

**American University of Beirut  
Institutional Self-Study  
Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools**

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## **Introduction**

In 1862, American missionaries in Lebanon and Syria, under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, asked Dr. Daniel Bliss to found a college of higher learning that would include medical training. It was felt that this college should have an American educational character, should be administered independently from the Mission, and should be maintained by its own funds. Dr. Bliss sailed for the United States in the summer of 1862 to solicit funds for the new enterprise. By August 1864 he had raised \$100,000, but because of inflation during the Civil War it was decided that he should raise a sterling fund in England in order to start the operations of the college, leaving the dollar fund to appreciate in value. After collecting £4,000 in England he sailed for Beirut in March 1866.

While Dr. Bliss was raising money for the new school, the State of New York, on April 24, 1863, granted a charter under the name of the Syrian Protestant College. The College opened with its first class of 16 students on December 3, 1866. The cornerstone of College Hall, the first building on the present campus in Ras Beirut, was laid on December 7, 1871, by the Honorable William E. Dodge, Sr., then Treasurer of the Board of Trustees. College Hall and the first Medical Building were completed and occupied in 1873. The bell in the tower of College Hall pealed for the first time on March 14, 1874.

On November 18, 1920, as part of the aftermath of the First World War and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Board of Regents of the State University of New York granted a change of name for the institution from Syrian Protestant College to American University of Beirut. Two years later, the University became coeducational and accepted its first women students. As time passed the university grew, prospered, and expanded, and following the end of the Second World War the original two Faculties, Arts and Sciences (1866) and Medicine (1867), were joined by a range of professional schools: Engineering and Architecture (1951); Agricultural and Food Sciences (1952), Health Sciences (1978), and the School of Business (2000). The School of Nursing, founded in 1905, is part of the Faculty of Medicine.

Throughout its history, the American University of Beirut has presented the best in American education and values to generations of students from the Arab world and beyond. It is a highly respected institution in the region, with thousands of graduates spread throughout the Arab world. The majority of AUB faculty members in the professorial ranks have received their advanced degrees from institutions in the United States, and the AUB faculty believes in and utilizes American instructional methodologies and textbooks and emphasizes liberal arts values in courses and in laboratory practice. In the professional schools a "hands on" approach is emphasized, while every student in each of these schools—Medicine, Health Sciences, Nursing, Engineering and Architecture, Agricultural and Food Sciences, and Business—is required to obtain an educational base in the humanities and social sciences. The University continues to attract highly qualified students, and the number of applicants every year significantly exceeds the number of places available. Graduates of excellent regional secondary schools, fifty percent of AUB students graduated in the top twenty-five percent of their high school classes while twenty-seven percent graduated in the top ten percent in their high school class. A place at AUB is always sought, in spite of opportunities in the many other universities in the area.

AUB alumni, of whom over 44,000 are living, have had a wide impact on the region through the years. Many graduates have served as presidents of their countries, prime ministers,

members of parliament, ambassadors, governors of central banks, and as presidents and deans of colleges and universities.

In the private sector many AUB graduates either head their own firms or are chief executives of some of the largest and most successful banking and business enterprises in the Middle East. As alumni of AUB they are trained in and use American banking and business practices. Engineering graduates have established and continue to manage a number of large contracting firms that have been responsible for much of the new construction in the Middle East. The largest and most efficient hospitals in the Middle East countries are owned, managed, or staffed by AUB physicians, nurses, public health technicians and other supporting staff.

Among the over 3,800 graduates of the Faculty of Medicine are a number of prominent scholars at prestigious medical institutions in the United States, and, conversely, many outstanding AUB graduates who have received postdoctoral training in the US return to AUB as full-time or part-time members of the Faculty. This pattern has provided continuous links with medical centers in America. Together with formal affiliations, this interaction has cemented a strong bond between the AUB Faculty of Medicine and US medical institutions, a bond which is of vital importance for the continued progress of the Faculty, and for the maintenance of American-oriented medical education in the country and the region.

The AUB Medical Center, with a capacity of 420 beds, performs an important function by providing internship training in the American medical tradition for a limited number of individuals who have completed their medical education elsewhere. Many of these physicians subsequently undertake residency programs at AUB, which are patterned exclusively on the American model of graduate medical training. The Faculty of Medicine also offers an elective program which exposes the medical students from the region and all over the world to the wide spectrum of its medical courses and clerkships. During the last five years, this program has accommodated over 600 medical students from over 50 medical schools.

AUB and Lebanon suffered greatly during the period of the Lebanese civil war (1975-90). During 15 years of conflict in Lebanon, physical damage to the University and an inability to increase tuition revenue at a rate proportional to the country's spiraling inflation made it difficult for AUB to keep its classroom and research facilities in good repair and abreast of rapid advances in technology. The University also suffered from changes in its faculty and student body during this period. There was great faculty attrition due to the extremely unstable conditions in Beirut. Likewise, the university lost much of the international diversity of its student body since non-Lebanese students were reluctant to go to school in a war zone. Although these international students were replaced by well-qualified Lebanese, AUB has always sought a broad regional base of students both because the University defines its mission in regional terms and because it believes that such diversity contributes to the quality of an American, liberal arts education. The University continues to work intensely toward its goal of broadening once again the regional and international character of its students, faculty, and patients.

