

Office of Student Affairs

Executive Summary - Strategic Plan 2020

"The concepts of learning and personal development are inextricably intertwined and inseparable"- American College Personnel Association - The Student Learning Imperative (1996).

A top tier university graduate is expected to have instilled in her or him the founding triumvirate of Knowledge, Life Skills and Social Responsibility. Books and technical know-how alone do not in themselves create a truly outstanding global citizen. More is required in the formation of a leader, thinker and contributor to society at large and even in terms of adding real value to the existing body of knowledge when pursuing advanced stages of study and research. This has become a widely recognized attribute among contemporary educators in top rank universities. Our challenge is to put this in context of where AUB stands in the world and where we would want AUB to be in the future. While this plan's cycle ends in 2020 for practical ends, mainly to set achievable goals in the short term in the context of the strategy, the vision goes beyond that.

Where we are

With *"Let them have life"* as the core message, the AUB Office of Student Affairs strives to offer programs, services, and personal support as well as to create a campus climate conducive to academic and personal success. Student success is impacted by a broad range of influences (from housing to campus diversity and inclusion, from student activities and career path planning to health and wellness, from student leadership development to opportunities for civic engagement and global awareness) that are the bread and butter of Student Affairs domain of work.

AUB remains to this day proudly committed to its liberal arts tradition; a cornerstone of this tradition being the values placed on learning beyond the confines of the classroom to supplement curricular, academic, and professional programs. We believe that our primary goal at AUB Office of Student Affairs is to maintain and improve upon an effective student affairs and services operation that places students at the center of all efforts by supporting them in their academic endeavors and broadening their emotional, social, cultural and cognitive development.

Reluctantly it is necessary to state that between 2010 and 2015 the Office of Student Affairs faced major challenges in terms of severe budget cuts and constraints, a dismantling of its units and general undermining of its institutional role. This was a direct reflection of the shift away from student focus and interest perhaps towards other institutional priorities. But another important factor was the more ingrained misconception regarding the role of student affairs as a learning entity, a center for student experience and personal growth and development in a university setting. The strategic plan for 2011- 2016 set out to implement major new ideas and

practices as well as improve on existing process, programs and infrastructure. For reference: <http://www.aub.edu.lb/sao/Documents/Archives%20till%20December%202013/Strategic%20Planning%20Report%20Summary.pdf>

One of the challenges faced in AUB and other universities in Lebanon is that there is often no distinction made between general student academic support and services administration and the more educational, character-building and experiential aspects of student affairs. This educational role does not only refer to the education of the student but also to institutional values in terms of rights, equity, fairness, civic engagement, inclusiveness and cultural enrichment.

This is not to devalue student services which are important and impact the student experience. Transactional services such as payment of fees, printing services, petitioning for withdrawal and so on all can leave a positive or negative impression on the student of his/her university. There are also more grey areas such as advising and disciplinary issues where there is an overlap for the student between the faculty and the office of student affairs. The Office of Student Affairs in this regard is well placed to serve as the student advocate. Whether through the counseling center, the accessible education officer, career center, or the dean's office for appealing faculty decisions, students can rely on a central and independent office to look at their case objectively, assess the legitimacy of the case and promote the student's interest.

There are four identifiable aspects of student development and support for the future that can dramatically enhance and improve the student experience and AUB's institutional standing.

Area	Examples	Nature
Student services	Payment of fees, attaining documents, registration, Financial Aid, transfer of majors, dropping courses/semesters etc.	Transactional, practical
Student support	Academic advising, orientation, internships, counseling etc.	Informational, guidance
Student Rights and responsibilities	Code of Conduct, academic guidance, orientation, syllabi, grading, petitioning, appeals, academic success	Rights, fairness, procedures, transparency, Student input.
Student Engagement and Leadership	Student government, activities, sports, free expression, Civic engagement, diversity: Outlook, Outdoors, etc.	Activism, co and extra-curricular learning, global citizenship, political, social and cultural education.

A forward-looking office of student affairs must be attuned with all these areas in an integrated fashion. The administrative approach and inclination is to look at the parts and thus inadvertently separate them, a student-focused approach requires a more holistic approach: This means unifying all the student needs by looking at the student as a whole.

President Fadlo Khuri outlined key priorities including mental health and career services and budget has been set aside for more staffing to provide additional support to a growing student population with complex issues. This is part of the new and motivating student-focused narrative and purpose that has been outlined which has revived the campus morale as a whole.

Looking ahead

There is still a long way to go. The points below highlight specific strategic goals that we are confident AUB can attain by 2020. They can broadly be divided into two areas: 1. Physical space and Infrastructure; 2. Student Engagement and Leadership.

Strategic Goals

1. **Establishing a Leadership Center:** The Leadership center can build on and complement what we offer (engagement, student elections, service, etc.) to our students. Such a center would contribute to the preparation of our students to become ethical and enlightened global citizens. In addition, it would play a role in enhancing self-awareness; and give students the ability to motivate and empower others. It is tempting for tertiary institution to adopt a soviet-style centralized planning approach to civic engagement. This structured approach is practiced in schools and in universities as part of courses or required training as part of programs, including scholarship models. However, AUB's greatest success past and present is due to its liberal arts model and laissez-faire attitude. Student initiative is overwhelming and can never be overstated enough. This center would rather be a conduit and guidance and learning resource for the unstructured approach that empowers students, feeds off their initiative and allows them to design the journey they wish to embark on. The Center's Director or Coordinator would organize sessions, workshops, offers personal guidance and facilitate debate and dialogue sessions for students to explore their full potential. This would be in democracy training, policy making, advocacy, global awareness, teambuilding exercises and project management. It is important here to make that distinction between structured and unstructured approaches: In the former, while some students may find value in the experience, the ultimate outcome is about what the institutional impact on the community is. The Syrian refugee crises is an urgent headline of today and an institutional response is justified and warranted, and is a priority for the CECS department. My focus here though is on the student experience. And here engagement also has a far broader meaning. It's about playing in a band, performing and spreading culture, political debate, ecology and in fact any area the student chooses to improve the lives of those around him/her. It's a

personalized approach where the center offers mentorship, guidance, support and resources for learning.

