Greetings,

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate our Middle Eastern/North African (ME/NA) student graduates.

This celebration highlights the accomplishments and the cultural significance of our ME/NA communities at the University of Michigan. We hope that the celebration of today’s graduates will also inspire our current and future students to reach their goals as well.

While we recognize this is an exciting time for our graduating students, it is also a bittersweet moment. It is a time where nostalgia is met with mixed emotions for what lies ahead. We often think of graduation as the conclusion of a long journey. However, it is important to remember that the Latin root for the word "commencement" means beginning. I am confident that the Class of 2021 has been empowered with the skills and determination necessary to overcome any challenges that await them.

As we honor this extraordinary graduating class, I am enthusiastic about the opportunities that await them. I am confident that they have all the skills, talent, drive, and commitment necessary to overcome whatever challenges they may face and to make a real difference in the world. They have endured one of the most challenging times in memory at the University and the broader society. Nonetheless, they have not only endured, but they have also overcome.

Make no mistake, the Class of 2021 has made a difference during their time here. We are a better university for having them as students. The University of Michigan will always be their home, and they will always be welcome.

Please join me in congratulating the class of 2021 and their families for their outstanding accomplishments.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Sellers
Vice Provost for Equity and Inclusion
Chief Diversity Officer
Martino Harmon
Vice President for Student Life

Wolverines, congratulations on your graduation!

Wolverines, you never cease to amaze. You spent the past year striving for academic excellence in the middle of a pandemic that put life as we know it into lockdown — and you still came out of it with your head held high and a shiny new degree from the University of Michigan. That takes courage. That takes commitment. That takes the kind of grit and self-love and respect that will serve you well for the rest of your lives.

To be a Michigan graduate is not just to join the community of over 500,000 Michigan alumni spread around the globe — 500,000 friends who are ready to help welcome you into your next chapter. It is also to embrace the idea that the knowledge and experiences you have earned here are a gift to be used. Your talents, dreams, and aspirations, along with the book-learning and real world practicums that you have seized all along here on campus, are not meant to be hoarded, but shared.

Go out and do great things with what you have learned. Do them well, with integrity and joy in the honest work of it. Carry with you the sense of self-assurance that even a pandemic could not stop you from chasing your dreams. You have overcome sleepless nights of studying for finals, the sweaty-palms feeling of just before a thesis defense, and so many other challenges, big and small. Whatever the next chapter of your story brings, I know you can handle it, and make us still here in Ann Arbor so very proud.

In fact, we are already proud. Your friends, family, and classmates could not be prouder of your achievements. But I hope you know that the most important opinion in all of this is how you see yourself. Wolverines, be proud of yourselves. Recognize and celebrate you for all you have done. Have there been times of self-doubt and struggle for you? I am sure there have. After all, that is what it means to be human.

You are not alone. I have those moments, too — and I am the vice president for Student Life at "the greatest university in the world!" as the voice for Darth Vader (James Earl Jones) put it. Every single other Michigan alum has been through this before you, and as you cross this finish line and set your eyes on a new horizon, remember that they are excited for you to join them, and we the staff and faculty at the University of Michigan will always be here to support you, wherever you go.

And, wherever you go — Go Blue!

Congratulations again, Wolverines. We are so proud of you.

Martino Harmon, Ph.D.
Vice President for Student Life
Congratulations to all of my fellow graduates! Needless to say, we have endured a lot this year, but regardless, I hope you all are as excited as I am to begin the next chapter of our lives.

I came to the university inspired, with one goal in mind, one dream, one path. I figured I’d make some memories along the way but the end goal was to get my degree and continue on a path I thought was set from the day I wanted to be a doctor. Instead, over the last three years, I had no idea where I was going or what I was doing most of the time. See, what I didn’t expect to happen was self-discovery, or at least the start of it. I knew my Middle Eastern identity made me different from those around me, as it had been my whole life, and I didn’t expect that to change in college. I knew I was a minority but it never crossed my mind that I would even have the opportunity to meet a community of people that were like me. And because of that, I neglected the impact of my identity on who I was, let alone who I would become. In my journey to get a degree, I feel like I circled the world finding myself along the way, and gaining inspiration from those around me.

I know that everyone may not have that same experience. Frankly, one thing I naively didn’t expect when I became part of the Arab community was that there would be so many unique experiences. The Middle East and North Africa is comprised of multiple languages and dialects, dozens of ethnicities, and a variety of religions. On top of that, we were all raised differently, whether it was the city you grew up in, the number of people you lived with, and the way we choose to express our culture. Overall, there is no singular defined way to be from the MENA region. However, despite our differences, we are united by our similarities. Our hospitality, great taste in food, tendency to talk a little louder than most, big friend groups that are like family, and a few other things I’m missing for sure. We all have amazing stories to tell, influenced by our heritage and upbringing, but it never tells the whole story.

