

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, March 31, 2023

Present: I. Abou Faycal, H. Abu-Khuzam, F. Afiouni, A. Al-Hakim, A. Al-Hroub, I. Baalbaki, R. Boustany, F. Dahdah, A. Daou, Z. Dawy, N. Dumit, T. Ghaddar, A. Ghauch, G. Honein, N. Hwalla, S. Karaki, M. Khraiche, S. Kharroubi, F. Khuri, S. Mallat, M. Massoud, N. Melhem, L. Musfi, M. Nasrallah, A. Olabi, A. Sabra, R. Sawaya, K. Scheid, Y. Shaib, A. Shihadeh, A. Sibai, Y. Sidani, R. Sultan, B. Tucker, R. Zurayk.

Absent: N. Al-Akl*, M. Jaber*, S. Nouredine*, S. Zein-el-dine, J. Doumar, S. Altug, A. Abu-Alfa, P. Bou Khalil,

(*= regrets notified before meeting)

The meeting was called to order at 2:07 p.m.

1- Approval of Senate meeting minutes of February 24, 2023

A motion was made and seconded to approve the February 24, 2023, Senate meeting minutes as amended. The motion carried **(27 with: 0 against: 3 abstain)**.

2- Update on the Board of Trustees meeting

President Khuri updated the Senate on the March 2023 BOT meetings, noting that it was well attended and productive. The BOT elected three new alumni trustees (R. Karam, S. Karajerjian and K. Wehbe) and two new trustees for three-year terms (Carlos del Rio and Kevin Taweel); and Jose Zaglul was confirmed as trustee emeritus. The President added that the BOT also appointed Dr. F. Dahdah as professor with tenure retroactive to his appointment as the FAS Dean, Dr. M. Bashshur as professor emeritus, Dr. K. Bitar as Dean emeritus and Dr. O. Sukkarieh as an associate professor in the tenure track at HSON. Fundraising priorities, such as connecting with the Latin American diaspora, to acquire funds for the “Boldly” campaign and a possible establishment of a community hospital at North Lebanon and building up the AUBMC’s equipment were also discussed. President Khuri also updated the BOT on the University online learning and artificial intelligence initiatives and the need to revise the campus master plan, where the BOT expressed support for the discussed topics. The President informed the Senate that the University budget would be completed by May 19th, and reassured the Senate that the AUB administration and the BOT are doing their best to sustain the current faculty benefits during these hard-economic times. Finally, the President urged the senators to not only carry messages to the faculty but also educate their constituencies. A Senate member commended President Khuri’s efforts to protect the faculty’s benefit package since 2019. Another Senate member urged the senators to speak out and address issues rather than keeping discussions behind closed doors, and emphasized the importance of representing everyone. A Senate member commented that he didn’t enjoy reading some faculty members’ emails since they lacked connection between their ideas, and suggested adding some topics for discussion at the Senate before the President’s meeting with the BOT. President Khuri replied that the annual process of putting things together regarding the University budget begins in March and ends in late May, and thus the faculty can be informed only after the BOT approves the proposed budget during the June academic year-end Board meeting. President Khuri suggested to the Senate to educate the faculty about the process’s timeline where this could be reassuring to those who may not know about it. A Senate member commented that she is with increasing benefits for faculty and staff, particularly medical benefits, and does not believe in reducing benefits. The same Senate member expressed discomfort

