hair, dirty shirt, holey pants and on occasion a bloody knee or two to match the look. I loved running, biking, climbing and being in nature. So, you can imagine what I did when I saw a small creature peeping out of the cemented stairs extending from the side of the house and suspended in the air up to the roof. Yes, I decided the doll could remain naked for a while longer.

One grasshopper at a time started coming out, first a small one, then a big one, then a medium one. It was a family of grasshoppers, and I started to play with them. I decided they needed to have a bed to rest in, and I was able to find a match box that would do nicely. I picked them up one at a time, trying to see which one fit better as they were trying to go back into the small hole to escape. I am not quite sure how I kept them around for a while, but one of them became my companion till grandma called me in for dinner.

Now to what I don’t remember, such as getting to the age of forty-six. How did my days go by and why did I choose this imaginary world that surrounds me today? Over time, I had imagined living in thirteen homes in different states and countries. Attending twelve
different schools with thousands of classmates with hundreds of teachers. I married once and divorced once, had three children and miscarried three. I have had seventeen different jobs in many different fields. I have traveled over fifty times to fourteen different countries. I have a lot of loving friends and family; I also had conflict with friends and family.

These days I am playing with oil paint, bringing different forms onto canvas at my villa in Qatar. I am imagining that I am working at a prestigious university with many people from all over the world. I have so many friends of all ages, nationalities, religions, and so many more differences that make us similar in our diversity. I am watching a pandemic that is separating humanity and creating more discrimination due to fear. I am still a parent and doing the duties of what one would consider to be of a mother. With all this power to imagine so much, why can't I bring more of my creative imagination into this world?

I will have my paintings in a gallery for all to enjoy and understand their purpose. I imagine myself to be a writer, publishing a few books and sharing with others. I foresee a long-lasting relationship full of respect and love so deep into old age. At the age of sixty, I will dance to life's music and sing with the wind. I will play in a world of respect and unity. Imagining more every day till an angel calls me back for dinner.
CHAPTER 8
Moving Forward
The Continuum

The power of the me is in my body, mind and spirit following a path forward in life, stopping at times to reflect on the past. Good or bad, this is how I see the movement of life—well, my life. “You shouldn’t really focus on the past,” I tell myself. “Move forward always.”

Unproductive thoughts do however pierce the gauze of the past, querying, “Don't you want to be twenty years old again?” I sometimes ask myself this question particularly in the company of those, and there are many—who get stuck in the past for a way of life that was somehow simpler and easier. As I await my response, I know without a doubt what I will say, and yet at the same time, I demand to understand why I wouldn't want to be young again.

Alas, I say to the grown-older version of me, “You know the answer.” It has to do with the process of moving forward. Life moves this way. On a line. A continuum. Moving Forward. One way and one way only. No U-turns.

“What would I change by going back, anyway?” I beckon for my implausible answer. I would feel the comfort of my beautiful mother, see my loving father, hold the small hands of my adorable sister, pet the only dog I ever loved, and challenge the mistakes I have made.

Time does move on, and I have moved far on that line of life. Walked on it like it was some kind of tight rope hanging perilously above everyone I hold dear as they look up and cheer me on like I actually know how to do this. Up here, I peer into the horizon and squint so hard, my eyes begin to water. “What is on the other side? The past or future?” I speculate. I don’t care. I hate heights.

My thoughts begin to quarrel. “Get down,” I command myself. The adventurous me calls me out, “Don't be afraid. Go back and keep walking, one foot in front of the other. Curl your toes around the wire. You won't fall.” The sensible me says this is happening. “Life is happening here and now folks,” I scream to an audience of one.