Sometimes we are guilty of making assumptions about others character, beliefs, and practices based on their country of origin, religion, or ethnic identity, in the same way that assumptions are made about all people of the MENA region. While I may be the only Arab Syrian Ismaili woman from West Bloomfield at the university, that isn’t how I would want to be defined as or judged by, and it does not nearly describe my character. If we uplift each other, empower the voices of our community, we can
collectively work together to create opportunities for ourselves and the younger generations that will follow in our footsteps. Those who came before us gave us the opportunity to celebrate our graduation together, to identify as MENA on university forms, to bring the MENA identity into spaces where it was suppressed before. They worked to make sure our voices were heard. That we were not invisible on this campus. That our needs are acknowledged, and we have the ability to advocate for ourselves.

Before I came to Michigan, I felt that my identity wasn’t important, that it was something to hide, and not bring into the spaces I was a part of. I cowered away from cultural expression, fearing that I would never fit in anywhere if I was different. My community made me proud, outspoken, and empowered, which is why I dedicated my college career to make sure that those who follow can gain the same self discovery that I had. And every day I reflect on how differently my life might be if I didn’t put off studying to go dancing in the diag with people I hardly knew, or spent a semester pledging an Arab sorority, or get roped into hosting the Arab Xpressions after-party, among other quick decisions my freshman year that changed the course of my college career. Being part of such a diverse community taught me to fight for the world I want to see, to be myself, and most importantly, to surround myself with people that will do the same.

As we continue on our separate paths, we will all carry our MENA identity with us, proudly and strongly. Congratulations again to all of you, and forever, GO BLUE!
Bachelor's
Bachelor's

Reem Aburukba
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Political Science

Mays Albayati
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Molecular Cellular and Developmental Biology, Middle East Studies

Atheer Alhajri
أثير الحجري
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Museum Studies

“Trust yourself and do your best to achieve your dreams”

Leena Alhawati
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience

Israa Ali
College of Engineering; Aerospace Engineering
There will be instances and people who make you feel like you don’t belong. You are exactly where you should be in life.

Congratulations everyone! Never let your MENA identity hinder you from your goals, personal, professional, and academic pursuits. Use your identify to uplift others to pioneer a pathway for other MENA minorities to excel. Go Blue Forever!
John Ballouz
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biomolecular Sciences and Middle Eastern & North African Studies

“I have never been around so many outspoken ME/NA people who stand up for each other. I am so happy to have been a part of a community that gathers together around our shared background and embraces each other. I would not have been as successful at UMich if it was not for (specifically) the Arab community on campus.”

Nadya Barghouyt
College of Engineering; Mechanical Engineering

Sara Bashir
College of Engineering; Nuclear Engineering & Radiological Sciences

Hawraa Beydoun حوراء بيضون
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience; Arab and Muslim American Studies (minor)

“Keep working towards your life goals and purpose, and make the obstacles you face along the way life long lessons. Go Blue and Beyond Forever!”

Haya Beydoun
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biology, Health, and Society; French
Bachelor’s

Katia Bitar  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Criminology and Criminal Justice

Gabriel Boudagh  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Cellular and Molecular Biology; Writing (minor)

Fatima Bouhamdan  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Computer Science  
“How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” - Winne The Pooh

Lounis Bouzit  
College of Engineering; Computer Engineering

Aiya Charara  
College of Education, Health, and Human Services; Health and Human Services  
“It's good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters, in the end.”
Bachelor’s

Amjad El Othmani
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience

“Take advantage of all the opportunities presented to you, since each plays a significant role in the person you become. Remember to always stay true to yourself, your values, and to always live your truth!”

Naveen Fawaz
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biomolecular Science

Navid Fotovat
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Neuroscience

Laura Hattar
College of Engineering; Industrial and Operations Engineering

Ibrahim Haydar
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts;
Cognitive Science; Mathematics; Biomolecular Science

“I’m overwhelmingly grateful to have met those of you that I have, and even more grateful to have formed friendship with some among those, I’ve never met so many who amazed me so deeply. Please keep alive the passion and pride I’ve been honored to see sparkling in your eyes.”
Suzanne Irani
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience

Hollya Israil
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Business Administration

Mustapha Jaber
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biology, Health, and Society

Louma Kaakarli
School of Public Health; Community and Global Public Health

Britney Karche
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; English; Psychology; Education for Empowerment (minor)
Bachelor’s

Bashir Kaspo
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Neuroscience

“Always Go Blue!”

