

Beyond the Walls: The American University of Beirut Engages its Communities

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Abstract

The American University of Beirut (AUB), a private institution of higher learning founded in Beirut in 1866, has long espoused a mission of social responsibility. From peace time to periods of conflict, AUB students and faculty have reached out through established organizations and clubs, summer work camps, and other voluntary efforts.

This paper presents the AUB experience in three sections. The first section offers an historical overview of community engagement at AUB using a mix of archival material, published articles and books, and first hand accounts. The second section analyses the difficulties of community engagement within a university context. Although faculties are evaluated on their community service, this assessment rarely influences promotion and contract renewal. The third section presents case studies of three new initiatives at AUB which reaffirm the university's commitment to service: CCECS: The Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service; AREC: Advancing Research, Enabling Communities; and The Neighborhood Initiative. The paper concludes with a reflection on the institutional changes needed within AUB for these young programs to thrive.

...“Graduates will be individuals committed to creative and critical thinking, life-long learning, personal integrity and civic responsibility, and leadership.”

from the AUB Mission Statement

“All academic units, and some administrative units, must build into their missions a commitment to seek ways to benefit the broad communities in which we live.

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It is not enough to provide good education to our students. We must in addition constantly ask ourselves how we can serve our community. The answer to that question will be easier for some units than for others, but all must ask it.”
President John Waterbury, State of the University address 2004, citing community service as one of AUB’s ten strategic goals.

I. Introduction

Institutions of higher education exist to prepare young men and women for useful and productive lives. Some aim even higher: to produce a new generation of thinkers and leaders who will in their professional lives contribute significantly to the development of their countries, and to produce research that expands the realm of the known. Through these actions, institutions of higher education fulfill their social responsibility. This paper employs a wider definition of social responsibility, one that incorporates the notion of service, of working explicitly for the public good, and connecting to the people and the place in which we live and work.

This wider notion of social responsibility is at the heart of three new initiatives at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

- The Center for Civil Engagement and Community Service, located in the office of the Provost of AUB, was founded in spring 2008. The Center aims to develop a culture of service and civic leadership at AUB.
- The Agricultural Research and Education Center (AREC) established in 1953 as the university’s farm. In 2008, the AUB Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences decided to strengthen and deepen its commitment to sustainable rural livelihoods, and, at the same time, to reach out to the entire university to literally create an AUB campus in the Bekaa. AREC’s current mission is embodied in the new reading of its acronym: Advancing Research, Enabling Communities.
- The Neighborhood Initiative, located in the Office of the President, was launched formally in autumn 2007. The Initiative aims to link AUB faculty, students and staff to the district of Beirut immediately surrounding the university through invigorated outreach, research focused on priority problems facing the neighborhood, and partnerships to protect the legendary diversity of the place.

The paper highlights the challenges that must be addressed to enable these three young initiatives to develop to their maximum potential.

II. The history of engagement at AUB

The imperative of community service has been an enduring theme in the history of the American University of Beirut⁴ since its establishment in Beirut in 1866. Approaches to community service, however, are not fixed; they change over time, and in the case of AUB, reflect historical contexts which combine prevailing economic, political and intellectual currents and, often, the exigencies of war and conflict.

The founders of AUB had grand ambitions for their graduates. A printed manifesto that appeared in 1863 outlined the ideological basis of the new university and listed among its objectives:

⁴ Founded as the Syrian Protestant College. The name changed to the American University of Beirut in 1920. See: (Penrose, 1941, p. 171).



to supply the educational needs of the country, encourage its industrial interests, develop its resources, and for its graduates, to occupy positions of authority (Munro, 1977, p. 14 - 15). Indeed, in 1864, the Ottoman Turks gave Lebanon more autonomy and Lebanon needed competent leaders. The founders of AUB endeavored to train those leaders, and provide an education that combined Christian ideals with principles of modern Western education. Their objective was to produce "honest, intelligent and courageous men, liberal in point of view, and devoted to the true interests of their country" (Penrose, 1941, p. 4).

The founders of AUB also inculcated in their students a special *attitude*: the obligation to serve their fellow men. The notion of service was in fact deeply rooted in the religious faith of the founders of AUB, Protestant missionaries from New England. The AUB founder and first President Daniel Bliss, in his baccalaureate address of July 8, 1894 entitled "The Thrones of Service", cites the principle of service as the law of life, the principle running through the moral and spiritual universe (Rugh, 1956, p. 16).

In tones typical of the time, Reverend Bliss later warned his students (Rugh, 1956, 24):

"You came to College that your view of the world might be extended, that your view of life and the duties of life might be enlarged, that you might become stronger and better able to help and bless mankind. If you are more and more willing to serve your fellow-mankind, your college course will be a blessing to the world; and the founders and teachers of the College will rejoice that you came to us. But if you are less willing and continue to be less willing to serve your fellow men, would to God that you had never entered these doors!"

Service in the early years of AUB had distinctly Christian overtones. Although the college was institutionally separate from the mission, AUB was still charged, in its earliest days, with bringing converts into the faith and training a 'vigorous Native ministry.' Successful ultimately in neither, the founders recast their mission more broadly to encompass a more secular and scientific approach to education (Makdisi, 1997, p. 707- 711; Khalaf, 2001, p. 44). Institutional values included: freedom of conscience and religion, tolerance, and service to fellow men (Crawford, 1927, 192 - 195; Munro, 1977, p. 15). Service should not then be viewed as a crudely utilitarian tactic of proselytization, but rather as a humanitarian perspective stemming from the founders' faith.

