THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

Making History Again
“Our institution is here to serve Egypt and the population of Egypt. ...The full recognition of this point is fundamental to any consideration of our program and plans. ...The American University in Cairo has from the beginning laid a unique emphasis on character training in education. ...Our education is directed not merely to the student’s head and intellect, but also to his heart and moral character.”

— Charles R. Watson, AUC’s founder and first president, June 1925
After a decade of planning and five years of construction, the New Cairo Campus represents the realization of a dream first envisioned by the founders of the American University in Cairo nearly 90 years ago.
1912
Charles Watson completes report outlining vision for AUC

1919
AUC officially incorporated in Washington, D.C.

1920
First 142 students begin classes equivalent to the final two years of high school. Student Union formed

1921
School of Oriental Studies established

1922
First commencement

1923
Degrees recognized by the New York State Board of Regents as equivalent to junior college degrees

1924
Division of Extension (forerunner to the School of Continuing Education) established

First campus newspaper, AUC Review, issued

1925
First university-level courses offered

Ruth Litt donated $100,000 for an auditorium to be named after her grandfather, William Dana Ewart

1926
Old Boys Club created for alumni

1927
AUC offers four years of secondary school and four of college

1928
First university-level bachelor’s degrees awarded to three students

AUC welcomes first female student Eva Habib El-Masri
The American University in Cairo began as a preparatory school. Its first class arrived in the fall of 1920 — fewer than 150 students following a curriculum that was equivalent to the last two years of American high school. Not until 1928 did it graduate its first university-level students: two earning a Bachelor of Arts degree and one a Bachelor of Science degree.

AUC was, from its inception, a bridge between cultures, linking East and West. It aspired not to stand with one culture but to embrace both, to become something hybrid and cosmopolitan and new. It would draw its creative and scholarly energy from the friction that naturally arises when one world meets another.
AUC’s founding president, Charles R. Watson, was an early embodiment of the university’s character. Raised in Cairo, and educated at Ohio State and Princeton universities, Watson valued intellectual acuity, personal integrity and principled leadership in any language, on either side of the globe.

Under Watson’s leadership, the university grew in ways large and small. Its first students were required to take weekly sessions of calisthenics and gymnastics. A modest end-of-year competition, Sports Day, became within a decade a major event featuring a live band and a bright canopy covering the bleachers.

Other developments were more dramatic. AUC enrolled its first female student in 1928, more than 40 years before Princeton would do the same. In 1930, a speech in Ewart Hall on women’s rights sparked heated protests; the university defended the speech in particular and reasoned debate in general.
1929
Hill family started AUC’s first endowment fund with $450,000

1931
Old Boys Club developed into Alumni Association.

Gillespie family donated $65,000 to build Oriental Hall

1937
Om Kalthum performed in Ewart Hall

Late 1930s
Campus Caravan replaced AUC Review

1940
King Abdullah of Jordan visited AUC

1941
AUC hosted special concerts in Ewart Hall for allied soldiers in Egypt

1942
AUC students petitioned Ministry of War to allow an instructor to teach them military formations, which soon replaced acrobatics and team sports

1950
First graduate degree awarded

1951
Last preparatory class graduated, making AUC strictly a university-level institution

1952
Helen Keller visited AUC

1953
Hill House formally dedicated as first student dormitory on campus

Social Research Center created

1954
Late Egyptian presidents Gamal Abdul Nasser and Mohammed Naguib attended AUC’s Arabic Language Day Convocation
1956
English Language Institute opened
School of Oriental Studies became the Center for Arabic Studies
AUC obtained Creswell Collection

1959
Hill House rededicated as a library

1960
AUC Press established

1961
AUC’s name was changed from “at” Cairo to “in” Cairo

1964
Buildings purchased from the Greek community. Falaki building built for use as a student dormitory

1966
Science Building construction completed

1967
Center for Arabic Study Abroad opened

1969
Government sequestered AUC until 1975

1972
AUC Press obtained exclusive English-language rights to the works of Naguib Mahfouz

1974
Ministry of Higher Education recognized all but three AUC degrees as equivalent to those offered by Egyptian universities

Sports program won representation in the National Universities Sports Union

1975
Egyptian government relinquished control of AUC

Protocol issued between AUC’s Board of Trustees and the Egyptian government
In the late 1950s, an Egyptian government official claimed that the university’s original name — the American University at Cairo — diminished the city. The substitution of the word “in” for “at” balanced the scales. AUC was not a satellite temporarily stationed in Cairo; it was part of the city itself.