with how some faculty members addressed some issues with overwhelming emails on the list server, and suggested that people who are upset should vent to their division chief and Dean first, but acknowledge that this may not always work. President Khuri commented that the BOT are present at AUB twice and have four board meetings a year, and it would be more beneficial that they hear any faculty concerns during their meetings with faculty and Senate members and not through leaked emails on the list server. A Senate member commended the President's efforts for protecting the faculty benefits, and added that she is worried about weaponizing what faculty say on the list server against them, and that might increase their sense that communication doesn't work. President Khuri replied that conversations on the University list server have never been used against any faculty member, however, some wrongly communicated emails with misinformation could cause unintentional harm. He added that for the same reason, seven years ago the AUB administration decided to have the Senate elect a member to present to the BOT on its behalf any faculty concerns at the end of each year. He added that the BOT is focused on protecting the University's finances and the well-being of the students, faculty and staff who are important to maintain a productive and valuable workplace. A Senate member commented that faculty members do have access to the BOT members through visits and letters, and that it is the responsibility of faculty members to communicate effectively without the invalid accusations of weaponizing their speech against them. A Senate member suggested that the AUB administration try to revisit budget plans more often per year and not just between April to May, since inflation is going at a very fast rate in Lebanon lately. Another Senate member requested that the AUB administration communicate future plans during the year more often in order to plan things accordingly. President Khuri commented that the AUB administration has been very clear about what the plans are for the next three years regarding restoring the purchase power of the faculty and the full dollarization of the tuition by 2025, and this was communicated with the Senate and faculty during previous town hall meetings, repeatedly. A Senate member expressed appreciation towards the administration's efforts to support the university community. The same Senate member added that the faculty had two main concerns in their emails: they wanted to know what to expect in the future and there was a concern for those with the lowest income. President Khuri applauded the concern about the low wage earners, and added that what makes the budget preparation a complicated one is the fact that bringing up the salary floors, protecting the benefits and restoring them becomes very hard if someone is unwilling to do it at the expense of the students.

3. Election to Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs (SCFA): replacement of Shady El Bassuouni

President Khuri opened the floor for nominations to elect a member of SCFA in replacement for Dr. S. El Bassuouni for the spring semester of 2023. Dr. K. Scheid won by acclamation.

4- Approval of a new Online Graduate Academic Diploma in Engineering Management, Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA)

Dr. I. Srour, the coordinator of the online education program at MSFEA, presented the new program proposal titled "Online Graduate Academic Diploma in Engineering Management" that aims to attract learners interested in developing their skills in engineering management and specifically designed for individuals who cannot commit to a full-fledged Master's degree program. The program targets fresh graduates and working professionals from various engineering backgrounds and architecture. Dr. Srour presented data that showed interest in programs that are affordable, short, and flexible, such as the presented new program. The program is an academic diploma with 15 credits and its structure is similar to the current Master's in engineering management, where some core courses are common between the two programs, and there are elective courses that students can choose from based on their interests. Dr. Srour added that all the courses to-be-offered as part of this new program have already been developed and are currently part of the existing Master's program, with minimal

additional costs associated. Dr. Srour noted that the proposal has gone through all the required approval channels.

A motion to approve the new online graduate academic diploma in engineering management at MSFEA was made, and seconded. A Senate member inquired about the transfer procedure from the new online program to the Master's program. Dr. Srour replied that this would follow the University's policies as stated in the catalogue, and added that transferring to the Master's program would require that the students do exceptionally well in the online program and the full background would be looked at before acceptance of the transfer. A Senate member inquired if amendments are needed for the transfer requirements into the Master's program from the online diploma. Dr. Srour replied that the policy would allow for that by stating that this could be done in exceptional circumstances and/or at the discretion of the department. Provost Dawy added that this is not specific to the program under discussion, but rather these transfer requirements are the same for all Masters' degrees. A Senate member inquired if the exams for the online program are administered in person or online. Dr. Srour answered that a teaching approach that involves multiple low-stakes exercises throughout the semester instead of a few high-stakes exams would be adopted, where the course would include frequent knowledge checks that are intended to reduce the reliance on exams. A Senate member endorsed the presented online program and commented that it has common grounds to the online food security diploma at FAFS. He added that it would be an excellent entry point for professionals and believed it would be successful based on their own experience at FAFS. President Khuri commented that such online programs could diversify the University's income revenues.

Vote 2022-21: The motion carried **(30 with: 0 against: 0 abstain)**.

5- Approval of Changes to the Civilization Studies Program (CVSP)

Dr. N. Abou-Ali presented a proposal to turn the civilization studies program (CVSP), into a Critical Humanities Program for the liberal arts (CHLA). Dr. Abou-Ali informed the Senate that the proposal includes changing the name of the program to reflect its new mission, as well as making curricular changes to the program to respond to demands from other faculties and to address longstanding complaints about the program's content. She added that the proposal is also in line with the new general education (GE) changes that are ready to be adopted the following year. The aim of the new program is to affirm and develop the value of the liberal arts at AUB and to offer critical humanistic inquiry that engages with both historical and contemporary global issues by introducing new courses addressing questions about the environment, techno-science, AI automation, the future of work and health. Dr. Abou-Ali added that in the 2000s, the program underwent a drastic change when MSFEA, OSB, and HSON no longer required CVSP courses, and as a result, the proposal aims to rethink and reposition the program to reflect its value and relevance in the contemporary context.

