

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, December 3, 2021

Present: A. Abu-Alfa, H. Abu-Khuzam, F. Afiouni, N. Al-Akl, A. Al-Hroub, T. Amin, R-M. Boustany, S. BouJaoude, R. Chedid, L. Choueiri, A. Daou, M. Darwish, Z. Dawy, J. Doummar, N. Dumit, S. Elbassuoni, N. El-Cheikh, N. Hwalla,, L. Farhoud, T. Ghaddar, A. Ghauch, S. Guler Altug H. Jaafar, S. Kharroubi, M. Khraiche, F. Khuri, S. Mallat, N. Melhem, L. Musfi, M. Nasrallah, A. Olabi, H. Puzantian, S. Sadek (for A. Shihadeh), R. Sawaya, Y. Shaib, Y., Sidani, , A. Sibai, R. Sultan, B. Tucker.

Regrets: S. Abdulrahim, P. Bou Khalil

Absent: G. Burris, H. Darwish

The meeting called to order at 2:00 pm.

1- Approval of October 29, 2021 Senate meeting minutes:

A motion was made and seconded to approve the October 29, 2021 Senate meeting minutes with minor editorial corrections. The motion carried: **Vote 34 (for) – 0 (against) – 0 (abstentions) (Vote 2021-14)**

2- President's update: Board of Trustees meeting

President Khuri updated the Senate on the Board of Trustees (BoT) meeting held on November 17-19, 2021, pointing out that this was the first in-person BoT meeting since Jan 2020. He commented that there was a very high level of participation by BoT members. This meeting was important because of its focus on AUB's global strategy. The President announced that during the time of the BoT meeting, AUB's bid for the land where the AUB-Cyprus campus is to be located in Pafos, Cyprus was successful. At the meeting, the BoT approved AUB's initiative to expand to the gulf in concert with a global plan focused on the preservation and sustainability of the mothership, and approved the Statement of Principles for Academic Freedom and Information which was based on the AAUP statement of 1941. The statement, which was approved unanimously by the board includes three aspects: research and publication; teaching and learning; and intermural exploration. President Khuri commented that this is very important for our global expansion as it would apply wherever AUB has a presence. The BoT meeting also included a number of constructive breakout sessions each focused on a particular theme, such as medicine and health, teaching, research, sustainability, and others. Also discussed were the challenges being faced by AUB at the moment, including, in particular, challenges with budget and finance in the broader context of the Lebanese economic crisis. President Khuri informed the senate that the BoT revisited the master plan for the main campus and what will need to be invested in locally – both in term of material and human resources - to make sure the AUB Beirut campus thrives. All agreed that any twin campus expansion had to benefit and bolster AUB Beirut campus. President Khuri also updated the senate on a successful fundraiser that took place in NYC on November 19, 2021, raising \$3.1M for AUB. He also updated the senate on a number of appointments that were approved by the BoT during the meeting. He noted that the BoT thanked Dean Nadia El-Cheikh for 5 ½ years of service as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

3- Approval of automatic posting of “PR” (in progress) for thesis registration instead of blank grades

Registrar B. Tucker presented a proposal that was brought to BGS on Nov 3rd 2021 regarding the posting of grades to update the status of students registered for thesis. He pointed out that thesis advisors are often delayed in submitting “PR” (for “in progress”) for thesis courses numbered 399, 399A, 399B etc. He commented that this seems to be unnecessarily cumbersome for thesis advisors. He presented a proposal to update students’ status automatically with PR until the registrar receives all documentation that a student has completed their thesis defense and submitted the thesis successfully to the library; at that point the Registrar will change the grade to P. Thus, the proposal removes the role of thesis advisor in updating their students’ status on the system entirely.

A senator asked whether students still had to register every semester. Registrar B. Tucker confirmed that they did. Another senator commented that what was being proposed was a long-awaited change.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the proposal. The motion carried with a unanimous vote in favor the motion: **Vote 34 (for) – 0 (against) – 0 (abstentions) (Vote 2021-15)**

4- Approval of PhD Proposal in Mathematics:

R. Bertrand, chair of the Department of Mathematics, presented a proposal of the PhD in Mathematics (which had been circulated to the senate before the meeting). He highlighted the research progress of the department as reflected in a steady increase in the number of publications produced by its faculty. He suggested that this was partly due to the clustering of faculty in areas of common interests and to increasing collaborations outside the department. He pointed out that the goal of a PhD in mathematics aligns well with AUB’s mission to pursue research excellence. He clarified that the proposed program requirements align with the university’s PhD requirements generally. He also outlined the enrollment target of the first few years of the program and the associated cost which was detailed in the proposal that was circulated.

A motion to approve the proposal was made and seconded. The floor was opened for discussion.

A senator made a point about the costing, pointing out that since the Department of Mathematics has a MA program and is offering many of the graduate courses listed already, the cost of the PhD program is not as high as indicated. Another senator asked whether the increase in publications is also associated with an increase in internal and external grants. Another asked if there was an advertising cost and what that was. A senator asked F. Bertrand to clarify the job prospects for PhD graduates here in Lebanon at the moment. Another asked what other PhD in mathematics programs there are in Lebanon and what job prospects there are other than in academia. Finally, another senator expressed strong support for this program commenting that it was greatly overdue and agreed that the Department of Mathematics is in a very strong position to take this step.

