







*To the NYUAD Student Body;
Past, Present, and Future*





Contents

Our Beginnings	10
Our Spirit	18
Our Challenges	24
Our Stories	32
Our Octaves	40
Our Responsibility	48





shibboleth (n.)

A custom or belief, that acts as a test of belonging to a group, and can distinguish that group from others.





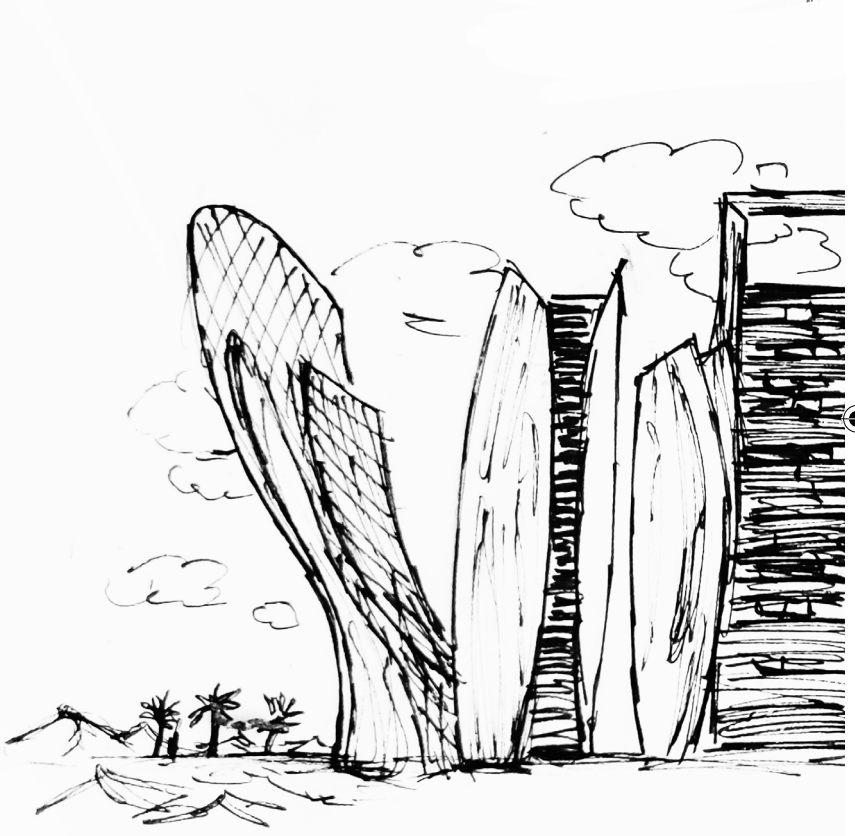
This is ours. From all previous generations of students as well as the ones you now see around you – welcome to NYU Abu Dhabi.

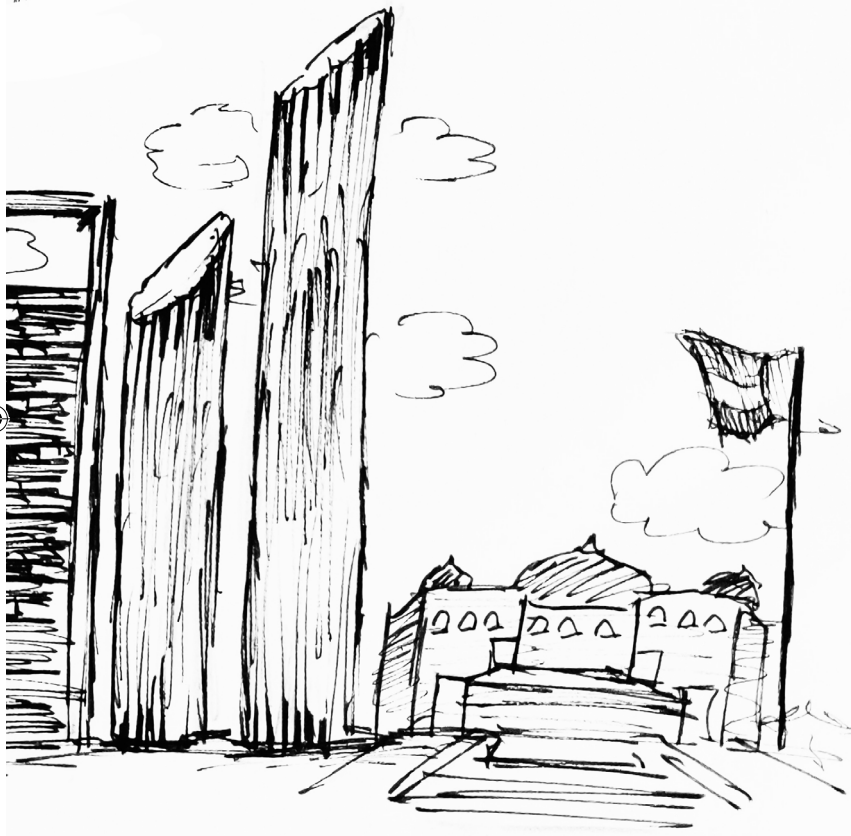
What you have in front of you serves not as a guidebook for the next period of your life, but as a beacon that you can look to whenever you feel lost about why you may be here. In that capacity this book serves as an answer. In times of self-doubt or ones when you question the environment you are in, it will help remind you that you chose this university for a reason, and it chose you all the same.

You've already amassed tons of information about this institution. You've heard from staff, from faculty, from university leadership, from the admissions team, from college brochures – the list goes on. Now you'll get to hear from the one voice that we hope you'll be able to relate to the most: the students, past and present, who make up our family here on Saadiyat Island. This is where we tell you our story, the story that you are now a part of.

To make sure you get the full version of this story though, we want to take you back to the very beginning. To show you how NYU Abu Dhabi came to exist, and the mission we all set out on, we're briefly handing over to the person who started everything.









Our Beginnings

*from John Sexton,
President Emeritus of NYU*





The Shibboleth

From the beginning, NYU Abu Dhabi has been more than a university. For all of us who were there at its founding, it was and is a mission. Faculty, students, and staff were and are attracted, of course, by the very high quality of research and learning offered; but, beyond that, we have embraced a cause.

Every university worthy of the name is a sacred space for the dialogue that advances our thought and understanding. NYU Abu Dhabi, however, is the first instance of a university tailored to go beyond this traditional role to a far more ambitious office.

