

## Editorial

*Appreciation of Diversity, Colin Smith, Department of Biology, FAS*

What surprises me most about teaching and learning is diversity: the diversity of what is taught, of how it is taught, of how students learn, of how learning is assessed.

I do not remember thinking much about teaching or learning methods when I was a student. Teaching style seemed to be part of the personality of the educator or it was what that subject demanded, the separation of which is often difficult. Beyond introductory college courses, it became very clear that professors had immense control over how they taught. My current view is that teaching methods should reflect what works for the particular subject being taught that day by that instructor for those students: a complex relationship that relies heavily on the experience and pedagogical philosophy of the instructor.

Now in the profession, I realize how much responsibility professors have over what is taught and how learning is assessed. Although limited to my experience as a student, hearsay, glimpses of colleagues teaching, and other indirect evidence, a picture of great diversity emerges in types of learning outcomes, methods, assessments, and how much individual faculty modulate their methods within courses.

### **From where does this diversity originate?**

An obvious truth, so obvious one must exert some effort to question it, is that people teach the way they were taught. This is being comfortable with the familiar. This is the very idea of tradition, that things are done the way they are done not simply because that is the way they have always been done, but because the traditional approach is successful, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Some national systems are deeply traditional, have fixed curricula, and use standardized exams. Faculty are beholden to curricular needs to teach the book or teach to the exam. One sometimes hears descriptions of memorization and recitation rivalling the extremes of the Confucian imperial examination system. Contrast standardization, verbatim dictations, and rote memorization with

the equally classical traditions of Socratic method and apprenticeship.

In the US, great variety exists among public school districts and among private schools. Home schooling encompasses unlimited diversity. In higher education, we see diversity of methods of instruction as well as content and assessment. Standardized exams and self-directed learning coexist with lectures and laboratories, with notepads and iPads, with projects and presentations. The ideology is not respect of tradition, but of outcome, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

A lesson from biology is that the enormous diversity of living species means that there are many ways to live. There are many solutions to the same problem. The diversity of teaching and learning suggests that many strategies are effective, that there are many paths to the same end. Extending the analogy imperfectly, if biodiversity reflects (and possibly creates) the number of available niches, then the variety of learning outcomes, educators, and students suggests that there should be great diversity in education. If one considers that each subject has a great variety of concepts, skills, modes of analysis, and experiences to impart to students, that each educator is different, that each student is different, one would expect to observe great diversity. We should respect diversity, we should embrace diversity, we should use it to help students achieve their full potential. This is liberating: one need not be confined to received wisdom, orthodoxy, or the current belief system. We all learn from a great diversity of experiences. Reading, listening, watching, doing, thinking, trying, failing, succeeding, presenting, et cetera.

Consider all the different ways that we have learned how to do what we do and how important it is to be able to learn in different ways. We should unpack our professions and sieve what lessons are important and can be taught. Once one realizes that many approaches work, the question changes from "what is the best way to teach" to "what is the best way I can teach this particular concept to these particular students." Even

before that, the instructor should question what is to be taught. Many decisions must be made. How does one balance general knowledge with specialization? "A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one."

Presumably, what is best for the student is the same as what is best for the future employer is the same that is best for the profession is the same that is best for society. Each stakeholder perceives what is best through a different glass, and our responsibility as educators is to identify and communicate our understanding of what is best. It is very easy for us to assume that these choices are so obvious as to not need stating. Such assumptions are easily overturned by asking students why the learning outcomes are important. In my experience, few students have considered the matter.

A few years ago, I was passing a couple of students on the stairs. I overheard one complain to the other that the exam they had just taken was unrealistic. "Having to read a passage and in 20 minutes provide a written analysis and response! When in my life will I ever have to do such a thing?" I assumed my educator's right to intervene at a teachable moment and asked them, "Can you imagine in which kinds of job you would not be expected to receive a complex argument and be able to respond convincingly in a short period? Would that be a job requiring a university degree?" They seemed appreciative of my concern for their future, but one can only hope. What is obvious to us is not obvious to students, and there is value in spending time explaining to students why particular courses, learning outcomes, lessons, and experiences are part of their program.