I quietly descend, feeling the earth beneath my feet and back to this moment, relieved to be here at this very time.
“When I leave Qatar for summer break, the first place I’ll go is…”

“The first place I’ll go is Istanbul to see the markets!”
— Dr. Anne Schmalstig

“The first place I’ll go is the island of Sifnos in the Aegean sea. Sifnos is a beautiful and peaceful island with great scenery, clean beaches and white sand. Besides doing some healthy exercises, being there will give me the opportunity to plan the next academic year in TAMUQ, which for sure will be full of challenges and opportunities.”
— Dr. Yannis Economou

“The first place I’ll go is HOME to see my family.”
— Dr. Mohamed Fadlelmula

“The FIRST place I’ll go is Germany for the forests, and lakes, and hiking and Berlin for the cafes, and music, and bookshops, and farmer’s markets!”
— Dr. Mary Queen

“As a way of moving forward, I’ve been practicing…”

“Living more in the immediate as opposed to always daydreaming about some future event.”
— Dr. Sara Hillman

“Patience with myself as well as others.”
— Dr. Mary Queen
“After living and working in the midst of a pandemic for the last year, what I know for sure is…”

“Few things can be known for sure!”
— Dr. Sara Hillman

“Essential is not the same as valued.”
— Anonymous

“I really like getting to know my students face to face.”
— Dr. Anne Schmalstig

“I do not want to have online exams again.”
— Dr. Mohamed Fadlelmula

“Life is unpredictable, but at the same time challenges can make someone stronger in ways that he/she has never thought before. For sure, I look forward to going back to a normal life soon!”
— Dr. Yannis Economou

“The grass is not always greener on the other side; be happy with who you are, where you are, and what you have!”
— Dr. Naqaa Abbas

“I will appreciate walking without a mask.”
— Dr. Ma’moun Rawashdeh

“Everything changes. We think of our worlds as permanent, of our institutions as built on stone, but this past year we found out that something so small that it can’t even be seen can change our lives in ways we never even imagined before. Someday we’ll look back on this time and we will see that it, too, is over, and we will all be different people on the other side of it. For better or worse, this too shall pass. The question we all need to answer is who we will be when it does.
— Shaun Torres
CHAPTER 8 | Moving Forward

Brittany & Joshua Bounds
Liberal Arts Program
Moving Forward with the Camels

We arrived exactly as the online blogs have described, on a crisp, beautiful morning. The directions to get to Al Shahaniya were clear. But once we got to the location itself, we realized the descriptions had ended before instructing the reader (us) where to go to actually view the races. We pulled into a long road with camels warming up all around us, heightening the excitement. At the end of the road, I asked an SUV full of police officers for the viewing site, and not understanding what we were asking, they pointed to the racing fence. We parked diagonally in front of the fence, scoping out the area in search for bleachers and a digital screen to watch the camels run around the track. A short few minutes later, we heard a horn that apparently signaled the release of twenty camels to our right, and we whooped in the excitement that the race was starting. The camels ran right in front of us. Cool! Is that it? Then a dozen cars around us started honking. But why? We realized the cars to our left had taken off after the camels, and we were blocking the cars to our right! GAH! We were IN the race! We decided to go for it, and Josh, my eight-year-old son in the back seat, screamed, “Just floor it!”

Giggling, I spun the wheel and followed the SUVs hot in pursuit. I multitasked trying to film the camels running next to us while navigating the drivers around us cheering on their camels. The other vehicles were full: the driver weaving through the other cars to keep up with his camel, his son operating the robot jockey, the other men in the car cheering, “Yalla! Yalla!” One young boy even stood up through the sunroof of one of the many white Toyota Landcruisers. It was only a few minutes later after the adrenaline started to wear off that I realized that I probably should not be driving my brand-new SUV in a camel race among these die-hard racers.

In the next race, we heard a crash too close and thought someone had hit us while following his camel too closely. I was very upset, already calculating the story I was going to have to tell the dealership. At the end of the race, we pulled off to the side and checked the front corner. Alhamdulillah, we had not been hit. “Let’s go for another race!” Josh cheered from the backseat. He is definitely my son.
We drove three exciting races in total and promised to make it an annual tradition. I switched up the view by driving on the inside of the track on the second round, and remained on the outside of the cars on the third after our near miss. Next year, maybe we’ll rent a nondescript Land Rover instead.
Change Is Inevitable

Oftentimes in life, one’s plans are altered. While change is not within most people’s comfort zones, it is inevitable. After twelve years of being a member of the Texas A&M University branch campus in Qatar, deciding to leave was one of the most difficult decisions I’ve ever had to make. It is not a “job” I was leaving, but rather a community, a population of current and former students that I was blessed to interact with regularly and pleasant coworkers I had the honor of working with; it was a life I was leaving, one that I had known for so long, and the only one my children ever knew. The decision was not easy, but it was necessary.

