

AUB launches University for Seniors to reach out to the “plus 50” community

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The American University of Beirut is launching a pioneering learning program for senior citizens, in a bid to reach out to its older neighbors and alumni.

Spearheaded by Cynthia Myntti of the AUB Neighborhood Initiative and Professor Abla Sibai, a faculty member and expert on healthy aging, the University for Seniors (جامعة الكبار) aims to provide older people with opportunities to remain intellectually stimulated and socially connected. Encouraging learning for the pleasure of learning is one of its main objectives.



The program, which will be officially launched in Winter 2010-11, will be membership-based and member-run, and will offer a range of activities: study groups, educational trips, or lectures on a wide range of topics, depending on interest and demand. The Program will follow the peer-learning model, where members can choose to either lead or join a study group.

"We decided to launch this program after noticing that the population of Ras Beirut is 'graying. Older adults in Lebanon are generally living longer and healthier than their parents, and many are living alone as their children migrate for their working lives." said Cynthia Myntti, who heads the Neighborhood Initiative.

"We respect our elders but assume that they will face an inevitable early decline in health and associated dependency. And yet this is no longer the case for all. Many older adults do not want to spend their last decades of life in inactivity – they want to remain intellectually challenged, socially connected and useful in their communities. The AUB University for Senior addresses this gap," added Sibai.

During two years of planning, Myntti and Sibai organized focus group discussions and a survey sent to older alumni. They learned that there is a "huge interest" in such an activity.

Currently in its trial phase, the program has already organized three free study groups on computers, classical music, and the architectural history of Beirut for 50 senior citizens.

"With this pioneering program, we aim to promote a new vision for healthy aging in Lebanon and the region," said Myntti.