

ASU film grad is a shining example of survival

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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable spring 2021 graduates (<https://news.asu.edu/20210416-sun-devil-life-after-unprecedented-year-asu-spring-2021-grads-face-next-journey>).

Omar Hashem never gave up.



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As a teenager with a hobby in photography, he didn't give up when he needed money to upgrade his equipment. Instead, he worked for three summers to earn the money for a new camera and lenses. He didn't give up his passion for film despite growing up in Saudi Arabia during a time when cinemas were banned. He didn't give up his dream of working as a filmmaker when his parents were against it. He didn't give up when doctors diagnosed him with a rare disease in his lungs and told him he needed a double lung transplant. He didn't give up during chemotherapy for a post-transplant lymphoproliferative disorder tumor. And he didn't give up when his body rejected the new lungs and he underwent surgery again for a second double lung transplant.

Now, a year and half after his second double lung transplant, Hashem is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in film and media production from The Sidney Poitier New American Film School.

Growing up in a country without a cinematic tradition, Hashem said he always hoped a time would come when that would start to change – and he wanted to be a part of that change. After his first transplant, his parents agreed to let him study film, and he became one of the first Saudi Arabian students to be granted a visa from his country to study film. While traveling on a ferry in New York City, he met a friend by chance who told him about ASU’s fast-growing film program in the Heberger Institute for Design and the Arts. The conversation motivated him to apply to ASU, where the film program became a school in 2020.

After graduating, Hashem will continue his education as a graduate student in the Heberger Institute’s Creative Enterprise and Cultural Leadership program. He said he plans to move to Los Angeles eventually to work on films, and he intends to bring film/media entertainment to his home country and other Arab markets that have no industry infrastructure.

During his time at ASU, Hashem’s perseverance and dedication have inspired his peers and his mentors.

“In a world where we literally had to relearn how to breathe and share space with each other, Omar was a shining example of how to survive with grace, humility and confidence,” said Jason Davids Scott, interim director of The Sidney Poitier New American Film School. “His work in every class has been exceptional, even when he has been hospitalized and needed accommodations. His presence on film sets, his gentle demeanor and warm smile, and his unfailing belief in the talent and abilities of his peers has made him an outstanding producer and someone who is universally loved and admired.”

Question: What’s something you learned while at ASU — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?

Answer: As we watch movies in theaters we never think about how complicated it is to make a film, but now after studying (film) I’ve realized the creative process and understand all of the roles of who works in movies.

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: As a person who came from a place that doesn't really have any teachers or professors who teach film, all of the professors have added a lot to my knowledge, so I cannot really choose one. But as someone who wants to produce films in the future, Professor Chris LaMont for sure was notable. I also learned a lot from Professor and Interim Director Jason Davids Scott, especially regarding topics that talk about the history of film.

Q: What’s the best piece of advice you’d give to those still in school?

A: Film school is a place to build yourself and your connections. Never feel shy and always try to introduce yourself to others. Moreover, if your short film project didn't turn out the way you wanted, you should still be proud of it and remember that no one will succeed from the first try. You should never give

up.

Q: What was your favorite spot on campus, whether for studying, meeting friends or just thinking about life?

A: Noble Library was always my best place to study. In addition, the coffee shops around the school were great to meet friends and socialize.

Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?

A: As a cancer survivor and an organ recipient, I would love to build an organization that helps people who go through organ failure and cancer and give them the support they need in order to progress in their life and get their education.



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