Note that one's students may come from different educational systems, approach learning in different ways, have different needs, and have different interests. We expect instructors to know their subjects, but they should also know their students and many pedagogical approaches. How do we assess what was learned? Factual recall, standardized exams, multiple choice, short answer, essays, oral exams, projects, presentations, dissertations? The educator has a great variety from which to choose. We should question why we are doing what we are doing, question whether it works well, question content and outcomes, question assessment, subject by subject, educator by educator, student by student, cohort by cohort.

Thus, the conclusion is to question the timelessness of the wisdom of the ancients and avoid being bedazzled by the latest teaching fashion trend. Find what works for your students in your classroom with your subject. We expect students to learn a great variety of subjects taught by different educators using different approaches. Surely, we want students to have experienced diverse methods, to be able to learn from diverse sources, to be able to demonstrate competency by diverse assessment methods. Should we not hope that educators are fluent in choosing the best approach for each concept for each student? Reflect on your experience, engage, explore, experiment!

The Center for Teaching and Learning is here for us. Their activities include many opportunities for learning about others' experiences, for discussions with colleagues, and for helping educators try new approaches.



## Teaching Excellence Award

**Howayda Al-Harithy and Hazem Hajj awarded for teaching excellence**  
*Jennifer Muller, Office of Communication, AUB*

For the sixteenth year in a row, two professors have been singled out for their exceptional accomplishments as teachers, mentors, and role models. The 2018 Teaching Excellence Awards were given this year to Dr. Howayda Al-Harithy, professor in the Department of Architecture and Design, and Dr. Hazem Hajj, associate professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, both from the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA).

At a ceremony in AUB's West Hall attended by President Fadlo Khuri, deans, colleagues, students, and the awardees' family and friends, Provost Mohamed Harajli commended the awardees and read excerpts from the glowing testimonials written about them.

### **Howayda Al-Harithy: Inspiring Generations**

Al-Harithy holds a BArch from the Oregon School of Design, MS in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MA in art history from Harvard University, and PhD in history of art and architecture from Harvard. She began teaching at AUB in 1992, initially in the Civilization Sequence Program of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), but moved to the Department of Architecture and Design in 1997, where she has been ever since.

A colleague said of Al-Harithy that she has "mentored and inspired generations during her 26 years of teaching at AUB," and described her as "one of a handful of academics to excel in both research and teaching, accepting that the two go hand-in-hand."

In another testimonial, a former student said, "I believe Dr. Howayda's educational background and strong personality are qualities that not only qualify her for the Teaching Excellence Award, but also make her an exceptional teacher, mother, and human being."

"Teaching design is a total privilege because we get to interact with our students on a daily basis," said Al-Harithy in her remarks upon receiving the award. "We really get to know them, which is the most important privilege of all because that gives us the opportunity to really learn from them. For that I am very grateful."

### **Hazem Hajj: Transformative Mentor**

Hajj joined the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering in 2008 after working for 12 years at Intel Corporation on automation research and development. He graduated with distinction from AUB in 1987

with a bachelor of engineering and earned his MS and PhD degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

One former student who went on to a career in academia said of him: "Dr. Hajj is a superstar teacher and educator whose transformative impact on his students' careers extends far beyond the boundaries of the classrooms or their undergraduate and graduate education."

Another former student and current colleague said, "his selflessness, reliability, strength, and honesty are factors that inspire students and colleagues to view him as a role model."

In his remarks, Hajj said that he was "humbled and honored" to be receiving this award and noted that, "teaching success does not come from one faculty member alone. It comes from a complete ecosystem, where family, faculty colleagues, staff, and great students play a very important role to make it all happen."

### **Celebrating the Importance of Teaching**

In closing the ceremony, Provost Harajli noted that there was an extremely strong field of nominees this year, but that these two faculty members were "far ahead of everybody else." He also thanked the selection committee, which operates anonymously, and applauded the efforts of the Center for Teaching and Learning for their numerous activities aimed at promoting and supporting high quality teaching and learning at AUB.

Professor Saouma BouJaoude, director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and associate dean of FAS, talked to us about this award and about how central teaching is to what we do. "Students come here to be taught," he said, "and we are here to serve the students," adding that this means that recognizing the importance of teaching is something that should be done throughout the year and in multiple ways.

