

American University of Beirut
Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, September 30, 2016

Present: M. Abiad, H. Abu Khuzam, M. Al-Ghoul, G. Araj, I. Baalbaki, B. Bashour, S. Boujaoude (by invitation), J. Chaaban, A. Chalak, M. Clinton, Z. Dawy (by invitation), H. Diab, N. El Cheikh, I. El Hajj, W. El Hajj (by invitation), M. Harajli, C. Harb, M. Harb (by invitation), S. Harvey, E. Hitti, N. Hwalla, D. Jamali, M. Jurdi, G. Kanazi, S. Kanj-Shahara, R. Karami, A. Kayssi, F. Khuri (chairing), T. Mehmood Ali, S. Mejcher-Atassi, H. Muller, W. Nasr, T. Nizameddin, I. Nuwayhid, D. Patra (by invitation), S. Sadek, M. Salameh, S. Saleh, I. Saoud, M. Sayegh, R. Sedehi, E. Shammas, A. Shihadeh,

Absent: S. El Fakhani, H. Huijer*, F. Maalouf, A. Taher, S. Zeineldine.

(* = regrets notified before meeting)

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

1) Approval of minutes of May 24, 2016

The minutes were approved with minor amendments.

2) Welcoming new Senate members

The president welcomed six new Senators: Professor Hazar Abu Khuzam, Professor May Jurdi, Associate Professor Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, Professor Salah Sadek, as well as Dean Nadia El Cheikh, and Interim Dean Alan Shihadeh.

3) Elections to Senate Steering Committee (SSC) and Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs (SCFA)

The following senators were elected to the SSC by acclamation: E. Hitti (FM), I. El Hajj (FEA), M. Abiad (FAFS), D. Jamali (OSB), and S. Saleh (FHS). For the FAS position, there were three nominations. In the first election, none of the three candidates (C. Harb, R. Karami, and S. Mejcher-Atassi) received more than half of the votes. A first run-off election was held between candidates with the two highest vote tallies in the first election (C. Harb and S. Mejcher-Atassi), but that election ended in a tie. A second run-off election was held, which was won by S. Mejcher-Atassi.

The following senators were elected to vacancies on the SCFA: B. Bashour (FAS), M. Jurdi (FHS), and E. Shammas (FEA).

4) Voting of degrees for summer 2016 graduates

M. Salameh presented the list of graduates and statistics on their distribution. Dean Hwalla, EVP Sayegh, M. Clinton (standing in for Director Huijer), Dean Nuwayhid, Dean Harvey, Dean El Cheikh, and Interim Dean Shihadeh recommended the awarding of degrees to graduates in their respective Schools (circulated list of expected graduates of summer 2016). Interim Dean Shihadeh asked A. Kayssi to explain a unique case in which an B.E. candidate was being nominated for a fall 2016 degree now because an internship he recently finished met the final requirement for graduation. **A motion was made to approve the awarding of degrees to all recommended candidates. Vote 2017-01. The motion was passed unanimously.**

5) President's report on the BoT meetings of June and September 2016

The president summarized the previous two meetings of the Board of Trustees, beginning with the September meeting. In that meeting the appointments of FAS Dean El Cheikh and OSB Interim Dean Shiadeh were approved, as were three new Masters programs, the capital budget, the operating budget, and a plan to increase research funding. The president reported showing the board the progress that has been made on the issue of tenure, discussing resolutions to negotiate with new vendors for retirement plan B, and acquiring support from the board on a proposal to raise the debt ceiling to fund urgently needed capital improvements. The president also reported discussions around key issues pertaining to expanding programs strategically but sustainably given the precarious outlook for the regional economy. Finally, the president described a plan to spend 11 million dollars to buy land adjacent to the campus that the university has wanted to buy for years, and the purchase of which has recently become much more feasible. The president then opened the floor for questions.