F. Bertrand responded by sharing more data showing that indeed there are more internal and external grants obtained by Department of Mathematics faculty. He commented that the department felt that a budget for advertising could be important and may require some funding. He clarified that there are many universities in the country that would offer graduates good job prospects in Lebanon. He also pointed out

that there are other PhD in Mathematics programs in Lebanon noting one at USJ, which uses the French system, as an example; another is at BAU, which would be the closest to the one being proposed at AUB

President Khuri called the question. The vote was unanimously in favor of approving the proposal: **Vote 34 (for) – 0 (against) – 0 (abstentions) (Vote 2021-16)**

5- Approval of Professional Master's in Education

A proposal for a Professional Masters in Education (MEd) was circulated before the meeting. Highlights of the proposed program were presented by T. Amin, from the Department of Education, FAS. He pointed out the A. Al-Hroub (a current senator) and R. Karami (chair of the Department of Education) are also present and had also worked on the proposal and so could also respond to questions about the proposal. T. Amin emphasized that the purpose of this MEd proposal is to meet the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education standards of teaching quality (Teacher Certificate Requirements) anticipated soon, to align the Department's teacher and school leader preparation programs with international standards and to respond to the recommendations in the Department's self-study that were endorsed in 2014.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the Proposal for a Professional Masters in Education. The floor was opened for discussion.

Senate members raised several questions including: Are there professional tracks for computer sciences and history? Are there similar professional programs in the country? What are the admission criteria? Are we heading in a direction whereby teachers can't teach unless they have a professional MA? Will the MEd program replace the diploma programs in education? Will some of the diploma credits be transferred to the MEd program? Are there expectations of granting GAships to students? Will the enrollment in the regular MA be affected by the enrollment in this new MEd program? What are the potential jobs for MEd and regular MA program graduates?

T. Amin, A. Al-Hroub and R. Karami responded to questions. They commented that the proposed program has two tracks: a track in teaching at the secondary level (with specializations in mathematics, science or teaching English as a foreign language) and a track in educational leadership (principal preparation). No other tracks (e.g., history, computer science) are proposed, reflecting limitations in the specializations represented in the Department. They clarified that the proposal does not address the transferability of diploma credits to the MEd program because of the sequencing of courses but the department will consider whether there is a rationale to allow some transfer of credits under some circumstances. They pointed out that students in this program are also expected to benefit from Graduate Assistantships. He reiterated the admissions criteria that were presented and included in the proposal. They clarified that most developed countries in the field of education have similar graduate professional degrees required for teacher certification (e.g., PGCE in the UK). They also pointed out that there is a local professional MA in Education program at USJ, but it is offered in French and graduates are typically hired by schools who use French as a primary foreign language of instruction. Currently, no MEd professional program is offered in English in Lebanon. Thus, the projected enrollment, though difficult to predict the exact number, is expected to be significant due to the demands for such a program. It is expected that there will be an increase in the overall number of graduate students because the proposed program will attract those interested in the field of education as a profession but want an masters degree not just a diploma. These will join the masters program alongside others interested in the regular MA program, which is expected

to remain strong due to its research focus preparing graduates for a more academic career. Graduates of the proposed MEd program are expected to take on leadership positions in schools and other educational settings.

President Khuri called the question. The proposal was approved. **Vote of 32 (for)- 0 (against) – 2 (abstentions) (Vote 2021-17)**

6- Approval of curriculum changes of MS in Epidemiology

L. Ghandour presented key features of the proposal for curriculum changes to the MS in Epidemiology. These are minor changes motivated by impact the COVID-19 epidemic has had on epidemiology and the increasing interest in and demand for the field. The proposed changes incorporate increased focus on quantitative analytical skills and reducing electives with no change in the overall number of credits.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the proposed modification to the MS in Epidemiology. The motion carried with a unanimous vote in favor: **Vote 34 (for) – 0 (against) – 0 (abstentions) (Vote 2021-18)**

7- Discussion of guidance to faculty for support of students' mental health and well-being:

F. Afioni shared the concern that faculty members are reporting difficulties in dealing with students who are not attending classes or completing coursework, possibly as a sign of mental health challenges that students are facing due to the multiple crises unfolding in Lebanon at the moment. The general sentiment expressed was that faculty members felt that they needed guidance in identifying those that might be dealing with mental health problems and how to direct them to the appropriate support services.