As it continued to respond to the needs of its students and to changing practices in higher education, AUC expanded its academic offerings. The university added programs in sociology, anthropology, political science and economics; expanded its offerings in the natural sciences; and established the English Language Institute, the Social Research Center, and later the Desert Development Center. It moved the School of Oriental Studies into the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, giving it a new name: the Center for Arabic Studies. Soon it developed a series of high-profile professional programs in engineering, computer science, journalism and mass communication, and management.
In 1960, AUC enrolled 400 students. By 1969, under the leadership of President Thomas Bartlett, the university had more than tripled its enrollment to more than 1,300 students, of whom 450 were pursuing graduate studies. It was still tiny in comparison to Egypt’s public universities, but it was attracting students of unusual promise — students who would go on to take leadership roles in the country and the region.

At the end of Bartlett’s term, the political situation in the Middle East simmered and then boiled over. As always, the university reflected and responded to its environment. Consider a single year, 1967: Gamal Abdul Nasser pondered nationalizing AUC; the government sequestered the university after the June war; and AUC opened the Center for Arabic Study Abroad, a program that established the university as the premier destination for foreigners to study Arabic. Even as it was under tremendous pressure from its home country, AUC welcomed students from around the world to explore the language and culture of Egypt.
1978
AUC Press published the first Naguib Mahfouz novel in English

1979
Desert Development Center approved

1982
New library on the Greek Campus completed

AUC received largest single donation ($5,500,000) from Yousef Jameel ’68

Middle States Commission on Higher Education granted AUC full accreditation

1985
Opening of Egypt’s first university bookstore

1988
Mahfouz won Nobel Prize. AUC Press was already his English-language publisher (with nine of his novels in print) and worldwide agent

1989
Abdul Latif Jameel Building for Middle East Management Studies inaugurated

Core Curriculum introduced

Model United Nations started

1990
Model Arab League started

1991
AUC opened Zamalek building

1992
Rare books library inaugurated

1993
Noam Chomsky spoke at AUC

University Senate established

1994
AUC celebrated 75th anniversary
1995
Grand Mufti Sheikh Muhammed Tantawi and Pope Shenouda III spoke at AUC

AUC Professor Kent Weeks rediscovered KV5 in Valley of the Kings

1996
Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature established

1997
AUC purchased land in New Cairo

1999
U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton spoke in Ewart Hall

2000
Queen Rania Al Abdullah ’91 visited AUC. Distinguished guests in first years of the century included Jimmy Carter, Kofi Annan, Condoleezza Rice, and Nobel laureates Ahmed Zewail and Mohamed ElBaradei

2003
New Cairo Campus design completed and cornerstone laid by Egypt’s First Lady Suzanne Mubarak ’77, ’82

2004
AUC established Leadership for Education and Development program
AUC signed construction contract for New Cairo Campus

2007
AUC Press published its 1,000th book

2008
First day of class held on the New Cairo Campus

2009
Egypt’s First Lady Suzanne Mubarak ’77, ’82 inaugurated New Cairo Campus
AUC celebrated 90th anniversary
By 1975, Egypt had released AUC from its order of sequestration and recognized nearly all of the university’s degree programs as equivalent to those awarded by Egyptian universities.

Soon, AUC was viewed as an anchor of Tahrir Square, the bustling heart of Cairo; a meeting ground for some of the region’s most important civic, cultural and religious leaders; and a source of important new research that touches the lives of communities across Egypt and the Middle East. Turn any corner on campus, open any door, and the university would reveal some project or initiative that reached out to the city, the country and beyond.

Today, the university is home to nearly 5,000 undergraduates and more than 1,000 graduate students representing nearly 120 countries. It is home to leading faculty members who work at the vanguard of their fields and serve as mentors and advisers to each new generation of students.
The future is here
AUC’s new 260-acre campus in New Cairo is a bold declaration of purpose for the university and a ringing affirmation of the future of education in the Middle East. It represents a major investment in the future of the city, the country and the region.

