

For Immediate Release



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International conference on effective higher education **focuses on equity at AUB**

The American University of Beirut (AUB) held the Ninth International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Communication Skills Program of the English Department, and the Office of Information Technology at AUB collaborated in organizing the conference, drawing more than 200 participants from universities throughout the region.

This year, the conference focused on the theme of "Achieving equity in higher education" and offered local, regional, and international members of the community of university faculty and researchers in teaching and learning in higher education the opportunity to build professional relationships. The conference presentations focused on five themes: assessment of program and course learning outcomes; community-based learning; e-learning and pedagogy; teaching, learning, and assessment procedures; and writing instruction and research.

Dr. Brenda Jo Brueggemann, professor of English and the Aetna Endowed Chair of Writing at the University of Connecticut, spoke in her keynote speech about minimizing barriers and optimizing access and inclusion in active learning for all students, despite their diverse backgrounds and capabilities, and ways to increase true active, accessible, engaging, and equitable learning and writing in the 21st century. In her demonstration of the principles of the universal design for learning (UDL), she engaged the audience which worked in groups and engaged in providing solutions and suggestions. Brueggemann initiated a disability studies major and minor, and a robust American Sign Language program, at The Ohio State University where she worked for 21 years before recently coming to New England and the University of Connecticut.

The second keynote speech was delivered by Dr. Patrick Fitzgerald, director of the Executive MBA (EMBA) program and senior advisor to the dean of the Olayan School of Business (OSB),

with the aim of contributing to the enhancement of higher education through insights regarding technology and innovation to drive good results for the industry and learners. The insights were offered as possible models for higher education leaders to use as mechanisms for benchmarking objectives, approaches, and progress of their universities' digital transformation efforts. With his strategic and operational knowledge of executive education, educational technologies, and higher education, Fitzgerald oversees the EMBA program and assists in increasing the reach of OSB's executive education and related programs, and provides expert advice and support to develop partnerships and grow centers and hubs of excellence at OSB.

“Educational equity is a moving target. Like excellence it's not something we can ever actually attain, precisely because it is something we must continually strive for. This is why we must innovate and respond to the evolving needs of society in order to make education affordable to all. And to produce graduates that can drive and succeed,” said Provost Mohamed Harajli, who spoke about the numerous initiatives at AUB that focus on equity and diversity, such as the Leadership, Equity, and Diversity (LEAD) initiative to promote diversity and offset inequities in access to transformative education; the University Preparatory Program (UPP) that works to incorporate students in an English language institution; the Accessible Education program that fosters an inclusive university community that welcomes and values people of diverse backgrounds and abilities; and blended and online courses and programs that AUB has started planning in order to increase the accessibility of previously distant groups to its education.

“A broadly diverse student body – a goal that we have been trying very hard to attain – means a richer and even more transformative educational experience for all, students, faculty, and staff,” added Harajli.

The two-day conference included four pre-conference workshops, two keynote speeches, 34 presentations, and two poster sessions that were delivered by 50 researchers from universities in Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the US.

“A major aim of this conference is to create an opportunity for people who teach in higher education to talk about their teaching and how they focus on student learning,” said Dr. Saouma BouJaoude, director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at AUB and chair of the organizing committee of the conference. “We want people to start thinking about evidence-based teaching. So, rather than coming to the classroom and just lecturing, we look at what students already know and we build on that so that we achieve a more meaningful and sustainable learning, not only for students to do well on tests but so they can use this learning in everyday situations. I think more of these types of activities are needed so that we learn from each other's different experiences.”

ENDS

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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