

ASSESSMENT REPORT

**American University of Science
and Technology (AUST),
Beirut, Lebanon**

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1. The American University of Science and Technology (AUST)

The history of the American University of Science & Technology (AUST) dates back to 1989 when it began operations under the name of American Universal College (AUC).

In August 2000, AUC changed the name to American University College of Science & Technology (AUCST) as per presidential decree #3585/2000. In August 2007, Presidential decree #677/2007 confirmed the present name of American University of Science & Technology (AUST) with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities associated with a full-fledged university.

The main campus of the university is located in Beirut. Additionally, the university operates two smaller regional centres in Zahlé and Sidon.

Currently, around 4,652 students are enrolled at AUST across its 40 undergraduate and graduate programmes in 4 faculties:

- Faculty of Arts and Sciences
- Faculty of Business and Economics
- Faculty of Engineering
- Faculty of Health Sciences

Table 1 shows an overview of AUST in numbers.

American University of Science and Technology (AUST)	
Founding year	1989
Number of students	4,652
in Beirut	3,818
in Zahlé	414
in Sidon	420
Full-time ¹ academic staff	43
Full-load ² and part-time academic staff	203
Administrative and technical staff	107
Faculties	4
Number of academic departments	21
Number of programmes:	
Undergraduate	29
Graduate	11
Students who graduated in July 2017 (BA/BS)	861
Students who graduated in July 2017 (MA/MBA)	184

¹ Faculty members with full time contracts for at least 12 months.

² Faculty members with a guaranteed full load for 9 months who may also teach outside AUST.

Enrolments (October 2016)	698
Students who graduated in July 2017 (MA/MBA)	184
Budget (revenues)	20 Mio \$
Annual tuition for 30 credit hours (for undergraduate study)	7,400 \$
Percentage of budget for financial aid	10 %
Percentage of budget for research	2 %

Table 1 – AUST in numbers (Academic year 2016-2017)

AUST follows an American-style educational philosophy based on an obligatory broad liberal arts curriculum that includes languages, social sciences, humanities and math/natural sciences requirements from all students regardless of academic major.

The academic calendar of AUST is based on two semesters per year, each of a 15 week duration. One credit hour is defined as 15 hours of face-to-face interaction between student and teacher. Most courses are 3 credit hour courses meaning that the student and the teacher have met for 45 hours per semester.

Students have to accumulate a minimum of 105 credit hours in order to qualify for a Bachelor degree starting the sophomore class. Students who join AUST as freshmen with General Secondary Certificate (after successful completion of 13 years of education) may be given up to 30 credit hours of first year courses depending on their performance in the placement exams.

Personal attendance of class sessions is obligatory and only a small number of absences per course are allowed.

As a private university, AUST does not receive any public funding for its activities. Thus, the university relies on student fees as its main source of income.

2. The accreditation procedure

The assessment procedure was carried out with an informed peer review on the basis of a self-evaluation report provided by the university, a two-day site visit of international experts, an assessment report by the expert team and the accreditation decision taken by **evalag**'s Accreditation Commission.

The procedure applies the fitness for purpose approach which assesses to what extent the institution is able to achieve its self-set objectives. The point of reference is **evalag**'s criteria for international institutional accreditation that follow the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area dated 15 May 2015.

These criteria focus first of all on the profile and the strategies of the institution which are in the centre of the procedure. The governance structures which are used to implement strategies, the fields of activities of the institution and cross-cutting issues which influence the implementation and the success of the institutional strategies are also examined. By assessing compliance with the criteria, **evalag** checks whether the institution has objectives with regard to each criterion, whether it implements activities which serve to reach the defined objectives, and whether it uses mechanisms to assess the

results of its activities. Additionally, **evalag** assesses if the institution meets academic standards that are accepted in Europe and internationally.

The following criteria are used:

- Institutional profile and strategy
- Governance
- Resources
- Teaching and learning
- Research
- Institution and society
- Quality assurance

The experts express the extent of compliance of the criteria with the following assessments: passed, passed subject to conditions, suspension of the accreditation procedure or failed. Depending on the degree to which the institution meets the criteria, the institution will be accredited, accredited with conditions or not accredited.

As a first step of the procedure and in preparation for the site visit, AUST produced a self-evaluation report based on guidelines provided by **evalag**. At the same time **evalag** formed an expert team consisting of three professorial experts and one student expert:

Prof. Dr. Hans-Hennig von Grünberg	President of Hochschule Niederrhein – University of Applied Sciences, Krefeld, Germany
Prof. Vicky Gunn, MA (Hons) PhD	Head of Learning and Teaching, Glasgow School of Arts, UK
Prof. Dr. Peter F. Sloane	Professor of Business and Human Resource Education, Paderborn University, Germany
Simona Dimovska, LL.M.	Student, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius”, Skopje, Macedonia

All experts had declared to be free of any conflict of interest.

The site visit took place from 21 to 22 June 2018 at AUST Beirut campus.³ During the site visit the expert team met with the President, the Vice President, the Provost, with the deans and the heads of departments, with academic and administrative staff, students and alumni, and visited selected facilities of the university.

The expert team produced an assessment report which was submitted to the university for correction of potential factual errors on 3 September 2018.

From **evalag**'s side, Georg Seppmann coordinated and carried out the project, with back office assistance of Elena Gladkova in Mannheim.

The following assessment report is structured along the assessment criteria which are the basis of **evalag**'s institutional accreditation. After a short description of the criterion, each chapter starts with a presentation of the current status regarding the criterion which is based on the information in the self-assessment report of the university and the information gathered during the site visit. On this basis, the expert team assesses the criterion. Finally, the experts list their recommendations for further improvement.

³ Prof. Gunn was not able to attend the site visit.

3. Institutional assessment

3.1. Institutional profile and strategy

The institutional profile and strategy define the main activities of a higher education institution and therefore are at the centre of the institutional accreditation procedure. Applying the fitness for purpose approach, the experts mainly check whether an institution has a clearly defined strategy that fits the institutional profile and whether the strategies and profile of the institution comply with internationally accepted standards. The experts also review the processes for the definition of strategies. Furthermore, they look whether the strategies are adequate to reach the institutional objectives.

Current status

Strategic profile

AUST was established with the goal to provide American-style education especially to those young men and women in Lebanon who are financially challenged. The basic idea was to make higher education accessible to individuals with limited means, thus providing opportunities for social advancement and progress.

From the outset, AUST decided to distinguish itself by offering majors that the Lebanese and Middle Eastern market would need but no university is offering, e.g. optometry, radiologic sciences, fashion design and forensic science. These majors should provide the typical AUST student with good opportunities to achieve and find jobs in fields that are much in need. The University Board defined the mission of AUST as follows:

“AUST reflects the concerns of its founders that American-styled university education should be within the reach of all qualified students. Hence, tuition fees are kept at a minimum level while providing financial aid to those students who cannot afford the tuition without compromising the requirements for growth and excellence in academic delivery. The American University of Science & Technology seeks to:

- Promote the search for the truth through the pursuit of knowledge and the application of its derivatives.
- Provide men and women from Lebanon, the Middle East, and the rest of the world with the opportunity to seek higher education (without discrimination as to religion, gender, color, national origin, or socioeconomic background) in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and respect for the particularities of one's own culture and customs.
- Offer American-styled educational programs comparable with similar programs offered in the U.S.A., and which are focused to the needs of the geographical region that it serves.
- Instill in the minds and the hearts of its students the principles of good national and international citizenship so that they may become the agents of social justice, catalysts for universal peace, and promoters of human rights.
- Ensure an intellectually rich atmosphere of academic pursuit dominated by responsible freedom and respect for the rights of others.
- Develop the student's analytical, critical, creative, and communication skills across the curriculum and in par-academic activities.
- Strive to become a model for the use of high technology in education in the region.

- Avail the students of social, cultural and educational programs and activities that will support and complement the traditional classroom teaching and the learning processes.
- Work on graduating ecologically aware students who value the ecology of their countries, and strive to ensure its preservation for future generations.
- Be a model of the pursuit of excellence in higher education in the region that it serves.”⁴

According to the university’s mission, students of AUST should become productive citizens who are independent thinkers and potential entrepreneurs with valid internationally recognised degrees who are proficient in their field of study, well versed in the use of modern technology and skilled in communication in English. In this context, academic courses that are directed toward good citizenship (e.g. human rights, peace culture and conflict resolution, western civilization) are complemented by lecture series and activities designed to foster understanding among peoples and cultures.

At least annually, AUST organises public activities (e.g. the Math Olympics organised with the Bulgarian Embassy, and the forensic competition held with a neighbouring school in Beirut) to strengthen the connection between the university and the local community. AUST also addresses this issue with an annual series of lectures and events designed to bring the parents of the future students to within the perimeter of the campus.

Definition process

The definition of strategies is generally understood as a continuous process that involves evaluation of the past and planning for the future. The mission statement of the institution (see above) is the driving point of the institutional strategy which has been drafted for a period of five to eight years. Accordingly, the academic units draft their own. Institutional and academic units’ strategies are revised annually: According to the self-evaluation report and the meetings during the site visit, strategic planning and budgeting go hand in hand:

- In July of each academic year, the deans and the heads of departments conduct series of meetings to discuss the results obtained from the outcomes assessment exercise of the last academic year.
- A report of findings is submitted to the Vice President/Provost by the end of October. The report includes qualitative and quantitative indicators that assess the progress in achieving the goals, objectives and strategic initiatives set for the previous year as outlined in the summary of the strategic plan.
- Based on the evaluation report and the revision of the institutional strategy provided by the Vice President, each faculty and department will then conduct a SWOT analysis to prepare future goals and challenges. The results are submitted to the Vice President/Provost by February, together with a budget request.
- The strategic plan is presented to the Vice President responsible for validation, and then to the Executive Council for approval by the end of May.
- The President presents the strategic plan to the Board of Trustees for final approval along with the final budget in its July session.

⁴ cf. AUST self-evaluation report, pp.7-8

- Once the plan has been approved, the Executive Council sends the plan to the deans and to the heads of departments for implementation.
- Students have no active role in this process.

Assessment

Strategic profile

In the experts' view AUST's mission is clearly stated, practical, and attractive. It reflects a deep understanding of the social responsibility that higher education institutions have in emerging societies like the Lebanese. The experts appreciate that AUST opens up study possibilities of high academic quality even to students with lesser financial means, while the institution is managed as a private company in a competitive market. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the experts the mission statement seems limited and a little outdated since the most significant characteristics of the university – the academic based, labour market-oriented, and practical education – are not adequately mentioned. The mission statement is reminiscent, rather, of AUST's very first steps in the education market. Meanwhile, the achievements (and even the university's strategies) far exceed the text of the mission.

The experts appreciate the multicultural and tolerant educational approach of AUST that addresses all facets of the Lebanese society. All students the experts could interview praised AUST for its "caring atmosphere" right from the beginning. The commitment of AUST to its students is evidenced by a great deal of individual support in social and financial matters as well as when helping students to find internships or later on jobs.

The strong connection to the job market is clearly reflected in several agreements with companies reaching from internship possibilities for students to joint projects. The fact that almost all enrolled students work while studying also serves as a connecting element. The university takes into account the special limitations and needs of de facto part-time students. In the eyes of the experts, this should be emphasised in the university mission statement as a unique selling point.

During the site visit, the experts experienced students and staff in remarkably high spirits and explicitly convinced about having chosen the right institution to study or to work for. Furthermore, all staff, students and alumni whom the experts interviewed are familiar with the university mission and goals, they know and accept what is expected and how to contribute.

