Proposal for the Establishment of a

Division of University Interdisciplinary Programs

Prepared by
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Introduction

The past decade has witnessed a major shift toward interdisciplinary research that advances solutions to complex real-world problems unconstrained by the boundaries and frameworks of traditional disciplines. This shift has been global in nature, and its impact has been felt at leading international universities and institutions established across the Middle East. Here at AUB, many faculty members have been building on strong disciplinary foundations to pursue problem-centered interdisciplinary research. While they remain committed to their own fields of study, they also understand that cooperation across departments and faculties/schools is critical when addressing the difficult research questions that underlie human development – questions involving climate change, energy access, economic growth, cultural transition, and public health, among many others. Many of them are also familiar with today’s problem-based approaches to teaching and learning in higher education. These methodologies prepare students – and future colleagues – to accelerate the pace of scientific discovery; unravel the complexities of development issues; and make meaningful contributions to their societies.

The long-term success of our faculty and students depends on AUB’s commitment to creating an environment and structure capable of supporting, monitoring, assessing, and rewarding interdisciplinary research, and developing successful interdisciplinary graduate degree programs. This imperative was formally recognized in 2007, when the strategic plans of AUB’s six faculties/schools expressed strong backing for the establishment of such programs and of centers of academic excellence. The University now offers a growing number of interdisciplinary programs and is home to several thriving research units, including the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs; the Munib R. and Angela Masri Institute for Energy and Natural Resources; the Center for Advanced Mathematical Sciences; and the Nature Conservation Center for Sustainable Futures. Centers and institutes like these have high potential to evolve into units offering new interdisciplinary minor and graduate degree programs in the near future. Some currently have graduate programs under development.

Obstacles remain, however, to the effective administration of these programs and to faculty involvement in them. Despite steps to address certain longstanding concerns over the last five years, interdisciplinarity at the University continues to face the following challenges:

a. The culture of interdisciplinary teaching and learning is not well developed at AUB.

b. Interfaculty programs are administered by committees, and their academic governance is bounded by policies applicable to traditional disciplines.

c. Faculty recruitment is initiated by departments/faculties. Interdisciplinary programs cannot make professorial hiring decisions. Joint faculty/program appointments are not addressed by AUB administrative procedures and resource allocation policies.

d. Faculty members with appointments and responsibilities in more than one department face a more complex promotion path and a higher service load.

e. Faculty involved in interdisciplinary teaching and research are rightly concerned about the weight given to these contributions during reappointment and promotion processes.

f. Cost-sharing and funding structures for interdisciplinary programs are not well developed at AUB in terms of academic and non-academic lines and budgets.
g. Most facilities and research spaces are administered by deans and departmental chairs.

h. There are few common facilities for cross-faculty interaction at AUB.

i. An external complication to the development of interdisciplinary programs involves the Lebanese Ministry of Higher Education degree registration requirements, which are tailored to traditional disciplines and require that faculties/schools grant degrees.

Interdisciplinary research is no longer merely a trend, but as a transition to a dynamic state\(^1\) which engages the institution, its faculty, and its students with the broader communities that sustain them. Our vision, as AUB makes this transition, is to empower and support faculty endeavoring to advance knowledge in areas unexplored by traditional disciplines. This entails strengthening existing interdisciplinary programs, motivating curricular innovation and reform, and supporting the introduction of new interdisciplinary programs. It also depends on the creation of a new academic unit to grant interdisciplinary graduate degrees; to administer these programs in coordination with participating faculties/schools; and to deepen the involvement of University centers in research and outreach activities. Interdisciplinarity at AUB increases our ability to address the region’s most complex and pressing issues, while helping the University to meet its goal of becoming an acknowledged leader in graduate education and a respected member of the global network of research institutions. Support for interdisciplinary programs is now at the forefront of the University’s strategic initiatives and is the basis for this proposal to establish the **Division of University Interdisciplinary Programs**.

AUB currently offers four interdisciplinary graduate programs that have positively influenced research collaborations across faculties and departments and attracted research funding. Each of these programs fall into one of three broad categories. The first category includes interdepartmental programs offered within a single faculty, such as the MA in Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (FAS) and the MS in Public Health (FHS). Programs in the second category involve departments in two or three different faculties, but working in related fields. One department usually takes the lead, offering most or all of the courses, while the others contribute to the program’s research component. Examples include the Interfaculty Graduate Nutrition Program (GNP), leading to the MS in Nutrition (FAFS; FM; FHS), and the Interfaculty Graduate Neuroscience Program (IGNP), leading to the MS in Neuroscience (FM; FAS; FEA). The third category includes programs like the Interfaculty Graduate Environmental Sciences Program, leading to the MS in Environmental Sciences (FAFS; FEA; FHS; FAS), which also involves multiple departments or disciplines in two or more faculties. Programs of this type, however, require more complex governance structures and closer coordination in order to better achieve their missions and educational objectives and fully meet the needs of students.

