

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, March 4, 2022

Present: S. Abdulrahim, A. Abu-Alfa, F. Afiouni, A. Al-Hroub, T. Amin, S. BouJaoude, R-M. Boustany, R. Chedid, L. Choueiri, A. Daou, Z. Dawy, J. Doummar, N. Dumit, S. Elbassuoni, L. Farhoud, T. Ghaddar, A. Ghauch, H. Jaafar, M. Jaber, S. Karaki, S. Kharroubi, M. Khraiche, F. Khuri, N. Melhem, L. Musfi, S. Nouredine, A. Olabi, H. Puzantian, R. Sawaya, Y. Shaib, A. Sibai, Y. Sidani, R. Sultan, B. Tucker.

Regrets: H. Abu-Khuzam, P. Bou Khalil, A. Shihadeh (represented by R. Chedid)

Absent: G. Burris, S. Guler Altug, N. Hwalla, S. Mallat, M. Nasrallah

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

1) Approval of Senate minutes of January 28, 2022

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes of the senate meeting of January 28, 2022 with minor amendments sent to the secretary. The motion passed unanimously: **Vote 2021-23: 31 (in favor) – 0 (against) – (abstentions)**

2) Approval of proposed amendments to the Senate Bylaws

Provost Dawy presented the proposed amendments to the Senate Bylaws. He began by clarifying the policies that govern changes to the Senate Bylaws whereby 2/3 of voting members must vote for the adoption of revised Senate Bylaws. He pointed out that there are two changes being proposed: 1) Given the dissolution of OIRA, it was suggested that the reference to the membership of the Director of OIRA on the University Admissions Committee be replaced with the Director of Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Decision Support which was established on January 1, 2021; it was also suggested to include the Vice Provost as an ex officio member on this committee (see p. 9). 2) It is suggested that the Registrar be add as an ex-officio member of the Academic Development Committee (see p. 17). He then invited questions and comments from senators.

Interim Dean S. Boujaoude suggested that it might be appropriate for the chair of the Council of Associate Deans to be an ex-officio member of the senate. Another senator asked why OSB has only two representatives, wondering if this was based on the size of the faculty.

Provost Dawy clarified that the chair of the Council of Associate Deans is invited to attend the senate meetings, but this does not require a change in the bylaws. He also clarified that indeed the number of senators from each faculty does reflect the size of the faculty. He also mentioned that changing the number of senators is a very substantial process and requires careful consideration and discussion and cannot be reconsidered now with the changes being considered in this meeting, which were circulated in advance for senator consideration. He clarified that such changes need to be initiated by the owner of the policy. President Khuri agreed with this.

A motion was made to approve the proposed amendments to the Senate Bylaws and seconded. The motion passed unanimously: **Vote 2021-24: 31 (in favor) – 0 (against) – (abstentions)**

3) Voting of degrees for Fall 2021-2022 Graduates

Registrar Tucker presented to the senate the lists of the students graduating in Fall 2021-22. He pointed out that there were no major changes in the numbers of those on distinction and those graduating compared to Fall 2020-21. Interim Dean BouJaoude recommended awarding the degrees to the students graduating from programs in FAS indicated in the circulated list. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously (**Vote 2021-25: 31-0-0**). Dean Sawaya recommended awarding the degrees to the students graduating from programs in FM indicated in the circulated list. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously (**Vote 2021-26: 31-0-0**). Interim Dean Farhoud recommended awarding the degrees to the students graduating from programs in RHSON indicated in the circulated list. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously (**Vote 2021-27: 31-0-0**). Acting Dean Chedid recommended awarding the degrees to the students graduating from programs in MSFEA indicated in the circulated list. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously (**Vote 2021-28: 31-0-0**). Interim Dean Olabi recommended awarding the degrees to the students graduating from programs in FAFS indicated in the circulated list. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously (**Vote 2021-29: 31-0-0**). Interim Dean Sibai recommended awarding the degrees to the students graduating from programs in FHS indicated in the circulated list. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously (**Vote 2021-30: 31-0-0**). Dean Sidani recommended awarding the degrees to the students graduating from programs in OSB indicated in the circulated list. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously (**Vote 2021-31: 31-0-0**).