2. **Reclaiming Student hubs:** Such efforts as above must begin by reclaiming student space that was lost under the previous administration, especially in West Hall to return as a student hub (as it was originally intended by the founding fathers of this university) under full management of the Office of Student Affairs. In addition, reclaiming the space in the CHSC and Mary Dodge is essential for meeting our goal to introduce more activities in the center or having a social space for students living in the lower campus residence halls. Aims include moving the expanded Counseling Center to the 4th floor and that in turn would be replaced by a career center with resource room and support areas.
3. **Kerr and Murex renovation:** Continue our efforts to bolster student life/experience in residence halls: A major investment has been set aside this year to start the complete overhaul of Penrose Hall. After this is complete Murex and Kerr are next targets in line. Murex is a building with no elevator and after demolition offers the opportunity of a larger building and thus more space for the growing number of students and thus more revenue. Likewise Kerr is a building that is beyond meaningful maintenance which is very costly. A revamped replacement would bring men's housing up to the best standards in the 21st century. In light of growing student numbers and particularly scholarship students that require assured accommodation it will be necessary to identify and acquire an affordable off campus building to offer housing managed by AUB as is the case with the Sidani Street Building at this time.
4. **Initiate a physical education program/interdisciplinary sports program:** As a leading university in many fields, and outstanding facilities in the Charles Hostler Center and expertise, a glowing opportunity exists for AUB to become a leader in sports/physical education. Today sports management and specializations have become successful and sought after fields of study. Already CHSC offers IPFA certification and is coordinating fitness specialists, physiotherapy, and dietetics with FAFS for holistic wellbeing. Currently we are exploring options for a full-fledged degree program which can offer cross-collaboration with OSB (Sports marketing and business) FAFS (nutrition), FHS, FM as well as sports ethics courses and politics of sports (PSPA-FAS), which can also lead to interdisciplinary research that is unequalled in the region. CHSC can become a hub for both practice and learning.
5. **Promote AUB to become a clear regional leader in areas of mental health, substance abuse and advocacy:** The CC expansion is ongoing and with the addition of the Accessible Education Office (AEO) there is a more efficient coordinated effort to supporting students facing difficulties. The next step is to move to larger space in West

Hall on the 4th floor once the current guests move elsewhere and with the increased professional capacity establish a center for awareness and advocacy with regards to crucial topics (Prejudice, Alcohol and Drugs, and Mental Health) that are major concerns for students. This will include founding a research base by utilizing the clinical experience and also engaging legal and cultural challenges to push the boundaries of current attitude. AUB is in a prime location to promote a progressive approach to such issues and the center can become a leader in the region with a unique output in addition to providing professional student care.

6. **Creation of student rights office:** We believe also that there is an advocacy role for students in terms of classroom and other university rights: A significant number of students at AUB have issues with faculty members (e.g. exam scheduling, requesting a make-up), staff, or security. We will endeavor to create a unit which can follow up with faculties or other departments regarding problems faced by students. A clear framework will be established for this help desk in order to deal with the security establishment and the law to protect students and their rights.
7. **Commit to Partnerships:** The Office of student Affairs will be committed to building partnerships across campus and in the community that create collaborative opportunities for our students. We will explore, identify, and establish mutually beneficial partnerships that promote the development of our students as active citizens and make a difference in our communities. Our mission is to build an inclusive university community that welcomes, respects, and values people of diverse backgrounds and abilities by providing the supports necessary for a robust and well-rounded student experience. We plan to: partner with faculties to engage in relevant research projects; develop a Learning Support Center which would house assistive technology resources as well as provide a space for peer-support and tutoring; work with FPDU to prioritize the upgrades needed to make certain buildings fully accessible; and be a regional leader in this cultural-shift toward inclusion and accessibility for all.
8. **Build and enhance a data-driven and evidence-based decision making in all units as basis for international impact:** We realize the power of data in promoting the improvement of our services. Therefore, we will be working with the relevant units on campus to make sure that the appropriate data are collected and analyzed in a meaningful fashion. In addition, to making sure that data is shared with the concerned individuals/units in order to be used improve their services.

In sum, students need an integrated and institutional approach at university to help them succeed and grow as individuals and for AUB to raise its global profile. Only an institution-wide set of principles, approaches, and philosophy can meet the expectations of students of this generation where the information technology revolution allows them choice, access to knowledge and

arguably a level of awareness that is unprecedented. It's crucial for AUB to move and to move quickly to stay with the times.

Mission Statement

The Office of Student Affairs is an integral part of the educational process at the American University of Beirut providing services, programs, and facilities that foster academic success and promotes student assured self-awareness and better informed career planning in a changing world. The Office of Student Affairs is committed to a holistic approach to student development - intellectual, social, physical, psychological, cultural - in an environment that promotes diversity, tolerance, civic and moral responsibility, local and global awareness, psychological and emotional well-being.

Vision Statement

The Office of Student Affairs at the American University of Beirut strives to be a leader in the field of student affairs in the region and beyond. The Office of Student Affairs will stay at the forefront in terms of providing exemplary student centered services and programs that assist students explore and discover their academic and personal potential in a rapidly changing and complex world.