

**American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, January 28, 2022**

Present: S. Abdulrahim, A. Abu-Alfa, H. Abu-Khuzam, F. Afiouni, T. Amin, M. Aouad-Maroun I. Baalbaki, S. BouJaoude, R-M. Boustany, L. Choueiri, A. Daou, M. Darwish, Z. Dawy, J. Doummar, N. Dumit, S. Elbassuoni, T. Ghaddar, A. Ghauch, N. Hwalla, H. Jaafar, M. Jaber, S. Kharroubi, M. Khraiche, F. Khuri, S. Mallat, N. Melhem, L. Musfi, M. Nasrallah, S. Nouredine, A. Olabi, H. Puzantian, R. Sawaya, Y. Shaib, A. Shihadeh, A. Sibai, Y. Sidani, R. Sultan, M. Tauk, B. Tucker.

Regrets: A. Al-Hroub, R. Chedid, L. Farhoud

Absent: G. Burris, S. Guler Altug

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

Agenda:

1) Approval of Senate minutes of December 17, 2021

A motion to approve the minutes of the senate meeting of December 17, 2021 as circulated was made and seconded; **The motion carried: 30 (in favor) – 0 (against) – 0 (abstain). (Vote: 2021-20)**

2) Approval of policy addressing the protection from sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and sexual abuse involving beneficiaries of United Nations projects

The policy was presented to the senate by Equity/Title IX Coordinator M. Tauk. She explained that AUB needs this policy because the UN has launched a new strategy regarding protection of all those who work on projects involving UN partners (agencies, funds and programs). As a partner to the UN, we were required to complete a self-assessment based on six core standards to examine the extent to which our policies and procedures align with these very specific standards. The policy circulated ensures that we meet the six UN core standards and is based on appropriate benchmarking. M. Tauk provided an overview of the policy which was prepared following the template made available by the Office of Compliance. She pointed out that most elements are in-line with AUB's already existing policies, but she highlighted some differences that needed to be incorporated into this policy.

A motion was made to approve the policy and was seconded; a discussion followed in which senators brought up a number of issues. One senator noted that the policy mentions support that must be provided for victims of harassment, exploitation or abuse, and asked whether AUB would provide similar support for those not involved in UN projects. Another senator asked whether there are any changes needed at the level of HR systems. In addition, a clarification was requested regarding the conditions under which consensual romantic relationships are prohibited and how "romantic" is defined. Another senator asked if there have ever been complaints at AUB from UN beneficiaries. One senator informed fellow senators that the absence of such a policy that specifically aligns with UN standards delayed their ability to participate in a UN project.

M. Tauk responded to these questions and comments. She clarified that the support for victims is the same at AUB regardless of the specific policy governing a particular project/partnership, so the UN expectations are not different from what we usually do; the difference in this policy is that there is some specificity in the process that needs to be followed. With regard to HR systems, she pointed out that there are some specific requirements such as implementing specific clauses in contracts. With regard to the issue of prohibiting consensual romantic relationships under some conditions, she clarified that the focus is on the issue of conflict of interest between a member of the AUB community working in a UN project and a beneficiary of the project. She added, more generally, that AUB has not done as much awareness raising among beneficiaries as we would once this policy is approved.

Provost called the question. **The policy was approved with a vote of 28 (in favor) – 0 (against) – 2 (abstain). (Vote: 2021-21)**

3) Recommendation to change the name of the Department of Anesthesiology (Faculty of Medicine) to become the Department of Anesthesiology & Pain Medicine

M. Aouad-Maroun presented the proposal for this name change. She explained that under the existing Department of Anesthesiology there is a pain division and that pain education is integrated in the anesthesiology residency. Moreover, research on pain and related topics is conducted by faculty in the department. She also provided an overview of pain-related interventions and consultations conducted by the department annually (e.g. about 600 pain interventions and 800 pain consultations per year). The name change is proposed to reflect more accurately and clearly the scope of this department.

