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CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
NEWSLETTER

Editorial

Building a Digitally Accessible Higher Education Ecosystem

Yousif Asfour, Chief Information Officer, AUB

Imagine a blind student attending a presentation, a deaf student participating in a debate, an autistic student learning how to program, or an amputee building a rocket prototype.

At digitally accessible universities, you do not have to imagine this because these universities use technology to create an inclusive environment that caters for all students, regardless of their abilities. Instead of creating separate environments for students with special needs, these universities use technology to integrate students with special needs into their regular programs.

As technology has become more pervasive in every aspect of education, Digital Accessibility and Assistive Technology have begun to play a critical role in adapting our environment to guarantee inclusive education. While Assistive Technology helps students integrate better into the physical environment, Digital Accessibility adapts our learning and "digital environment" to provide better access to students with special needs.

Digital Accessibility is not just about technology; it is about designing content that is accessible by everyone. This means that whenever you write an email, create a presentation, post a video or build a website, you should think about how to make your content accessible. The good news is that it takes very little effort to make your content Digitally Accessible. For example, do not use bright contrasting colors in your presentation when addressing autistic students, rather use images and diagrams to support text when presenting to students with dyslexia, give students with anxiety enough time to finish their exams, and use sub-titles when showing videos to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Check out https://ukhomeoffice.github.io/accessibility-posters for a more complete list of guidelines.

The starting point for implementing Digital Accessibility at any institution is an audit of all students facing systems and digital content to identity gaps. It is always a good idea to engage an expert and to solicit the input from faculty, staff, students and parents. The audit should include the online-learning environment, institutional websites, student information systems, learning management systems (LMS), support services applications, survey tools, career services, and email.

An institution does not have to update all content and systems. To create an inclusive environment, it is important to focus on the critical content and systems first. Content that all students must access is a good place to start. For example, start with updating the registration and financial aid sites. Focus on updating the content of "core courses" that most of the students need to attend and make sure that the faculty teaching these courses follow accessible content guidelines.

It is also important to provide assistive technology in high traffic areas where students congregate. For example, an institution should provide accessible computer stations at the libraries, computer labs, and key public places. Such computer stations should be equipped with large screens, text readers, and alternative data entry and pointing devices. It is important to ensure that students with special needs can physically get to these stations.

Digital Accessibility also requires updating some of the core business processes. For example, an institution must integrate accessibility requirements into their procurement process by letting vendors know their accessibility standards and asking them questions about which standards they meet. It is also important to embed accessibility guidelines into the IT service delivery to ensure that systems support the institutional accessibility

standards. An institution must also revisit its critical redefining and automating workflows to ensure accessibility for students with special needs.

Creating a sustainable inclusive environment also requires embedding Digital Accessibility into the culture of the institution. Seminars, town hall meetings and public sessions targeting candidates, students, faculty and staff are a good starting point for building such awareness. But, that is not enough. Professional development programs need to be developed in order to provide faculty and staff with the appropriate pedagogical skills to teach everyone equally and the right soft skills to interact with students with special needs. Faculty and staff also need to acquire specialized skills to support assistive technology, and to incorporate digital accessibility into their course material.

It is also important to set up a cross functional advisory group consisting of faculty, students, staff and IT representatives to oversee accessibility initiatives, monitor the critical success metrics (KPIs) and perform regular audits.

A Digital Accessibility coordinator with leadership experience in accessibility, technology and change management must also be appointed to coordinate efforts across the institution.

Creating a Digitally Accessible Higher Education environment requires upgrading student electronic services and content, creating specialized platforms, availing Assistive Technologies to users, and ensuring physical access to services. Although the effort requires investment in technology, it is about community engagement, and building a culture of inclusion.

AUB launched the ABLE (Accessibility for a Bolder Learning Experience) initiative in April 2019 to integrate students with disabilities into its academic programs and to help other Lebanese institutions do the same. Although it is hard to achieve, it is not impossible. AUB chose to launch ABLE not because it is the law, but because it is the right and smart thing to do. After all, "special needs or not, equal access is everyone's right".



