

American University of Beirut
Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, December 16, 2022

Present: I. Abou Faycal, A. Abu-Alfa, H. Abu-Khuzam, F. Afiouni, N. Al-Akl, BouJaoude, P. Bou Khalil, A. Daou, Z. Dawy, J. Doumar, N. Dumit, L. Farhoud, T. Ghaddar, A. Ghauch, N. Hwalla, M. Jaber, M. Khraiche, S. Kharroubi, F. Khuri, S. Mallat, M. Massoud, N. Melhem, L. Musfi, M. Nasrallah, A. Olabi, A. Sabra, R. Sawaya, Y. Shaib, A. Shihadeh, A. Sibai, Y. Sidani, B. Tucker, R. Zurayk.

Absent: R. Sultan*, S. Nouredine, I. Baalbaki, S. Zein-el-dine, A. Al-Hroub, S. Altug, K. Scheid*, S. Elbassuoni, R. Boustany*, G. Honein*, S. Karaki
(*= regrets notified before meeting)

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

1- Approval of Senate meeting minutes of November 25, 2022

A motion was made and seconded to approve the November 25, 2022, Senate meeting minutes as amended. The motion carried unanimously (28 with: 0 against: 0 abstain).

2- Approval of e-course on mental health for faculty and students

The Counseling Center, and the Center for Public Health Practice & Department of Health Promotion & Community Health, presented a proposal to the Master Card Foundation for an e-course on mental health in 2020. Mrs. S. Chamate, Director of Counseling Center, and Mrs. J. Kalot, member of the Center for Public Health Practice & Department of Health Promotion & Community Health presented the rationale behind this e-course, and it involved the increase and recurring episodes of stress and anxiety among students, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, where students would be equipped with knowledge and skills to identify signs and symptoms of mental health problems. The e-course is composed of 5 modules (introduction to mental health, common mental health problems among youths, signs and symptoms of mental health, self-care and coping, supporting others in need of mental health support), and would be a mandatory online course to be taken by all freshmen and sophomore students. A second component of the program is on peer support where students would be taught how to perform this peer-to-peer support and will be under supervision by health professionals. Lastly, faculty and staff would be trained on how to support students with mental health problems and will be provided with the proper referral mechanism.

- *A Senate member asked if whether the e-course includes contacts and information for students in need of mental health support, and to share data with the different faculties about how many of their students took the course and passed. The same Senate member commented on the need to include CVs of all personnel involved in any proposal that has an academic perspective. Mrs. Chamate acknowledged the comment and added that at*

the end of the last module in the e-course there are contacts for students in case they need them. As for the data, Mrs. Kalot informed the Senate that they are and will continue collecting data and metrics for this program. Provost Dawy added that AUB will share these data with the faculty once available.

- *A Senate member asked to highlight the contacts in the e-course, and whether the program has a research component.* Mrs. Chamate informed the Senate that the e-course has the Crisis Intervention number in the Counselling Center in addition to the Lebanese national number and the contact of the Emergency Department at AUBMC. As for the research component, Mrs. Kalot added that this is present in the program and they already have received the IRB approval.
- *Dean Sawaya commended the team for working on this essential program, and asked whether the online course will give a better idea about the prevalence of this problem.* Mrs. Chamate informed the Senate that the purpose of the online e-course is not to collect data on the mental health of students but mental health disorders can be estimated to be around 10%;and can go as high as 30% or more depending on the country and different contexts and groups, however, a better reading of the students' needs could be derived through the project's evaluation phase.
- *A Senate member acknowledged the 10% number that is very similar to the percentage of e-petitions related to mental health issues received by the Students' Affairs committee he is chairing at FAS.*
- *A Senate member commended the e-course team on their work and asked to accompany this course with faculty support and education to be able to support their students.*
- *A Senate member asked whether passing this e-course by students is mandatory.* Mrs. Kalot informed the Senate that a student has to pass the e-course; else, he/she would repeat it.
- *A Senate member asked whether the animation and context are of western type.* Mrs. Chamate replied that they did their best to make it as universal as possible, while keeping the e-course contextualized to the local setting.
- *A Senate member asked to make the contents and e-course available to the public.* President Khuri and Provost Dawy acknowledged this idea. The President added that we could make it available to the public through AUB Online as a free content.