The humanitarian aims of the early AUB community are most obvious in the early medical education and outreach. The Medical School was founded in 1867, just a year after the university enrolled its first students, and the first class of physicians graduated in 1871. Students and faculty eventually played large roles in the provision of maternal care in the poor neighborhoods of Beirut, including one populated by Armenian refugees; the Lebanon Hospital for Mental Diseases in Asfurieh, the tuberculosis sanatorium in Shebanieh, among others (Khairallah, 1939, p. 461 - 463).

Other welfare organizations and activities developed, all within the framework of the Christian faith. As President Bayard Dodge was to declare in his inaugural address (Penrose, 1941, p. 292):

"...religion is not the ulterior aim of education ... is it something more fundamental; it is the consciousness of a spiritual power, controlling life and seeking good. Religion is not for the chapel alone, but can be found in the spirit of honest study, good sportsmanship, and consecration of the welfare of mankind."

One such welfare organization, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), was to become the largest and most influential student organization on campus prior to World War I (Penrose, 1941, p. 50 - 51). The Association collected charitable contributions from the student body, and





combined social and religious services. They were particularly active in Ras Beirut⁵. World War I brought many hardships to the people of Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, and AUB responded. By the summer of 1916, the stress of war was acute; the rural economy of Lebanon was in shambles and starvation and disease were widespread. The university ran soup kitchens in the villages of 'Abeih and SuK al-Gharb, and medical students became active in providing medical care there⁶. Throughout the war, AUB leaders stressed the independence of the university from the American government which had broken diplomatic relations with Turkey, and demonstrated its neutrality by setting up tent hospitals for wounded soldiers. The Turkish governor at the time, Jemal Pasha, was impressed that graduates of the American medical school were the only ones prepared to serve in the typhus wards and on front-line dressing stations (Penrose 1941, p. 161; Munro 1977, p. 66). Wartime relief work brought other cordial relations: an often repeated story from the period describes the attitudinal transformation of the Mufti of Beirut. Prior to the War he had been distrustful of what he saw as a predominantly Christian proselytizing enterprise, but observing the hard physical labor of the doctors, nurses and medical students in organizing the war relief, he later called on President Howard Bliss, son of Daniel, to announce "From now on I shall be your best friend" (Dodge, 1958, p. 40).

Community service work continued after the war. Bayard Dodge, AUB president from 1923-1948, in an article entitled "University Work and Community Life", offers numerous examples: AUB took over and reconstructed an old building in Ras Beirut to serve as an experimental elementary school and community service center offering night classes, evening meetings, and activities for boys of the neighborhood; faculty and students in Dentistry started a 'clean teeth' campaign; with malaria endemic, medical professors worked with local government to eradicate mosquitoes from Ras Beirut. Summing up the prevailing attitude, the university president states (Dodge, 1927, p. 262 - 264):

"The University will do more harm than good, if it weans men and women away from service to their communities, by giving them a veneering of culture and puzzling their minds with too many theories."

Adding that

"...the greatest intellects in the world are not ashamed to interest themselves in commonplace things... instruction is not limited to the classroom or laboratory, for the country village, the city slum, the market and the factory are used to demonstrate problems of intellectual value."

In the 1920s, the YMCA was transformed into a distinctly inter-religious faculty-student organization called the West Hall Brotherhood, where

"men of different religions can work together for their common good and uplift their fellow men, with a spirit of cooperation that is sympathetic and hearty and based on mutual respect and mutual confidence."

The West Hall Brotherhood motto emphasized common ground: "The realm in which we share is vastly larger than that in which we differ." Among its activities, the Brotherhood organized a night school for lower-level staff at AUB, language teachers for Ras Beirut School, volley ball games at the Muslim Boys' School, visits to hospital wards, school assistance 'deputations' to

⁵ AUB Archives (Jafet Library) Student Life and Activities 1896. AA4.3. 1896 Minutes of the YMCA of the Syrian Protestant College. AA4.3 1903 - 1915. Circular.

⁶ AUB Archives (Jafet Library) Howard Bliss Collection 1902 - 1920. AA2.3.2 Report of the 'Abeih and Suk el-Gharb soup kitchens.





Tripoli, Choueifat, Aley, Shoueir, Nabatiyeh, as well as Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Damascus. Names such as Harry Dorman and Constantine Zurayk appear in leadership positions of the West Hall Brotherhood in the 1920s and 1930s⁷.

During AUB's first sixty years then, from the 1860s until the 1920s, community service was carried out by faculty and students under the banner of religion. By the 1930s, service had a different emphasis: AUB students and faculty were bringing modernity, through their predominantly extra-curricular voluntary work, to underdeveloped regions and people. Attention turned to rural development and agricultural modernization.

In 1930, the Near East Foundation, a New-York based philanthropy created by the Dodge family who had been benefactors and leaders of the university from its inception, funded the establishment of the Institute of Rural Life. The Institute functioned as an agricultural extension program, working with farm families to improve crop production and animal husbandry; it also organized agricultural education for schools, child welfare programs, and farmer's cooperatives⁸. AUB students began participating in Institute programs as volunteers during weekends and vacations, and eventually this work evolved into the Village Welfare Service.

