

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, February 28, 2020

Present: M. Abiad, Y. Abunnasr, A. Abu-Alfa, M. Alameddine, E. Al-Chaer, T. Amin T. Bazi, S. Bou Jaoude, I. Baalbaki, G. Burris, R. Chedid, A. Chehab, L. Daouk, H. Darwish, N. Dumit, N. El-Cheikh, S. El Fakhani, W. El-Hajj, H. El Rassy, M. Farah, L. Farhoud, M. Harajli, C. Harb, A. Harutyunyan, S. Harvey, E. Hitti, S. Isber, H. Jaafar, K. Kabalan, F. Khuri, N. Melhem, R. Mohtar, H. Muller, T. Nizameddin, I. Nuwayhid, G. Saad, N. Saliba, A. Shihadeh, R. Sharara, F. Talih, B. Tucker, G. Zaatari

Absent: S. Kanj-Sharara*

(* = regrets notified before meeting)

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

1) Approval of Senate minutes of January 31, 2020

The minutes of January 31, 2020 were unanimously approved with minor modifications.

2) Voting of Degrees

Vice Provost B. Tucker circulated the list of expected graduates of the Fall 2019-2020 semester. Dean El Cheikh recommended awarding degrees to the indicated students in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS). **A motion was made to award degrees to the candidates in FAS. Vote 2019-25. The motion was approved unanimously.** Interim Dean G. Zaatari recommended awarding degrees to the indicated students in the Faculty of Medicine (FM). **A motion was made to award degrees to the candidates in FM. Vote 2019-26. The motion was approved unanimously.** Interim Dean Farhoud recommended awarding degrees to the indicated students in the Rafic Hariri School of Nursing. **A motion was made to award degrees to the candidates in Rafic Hariri School of Nursing. Vote 2019-27. The motion was approved unanimously.** Dean Shihadeh recommended awarding degrees to the indicated students in the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA). **A motion was made to award degrees to the candidates in MSFEA. Vote 2019-28. The motion was approved unanimously.** Dean Mohtar, recommended awarding degrees to the indicated students in the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences (FAFS). **A motion was made to award degrees to the candidates in FAFS. Vote 2019-29. The motion was approved unanimously.** Dean Nuwayhid recommended awarding degrees to the indicated students in the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS). **A motion was made to award degrees to the candidates in FHS. Vote 2019-30. The motion was approved unanimously.** Dean Harvey recommended awarding degrees to the indicated students in the Olayan School of Business (OSB). **A motion was made to award degrees to the candidates in OSB. Vote 2019-31. The motion was approved unanimously.**

3) Flow of discussion in the Senate Meetings

The chair of the Senate Steering Committee, N. Dumit, explained the rules that will be enforced to coordinate the flow of discussions during the meetings:

- The chair of SSC will tally the names of senators wishing to speak.
- Each senator is allowed up to two interventions per topic.
- The durations specified on the Senate agenda will be strictly enforced. The Senate will be notified 5 minutes before the allocated time ends.

4) Senate Secretary emailing the faculty at large policies that require a senate vote prior to meetings

This agenda item was proposed by one of the senators. The senator explained that many faculty members feel alienated from the decision making process and only here about the Senate decisions

while reading the circulated minutes. Therefore, to avoid having situations where policies are voted on in the Senate without soliciting faculty feedback; and to avoid having the feedback solicitation process dependent on the individual senators' initiative only, the following motion was made:

The Senate secretary shares policies that require voting with the faculty at large in a timely manner prior to Senate meetings and requests that all feedback be directed to the respective faculty senators.

There were concerns raised that this request will add undue work to the secretary's load and might hinder the policy approval process. Managing the flow of replies and synthesizing them into constructive comments will be a major challenge for all stakeholders involved.

Moreover, it is each senator's duty to share all policies with their respective faculty members and solicit their feedback prior to Senate meetings.

A suggestion was made to put all policies on an intranet website where faculty members can access them in draft format and provide their comments prior to meetings. Another suggestion requested tightening the policy development/approval process so that all constituents become aware of the changes before the policy reaches the Senate for voting.

Vote 2019-32. The motion was overruled by a vote (5-14-15).

5) An update on the Ombuds position

President Khuri gave an update on the Ombuds position. He stated that more than 100 applicants for the position were received. A committee conducted skype interviews and shortlisted candidates. The top candidate was supposed to visit the campus on October 24th, 2019, but the visit was postponed due to the situation in the country at the time. Moreover, given the current economic situation all shortlisted candidates are reconsidering their willingness to join AUB. As such, the position will be re-advertised and new applications will be considered.

6) Online MBA

Dr. Tannir presented a proposal for developing a fully online MBA degree program at OSB. She stated that online programs have become increasingly more credible and trustworthy. Most top tier schools are moving online and finding value in offering an increased number of degree programs through distance learning. Such programs provide the needed flexibility for full-time employees to juggle between career demands and personal development initiatives.