Dean Sawaya commented that this was a reasonable request and that this is common practice elsewhere. He told the senate that the Faculty of Medicine was overwhelmingly in support of this proposal.

Motion made and seconded to approve this proposed name change. There was no discussion. **The motion passed: 30 (in favor) – 0 (against) – (abstain). (Vote: 2021-22)**

4) Update and discussion: academic continuity and COVID-19

Provost Dawy presented some background information about the measures that have been (and are currently being) taken to ensure academic continuity in the context of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed out that this update was requested by the SSC to provide an opportunity for the senate to raise questions and make comments. Provost Dawy shared the various factors influencing the return to face-to-face instruction; he outlined the advice offered by various relevant committees; he emphasized the importance of ensuring health and safety while meeting our pedagogical goals, and lauded the success of the vaccination campaign that has been central to achieving both goals by allowing a safe return to in-person instruction in fall 2021-22. He also emphasized the importance of the planning framework for academic continuity and the particularly important role of the Council of Associate Deans. He shared with the senate that the council has recommended increasing our effort to enhance communication about compliance of the AUB community with protective measures, improving coordination between administrative units about managing the public health situation, and reemphasized that faculty should continue to provide accommodations as much as possible. Provost

Dawy concluded by commenting that of course we will continue to monitor the situation and adapt as needed. He then opened the floor for discussion.

One senator asked what the protocol was if a student tests positive; what should a faculty member do? Another senator commented that while we probably have an accurate count of those who test positive for COVID-19 when tested within AUB, how do we account for those who tested outside AUB? Another commented that this was quite common due to the cost of the test at AUB now. Another senator commented that even when all students are wearing masks, they often don't sit far from each other, and asked: "can we enforce physical distancing?" This senator also mentioned that some students are asking for us to post recordings and asked whether the administration requires faculty to do this and asked what the suggested response to such requests should be. A senator suggested that when someone tests positive in class, it is the right of the others to know. It was also mentioned that the issue of the high cost of the PCR test needs to be addressed. Another senator commended IT support throughout this pandemic which has been crucial in enabling us to continue to teach. Another senator thanked the administration for the way they got us back to campus and asked how we are handling health exceptions for people who can't take the vaccine (for example, someone joining as a student or staff member who has recently tested positive).

The provost pointed out that when a student in a class tests positive for COVID-19 the protocol does not require faculty to stop in-person teaching, which is based on the expectation that all should be wearing masks in indoor teaching spaces. Of course, the student who tests positive should isolate; those in close contact should be vigilant. N. Melhem elaborated on the important role of the focal point person in each faculty who must be informed about each positive test; the former communicates testing results with the university health employee (community health nurse) at AUBMC ; follow up with COVID-19 positive and their contacts at AUB will be followed up and monitored for symptoms based on the risk of the exposure of. The protocols have been published by the COVID-19 Expert Committee. Interim Dean S. BouJaoude shared information about the focal point person and the process followed in FAS. Provost Dawy added that it was strongly advisable to enforce distancing in class whenever possible; he clarified that with regard to recording classes, it is left up to the faculty member to decide what accommodations are appropriate in any given class and a given situation; the overall message is to be considerate in your accommodations. Deputy Provost L. Choueiri added that this is quite an exceptional circumstance, so it is very important that thought and design go into the needed accommodations. Provost Dawy reminded the senate that the issue of the cost of PCR tests at AUB is a separate agenda item that will be discussed later in this meeting. With regard to medical exceptions to vaccination, he clarified that there is a process in place for medical evaluation of such cases. Dean Sawaya commented that there is significant non-compliance with regards to wearing masks in the AUB community and that we really have to emphasize the wearing of masks; he also added that receiving the booster shot is a very important protective measure for individuals and the community as a whole. He reiterated the importance of these measures as we are seeing a very large number of positive COVID-19 cases among staff at AUBMC.