Hajj echoed this sentiment in his speech, when he thanked the students who have been the source of his inspiration, saying: "without 'them' there would be no 'me' and no 'we'."

The AUB Teaching Excellence Awards started in academic year 2002-03 and 32 faculty members have been awarded thus far: ten each from FAS and MSFEA, six from the Faculty of Medicine, three from the Olayan School of Business, two from the Faculty of Health Sciences, and one from the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences.

## Teaching Excellence Award Speech

**"Caring, Learning, Doing the Best, and having the Passion!"**

**Hazem Hajj, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, MSFEA, AUB**

Dear esteemed President Khoury, Provost Harajli, CTL organizers, and colleagues,

I am humbled and honored to stand here today among friends and colleagues, receiving the AUB Teaching Excellence Award.

There are many people I want to thank for being here today. Teaching success does not come from one faculty alone. It comes from a complete ecosystem, where family, faculty colleagues, staff, and great students play a very important role to make it all happen.

I first want to thank my family and parents who have provided me endless support and constant motivation. I want to thank my colleague friends at AUB, and include in my thanks the staff across AUB: in the ECE department, in the faculty of MSFEA, in CTL, in IT, and in HR...in particular, those who handle our benefits.

I want to thank the leaders of these departments, faculties, and AUB administration for making this whole ecosystem function so smoothly. Last but not least, I want to thank the students who have been the source of my inspiration. Without "Them", there would be no "We". Since joining AUB in 2008, my job has provided me with this great environment for doing what I love and making all of my relentless efforts seem effortless.

As I reflect on what really drives my teaching, I recognize that I am driven by four simple principles: caring for the students, a desire for continuous learning, doing the best I can, and having the passion for teaching.

### **1.Caring:**

As technology and artificial intelligence advance, tremendous opportunities exist for major advances in education: More Online classes, virtual reality, mixed reality, robot teachers, learning on demand, knowledge on demand, personalized learning...and many more unimaginable changes to happen. However, what should not change is our human touch: Our focus on treating students with care and respect like we would want to treat our own kids, while being firm and challenging them to be the best they can be.

### **2.Learning:**

Three years ago, I was visiting the University of Texas at Austin, and my host took me out to lunch. We walk into a university restaurant, and he introduces me to a group of professors. As I meet them, one of them struck me as being more down to earth than the others. After we sat down, my host explained that that person has just won the Nobel prize. It reminded me how more learning makes us more modest as we know so little about the universe and tremendous opportunities lie ahead.

### **3.Doing the Best:**

I am at peace with the outcomes as I am really always trying to do my best. The students and the classroom are a source of my energy, and with every lecture, I am always trying to give them the most.

### **4.Passion for teaching:**

Teaching, for me, is not just a job. It is a passion. I stand humbled and very honored for receiving the AUB Teaching Excellence Award. As the Chinese philosopher Confucius once said "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life."

Thank you for allowing me to do what I love!



## Teaching Excellence Award Speech

*Howayda Al-Harithy, Department of Architecture and Design, MSFEA, AUB*

I am very thankful and honored to receive the teaching excellence award especially that I take pride and joy in teaching. I am thankful to AUB for this recognition, to the committee, and to the fantastic students and colleagues who forwarded and supported the nomination.

I feel truly privileged. I feel privileged to teach students in the architecture program at AUB because they are the best. Teaching design is an interactive process through which you get to know the students well. It is a daily engagement inside and outside the classroom. When teaching design we interact with the students one to one. We engage with their creative and critical process of design as individuals. We get to understand their work habits, analysis and decision making so that we can help them achieve their individual design methods and creative professional edge. I feel privileged for being part of the students' life, learning and growth over the five years and beyond.



## “My Experience with the Faculty Seminar on Learning and Teaching Excellence”

*Aram Yeretzian, Department of Architecture and Design, MSFEA, AUB*

I participated in the Faculty Teaching Seminar in March-April 2018. The seven weekly sessions proved to be very informative thus significantly fuelling my pedagogical methodologies. The fact that the cohort of participants had different backgrounds, came from different disciplines and pertained to different levels of the academic echelons, enriched the discussion sessions and made them more lively.

