



AUB Arab Uprisings Research Initiative: A brief summary

The Arab uprisings which started in December 2010 will undoubtedly be one of the most studied episodes of recent history. Accordingly, the office of the AUB Provost has launched a long-term, multi-sectoral research initiative on the Arab uprisings, aiming to harness the university's many resources and assets to engage constructively with the historic changes taking place across the Arab world. The revolutionary and transformational processes underway are dynamic, defined by many ups and downs, in one of the most complex geo-political regions in the world. The challenges of researching and understanding this pivotal moment in history – its causes, main actors, critical dynamics, changed power relations, and likely consequences – demand that critical research in multiple fields be defined by perspectives from across the region, and continue for years ahead rather than merely comprise an occasional conference or publication.

Research projects funded by AUB and donors form the heart of the initiative, which will also include seminars and conferences, a lecture series, publications, a website, and other activities that can help us better understand the nature and consequences of the changes underway. The immediate aim of the AUB research initiative is to identify and research the most significant elements of the current transformations throughout the region, and understand how these will influence the Arab countries and their relations with other states.

At a panel discussion in December 2011 that analyzed the many dimensions of the Arab uprisings, Provost Ahmad Dallal said: "In keeping with AUB's status as a long-standing respected leader in policy-related research and analysis throughout the Arab world, we see this moment as both an opportunity and an obligation to engage more deeply with our societies. We will do this by using the intellectual and pedagogical tools of our trade -- research, publishing, teaching, public debate and discussion, and institutional collaborations with colleagues around the region and the world. In the months and years ahead we will explore new ways to engage interested faculty members and students in this epic that unfolds before us on a daily basis, making this a truly university-wide initiative."

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) is managing this AUB-wide initiative, which was initiated in April 2011 with a five-member AUB faculty panel discussion moderated by the provost. This was followed by a trip to the USA by

four faculty members and the AUB president, who held public events in half a dozen major east coast venues. The initiative has identified to date 20 AUB professors in different fields who are working on research projects related to the Arab uprisings and the transformations in society that they reflect, in fields such as political science, international affairs, psychology, youth attitudes and identities, public health, media studies, sociology, food and agriculture, civic engagement, democratization, economics, and others. A steering/advisory committee of 8 AUB professors, chaired by the provost, oversees this initiative.

The faculty steering committee has defined the overarching inter-linked themes of "power, equity, and collective action" as central to understanding the dynamics unleashed during the first year of the uprisings. An initial set of research projects for a spring roundtable seminar will include an inventory of research issues related to the Arab uprisings that indigenous and international institutions have addressed during the first year, and a critical analysis of what the chosen topics reveal about local and foreign attitudes towards the dynamics underway in the region.

We hope that the knowledge we generate from these activities will also provide useful inputs into policy-making by governments, the private sector, NGOs and international parties who are all trying to make sense of the historic changes underway.

January 2012