

American University of Beirut
Office of the President



December 19, 2014

Dear AUB Faculty,

At this afternoon's Senate meeting, discussion was held on an open letter to the administration that was previously circulated to the faculty at large, and I write to you now, together with the Board of Deans, the senior administrative body of the University. Before addressing the specifics of the open letter, let us first affirm our utmost respect for AUB's diverse and talented faculty. AUB is known, above all, for the superior educational experience it provides our students and the quality of its medical care. This speaks specifically to the caliber of those of you who teach, research, practice medicine, and participate in the administration of the University. We are proud of the achievements that we continue to make together to advance AUB's mission in Lebanon and the region.

While fully respecting the rights of faculty members to advocate for the University's improvement and for their professional interests and welfare, we feel it is important to hold such discussions to the same standards of evidence to which we hold ourselves in academic discourse. In this regard we take exception to several of the assertions in the open letter. We are compelled to write because we believe that the interests of AUB are not best served by misinformation, conjecture, or imputations of inaction when so much is being done to address most of the concerns noted in this statement.

First, the exhaustive investigation ordered by the trustees, through independent legal counsel and a forensic team from KPMG India, has failed to discover any evidence that would support allegations of corruption at AUB or AUBMC. Second, the actions by the University Auditor have been assiduously aligned with current policy guidelines. As the Senate knows, the development of the Privacy Policy has been a step forward in refining those guidelines and is in response to the recommendations of the Faculty Working Group on IT Data Privacy, convened by the President. Third, it is inaccurate to say that the administration has been unresponsive to faculty concerns. In fact, in the open letter, the authors and signatories detail a partial list of committees, task forces and work groups that were convened by the administration—in the spirit of shared governance—to ensure faculty participation in addressing substantive issues affecting faculty members and their colleagues across AUB. Fourth, the administration has adopted and implemented the vast majority of recommendations of the University Senate and Faculty Task Forces over the last years. [link: [Senate Vote Logs](#) 2007-present] In particular, the Task Forces on Tenure and Faculty Compensation have been charged by the President in direct advocacy of faculty members' work and legitimate concerns on these issues.

The five major issues listed in the statement are in fact being addressed by the administration, often with full participation by members of the faculty. In most instances, they require intensive collective effort and patience before we can move forward.

1. University Budget - The Budget and Tuition Fee Commission appointed by the President last year was an ad hoc committee with a limited brief, and was focused on proposing suggestions to moderate the tuition increase. It deliberated for just one week and then delivered several recommendations. By implementing some of the Commission's realistic recommendations and adopting other measures, it was possible to introduce a modest tuition increase for the current fiscal year.

Following debates last spring about the university's budget, the administration also committed to developing a rigorous budgeting process that is transparent and provides opportunities for participation and input by the University community. A 19-member university-wide Budget Committee started intensive work in September. Along with several sub-committees, the Committee has been making steady progress, and is expected to generate a comprehensive and evidence-driven budget that better aligns planning with budgeting. Although this process commenced before we received the review report of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), it will help meet the recommendation of the MSCHE. [links: [Budget Committee charge and composition](#) and [Budget Calendar](#)]

2. Faculty Compensation - Late in the spring semester of 2014, a Task Force on Faculty Compensation comprised of faculty and administrators was created by the President to study faculty compensation (salaries *and* benefits) and to benchmark AUB's compensation scale against international and regional standards. The Task Force has done extensive work and is expected to finish its report and present its recommendations in early January. The committee will propose a three- to five-year compensation plan and will also recommend a compensation policy. The documented findings and recommendations of this Task Force will be shared with the university community and will propose ways of addressing the concerns of faculty related to compensation. We invite you to read the Task Force charge. [link: [Task Force on Faculty Compensation charge and composition](#)]

3. Tenure - More than two years ago, the Tenure Task Force was charged by the President to assess tenure and the impact of its reintroduction at AUB. The Task Force finished an initial draft of its report and recommendations in the fall of 2013. The report has since been discussed with trustees, in the Board of Deans, and with the faculty at town hall meetings. The discussions will continue in the Senate. The trustees will be further discussing the report this winter and plan to bring these discussions to a conclusion no later than the spring of 2016, thereby satisfying the MSCHE recommendation of resolving the tenure question, one way or the other, within the context of shared governance. Again, we invite you to read the charge of the Second Task Force on Tenure as well as its report. [links: [Second Task Force on Tenure charge and composition](#) and [Report of the Task Force](#)]

