

For Immediate Release



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Transformative learning in higher education **the focus of international conference at AUB**

The eighth international conference on effective teaching and learning in higher education was held at the American University of Beirut (AUB) over two days, bringing together a multidisciplinary group of academics and researchers to discuss innovations in teaching and ways of promoting transformative learning.

This annual conference was co-hosted by three units at AUB: the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Office of Information Technology, and the Communication Skills Program of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS). It brought together around 200 participants from a wide range of fields coming from AUB, from sister universities in Lebanon and the Arab region, as well as from Europe and North America.

The conference began with an introduction by Associate Provost Lina Choueiri, professor of linguistics in the Department of English and chair of the Advisory Board of CTL. She shared with the audience some alarming statistics about the regional educational landscape, noting that only 10% of the population in the Arab world aged 25 has a university degree, compared with 25% in Ireland, for example. She also noted that 30% of unemployed people in this region have a university degree, which means that even well-educated people are not being equipped with what they need to succeed.

“It is not enough to educate our students to be career-ready; we need to educate them to be job creators and to contribute effectively to building global knowledge,” said Choueiri. “If education is as important as we think it is for social, economic, and political development of all societies, then the situation I’ve just described requires serious investment in education. We are facing a mammoth task and nothing short of transformative will make a difference.”

A learner-centered approach

Dr. Michelle Navarre Cleary, associate professor at DePaul University's School for New Learning, delivered one of two keynote addresses for the conference and shared an approach to teaching and learning called competency-based education (CBE), which has been gaining traction recently in the US and is especially popular among adult learners.

This educational method changes the focus away from credit hours and mastery of course content toward a system that concentrates on demonstrated ability and evaluation based on performance of skills or competencies. Unlike traditional higher education, the CBE model begins with looking at what graduates need to be able to do and then building a curriculum to achieve these ends, which is why it is considered a learner-centered educational model.

During the remainder of the first day, a series of workshops were held on topics such as using virtual and augmented reality in classrooms, the challenges of addressing plagiarism in the digital age, and instructional strategies to promote critical thinking. Dr. Milton Cox, a long-time conference participant from the Center for Teaching Excellence at Miami University in Ohio, led one of these workshops aimed at giving people tools that will help them publish in the field of teaching and learning.

"The scholarship of teaching and learning is a new discipline, and at this conference I will assist colleagues in developing projects and steps to publish them," said Cox. "It is my fifth year at this conference, and it is the best conference on teaching and learning in the Middle East."

Embracing multilingual learners

The second day of the conference began with a keynote address by two professors from the University of Birmingham in the UK. Drs. Angela Creese and Adrian Blackledge discussed translanguaging, which focuses on how multilingual people use their full linguistic repertoire in different situations. The concept of translanguaging is a hot topic in education these days, with proponents arguing that it is unfair to limit bilingual or multilingual students to only one "official" language.

"Translanguaging as a pedagogy has the potential to be transformative, removing the hierarchy of practice that deems some languages and varieties to be more valuable than others," explained Creese and Blackledge. "A translanguaging pedagogy enables learning through the communicative practices with which students routinely succeed."

Numerous concurrent sessions continued throughout the second day of the conference, including a panel discussion on digital transformation in higher education with FAS Dean Nadia El

Cheikh, Dean Steve Harvey of the Olayan School of Business, and Chief Information Officer Yousif Asfour.

A total of 27 papers were presented over the two days, along with the keynote addresses and panel. Dr. Saouma Boujaoude, director of CTL as well as professor of education and FAS associate dean, noted that they followed a highly selective process whereby only around half of the submissions were accepted. He also noted that the conference went entirely paperless this year, using a digital platform for the conference program and abstracts that allowed participants to plan their individualized schedules using their phones or laptops.

ENDS

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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