

American University of Beirut
Final Minutes of the University Senate
Meeting of Friday, January 31, 2020

Present: M. Abiad, T. Bazi, S. Bou Jaoude, I. Baalbaki, R. Chedid, L. Daouk, H. Darwish, N. Dumit, 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, R. Nakkash, I. Nuwayhid, G. Saad, A. Shihadeh, R. Sharara, B. Tucker, G. Zaatari

Absent: Y. Abunnasr*, A. Abu-Alfa, E. Al-Chaer*, T. Amin, G. Burris*, A. Chehab*, H. Diab, N. El-Cheikh*, S. Kanj-Sharara*, T. Nizameddin, N. Saliba, F. Talih*

(* = regrets notified before meeting)

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

1) Approval of Senate minutes of December 18, 2019

The minutes of December 18, 2019 were unanimously approved with minor modifications.

Following the approval of minutes, the President and Provost welcomed Mr. Bradley Tucker and Professor Hala Darwish to the Senate. Professor Darwish is the second Senator representing HSON as per the updated Senate bylaws.

2) Voting of Degrees for MSFEA Graduates

Dean Shihadeh moved to recommend awarding degrees to a list of candidates in the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA). **Vote 2019-20. The motion was approved unanimously.**

3) Report of the President on BOT January Committee Meetings

President Khuri stated that the BOT meetings took place on January 20 and 21, 2020, and there were 22 trustees and emeriti trustees present. The highlights of the different BOT committee meetings were summarized as follows:

- The BOT attended a presentation on the preliminary findings of the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA). The presentation was given by Jamal Al Sagheer from IFI and Simon Naimi from FAS and focused on University business only as the data pertaining to the hospital has not been provided to the council yet. The council's presentation will be further developed and presented to the Senate in the February meeting.
- The finance committee met and discussed AUB's financial and economic situation.
- The information technology committee meeting focused on advancing online education at AUB. The Provost's office is overseeing the online education initiative.
- The BOT congratulated Dean Nuwayhid and the FHS faculty for receiving full accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) for seven years (2020-2026) with no interim reporting. The BOT highlighted this remarkable achievement noting that only 15 percent of more than 200 public health schools and programs that applied between 2012 and 2019 received an unconditional accreditation.
- On January 20, the trustees attended an art exhibit by Rania Mattar and then listened to a Faculty talk by Professor Mona Fawaz entitled Beirut: a City for Sale? over lunch followed by a tour of MSFEA.

A senator inquired about the nature of the information presented by the CEA and if the report of the council will be shared with the Senate once complete. The President replied that the council got all financial metrics from the CFO, Drew Wickens. He added that the council's initial efforts focused on working on faculty and student data through conducting meetings with the Provost's office and the

Deans of the different faculties. President Khuri concluded that the final presentation of the council will be presented to the Senate in February 2020.

4) Update on Spring Semester Enrollment and Fall 2020 Projections

Provost Harajli presented a comparative analysis between the number of registrants and the number of paying students to date this Spring 2020 semester and Spring 2019 semester. The presented numbers were consistent over the two semesters showing that the economic situation in the country has not affected the enrollment numbers of the Spring 2020 semester. Moreover, the number of students who have already paid their tuition fees this semester before the end of the drop and add period is comparable to the number of students who paid tuition fees at the same time in the Spring 2019 semester.

As for the Fall 2020 semester projections, it was noted that the number of applicants to date has dropped compared to the Fall 2019 semester. The number of freshman applicants this year is expected to be around 470 as compared to 778 applicants last year, and the number of sophomore applicants is expected to be around 3000 as compared to 3500 last year. The drop in number of applicants is expected to translate into a drop of around 350 students in the incoming cohort of students in the AY 2020-2021. This projected drop is assuming the same cut-off scores and the same acceptance/yield rates that were adopted for the current academic year.

Some senators indicated that the presented analysis is optimistic for two reasons: 1) There are no guarantees that all the registered students this semester will pay all their tuition fees by the end of the semester, and 2) although the acceptance rate for the fall semester might remain the same as last year, there are a lot of uncertainties associated with the yield rate (the number of accepted applicants who will end up at AUB). Some counter-arguments were presented: 1) People may be encouraged to pay their dues as soon as possible knowing that the current USD to LBP exchange rate is 1515 LBP/\$ and it is uncertain how this will change in the future, and 2) The number of applicants might increase since people cannot send their children abroad for education because of the constraints on money transfers.