Moreover, Dr. Tannir stressed that the online degree will have the same structure, admission criteria, and credit load, as the currently offered traditional classroom program. The program will also have the same quality controls, learning assessments, and learning objectives. The only thing that will change is the mode of delivery.

A senator commented on the presented program budget. He specifically inquired about the impact of the online program on the traditional classroom program. He also asked how the charge per credit for the online degree compares with international institutions offering similar degrees.

It was explained that regular MBA programs are losing students to Online programs worldwide. Moreover, the developed OSB program allows the flexibility for students to switch between the regular and the online modes of delivery on a course by course basis.

The cost is the same for both MBA programs, around \$37,000/year. Qualified students are offered a 30% reduction in fee. The online MBA at AUB offers the regional experience which gives it an edge over most international programs. Furthermore, most international institutions offer only non-degree online programs regionally and therefore do not directly compete with AUB.

It was also mentioned that although the Lebanese Ministry of Education doesn't recognize online degrees, this will not affect the program as most graduates will be practicing internationally; and AUB is currently communicating with the Ministry to push for accrediting all online degrees that will be offered by the University.

OSB relies on an aggressive online marketing strategy to attract students. The catchment of people that will attend the online program at AUB includes a unique combination of high quality students

who value an AUB education but cannot attend the tradition MBA program. A senator warned about compliance issues and the need to respect the geopolitical situation i.e. devise means to prevent Israeli's from registering in the program.

A motion was made to approve the Online MBA degree program as presented. Vote 2019-33. The motion was approved unanimously.

7) Report on letter grading

Professor Boujaoude gave a presentation on the repercussions of introducing letter grading for new students starting in Fall 2019-20 semester. He reported that there are no considerable differences in the grade distribution for new undergraduate students between the fall semesters of academic years 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20. However, it was noted that in some departments there was an increase in the number of new graduate students on probation. The above comparison was done with actual numerical grades being compared to letter grades.

Although the report on letter grading recommends using a unified conversion table from numerical to letter grades throughout AUB, several senators expressed concerns with the recommended table itself. The main issue was that the recommended table significantly deviates from the College Board grade conversion table. Moreover, According to the recommended conversion table, around 40% of the class will have a grade letter above "A-"; and a "B" letter grade in the table places a graduate student on probation. Senators also noted that while the migration to letter grading was approved by the Senate in the May 2019 meeting, the conversion table was not approved and was included as a recommendation/ guideline for grading only.

A senator blamed the confusion in letter grading on the Council of Associate Deans and the Office of the Registrar for adopting a conversion table that was not approved by the Senate. The senator added that having 40% of the class with a letter grade of "A" is misleading and harmful to the AUB reputation for generations to come. The senator also stated that he was involved since the beginning of the letter grading initiative, and the initial efforts of the taskforce were based on the grading distribution of the graduating students at AUB being: 25% "A", 35% "B" and 40% "C". Associate Dean Kayssi replied that these numbers are either outdated or erroneous, and presented grade trends for graduating students in US institutions showing the portion of students with an "A" average to be above 40%.

Another senator noted that while the distinction, probation and other criteria using letter grading were discussed and approved for undergraduate students in the Senate; such criteria were never discussed for graduate students.

Noting that it is very difficult to control faculty members' grading perceptions and to force them to use a predefined conversion table, it was recommended to continue monitoring the transition to letter grading and make sure not to have grade inflation or deflation.

8) Update on policies: pre-tenure, post-tenure, faculty workload

Associate Provost Dawy explained that there are 4 ongoing taskforces working on policy development:

- **Pre-Tenure Review Policy**

The first draft of this policy was presented to the faculty in May 2019. Based on the feedback received at the time, the taskforce revised the policy and submitted a revised draft to the Provost's office in February 2020. The revised policy is currently being discussed by the administration, and it is expected to be shared with the faculty at large towards the beginning of AY 2020-21. Per the policy, assistant professors will be reviewed during their 4th year in rank. The revised policy introduces a feedback loop so that faculty members are informed of the outcome of the evaluation to better plan for their promotion. While a positive outcome of the review process will lead to contract renewal, the decision following a negative outcome is still under discussion. Another point of controversy in the policy is

whether the peer review committee will solicit external reference letters or an internal evaluation only will suffice.

- **Post-Tenure Review Policy**

The work on this policy commenced during the Fall 2019-20 semester. A draft was submitted to the Provost's office in February 2020, and is currently being discussed by the administration. A tenured faculty member will be evaluated during the 6th year post his tenure appointment or post previous evaluation. It is expected that this policy will be shared with the faculty for feedback and approval later during the current Spring semester. The administration assured the Senate that the post tenure review is not an illicit way to terminate tenured faculty.

- **Faculty Work Load Policy**

The work on this policy started in Fall 2017-18. A first draft was shared with the faculty in April 2019. Based on the feedback received, a new draft was prepared and became ready in February 2020. This policy will be placed on hold until the right circumstances for initiating the approval process.