The Village Welfare Service, in fact, reflected growing nationalist sentiments and the obligation of students to contribute to national development⁹. As a report published in 1935 reminds the AUB student (Munro, 1977, p. 87):

... "in accepting the privilege of an education he thereby incurs increased responsibilities. He has contracted a debt which he can discharge only by bringing the knowledge and experience he has gained to bear upon the problems of the community which sent him to be educated, whether from city or from country."

The AUB administration, anxious about the political agitation accompanying the rise in nationalism, viewed service as a convenient channeling of nationalistic aspirations into productive activity, compelling students into altruistic work in all aspects of rural life: farming, water and sanitation, public health and hygiene, home economics, refugee assistance and literacy (Dodge, 1958, 65,68; Munro, 1977, p. 86 - 87; Penrose, 1941, p. 271).

The Village Welfare Service, in turn, evolved into Civic Welfare League (*Rabitat al-In'ash al-Qawmi*)¹⁰, with a broader mandate to work year round and in Beirut as well.

World War II thrust AUB again into the domain of relief work. By 1941, the AUB campus had become a refuge for Free French and British troops. The AUB medical staff provided anti-malarial training to the foreign forces, and supported the work of the Red Cross and the Spears Mobile Clinics (Dodge, 1958, p. 73 - 4, 82). The latter were set up by Lady Spears, and eventually became a permanent clinic in Chtaura headed by a pediatrician from AUB, with childhood immunization

⁷ A West Hall Brotherhood pamphlet from the 1930s contains clarifications about its modus operandus: The Brotherhood does not compete with other AUB student societies (such as the Urwat al-Wuthqa) but serves them; teacher and student are on the same level in the Brotherhood; the Brotherhood is inter-religious not irreligious; the Brotherhood does not promote internationalism but encourages 'true' nationalism; alumni may also be Brotherhood members. AUB Archives (Jafet Library) Student Life and Activities. AA:4.3 1921 - 1935. The Brotherhood. AA:4.3 Brotherhood Meetings 1930s. See also: (Avery, 1927, p. 265 - 266; Tannous, 2004, p. 118 - 119).

⁸ AUB Archives (Jafet Library). Institute of Rural Life, 1944. AA:3.5.2 The Institute of Rural Life at Beirut. Bayard Dodge. Also: Personal Communication, Dr. Nuhad Dagher.

⁹ AUB Archives (Jafet Library). Students Life 1882- 1980s. AA: 4.3 1954 - Constitution: The Village Welfare Service.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note the prominence of the Arabic name *Rabitat al-In'ash al-Qawmi* in the archival materials.



programs run by AUB graduate doctors. The AUB pharmacy and laboratories provided technical back-up to this outreach work¹¹.

AUB became a genuinely secular institution after World War II. By the time Constantine Zurayk became acting President in 1954, the institution was in the forefront of the secular renaissance of the Arab World. And as the historian John Munro observes: University leaders “found it increasingly embarrassing to speak earnestly about morality and disinterested service to one’s fellow men; the AUB had passed into the modern, secular, pragmatic world.” (Munro, 1977, p. 76, 125).

Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, AUB was no longer led by missionary-spirited individuals who had come to Lebanon with a life-long commitment to doing good works. Following World War II, AUB devoted considerable attention to improving its academic standards, programs in agricultural, social and public health sciences were established with funds from international foundations such as Ford and Rockefeller, and there was a regular turnover among the more globally-oriented faculty (Dodge, 1958, p. 94, 101 - 2).

This was a time when what had been extra-curricular service activities became incorporated into academic programs. Funding from the US Government’s Point Four Program and international foundations allowed the university to diversify and expand. In 1953, a School of Agriculture with an experimental farm in the Bekaa was established with Ford Foundation funding (Munro, 1977, p. 101 - 104). Community development projects offered research opportunities to faculty. The Social Sciences received support from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation to develop this work (Penrose, 1941, p. 243).

It is in this context, then, that the evolution of AUB’s community service programs must be seen. But there were competing and sometimes contradictory pressures on faculty and students alike. The professorial ranks were now expected to perform to international standards, not just as good teachers and researchers working on locally relevant problems, but publishing in international journals topics of interest to international audiences. This eventually forced new priority-setting, and imposed dilemmas that the AUB faculty struggle with even until today.

As an institution with firm footing in the Arab world, faculty and students influenced and were influenced by the rising tide of Arab nationalism, and the despair and fury that followed the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In fact, a Palestinian diaspora of intellectuals contributed significantly to the shaping of AUB and its academic excellence in the 20th century. As noted above, nationalism encouraged a growing civic consciousness and a commitment to uplift and develop the Arab world. Parts of this consciousness AUB found threatening, as is well-documented in the histories of student activism on campus (Anderson, 2008a; Anderson, 2008b; Rabah, 2008).

The post war period also ushered in a period of affluence and with it, a new global consumerism. A review of AUB student publications from the 1950s and 1960s suggests that for many at AUB in the 1950s and 1960s, campus life was meant to be fun, and ‘sock hop’ dances, beauty pageants and fashion-shows were interspersed with the occasional charitable activity for the underprivileged¹².

AUB was also influenced by another global trend, seen most memorably in France in 1968: a general revolt by the young against the old and established. Anti-authoritarianism at AUB also responded to regional events: September 1970 in Jordan, and the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. Student unrest reached its climax at AUB in 1974, with the student strike and occupation of university buildings, leading to the expulsion of 103 students (Munro, 1977, p. 152 - 177; Anderson, 2008a).