Mehrdad Kavani
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biology, Health and Society; Middle East Studies (Persian Cultural Studies)

Zahara Makki
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Computer Science

“Wherever life may take you, I hope it is filled with adventure and joy.”

Mariel Manzor
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biology, Health, and Society; Gender and Health

Troy Martinos Saruna
Stephen M. Ross School of Business; Business Administration

“We are our ancestors’ wildest dreams and the very grounds for untold posterity. Remain zealous.”
Bachelor’s

Ann Maya
“God is Love!”

Fadi Moaikel
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Neuroscience
“While it wasn’t easy to spend time with everyone this year, I’m glad we all persevered and made it through in the end. Best of luck!”

Layaill Mustafa Mustafa
Stephen M. Ross School of Business; Business Administration

Moustafa Mutahr
College of Engineering; Computer Science

Sunia Sadeghi
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; History
“We’re making our ancestors proud <3”
Mohamad Saleh
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience

Salma Shaker
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; International Studies, Global Environment and Health

Nora Sharba
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Neuroscience

“TO MY FELLOW GRADUATES, I WISH YOU THE BEST OF LUCK AND I CAN’T WAIT FOR OUR REUNIONS AT XPRESSIONS AND FOOTBALL GAMES! I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT YOU WILL ALL LEAD SUCCESSFUL AND HAPPY FUTURES”

Mohamad Talab
College of Engineering; Mechanical Engineering; Bio Engineering

Izziah Thabath
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; Gender and Health

Maya Yassin
College of Engineering; Bio-engineering

“KEEP STRIVING, NO MATTER WHAT. EVERYONE AND ANYONE HAS THE ABILITY TO REACH THEIR GOALS, ALL IT TAKES IS DEDICATION, ENDURANCE, AND TIME. DO NOT LISTEN TO THOSE AROUND YOU, ONLY HEAR THEIR PERSPECTIVES. SET YOUR MIND AND FOLLOW THROUGH.”
Graduate Students
Graduate Students

Khulood Aboalsaud
School of Dentistry;
Master of Science in Dental Hygiene; Department of Periodontics and Oral Medicine

Silan Fadlallah
Stephen M. Ross School of Business; Master of Management

Ali Fakih
Stephen M. Ross School of Business; Master of Management

Samah Mkanna
School of Education; Post Degree Certification Program - Physics

Seif Saqallah
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, Law School, Rackham Graduate School;
Master of Arts - Modern Middle Eastern and North African Studies; Juris Doctor - Law

“Well done and well doing; I commend you!”
“My professors and my friends I will always remember you and remember how you trust me to be what I am right now and how you always support me” - Atheer Alhajri

“Thank you to my loving family, my supportive partner Issa, my amazing friends, and professors Alexander Knysh and Behrad Aghaei for their guidance throughout undergrad.” - Nour Ali

“Thank you to my parents, brothers, and friends that have become family. Couldn’t have done this without your continuous love and support!” - Haya Beydoun

“Thank you to everyone who helped me throughout these past years, I couldn’t have made it to this point without my friends and family.” - Fatima Bouhamdan

“Infinitely grateful for all of the opportunities I have been given, growth I have experienced, and close friends I have made during the past couple of years. Go Blue!” - Amjad El Othmani

“A warm thank you to my loved ones. Though I have graduated, it is the love and belief of my family that helped me sail through all the challenges I have faced and allow me to achieve the success in my academics and career.” - Laura Hattar

“To my parents, I want to thank you for the unconditional love and support the past four years. The opportunity to study at the University of Michigan was only made possible through your encouragement. To my sister and best friend, I am beyond grateful to have had you at my side, and I am so excited to witness all of the amazing things you accomplish here. Go blue!” - Suzanne Irani

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“Thank you to my loving Holy Trinity for everything and thank you to my family for your endless support!” - Ann Maya

“I’m thankful for the community around me at this school. It’s helped me create a lot of lifelong friends and memories that I’ll cherish forever.” - Fadi Moaikel

“Thankful for my parents. I wouldn’t be here without them and their sacrifices.” - Sunia Sadeghi

“Thank you to the Arab community for making me who I am today and pushing me to defy my own expectations. I hope you all continue to uplift those around you. Never be afraid to reach out to those around you! And thank you mama and baba for supporting me from day 1, I love you!” - Nora Sharba

