

## **AUB President incites students to ask questions that provoke the human spirit**

Monday October 12, 2009

Questioning the utility of a liberal arts education during the current financial crisis may be expected, but it is exactly such an education that can possibly help people overcome the world's greatest failures.

AUB President Peter Dorman made these comments on October 12, before a packed audience in Assembly Hall, during the Opening Ceremony which marked the beginning of the 2009-2010 academic year.

More than 2000 new students joined AUB this year, along with nearly 75 new faculty members and about 13 PhD students, who will have the opportunity to study for a doctoral degree in one of eight recently reinstated PhD programs.

"It can be argued that the greatest failures—world wars, regional conflicts, genocide, persistent poverty, extremist ideological movements—may be defined as failures of a liberal education," said Dorman.

[These] failures...have fostered deep chasms of willful misunderstanding and closed minds, as well as prejudice based on the characterization of groups of people as the untouchable and unapproachable 'other.'"

These festering problems, which are not new-born, but have a centuries-old pedigree, seem immune to scientific proofs, and require the painful relearning of old lessons by every generation

Citing education scholars, Dorman argued that the purpose of education is not merely to inform or to offer professional training, but also to evoke curiosity and judgment among young minds as well as training them to solve complicated problems.

"Higher education is not utilizable in an economic sense alone. It seeks to provide an understanding of the ways in which the human mind has inquired—and continues to inquire-- into its own self-awareness. It raises the question of what makes us common participants in the social, spiritual, and intellectual sense," he said.

"So if we speak of training competent leaders for tomorrow, let us also speak of training leaders who are also thinkers, critics, and humanists. A corollary to this goal is that—in spite the standard degree requirements we demand, and the common learning outcomes we desire--we do not intend to produce a cadre or a generation of like-minded thinkers."

"The greatest contribution of higher education may lie in its mandate, and its freedom, to teach things of no direct utility in a practical sense, but which make us ponder the values that underlie the broad social contract.

"As this year begins, then, I would urge my colleagues on the AUB faculty to teach at least one thing of no immediate practical value--something useless, if you will; to ask questions that have no correct answers—and perhaps cannot be answered at all; to pose

quandaries or moral choices that engage the mind in impractical but otherwise crucial ways."

"And to our students who are returning for another year at AUB, or who are arriving for the first time: let me urge you not to come to campus expecting answers, but come for questions that cannot be answered. Whether inside the classroom or outside it, your lives will be enriched—and so will ours.

I wish you all a productive and provocative year ahead."