

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, December 17, 2021

Present: S. Abdulrahim, A. Abu-Alfa, H. Abu-Khuzam, F. Afiouni, N. Al-Akl, T. Amin, R-M. Boustany, S. BouJaoude, , L. Choueiri, A. Daou, M. Darwish, Z. Dawy, J. Doummar, N. Dumit, L. Farhoud, A. Ghauch, S. Kharroubi, M. Khraiche, F. Khuri, S. Mallat, N. Melhem, L. Musfi, M. Nasrallah, A. Olabi, H. Puzantian, A. Shihadeh, R. Sawaya, Y. Shaib, Y., Sidani, , A. Sibai, B. Tucker.

Regrets: A. Al-Hroub, N. El-Cheikh, H. Jaafar.

Absent: P. Bou Khalil, R. Chedid, S. Elbassuoni, G. Burris, T. Ghaddar, S. Guler Altug, N. Hwalla, R. Sultan.

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 pm.

1- Approval of December 3, 2021 Senate meeting minutes :

The minutes of the December 3, 2021 senate meeting was approved unanimously as circulated. **28-0-0 (Vote: 2021-19)**

2- President's update/feedback on town hall meetings

3- Twin campus discussion

President Khuri updated the senate on a series of townhall meetings that he held with all faculties during the current month of December. Central to this update was the state of AUB's twin campuses project. He updated the senate on the advanced stage of work to establish a twin campus in Cyprus, pointing out the AUB recently won the bid for a piece of land in Pafos, Cyprus, where the campus would be established. He also updated the senate that serious negotiations were underway to establish a campus in Dubai.

Senators raised a number of questions as follows. A senator asked where the idea for the twin campuses originated. A number of senators commented that this project was interesting but asked about the rationale for this project to expand AUB internationally and raised a concern as to whether this project could be completed without draining AUB's resources, both financial and human resources. A senator said that the townhall and other meetings during which the twin campuses project was discussed have been important to address the initial concerns of some faculty members and suggested that more of this kind of communication was needed. A senator asked whether it was believed that this project will help with addressing salaries and their purchasing power. A concern was raised as to whether establishing twin campuses might create two classes of faculty. Another senator asked whether hiring of Israeli faculty and staff and admitting Israeli students will be permitted.

President Khuri responded to these questions and comments by highlighting the following points. He pointed out that the idea of the twin campus project can actually be traced to his inauguration speech. He explained that the momentum for the project developed over the last year and half as work evolved on the strategic plan. He mentioned that these twin campuses will provide synergistic opportunities and will benefit the AUB Beirut mother campus. He suggested that increasing faculty input during this planning process will help in this. He added that generally these twin campus projects will help AUB enhance what it does, including enriching the kind of liberal arts education it can offer students in any of

its campuses. Moreover, he pointed out that there was no intention to drain the Beirut campus's human resources and clarified that anyone hired would be hired because they can serve AUB as a whole. President Khuri clarified, more generally, that there was no intention for AUB give up on its core mission to serve Lebanon and the region. Indeed, this is being carefully scrutinized by the Board of Trustees. He pointed out that funding for this project is being secured in part via philanthropy, and that public and private sector partners are being sought; he added that the Cypriot authorities are a supporting partner. With regard to the point about hiring Israeli faculty and staff, he said that this would not be possible because anyone recruited or admitted to any of AUB's campuses will have to be eligible to serve or study at the campus in Beirut. With regard to faculty purchasing power, he commented that this twin campus project, and indeed no single strategy, will resolve the financial challenges we are experiencing on its own or overnight. He reiterated that the strategy continues to be to diversify revenue streams. The President agreed that communication about the twin campus project and involving many constituents is very important. He explained that there are a number of working groups with representatives from across many parts of AUB working on the Cyprus project and increasing communication and widening involvement is being planned.

During this discussion, a number of senators raised a number of other points not related specifically to the twin campus project. One senator said that the decision to give a portion of faculty and staff their salaries in fresh dollars was applauded but mentioned that banks are restricting access to dollars and wondered whether there were any other strategies being considered to help. President Khuri responded that more than a year ago, AUB began to establish better relationships with banks, including banks outside the country. He also mentioned that he had met with governor of the Lebanese Central Bank to express concerns about how staff accounts are being treated in particular, especially given that AUB is bringing fresh dollars into the country.