Moving forward is a part of life—one that we cannot escape. And while change is often unsettling, it is also beautiful in the new adventures it provides, the new experiences gained, and new friendships made. I will forever be grateful for my time in Qatar, for the wonderful people I met whom I now call family, and the warm Aggie community that will always hold a special place in my heart. Moving forward is what I am doing, and I am eager for the challenges, learning, and valuable experiences that lie ahead.
Spring 2021 Graduation Speech

Howdy everyone! I am so blessed to be here tonight, and I am so glad to say that we finally made it; we are finally the engineers that we kept saying we were going to become.

My name is Hourig Ohanian, and I am a Mechanical Engineer; it feels so good to finally say that.

On behalf of my fellow graduates, we want to thank God, our parents, our family, the faculty, the staff, our lab coordinators, teaching assistants, and every single fellow graduate who made this possible for us.

Unfortunately, we are not able to be here together in the way that we had hoped for when we came in as freshmen. The transition from in-person to online has not been easy, and I hope that it only goes up from here for the coming years.

Today, we accomplished one of the biggest milestones in our lives, the point where we carry the title, “Engineer.” There is a lot of meaning behind this title: we are not only responsible for advancing technology, or creating graphs and codes, drilling, designing cars and buildings, but we are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the public, the environment, and for the future of our community. However, we also carry another important title, an “Aggie Engineer,” where we have been taught more than just what was said in classrooms; we have been taught the importance of diversity, sociability, sustainability, management, creation, and social awareness.

Engineering was not my first choice; I’m not going to lie. However, during my senior year of high school, the admissions office held an event for prospective students to get the chance to talk to professors and students from each major. I went in with an open mind, but I was also telling myself that I could never become an engineer. However, after listening to these professors and the students from the panel, my mind changed completely. I knew that it was what I wanted. Not just to become an engineer, but to become part of the Aggie community in Qatar.
Once I received my acceptance and attended orientation, I felt calm knowing the people I was going to graduate with were going to be with me every step of the way.

TAMUQ has always been supportive and nurturing. Last year, a group of us were in College Station, Texas, for study abroad and on our way to the airport to come back to Qatar, we received news that the airports had closed. We were all in shock and had no clue what to do. However, the Qatar support office in Texas and the Dean’s office here did everything they could to make sure that we were safe, that our quarantine hotels and flights were booked, and they always asked to meet with us and follow up. I had no doubt that they were going to handle the situation with excellence, just like in everything else that they do.

During my time at TAMUQ, I have made friendships that I will cherish for the rest of my life; my friends have become my family. We laughed in the hallways, we cried in the computer labs, we traveled together, we fought together, we faced hardships, we made some unforgettable memories, but, in the end, we made it. I am so proud of every single person graduating tonight, whether it was someone I spoke to once during orientation, or only took one course with, or has been in the same major as me, I am very proud and grateful for you.

I hope that each and every one of you carry and improve on the technical knowledge that you have gained in and out of the classrooms, as well as the Aggie core values that we have been taught over the years for the rest of your lives. And never forget that the Aggie family is always there for you. We stand here as the 14th graduating class from TAMUQ, Congratulations Class of 2021, we have truly led by example. You should all be very proud of yourselves--after all the hard work, it is truly an honor to be called an ‘Aggie Engineer.’ I wish you all the best of luck in your futures, whether this includes pursuing a higher degree or going into industry. Hopefully, we will be able to reunite soon and celebrate this in person all together.
Jude Aloudeh
Class of 2021
With Every Hardship Comes Ease

With the theme being “moving forward,” my mind went to many different places; however, the one thought that was always at the back of my mind is this verse from Surah Ash-Sharh in the Quran:

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسِّيَّ مَعِينًا

This verse literally translates to, “Indeed, with every hardship comes ease.” To me, this is so beautiful and gives me a lot of hope that no matter how bad things seem at any specific point, things have their own way of working out, and it will get better. I always fall back to this ideology when I am faced with a hardship.

