

Universal Academy of Florida

# Guidance Counseling Corner

June 28, 2018

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Special Edition Newsletter: The Champions of 2018

## A Message from the Counselor



Bismillah Ar Rahman Ar Raheem. My journey with the esteemed Class of 2018 began in the fall of 2016. This was the start of their sophomore year and it was also my first year as the Guidance and College Counselor at UAF. Within the first few months here, this group of students struck me as an

exceptionally intelligent, articulate, analytical, sophisticated, and polished body of young men and women. I saw before me a group of critical thinkers, seasoned debaters, fearless leaders, and skilled artists. They brought with them their brilliance and talent not only to the classroom, but the UAF community at large.

As is my standard practice, I began working closely with this group at the start of their junior year, through to the end of their senior year. I had the privilege of working with each student personally as we created an individualized plan to achieve their goals toward college acceptance and earning desired scholarships. In our many sessions together, both as a group and individually, we addressed the many aspects of what constitutes an excellent application to college, including but not limited to: college essay development, standardized testing timeline and strategy, developing a resume of activities, collecting letters of recommendation, visiting colleges, learning about college scholarships, filling out applications, and making a final decision with thoughtful and reflective care.

The struggle for me, year after year, is how to convince qualified and highly capable students to apply to schools that are a competitive match/fit for them, schools matching their academic aptitude, skill set, and potential. This struggle is due to multiple competing factors such as: the convenience of attending a local college, parental desire to keep children close to home (often culturally based), students' lack of self-confidence,

and often an unfounded belief that they will be rejected. However, this was one of the first years in UAF history that several students, from the Class of 2018, broke past these barriers, took a chance, challenged themselves, and applied to several schools outside of their comfort zone.

By no means was this journey an easy one. On my end, as their counselor, it took a lot of persuading, supporting, guiding, but mostly repeatedly reminding my students:

**You have what it takes**

**You can do it**

On their end, it took hard work, discipline, commitment, and a relentless determination to build themselves and their application to their fullest potential. Whether it was studying day and night to achieve the desired test score, going through six drafts of their personal statement until it was just right, or showcasing their best self in alumni interviews, our students gave it their all to this stressful yet rewarding process. What followed did not disappoint!

Not only did students in the Class of 2018 make UAF history by having the courage and discipline to apply to high ranking schools, they made history this year by getting accepted into some of the most competitive schools in the country. The 37 graduates of the Class of 2018 were accepted to a combined total of 25 universities across 12 states, including 10 of the top 20 schools in the country. The combined scholarship offers they received from universities nationwide added to a lofty \$1,000,000, and nearly 2/3 of the class qualified for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program. Although I wish I could highlight the successes of each of our graduates, we will share with you the narratives of a few students, some of the Champions of the Class of 2018.

Lastly, a reminder to us all, as believers we should always strive for ihsan (excellence) in all our affairs, those of this world and more importantly our afterlife. Ultimately, all praise belongs to Allah (swt) and all success is from Him alone.

**Unaiza Malik, Guidance/College Counselor**

## To Tampa I'll Be True 🌿



Firstly, I'd like to preface my monologue by giving credit where it is undoubtedly due. Any successes of mine are inherently successes of UAF, and without the guidance of Sr. Unaiza, none of this would have been possible. I am grateful and humbled to have had such an amazing faculty and family supporting me throughout this entire process. Alhamdulillah.

To be quite honest, I never truly considered applying out of state until a few months into senior year. After speaking to Sr. Unaiza and many UAF alumni attending local colleges, I found myself met with an overwhelming majority of people advising me to learn from their mistakes and give myself options in the college application process. They asserted that this is an opportunity I will only get once in my lifetime, and it only makes sense that I gave it a fair shot. And so, I took a short leap of faith and committed to applying to colleges across the nation.

As an Ummah that prides itself on striving in the pursuit of excellence, I found it quite ironic that the vast majority of our students complacently settle on local colleges. Our families and communities have worked tirelessly in an effort to help us succeed, and it is imperative that we do their work justice. While everyone's path to success is not the same, as long as we do our part in opening up the doors of opportunity, we can have faith that Allah will guide us towards the path that is best for us.

The process of applying out is honestly much easier than it's made out to seem. It's very formulaic, and Common App organizes your work, making it easy to apply to numerous colleges simultaneously. This process is much like taking a test – the more you prepare, the less you worry about the results. Though waiting for admissions decisions was tiresome, receiving acceptances in the end made it all worth it. Nothing was more fulfilling than watching all my hard work pay off. And although acceptances are not to be expected, it's better to lose giving it your all than to sit on the sidelines watching. As long as you've done your part, you can rest assured that the results are in the hands of Allah swt.

