

Qatari Women Push Boundaries to Excel in Media Thanks To Qatar Foundation

Doha, 6 May 2014 – An increasing number of ambitious, young Qatari women are overcoming conventional attitudes and honing their creative skills, in order to pursue a career in the media industry.

Although cultural sensitivities related to women's role in the media prevail, the future looks bright for the younger generation. The evolution towards a more participatory environment can be seen in the rising number of outstanding female graduates at Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q), an educational establishment specialising in media within the campus of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development.

Sara Abdulaziz Al Derham, 21, is a positive example of this change. She has earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Communication from NU-Q, with a major in Media Industries and Technology. Her passion for the field of communication knows no bounds, as is evident from her exemplary university performance and pursuit of extracurricular activities.

Despite being faced with some resistance from family members regarding her choice of major, Sara felt it was necessary to persevere and follow her dreams. Initially, she was interested in a career in medicine and volunteered at a local hospital during her time in high school, but she soon had a change of heart. She attributes this to her desire for a dynamic and versatile career that builds upon her interest in photography, art and debate.

"It was like this moment when I had an epiphany. I had to stop and ask myself which major would allow me to do all the things I love and would not limit me," explains Sara. "I wanted a field that constantly changes and where I could learn in the process and experiment. This was the ideal choice for me, because right now I can report, photograph, make short films, and research."

As one of Qatar Foundation's top-ranking partner universities, NU-Q's superior academic program helps prepare students for a productive career by equipping them with hands-on training.

Determined to prove her potential, Sara has worked very hard to make a difference both on and off campus. She has maintained a commendable Grade Point Average throughout her four years at university and has taken up several leadership roles, including President of the Culture Club at NU-Q.

Moreover, after learning how to produce and direct film, she felt it was necessary to be true to her heritage and culture by working on projects that could showcase her Qatari identity. "I was one of the first students who started filming in Arabic at university. I always try to relate my films to something within my culture, heritage and background. I want to be one of the people who pioneer in creating the real identity of Qatari cinema," she says.

The hardworking graduate has wasted no time applying her skills and insight to a number of films that have garnered national and regional recognition. In 2012, her film *Ghazil – The Story of Rashed and Jawaher* was selected for screening at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival in Qatar and the Gulf Film Festival in Dubai.

To further complement her interest in media and culture, Sara has completed a Certificate in Middle East Studies from NU-Q. In the future, the high-achiever hopes to join Qatar's diplomatic corps. "I want to be part of the government and to participate in the diplomatic field. I would like to be involved in decision-making and in the amendment of laws," she explains.

Sara's tenacity to lead and help others choose the right career prompted her to establish a non-profit voluntary organisation in 2011 called 'Ta2heel'. The program's goal is to prepare high school students for university by developing their leadership and communication skills, while giving them a broad overview of educational opportunities. This year, Ta2heel was awarded Student Organisation of the Year at the Hamad bin Khalifa University Takreem Award Ceremony.

And the future looks promising. Sara has applied to graduate school in the UK and hopes to pursue a degree in Creative Media and Cultural Studies before joining Qatar Airways. As she wraps up one chapter of her life and begins another, she advises students, “Plan your life the way you want because at the end of the day, it’s your choices that are going to take you places.”

Haya Al-Mannai, 21, is another exceptional Northwestern University in Qatar graduate with a passion for journalism and a commitment to lifelong learning. In addition to earning her Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism, she also holds a Certificate in Public Relations and

أرى فيكم آفاقاً مدهشة فيكم آفاق مستقبل جديد
نعيش الحاضر بآداب المستقبل
نعمل لخدمة مجتمعاتنا
تعلّموا لهذا اليوم الذي أصبح من آفاق المستقبل

a Certificate in Middle East Studies. Haya plans to pursue a postgraduate education in Middle East studies in the near future.

“Journalism is definitely something I want to do in terms of a career. My inspiration was that I have always loved to write and read. I’ve read since I was a child and I also remember watching television networks, and that is what sparked my interest,” she says. “I really want to do magazine and feature writing, and I also want to do multimedia journalism.”

Although her choice of career was a little unusual, Haya explains that her family was extremely supportive of her decision and is very proud to see her reach the end of the line.

Commenting on the unique program at NU-Q, she says: “We have to push boundaries and get out of our comfort zone in terms of writing stories and interviewing people, but it pays off in the end. It prepared me because I didn’t just grow as a student, or as a person, but it also gave me a taste of what to expect when I graduate.”

She adds: “I definitely feel that over the years more and more Qatari girls will enrol in Northwestern. I think people’s perceptions are changing and there’s more room for women in journalism.”

During the course of her study, Haya has participated in a number of extracurricular activities and played a role in student government. She also successfully completed a journalism residency at Bloomsbury Publishing in the UK.

The bright student explains: “My residency played a big part in making me a much more confident and independent person. The best thing about the whole experience was that I got to apply the skills that I learned at NU-Q.”

In terms of the future, Haya harbours big dreams. “I hope that one day I’ll have at least two Master’s degrees and I would have realised my objective of contributing considerably to journalism in Qatar, specifically in writing and video journalism.”

-ENDS-