

**American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Wednesday, November 28, 2018**

Present: M. Abiad, H. Abou Araj, E. Al-Chaer, Y. Asfour (by invitation), I. Baalbaki, T. Bazi, J. Chaaban, A. Chalak, L. Daouk, N. Dumit, S. El Fakhani, H. El Rassy, N. El-Cheikh, W. El-Hajj, C. Fugate, N. Ghanem, M. Harajli, A. Harutyunyan, S. Harvey, E. Hitti, H. Huijer, S. Isber, M. Jurdi , K. Kabalan, S. Kanj-Sharara, F. Khuri, N. Melhem, J. Norton, I. Nuwayhid, A. Olabi (replacing R. Mohtar), G. Saad , S. Sadek, N. Saliba, M. Sayegh, E. Shammass, R. Sharara, A. Shihadeh,

Absent: A. Abu-Alfa*, H. Diab M., Farah, R. Mohtar (replaced by A. Olabi), H. Muller, T. Nizameddin, F. Talih*

(* = regrets notified before meeting)

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m.

1) Obituary for Dr. Juheina Fakhreddine

Dean Nadia El-Cheikh read an obituary for Dr. Juheina Fakhreddine (see appendix I). Moment of silence was observed after that.

2) Approval of Senate minutes of October 31, 2018

The minutes were approved unanimously

3) Report on the BoT meetings of November 2018

The president briefed the senators on the outcomes of the BoT meetings, which took place on 14-16 November 2018. The meetings included strategic sessions for AUB as a whole, FAS, OSB, and FAFS. It also included the awarding of Prof. Freeman Dyson the AUB's inaugural Science and Humanism Award. The board voted to approve: (1) the Policy on Graduate Diploma Programs, (2) the revised Bylaws of the Faculties specifically the items related to the school of nursing, (3) the appointments of associate professors Kivanc Kilinc and Mazen Saghir in MSFEA, (4) the appointment of two new trustees Tania Semaan and Fouad Es-Said for three-year term, (5) the proposal for the center for Inclusive Business and Leadership at OSB, (6) the appointment of Dr. Said El Fakhani to the Employee Benefits Committee for one-year term, (7) the resolution on the Investment Management program at OSB, (8) the audited financial statements for the year ending June 30, 2018, (9) the extension of Dean Harvey's term, (10) and the health 2025 vision to establish a health sciences campus; the president will coordinate with all involved parties and report to the BoT on the implementation progress in March 2019.

Following a question on whether the faculty representative on the BoT was present in the BoT meetings of November, the president clarified that the faculty representative is invited to one of the two full BoT meetings, and after consultation with Dr. Sadek (the faculty representative on the BoT), Dr. Sadek decided to attend the March 2019 meeting.

4) Announcements by the Provost (Performance of Retirement Plan B and update on searches)

The provost stated that Union Bancaire Privee (UBP), the custodian of Plan B, is visiting AUB end of November 2018 and will be holding multiple informative town hall meetings which will cover the current market conditions, an outlook on the expectations of future market corrections, and an overview of the strategy UBP is following with regards to the Plan's fund line up. A senator asked the provost about the AUB entity that is supposed to follow up with UBP to make sure it honors the details of its contract. The provost indicated that the Employee Benefit Committee (EBC) are supposed to do that and he will follow up with them on this task. Another senator suggested that UBP prepares a

simulation using the previous portfolios as opposed to the new ones. The provost acknowledged this suggestion and ended by reflecting his concern for discussing Plan B performance on AUB's listserv even after listing it as an item on the Senate agenda, which caused bad publicity for AUB.

The provost also updated the Senate on the status of the recent searches: (1) CAMS Director: the search for CAMS director started a year ago and one candidate was short-listed but then declined for personal reasons. The search continued and many qualified candidates applied. The search ended and one will be selected very soon. The provost also thanked Prof. Wafic Sabra for serving as CAMS director for the past fifteen years and for his contributions. (2) Registrar: the search for AUB Registrar is ongoing and has been extended to cover international applicants. The provost thanked Hala About Arraj for doing a great job in her current post as interim Registrar. Regarding the HSON Dean search, the provost indicated that the Senate is not the venue to discuss it, and the community will be briefed about it in due time.

