Upon arriving at Boston University in the fall of 2022, I was very intrigued by a *BU Today* article on Boston University’s recent partnership with the US State Department for Afghan Women's Economic Resilience (AWER). Being half Afghan, I instantly felt very supported by my university and their efforts to aid Afghan women. I was able to reach out to the co-founder of AWER, Boston University Professor Rachel Brulé, and learn more about the initiative. Working with AWER has offered a unique opportunity to be part of a collaborative effort aimed at addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Afghan women. The organization's focus on education, employment, and entrepreneurship resonates deeply with me, as I understand the transformative power of these pillars in women's lives.

Since working with AWER, I have enhanced my research and writing skills, from drafting grants, researching initiatives, and defining specific goals. One of the most rewarding aspects of working with AWER is witnessing the resilience and determination of Afghan women. Despite facing immense obstacles, including Taliban restrictions and societal norms, Afghan women continue to strive for a better future for themselves and their communities. Their unwavering spirit serves as a source of inspiration and motivates me to work even harder towards our shared goals. Moreover, being part of AWER has allowed me to contribute my skills and expertise towards initiatives that directly impact Afghan women's lives. Whether it's through mentorship programs, educational scholarships, or online skills building, I feel a sense of pride in knowing that my work is making a tangible difference in empowering Afghan women to pursue their dreams and aspirations.

Attending the AWER summit at the US State Department on February 27th, further amplified my pride for this work. The summit gathered approximately 200 participants from various backgrounds, including academics, entrepreneurs, politicians, civil society, and private sector representatives. Its goal was to mobilize partnerships to support the education, employment, and entrepreneurship of Afghan women and girls. Speakers highlighted the dire situation faced by Afghan women, particularly since the Taliban regained power in 2021. Restrictions imposed by the Taliban have severely limited women's opportunities, including bans on education beyond sixth grade, aid from international organizations, and leaving the house without male accompaniment. Further, navigating mentorship programs for Afghan women while accounting for cultural sensitivities is dire. Despite these challenges, there was a sense of optimism and determination throughout the summit. Secretary of State Antony Blinken outlined AWER's ambitious efforts, including online skills building, scholarships for Afghan women, and mentorship programs from partners in the private sector.

My experience with AWER reaffirms my belief in the resilience and potential of Afghan women. AWER is not only addressing Afghan womens’ economic restraints, but also gender inequality issues as a whole. As an Afghan woman, I am proud to be part of this movement, and I remain committed to continuing the fight for a brighter and more inclusive future for all Afghan women.