A motion was made to approve the changes of the CVSP program (name change from CVSP to CHLA) and was seconded.

A Senate member asked Dr. Abou-Ali if the changes of the courses have been discussed with the different faculties. Dr. Abou-Ali answered that discussions have been ongoing for a long time with many departments and the new GE committee, and she personally presented these changes in different places and discussed it with people from various disciplines. A Senate member commented that the new program's name "CHLA" should contain a vowel to make it abbreviated easily. Registrar Tucker replied that a 4-letter abbreviation is needed for Banner and course registration purposes. A Senate member commented that it is understandable why the changes in the CVSP program are needed but wondered if these were discussed with SOAM or not, especially that the latter can be considered as the home department of CVSP. Dr. Abou-Ali replied that these changes were discussed with 2 faculty members and the Chair of SOAM. She added that the changes are for the sake of inter-

disciplinarily purposes in the new GE offerings, where while courses may have similar topics or themes between the two programs, they would fulfill different designations; i.e, a CHLA course on social inequalities would be classified as a social science course, but has a different nature or approach than other social science courses. Provost Dawy reminded the Senate that the motion in hand is for the name change from CVSP to CHLA only, and any other changes to courses and offerings would need a faculty approval at some point. A Senate member inquired about how would this change be reflected in the students' transcripts especially for the currently enrolled ones. Registrar Tucker answered that the work on this is in progress and the Registrar is ready for the implementation once the change is approved by the Senate. Dr. Abou-Ali commented that currently they are in the process of recruiting new faculty members with various background profiles (historians, social scientists and philosophy) to enhance the interdisciplinary aspect of the program. Dean Dahdah commented that one way to allay the physical critique of the new program is by closely examining the different faculties on campus to identify the binary oppositions they rely on, and which sides they tend to favor. He suggested to use critical analysis to understand why certain sides are favored over others in the different areas. A Senate member commented that she commends these changes and proposed to inform the faculty about the possibility to be involved in teaching some of these interesting offerings in the new proposed program.

Vote 2022-22: The motion carried **(29 with: 0 against: 1 abstain)**.

6. Updating of Graduate and Undergraduate Cutoff Scores

Registrar Tucker presented to the Senate the need to address inconsistencies in the undergraduate and graduate catalogues, where GPA equivalences were not properly adjusted in the transition from numeric to letter grades that was implemented four years ago. Registrar Tucker proposed to correct these inconsistencies in the upcoming catalogue revisions, and has received supporting recommendations from the academic development committee and the board of graduate studies to proceed with the change. He added that any catalogue changes would only apply to students who join AUB in the up-coming fall semester, and showed examples from the catalogue representative of the inconsistencies and explained that the changes won't have negative impact on students. He also updated the Senate on the ongoing admission process, where work on regular admissions and resolving technical issues with Banner to send out offers of admission by Monday are underway. He added that a late admission cycle has been opened due to students applying after the regular deadline and the early admission cycle was successful with over 960 applications, and 364 top students have already confirmed attendance.

A motion was made to approve the changes in the catalogue and was seconded.

A Senate member suggested that this be clearly communicated to students upon implementation. Another Senate member wondered when these changes would be implemented. Registrar Tucker replied that these changes would be effective the coming fall semester.

Vote 2022-23: The motion carried **(30 with: 0 against: 0 abstain)**.

7. Discussion: Framing Budget and Salaries Plan

President Khuri introduced the subject by stating that the plan to restore faculty salaries without compromising benefits is by gradually increasing the dollar component of all salaries each year from 2020 through 2025 while adjusting the tuition to a full dollar basic during the same period. He added that various funding mechanisms such as board designated professorships and non-salary related support such as the Heroes fund were also established. President Khuri added that the plan also includes improving staff salaries and stated that there are still details to be worked out, but he is confident that by the summer of 2025, salaries would gain back much of the purchasing power of

pre-crises while continuing to support students, all while restoring and indeed improving aspects of student life and informing them as far in advance as possible ahead of future tuition increases. Finally, President Khuri informed the Senate that he is planning to hold town hall meetings and detailed updates and discussions with faculty, staff and students about the plan.

