

For Immediate Release



AUB's campaign against smoking shifts into second gear: Strict enforcement of rules and new signage on campus

Beirut, Lebanon- 09/03/2011 - The story has all the ingredients of a historic bestseller, or at least a science-fiction extravaganza. The human race is pitted in a fight to the end against a merciless species that uses subterfuge to control earthlings and send them to oblivion. The humans are losing. Smoking is winning.

Smoking has been the scourge of the human race for several centuries now, and has claimed the lives of untold millions.

According to the United Nations' World Health Organization (WHO), smoking is no doubt the single greatest cause of death in the world. It kills more than 5 million people a year. By 2030, if unchecked, the tobacco onslaught is going to kill 8 million people a year.

In the US alone, according to the Center for Disease Control, 440,000 persons per year die from smoking-related causes. By comparison, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atom bombs roughly claimed 100,000 lives.

Early outcries against smoking can be traced as far back as the year 1604, when King James the First of England issued his Counterblaste to Tobacco, denouncing smoking as "a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs . . ."

From the late nineteenth century to the present, the United States witnessed a revival of the King of England's opinion on smoking. Numerous groups orchestrated zealous campaigns against smoking, armed with pamphlets, films, posters, and other materials. In fact, as early as the 1950s, research had proven that smoking was very bad for health. The first US Surgeon General report issued in 1964 was a landmark report that reviewed the health risks of tobacco smoking on smokers and non smokers. A 1987 Gallup poll sponsored by the American Lung Association found that 94 percent of the public agreed that smoking is harmful to one's health.

On a visit to AUB on December 8, 1998, US Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, strongly warned her audience to stop smoking.

AUB was aware of the dangers of smoking long before that.

In his AUB Founders Day speech of 2009, Professor Makhluf Haddadin recalled that no smoking was allowed on the entire campus in the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), and faculty members used to go to Bliss Street to smoke a cigarette. Reportedly, an SPC instructor was dismissed because he insisted on bringing his nargileh to the classroom.

It is not known when the smoking ban was lifted in AUB, but an Outlook issue of December 1961 carried a letter by Imad Shehadeh criticizing "a couple of AUB co-eds enjoying a quiet smoke."

Khalil Abu-Feisal, MD, warned of "the perilous pleasures" of smoking in an Al-Kulliyah issue of 1971.

The AUB Bulletin reported on 22 December 1980 that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences voted to ban smoking in its classes as a result of a petition by more than 800 of its students and around 95 of its faculty members.

It is not known how successful this ban was. It can safely be assumed that during the war in Lebanon, no kind of restriction was imposed on smoking. But in 1993, the Lebanese government issued an administrative decree that bans smoking in some public places such as hospitals, dispensaries, pharmacies and movie theaters. On March 1 that year, smoking lost one of its most strategic positions when AUBMC became a smoke-free institution, for the sake of its health status and the wellbeing of its staff, patients and visitors.

In AUB, researchers from several faculties repeatedly warned of the dangers to smokers and non-smokers alike and formed in 1999 the multidisciplinary Tobacco Control Research group (TCRG). Around this time, and in recognition of the severe health risks associated with smoking and secondary smoke, and in the interests of promoting a healthy and smoke free environment, the University Committee on Health launched the Smoke-Free Campus program. AUB became the first educational institute in modern-day Lebanon to prohibit smoking inside its buildings. All University buildings except for private residences were declared smoke-free, effective October 16, 2000. Smoking was also prohibited in the vicinity of windows and doorways of university buildings to prevent contamination of smoke-free areas by second-hand smoke. In addition the following outdoor public spaces were designated "smoke-free": The Charles Hostler Center, the entire Green Field including the bleachers, the Van Dyke Building courtyard, the Jafet and Saab Medical Library plazas, the Building 56 garden, and the College Hall breeze way.

This was the opening shot in AUB's war against smoking and it came with the announcement that AUB intends to gradually expand "smoke-free" areas on campus, including in student dormitories.

In the few following years workshops were held to teach participants how to help smokers quit smoking, and to train others to become smoking cessation trainers. In a one-day "Smoke-Out for Palestine" campaign in May 2002, smokers were asked to quit smoking for a day and donate the cost of a pack to Palestine.

A little later, AUB's Quit Smoking Program conducted a study of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) for smoking cessation.

AUBMC observed World No Tobacco Day in May 2005 with a special program.

In April 2006, AUB launched the Wellness Program in response to several important community health needs and issues, and smoking was chief among them. Later an AUB-wide smoking study was carried out to know what AUB faculty, staff, and students say about smoking, tobacco companies and the AUB policy on smoking.

On June 23, 2008, AUB moved to continue its Smoke-Free Campus program, leaving only a few small designated areas where smoking would still be tolerated. Starting that day anyone observed smoking in a non-designated area or walking on the campus while smoking could be subject to a warning from Protection Office personnel.

On the whole, the Smoke-Free Campus program was a tremendous success by Lebanese and international standards. AUB's advocacy in restricting smoking was recognized with admiration by the country at large, and has encouraged other establishments to ban or curtail smoking. It has also bolstered the efforts of anti-smoking individuals or groups. The AUB Campus was chosen last year as the venue to announce the introduction of a law to ban smoking in indoor public places and to institute other sanctions against the pernicious addiction of smoking.

However, lately, some individuals on campus have recently been seen blatantly disregarding the University policy and smoking in areas clearly outside the designated smoking zones. Asked to smoke only in a smoking-designated zone or to put out their cigarette, some of them responded in a hostile, rude, or uncooperative manner. Others however complied with civility and reason.

AUB has mobilized against smoking, again. New large signs everywhere on campus remind smokers that they should adhere to designated areas.

AUB is a community that cares for others and respects them. It strives to keep everyone satisfied, as much as possible. This is why it did not resort to an all-out smoking ban, but compassionately designated a few areas at AUB in which smoking is permitted, in recognition of the fact that some members of the community freely choose to smoke.

These smoking areas were not chosen at random, but after careful study which revealed that smoking in these areas greatly limits its hazard to others. Smoking elsewhere on campus exposes others to second-hand smoke or taint their skin and clothing with cigarette fumes. This would be an abuse of the rights of non-smokers and is not befitting the AUB principle of community spirit and mutual respect.

Opinions about the smoking policy on campus have been varied, but many think that smoking-designated areas, if rigorously adhered to, would be a successful temporary compromise between smokers and non-smokers, until a total and comprehensive smoking ban is imposed.

The scourge of smoking cannot be stopped unless each community chips in. AUB and other like-minded entities will set an example to be followed locally and then around the globe. Eventually, whole neighborhoods and towns will become smoke-free. But the AUB example must not be allowed to fail. No one will take the AUB anti-smoking message seriously if smoking continues on campus outside designated areas.

With these considerations in mind, a memo to the community by President Peter Dorman, on February 21, 2011, expressly warned: "Students who violate the non-smoking policy are reminded that they face disciplinary measures that incrementally increase in severity for repeated violations, up to the possibility of suspension from the University, if the case is referred to the University Disciplinary Committee."

The President also warned: "Some of our faculty and staff have occasionally been identified as violators of the non-smoking policy, and such infractions will be subject to discipline in accordance with Human Resources policies of the University."

The President concluded: "AUB is determined to oversee the strict implementation of this policy in the interest of our communal well-being."

Please see the link below for areas that are designated as smoking zones:

<http://www.aub.edu.lb/communications/Documents/smoking-map.pdf>

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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of more than 7,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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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