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ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE
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FUTURE STATES OF THE UNIVERSITY

JOHN WATERBURY, PRESIDENT

Two years ago I gave an address entitled **The State of the University**. Today I am shifting my focus to future states or possible paths of evolution of the University. My thoughts stem from our current strategic planning initiatives, and based upon them, I want to frame some choices that lie before us. I will do so in terms of three basic themes: the perils and promise of research, need-based financial aid, and honoring our commitment to undergraduate education.

One choice I will not deal with today, but which is very much alive, is that pertaining to issues of stability of academic employment, specifically long term contracts and tenure.

I begin with this premise: faculty quality is the *sine qua non* of our enterprise. It is the magnet that leads to student quality. It is the magnet for attracting new, high quality faculty recruits. Once faculty quality is established then we have a virtuous circle, a dynamic of good faculty attracting good students, in turn attracting good faculty. My second premise is that a good student body is defined by academic achievement *and* by diversity. Diversity can be measured by national origin, gender, sect, age and income level. I am particularly concerned in my remarks today by income level.

In assessing the progress of our faculty, what is the proper balance between teaching and research, the two primary criteria by which we measure quality? Our faculty must walk on those two legs, with a substantial backpack of institutional service added on. Our institutional mission is founded on education in the broad sense, and teaching is the most significant component of education. Faculty quality, however, is surely also dependent upon the realized or potential research achievements of our professors. Moreover, faculty engagement with on-going research enhances the quality of teaching **up to a point**. Our challenge is to figure out what that point is and then deploy our resources (university finances and support services) to help us achieve the proper balance.

I doubt that we will ever have full consensus on what that point is, and even if we do agree, the balance may well shift over time. That is a prime reason for why institutional planning must be an on-going process of anticipation, assessment, and recalibration.

AUB prides itself on following the US model of higher education, but we all know that there are, in fact, a number of models. There is no doubt that the model of the great North American research university, whether public, like Berkeley, or private, like Harvard, has been envied worldwide. No one can doubt its past success. But given the choice, is it a model that one would emulate and replicate? Keeping in mind that I spent most of my academic life in such institutions (Princeton and Columbia for my education and Michigan and Princeton as a



professor), and that I benefited enormously from them, I answer the question with a qualified ‘no’. **Moreover, AUB can make a choice whether or not to follow that model.** Through our strategic planning process we are at a point where we will make strategic decisions that will, over time, commit us in certain directions and thereby foreclose certain options. Before we move down one of several possible pathways, I want us to be very clear about the implications of what we are doing.

William Massy, in his book on university finances, Honoring the Trust, addresses these issues in a useful way. Massy was a tenured professor and senior administrator at Stanford University, an institution he greatly admires. Yet he notes two phenomena in US higher education that have the makings of vicious circles. First, in his view, is the over commitment to research productivity that was fed by abundant federal and foundation funding in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. A generation of scholar-teachers who entered academia in those years now run the academic establishment. Only a few challenge the assumptions established at that time. The emphasis on research productivity measured against a promotion clock has led to quantity but infrequently to real quality. I recognize that even mediocre research may keep the academic abreast of his or her field and analytically sharp, and I accept that mediocre research is a distinct advance on no research at all. But mediocre research costs money—it costs as much to produce mediocre research as it does to produce quality research-- and it costs time to meet the productivity criteria of the promotion process. We must ask if some of that money and time could not be put to better use within the institution. Stanley Katz, an historian at Princeton University and a recent visitor to AUB, summed up the essence of the prevailing research university model:

“The main issue is the emergence of government-funded research as the engine that has driven university priorities. On the one hand, that has meant a huge expansion of campus-based science—a multitude of new science buildings, laboratories, computing facilities, professors, and research staff—and on the other it has biased universities toward research and graduate students, and relegated the teaching of undergraduates to a lesser position...

All of these changes have occurred in a neo-liberal atmosphere of university fiscal administration in which academic units are viewed as individual cost centers, favoring those most capable of attracting external financial resources.”