CFO Wickens affirmed that the road map for academic personnel mentioned by President Khuri is achievable by 2025 if no surprises arise. However, for non-academic personnel, the budget work plan is still in progress. He added that the latter is due to the two increases in the minimum wage that have distorted the salary scale among the different position grades at AUB, where some non-academic staff with lower position grades are approaching their pre-2019 wages but not the higher ones. The CFO added that moving forward; there will be a new approach to the non-academic personnel salary scales. A Senate member asked if the changes in USD percentage can be communicated earlier than the end of spring semester of every year, in order everyone can plan their personal finances accordingly. President Khuri and Provost Dawy replied that each year around late May the finance and budget committee of the board discuss and approve the next year's budget, and therefore exact numbers and changes can't be communicated to faculty and staff before the final board approvals. President Khuri added that for this year these approvals and the BOT full approval will take place between May 19th and June 10th, 2023. A Senate member suggested to the President and Provost to include a range of percentages for the planned increase in the fresh dollar component of the salary during the upcoming town hall meetings; this would put the faculty members at ease. President Khuri replied that the percentages don't provide the full picture since the current 45% can vary based on the implemented brackets, and it is a multivariable type of problem. He added that the goal is by 2025 to convert faculty members' salaries to what they were in 2019 in 100% fresh dollars, and the AUB administration feels that this is doable and will do everything within its power to get there and try to make the intermediate steps less painful. A Senate member asked the administration to take quick steps in increasing the fresh dollar component of salaries, re-instate home leaves and merit, in order for them to decide ahead to stay or leave. President Khuri replied that they are doing their best; however, the drop in net revenues the last 3 years dictates the budgeting math. President Khuri added that if people decide to leave it is ultimately their choice. We of course don't want it but the reality is a fiscal one here and the student and patient population can only tolerate a certain level of increase. A Senate member commended the fact that the Provost has been analyzing the faculty members' salaries and anticipated that the analysis will reveal disparities in pay among the different faculties and departments. On another note, the same Senate member commented on the fact that for the past 3 years the annual merit increase has been halted, and urged the administration to help with this since even a slight merit increase per year can make a difference regarding the pension plan 20 or 30 years from now, especially for junior faculty members. President Khuri replied that this would be fixed in the future once the faculty's salaries are 100% fresh dollar, where the total compensation per faculty member, including benefits, will be analyzed and benchmarked with other competitive institutions. A Senate member commented that now is the right time to start revision plans to fix salary scales, including benefits, and inequities among faculty members. President Khuri replied that this work started in 2015 and several adjustments across faculties were implemented, however, this was halted during the economic crisis. He added that the administration is working on eliminating disparities while factoring in seniority, gender equality, rank, productivity, etc. A Senate member asked if the donations to AUB could be used to cover salary increase or for benefits purposes. President Khuri and VP Baalbaki explained that around 98% of donations received by the University are designated for specific purposes, while only about 2% are unrestricted; some of these funds can't be used in the same year and are put into the endowment, but they can later be used to support

operations such as financial aid and scholarships. A Senate member suggested to help financially the vulnerable faculty and staff during these hard times until the plan is finalized in 2025. He added that their respective Chairs and Deans could identify such personnel, and this step would send a calming message to the whole AUB community. President Khuri replied that AUB has been doing this for the past two years and helping these personnel using the “Heroes” fund from which more than 550k USD has been used for this particular purpose.

CFO Wickens informed the Senate that the new taxation law has been implemented for March 2023 payroll, and AUB will pay the Lebanese government these taxes retroactively from January 2023, but not for the year 2022. He added that the payroll statement is complicated and can't be explained in easy terms, since the current software used can't handle the constant changes in Lebanese pound rate, however, in case any faculty member needs to know more details he/she can always contact the payroll section for any inquiries. Provost Dawy added that for the March payroll, on average 3 to 5% of the fresh dollars component was deducted as taxes above the normal taxes paid in previous months, and urged AUB personnel to contact the payroll section in case they lost a much higher percentage. A Senate member inquired about the Lira rate that should be used by faculty members who have dual citizenships for filing their American taxes. CFO Wickens replied that they should check the IRS website for any information, and the Lira rates of previous years can be found on BDL's website.

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 5:05 pm.

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