Teaching Excellence Award

Safa Jafari Safa, Office of Communications, AUB

In its annual honoring of its educators who excel in their mission, AUB presented this year's Teaching Excellence Award to Dr. Joseph Costantine and Dr. Bilal Orfali. A university-level celebration was attended by President Fadlo Khuri, Provost Muhamad Harajli, FAS Dean Nadia El Cheikh, MSFEA Dean Alan Shihadeh, as well as colleagues and students of both professors.

The two faculty members were selected among nominees by the Teaching Excellence Award Committee, based on nominations and recommendations sent by their colleagues and their current and former students.

"It gives me a great pleasure to introduce two excellent educators and mentors," said Provost Harajli who introduced both professors before the awards were presented. "In celebrating the awardees, we celebrate the remarkable efforts that AUB faculty have been making to excel in teaching students."

Dr. Bilal Orfali is associate professor at the Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages, Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS). An AUB and Yale University graduate, Orfali is an expert in Arabic language and literature and the recipient of several awards. He is the editor of seven books and he published two books, 26 articles and book chapters, and 39 conference papers.

Dr. Orfali was commended by his colleagues for "succeeding in distinguishing himself as a teacher and mentor at AUB, inspiring many faculty members and students." Students that have attended some of his courses on Sufi Literature, Readings in Renaissance and Modern Arabic Literature, Arabic Stylistics and Metrics, and Abbasid Poetry, describe his enthusiasm and passion for teaching as matchless. Described as a lifetime mentor for many, he is commended for "his mastery of the presented material" and "his unique care to the wellbeing and development of his students."

Dr. Orfali's care for his students, as for the content he teaches, was emphasized in his speech at the ceremony. "My job is to set the stage for the students and then get out of their way. It is not my stage. It's theirs," said Dr. Orfali. "Harder, and yet far more important than my enthusiasm and passion about my topic is my willingness to care about my students. To truly, genuinely, honestly, care. To believe in their ability to learn, even if they do not … When you believe in your students, magical things happen, they'll stand a little straighter, a little taller and will begin to believe that they can do it, and it's an absolute privilege to witness this."

Dr. Costantine is associate professor at the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA), currently co-advising nine master's students and three doctoral students. Since he joined AUB in 2013, he has focused on developing an independent and well-defined research and academic identity, contributed to advancing a new track of entrepreneurship that encourages students to innovate and develop startup concepts as part of their projects, and developed various courses that provided students with the needed knowledge in order to attract them into the field of applied electromagnetics. A graduate of the Lebanese University, AUB, and the University of New Mexico, he is the recipient of several awards and honors and has published two books, 33 journal articles, and 105 conference publications.

With a reputation in the department of being enthusiastic and passionate about the subjects he teaches, Dr. Costantine was commended in his nominations for being the "lively," "fun," and "interactive" professor who "exemplifies the real meaning of professionalism and true mentorship." He was described as "always taking care of his students" and "a professional whose trust in his students and their abilities gave them a push to give all they have."

"I believe there must be a passion that transcends the mechanical act of reciting information, deriving equations or transferring pure facts," said Dr. Costantine. "I must be an advocate for the material being taught and must entice in students a similar excitement. In fact, there is nothing that makes me feel more satisfied, excited, and deeply motivated than witnessing students who search to expand their horizons and flock into working hard on interesting topics in my area of research... This inspiration drives me to always be better, do more, and innovate new methods of societal impact."

Teaching Excellence Award Speech

Bilal Orfali, Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages, AUB

It is truly humbling to accept this award. Preparing for this speech, I found myself reflecting on my work and my students, things that often remain unsaid amidst the bustle of daily life in the university.

Students come to us, Arabic teachers, armed with various ideological presumptions about the Arabic language, literature, and culture, and worse, they stereotype us picturing us as though we have emerged from the Stone Age, resisting change, and speaking in words that mean one thing, it's opposite, and another related to camels. I personally do not feel concerned about these stereotypes, and I plead guilty when it comes to fascinations and obsessions with things past. I have no aspiration to "simplify" or "revive" or "revise" the language. I do feel, however, that I have something to offer. The 8th century ascetic, zāhid, Sufyan al-Thawri once said: "The beginning of worship is silence. Then follows the pursuit of knowledge, then acting upon that knowledge, then recording it, and finally spreading it."

