



**The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Commencement Ceremony Undergraduate  
Valedictory  
Tebeen Seerwan Ibrahim - Business Studies  
May 28, 2016**

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, beloved parents, my fellow classmates, welcome to the AUIS Commencement Ceremony of 2016.

I want to thank my family for their endless support over the four years, my friends for making it a memorable experience, and the AUIS community for making today possible. It is an honor and privilege to be standing here on this podium. By the end of today, the class of 2016 will give AUIS their farewell - their home of 4 to 5 years. The power of being educated and aware is the power to shape history and not only be shaped by it. From the arbitrary lines and mandates drawn, a foolish brush paints a crippled nation; a nation born out of the fumes of war. A geography of accident and a history of oppression. This is Iraq and Kurdistan. This is who we are and where we are. Mary Oliver's timeless message in her poem *The Summer Day* is true today more than ever. "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" This question is what I wish and hope for you all to take away from this speech. I believe it is no mystery that you have one shot at life. Life is no dress rehearsal!

Despite Kurdistan's instability, Iraq's failures, and the Middle East's chaos, my vision for a sustainable world is to look beyond the chains of race, gender, religion and politics and lead the movement of history towards responsible progress (science) and peaceful coexistence. Now imagine, for a second, a world with a focus on advancing healthcare and extending the horizons of literature, poetry, philosophy, science, cosmology, love and friendships; you know, the things that make life pretty. Instead we see so much bloodshed over religion, race, and sexual preference. What a shame! What a loss! Is this really what you want to do with your one wild and precious life? Among you, some have already figured out what you will be doing, some are trying to figure it out; some of you are here to find who you are. Regardless, year after year, AUIS creates successful, ambitious, daring, and compassionate graduates. **In a land torn by war, AUIS stands as the beacon of hope.**

At AUIS, classes were more than just classes; they were experiences into greater awareness and self-discovery. I accidentally took a photography class and it provided me with a set of lens and the Golden Rule to look at the world with. Genetics class taught me how our human story can be told from our genetic markers. Robotics class taught me how machines can be controlled and the fear that they may someday control us. Psychology class taught me how strange our inner selves are and how little we know about them, along with the thousands of emotions, impulses, and instincts that make a human being. Primo Levi taught me how easy it is to end a life but how terribly difficult it is to break the human spirit. I learned all these outside of my major and minor classes. This is the value of a Liberal Arts education.

This is perhaps the standard definition of the liberal arts education. However, I do not stand here pretending to be the wise old man. I am not that person. In all honesty, life was simpler before university. Perhaps because our eyes weren't opened to who we are, our awareness not kindled to where we are. I am more confused now, and some of you may be too. Because once we go out of that front gate and give our final bow to AUIS, it will be you and only you who will narrate your story. It is daunting. It is scary. But it is a privilege to become aware.

The AUIS community has been like a family to me. I've spent more than 35,000 hours at this university, and have struggled here and succeeded here. There were days when we wished to ignore the beautiful strangers on campus, or when we were excited to meet a new friend; we have all had our days when one of



the cleaners happen to open the door for you with a smile; or days when Mr. Geoff calls your name. But you know you're not in trouble if he smiles back. It's a good thing that he smiles a lot. Phew.

The time we've spent together has made us family, and like any family we have had our own share of rivalries. Business students envy the IT students because coding is the new cool now. The IT students envy the engineering students because they play with heavy machines and that 3D printer no one is allowed to touch. The engineering students envy the English students because all they do is sit, relax and read literature books on a rocking chair. The English students envy the business students because at the end of the day Forbes 100 hardly has any English grads on its lists.

But the world is in need of our different perspectives and our respect for these different perspectives. And I say there is value in everything you do. Let us become entrepreneurs who provide jobs and opportunities; let us become engineers who create and foster innovations; let us become teachers who inspire the beauty of questioning and knowledge; let us become politicians who foster real values of leadership; and best of all, let us become human beings that believe in humanity. AUIS has created in us ambassadors who are today ready to go out into the world. Once we step out of the front gate tonight, it all begins.

Today we stand here with pride in our academic accomplishments, yet humble in what is to come. Today we stand here because we have had the privilege of education, and this alone is the reason why we should become better and stronger. We owe it to the privileges we have had when others haven't. Let us remember what we owe it to those who wish to be sitting among us, but can't. Let us make the world a better place so they too can have the privilege of education, opportunities and success. Inside all of us, there is a desire to do something meaningful and important. So be inspired by what has moved great men and women towards greatness. Seek the burning passion that leads to dedication. The world certainly needs more of them. And you are them!

This is a beautiful moment in all our lives. Let's take a mental picture of this great achievement. Whether you become a programmer, an entrepreneur, an accountant, an engineer, a teacher, a politician, remember this moment and let it inspire your values. Let it build you, let it lead you to serve and give. The real value of education and awareness doesn't stop when you get this degree. At best, it ought to open more doors - more room to understand life, to learn how to think and to learn why you do what you do. Our greatest discovery is to find out who we are, and not who we are supposed to be, or who we are told to be. The power of pondering leads to the practice of questioning. It's our most powerful privilege. Born with the privilege to question, understand and reason, we must never stop.

Cherish your dreams and decide what it is you plan to do with your one wild and terribly precious life. Don't be manipulated by mass media and consumerism! Don't allow your awareness to blur. Develop your sense of curiosity and your ability to think critically. Otherwise, we will enjoy being ignorant, mundane conformists who are told which religion to believe in, which God to worship, what leader to glorify, and which concepts to never question. I will not say our generation will change the world because every single generation has changed the world for better or for worse. What matters is *how* our generation will decide to change the world. What matters is what we plan to do with our one wild and terribly precious life. We are all made of stardust and this life is a privilege and an opportunity. It's a privilege to be able to give and share, and love and smile.

This is a farewell speech. But this is no farewell itself. We won't be leaving AUIS behind; we will be taking AUIS with us everywhere we go.

Love and peace to you all.