It is designed to incubate a way of looking at and being in the world that sees humankind as a community of interlocking communities, as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. In short, this university has a role beyond producing knowledge and imparting it; it is the blueprint university for building an interconnected world.

By the turn into this century, NYU had come to understand its deep relationship to its founding city, and had come to appreciate the way in which New York, as a city, foreshadowed a world that could be.


New York itself had become a microcosm of the world; the first city anywhere to have a local neighborhood for every single country in the world, with each neighborhood populated with people born in that country. So within a subway ride, NYU students could visit a part of the city where they would hear the language, dance to the music, and eat the food of any country on earth. And notably, in that place they would encounter people of all ages who, even as they preserved their heritage, would identify as New Yorkers — members of an overarching community of communities. Soon, the joy of these encounters with the diverse wonders




Our Beginnings

of the world spawned a desire to explore the world's cultures not simply in a neighborhood of New York, but also in their place of origin. This led to the development of NYU's study-away sites, first in Europe and eventually on six continents, meaning by 2006, it was possible for most NYU students to complete their studies while spending several full semesters or January Terms at NYU sites away from the New York campus.

But, the Arab and Muslim world — fully one-quarter of the world's people, and a repository of a storied intellectual and cultural history — was missing from the picture.



Those of us charged with addressing this gap eventually considered several possible study-away sites, but almost everyone we consulted said that both the leadership and culture of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates made it something special. The more we came to know Abu Dhabi, the more we came to understand why the experts we spoke to all felt this way.



So it was that in June 2006, I led a delegation from NYU to meet with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed. In what was supposed to be a 15-minute meeting that extended over nearly two hours, the Crown Prince invited consideration of much more than just a study-away site.

He proposed a partnership between Abu Dhabi and NYU to create a comprehensive university, that was both fully integrated into NYU's global network, and in itself was as good as any in the world.

The university he envisioned would be anchored by a liberal arts college that would draw the best students literally from



The Shibboleth

around the globe and from every sector of society to learn and live together. This liberal arts college would be nested in an advanced research enterprise, with the undergraduates working side-by-side with world-class scholars.

And the University would have a unique mission: to cultivate, both within the Emirates and for the world, the leaders of a global society, that operated as a community of communities.

“Can it be done?” the Crown Prince asked.

“I don’t know. But I know it’s worth it to try. And if we don’t try, then we know it won’t be done,” I replied.

“What worries you most about the project?” the Crown Prince continued.

“That perhaps, even unconsciously, one of us would compromise excellence. If I send you students who are A-, in a context when only the unique and never been done before will do, or if you say cut a corner here, let’s cut back on this,” I answered.

And he looked at me in the eye and said, “If you never compromise, then we never will.”

And we hugged.

From that moment, the pact of excellence and the unique mission of NYU Abu Dhabi was sealed. And so far, each side has exceeded the expectations of the other.

Years later, in a celebration of NYU Abu Dhabi’s second cohort of graduates, the extraordinary woman named Rima Al Mokarrab whom the Crown Prince charged with





Our Beginnings

partnering with NYU to make this dream a reality, reflected on this founding moment:

We sought to create a new way to learn and to educate, not just for us in Abu Dhabi, but also as a contribution to the global community.

Our wish was for a place where people could encounter a foreign idea or a foreign person without fear or the desire to marginalize; value each other and search for commonalities and goodness as a first instinct; and, in those cases where agreement is not possible, disagree in a constructive and respectful way.

We wanted to create a special environment, a forum for engagement and understanding among people of many different perspectives. The things that united us would be understanding, dialogue, openness, tolerance, public service, mutual respect, and (perhaps more importantly) mutual responsibility.

A tall order.

A decade later, even those expectations seem modest compared to what has happened.

Not surprisingly, the groundbreaking undergraduate opportunity in Abu Dhabi to build a university like no other appealed to a high-talent group of students. The admissions team sought a cohort — literally from around the globe — who were “clearly admissible, on the traditional norms, to any college or university in the world”. But, from the start, they understood that finding students who met this standard



The Shibboleth

alone would not be enough. Each student admitted to NYU Abu Dhabi had to manifest a mature commitment to cosmopolitanism and to creating a global community that relished diversity and difference.

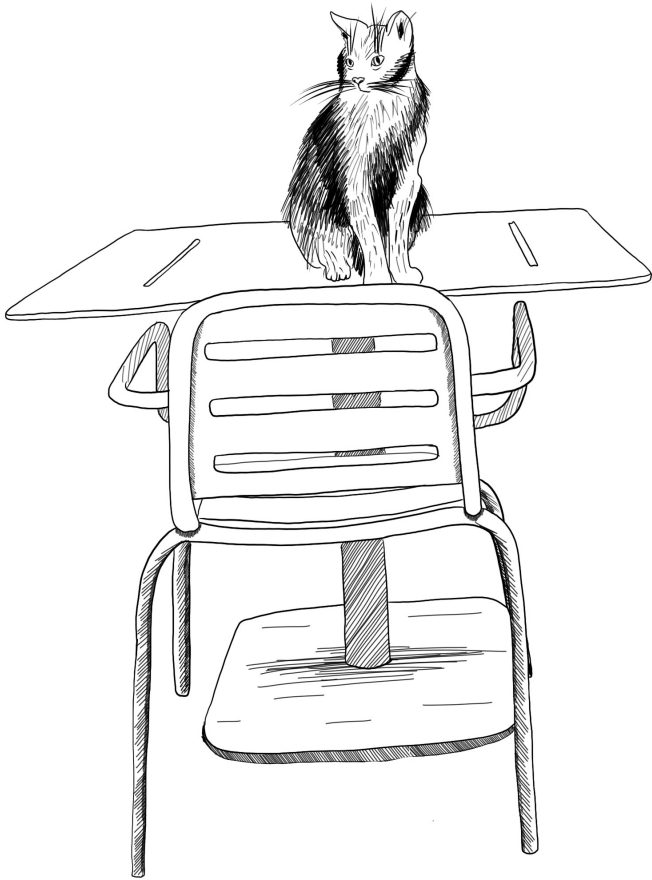
Those students who come here commit themselves to our mission; and, in turn, the enterprise of NYU Abu Dhabi commits to enabling for you, as the individuals you are, joyful and fulfilling lives. And as attractive as Abu Dhabi and the opportunities for learning here may be, the critical factor in students' choice of NYU Abu Dhabi so far has been that prospect of working with peers who share their cosmopolitan view of the world.

