American University of Beirut

Founders’ Day 2008

December 1, 2008

By

President Peter Dorman
Distinguished guests, faculty, students, and staff: I am delighted to be able to welcome you all to this celebration of Founders’ Day, the annual event at AUB that celebrates the birth of our institution in Beirut in 1866. Just as importantly, Founders’ Day also commemorates the earliest establishment of an American model of education in what was then just a province of the Ottoman empire. This is a model of education that is now greatly in demand across every region of the Middle East. The founders of this university would have been enormously gratified, and perhaps not a little astonished.

Before we begin these proceedings, let me extend a word of congratulations to our students, for having concluded their annual elections in a manner worthy of the democratic system. Their candidates were supported with passion and with conviction, and their positions argued noisily and even raucously—as I could hear from my office and from Marquand House: but the electioneering and voting were conducted with due respect for the rights of all to make their voices heard. I trust this year will serve as a model for future elections and, again, I applaud our students for their conduct and their commitment.

As you all know, on the occasion of Founders’ Day, students are invited to contribute essays on a particular topic, and the theme for this year is as follows:

“Each generation of the university’s leaders has faced the question: What from AUB’s past should be preserved or revived, and what needs to change? What advice would you give new President Peter Dorman in this regard?”

As you can imagine, I’ve been personally interested in the hearing the responses to this question. This year for the first time there are three prizes to be awarded, for the three papers judged to be of highest quality. My thanks go especially to the faculty committee who were asked to select the winning submissions: Dr. Patrick McGreevy, Prof. of History and Archeology and Director of Center for American Studies and Research, who chaired the committee, Dr. Mona Harb, Professor of Architecture and Graphic Design; and Dr. Richard Smith, Professor of Social and Behavioral Studies. Let me also extend my personal thanks to all of the students who took the time to write an essay on this theme.

The third prize in this year’s essay contest goes to Zakaria El-Mir, from FEA, a fourth-year student in Civil Engineering.

Second prize has been awarded to Hind Hobeika, also from FEA, a third-year student in Mechanical Engineering.

The first prize winner is Paul Ramia, form FAS, presently a junior in Biology.

I am delighted to introduce Mr. Ramia, who will read his essay.

Introducing Professor Huda Zurayk
It is a distinct pleasure for me to introduce the main speaker for Founder’s Day 2008. Dr. Huda Zurayk is herself an alumna of AUB, having earned her Bachelor of Arts in Statistics, then going on to receive her master’s degree in the same subject a year later from Harvard University. Her PhD in Biostatistics was conferred by the Johns Hopkins University in 1974, and she has spent most of her academic career since then at AUB in the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS). From 1987-89, she was given research leave to participate in work of the population Council at their Cairo Office, and has also been active as a visiting researcher at Johns Hopkins and Georgetown Universities. Her lifetime scholarly work has been focused on the important issues of population policy and women’s reproductive health, including regional case studies as well as broader considerations of family planning; the effect of education and urbanization on fertility; infant mortality and breast-feeding; the economic empowerment of women; and methodological studies for field researchers. Her contributions to the field of health sciences have been necessarily curtailed by her ten years of sterling service as Dean of FHS, from 1998 to the present year, an administrative task she has concluded with brilliance and to the acclaim of her faculty. While we are sorry to lose her as a dean, we know she will be returning to the research she loves, and which she has postponed for the good of this university. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Zurayk, who will speak on the topic, “Living and Working Abundantly.”