It was also noted that the administration is helping current students who lost access to bank loans because of the economic situation by increasing their financial aid by an additional 10%.

5) Faculty Manual: Structure and Organization

Associate Provost Choueiri presented the plan towards a comprehensive review of the faculty manual. Dr. Choueiri stated that currently the faculty manual is a standing policy owned by the Provost. Before conducting a thorough review of the faculty manual, the plan is to divide the existing content into independent policies. This entails replacing the current faculty manual with a web based faculty manual consisting of ten new independent policies resulting from separating the existing text of the faculty manual into different sections. This change will allow for the flexibility in modifying select policies or adding newly approved policies without changing the entire faculty manual. In addition to the latter reasoning behind the change, it was noted that:

- There are inconsistencies between the current faculty manual and other university policies. The faculty manual clearly states that if any of its policies contradicts with a university policy, the latter takes precedence.
- Tenure related policies are not currently reflected in the faculty manual.
- The faculty manual was not updated to reflect changes in other university policies.
- The existing grievance policy in the faculty manual is inconsistent with the procedures listed in the AUB grievance policy. For the time being, the text from the faculty manual is appended to the AUB grievance policy and procedures. President Khuri appointed a taskforce to review the grievance policy and resolve inconsistencies.

A motion was made to revoke the faculty manual as a standing policy on policytech and replace it with an online manual with reference to all current policies in the manual and future policies related to the faculty. Vote 2019-21. The motion was approved by a vote (24-0-6).

6) Policy on Leaves for Academic Personnel

Associate Provost Choueiri presented the proposed changes in the policy on leaves for academic personnel. She stated that the entire policy was copied from the existing faculty manual, and the proposed revisions pertain to the section on leaves without pay only. The changes aim at regulating leaves for full time faculty members who are either appointed to public office e.g. as minister in the cabinet of ministers, prime minister, or ambassador; or who elect to run for public office, e.g. as member of parliament or chair of municipal council. The amended policy states that a leave without pay of up to one year is mandatory for all full-time faculty member who assume one of the public office positions listed above. Under exceptional circumstances, a leave with no pay may be renewed for a maximum of one additional year. Furthermore, full-time faculty members running for public office are eligible for a period of maximum one year leave without pay. If they win the election, they shall immediately resign from their position at AUB, even if it is before the end of their leave's term, and without any further notice or compensation.

One senator stated that this new policy may hinder faculty members from serving their country; the senator added that many faculty members are young enough to serve in public office for a couple of years and return back to AUB to resume their academic career. Another senator highlighted that not all chairs of municipal councils should be treated the same way. The chair of the municipal council of a major city like Beirut has much more responsibilities than the chair of the municipal council of one of the rural villages. Other senators stated that the term public office is vaguely defined and needs further clarification in the policy. There were inquiries on whether the amended policy had been cleared by the legal office and whether there are any distinctions between leaves without pay in general and those associated with public service. It was also suggested that the the entire policy might need to be revamped and not only the section pertaining to leaves without pay.

President Khuri stated that the amended policy is needed to guarantee consistency and allow for accountability amongst the different constituents of the AUB community. The policy was benchmarked against international universities and falls inline with the practiced laws worldwide. The aim is to protect the institution and not put it in an undefensible position. He added that in the USA and the UK politicians often come back to academic institutions as lecturers or adjunct faculty. A senator requested to amend the motion to reflect the concerns raised by fellow senators. The chair denied the request, noting that the question had already been called. **Vote 2019-22: The motion to adopt the presented changes in the policy on leaves for academic personnel was approved by a vote (23-4-1).**

After the vote, President Khuri stated that there is a sense that this policy can be further improved; consequently, he will form a taskforce to incorporate changes in the policy and bring it back to the Senate.

7) Proposal for an Alternate Crisis Response Plan

Professors Elizabeth Saleh and Carmen Geha gave a presentation proposing an alternate plan for dealing with the current economic/political crisis in the country. Their proposal aims at forming a multi-disciplinary working group tasked with developing a crisis response plan that fosters research productivity and encourages quality teaching while supporting balanced workload and personal well-being. President Khuri commended the initiative of the presenters and highlighted that their proposal complements the work of the CEA. While the CEA focuses on the macroeconomic nature of the crisis, their task lacks depth when it comes to social parameters. The President added that the taskforce proposed by Saleh and Geha should work in parallel with the CEA; and ultimately the outcomes of the two committees should converge. He also recommended that the presenters meet with the CEA and share notes.

