



UKH ALUMNI ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 5
SEPTEMBER 2024

WWW.UKH.EDU.KRD

BINAR FK

Fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and Master of Global Affairs candidate

This is not just a personal story; it reflects a deep commitment and dedication to a greater purpose, inspired by a love for Kurdistan and a commitment to its people. It's a classic UKHIAN tale of relentless learning, tireless work, unwavering dedication, and ultimate triumph. It is the story of another proud UKHIAN, carrying the essence of home in every endeavour.



The story begins with a passion for media and journalism deeply ingrained in one's being. At just 16, the aspiring journalist took their first steps by writing pieces for newspapers and media outlets. Soon, the narrative took a dramatic turn; ISIS unleashed a devastating assault, seizing vast territories in Iraq, the Kurdistan Region, and Syria. Thrust into chaos, the story found itself on the front lines, documenting the harrowing war and conflict from the first day to the last, working with numerous international media and news agencies.

As the war drew to a close, the story evolved from the chaos of conflict to the complex world of political media and communications. This journey included work with organisations such as the European Union, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, YouGov, GIZ, and several policymakers, including the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

After a decade immersed in the field; from war coverage and journalism to media, politics, and research; the story reached a new pinnacle. Today, the story continues with the pursuit of a Master of Global Affairs at the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame, and as a proud recipient of a Kroc Institute Fellowship for International Peace Studies.

Recently, I embarked on a six-month field placement as a Research and Analysis Intern at the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) in their Washington, D.C. headquarters. CEPPS is dedicated to fostering resilient, inclusive, and accountable democracies, championing human rights, and promoting effective governance across over 140 countries.

UKH's visionary approach and rigorous education have shaped leaders with the intelligence and resilience to tackle challenges both at home and abroad. It's a classic UKHIAN tale of relentless learning, tireless work, unwavering dedication, and ultimate triumph. It is the story of another proud UKHIAN, carrying the essence of home in every endeavour.

SARA KANIMARANY

Founder of Bee Gifting

My journey with UKH began in the autumn of 2011, during a time when I was uncertain about my future. Despite feeling lost, I managed to secure a place in the Computer Engineering programme as one of the top students from the Access programme. This early struggle taught me valuable lessons about perseverance and finding my own path. UKH's supportive environment encouraged me to start working during the summer of my first year, which led me to begin my career in humanitarian aid work. After graduating with a degree in Computer Engineering in 2016, I took on various roles in humanitarian aid, such as data management, project assistance, and reporting.

Following graduation, I pursued my dream of starting a business by launching a logistics company in Turkey. While the venture was initially successful, being away from home made me miss it deeply, which only fuelled my aspirations further. However, the pandemic brought challenges that caused my business to decline, leaving me with plenty of free time. During this period, I began exploring design, drawing inspiration from my culture, heritage, and Kurdish poetry. What started as a simple hobby quickly turned into a passion project.

One day, needing a bag, I decided to print my designs on tote bags, combining personal and cultural significance with practicality. As I learned more about recycling and printing, my apartment soon filled with bags featuring my designs and cultural inspirations. When I prepared to move back temporarily, I found myself showcasing my products at a UKH alumni event, which led to the official launch of my brand, Bee-Gifting, in the spring of 2021.

I started with 25 tote bag designs as a social project to share our culture with young people and the world. Bee-Gifting now focuses on recycling and personalisation, offering gifts with artistic embroidery and prints. The project has established strong partnerships with fellow UKH alumni and has set up sell-points through the open support of Lala Candles Studio. It's inspiring to see our bags, adorned with Kurdish poems and prints, reaching people from the Middle East to Europe and America, representing our connection to our homeland and our hope for a greener, preserved mother Earth.

Running Bee-Gifting has been a rollercoaster, but I'm hopeful for its future. I plan to set up a studio to expand our recycled paper products with seeds, promoting a greener Kurdistan through culture, heritage, and environmental awareness. I'm grateful to my fellow alumni for their support and network, which have been crucial in advancing our projects and serving our community. I look forward to continued collaboration and innovation, striving for a cleaner environment and a brighter future for our planet and homeland.



AYAR RASOOL

Multidisciplinary Entrepreneur and Strategic Consultant

My journey at UKH feels like something straight out of a film; perhaps something akin to *Good Will Hunting*. I vividly remember my first interview with Dr. Tahsin, the head of the faculty. He wasn't particularly impressed and told me that I wasn't qualified to be at UKH. After the interview, I returned to my hometown of Kirkuk, and it was an incredibly painful experience. I found myself lying on the floor of my room, staring at the ceiling for hours. But then I thought, perhaps this is what UKH is all about; separating those who give up from those who persist. I decided I would not be one of those who walked away.