A senator commented that there are lots of great things happening at AUB, but we need to be more aggressive in presenting what we're doing to a wider audience. There are increasingly more positive experiences in the hospital, for example. He suggested that we really need to do a better job of reporting about the amazing things that we are doing. In sum, we need better PR. The President responded by commenting that the communication community in Lebanon is in a pessimistic state. He cited as an example how the press in Lebanon handled the roll out of the covid-19 vaccine in which AUBMC played a central and important role. He mentioned that we often go to the press with good news stories and they're not so interested. But he agreed with the senator that we should certainly share positive stories with the Office of Communication and individuals can help directly through more active use of social media. Dean Shihadeh invited the senator to share any stories he was aware so that these could be disseminated via Twitter straight away. The senator mentioned that there are many small but important stories; but highlighted, in particular, the case of a colleague at AUBMC who went through a very difficult life experience and was taken such good care of by AUB, in a way that no other institution would have done.

4- Follow-up discussion: on students' well-being and mental health

Interim Dean of RHSON L. Farhoud made a presentation entitled the "Mental Health Issues in College Students." In this presentation, she emphasized the importance of focusing on the mental health of students. She provided an overview of the typical mental health problems common among college students. She mentioned that mostly, these are left untreated. This is a concern because some serious

mental health problems begin at around this age and it is very important for these to be identified at this early stage. She emphasized that university instructors have a very important role to play. She listed the most prevalent mental health problems on college campuses. She alerted senators to the fact that suicide is also a very important issue, commenting that while the rates are not high at AUB there are cases, and it is important to be aware of this. She explained that problems certainly can be triggered and aggravated by college work and shared warning signs which can include general physical appearance, absence from classes, producing inconsistent academic work, engaging in angry behavior in classrooms, erratic behavior, and unrealistic goals and expectations. She shared that in the US context, many counselors have reported a very significant increase of mental health problems during the recent pandemic crisis. She explained that causes are complicated implicating a combination of genetic and environmental factors and that mental health problems can influence academic work because they have effects on multiple mental functions. She shared some of the barriers preventing students with mental health problems from seeking help and made some suggestions for what could be done to address the problem.

This presentation was followed by another entitled “Mental Health at AUB,” presented by the Chair of the Department of Psychiatry, F. Maalouf. He thanked the senate for addressing this important problem. He shared data documenting the increase in mental health problems globally in many universities, including AUB. He informed senators that AUB has identified mental health as a key problem that needed to be addressed. He shared the trends in rates of use of outpatient mental health services in 2019, 2020 and 2021. He shared the rates of appointments to see a psychologist, psychiatrist or psychometrician pointing out the increase in these appointments over the last couple of years. He also commented that suicidality is on the increase, sharing statistics for 2020 and 2021. He provided senators with an overview of the psychiatrists currently working on a full-time and part-time basis. He informed the senate that AUB’s Mental Health Council was launched in 2020 and was charged with examining mental health issues. He suggested that the work to date has been more successful in addressing employee needs than those of students. But he explained that psychiatric services have been incorporated into the counseling center. Moreover, he informed senators that there is a Mental Health Resources/Response protocol which is due for review; the “owner” of this policy is the Dean of Students. As a concluding message, he urged senators not to worry alone and shared useful contact information.

A number of senators raised some questions and made comments in light of these two presentations. One senator expressed appreciation for the speed in the response to the senate’s request for information about mental health problems. This senator, addressing a point reiterated by a number of senators, explained that faculty don’t know how to deal with problems among students and need guidance and awareness raising. The senator commented that this guidance and awareness is needed among students as well. Another senator reported recently starting to teach undergraduates for the first time and faced a situation of not knowing what to do when a discussion of the topic of violence in the classroom triggered a bad reaction from a student. The senator asked how the relationship between the counseling center and faculty could be improved so that the needed information about how to deal with such situations can be shared. Another senator commented that the letters received from the Accessible Education Office do not offer a lot of information about the student requesting accommodations. A senator commented that part of the challenge is that there is public stigma associated with psychiatric problems. This senator added that we have to view faculty members as authority figures who can play a positive role as a first point of contact with students who can direct

