AUB Students Take on Leadership Roles at Arabian Days Festival in Abu Dhabi

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The American University of Beirut (AUB) announced that ten of its students participated in the prestigious Arabian Days Festival in Abu Dhabi, marking a strong presence at one of the region's foremost celebrations of Arabic language and culture. The students' involvement underscores AUB's commitment to cultural engagement and highlights the significance of this international festival.

Arabian Days Festival: A Celebration of Arabic Language and Culture

Now in its third edition, the Arabian Days Festival is a three-day cultural event organized by the Abu Dhabi Center for Arabic Language and hosted at Manarat Al Saadiyat in Abu Dhabi. Timed to coincide with UNESCO's World Arabic Language Day on December 18, the festival has become an annual celebration of Arabic as an integral part of identity, heritage, and creativity. The 2025 program featured an array of high-profile panel discussions, art exhibitions, live concerts, traditional bonfire storytelling sessions, and other vibrant cultural activities that reimagined the role of the Arabic language in contemporary society.

AUB Students' Active Participation

During the festival, the group of ten AUB students took on active roles beyond attendance. They participated in panel discussions and even led *"Jalsat Samar"* bonfire gatherings—informal evening storytelling sessions around the fire—engaging audiences with tales from Arabic folklore. The students were also involved in organizing conference sessions and behind-the-scenes coordination, ensuring a strong and visible AUB presence throughout the event. Their contributions were warmly received by festival organizers and attendees alike.

Showcasing Leadership: Rawane Helou's Role

One standout example of student leadership was the contribution of Rawane Helou, a PhD student at AUB, who served as a moderator for two prominent panel discussions. In one session, Helou led a conversation with renowned Syrian singer Lena Chamamyan and Lebanese poet Dr. Mahdi Mansour, exploring how musical heritage and poetry intersect in contemporary creative expression. In another session, she moderated a discussion featuring an award-winning Emirati poet alongside celebrated Emirati musicians, bringing together diverse perspectives on Emirati folklore and modern art. Helou's skilled moderation and insightful questions exemplified the caliber of AUB's student engagement at the festival.

“Participating in the Arabian Days Festival was a transformative experience," said Rawane Helou. “Moderating discussions with such inspiring artists and intellectuals showed how students can take on leadership roles on an international stage. It allowed me to engage directly with creative minds and highlight our passion for Arabic language and culture."

Partnership and Ongoing Collaboration

This exceptional opportunity was made possible through a partnership between the Sheikh Zayed Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies at AUB and the Abu Dhabi Center for Arabic Language. The collaboration enabled AUB students to not only attend but actively contribute to the festival's programs, reflecting a shared mission to promote the Arabic language and cultural exchange.

“We are extremely proud to see AUB students stepping into leadership roles at major cultural events like the Arabian Days Festival," said Professor Bilal Orfali, Sheikh Zayed Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies at AUB. “Their engagement in Abu Dhabi—following their participation in the Congress for Creative Industries this past September, and ahead of their involvement in the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair next April—demonstrates AUB's commitment to fostering young leaders in the Arabic language and cultural sectors. It is inspiring to witness our students championing Arabic culture on such prominent international stages."