In the experts' view the strategies both at university and at faculty level appear to conform to the university mission. In its focus on academic training primarily for the labour market, AUST's profile complies with internationally accepted standards for higher education institutions.

Definition process

In the view of the experts, the university mission should be checked and readjusted earlier than every five to eight years, and all university stakeholders (students and staff included) should be involved.

The experts appreciate that regular processes to reflect and adjust the strategies are already implemented at AUST. These processes appear well thought out, based on indicators, and dynamic. Strategic planning goes ahead together with budget planning,

considering input and participation of the academic units but with the final decision made by the Board of Trustees alone, later implemented by the Executive Council.

Since all voting members of the Board are currently from outside AUST and mostly even from institutions other than universities, the experts doubt if this way of decision making really fits the participatory demand of a modern university.

Adequacy of the strategies

The experts assess that the strategies that AUST uses to reach its objectives are consistent and fit for purpose. All activities not only consider the university's mission and the original intentions of the founders but go far beyond. The university's acquired reputation and the obvious success of many of their former students give evidence that the strategies chosen are adequate.

Areas for improvement

According to the experts, AUST's focus on academic training connected to the job market could be stated more clearly in the university's mission so that it becomes more visible as a unique feature of the university. The experts also think it worth mentioning more explicitly (and in the mission itself) how the university makes major efforts to address the special needs of working as well as of financially weaker students.

Although the experts were impressed by the university's spirit being more comparable to a start-up business company, they think it would be the right time now to develop the university structure further, especially the participatory elements by stronger involvement of the university community. A strategy workshop of all departments, all faculties, and the executives (maybe on a remote place) could make a good starting point.

Recommendations and condition

In the view of the experts, the university mission must be revised and updated addressing the actual profile of the university with its focus on part-time (and working) students and study programmes that are oriented to labour market demands. The mission statement should also reflect the student perspective. The university mission should be checked and readjusted at shorter intervals than every five to eight years. The experts suggest a period of three to four years.

The faculties, departments and the students should have a more active part in the discussion process of the university mission and its general strategy.

3.2. Governance

The criterion focuses on the internal governance and decision making processes of the institution. The experts check the clarity and transparency of the organisational provisions and governance structure. They examine whether governance structures are adequate to support the institutional strategies and how decision making processes are organised. Furthermore, the experts check how stakeholder groups are involved in governance, whether the institution provides relevant information about its activities for the internal and external public and whether academic freedom is ensured.

Current situation

AUST follows a system of governance similar to US universities. According to the self-evaluation report, two key principles are observed:

- a. Whenever and wherever various inputs are desired, the faculty councils come into play.
- b. There is always a possibility for appeal and the Executive Council is the last appeal stage.

All documents on governance – the constitution of councils, the university mission, university policies, the university bylaws, the faculty bylaws, the guidelines for faculty members, etc. – are published on the university website.

University governance and structure, decision making processes

The Board of Trustees, responsible for university development, consists of between 9 and 21 members from outside the university, plus the President (as ex-officio member without voting rights). Each board member is elected for four years and may be re-elected once. The board oversees and implements the basic university policies. Every four years, the board elects the President of the University.

The President is responsible for all aspects of university life and is solely responsible to the Board and in front of the legal authorities in Lebanon. The President appoints her/his main assistants, Vice Presidents, lawyers and auditors after receiving the approval of the Board. Each Vice President executes the responsibilities delegated to her/him and regularly consults the President and reports to her/him.

The Executive Council with the President (as chair), the Vice Presidents and the Provost is the highest institutional council. It ensures that the total programme of the university is implemented according to the set policies, rules and procedures. The Executive Council acts on recommendations submitted by the lower councils, academic units and personnel within the general policy framework set for the institution. The council also acts as a council of appeals in cases of conflict, e.g. disputes among faculty, disputes among staff, disputes among faculty and staff and disputes involving students after lower councils run their course.

The University Council includes the members of the Executive Council plus the academic Deans, the Dean of Students and Admissions, the Registrar and invited individuals as per the cases being discussed.

The Administrative Council deals with day-to-day decisions. Members of the Council comprise the Dean of Students and Admissions, the Registrar, the Public Relations Officer, the Quality Assurance Manager, the IT Manager, the Design Office Manager, the Campus Security Chief, the Building and Grounds Manager, the HR Manager and the highest student achiever (by invitation, when issues relating to student welfare are to be discussed).

According to the self-evaluation report, AUST generally follows a participative management policy in which all university groups and stakeholders and their interests are considered, while keeping in mind that the system should remain free of all political interference and meddling.

In the report and during the meetings the phrase “open door policy” was often used meaning a fluid and non-obstructed communication process between students, staff, faculties and administration.

In the academic sector, deans are appointed by the President after consultation with the Provost and the approval of the Board. Each dean has the responsibility to oversee the running of the concerned faculty as per the general guidelines set in the Board approved policies. Deans are required to hold meetings with chairs of departments who, in turn, hold departmental faculty meetings which full-timers and part-timers attend.

The chairs of academic departments are appointed after consultation with the faculty concerned and they are ordinarily rotated.

Alumni are included as members of advisory boards of certain majors; the establishment of an alumni association is already planned.

Student participation in decision making processes takes place informally, by selection of individual students since organised political student groups are banned from the campus.

Clarity and transparency and information policy

The website of AUST is the link between the institution and the internal and external public. Announcements on job vacancies, activities, the university calendar, applications, news, registration, and more study-related information are communicated via the website www.aust.edu.lb. AUST also uses social media services to address the public: Facebook (about 21,200 followers), Instagram (about 3,900 followers) and Twitter (about 326 followers).⁵

The magazine "Midweek" with information on activities, announcements and job vacancies is weekly published and distributed to banks, enterprises, embassies and alumni.

Academic freedom and hiring procedures

Faculty members are formally guaranteed academic freedom in research and in the delivery of their academic subjects, in incorporating changes to the curriculum and in implementing new curricula.

Applications of new faculty members can be submitted on public job vacancies or as general applications. In the application process the candidates are interviewed and present themselves to the department. Each application is internally discussed between the academic members and the chair. Typically, three candidates are chosen and recommended to the dean who reviews the recommendation and submits a prioritized list to the Provost who in turn will negotiate with the candidates in the order of the priority submitted. The President finalizes the deal with her/his approval and a contract is issued.

Faculty and staff members serve on standing councils in which they participate in the governance. These councils are:

- Admissions Council (4 faculty members plus a staff member from the Admissions Office);
- Curriculum Council (4 faculty members plus the Registrar);
- Co- Curriculum and Student Life Council (4 faculty members plus Dean of Students and Admissions);

⁵ June 2018

- Financial Aid Council (4 faculty members plus Dean of Students and Admissions, plus a staff member from the Bursar's Office);
- Research Council (4 faculty members; Associate and full professors)
- Graduate Studies Council (4 faculty members who have graduate program)
- Institutional Review Board (Administrators and faculty members)

Each year, the Provost forms one (or more) peer group committee(s) that is/are entrusted with the study of the files of faculty members who are eligible for promotion in rank and for limited tenure. Peer group committees are constituted of faculty members at the associate and full professorial levels; this way faculty members applying for promotion are judged by their peers as to the quality of their teaching, research and service. All peer group committees prior to 2016-2017 were formed of peers from outside AUST because AUST lacked faculty members in the top two professional ranks. Today, the peer group committees include AUST faculty members in growing numbers.

Appeals

The right to appeal is formally regulated. Students, staff and faculty members have the right to appeal decisions of individuals and councils all the way to the Executive Council which is the last appeal authority.

Before this, student non-academic issues (e.g. absences, misbehaviour) are normally decided by the office of the Dean of Students and Admissions. Student academic issues are decided in the faculties with the right to appeal to the next higher instance up to the Provost's desk. For conflicts involving staff members, the Human Resources Director will deliberate on a solution to the issue which, if not agreed upon by either party, may be appealed to the Administrative Council.

Conflicts between a faculty member and a staff member are first handled by the chair of the department if the issue is intradepartmental. The dean of faculty and the Human Resources Director will step in in case one of the parties is not satisfied. Conflicts between faculty members are dealt with by the concerned deans, followed by the Provost.

In all these cases a final appeal to the Executive Council is possible.

Assessment

The experts suggest that the governance structures of AUST are clearly structured and documented. The responsibilities and procedures of the main university bodies are described in the constitution and in the bylaws. The governance procedures appear well thought out and applicable. The relations between academics and the funding body are clear and transparent.

Looking back into the history of AUST, an institution born out of the initiative of one single person, the experts appreciate the long way the institution has passed ever since. Nevertheless, in the view of the experts, too much of the university's efforts still depend on single persons and personalities with strong positions. This might make decision making processes easier but it endangers academic freedom. The experts urge AUST to intensify active involvement and participation of the wider institutional community in the governance. The experts insist that academic self-government is more than just a "nice game": it is both essence and sanctuary of a university as an autonomous true science based institution. In this context, it would be not enough to appoint a dean

only after consultation with the faculty. Such appointments should rather be results of real elections.

The experts encourage the institution to further implement the bylaws from written documents into general practice. During the site visit, almost all people the experts could talk with praised the “open door policy” of AUST that allows direct influence on planning and decisions besides the official channels. Cooperation between faculties and disciplines happens mostly informally, too.

In the experts’ view, all this is a valuable asset but it should be guaranteed that through the open doors and through informal connections the official procedures do not become hollowed or thwarted. Governance processes and structures need both formalisation and transparency so that they are efficacious.

Adequacy

The experts assess the governance structures as working in both formal and informal ways. They have no doubts on the efficiency and applicability of the university governance as evidenced by the reputation AUST so far received.

Academic freedom

The experts experienced the academic staff as highly committed to AUST. Without any doubt, they are free both in scientific and teaching activities.

Areas for improvement

AUST should proceed further in shifting the university governance from the personal approach to a structural approach, thus both to improve the academic self-government and to ensure sustainability even after the transition process from the founder’s generation to the next.

In the experts’ view the involvement of university stakeholder groups can be further improved. They appreciate the different standing councils that have been established and how they are regularly participating in functions and processes but they miss a clear and transparent policy of how these councils are filled.

The exchange between disciplines should be more formalised.

Formal student representation remains a necessity for a modern and pluralistic university. The experts encourage AUST in its efforts to ensure student participation in academic matters, quality issues and campus culture in general. For instance, in the upcoming revision process of the university mission and its “brand essence” students’ ideas would offer high potential.

Recommendations

The role of the faculty council to the deans should be reconsidered in order to be improved: A dean should be elected by a faculty, and he should be accountable to both the university leadership and to the faculty council.

Possibilities for students to be represented in all university councils and boards (besides student elections) should be further developed.

When filling the advisory boards and councils, all university groups should have the right to make proposals. The composition of the advisory councils should always be in reasonable proportion to the subject matter under discussion.

3.3. Resources

The criterion focuses on adequate resource endowment and deployment to sustain the core activities. The experts check the existence and sustainability of a professional funding and financial management. They also check whether the qualification and number of the (academic) staff (full-time and part-time) are adequate to support the institutional strategy as well as to ensure the intended learning outcomes. Further, they review which strategies and processes for the staff recruiting and staff development are used and if the search, hiring and tenure procedure are in line with international academic practices. The resources, facilities and equipment are also part of the criterion. Therefore, the experts examine if the amount and quality of facilities and equipment allow the provision of the programme (library, laboratories, teaching rooms, IT equipment) and if the resources are adequate to reach the objectives of the programme and are in accordance with the institutional strategy.

