

**President John Waterbury's comments to
the external visiting evaluation team from
the Middle States Commission on Higher Education
March 7, 2004**

GETTING FROM “OR” TO “AND”

Recently I had the occasion to meet extensively with the visiting team of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the regional body through which AUB is seeking full academic accreditation in the United States. In remarks at an organizing dinner I reflected on what I see as major challenges in institutional change at AUB.

What I wanted to emphasize to the team is that my tasks are basically similar to those of any university president, and the fact that AUB lives and thrives in Lebanon does not change very much the nature of the challenges we face. I was and am sure that the four challenges I outline below would be more than familiar to any leader in higher learning.

All great institutions have a culture that derives from the habits and preferences of the past and shapes the way in which change takes place and fundamental choices are made. There are four (at least!) major choices facing AUB. In my experience many of AUB's citizens see these choices in 'either-or' terms. My challenge is to bring us to see them in 'and-and' terms.

Undergraduate vs. Graduate Education

AUB has always been an institution built on and around undergraduate education. In terms of our mission and in terms of numbers, undergraduate education has been our center of gravity. I think it should remain our center of gravity, but that does not mean that graduate education is somehow depreciated. It is, rather, different.

Graduate students have already made a firm commitment to a particular specialization, and they may have considerable knowledge of the field in which they seek a degree. They are selected almost purely on merit and academic promise. They are older and one hopes more mature than our undergraduates. They are probably less receptive to the values and practices that we try to impart to our undergraduate students. We welcome them and want to help them become the professionals that they themselves want to be, but their experience at AUB will be fundamentally different from that of undergraduates. I happen to believe that what we do at the undergraduate level is what sets us apart from most other universities in the region, but I also believe that we must aspire to outstanding graduate education as evidenced in our commitment to relaunch PhD programs.

Professional vs. General (Liberal Arts) Education

Reflecting the preferences and perhaps biases of the population at large, many of our citizens see our comparative advantage lying in professional education. Our history in

medical and engineering education has truly been remarkable. Our emphasis at the undergraduate level on general or liberal arts education in no way diminishes our professional programs. As has been found in the United States, and as has been emphasized in “Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise,”¹ general education enhances professional specialization by cultivating the ability to move across disciplines, to learn to think analytically and critically, and to sharpen skills in verbal and written expression. General education is a great foundation for professional education whether the two are pursued simultaneously or sequentially.

Teaching vs. Research

There is considerable ambivalence at AUB, among our faculty, as to whether or not research productivity and teaching excellence can be combined. On the one hand, many faculty members profess to want PhD programs and high quality graduate students, but on the other hand, they express skepticism about AUB’s research infrastructure and cite bias in promotions against those who are primarily teachers. There is, just about everywhere, a tension between teaching and research. Nonetheless there can be great synergies between them, even at the undergraduate level. It is always difficult to find the right balance, but I am convinced that such a balance does exist.

Service vs. Performance

This issue involves everyone who works for AUB. AUB’s faculty and staff are extraordinarily loyal to the institution. Academic and nonacademic staff have often been connected to AUB across more than one generation. Many have attended AUB and then worked for the University. In this sense AUB is a family. That is a tremendous asset. Accompanying this fact is a sense that service and loyalty to the institution should be sufficient in determining the value of and rewards for any particular employee. The University's emphasis on performance, especially last year’s performance, appears to discount years of loyal service, and for some that perceived discounting is seen as unjust and unfair. The University clearly wants loyal service *and* good performance and believes that both are attainable.

I do not think that any institution ever fully resolves these choices, once and for all. They must periodically be revisited and reexamined. Institutions change and evolve as do the contexts in which they operate. A new generation may want to shift the balances implicit in these choices. However, if we and our successors focus on ‘and’ and avoid ‘or’, such re-examination should always be productive and ensure the dynamism of the University.

¹ Task Force on Higher Education and Society, “Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise,” chapter six, The World Bank, Washington DC, 2000.