A discussion followed in which senators shared a number of concerns and shared recommendations for how to address this problem. A concern was expressed about how to know why students are not attending classes and whether this could be for mental health reasons, especially in large classes. A senator argued that faculty members do need to be involved in trying to understand why students might not show up to class or are not submitting work, suggesting that it could make a big difference if faculty members contribute to directing students to needed support. Another senator emphasized that it is very important that there is communication between the faculty and students and that it is important for us to ask what we can do as faculty members. Another senator insisted that we should take this seriously and recommended that we look at this problem holistically: training for faculty might be important; as well as developing guidelines for faculty members. President Khuri acknowledged the larger, growing problem of mental health in the community at the moment, but clarified that the narrower question being considered is what kind of guidance faculty need. SSC chair, N. Melhem, pointed out that this topic will be addressed in the next faculty meeting and experts from among the faculty will be invited to share their input. A senator commented that he agrees with colleagues, but the question is how a teacher is going to play the needed role in detecting those needing support, suggesting that a checklist is needed to avoid subjectivity in the process. Another senator recommended the need to consider various administrative options for delayed completion of courses as opposed to dropping course. Another confirmed, in light of his expertise in this domain, that he is noticing quite of lot of signs of mental health problems among students; he agreed that there is a need for guidance for faculty and possible training. A/Dean of Students N. Akl clarified that the Counseling Center is open but is forced to open at lower capacity at the moment due to

understaffing; but she confirmed that they are seeing more cases and there is a great need for support among students. She also suggested that it is very important for us to address resistance to seeking help for mental health problems among many students. She encouraged faculty to encourage apparently isolated students to seek out those with whom they can communicate and establish a connection. She pointed out that we can explore peer support strategies as well as the support and guidance that faculty members can provide. A senator emphasized that university professors are figures of authority (along with parents) and that we can play an important role because we might be the first ones to notice a problem. A. Ghauch pointed out that from his perspective as chair of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, the number of these cases is a concern; he said the committee has been lenient with petitions but sometimes requests for “underload” are not reasonable. He also mentioned that sometimes logistics (e.g. timing of petitions in relation to deadlines) make it difficult to seek guidance from the Counseling Center as a basis for committee decisions. Another senator suggested that it would be important to have statistics about the prevalence of mental health problems in the community and indicated that there are many logistical questions about what resources are available at the university and how quickly students can get an appointment to see a counselor or therapist. President Khuri acknowledged that there are certainly many empirical questions that we need answers to but that these would require research that we don’t have and suggested the discussion focus on what kind of guidance faculty can provide students. A senator insisted that there is a big difference between those who want to abuse the system and those who have serious mental health issues. Another raised the question of whose responsibility it is to initiate engagement of a faculty member with a student around a mental health problem - the professor or the student – and raised the concern that it might be difficult for faculty members to take the initiative if they have a large class. He suggested that we need a policy and mechanism for how to initiate this process but accepted that, as faculty, we have a responsibility; but still he wondered how this issue should be approached. A senator reminded colleagues that we are forgetting about academic advisors and suggested that they should be trained to help with this problem since they are interacting with students most closely. Another senator reiterated the point that Lebanese students are possibly more resistant than others elsewhere to seek mental health support and that it is not easy to detect those who need support, concluding that guidelines for faculty are needed. Dean R. Sawaya emphasized that this is an important issue and commented that we need to recognize a huge range of distinct mental health problems; he suggested that most can be handled calmly and slowly, but that some need expedited attention and these are of particular concern and need to be addressed. President Khuri mentioned that the senate will be inviting members of the department of psychiatry for a discussion with the senate in the next meeting. Deputy Provost L. Choueiri concluded the discussion and pointed out that the provost’s office is looking into this issue to determine where there are gaps in the guidance provided to faculty and mentioned that they will be collating guidance from the different relevant units around the university who deal with mental health and well-being. She suggested that a concise summary of available resources and existing procedures could be inserted in a syllabus or placed prominently on various websites. The topic would be revisited during the upcoming senate meeting and mental health experts would be invited to contribute to this discussion as the direction forward is considered.

8- Other business

M. Darwish communicated a concern raised to him by some members of his faculty regarding deductions from the fresh dollar portion of salary, such as medical expenses. In addition, he mentioned that some faculty who are renting have indicated that they are finding it difficult to find appropriate accommodation

with subsidy being provided at 3900 LL/\$ rate. The provost suggested that this issue be presented to SCFA for their consideration, who can then submit a specific proposal to the senate.

A. Ghauch brought a concern among some FAS faculty regarding the 3/9 policy for compensation over above the base salary that they felt needed to be updated or even suspended for the three years of the current plan for salary recovery and addressing the financial conditions in Lebanon. They believe that the current plan hinders faculty members serving as academic advisors, chairpersons of academic units or committees, summer teaching - which are tasks/appointments that provide compensation - from fully benefiting from their allowed 3/9 addition to salary, especially with current currency conversions. He offered as an example of the problem the advising compensation which is 18 million LBP per year and is equivalent (in real terms) to less than \$1,000 but is deducted as \$6,000 from the 3/9. One possible solution is not to include advising and administrative compensation in the 3/9 or simply suspend the policy until the economic circumstances allow this practice again. The provost suggested that this also be shared with SCFA for their consideration.

Another senator added that there is a need to reconsider the payment of RAs paid from external grants at a rate of 60% in fresh dollar and the rest in LBP. Provost Z. Dawy pointed out that the current system has to be kept for this year since this was set up in response to conditions that arose last year and it responded in an equitable way to those conditions. But the policy will be revisited in the spring for the next academic year.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40.

Minutes taken by Tamer Amin