My goal in teaching is simple: to help students engage in Arabic literature as a rich tradition that was weaved out of encounters with many other world traditions, inspired various classical and modern artistic trends, and resonates with basic humanistic questions and concerns. It is my goal to show that Imru'u l-Qays, Abu Nuwas, and Mutanabbi have meaning and purpose for the life of an engineering student as they do for the life of an English literature student; where the study and practice of poetry can reshape the lives of future programmers and investment bankers; and where the love of learning is a value because it leads us to the very center of our humanity.

I suppose I was a good teacher, not because of scores and numbers, but perhaps because students often stayed in touch years after they graduated. This, however, is the norm at AUB. Like many in this room, I am passionate about teaching. When I come across humps in my administrative duties and research, I immerse myself in my teaching. My students know this well: when I am with them, I am myself.

Thinking about it I have learned that how I do it has nothing to do with intelligence, talent or hard work -- although all of these are essential for good teaching. Instead, what made students enjoy my classes is my willingness to care -- about the content and about the students. My job is to set the stage for the students and then get out of their way. It is not my stage. It's theirs. As one Sufi allegory proposes, "They are like flower buds that will blossom in their own fashion."

I care about the field of Arabic and Islamic studies, and I have pledged to dedicate my life to it. Today, I renew this pledge. But, harder, and yet far more important than my enthusiasm and passion about my topic is my willingness to care about my students. To truly, genuinely, honestly, care. To believe in their ability to learn, even if they do not. I hear on campus stories about the millennial generation. How they don't read, are always checking their phones, and are ironically "disconnected". These stereotypes are untrue and damaging. My students are brilliant, caring, engaged, and thoughtful; they have interests and passions. And I would be doing them serious damage if I believed otherwise. Think about a time when someone you respected cared about you and believed in you?

I recall here Michelangelo's famous statue, David. People asked Michelangelo how he created something as incredible as David from a block that was discarded by other sculptors. He replied, "I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free." There is a David in each and every student of ours. When you believe in your students, magical things happen; they'll stand a little straighter, a little taller and will begin to believe that they can do it, and it is an absolute privilege to witness this.

من لم يشكر الناس لم يشكر الله . If I am a good teacher, it's because I had good teachers. I am forever grateful for all the teachers, the master poets and writers of Arabic literature and the textual tradition, in addition to my living mentors, who, whether they realized it or not, have profoundly shaped the person I am. I am thankful for all those who believed in me and saw something meaningful when I couldn't see it myself. And so, I say thank you to my parents, my teachers at AUB and Yale University, beloved friends, colleagues at AUB, Dean Cheikh who is included in all previous categories, dear students and colleagues in my Department who nominated me for this prize, and to those who may never know the ways in which they have touched me. I am grateful to you all. This award is not mine - it is ours. Thank you.

Teaching Excellence Award Speech

Joseph Costantine, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, AUB

First of all, I am very honored and humbled by this award. I am very grateful to CTL, Prof. BouJaoude, Prof. BouZeineddine, Ms. Husseini, the committee who evaluated the files, and the Provost's and the President's offices. I am also very grateful to all the students who nominated me, and I tell them that this award is shared with you. My biggest accomplishments and honor are your success.

I am very passionate about teaching within my area of expertise, which is electromagnetism. I started and continue my career as a professor with the determination to show the students the reasons that attracted me to this area of expertise, and transfer to them my enthusiasm and care about this field.

I believe there must be a passion that transcends the mechanical act of reciting information, deriving equations or transferring pure facts. I must be an advocate for the material being taught and must entice students in a similar excitement.

In fact, there is nothing that makes me feel more satisfied, excited and deeply motivated than witnessing students who search to expand their horizons and flock into working hard on interesting topics in my area of research.