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The Proposal for the Establishment of the Division of University Interdisciplinary Programs (DUIP)

AUB is proposing the establishment of a new degree-granting unit, the Division of University Interdisciplinary Programs (DUIP), which will support existing interdisciplinary programs as well as new ones being developed within and across faculties/schools. In addition to essential governance reforms, the proposal includes incentives and recognition for activities which strengthen the capacity of the University, including its centers, institutes, and museums, to foster interdisciplinary research and programs; and which encourage more faculty and administrators to endorse and promote interdisciplinarity. Building the administrative capacity to support this initiative will be pursued at the same pace as academic development. DUIP will be a university-wide body headed by a director who reports to the provost. It will have an independent cost center and budget.

DUIP Mission and Objectives

The Division of University Interdisciplinary Programs will promote interdisciplinary engagement in teaching and research as a shared enterprise involving AUB faculties and research units. These collaborative engagements will permit faculty members and graduate students to cross traditional disciplinary boundaries in order to advance research and scholarship, acquire knowledge, and generate new insights.

DUIP will provide a responsive environment for graduate education and research by focusing on scholarship in areas not addressed through existing departmental structures, and by connecting graduate students from a variety of backgrounds with the resources which they need to achieve diverse career goals.

The objectives of DUIP are:

a. To create an environment that fosters interdisciplinary approaches to graduate education and research.

b. To improve administrative and financial support for interdisciplinary programs.

c. To strengthen existing interdisciplinary programs and to support the creation of new interdisciplinary curricular offerings.

d. To support the involvement of University centers, institutes, and museums in research and outreach activities.

DUIP will recommend the granting of interdisciplinary graduate degrees to the Senate. It may also oversee interdisciplinary graduate programs when their learning goals are most effectively achieved outside of existing academic units, including faculties/schools.

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2 Historically, the Division of Education was a degree-granting unit. The degree used to be signed by the chair of the program and the director of the division.
Administrative Structure of DUIP

Director

The provost will recommend the appointment of the DUIP director to the president following consultations with faculty and deans involved in the relevant programs in accordance with University policy for the appointment of directors/chairs of academic units.

The director will be responsible for the administration and academic development of the unit. The DUIP director will be evaluated by the provost in accordance with the University policy for the evaluation of the directors/chairs of academic units.

Interdisciplinary Program Coordinating Committees (IPCCs)

Current University practice is that each faculty member contributing to an interdisciplinary program belongs to a home department/faculty for administrative purposes. Interdisciplinary programs are commonly\(^3\) governed by an Interdisciplinary Program Coordinating Committee (IPCC), whose members are appointed by the deans to represent the departments/tracks of the faculties/schools which contribute to the program. The chair of each committee is appointed by the president on the recommendation of the provost.

With the establishment of DUIP, this practice will change slightly in that the director of the division will appoint IPCC members. IPCC chairs will continue to be appointed by the president. Committees will normally be composed of four interdisciplinary faculty drawn from at least two different faculties/schools and different departments. Appointments will be for terms of three years, renewable.

The IPCC, through its chair, will initiate all curricular changes to the program. Changes which may affect any participating faculty/school must be communicated through the DUIP director to the relevant faculty’s Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) for its input. Faculty representatives on IPCCs are expected to attend their faculty’s GSC meeting when curricular issues related to the program are discussed. Curricular changes approved by the IPCC are recommended to the Board of Graduate Studies for approval.

Much like other academic units, IPCCs will have autonomy over their program’s academic decisions. They will work with program faculty and the DUIP director, and with the support of the Graduate Council, to develop/reform program bylaws, and policy/graduate student guides/handbooks. IPCCs will recommend the conferral of their respective degrees to the DUIP director with the support/vote of core and shared full-time faculty involved in their programs.

IPCC Chairs

IPCC chairs will be responsible for their program’s administration. The compensation of IPCC chairs will be similar to that received by departmental chairs.

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\(^3\) The intra-faculty MA in Arab and Middle Eastern Studies, for example, is directed by a program coordinator.
IPCC chairs will receive all information pertinent to their programs (such as course schedules, names of instructors, total FTE support, and Instructor Course Evaluations) through the DUIP director, who will coordinate with the deans of participating faculties/schools. The chairs will report to the DUIP director any deficiencies in course offerings due to a lack of FTEs one year in advance in order to seek support for necessary part-time or full-time hires.

**DUIP Administrative, Advisory, Graduate Studies, and Research Committees**

The DUIP Administrative Committee will be composed of chairs of Interdisciplinary Programs Coordinating Committees. The Advisory Committee will be composed of three faculty members of professorial rank elected by participating IPCC members in accordance with AUB faculty bylaws. The administrative committee will advise the DUIP director and be responsible for the division’s strategic planning and its assessment and continuous improvement activities. The Advisory Committee will advise the DUIP director on issues related to appointments, reappointments, and promotions in accordance with AUB faculty bylaws. The DUIP will also form its graduate studies and research committees in accordance to Unified Faculty Bylaws.