We — humankind — are at an inflection point, a critical threshold. We soon must choose between the fear that is the currency of populism and the hope that is harbored by those who see the possibility of a world that truly is a community of communities.

True, NYU Abu Dhabi was created to be a great university, standing beside the best in the world, and anchoring Abu Dhabi as one of the world's great idea capitals. But NYU Abu Dhabi also was created to be something more than that: an incubator for those of you who will lead humankind to that possible better place.

There are signs that it has already begun to play that role. It remains for generations of faculty, staff, and students to ensure that we stay faithful to this lofty mission.







Our Spirit





The Shibboleth

You packed up your bags, said your goodbyes to your loved ones, took anywhere between a 20-minute car ride to a 30-hour plane journey and reached our desert island. What now? What does being here actually mean? What does it mean to live in this constantly growing, ever-evolving, non-stop community as an NYU Abu Dhabi student? What makes us, us?

When you live in such close quarters with a crazy ambitious group of people in the desert, interesting things happen. One thing is for certain: like it or not, we are a very tight-knit community. There's a sense of deep interconnectedness that binds us together in a shared narrative.

This is why our alumni don't hesitate to take 15-hour flights to attend each others' weddings. It's why you'll have seventeen unread messages checking in on you if you break an ankle playing volleyball. Why people will bring your favourite snacks, books, or Amazon deliveries half-way across the world, or when you ask for vanilla extract at 1 am for an impromptu baking session, someone will be able to find some for you (in return for a slice of cake, of course).

When all is said and done, we've got each others' backs.

This is why NYUAD is a place where you will often find yourself and others keeping your apartment doors open. Why you will leave your laptop out in the library for hours as you talk with a fellow student at the palm trees about the religio-politics of their country, only to come back and find it and the rest of your stuff still there, untouched. Or when you find yourself in someone's hometown, they won't stop to think twice before opening their home up to you, or showing you around. The openness and shared trust that's woven into the fabric of our community is why you'll find people who





Our Spirit

hardly know each other making Fall break plans together, and why there will come moments when you're open and vulnerable about your thoughts with someone who thinks differently than you do.

We look after each other, share the ups and downs, have our disputes and disagree, yes, but ultimately we're all on the same team. All of us have left behind the familiar and the comfortable — this is new territory and exploring it, together, is all part of the adventure.

Ours is also a community where you'll have comfortable *and* uncomfortable, familiar *and* unfamiliar, old *and* new, conversations alike. Every person you talk to holds their own unique thoughts and experiences that you only need to dig a little further to uncover. They might have cycled across Canada, competed for Zimbabwe's national chess team, or speak languages you didn't even know existed. But we only learn these things when we engage and invest in people, and ask them more than just how their weekend was or what their major is.

These conversations will happen in ways and with people both expected and unexpected, and not only challenge you constantly but also give you an opportunity to grow at every step. Sometimes, after getting lulled into the routine of classes and the dining hall and classes and back to the dining hall, it can become very easy to forget the depth of experiences that exist all around you. Sometimes you may not be in the mood to engage and explore, and it's okay to take a step back every now and then, but remember that the community, the conversations, and the opportunity to be a part of both will always be there.



The Shibboleth

The community each of us finds here for ourselves didn't appear overnight though – and more importantly, everyone has their own journey to go through before they find that sense of community, and their own place within it. For some it may happen during Marhaba, for some it may be weeks, months, even years later. Each person's experience will always be different, but if we stay open and engaged, and if we invest rather than just spectate, that shared trust, openness, and collective sense of adventure will start to appear.







Our Challenges





The Shibboleth

This is our school — a giant mix of people unlike ourselves, who have seemingly opposite backgrounds and lives and families and experiences. All of us have our own stories that make us who we are, and all of us are perpetually forming new stories as well.

When we squeeze such a diversity of stories and experiences into such a tight community, the results can sometimes be uncomfortable. Perhaps our greatest challenge as a community, then, is becoming comfortable outside of our comfort zones.

When conflicts arise, as it is crucial to make your voice heard and stand up for what you believe in, it is equally important to listen.

With all of us here in such close proximity, you will meet people you dislike. You will see things you think should change. You will hear opinions you disagree with, and some that may even enrage you.

Remember that there are reasons behind why and how people are, and that by the end of these four years, they will have changed and you will change as well.

But no one will change if none of us listen. And no one will listen if we decide to judge. And no one here will ever learn anything if we isolate ourselves to the people and groups who only think as we do.

Becoming comfortable with difference doesn't mean that we always agree with each other. But when we choose comfort over the awkwardness, we isolate ourselves from the whole reason we came here in the first place. When we insulate ourselves among the people and groups who think like we





Our Challenges

do, we forgo endless opportunities for learning.

Most conflicts will arise on this campus because of assumptions we make rather than actual differences between us, so go out, engage, learn, educate, and, most importantly, ask.

Ask when you don't know, and ask again even when you're certain. Question what you've been told, and question what you tell others. All of us are here, above all, to learn; but learning will not happen if we never ask, or if we're not willing to patiently answer people's questions in return.

The other difficult thing we need in order to move forward though, is the humility and courage to admit we don't already know everything. Sometimes it can seem like everyone here is smarter, better travelled, more knowledgeable or more accomplished than you.

But remember that it's okay if you don't know something.

This point is important enough to state again: *it's okay if you don't know something.*

None of us here knows it all (even if it seems like we do).

There will probably come a time when in a room full of people you will feel as if you're the least intelligent person in the crowd. Whether it's in a class or even just chatting at the dining hall, sometimes you'll feel terrifyingly out of your depth.

So what do you do? Do you let these thoughts bottle up at the back of your throat and never engage with what you don't know? Do you leave the room, these people, and never come






The Shibboleth


back? Do you bluff and overcompensate to pretend to keep up? Or do you stay and do something as easy, and yet at times as difficult, as asking a question?

You did not get into this university by mistake. You got in because you are smart enough to be here, you belong here, and you have the potential to make a difference. But that does not mean everything will be easy or that you know it all already; it means that you have every capacity to learn what you need to learn.

When there are times you feel like you can't keep up, remember that you are studying alongside an extremely high caliber of people, so don't let it distort your perception. You are one of them too. Being here, learning and doing different things, is already something to be immensely proud of and will be a stepping stone to even greater things.



