

## INTERIM REPORT #1 – FEBRUARY 15, 2002

February 15, 2002

To: Judson H. Taylor, President, State University of New York College at Cortland  
(team chair)  
George Santiago, Executive Associate Director, Middle States  
Commission on Higher Education

From: John Waterbury, President, American University of Beirut

Re: Interim Report in response to the Application to Candidacy Assessment  
Visitors' Report to the American University of Beirut, Beirut,  
Lebanon, March 28-30, 2001

Following the visit of the "Application to Candidacy Assessment Visitors' Team" to the American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon, on March 28-30, 2001, the team leader, Dr. Judson H. Taylor, sent a report, dated April 4, 2001, to the AUB administration in which he outlined the team's assessment of the university's strengths and weaknesses, according to the criteria specified by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

This present document reports the progress that the AUB administration has made in addressing the areas of weakness that the Visiting Team highlighted in their report as necessary for the fulfillment of the application requirements. Prior to responding to individual areas of concern, there are a number of specific initiatives and improvements that the last six months have witnessed at AUB that deserve mention. In their various ways, they go far in addressing many of the concerns of the Visiting Team, in either the shorter or longer term. These initiatives and changes are as follows:

**1. Completion of the AUB Campus Master Plan.** The AUB Campus Master Plan consultants, Sasaki and Associates of Boston, Massachusetts, will present the final plan for approval to the AUB Board of Trustees during their meeting on March 15, 2002. The plan represents the culmination of 15 months of close consultation with the administration and other campus constituencies; we are confident that Board approval will be given to the plan. This campus master plan will guide AUB's renovation and building efforts for the next twenty years. It is already being incorporated into our current planning for next year's capital budget. AUB is also establishing a special architectural/engineering unit, the Facilities Planning Department reporting to the Vice President of Administration, to monitor the progress of master plan's implementation and to ensure that we follow its guidelines in developing the campus in the coming years.

**2. Development of the Design for Self-Study document.** Following the visit of the accreditation team, we appointed a Design for Self Study Task-Team. In the

intervening months, this task-team has composed a near-final draft of the Design for Self-Study. This document has been reviewed by Dr. George Santiago, AUB's Middle States Association liaison, and is being modified in light of his comments. We will complete the document in late spring, 2002.

**3. Full implementation of the SCT Banner Student Information System (SIS).** Starting Fall 2001, AUB used this system for full web-based registration for all students, except those in the Medical School. In addition to an improved registration process, a major consequence of implementing this system is utilizing its powerful reporting potential. At this point, we are beginning to receive reports that conveniently and easily provide full information on such areas as student registration and class size, trends in enrolment in the major, faculty teaching loads, and linking student enrolment with tuition revenue flow. As we further refine this reporting system, we will gain access to a wealth of information that will help guide institutional planning.

**4. Revision of the undergraduate curriculum.** Already in its final stages when the team visited, a reviewed, improved and more integrated undergraduate curriculum has been launched in Fall 2001. This curriculum has increased the number of electives, diversified the general education requirements, further integrated the undergraduate curricula in the professional schools with those of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, removed from the catalogue most courses not offered in the past five years, and introduced new courses and several new academic programs. This represents a significant advance toward meeting AUB curricular goals.

This process of academic review needs several additional iterations before the AUB administration attains its goals of formulating a reinvigorated modern curriculum. On the level of policies and procedures, the Academic Deans continue to meet with the President and the Provost to set targets (such as enrolment figures) and to harmonize and unify academic rules and regulations among the Faculties. Furthermore, as part of the up-coming self study process, academic departments will specify programmatic goals and indicators that measure how well they meet these goals. In other words, self-assessment has to become a part of the way that departments do business. Departmental goals must be aligned with institutional educational goals and indicators as developed by the Educational Programs and General Education self-study task teams (whose work will be coordinated). Thereafter, academic departments must review and adjust their curricula and teaching methods to accord with the newly set goals. The end of the self-study period will therefore represent a culmination of the academic review process.