The prospect of reinstating tenure at AUB is far more significant than many of the issues raised in the open letter. The current administration initiated the process, has advocated for tenure with trustees and faculty, and is ready to bring it to the trustees this spring. If AUB reinstates tenure, it will instantly raise the University's academic profile as an institution willing to take distinctive decisions based not on expediency but rather on its long-term commitments to liberal arts education and innovative research.

4. Faculty Contracts - The administration has been engaged in good faith negotiations regarding faculty contracts with significant results to date. The suggestion that the administration confronted faculty with an ultimatum on the benefits issue is unfair and untrue. The scheduled vote on the contract was postponed twice (May and October of this year), when members of the Senate or Senate Steering Committee and the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs requested more time to reflect on the terms; the vote was then placed on the agenda of the Senate meeting of November 28.

Only weeks prior to that meeting, however, faculty negotiators, for the first time, proposed added wording to the paragraphs on the health and retirement plans that would unacceptably limit the trustees' fiduciary responsibilities and legal mandate for the long-term sustainability of university operations. The President personally explained to the faculty negotiators—and, as the minutes of the November 28 meeting show, to the members of the Senate as well—that these final proposed changes were not acceptable. Nonetheless, the senators voted in favor of the added wording. Otherwise, most of the requests made by faculty representatives were accommodated, and we believe the second version of the contract is dramatically better than the older one.

To honor the hard negotiations that have taken place between faculty and administrators, and exercising his prerogative regarding Senate actions, the President has decided to instate the draft contract template of October 23, 2014, minus emendations, as the operative faculty contract going forward, a decision that is unanimously supported by the undersigned Board of Deans. This version, for the first time, contains listed benefits that are guaranteed for the duration of the contract, including both housing and education. While locking in these interim gains for the faculty, the President remains open to discussions concerning alternate wording for the health and retirement plans.

5. IT Security – There are many international examples of major universities (Harvard, Yale) and companies (Sony Pictures) that have had their IT systems penetrated or their data compromised. A motivated hacker can penetrate even the most elaborate and sophisticated cyber-defense system. The administration responded immediately to the recent theft of proprietary documents from AUB, and is conducting a criminal investigation by a highly experienced external cyber-forensics team. The university is rigorously investigating all aspects of the breach and its implications. The administration can assure you that the spirit and the letter of the Senate-approved Privacy Policy are upheld at AUB. It is fully committed to ensuring that our network is as secure as technology and resources will allow.

We conclude by noting that the periodic review of AUB's accreditation status across all fourteen standards covering administrative, financial, and academic spheres, asserted in unprecedented terms that "AUB is a model university, and in many ways." MSCHE also confirmed that AUB is in full compliance with all accreditation-relevant federal regulations, an emerging and challenging aspect of the accreditation process. [links: [Periodic Review Report June 2014](#) and [MSCHE Peer Reviewers' Report](#)] Let us not ignore these encomiums, as we also dedicate ourselves to self-improvement. The way forward is through collaboration and a shared vision of proper university governance, which this administration has done its best to champion.

We share your abiding loyalty to AUB and a commitment to upholding the legacy of excellence that we inherited. We believe the road forward is best traveled in the spirit of cooperation, collaboration, and coordination. This administration will continue to engage faculty and students in issues touching on their interests and wellbeing, in the certain conviction that together, we are AUB.

Peter Dorman, President

The Board of Deans

Ahmad Dallal, Provost

Mohamed Sayegh, Vice President for Medical Affairs / Raja N. Khoury Dean of the Faculty of Medicine

Hassan Diab, Vice President for Regional External Programs

Richard Brow, Vice President for University Advancement

Patrick McGreevy, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Nahla Hwalla, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences

Makram Suidan, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture

Iman Nuwayhid, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences

Salim Chahine, Acting Dean of the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business

Huda Abu Saad Huijjer, Director of the Hariri School of Nursing

Talal Nizameddin, Dean of Student Affairs