Take this opportunity to ask questions and learn from people who know things that you don't necessarily know. Take this opportunity to patiently teach them something new in return when people show the courage to ask you difficult questions.



There is a unique breadth of knowledge on this campus that you probably won't have access to after graduation. So be humble enough to admit to everything you don't know, because once you have the courage to open yourself up like that, you'll be a far better and more well-rounded version of yourself than when you started.

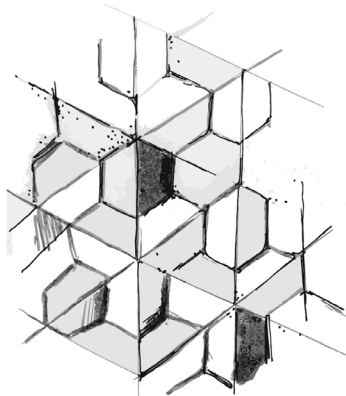
You'll face your own individual challenges here which will extend far beyond the ones we've mentioned. But you definitely will be challenged, more than you expected, and more than anyone warned you would be. So be prepared for your college years to simultaneously hold some of the best,

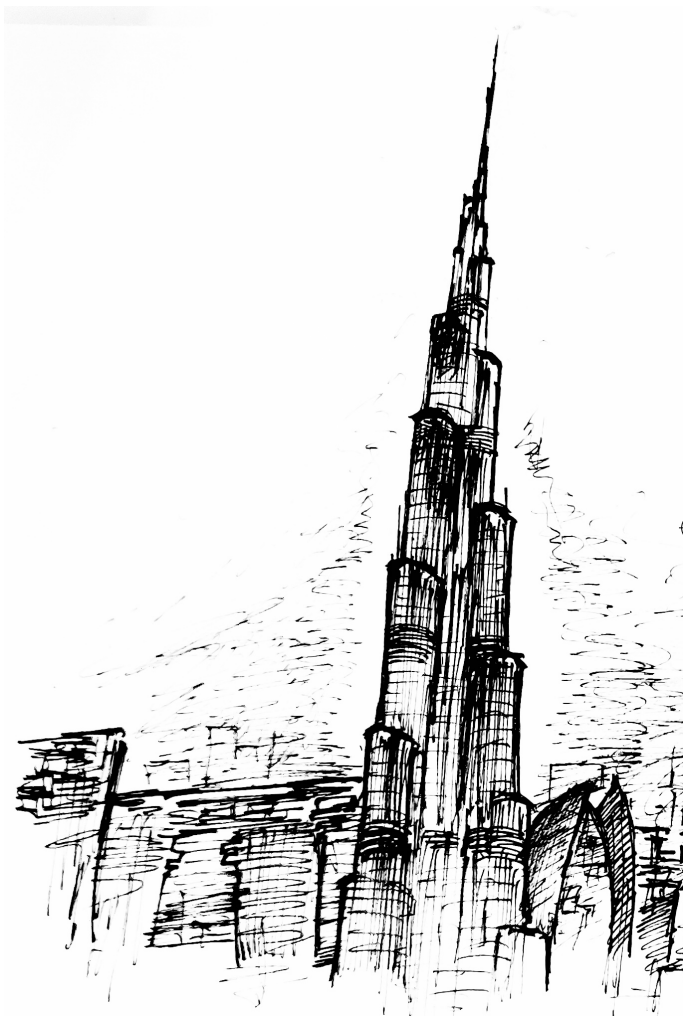


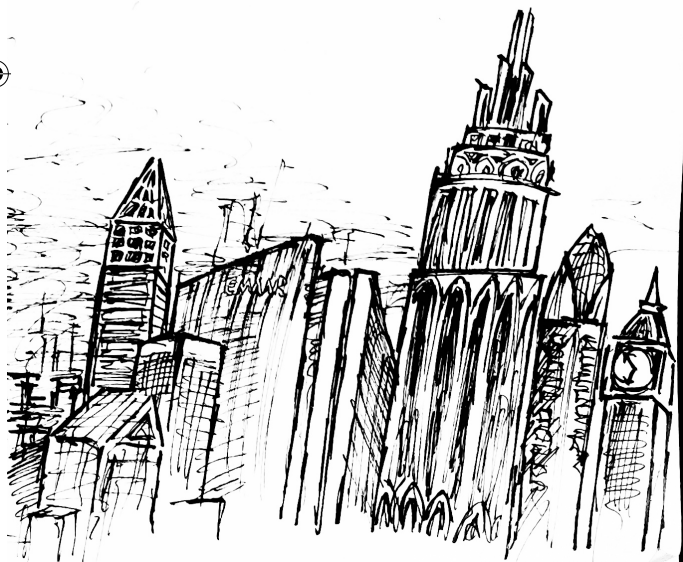
Our Challenges

but also some of the most difficult moments of your life. Those difficult moments might be major, serious obstacles, or they may be things like learning how to do laundry without losing all of your socks, maintaining relationships with friends back home as you both grow and change, or even just surviving the relentless heat of September in Abu Dhabi.

Whatever they are, know that you have every capacity to belong here. It's not easy – it's incredibly difficult, and it may take some time. But you have the capability to push through, or crawl out, or climb up, and become comfortable outside of your comfort zone. You wouldn't be here otherwise.









