



AUB president addresses student concerns over projected tuition hikes in an email to the community

Thursday, May 20, 2010

In an email addressed to students and distributed to the entire AUB community on the morning of May 19, 2010, AUB President Peter Dorman responded to student concerns over projected tuition hikes for the next academic calendar. The letter read as follows:

Dear AUB Students,

I'd like to congratulate the organizers of the demonstration yesterday for an event that was well organized and well executed, making a number of deep concerns to our students known to the administration. I especially appreciate the commitment by the organizers—representing the USFC and the Campaign for an Affordable Acceptable Education—that their aims are “voluntary, nonviolent, and progressive.” The event was carried out in a manner consistent with that pledge, and I applaud both the intention and the outcome; it reflects the best traditions of free speech and the dynamics of a responsive academic setting.

Yesterday I had the chance to talk with a number of students who had relevant questions about the new tuition policy. One question needs to be laid to rest immediately. A good number believed that they would have significantly higher tuition costs next year and were worried about how they or their families could afford it. Nothing could be further from the truth. For current students, tuition will be priced according to the present 12-hour credit system and AUB promises to freeze tuition increases at 4% for the next three years. We do not feel that we can change the rules of the game for students who are in the middle of a multi-year university commitment. This would not be fair to them or their parents.

Another young woman at FEA, knowing of our pledge to cover 75% of the added tuition burden for eligible students under the new pricing policy (again: which applies only for students enrolling for the first time in 2010) asked if we could cover that final last 25% with financial aid. I promised her we would review our options. We have been discussing that very question, and feel that we can soon propose a solution that will in fact cover 100% of the added burden for students who need it.

One slogan I began to hear yesterday is that the new tuition policy is just “stealing from the rich and giving to the poor.” Actually, that is a somewhat accurate, if sardonic, description of what direct financial aid is all about. It is what AUB and thousands of American universities and colleges have been doing for decades, and is the foundation for permitting needy students to study here. The system is simple: out of all tuition revenues received, a certain percentage is dedicated toward outright grants to offset the costs of tuition to students who otherwise could not afford to enroll here. AUB is one university in Lebanon that gives significant amounts of direct grant to its neediest students, rather than loans. If this system did not exist, AUB would be an institution for the purely elite, available only to those who could pay full freight—something none of us wants. Rather, we aspire truly to be a “college for all classes and conditions of men.” (And women.) Let me add that financial aid generated from tuition revenues (about 30% of the total) is supplemented generously by annual donations given by alumni and trustees, by endowed

scholarship funds set up by donors and alumni chapters, and by government grants. In other words, the benefits of “stealing from the rich and giving to the poor” are enjoyed by all who use and enjoy our campus, by ensuring that we maintain a diverse student body represented by every region and socio-economic group of Lebanon, as well as countries beyond.

The administration has heard your concerns, and I was presented an eloquent statement from Jeffrey Karam, which I have read with interest. Yesterday Provost Dallal publicly declared that we are ready to meet with the organizers of the demonstration to discuss these issues. Yesterday I was also able to make the same pledge to USFC vice-president, Elias Ghanem, and others, that I am ready to begin discussions any time after 9 AM this morning. Open discussion is the essence of university life and the key to resolving the remaining issues. It is also essential that continuing engagement be “voluntary, nonviolent, and progressive,” so that those who wish to attend classes and go to work not be prevented from doing so.

With best wishes,

Peter Dorman
President