

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, December 18, 2020

Present: M. Abiad, A. Abu-Alfa, F. Afiouni, E. Al-Chaer, A. Al-Hroub, T. Amin, H. Auji, I. Baalbaki, T. Bazi, G. Burris, A. Chalak, R. Chedid, A. Daou, H. Darwish, Z. Dawy, N. Dumit, H. El Rassy, M. Farah, L. Farhoud, A. Harutyunyan, H. Jaafar, K. Kabalan, F. Khuri, S. Mallat, N. Melhem, R. Mohtar, L. Musfy, M. Nachar, R. Nakkash, M. Nasrallah, T. Nezameddin, G. Saad, A. Shihadeh, A. Sibai, Y. Sidani, R. Sultan, F. Talih, B. Tucker, G. Zaatari, S. Zein-el-dine

Absent: N. El-Cheikh*, S. Isber*, N. Saliba*

(* = regrets notified before meeting)

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. The meeting was held virtually using "Zoom".

1) Approval of November 27, 2020 Senate meeting minutes

The minutes of November 27, 2020 were unanimously approved.

2) Update on tuition fees

President Khuri gave an update on the tuition fees increase. He stated that the administration met with the different University constituents (Senate, faculty, and Students) and explained the need to adjust the exchange rate for tuition payments to match the electronic exchange platform of the Banque du Liban, currently set at LBP 3,900. The adjustment in exchange rate will be coupled with a significant increase in financial aid awards. Moreover, there are ongoing meetings with SRC and USFC to discuss possible ways AUB can relax the associated financial burden on needy students. The President stated that the administration is trying to shift the burden from needy students by relying on:

- Tuition fees paid in USD by students whose parents are abroad
- Philanthropic donations
- Extramural Grants

President Khuri added that while students may be unhappy with the tuition adjustment, many understood that AUB does not have another choice, and he promised that the dialogue will continue with student representatives in order to help as many of the continuing needy students as possible. A senator stated that not all students have accepted the tuition increase as was evident from the demonstrations around campus. Some students still consider this hike in tuition fees unfair and are discontent with the decision. The President replied that those students are not reaching out to the administration. The University is interested in having an open dialogue with all students, and the unsatisfied students should reach out to the administration to discuss their issues.

3) SAT requirement for fall 2021-22 admissions

A. Sabbagh presented a motion to allow students who have not taken the SAT I exam to not submit it on an exceptional basis this year. He attributed the reasons behind the motion to:

- The compromised SAT exam that led the testing agency to cancel the December 5, 2020 exam in Beirut.
- The difficulty in finding fresh dollars to register for the SAT exam
- The COVID-19 pandemic

The above waiver will apply to both freshman and sophomore applicants. As SAT I and II are a government requirement for all freshman applicants, the Lebanese government showed flexibility this year allowing students to take the exams during their freshman year rather than before admission.

Freshman students who fail to meet the requirements by the end of their freshman year will not have their degrees authenticated by the Lebanese government.

Sabbagh explained that the admission composite score is equally based on SAT scores and school grades corresponding to Grades 10 and 11. On an exceptional basis, the composite score will be based solely on high school grades this year. The admissions office realizes that different schools adopt different grading schemes, and therefore used history data to normalize school grades to avoid bias. However, since some individuals may have already taken the SAT exam before December 5, a good SAT score will be considered favorably during the evaluation of their applications to admission.

Several senators asked if AUB has considered having a standardized entrance exam to replace SAT. Mr. Sabbagh explained that such recommendation was rejected by the Board of Deans (BoD). The BoD justified their decision by not wishing to add more uncertainty to the situation than what already exists. They recommended to follow through with this interim motion while keeping the possibility of an entrance exam for the future. The BoD realizes that the SAT exam may not be accessible in the future due to the country's economic crisis and the devaluation of the LBP. Therefore, AUB needs to work on redeveloping entrance exams, but such exams may not be readily available for this year's applicants. If SAT exams are to remain inaccessible, the goal is to develop an aptitude entrance exam rather than a subject exam, as the high school grades cover the different subjects.

A motion was made to allow individuals who have not taken the SAT I exam to not submit it, on an exceptional basis for this year only. Students would, nevertheless, be allowed to submit it and will be required to take it for their freshman equivalency. Vote 2020-21 (29-3-0).

4) Update on students' elections

Dean Nezameddin gave an update on this year's students' elections. The elections were run fully online and depicted excellent partnership between the office of student affairs, the IT office, and the registrar. No significant snags were encountered when it came to students' participation. 53% of the student population voted – approximately 4250 students. 91% of the students who preregistered to vote actually voted. The USFC/SRC elections also ran very smoothly. Overall the experience was very successful.

5) Prospects for the winter session and spring semester

Associate Provost Choueiri gave a presentation on the prospects for the winter session and the spring semester. She stated that the vast majority of courses will be delivered fully online until (at least) the end of February 2021. In person instruction to satisfy program requirements will only be allowed if authorized by the Deans. However, even in the case of in person teaching, accommodations must be made for those who cannot be present on campus, and instructors must ensure asynchronous access to course materials, including recordings of lectures. Instructors will follow best practices for designing a positive online experience. They will strive to maintain student engagement via virtual office hours and discussion forums.