Our Stories

Broke fingers playing tug of war

*Attempted world record for
blanket fort*

*Sneaked into Zanzibar resort
on scooters*

Slept in cave, descended into Petra

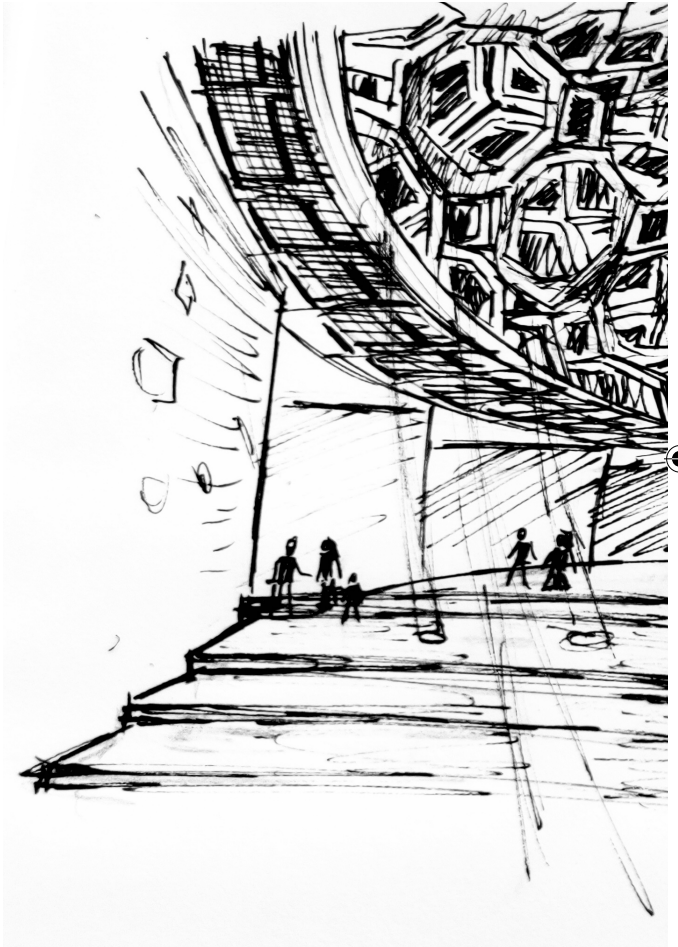


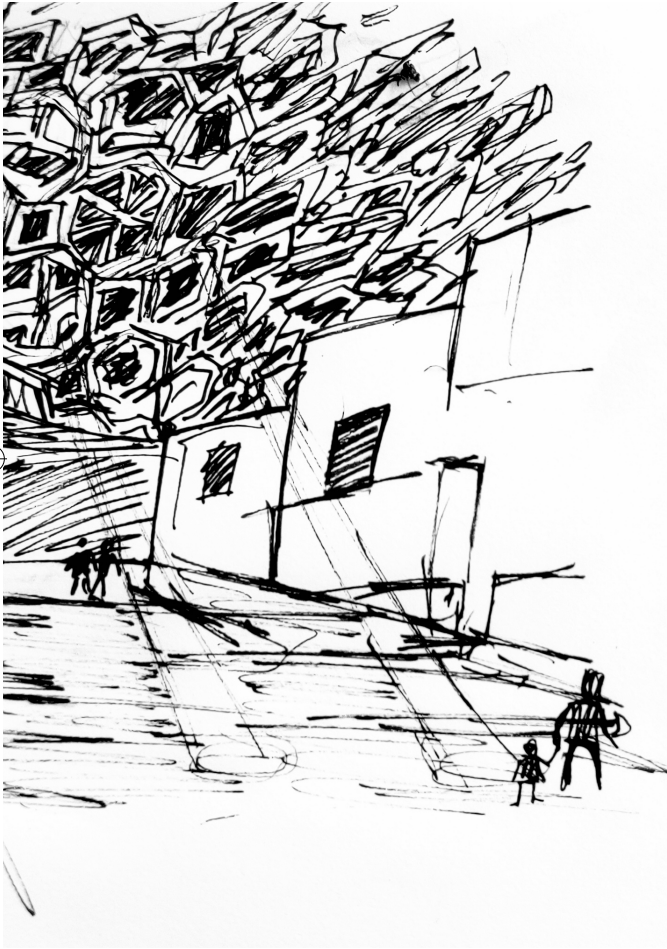
In gym clothes, met French president

*Voluntarily deported in Azerbaijan
for solidarity*

*Midnight movie screening on
library roof*

Ate lunch at Iranian stranger's house







*Went falcon hunting with
Bedouin friends*

Uzbek scribe killed us with cognac

*Plane was diverted, baby
born aboard*

Squeezed six people out a sunroof

Crashed jet-ski, lost Emirates ID

Came in single, nothing has changed



*Got arrested outside Chinese
military base*

Cycled out to Liwa and back

*Sang Christmas carols with
Norwegian ambassador*

Dates and karak at the breakwater

Nearly crushed by landslide in Nepal

*Malaysian monkey attacked pristine
rental car*







Our Octaves





The Shibboleth

NYU Abu Dhabi was explicitly envisioned to help us explore, experiment, and engage with things we've never done before.

It was designed to help us **play another octave of the piano.**

Playing another octave is being brave, being curious, and learning about the world by exploring the unknown.

It's choosing roommates from a country you know nothing about. It's picking something on a menu and having no idea what will arrive. It's joining a club that "high-school you" would have laughed at you being a part of. It's taking a theater class as an engineering student, or dancing during Diwali despite having no coordination skills.

It's doing something like trying to build a university in the middle of the desert, with students from every single corner of the world.

While one part of playing another octave is challenging ourselves to do things we've never done before, another part is about reaching out to try and touch those new notes, which nobody has managed to touch yet.


At a university that will always be the first of its kind, you have a phenomenal opportunity to start things here, and take on projects which you'll remember forever. You'll envision new ideas in your dorm room at 3 am, and have crazy dreams about what you can do with the amazing people around you. You will make these happen, because you'll always find someone in this community who will support your ideas, no matter how ridiculous they seem. Of course you'll fail, sometimes a lot, before you succeed; but never be afraid that your dreams here are too ambitious, and never fear showing how much you care about making something happen.




Our Octaves

Even with all of this in mind, we must not forget that the real meaning of playing another octave doesn't lie in doing big-name new things around the clock. It's anything new, different, or challenging that sticks you outside of your comfort zone.