Current status

Financial resources and management

AUST has an annual budget that shall guarantee the financial safety, stability and well-being of the operation in its various cost centres. The budget is developed from the bottom up thus getting individuals at various levels of the decision-making process involved: In October of each academic year the budget cycle begins and ends in July of the same academic year, the date on which the Board approves the proposed budget. The procedural steps in the academic sector are described below (non-academic cost centres follow similar pathways).

1. The Vice President for Finance and Administration sends all cost centres copies of the actually approved year budget with space provided for incorporating changes desired for "next year" with a note explaining the margins of change approved by the Board.
2. The academic cost centres submit their internal deliberations to the respective dean by end of January. These deliberations will include the needs for the coming year in full-time and part-time faculty, equipment, facilities, etc. The non-academic cost centres will submit the results of their deliberations directly to the office of the Vice President for Finance and Administration.
3. The dean will coordinate the requests of the various cost centres under her/his jurisdiction and will send them to the Provost by the end of February.
4. The Provost will meet with the dean in an academic budget defence session and together they will arrive at figures that will be submitted for review to the Vice President for Finance and Administration by end of April.
5. The Vice President for Finance and Administration will hold all university budget defence sessions with each budget centre represented by its ultimate head during May until a final all university budget is agreed upon. This budget will be presented to the Executive Council for discussion and approval by June 15.

6. The President submits the proposed university budget to the Board in its July session for approval.

The Vice President for Finance and Administration is the key person in the budget cycle. The offices directly involved in collecting and allocating funds according to the approved budget employ eight full-timers (with Bachelor and Master degrees) who make sure that revenues are collected and payments are made according to the approved budget. An internal auditor rechecks all income and expense statements. The university also employs an external auditing firm.

The annual budget guarantees the salaries (including possible increases⁶) and plans for growth as requested by the various cost centres and approved by the Board at least a year ahead of implementation.

Students' tuition fees account for practically 100 % of the revenues in the budget. Despite increasing costs (inflation, increase in salaries, equipment renewal, etc.) in Lebanon and of the loss of 200-400 students every year⁷, AUST has not increased fees for the last three years.

Human resources and the recruitment process

Vacancies are normally advertised on the website and in journals. General applications are also accepted. According to the self-evaluation report, AUST's policy concerning the pay scale, the teaching loads and the promotion requirements of its faculty members observe other universities' practices.

The Board approved faculty affairs policy regulates recruitment, contracts, loads, promotion, leaves, outside teaching, etc.

Regardless of the type of contract envisaged, each academic applicant must appear in front of a faculty panel for a presentation of 30-45 minutes.

AUST offers three types of faculty contracts:

- Full-time contracts where faculty members receive payments for twelve months. They are promoted within the provisions of the faculty affairs policy and they enjoy the benefit of a life insurance that pays off a certain bulk amount in lieu of indemnity. Faculty members in this category dedicate 100% of their times to AUST. Contracts are for one or three-year duration.
- Full load contracts where faculty members have a guaranteed full load for nine months. They are required to keep office hours and they may teach outside AUST. This category of faculty does not qualify for promotions. Should they become with full-time contracts, the period during which they were in the full load category will count for them.

⁶ Raises in faculty and staff salaries usually come as a result of an evaluation process.

⁷ Because of the worsening financial conditions in Lebanon due to the influx of Syrian refugees and the worsening political relations with the Gulf nations, many Lebanese families saw their incomes dwindle; coupled with the fact that many hotels and restaurants closed in Lebanon, many students lost their full time or part time jobs and consequently many students decided to withdraw from university thus causing a drop in enrolment in most universities and colleges in Lebanon. According to the self-evaluation report, this development has not jeopardised the continuity of the operation at AUST but it is regarded as very worrisome.

- Part-time hourly contracts where faculty members are contracted to teach a certain number of hours and they are paid the agreed hourly rate according to their academic degrees and experience.

In academic year 2016-2017, there were 27 faculty members with three year full-time contracts, 16 with one year full-time contracts, 45 with full load contracts and 158 with part-time contracts.

Table 2 gives an overview in numbers on the academic and administrative staff of AUST

2016	Total	Full-time academic staff	% Female	% International	% Tenured	Part-time academic staff	Administrative staff
Total	247	89	45 %	5 %	10 %	158	107
With Master degree	182	40	53 %	7 %	0 %	142	27
With PhD degree	65	49	56 %	2 %	100 %	16	0
By Academic Unit:							
Business and Economics	59	24	42 %	5 %	26 %	35	3
Arts and Sciences	133	46	56 %	7 %	52 %	87	7
Health Sciences	37	13	68 %	3 %	16 %	24	5
Engineering	18	6	5 %	0 %	6 %	12	2

Table 2 – Academic and administrative staff of AUST⁸

Staff quality assurance and evaluation

Faculty members may enrol in or audit any university course for free. Staff members are encouraged to enrol for higher degrees and the fees will be shouldered by the university if the higher degree is in the line of service of the employee. Occasionally, AUST holds special development courses and workshops for its staff and workers (e.g. English language courses for drivers, parking attendants, cafeteria staff and security personnel, etc.).

Faculty and staff salaries are reviewed each year. Normally, a certain increase due to inflation is given to all and then merit increases are dispensed based on individual performance.

Facilities

The American University of Science & Technology operates three campuses: the main campus is located in Beirut (land space: 10,000 square metres; building space: 12,245 square metres). Zahlé campus consists of 8,000 square metres of land space and 6,000 square metres of building space. Sidon campus consists of 7,245 square metres

⁸ Cf. self-evaluation report, p. 20

of land space and 3,725 square metres of building space. The property and buildings of the campuses are owned by AUST.

Several laboratories are available for teaching, learning and research. The Faculty of Engineering maintains 12 laboratory facilities distributed over more than 1,000 square metres:

- Quantitative Medical Physiology Laboratory (QMPL)
- Biomedical Instrumentation & Controls Laboratory (BICL)
- Biomechanics/Biomaterials & Human Performance Laboratory (BBHPL)
- Communication Systems Laboratory (COMSYSLAB)
- Control and Industrial Automation Laboratory (CIAL)
- Digital and Microprocessors Laboratory (DML)
- Circuits Analysis and Electronics Laboratory (CAEL)
- LabVIEW Facility (LabVIEW)
- Senior Capstone Project Laboratory (SCPL)
- Engineering Workshop
- Computing Facilities and Computer Networks/Hardware Laboratories
- Innovation Center

The Faculty of Health Sciences houses the following ten laboratory facilities distributed over more than 2,000 square metres:

- Applied Toxicology Laboratory (ATL)
- Biology Laboratory (BL)
- Biotechnology Research Laboratories (BRL)
- Chemistry and Pharmaceuticals Laboratory (CPL)
- Computer Laboratories (CL)
- Medical Physiology Laboratory (MPL)
- Molecular Biology Laboratory (MBL)
- Molecular Genetics Laboratory (MGL)
- Optics and Optometry Laboratory (OOL)
- Phlebotomy Laboratory (PL)

The DNA and toxicology laboratories are highly reputed, the laboratory for genetically modified organisms is recognized as the reference GMO laboratory for Lebanon and the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region.

The Department of Arts and Design runs a ceramics and printmaking studio, a drawing, painting and sculpture studio, a fashion design lab, a carpentry workshop, and a computer design lab.

The Department of Communication Arts maintains a TV studio fully equipped with professional digital video cameras as well as a state-of-art radio studio. In the editing suite, there are about 15 editing stations where students are able to digitize and edit their work.

Additionally, an “Innovation Center” for AUST students and alumni who want to start tech companies is available, equipped with Apple desktops, tablets, and mobile devices.

Besides, AUST’s offers modern computing and computer networks/hardware laboratories with Macintosh, Windows, Linux, Android, iOS, and Windows Mobile based equipment. Each laboratory capacity ranges from 20 to 46 workstations, and locations are distributed throughout the campus. Most of these labs are open daily, from early morning until late at night.

These lab facilities provide an extensive high-tech suite and a secure work environment for faculty, staff, and students. Instructors can request to have some software/hardware installed in the labs for course use, and can reserve instructional labs for teaching. The instructional labs provide faculty with fully configured computer facilities to deliver an advanced, hands-on learning environment for students.

The whole campus is equipped with a high-speed wireless Internet connection that can be used by all university members. All classrooms are also equipped with LCD projectors along with a PC and internet connection.

The recent conclusion of an agreement with Blackboard Inc. will offer the use of the learning environment Moodle for the whole university in the very near future.

Library

AUST students and staff are may use the library holdings of EBSCO online which offers access to a wide range of electronic library services.

A small campus library is currently to be extended.

Assessment

Altogether, AUST provides sufficient resources to sustain its operation at the desired quality level. The campus appears well-maintained with modern facilities, the entrance area in Alfred Naccash Avenue appears open and friendly to students and visitors.

Financial resources

In the experts’ view the financial management is professional; the process of preparing the yearly budget is clear and executed with the collaboration of the faculties. The university relies for its funding almost exclusively on its tuitions.

The expert group appreciates AUST’s general policy to keep the tuition fees on a reasonable level and to spend a significant amount on student financial aid. The experts had the impression that by and large this system works, and desired projects do not fail for funding reasons.

The deployment of resources is according to the expert group consistent with the mission of a student-centred institution: AUST spends about 75 % of its expenditures on the four faculties. On the other hand, the only 2 % of the budget spent directly for research appears as far too low.

Staff

The experts agree that the staff of the university seems appropriate to provide high quality education to its students, even under the impression that only 36 % full-time teachers are quite a small number. Nevertheless, the experts did not get the impression of any negative effects on both the quality and the range of studies by this imbalance. The experts were impressed by the dynamic and motivated staff members, both academic (full-time and part-time) and administrative, which are a big asset of AUST.

However, in the experts' view AUST lacks really structured support offers for staff to improve their knowledge in areas such as pedagogic practice, higher qualifications and general capabilities: Individuals appear to be supported, and personal development is generally appreciated and recommended by the institution but there is no clear wide-ranging concept behind.

The reported search and tenure procedures of the university seem to fulfil by and large academic standards and ensure the selection of academics based on an academic decision. "Parachuting decisions" by executives bypassing official ways were exceptions in the past. During the site visit the experts could be convinced that faculties could at least prevent such decisions.

International mobility exists at certain individual levels, mostly for short periods, e.g. participation in conferences, workshops etc. The university should make further efforts to increase the level of mobility, especially for longer periods abroad. The experts estimate the existing contacts and partnerships with universities abroad as a good starting point.

Facilities

By and large, the facilities of the university are appropriate for sustaining the teaching and the research activities of the university.

AUST has several modern laboratories on the Beirut campus which the experts could visit. The technical equipment should allow a high quality of teaching and seems also appropriate for carrying out applied research projects, even on a very high standard.

Concerning computer rooms and lecture rooms, the experts admit that AUST tries to make the best of the limited space available in a heavily built-up area. Some of the rooms the experts could visit appear to be very small, considering classes of about 25 people. The experts experienced the university executives to be aware of these limitations and looking for opportunities to improve the room situation.

During the site visit, students expressed their wish for more green spaces and leisure areas.

Outside class hours, students are allowed to use any lecture room, even computer rooms are available. Besides, the situation of working and study spaces solely dedicated to students seems to be insufficient.

The existing library is very small and provides only a limited range of scientific literature. The experts welcome that AUST has come to an extensive agreement with ESCBO which should guarantee online access to scientific sources both to students and staff at least in an adequate amount – as long as AUST provides practical support through qualified personnel how to work with digital libraries, e.g. how to find relevant sources and how to deal with them (proof of validity, references, quotation rules, plagiarism, etc.). Since access to the library services from outside is possible (and according to the interviews increasing), the university should install an appropriate user support system especially for the library.