**5. Creation of an Office of Grants and Contracts.** This office was created in September, 2001, following an international search for two new staff members, a director (with a US law degree) and an experienced grants administration officer. Added to this office is the part-time specialist in governmental grants that the university already employed, and linked to it is the corporation and foundation officer already present in the AUB Development Office in New York. The long-term goal of the Office is to increase the amount of sponsored research and

institutional support from private foundations and governmental agencies. In the past few months, AUB has submitted grant proposals for over \$2,000,000 to NSF, the Macarthur Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and USAID. We received a position response from the Hewlett Foundation with an award of \$600,000 over three years to support faculty research. From USAID we have received grants totaling \$1,000,000 for project support for programs in rural sustainable development and agricultural production. Grants and Contracts monitors administration and implementation of such grants and helps compile reports to donors. At present, it administers over \$6.4 million in AUB research grants.

**6. Creation of an Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.** This office, which consists of a Director, three staff members, and the university statistician, undertakes to coordinate institutional assessment and research activities, and in this respect is responsible for the collection, analysis and dissemination of accurate and timely information about the University's environment and performance. This information supports institutional management, operations, decision-making, planning functions, and assists to achieve excellence in student learning and community service. Furthermore, the Office develops and conducts assessments for various purposes at institutional, regional and international levels.

**7. Appointment of a senior Director of Service Quality and Organizational Improvement reporting directly to the President.** Mr. Andre Nahas brings thirty years of corporate management experience with the Kodak Corporation to this position. He reports directly to the President and is working closely with the senior administration to design a plan of continuous quality improvement based on the *Baldrige National Quality Program 2001: Education Criteria for Performance*, published by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, U.S. Department of Commerce. In addition, AUB has hired U.S.-based consultants, Adams Consulting Group of Atlanta, Georgia, to conduct a thorough review of the activities of our Physical Plant's operations. It is also bringing in two consultants, directors of US university libraries, to review the status of the AUB libraries and a different consultant from the London Museum of Natural History to review the AUB Natural History Collection with a goal of creating an AUB Museum of Natural History.

**8. Appointment of two faculty members to organize and implement a program of faculty teaching and advising workshops.** Although a number of such workshops have been given over the last two years, the appointment of two faculty members from the Education Department to lead this initiative (on a part-time basis) is a further step on the path toward instituting a Center for Teaching and Learning. Already created last year was the Office of Academic Computing, which has had significant success in training faculty to integrate computer technology and the web into their teaching, using mainly the program WEBCT. At present, over 20 courses with over 1200 students enrolled have adopted the use of this program, compared to none a year ago.

**9. Centralization of course, classroom, and final exam scheduling.** The University Registrar has developed the necessary computer programs and is currently working closely with individual Faculties and Schools to implement unified scheduling of all courses, classrooms, and final exams. This will allow departments to offer and plan their course offerings on a yearly rather than semester basis. Testing these programs is underway, so this effort is expected to be completed by the end of the current academic year.

**10. Strengthening Student Affairs.** We have hired a Director of Counseling whose efforts are supplemented and coordinated with Student Health Services. We have also hired a Director of Residence Halls and now provide 24 hour monitoring all student dormitories, and a Director of Student Activities to coordinate the activities of student clubs and societies. In the next few months, we will fill the budgeted position of Director for Career and Placement Services. In addition, the International Students Office is in its second year and is increasing the scope and level of its activities. Finally, we have assigned a full-time staff person to undertake responsibility for individual academic and career counseling and to conduct exit interviews and follow-up studies to discover where our students are going after graduation.

**11. Appointment of a new Director of Financial Aid and aligning the Office's activities with Admissions.** In the course of this year, we continue to review financial aid policies and procedures with an eye toward making financial aid awards more transparent and consistent. We have engaged two short-term consultants from the United States to help in these efforts.

**12. Implementing a new Oracle-based Financial Management System (FMS).** This system is being implemented over the course of this academic year. It will provide considerably enhanced up-to-the minute reporting capabilities that will enable administration to track finances and plan adjustments more easily.

These initiatives have done much to improve AUB's ability to engage in institutional planning and assessment. In different ways, they also address some of the concerns of the Visiting Team, and thus will be referred to by number where relevant in the discussion below.