*Content:* The sessions consisted of four main themes. They were all clearly presented and formulated and addressed distinct successive topics. The first topic dealt with enhancing the course syllabus, which was followed with sessions on the role of instructors in the academic environment. The performance of an instructor was examined from the perspectives of presentation skills, relationship with the student body as well as contemporary methods supporting pedagogy. The seminar concluded with the presentation of key methods that allow the identification of suitable student assessment techniques and therefore, a better evaluation of student learning outcomes.

*Interaction and involvement:* The way the sessions were conducted allowed the

numerous participants to engage in and discover first hand, the educational methods that were presented. This interactive approach allowed us to experience particular group work methods, group work dynamics and group presentation techniques by actually working in groups and attempting problem solving methods ourselves.

*Tools for the future:* The content and tools presented in the sessions provided a wide array of application and integration into the different academic disciplines. Although I immediately started to implement particular group work methods in the courses I was teaching this semester, I was left with substantial food for thought regarding implementing these new techniques in next year's design studio as well as in other courses that I will be teaching.

I want to thank Drs. Amal BouZeineddine, Hoda Baytiyeh, Enja Osman and Saouma BouJaoude for their motivation and their excellent delivery of the content. They were all truly inspiring! Also, many thanks to Ms. Lamia Husseiny for her excellent coordination.



## Faculty Seminar on Learning and Teaching Excellence by the Center for Teaching and Learning

*"When you get, give. When you learn, teach."*

**Mohamad F. Abbas, PhD Student, Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering, MSFEA**

*"When you get, give. When you learn, teach." - Maya Angelou.*

Teaching is a sacred mission where messengers, the teachers, do not only motivate their students to learn about the classroom material, but also influence them to learn about life and guide them to become future leaders. They say a good teacher explains, but a great teacher inspires. But the question stands: how do you become a great teacher? Is there a way to learn how to teach? B. F. Skinner once said "Teachers must learn how to teach...they need only to be taught more effective ways of teaching." Again, what are the fruitful teaching methods and skills? How does one acquire and apply them? These queries may burden many aspiring to become great teachers and in particular PhD students who thrive to become future lecturers and instructors.

In a seminar on Learning and Teaching Excellence, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) provided answers to the questions posed above. The CTL took part in the training as part of its role in promoting and supporting high quality teaching and learning at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

The sessions of the seminar, which were attended by both faculty members and PhD students, were rich, diverse, and tackled various essential teaching topics. The topics ranged from how to design an effective course syllabus to applying new and advanced teaching strategies and practices. Despite the various discussions brought forward, they all aimed for one goal: enhancing teaching excellence and improving student learning.

It's safe to say the seminar was a success since the objectives were met and people left with more info than they had walking into it. Each session offered an intellectual platform where every participant had the chance to share their knowledge with other PhD students and faculty members coming from different backgrounds and fields, and to benefit from their multidisciplinary experiences.

We left the last session impressed by the organizers' professionalism, influenced by their constructive instructions, and eager to attend future seminars.

To the CTL professors and members, when you got, you gave, and when you learned, you taught. Your effort and accomplishments are remarkable, so from all of us: thank you.



## What is Competency-Based Education?

*Michelle Navarre Cleary, Associate professor, and Writing Program Director  
The School for New Learning, De Paul University*

Competency-based education (CBE) breaks with traditional higher education by awarding credit based upon the demonstration of learning rather than on time spent learning. Students in CBE programs advance by demonstrating what they know and can do rather than by taking courses with fixed seat time to earn credit hours. This focus on the demonstration of competence rather than on time in class creates opportunities for flexibility in how, when, and where learning happens. It allows for personalized learning and is particularly appealing to adult students who can accelerate by using learning they have already gained through work and other life experiences.

There are many different kinds of CBE programs, but the following three examples demonstrate some of its flexibility. Students at Western Governor's University (WGU) pay a flat fee for six-month terms in which they move at their own pace. With 91,436 enrolled students, WGU is the largest competency-based institution in

the US and offers bachelor's degrees for as little as \$12,000. Students at Lipscomb University can accelerate and save money by demonstrating what they already know and can do through an upfront, one-day behavioral assessment of competencies. Finally, rather than taking courses, students in Westminster University's MBA program complete cross-disciplinary projects that more closely resemble work in the business world than course-based assignments.