In my four years at Texas A&M, similar to many other students, I was faced with many challenges. These challenges come in so many different forms, for example getting bad grades, being stressed with the amount of work, losing friendships, losing family members, the COVID crisis, lockdown and so on.

Instead of dwelling on these problems, I was able to wholeheartedly believe better days are on their way. If you lose something, it will be replaced with something better, and even if we can’t see that in the meantime, we have innumerable blessings that we should be thankful for. Reflecting on these blessings will improve our lives and allow us to have peace of mind and clarity which translates to true happiness.
Ghadeer Al-Haddad
Class of 2018
Slow Down

Here and there, it’s everywhere
no matter the color, religion or origin
no matter if king or servant, rich or poor
no matter if doctor or patient
it doesn’t differentiate
far or near, the storm is here

Passing through with stress and disappointment
leaving us entrapped
with doubts and not many answers
even if we closed our doors
and ignored the rules
It’s there, going up and down,
changing life everyday

But a pandemic can give us lessons
teach us to plant a tree, or paint a river
tells us to slow down
and sense the small details
aware of ourselves and others
responsible for things we didn't care about
making safety an issue again

It’s softly telling us a tale
showing us our instinct and reality:
we are not individuals but communities
we are not distanced but connected
we are all as one and belong to one place

Fast or slow, we can heal and develop
find a solution or change over time
It doesn’t matter if it stays or goes away
we are adapting and we are okay.

Ghadeer Al-Haddad graduated from TAMUQ in 2018 with a chemical engineering degree.
This year was not at all what I expected it to be. You already know why: two words, global pandemic.

This was supposed to be one of the best years of our lives where we get to enjoy all the privileges of being a college senior. One after another, everything I looked forward to, senior walk, cap and gown day, graduate luncheon, senior gala, even commencement and convocation, were all slowly slipping away. These events were my biggest motivation to push through the years and work as hard as I possibly could. Maybe it was the prospect of celebration, maybe it was a need for recognition, or maybe it’s just wanting my family to finally get to see everything I’ve achieved.

When my brother walked the stage two years ago, my mom looked at me and said she couldn’t wait to see me do the same. Now, she wouldn’t get to.

And just like that, doing well didn’t matter to me anymore. Why would it? What was the point?

In the past, even a 0.001 drop in my GPA would’ve felt like someone ripped my heart out, but now it was just another number. I used to work and study like my life depended on it and then study some more. Now, I couldn’t get myself to study to save my life.

Why was this happening? I didn’t feel like myself and didn’t want to feel this way anymore. I couldn’t just throw away everything over some ceremonies, could I? I needed to really spend some time with myself and rediscover my intrinsic motivations: why I’m really here.

I was reminded that I’m here because I love what I study, because I have huge life goals, because I really want to go to grad school, because my parents love me, because my friends truly support me, because my brother believes I can do great things, and because I know I can.

So, I pushed through. I found my motivations. I graduated with honors. I celebrated with my friends. And, in the fall, inshallah, I’m
Going to my dream school with two of my best friends. How many people get to say that? I’m so grateful, Alhamdulilah.

My mom always told me to be patient. If something doesn’t work out the way I planned it to be, then that means it wasn’t what Allah had in store for me.

My mom was right, Allah had something better planned.

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*Tawakkul in the Arabic language, is the word for the Islamic concept of the reliance on God or ‘trusting in God’s plan.’ It is seen as ‘perfect trust in God and reliance on Him alone.’ It can also be referred to as God-consciousness*  (“tawakkul” Wikipedia)
When the virus hit, it changed everyone’s lives. Daily routines were affected, and so many things were put on a standstill. The piece that I have written is about my personal experience of living through the pandemic. Sharing experiences, helping each other, and being there for one another is what will get us through this. This piece is a reminder that you were not the only one who had their life turned upside down.