¹¹ AUB Archives (Jafet Library) Missionaries. AA:7.5.2.6. The Work of the Spears Mobile Clinics in Syria and Lebanon, 1941 - 45. pp2, 17, 23 - 24.

¹² Personal Communication, Dr. Betty Anderson.

And yet, even in the tumultuous years prior to the Lebanese Civil War, the spirit of Arab nationalism animated community service, not just campus politics, at AUB. For example, in 1972 AUB students organized a National Development Committee to promote integrated rural development in villages surrounding Nabatiyeh in southern Lebanon. Students from all AUB faculties were involved in work that included childhood vaccination campaigns; workshops for farmers on bee-keeping and the care of olive and fruit trees; the distribution of large numbers of olive, almond, citrus and fig trees at discounted prices; assistance to farmers during the tobacco harvest; vacation camps for children; painting, repair and maintenance of school buildings and more. Transportation was provided by the Lebanese Army, UNICEF, and Red Cross¹³.

The events of the Civil War (1975 - 1990) understandably constrained community service at AUB but also offered many opportunities for courageous altruism. AUB records, such as reports by presidents to university trustees, reveal the sheer determination it took to keep the university open and the civil war outside the walls, while coping with war damage to campus; abductions and murders of students, staff and faculty; budgetary short falls; and the crippling attrition of teaching staff. But those same reports also describe heroic voluntary efforts to keep the hospital emergency room functioning when it was too dangerous for essential staff to get to Ras Beirut, as in the spring of 1976, or when displaced persons were cared for in West Hall during the Israeli invasion of 1982¹⁴. And when feasible, some faculties continued community-based research. The Faculty of Health Sciences, for instance, conducted substantial community based research during the War: epidemiological surveillance; disease control activities, and in particular the monitoring of drinking water quality; evaluation of services; and research on the effects of war on the Lebanese population (Armenian and Acra, 1988, p. 267).

In the last two decades, since the end of the Civil War, AUB has again reached out. Many examples may be cited. For example, Faculty and students in Agriculture created Healthy Basket, a program to support small organic farmers in Lebanon. Students in Civil Engineering participate in summer work camps designed to offer technical service to communities in rural Lebanon. Faculty and students in public health are involved in intensive and multifaceted collaboration with the people of Zawtar el-Charkieh in southern Lebanon. Activities range from solid waste recycling, to developing alternatives to tobacco, to preventive health workshops, to improvements to the local day care center (Germani, 2009). In 2001, AUB medical and non-medical students established the Volunteer Outreach Clinic in the Shatila Refugee Camp to provide medical care to the underserved. The clinic functions with donations and a totally volunteer staff, and offers free medical assessment; medications and counseling; free laboratory services and free referrals to the Outpatient Department of the AUB Medical Center¹⁵.

In summary, then, social responsibility, seen through the lenses of community service and engagement at AUB, has, since the very founding of the university, evolved as a reflection of changing times: humanitarian projects reflecting Christian ethics; noblesse oblige charity to the underprivileged; earnest contributions to national development and modernity; individual student and faculty projects tied directly to academic programs, and throughout, intense relief efforts in times of crisis. Over the years and especially since World War II, competing and sometimes contradictory pressures have affected faculty and student responses to the service imperative. These will be discussed in the next section.

¹³ Dr. Hafez el-Zein. Personal Communication. See also: (Srouji, 1974, p. 12 - 13).

¹⁴ AUB Archives (Jafet Library) President's Reports to the Board of Trustees 1975-1990-.

¹⁵ Dr. Mona Nasrallah, Personal Communication. See also: www.voclebanon.org, accessed 26.2.09.



III. The challenges of engagement within a university context

AUB's Mission Statement underscores the university's three functions: teaching, research and service. As has been shown, service has long been a part of the AUB student and faculty experience, and was recently recognized explicitly as a strategic priority of the university.

"The American University of Beirut (AUB) is an institution of higher learning founded to provide excellence in education, to participate in the advancement of knowledge through research, and to serve the peoples of the Middle East and beyond..."

Despite this long and noble history, and the recent explicit prioritization of service among the university's priorities, AUB struggles with several huge challenges to bridge the gap between stated ideals and the reality 'on the ground.' Three main interrelated challenges may be identified: the extent to which service and engagement are conceptualized as part of a *political* project, as put forward by theorists of 'critical pedagogy'; the question of accountability - that is, social responsibility to *whom?*; and, how to recognize and reward service by faculty and students where such rewards matter most.

First, the extent to which service and engagement are conceptualized as part of a *political* project. There are many different ways to conceptualize service and engagement, and AUB's history touches on most of them. Service as a philanthropic act may go some way to alleviating suffering but rarely seeks to change the status quo. To what extent should university faculty and students seek to change the status quo? There are many who would argue that the academy should remain outside – or above - politics, that the ivory tower of learning and reflection must be preserved. One need not look too deeply into Lebanese history to appreciate the potentially incendiary effects of political factionalism and sectarianism, should they be let loose on campus. The political we are referring to here is something different; it is about the role of the university, and especially its faculty and students, in imagining and working toward a different and better future for everyone. This political project is, ironically, closer to the ideas of AUB's founding fathers than to more recent conceptions of the role of a university: of Daniel Bliss, who was amply aware that education at his college would undermine Turkish hegemony, or that of Bayard Dodge, who believed that the village, the city slum, the market and the factory offered problems worthy of academic study (Bliss, 1993, p. 33). Here, the political means that faculty members, as citizen-scholars take critical positions, relate their work to larger social issues, encourage their students to engage in community projects and research that are socially responsible, and, ultimately, give them the hope that they can make a difference in their society, and in the world (Giroux and Giroux, 2006, p. 29). In the field of agriculture, for example, engaged academics are joining with social movements around issues such as community supported agriculture, organic food and the environmentally sustainable practices to push for an agenda that has 'emancipatory change to end injustice' as its fundamental goal (Constance, 2008).