The IT infrastructure of the university is up to date and equipped with modern and functional software which was also affirmed by different stakeholder groups during the site visit. The experts appreciate that through the recent agreement with Blackboard Inc. a virtual learning environment can be provided university-wide.

Areas of improvement

As suggested by students, AUST should consider how to increase the amount of green spaces and leisure areas on the Beirut campus. This should be taken into account for future renovation projects or campus expansion. A university-wide greening project together with students, staff and the local community would even have positive effects on the community spirit.

Recommendations and conditions

For each academic position the university wants to fill there must be a formal job posting before with university-wide standardised application deadlines.

The transparency of hiring and tenure procedures (from part-timer to full-timer) should be more developed with clearly described criteria and pathways.

A concept for systematic staff development – academic and non-academic – should be set up and implemented with the university community involved.

Part-time staff should be part of staff development.

Considering the great amount of students studying at home and using digital resources, AUST must offer appropriate user support by specially trained and qualified personnel especially for the digital library services.

The rate of full-time staff to part-time staff should be increased: Ideally, part-time staff is hired only in those cases where the curriculum suggests a close and lively contact with the world of professionals outside the university.

The university should establish more working places with tables and sockets dedicated to students across the whole campus. Overall, the number of work spaces permanently available should meet at least 13 % of the number of students.⁹

3.4. Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning is one of the main topics of higher education institutions. In the accreditation procedure the experts check whether the study programmes comply with the institutional strategy and national regulations. They also check the academic standards of the study programmes and how research and teaching are linked. The experts review whether the institution employs student-centred teaching and learning processes which acknowledge to the diversity of students and their needs. Moreover, they assess how the assessment of intended learning outcomes is organised and how the student life cycle is organised.

⁹ According to a study by the German HIS Hochschul-Informationen-System GmbH, universities should provide work place for students in an amount of altogether 13 % based on the number of students. (Cf. Vogel / Woisch: Orte des Selbststudiums. HIS Forum Hochschule 7/2013, online at https://www.dzhw.eu/pdf/pub_fh/fh-201307.pdf, accessed on 16 July 2018.)

Current status

Academic standards of the study programmes

Students admitted to AUST must have passed successfully the General Secondary Education Examinations (Baccalaureate II) in compliance with the Lebanese Law that prohibits enrolment in tertiary education institutions without passing the official exams (or equivalent). The Lebanese law requires that universities operating on the American-style system award BA/BS degrees after the completion of a minimum of 120 credit hours. AUST has opted to award its Bachelor degrees after the completion of 135 credit hours or 105 credit hours starting the sophomore class. The extra fifteen credit hours are used to provide students with additional material that could not be adequately fitted in the 120 credit hours.

All new students must pass the International Computer Driving License Test (ICDL).

Faculty members in academic departments have the responsibility to constantly update and improve their curricula. The process of improvement considers inputs from various stakeholders. To align the academic programs with the latest advances and changes, faculty members may resort to curricular changes. Such changes must come as results of deliberations within the academic department and must receive the approval of the dean of the faculty and the Provost. These changes should take into consideration the input of stakeholders especially the advisory board, where it exists, and the alumni input.

The academic year consists of a fall semester and a spring semester, each of 15 weeks. A full-time student's normal load is five courses per semester (15 credit hours). Some students may petition to enrol in six or seven courses (maximum 21 credit hours per semester) if they are graduating in that particular semester or if they have a Grade Point Average (GPA) superior to 3.00/4.00.

At the undergraduate level, students need to get C grades (2.00/4.00) in all courses in the major field of specialization and to attain a minimum cumulative Grade Point Average of 2.00/4.00 in order to graduate.

In the past, class sessions of 50 minutes were held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays while sessions lasted for 75 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In 2015, AUST started holding all sessions for 75 minutes (on Mondays, Wednesdays and Tuesdays, Thursdays) and reserved Fridays for administrative meetings, consultations between faculty and students, research, extra sessions for weak students, problem solving sessions and senior capstone projects.

By having Fridays as non-teaching days, attention to the research factor was enhanced. On Fridays, the university is not empty; it is rather busier than usual. One would find students busy in computer centres, design studios, engineering workshops, DNA and toxicology laboratories doing things that they did not have time to do during class days.

Accredited study programmes

AUST received accreditation by IACBE¹⁰ for the following programmes:

- Master of Business Administration

¹⁰ The International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE) is an educational accreditation agency for college and university business programmes. It is based in Olathe, Kansas, United States.

- Bachelor of Science in Business Administration

Furthermore, three Bachelor programmes were accredited by ABET¹¹:

- Bachelor of Science in Computer Science
- Bachelor of Science in Computer and Communications Engineering
- Bachelor of Science in Computer and Communications Engineering with Minors in Biomedical Engineering and Biomedical Sciences

Student-centred study

All study programmes should meet the general demand of student-centred teaching and learning by interactive class sessions as far as possible. The emphasis is on learning and teaching. Faculty members are not to assume preaching positions where the students listen and believe. They are to be leaders of discussions and, hence, engage the students in a process of deductive learning whenever possible. Faculty members are encouraged to engage students in case studies and this is to be reflected in their exams.

Classrooms are equipped with audio-visual equipment and computer facilities that support the learning/teaching process, and faculty members are asked to take full advantage of these facilities. The number of students in a class varies from 16 to 45 depending on the nature of the course being taught. The final evaluation of students is a sum total of grades received in quizzes, exams, papers, projects, attendance, participation and the final exam which can account for a maximum of 40% of the final grade.

AUST has recently begun to add online teaching elements to conventional on-campus teaching, thus to address the increasing demands by working students for blended learning offers. In 2017-2018 each faculty was asked to prepare one course to be offered solely online so as to make preparations for future growth in this direction.

Assessments of intended learning outcomes

The syllabus of each course offered specifies what is required from the student in the course and how the student will be evaluated. Normally, at least three exams and a final (aside from papers, projects and short quizzes) are required to evaluate the student's progress in the course. The final grade attributed to a student in a course is a sum total of her/his performance in the evaluation criteria in addition to the evaluations received on class participation and on absence from class sessions.

In order to connect the classroom and "the real world", students are required to do internships in banks, studios, financial companies, TV stations, design companies, etc. The internship hosts are required to write a short report or fill in a special evaluation booklet about the student's tenure in their locale. These internships proved to be very beneficial in connecting students with potential employers. Many students – as a result of the internship – received part-time or full-time job offers. In this regard, several memorandums of understanding have been signed with industry partners to guarantee

¹¹ ABET, incorporated as the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc., with 35 professional and technical member societies, is a non-governmental organisation that accredits post-secondary education programmes in applied and natural science, computing, engineering and engineering technology.

the needed number of internship opportunities that have well defined outcomes and evaluation forms with detailed rubrics.

The university requires that students practice the synthesis of the knowledge acquired in the classroom in the form of a senior capstone project. Students in the business major will have (for example) their projects deal with the formation of a new company (restaurant, club, leisure centre, etc.) for which they would need to do research about the competition and a feasibility study that includes management, marketing, financing, legal aspects, i.e. the project should combine all the aspects studied in the business major together so as to bring about a profitable venture.

The senior project is required in all disciplines of study. The senior project course assesses the student's ability to synthesize the knowledge obtained from various courses throughout the student's tenure at the university.

In the last 4 years the Faculty of Business and Economics, the Faculty of Engineering, the Computer Science program and the Clinical Laboratory Science program have been administering exit exams to graduating students designed to assess the student's retention of essential principles and concepts in the field.

Practice oriented study

Disciplines such as engineering, computer science and business have Boards of Advisors, made up of leaders in the field who are at the same time potential employers of the graduates. These advisors may influence the academic faculty on the latest needs of the market and on curriculum changes needed to meet these needs. The Board meets at least one time a year and its membership usually includes a graduate of AUST.

Each year the Human Resource Directors in institutions that employ AUST graduates are asked to fill in questionnaires designed to reflect the employer's satisfaction with the graduates of AUST. These comments are taken seriously and suggestions are implemented wherever possible.

Diversity

According to the university's mission, students, faculty and staff come from all religions and from all socio-economic strata. Special attention is paid to the individual needs of all students especially those who prove to be academically in need of help. Weak students may benefit from extra sessions for free (especially problem solving sessions) that are held on Fridays and Saturdays by able adjunct instructors who may also be high achieving students. Physically disabled students are guaranteed classes in accessible locations and visually impaired students are given assistance by readers and in purchase of specialized equipment.

For students who are slow learners, AUST has established the Learning Enhancement and Assistance Program (LEAP) which is unique in Lebanon (the only condition is that the student should be socially adaptable).

Students who are financially needy may benefit from financial aid (10 % of budget in 2016-2017) which is awarded to siblings, students who lost parents, excelling students, student on varsity sports teams and students in financial need.

Student Life Cycle

The life cycle of the student at AUST begins with the application form that may be presented in print or online. Applicants are asked to sit for placement tests in English language and mathematics. The decision on acceptance (admission) is decided based on passing the National General Secondary Exams (Lebanese Baccalaureate II), the school grades in the last two years and the results of the placement tests in English and mathematics. Once the student is admitted she/he will be asked to attend an obligatory orientation session that will introduce her/him to university life and to the academic rules and procedures. The student is then assigned an academic advisor, and a student programme contract sheet summarising the courses required to complete for the degree will be issued.

Each new student is given a copy of the Students Handbook that contains the academic rules and procedures and other relevant information.

At the beginning of the semester, the first two days of classes may be two days of departmental orientation to the new majors, introduction to scholarly work and to getting into the cycle of studying.

The Dean of Students and Admissions who is a member of the University Council deals with students' direct concerns, worries and views of students. The dean's office assists students who have absence issues, academic issues, adjustment issues with the move from high school to university, and behavioural issues. The office drafts a profile sheet for each student that summarises not only the academic life of the student but also the "behavioural life". The office in cooperation with the faculty advisor follow up on assistance of weak students who are asked to come on Fridays and Saturdays for problem solving session. Students in need of special counsel may find it with the clinical psychologist who is part of Dean of Students and Admissions' office. Three afternoons per week a medical doctor receives students; if needed she/he refers difficult cases to any of four neighbouring hospitals. All students are obliged to obtain medical insurance during the registration week for a nominal group fee.

The Center for Learning and Development collects data on available jobs for students outside the university and refers students who are seeking jobs to these companies (students with financial assistance from AUST work on Campus). The centre also offers instruction sessions on how to dress and prepare for a job interview and on writing CVs and letters to employers. A majority of students enrolled at AUST are – in general – financially needy and they cannot depend on their parents to pay or help in the tuition costs.

Every year, the office of the Dean of Students and Admissions organises a job fair for companies to introduce themselves especially to graduating students who are seeking jobs. A considerable amount of recruitment takes place during the job fair day. Recently, it was decided to have pointed, specialised day(s) for each job type and the first application of this change proved positive.

The Sports and Activities Office is responsible for coordinating the non-academic life of students on campus with several clubs and sports offers. The Sports and Activities Office also oversees the involvement of students in volunteer work and in work that forges the identity of students with social, cultural and national issues such as activities for the elderly and for orphans, marathons, greening of Lebanon, etc.

Academically, students are assigned advisors who see to it that the courses students choose to carry each semester fit well together so as to guarantee graduation in six or

seven semesters. Faculty advisors also act as guides and mentors. The last two semesters of a student's tenure at AUST will see the advisor and the student get together to study the course load to be taken so that no surprises happen that will hinder graduation. The same work is done in the Registrar's Office.