I remember writing this essay on a Friday afternoon. While writing, I repeatedly kept having flashbacks of the moments I was writing about. Reminiscing the entire scenario chronologically in my head felt like a small movie being played. Writing this also gave me an opportunity to relive my final high school days, and to see how far I have come despite the pandemic. It was an extremely fruitful and wonderful experience.
A Dream of a Pandemic-Free World

On March 3, 2020, like many students in Qatar, my life took a huge turn. The government announced that schools in Qatar will shut down until further notice. It was official: the coronavirus had arrived in Qatar and started to affect everyone’s lifestyles.

Only a few weeks before this announcement, I was sitting in my high school’s library having a conversation with my friends. I was telling them about my planned visit to my home country, Pakistan. For the past two years before that year, I visited Pakistan in the month of February to watch the final of the Pakistan Super League (PSL), a tournament equivalent to the English Premier League in England. It was the best time of the year for me. Sitting in a jampacked stadium, singing, and feeling all the emotions a sports fan feels was something I waited for every year. My friends then broke the news to me that Qatar has put restrictions on all air travel. All my excitement and soaring happiness shattered at that very moment. Immediately, I realized how different and difficult the next few months would be.

Life during lockdown was tremendously different to anything I have ever experienced before; not being able to meet my friends, play sports, or simply go out was immensely difficult to begin with. However, I tried to take this as an opportunity and make the best of the situation. Not being able to do things which I did on a day-to-day basis meant that I had to find other things to do. I turned to things that I never thought I would ever turn to. I started to read books, play chess, and occasionally paint and write.

When the news broke that the Qatari government decided to slowly open the lockdown, it was like a ray of sunshine appearing in a dark cave. The thought of going out had now become a reality. To see families going out together, friends hanging out, and people running in the parks again had a very good feel to it. The transition from a quiet and deserted Qatar to a moving, active, and vibrant one was a transition that cannot be explained in words.

This year was my first year as a university student. Like any other student, I was excited, nervous, and prepared to kickstart the next chapter of my life. However, with nearly everything being online, and the campus not being as lively as usual, the feeling
of nostalgia faded within the first couple of weeks. It was difficult to interact with fellow students, make friends, and get to know the professors. Many of my high school friends felt the same way. Some of them who had travelled abroad chose to come back because of the virus and due to nearly everything being held virtually.

My experience along with my friends and many other students in the world teaches us something: to never take anything for granted. Who would have thought a couple of years back that the current state of the world would be such that students in the developed world would not be able to go to schools and campuses? Many of us took this for granted. Similarly, we take so many other things for granted. For example, food on our tables or access to clean water all the time. What this pandemic has taught us is that we only understand the value of something once we do not have easy access to it. While we must appreciate the value of the smallest things in our lives, we should also strive to help others who are not as blessed and fortunate as we are.

If humanity ever forgot the idea of unity, this pandemic has been a perfect reminder. The fact that most countries committed to the WHO guidelines of lockdowns, washing hands, and social distancing shows how the world came together to curb a common challenge. As a result, most countries flattened their curves, and controlled the virus. Nations put aside their diplomatic self-interests to create relief funds and hold conventions to share ideas on how to contain the virus. With so many negative events occurring worldwide, seeing nations work together was a wonderful sight. It gives hope. Humanity is facing the biggest problems it has ever faced: climate change, depleting water resources, overpopulation, etc. To see governments displaying the ability to work in unity and put their differences aside is an indication that we can undoubtedly combat any global issue.

We are nearly there. We are close to the dream of a pandemic-free world. Soon, we will not need masks. We will be able to enjoy each other's company and go outside without ever worrying about falling prey to this virus. However, until we are there, we need to stay disciplined. We need to continue treating this pandemic
seriously and follow the guidelines set by our governments. As someone once said, “Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.” Let us all wait for that fruit.

Muhammad Saad is from Pakistan and is currently studying mechanical engineering, having recently completed his freshman year. He is a passionate cricket follower and has played the game professionally as well. In addition to that, he enjoys reading, politics, learning new things, and spending time outdoors.
Vanessa Lina
Center for Teaching & Learning
When things are uncertain
and all seems to be in vain,
it won’t always be this way,
for this too shall pass.

When loneliness overtakes
and you feel your heart will break,
cry if you must, but also chant:
this too shall pass.

