

AUB University for Seniors

Interim Report November 2014

Why the University for Seniors?

For the past few decades, the number and proportion of older Lebanese have been steadily increasing. It is estimated that by the year 2050, the proportion of older people aged 65 years and over will approach 20%, the highest proportion in the Arab countries. This aging population presents a huge challenge for the country, not only to anticipate the medical and economic needs of older adults, but also to promote their overall well-being in society. Public health studies show that social connections and meaningful engagement have a positive impact on the health and well-being of older adults; the UN motto “Engaged as We Age” captures this idea.

In 2007, the AUB Neighborhood Initiative learned from interviews with neighbors in Ras Beirut that opportunities for many older residents were strikingly limited: with few occasions to leave their homes, lacking in mental stimulation, and with virtually no opportunity to give back to their communities. In response, Cynthia Myntti, leader of the Neighborhood Initiative, and Abla Sibai, a Public Health scholar and an expert on aging, joined forces to create an educational and cultural program at AUB designed with and for older adults, one that satisfies their aspirations and responds to their needs.

After an extensive feasibility study, in 2010 AUB’s “University for Seniors” (UfS) or جامعة الكبار was born.

UfS vision & guiding principles

The program aims at creating a new and positive image of aging in Beirut, Lebanon and the Middle East: one that offers visible proof that engaged aging is possible in the Arab world, and that it contributes to healthy aging.

To our knowledge, no programs exist in Lebanon or the region that portrays a positive image of aging or promote active, engaged aging. Adult education programs typically cater to adults seeking to improve their career prospects with additional skills and certificates. The University for Seniors lies on three unique guiding principles: Peer-learning (seniors learn from one another rather than from a paid professional instructor), Community building (one joins a community rather than pays for one-off activities) and Intergenerational connections (seniors are not ghettoized as ‘old people’ and are connected to the regular AUB student body).

UfS in a nutshell

The University for Seniors is a pioneering program in Lebanon and the region that addresses the aspirations of many older adults to remain intellectually challenged and socially connected. The program offers courses, lecture series, educational travel programs, and other social and cultural events during two 12-week terms per year.

The Lebanese society is more segregated than ever along sectarian and class lines. Few social institutions exist to break down those barriers for young and old alike. The University for Seniors offers an example of how Lebanese from different religions, different social backgrounds and different parts of the country can live together and positively interact with each other. Also, in a country where education is highly costly, our program was able to attract members from different social classes due to its affordable membership fees (\$150 per term).

From its inception in Spring 2010 until this Fall 2014, 498 individuals benefited from 111 courses, 129 lectures, 7 social and cultural events, 16 educational travel programs inside and outside Lebanon. This Fall 2014 term we have 223 members, 23 courses, 20 lectures and four trips within Lebanon and we have 1180 subscribers on our mailing list.

The University for Seniors has been welcomed enthusiastically by seniors and non-seniors alike who understand its uniqueness and potential for meeting the aspirations of older adults to do something different, something challenging and meaningful in the last decades of their lives. The exponential increase in memberships and the extensive media coverage (29 pieces about the program appeared in local and regional media -TVs, radios and newspapers – since April 2012) are a witness to that.

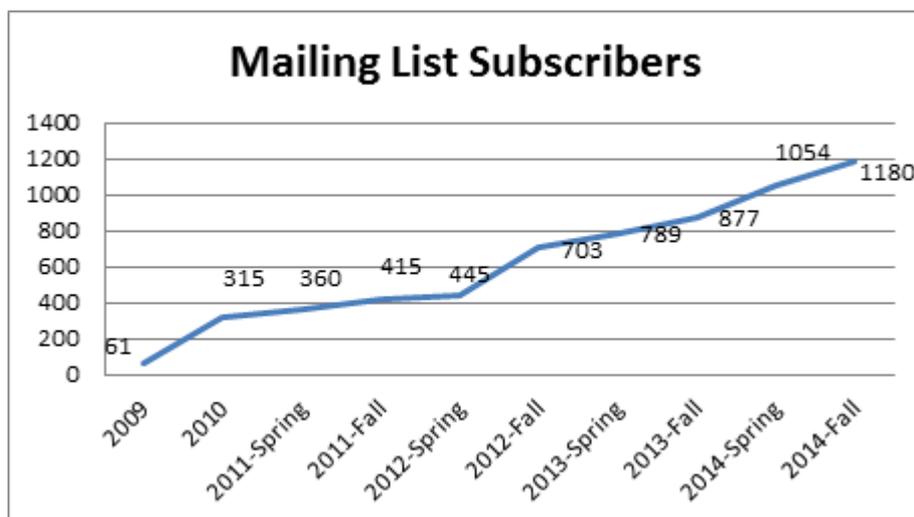
For more information about the program:

- www.aub.edu.lb/seniors
- <https://www.facebook.com/aub.universityforseniors>

Four years in numbers

Number of activities				
	Study groups	Lectures	Trips	Comments
Spring 2010	3	0	0	
Fall 2010	3	4	1	
Spring 2011	4	4	0	
Fall 2011	6	5	0	One intergenerational activity during the term
Spring 2012	7	7	1	Two intergenerational activities during the term
Fall 2012	9	12	0	Two intergenerational activities during the term
Spring 2013	15	21	2	Five intergenerational activities during the term
Fall 2013	20	23	6	Two intergenerational activities during the term
Spring 2014	21	33	3	Two intergenerational activities during the term
Fall 2014	23	20	4	Two intergenerational activities during the term

Number of Members	
Spring 2010	57
Fall 2010	76
Spring 2011	99
Fall 2011	76
Spring 2012	56
Fall 2012	102
Spring 2013	108
Fall 2013	154
Spring 2014	160
Fall 2014	223



Through the words and faces of our members....

"I think this is one of the GREATEST opportunities AUB has offered anyone and everyone".

"Your program is life changing".

"The UfS has become our reason for being".

"My brother-in-law is a changed man after taking a class through your program. It really has opened up a whole new world for him".

"A uniting and positive effort, something we severely lack in this city."

"A university in the original sense – a community of people learning from one another".

"One should never retire from life. There is always time to learn more, and also to give more. This gives meaning to life."

"It is an opportunity for seniors to feel capable and full of potential yet to achieve."



Plant Identification walk on campus



Smart phones



Computer literacy



Rethinking History education



Mediterranean Europe



Philosophy of religions