## **Curriculum**

In regard to curriculum, the team reported the following strengths and weakness:

### Strengths

*In the area of curriculum, the team observed a broad range of high quality programs that address regional needs and international trends. There is good balance of arts and sciences and professional programs. The general education program is being reformed to bring more consistency across the faculties (schools). A thorough process is in place to propose and approve new curricula.*

### Areas Needing Attention

*Completing and implementing outcomes assessment plans for all programs with a special emphasis on student learning outcomes.*

**AUB Response:** This will be a major goal of the Self-Study that we will undertake over the next two years. The faculty teaching coordinators mentioned in Point 8, above, will also be conducting workshops to ensure faculty understanding of this concept. The Self-Study task-team leaders of the committees on Educational Programs, General Education, and Assessment of Student Learning will coordinate the activities of their task-teams to develop a unified set of curriculum assessment criteria for departments to use to improve their courses and programs.

*Building a plan to finance new programs without dramatic increases in tuition and other fees*

**AUB Response:** Cost estimates for new programs are a regular part of AUB's academic planning process for new individual programs. The approval process moves from departmental proposal, to Faculty or School, to the Academic Development Committee of the Faculty Senate, to the Faculty Senate, to approval by the President, and finally Board of Trustees. We are now developing the financial reporting tools necessary to identify more precisely the costs of current programs. Once this capability is in hand, we will be better able to compare such costs with those of proposed new programs. In addition, we are increasing the university's fundraising capabilities by expanding and better training staff in our Office of Development. Such activities in the past year have resulted in a 20% increase in our annual giving. The university is also studying the feasibility of conducting a major five-year capital campaign.

*Creating a set of core objectives for general education and building a program to assess student attainment*

**AUB Response:** The set of core objectives for general education are implicit as stated below in the AUB Mission Statement:

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 are not only technically competent in their professional fields but also life-long learners who 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.

The academic deans, President and Provost have met regularly in full-day academic retreats over the last three years to review the extent to which current expectations meet the above-stated goals. As part of the accreditation self-study

process, we will work to translate further and refine the implementation of these general principles into a specific set of core objectives. We will also develop a program of assessment to determine our success in reaching these goals. As stated above, in regard to general education assessment, the Self-Study task-team leaders of the committees on Educational Programs, General Education, and Assessment of Student Learning will work to develop a unified set of curriculum assessment criteria for departments to use to improve their courses and programs.

## **Governance/Planning**

### Strengths

*The AUB leaders, including the president, provost, vice presidents and deans, have excellent credentials and seem committed to the mission and long-range goals of the University. There is strong support from a seasoned Board of Trustees that has a broad array of influential representatives from Lebanon and the United States. Members of the faculty are fully involved in the development of the curriculum. Students are eager to give input and those interviewed felt they had avenues to do so.*

### Areas Needing Attention

*Building long range plans that tie resource allocations to goals, objectives, and action plans*

**AUB Response:** We are developing the background information and the tools necessary to achieve this goal. The Campus Master Plan, the SIS and FMS systems, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, the Service Quality initiative, and the operational reviews that we are conducting or plan to conduct in such areas a Physical Plant, Financial Aid, and the university library system are all instruments that will provide the information we need for long-term planning. Every objective submitted for consideration will include quantification of the resources needed to achieve the goal.

*Making sure the five year plans of the faculties include an analysis of (1) the number of programs already in existence, (2) potential student enrollment, and (3) resources available.*

**AUB Response:** As above in the previous response.

*Engaging faculty, staff, and students in long range planning*

**AUB Response:** The above-mentioned tools will enable us to obtain reliable information on a broader basis in a more readable format than the current mainframe computer now allows. We are increasing the use of Task-Forces to engage faculty. In the past year, we have had one interfaculty task-force plan the development of our teaching and research laboratories over the next five years, another one to plan the development of classrooms, a third to study the re-launching of Ph.D. programs, and a fourth to study promotion criteria. The

implementation process of the FMS also involves consultation with a “Users Group” that includes faculty and staff outside of the Comptroller’s Office. All of these reports are being used or will be used in our planning efforts. AUB’s Director for Service Quality is creating mechanisms to assure that there are immediate indications of administration follow-up of task-force recommendations. Such recommendations must of course be aligned with AUB’s mission and campus priorities.

