New Master in Rural Community Development (MSc RCODE)

The Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences (FAFS) will start a new Master of Sciences program in rural community development (RCODE) in the fall of 2014.

The RCODE program will allow students to build their capacities in community development to better design, manage, follow up, evaluate and monitor development projects, either in the public or private sector and locally, regionally and internationally.

Administered by the Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (ESDU) at FAFS, the MSc RCODE, is a definite pioneer in Lebanon and the region and it has been reviewed and evaluated by Cornell University Professor David Brown, co-director of the Community and Regional Development Institute (CaRDI) at Cornell, who recently visited AUB and highly recommended the program. The program is now registered in the New York State Education Department and the Lebanese Ministry of Higher Education.

“According to a 2010 World Bank report, non-governmental and governmental organizations, in Lebanon alone, have spent more than $500 million on community-based development project addressing mainly agriculture, public health, natural resources and environmental in the past decade,” said FAFS Dean Nahla Hwalla. “Yet there is currently a shortage of qualified professionals with a strong knowledge base in rural community development. What’s more, no university in Lebanon or the Middle East offers such training, while this approach is now firmly established in western universities.”

Hwalla added that community development efforts in the region have largely failed because of top-down approaches leaving little room for community-driven initiatives and partnerships.

“AUB recognizes these challenges and is well-situated to be amongst the first academic institutions in the MENA to offer a rural community development program,” she noted.

The RCODE program will focus on a participatory and multi-disciplinary approach, in order to graduate professionals in community development with up-to-date knowledge on issues and tools to better assist their organizations and their community in development programs in different disciplines.

Graduates of the program will be able to work as planners, extension associates, human service providers, economic development specialists, or other local, regional or state policy-makers, practitioners or administrators in order to improve the livelihoods of their communities.

The RCODE program is flexible: it is open holders of bachelor degrees in the fields of science and social science; it accommodates full-time and part-time students, and offers thesis or non-thesis options.

Established in 1952, the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences (FAFS) has played a pioneering role in the region in the fields of nutrition and dietetics, landscape, environment and natural resource management, and community and rural development. It offers six undergraduate programs in
agribusiness, agriculture, food science and management, landscape architecture, nutrition and dietetics, and nutrition and dietetics coordinated program. In addition FAFS offers opportunities for graduate studies with special focus on issues of regional importance including alleviating obesity, malnutrition, addressing poor eating habits, improving food security, contributing to a thriving agriculture business sector, promoting the rational use of water to face climate change, protecting the region’s natural and cultural heritage, and planning for an improved urban green environment. FAFS owns and operates a 100 hectare research and outreach center located 80 kilometers east of Beirut in the Beqa’a Valley known as the Agricultural Research and Education Center (AREC).

Founded in 2001, ESDU has established itself as a regional center specializing in community development and outreach projects. Through its programs, ESDU adopts an inter-disciplinary approach to conduct studies that support local food production and improve food security. The Unit also offers international training in community development project design, implementation, and monitoring to improve the impact of development projects in the region and in knowledge assessment and management to best document and share information.

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