I returned to the university and requested another interview. By some stroke of luck, Dr. Tahsin didn't recognise me; I assume he had already interviewed so many people. There I was, waiting for my turn, but let me take you back a bit. Before heading to the interview, I spent nearly five days speaking to all the students who had been through the process before. I was trying to gather insights into Tahsin's personality and the types of questions he might ask. After collecting enough information, I was finally ready for the interview. When the moment came, Tahsin asked me a few questions, and to my relief, he liked my answers. Of course, he did as I already knew what he was going to ask. But there was still another issue: my grades. He said it was impossible for me to be admitted. I remember telling him that I'd even accept a job as a cleaner at the university, just like the protagonist in *Good Will Hunting*. He laughed and placed me in the Politics and International Relations department. How I ended up graduating from the Business department is a story for another time.

I was never the brightest student. I often struggled with exams and barely attended classes. It's not something I'm proud of, and I won't make excuses for it. My financial situation at the time was dire, and I had to work long hours after university just to make ends meet. It was a struggle I kept hidden from my teachers and friends. I lived two different lives: one at university and one at work. Despite all this, I was the kind of future leader UKH was looking for. I can confidently say I was friends with most of the students. I remember one of our lecturers, Michellene, who taught us Sociol-



ogy. She once told us that the people you know are your social capital, and you can turn your social capital into money. She was right; 90 per cent of my current clients come through my UKH connections. Back in the day, I led the UKH+ Facebook page, which didn't exactly endear me to the university management, especially the security. But I believed in the power of unity and the importance of freedom of speech. UKH+ provided that platform for our students. We achieved a lot, from bringing back students who had left, to changing rules, and even improving the food in the cafeteria. I've since worked with Apple TV, Netflix, and HBO, earning an Emmy, two nominations, BAFTA nods, and local recognition. Although I don't see myself as a great filmmaker, I've been a risk-taker in the right place at the right time.

I'm particularly proud of my work on documentaries like *WOMEN, Sisters in Arms*, and *The Crossing*, as well as collaborations with BuzzFeed, Vice, BBC, and PBS.

Stop trying to control everything around you. Just give your best to everything with good intentions, and you will never end up in bad places. Next time you see a fellow UKHian, say hello without considering who they are, their political background, or what their father did in the past. Only you can shape your future, and UKH is the best place to start doing that.

DIANA KAMAL

HR Generalist at Toters Delivery Company



It does not matter how slowly you progress, as long as you do not stop. In 2011, I embarked on my journey in Politics and International Relations at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH). It was an exciting time, yet filled with uncertainty and numerous challenges. There were moments when I nearly gave up, feeling as though time was slipping away. However, those moments of doubt were integral in shaping the person I am today, both personally and professionally.

In 2018, after seven transformative years, I graduated. The struggles were indeed worthwhile, moulding me into someone ready to face the world. My career began immediately after graduation with a role at the European Technology & Training Centre (ETTC), where I worked as a Reintegration Counsellor. Although my time there was brief, it served as a stepping-stone to something greater. By November 2018, I transitioned into a new role as an HR Supervisor at Logistics Mustawfy Group of Companies. It wasn't long before I was promoted to Group HR Manager, a position I held until February 2022. In this role, I oversaw HR operations for numerous subsidiaries, each presenting its own set of challenges and opportunities.

Subsequently, I joined Nandrlon Group as an HR Manager in the pharmaceutical sector, continuing my growth in a new industry. Most recently, I became an HR Generalist at Toters Delivery Company, responsible for the Kurdistan Region (KRD). This role demands flexibility, resilience, and a deep understanding of people—traits I honed during my time at UKH.

UKH didn't just teach me about Politics and International Relations; it developed my leadership and problem-solving skills. I remain grateful for every presentation I dreaded as a shy student, and for every moment that pushed me out of my comfort zone, as those experiences were preparing me for the real world. To UKH students: strive to do your best. You are the future leaders, and the world needs your strength and passion.



ALUMNI STORIES

DWEN A. CHAWSHEEN

**Head of the Information Management Section at the
Department of Media and Information for the KRG**

Reflecting on my time at the University of Kurdistan Hewlêr (UKH), I am genuinely grateful for how it has shaped my career and personal growth. My journey began in the summer of 2006 when I first heard about the new university opening in Kurdistan. The prospect of studying Information Technology, a field just beginning to develop in the region, immediately sparked my interest.

