Our Commitment to Academic Excellence

Strategic planning

Our university’s unusual history puts us in a unique position: we have both the deep roots and resources of an established institution and the unencumbered agility of a newly rising one. LAU has transformed, in an almost breathtakingly brief compass of years, from a liberal-arts school with a regional legacy as a pioneer in women’s education into a fully accredited, major international institution with seven schools.

No one doubts the success of this transformation, but with that success come new challenges. Increasing recognition means increasing expectations. Every advance we make — whether it’s opening a new teaching hospital, winning a major research grant or student-aid grant, inaugurating a new professional school or receiving a new program accreditation — raises the stakes for our continued performance.

When I was entrusted with the presidency of LAU seven years ago, I promised to implement a comprehensive five-year strategic plan for the university. Over the ensuing 11 months we developed the Strategic Plan 2005–2010, which provided a strong sense of institutional direction, focusing on LAU’s expansion, accreditation and sustainability, while setting the precedent for integrated, university-wide planning.

I am proud to say we brought that plan to completion successfully and on schedule. In the words of a visiting member of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, “planning has become an integral part of doing business at LAU.”

Our 2009 accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) was a highlight — perhaps the highlight — of that thrilling half-decade of strategic growth. It culminated years of growing recognition from our academic peers, and has since proven a stimulus for accreditation of individual programs — including, most recently, the bachelor’s degree programs of the entire School of Engineering, as well as the computer science program in the School of Arts & Sciences.

At the same time, the very process for preparing for regional accreditation has bonded and harmonized the university’s many entities more closely than ever before, and — with the help of the newly established Institutional Research and Assessment office (IRA) and the Center for Program and Learning Assessment (CPLA) — created and nourished a culture of assessment and self-review at LAU.

This institutional culture — a combination of restless collective ambition, rigorous self-scrutiny, and increasing transparency — is the foundation for our new, academically focused Strategic Plan 2011–2016. Recognition and achievement are symbiotic: our increasing stature and visibility have galvanized our sense of academic mission, laying the groundwork for the new plan, which was approved in spring of this year. This is not a time to rest on recent laurels; it is a time to build and expand, to consolidate our gains, and to capitalize on the current momentum.
The fundamental goal of this new five-year plan is to take LAU to the next level of academic excellence. Its objectives include the integration of a rich liberal arts education with strong goal-driven science, humanities and career-oriented programs; the recruitment and retention of both a highly competitive and diverse student body, and full-time faculty at the top of their respective fields; the strengthening of outreach programs beyond the walls of the campus and the borders of the country; the targeting and tailoring of LAU’s strengths to national and regional needs; and the expansion and enhancement of LAU’s graduate studies, library resources and research capacity.

The new strategic plan was designed without external strategy consultants, but with direct input solicited from all levels of the university, as well as indirect input from our colleagues in New England institutions involved in the NEASC accreditation. With the new plan comes a renewed emphasis on staggered school-level and institutional planning; local plans at various levels of the university are shaped with an eye to the whole, ensuring harmony and continuity.

Many schools and programs have already begun to fulfill this mandate for ongoing review cycle of all degree programs. In the School of Arts & Sciences (SAS), the B.A. in Communication Arts, the B.A. in English, the B.A. and M.A. in Political Science and International Affairs, the B.A. in Psychology, the B.S. in Biology, the B.S. in Chemistry, the B.A. in Education and the Teaching Diploma are all currently under review.

The School of Architecture & Design (SArD), in collaboration with the CPLA, organized a workshop on learning assessment, designed as an interim step toward establishing the kind of comprehensive learning assessment system envisioned by LAU’s 2011–2016 strategic plan. Similarly, the school’s Department of Fine Arts and Foundation Studies prepared a self-study of its Bachelor of Fine Arts Program. Carried out with the collaboration of faculty as well as external and internal reviewers, the resulting report will be used by the department to enhance the program and its appeal for prospective students. The school has also started developing its own strategic plan, scheduled for completion by the end of the academic year 2011–12.

