A Better Life

By

Paul Ramia

(Junior, Biology Major)
A Better Life

What is there to change in an academic institution that has for over a century played a vital role in the development of Lebanon and the region as a whole? The answer to that question is simpler than most people realize. In one word, the answer is “everything”. Everything needs to change. What good are the accomplishments of our forefathers if we cannot reproduce those accomplishments and reap their benefits today? The past means nothing without the present.

There can be no doubt that the American University of Beirut has changed the Middle East for the better by providing not only an outstanding education but also a model for democracy. It is this combination of academic superiority and value for an individual’s basic right to freedom that has attracted thousands of young men and women to become members of the AUB community. What those thousands of young men and women of different backgrounds had in common was the dream that someday they could make a difference. AUB to them was the gateway through which they needed to pass in order to change the world in whatever way they knew best. However, these present times hold far bigger challenges than those of years past and the university is no longer that catalyst of change. How can AUB justify the claim that it is a centre for a better “more abundant” life when it no longer dares to address the issues that matter? Right across the street our sea is polluted to a nauseating degree and yet we do nothing. Right across another street, we see starved children begging for money that in all likelihood is later forcefully taken from them and yet we do nothing. Where are the values that Daniel Bliss built this university upon? Surely more should be done to insure that we live in a world of decency and righteousness. The American University of Beirut was not built to be an isolated scholarly island; it was built to abolish the concept of isolation and to bring the people closer together as a community. Furthermore, AUB’s reputation ensures that when the AUB community speaks, the world listens. Keeping that in mind, more should be done when it comes to raising awareness about topics that can improve the lives of many. Such topics include but are definitely not limited to improving economic policies and regional politics. Also public health awareness and basic woman rights deserve special mention since addressing them should be a university and indeed a national priority.

On an intra university level, the challenges we face are just as numerous. Our greatest challenge is to expel the partisan politics that divide our country, from our student elections and even from our very campus. Too long has the university kept quiet about the highly polarized and tense atmosphere that accompanies the election period and distracts the students from voting for the candidate whose allegiance is to the university and not to an external political party. The second challenge we face is the task of developing a fixed and fair financial aid system that allows all students the opportunity to decrease their tuition fees based on their academic and even athletic achievements. The third challenge to be addressed is the course registration system. AUB students deserve to register in whatever course they are eligible for without having to compete with their fellow students over the seats available in that class. Simply, it isn’t fair that students have to go around asking professors and other members of staff to increase capacity
for classes they choose and sometimes even need to be in. The system is flawed and needs to be replaced. Lastly, it is incomprehensible that other universities offer their students transportation to and from the university and yet here at the prestigious American University of Beirut, such a service is unheard of.

In conclusion, my advice to President Dorman is to remember the accomplishments of the past by addressing the challenges of today. Much work needs to be done but here at the American University of Beirut we know that no obstacle is big enough to stop us from reaching our goal of making this world a better place where we can have life and indeed have it more abundantly.