American University of Beirut

Founders’ Day 2008 – Third Place Winning Student Essay

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By

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(Fourth Year, Civil Engineering)
Dear Dr. Dorman,

First, I would like to congratulate you. You have joined one of the most, if not the most, academically and culturally vibrant institutions in the region.

As a Lebanese who had not lived in Lebanon before, and as an AUBite for the fifth and last year, I would like to entrust you with the vision I have of what has become my second home. I grew an attachment to the AUB "way of life", to both the exceptional campus and the rich student life it offers us. In the same token, I would like to make my contribution in maintaining AUB's charm and further embellishing it.

The multi-cultural aspect of this university is an asset for both its students and its surroundings. With people coming from more than 100 different countries, the exposure to their varying traditions, values and perspectives builds up our people-skills. This is compulsory for becoming successful in professional life and leading a healthy social and personal life. We learn how to deal, communicate and work with people from different backgrounds and ways of thinking. Added to course work, AUB offers multiple opportunities for group work through its numerous clubs, student associations, and faculty societies which enhance socialization between AUBites. The frequent events that take place on campus furthermore highlight this multi-cultural atmosphere so specific to AUB in comparison with other institutions in the region. Choirs, concerts, lectures and plays, to state some of the events that act as social and cultural catalyst, are an inherent component of the AUB experience that I consider essential to be preserved and further encouraged. Insisting on this side of the cultural expressions manifest on campus would also help abate the political and sectarian tensions sometimes noticeable. Unfortunately, the divisions in the Lebanese nation are also reflected in AUB and are especially obvious during SRC and USFC elections.

As for the academic aspect, it is a well known fact that AUB is a regional leader, with highly qualified faculty at its head. We are proud to be part of such a top institution; however, there is a growing competition gradually emerging in the Middle East with several highly reputed universities opening branches in the region such as Michigan State University in Dubai and the Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. This should act as a motivation to push AUB’s academic performance beyond its current accomplishments. Both faculty and students should be enticed to engage in a healthy competitive atmosphere and help AUB maintain its leading position. As part of rendering its pursuit of academic excellence more dynamic, I think it is important to further involve students in faculty research. Indeed, the AUB staff has a competitive advantage that we are not benefiting from as much as we could. Most professors are leading their own research projects and are required to issue regular publications. As it is, AUBites and especially undergraduates are not offered the opportunity of participating in these projects thus preventing them from gaining very valuable experience. Introducing undergraduates to faculty research and allowing them to be part of it would increase the human resources at hand for the professors on the one hand and would improve the training and educational transmission to students on the other. AUB, being the leader it is, could also act as a local pioneer in educational collaboration between the various faculties within our universities as well as with other institutions in Lebanon. Very few joint projects have been put together which gather teams from different majors in AUB, let alone from other academic or professional organizations. For example, students in agriculture could work with environmental engineers and environmental health students to critically assess a case study of local agriculture and try to find a solution. Economic students could work with anthropology and social science students...
and local NGOs to do the same. Many such suggestions can be made and I sincerely believe that
AUB can assume the responsibility of this initiative and owes it to itself. Universities are not
only a place for educational training but are also important players in finding solutions for the
problems that affect their surroundings. Our university has done more than most others in this
field in the Middle East but it still has much more to give.

Now I come to the most superficial but probably the most appreciated aspect of AUB: its
campus. It has conserved a traditional style of architecture for the most part. The choice of the
new buildings has been made so as to add a modern touch to the campus while still respecting
and melting into its old one. Being the greenest area in Beirut, it is an important stopping point
for migrating birds passing by here. It is very well maintained, be it in cleanliness, having its
own electricity generator or its colorful and rich fauna. The whole exemplifies AUB’s charm.
Nevertheless what I do see wanting is better equipment in several AUB buildings such as Nicely
Hall, the engineering library, amongst others. The university has allocated much of its budget
for the new buildings and for upgrading the existing facilities to be able to provide a convenient
setting for PhD programs. It is not easy and might not be a priority at the moment but I know
classes to be the place of educational upbringing and would like to see AUB living up to its own
standards by improving on these minor details.

I have shared with you the different points that constitute my vision of AUB, both the good
and the ones I think need improvement, and that is only based on the saying so true in this case,
“sharing is caring”.

I heartily congratulate you again for becoming our President and wish you a lovely and
pleasant leadership,

Sincerely,

Candidate THIRTEEN