



**Ghassan Aouad**

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## The Story of My PhD

In the mid-eighties, I was fortunate to receive a scholarship from the **Hariri Foundation** established by the late PM of Lebanon, HE Rafik Hariri (may God bless his soul and send him to heaven) to enable students in Lebanon 🇱🇧 to complete their university studies (34,000 were supported). This opportunity allowed me to pursue both an MSc and a PhD in construction management and IT at **Loughborough University** in the UK.

I began with an MSc in construction, immensely supported by Program Director Prof. **Tony Thorpe** and my thesis supervisor, Prof. **Andrew Price**. After completing my MSc, I was accepted into the PhD program under Professor Price's supervision. My PhD thesis focused on linking AutoCAD, a design package, with Artemis, a scheduling package, which involved extensive programming in LISP. I had to teach myself how to program in both packages.

Halfway through my journey, I faced a significant setback. I went to the PhD room but couldn't find the hard disk containing my work. I approached Vera, the secretary of the Head of Department, to report the missing disk. When I admitted that I hadn't backed up my work, she responded, "It must have been stolen," which was highly unusual. Initially, I thought perhaps a fellow student, intrigued by my groundbreaking research, had borrowed it.

In a moment of despair, I confided in my supervisor about my intentions to return to Lebanon, believing it was not meant to be. Prof. Price advised me against such a quick decision, urging me to take a week to think it over. I received similar encouragement from Prof. Thorpe. After just one day of contemplation, I reflected on my family in Lebanon, who were eagerly awaiting my return with a PhD from the UK. Motivated, I managed to recode what had taken me a year in just one month, ultimately completing my PhD successfully. The support I received from the Head of Department at that time, Prof. **Ronald McCaffer** was incredible.

During my viva, which lasted an unusually long four hours, the external examiner was particularly interested in seeing me demonstrate the functionalities of the developed application, which was a major breakthrough at that time.

This experience not only solidified my academic credentials but also opened doors for me to work at the **The University of Salford** under esteemed leader Prof. Peter Brandon. This pivotal role eventually led me to serve as Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation at the same University.

In 2016, Loughborough University awarded me an Honorary Doctorate in Technology for my contributions to the built environment. I am fortunate to hold 3 degrees from this amazing university: a master's degree and 2 doctorates.

I share this story to encourage resilience and perseverance among those pursuing their PhDs. Challenges are inevitable, but with determination and support, success is within reach. Remember, the journey may be tough, but the rewards are immeasurable.

**#Resilience #PhDJourney #NeverGiveUp**



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