

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, January 26, 2018

Present: M. Abiad, H. Abou Araj, F. Abu Salem, E. Al-Chaer, B. Bashour, A. Chalak, L. Daouk-Oyry, N. Dumit, N. El-Cheikh, S. El Fakhani, W. El-Hajj, M. Harajli, C. Harb, E. Hitti, D. Jamali (for S. Harvey), M. Jurdi, G. Kanazi, R. Karami, A. Kayssi, F. Khuri (chairing), N. Melhem, R. Mohtar, H. Muller, I. Nuwayhid, S. Sadek, M. Sayegh, E. Shammas, R. Sharara-Chami, A. Shihadeh, C. Tarraf (for T. Nizameddin), S. Zeineldine

Absent: A. Abu-Alfa*, I. Baalbaki, J. Chaaban, A. Chehab, H. Diab, D. Gubara, S. Harvey, A. Harutyunyan, H. Huijer*, S. Kanj-Shararah, P. McGreevy, W. Nasr, T. Nizameddin, A. Olabi

(* = regrets notified before meeting)

Provost Harajli called the meeting to order at 2:10 p.m. and served as chair for the first four agenda items until President Khuri returned from a trip abroad. The Provost began by welcoming the new Dean of FAFS, Dr. Rabi Mohtar.

1) Obituary for Dr. Ghazi Sirhan

Dean Nadia El Cheikh read an obituary for Professor Ghazi Sirhan (**see appendix I**) and a moment of silence was observed.

2) Approval of the minutes of December 22, 2017

The minutes were approved with minor amendments

3) Student enrollment data

The Provost gave a presentation on enrollment data collected over the past ten years. During discussion several Senators from FAS expressed concern over the projected increase in total enrollment to between 11,000 and 12,000 students. Dean El Cheikh noted that currently a typical Monday sees 5,600 students attend classes in Nicely Hall and the physical plant of that building has been deteriorating for years. The Provost responded by saying some of the additional students might be taught via internet-based classes so they needn't be physically on campus, classroom space in Nicely and elsewhere could be better utilized by optimizing the weekly schedule, and classrooms in Nicely are renovated on an ongoing basis. Another Senator said it is already difficult to find laboratory space for students taking classes in the physical and life sciences and increasing enrollment would exacerbate the problem. The Provost and the EVP said that this issue is anticipated in the master plan. A Senator said it would be helpful if the faculty were told about those aspects of the master plan that address shortages in classroom, laboratory and office space. The Provost said a presentation to the Senate on those issues could be made. Another Senator said the mandate to become a more research-intensive university was consistent with increasing the size of the graduate student population, but increasing revenue only comes from adding undergraduates. The Provost responded by saying that while PhD students will continue to be subsidized, the plan is to turn Master degree programs into revenue generators; so it will be possible to simultaneously increase both revenue and the number of graduate students. A Senator drew attention to both the very high rate of acceptance of freshman applicants and the relatively low rate of graduation of students admitted into the freshman program. The Provost acknowledged that this is a problem but

emphasized the importance of the freshman program as a source of geographic and national diversity for the student body.

4) Obituary for Dr. Riad Khalifeh

EVP Mohamed Sayegh read an obituary for Professor Riad Khalifeh (**see appendix II**) and a moment of silence was observed.

5) Presentation on financial aid and scholarship programs

The Provost gave a presentation on the financial aid and scholarship programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and from both internal and external sources of funding. He noted that one important change is that USAID has removed the requirement that their scholarships go only to graduates of public secondary schools and can now go to students from both public and private schools. Dean El Cheikh recommended that we be careful to avoid moving to a situation in which all of the USAID money goes to private school graduates. The President said that this change in policy is part of a general trend from the current US administration to open up federal funds to private schools so it isn't all up to us but he agreed on the importance of keeping the student body as diverse as possible. Dean Shihadeh requested that the Director of Admission, Salim Kanaan, come to the Senate to explain how financial aid is distributed. The President and the Provost agreed that this is a good idea.

6) Presentation on the tenure process including the method for handling grievances

The Provost postponed presentation and discussion of this issue until the next Senate meeting.