In addition, the Self-Study process will go a long way toward empowering faculty, students, and staff and providing clearly delineated roles for them in the planning process. Nevertheless, in the course of self-study, AUB must find better mechanisms for improving in this area in a sustained fashion. This will be one of the major aims of Self-Study.

*Communicating campus plans and progress toward achieving goals on a regular basis to campus community*

**AUB Response:** We have developed web-pages for the Teaching Excellence initiative, Campus Master Planning, the Service Quality. We are increasing the number of administrative web-pages at a rapid rate. The results of questionnaires, such as the Registration questionnaire filled out by students are being published on the web. Policies and procedures are regularly up-dated and published on the web. Moreover, we have made increasing use of general emails to keep the AUB community informed and up-to-date concerning the application for accreditation process, the planned accreditation web-page, and the reports that the self-study committees will be making on the web. Next year’s budget will include funds to implement a total reworking of our web and assigning not only a web-master but also an editor of the web to ensure quality control and completeness of institutional presentation.

In addition, two years ago, AUB created a new monthly publication, *AUB Bulletin Today*, to improve communication with the university community. The Provost also issues several reports a year to faculty to keep them informed of recent developments.

## **Assessment**

### Strengths

*The campus has initiated an excellent quality improvement initiative that should allow for assessment of all campus functions on a continuous basis.*

### Areas Needing Attention

*Making sure deans provide leadership in the implementation of assessment plans*

**AUB Response:** The academic deans are either chairs or participants in different Self-Study Task-Groups. Once these Self-Study committees develop indicators, a regular part of each

dean's yearly assessment will involve review of performance on this item. Regular reports on progress in this area are also made at the weekly meetings of the Board of Deans and the Senior Administrative Staff, as well as the monthly meeting of the Faculty Senate.

*Providing technical support for assessment plan development and funds for assessment instruments*

**AUB Response:** Two offices have been put in place to meet this need: the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment and the Director of Service Quality and Organizational Improvement. The Directors of both offices are moving vigorously to put into place regular assessment plans for both the academic and non-academic parts of the university.

## **Student Services**

### Strengths

*Although the student services staff is small in number, those serving students seem dedicated to a students come first philosophy.*

### Areas Needing Attention (based mainly on student input)

*Additional support for career development and placement*

**AUB Response:** We are devoting one current officer in Student Affairs to the task of academic and career advising for individual students. AUB will in the next few months fill the already budgeted position of Director of Career and Placement Services. This individual will coordinate activities with the above-mentioned Academic and Career advisor and with Career and Placement offices already in place in the School of Business, Health Sciences, and Engineering and Architecture. These offices have been working individually and somewhat informally. We intend to unify and organize their activities, as well as to coordinate them better with the Alumni Affairs section of the Development Office. This structure will be in place by the end of this academic year.

*Analysis of timely student access to health services*

**AUB Response:** As part of the Campus Master Plan, student health services will move to new quarters near, but not in the American University Medical Center. A core part of this move is to integrate care of students with the standards of care provided by the hospital while also improving their access to high quality health care. Improvement in this area is needed, however, and follow-up will be related in future reports.

*More effective integration of admissions, financial aid, registrar, and G.E. advising – enrollment management team*

**AUB Response:** This process is progressing. Admissions and Financial Aid are now under one director. Coordination between this Director and the Registrar are excellent. What is needed here is clear guidance from the central academic administration—the President, the Provost, and

the Deans—as to the directions that these offices should move in. Two senior academic retreats were held in January 2002 to address these central questions. Admission criteria and enrollment goals were reviewed and targets set, and the relevant offices, including Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid and the Budget Office, are working to create a plan of action.

*Increased attention to and support for athletics*

**AUB Response:** Management in this area is under scrutiny and is in need of formal review, but this is a secondary priority right now. Athletic facilities will improve with the construction of the Hostler Athletic Student Center; planning for and design of this facility will begin this spring. Student satisfaction with AUB's athletic program will continue to be monitored.

