

GRAD CABLE

The official newsletter of the Texas A&M University at Qatar
Graduate Student Association



UPCOMING EVENTS/NEWS

NOV. 26

READING DAY
(NO CLASS, OFFICES OPEN)

DEC. 1

DEADLINE TO APPLY FOR
TAMU PHD

CONGRATULATIONS TO DR. NIMIR
ELBASHIR ON BEING AWARDED
THE 'DISTINGUISHED INVENTOR
OF THE YEAR 2020' AT THE QF RDI
SHOWCASE

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE
FOLLOWING GRADUATE
STUDENTS WHO RECENTLY
DEFENDED THEIR THESIS!

MASTERS

KALTHAM AL KAABI
SHAZA SHEHAB

Matrimony and Masters

by Ola Srour

Our story starts at the American University of Beirut where we met during the junior year of our undergraduate studies. What started as friendship quickly bloomed into something more as we found our interests, ambitions, and plans crossing.

After earning our BE degrees, we decided to go abroad to enrich our profiles and experiences. We applied to universities all over the world in order to increase the likelihood of being accepted together. Fortunately, we got accepted into many different programs and could choose where to go next. After a thorough screening of all the available options, we accepted the offer granted by TAMUQ. We believed that joining an institution with high-impact research and outstanding regional and worldwide ranking would open many doors for PhD, our ultimate goal.

We decided it would be more advantageous to get married before arriving to Qatar so we got married a few days...

... before traveling. Unfortunately, due to a visa delay, only Mohammad flew to Doha while I stayed in Beirut for my first two months of graduate school and joined the classes from the next spring semester. That initial period was not as hard as it could have been due to the extreme help and full support of the office of graduate studies, the dean's office, and the chemical engineering department.

The past two years in Qatar were as amazing and enriching as we hoped them to be. Between faculty, staff, and friends, we met different people who we now consider family and who made living away from home considerably easier. Qatar's multicultural nature, particularly Education City, has provided us with an exceptional experience where we could meet new people with completely different backgrounds yet feel that we are at home. Living in Qatar has been comfortable for us as everything we need is easily accessible. We even invited my parents to visit this exciting city where they had a marvelous time. They keep thanking God that we ended up in Doha after they saw the comfort we are enjoying and the people around us.



Under the guidance of excellent supervisors, we were able to finish our degrees and successfully defend our theses *on the same day* last summer. The research experience here has been unique as we got to learn a lot beside what we were taught in classes, one of our goals for moving abroad. My personal experience was even more exciting as I was (and still am) a member of the safety center, MKOPSC-Q, which opened several doors for me, and introduced me to the world of safety engineering via the center's various activities (conferences, continuing education, research, safety analyses, trainings, writing, ...). We were both able to keep a high profile which allowed us to continue at TAMU as PhD students starting this Fall.

As successful as our master's experience was, it was even better during the COVID-19 lockdown. I can't imagine that we would have handled such a bad situation with such positivity if we weren't in Qatar: a country that handled the pandemic in a remarkable way, ensuring everyone's safety. It has been very hard to maintain a healthy life while staying home for most of the last 6 months, particularly the first 100 days where we were in quarantine. To do that we woke up and started the day working with lunch breaks as if at work in normal times. We made sure to have our meals together as much as possible to communicate and spend time together as the rest of the day each one of us would be in a separate room with their own laptop and materials. From time to time, we felt the pressure of staying home. We would then take a break or go out and we update our work schedule accordingly to make up for the delay. During quarantine, we maintained a healthy and happy relationship, and this pandemic only proved to us how made we are for each other.

A new country, a master's degree, a global pandemic and now a PhD degree. Numerous experiences and only one person always by my side during all times, at all places, in all situations. We both use this relationship to provide a silent boost for a healthy life. Nonetheless, being in Qatar was the blessing that changed our lives forever. We see in Qatar the ideal place, especially for a couple, to build their own small home within this big diverse community. Our experience abroad in Qatar has been extremely successful, and we have high expectations for the next phase!