I want to say that I am very proud to be a member of the ECE department. I am also very proud to be a faculty member at MSFEA under this incredible Dean Shihadeh.

I am privileged to be part of this AUB family with its outstanding faculty and devoted staff. This family inspires me every day, especially those whom I call "My adopted mentors", my colleagues and friends. I am also inspired by my family at home who are all educators (parents, brothers, uncles, aunts, cousins). This inspiration drives me to always be better, do more, and innovate new methods of societal impact.

I end with the words of Gibran Khalil Gibran: "The teacher, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness." I have faith in AUB, and I love you all

Thank you so much.





SoTL Grant Research

A total of 20 Balint seminars were delivered. On average, residents attended 6 sessions with standard deviation (SD) of 2. Using paired t-test to compare post and pre-total Emotional Intelligence (EI) scores, there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores [mean difference post-pre= -0.6±9.7, p value=0.738]. Gender was the most important predictor of the difference between pre-and post-total EI scores (females are the reference,β=-8.403, p=0.007) as well as understanding emotions baseline score (β=-0.263, p=0.003). A significant proportion of residents (22.2%-29.6%) showed severe burnout levels on at least one of the three domains of burnout at baseline; however, Balint seminars did not have any effect on any of the burnout domains. Results showed that Balint seminars may play an important role in improving emotional intelligence among residents, especially female residents; however, more studies are needed to explore this link. The study suggests that implementation of Balint seminars should ensure proper attendance for better outcomes. Further research should be directed to examine the Balint process and how it can be modified to align with different learning styles of residents. Furthermore, burnout is a complex syndrome that may require multidimensional interventions that can include Balint seminars.

Effect of Balint Seminars on Emotional Intelligence and Burnout among Medical Residents

Imad Bou Akl (Department of Internal Medicine, AUB), Jumana Antoun (Department of Family Medicine, AUB), Maya Romani (Department of Family Medicine), Pierre Bou Khalil (Department of Internal Medicine, AUB), Zeina Halabi

Balint seminars are educational activities used in residency programs to help physicians become aware of their blind spots during their interactions with patients and to use their feelings and responses to patients as tools to better understand the physician-patient relationship. It is a form of longitudinal experiential learning of regular group discussions that occur over 1-2 years. However, their efficacy on measurable outcomes is sporadic and controversial. The discussions in Balint seminars deal with perceiving and understanding emotions of the participants.

This study measured the effect of Balint seminars on the emotional intelligence and burnout of internal medicine residents at the American University of Beirut. The study used a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design and involved 27 internal medicine residents. It evaluated the effect of bi-weekly Balint seminars on emotional intelligence using Mayer Salovey and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). Moreover, it evaluated the burnout level by using Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

A total of 20 Balint seminars were delivered. On average, residents attended 6 sessions with standard deviation (SD) of 2. Using paired t-test to compare post and pre-total Emotional Intelligence (EI) scores, there was no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores [mean difference post-pre= -0.6±9.7, p value=0.738]. Gender was the most important predictor of the difference between pre-and post-total EI scores (females are the reference,β=-8.403, p=0.007) as well as understanding emotions baseline score (β=-0.263, p=0.003). A significant proportion of residents (22.2%-29.6%) showed severe burnout levels on at least one of the three domains of burnout at baseline; however, Balint seminars did not have any effect on any of the burnout domains. Results showed that Balint seminars may play an important role in improving emotional intelligence among residents, especially female residents; however, more studies are needed to explore this link. The study suggests that implementation of Balint seminars should ensure proper attendance for better outcomes. Further research should be directed to examine the Balint process and how it can be modified to align with different learning styles of residents. Furthermore, burnout is a complex syndrome that may require multidimensional interventions that can include Balint seminars.