*More opportunities for financial aid and an improved method of determining need*

**AUB Response:** The new Financial Aid Director has improved processes and is working actively on further improvements. Our ability to assess need will improve with the appointment, already completed, of the Associate Director of Financial Aid, one of whose objectives is to conduct house visits to help better assess family need. The FA Director is working with the Vice President of Financial Affairs to develop a university sponsored bank loan plan for students and their families and to use our work-study funds more effectively. The University has contracted with external consultants from the U.S. to assess current FA procedures and to recommend improvements. The consultants arrived on February 12, 2002, for a two-month visit.

**Staffing/Faculty**

*Strengths*

*The University has recruited a well-qualified faculty from diverse backgrounds.*

*Areas Needing Attention*

*Clarification of criteria for promotion and retention, especially the value of teaching and how its effectiveness is measured*

**AUB Response:** AUB has appointed an interfaculty task force to address these issues; their work is ongoing. They have created and circulated a faculty survey and are now tabulating the results; they are also holding focus group discussions with small groups of faculty. Furthermore, the Faculty Self-Study Task-Team will address this subject as part of its deliberations. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment has also taken over from the Faculties the task of administering student course evaluations. This will lead to a quicker turn around so that faculty members will receive the results of these evaluations in a few weeks rather than a few months, as was often the case before.

*Development of a mentoring support system for new faculty*

**AUB Response:** This issue is crucial. For the last two years we have hired an instructor during the summer months to serve as a New Faculty Coordinator. This has worked wonders in making

the initial transition period to campus an easier and more pleasant experience, according to the surveys we have conducted following the arrival of new faculty. Beginning this year we have initiated a new faculty seminar prior to fall and spring terms in which senior administrators and faculty introduce new faculty to the university. These orientation sessions are followed by a welcoming dinner. Faculty teaching seminars and workshops also help young faculty, but a better system of long-term mentoring must still be developed.

#### *Increased support for grant development and management*

**AUB Response:** The new Grants and Contracts Office has already improved AUB's support of faculty activities in this area; further improvement is expected as the personnel in this office gain experience. We are also working to set up a system in which successful grant writers mentor and advise less experienced ones on strategies needed to obtain grants.

#### *Broader involvement of members of campus community in the search and screen process for key management positions*

**AUB Response:** Student and faculty have participated as committee members in recent personnel searches, such as those conducted for the Dean of Student Affairs, the Director of Counseling, and the Directors of Student Activities and of Residence Halls. Broad participation in management searches is a priority for the administration.

*?? Required submission of transcripts by all new hires to verify degree completion*

**AUB Response:** This is now a requirement for all future academic hires.

## **Enrollment**

### Strengths

*The recruitment of new students involves the utilization of cooperative "admissions team" approach involving representatives from the faculties and admissions staff. It yields a good pool of qualified candidates.*

### Areas Needing Attention

*Full implementation of the plan to award financial aid prior to the time a student must notify university of acceptance. Should increase yield of accepted students.*

**AUB Response:** Improvements in administration, computer data bank systems, and coordination with admissions have been put in place to meet this goal. A student and parent satisfaction form will be developed to assess how well this office is perceived to be doing.

## **Finances**

### Strengths

*Financial records indicate that the University has made effective use of endowment growth and income to balance budget.*

*Areas Needing Attention*

*Developing a balanced budget within the next several years.*

**AUB Response:** AUB is well advanced towards the development of a long-term plan, which integrates strategic academic reviews, with a strategic physical review, and a variety of administrative restructuring efforts. The main elements of the long-term educational plan are for a slowly growing student body, with a commensurate investment in faculty staffing, classroom renovation and student activities, combined with productivity and service quality improvements on the administrative side of the house. At the Hospital, a costing and re-pricing initiative, together with a complete overhaul of physician compensation (recently completed), are intended to facilitate the long-term goal of shrinking a systemic operating deficit. We believe that these efforts will result in a balanced operating budget in 2005, assuming stable political and economic conditions in Lebanon.