4. Discussion of revised Grading Policy

Registrar B. Tucker presented the revised Grading Policy for discussion. He provided an overview of the process that led to the proposed revisions and the main changes being proposed. With regard to process, a task force began work in January 2021 and conducted a benchmarking with other institutions. Subgroups worked on different parts of the policy and then came together to develop a draft policy. The document was circulated to the senate after it had gone through various bodies for review, a feasibility check was done and it was reviewed by the provost. We are now turning to the approval process and implementation. After approval by the senate this will go to president for approval. In this meeting, however, the revised Grading Policy is being presented to the senate for discussion not yet for approval. Registrar Tucker then provided an overview of the important elements of the policy and noted key change addressing the following components: purpose, faculty responsibility, inclusion of all university grading systems, description of GPA calculation, including a S/NS (satisfactory/not satisfactory option) (i.e. Pass/No Pass) option; grade submission. He gave particular attention to the new S/NS option. Highlighting that this had broader pedagogical goals beyond just providing options for handling future lockdown situations as experienced recently and required the introduction of some flexibility in grading options.

The following questions and issues raised by senators. One senator commented that the S/NS option presents risks for students that outweigh the benefits. Another senator expressed concern that this might dilute the quality of the degree. Another senator commented that it's not very clear when students would have to confirm which courses they want to take as S/NS; that senator suggested that it was better for students to make this choice later in the semester. Another senator asked what incentive there was for a department/instructor to designate a course as S/NS. Another senator offered a positive evaluation of this option, suggesting that it can help students focus on topics of interest to them when selecting elective/GE courses and reduce the emphasis on grades. This senator commented on the

earlier comments of fellow senators saying that these fears about the perception of the quality of programs can be addressed if we approach the change clearly as a broader academic culture change within the university and consider carefully how we communicate about the pedagogical motivation for this change internally and to others outside AUB. Another senator suggested to have a very clear list of courses that would have the S/NS designation. Another expressed concern about possible letter grade inflation at AUB in light of the most recent number-to-letter grade conversion scheme. A senator asked what the role of the course instructor was when a grade is appealed, suggesting that it was currently unclear what that role was. Another commented on this same issue saying that it was odd that the student and instructor seem to have equal standing when there is a grade appeal. Another senator was surprised by the inclusion of the sentence “the instructor will not be informed if the student has chosen the S/NS option.” Finally, a senator asked whether a student would still be able to withdraw from an S/NS course as usual and asked whether we would expect a reduction in withdrawals as a result of the inclusion of this option.

The Registrar responded that the advisor would play an important role in advising students about the appropriateness and wisdom of some S/NS choices. He clarified that many major universities have implemented an S/NS option with no loss of reputation to their degrees. Moreover, he clarified that there are limits on the number and the kind of courses that can be taken as S/NS and that addresses some of the concerns expressed by senators and limits its overall impact on the GPA. With regard to when the student should commit to choice to designate a course as S/NS, he clarified that this should happen at the beginning of the semester, clarifying that making the choice later in the semester would undermine the purpose of providing this option to shift attention away from grades for some courses; emphasizing that it shouldn't be approached as “try before you buy.” Provost Dawy added that the suggested S/NS option is not intended to be a tool to help students have good grades. Registrar Tucker emphasized that the incentive is for students to take risks and explore interests. He added that not informing the instructor about a student's choice of designating that course as S/NS is to protect the instructor/student relationship. With regard to the grade conversion scheme, the registrar clarified that this was not part of the mandate of the task force and was not addressed in the current revision. He also clarified that in appealing a grade there is certainly a role for the course instructor in the discussion of the appeal. President Khuri added that it is clear that course assessment is in the hand of the instructor/professor and that is not in question. In concluding the discussion of this item, Provost Dawy reminded the senate that this revised Grading Policy was not being presented for a vote in this meeting, but for discussion. It will be brought back for final discussion and vote later in the semester.

