

Press Release



AUB acknowledges achievements and steps forward in gender equity

Beirut, Lebanon- 17/3/2016– Marking 111 years since women were first admitted to AUB and the 150th anniversary of the University’s founding, the Gender Equity Group organized “AUB and Gender Equity: 1905 to 2016” on March 9 at the AUB Olayan School of Business (OSB).

A cross-faculty gathering of researchers, staff, and students focused on critical reflection of key issues surrounding equity and inclusion, the event provided an opportunity to raise awareness, to showcase related initiatives at AUB, and to recognize institutional milestones with respect to women.

In 1921, AUB—in a bold and decisive step—expanded opportunities for women to enroll in programs beyond the Training School for Nurses: in the School of Medicine, Pharmacy and Dentistry, in the pre-medical program in the School of Arts and Sciences, and as special students in courses above the freshman year in the School of Arts and Sciences. From the first five women who registered in 1921, to the 127 female students registered in 1947, AUB charted a courageous pedagogical, social, and cultural path that contributed to a dramatic shift in gender relations. The University provided “young women with the possibility to imagine a different future,” as wrote Nadia El Cheikh and Samar El Mikati in their chapter titled ‘Women at AUB: The Beginnings, 1905 – 1947, a Photo Essay) in the recently AUB-published book *One Hundred and Fifty*. The pioneer in higher education for women in Lebanon and the region, AUB had within 25 years succeeded in offering a transformative platform and experience for women.

In his opening remarks, President Fadlo Khuri noted that although the University has two female deans and two female associate provosts, inequities remain. “We are proud that a lot of AUB’s leaders among staff and faculty are women, we have a good proportion of male to female, but there needs to be more women in leadership positions,” said Dr. Khuri.

Dean Nahla Hwalla of the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences highlighted that the framework for responding to discrimination and harassment was established more than a decade ago under then President John Waterbury. Citing President Waterbury’s State of the University address in 2002, the Dean noted that it was his policy “to increase the number of women in our student body, in our faculty ranks, and in our senior administration.”

Following presentations on the historical role of the University, panel discussions centered on four main topics: AUB efforts for the advancement of women; faculty research and education;

student action to raise consciousness; and AUB community engagement in the field of gender advancement at AUB. Expert participants included researchers from all AUB Faculties and representatives from the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS), the Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (ESDU), the University for Seniors, and the Executive Education Program. Students participated in a panel formed by representatives of the Gender and Sexuality Club and the Secular Club, as well as graduate students conducting their theses around gender related issues. Panelists, identified through the Knowledge is Power Gender and Sexuality Project directed by Chairperson at OSB, Dr. Charlotte Karam, shared their work in relation to gender and gender equity at AUB, highlighted critical issues to be addressed, and shed light on the role that AUB is playing to promote gender equity in Lebanon and the region.

President Khuri has initiated several key projects surrounding gender equity and inclusion since his inauguration. In 2015 he formed the Task Force on the Lives and Careers of Women Faculty chaired by former Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences Huda Zurayk and co-chaired by Professor of Architecture Howayda Al-Harithy. Charged with institutional assessment and development of recommendations, the Task Force is scheduled to provide a report by the end of the year 2016.

President Khuri also formed the Equity & Title IX Policy Group, chaired by Dr. Brigitte Khoury of the Faculty of Medicine and assisted by Ms. Trudi Hodges, AUB's first Title IX (gender equity) Coordinator. A faculty/staff advisory team charged with the review of institutional strategies and the policy framework for addressing discrimination and harassment, the group will develop recommendations to advance a climate of respect, equity, and inclusion. The President also announced mandatory training on issues related to discrimination and harassment for all managerial-level employees, with similar training anticipated for faculty and students in the future.

At the opening of the panel discussions, President Khuri announced an annual award—funded as a presidential initiative—for a member of the AUB community to be recognized for outstanding promotion of the lives and careers of women at the University.

“I would like the next person who is president of AUB or provost or dean, to be chosen based on merit not on whether they are Lebanese or American, male or female. I want the best person chosen just based on the fact that they are excellent and fair and just and good role models. That's our overarching role, and that's why today is a great day, a start of a long and critical voyage,” said President Khuri.

AUB embraced coeducation long before a number of prestigious institutions around the world, and will continue to play a leading role in the empowerment of women in the country and the region.

Note:

The Gender Equity Group is composed of AUB Interim Provost and Professor of History Nadia El Cheikh; Interim Associate Provost and Professor of Biology Hala Muhtasib; Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences Nahla Hwalla; and Chairperson at OSB and Director of the Knowledge is Power Gender and Sexuality Project Charlotte Karam. The group was formed in June 2015 to set in motion critical reflections about the status of gender equity and gender advancement of faculty, students, staff, and other stakeholders at AUB.

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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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 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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