*Reconciling the balance sheet to identify useful management information including total value of endowment funds reserved for building and equipment replacement end of service requirements or provident funds, and free balances or otherwise uncommitted funds. FY2000 audit needs to be filed as soon as possible and all future audits need to be filed in a timely manner.*

**AUB Response:** Financial services are undergoing systematic review. This project involves the introduction of the new Financial Management System (due to go live in the Spring of 2002), and the involvement of a committee of stakeholders in reviewing internal and external financial reporting, budgeting and other financial services. In this effort, we are also researching best practices in North America and establishing long and short-term goals for the improvement of productivity and service quality. The new FMS will facilitate completing all reporting and auditing in a timely fashion. Implementation of the new FMS will take several years to complete; stakeholders' feedback will be regularly solicited to assure satisfaction and promote accountability.

*Continuation of aggressive efforts to collect Account receivables which total \$40 million with a reserve of \$13 million.*

**AUB Response:** Controlling the level of Hospital accounts receivable represents a continuing challenge for AUB. Since we expect the Lebanese public finances to be poor for the foreseeable future, and since for a variety of academic, practical, and community service reasons, we need to continue to treat government patients, AUB must continue to live with high levels of receivables. A vigorous lobbying and collection effort, together with controls over government patient throughput, are hopefully preventing this problem from getting worse.

## **Facilities**

### Strengths

*AUB has an attractive and well-maintained campus of which faculty, staff, and students are highly appreciative. The University owned farm is also a major asset and is being run efficiently by the local director and his staff. The new sports and activities center will be a positive addition to the campus. It is much anticipated by the students who are desirous of more support for athletics.*

### Areas Needing Attention

*None noted for this category*

**AUB Response:** The Campus Master Planning exercise and the Physical Plant review will yield significant improvements in this area.

## **Libraries/Information Technology**

### Strengths

*The University has responded in positive manner to increased demand for information. Significant progress has been made toward the comprehensive networking of the campus. Nearly every facility except rooms in the residence halls is wired for access. The libraries as central modes of information are quite well equipped and managed. The libraries are reasonably well stocked with books and periodicals, and students have access to several large bibliographic databases.*

### Areas Needing Attention

*Growing demand for services will require a reassessment of staffing needs*

**AUB Response:** AUB is currently forming a team of senior university librarians from the U.S. to review library operations and staffing. The director of Wake Forest University library and the former dean of Case Western Reserve University library are visiting the campus for a week at the end of February, 2002, to provide an initial assessment of library's future needs in the areas of collection development, staff needs, infomatics, and space. The report of these consultants will help us formulate long term development plans for the library, especially in the area of staff.

## **Faculty of Medicine Observations and Recommendations**

*Dr. Robert McDonald conducted a separate assessment of medical programs. His observations were as follows:*

### Strengths

*The University has recruited and retained a well-qualified and enthusiastic faculty. The development of core labs, and an animal care facility should further aid recruitment. Special attention has been given to the implementation of a problem based learning curriculum.*

### Areas Needing Attention

*Develop workload distribution strategy to encourage further curriculum development*

**AUB Response:** A new medical practice plan was introduced as of October 1, 2001, which rewards clinical faculty for the time they spend in curricular teaching. This allowed the Chairs of departments to engage a larger number of faculty members to participate in teaching, specifically in the basic sciences, Med I and II curricula. An effort analysis tool was developed to assess the contribution of each faculty member in teaching. Faculty participation made it possible to introduce Problem Based Learning (PBL) to 10% of the first year curriculum. PBL is targeted to comprise 50% of total credits given in Med I and II in 4-5 years.

*Recruitment of a more diverse medical school student body to avoid excessive inbreeding. AUB graduates are well qualified but broader-based recruiting is needed.*

**AUB Response:** This is a clear goal of the Faculty of Medicine, but it is not one that will be achieved immediately. The admission committee is working to consider performance up to first semester in the senior year rather than its end, for the decision to offer admission to the Faculty of Medicine. Such early decision will encourage more students from outside AUB to apply. A visit by the Dean to Saudi Arabia looked into possibilities for accepting applications from students who completed two years in the Saudi medical and health science program which is entered from high school; to join AUB for and additional pre-med training with the ultimate goal of entering the FM. The curriculum is being restructured to provide more electives and path choices that hopefully will also increase the pool of applicants.

This completes the report.

Sincerely,

John Waterbury, President