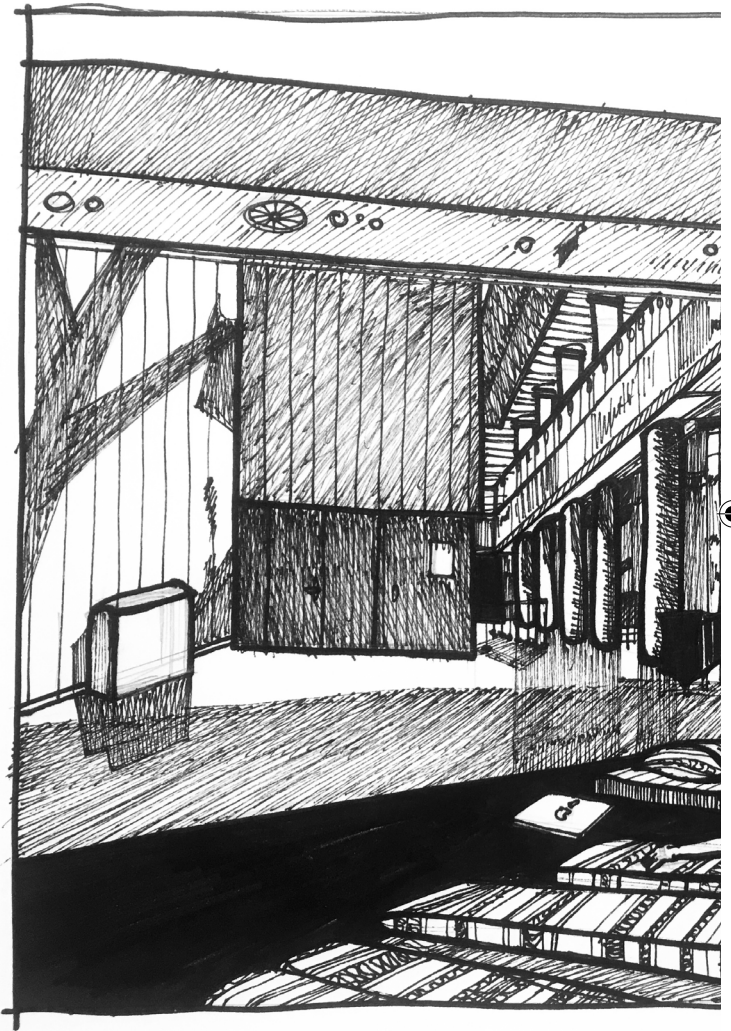
The essence of playing another octave is in adopting a mindset that we will keep pushing and challenging ourselves to stay curious, and carry on exploring new things.

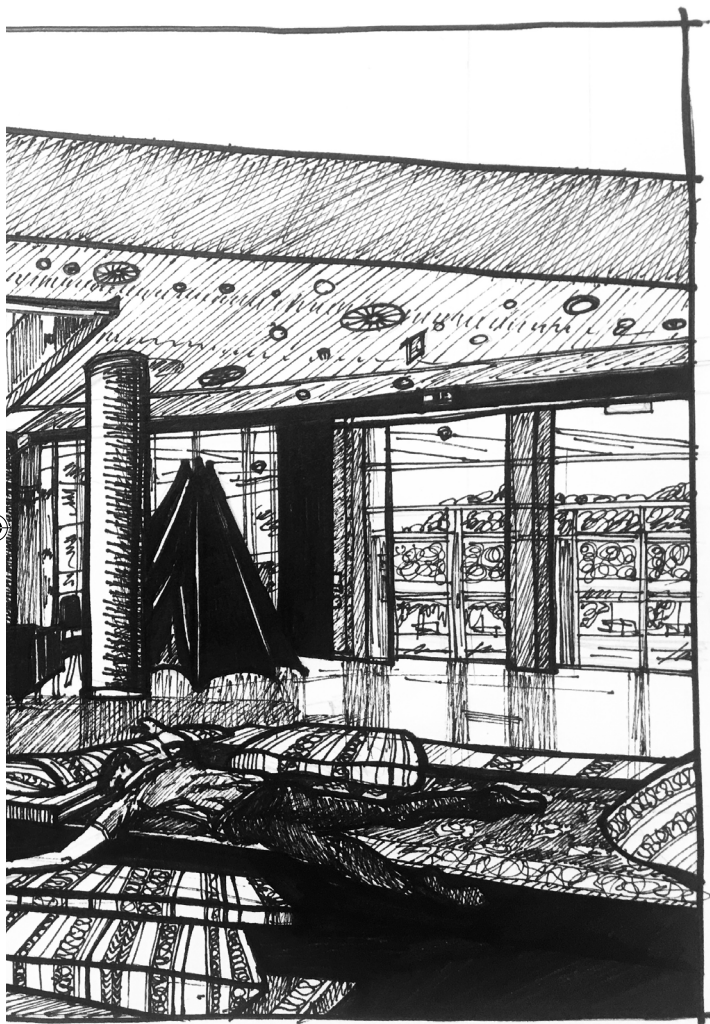


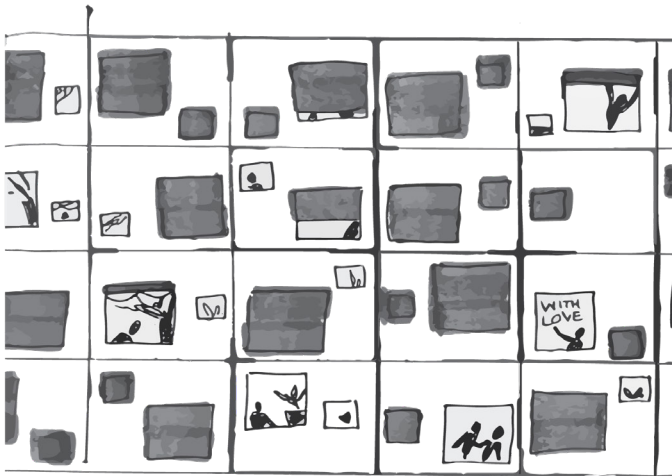
But does this mean that we must never, ever stop playing another octave? Of course not. Occasionally we need to go back to familiarity, and to the notes we already know inside out. Sometimes we need to take a step back and stop pushing ourselves. Not only is that important, it's *needed*. The value of individual comfort zones isn't just necessary to help us take care of ourselves, but to help us pause, reflect, and put our new experiences into context. So when there are days where you don't feel like playing any octaves at all, know that it is okay to sit down, breathe, and come back to the keys on another day.

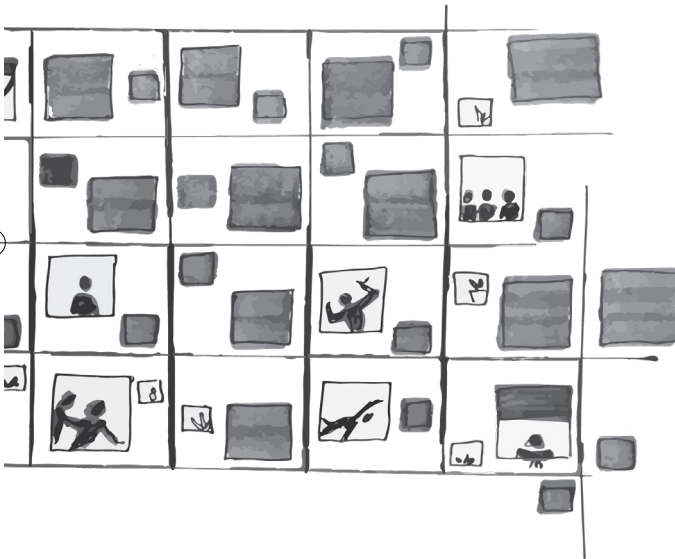


The amount of new things we'll experience for the first time at NYUAD might get overwhelming. But in fifty years' time, we won't be telling stories about the times things were normal, easy, or ordinary. So challenge yourself, dream big, and soon enough you'll be telling incredible stories about the new octaves you played here, and the people you played them with.