If you’re worried, afraid, and things are spiraling,
If you feel that life is pushing you too hard, remember:
troubles and hardships don’t always last;
they too shall pass.

When success blinds your gaze,
pride and easiness lead you to laze,
and all could vanish in haste, please know:
this too shall pass.

So, no matter how dark the moment,
be still, calm, and quiet;
breathe and inhale the breeze of peace,
for this too shall pass.
Something New

Whenever I think of doing something I haven’t tried before, I get frightened by the thought of failing. More than that, I get terrified of people seeing me fail. They will make fun and make a meme material out of me. When I was in my weight-loss journey during the summer of my sophomore year, I thought swimming could be a great exercise to increase my physical activity. The only problem was, I didn’t know how to swim. I had taken a few swimming classes before, so I knew a little bit of floating, but I could never swim. The first time I went swimming with my friends to the rec center, I would always stay by the edge and hold on to the walls while I “walk” on the water. I wanted to learn to swim, so I watched some drills on YouTube. The next time, I didn’t go with my friends because I didn't want to embarrass myself by doing beginner drills in the light end by the edge. I went to the smaller pool in Awsaj because the one in rec center is massive, and I couldn’t stand even on the light end. I picked a time when the pool would be relatively empty of people. I remembered the drills (I have a good memory) and performed them by the edge of the pool. Now it was time to swim across.

While I swam, I lost my form in two strokes, panicked, and kept splashing water like there was no tomorrow. Although I was the only one in the pool, I made it sound as if an Olympic race was going on. I somehow made it to the other end. I was so embarrassed with the havoc I created with all the splashing. I could feel the lifeguard wanting to pick me up and throw me out of the pool. Before he could do that, I got out of the pool myself and decided never to swim again.

Fear of failing had stopped me from trying so many things, and now I am just in regret. In my freshman year, I thought I would learn to speak Arabic by trying to speak with my Arab friends, even if gibberish comes out of my mouth. But every time I tried to speak, my mind would go, “Nope, they are gonna laugh.” I wish I hadn't thought like that. I could have spoken Arabic by now, and it would have been such an asset in this country. Alas, now I am leaving and nothing can be done. There was also an opportunity from the Aggie Music Organization (AMO) for piano/guitar lessons in my sophomore year. I was so interested in the piano lessons, but my stupid inner voice kept telling, “Nope, you and
piano? Never.” I wish I had taken those lessons. Now I just imagine how I could have expanded my skills on those piano lessons during the lockdown when I was doing nothing in my room. Graduating with regrets is not a great feeling. So, people, make sure to graduate without regrets.

But I am not here to write about how I would do things differently if I were a freshman again. I am here to tell you that you are not doing enough. You think you will finish your courses, get a degree, get a high paying job, and live happily ever after? (**Laughs**) Let's talk about it. You won't get a high paying job, okay. All the numbers that you saw online are average salaries and you reach those numbers only after ten to fifteen years of work. We all saw the flashy numbers of TAMUQ professors' salaries. They are public information, so if you haven't seen them, you can look them up. The numbers are just WOW. But do you know when professors get that much amount? It's never before the age of forty. Maybe even fifty. And if you are looking for a high paying job outside of Qatar, have fun seeing your net salary after the government takes its share of income tax. The more you earn, the more income tax you pay.

So what does this mean? To live a healthy financial life, you can't depend entirely on your engineering job. You must create multiple sources of income. For that, you have to try different things – things out of your comfort zone. You could try starting a new business – doesn't have to be Amazon or Facebook level business, though our Aggies are great entrepreneurs. For example, look up, Haitham Al-Haidari ‘15 – he is the co-founder of one of the largest EdTech companies in the world, Modaris. But you don't have to achieve such a feat. You can run a small business on the side, like selling cookies, which someone is already doing in TAMUQ. I, myself, have been trying some side hustles after graduation. I am doing some video editing as an online freelancer. I am also going to launch my blog in a few months (By the time you are reading this, my blog should have been launched. If not, shame on me).