Research on Plagiarism Policies in a Sample of Universities and Schools in Lebanon

Zane Siraj Sinno, Malaki Khoury, Department of English, AUB

Plagiarism has been causing angst among faculty and administrators who believe it has become endemic, especially because of its confusing, multifaceted understandings and with easy access to online texts. Active steps have been taken in academia to prevent plagiarism, including instruction in what it is and how to avoid it, honor contracts, establishment of strict no tolerance policies and the use of plagiarism detection software, but none have entirely solved the problem (Youmans, 2011), and students continue to plagiarize for reasons we can only postulate.

Even though a clear instituted understanding of plagiarism is essential, Howard (2000) posits that the definitions of plagiarism are 'unwieldy, unstable and insidious' (448), ranging from highly traditional, stringent definitions to developing-writer-supportive ones. Most universities, including AUB, focus on the punitive approach (Zwagerman, 2008). Much of the literature focuses on how plagiarism policies, their dissemination, and the belief in their preventing plagiarism, create a culture of fear that goes against the principles of teaching and learning (Zwagerman, 2008) and on how teachers and programs focused on "vigilance in curbing academic dishonesty" create a false binary of "the good student" and "the plagiarist" (2008, p.682). This cultural and ideological disconnect from the system could explain plagiarism, particularly that involving paper services (Ritter, 2005) and indicates an incongruous attitude towards academic versus workplace plagiarism which is taken more seriously (Power, 2009). Other explanations accuse faculty and administrators of being hypocrites (Evering & Moorman, 2012), inconsistent (Lofstrom, et. al, 2015; Pecorari & Petrić, 2014) and passé (Evering & Moorman, 2012; Howard, 2007). The diversity of perspectives towards plagiarism may indicate conflicting underlying assumptions about teaching and learning and problematizes policies on plagiarism in schools and universities in Lebanon, which we studied to deconstruct their assumptions. An investigation of the websites and online catalogues of nine Lebanese universities for plagiarism policies shows that ease of access to plagiarism policies in academic institutions in Lebanon ranges from difficult to highly accessible. Some universities present their policies on all possible platforms, while others present it on one or two quasi hidden resources. Some use a more student centered lexis, while others use an indifferent, detached legal tone. While some place the responsibility on the student, others require faculty to be instructive of plagiarism and more creative in assignments development. An online search of nine public and nine private schools (in process) from different governorates, uncovered the absence of websites, but seven Facebook pages with no plagiarism content. Interviews will be conducted with teachers and administrators of the universities and schools for information on dissemination of and familiarity with plagiarism policies, after which a rhetorical analysis of the policies will be applied. Hopefully, this study under a SoTL grant will draw conclusions that inform our policies and praxis.



EService Learning in Social Marketing Education: is it Worth the Effort? A Report on a CTL-Supported Graduate Course in the Master of Public Health at AUB

Marco Bardus, Assistant professor in Health Promotion and Community Health, FHS, AUB

Over the past three years, I came to realize how service learning (SL), also known as "community engagement", for teaching a practice-based subject such as social marketing may be implemented successfully. Since spring 2016, I have been teaching a social marketing course for Master of Public Health (MPH) students concentrating on Health Promotion and Community Health. This course includes a SL component, whereby students work in close collaboration with a local community organization to develop projects addressing issues relevant to the community. Many students in their final year reflections, mentioned how SL improved their learning experience and allowed them to grasp social marketing concepts better than just studying books and papers. This experience has been incredibly enriching for me as an instructor: I could see how my work can be used to address issues relevant to the local community. While I am a strong advocate of SL, I learned how demanding this course can be for both students and instructors. The students have to find the time to study, prepare for class, and also to meet many times with the community partner outside regular class hours. The instructors need to invest a lot of time in engaging with the community partners beyond the regular contact hours.

