



Headlines:

The untimely passing of Trustee Maroun Semaan is felt with deep sorrow, but great pride in his legacy of philanthropy and civic duty. [READ MORE](#)

AUB's NGO Fair hosts a platform for dialogue between the academic community and our counterparts in the humanitarian sector, mediated by the CCECS. [READ MORE](#)

An unforgettable visit to the eight GHATA schools in the Beqa'a valley, where thousands of refugee pupils discover realistic hopes for a better future. [READ MORE](#)

Dear colleagues and friends in the AUB community,

Maroun Semaan, a servant leader for our time



At the start of the 2016-17 academic year, I delivered the Opening Ceremony address on the subject of AUB's legacy of service, in which I called on all of us to re-commit ourselves to the original ideals of societal betterment that this institution was founded to uphold. Having repeatedly referenced our mission of service as a compass point since then, little did I imagine that before the next graduation we would have to say goodbye to a man who set the bar of service to an unprecedented height. Scholar, alumnus, entrepreneur, civic leader, philanthropist, visionary, partner—**Maroun Semaan** was the embodiment of the servant leadership that has long exemplified AUB and which will underpin the future of this University for many decades to come through BOLDLY AUB: The Campaign to Lead, Innovate and Serve. Maroun was the protagonist of an extraordinary and uniquely AUB story, one that is the stuff of legend. A boy born of modest origins in the South of Lebanon who rose to a position of preeminence in the business world reflecting his remarkable drive and willingness to take risks. Unlike many of his singular breed, he was never interested in politics or statecraft, but was consumed by a craving for civic duty, and his belief that Lebanon could only thrive if it developed an independent and secular civil society. That manifested itself not just in generous philanthropy towards AUB, the

greatest difference maker through education in this region, but in the largest gift in AUB's history—in the year of his untimely and tragic passing—a gift we were pleased to honor by naming the school he graduated from the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture.



Interim Dean of FEA, Dr. Alan Shihadeh phrased our feelings eloquently in his message to Faculty colleagues, which I would like to share more broadly here. “We are proud [Mr. Semaan’s] path went through an engineering education at AUB, and would like to think this Faculty played a role in his success. Perhaps more remarkable however was his deep and enduring concern for the well-being of Lebanon and its people, reflected not only through charity... but also by supporting efforts to change the rules of the game. [His] involvement and directed philanthropy set an example for the businesspeople of the region. [...] For believing that well-meaning people can change the world for the better, for believing in the Faculty’s mission to bring about a more viable, livable, and equitable world, and for investing in our ability to carry on this important work, we will be forever in his debt.” I commend Dr. Shihadeh’s words to you and add to them that I cannot think of a more fitting name to represent this outstanding Faculty or an alumnus’s legacy more closely aligned to our strategic path for FEA and the wider AUB, than Maroun Semaan. He shall be deeply missed. [BACK TO THE TOP](#)

NGO Fair pushes new boundaries



It is no coincidence that AUB's yearly NGO Fair directly follows the Job Fair in which employers from some of the leading companies come to scout for tomorrow's professional leaders in a recruitment drive. The **Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service**, always on the lookout for ways to make a difference, arranges with the Job Fair suppliers to lend us the more than 100 booths already erected on Upper Campus, in the name of supporting community service. And so the stage is set for one of the most important humanitarian non-profit platforms of the Lebanese

calendar—a major forum for dialogue mediated by the CCECS between the academic community and our counterparts in the NGO sector. This year's fair saw two firsts: Being held in partnership with our colleagues at the **Université Saint-Joseph** for the first time, as well as showcasing displays of community projects by our students who are taking the **transformative leadership program** to another level, alongside the booths occupied by our NGO partners.



Community project work is a requirement for students receiving institutional scholarships and what was on display was genuinely impressive. We are not talking about initiation phases, or the first faltering steps towards realizing a project. These are fully fledged, successful implementations of pilot projects that have been created from the bottom up by students. They choose their partners, pick the theme and area of implementation, carry out stakeholders' and needs' assessments, design and develop the proposal, set the budget and implement the project. You can see the pride and engagement in their eyes as they explain their activities and the effect it has on them and on members of marginalized communities. **Environmental sustainability awareness** in the Beqa'a, **road safety** in Kleiat and Yahchouch, **sports for people with special needs** in the South, **school art therapy** in Bourj Hammoud, and a new **cultural trail** for Ehmej were just a few of the excellent projects. Many students will doubtless go on running such activities after graduation. In many ways, each group of 6-8 students recreates the internal structure of an NGO. But where a traditional NGO does not generally have the luxury to stop and reflect, our students have exactly that opportunity, and they come forward with brilliant new ideas which are daring, strategic and sustainable. Not only that, but with the support of AUB professors empowering their ideas, and the authenticity they achieve by tackling real social issues in their own communities, these projects are some of the most worthwhile activities undertaken by AUB community members. I hope the day is coming soon when we will be able to make them a requirement across the board for AUB students, as is the case at USJ. [BACK TO THE TOP](#)

Temporary structures changing lives

On the back of a great NGO fair, Provost Mohamed Harajli and I headed to the Beqa'a to visit the **GHATA project schools**, designed by AUB faculty and students under the guidance of CCECS Director Rabih Shibli and implemented by the **Kayany Foundation** headed by the remarkable Nora Joubblatt. It was both astonishing and inspiring to see thousands of young Syrian refugee pupils so enthusiastic and eager to learn in the classrooms of the eight temporary schools, located mainly in the Saadnayel and Majd El Anjar areas. When we asked the children about their future aspirations, the smiling and spontaneous responses came back at full volume: Doctor, teacher, engineer, seamstress, political scientist, chemist and even political leader! These children, facing serious daily existential challenges, clearly have caught a deep collective enthusiasm and appreciation for this opportunity to learn and they are grasping it with both hands, and they are positively reverberating with commitment, desire to learn, and discipline.



Temporary GHATA structures provide pupils with a sense continuity in education

Though a major step in the right direction, and absolutely remarkable in scope (eight schools with 700 refugee pupils each), this is no time to pat ourselves on the back. It is rather our duty to take immediate action to help save a generation from sinking without a trace. Providing education for 5-16-year-olds is a powerful tool to put war and displacement behind them, showing a world of opportunity beyond the conflict zone and refugee camp. "Today a reader, tomorrow a leader" reads a banner at one of the schools. This is an inspirational and powerful statement that could shape a child's life and affect her future path. In the classroom, students are encouraged to participate and voice their opinions, and are praised for their contributions. The educators are showing immense commitment in their work, and no doubt this will be reflected in years to come in the psyches of thousands of children living in some of the toughest circumstances today. I was happy and proud to hear of the AUB students involved with the project under the supervision of Dr. Tony Hoffman from the Psychology department, who organizes weekly trips to the Beqa'a to provide entertainment and activities for the children. Serving the underprivileged is something the daughters and sons of AUB have done since the very beginning. It is gratifying to

see new generations taking up the challenge, undaunted by the scale of today's humanitarian disasters. [BACK TO THE TOP](#)

Best regards,

Fadlo R. Khuri, MD
President