While CBE is outcomes based, CBE programs differ in fundamental ways from the learning outcomes approach many schools have adopted over the last few decades. The approach rather than the terms used are what is important. A program that never uses the word "competence," preferring "outcomes," "proficiencies," or "mastery," can use a competence-based approach. Conversely, a program that advertises itself as a CBE program might actually have a learning-outcomes approach.

### Key Differences between Learning Outcomes & Competency-Based Education Approaches

#### 1. INDUCTIVE VERSUS DEDUCTIVE (BACKWARDS) DESIGN:

- **Learning outcomes approaches** have usually worked inductively, starting with what is in place and working from course outcomes to program to institutional outcomes. They articulate the outcomes assumed to be implicit in the curriculum.
- **Competency-based approaches** start with identifying what graduates need to know and be able to do, and then build the curriculum to achieve these ends. When done well, this backwards design process (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) results in a holistic and integrated curriculum.

#### 2. HOW LEARNING HAPPENS:

- **Learning outcomes approaches** privilege learning that happens in higher education institutions and, in particular, in the higher education institution in which the student is enrolled.
- **Competency-based approaches** are agnostic about how and where learning happens. Instead, they focus on rigorous and authentic assessment of learning.

#### 3. WHAT STUDENTS LEARN:

- **Learning outcomes approaches** tend to privilege knowledge and the demonstration of mastery of content.
- **Competency-based approaches** privilege application and the demonstration of the ability to use knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions to act in the world.

#### 4. WHO IS IN CHARGE:

- **Learning outcomes approaches** are faculty centered and usually local. Faculty define learning outcomes, sometimes cross-walking locally developed outcomes to more global ones. Faculty control how learning happens, choose learning resources, and design and implement their own assessments.
- **Competency-based approaches** are learner and/or employer centered with competencies that can be defined by industries and national organizations as well as by faculty and other experts. The faculty role can be more or less disaggregated with specialized roles for content development, assessment, teaching, and student support.

CBE can help make higher education more affordable, transparent, relevant, accessible, and learner-centered. However, these benefits are not guaranteed. In particular, skeptics ask if CBE can really deliver high-quality, low-cost, and equitable programs. To support the development of such programs, the Competency-Based Education Network (CBEN) (2017) has published the Quality Framework for Competency Based Education Programs. The risk of bad actors exploiting the CBE concept is also why regional accreditors and the U.S. Department of Education have moved slowly in approving CBE experiments. As a result, the regulatory environment remains uncertain even as schools across the educational landscape experiment with CBE. Nevertheless, CBE has already begun to transform higher education by driving down the price point, personalizing learning, reimagining faculty roles, and enabling transformative learning.

TO LEARN MORE:

- American Enterprise Institute (AEI) series on CBE, <http://www.aei.org/feature/aei-series-on-competency-based-higher-education/>
- Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) CBE Publications and Case Studies, <https://www.cael.org/cbe-publications>
- Journal of Competency-Based Education, [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/\(ISSN\)2379-6154](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)2379-6154)
- Competency-Based Education Network Quality Framework for Competency Based Education Programs, [http://www.cbenetwork.org/sites/457/uploaded/files/CBE17016\\_\\_Quality\\_Framework\\_Update.pdf](http://www.cbenetwork.org/sites/457/uploaded/files/CBE17016__Quality_Framework_Update.pdf)
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). New York: Pearson.



## Is AUB ready to embrace a diverse body of students?

*Maha Haidar, Program Director, Mastercard Foundation Scholars program, AUB*

Diversity and inclusion have gained a lot of attention in the academic sphere with higher education institutions revisiting their strategies to push for diversity at all levels. Some universities reverted to affirmative action to ensure representation of different social groups and a diverse body of students. Values of social justice, equity and inclusion were driving factors behind these new strategies. For AUB, the commitment to diversity is clear through, among others, the variety of partnerships offering comprehensive scholarships to talented students from economically disadvantaged communities and from countries of conflict, with particular attention to refugees. The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program is one of those scholarship programs at AUB and focuses globally on supporting youth in Africa. This program was launched at the Faculty of Health Sciences in 2012 and aims to educate the next generation of ethical leaders. In 2016, the program expanded to all faculties at the university and while the first three cohorts of Scholars were all undergraduate students from Lebanon (Lebanese and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon), in August 2015 the program admitted the first group of 5 graduate Scholars from Africa. Since then, 60 Scholars joined AUB; 23 from Africa, 17 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 12 Lebanese, and 8 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. These Scholars are currently distributed among the seven faculties and schools at the university pursuing a variety of graduate and undergraduate degrees.

