

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, January 29, 2021

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, L. Choueiri, A. Daou, H. Darwish, Z. Dawy, N. Dumit, N. El-Cheikh, H. El Rassy, L. Farhoud, A. Harutyunyan, S. Isber, H. Jaafar, K. Kabalan, F. Khuri, S. Mallat, N. Melhem, R. Mohtar, L. Musfy, M. Nachar, R. Nakkash, M. Nasrallah, T. Nezameddin, G. Saad, N. Saliba, A. Shihadeh, A. Sibai, Y. Sidani, R. Sultan, F. Talih, B. Tucker, G. Zaatari, S. Zein-el-dine

Absent: M. Farah*

(* = 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 December 18, 2020 Senate meeting minutes

A senator suggested a minor amendment to the minutes. The minutes of December 18, 2020 were unanimously approved as amended.

2) Approval of Senate to the “Proposed amendments to the Policy and Procedures for Tenure and Promotion Evaluation of Tenure-Eligible Faculty Members”

Interim Provost L. Choueiri gave an overview of the history of the proposed policy amendments. The amendments were based on issues and questions collected from the different stakeholders over time. The proposed amendments do not affect the underlying principles on which the tenure evaluation system is based and therefore do not touch on the policy portion of the document. They are meant to add procedural clarity. Choueiri added that the objective of this agenda item is to bring the proposed amendments for approval by the Senate after having been approved by previous levels in the approval hierarchy. If additional changes are proposed by the Senate, the new proposed amendments will have to follow due process before they can be voted on. Associate Provost Dawy went over the proposed amendments to the policy explaining the rationale behind each change.

Few senators highlighted some editorial comments to the text of the policy. Most of these comments were adopted instantaneously.

A senator raised concern about item 5 in the “External Referee Evaluation Guidelines” section. The senator stressed that it is the responsibility of the PRC and the Dean’s office to solicit as many letters as needed, and that the university shall not proceed with the evaluation of the tenure and/or promotion applications with a low number of external referee letters without securing the applicant’s approval. Other senators stated that applicants with a low number of external letters are disadvantaged, and applicants should not be penalized for this. One possibility would be allowing the applicant to withdraw his/her application if the number of letters is not sufficient. Such solution is not always possible especially if the applicant is applying by the deadline. It was pointed out that policies should not be creating deadlocks and should provide solutions for those when they do occur in a process. Dawy said that such situations are rarely encountered, as the PRC and the Dean’s office must exhaust all possibilities before reaching such scenario. Moreover, there are time limitations in the promotion/tenure process and the PRC cannot keep looking for external referees indefinitely. Dawy also noted that the evaluation process depends on the quality of the external reviewer reports and not on the number of received letters.

Another senator raised a concern regarding dual appointments. The senator claimed that in case of dual appointments, the two departments are independent administrative units, and the promotion process should be carried independently in each department. Otherwise, the term secondary appointment should be better defined. This was clarified by the fact that professors with a dual

appointment typically have a home department that deals with all promotion related criteria. If that is not the case, then the dual appointment policy must be revisited to clarify any ambiguity on the subject.

Another senator remarked that minority reports at the PRC level should not be allowed. The PRC mainly reports facts about the applicant's case. The PRC report should objectively state the pros and cons of the case evaluated. Moreover, since there is no voting at the PRC level, there is no need for minority reporting. It was agreed to remove all references to minority reporting at the PRC level from the policy.

Senators also commented on the requirement that PRC members should not be active research collaborators with the candidate. A senator suggested that if that is the case, then collaborators should be excluded at the UPTC level as well. Dawy assured that this is the internationally adopted norm in selecting the PRC members, and while one out of three members can influence reporting at the PRC level, the weight of any collaborator at the UPTC level will be diluted due to the large size of the committee.

The Senate also agreed to allow tenured associate professors to serve on the PRC for associate professors applying for tenure only.

After the discussion, Dawy went over all the changes one by one and any contentious points were reconciled on the spot.

A motion was made to approve the proposed amendments to the Policy and Procedures for Tenure and Promotion Evaluation of Tenure-Eligible Faculty Members as amended in the meeting. The motion passed by a vote. Vote 2020-25 (33-0-3).

3) Updates on students' strike/tuition/ fate of the semester ahead

President Khuri stated that the university is deeply engaged in dialogue with the students. The administration has met with USFC several times since the demonstrations. It is expected that a significant majority of the students will continue at AUB during the Spring 2020-21 semester. The numbers will become clearer by February 19, 2021, the deadline for payment of fees for the spring term.

Dean of student affairs, T. Nezameddin, said that since their election, the USFC has met regularly with senior members of the administration. Students are mainly trying to understand the main reasons behind the tuition increase. The USFC and the administration had tough discussions about the protests and violations. Most of the raised concerns were addressed, and the USFC is working closely with the administration on proposals on how to deal with this tuition increase and lower the burden on students and their families.

Interim Provost L. Choueiri gave a brief update on the fate of the semester ahead. She noted that the Office of the Provost is continuously working on supporting faculty and students to improve their online educational experience.

Vice-Provost and Registrar, B. Tucker, said that the financial aid awards have significantly increased. A limited number of new financial aid applications were received, but hundreds of appeals from existing awardees have been submitted. The financial aid committee is seriously studying all appeals with the objective to help as many students as possible. Student recruitment efforts are ongoing at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. Social media campaigns and promotional materials for AUB are due to appear in the MENA region and certain other countries that have been identified as priorities for AUB in the near future.