The relationship of the student with AUST does not end with receiving the diploma on graduation day. The Office of Alumni Affairs holds the addresses of 4,000 graduates, and it keeps the alumni informed about the latest news at AUST. An Alumni Association is on its way to be founded, the constitution and bylaws have already been drafted.

Assessment

Teaching and learning with a view to the university strategy

AUST was established to make high education accessible to individuals with limited financial means. Teaching and learning is considered the central activity of the university. AUST strives to adjust its study programmes to the needs of the Lebanese labour market, thus competing with other private universities. A strong but almost unspoken focus is on working students, on a close connection to local companies, and on entrepreneurship. In the eyes of the experts this should be made more explicit by a formal definition of AUST's special way of teaching and learning.

The expert team views the approaches in the field of teaching and learning positively. They appreciate how AUST has established contact to key stakeholders on the labour market to monitor developments and needs that could lead to new study programmes.

In the view of the experts, the study portfolio of AUST is innovative with offers unique in Lebanon. The expert group supports the general education concept of the university with the obligatory broad liberal arts curriculum that includes languages, social sciences, humanities and math/natural sciences requirements from all students regardless of their academic major.

Furthermore, the experts appreciate the university's flexible approach to the needs of the students, here just to mention that many classes are offered twice a day since most of the students are working. Considering these efforts made it is surprising to see that this part-time-studying feature is not properly reflected in the mission statement and the published strategies of AUST.

During the site visit the experts witnessed that students and staff obviously make good use of the university's decision to keep Fridays free from classes: the campus was busy with student working groups, and consultant services were obviously well frequented.

In the view of the experts the university allocates appropriate resources to teaching and learning. The staff met during the site visit was very dynamic and motivated and expressed a high commitment to AUST. In general, the experts deem the student-staff ratio to be appropriate.

Student-centred study system

In the view of the experts AUST shows a tremendous interest in the students' success: The students' learning process is continuously observed, and problems and difficulties are dealt with in close consultation between students, student services and academics. It is worth mentioning how the university cares even for students in financial, social and psychological straits. These service-oriented and competent offers can be seen as a great asset of AUST.

Asked for a short characterization in one word for AUST during the interview sessions, “supportive” and “understanding” was mentioned most frequently.¹² The students explicitly appreciate the services offered by the university and report a well organised study process.

Academic standards and curriculum development

The expert group assesses the academic standards of the study programmes as being met. In the eyes of the experts the strict obligatory attendance policy has a positive impact on the study success. Nevertheless, in cases of hardship the university tries to comply with students’ double burden of study and work, and a great deal of flexibility is shown.

The university has appropriate procedures for the development of study programmes. The responsibility of the programme content is up to academics, the compliance with university and national regulations and an appropriate study organisation are ensured. The experts emphasize that AUST is keen to involve enterprises in the development of the study programmes. For the experts, this is an excellent way to ensure best preparation for the professional market without questioning the academic basis of the programmes.

AUST also seems to ensure an appropriate workload of its study programmes. Research methodology, internships or capstone projects are obligatory, and the experts appreciate how the university acts to support students in finding places for internship, partner enterprises for the projects, and later jobs. Given the present economic crisis in Lebanon in particular, the experts would like to mention the later graduates’ obviously excellent starting conditions.

Overall assessment

The site visit confirms to the expert team that teaching and learning of high quality is well practiced at AUST. The university devotes energy and resources to provide innovative study programmes with high academic quality. Robust links between the study programmes and the labour market exist. Teaching is carried out by dynamic, motivated and supportive lecturers. The university offers professional student support services and takes special account on working students.

Financial and social support for students in need is obviously a high priority of AUST.

Areas of improvement

Projects related to fields of modern research should be incorporated more frequently into teaching. This happens already in the faculty of engineering by student projects (e.g. robotics) but it could be extended to all fields of study. Staff’s opportunities to individual research could also be strengthened since university teachers also should be scientists and researchers.

Interdisciplinarity between faculties and study programmes could also be increased and brought into teaching.

¹² In the same session the students described themselves as “hard working”.

A university is also the place where a society can think of and discuss about itself and its problems and where young people are getting aware about the challenges of the future. AUST could refer to these challenges more clearly, esp. to the country's current problems (e.g. traffic jam, pollution, disposal, climate change, digitization, etc.) in its teaching programme.

Recommendations

AUST should start a university-wide discussion process to identify and define its special teaching profile. This could be part of the revision of the university's mission.

Overall, the university should develop interdisciplinary cooperation in teaching with possibilities of exchange of modules between subjects.

Students as well as alumni and their experiences should be involved in curriculum development and in the review of study programmes.

3.5. Research

The criterion focuses on the research profile and academic goals of the institution and whether the profile fits the institutional strategy. Moreover, the experts check whether the academic standards are fulfilled, how the research process is organised and supported by the institution and how research is evaluated within the institution. They also check how the training of young researchers is organised, how the institution ensures the academic standards of the training of young researchers and their rights.

Current status

Research and institutional strategies

In the self-evaluation report, AUST describes itself as a comprehensive institution that combines teaching and research while the preponderant factor is teaching. Research takes a distant second position to teaching but is seen as an important factor at least for the identity of the university. AUST's website has a special section entitled "Research and Publications" that reflects the work of AUST's faculty members and their research interests.

The university follows a policy that hinders money from student fees going directly into research projects. Less than 2 % of the university budget is currently spent for research (around 370,000 \$).

Since 2003, AUST has had a Vice-President for Academic Affairs who dedicated his effort to institutionalise the academic affairs sector by decreasing teaching loads together with promoting the requirement for research in each faculty. From the very beginning, research is seen the strict domain of faculty members. The topic and methodology are decided upon and executed by the individual faculty member(s) concerned.

The university provides seed money for research and the allocation of seed money is deliberated upon by the Research Council composed of faculty members. In addition, AUST has an Institutional Review Board made up of faculty members and administrators whose task is to review research projects with an ethical angle especially when humans and/or animals are subjects in the experiments.

AUST especially encourages applied research that should be of use to the country whereas theoretical research is given less support. For example, the university encouraged research on the issue of young Lebanese entrepreneurs and how they coped with Israeli induced paralysis during the war on Lebanon in 2006. The self-evaluation report also mentions research made on the successful franchising ventures by young Lebanese entrepreneurs or on the effects of consanguinity on the physical health of children in marriages among close relatives.

Faculty members are encouraged to work in research groups together so that people with a lower research profile will profit from colleagues with stronger research backgrounds. AUST pays the publication fees that some journals impose. In the case when a project is of long duration and has been deemed of high importance by the Research Council, the faculty member may be awarded a decrease of one course per semester to accomplish the research task.

Research and promotions

Prior to 2003, all full-time PhD holders were assigned to the rank of assistant professors. The Faculty Affairs Policy regulates the procedure of duly promotions to the rank of associate professor after evaluation by a Peer Group Promotion Committee based on three criteria: teaching effectiveness, research output, and services. This was implemented for the first time in 2006. The Faculty Affairs Policy also specifies the publication and conference requirements needed for promotion in rank.

According to the policy, the university supports researchers with the necessary tools needed, e.g. the electronic library, several laboratories, and computer equipment (see above). In some of the laboratories graduate (and, at times, undergraduate) research assistants are at the researchers' disposal. Financial assistance and funding are provided through seed money designated for research. More substantial expenditures for research may be received from the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS) which has recently started assisting research in social sciences, business, and human sciences.

The research expertise of AUST faculty and graduate students was put to public benefit in the DNA and toxicology laboratories involvement in uncovering forensic data in the case of the murder of Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and in identifying the corpses of the Lebanese army soldiers killed by the Islamic State terrorists. As a consequence, these research laboratories are now often sought after in complex forensic cases by the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces as well as in analytical cases regarding DNA parenting and biologically altered or controlled agriculture species.

Some faculty members engage in research with faculty members in cooperating universities in Europe and the USA, e.g. recent health studies on Syrian refugees Lebanon together with colleagues from the University of California at San Francisco and the University of California at Berkeley. All agreements with international universities include cooperation in research and year after year this is picking up especially in the biological sciences.

AUST assists faculty members who do not have PhDs in securing PhD acceptance and provides modest support in helping the faculty member complete the desired doctorate degree. This support may be in considering travel days for research consultations with advisors as "non-absent" days and even assigning substitute faculty members to cover up these absences.

Training of young researchers

AUST does not have PhD programmes in any field of study.

Research done by students at the undergraduate level may or may not be directed toward obtaining novel results unknown to the field before. Undergraduate student research work may be initiated in order to acquaint the student with the scientific method pursued in research. Rarely do faculty members ask undergraduate students to aim for novel findings that no one arrived at before.

In Master programmes, the researchers (students and teachers) have to come up and realize a contribution that is totally new to the field. In short, the limits of knowledge in the field must be pushed forward at least incrementally. Several of the students who received their BS or MS degrees in "Science fields" from AUST completed or are about to complete work toward PhDs at universities abroad.

Young researchers at AUST offered graduate programmes are given the same support that faculty members engaged in research receive from AUST. In the molecular biotechnology and toxicology areas, the graduate students enjoy free access to electronic library holdings, free copies of papers downloaded for a fee, computer and internet access, bench top space, a desk and up to \$ 10,000 (per student) for purchase of incidentals required in their research. Other graduate students who do not need laboratory benches and incidentals enjoy all the remaining advantages mentioned above.

Thesis, research results and final projects (in short, all items that have some research factor) need to be defended in open sessions. At least one member of the examining committee must be from outside AUST. The open defence and the presence of non-AUST examiners are safety valves that ensure fairness, objectivity and preservation of standard. Perhaps the best example that could be given in this regard is the Annual Engineering and Computer Science Expo that is done in May of each year. Here, senior students (undergraduates) exhibit their final research results and products in a public display to which all the university community in Lebanon and industry stakeholders are invited. The Jury members who judge the products for quality, originality and standards are in their overwhelming majority from outside AUST – faculty members from other universities, leaders in the industries, potential buyers of good ideas, etc.

Assessment

In the view of the experts, both investment in research and research output of the university seem fairly low. This might be by and large in line with the mission of a teaching university. It also reflects the Lebanese tradition which might value education much more than research. The budget allocation supports this view as the state only supports research in a very modest way.

Research offers itself primarily as applied research, related to the needs of Lebanese society. In the eyes of the experts, the results are commendable. However, there appears to be a need for greater coordination of research activities and more effective communication for institutional research priorities.

The experts acknowledge the commitment of the staff in applied research activities and its integration in the curricula through projects and during internships. Nevertheless, the experts still see considerable potential for improvement regarding applied research: Applied research could be even more integrated in the curricula of the programmes in order to further develop the link between teaching and research and to strengthen the learning experience of the students.

In the eyes of the experts, first steps have already been made, just to mention the field of biomedical engineering. Since research intensity differs between faculties, the experts would recommend AUST to seek ways to carry out more applied research projects in cooperation with enterprises, institutions and administrations in all faculties.

The experts observed that research activities of the academic staff are encouraged, but only to a limited extent. They appreciate that AUST has begun to think about incentives for researchers, but a comprehensive and central research strategy is obviously missing. In the eyes of the experts it is a good step in this direction that research activities and publications are monitored by the departments and published on the university website.

According to the expert group, the research observed at AUST meets international academic standards. The university officials illustrated how researchers can work on their own projects and how the university within the limited budget supports them to carry out individual applied research. It could also be observed that students are encouraged to participate in research projects.

As the experts experienced from the interviews with the heads of departments and with staff, the significance of the research profile of applicants in staff recruitment is obviously growing.