Stanley Katz

Even US research universities have found the old model financially unsustainable as they have shifted their sights from dwindling federal and foundation research funding to private sector, corporate funding.

The second vicious circle is related to tuition discounting. This practice was given a major stimulus in 1991 when the US Dept. of Justice challenged the Ivy League's and MIT's coordination of financial aid offerings as a hindrance to commerce, i.e. as collusion to restrain trade. The Ivies had wanted all choices of applicants whom they admitted to be governed solely by the merits of the particular university, not by the financial aid package offered. The Justice department



challenge said that the Ivies should compete for students by offering variable financial aid packages for the students they wanted to attract. The courts upheld the challenge, and competitive tuition discounting became the norm throughout the US.

If universities competed primarily to attract the less well-off or to promote racial and ethnic diversity, then tuition discounting might have been relatively progressive. But what in fact happened and continues to happen is that tuition is primarily discounted to attract the best students with the highest SAT scores. Various ranking systems, such as that of US News and World Report, compare universities and colleges according to the average SAT scores of their undergraduate students. To hold steady or move up in the rankings, admission offices are under pressure to recruit the brightest students and use discounts to do so. Relative rankings, it is believed, allow universities and colleges to attract more bright students who can pay full tuition.

“If successful, tuition discounting can meet enrollment goals and yield net tuition revenue that colleges can use to improve instruction and enhance other services.”

Jerry Davis

The same study goes on to say that it has not been clear whether most institutions are successful in this sense over time. It is a very delicate game to balance discounted tuition against a steady supply of qualified, tuition-paying students.

What is more certain is that there has been a diminution of socio-economic and racial diversity in leading universities and colleges in the United States. Massy calls this "no need" financial aid, and about 60% of all financial aid awarded by *private* US institutions is "no need" (p. 45). The 'best' students tend to come from higher income school districts and higher income families. Even public or state institutions are moving in the same, non-progressive direction.

“The result is a paradox. We are opening up access to higher education at the base of the prestige pyramid at the very time that more institutions, hoping to strengthen their claim to be pathways to leadership in American society, are competing to rise to the top of the pyramid. With the passing of time, the institutions locked in this competition, especially public ones, may lose their ability to serve as agents of social and economic mobility. Their degrees are increasingly becoming stamps that ratify social advantage. Indeed, one unintended consequence of the rankings craze is that it generates behavior totally at odds with our rhetoric about providing educational opportunity for all students, regardless of their backgrounds.”

‘The Perils of Pursuing Prestige’ CHE, Jan. 21, 2005

What, you may ask, do these two vicious circles have to do with Lebanon or the Middle East? My answer is ‘plenty’. Many of our faculty are recruited from the best research universities in the US, and they tend to want to emulate the environment that produced them. If someone with a magic wand were to say to me, “President Waterbury in a short time AUB could have the depth, breadth and quality of MIT; let me wave my wand,” I doubt that I would slam the door in his or

her face. Second, as in the US, the best secondary schools tend to be available to the wealthier strata of society so that academic merit tends to reflect socio-economic privilege.

It is quite possible that a viable, sustainable educational model could be built here at AUB that emphasizes graduate education and research and that recruits better off students through tuition discounts based on merit rather than need. I do not mean to demean such a model, but it is not the one I favor.

AUB need not be victimized by either of these vicious circles. For once, our isolation and stagnation during the civil war may actually be an advantage. We do not have to go down the same paths as some of our peer institutions in the US. Indeed, we have some very exciting opportunities to design strategies that will avoid the research and enrollment distortions that I have outlined above. We are only at the beginning of re-establishing research as a central feature of academic excellence, so that we have an opportunity to define what we mean by good research in ways that match our faculty's capacity and our likely resources. We have not become part of the US ranking game so that we have the opportunity to use our financial aid to shape a more diverse undergraduate student body, socio-economically, and by nationality.

