

Kuwait Alumni Chapter Gala Dinner
Friday, May 28, 2010 at 8:30 pm

Welcome: etc. It is

Great pleasure for me to address the Kuwait Chapter of WAAAUB and bring you up to date on priorities and goals ahead.

In my inaugural address a year ago, I identified three priorities for AUB that will inform the choices we make as we plan for the future: to achieve a dynamic and diverse student body; to empower faculty with research that creates new knowledge; and to cultivate an intellectual community on campus that thrives on collegial discourse and interdisciplinary innovation. These priorities have evolved into many separate initiatives intended to put AUB at the forefront of higher education in the Middle East:

I'd like to spend a few minutes to bring you up to date on our chief priorities and goals in the coming months and years.

First: student and faculty diversity

The arrival of new leadership on campus this past summer has been wonderfully invigorating. Provost Ahmad Dallal has focused his efforts on several issues that lie at the heart of our institutional vitality. One initiative involves the establishment of an Office of International Programs to address AUB's desire to attract excellent undergraduate and graduate students and to recruit excellent faculty, including visiting professors. International students and scholars bring a breadth of experience and diversity of academic and cultural perspectives.

Second: scholarship aid

You will all recognize the value of students having the freedom to mingle with peers who embrace different perspectives than your own—this is the heart of any great academic community, and the beginning of any meaningful debate. Toward this end, we are continuing to build our financial aid program to attract a wide range of students that would otherwise be unable to attend AUB. We are launching a two-year fundraising campaign to raise \$20 million for scholarships. Combined with the \$5 million we have already received, we are looking at a grand total of \$25 million for financial aid. We are also working with local banks and other institutions to make student loans broadly available to AUB students at very low rates of interest.

Third: our great medical center

To put it simply, AUB deserves a new hospital that will match our aspirations and the great human resources we already have. Our new Dean and Vice President of Medical Affairs, Mohamed Sayegh, is pursuing plans for a cutting-edge hospital facility, including revising the multi-year master plan for the Medical Center. Reaching out to the community, we will be embarking on collaborative agreements with sister hospitals and considering the establishment of satellite clinics around Lebanon. A recent memorandum of understanding with Clemenceau Medical Center brings with it greatly improved admittance and teaching opportunities for our medical faculty.

Fourth: the use of technology

This is also a time to rethink how we do things at the university and how they can be done better. An important part of this is the newly created position of Vice President for Information Technology. The goal is to centralize ownership of IT operations across campus and the medical center; to support the many vital systems we depend on, and to find innovative solutions to current technological challenges. After an intensive, international search, I am pleased to announce that Rita Khayat-Toubia will join AUB this June as its first VPIT/Chief Information Officer. She will bring a comprehensive,

carefully implemented approach to information technology at the University that will benefit everyone in our community, including faculty, staff, students, patients at AUBMC, and our alumni around the world.

Fifth: physical expansion on campus

Let me say this plainly: AUB has the best faculty and medical staff in the Middle East, and they need the best physical spaces in with to teach and heal the sick. In December, the Olayan School of Business was dedicated in a splendid and memorable evening in the presence of over 400 guests, including Lebanon's current Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora, several deans and former deans of American business schools, and the indomitable Olayan family. I hope that future academic buildings on our campus will be inaugurated with similar unforgettable ceremony. Even now, construction continues on the impressive Irani Oxy Engineering Complex as well as the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, a building designed by Zaha Hadid, one of our own successful and innovative architecture graduates.

Finally: partnerships with other institutions

Last fall I had the privilege to attend the opening of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, a new graduate university on the shores of the Red Sea devoted to finding technological solutions to urgent challenges that have local, regional, and global resonance, including water resources, alternative energy, sustainable food production, and climate change. These are challenges which concern us all, and our best chance of realizing real progress is through the collaboration of scholars from around the world. AUB has much to contribute in these areas – from students, graduates, and faculty members – as well as through groups like the Issam Fares Institute in making connections between academics, policy-makers, and public and private institutions. If higher education is to be considered as preparation for the world beyond campus walls, then universities cannot ignore the realities that lie beyond their ivy-covered precincts.

In conclusion, I hope I have given you a flavor of what is taking place at AUB today and the goals that we aspire to reach. As I near the conclusion of my second year as president of AUB, I am ever more appreciative of the many support structures in place to help me pursue the objectives outlined here. Alumni are one of the most important assets of any university and we are proud of the dynamic relationship we have with our graduates.

The Kuwait alumni chapter has continued to distinguish itself through outstanding support of our mission, with a superb track record of fundraising and outreach activities. AUB is working with its worldwide alumni association toward engaging our alumni in advancing and supporting the University's mission. This chapter is a shining example of what can be accomplished with alumni that are motivated and committed to supporting their alma mater. I encourage all of you to stay in touch with AUB through your local alumni chapter and WAAAUB.

I want to thank all of you for your tremendous support, with special appreciation to the chapter leadership including President Mr. Faisal Mutawaa and his Committee members: Maha Abbas, Yasmine Saadi, Zein Kabara, Shorouq Al Khatib, Awatef Al-Shemmeri, Lina Dalloul and Kamal Al-Zein. I look forward to working with all of you toward our common goal of upholding the grand traditions of AUB and endeavoring—always—to make it even greater.