students to the needed help. The senator added that HIP coverage for psychiatric support is relatively limited and this can be a problem. Another senator, A. Ghauch, who chairs the Undergraduate Student Affairs Committee pointed out that the committee gets lots of petitions with supporting letters citing mental health problems as justifications for various requests; he point out that it can be difficult to evaluate the authenticity of these letters (some which do not come from AUB doctors or counselors) and so it is difficult to know how to act on them. A senator from the RHSON indicated that their experience in the faculty has allowed them to learn about the available services. This senator suggested that we need a very concise brochure to share with the community. Chair of the SSC, N. Melhem, suggested that in addition to the suggested solutions we could consider doing something that many universities and colleges have done – to incorporate a teacher and/or student “tool kit” into orientation and refer to this in syllabi. Dean Sawaya expressed appreciation of the important and informative presentations and expressed great confidence in the professionalism of the Department of Psychiatry. He brought up a point mentioned in a previous meeting regarding the length of time for students to get an appointment to see a psychiatrist; he said that 10 days was mentioned and commented that this, if accurate, seemed too long for serious cases and asked how this can be addressed.

The following responses were made to these questions and comments. F. Maalouf made a number of suggestions for how to move forward. He suggested that it would be helpful to engage a network of volunteer counselors; establish a peer support initiative; organize sessions for instructors to offer guidance about identifying students with mental health issues and how to direct students to the appropriate support on campus; reactivate the Mental Health Council; and finally, he suggested offering a session on mental health for incoming students. He mentioned that these actions are being discussed with Deputy Provost Choueiri. With regard to letters dealing with accommodations for students, F. Maalouf commented that we are asked by the Accessible Education Office to provide recommendations about the accommodations that should be granted to students in given particular mental health issues they are facing; he clarified that the Department of Psychiatry does not draft these letters. Acting Dean of Students N. Al-Akl clarified that the detailed bases for accommodations are confidential and cannot be shared in the letters sent to faculty. She also clarified that it is appropriate that communication on such matters is between the Accessible Education Office and faculty when instructional accommodations are required, but that there is no direct communication between counselors and faculty about the mental health of a specific student. L. Farhoud commented that the presentation today is an important start and that we need to push forward initiatives to inform faculty and students and raise awareness. With regard to communication with faculty about specific students, F. Maalouf explained that it can be a challenge to relay the information needed by faculty while safeguarding the privacy of students. He acknowledged that sometimes some letters come across as vague but emphasized that the focus of such letters must be on the impact of the mental health issues the student is facing on academic performance. F. Maalouf confirmed that 10 days is the length of time that it typically takes for a student to secure an appointment with a psychiatrist but considered this reasonable as it is in fact better than other contexts. There are other options for more serious cases. F. Maalouf advised faculty who suspect that a student is having a problem to meet with them, try to understand the nature of the problem and if the faculty member can't handle it to advise students to seek support from counselors or other mental health professionals on campus.

5- Vaccination updates

A presentation was prepared and delivered by U. Musharrafieh and C. Sakr, representing the Vaccination Working Group. The presentation provided an update on the flu shots as of Dec 16, 2021. Senators were informed that the rate of vaccination against COVID-19 at AUB reached 99.5% as of Dec 1, 2021; most of the remaining unvaccinated individual have a waiver on medical grounds. They commented that few universities in the world have reached these numbers. They pointed out that extra doses of the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines have recently arrived for AUB and will be made available. With regard to the booster jab, senators were informed that AUB is following CDC guidelines; so booster doses have been offered to all health care workers, those with immunocompromised conditions and then offered to older age groups (50 and above).

In response to a question from a senator, U. Musharrafieh explained that the vaccination marathon conducted the week before was administrated by the Lebanese Ministry of Health in coordination with AUB. She also reassured another senator who inquired about the availability of the booster, that AUB does have enough doses to vaccinate all the AUB community with the third dose. A senator asked whether AUB was planning to send mobile units to schools. U. Musharrafieh indicated that AUB is coordinating with the red cross for dissemination beyond AUBMC. Another senator suggested that maybe community members who are participating in many of the community-based projects organized by AUB faculty could be prioritized, mentioning migrant domestic workers as an example. U. Musharrafieh clarified that AUB has to follow MoH guidelines in these matters and we coordinate closely with them. Another senator asked what percentage of people in Lebanon have been vaccinated to date. N. Melhem responded that this stands at about 35%. A senator appreciated the reference to the flu vaccine in the presentation because clinics we're seeing a lot of influenza this season. SSC Chair N. Melhem commented that more than 85 countries have documented the presence of the Omicron Covid-19 variant and emphasized the need for AUB to act quickly with vaccinating as many as possible with their third dose. Another senator asked whether it is correct that if you are below 40 you currently cannot yet receive the booster. U. Musharrafieh confirmed that this was correct.

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 4:40.

Minutes taken by Tamer Amin