

Class Reunion 2006
State of the University

I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to you about the state of the university—and to be able to report that AUB is doing pretty well these days.

We are entering the final months of a very successful \$140 million five-year campaign—a campaign that has attracted unprecedented levels of support from our alumni and that will help to secure the long-term financial health of AUB. Every gift that is made in support of this campaign is important. One of the most gratifying parts of this whole experience has been the number of people who have been prompted to make a gift to AUB for the first time. We hope very much that this will become a habit—one that they won't break!

There are a number of building projects taking place at the moment at the University. There are simply too many for me to name them all, but if you had the chance to walk around campus you will have seen many of them for yourselves: the Charles W. Hostler Student Center, the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business, the Irani/Oxy Engineering Complex, the CCC Scientific Research Building—the list goes on and on. We are also renovating a number of existing buildings: the Pierre Y. Aboukhater (Fahed) Building, the School of Nursing, the Abu-Haidar Neurology and Behavioral Science Center for example. Almost exactly a month ago, we celebrated the inauguration of the renovated AUB Archeological Museum. I urge you to stop by the museum if you have not already done so. It looks spectacular!

In addition to these capital projects, we have launched new academic programs and established several new centers and institutes in recent years—I n American Studies, in Public Policy and International Affairs, in Neuroscience. Here too, the list is pretty long. One of the more significant developments in this area has not taken place yet—but we hope that it will soon: the reintroduction of the PhD programs. This is an enormous—and an expensive—undertaking, so we are moving slowly. In fall 2007, we hope to welcome our first PhD students in many years in the Arabic Language and Literature, Arab and Middle Eastern History, Theoretical Physics, Cell and Molecular Biology, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Civil & Environmental Engineering.

The heart of a great university is its faculty. Faculty quality is the starting point. If it is not the high quality of students will not be high and the quality of research will not be high. I am confident that the quality of AUB's faculty today is higher than at any time in its history. We have the equivalent of 600 full time faculty members. That number has grown by over 25% in the last five years. The energy of all this new blood combined with the wisdom and experience of the older faculty—I think of people like George Ayyoub, Raja Tannous, and Nasri Kawar, members of the class of 56—equates to a faculty that is up to date, research oriented and capable of performing well in the classroom. Our faculty and research orientation is our competitive edge; because of it we attract the highest quality students in the region.

When we launched our fundraising campaign four years ago, the single largest component was financial aid. I believe that financial aid will—and should—remain a priority for AUB even after we conclude this campaign. It is so important that we be able to offer “the best and the brightest” from the region the opportunity to attend AUB. I have said it many times before and I will say it again here. When these men and women come to AUB, they strengthen the University and enrich the educational experience of all our students. A diverse student body should lead to diversity of opinions and a livelier exchange in the classroom. It also supports our efforts to promote an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for others among all of our students.

We are delighted that so many of you have chosen to participate in this year’s Class Reunion activities. One of the great strengths of this institution is its alumni—people like you. We need your financial support. We also need your ideas and your suggestions. We are in the process of establishing a single worldwide alumni association that will make it easier for you to stay in touch with each other—and with your alma mater. We have also established an on-line community—a way to stay in touch using the Internet. I urge you to get involved with your local alumni branch or chapter and with AUB.

Thank you.