

Founders Day

December 3, 2012

President Peter Dorman

Dear students, faculty, staff, and friends of AUB, I am especially pleased to welcome to this year's Founders Day ceremony, which commemorates the establishment of our university on this very day, December 3rd, 146 years ago.

This annual celebration affords us an occasion to reflect on those who had the vision and the determination to found an American college along the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, on the edge of the Middle East, at this crossroads of both ancient and modern civilizations. They did not know if their endeavor would succeed or be long-lasting, but nonetheless they persevered. The early days of the fledgling college were hard ones. In his farewell address upon resigning the presidency in 1902, Daniel Bliss describes the school in its first years as a "small, feeble, unknown affair" that was "almost beneath notice." But even 36 years later, at the time of his retirement, he could see that the university was thriving with "a campus of 40 acres, a dozen of noble buildings, its forty teachers and 640 students." Today, our campus has grown to occupy 60 acres, with 64 buildings (and counting), over 700 faculty members, and over 8,000 students.

How the College came to be established and how it grew is a fascinating story, which can be found in several books about AUB's founders and those who came after. One of these is a compilation of letters written by Daniel Bliss to his family in Massachusetts between 1873 and 1874. After the ceremony today, you can see this and other books about the University if you stop by the AUB Press table. There is also a special student initiative being featured today related to a class project on this book of letters. Dr. Rula Baalbaki's students in her Arabic-English translation course have been working on translating parts of this book, *Letters from a New Campus*, and will be distributing a small booklet of these translations as well as offering some of the foods that are mentioned by Daniel Bliss in these personal letters.

We are also featuring another student endeavor, which is the annual Founders Day Student Essay Contest, now in its 14th year. This year's theme developed out of a quote from Daniel Bliss. In his commencement address in July 1888, Dr. Bliss gave a speech entitled "The Race of Life" based on a biblical parable about "laying aside every weight" in order to run "the race that is set before us". During

this speech, he discussed the various weights that must be laid aside in order to excel in the race of life.

These burdens include pride, slothfulness, and self-conceit. About this last, he said:

“You must lay aside self-conceit... Self-conceit hinders you because you think you know it all... When we are ignorant of a thing we seek to know it. When we think we know it we are satisfied and hence self-conceit is a great weight, a great hindrance in the race for superior excellence.”

With this quote as a background, we asked our undergraduate students simply this: “think inventively and just: **write about what you don’t know.**”

The idea behind this vague yet provocative essay question lies at the heart of what we strive to do in providing our students with a liberal arts education, which focuses on broad knowledge and creative thinking. The kernel of a liberal arts education is about encouraging and enabling our students to make their educational journey last a lifetime. We do this at AUB by creating a safe haven for exploring new ideas, meeting different people, and pursuing novel experiences.

In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates says: “I am the wisest man because I know I know nothing.” Indeed, it takes the humility of Socrates to have an appreciation for how much you do not know, coupled with an eagerness to seek out further knowledge. Of course, we want our students to leave AUB knowing considerably more than they knew when they entered, but also with a deeper awareness of how much more there is to understand.

I am pleased to have heard from our selection committee that the essays received were of very high quality and that many writers took interesting and even adventurous approaches in their essays. In fact, the selection committee felt so strongly about two of the essays that they recommended both for first prize. So this year we are declaring a first-place tie, and the two winning essays will be read today by their student authors.

I want to extend my special thanks to the faculty committee who were asked to select the winning submissions: Dr. John Meloy, Professor of History and Archaeology; Dr. Ray Brassier, Associate Professor of Philosophy; and Dr. Charlotte Karam, Assistant Professor of Marketing and Entrepreneurship. And I want to express my personal appreciation to all of the students who took the time to write an essay this year: thank you all for making this event an especially enriching experience.

- Third prize has been awarded to **Samar Semaan**, a fourth-year Chemical Engineering student in the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, who could not be here today because she is on a trip to visit oil refineries in Amman, Jordan with other senior students.
- The first-prize essays will be read in the alphabetical order of the winners. So first, please join me in welcoming **Zeinab Bailoun**, a sophomore Political Studies and Public Administration major in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, to read her essay.
- Our other first prize winner is **Mahmoud Kambris**, a fourth-year Electrical and Computer Engineering student in the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture.

Mr. Kambris will now read his essay, entitled “Identity”.

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It is a distinct pleasure for me to introduce the keynote speaker for Founder’s Day 2012, Dr. Paul Salem, who is currently the director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut. Many of you will recognize him from his numerous writings on the Middle East and current events in this region. He is a frequent commentator on television and radio and contributes regularly in the Arab press as well as in major international journals, magazines, and newspapers such as *Foreign Affairs*, the *Financial Times*, and *Politico*.

Before joining Carnegie in 2006, Dr. Salem was general director of the Fares Foundation, during which time he helped establish the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB. He also founded and directed Lebanon’s leading public policy think tank, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. He received his BA, MA, and PhD from Harvard University and then taught for twelve years at AUB in the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration. In fact, the Salem family has a long and rich history with AUB. Paul’s father, Elie Salem, was a professor and dean at AUB; his mother, Phyllis Salem, both studied and taught here for a time; and Paul’s sister, Nina Salem Shabb, is currently a professor in the Department of Cytology, Pathology, and Laboratory Medicine.

Please join me in welcoming Paul Salem, to deliver this year's Founders Day address.