Each one of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars at AUB, with her/his unique cultural and academic background brings to the classroom and to campus new perspectives and new ideas. In the classroom, the interactions and discussions are enriched by the diversity of the students' experiences. Graduate scholars tackling public health, gender, and development issues work on their projects and theses in their countries of origin bringing firsthand experience back to AUB that is both interesting and enlightening for other students in their programs. On campus, Scholars' activities and involvement in clubs, societies, students' publications, and students' groups is exposing other AUB students to new cultures and new ideas. However, and in spite of the active involvement of Scholars on campus, many of them report incidents that challenge their integration at AUB and exacerbate the difficulties all young adults encounter as they transition to university especially outside their country of origin. Unfair treatment such as denying certain services, disrespecting, or making culturally insensitive jokes affects Scholars' wellbeing, leading to anxiety and in extreme cases depression. Many of the incidents reported by Scholars fall in the "grey zone" where reporting is difficult. Such incidents are sometimes repetitive and at other times isolated. In both cases, their negative effect on the Scholars' wellbeing as well as their perception of the country can be irreversible. As we all know, outside the walls of campus, all AUB students are subject, and for a variety of reasons, to provocations and bothers. As such, it is our duty to ensure that campus is their safe space.



## Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

### Seminars and Workshops

During the fall semester of 2017-2018, CTL staff organized a panel and gave a presentation in the New Faculty Orientation on Aug. 24. CTL hosted a workshop on Sept. 20, entitled Developing and Assessing Student Learning Outcomes at Program Level. A coffee hour on plagiarism took place on Oct. 4, and was followed by three workshops on Developing and Assessing Student Learning Outcomes at Course level on Oct. 22, on Using Rubrics to Assess Student Performance on Nov. 1, and on Tools for Assessing Learning Outcomes on November 15. CTL also offered a panel on High impact practices II: Diversity and inclusion, on Nov. 8, and a seminar on Compiling and Assessing Teaching Portfolios on Nov. 29. Most of these activities were first discussed in a meeting of the CTL Advisory Committee held on October 25, 2017.

During the spring semester of 2017-2018, CTL organized a panel and gave a presentation in the New Faculty Orientation on January 25 and organized its annual faculty seminar on Teaching and Learning Excellence. The seminar included seven sessions and was held every Tuesday from 5:00 to 7:00 pm from Feb. 27 to April 17. Each session discussed a different topic. Participants in the Seminar included 21 faculty members and PhD candidates. Moreover, other faculty guests attended a number of sessions because of their interest in the session topic. Most of these activities were first discussed in a meeting of the CTL Advisory Committee held on Feb. 28, 2018.

### Other Activities

*Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Grants.* Year seven of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Grants program was organized and four proposals were supported within the framework of the SoTL initiative managed by CTL.

**Annual Conference.** CTL organized its eighth annual conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in collaboration with the office of information technology, and the Communication Skills program of the English Department. The Conference theme was 21-Century Skills in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education; the Conference attended by around 130 participants from Universities in Lebanon and other Arab countries.

**Faculty Learning Communities.** An FLC on Transformative Learning started its

activities during the fall semester of 2017-2018 semester.

**AUB Teaching Excellence Award.** Sixteen faculty members accepted the nomination for the Award this year. The portfolios of these candidates were reviewed by the Teaching Excellence Award Committee which voted to present this year's AUB Teaching Excellence Award to Dr. Howayda Al-Harithy, professor in the Department of Architecture and Design, and Dr. Hazem Hajj, associate professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, both from the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA).