Vote: 2022-09: The motion carried (27 with: 0 against: 1 abstain).

3- Update on new taxation law and potential impact on AUB community

President Khuri introduced the subject by informing the Senate that the Lebanese Government has sent a memo on December 15 2022 stating that if the new taxation bill is not objected by January 2, then it will be effective immediately, and this will result in very negative consequences for the faculty, staff and AUB. Mr. Dayya presented the three governmental Articles (#27, 33 and 35), where these articles mainly focus on the increase of the exemption floors by about 5 folds if one looks only at the Lebanese Pound part, however, if these are pegged to the Dollar value, it turns out that the exemption floors went down substantially when compared to pre-2019. Mr. Dayya presented a real life situation of a faculty member's salary before and after these new to-be-implemented legislations, where

the income tax would increase from around 6% to 18 - 25%, in addition to being this retroactive from January 1 2022. This would result in catastrophic implications on the employees' salaries and the University budget. After an inquiry by a Senate member on how vouchers and wire-transfers are pegged after January 1 2022, Mr. Dayya explained that all such payments would be pegged to Lebanese Pounds using the black market rate at that specific date. Another Senate member inquired about the implication of these bills on clinicians' salaries, and Mr. Dayya explained that clinicians file their own taxes where AUB does not interfere in this procedure. President Khuri commented that any government has to offer some services to the citizen for the citizen to agree to pay tax, and what is demanded here is that the private sector and its employees pay the salaries of the public sector, without justification of the services of the government towards its citizens. President Khuri added that AUB intends to legally object the implementation of these laws through the appropriate dialogue channels. He added that AUB would be involved with other universities, the appropriate tax experts, tax economists in the country to convince the government to work on new tax brackets. A Senate member acknowledged President Khuri's re-assuring of this subject, and asked about what should be done if this new bill goes through. President Khuri replied by saying that AUB does not have the resources to shoulder taxes for its employees indefinitely; however AUB will do everything possible to alleviate the burden on its faculty and staff. He added that the Senate should be united in not just objecting strenuously, but also in the dialogue. A Senate member commented that this would drive the economy into a non-reporting one, which will drive down the tax revenues. Another Senate member inquired if AUB's lawyers in the US can be involved in this. President Khuri replied that this is an internal Lebanese issue and AUB's US lawyers cannot be part of this but they can give some legal opinions. A Senate member commented that there is a Lebanese law stating that no more than 40% could be deducted from one's salary as taxes, and as such how would this new bill be implemented while we pay taxes on benefits and pension that can result in higher taxes than 40%. Mr. Dayya replied that a maximum of 25% would be deducted as taxes at any point as per the Lebanese labor law, however, with the retrospect added that would surely make it exceed this value. President Khuri urged the Senate to act, inform and mobilize the faculty towards this unjust bill. A Senate member commented that AUB's faculty might not know the severity of this and suggested that the administration send an email explaining the situation. President Khuri replied that this can be a bit dangerous and could be taken against the University, however, senators should inform faculty and involve them with this issue. VP Jaber stated that in any way we look at this, staff would be hit very badly by this income tax bill. A Senate member inquired if the Senate could be updated about this issue before the next assigned meeting. President Khuri and Provost Dawy agreed to see how to communicate with the Senate on the legal steps that are planned to be taken.

