

For Immediate Release



New AUB initiative to turn Lebanon into an epicenter of knowledge, not disaster

Beirut, Lebanon- 21/03/2014 - If AUB professors have it their way, every Lebanese would be prepared for any disaster, and an emergency kit would be present in every household; what's more, AUB would establish a center for disaster risk reduction that will be an epicenter of knowledge for Lebanon and the region.

To set the ball rolling, AUB launched on March 19 the [Earthquake Preparedness Initiative \(EPI\)](#), which will be devoted to the social and scientific studies of disasters, in general, and earthquakes, in particular.

“EPI plans to conduct research projects and activities to generate knowledge on community awareness and preparation for, response to, and recovery from earthquakes,” explained Hoda Baytiyeh, assistant professor of education, and one of three academics leading the initiative.

Along with Baytiyeh, Assistant Professor Ata Elias from geology and Assistant Professor Thomas Haase from political studies and public administration, will be addressing earthquake hazard and disaster mitigation, focusing on response and preparedness from several aspects, including hazard maps, socio-economic impact, disaster management policies and plans, psychological impact, capacity building and education as well as others. This newly-established program will be under the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS).

So, expect awareness projects with schools, data dissemination tools, multidisciplinary research studies on Lebanon's geological hazards, and proposals for policies and planning at the level of the state and local communities, as well as many other projects.

The team hopes to partner with schools, other universities, the private and public sectors, and international agencies to achieve their goals.

Among the challenges the team will face is the fatalistic attitude prevalent in Lebanese and Arab culture. “People often resign themselves to fate when dealing with natural or even man-made disasters,” noted Baytiyeh. “For instance, we would never hop in our car if we were not sure that it had not undergone proper maintenance. Similarly, we should not accept to live in a building, if we are not sure it is earthquake-safe. And we would never blame fate if the brake pads were worn-out and we had failed to properly maintain them.”

Elias highlighted the importance of studying the geology of the area we live in, in order to anticipate and reduce any risk of devastation due to seismic activity.

“We need to realize that earthquakes are destiny, but not necessarily a catastrophe,” said Elias. “We can learn from previous examples from Lebanon and other countries and create a society that is more resilient.”

FAS Dean Patrick McGreevy, who applauded the professors’ enterprise, said: “This initiative will address a potential threat that is often overlooked in Lebanon’s crowded agenda of crises and calamities, but one that will indeed arrive someday, and, when it does, will have the potential to cause a tragedy of monumental proportions.”

McGreevy noted that the program will have a research a component, an outreach component, an education component, and it will urge AUB students to become involved via civic engagement.

“This program aims to make AUB the epicenter of knowledge and information about earthquake risk and preparedness,” he added.

LINK: <http://www.aub.edu.lb/fas/epi/Pages/index.aspx>

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For more information please contact:

Maha Al-Azar, Director of News and Information, ma110@aub.edu.lb,
01-75 96 85

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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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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