Areas for improvement

AUST does not have PhD programmes in any field of study but cooperation agreements exist that allow individuals (in limited numbers) to do the doctorate at one of the partner universities. In the eyes of the experts, these possibilities should be increased.

The wave of digitalisation sweeping the world could open new fields for applied research especially for AUST.

More applied research projects could be implemented that address public problems: pollution, environment protection, employability etc. (see 3.4). The Advisory Board should play an active role here.

Recommendations and conditions

If AUST wishes to strengthen its applied research activities, the expert team sees it indispensable to invest more resources and to raise additional research funds.

The university should make use of the Advisory Board to identify fields for research in a more systematic way.

AUST should consider more incentives in order to support and enhance the research output of its academic staff. Even sabbaticals for research should be thought of.

At department level, systematic measures should be taken to identify the talents of those students who may do research and later to be promoted.

Strategic partnership contracts with universities abroad should be increased to offer more postgraduate/doctorate places for the young scientists. Future master programmes of AUST should be designed as compatible with international postgraduate programmes.

The university must formulate a general policy for applied research, enterprise and knowledge transfer together with clear institutional objectives and realistic targets, linked to both the teaching and learning profile and the university's mission.

3.6. Institution and society

The experts check whether the strategy of the institution takes the needs of the society into account. They also examine the activities with which the institution connects to the society among others with cooperation, internationalisation, entrepreneurship, diversity. In addition, the experts review whether the activities fit the strategy.

Current status

The mission statement of AUST reflects its objective of the development of society and in particular the development of the student seen as central figure in society. In its self-perception as a centre of learning, research and activities with physical facilities, sophisticated equipment, and highly educated, well trained and smart individuals, the university claims a potential to raise the various standards associated with education of the youth of the community and to provide training programmes in the continuing education department for society at large.

The university executives see their institution in a dynamic and organic relationship with society and state whilst keeping the independence of the university.

Several activities that illustrate how AUST feels as a responsible part of society were mentioned during the site visit and in the self-evaluation report:

- The Optometry Department runs a clinic on wheels that visits schools and municipalities and checks the vision of students and citizens (free of charge).
- Sagesse High School and a secondary public school in Bcharre were offered (each) laboratories with forty computers complete with wiring, networking, and software. Donations and support to several other schools are often made, too.
- AUST is engaged in teacher training programmes for school teachers improving teaching skills and effectiveness: Some of these activities are co-funded by private foundations, e.g. the Hariri Foundation.
- Aside from research done at AUST in support of the needs of the armed forces, AUST continually trained (free of charge) members of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) on the running of forensic laboratories that AUST built for the ISF through a donation from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
- Until 2017, AUST ran every summer free intensive courses in English and mathematics to help university applicants (to all universities, not strictly AUST) improve their scores on college placement exams. As of 2018, high schools can ask AUST to run the special intensive sessions in the schools anytime during the year after regular classes.
- Every summer, AUST holds a 7 hour/day programme for the children of faculty, staff, workers and the neighbouring community free of charge.
- AUST hosts the Students Chapter of the Tribunal on Lebanon that follows the deliberations of La Hague Court deliberations on the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri, and hosts the Lebanon Chapter of the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), the monthly meetings of the Benevolent Association of the Women of Ashrafieh plus many of the neighbourhood associations that require meeting venues.
- AUST offered the first nationwide course in biometrics in collaboration with SpeechPro (STC) in Saint Petersburg, Russia to law enforcement agencies including LAF, ISF, General Security and State Security in addition to the

banking sector. Biometrics are used now in business authentication of clients, human identification, border security and anti-terrorism activities.

- AUST has started several planting activities along medians and places in the direct neighbourhood. A project to plant one million trees over the whole country is underway.
- On the Beirut campus, the Garden of the Lebanese Genius was installed with statues of famous Lebanese from the past to remind students and other people passing by of the country's rich heritage.
- The University has installed a huge electronic digital board on the wall of a building that constantly (24 hours) presents information on new majors, visitors, event, exams, etc.
- Annual lecture series of different topics are offered to the public. Conscious of the fact that the information revolution necessitates being updated in one's field, AUST's Continuing Education Program (CEP) offers courses and certificates to professionals who need such updates, e.g. on Big Data, English for special purposes and applied courses for medical doctors.

With industry, AUST has developed many memorandums of understanding which allow AUST students to intern at these companies and (perhaps) have preferential opportunities at landing available jobs in these companies by virtue of the fact that the particular company has tried them and they are not strangers anymore.

AUST constantly addresses the increasing importance of crossing interdisciplinary borders and new needs of qualification by offering new interdisciplinary majors and topics such as: design management, media management, game design & programming and social media, business analytics, cyber security and financial engineering.

Assessment

The experts highly appreciate the strong and active affection of AUST to the local neighbourhood as well as to Lebanese society needs. The university's mission confirms both commitment and responsibility for the society.

The self-evaluation report and the interviews during the site visit also gave proof that university executives, staff and students give high attention to the needs of society.

In the experts' view, the mobile clinic is one of the most impressive examples: The mobile clinic run by the Optometry Department tangibly improves health services for smaller communities, and students might experience how academic knowledge can be used practically.

Without any doubt, academic training is closely connected to the job market. Activities like the Expo bring scientific results into the heart of society and open new cooperation and partnerships with enterprises or may lead to joint projects with industries.

In the view of the experts it can be seen as an asset of AUST to offer higher education even for societal groups that otherwise could not afford a study.

In the eyes of the experts the frequent laboratory services for state institutions at least strengthen the university's reputation. The presence of the Lebanese Prime Minister at the Commencement Day 2018 might be seen as a good example what has so far been reached in this matter. On the other hand, the university representatives should be very careful not to be used by political interests.

Areas for improvement

As mentioned above (see 3.4), universities should be the places to discuss the challenges of society and future. The problems of modern Lebanon from pollution to digitization should become subjects the study programmes at AUST focus on.

Recommendations

Fundraising activities should be increased, especially with regard to student start-up initiatives.

Due to an increasing importance in the further development of Lebanese economy, AUST should make entrepreneurship a topic (e.g. as optional modules) even in study programmes outside the Faculty of Business.

3.7. Quality assurance

The criterion focuses on the internal and external mechanisms used by the institution to monitor and improve its quality. The experts check the existing quality assurance concept of the institution, which indicators are used for monitoring the achievement of objectives and how the institution and the persons responsible for the programme systematically collect, analyse and use relevant information about their activities. Moreover, the experts examine whether quality assurance is used regularly, systematically and effectively for quality enhancement, if quality feedback loops are closed and how the institution fosters the development of a quality culture in general.

Current status

The quality assurance concept

According to the self-evaluation report, AUST fosters the quality culture through the participative system that is adopted by AUST management as a whole. All chairpersons, deans, and heads of administrative departments are involved in updating the “process and procedures” manual on a yearly basis. This shall enable everyone in the institution to recognize the relevance of the quality processes and actively participate in their development and enhancement.

AUST adopts a quality management system that mainly focuses on the effectiveness of teaching and student learning, and the validity of the programmes that it offers. The evaluation of the validity of the programme is within the jurisdiction of the faculty concerned. The academic departments regularly evaluate the programmes and report to the Executive Council through the faculty dean. This is done through evaluating student learning outcomes from each course and from the whole programme through variety of instruments such as course exams, course projects, senior projects, capstone projects, exit exams, students’ performance in exchange programmes and graduate studies

Similarly, the Research Council evaluates the research programmes and reports it to the Executive Council, too.

An internal quality assurance system is adapted to develop quality assurance processes as well as improve the communication between internal constituents at all levels. For this purpose the Quality Assurance Department documents processes and procedures with the departments concerned. It monitors the adherence to quality

standards, and proper implementation of processes at all levels of the university as set by the departments concerned and approved by the Executive Council. It receives feedback on the quality of education from various stakeholders. It reports any quality non-compliances to the Executive Council for review and corrective action.

The scope of work of the Quality Assurance Department covers the following functional areas:

- Monitoring the execution of academic processes pertaining to the academic rules, regulations, and procedures, such as: presenting the course offering on set deadline, courses offered match the needs of students, courses' capacities are met, books are available for students on the set deadline, the process of approving courses syllabi, course materials and syllabi are posted on line on the set deadline, the process of hiring new faculty members, the process of evaluating faculty members, the process of submitting final examinations, proctoring of exams, the process of posting of final grades, the process of changing a grade, change major process, advising of students during advising periods, the process of evaluating senior projects, the process of execution of events, clearances for graduation process, the process of make-up exams, branch visitations.
- Monitoring the execution of administrative activities pertaining to administrative rules, regulations, and procedures, such as: students' admission process, hiring of staff process, staff evaluation process, staff development process, students' registration process, students' financial aid process, collection of tuition fees process, schools orientations process, students' requests (absence, withdrawal, certificates, transcripts, counselling, make-up exams) processes, graduation process, purchasing process, buildings and grounds maintenance.

Indicators and collection of information.

The Quality Assurance Department monitors a list of "Planned Semester Activities" pertaining to the processes and procedures that need to be conducted by each academic and administrative department. The activities are distributed among the semester to include the registration week(s) prior to the start of the semester, the 15 weeks of instruction, the final examination period, and the posting of grades period. A process manual was developed with concerned departments as well in order to map the proper implementation of these activities.

The departments' chairpersons/directors report the execution of these processes on a weekly basis (on Friday afternoon of each week) and submit the report to the Quality Assurance Department where they are checked if the tasks listed for the specific week were performed and whether the performed tasks meet the standard as per the indicators that were developed. The indicators could be quantitative or qualitative. Examples of quantitative indicators pertaining to academic activities are:

- the percentage of instructors who attended the faculty meetings;
- the percentage of new students who attended the department's general orientation;
- the percentage of senior students who received advising in order to graduate on time;
- the number of contacts with the industry to ensure training and job placement to students and graduates.

Examples of qualitative indicators are:

- the preparation of the preliminary course offering for the next semester;
- the revision of syllabi.

Administrative departments as well report quantitative indicators such as the percentage of target schools visited by the admission's office for orientation, number of students issued acceptance letter by the Registrar, percentage of due tuition fees collected by the Bursar's office, and qualitative information such as whether the Registrar's office sent the course offering on time to the IT department to be posted online or whether the Bursar's office reminded concerned students of their tuition fees instalment due dates.

Some tasks and processes that are listed in the "Planned Semester Activities" are interlinked between academic and administrative departments. For example, the Registrar's office sends the list of senior/graduating students to the academic departments in order for the latter to provide students with proper advising and graduation clearances, the IT department issues a user name and a password for each instructor and the academic department ensures that the instructors post the course material and syllabi online.

Quality complaints from any of the university's stakeholders pertaining to non-adherence to set processes and procedures are reported to the Quality Assurance Department for corrective action with the concerned department and with the approval of the Executive Council. Furthermore, the Quality Assurance Department collects feedback from other university constituents:

- the students who evaluate each course that they register for during the semester: Students' evaluation of their courses are conducted through a questionnaire that is posted to them on their online system.
- the graduates who provide information on their employment status and success in the job market: The information is collected through an online questionnaire that is sent to the graduates via their personal emails. This process started in the year 2017. The result of the questionnaire is reported to the academic departments to monitor the employment status of the graduates as an indicator for the validity of their programmes.
- the job market that provides information on the performance of students and graduates whom they hired: Companies that operate in Lebanon may approach the Job Placement Office at AUST to hire students and/or graduates for available job vacancies. The Job Placement Office works on filling these vacancies through matching the job description and required qualifications and skills with AUST students and graduates, and regularly follows up with the companies to get feedback on whether the students were employed. Any quality related issues are reported to the Quality Assurance Department.