5) Deductions from “fresh” USD salary component: Discussion and mitigation strategy.

Comptroller I. Dayya made a presentation to clarify how “fresh” dollar salary components are incorporated into faculty monthly payroll and how Lebanese Lira deductions are calculated. He presented pay slips for a typical month to illustrate.

Senators raised various questions and comments. One senator was very appreciative of support he had received from staff at the Office of the Comptroller. That senator expressed some concern that it wasn't always clear in the pay slips what various deduction items were. Another senator asked about the restrictions that banks were imposing on how much cash they are allowing AUB employees to access and whether this was a decision of the banks or AUB. Another senator wanted to make clear that faculty are experiencing a lot of the frustration, which is being communicated to SCFA, with many complaining that they don't understand the system well enough. This senator asked whether it would be possible to

approach some payments as supplementary rather than in lieu of salary. Another asked: what happens if in lieu of salary fresh dollar payments exceed the available Lebanese Lira. A senator, as a director of a scholarship program with great financial complexity, commended what the Office of the Comptroller is doing in these difficult circumstances. Another senator acknowledged the complexity of the situation but asked how we might communicate with the faculty better and guide them. In light of this comment, another senator suggested that a town hall on this topic would be a good idea.

Comptroller I. Dayya, responded we cannot make payments as supplementary to income rather than in lieu of salary for reasons that have to do with taxes. Provost Dawy added that there is also an issue of the limit to how many months work can be reported. I. Dayya commented that the Office of the Comptroller is trying to automate the voucher payment process and that when this is done it will make more information available. Provost Dawy agreed that we certainly need to work on improving communication on this issue. I. Dayya clarified that when we make transfers we have the money available in AUB accounts but it is the banks that are not honoring these payments, but AUB is communicating with the banks regarding these cash payment restrictions. President Khuri added that we contacted the banks requesting that a minimum amount is made available to employees, but the banks have been manipulating information about the process and responsibility, especially among the less educated of AUB staff. Provost Dawy clarified that the decision to make use of the 3/9 supplementary summer salary scheme and/or then 4.5/9 “in lieu of salary” scheme is each faculty member’s decision. Faculty all go for the 3/9 first and then go to 4.5/9. I. Dayya explained that when Lebanese Lira deductions due to fresh dollar components exceed available Lebanese Lira in the faculty member’s salary these payments are distributed over a number of months. President Khuri suggested that SCFA meet with I. Dayya and D. Wickens to discuss how to communicate with faculty better regarding key points that seem to be unclear to faculty.

6) Update and progress on housing

This item is being brought to the senate at the request of SCFA. Director of Benefits Office H. Bihkazi presented the update on the situation with housing in light of the current economic crisis. She presented an overview of the on-campus housing occupied and under maintenance; the number of rental contracts; furnished apartment rentals; and she summarized the payment modalities. She pointed out that all payments are in local dollars (“lollar”) currently and that AUB is negotiating with landlords to keep this payment approach. This is beneficial to faculty since it’s a favorable exchange rate; it is also beneficial to AUB given cash availability. She pointed out that another key problem is availability of power at home and that miscellaneous fees are being requested in fresh dollars. She explained that moving forward AUB is pushing further with negotiations on methods of payment and rates of exchange; is looking to rent in bulk (which is preferable to AUB); and is continuously assessing market conditions. She clarified that it is expected that majority of landlords will be requiring fresh dollar payments in 2023. AUB will be pushing for comprehensive agreements of all elements of what faculty need to pay to landlords as much as possible.

Senators raised a number of questions and comments on this issue. One senator, a SCFA member, comments that SCFA had received a few complaints but found that the housing team had all the challenges on their radar. This senator commented faculty often did not know what was being done about this issue on their behalf. Another senator echoed the previous senator’s comment and commended the administration for their efforts on this and asked what the next step was, hoping there might be success in the bulk renting initiative. Another senator thanked to the benefits office and asked

about faculty who are not benefiting from housing and whether AUB is helping those faculty to improve their electricity situation and internet connectivity. Interim Dean of students L. Choueiri pointed out that there is a capacity problem for housing of students and suggested that there should be a joining of efforts to address the needs of students and faculty at the same time.