A senator asked about student access to books. With the enforced lockdown and limited access to foreign currency credit cards, students are going to face a lot of obstacles in acquiring textbooks early on during the Spring semester. Interim Provost L. Choueiri assured the Senate that AUB is closely coordinating with Librarie Antoine to resolve this issue. Moreover, the plan is to migrate to e-Books whenever the option is available.

Another senator asked about the fate of students who will default on their tuition payments despite the increased financial aid packages. President Khuri said that the various faculties/schools are

chipping in to support as many students as possible. Dean Mohtar added that FAFS has created an initiative to provide complementary financial support to continuing students.

4) Request from BGS to waive the GRE requirement for admissions to PhD programs for fall 2021-22

The chairman of the BGS, S. Elfakhani, presented the request stating that the waiver is a mere extension of what was adopted for the Fall 2020-21 semester. Moreover, the BGS surveyed the different faculties/schools, and all the Deans accepted to extend the waiver for another year. It is also noteworthy that the faculties are currently re-evaluating the need for GRE as an admission criterion for PhD applicants.

A motion was made to approve waiving the GRE requirement for admissions to PhD programs for fall 2021-22. Vote 2020-26. The motion was unanimously approved.

5) Update on the part-time faculty members working conditions

The Deans of the different schools gave an update on the status of part-time faculty members in their respective faculties.

Dean El-Cheikh said that FAS has a total of 160 part-time faculty members mainly teaching essential undergraduate level courses. El-Cheikh met with representatives of the part-time faculty members repeatedly, explained the current financial situation of AUB, and presented the ongoing efforts to enhance their working conditions. Based on the meetings with part-timers and in coordination with the Deans of other faculties, El Cheikh decided to give part-time faculty members a salary raise pro-rated as per the rate of current full-time instructors who teach 8 courses a year.

Dean Shihadeh adopted a similar approach with MSFEA part-time faculty members. He said that few part-timers are pushing for a one size fits all solution. This does not work because MSFEA has a diverse pool of part-time faculty members that come from different backgrounds. Some MSFEA part-timers donate their pay back to MSFEA, while others need the money. Dean Shihadeh added that moving forward part-timers are made aware of the conditions of employment well in advance and are free to take up the role or not. Most of the current pool of part-timers at MSFEA were happy with the solution and no major problems emerged.

Interim Dean Sidani of OSB echoed the messages of the Deans of FAS and MSFEA. Dean Mohtar added that part-timers at FAFS regard AUB as their home and want to contribute regardless of the remuneration. Interim Dean Sibai of FHS stated that part-timers at FHS have been there for a long time and are treated as part of the faculty body.

President Khuri concluded that while part-time faculty members are valuable and important citizens of the university, they have no direct link to the central University administration. They are based in the individual Schools/Faculties and report to their respective Deans. That is why the Deans were tasked with coming up with a harmonizing solution for the raised concerns.

A senator stated that the main issue is that part time faculty members are not being paid the value of their labor. Some of them are essential for the continuity of business, and part-timers teaching social sciences are not as well off as those in other schools and are in need for the money.

Another senator stated that regardless of the compensation, part-timers do not feel valued by AUB. They need to feel that they are appreciated and are a constituent of the institution. President Khuri assured the Senate that while AUB might not have done a great job valuing part-time faculty members in the past, the University needs to and will do a better job in that regard in the future.

6) Inequities in the special fresh money pay for full-time instructors

Professor Sultan raised this issue highlighting that full-time instructors at FAS have been classified into different categories with a substantial differential in the fresh USD supplement that each category received. He added that departments were not consulted on this, and this is a bit unfair for some instructors. Sultan stated that a division based on whether the instructor teaches regular or lab

courses is not fair since not all lab courses are the same. Some lab course are extremely demanding and require substantial effort. Sultan called on the administration to revisit the decision.

Associate Provost Dawy explained the rationale behind the full time instructors' supplement packages. He explained that this is a one-time arrangement that was implemented after coordination with the Deans and consultation with SCFA, and it was carried out under stringent budgetary constraints while trying to secure faculty retention and maintain equity amongst constituents including faculty and staff. Dawy added that since full time lecturers and instructors constitute a diverse group that have duties spanning a wide range, it was decided to classify them into three categories for the purpose of allocating the salary supplements:

- Those who teach full courses (typically up to four regular 3-credit courses per term)
- Those who teach lab courses, course recitations, and lab rotations
- Those who have administrative duties

This classification is based on the duties of the instructors and is not meant to undermine their hard-work and the value of their individual efforts.

7) Update on the results of the circular email vote to approve the updated calendar of the spring semester

Registrar, B. Tucker, explained that after the announcement of the total lockdown in the country, it was decided to propose delaying the start of the Spring semester by one week.

A motion was made to delay the start of the Spring 2020-21 semester by one week. The motion was circulated via email for a circular vote. The motion passed by a circular vote prior to the meeting. Vote 2020-27. (27-0-0)

8) Other business

A senator asked whether under the current exceptional circumstances faculty members can extend their on campus residence beyond the seven years limit. It was explained that the policy is clear on the matter, however the administration will look into it. If the on campus housing waiting list is cleared, the proposal might be considered favorably.

Another senator inquired about the involvement of AUBMC in the COVID-19 vaccination process. It was highlighted that AUBMC is one of the government adopted vaccination centers.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 pm.

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