The Board of Trustees began the process of rebuilding the university as soon as the civil strife ended in 1990. A first major step was the recruitment of a new president, Dr. Robert Haddad in 1993. A second major achievement was the subsequent recruitment of a new dean of medicine, Dr. Samir Najjar, who together with his departmental chairs, over the next five years recruited a new core of over forty highly qualified and well established academic physicians. This process was essential to rebuilding the Faculty of Medicine.

With the appointment of John Waterbury as president in 1997 and the formation of a new senior leadership team of academics and administrators, the process of rebuilding sped up.

One major reason for this was that in 1997 the U.S. Department of State lifted its ban on American citizens traveling to or residing in Lebanon. With this development, President Waterbury and the senior academic and administrative leadership of the university resided wholly in Beirut instead of being split between Beirut and the AUB New York office. With this development; AUB has ceased to be managed by a president forced to administer the university from New York. Since 1998, the university has undertaken a series of self-assessment and improvement initiatives. Immediately on his appointment as president, Dr. Waterbury assigned the Joint Commission International (JCI) to carry out an assessment of the AUB Medical Center to ascertain its quality of service and to identify the steps needed to attain accreditation by the JCI. This review was completed in fall of 1998; since then intensive efforts have been made toward bringing the Medical Center to levels that will enable it to meet accreditation standards of US hospitals.

A second major initiative was a thorough review of academic programs through a combination of internal and external assessment. During the 1998-1999 academic year and into the fall of 1999, each academic department and faculty or school engaged in an internal academic review exercise. Simultaneously, support from the Ford Foundation for the project "Rebuilding Academic Excellence at the American University of Beirut" enabled the University to form six external visiting committees consisting of a total of 29 prominent scholars from prestigious universities (Berkeley, Cornell, Harvard, Michigan, Princeton, Rockefeller University, UCLA, and Wisconsin among others) to conduct academic review visits. Each committee focused on the academic assessment of one of the Faculties. In the cases of the larger Faculties (Arts and Sciences, Medicine, and Engineering and Architecture), committee members focused on individual areas of specialization (the humanities, sciences, and social sciences in regard to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, for example). Each committee was charged with assessing all aspects of AUB's academic mission: curriculum, teaching and student advising; departmental and interdisciplinary academic structures; and the research profiles, activities, and support environment of the Faculty. In order to maintain a policy of transparent interaction with faculty members, President Waterbury made all external review reports (now on the AUB accreditation website) available to full-time faculty members in March 2000.

Concurrent with the visits of the final set of evaluators in the fall of 1999, and based on the process of internal and external review, the president, the provost, and the academic deans held a series of meetings to plan academic restructuring. An important focus of these strategy sessions was how best to reshape the undergraduate curriculum to establish a common set of general education liberal arts requirements for students in all Faculties. Making the curriculum more flexible to allow greater student choice, creating the possibility of minors, reducing overlapping and redundant courses, strengthening the freshman year, and promoting innovative teaching were other recurrent themes of these meetings. This group also focused on streamlining graduate education and nurturing the research environment for faculty and students.

Two documents (also on the website) evolved from these discussions: one, a position paper on undergraduate education; the other, drafts of mission and vision statements along with recommendations for implementing a first round of academic restructuring. As a result, AUB undertook structural and curricular changes. The Division of Education rejoined the Faculty of Arts and Sciences as the Department of Education after a quarter of a century of separation, and a new independent School of Business was created. Moreover, each Faculty and School completed by the fall of 2001 reviews and revisions of its undergraduate curriculum and started similar reviews of its graduate curriculum. The 2001-2002 university catalogue was thus a completely new document. Other initiatives have led to new Masters programs, Computer Sciences, for example, and Nursing. The University is also providing stronger support for such interdisciplinary areas as Environmental Sciences and Nutrition. The AUB Medical Center is

advancing as well. In 2002 the new Children's Cancer Center, which is co-sponsored with St. Jude's Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, opened. In fall of 2002, AUB's School of Medicine received the Sheikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Maktoum award as the best medical center in the Arab world.

To emphasize its continued commitment to undergraduate teaching excellence, the University, with support from the Mellon Foundation, started a teaching excellence initiative that—among other things—has created an interfaculty teaching excellence task force, provided a series of teaching workshops for faculty, and supported the incorporation of technology into teaching at AUB. In 2000, the University established a new Center for Academic Computing to aid faculty in incorporating new technologies into their teaching. By spring semester 2003, over 2800 students were enrolled in over 71 courses that rely partially on web-based instruction. A new Center for Teaching and Learning is being planned. This Teaching Excellence initiative is ongoing.