Several senators had questions about the land purchasing plan, including whether the 11 million dollars would need to be moved away from other university priorities and whether the land and/or building purchased might be used for additional student and faculty housing. The president and EVP Sayegh both explained that the 11 million dollars would be acquired by loans and that these purchases should be considered investments, and that those investments stood a good chance of being financially successful both because of the very low interest rates AUB is currently able to get on loans and the seemingly limitless capacity for property values in Ras Beirut to rise. Two senators asked questions about how much debt the university currently has and how much will be added to that total. The president and COO Sedehi explained that AUB's current debt level is 150 million dollars and that this is at the debt ceiling. They reported that the board has agreed, in principle, to raising the debt ceiling to 190 million but that the plan currently under discussion would only raise the debt to about 162 million. Several senators had questions about the planned expansion in research funds, including how much the increase would be and how it would be distributed. The president reported that the plan is to increase research funds by \$200,000 per year and for additional details referred senators both to the annual report of the University Research Board and to the recently distributed announcement about the Collaborative Research Stimulus.

The president then summarized the proceeding of the June meeting of the BoT. He reported to the board on development with REP, recapped decisions made at the strategic planning retreat, discussed the financial weight of tenure, and discussed issues having to do with facilities maintenance and implementing the master plan. The president also noted that at the June meeting, the board met with students and faculty to discuss matters of concern to those constituencies. The president then opened the floor for questions.

A senator asked when the tenure report will be made available, noting that a commitment had been made to share the report in September of 2016. A wide-ranging discussion ensued covering such issues as whether "sharing" the report refers to distributing the paper document or giving public presentations and explanations of its contents, and whether distributing the paper document before convening public discussions would lead to better informed or less well informed discussions. A senator asked whether the faculties should vote on the report. This question initiated another broad discussion that raised such issues as whether tenure is mentioned in the university by-laws and what the procedural differences are between initiating tenure anew (which is not what is being proposed) as opposed to reinstating a tenure regime which was suspended (which is what is being proposed). These issues were not conclusively resolved. The president emphasized that this is a work in progress and that we should be mindful of the fact that the goal is to end up with a proposal that will be approved by the BoT. The

upshot of this discussion was the following plan: **the tenure report will be distributed to the faculty next week** (the first week in October), **there will be various fora to discuss the report** (e.g. at the level of faculties and departments, facilitated by the tenure design committee), **and the feedback from those discussions will be incorporated into the report before it goes to the BoT.**

6) Annual reports of the Senate Committees and Boards

Board of Graduate Studies (BGS): S. Boujaoude reported that the BGS reviewed 15 proposals for new programs from the last two years: 4 PhD programs and 11 MA programs. He recommended three changes to the BGS: (1) the current practice is to have the first meeting of the year in November, and that henceforth it should happen earlier than that; (2) a repository for the BGS's old minutes and other documents should be created; and (3) the BGS needs administrative support in order to complete all that they are asked to do. Dean Hwalla asked if post-graduate diplomas are in the remit of the BGS and S. Boujaoude said that under his understanding of the by-laws, they are.

University Disciplinary Committee (UDC): Dean Nuwayhid reported that the current practice of the UDC involves too many unwritten rules and procedures and that we need a written document for the sake of both clarity and transparency. This would help both faculty and students.

Library Committee (LC): D. Patra reported that the LC has three recommendations: (1) that a financial hold be put on faculty who do not return a book when a recall is put on it by another patron; (2) that a limit of 100 books per faculty member be instituted; and (3) that the trend toward online access to books be increased. A senator asked whether the LC had made any recommendations about a proposed relocating of the books in the Science Library. D. Patra said that he was aware of a long-extant proposal for a joint library for engineering and sciences, but that he had not heard anything recently. The president interjected that this plan has been stalled because some requests made by the donor were simply unimplementable given certain facts about AUB's physical plant. But he did say that progress was being made on getting the donor to alter those requests.