5) Proposed amendment to the MBA program

Dr. Lina Tanneer gave a presentation on the proposed changes to the MBA program. She started by presenting some statistics showing the declining trend in the demand for the MBA program. She then explained that this decline is attributed to many reasons, including: (1) high credit load (42-45) as opposed to the recent global trends of one-year graduate programs, (2) high cost and length of degree, which is inconvenient for working applicants, (3) the 3-credit project option or its 6-credit replacement, where the global trend is to remove the project requirement all together, (4) rigid admission requirements, and (5) the inflexibility of concentration areas. She then presented the proposed changes, which include: (1) reducing the credit load to 36 with 24 core credits and 12 elective credits allowing full time students to finish in 12 months, (2) make the project optional, (3) open collaboration with other faculties specifically for concentrations, and (4) make admission requirements more flexible specifically when it comes to work experience requirement.

A senator asked whether the suggested changes still meet accreditation requirements and the answer was yes. Another senator asked about the feasibility of finishing the degree in one year and whether there are enough offered courses every semester. Dr. Tanneer noted the students could take 4 courses in Fall, 1 course in winter, 4 courses in Spring, and 3 courses in summer, and that course offerings will be made available to tailor for these students. She also noted that current students could chose to follow the old or the new requirements and that the new program is expected to start Fall 2019-20. A senator asked on how does the program tuition compare to other programs in Lebanon. Dr. Tanneer indicated that even with the reduced number of credits, the tuition is still more expensive that other universities in Lebanon and the region, but it will be more affordable now than before. Dr. Tanneer added that we expect to see increased enrollment and hopefully increased number of GA spots. **A motion was made to approve the suggested changes to the MBA program. Vote 2018-12. The motion was approved by a vote of 31-0-2.**

6) Email Policy

Chief Information Officer, Dr. Yousif Asfour, asked whether there are any questions related to the previously circulated email policy. **A motion was made to approve the email policy and seconded.** More than one senator commented on the one-month period after which the email of a faculty member leaving AUB is stopped. Senators added that many faculty members are part of professional associations' mailing lists and the one-month is not enough to make the switch to an alternative email address. The feasibility of email forwarding, even after the email account is deactivated was suggested and the CIO will investigate whether it can be done. The president agreed and mentioned that the Deans can request to get an extension beyond the one month if needed. Other senators requested that "mass emails" be clearly defined. Dr. Asfour indicated that "mass emails" mainly refer to spam emails and approved listservs are not considered "mass emails". A senator asked why is email logging

needed. Dr. Asfour stated that this is mainly needed to track viruses. He added that any access to emails is governed by the relevant policies that already exist. **An alternate motion was made to approve the email policy after updating the following statements in the policy** as follows:

- Change “*Mass email messages are restricted to academic or administrative purposes and must be approved by the appropriate unit head or dean.*” to “*Mass email messages, besides university approved distribution lists and chatrooms, are restricted to academic or administrative purposes and must be approved by the appropriate unit head or dean.*”
- Change “*Emails must not be used to send inappropriate and potentially offensive content as defined by the Policies Concerning Sexual and Other Discriminatory Harassment.*” to “*Emails must not be used to send inappropriate and potentially offensive content as per AUB policies and procedures, while upholding academic freedom and freedom of speech.*”
- Change “*Full-time faculty members who leave AUB before retirement may keep their email access for 1 month after leaving AUB.*” to “*Full-time faculty members who leave AUB before retirement may keep their email access for 1 month after leaving AUB. The Dean can request to extend this period.*”

The motion was seconded. **Vote 2018-13. The alternate motion was passed unanimously.** Dr. Asfour will check if the email forwarding suggestion is technically feasible.

7) Incorporating the document “Promotion and Tenure Guidelines during Transition Phase” as an Appendix to Policy on “Academic Appointment, Reappointment, Tenure and Promotion”

The provost stated that neither of these policies has been updated. The request is to incorporate the first policy as appendix in the second, given their relevance to each other. **A motion was made to approve incorporating the document “Promotion and Tenure Guidelines during Transition Phase” as an Appendix to Policy on “Academic Appointment, Reappointment, Tenure and Promotion”. Vote 2018-14. The motion was passed unanimously.**

8) Discussion/Approval of the Senate suggested amendments of the “Policy and Procedure for the Termination of Tenure Appointments”

The provost stated that this is the same policy that has been approved previously by the Senate, and which included suggested changes to be discussed with the BoT for possible approval. The suggestions were discussed with the lawyers first and they approved some and modified others. Some senators noted that the modifications proposed by the lawyers are substantial and the document should go first to the senate committee for faculty affairs (SCFA), as per the bylaws, for discussion before it is sent to the Senate at large. They also noted that there is enough time to discuss this policy in SCFA then the Senate since we are not under the pressure of close deadlines. Other senators proposed to at least start discussing the proposed modifications without putting the policy to vote. **A motion was made to table the discussion/vote on this item and send it to SCFA for discussion. Vote 2018-15. The motion was approved by a vote of 17-11-4.** A senator requested to give the Senate enough time to review the document after SCFA completes its task.

