

For Immediate Release



AUB helps establish first private English-speaking university in northern Saudi Arabia

Beirut, Lebanon- 19/10/2011 - The American University of Beirut (AUB) joined Fahd Bin Sultan University (FBSU) in Tabuk in celebration of FBSU's recent accreditation by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education. FBSU is the first private English-speaking University in northern Saudi Arabia and it owes much of its success to its fruitful relationship with AUB's Office of Regional External Programs (REP).

First mooted in the mid-nineties by Prince Fahd Bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, Governor of the Tabuk, the idea of establishing a private university in this remote Saudi province presented serious challenges for all those involved. Building buildings was the easy part but recruiting academic professionals to run an upmarket college and enroll high caliber students was altogether another proposition.

This was the problem confronting veteran contractor Kamil Saadeddine of the Arab Supply and Trading Company (ASTRA), the company charged with establishing the University. After 35 successful years in Tabuk he admits, "It was the biggest challenge of my life and for a long time I tried to delay it. Now I am so proud of what we have achieved, thanks to help from REP."

REP first became involved with FBSU back in 2006 when it was a single Computing College devoid of academic credentials, a proper curriculum, the requisite academic and ancillary personnel and all other programs that go into the successful running of a university. With two successive Presidents and Provosts seconded by REP from AUB, backed by all the expertise AUB has to offer, today FBSU is recognized as a pioneer throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Riad Chedid, AUB Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, was the first to take up the mantle of President in 2008, alongside Ahmed Smaili as Provost. The two men worked 15-hour days, seven days a week to establish two new Colleges of Business and Engineering. The job included designing laboratories, libraries, a medical center, classrooms and recreational facilities. That is not to mention the curricula, catalogues, manuals, hiring faculty and finding students. "This was at a time when 70 per cent of the students did not have high school science certificates," Chedid explains.

Designed by AUB's Ghazi Ghaith (Chairperson of the Department of Education) and drawing on its liberal arts model, a Foundation Year Program was launched in 2007. Since then student numbers have climbed from 400 to over 1,000 and in June 2009 the first graduates from FBSU were awarded their degrees.

Ahmad Nasri, (AUB Professor of Computer Science) took over as President in 2010. In tandem with Provost Abdallah Luyizzak, (AUB Professor of Mathematics) he is concretizing FBSU academic and regulatory programs as well as overseeing the introduction of an EMBA Program. An immensely successful two-year Bridging Program for technical students working towards a Bachelor's was initially expected to attract 50 applicants but is currently hosting 200 students. There are new technical exchange programs and MOUs with various European universities in the push to improve research. An Arts faculty is in the planning stages.

Abdul Hamid Al Hallab, Chairman of the FBSU Steering Committee and founder of REP says, "I feel very good about the success of the university. It has become a quality university with quality students and hopefully this will continue. This is at the heart of what REP does."

"This is a proud moment for the Office of Regional External Programs and AUB" said George Farag, Acting Vice President for REP. The recognition of the FBSU by His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, pays tribute to the important work that a large team of AUB faculty and staff have done since 2007. This is another step as we move towards striving to elevate the quality of education in the region by fulfilling AUB's motto, 'So that they may have life and have it more abundantly.'"

As for Kamil Saadeddine, he says his nightmare is far behind him. "I have forgotten all those days and sleepless nights when I felt that this was the worst challenge I had in life. This Regional External Program is really a blessing to all the Arab countries."

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For more information please contact:

Maha Al-Azar, Assistant Director for Media Relations, ma110@aub.edu.lb, 01-353 228

Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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