So how could we make this learning experience more efficient and meaningful? Some researchers suggested introducing the concept of "e-Service learning", that is, the use of technologies to deliver some instructional and service components so that students can learn more flexibly while finding more time to perform service. Following this idea, in academic year 2017-18, my colleagues (Tamar Kabakian-Khasolian, Mayada Kanj) and I re-designed the social marketing course to include a blended learning component, supported by a CTL Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grant. To test whether blended learning was an effective strategy to increase engagement with the course, we employed a mixed methods quasi-experimental study. Students could choose to enroll either in a blended (face-to-face and online) or in a traditional (face-to-face only) section – due to registration requirements; a randomized controlled experiment was not feasible. The blended component included online lectures and instructor-led discussions on Moodle, which were not used in the traditional section. In both sections, students could use a project management app (Basecamp) and collaborative writing software (Google Docs). We used a formative focus group with previous year's students to validate the content of the blended course. We employed quantitative indicators (e.g. Moodle logs, ICE scores, surveys) and qualitative indicators from summative focus groups to evaluate the impact of the course in terms of student engagement and satisfaction.

A total of 13 female students enrolled in the course (8 in the blended, 5 in the traditional section). Students chose the sections because of time preferences or because of the instructors, not because of the technology. As expected, online activity was significantly higher in the blended section, whereas interaction with the instructors and satisfaction with the course were similar in both sections. Students in the blended section seemed to appreciate SL experience more, as 6 out of 8 explicitly mentioned the importance of SL in teaching social marketing. As the differences between the blended and traditional sections were not significant, some might ask: why should you upgrade a regular course to an e-Service learning? I believe blended learning gives students more flexibility and allows them to find more time to dedicate to SL activities, which is crucial in this type of courses. Technologies are here to stay and allow us to optimize our work and give more time to reflect and focus on essential things such as interacting with the communities we serve.



Can female science advisors help narrow the STEM gender gap?

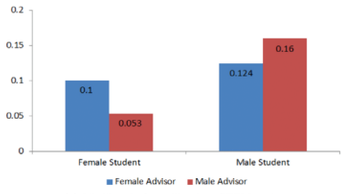
By Serena Canaan, and Pierre Mouganie, of Department Economics, AUB

Women are still largely underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). In 2013, women accounted for 31 percent of U.S. postsecondary graduates in the sciences and merely a quarter of all STEM jobs. This issue has prompted fervent discussions among policymakers and researchers on how to encourage women to pursue careers in STEM. An often-discussed solution is to provide women with close mentoring by female scientists. Indeed, in a 2011 press release by the White House, mentorship was identified as an "important key to increasing and keeping women engaged in scientific and technical careers". This is based on the idea that female scientists can act as role models and counteract negative gender stereotypes that are particularly pervasive in science fields. However, as of yet, there is still no evidence on the role of mentor or advisor gender in reducing the STEM gender gap.

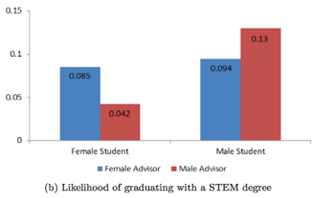
Our research uses rich administrative data from the American University of Beirut to document the impact of advisor gender on women's STEM degree attainment. We exploit the Faculty of Arts and Sciences' unique freshman academic advising system, where undergraduate students are randomly assigned to academic advisors—who are also faculty members—in their first year of college. Random assignment ensures that no other unobservable aspects of student-advisor match are driving the results, enabling us to speak to the causal impact of an advisor's gender on female students' outcomes. An advisor's main role is to provide students with one-on-one mentoring and personalized assistance regarding course and major selection, as well as monitor students' academic progress. Students declare a major at the end of their freshman year, after having had the opportunity to repeatedly interact with their advisors.

Figure 1 summarizes our main results. We find that women who are matched to a female rather than a male science advisor are substantially more likely to enroll in and graduate with a STEM degree. These effects are entirely driven by high ability female students. We further show that the gender of an advisor from a non-science department has no impact on students' major choice. Our results indicate that providing close mentoring or advising by female scientists can play an important role in promoting women's participation and persistence in STEM fields.

Figure 1: Unconditional Means of Student and Science Advisor Gender Match



(a) Likelihood of enrolling in a STEM major



(b) Likelihood of graduating with a STEM degree

Notes: Sample includes all Freshmen students matched to a Science Advisor at AUB for the academic years 2003-2004 to 2013-2014.



Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) Activities

Seminars, Workshops, and Brown Bags: During Fall 2018-2019, CTL conducted the following workshops: Workshop on instructional strategies to promote critical thinking on Sept. 27; Introduction to Institutional Review Board (IRB) for faculty members on Oct. 4; Coffee hour titled 'Special Needs' on Oct. 11; Developing and Assessing Student Learning Outcomes at Course level on Oct. 25; Group Work: from Formation to Assessment on Nov. 8; Interactive Lecturing on Nov. 15; Compiling and Assessing Teaching Portfolios on Dec. 6;. Most of these activities were discussed in a meeting of the CTL Advisory Committee held on October 8, 2018. During Spring 2018-2019, CTL gave a presentation in the New Faculty Orientation on Jan. 19 and three sessions on 'Developing Teaching portfolio for Promotion Purposes' on March 26, April 23, and June 18. Additionally, CTL organized its annual Faculty Seminar on Teaching and Learning Excellence, which included eight sessions held every Tuesday from 5:00 to 7:00 pm between Feb. 27 and April 17, 2019. Each session discussed a different topic. Participants in the Seminar included 21 faculty members and PhD students; other faculty guests were interested in some topics and attended a number of sessions. Most of these activities were discussed in a meeting of the CTL Advisory Committee held on April 15, 2019.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) grants, Year eight of the SoTL grants program was organized and five proposals were supported within the framework of the SoTL initiative managed by CTL. **Annual Conference,** CTL organized its Ninth Annual Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in cooperation with the Office of Information Technology and the Communication Skills Program of the English Department on February 15 & 16. One hundred forty five participants attended the Conference from Universities in Lebanon and other Arab countries. **AUB Teaching Excellence Award,** The Teaching Excellence Award Committee of 2019 voted to present this year's teaching excellence award to Dr. Joseph Costantine, Associate Professor, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA) and Dr. Bilal Orfali, Associate Professor, Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages, Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS). **Individual Consultations,** Individual consultations based on faculty requests were held during the academic year 2018-2019. These consultations covered, course syllabus design, compiling a teaching portfolio, program learning outcomes. **REP Consultations,** CTL gave a series of workshops to Ahfad University for Women in Sudan and Abu Dhabi University and to faculty members of the Continuing Education Center (CEC) of REP. **CTL Self Study,** CTL finalized a self-study report and submitted it to the Provost.



Ninth International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
"Achieving Equity in Higher Education"

Safa Jafari Safa, Office of Communications, AUB

AUB held the Ninth International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Communication Skills Program of the English Department, and the Office of Information Technology at AUB collaborated in organizing the conference, drawing more than 145 participants from universities throughout the region.

This year, the conference focused on the theme of "Achieving equity in higher education" and offered local, regional, and international members of the community of university faculty and researchers in teaching and learning in higher education the opportunity to build professional relationships. The conference presentations focused on five themes: assessment of program and course learning outcomes; community-based learning; e-learning and pedagogy; teaching, learning, and assessment procedures; and writing instruction and research.

Dr. Brenda Jo Brueggemann, professor of English and the Aetna Endowed Chair of Writing at the University of Connecticut, spoke in her keynote speech about minimizing barriers and optimizing access and inclusion in active learning for all students, despite their diverse backgrounds and capabilities, and ways to increase true active, accessible, engaging, and equitable learning and writing in the 21st century. In her demonstration of the principles of the universal design for learning (UDL), she engaged the audience which worked in groups and engaged in providing solutions and suggestions. Brueggemann initiated a disability studies major and minor, and a robust American Sign Language program, at The Ohio State University where she worked for 21 years before recently coming to New England and the University of Connecticut.

The second keynote speech was delivered by Dr. Patrick Fitzgerald, director of the Executive MBA (EMBA) program and senior advisor to the dean of the Olayan School of Business (OSB), with the aim of contributing to the enhancement of higher education through insights regarding technology and innovation to drive good results for the industry and learners. The insights were offered as possible models for higher education leaders to use as mechanisms for benchmarking objectives, approaches, and progress of their universities' digital transformation efforts. With his strategic and operational knowledge of executive education, educational technologies, and higher education, Fitzgerald oversees the EMBA program and assists in increasing the reach of OSB's executive education and related programs, and provides expert advice and support to develop partnerships and grow centers and hubs of excellence at OSB.

