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AUK Project

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*The AUK Internship Program*

My time with the American University of Kuwait (AUK) stands out amongst my Dartmouth career as the single most important, memorable, and worthwhile experience I've had the honor of participating in. For this reason, I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to all those who make the Dartmouth-American University of Kuwait partnership possible, as well as to the AUK project selection committee for believing in me and providing me with the opportunity to travel to Kuwait.

My time in Kuwait was largely defined by my work. I spent the majority of my time in the AUK Counseling Center, under the supervision and mentorship of Dr. Georges Chedid. In the Counseling Center, I worked alongside Counselors Sophia Pais and Fatima Assad, as well as Coordinator Aysha Alkandari, to support the AUK student body's mental health and well-being. Specifically, I worked to provide a group of about seven AUK students with one-on-one peer support. Roughly half of the students I worked with have Autism. I worked with each of these students in varying capacities to support their self-identified social goals (such as joining clubs/university organizations, finding community, etc). Our sessions included practicing skills to reduce social anxiety and very often, role-playing various social situations. With the other half of the students I met with, we focused on academic skills such as those related to time management and studying practices. A major focus in these sessions was encouraging students to view themselves as capable of achieving their academic goals.

Working in the Counseling Center was by far the most enjoyable aspect of my time at AUK. I sincerely appreciated the time I spent working with each student I had the privilege of supporting, and nothing was more rewarding than learning several reached and exceeded their goals. A secondary responsibility of mine during my internship in the Counseling Center was filming informative, mental health-affirming Instagram Reels content for the AUK Student Affairs department (@AUKStudentAffairs) - check them out! Additionally, one of my final tasks during my time at AUK was leading a workshop for first-year students on “Finding Balance” between academic and social engagements. Further, as a psychology major, I believe that completing an internship program with the AUK Counseling Center was an incredible opportunity and without a doubt one of, if not *the* most, informative and beneficial experience available to me at Dartmouth College. I can think of no other program that offers the same degree of hands-on experience in our field. I loved every second of my work with the AUK Counseling Center and am overwhelmingly grateful for Dr. Georges Chedid and Lara Jadayel and the time and energy they spent constructing such an amazing internship for me.

### *Kuwait: A Closer Glance*

One of the definitive highlights of my time in Kuwait was the extreme level of hospitality my friends and colleagues welcomed me with. Even in my first moments in Kuwait, I was receiving welcoming messages from members of the AUK community. Ahmed AboElhiba, an AUK Senior whom I met during his time at Dartmouth in the summer term of 2023, was especially kind and welcoming; throughout my time at AUK, Ahmed and I became good friends and now share memories of adventures such as meeting Giancarlo Esposito (the actor who played Gustavo Fring in “Breaking Bad”) at Kuwait’s ComfestCon!

As I write to you now, I am flipping through hundreds upon hundreds of photos from my time exploring Kuwait's incredible museums with Faisal Dhulfan - our enormously welcoming friend and often, guide- and lavish malls with my roommates, indulging in the world's best shawarma and delicious majboos, visiting arcades and going on adventures with my friend and AUK student Mason Razouki, and befriending Salmiya's cat population. As I scroll I am reminded of nights staying up late with my roommates Ayman Agic, Amen Salha, and Joseph Fausey exchanging stories of our days, of unforgettable hours spent in the AUK fitness center with the unbelievably knowledgeable Coach Mazen Sarkis- whose mentorship and kindness I will never forget, of hilarious and heartwarming exchanges with Sophia Pais, Fatima Assad, and Ayshah Alkandari in the Counseling Centers diwaniya, and so much more. I find myself struggling to even begin summarizing these experiences out of fear of diluting their meaning to me.

*To Conclude: My First Day*

As soon as I arrived in Kuwait, I collected my luggage and, intending to buy a SIM card, made my way to the STC store (a major Kuwaiti cell carrier) near my terminal's exit. There, I was greeted by a man wearing a kind smile and a pristine white dishdasha; he offered me coffee and attempted to assist me in purchasing a SIM card. Unfortunately, I had forgotten to contact my carrier in the US to unlock my phone, so shortly after finishing our coffee and conversation, I said goodbye to my first friend in Kuwait and left the airport (without a SIM card).

Immediately outside of the exit was a long line of Kuwait Airport taxis. I made my way to the nearest cab, greeted the driver, and requested a ride. I am pleased to report to my Dartmouth professor, El-Mostafa Oujjani, that using the Arabic I learned from Dartmouth's introductory sequence, I booked my ride and enjoyed a pleasant conversation with my driver during the trip to the AUK apartments.

Around 11 P.M that night, I realized that I could not find my passport to send to our coordinator in the AUK International Relations department. I remembered that my passport was in the same bag I left my laptop, iPad, and wallet. My heart dropped when I realized the entire bag was missing, and it fell even further when it became clear that I must've left the bag in the taxi earlier. My roommates worked together to help me contact our first contact at AUK, International Programs Coordinator Lara Jadayel. Lara was enormously kind and endlessly helpful; even so late in the evening, she did everything she could to help remedy the situation. With her assistance I found my way back to the airport, searching for the taxi driver from earlier. It wasn't until 2 A.M., and not without the help of several airport security drivers, that was I able to get in contact with the taxi driver. The driver, at this point at home, informed me that he would make his way to the airport immediately. Upon arriving, he returned my bag with everything in place and intact, then relayed to me that his commute was over an hour long. Earlier, he said, as soon as he realized I had left my bag, he had spent two hours searching for me to return it. He then offered to bring me back to my apartment, and although I felt awful, I had no other option. Once there, he initially refused any tip, though eventually accepted.

I share this story with you to highlight several defining characteristics of the many friends, colleagues, mentors, and friendly strangers I encountered in Kuwait: kindness, altruism, and hospitality. Without these individuals, I am certain that my experience in Kuwait would not have been nearly as enjoyable. For this reason, I would like to conclude by thanking all of those who welcomed me to AUK and made me feel at home:

To Lara Jadayel , Dr. Georges Chedid, Sofia Pais, Fatima Assad, Aysha Alkandari, Coach Mazen Sarkis, Faisal Dhulfan, Mason Razouki, Lilo Salem, Ahmed AboElhiba, Fatemah Ashkanani, and Lynn Pais, thank you. I am endlessly grateful for your kindness and all you did

to share your culture and community with me; I look forward to continuing our friendships and all that is to come.