Although the political project is not new to AUB, it is safe to say that consensus does not currently exist at AUB about the value or even the wisdom of such political engagement.

Second, when university faculty and students become engaged in projects to make the world a better place, to whom are they accountable? Students, when participating in curricular and extra-curricular service activities, must still produce the required academic work to pass their courses. In this sense, they are accountable to their teachers. Faculty members must account for their teaching, research and service activities to their academic peers and their superiors responsible for judging their performance. (More will be said about this below). As with students, the usual





channels of faculty accountability remain within the university walls.

The AUB archives contain ample documentation of good works done, life-changing experiences to students, indeed technological developments brought to the fields of medicine and agriculture. Little is known, however, about how the intended beneficiaries participated in and benefited from AUB service-related activities, or even whether the activities were seen as priorities by them in the first place¹⁶. Where activities are funded by external agencies, AUB faculty and students become accountable to them for the agreed-upon use of funds, adding another potent direction for accountability and one that may well trump all other claims, especially from less powerful local constituencies.

Times have changed since the soup kitchens of Suk al-Gharb. The issues of accountability and participation have been problematized in endeavors ranging from humanitarian relief, community and economic development to the academy itself (Strathern, 2000)¹⁷. AUB, however, has yet to have an open discussion about the question: social responsibility *to, or for, whom?* Moreover many faculty find themselves ill-prepared for the social and political intricacies of community-based work, especially that defined within a participatory framework.

The third and final challenge relates to the institutional recognition and reward given to service by faculty and students. Although service, along with teaching and research, is one of three pillars of academic life, and has been named a university strategic priority, its value is strenuously contested at AUB.

For more than 50 years, AUB has aimed at increasing its academic standards as measured by prevailing international norms. As a result, certain academic production has become more valued than other work: research over teaching and service; individual research output over institution building efforts; research published in international peer-reviewed journals over local or regional outlets; research on theoretical or methodological questions over development research aimed at solving local problems or improving the conditions of the poor. At their crudest, these norms translate into a specified quantity of publications in high-impact journals. As critics of this approach have noted (Dupeyrix, 2009), this globally pervasive system of academic evaluation has led to a 'publish or perish' rat-race, and AUB now stands shoulder to shoulder with the rest. These standards are important because they determine how an individual scholar fares: how his or her performance is evaluated, whether he or she is promoted; and whether his or her contract is renewed. AUB froze its tenure contract in the mid 1970s, so it is understandable that ambitious faculty emphasize those aspects of their academic production that matter most for contract renewal. In other words, while many faculty members may be persuaded of the importance of community-based approaches in teaching, research and service, few are willing to take the plunge, especially in the absence of job security.

Even those sympathetic to the ideas that service is important in the life of AUB and that it should count in performance evaluation are unclear about how precisely to measure and evaluate it when individual faculty members are being assessed. Internal discussions are taking place about how to proceed, but, generally speaking, what is interesting is how narrowly service is defined. The argument rests not on the inherent value of service – as an act of citizenship – but how it will build the financial, political and social capital of the implementer through service on expert committees, editorial boards and media contributions.

Under current conditions, service activities conducted by faculty may have little overall effect

¹⁶ We are indebted to Dr. Betty Anderson for underscoring this point.

¹⁷ Although much has been written recently on participatory approaches, this classic reference outlines the challenges succinctly: (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216 - 224).



on how their intellectual output is judged. Ironically, for students, it is the opposite. Service activities are now highly desirable additions to resumes and graduate school applications, where standardized test scores and grade point averages are not enough to separate out the premier candidates from the rest. Obviously not all AUB students take such a utilitarian attitude toward volunteerism and community service, but an increasing number do.

IV. Three new initiatives at AUB

Three new initiatives at AUB reaffirm the university's commitment to service, but they also provide concrete examples of how the challenges facing the university play out in practice.

1. The Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service

Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006, which caused extensive damage to people and property across the country and forced many in the south and in Beirut's southern suburbs out of their homes, thrust AUB again into a relief mode, playing the unplanned-for role that it has played since its earliest days. Faculty, staff and students worked spontaneously with others to provide emergency care for those most affected by the violence. Following the month-long war, the university president formed a Task Force for Reconstruction and Community Service composed of AUB faculty and administrators most active in the relief effort. The Task Force offered support to other faculty and students involved in the mammoth task of immediate relief and reconstruction. The Task Force further encouraged and raised funds for community-based projects to strengthen sustainable livelihoods in underserved regions. Out of this experience, the group recommended that the university create a focal point for community service and engagement, a place that could at once advocate for and support community engagement by faculty and students (Task Force for Reconstruction and Community Service, 2007).