"Educational equity is a moving target. Like excellence, it's not something we can ever actually attain, precisely because it is something for which we must continually strive. This is why we must innovate and respond to the evolving needs of society in order to make education affordable to all. And to produce graduates that can drive and succeed," said Provost Mohamed Harajli,

CTL Staff

Director:
Dr. Saouma BouJaoude

Associate Director:
Dr. Amal BouZeineddine

Administrative Officer:
Miss Lamia Husseiny

Mailling Address:
AUB, Ada Dodge Hall, 2nd floor
P.O.Box: 11-0236
1107 2020 Riad Solh
Beirut-Lebanon
Tel: 009611350000
Ext. 3046

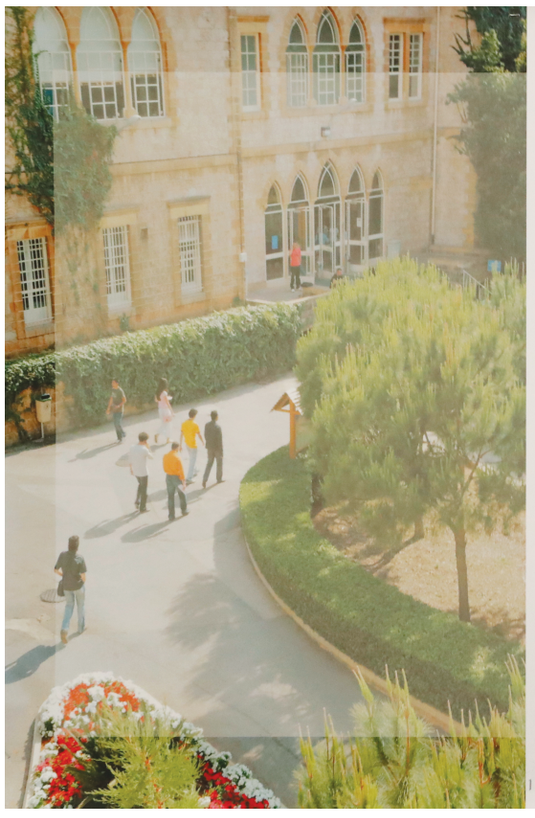
E-mail:
ctl@aub.edu.lb
Website:
http://www.aub.edu.lb/ctl/Pages/index.aspx

who spoke about the numerous initiatives at AUB that focus on equity and diversity, such as the Leadership, Equity, and Diversity (LEAD) initiative to promote diversity and offset inequities in access to transformative education; the University Preparatory Program (UPP) that works to incorporate students in an English language institution; the Accessible Education program that fosters an inclusive university community that welcomes and values people of diverse backgrounds and abilities; and blended and online courses and programs that AUB has started planning in order to increase the accessibility of previously distant groups to its education.

"A broadly diverse student body – a goal that we have been trying very hard to attain – means a richer and even more transformative educational experience for all, students, faculty, and staff," added Harajli.

The two-day conference included four pre-conference workshops, two keynote speeches, 34 presentations, and two poster sessions that were delivered by 50 researchers from universities in Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the US.

"A major aim of this conference is to create an opportunity for people who teach in higher education to talk about their teaching and how they focus on student learning," said Dr. Saouma BouJaoude, director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at AUB and chair of the organizing committee of the conference. "We want people to start thinking about evidence-based teaching. So, rather than coming to the classroom and just lecturing, we look at what students already know and we build on that so that we achieve a more meaningful and sustainable learning, not only for students to do well on tests but so they can use this learning in everyday situations. I think more of these types of activities are needed so that we learn from each other's different experiences."



Upcoming conference

Please mark your calendars for **February 21 & 22, 2020;** the tentative dates of the Tenth Annual Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

For further information please contact the **Center for Teaching and Learning**
Email : ctl@aub.edu.lb