“I’ve got nothing to hide” is irrelevant. So why is privacy important?

by Muhammad Ziauddin

“Arguing that you don't care about the right to privacy because you have nothing to hide is no different than saying you don't care about free speech because you have nothing to say.” is a famous quote from Edward Snowden whom we all might know of. In today's world technology plays an integral role in our lives and everything we perform which could be as simple as a daily routine is being logged by someone miles away. We are being watched every day, every minute and every task we do is logged.

Not to mention, Privacy is now almost a trivial matter in a common man's world. Little to no one has

IMAGE SOURCE: SIA INC., 2019



cognizance of the digital world we live in. The motive for all the tech tycoons out there is simple - “Data is wealth!”. Many now would be thinking, “Well I have got nothing to hide, so why should I care?”. It does not matter if you have nothing to hide, privacy is a fundamental right that every individual is obligated to get that allows us to have freedom of thought and expression. Our freedom of expression is under jeopardy by mass surveillance of our internet activity. We can observe this from the

recent US elections. People were profiled and targeted by specific advertisements that ultimately led to the manipulation of the voters. Your search for a product on Amazon appears instantly the next minute as ads of similar products on Instagram. Pam Dixon of the World Privacy Foundation has new congressional testimony where she highlights the deleterious effects of predictive modelling. This was in the year 2013 and the ways to exploit us have only been expanding since. This is one of the plethora of articles/news that has come on data mining. A week back Facebook has sent a letter to shut down the work of two NYU researchers working on political ad targeting. The places we go, the phone calls we make, the browsing we do can all reveal our political and religious belief to the robots at the helm. With enough data and time and with advancing AI algorithms, your next move and behavioral pattern can be predicted!

We can divide our data into two categories: Important and unimportant. The important includes passwords, credit card info and other personal details. While the unimportant or trivial... includes

.... the online browsing activity, the movies you watched, the posts you liked, the pages you follow. Most people take the least effort to protect the first category but fail to realize that the other also plays a vital role in one's perimeter of privacy. If this data goes into the hands of the wrongdoers, it can do a lot of damage.

Google and Facebook might have the best security available but the problem arises when a third party comes into the picture. We have used our Google accounts to sign up a lot of services. At this point, the information is no longer protected by Google but by the service you just signed up. It does not matter if you have a dozen CCTV cameras in your home if leave your door unlocked. The recent documentary titled 'The Social Dilemma' is an excellent ELI5 to understand visually the underworld data mining mafia. It is up now up to us to spread awareness on the topic and enable people to make wise decisions and break loose from the shackles laid upon us by the digital world we live in.

PHOTO BY SAFEER HAFEEZ



A link to Pam Dixon's congressional testimony can be found here: <https://www.banking.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Dixon%20Testimony%206-11-19.pdf>.

'The Social Dilemma' is a Netflix produced documentary and can be watched here (needs subscription): <https://www.netflix.com/qa-en/title/81254224>

ADDITIONAL DEADLINES

MASTER'S - NON-THESIS

NOV. 6 - LAST DAY TO TAKE FINAL EXAMINATION
NOV. 10 - LAST DAY FOR ALL STUDENTS TO DROP COURSES WITH NO PENALTY (Q-DROP), 4:30PM. LAST DAY TO OFFICIALLY WITHDRAW FROM THE UNIVERSITY
NOV. 24 - LAST DAY TO APPLY FOR GRADUATION

MASTER'S - THESIS

NOV. 10 - LAST DAY FOR ALL STUDENTS TO DROP COURSES WITH NO PENALTY (Q-DROP), 4:30PM. LAST DAY TO OFFICIALLY WITHDRAW FROM THE UNIVERSITY
NOV. 24 - LAST DAY TO APPLY FOR GRADUATION

DOCTORAL

NOV. 10 - LAST DAY FOR ALL STUDENTS TO DROP COURSES WITH NO PENALTY (Q-DROP), 4:30PM. LAST DAY TO OFFICIALLY WITHDRAW FROM THE UNIVERSITY
NOV. 24 - LAST DAY TO APPLY FOR GRADUATION