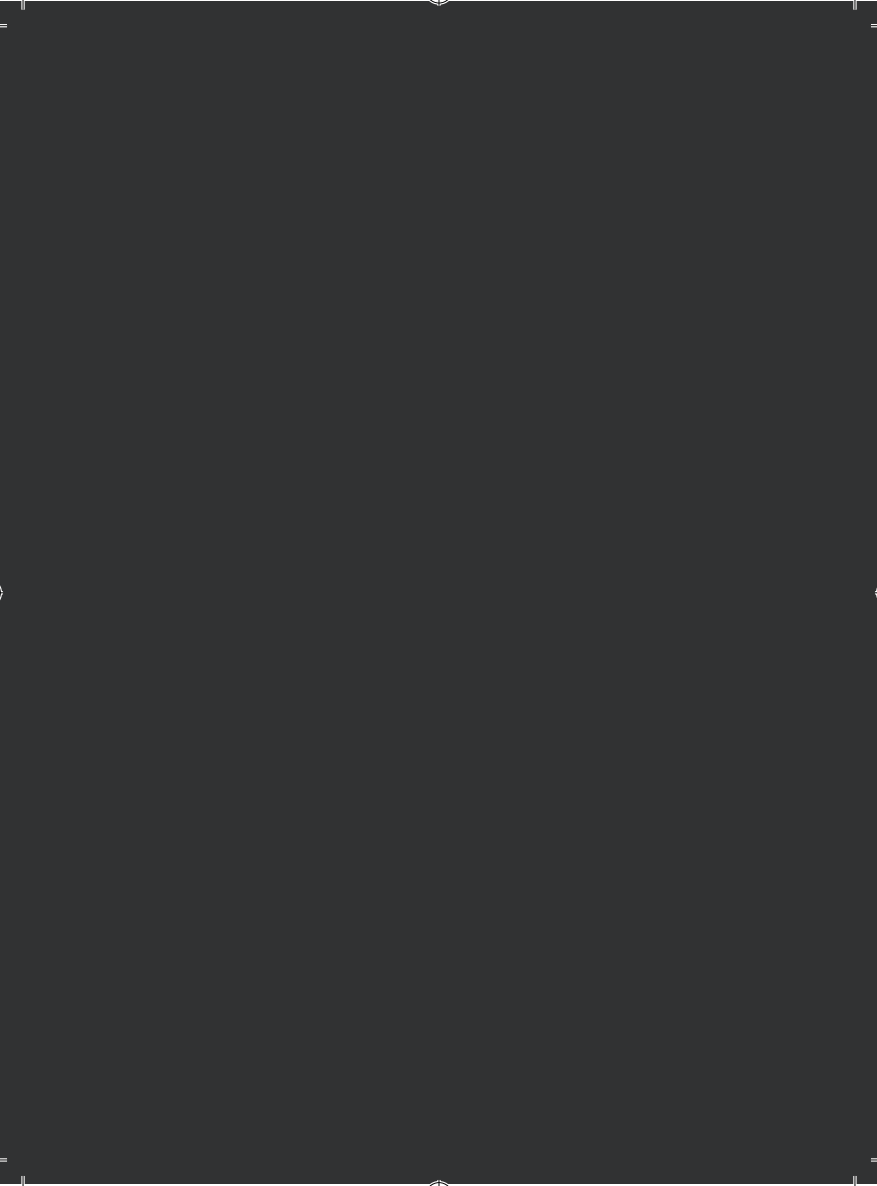








Our Responsibility







The Shibboleth

In September 2018, a group of students invited John back to campus to talk to first years about the founding of NYUAD. He had another message in store for us though, which few of us had ever heard before:

I'd come to Sheikh Mohammed thinking about a study-away site, but now listen to this, every one of you listen to this. I'm not claiming that this place... I'm not claiming that he is perfect, none of us are. But understand the shot that you have here. Because I don't want you messing it up. This may be the best shot that humankind gets.



You did not choose a school. Don't you dare think that. You did not choose a school, you chose a mission. And when you have your petty fights with people here on campus, get over them. Use them as exercises in peacemaking. And if you find yourself being isolated with people who are similar to you. Get over it. Reach out.



You did not choose a school. This isn't about you, it's about the mission, and you're part of an army that's committed to that mission, because this man and his people have made an act of confidence in us, and we're not going to let them down.

There's never been a people that has been as generous to people that were not from them, as this university. Think about it for a second. And we owe it, because we don't know if we're ever gonna get another shot.

You were not admitted to this university as a prize for your high school accomplishments. Your time here isn't just about



Our Responsibility

getting a degree. You are here because you have the potential to contribute to the mission of NYU Abu Dhabi, and to be a part of the purpose of this place.

Every university has a noble mission statement and an ambitious founding vision. But what makes us different? What makes this mission more than a marketing tool, and into something we actually embody? What makes this idealistic vision worth listening to?

It's us.

We are the ones who decide if all of this is worth it. We are the ones who will make it worth it. We are the ones who have to live up to the vision and carry it forward, and it comes down to the choices each one of us makes every day. There is absolutely no room to shy away from the part that every single one of us has to play in realising this mission, because everything that we do, big or small, leaves an impact as we move forward to build upon this mind-blowingly unique foundation we have been blessed with.

Nobody has ever been able to build a place like NYU Abu Dhabi before. A place with this vision, with this level of diversity, and with this level of resources to back it up. Being part of this experiment is nothing short of a privilege, and every single one of us is a part of it now - so it's our responsibility to not let this opportunity go to waste.