The campus brings the liberal arts vividly to life: it’s a grand public space that welcomes students and faculty from all nations, serves as a model of civic engagement and environmental awareness, and embraces the social and civic life of Cairo.

Marked by winding paths and expansive courtyards, stocked with the most advanced resources for research and scholarship, bustling with life and crowded with new ideas, the new campus is a sweeping vision of tomorrow’s essential international university.
The Abdul Latif Jameel Hall is home to the School of Business, Economics and Communication, the Kamal Adham Center for Journalism Training and Research, and the Sony Gallery. Facilities include executive training rooms, computer labs, fully equipped video editing and production labs, and specialized labs for graphics, multimedia, radio broadcasting and newspaper production.

The home of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud Hall, features labs for psychology and Egyptology and computer-assisted language labs. The AUC Center for the Arts houses an art gallery; 300-seat mainstage theater; labs for electronic music and photography; studios for drawing, painting, sculpture and theater design; and studios for music and film editing and production.

The School of Sciences and Engineering features spacious, sophisticated labs in every major scientific discipline and a range of specialized fields, from microbiology to systematics, from microprocessors to polymers, from energy systems to soils. Other highlights include an animal facility, greenhouse, herbarium and structural testing facility.
Creating a central location for services, the Campus Center provides students with a communal area to eat, congregate, organize trips and attend campus-wide events. Inside the building are a bookstore, gift shop, bank, travel office and the main dining room. Mexican architect Ricardo Legoretta, who designed the Campus Center, likened it to a small village.

Near the Campus Center is the student-housing complex. Nestled among palm groves, gardens and small courtyards, the residences create a private space that also encourages community building among students. Across the student residences sits the three-story indoor athletic complex, including a 2,000-seat multipurpose court, a jogging track, six squash courts, martial arts and exercise studios, a free weight studio and training courts. Outdoor facilities include a 2,000-seat track and field stadium, swimming pool, soccer field, jogging and cycling track, and courts for tennis, basketball, handball and volleyball.
Housing the largest English-language collection in the region, AUC’s five-story library includes space for 600,000 volumes in the main library and 100,000 volumes in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library; locked carrels; computer workstations; video and audio production and editing labs; and comprehensive resources for digitizing, microfilming and preserving documents.

In addition, on the plaza level of the library, the Learning Commons emphasize group and collaborative learning. This unique area integrates independent study, interactive learning, multimedia and technology rooms, and copy and writing centers. Students can listen to music, watch a DVD, see a live performance or listen to a speaker while working on their assignments. They can also get walk-in assistance from the Writing Center’s satellite office or help with AUC’s online teaching and learning system.
A model of green building techniques, the campus design draws on the latest sustainable technologies and is guided by a concern for the surrounding environment. The 100-centimeter-thick slabs of sandstone that cover the buildings also act as a layer of insulation, slashing air conditioning and heat requirements by at least 40 percent. More than 75 percent of the stone in the Alumni Wall that circles the campus is made from recycled stone.

Throughout the campus, plazas, courtyards and gateways between buildings guide the prevailing northeast winds through fountains and greenery, cooling the air at the center of the campus and reducing long-term energy and maintenance costs. A hollow-square building design, repeated across the campus in different scales, allows as much natural light and air as possible to enter offices, classrooms and labs from multiple directions. In addition the cooling system is powered by natural gas instead of electricity, relieving power stations of energy they would need to produce, thereby improving the efficiency of the system. The use of desert landscaping was also selected for its environmental sensitivity and minimal water usage.
Carrying forward a tradition of cultural outreach and education, the New Cairo and Tahrir Square campuses extend AUC even further into Egyptian society through a full array of public lectures, artistic performances and educational offerings. Significant portions of the Tahrir Square Campus will be given new life and purpose. Ewart Memorial Hall and Oriental Hall will host public lectures, musical performances and other cultural events. The ground floor of the palace building will include a new branch of the AUC Bookstore, a café and the Margo Veillon Gallery for Contemporary Egyptian Art.

The university’s newest academic building at Tahrir Square, the Falaki Academic Center, will serve as a home to some of AUC’s schools and programs, including the School of Continuing Education. With its campuses in New Cairo and in Tahrir Square, AUC extends its reach, serves a broad community and renews its commitment to the past and the future of the city and the region.
Thank you
This special moment in AUC history would not have been possible without the generous contributions of the university’s supporters.
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