In the School of Business, the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management undertook a self-review, and was externally reviewed this year by the chair of the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Implementation of those recommendations, as well as those of previous year’s reviews, are either fully implemented or in progress.
LAU moved swiftly to seize the academic momentum resulting from NEASC accreditation. In late September of this year, after years of preparation, self-study and external evaluation, the School of Engineering (SOE) received accreditation for the full suite of its bachelor’s degree programs (in civil engineering, computer engineering, electrical engineering, industrial engineering, and mechanical engineering). The stamp of approval came from ABET, the recognized accreditation agency for college and university programs in applied science, computing, engineering, and technology.

Just a few days later, the SAS’s Department of Computer Science and Mathematics received ABET accreditation for its program in computer science.

We have long known that our programs in engineering and computer science are top-notch. The industries that for years have assiduously recruited our students know this as well. As our institutional visibility increases, however, so too does the need for formal academic peer recognition. We now have the only ABET-accredited computer science and industrial engineering programs in the country, and the highest number of ABET-accredited programs of any Lebanese university.

Progress continues on other accreditation fronts. SAR has recently initiated the application for accreditation of its architecture program by the National Architecture Accreditation Board (NAAB) in the U.S. A departmental strategic plan was created (as mandated by the NAAB) and a steering committee formed. To gain valuable firsthand experience, the school’s interim dean visited two universities in the Boston area presently undergoing NAAB accreditation.

Accreditation is the School of Business’ top priority, targeted by the 2011-2016 strategic plan to take place within five years. The school is planning to pursue accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). In June of this year, meanwhile, the school formally became a full member of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), the first step for accreditation from the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS).

The School of Pharmacy’s Pharm.D. program was reaccredited by the U.S. Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) in June 2011, for a term of one year. In line with ACPE requirements, the school has completed the curriculum mapping project it initiated in the academic year 2009-2010, and established collaboration agreements with North American universities, hospitals and medical centers, permitting students to complete their clinical rotations in the United States.

The School of Pharmacy remains the only pharmacy school outside the United States to offer an ACPE-accredited Pharm.D. degree, and to hold full membership in the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP). 100% of our pharmacy graduates passed the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination (NAPLEX) in 2010, compared with an average of 95.7% over the previous eight years.

Finally, the newly established Alice Ramez Chagoury School of Nursing (ARCSON) is preparing to pursue accreditation through the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education.

Professional accreditations
Growth of programs and departments

At a time when many American universities are implementing hiring freezes and scaling back their offerings, LAU continues to recruit new faculty, expand departments and add new degree programs.

In the School of Arts & Sciences (SAS), the Department of Humanities has developed two new undergraduate programs, the Bachelor of Arts in Arabic Language and Literature and the Bachelor of Arts in Translation, which will be implemented progressively over the next two years. In fall 2011, Humanities began enrolling students in its recently approved B.A. programs in history and philosophy. The highly regarded former LAU Nursery will soon be reopened as the Early Childhood Center, and will operate as a support lab for early childhood education.

The School of Architecture & Design (SArD) has extended offers to one tenure-track professor and five visiting professors, as well as establishing faculty-promotion criteria more appropriate to faculty in the design and fine arts fields. The school also completed its own bylaws, and established its own School Advisory Council composed of eminent local and international professionals, academics and artists. SArD also completed a proposal for a new degree program, the Bachelor of Arts in Fashion Design, which it plans to launch in fall 2012.

Major steps have been taken this year both to expand the School of Business’ full-time faculty and to improve its student-faculty ratios. Four accomplished full-time and two visiting professors joined the faculty this fall, and the school’s 2009 initiative funding graduate students pursuing business Ph.D.s elsewhere — on the condition that they return to teach at LAU — has seeded nine doctoral candidates in British and American universities, and will soon be bearing fruit.

The school has also added the Minor in Economics. While this minor specifically benefits SAS students majoring in Political Sciences and International Affairs, it has been made available to all LAU students, with the intention of making graduates in all fields more intellectually informed citizens on economic matters.