Using information for the governance of the institution

The various quality assurance instruments that are detailed above are regularly and systematically used for quality assurance purposes. These instruments are used on a weekly, monthly, semester, and/or yearly basis depending on the instrument. The "Planned Semester Activities" are used on a weekly basis, students' evaluation are conducted at the end of each semester, data on graduates' employment status is updated yearly, and feedback on students and graduates performance in the workplace

is received regularly by the Job Placement Office as part of its daily task. The Quality Assurance Department reports the outcome of the various instruments to the concerned academic and administrative department and the Executive Council to close the feedback loop. Therefore, as regards the quality principle “factual approach to decision making”, all analysed indicators in addition to the results of regular process assessment are reported to the Executive Council and the departments concerned for effective and efficient decision making for continual improvement of the University.

Students’ feedback is incorporated as well in the decision making process. Students’ evaluation of courses is considered to be an essential criterion in the evaluation of faculty members’ teaching effectiveness. The Chairperson of each academic department conducts an evaluation of the faculty members in the department on a yearly basis. The evaluation is based on several criteria that include the faculty members’ performance in academic and administrative duties. The students’ evaluation holds 52% weight of the total score of the faculty member evaluation. A faculty member who receives a weighted score less than 3.0/4.0 is asked to discuss the reasons behind this “low score” with the Chair and the two agree to a plan for improvement which is closely monitored by the chair. If the score of less than 3.0/4.0 persists in a subsequent semester the contract of the faculty member is not renewed.

Students who petition the Dean of Students and Admissions or the concerned Chairperson/Dean on any issue pertaining to academic or administrative matters receive a copy of their petition indicating the decision regarding the petition and the actions to be taken if applicable.

In both the Faculty of Engineering and the Department of Computer Science AUST has started to incorporate students’ feedback in the evaluation of its programmes’ educational objectives through yearly meetings of alumni representatives along with the Industry Advisory Board members for evaluating the objectives. The student representatives participate in the evaluation, and they approve the meeting minutes and the desired changes. According to the self-evaluation report and to the interviews during the site visit, AUST will start gradually adopting students’ feedback in the evaluation of its programmes’ objectives in the rest of the academic departments.

Assessment

The experts observe a well-developed quality assurance system based on formal processes. The main focus is on the effectiveness of teaching and student learning, and the validity of the offered programmes.

In the experts’ view, responsibilities of teachers, department, faculty and administration are clear, and the quality assurance instruments, which are currently in place, seem to be broadly accepted and implemented. The experts appreciate the establishment of the Quality Assurance Department to monitor and assess the adherence to quality standards and for documentation and report of processes and procedures.

Assessment criteria and indicators are clearly defined, published and – according to the interview during the site visit – university-wide accepted. In the eyes of the experts, data is collected and analysed systematically.

By and large, this system appears to be adequate and functioning well since both students and staff the experts talked with during the site visit confirmed their satisfaction with all processes they deal with.

The experts appreciate that the university tries to close the feedback loops and students in most cases students receive feedback on their evaluation surveys.

Condition

The experts appreciate the strong focus on quality in teaching that AUST follows. Quality assurance of teaching should not stop with the feedback on the teacher's performance but must offer possibilities to improve personal teaching skills (e.g. by a mentoring system for teachers or general counselling services for didactic improvement).

4. Assessment

Overall assessment

During the site visit the expert group experienced a university community mentally open, full of spirit and eager to improve. They would like to thank the organisers of the visit schedule for all the opportunities for additional questions and an open discussion.

AUST appears as a dynamic university with a clear and attractive profile. The experts noted a good sense of responsibility for society, and they appreciate that AUST opens up study possibilities of high academic quality even to students with lesser financial means. The university takes into account the special limitations and needs of working students, and AUST's multicultural and tolerant educational approach addresses all factions of the Lebanese society. This aspect should be made more visible and stated more clearly in the university's mission statement. The experts got the impression that the current mission statement is reminiscent, rather, of AUST's very first steps in the education market. Meanwhile, the achievements (and even the university's strategies) far exceed the text of the mission.

In its focus on academic training primarily for the labour market, AUST's profile complies with internationally accepted standards for higher education institutions.

The governance structures of AUST are clearly structured and documented. The responsibilities and procedures of the main university bodies are described in the constitution and in the bylaws, governance procedures appear well thought out and applicable. The relations between academics and the funding body are clear and transparent.

Looking back into the history of AUST, an institution born out of the initiative of one single person, the experts appreciate the long and successful road the institution has taken ever since.

However, the involvement of university stakeholder groups should be further improved. Several standing councils have already been established and they regularly participate in functions and processes but it would be the right time now to develop the university structure further, especially the participatory elements. Too many of the university's efforts still depend on single persons and personalities with strong positions. This might make decision making processes easier but it endangers academic freedom. The experts urge AUST to intensify active involvement and participation of the wider institutional community in the governance. Since formal student representation remains a necessity for a modern and pluralistic university, the experts encourage AUST in its efforts to ensure and develop student participation in academic matters, quality issues and campus culture in general.

The financial management of the university appears to be professional. The expert group appreciates AUST's general policy to keep the tuition fees at a reasonable level and to spend a significant amount on student financial aid.

The deployment of resources is according to the expert group consistent with a student-centred institution but the budget spent directly for research appears as far too low.

The staff of the university seems appropriate to provide high quality education to its students. The experts were impressed by the dynamic and motivated staff members, both academic (full-time and part-time) and administrative, which are a big asset of AUST. However, in the experts' view AUST lacks really structured support offers for staff to improve their knowledge in areas such as pedagogic practice, higher qualifications and general capabilities.

The facilities of the university are appropriate for sustaining the teaching and the research activities of the university. Laboratories and technical equipment should allow a high quality of teaching and seem also appropriate to carry out applied research projects, even on a very high standard. The IT infrastructure of the university is up-to-date and equipped with modern and functional software.

However, students suggested that AUST should consider how to increase the amount of green spaces and leisure areas on Beirut campus. This should be taken into account for future renovation projects or campus expansion.

Teaching and learning of high quality is well practiced at AUST. The university devotes energy and resources to provide innovative study programmes at high academic quality, with a special regard for working students. Robust links between the study programmes and the labour market exist. In the eyes of the experts this should be made more explicit by a formal definition of AUST's special way of teaching and learning. AUST should start a university-wide discussion process to identify and define its special teaching profile. This could be part of the revision of the university's mission. The students' learning process is continuously monitored, and problems and difficulties are dealt with in close consultation between students, student services and academics.

Research at AUST presents itself primarily as applied research, related to the needs of Lebanese society. The results are commendable. However, there appears to be a need for greater coordination of research activities and more effective communication for institutional research priorities.

The experts acknowledge the engagement of the staff in applied research activities and its integration in the curricula through projects and during internships. Nevertheless, the experts still see considerable potential for improvement regarding applied research. More applied research projects could be implemented that address public problems: pollution, environment protection, employability etc. In this context, the university should make direct use of the Advisory Board to identify fields for research more structurally.

The experts highly appreciate the strong and active affection of AUST for the local neighbourhood as well as to Lebanese society needs. It can be seen as an asset of AUST to offer higher education even for societal groups that otherwise could not afford to study. Due to an increasing importance in the further development of Lebanese economy, AUST should make entrepreneurship a topic even in study programmes outside the Faculty of Business.

The experts observe a well-developed quality assurance system based on formal processes. The main focus is on the effectiveness of teaching and student learning, and the validity of the offered programmes. Responsibilities of teachers, department, faculty and above are clear, and the quality assurance instruments, which are currently in place, seem to be broadly accepted and implemented.

Altogether, the expert team sees AUST on its way to good progress.

Assessment levels

Level	Assessment	Description
A	Passed.	The institution fulfils or exceeds all criteria. All activities are in line with the profile and objectives of the institution and provided at a high academic level.
B	Passed subject to conditions	The institution does not fulfil some relevant criteria. However, the institution should be able to remedy the shortcomings within nine months after the assessment.
C	Suspension of the accreditation procedure	The institution does not fulfil relevant criteria, but it is likely, that it will be able to remedy the shortcomings within 18 months after the assessment. The HEI may apply for a resumption of the accreditation procedure.
D	Failed	The institution does not fulfil relevant criteria, and is not expected to be able to meet all assessment criteria within 18 months' time.

Assessment grades

No	Assessment criteria	Assessment
1	Institutional profile and strategy <i>Conditions:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The university mission must be revised and updated addressing the actual profile of the university with its focus on part-time (and working) students and study programmes that are oriented to labour market demands. It should reflect the student perspective. 	B
2	Governance	A
3	Resources <i>Conditions:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For each academic position the university wants to fill there must be a formal job posting before with university-wide standardised application deadlines. AUST must offer appropriate user support by specially trained and qualified personnel especially for the digital library services. 	B
4	Teaching and Learning	A
5	Research <i>Conditions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUST must invest more resources into research. For this purpose additional research funds should be raised. AUST must formulate a general policy for applied research, enterprise and knowledge transfer together with clear institutional objectives and realistic targets, linked to both the teaching and learning profile and the university's mission. 	B
6	Institution and Society	A

7	<p>Quality assurance B</p> <p><i>Condition:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality assurance of teaching should not stop with the feedback on the teacher's performance but must offer possibilities to improve personal teaching skills (e.g. by a mentoring system for teachers or general counselling services for didactic improvement).
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5. Accreditation recommendation of the expert group to the Accreditation Commission of evalag

According to the expert team, the American University of Science and Technology (AUST) meets **evalag**'s criteria for institutional accreditation. Therefore, the team recommends AUST for accreditation and recommends awarding the **evalag** label for institutional accreditation.

The team recommends AUST to consider and implement the following conditions (C) and recommendations (R) to further improve the university:

Institutional profile and strategy

- C1** The university mission must be revised and updated addressing the actual profile of the university with its focus on part-time (and working) students and study programmes that are oriented to labour market demands. It should reflect the student perspective.
- R 1** The university mission should be checked and readjusted at shorter intervals than every five to eight years. The experts suggest a period of three to four years.
- R 2** The faculties, departments and the students should have a more active part in the discussion process of the university mission and its general strategy.

Governance

- R 3** The role of the faculty council to the deans should be reconsidered to be improved: A dean should be elected by a faculty, and she/he should be accountable to both the university leadership and to the faculty council.
- R 4** Possibilities for students to be represented in all university councils and boards (besides student elections) should be further developed.
- R 5** When filling the advisory boards and councils, all university groups should have the right to make proposals. The composition of the advisory councils should always be in reasonable proportion to the subject matter under discussion.

Resources

- C 2** For each academic position the university wants to fill there must be a formal job posting before with university-wide standardised application deadlines.
- C 3** AUST must offer appropriate user support by specially trained and qualified personnel especially for the digital library services.

- R 6** The transparency of hiring and tenure procedures (from part-timer to full-timer) should be further developed with clearly described criteria and pathways.
- R 7** A concept for systematic staff development – academic and non-academic – should be set up and implemented with the university community involved.
- R 8** Part-time staff should be part of staff development.
- R 9** The rate of full-time staff should be improved: Ideally, part-time staff is hired only in those cases where the curriculum suggests a close and lively contact to the world of professionals outside the university.
- R 10** The university should establish more working places with tables and sockets dedicated to students across the whole campus. Overall, the number of work spaces permanently available should meet at least 13 % of the number of students.

Teaching and learning

- R 11** AUST should start a university-wide discussion process to identify and define its special teaching profile. This could be part of the revision of the university's mission.
- R 12** The university should develop interdisciplinary cooperation in teaching with options of exchange of modules between subjects.
- R 13** Students as well as alumni and their experiences should be involved in curriculum development and in the review of study programmes.