“Thank you Allah for allowing me to proceed to this stage and helping me throughout this journey. Thank you mama for supporting and reassuring me every step of the way and thank you to my sister Aida for believing me and helping me achieve this goal.” - Mohamad Talab

“Mom and Dad, Thank you for instilling me with a strong passion for learning. I am who I am today because of your effort, guidance, and support. Thank you for everything!” - Samah Mkanna
Staff & Faculty
“Trust yourself and remember to make space for your own growth and well-being. Be open to change and don’t be afraid to take risks and to make mistakes. Remember where you’ve come from. Congratulations! Be proud of yourselves and all that you’ve achieved.”

Charlotte Karem Albrecht
Assistant Professor;
Arab and Muslim American Studies, American Culture; Department of Women’s and Gender Studies

“Liberation is a praxis; the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” —Paulo Freire  Congratulations, Class of 2021!

Ethriam Brammer
Assistant Dean & DEI Implementation Lead; Rackham Graduate School

“To all of the Arab, Chaldean, and MENA students: I have had the pleasure of getting to know many of you, whether you were a student or I attended one of the many events and fundraisers you helped put together. You have all impacted this campus and left a legacy for future MENA students to follow.”

Matthew Stiffler
Lecturer; American Culture and Arab & Muslim American Studies

“Congratulations Class of 2021! You did it! During this moment, I ask for all of you to use this time to thank yourself, to love yourself, and to be grateful for everything you have accomplished. Graduating from the University of Michigan is just the beginning of your amazing journey in life. Remember that there is beauty in everyone’s journey. Everyone’s story consists of many different chapters. Some chapters are a bit shorter than others. Some chapters are a bit funnier. And some chapters are a bit more serious. The beauty is in living through all of those chapters.”

Javier Solorzano
Program Manager; Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs

“Congratulations Class of 2021! Reinvention may become a hallmark of your generation, the ability to adapt and use resiliency as you build your future. Remember that was you embark on your new journey! The University Career Center is here to help you in your job search process and beyond. We believe in you!”

Joelle Fundaro Randall
Assistant Director; University Career Center

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Regents and Statements

Jordan B. Acker, Huntington Woods
Michael J. Behm, Grand Blanc
Mark J. Bernstein, Ann Arbor
Paul W. Brown, Ann Arbor
Sarah Hubbard, Okemos
Denise Ilitch, Bingham Farms, chair
Ron Weiser, Ann Arbor
Katherine E. White, Ann Arbor
Mark S. Schlissel (ex officio)
Territorial Acknowledgement

The University of Michigan was founded through the Treaty of Fort Meigs in 1817, when the Anishinaabeg - the Three Fires Confederacy of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi - along with their neighbors, the Seneca, Delaware, Shawnee, and Wyandot nations ceded portions of their land so that their children could be educated.

Through these words of acknowledgement, their ancestral, traditional, and contemporary ties to this land and the founding of the University are renewed and reaffirmed.

The University of Michigan Statement of Affirmative Action

The University of Michigan, as an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer, complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding nondiscrimination and affirmative action, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The University of Michigan is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination and equal opportunity for all persons regardless of race, sex*, color, religion, creed, national origin or ancestry, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, or Vietnam-era veteran status in employment, educational programs and activities, and admissions. Inquiries or complaints may be addressed to the Senior Director for Institutional Equity and Title IX/Section 504 Coordinator, Office for Institutional Equity, 2072 Administrative Services Building, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1432, 734-763-0235, TTY 734-647-1388. For other University of Michigan information call 734-764-1817.

Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression

The University of Michigan strives to create an open form in which diverse opinions can be expressed and heard. Members of the University community, speakers, artists, and other invited guests have a right to express their views and opinions, and the University will protect that right. The University also supports the rights of those with differing views to express their opinions. In the interest of protecting these rights for all, University representatives may warn anyone unduly interfering with a speaker of performer’s freedom of expression, and if the warnings are not heeded, may remove those individuals from the building. The policy extends and affirms University policies set forth by our Civil Liberties Board in our Student Handbook; and in the U-M Standard Practice Guide; Regents Ordinance Article XII, Section 1; and state statutes.
These symbols represent the cultural graduation ceremonies that are coordinated annually through the Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives.

Top left to right: Black Celebratory, Native American Graduation, La Celebración Latina

Bottom left to right: Middle Eastern/North African Graduation, First Generation Graduation, Asian & Pacific Islander Graduation

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