

Tuition Fees - Finding a Solution Together

March 3, 2014

Dear Students of AUB,

I want to acknowledge the very clear message about tuition fees that you conveyed from Main Gate last week. As I discussed with the Tuition Increase Committee (TIC) last week, I am committed to working with you to address the grave concerns you have about rising tuition costs.

I recognize that these are very difficult times for many AUB students and their families, with the economic turmoil and uncertainty throughout Lebanon. The challenge for us is to find a budgetary solution that safeguards the high academic standards of AUB and ensures that we meet the diverse needs of the university—including the well-being of our faculty and staff—without putting an excessive or unfair financial burden on our students. Such financial challenges are not unique to AUB, but are faced by every great university.

In response to specific requests from the TIC, let me pledge the following:

- Students deserve transparency into the University budget as well as understanding of how their tuition fees are supporting their education.
- No decision will be made on tuition increases at this time. I am convening an ad hoc committee on tuition that includes deans, faculty members, and student representatives to consider ways to address the pressing needs of AUB and propose budgetary efficiencies across the university.

- The ad hoc committee will meet frequently to achieve an agreement as soon as possible. The university's operating budget will not receive final approval by the Board of Trustees until the end of May.

- Since the committee is dealing only with the budget for 2014-15, it cannot address the longer term question of financial sustainability. For this purpose, I will convene a separate Commission on Institutional Sustainability that will search for ways to pursue multi-year operational efficiencies and identify alternate streams of revenue for the university—such as executive education, diploma programs and continuing education for the community, the development of on-line courses, and an innovation incubator—to relieve the overwhelming burden on students' tuition fees. A number of these possibilities require investment before revenue can be expected; but we need to think inventively about bringing in funding from other sources.

Equally important, I reaffirm my commitment to you that AUB will continue to provide the finest educational experience in the region. I recognize that for so many people, an AUB education is considered to be a guarantee of a better future, both for our graduates and for their families. The liberal arts education offered at AUB is unique in the region for preparing graduates for the challenges of our changing world and for a competitive global economy on which they will have to take leading roles. AUB graduates will continue to be the most sought-after and respected by employers.

Moreover, AUB – *our* AUB – finds its strength in the diversity of its campus community, including socio-economic diversity. In my ongoing dialogue with the USFC leadership, I have re-emphasized that this great university will not be limited to the children of the privileged. Today, more than 3,000 students receive financial aid from AUB, at an average of nearly \$8580. 400 students every year receive full scholarships. AUB's strength is in its diversity. Affordable education, with the support of financial aid, is essential to this objective. We have been very successful in raising donations for financial aid, and with your involvement, we can do more.

I have had productive discussions with your TIC representatives. I have been impressed with their commitment and diligence. I am confident that together, we will find a solution that maintains AUB's traditional high standards in a difficult economy, makes sound fiscal sense, and ensures accessibility for students who aspire to the best education this region has to offer.

Professor Maha Bali has said that “higher education’s role, as I see it, is to help society reflect beyond activism and resistance, necessary and important as they are. There is a need to develop critical citizens capable of negotiating multiple conflicting interests in a process of creatively co-constructing a better future.”

Let us move together toward that goal. My thanks to you for your activism and for the well-organized and peaceful way that you express your views. I do appreciate your loyalty to, and concern for, the welfare of AUB and look forward to working with you for the future of our great university.

Sincerely,

Peter Dorman