I firmly believe that research and teaching complement each other. There is little doubt that a dynamic research environment attracts good faculty. We would be naïve to think that it is the quality of students alone that attract faculty. Rather it is a combination of good undergraduates ready and willing to learn, first-rate graduate students who can assist the faculty in their research, and other faculty colleagues who can constitute a supportive research community. It follows that some of the costs of maintaining these research communities are appropriately born through fees charged to undergraduate students.

The question is when does the feeding and caring of these research communities detract significantly from the educational experience of undergraduates? When are too many financial resources and too much faculty time being devoted purely to the research endeavor? Our strategic planning initiative is trying to answer that question for AUB. Increasingly in the United States the answer is that too much time and money is being poured into the research machine, to the detriment of undergraduate education.

“To put it bluntly, the focus on research and publication and the mad dash for federal funds and external grants has diverted energies away from important faculty work. It has had a direct and negative impact on the quality of classroom instruction and on the ability of institutions to provide support to and involve their communities. It also diverts energies from types of research that do not fall within the traditional publication realm.”

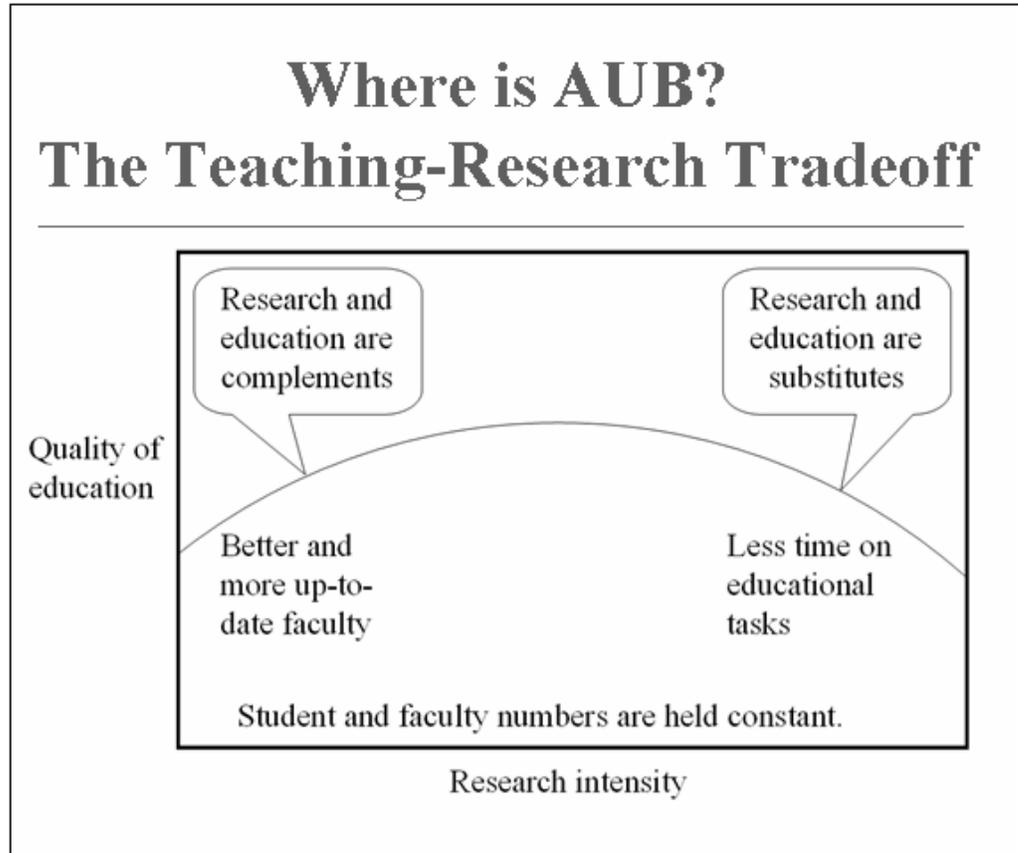
National Academy for Academic Research, 2001

I should note that most of the feedback I have received over the years at AUB would suggest that currently we are not carrying out our teaching and advising missions with the quality to which we should aspire. At the same time, we



have not tilted faculty time and university resources in support of research. We are, as the saying goes, between two stools. Rather than opt for one stool or the other, I want to pull them both together.