4- Update on student enrollment and financial support modalities

Provost Dawy shared with the Senate a presentation on AUB's current performance pertaining to students' numbers, tuition fees collection and support. Data presented was benchmarked with that of the fall 2019 semester, where in the last few years there was a decline in the students' number. However, for this fall semester (2022-23) the numbers are at 7818 which is above what was budgeted for, where the new undergraduate students who joined this fall is around 1600 students. Students' numbers differ from one discipline and

another, where in some majors they went up while in others went down. For example in FAS, the freshman program has taken a big hit in the year 2020 because of the Beirut explosion, however, the numbers are picking up again to normal, and this is a very important cohort because freshmen students mostly come from outside Lebanon. Currently, this number is close to 11- 12%, which is another indicator of a reduction in the number of international students which used to be around 18%. As for the graduate admissions, the situation is similar to that of the undergraduate programs, where in some faculties there has been a decline in the number of enrolled students while in others the numbers are somehow the same as (or higher than) before.

As for tuition collection, Provost Dawy added that the number went down by 50% from 67 million USD in fall 2019 to 33 million USD this current fall semester. The amount that was billed this semester to students was 85 million USD, where the 33 million USD that were received are self-payments, and the rest (52 million USD) are divided into two parts. One part is the internal support (that doesn't add to revenues) that was waived to students by AUB and the rest is from external support. Therefore, the collection income is close to 42 to 44 million USD. Provost Dawy added that the student tuition support that was given by AUB is expected to exceed 110 million USD, which is by far a record high. Currently, 1700 students don't pay any tuition since they benefit from full scholarships from different agencies. In addition, 5200 students benefited from the 40% tuition reduction granted by AUB, and on top of these 3000 students received additional financial aid from the Financial Aid Office based on need. The AUB administration is actively working on fund raising for students from donors and friends of the university, where in the past year and a half 105 million USD in grants has been submitted, out of which 54 million USD have been awarded and 51 million USD are still pending. Provost Dawy ended his presentation by saying that AUB is starting to transition from crisis management to recovery and advancement.

Senate members were invited to ask questions and make comments. The following issues/questions were raised and were answered by the Provost:

- *A Senate member inquired about the 33 million USD in collections and how does this number relate to the drop in the number of faculty and staff, which lowers the operation budget.* The Provost explained that there is no complete answer at the moment since this would fall under expenditures and these numbers will be looked at towards the end of the fiscal year.
- *A Senate member inquired if next year AUB would expect only a 20% of the 33 million USD increase when compared to this year if the numbers stay within the same trend.* The Provost agreed with this comment and added that this is why the 33 million USD number was used and not the one that includes the financial support, since the latter will also be higher than this year.
- *A Senate member inquired about the number of African students that are supported by the different agencies such as MEPI and MSF.* The Provost replied that around 50% of the total number of students that are funded by external grants are international students, and this number includes besides the African students many from Afghanistan, Syria and Palestine.

5- Update from Senate Committees, plans and challenges

a- University Admissions Committee:

Dr. M Masoud, Chair of the University Admissions committee, started by introducing the members and the function of the committee. Dr. Masoud informed the Senate that the committee is currently working on a proposal to revise the criteria for the admissions of undergraduate students. Primarily, to consider extracurricular activities in the University admissions besides the higher academic achievements, where more attention would be given to social development and understanding the value of community service. Dr. Massoud added that the committee, besides benchmarking with international universities, it will consider having a more holistic admission process, and currently the committee is working on the rubric and evaluation criteria of such extracurricular activities. Another aspect the committee is working on is the social media campaigns to target specific teachers and schools to encourage students to apply to AUB, in particular to the public schools in order to create the best and most effective messages to convey to potential students. Lastly, the committee is looking for ways to enhance the admission process in certain majors that suffer from low enrollment with the aim of attracting more students to these majors.

