

October 2010

Dear Members of the AUB Community:

This is the first of a series of “letters to the community” that I plan to send at the beginning of each semester to update you on recent developments at AUB. There are many important things going on at the University that I wish to tell you about.

A New Year Begins

A few statistics paint an interesting picture of the new academic year. This fall, we welcomed 53 new faculty members and 2,207 new students to campus. The fine academic caliber of our student body is clearly rising. The average SAT scores of incoming freshmen jumped by 38 points this year while those of new sophomores increased by 21 points. The number of applications increased as well: up 7.5% for undergraduates and up 17.3% for those applying for graduate programs, allowing us to choose selectively from a large number of submissions. In 2009-2010, of those who applied for financial assistance 83% received an award, and we expect a similar or greater proportion of grants this current year. Looking at our numbers for international diversity, we note that presently 26% of our undergraduates are from foreign countries, compared to 16% of our graduate students.

Our faculty body now consists of 48.3% Lebanese citizens, 33.1% who hold dual nationality, and 18.6% who are citizens of countries other than Lebanon. At the end of last year, 13 faculty members earned promotion to the rank of full professor and 12 to the rank of associate professor. I wish to extend my warmest congratulations and thanks to these deserving scholars, who uphold the highest traditions of the University.

A New Strategic Plan for the University

In November, the Board of Trustees plans to endorse a five-year strategic plan for AUB that outlines the institution that we envision for the near future. The adoption of this plan will be the culmination of a multi-year process that involved the entire AUB community--those of us who live and work on campus, and also alumni, friends and supporters from around the world.

The strategic plan addresses eight primary goals grouped under *core activities*—covering liberal education, students, faculty, staff, research, and our relationship to the community—and *foundational activities* having to do with enhancing our technological edge, governance, and institutional renewal. This plan encompasses the entire University, including our prized Medical Center, and will help focus our efforts on the areas that are most important to delivering our mission and vision.

Three of these goals focus on an abiding commitment to our students. For undergraduates, we aim to provide an unrivalled foundation in the liberal arts and to enhance the diversity of our student body. We also seek to continue growing our eight PhD programs and promoting pure and applied research, as we maintain our role as the premier research university in the Middle East and a hub for regional innovation and entrepreneurship.

Several of the strategic goals are fundamentally concerned with responsiveness: to students and patients, faculty and staff, the community surrounding us, and the environment that sustains us.

Through initiatives directed at improved governance, institutional renewal, and community engagement, we will not only maintain our standing in the region but also make AUB stronger and more resilient to growing competition.

Information Technology

Another strategic goal concentrates on the critically important area of information and communication technology. With new leadership under Vice President Rita Khayat-Toubia, we are seeking to transform the integrative functions of our university, including the business and financial systems, the digitization of patient records, the introduction of operational modules for human resources and financial aid, the establishment of a secure central data bank, and the management of critical inventories. This effort will also improve many aspects of academic life including on-line course registration, data-driven classroom schedules, computerized grade scores, up-to-date and secure information on the admission of prospective students and decisions on financial aid, and even access to on-line teaching evaluations--in other words, we are making it easier for students to get the information they are most eager to have.

Strengthening Academic Programs and Expanding Financial Aid

As many of you know, AUB announced a new tuition and financial aid policy last spring. It generated some controversy on campus due to the financial impact the policy may have on the total cost of education at AUB. Yet one of the primary reasons for implementing the policy, which will begin with the class of students entering in fall 2011, is to ensure that an AUB education will remain affordable to all qualified applicants.

First, following the general model of American higher education practices, the new policy will:

- *Double* the total amount of financial aid over the next four years
- *Quadruple* the amount of unrestricted aid over the next four years
- Almost double the average financial aid grant from the first year onward
- Provide significantly larger awards to more students who qualify for aid
- Help to attract the best and brightest students regardless of their ability to pay
- Ensure greater socio-economic diversity among the student body

To help alleviate fears regarding tuition cost, the University will guarantee that the cost of extra credit hours will be covered by a financial aid package for all students who qualify for such aid.

Moreover, in addition to direct grants, AUB has secured an agreement with several Lebanese banks to offer low-interest loans (at 3%) over a ten-year period to all students, regardless of the major they have chosen, an arrangement that is not available at any other university in the country.