A motion was made to recommend to the President to form a multi-disciplinary working group aiming at developing an alternate plan for dealing with the crisis as proposed in the presentation. Vote 2019-23. The motion was approved by a vote (25-0-2).

8) Consider Relaxing the Policy on Consulting, Professional Activities and Research Support from Outside Resources

Given the current economic situation and the drop in purchasing power of the Lebanese Pound, the need rises for complementing the faculty salaries from external sources. This agenda item, proposed by one of the senators, is to request from the Deans of the different faculties to use their discretion and exercise flexibility in applying the subject policy on a case by case basis. Senators expressed opinions with and against the proposed argument. The main concern was to make sure that such flexibility will not become the norm in the future; and that faculty members will not take advantage of the proposed flexibility and neglect their other academic responsibilities. The discussion was synthesized into a motion that states:

“Exclusively, during the current extraordinary economic and political circumstances, a faculty member who is fully compliant and meeting all expectations regarding their duties in teaching, research, service, and patient care where applicable, may be allowed to exceed the number of consultancy days but only within a reasonable limit. This exception to the policy is allowed provided it is strictly justified and approved by the department chair and Faculty/School dean, and shall be evaluated on semester basis.”

Vote 2019-24. The motion was approved by a vote (21-1-4).

9) Election of two members of SCFA

Two members resigned from the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs (SCFA): one representing MSFEA and the other is a member at large. Professor Riad Chedid was elected to represent MSFEA; and Professor Wassim El Hajj was elected to serve as a member at large on SCFA. Both members were elected by acclamation.

10) Other Business

Senator Charles Harb made the following statement:

“I have carefully read the letter of resignation that the Chair of SCFA shared with the Senate on January 7, 2020 - and found the correspondence between the President and the Chair of SCFA and the ensuing resignations within SCFA and the CEA to be deeply unsettling.

We are facing an unprecedented economic and financial crisis with potentially grave consequences for this institution - which only recently celebrated its 150th anniversary, and its MSCHE re-accreditation. When we entered this crisis, I was confident that the University’s stakeholders and representatives would unite their efforts and pull together to find solutions to the challenges threatening us all.

Unfortunately, the exchange between the President and the Chair of SCFA erodes rather than builds such confidence; for no matter what errors may have been committed, rupturing communication lines between key stakeholders, personalizing interactions, and threatening disciplinary actions are certainly not the way forward. These are not in line with the values of the university, not in line with the spirit of shared governance or collegiality, and certainly not in line with the values the President espouses.

As a senator, I cannot help but stand in solidarity with my fellow colleague, Dr. Harutyunyan who bore the brunt of that regrettable exchange. Because of the asymmetry of power and the disproportionate response expressed in the President’s letter, a key elected body of the Senate is now effectively paralyzed. I fear that the current governance trajectory is showing some antecedent conditions and symptoms of groupthink, and thus increasing the likelihood of faulty decision making. AUB’s credibility and integrity depends on meeting the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)’s Standards, especially Standards I, II, VI and VII. I would like to remind my colleagues that of the 21 areas of improvement identified by the Self-Study Workgroups, “the single overall recommendation related to a “need to develop a strategy for effective communication among

the different AUB constituencies”” (p5 of the Visiting Team’s Evaluation Report). I do not think we are doing well in this regard.

I hope that these developments do not constitute a crossing the Rubicon moment – and that corrective measures are quickly enacted to avoid unnecessary turbulences ahead.”

A senator argued that the problems in SCFA have started much earlier than the mentioned communications with the President. He added that there was a division amongst SCFA members since the beginning of the academic year and conflicts started arising during the vote for the SCFA chair. The senator also claimed that the elected SCFA chair was trying to push her agenda since then.

The resigned SCFA chair replied that all agenda items were unanimously approved by all members of the committee and were never enforced by anyone.

The President stated that the current exchange and the actions undertaken by the prior SCFA chair involved attacks on the integrity of others, including himself, and were not constructive.

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