- **Faculty Retirement Incentive Plan**

The work on this plan started in Fall 2018-19. All work on this plan is placed on hold until a decision is made to reinstate work on it.

A senator inquired on how the above policies will deal with the current uncertainties in the county. These uncertainties hinder purchasing equipment and laboratory materials and traveling to conferences and will definitely have an impact on the research productivity. The senator was assured that these issues are being actively discussed in the Board of Deans.

9) Information outlined on the back of the transcript

Vice Provost Tucker presented the updated transcript key. The old transcript key was lacking and required updating to transfer sufficient information to people reading it. The updated key includes:

- **Grading System:**

Both the old numerical system with its equivalent letter grade as per the current transcript and the new letter grade system are presented on the back of the new transcript. There were discussions regarding the inconsistencies between the two systems and how such inconsistencies may be misleading for some readers. Suggestions to transition to only one system in the future were made; but that possibility was refuted since alumni whose grades were based on the numerical system still order transcripts.

- **Abbreviations**

- **Accreditation Statement**

- **Calendar Description – semesters versus quarters**

- **Semester Hours – number of contact hours per semester**

- **Grade Point Average**

- **Withdrawal and Transfer**

- **Repeated Courses**

- **Course Numbering System**

- **Eligibility to Re-enroll**

- **Language of Instruction**

10) Development Grants – Conferences

Given the current economic situation and the limited access to foreign currency; faculty members are facing difficulties in paying conference registration fees and securing the necessary travel funds to attend conferences. As such a large number of faculty members will not attend conferences this year.

President Khuri encouraged faculty members to reach out to CFO Wickens and to their respective Deans to try and charge the conference expenses on either the CFO's or Dean's credit cards. He

explained that the situation is tough and even AUB has limited access to its money in Lebanese Banks. President Khuri added that the University is also facing difficulty accessing fresh money transferred from abroad. There are ongoing confrontations with local banks trying to force them to release part of AUB's money.

A senator noted that some faculties are prioritizing travel funds for young assistant professors given the budget constraints. Other senators highlighted the difficulties in acquiring lab materials and tools, repairing lab equipment, renewing software licenses ... and how these challenges will impact research productivity.

Concerns relating to the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound and its impacts on salaries and purchasing power were raised. The President explained to the Senate that nothing can be done before the official devaluation takes place. Only then, AUB will try to make a difference and adjust salaries accordingly. Dr. Khuri added that he will hold a Town Hall meeting to hear the concerns of the faculty and communicate with them the strategies that AUB is undertaking re: the situation with the hope of clearing some of the uncertainties.

11) Other Business

President Khuri made a statement expressing his dismay and distress while reading the decision of the Lebanese penal court against one of AUB's faculty members and the University. Speaking on behalf of the BOT, President Khuri stated: "We regret the criminalization of the medical system and warn again how this verdict will reflect on the medical field and healthcare system in the region. We will appeal the verdict and raise our concerns with the highest authorities in the country." Dr. Khuri added that if such verdicts exist, hospitals will start excluding high risk cases to avoid being penalized; and deal with light/minor cases that have no risks associated with them. This will be a mortal blow to the least fortunate people who require high risk emergency services and won't find them available. This is a major societal issue that has been undermined by a politicized judge, he added.

Interim Dean Zaatari stated that the Faculty of Medicine and the leadership of the Medical School stand firmly behind their faculty member and confirm that the undertaken treatment at the time was the right one. He reiterated that AUB will appeal the court verdict with the hope that the truth will eventually be clear to everyone. He added that AUB is one of the very few institutions in the region that does not turn away emergency patients.

Senators stressed that AUB should raise this issue with the Lebanese Order of Physicians and the medical community as a whole to avoid misinterpretation of the situation. Moreover, senators recommended that AUBMC should issue a media press release confirming their standpoint and clearing the situation.

Senator Bazi made the following statement:

"The Senate took note of the verdict delivered on February 26th 2020 by a judge in a Lebanese penal court regarding the serious health events that the child E.T had suffered before and after presenting to AUBMC in 2015. The highly publicized verdict carried a negative implication regarding Dr. Rana Sharara, Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Faculty of Medicine.

The Senate took note that the management of the patient E.T at AUBMC was reviewed intramurally and was found to be conforming to standards of care. The Senate took note that the judicial process included reviews from highly reputable international medical academic institutions which concluded that management did not breach standards of care.

The Senate stands by our faculty colleague Dr. Rana Sharara, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Adolescent medicine, as a clinician who continues to care for patients and families in our community, physician-educator, and child safety champion through initiatives that include the "stray bullet project" founded by Dr. Sharara herself."

A motion was made for the Senate to adopt Dr. Bazi's statement. Vote 2019-34. The motion was approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 pm.
(Minutes recorded by G. Saad, Secretary of the Senate)