Being a part of NYUAD is not like being a part of any other university- accepting our admission here is a commitment. It's a commitment to this place, these people, and what we learn. It's a pledge to not take our time and education here for granted. It's the responsibility to educate others about what we've learned, to remember the people we met





The Shibboleth

along the journey, and to bring those memories along with us wherever we go. So in decades down the road, a foreign country is not just another place on the map — it is a lab partner, a roommate, a friend. A faith other than yours is not just a different set of beliefs, it is understood and respected. A foreign policy is not just politics; it is your classmate's family, home, and future.

One thing we must always bear in mind is that the university itself is constantly growing, much like how each one of us is growing by virtue of being in it. That growth necessarily means that nothing is set in stone — things are shifting, history is being written, and a legacy is in the works. Every tradition you're diving into, each student group you're a part of, any student activity you're engaged in, all of that was built from the ground up by students just like you, driven by the passion to shape this place into something they could be proud of.

That's where you come in as a pioneer of this new legacy. You have a one of a kind opportunity to impact a campus and a community that will always be the first of its kind. If you think there's something missing from this place, will it into existence; if you want to change something for the better, fight for it; if you don't know how to do that, ask. This place is only so spirited because people are constantly pushing for it to be better, it only feels like home for those who make themselves at home, and it is only special if people like you take initiative and work to keep it special.

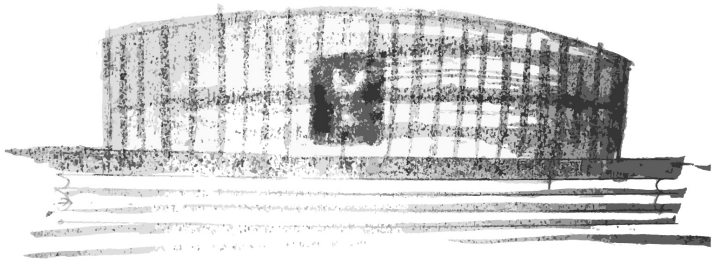
If you are here, you're agreeing to be a part of not only a university, but a mission. It's our hope that you embrace this crazy but brilliant idea. We hope that you challenge yourself and support one another, and share in each others successes and sorrows, because this place, this outrageous idea of a

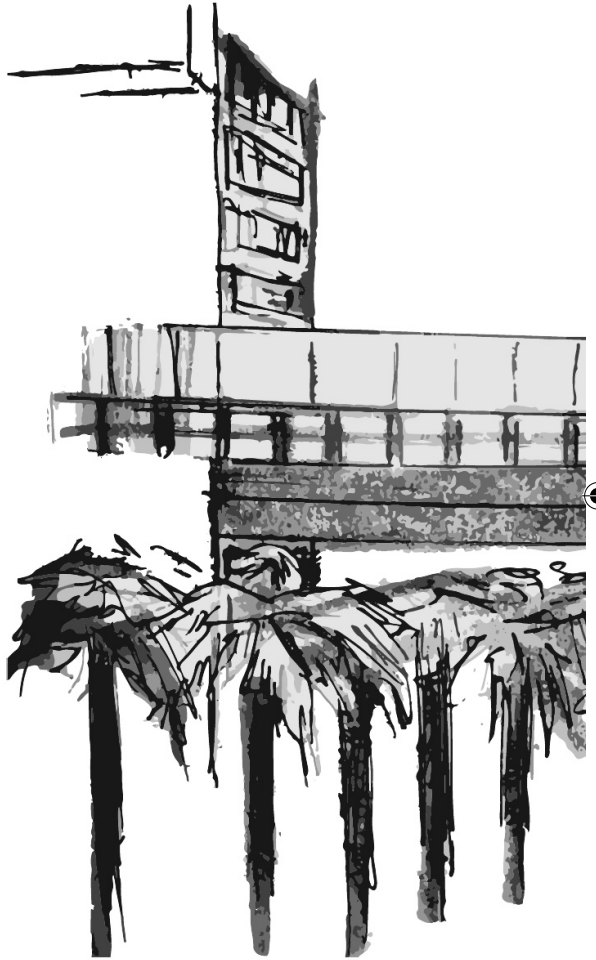


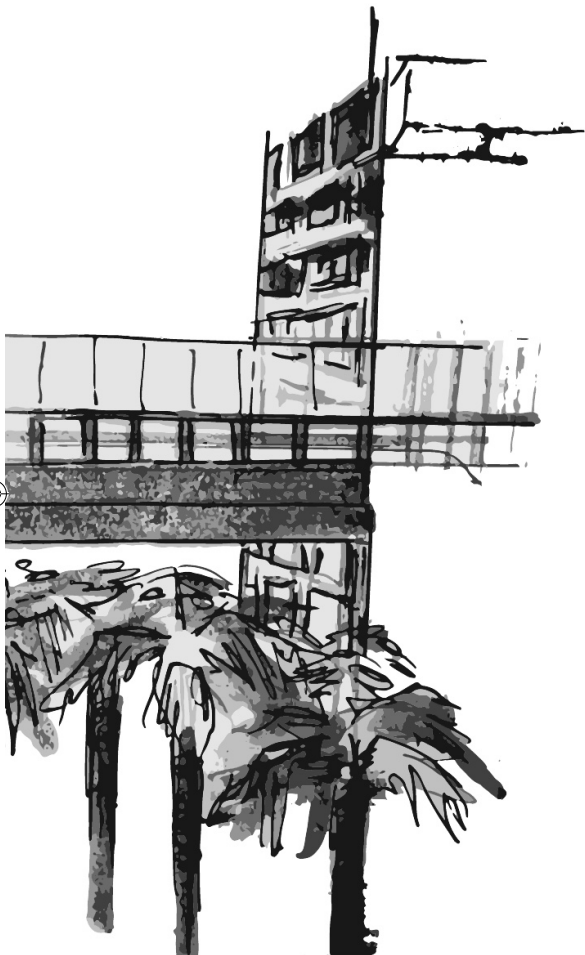


Our Responsibility

university, will only ever be as good as we make it. What you see around you was built by the students who came before; now it's up to you to continue to shape this place – and we can't wait to see everything you do.











2019

C.W.
E.K.T.
H.A.
K.M.
K.T.H.
T.A.S.
T.L.

• • •

A.Y.
C.J.W.
G.C.
H.G.
H.M.R.
J.S.

L.G.D
M.W.
R.B.
S.G.
S.V.
T.G.
T.K.
V.CM.

• • •

A.B.C.
G.B.
L.M.P.
M.H.A.
R.D.