Research

- C 4** AUST must invest more resources into research. For this purpose additional research funds should be raised.
- C 5** AUST must formulate a general policy for applied research, enterprise and knowledge transfer together with clear institutional objectives and realistic targets, linked to both the teaching and learning profiles and the university's mission.
- R 14** The university should make use of the Advisory Board to identify fields for research in a more systematic way.
- R 15** AUST should consider more incentives in order to support and enhance the research output of its academic staff. Even sabbaticals for research should be taken into consideration.
- R 16** At department level, systematic measures should be taken to identify the talents of those students who may do research and later be promoted.
- R 17** Strategic partnership contracts with universities abroad should be increased to offer more postgraduate/doctorate places for the young scientists.
- R 18** Future master programmes at AUST should be designed to be compatible with international postgraduate programmes.

Institution and society

- R 19** Fundraising activities should be increased, especially with regard to student start-up initiatives.
- R 20** Due to an increasing importance in the further development of Lebanese economy, AUST should make entrepreneurship a topic (e.g. as optional modules) even in study programmes outside the Faculty of Business.

Quality assurance

- C 6** Quality assurance of teaching should not stop with the feedback on the teacher's performance but must offer possibilities to improve personal teaching skills (e.g. by a mentoring system for teachers or general counselling services for didactic improvement).

6. Accreditation decision of the evalag Accreditation Commission

6.1. Decision

At its meeting on 28 September 2018 the **evalag** Accreditation Commission decides unanimously to accredit the American University of Science and Technology (AUST) with the conditions (C) and recommendations (R) mentioned in Chapter 5.

6.2. Compliance with the conditions

The American University of Science and Technology (AUST) submitted the documents in due time to prove compliance with the conditions. These were forwarded to the expert team with a request for comments. Thereafter, according to the experts' recommendation, the **evalag** Accreditation Commission considers all requirements fulfilled (as from 8 July 2019).

- C 1** The university mission must be revised and updated addressing the actual profile of the university with its focus on part-time (and working) students and study programmes that are oriented to labour market demands. It should reflect the student perspective.

“A new Statement of Mission has been developed and approved through the pertinent internal bodies and then submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval. The process involved contributions by students, staff, faculty, administration and Board Members. The updated New Statement of Mission reflects the university focus on part time and full time students and emphasizes the relationship with industry and the work place.

The New Mission Statement incorporates a phrase requiring revision of the statement every fourth year by all stakeholders (cf. R1, R2).

The New Mission statement is attached and is now part of the webpage of AUST.”

Fulfilled.

C 2 For each academic position the university wants to fill there must be a formal job posting before with university-wide standardised application deadlines.

“Vacant positions (teaching and non-teaching) are advertised on the university webpage. AUST advertises the position when a vacancy occurs. It does not have set application dates every year. Interested individuals may consult the webpage for vacancies (see www.aust.edu.lb/career/opportunities).”

Fulfilled.

C 3 AUST must offer appropriate user support by specially trained and qualified personnel especially for the digital library services.

“The Librarian is now entrusted with the task of instructing new students on how to use and benefit from the digital library services on campus and off campus. All new students will have to schedule appointments with the librarian for such instruction during the first semester at AUST.”

Fulfilled.

C 4 AUST must invest more resources into research. For this purpose additional research funds should be raised.

C 5 AUST must formulate a general policy for applied research, enterprise and knowledge transfer together with clear institutional objectives and realistic targets, linked to both the teaching and learning profiles and the university’s mission.

“Although AUST does not claim that it is a research university, it has research as component for faculty advancement in rank and it requires that classroom instruction and work to be research based.

Projects required of all students in all classrooms are expected to have a research element which culminates in a Senior Capstone project that is a requirement in all majors. This capstone project is ordinarily research based and should incorporate a synthesis of the various fields of knowledge acquired in the major field of study. As example: a project in Marketing should touch on issues of marketing, finance, economics, accounting and management. The same holds true for engineering projects and others...

AUST has appointed a Dean for Research as of October 1, 2018. This position did not exist prior to this date and the step represents a new commitment to organize and strengthen research at AUST. The job description of the Dean for Research and AUST’s Research policy as developed by the new Dean are found on the webpage of AUST under Research and Development.

The new Dean was instrumental in developing and structuring a new relationship with the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS) in which the Council will match AUST’s contribution to research in the areas of Artificial Intelligence in Rehabilitation Engineering and in Forensic Science (DNA profiling, Drug Abuse, Forensic Radiology) to a combined sum total of \$47,000. The agreement with the CNRS was signed on May 23, 2019. A similar matching agreement to the tune of \$9,000 was signed with the Lebanese Industrial Research program. Two students and faculty projects benefited from this new relationship.”

Fulfilled.

C 6 Quality assurance of teaching should not stop with the feedback on the teacher's performance but must offer possibilities to improve personal teaching skills (e.g. by a mentoring system for teachers or general counselling services for didactic improvement).

“Quality Assurance of the teaching and learning process (in particular) is a subject that is very important at AUST and Academic Departments and Faculties strive to constantly be on the lookout for valid measurement criteria and methods for improvement of the staff and of the process.

Since the academic year 2015-2016 new applicants for teaching positions in the departments of Arts and Design have been asked to spend a semester (or up to a year, at times) as teaching assistants in the courses that they hope to teach later. Ordinarily, they assist in classes managed by veteran instructors.

The same “interning” system was also used in accounting, economics and auditing courses where the new (to be) instructor was given problem solving sessions to “break in” slowly in the system under supervision from established and proven faculty members before they are in total control of the class.

One has to state that many new instructors refuse to “waste” a semester or a year as interns. In fact, to some of them, this is degrading.

Since AUST received evalag's assessment report, academic departments were asked to discuss and react to C6. The collective input is that the assessment and evaluation of faculty members is a continuous process that should not be stopped with the evaluation of faculty by chairs and students and that improvement is – at times – dependent on the nature of the subject matter taught. There were differing viewpoints, but it was possible to come out with two recommendations to start within 2019-2020:

1. There shall be a mentoring system for newly recruited faculty members whereby ranking and seasoned faculty members will act as mentors and guides to new ones (cf. R 1). These mentors will provide reference in getting acquainted with the system as well as pedagogical reference on proficiency in classroom teaching/learning.
2. Two workshops designed for pedagogical update and improvement shall be run each year (with special emphasis on the attendance and involvement of faculty members who scored 2.50-3.00/4.00 in student evaluations). These workshops will deal with new instructional methods, innovative approaches to learning and teaching, instruction on alignment of goals, assessments, testing, evaluation and research engagement.”

Fulfilled.

Annexes

1: Site visit schedule

Wednesday, 20 June 2018 – Arrival of expert panel and preparations

6.00 pm – 8:00 pm	Preparatory internal meeting (expert panel, evalag)
8:00 pm	Dinner (expert panel, evalag)

Thursday, 21 June 2018 – First day of site visit

8:00 am – 9:15 am	Breakfast and internal meeting of expert panel
	<i>Walk from Hotel to AUST</i>
9:30 am – 10:30 am	Meeting with President, Vice President and Provost
	<i>Break</i>
10:45 am – 11:30 am	Meeting with the Deans
	<i>Break</i>
11:45 am – 1:30 pm	Meeting with Heads of Departments (with a focus on curriculum development):
11:45 am – 12:30 pm	1 st group
12:30 pm – 1:30 pm	2 nd group
	<i>Lunch break</i>
3:00 pm – 3:45 pm	Meeting with Teaching Staff
3:45 pm – 4:30 pm	Meeting with Adjunct Staff
	<i>Break</i>
4:45 pm – 5:30 pm	Meeting with Dean of Students & Admissions and with members of Career Services and of Center for Learning and Development
5:30 pm – 6:45 pm	Internal meeting of expert panel: review of the first day
8:30 pm	Dinner with AUST executives

Friday 22 June 2018 – Second day of site visit

8:00 am – 9:15 am	Breakfast and internal meeting of expert panel
	<i>Walk from Hotel to AUST</i>
9:30 am – 10:15 am	Meeting with Students
	<i>Break</i>
10:30 am – 11:15 am	Meeting with Alumni

11:15 am – 12:30 pm	Campus tour (library, labs)
12:30 pm – 1:15	Meeting with Registrar and IT Services
	<i>Lunch break</i>
3:00 pm – 3:45 pm	Meeting with Quality Assurance
3:45 pm – 5:00 pm	Internal meeting of expert panel: review of the second day
5:15 pm – 6:00 pm	Closing meeting with President, Vice President, Provost
8:30 pm	Dinner with President, Vice President, Provost, Deans and Heads of Departments

2: Profiles of expert group members

Prof. Dr. Hans-Hennig von Grünberg (Germany)



Since 2010 Hans Hennig von Grünberg is President of Hochschule Niederrhein – University of Applied Sciences in Krefeld, Germany which is one of the four largest universities of applied sciences in Germany. Born in Eckernförde/North Germany, he studied Physics at RWTH Aachen and FU Berlin where he graduated in 1993. He received his doctorate in Physics in 1994 and habilitated in 2002.

Prior to his presidency, Hans Hennig has worked as both a lecturer and a researcher at universities in UK, Germany and Austria. Apart from his scientific background, his academic interests are in the area of higher education policy, including governance and leadership, quality management, evaluation of policy and the implementation of strategies.

Hans Hennig von Grünberg is founding member and 1st Chairman of “Hochschulallianz für den Mittelstand”, a university network focused on the cooperation between German universities of applied sciences and medium-sized enterprises.

Prof. Vicky Gunn MA (Hons) PhD (UK)



Professor Vicky Gunn joined The Glasgow School of Art as the Head of Learning and Teaching in November 2014. Prior to that she was Director of the Learning and Teaching Centre at the University of Glasgow. She has a research and teaching profile in tertiary learning and teaching in the Arts and Humanities and an eclectic publications list as a result.

Vicky has been the research lead on several national-level teaching enhancement projects with both QAA Scotland and the Higher Education Academy and has a penchant for policy development in higher education at institutional and national levels. Her research areas include: the relationship between broad personhood development and research-intensive disciplinary learning in a creative practices environment; the application of cultural theories to learning in higher education in general and Art School in particular; embracing equality and diversity through

disciplinary development in Art and Design; (and for fun) developing the queer historical imaginary to explore contemporary social conflicts as a creative Arts practice.

Prof. Dr. Peter F. E. Sloane (Germany)



Peter F.E. Sloane holds the chair of Business and Human Resource Education at the University of Paderborn. Born in Halifax/UK, he was brought up in England and Germany. Peter studied Economics at the University of Cologne where he graduated in 1983.

Since then he gained teaching experience: at first at a school for master craftsmen in Cologne, later at the universities of Jena and Munich. In 2000 he joined the University of Paderborn where he was Dean of the Faculty of Business Administration and Economics from 2003 to 2011. He is also Associate Research Fellow at the Department of Education of the University of Oxford and since 2013 Appointed Visiting Professor at the Department of Education of the University of Leeds.

In September 2018 Professor Sloane was appointed as a member of the German Parliament's Enquete Commission on "Vocational Training and Continuing Education in the Digital World of Work".

Simona Dimovska LL.B. (Macedonia)



Simona Dimovska studied at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje/Macedonia and holds both a Bachelor in Political Science and a Master (LL.M.) in Intellectual Property.

As member of QA pool of the European Student Organisation (ESU) since 2011, Simona took part in several projects related to quality assurance processes in higher education as well as in numerous evaluation and accreditation procedures on different higher education institutions all over Europe.