Access to campus and residential living areas will be allowed while maintaining a limited occupancy capacity. An online reservation system will be used for managing a safe on campus experience.

Choueiri presented the outcomes of the mid fall evaluation of online education experience survey conducted by the eCAD:

- Students mostly raised concerns regarding the fast pace and high workload associated with online teaching. They also commented that exams were long, sequential, and many faced connectivity/ access issues.
- Faculty members indicated that there are challenges in keeping students fully engaged throughout the course. They also stated that their workload significantly increased to maintain an asynchronous teaching modality.
- First year students had an overall negative first year experience. They felt isolated and disconnected from university life and were not prepared for a fully online experience.

The senate committee on student affairs has been tasked with developing a plan to address academic integrity and contract cheating on campus. The BoD voted to approve the establishment of a university wide taskforce mandated to develop a university grading policy. A Lab equipment taskforce has also been established to implement a process for sharing lab equipment and facilities across faculties/schools, and to develop initiatives related to enhancing lab facilities and maintenance during the coming period.

Choueiri concluded by presenting an update on internal and extramural research grants highlighting the positive trend in externally approved funding this year.

Senators inquired about the pay rate for personnel supported by external grants. Choueiri confirmed that starting Spring 2021, such personnel will be paid at 3900LBP/\$ rate.

Other senators inquired about whether professors can continue teaching from abroad during the spring semester. They also asked that the administration adopts a unified decision in this regard. The interim Provost said that the university cannot have a unified decision and such occurrences will be dealt with on a case by case basis. This is because certain courses including clinical rotations, studios, labs... require physical presence.

6) Certificate in “Teaching in Higher Education” as a graduation requirement for PhD students

Professor BouJaoude presented the proposal to make the certificate in “Teaching in Higher Education” a graduation requirement for all PhD students. BouJaoude commenced with some statistics about current PhD programs at AUB and the increasing number of doctoral students. He then presented the goals of the proposed certificate and its design components. The certificate will be offered by CTL with the objectives to:

- Enrich the students’ academic experience and professional skills
- Develop a customized program based on an experiential learning approach
- Engage the students more formally in teaching activities and duties, including teaching (and assisting in) regular courses and labs

The contents of the certificate program are coordinated with the Graduate Council. The certificate duration spans two terms during the second year in the PhD program.

A motion was made to add PhD Teaching Certificate as a mandatory graduation requirement for all PhD students. Several senators argued about the reasons behind making the certificate a mandatory requirement for all PhD students. They emphasized that some PhD students intend to follow a research career path and such certificate will constitute a burden on them. Research oriented PhD students especially in the field of medical sciences may not be interested in teaching, and we should not force on them this certificate, a senator added. BouJaoude replied that the certificate is in line with many European institutions. It will constitute an asset to the students when seeking academic jobs. The skill sets acquired through the certificate have communication skills components which are of great benefit even to those pursuing a research career. Another senator asked why not make the certificate available to non-AUB students. BouJaoude said that this might be a future possibility; the certificate needs to be perfected at AUB first and then rolled out as needed. **The motion passed by a vote. Vote 2020-22 (33-2-2).**

A second motion was made to have PhD students register for a 0 cr. P/F course per term for the Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education. The motion passed by a vote. Vote 2020-23 (35-0-2).

7) Protecting HIP of longest serving and vulnerable members of the AUB community discussion

President Khuri explained that given the current economic situation, AUB cannot formally expand HIP coverage. However, the University intends to support all constituents to the extent possible. Therefore, the Senate must think of ways to protect faculty benefits without sending a motion to the BoT that will not pass.

Senator Chalak stated that the HIP policy in its current format has unfair terms regarding retirement age and post retirement HIP benefits:

- The policy specifies minimum age of retirement and years of service as conditions for continuation of HIP coverage.
- The policy also states that a retiree can only benefit of continuation of HIP coverage if he/she has not taken a leave without pay within the five years that preceded his retirement date.

H. Bikhazi stated that the HIP policy is currently undergoing revisions. While modifications in coverage are not viewed favorably due to economic conditions, other changes are in flux, and the policy will be amended following due process.

A motion was made to mandate SCFA to work with the HIP policy owners to consider revisions to clauses related to post retirement HIP eligibility as soon as possible. Vote 2020-24. The motion was unanimously approved. The Senate also reminded SCFA to follow up on revisions pertaining to discriminatory language in the HIP policy. Those revisions were recommended in an earlier Senate meeting in the Spring 2019-2020 semester.

8) Other business

- A senator inquired about the pay rate for GRAs supported through extramural grants. Interim Provost Dawy said that official updates on the subject will be shared in January 2021. The 3900LBP/\$ exchange rate will probably be adopted, but this is not finalized yet.
- A senator inquired about the point of contact for the recently established Medical Social Fund. President Khuri replied that the Fund is managed by a committee lead by AUBMC medical director Joe Otayek. Khuri advised that all Fund related communications be channeled through Otayek.
- A senator commended the efforts that lead to the establishment of taskforce on cheating and requested that the Senate receives regular updates on the work of the taskforce.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 pm.

(Minutes recorded by G. Saad, Secretary of the Senate)