H. Bikhazi responded that channels of communication with SCFA will remain open as AUB tries to address all the concerns regarding rent and living conditions. President Khuri pointed out that the issue of connectivity should be addressed to the CIO, but he commented these are things that even AUB is finding a challenge given the conditions of the country.

7) Discussion: timeline for the capital and operating budgets for AY 2022-2023

President Khuri indicated that he requested that this item be added to this senate meeting. He clarified that the administration is currently making capital requests for the AUB-Mediterraneo project, that we have a tight schedule and that we need to show that we have these funds set aside. He emphasized that the three-year operating budget being prepared must be dependent on the correct valuation of an AUB degree and its medical services must also be appropriately valued. He pointed out that most items in Lebanon have now been adjusted to be valued in dollars. For these reasons, it is necessary that a substantial portion of the tuition fees must be in fresh dollars and that this process must begin this fall. The administration has already begun this discussion with the students, with members of SCFA and the SSC and others. He reminded the senate that so far AUB has addressed the crisis by drawing on unrestricted parts of the endowment but that a more sustainable approach is now required. He emphasized that we will of course work hard to protect those who are most vulnerable as we make this transition. He clarified that the goal to arrive at the next three-year operating budget proposal within 2 – 2 ½ months. CFO D. Wickens added that another aspect of the new operating budget is a move to improve salaries for faculty and staff and that for this to be possible it was important that the process to restructure the budget begin immediately. He pointed out that we have BOT support for this but acknowledged that it will be a difficult adjustment and that the challenges for students must be addressed. He concluded that AUB has no choice but to move in this direction; indeed, AUBMC has already started. President Khuri concluded that we are now focused on achieving BOT support for a sustainable budget for the next three years, and that it was important to have the support of the senate and that of the whole community.

Senators raised a number of questions and made comments. One senator said that everybody was expecting this to happen at some point; the former asked what the time frame was for the adjustments of tuition and faculty and staff salaries. Another senator asked whether we are going to create a system to monitor and follow up on who can pay and who can't pay once tuition is raised and asked how this will impact students of the middle class in particular. One senator asked whether new funding schemes - e.g. loan schemes – were being considered. Another senator commented that this is a shocking development, and while we must acknowledge that the country is going through a crisis, we must be very concerned about what the consequences will be of moving to as much 50% fresh dollar tuition asking: do we know how this will affect different students? This senator expressed skepticism about how successful this move will be and expressed worry about the impact on diversity. Another senator asked what we expect about the percentage of students who will need financial aid given such an increase in tuition.

President Khuri responded to these points. He mentioned that the reality is that there isn't a linear relationship between the increase in fresh dollar percentage for tuition and the increase in salaries; this is because we need to increase financial support for students who needed it. He added that the goal is in fact to protect the middle class, but that more generally we have to create a system that addresses the needs of all students who cannot afford AUB but are good enough to matriculate at AUB and desirous of attending. He realized that this was going to be very difficult to implement but that it is at moments like these that "we will figure out who we really are." With regard to the timeline, he pointed out that the focus now is to get the three-year operating budget approved and then we can look to the issue of creative financing, emphasizing that we would want our funding sources to be diverse to maintain our independence. He added that there were no viable alternatives to making this move. Provost Dawy added that this is a very complex decision, and that socioeconomic diversity is something we want to maintain. He pointed out that presently close to 60% are on some financial aid, with 15% on full support. We have already made this move when we went to charging tuition at the 3900 rate; now we need to take the next step to adapt further to the economic situation. Registrar Tucker added that we certainly need more information about students to guide us in our allocation of support moving forward.

8) Other business:

A senator thanked AUB and OSB for "The Researcher" program and suggested that we should advertise this more, also noting that we need to give credit to Office of the Provost and the Innovation Park for their support of this initiative.

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.

Minutes taken by Tamer Amin