During the past five years AUB has also undertaken a review and restructuring of its academic support services. It has created new Offices of Admissions and Financial Aid. It also implemented a new student information system that now enables students to register for classes via the web. Constant review of our academic rules and procedures is proceeding with the aim of simplifying and clarifying policies and practices in this area. Moreover, the University has invested significant resources to upgrade the Office of Student Affairs, including filling the position of Dean of Student Affairs and making new appointments in student counseling, student activities, residential life management and a planned appointment in career and placement services, all of which the post-war era had left in a rudimentary state. It has also established an International Students Office as part of Student Affairs to facilitate the arrival and orientation of students from abroad. Athletic life will be immeasurably improved when the new Hostler Student Center is completed in about 3 years. The University has also renovated West Hall, the student activities center. West Hall is the heart of campus life, housing student clubs, performing and exhibition space, and is the central gathering place for students. Not previously renovated since it was built in 1914, West Hall reopened for student use in February 2003.

Perhaps most important, the university has succeeded in rebuilding its faculty. The number of full-time faculty has increased by over 30% in the past five years. The ratio of full-time to part-time faculty is steady at 85%, while the student/faculty ratio 13/1. The retention rate of first year students in the university is 94%, while the current six year graduation rate is 80% and on the raise.

Deferred maintenance of the university's physical facilities and laboratory equipment due to the war remains a challenge, but one that the university is overcoming. AUB needs to sustain and enhance the quality of its physical and laboratory facilities to attract an international faculty and students of the highest caliber. Teaching, research, and student and patient services at AUB must continually up-date their scientific, engineering, and medical laboratories; to renovate key buildings and facilities to remain competitive and to compensate for deferred maintenance during the past decades; and to meet the challenges of up-dating or implementing new information technology for student, faculty and administrative use. The process of rehabilitating and expanding laboratories and other facilities, and modernizing the equipment and technologies they house is on-going and will enable the University to remain competitive in faculty and student recruitment and allow AUB to play a greater role in the economic and social development of Lebanon and the Middle East as a whole.

Research has also been re-emphasized at AUB. The University has invested substantial funds over the last decade to improve its research facilities and libraries. Among other developments, AUB created two multi-million dollar research labs, one the Core Environmental Sciences Lab, and the other the Central Science Research Lab for interdisciplinary use by the

science departments; such investment has served greatly to facilitate and promote faculty research efforts. The Center for Advanced Mathematical Sciences, an interdisciplinary research unit, was also founded in 1999. The Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC) has also been extensively renovated and reequipped over the last six years.

During the mid-1990's, the university was thoroughly wired for the internet and starting 1999 internet service became available to all faculty and students. Similarly, AUB's libraries have invested heavily in subscription to on-line academic journals, while computer labs have proliferated throughout the campus. To organize the physical development and ensure the natural beauty of its campus, AUB hired the Boston-based architectural planning firm, Sasaki and Associates to help it engage in a major Campus Master Planning activity; this plan was completed in spring 2002. Service quality programs for non-academic staff on campus and in the Medical Center have also been introduced and pursued on a continuous basis. Both annual service quality awards and a faculty teaching excellence award have been initiated. Finally, in fall 2002, AUB launched a major fundraising campaign with the five year goal of raising \$140,000,000. This campaign, along with on-going fundraising efforts, will ensure that the university maintains and improves the quality of its education.

On November 8, 1991, after fighting had ceased in Lebanon, AUB's oldest building and its main administrative and academic center, College Hall, was completely destroyed by a car bomb. To rebuild this structure, contributions from AUB alumni and friends in Lebanon, the Middle East, the United States, and the world-over streamed in. By the summer of 1999, College Hall had risen again, using the same architectural style but now endowed with a completely modern infrastructure.

Today AUB remains a university based on the American philosophy and system of education with deep roots in Lebanon and the Middle East. Holding the university together and providing an internal compass for its future are a set of educational and humanistic ideals that its faculty, administrators, alumni, trustees, and—through their years at the university— students come to embrace through association with this unique institution. The university declares its commitment to these ideals through its mission statement:

*The American University of Beirut is a teaching-centered research university, convinced that excellence in teaching and research go hand in hand. Its mission is to enhance education, primarily the education of the peoples of the Middle, to serve society through its educational functions, and to participate in the advancement of knowledge. AUB bases its educational perspective and methods and its academic organization on the American model of higher education. The University emphasizes scholarship that enables students to think for themselves, stresses academic excellence, and promotes high principles of character. It aims to produce men and women who not only are technically competent in their professional fields, but who also have breadth of vision, a sense of civic and moral responsibility, and devotion to the fundamental values of human life. The University believes in and encourages freedom of thought and expression. It expects, however, that this freedom will be enjoyed in a spirit of integrity and with a full sense of responsibility.*

In its service to students and to the community, the American University of Beirut strives to realize and remain true to its motto: "That they may have life and have it more abundantly."

The University's current effort to attain accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is a natural part of its on-going efforts to improve its academic services and to fulfill its educational mission. Preparation has also begun in AUB's various professional schools to work toward accreditation in these areas as well. AUB is proud of its tradition of high-quality education and medical services and looks forward to continuing this tradition in the future.