As has been shown in this paper, community service and engagement are not new at AUB. And yet recent events in Lebanon and the region, and developments in various academic disciplines, have underscored the necessity for AUB to be more reflexive, more mindful, about its service and engagement. Put simply, it was time to examine both the quantity and quality of service at AUB, and in particular, how service and engagement both respond to, and challenge, institutional priorities.

The Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS), located in the office of the Provost of AUB, was launched in March 2008 with the designation of a half-time faculty director to lead and develop the initiative. The CCECS aims to develop a culture of service and civic leadership at AUB. A primary goal of the Center is to provide opportunities for faculty and students of every discipline to study and respond to critical social and civic issues affecting the people of Lebanon and the Middle East.

The CCECS will serve as a hub for community service and civic engagement at AUB. The Center's functions include: Support for community-based research initiatives; development of, and support for, service-learning; and the organization of a strong student volunteer outreach program.

Since its inception in spring 2008, CCECS has linked students with many volunteering opportunities. Both short-term outreach activities and long-term community-based projects have been organized with AUB partners and others from outside the university. As examples of the diversity: surveying traditional old houses proposed for rehabilitation and helping in the reconstruction of damaged houses in southern Lebanon; teaching computer literacy in villages;

creating a day-care nursery; developing public spaces in rural communities; assisting in a youth wellness project in Bourj al-Barajneh Palestinian camp; tree planting, collecting used clothing for needy families, painting Arabic poetry on urban walls, and more.

Students have generally been receptive to outreach activities. Their motivations vary. Some volunteer out of concern as socially-responsible citizens, others to enhance their credentials for career advancement, but generally both apply. Many student clubs at AUB have community service as one of their objectives. And yet, the volunteering spirit is not widely prevalent at AUB. There are a number of reasons why: students are pre-occupied with academic success; outreach opportunities are not yet sufficient to accommodate large numbers of volunteers; in some cases, they are not well advertised; and links to organizations outside AUB that might engage student volunteers could be stronger.

The Center is beginning to tackle these challenges by structuring the outreach program and providing students with greater opportunities; matching volunteer opportunities with students' academic and personal interests; and developing a system to recognize student outreach activities. For instance, the Center is developing a 'community transcript' which will list all voluntary activities and complement the standard academic transcript.

The issue of whether community service should remain voluntary or become a requirement for students at AUB is not on the Center's agenda at present. More time is needed to experiment with and assess the impact of the current outreach initiatives, both on students and communities served. The latter is rarely done and of prime concern. Moreover, making community service a requirement presents considerable logistical challenges that are beyond the capacity of AUB and its partner organizations at the present time.

In addition to extra-curricular outreach activities being developed, the CCECS has also begun to consider how outreach activities could become part of student coursework at AUB. During the summer 2008 a workshop attended by AUB faculty and colleagues from the American University in Cairo, Egypt and EARTH University in Costa Rica discussed the benefits and requirements of implementing service- or community-based learning (CBL) at AUB. Discussions with department chairs and deans are proceeding with the objective of formulating a model of CBL at AUB that would take into consideration AUB's institutional and cultural context.

Faculty engagement is another matter, and is an issue that reverberates throughout this paper. The CCECS has a vested interest in promoting community involvement by faculty university-wide, but integrating service into academic study and research is easier said than done. The main problem, as discussed in Part III, is the current faculty evaluation system. As the focal point for community service and engagement at AUB, the Center will play a main role in challenging current institutional priorities by advocating the valorization of service in faculty assessment (Mabsout 2008; Mabsout 2009).

2. Advancing Research, Enabling Communities: AUB Outreach from the Bekaa Valley

The Agricultural Research and Education Center (AREC) is AUB's campus in the Bekaa. Established in 1953 on 100 hectares of land near Baalbek, in the Northern Bekaa, AREC was initially created for students, faculty and local communities to collaborate in the development of innovative solutions to agricultural problems. Over the years, concern for the broader well-being of rural people led AREC to shift the emphasis of its work to rural community development and especially to the issue of improving rural livelihoods. The region is one of the poorest in Lebanon, and, although chronically deficient in water, is considered to be the breadbasket of the country



(Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences, 2009; Zurayk, 2009).

Since its creation in 1953, AREC has facilitated many important achievements in farming and rural development. They include the introduction of modern poultry production to the Middle East, new wheat and barley varieties, organic farming, and a commitment to biodiversity conservation. In recent years, AREC has served as the center for voluntary extension services in Lebanon through a variety of externally funded projects: Dairy; Forage; 'Arsal: Sustainable Improvement on Marginal Lands; Yammouneh: technology transfer to farmers benefiting from the Yammouneh irrigation scheme; and Sustainable Agriculture in the Qaraoun region.

Following Israel's war on Lebanon in 2006, AUB joined the reconstruction effort to rebuild shattered livelihoods of people in southern Lebanon. The Land and People relief program adapted a model from public health, the mobile rural development 'clinic', providing agricultural and business development advice to rural communities. The management of the Land and People program was recently moved to AREC. While retaining two mobile clinics in the South, the program expanded its services to the Bekaa, where a mobile clinic now covers the farm extension and capacity building needs of farmers' and women's cooperatives in the 12 villages surrounding AREC. The program achieved international recognition. It has been featured in the Lebanese, Arab, US, Dutch and German media and has won a certificate of appreciation from the United Nations Development Program for its innovative approach.