Two full-time clinical instructors joined the nascent Alice Ramez Chagoury School of Nursing (ARCSON) in the fall, one with expertise in maternal-child nursing practice, the other in adult and geriatric nursing. Of the doctoral students whose studies LAU has supported with the proviso that they return and join ARCSON’s faculty, one successfully defended her dissertation in June, and the other defended her dissertation proposal in May, and expects to graduate by summer 2012. A Fulbright scholar with community-health, research and administrative experience has also joined the school for the academic year 2011-2012. ARCSON continues to fine-tune its curriculum, and is offering nine new nursing courses for the academic year 2011-2012. Nursing students began their clinical learning experiences in summer 2011.

The Gilbert and Rose-Marie Chagoury School of Medicine (SOM) held its first white coat ceremony, and introduced its Med III students to their first round of clinical rotations. The school is offering eight-week clerkships in medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, and pediatrics; and four-week clerkships in psychiatry, primary care, and neurology.
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The design for the Med IV curriculum is meanwhile in its blueprint phase, and will emphasize revisiting medicine and surgery, rotations in specialties, sub-internships, and — most importantly — new rotations and electives both within and external to Lebanon. In summer 2011, three SOM students worked in research laboratories at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, one of the most prestigious comprehensive cancer centers in the world, and SOM is presently examining its options for placing students in institutions in the U.S., Canada, Europe and the Middle East for electives. The school is also working to establish residency and fellowship programs with the University Medical Center—Rizk Hospital.

Faculty recruitment at the hospital continues vigorously. Just this spring, UMC–RH brought on board a widely recognized scholar and physician from Harvard to chair its Department of Dermatology, as well as a distinguished cancer specialist from the University of Texas’ M.D. Anderson Center to serve as chief of surgery and head of hepatobiliary surgery.

Thanks to record enrollments in recent years, LAU’s increasingly prestigious Summer Institute for Intensive Arabic Language and Culture (SiNARC) offered its first spring module in 2011, in addition to its regular summer and fall sessions.

In line with the new strategic plan’s mandate, individual schools have created school advisory councils to set and manage criteria for recruitment and promotion.

The appointment of new deans for the School of Arts & Sciences and the School of Business in fall of 2011 brought the Beirut and Byblos branches of both schools under a single leadership, thereby completing the cross-campus unification of all schools. A longstanding goal of the university, this consolidation has a direct academic payoff, strengthening programs, streamlining planning, providing greater academic autonomy to the schools and facilitating their individual accreditation processes.
LAU actively promotes research, scholarship, and academic exchange, as well as cultivates and expands LAU’s ties to the international scholarly community. The university supports faculty research and publication through the University Research Council Mandate and the Faculty Development Fund. Faculty members meanwhile continue to win major external research grants, including Fulbright Research and other awards.

Major LAU books and studies have been published this year on topics ranging from the Lebanese diaspora in Australia, domestic migrant worker rights, mental disorders in Burj el-Barajneh refugee camp, and peace promotion through education.

LAU hosts numerous conferences, symposia and lecture series each year, many of which directly stimulate new research and publications. This year saw the publication of, Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora, a major collection of essays stimulated by the Institute for Migration Studies’ inaugural conference. The Department of Humanities’s Ameen Rihani symposium in January included the world’s top Rihani scholars and inaugurated the international centennial of the Book of Khaled (the first Arab-American novel).

With the collaboration of the École Polytechnique de Montreal, the School of Engineering in December 2011 hosted the 18th IEEE International Conference on Electronics, Circuits and Systems, the flagship regional conference for electrical engineering. LAU also signed an agreement this year establishing the Mounir Khatib Endowed Engineering Lecture Series, which will address research topics not typically covered in lecture courses.

