Building our Base

If the spirit of a university lies in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, the flesh, blood, and bone sustaining it consists of physical resources, technological hardware and human talent. With enrollments at their highest in the university’s history, and two new professional schools spearheading its foray into the field of medical education, LAU is at the crest of a massive growth phase. One of the university’s chief challenges at present is to find ways to continue expanding facilities and widening our footprint despite unprecedentedly high land prices, especially in Beirut.

New facilities for medical education

LAU now encompasses seven schools spread over two campuses: the School of Architecture & Design, the School of Arts & Sciences, the School of Business, the School of Engineering, the School of Pharmacy, the Gilbert and Rose-Marie School of Medicine, and the Alice Ramez Chagoury School of Nursing.

These last two are LAU’s newest schools, and represent the university’s audacious expansion into the field of medical education, a move buttressed by the acquisition of majority shareholder position in the University Medical Center—Rizk Hospital. UMC–RH is a large, four-building medical campus in the heart of Beirut, which LAU is currently transforming into a comprehensive university hospital, clinical teaching and research facility.

UMC–RH has been designed to support LAU’s schools of Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy, provide the clinical environment and services for teaching and training for health care students and professionals, launch clinical pharmacy services, and support academic research programs. Its transformation from a decades-old city hospital into a comprehensive, state-of-the-art university medical center is well underway.

UMC–RH will be home to several centers of excellence, including for advanced radiology and imaging, dialysis, endoscopy, dermatology, ophthalmology, IVF and cardiology.

Although the schools of Medicine and Nursing continue to operate at present in temporary facilities on the Byblos campus, the state-of-the-art, 15,500-square-meter, $31-million medical complex under construction on the Byblos campus is moving toward completion. The School of Medicine and Nursing building will take its place among the most advanced medical facilities in the world, and is certain to be a strong draw for SOM and ARCSON applicants in 2012-2013 and beyond.
LAU’s Facilities Management Department is currently executing several capital projects and several major renovations on both campuses.

The long-awaited Frem Civic Center, which sits high on the Byblos hilltop campus overlooking the Mediterranean, was officially inaugurated in June 2011 in a ceremony attended by members of the Frem family, LAU leaders and other dignitaries. The $8.5-million building houses a number of LAU institutes, offices of the School of Business, temporary faculty offices, a simulation teaching lab for the School of Nursing, and a conference center consisting of a 167-seat lecture hall, two conference rooms and a large multi-purpose hall, all equipped with state-of-the-art audio-visual smart facilities. The center serves, moreover, as a major hub for courses and seminars on topics related to citizenship, leadership and ethics.

This is indeed a transformative moment for the entire Byblos campus. In addition to the vast, ambitious School of Medicine and Nursing building scheduled for completion in spring 2012, construction continues on a $25-million infrastructure project in the valley adjacent to the campus and extending to the heart of it, which will provide waste water treatment plant, water pumping and storage, nine megawatts of standby electric power, and heat and air conditioning through underground tunnel systems. Construction of a $14.3-million, five-story, 19,000 square-meter underground parking facility to accommodate around 625 cars is also underway.

On the Beirut campus, LAU’s long-anticipated Memorabilia Gallery was inaugurated on the ground floor of Orme-Gray Hall in late April. Several major renovations are also underway on the Beirut campus. As part of a comprehensive space reallocation plan, the Faculty Apartments Building and Shannon Hall are being upgraded to house administrative offices. The basement of the former is being transformed into LAU’s largest data and IT center, and the latter will house an early childhood center for SAS’s Department of Education.

Visionary construction projects are meanwhile in the offing on both campuses.

Atelier Pagnamenta Torriani, a New York-based architectural firm, has been retained to plan and design the Gibran Library on the Byblos campus, scheduled for completion during the academic year 2014-2015. Khatib & Alami have begun designing the Engineering Workshops and Labs building, also at LAU Byblos.

In Beirut, the Learning Resources Center (LRC) will be transformed into a state-of-the-art student center, including student clubs’ offices, multi-purpose recreational rooms, a new gym and a cyber café adjacent to the Nicol Hall cafeteria, which will be upgraded and expanded over the LRC patio to become a modern dining facility.

Perhaps most spectacularly, a $40-million, 18,000-square-meter Arts & Sciences Building on the Beirut campus will house labs, studios, classrooms, faculty offices, as well as a gallery, conference center, and parking.

The Beirut campus will also soon see the execution of a major infrastructural project upgrading the electrical installations of the campus and building a central eight-megawatt backup power plant.
Information Technology infrastructure

The IT Department has introduced a number of systems upgrades that directly benefit faculty, students, and the entire LAU community.

IT has installed a high-performance computer specifically for the use of academic researchers, which speeds up the processing of complex formulae from days to hours.

The online registration system (Banner) has been upgraded to handle increased load at the beginning of each semester. IT is also in the process of making schedule and grades information on Banner accessible from students’ smartphones. IT has also introduced software that integrates with Banner to provide conflict-free classroom and exam scheduling.

Other services have been automated and streamlined. A new online deferred payment service, eliminates the need to queue for hours in front of the business office. IT is in the final stages of moving student and alumni email to a “cloud” service provided by Microsoft, allowing an identical user experience — and effortless sharing of calendars, contacts, and notes, plus smartphone synchronization — whether one is working on a personal or public computer or on a smartphone.

All classrooms in Byblos and over half of those in Beirut have been equipped with smart technologies, and video-conferencing equipment has been installed in 14 conference rooms and offices spread over Beirut, Byblos, and New York. A plan is underway to convert all classes in LAU to smart by the end of this academic year.

Meanwhile, IT’s Portal Project — now in a pilot phase, to be implemented in phases through 2012 — unifies LAU’s major business and academic applications, allowing faculty, staff, students and alumni to log in to a single webpage with LAU content personalized and curated.

Also underway is the continuous upgrade of network infrastructure in Beirut, Byblos, New York and UMC-RH, the improvement of network security through revised information security regulations and a new Identity and Access Management system, the creation of a data warehouse to function as LAU’s institutional memory, and a new document management system to prevent lost records and eliminate the need for file cabinets.

LAU’s Human Resources Department is collaborating with the Job Assessment Committee (JAC) to review and fine-tune the organizational structures of various departments, and plans to research and implement an automated performance management system during the 2011-2012 academic year. The system will incorporate both management-by-objective (MBO) and competency-based-management (CBM) business processes, and will include a detailed training program.

HR has also moved toward final implementation of the Human Resources Management System (HRMS), and has developed and launched a new, highly interactive website catering to the needs of staff and faculty.