In 2008, the AUB Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences took the decision to strengthen and deepen its commitment to sustainable rural livelihoods, and, at the same time, to reach out to the entire university to literally become the AUB campus in the Bekaa. AREC's current mission is embodied in the new reading of its acronym: Advancing Research, Enabling Communities. Beginning with a commitment to service and aspiring to work within a social justice framework, AREC accomplishes its goals through experiential learning, adaptive research and community outreach. In the coming years, AREC plans to establish an agribusiness development center to stimulate rural entrepreneurship through incubation services, technical support, and agribusiness workshops.

Looking to the near future, AREC must address two major challenges: how to create the right mechanisms and incentives to attract more AUB faculty and students to AREC, and how to operationalize a social justice agenda.

Agricultural students and faculty have always had strong connections to AREC. Whether working as part of their academic curriculum or as volunteers or paid staff on projects, at AREC students turn theory into practice through hands-on learning. Unlike courses taught at AUB's Beirut campus, most AREC's courses now include a service component that puts students in direct contact with the surrounding communities. Agriculture and Landscape Design and Eco-management students currently spend half of an academic year in residence at AREC. In the Spring 2009 term, for instance, the Landscape Design and Eco-management students worked with the students' environment club of the municipal school of Bednayel, a neighboring village, to rehabilitate the school grounds and re-design and manage its landscape.

The new challenge, however, is for AUB as an institution to exploit fully what AREC offers: the opportunity for sustained partnerships with communities in one of Lebanon's most disadvantaged regions. AREC offers AUB faculty unparalleled facilities for research, teaching and service in rural Lebanon. However, given the existing disincentives for community-based service and development research focused on the problems of disadvantaged communities, AREC will have to create new incentives to attract AUB faculty from across the university to their facility in the Bekaa. These might include new sources of research funding for interdisciplinary or interfaculty projects based at AREC, genuine partnerships with local people to be mobilized for research or



service-learning, and retreat and writing space for short research breaks or sabbaticals. To begin this process, the Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences now publishes a newsletter to inform all AUB faculty about the service, learning and research possibilities at AREC. A university-wide committee, the AREC Integration Committee, consisting of representatives from all faculties and interfaculty centers, was also recently created to promote AREC among the AUB faculty. For example, one such interfaculty center, IBSAR, the AUB Nature Conservation Center for Sustainable Futures, has already established a strong presence at AREC which it uses as a base for many of its activities. IBSAR's "Seeds of Hope, Trees for Tomorrow" program, provides support and advice to municipalities for the introduction of native trees in their urban greening program. The program organizes regular tree planting activities which bring tens of students to participate in nature conservation programs.

The second immediate challenge confronting AREC is how best to operationalize its social justice agenda. By virtue of its location in one of the poorest areas of Lebanon, AREC offers an exceptional opportunity for AUB to realize its commitment to improving the lives of the people of Lebanon and the region. The current outreach programs implemented from AREC are driven by the desire of some faculty members to contribute to the social and economic development of the poor surrounding communities. In recent years, AUB has taken firm steps to work on topics that matter to disadvantaged rural communities by initiating programs in organic and community-supported agriculture, emphasizing rural livelihoods, and underscoring the importance of sustainability and equity in rural development.

AREC has multi-stranded contacts with local communities: through the mobile 'clinics', extension programs, continuing education classes offered to local residents, outreach to farmers' and women's cooperatives, student projects in neighboring villages, and development or 'translational' research by faculty. As AREC seeks to strengthen its social justice agenda, the next set of challenges have to do with the ways of working with local communities, a certain reflexivity about questions of participation and accountability, and the nature of partnerships developed with people and communities in the Bekaa.

A new strategy for the valorization of AREC is currently being developed. Its central tenet is the reintegration of AREC into the University as a whole, and the recognition of the potential of the facility to contribute to the building of AUB's social capital. This, however, cannot be achieved without clear institutional recognition of the importance of this capital.

3. The Neighborhood Initiative: Going Beyond the Walls in Ras Beirut

The academic year 2007 - 2008 opened with a formal convocation and speech by the then AUB president, John Waterbury, who challenged the university to go outside its walls and engage with its neighborhood of Ras Beirut. There were many reasons for this challenge: Although the presence of AUB had been instrumental in the growth and development of Ras Beirut over its 140 year existence, the Lebanese Civil War had forced the university into an increasingly inward-looking attitude toward its place. By 2007 the juxtaposition between the peaceful flowering campus behind walls (significantly, in Arabic, haram) and the increasingly dense and chaotic neighborhood outside forced the university to examine its relationship with its place: what kind of an urban neighbor was AUB? Out of this challenge the AUB Neighborhood Initiative was born. AUB has two main reasons for working for the well-being of its neighborhood, a project of engagement that has a specific geographic focus. One is enlightened self-interest: to keep AUB attractive to excellent faculty and students, AUB has a vested interest in keeping the district of Beirut that surrounds it a stimulating, pleasant and affordable place, for everyone. The other



main reason acknowledges that as one of Beirut's most significant private employers, AUB has the moral obligation to be a better, even exemplary, urban institution. The Initiative is founded on the principle of mutual benefit: sharing and reciprocity, not a one-way transfer of knowledge or good works.

