

American University of Beirut
Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, October 21, 2016

Present: M. Abiad, H. Abu Khuzam, G. Araj, I. Baalbaki, B. Bashour, J. Chaaban, A. Chalak, M. Clinton, H. Diab, N. El Cheikh, I. El Hajj, M. Harajli, C. Harb, M. Harb, E. Hitti, H. Huijjer, D. Jamali, C. Karam (for A. Shihadeh), A. Kayssi, F. Khuri (chairing), F. Maalouf, T. Mehmood Ali, S. Mejcher-Atassi, H. Muhtasib (by invitation), H. Muller, W. Nasr, I. Nuwayhid, S. Sadek, M. Salameh, S. Saleh, I. Saoud, M. Sayegh, R. Sedehi, E. Shammass, I. Toufeili (for N. Hwalla)

Absent: M. Al-Ghoul*, S. El Fakhani*, S. Harvey*, M. Jurdi, G. Kanazi*, S. Kanj-Shahara*, R. Karami*, T. Nizameddin, A. Taher, S. Zeineldine

(* = regrets notified before meeting)

The meeting came to order at 2:10 p.m.

1) Approval of minutes of September 30, 2016

The minutes were approved with minor amendments.

2) Plan B update

The president updated the senate on the progress that has been made toward migrating the retirement investment portfolios of non-US based faculty to a new vendor, Union Bancaire Privée (UBP). The paperwork was signed on Friday 7 October 2016 and the goal of having the migration completed before the US federal elections on November 8th will be met. COO Sedehi explained that during the transition the value of the portfolios will continue to be tied to market fluctuations and that nothing will change in terms of clients' selection of distribution of assets. Both the president and COO Sedehi emphasized that a major advantage of UBP over the previous vendor is that UBP will offer an additional twenty funds from which to choose.

3) CASAR update

The president and the internal auditor, Andrew Cartwright, updated the senate on the investigation which resulted in, and served as a follow-up to, the termination of the search for a new director of CASAR this past spring. The internal auditor confirmed that a safe report was submitted on March 16, 2016 and went on to say that he did not know the identity of the person who submitted the safe report, which is how the policy for handling such reports says it should be. The audit determined that there were eighteen major violations of rules and procedures. In addition to that specific finding, the audit also came to the more general conclusion that there are significant inconsistencies in the various guidelines and policies pertaining to candidate searches at AUB. Accordingly, a systematic effort is called for to clarify and make consistent our hiring policies and practices. Senators had several questions both for the president and the internal auditor, including whether there will be a new policy according to which assistant professors will not be able to have any input in hiring decisions, whether or not this investigation involved accessing faculty members' electronic communications, whether any of the parties affected by the termination of the search are pursuing legal action, and whether any of the eighteen violations appeared to have been done with malice aforethought. The president said that assistant professors can have a substantial amount of input on hiring decisions, but AUB has a policy that they do not vote on hiring decisions when the proposal is to hire someone at the rank of associate professor or professor. Regarding accessing electronic communications, the president explained that it is only in cases in which there is a threat to the university's continued existence or evidence of major fraud or theft that such access would be

granted and that he did not think that threshold was met in this case so, no, electronic communications were not accessed. Another salient issue is that the people involved in the investigation were generally cooperative and, when asked about specific communications, were willing to share them. The president also reported that, as far as he knew, no legal action had been initiated by any of the parties involved. The internal auditor explained that his policy is to assume that all those under the scope of this or any other investigation are acting in good faith, and that applies equally to the person who submits the safe report and any person accused of any violations in that report. Besides noting that general policy, the internal auditor stated that nothing he learned in the course of the investigation gave him any reason to believe any of the violations were the result of malicious intent.

4) Revised Policy on the Development and Revision of Bylaws, Procedures, and Manuals

Hala Muhtasib gave a presentation to the senate on a proposal to revise AUB's policies on the development and revision of bylaws, procedures and manuals. **A motion was made to endorse the policy revision proposal.** At several points in the course of H. Muhtasib's presentation, senators raised questions about whether proposed revisions to specific types of policies should be brought before the faculties, the senate or both. **A substitute motion was made calling for the president and the provost to meet with SCFA to go through the 87 categories of policies and determine which require being sent to the faculties, or the senate, or both in order to have revisions approved, after which the updated policy revision proposal will be brought back to the senate. Vote 2017-03. The substitute motion was passed unanimously.** H. Muhtasib emphasized the importance of settling these issues before the November senate meeting.

5) Proposed new grading system at AUB

The registrar gave a presentation about grade deflation at AUB, the impact this has on our graduates' applications to graduate schools and scholarships abroad, and calling for a new method for translating the numerical grade given by the AUB instructor into the letter grade that will appear on the students' official transcripts (see appendix I). There was a significant amount of discussion. While there was widespread agreement that there is grade deflation at AUB and that this is a problem that cries out for a remedy, there was less than full agreement on other issues pertaining to the proposal. Senators expressed several concerns including worries about the new grading scale being non-linear, about a possible lack of empirical data supporting the effectiveness of the proposed changes, and about whether it was appropriate for the senate to act on this proposal without consulting the faculties first. Some senators asked why it wouldn't make more sense just to switch to assigning letter grades, but others argued this would backfire because too few AUB instructors would be willing to give high letter grades. A senator asked if the proposed changes would be applied retroactively and, if not, whether that might be unfair to previous graduates. The president explained that it wasn't clear whether it would be legal make such changes retroactively; even if it were legal, it would run into serious logistical problems because many of those older transcripts have already been sent to graduate schools and prospective employers. Some senators worried that these changes would lead to accusations of grade manipulation by AUB. Several senators expressed regret that this kind of intervention was even necessary, since there has been institutional awareness of the problem of grade deflation for decades but little or no progress on changing institutional culture on this matter has been made. No consensus on these issues appeared to be forthcoming. The president repeatedly emphasized that addressing this problem was a very high priority and delaying action in the hopes of finding a perfect solution that everyone was completely agreed upon would be a serious mistake. **A motion was made calling for the president to appoint a committee with at least one member from each faculty to look into this**

matter and to bring an updated proposal back to the senate. Vote 2017-04. The motion was passed unanimously.

6) Potential issues to discuss during 2016-2017

By the time we got to this sixth item on the agenda it was decided, in light of the late hour and dwindling attendance, that senators who wish to suggest items for discussion this year should send them by email to the chair of the Senate Steering Committee, Imad El Hajj. Earlier in the meeting a related matter came up, under the heading of items pending from last year, in which the chair of the Senate Steering Committee made a request to the COO that we have a presentation on the university's budget earlier in the 2016-2017 academic year than we did during in the year of 2015-2016.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 pm.

(Minutes recorded by H. Muller, Secretary of the Senate)

Appendix I: Proposed New Grading System at AUB



Proposed New
Grading System at A