Senate members were invited to ask questions and make comments. The following issues/questions were raised and were answered by Dr. Masoud:

- *A Senate member commented on the fact that social media campaigns do not always bring the benefit needed, and inquired if the committee has other plans for such advertisement. A second question was asked by the same Senate member concerning the issue of accepting students to their 2nd or 3rd choice of major if they are not successful in getting admitted to their preferred major. Dr. Masoud acknowledged the comment and replied that the committee is still looking into these issues currently.*
- *A Senate member inquired on how would the committee evaluate extra-curricular activities. Dr. Masoud informed the Senate that the committee is working on a proposal to establish the mechanism of extra-curricular activities, where these activities would be classified as academic activities and/or community activities. President Khuri commended this work and added that AUB relied solely before on the composite score for the admission process due to the civil war circumstances, but now it is the right time to change this.*
- *A Senate member commented on the admission process especially when a student is not accepted in their first choice major, and inquired if it is possible to admit them as majorless instead of suggesting to them other majors. University Registrar and Vice Provost Tucker agreed with this comment and added that many US universities admit their students without specifying the major, where a student cannot declare his/her major until their second year.*
- *A Senate member added that AUB could revive an old mechanism of accepting students in certain majors by having an aptitude test administered before their selection.*

b- University Library Committee:

Dr. R. Nasr, Chair of University Library committee, and Mrs. F. Charafeddine, Interim Director of AUB Libraries, presented the planned activities of the University Library committee during this academic year. One of the major hurdles the committee is currently working on is the ordering and selling of textbooks to students especially after the economic crisis Lebanon is facing. The committee has identified some setbacks in the books' ordering mechanism, where little communication is present between all parties involved. As for the selling process, students currently are not purchasing all of the ordered books due to their expensive prices. One of the action plans the committee will work on is to start first by preparing a list of the adopted textbooks available as open-access resources, and share it with students and faculty as an alternative to the adopted textbook. In addition, after discussions with faculty members, the committee will try to answer questions such as; is there any room for open educational resources to be adopted? Why faculty members are asking always for the latest textbook copy and not using last year's edition? The committee will also work on a policy that would help reduce the cost of the books, enforce the copyright infringement and ensure better communication between the different entities responsible for this process.

Senate members were invited to ask questions and make comments. The following issues/questions were raised and were answered:

- *A Senate member inquired about the possibility of AUB organizing a used-books exchange day. Mrs. Charafeddine replied that the AUB Libraries did this before and it was not successful, since students wanted the newest book edition or had access to pirated copies.*
- *A Senate member commented that students have an infrastructure ready for sharing pirated books such as societies and clubs. Another Senate member added that they even share previous copies of exams. Provost Dawy reminded the Senate that any such unallowed actions by societies should be reported by the faculty to the Students' Affairs Office.*
- *A Senate member suggested that students could buy the soft-copies textbooks instead of the higher priced hard-cover ones.*

5. Other business

- President Khuri thanked Interim Dean Laila Farhood for her extraordinary service to AUB during the last three years and four months of toil and trouble, where she has done a remarkable job in leading the Hariri School of Nursing. He informed the Senate that there will be an event to celebrate Dr. Farhood in January 2023.
- President Khuri also thanked Interim Dean Saouma Boujaoude for stewarding the largest faculty during last year. He also informed the Senate that Dr. Boujaoude will be taking up the senior advisor role which will be announced to the faculty in due time.

- *A Senate member informed the Senate that a resolution has been drafted by some Senate members and was recited as follows:
“The new law affecting and increasing tax brackets will negatively impact faculty and staff, as it jeopardizes their livelihood and threatens their work sustainability.
The AUB faculty senate strongly rejects the passing of this unjust law.”*
Vote: 2022-10: A motion to adopt the resolution was made, seconded and was approved unanimously by the Senate (28 with : 0 against: 0 abstain).
- *A Senate member informed the Senate that AUB was ranked 133 worldwide in terms of sustainability. President Khuri commented that such rankings are sometimes a risky business. VP Jaber informed the Senate that there will be at the beginning of the coming year a new initiative concerning sustainability at AUB.*

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 4:55 pm.

(Minutes recorded by T. Ghaddar, Secretary of the Senate)