I vividly recall the excitement of receiving that phone call from UKH, inviting me to join the language programme. This call marked the beginning of a significant transformation in my life. The support from the language teaching staff, particularly Mr Brian Witheridge, was instrumental during those early days and helped me build a strong foundation in language.

By 2007, I became part of the inaugural cohort of students in the bachelor's programme in Information Technology at UKH. Being among the first students was both challenging and exhilarating. The curriculum, which combined theoretical knowledge with practical work, broadened my understanding of the possibilities within the IT field. I greatly appreciated the Department's commitment to a well-rounded education, which encouraged curiosity and personal growth.

Graduating in July 2010 as one of UKH's first alumni was a proud moment for me and marked the beginning of my professional career. To build on this foundation, I pursued a master's in information security at Royal Holloway, University of London. The

advanced knowledge and skills I acquired expanded my expertise and prepared me for more complex challenges.

With my undergraduate and master's degrees completed, I was ready to embark on my professional journey. Today, I serve as the Head of the Information Management Section at the Department of Media and Information for the KRG. In this role, I oversee various projects and initiatives that align with the department's objectives. Over the years, and despite numerous challenges, I have contributed to many strategic IT projects for the KRG, reinforcing my commitment to the region's development.

Kurdistan's digital transformation goals highlight the vital role of technology in enhancing local services. As the KRG aims to become a leading digital government, my experiences have underscored how technology can drive meaningful progress. The strong foundation from UKH has equipped me to contribute effectively to this transformation.

Looking back, I am deeply thankful for the opportunities UKH provided. The education, support, and experiences I gained there were crucial in shaping my career and personal growth. As I continue to advance in my field, I remain dedicated to making a positive impact in Kurdistan. Thank you, UKH, for being the cornerstone of my career and helping me achieve my goals. May God bless the staff, past and present.



BANAN AZAD

Human Resources Officer at UKH

In 2007, I received the wonderful news that I had been accepted to study at UKH, marking the beginning of an extraordinary educational journey. UKH's reputation as a leading institution, renowned for its academic excellence and innovative teaching methods, provided me with a solid foundation that has proven invaluable throughout my career. Graduating from such a prestigious university enabled me, as a fresh graduate, to secure a high-level position as a Change Management Officer at Huawei. This was a testament to UKH's commitment to producing highly skilled and employable graduates. The unparalleled support and dedication from my lecturers and teaching staff had a significant impact on my academic and professional development, reflecting UKH's commitment to fostering an environment where students are inspired and equipped to excel.

Six years ago, I was delighted to take up a position in the HR department at my Alma Mater, and it has been an absolute honour to serve my university and give back to an institution that gave me so much. Despite relocating from Sulaymaniyah to Erbil, UKH's warm and supportive community has made me feel at home. My educational journey continues as I pursue a master's degree in IT Management, and I eagerly anticipate many more fulfilling years at UKH, because UKH is an exceptional place to develop yourself and build a strong foundation for your future. UKH provides the resources, guidance, and opportunities to help you achieve your goals and reach your full potential.

HEDI AZAD

HR Specialist and Benefits Administrator

Graduating from the University of Kurdistan-Hewlêr in 2016 with a degree in Business and Management was a transformative experience. The university's ethos centred on developing future leaders, instilling confidence, and fostering a management mindset. The rigorous academic environment, combined with a diverse community, provided a strong foundation for my career.

At the University of Kurdistan-Hewlêr, I was encouraged to think critically, lead initiatives, and engage in various extracurricular activities. The curriculum was designed not only to impart knowledge but also to develop skills essential for real-world challenges. This holistic approach to education shaped my perspective and prepared me for the complexities of the professional world.

After graduation, I embarked on a career with international NGOs, utilising the skills and knowledge I had gained during my university years. My role in human resources allowed me to work across various sectors, including camp management, cash-for-shelter programmes, child safeguarding, and protection. Each position presented unique challenges and learning opportunities, enabling me to grow both personally and professionally.

I am currently employed at Sardar Group Companies as an HR Specialist and Benefits Administrator. In this role, I am responsible for managing the health insurance of over 1,500 employ-



ees. This position allows me to leverage my extensive HR experience to ensure that our employees receive the best possible benefits and support. Managing such a large and diverse workforce presents its own set of challenges, but it is immensely rewarding to know that my efforts contribute to the well-being of so many individuals.

To the younger generation, my advice is to cultivate a flexible mindset and strong communication skills. These qualities will open doors to better opportunities and pave the way for a successful and fulfilling career.