After receiving my college decisions, I was blessed to have been given a few options to choose from. I prayed salat al-istikhara and found that life has ironically steered me full-circle towards USF in the end. And although I ultimately decided to stay, I confidently believe that the college application process has taught me invaluable life lessons I would have struggled to learn otherwise.

Whether you decide to go to a local community college or a prestigious Ivy League school, give yourself options so that your decision is one of true choice. The opportunities lie right at your fingertips, and now it is only a matter of whether or not you choose to seize them.

**Farres Bayyat, Class of 2018**

### ACCEPTANCES

**UCLA**

**UC San Diego**

**Northwestern University**

**University of Florida**

**University of South Florida**



## Yasin Joins Gator Nation



As a student I've always done my best to perform well in school, however it wasn't until the start of my senior year that I began thinking about the next step in my education. I had decided I wanted to pursue a career in medicine but where I would go remained unanswered. I wanted to give myself the best chance of succeeding so after planning with my awesome guidance counselor, Sr. Unaiza, we decided I should try my chances with not just USF and UF but the big shots like Harvard and Johns Hopkins.

**"You must expect great things of yourself before you can do them."  
Michael Jordan**

The process was very tedious. I had to make sure I had exceptional grades and even better test scores. Each application would take as long as 3 hours, asking complex questions to see whether I would be a good fit in that particular institution.

After the process was complete I felt at ease because the hard work was out of the way, but the most painful part was the waiting. As the deadlines grew near my anxiousness intensified. Thoughts such as, "I don't have what it takes to get in" and "Do I even deserve to get into these prestigious universities?" would constantly race my mind. But with the support of Sr. Unaiza and my friends I was content with any outcome. When the decisions came out it was one of the most exciting times in my life. Seeing the acceptance letters was a feeling like no other. Although the rejection letters were a bit painful, everyone around me comforted me and helped me focus on the many successes. I thank Allah for allowing me the opportunity to go through this experience. For anyone out there uncertain about applying out or even fearful of the process, remember the quote above.

**Yasin Adam, Class of 2018**

### ACCEPTANCES

**John Hopkins University**

**University of Washington**

**Vanderbilt University**

**Washington University in St. Louis**

**Northwestern University**

**University of Florida**

**University of Michigan**

**University of South Florida**

## Anas' Journey to the Windy City

I, Alhamdulillah, was accepted into one of the most reputable and distinguished universities in the nation, ranking third among the top universities in 2017. My journey in applying for college was a long and exhausting one. While deciding where to apply, I did not want to limit myself to USF. Believing that USF would be a waste of my potential, I pushed myself to shoot for the top universities in the country. This, I knew, would not be easy, as some of the most qualified applicants in the U.S. don't get into the school of their choice. Therefore, I knew I had to make myself stand out by, improving my test scores, and participating in a multitude of extracurricular activities that showed each university why I was a qualified applicant.

Creating an application that accurately represented my qualifications was a tedious task. It required hours of writing and editing essays, answering short answer questions, ensuring that every detail of the application was perfect, and constantly making dua for strength and patience in this difficult process. This, however, was not the most frustrating and stressful aspect. The most mentally exhausting part was waiting for the decision dates to arrive. I constantly asked myself if I could have done more to improve my application which made a three month wait for decisions feel like an eternity.

At the end, it was worth every second. I saw the fruit of my labor. All the late nights researching schools and writing essays, every dollar spent on the applications, and all the hard work had paid off. Alhamdulillah, Allah had granted me the opportunity to attend my number one choice. While I was the one accepted in this prestigious university, there were many people that stood with me and without them I would not be where I am today: my mother, who was there for me emotionally through every step of the way, my father, who gave me priceless advice during every decision I had to make, the greatest counselor in the world, Sister Unaiza, guiding me through the process, and a wonderful group of friends who supported me despite knowing it meant I would move away. I advise everyone that is getting ready for the application process to not settle for USF or limit your options. May Allah (SWT) grant us what is good in this world and in the hereafter and protect us from the punishment of the fire.

Anas Farrag, Class of 2018

### ACCEPTANCES

**University of Chicago**

**University of Notre Dame**

**University of Florida**

**University of South Florida**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**CHICAGO**