University Publications Committee (UPC): M. Harb reported that the UPC's current mandate is to find a way to restructure AUB Press to make it more international and to raise its profile. Two changes that should be implemented in the very near future are, (1) to move it out of the basement of College Hall, and (2) to hire more staff because it cannot continue to run with the 1.5 people that currently work for it. The UPC praised Claire Leader's tireless efforts on behalf of the press, but emphasized that she needs help. This prompted a vigorous discussion about how the goal of raising AUB Press's international profile might be achieved. Several senators noted that while they would like to publish with AUB Press, it is currently professionally risky to do so because a publication with them does not carry the same weight for promotion, etc., as publishing with some other university presses does. Dean El Cheikh added that it is hard to find enough reviewers to adequately assess submissions to the press because it is a very time consuming task and is likely to be seen as service and not research when one must apply for promotion. The president acknowledged both of these concerns and went on to say that this is a multiple year process but that he firmly believes that AUB Press will eventually be turned into an entity that will make a high profile impact for the university.

University Research Board (URB): Z. Dawy said that the full details are in the annual report but summarized them by saying that significantly more research money is coming and he thanked the president and the acting provost for making that happen because it required a real commitment. One recent intervention he emphasized was creating a fund which allows for un-used money from annual grants to be recycled, as it were, back into the URB for the next year. This is substantial because it amounts to 10-15% of each annual budget.

Senate Admissions Committee (SAC): This committee did not meet during the 2015-2016 academic year. The president said that this was obviously problematic and that the committee should and will be restructured under a new chair and given a clear mandate about its remit and goals.

Senate Steering Committee (SSC): A. Kayssi noted that the work of this committee culminates in the monthly Senate meeting agendas and since the senators are all familiar with those, no summary report at this time was necessary.

Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs (SCFA): E. Shammass referred senators to the annual report for the details and thanked the members of the committee for their hard work.

[In light of the late hour and the importance of addressing the proposal from the Computer Science department in a timely manner, it was decided to bring item 9 on the agenda (Plan B update) forward to discuss it briefly and to postpone the CASAR update to a future meeting.]

7) Plan B update

The president reported that the vendor AUB currently uses for this retirement plan is getting out of the business so meetings with several alternative vendors have been undertaken. A leading candidate vendor has been identified. Because of the likelihood of stock market volatility in the U.S. in the event of the election of one of the presidential candidates in this November's election, it is a goal to have this issue settled before that election so that a professional team will be in place to help manage such volatility should it occur.

8) MS in Computer Science (course-based option)

W. El Hajj, chair of the Department of Computer Science, noted that his department already offers two options in their MS program: thesis and project. The project option has not been working well because students ended up with projects that were too much like theses and, as a result, only three project-option graduate degrees have been completed in the last several years. The department asked the Senate to approve a new course-based option for an MS in Computer Science and W. El Hajj emphasized the following five points: (1) no Graduate Assistantships will be granted to students pursuing the course-based option, so this will be a net revenue earner for the university; (2) the department will not approve any requests to switch between the thesis option to the course-based option, and vice versa; (3) for students graduating from the course-based option, the transcript will indicate that the graduate program was course-based; (4) the course-based option will require 30 credits: 9 from required courses and 21 from electives (this contrasts with the 21 course credits required for the thesis option); and (5) this proposal for the course-based MS in Computer Science has been approved by the department, the Board of Graduate Studies, and by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

There was a lengthy discussion. Several senators raised concerns such as the possibility that students who start on the thesis option (and thus possibly with a GA) might transfer to the course-based option thus partially paying for this professional degree with funds intended for academically focused graduate work; other proposals for practice-based non-thesis graduate programs have been rejected in the past so there is a precedent for rejecting this type of proposal; and the general concern that AUB graduates need strong writing skills and that any move that lessens the amount of writing-based work they do could be detrimental to their professional development. W. El Hajj responded to these concerns by saying that the department would not approve such transfer requests, that FEA has had multiple course-based graduate programs approved and course-based programs in Computer Science exist at such institutions as Stanford and the University of Michigan, and that there will be a substantial writing component in all of the courses in this graduate program. **A motion was made to approve the proposal on the condition that it be amended to highlight the existence of the writing component in the course work in the program. Vote 2017-02. The motion was passed by a vote of 18 for and 5 against.**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 pm.

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