The basic trade-offs are illustrated in the following figure in Massy:



As an institution moves down the right hand slope, it succumbs to what Massy calls the “academic ratchet:”

“...cross subsidies from education to research boost prestige and thus market power, which allows higher prices to be charged for the same education quality, which enables larger cross subsidies. Buyers pay more for the same quality, or perhaps they pay more for less as research consumes increasing amounts of faculty time. “

Massy, p. 308

I do not want to minimize the difficulty of identifying the tipping point (i.e., the peak of the curve in the figure). In Massy's analysis there is an implicit divide between graduate and undergraduate education which I think is false, at least from an institutional point of view. We need to find a path to better undergraduate education while making our graduate education sufficiently attractive to bring the best faculty here. We were gently chided by the Middle States Association, in its accreditation assessment of AUB, for the phrase in our old mission statement that

we are a "teaching-centered research university," but it is precisely that to which I think we should aspire.

I have a few simple suggestions to make on how to improve teaching and how to sustain meaningful research. I begin with teaching.

We need our academic departments to take collective ownership of their teaching programs, objectives and outcomes. This means that the notion of the autonomous scholar-teacher must be questioned. One way to do this is for the entire teaching staff of a given department or inter disciplinary program, including part-timers, to meet in the spring and the fall to plan the next semester's course offerings. Those offerings must fit within an overall plan of what majors in that department or program should take away once they receive their degrees as well as addressing the service needs of the general education requirements. Each faculty member would present his or her course outline and specify the course objectives, content, teaching methodologies, staffing, and assessment procedures. The entire department would review and critique the individual plans. The chair would be responsible for assuring that the sum of the parts meets the mission objectives of the department. S/he would report to the dean each semester on the departmental program, and the dean to the provost on the faculty program.

If this process were followed, it would mean that something like 80% of a department's offerings in the next semester would not only be known but critiqued and fleshed out months in advance of the beginning of classes. The remaining 20% would encompass new recruits, unexpected leaves or departures, and non-promotions. Our current efforts to understand our teaching and learning outcomes already point us in this direction. If we continue, the department will become the community taking collective responsibility for outcomes rather than individual faculty members. The chair will become the primary source of coordination and assessment in pushing the teaching mission along. At present at AUB, the departments and their chairs do not play these roles. In particular the chairs are not currently given the time, incentives, and training to play these roles.

Our faculty is still of two minds on its research vocation. The spontaneous commitment to research is not the norm. When I held a town meeting for faculty some years ago on sponsored research, I received only two follow-up emails (one from FEA and one from FM), both of which said there will be a greater attempt to attract outside funded research support when it is clear that promotion might be affected. The message I took away was that research was an obstacle to be cleared on the path to promotion, not an opportunity, let alone a labor of love.

At the same time there is a definite but uneven faculty interest in PhD programs with the possibility that such programs may attract high quality graduate students who can help our faculty members meet their research obligations. It is not clear to me if most of our faculty realize that to attract those students, our faculty must have highly visible research profiles and name recognition.