5) Update and discussion: IT Support and academic continuity

Chief Innovation and Transformation Officer Y. Asfour made a presentation about IT support and academic continuity. He pointed out that the Office of IT seeks to offer support as needed to all units; he explained the federated service delivery model where generic support is decentralized (through locally

stationed IT managers and support staff who also communicate to the central office) and where anything that needs specialized service is centralized; he listed a number of challenges that are being faced including staff retention, recruitment, suppliers, and funding. He reassured the senate that they are trying to work through these challenges and have initiatives in place to address each.

Senators raised a number of questions and issues. A senator from FAFS mentioned that their work in the faculty requires a lot of IT support and was appreciative of the excellent support they have received; the senator asked whether AUB is exploring a contingency plan for internet access through satellite connections. Another raised the issue of obtaining IT staff support for exams and whether it is possible to get support after hours. This senator also asked about what IT recruitment priorities were. Another senator asked Y. Asfour about how he feels about AUB's IT infrastructure readiness to develop more online programs.

Y. Asfour responded by explaining that the Office of IT is looking into various options to enhance internet service, including satellite licenses for internet connectivity, but pointed out that this is challenging from a legal point of view and is very expensive. With regard to offering more support to faculty, including after hours, he explained that the strategy is to continue to work on faculty development to reduce reliance on IT staff. He explained that this was the strategy before the shift to online teaching during the pandemic, but emphasized that this is very important now given the loss of IT staff. With regard to his assessment of infrastructure readiness to accommodate more online programs, he commented that he believes that the right plan is in place and is being implemented.

6) COVID-19 testing cost for faculty, students, and staff

Provost Dawy reminded the senate that the cost for PCR has increased from LL150,000 to LL375,000 at AUBMC. He mentioned that the SSC asked for this issue to be brought up for discussion at the senate and possibly initiate an examination of whether the cost could be reduced for AUB faculty, students and staff. VP Jaber mentioned that the Syndicate of Workers also raised this concern and that the administration is looking into this issue. Dean Sawaya added that we should be clear on two aspects of this issue: the quality and the cost. He explained that the reagents used at AUBMC are of top quality and this drives up price. A separate question is who should cover the difference in cost; that decision must be made by the president.

N. Dumit took the floor and informed the senate that she had raised this issue and asked for it to be brought to the senate. She clarified that in her opinion, we should consider the possibility of the university covering some of the cost for AUB staff and students, in particular, those who are required to do the test, but not in cases when a test is being done voluntarily, for travel purposes, for example. Another senator agreed that we need to have a preferential rate and added that we cannot assume that we necessarily have the "best" quality available. N. Melhem agreed that the reagents are extremely expensive; she stated that the cost of the test was discussed by the COVID-19 expert committee and mentioned that some departments, but not all, felt it was appropriate for them to cover some of the cost. She added that the AUB community is vaccinated and current guidelines support less dependence on PCRs. A senator commented that they only trust tests done at AUBMC and suggested that those of us who can afford to pay should do so but that we should look for funds to support those less able to pay. Another senator expressed concern regarding quality outside AUBMC and worried that our high

cost would drive people away and to less reliable labs. Interim Dean Olabi argued that the cost should not be passed on to departments and suggested that this might be a good focus for seeking support from donors. Another senator suggested that maybe one way to approach this is to find statistics about how many are doing PCR from within or outside AUBMC. These sorts of data would be very helpful. Provost Dawy summed up that this is something that clearly needs to be looked into by the administration.

7) Other business

A senator brought up an issue for Other Business. The senator mentioned that an instructor raised the question as to why they had been paid less in a winter semester than a summer semester for the same teaching load. Provost Dawy said that he would like to have more details about this and suggested that it would be helpful if the instructor can share more details by email explaining this discrepancy.

There being no other business the meeting was adjourned at 3:50 pm.

Minutes taken by Tamer Amin