7) Feedback on the first trial of the letter grading system

Associate Dean Ayman Kayssi presented the data that was collected from the fall semester trial of having faculty assign non-binding letter grades for study alongside the binding numerical grades that are recorded on the current students' transcripts. There was a very wide ranging discussion. Some Senators emphasized the difference between norms-based grading versus criteria-based grading and how that might affect grade distribution between classes in different disciplines. Another Senator said it was important to keep two questions separate: (1) How do we symbolize learning via a letter in a way that is adequate and consistent? And (2) Is it appropriate to aim for a particular percentage distribution of letter grades in a given class? A Senator requested the Center for Teaching and Learning be involved in faculty discussions about letter grading as we move forward. The President brought the discussion to a close by emphasizing that this is just a first data-point and that we will continue to collect data in order to inform decisions about how to implement this change. He reminded the Senate that our goal here is to maximize our students' chances of being accepted into the graduate programs and professional schools that are appropriate for them and that the transition to non-deflated letter-grading will require a change in institutional culture.

8) Vote on the Tobacco Free AUB Policy

Dr. Rima Nakkash gave a presentation that was a follow-up to the one she gave at the October 25, 2017 Senate meeting. She began by noting an important change to the document presented at that meeting: i.e., there will be exceptions to the policy for various psychiatric patients whose diagnosis recognizes a level of harm-reduction associated with their continued smoking. At the beginning of the discussion **a motion was made to revoke the existing tobacco policy. Vote 2018-16. The motion was approved unanimously.** During the discussion, Dean El Cheikh noted that the student handbook for the 2017-2018 academic year contains the previous policy, so information about the new policy needs to be disseminated in an effective way in order to avoid confusion and misinformation. Dean Mohtar noted that AREC is part of AUB's campus and that, as FAFS is based on the model of a US land-grant university, part of its mission is to work with tobacco farmers and

help build up that part of the Lebanese economy. The President denied that working with tobacco farmers on this particular product was part of the mission of FAFS. Dean Mohtar asked what this meant for ongoing educational and research projects at AREC that involve tobacco farmers and tobacco farms. The President acknowledged that not all of these changes can happen overnight and that some degree of phasing in was prudent. Dean Mohtar asked if this phasing in was referred to in the Tobacco Free AUB Policy on which we are about to vote. Dr. Nakkash confirmed that it is not. Dean Nuwayhid said it was his understanding that the new remit for FAFS in this area is to help Lebanese tobacco farmers transition to alternative crops. The President concurred and said he would meet with Dean Mohtar about this issue soon to work out a transition plan. A Senator from FM drew attention to the special challenges faced by faculty and staff at AUBMC in light of the proposed policy. She said that one analysis which estimated the percentage of the 700,000 patients and guests that visit AUBMC that are smokers, and compared that to the number of employees, came up with a number of 150 incidents per year per staff member in which they would be required to try to get a patient or visitor to comply with the new policy. She expressed concern that this could become an onerous and distracting additional responsibility and asked that some help be provided by campus security. Another Senator asked on what grounds can AUB say that smoking is not allowed within a given distance from a campus entrance, given that this amounts to an imposition of a rule made by a private entity onto a part of the public sphere. Another Senator asked why the penalty for violations of the policy for staff will be harsher than for violations by students and faculty. The President said that the policy for staff were mandated by the Ministry of Labor, so AUB does not have as much flexibility there. The President urged Senators to think of this policy not primarily as a regime of sanctions to be imposed on rule violators but as an attempt to change institutional culture and a means of urging students, staff, and faculty to seek assistance with smoking cessation. **A motion was made to approve the proposed policy. Vote 2018-17. The motion was approved by a vote of 25-2-2.**

9) Chair's report on the January 2018 BoT meeting

The President gave a report on the recent meeting of the Board of Trustees in which he highlighted work done by the Academic Affairs Committee aimed at ensuring that appropriate personnel are in place to handle the first round of tenure applications and the signing of a memorandum of understanding with USJ which will make it possible to have joint PhD programs among other cooperative efforts. The Senate's Representative to the BoT, Dr. Sadek, said he had the sense that the trustees are getting more and more comfortable with having a faculty member involved in the meetings and he hopes that even more faculty participation will be possible in the future.

10) Other business

The Registrar asked Senators to treat the data collected from the first round trial of letter grading as confidential information. She said it should be regarded as a first data-point in a larger process and distributing it as a stand-alone item would be the opposite of edifying.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 pm.

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

Appendix I: Obituary for Dr. Ghazi Sirhan



Sirhan
obituary.docx

Appendix II: Obituary for for Dr. Riad Khalifeh



Riad Khalifeh.docx