If money does not matter to you (don’t worry, it will in a few years), it is still important to overcome the fear of failing. The pandemic has shown us that something as simple as a man eating a bat can
put your job in jeopardy. So, it is good to have multiple streams of income. You are never safe at your job. Moreover, engineering is an evolving field. Things you learn now will become outdated later. You must be able to adapt to the changes. Only if you get used to being uncomfortable, only if you have the discipline to learn something new, and only if you are patient enough, you can adapt. And you think your courses are enough for this? (**Laughs**) You might say, well you learn new things from courses. That’s true. But it’s not about what we learn, but how we learn. We learn in courses by listening to a person explaining equations on the slide, some integrations, derivations, doing quizzes, midterms, finals, some lab reports with the same format from freshman year. You see, we are not doing anything new, we have been doing these since first grade. I have been doing them for the past sixteen years! This is our comfort zone. We might be “learning” new things, but we are not doing anything new. When I talk about learning something new, I am not talking about the “what.” I don’t know what new thing you or I must learn. We don’t know what’s there in the future. But we must know how to tread the unknown.

To overcome fear of the unknown, the only way is to simply DO new things. It’s not about what we do. It’s about getting used to being uncomfortable. We must get used to criticism. We must get used to feeling lost and slowly making our way out of it. The best way to learn it is to do it. And the best time to do it is these four years. There are not many consequences of failing in these four years (I am not talking about failing courses). I tried debating in the Qatar Universities Debate League in my first two years, and I consistently ranked at the bottom. I was the President of an organization in my sophomore year, and I only organized one event which included a conflict with the OBO and media department. I sang a Bollywood song on the AMO karoke event. It was embarrassing because of my atrocious voice. People put the clip and shared it on snapchat. But it’s okay, no one remembers it anymore (I hope so, it was very embarrassing). It felt miserable back then, but there weren’t many lasting consequences. More importantly, I put myself out of my comfort zone and tried new things. Also, not everything has to end in misery.
Now when I swim, I see that the lifeguard simply sits at his place and doesn't care how I swim, how I jump, or how I go underwater. Back when I splashed water like an Olympic swimmer, I realized I was just imagining the lifeguard giving me insecurities. Truth is, I can't see the lifeguard because I can't see properly without my glasses, and I swim without my glasses (I don't think I have other options). I was simply imagining the lifeguard being disgusted by my swimming because of my fear and because he was the only one in the place. If there were other people, I would have imagined them laughing at me as well. It took me a few days to get over the imaginary monster, and I resumed my drills that I learned from YouTube. First, I improved my kicks with a kickboard, then I worked on my breathing. Mind you, I still felt insecure while doing the beginner drills by myself on the pool whilst everyone else was swimming like fish. “It's okay, they don't care what I do,” I said to myself. I know it's hard to not think about what people think about you, but it's easier when you realize they don't actually care. Very slowly in about two months, I could swim decently.

This article is not an advice column for my fellow Aggies. Rather, it is a commitment to myself towards the pursuit of launching my blog and expanding it to an online business. By announcing it here, I am driving myself to do something new. If it succeeds, you can take this as an advice. If it doesn't, well, at least I did something new.
Sometimes, the comfort you seek can be found within, by listening to your own body and feeling the sunshine that you already emit. I’ve come back to read this poem at times when I’m feeling anxious— the warmth has made me feel better. Maybe it can give you some warmth too :)

Nadine Elkholy
Let the Sun Rise in You

Let the sun rise in you;
let her rise from within.
Let her light bathe the darkness
that the night was basking in.

Let the sun rise in you;
let her warmth ebb and flow.
Let her beams hug you close
and sway you gently, to and fro.

Let the sun rise in you;
let her love caress your soul.
Let her fill your veins with honey
to sate your heart and make it whole.

Let the sun rise in you;
let her touch your cloudy face.
Let her softness dry your tears
and save you from this endless haze.

Let the sun rise in you;
let her glimmer through your eyes.
Let her golden pools of joy
dissolve the anguish of your cries.

Let the sun rise in you,
for every night comes to an end;
All the tightness, all the worry
is washed away with her ascent.
Many years from now, which of your stories about COVID-19 will you wish you would have written down?

Start writing now…