**Individual Consultations.** A number of individual consultations based on faculty requests were held during the academic year 2017-2018. These consultations covered program learning outcomes, course syllabus design, compiling a teaching portfolio,

**REP Consultations.** CTL worked with REP on. Moreover, CTL conducted workshops at Ahfad University for Women in Sudan and Rafik Hariri University in Lebanon. Conferences attended. American Council on Education's (ACE) 100th Annual meeting from March 10 to 13, 2018 in Washington DC.

### CTL Staff

#### Director:

**Dr. Saouma BouJaoude**

#### Associate Director:

**Dr. Amal BouZeineddine**

#### Administrative Officer:

**Miss Lamia Husseiny**

#### Mailing Address:

**AUB, Ada Dodge Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor**

**P.O.Box: 11-0236**

**1107 2020 Riad Solh**

**Beirut-Lebanon**

**Tel: 009611350000**

**Ext. 3046**

**Direct: 009611362811**

#### E-mail:

**ctl@aub.edu.lb**

#### Website:

**<http://www.aub.edu.lb/ctl/Pages/index.aspx>**

## Eighth International Conference on effective Teaching and learning in Higher Education

Transformative learning in higher education the focus of international conference

**Jennifer Muller, Office of Communications, AUB**

The eighth international conference on effective teaching and learning in higher education was held at AUB's West Hall over two days, bringing together a multidisciplinary group of academics and researchers to discuss innovations in teaching and ways of promoting transformative learning.

This annual conference was co-hosted by three units at AUB: the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Office of Information Technology, and the Communication Skills Program of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS). It brought together around 200 participants from a wide range of fields coming from AUB, from sister universities in Lebanon and the Arab region, as well as from Europe and North America.

The conference began with an introduction by Associate Provost Lina Choueiri, professor of linguistics in the Department of English and chair of the Advisory Board of CTL. She shared with the audience some alarming statistics about the regional educational landscape, noting that only 10% of the population in the Arab world aged 25 has a university degree, compared with 25% in Ireland, for example. She also noted that 30% of unemployed people in this region have a university degree, which means that even well-educated people are not being equipped with what they need to succeed.

"It is not enough to educate our students to be career-ready; we need to educate them to be job creators and to contribute effectively to building global knowledge," said Choueiri. "If education is as important as we think it is for social, economic, and political development of all societies, then the situation I've just described requires serious investment in education. We are facing a mammoth task and nothing short of transformative will make a difference."

### **A learner-centered approach**

Dr. Michelle Navarre Cleary, associate professor at DePaul University's School for New Learning, delivered one of two keynote addresses for the conference and shared an approach to teaching and learning called competency-based education (CBE), which has been gaining traction recently in the US and is especially popular among adult learners.

During the remainder of the first day, a series of workshops were held on topics such as using virtual and augmented reality in classrooms, the challenges of addressing plagiarism in the digital age, and instructional strategies to promote critical thinking. Dr. Milton Cox, a long-time conference participant from the Center for Teaching Excellence at Miami University in Ohio, led one of these workshops aimed at giving people tools that will help them publish in the field of teaching and learning.

"The scholarship of teaching and learning is a new discipline, and at this conference I will assist colleagues in developing projects and steps to publish them," said Cox. "It is my fifth year at this conference, and it is the best conference on teaching and learning in the Middle East."

### **Embracing multilingual learners**

The second day of the conference began with a keynote address by two professors from the University of Birmingham in the UK. Drs. Angela Creese and Adrian Blackledge discussed translanguaging, which focuses on how multilingual people use their full linguistic repertoire in different situations. The concept of translanguaging is a hot topic in education these days, with proponents arguing that it is unfair to limit bilingual or multilingual students to only one "official" language.

Numerous concurrent sessions continued throughout the second day of the conference, including a panel discussion on digital transformation in higher education with FAS Dean Nadia El Cheikh, Dean Steve Harvey of the Olayan School of Business, and Chief Information Officer Yousif Asfour.

A total of 27 papers were presented over the two days, along with the keynote addresses and panel. Dr. Saouma Boujaoude, director of CTL as well as professor of education and FAS associate dean, noted that they followed a highly selective process whereby only around half of the submissions were accepted. He also noted that the conference went entirely paperless this year, using a digital platform for the conference program and abstracts that allowed participants to plan their individualized schedules using their phones or laptops.