

March 2011

Letter to the Community from Peter Dorman

Our spring semester is well underway, and as usual there is a great deal happening on campus. I would like to share with you a few especially significant and timely developments.

New Financial Aid Loan Programs for Students

As you know, AUB has long been committed to attracting talented students, regardless of their background or financial circumstances. To ensure that all students have the support that they need to pursue their studies, we are increasing financial aid to those who need it most and improving our scrutiny of how that aid is awarded. Also, for the first time in AUB's history, students across all six faculties, regardless of their major, will be able to apply for bank loans to supplement direct financial aid grants.

On March 4th, we signed landmark agreements on a student loan program with Blom Bank and Fransabank. Additional agreements are being negotiated with other banks in Beirut. These new loans are advantageous in a number of ways: the interest rate is 3%, the duration of the loan is ten years, the first payments are not due until a year after the student graduates, and free life insurance is included with each loan. Any student may apply once they have been designated as eligible for financial aid by the Admissions Office. Each bank will, of course, independently vet every applicant for a student loan.

AUB is the only university in Lebanon to which banks have extended this remarkable loan offer. This reflects confidence in AUB as an educational institution, and confidence in AUB alumni as productive contributors to society and future leaders in their communities.

Graduate Program Initiatives

Building our graduate and research capacity is another key priority for AUB. Provost Ahmad Dallal and his team have been developing innovative proposals for expanding interdisciplinary research programs, for facilitating graduate research, and for new graduate degree programs.

AUB professors in different departments are already collaborating on closely related subject areas, such as the environment and energy. Modeled on best practice at other research universities, we are creating incentives and an administrative structure that will facilitate exciting collaborations across the university, and will allow students to benefit from cross-disciplinary studies.

In addition, the Provost is formulating policies that will unify the academic and financial aid process for all of the university's graduate programs, which until now, have been handled by our six individual faculties, resulting in notable discrepancies across the campus. These integrated policies improve how we admit and provide financial aid and work opportunities for graduate students.

Budget Processes and a New Fiscal Year

AUB has officially adopted a new fiscal year cycle that ends on June 30th instead of September 30th. This change aligns our annual budget planning with most of our sister institutions in the US. Also, the summer months tend to be the most unpredictable in terms of enrollments on campus and hospital operations. The new cycle will allow us to make fiscal adjustments with more flexibility and achieve balanced budgets by year's end.

Under the leadership of our VP for Finance, Steve Kenney, we are also evaluating how we plan and project our revenues and expenditures. To that end, three committees have been established. Dean Patrick McGreevy is leading a committee which is refining policies that will allow greater flexibility for faculties and departments to plan and control their own budgets. Another led by Deputy Dean Ziyad Ghazzal is re-examining the ways in which we allocate costs across the campus and the medical center. Finally, Dean Iman Nuwayhid and his committee are looking at ways departments can manage costs and operate more efficiently.

Reflections from Washington, DC

Each year I spend at least a week in Washington DC meeting with members of Congress and the administration to advance AUB's interests. These visits also provide a good opportunity to share insights into current developments in Lebanon and the region. As you can imagine, this year, there was considerable interest in Washington about the wider developments taking place across the Middle East.

I also noted a markedly different atmosphere on Capitol Hill. Specifically, Congress is battling to finalize an overdue budget for the current budget year. At the same time, a cohort of newly elected Representatives are determined to fulfill a perceived mandate to slash government spending. An obvious target at times of retrenchment is the annual allocations to foreign aid, which many Americans erroneously believe comprise a significant percentage of the Federal budget. It is through these foreign appropriations that AUB receives its important scholarship funding from USAID, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), and the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) program. We do not wish to see these diminished or eliminated through indiscriminate cutting. The good news is that all of the legislators I spoke to, whether Democrats or Republicans, instinctively understand the long-term value of supporting college-level scholarships at institutions like AUB, which offers an American-style education but remains firmly within the Lebanese cultural milieu.

Many American lawmakers also feel that the democratic uprisings in a number of countries in the MENA region deserve a coherent response in the form of some sort of economic assistance, in order to support more popular representation in the Middle East. There is clearly a rare historic opportunity for the US to give encouragement to popular democratic yearnings. Unfortunately, the effort to identify funds comes at a difficult time. The US administration is constrained by unprecedented budget deficits and an understandable determination to minimize them. The implications on aid to the region are still unknown and we will be following developments as they unfold in the weeks and months ahead. This is a timely opportunity for AUB to share its expertise and insights with constituencies here in Beirut and around the world. We are organizing a panel discussion on transformation in the Middle East in early April, and we are exploring ways to extend AUB's unique perspective more widely internationally.

New Members of the Senior Administration

In recent months, our senior administration has been joined by two new members. They are very welcome additions to our team in Beirut and will lead areas of critical importance to the university.

Richard Brow is our new Vice President for University Advancement, succeeding Steve Jeffrey, who recently retired as Vice President for Development and External Relations. Richard joins us with years of experience at leading universities in the United Kingdom and is operating from Beirut. His presence is vital for leading and integrating communications, alumni relations, and university branding, alongside the urgent and ever-present need to raise funds for university priorities. During the coming months, you will see a roll-out of the new brand campaign which will considerably strengthen AUB's position in an increasingly competitive global environment.

For the first time, AUB has permanent in-house legal counsel, with Peter May as our new Vice President for Legal Affairs. Most recently, Peter was with World Learning in Brattleboro, Vermont, an organization that advocates for international education and social innovation. He has extensive knowledge of legal operations in many countries. Peter's brief at AUB will primarily lie in the areas of human relations, policy review, contract law, and US tax compliance. Issues relating to Lebanese law will continue to be advised by our Beirut firms under Peter's direction.

Finally, I would like to wish our students and faculty a productive spring semester. I also look forward to congratulating our graduating students at Commencement and welcoming back our alumni during Class Reunion in July.

With best wishes ,

Peter Dorman
President