

## **Biology professor wins award for bringing science closer to the public**

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Professor Elias Baydoun of the Department of Biology at the American University of Beirut was recently announced as the 2010 winner of the TWAS-ARO Regional Prize for Public Understanding and Popularization of Science. TWAS-ARO is the regional division of The Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (formerly the Third World Academy of Sciences) that aims to promote scientific capacity and excellence for sustainable development in the region. Baydoun has been a TWAS fellow since 1998 and is the fourth recipient of the Regional Prize.



The annual TWAS-ARO Regional Prize recognizes individuals who have been instrumental in facilitating science communication to the public in the Arab region, and Baydoun has been recognized by the academy for his vast efforts in making science accessible to a larger audience through teaching at AUB, translating textbooks, and organizing international conferences through the Arab Academy of Sciences, which he helped establish, and public lectures. “Everything has to do with science, so we should help people appreciate it,” he said, recognizing, however, the challenge in doing so. “Even politicians don’t understand the importance of science. The first thing they cut from their budgets is [funds] for science and education. Unfortunately, this is a trend around the world, but it’s particularly worse in the Arab world.” Even with a lack of resources, Baydoun insists that progress can be made and that a good researcher will find ways to access resources. This philosophy has helped him update the AUB Biology Department and laboratories during his tenure as chairman of the department from 1987 to 1993.

When he first joined AUB, Baydoun was the only full-time faculty member in the Biology Department holding a PhD. Under his leadership, he succeeded in attracting new recruits with PhDs. Moreover, he encouraged renowned scientists to hold seminars on campus; he purchased new laboratory equipment; revised the science curriculum; added new textbooks; renovated the biology building; and constructed a new laboratory and classroom.

After obtaining his MPhil and PhD from the University of Cambridge, Baydoun maintained his relationships with international bodies and has had five PhD students from overseas universities conduct their research at AUB.

“I’m proud to be investing in the younger generation and offering a transfer of knowledge,” Baydoun said of his students.

Baydoun teaches biochemistry and plant physiology to junior and senior students and advanced biochemistry to graduate students.

Although he finds many undergraduates to be “reluctant scientists who fear science’s complexity, jargon, and concepts”, he enjoys seeing them change their perspective once they discover how science impacts societies.

Baydoun’s work is not, however, limited to the university. He has assisted in developing biology curricula and textbooks for secondary schools and community colleges in Oman and has written school biology textbooks for the Ministry of Education in Jordan. He has also acted as a

consultant for UNESCO, ENEP, and UNDP, among others, and his work is included in various publications.

Among his current projects is an upcoming conference on alternative and renewable energy, as well as others on solar energy, food production and food security, and scientific approaches to the sustainable use of water.

One of his bigger goals is to see the Arab world fully embracing modern science, engineering, and technology so that young people will not have to leave the region in order to develop their careers.

Baydoun will receive his award and \$3,000 cash prize during the TWAS-ARO regional meeting in December, and intends to use the money to assist him in preparing conferences and partially supporting two AUB students.