Through the Neighborhood Initiative, AUB is playing three roles in its neighborhood:

- a. AUB as exemplary neighbor: fostering an atmosphere that change is possible through invigorated but targeted outreach, and straightforward activities that demonstrate AUB's commitment to the neighborhood;
- b. AUB as producer of knowledge for the public good: providing incentives to faculty and students for research on problems confronting the neighborhood;
- c. AUB as partner in revitalizing and protecting the diversity of the neighborhood: creating positive and sustainable change through a strategic focus on projects that would have many positive secondary effects;

Intensive interviews with neighbors have defined immediate priorities for action. For example, neighbors complained about the lack of greenery, so the Initiative has supported faculty and students in horticulture and landscape design to develop a 'Greening the Neighborhood' project. Neighbors, visitors and members of the AUB community have also expressed frustration with traffic, noise and lack of parking near the university. So the Initiative will support a series of studies led by the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department dubbed the "neighborhood congestion studies." At this young age, the Initiative is vulnerable and many challenges exist.

The first challenge, and one shared with both the CCECS and AREC, is finding the most effective way to involve the AUB faculty, who have much to contribute to understanding and solving local problems. Any outreach activity that does not involve the faculty misses their unique contribution and risks being seen as 'not serious,' and in the case of the Neighborhood Initiative, a mere public relations exercise. The most effective way to involve faculty lies, in part, with finding the right incentives to encourage faculty to work on neighborhood questions, and defining the research and action agendas broadly enough to incorporate their theoretical and pedagogical priorities.

The second is solidifying the Neighborhood Initiative funding-base. The university's neighborhood of Ras Beirut is threatened by multiple problems, but it is not Beirut's most disadvantaged district. It is reasonable that funders wish to support service and engagement activities in disadvantaged communities. But should work in Ras Beirut be disqualified from funding because the area is not disadvantaged enough? In many places urban universities have become critical actors in the development of their neighborhoods and cities. AUB as an engine of innovation can contribute uniquely to positioning post-conflict Beirut in the globally connected 21st century.

Another major challenge is participation, again shared with both the CCECS and AREC. Participatory approaches are and will be critical to the success of the Neighborhood Initiative in its relations both inside the university and beyond the university walls. Still small in terms of paid staff, the Neighborhood Initiative is guided by a group of senior faculty and administrative staff who reside in Ras Beirut, and every activity is defined and carried out collaboratively with academic and administrative units of the University. For example, a survey to analyze how much AUB students spend in the neighborhood was organized with the Office of Student Affairs, or another to calculate how many student cars were adding to neighborhood congestion done with the AUB Registrar. The Neighborhood Initiative and Center for Civic Engagement Community Service recently collaborated on a student workday in the neighborhood.

Beyond the walls of the university, participation raises other challenges. The literature on university-community partnerships suggests that participation is vitally important but that it is



exquisitely complicated when powerful institutions attempt to engage with disorganized and often disempowered citizens (Kromer and Kerman 2005; Rodin 2007). The Neighborhood Initiative has adopted an approach that involves two distinct but mutually reinforcing 'conversations' with neighbors. One is the continuous consultation with a wide variety of individual stakeholders, to keep our 'finger on the pulse.' The second is that each activity proposed - Greening the Neighborhood, and so on - creates its own mechanisms of participation through steering groups, committees or whatever form is most appropriate. (Myntti, 2009)

V. Conclusion

Social responsibility, seen through the lenses of community service and engagement at AUB, has, since the very founding of the university, evolved as a reflection of changing times. In 2009, AUB and the communities with which it works - from its urban neighborhood to its rural hinterland and beyond - are profoundly affected by global trends and the penetration of the market. In response, the language of AUB's missionary founders has returned with renewed calls for engagement as an ethical and moral response to the changing world outside the university walls. The scope and ambitions for 'emancipatory' change are as great as ever. Questions are posed about how service fits a social justice agenda. And there is also explicit reference to mutual benefit and reciprocity, no longer assuming a one-way flow of good works from 'us to them', and new concerns about accountability and participation are being raised.

At this point, let us return to the theme, the social responsibility of universities, and ask the fundamental question: Why should universities in the Arab World take community engagement and service seriously? Now more than ever, the Arab World needs 'citizens': generous, ethical individuals committed to the wider social good. By providing students with service opportunities, universities may counteract the individualistic, careerist tendencies increasing in prevalence everywhere.

In addition, in this era of global competition and rankings, universities could do well to analyze all the possible elements of their comparative advantage. Research excellence is one such element. Rootedness in a particular place and connections to local communities offer other unique advantages. These elements, however, must be constructed through an outward approach that links global science and local priorities through service and community-based research.

This is thus the main argument of our paper: Social responsibility, as we have enlarged it to include community service and engagement, is not an optional 'add on' to the central educational mission of universities. It is central to excellence, relevance and the groundedness that confers comparative advantage. Moreover, in the Arab region it is central to the development of citizens. And yet, as has been described in this paper, the challenges and contradictions are many, and profound. The status quo pushes individuals into competitive isolation, and must be counteracted forcefully with community-building within the university as much as with outside organizations and groups.

The three initiatives outlined here, while young, offer a potent countervailing force to isolation and competitiveness. By virtue of their missions, they can serve as models of engagement by embarking on a reflexive and mutual learning process, and developing collaborative activities. Community-based learning and research initiatives are logical venues for such mutual integration. Ironically, the challenging endeavor of co-authoring the present paper provided an opportunity to reflect on where and how AUB ought to go next.

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