9) Presentation on Letter Grading

The provost gave a presentation on the outcomes of the testing phase of the letter grading system. He started by reminding the senate that in the senate meetings of October/November 2016 and in the process of addressing the grade deflation at AUB, a consensus has been reached on replacing the current numerical grading system with the letter grading system. The main objective of this change is to seize putting AUB’s graduates at a disadvantage when they apply to graduate schools abroad. Letter grades data during Fall 2017-18 and Spring 2017-18 were collected and analyzed. The provost indicated that faculty members used various approaches to come up with the letter grades: (1) some followed the recommended percentages guidelines giving 35% the letter grade A+/A/A-, 45% the

letter grade B+/B/B-, 10% the letter grade C+/C, 5% the letter grade D+/D, and 5% the letter grade F, (2) some followed similar guidelines but chose the cutoff percentages as they saw appropriate, and (3) others did direct conversion from numerical grade to letter grade using the College Board standard. The results showed that the letter grades entered by faculty members are on average midway between the letter grades obtained by converting the numerical grades using the College Board (lower bound) and the letter grades obtained by converting the numerical grades using the scale adopted previously by the registrar (upper bound). Consequently, the simulations indicate that students will benefit from the letter grade system in case universities abroad use the College Board scale to convert the grades. However, they are at a disadvantage if the universities abroad use the AUB scale presented on the back of the transcript for conversion. The provost added that universities abroad tend to use the College Board scale given their familiarity with it, and thus the simulations align well with the objective.

Dr. Saouma BouJaoude gave a presentation on letter grading vs numerical (percentage) grading. He indicated that prominent researchers state that percentage grades are difficult to defend from a procedural, practical, or ethical perspective. Percentage grade systems are inherently inaccurate and summing up individual assessment to evaluate the final grade of a student enhances the problem. For instance, a grade of 60% is passing while a grade of 59% is failing, but in reality, both grades are the same. Dr. BouJaoude added that the most prevalent grading scale in schools in the United States today is the ABCDF (with pluses and minuses added in some institutions). In addition, many universities suggest grade distributions to insure that there is no grade inflation or deflation. Although there is no golden rule to assigning letter grades, Dr. BouJaoude said that regardless of the difficulty of the exam given, the instructor roughly knows, who the A students are, who the F students are, and who the average students are. This comes from students' assignments, their questions in class, conversations outside of class, and so forth. The advice given by prominent researchers and educators is for faculty members to use their judgement because they know their classes and their material.

A senator suggested that some training/workshops be held to educate faculty members on letter grading systems and best practices for the objective of standardizing the process. Dr. BouJaoude indicated that the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) does such workshops and will keep doing so. Another senator voiced a concern that abiding with predefined percentages for A's, B's, etc. might be disadvantageous in classes that have bright students since their final grade might be less than what they actually deserve. The president noted that the best instructors are not necessarily the instructors that give high grades; on the contrary, some instructors are very good but still very tough on grading. AUB students are losing scholarship because of the harsh numerical grading system; the letter grade will be more fair and especially for graduate students and scholarship. Dean Shihadeh voiced a concern that the letter grades should be closer to the Registrar's conversion scale and not in the middle between the Registrar's and the College Board. The provost replied that we should start and then adopt better practices as we get more experience using the new system. He added that individual faculties know best their students and know the graduate schools they target. Consequently, each faculty can set its own guidelines for the letter grading system. **A motion was made to adopt the letter grade system starting Fall 2019-20. Vote 2018-16. The motion was approved by a vote of 19-2-4.** A senator highlighted the importance of reexamining the teaching and assessment practices at AUB.

10) Other Business

The president mentioned that he has been meeting with the international scholarship students, and indicated that we are doing a good job in providing them with a welcoming environment but we can do more and we should. He also stressed that any act of discrimination against these students will not be tolerated. The president closed by inviting the senators to the Christmas Choir, which is expected to be held on December 3 and 4, 2018, and asked them to invite their colleagues and friends.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

(Minutes recorded by W. El-Hajj, Secretary of the Senate)

Appendix I: Obituary for Dr. Juheina Fakhreddine



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