We have to know more, and more precisely, what we are actually doing for our students, especially our undergraduate students. We need continuously to ask what is our educational value-added? We tend to admit very bright students. Most





stay with us until completion of their degrees. Most go on to good or even great jobs. How much credit can AUB take for this? A former president of Harvard allegedly remarked, “our students bring so much to us, and take so little away.” We hope at AUB that they bring a lot to us and take away in equal measure. But how would we know? A much more recent President of Harvard, Derek Bok, had the same concern as his predecessor and suggested that if we are really serious about teaching, these are the follow up questions we must routinely answer:

- *“Does the college participate in the National Survey of Student Engagement that determines the prevalence of practices of active teaching and learning that have been shown to be effective in helping students learn? If so, what steps are taken to act on the results?”*
- *What efforts does the college make to assess student progress toward generally accepted goals, such as critical thinking, quantitative skills, writing, and proficiency in a foreign language?*
- *Are the results of such assessments shared with the faculty, and are they used to identify weaknesses and discuss potential remedies?*
- *Are funds available to enable instructors to experiment with new teaching methods, and are the results evaluated and publicized within the faculty?*
- *Is training in classroom teaching given to new faculty members? Does it include exposure to research findings on teaching and learning?*
- *What use does the college make of teaching evaluations, and how well are those surveys constructed? (For example, do they ask students to comment not only on the teacher but on what they think they learned?)*
- *What evidence of a candidate's teaching is collected in reviewing professors for appointment or promotion, how reliable is the evidence, and how much weight does it receive?”*

Derek Bok

The provost for a number of years has been prodding us toward answers to these questions.

The Strategic Planning Committee on Graduate Education and Research in its draft final report exhorts AUB to become a research powerhouse in the region within twenty years. Depending on how we define the term ‘powerhouse,’ that is not an impossible objective, but it will be difficult. Our research infrastructure, while improving, cannot now nor in the foreseeable future rival the infrastructure commonly found in the US. AUB is attracting higher levels of outside research funding, but again, nothing remotely on the same scale as leading US universities. Therefore, I think we need to redefine our research expectations for our faculty. We could do this in a number of ways. We could lengthen the clock for assistant professors from 6 to 8 years. We could and should emphasize research quality over quantity. One or two articles that embody original research and advance new ideas are worth more than eight assembly-line multi-authored articles. Outside evaluators would be asked to read only the candidate's best work and to comment on the methodology, relevance, originality, and quality of the research. A full professor would in addition to the above-mentioned criteria, have to have some name recognition within her or his field. However we do it, we must not succumb to the Massy “ratchet.”



In bringing the two stools of teaching and research together, I make perhaps my most radical suggestion; we could weight research and teaching excellence equally. Deficiency in either domain would be fatal. We could think of using university resources (or perhaps foundation resources) to pay summer salary for course development or to acquire new teaching skills, just as we use university resources and funded research grants to buy out faculty teaching time for research.

I beg many questions here. How do we evaluate teaching quality? We know the evaluation has to be entirely in-house. There are no outside letters we can seek. How do we balance between graduate teaching and thesis supervision and undergraduate teaching? These are large questions, but questions that can be answered. My main concern is that AUB walk on both legs, and without a limp. I also think that less may be more: we should do less teaching but better quality teaching. We should do less research but better quality research. In that way our students will receive a better education, we may become a regional research powerhouse, and our faculty may be able to juggle the nearly impossible set of demands currently placed upon them.

Let me recapitulate my three main themes. Higher education in the 20th century, and certainly in the present century, is the greatest engine for upward social mobility available to any society. Intellectual capital is the coin of the realm, and I think AUB must play a role in seeing that it is more evenly distributed. We must make a positive effort to seek out disadvantaged students from in and outside Lebanon and provide them the financial support they need to come here.

We need to keep focused on the quality of undergraduate education because it is the major source of our income and it is at the core of our mission. We must provide the incentives, time and support to our faculty to assure that we honor our mission.

We need to re-think the research enterprise at AUB. We will not have the kind of funding that has sustained the research machine in the US, nor can we set the same productivity schedules as are set in US research universities. I believe in promotion clocks and in productivity. The question for me is how much and how fast?

That is my main message on future states. I present it as an advocate fully understanding that there are other future states, equally viable, that some or many of you would prefer. How we move forward must be a collective decision reached through study and debate. Please understand my presentation more as sharing my concerns with you than as laying down a course of action.



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