[Fuller tuition information can be viewed at: <http://www.aub.edu.lb/main/Documents/tuition.pdf>]

Second, to sustain our commitment to academic and research excellence, revenues from the new tuition pricing structure will be directed toward several critical purposes: improving campus facilities that are central to teaching and learning; hiring and retaining the best international faculty on a competitive basis; investing in graduate research; and maintaining a low faculty-to-student ratio—all vital hallmarks of a competitive and thriving academic community.

Quite simply, our goal is to both provide the finest education to students who meet our admissions standards while at the same time ensuring that no one who comes from a disadvantaged background is turned away for financial reasons.

Institutional Branding

The University will soon be launching a re-branding campaign that will differentiate AUB in meaningful ways and extend its historic identity well beyond Lebanon. This initiative began over a year ago, when AUB established the Office of Communications, which consolidated and integrated its various communications, marketing, and public relations functions. An institutional self-study was undertaken to identify the defining characteristics of the University. Two consultants from the Olayan School of Business conducted a series of focus groups across multiple constituents, including students, faculty, senior officers of the University, alumni and major employers of our graduates. A number of themes and strengths emerged which position the institution well vis-à-vis regional alternatives. The branding campaign will focus on promoting specific messages that reinforce our leadership position in higher education and medical practice throughout the region.

All of our communications and branding will reinforce these campaign messages. A new visual identity system for AUB will be unveiled shortly, including a redesigned logo and university seal. You may have noticed our newly reconfigured and redesigned website. Along with enhanced social media applications, it will bring a more coherent look and feel to our increasingly important web and on-line communications. We will also project our official colors of red and white more consistently across the University, extending even to newly designed uniforms for our athletic teams.

New Cafeteria

The University continues to invest in new facilities for its students. Perhaps one of the most anticipated events so far this year has been the opening of the new cafeteria in Ada Dodge Hall. Following an extensive renovation, the layout of the cafeteria was transformed into an attractive and comfortable space for eating and socializing, with its mezzanine illuminated by three arches looking toward the front entrance. The catering service also offers a new concept to Lebanon, based on a “food court” model that offers a wide variety of options: Italian, Asian, and Lebanese foods are provided, as well as sandwiches, hamburgers, and a plat du jour option. The facility is also greatly improved in terms of new climate-control equipment, acoustics, and fire safety measures that conform to American standards.

After the first week of operation, Ada Dodge looks well on track to recapture its status as a central student venue on campus. We are planning more upgrades that will add to its desirability, such as an independent coffee shop run by Caribou, which will reclaim a prime space (formerly kitchens) overlooking the courtyard in front of Ada Dodge Hall and the Main Gate plaza. Also coming soon is new furniture for the outside eating area and a revamped faculty lounge on the floor above, which will provide a much-needed space for our faculty members to enjoy lunch and collegial conversations.

And Looking Forward...

In line with our commitment to be a good neighbor, we are happy to have the chance to help out our long-time friends at International College, an institution that will soon be celebrating a

groundbreaking ceremony for its new elementary school. Because this project will entail the temporary loss of athletic facilities, AUB has agreed to share our gym and track for IC classes and teams, balancing our own needs with theirs. You will doubtless see more of these young people from IC on the AUB campus, as the school continues with its renovations next door.

We are also moving forward this year with important new academic facilities, made possible by generous philanthropic support. These include the construction of the Issam Fares Institute on upper campus and the Irani-Oxy Engineering Complex on lower campus. Another major project you will be hearing much more about is *AUBMC 2020*: an ambitious new vision for the Medical Center. Since July 2009, VP and Medical Dean Dr. Mohamed Sayegh and his team have led a sweeping initiative that is revolutionizing patient services, medical education, and research at the Medical Center.

There is much more news to share with you. Other topics that I plan to expand on in the next message include: a shift in our fiscal year, accompanied by improvements in our budget process and cost efficiencies; new hires among the senior administration; and issues of academic governance.

These achievements are only possible because of the extraordinary commitment by all of you to AUB, for which I express my continued appreciation. I hope that you will have a productive and satisfying fall semester, and I extend best wishes from the President's Office.

Peter Dorman
President