The university’s 22 centers, institutes and special programs provide instruction and training, organize and host international conferences, publish journals and working papers, facilitate collaboration between faculty with intersecting interests, and stimulate continued research. This has been an active and fruitful year for many of them. The Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) — the region’s oldest institute devoted to academic research on women, founded in 1973 — hosted several lectures and book launches. “Veils: a Photographic Overview,” a major exhibition originally conceived and assembled by IWSAW, was launched in January at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in midtown Manhattan, New York. And this fall, IWSAW’s prestigious quarterly publication Al-Raida officially became a refereed academic journal.
In addition to its monthly cultural forum, the Center for Lebanese Heritage hosted several major events honoring renowned figures in Lebanese letters, including the late Shibli Mallat, the “poet of the cedars”; and Karam Melhem Karam, “the prince of the Arab novel.”

The Institute for Migration Studies (IMS) held a book launch for a major new study of the Lebanese community in Australia in spring 2011, as well as — together with IWSAW and the NGO KAFA (Enough) Violence Against Women — a launch for two groundbreaking new studies on domestic migrant worker conditions in Lebanon. IMS hosted a series of brown-bag talks at LAU Beirut, and collaborated with Johannes Gutenberg University in Germany to organize a conference on Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian migration since 1870.

In late 2010, LAU’s Institute for Media Training and Research (IMTR) hosted a week-long workshop for 13 journalists from Iraq, which included lectures from major journalists and professors in the field. As part of its Distinguished Journalist Series, IMTR also hosted a lecture by former CNN journalist and LAU alumna Octavia Nasr on the role of new media. In spring 2011, IMTR held a week-long media and gender workshop designed to empower ten female journalists from Iraq.

The Institute of Family and Entrepreneurial Business (IFEB) established the Family Business Leaders Network, which has organized several conferences and gatherings this year. IFEB research this year has also led to several publications (book chapters and conference proceedings) and awards.

In November 2010 and July 2011, the Institute for Banking and Finance (IBAF) offered training seminars to top bank executives and other financial professionals in Lebanon and Syria.
Scholarships and student recruitment

LAU is more committed than ever to admitting the most talented students in the country and the region, regardless of need.

Last fall, LAU was awarded a $6.9-million USAID grant for the University Student Assistance Program (USAP), which was established to provide full LAU scholarships for promising and ambitious but economically disadvantaged graduating seniors from public high schools in each of Lebanon’s 26 districts. This year Student Development and Enrollment Management not only administered that grant, but also successfully applied for a similar USAID grant for the 2012-2013 academic year. The two grants total over $14 million, and fully underwrite the education of 105 talented Lebanese students. These are youths for whom a full scholarship to study at LAU is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The benefits, however, are reciprocal: these matriculates bring with them not only raw talent and ambition but also new cultural and socioeconomic perspectives; with them on board LAU becomes both more worldly, more meritocratic, and more visionary in its promise.

The USAID/USAP program is indeed part of the university’s larger push — mandated by the 2011-2016 strategic plan — to increase scholarship monies to continue attracting the best students in Lebanon. Broad recruitment efforts and scholarships aimed at needy and qualified public-school students and top Baccalaureate exam students, along with increased Entrance and Merit scholarships, have produced an exceptional incoming class this year. Both the overall enrollment and the average SAT scores of this fall’s class are up from last year’s.

At the same time, our university is increasingly an educational beacon for talented students beyond the country’s borders. Our Tomorrow’s Leaders scholarship program, administered by the University Enterprise Office, has received $2.4 million in renewed support from U.S. government’s Middle East Partnership Initiative, providing 18 academically gifted students from various countries in the region with fully financed education.

In spring of this year, LAU signed a memorandum of agreement with Lebanon’s National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS) to provide full scholarships plus stipend to the top students from each of the four branches of the Lebanese Baccalaureate (General Science, Life Science, Sociology and Economics, and Humanities).

Thanks in large part to a generous gift from a private donor, we have also established several full scholarships for promising students from Palestinian refugee camps across Lebanon. Meanwhile, the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office continues to increase regular assistance to students through merit-based scholarships, work-aid programs, loans and grants.