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The School of Continuing Education celebrates its 90th anniversary

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On the cover: The Specialized Council for Education and Scientific Research is setting the stage for education reform in Egypt, photographed by Dana Smillie.
Editor’s Notes

Education is one of the most important investments we can make in ourselves and our children. In Egypt, the issue of education has been on the reform agenda for years, and we’re still not there. Many schools focus on memorization and loading students’ minds with information, hampering their creativity and imagination, and preventing them from being able to think for themselves. Syllabi are not always age-appropriate, teachers are not adequately trained and overcrowded classrooms hinder effective teaching; the list goes on. In the end, it’s not just about education, but quality education.

In this issue, we focus on education, particularly in Egypt. “A-Class Education” (page 16) sheds light on four AUC faculty members who are serving on the new Specialized Council for Education and Scientific Research, working to implement solutions to the country’s decades-old education crisis. In “Breaking the Mold” (page 10), AUC Provost Mahmoud El-Gamal ’83, ’85 examines challenges and ways to improve the higher education system in Egypt. “E-nhancing Education” (page 32) explores modern methods of online and blended learning, and how the classic notion of a teacher-led classroom is shifting to a more student-centered, interactive environment. In “Transforming Teachers” (page 24), we understand that it’s not the curriculum, class size or school resources that can make or break the learning process, but the teachers.

Focusing on AUC, “Scholarship Stars” (page 13) spotlights some of the most exemplary students on campus, scholarship recipients, many of whom not only have outstanding academic records, but also a strong sense of commitment toward their communities. “What is Liberal Arts?” (page 22) maps student and alumni feedback on what a liberal arts education means to them. Graduate student Diego Dalle Carbonare talks about citizenship education in “Empowering Citizens” (page 42) as a way of engaging and empowering students, particularly the underprivileged. Focusing on adult learners, “Continuing the Legacy” (page 36) traces the historic roots of AUC’s School of Continuing Education, which is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year.

Looking at where people go after education, “Matchmaker” (page 28) gives tips to job seekers on finding a career that suits their skills and personality traits. Alumni are, as always, pioneers in their fields. Abdallah Jum’ah ’65 (“Releasing the Genie Within,” page 9) used his liberal arts education, as head of the world’s largest oil producing company, to trigger innovation among employees. Dina El Moffy ’98 (“Desire to Inspire,” page 27) is leading an organization to mentor and motivate youth, whereas Bassem Fayek ’08 (“Hooked on MOOCs,” page 35) has established a startup that helps learners pursue their educational needs online.

As Socrates said, “Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.” This is the crux of the matter. Schooling should not be about students regurgitating information. Real education triggers students’ thought, creativity and awareness. This is what we need; this is what the job market needs; and this is where we should be headed.
School of Business Among 1% Worldwide to Achieve Triple-Crown Accreditation

AUC’s School of Business is one of nearly 70 business schools worldwide — out of approximately 14,000 — as well as the first in the Middle East and third in Africa, to achieve the prestigious triple-crown accreditation from the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

“The triple-crown ranking — the most sought-after status for any business school around the world — is a testament to the global quality of the teaching and research taking place at the school,” said AUC President Lisa Anderson. “It is a reflection of the caliber of the faculty, students and alumni. We are especially proud of this achievement, which places AUC’s business school in the top 70 globally and on par with the finest in the world.”

EQUIS is an accreditation system for management and business schools, administered by the European Foundation for Management Development. A high level of academic quality, professional relevance, innovation and internationalization is required to achieve EQUIS accreditation. EQUIS accredits programs that focus on the development of managerial and entrepreneurial skills. In April 2014, AUC’s School of Business also received accreditation for its MBA and Executive MBA programs by the London-based Association of MBAs. Only 2 percent of MBA programs worldwide are AMBA-accredited. In addition, since 2006, the school has been accredited by AACSB International — making it one of only 5 percent of all business schools in the world to receive such accreditation.

“The AUC School of Business has a long tradition of academic excellence,” said Karim Seghir, dean of the School of Business. “What makes the learning experience at the school so unique is the mix of the global perspective, innovative teaching techniques, experiential approach to business education and the multicultural and inspiring intellectual environment we provide.”

Alumna Represents Egypt at UN Women’s Entrepreneurship Day

Rana El Kaliouby ’98 ’00, co-founder and chief science officer of Affectiva, an emotion analytics and insights company that grew out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab, served as the Egypt ambassador and Middle East and North Africa board member for the inaugural event of Women’s Entrepreneurship Day at the United Nations in New York.

“The goal is to empower women and their businesses,” said El Kaliouby, “as well as gather a think tank of female leaders, which will ultimately create an amplified merged message to expand businesses with social initiatives in communities, locally and globally.”

El Kaliouby has been recognized by Entrepreneur as one of the Seven Most Powerful Women to Watch in 2014. She is also a board member of TechWadi, the leading not-for-profit organization based in Silicon Valley that aims to build bridges between Silicon Valley and the Arab world.
AUC was ranked as the top University in Egypt and the fourth in the region, according to the recently released 2014 – 2015 QS World University Rankings. The rankings were based on several criteria, mainly academic reputation, followed by student-to-faculty ratio, citations per faculty, employer reputation, as well as international student and international faculty ratios.

“The QS World University Rankings include a broad range of indicators, many of which prioritize high-quality teaching, selectivity of students, overall reputation, class size, and percentage of international students and faculty,” said Ted Purinton, associate provost for academic administration and international programs and associate professor of international and comparative education. “That is why we rank well with QS.”

Utilizing a less holistic approach, U.S. News recently released Best Arab Region Universities Rankings, placing AUC as 58th in the region. This ranking, however, is based solely on research output, leaving out a host of other relevant criteria that are included in the traditional U.S. News Best Colleges ranking used for universities in the United States. Ratios are not mentioned as part of the ranking process, and a number of metrics are closely related to the size of the university.

Purinton emphasized that AUC’s best features that make it a top university are its student-centered approach, promoting high-quality, liberal arts education to produce well-rounded graduates. “Indeed, we are not driven by the rankings; we are driven instead by the desire to be the best educational institution in the region,” he said.
Adopt-a-Plot Brings AUC Community Together Through Organic Gardening

Seasonal fruits and vegetables such as okra, bell peppers, chili peppers, squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, arugula, turnips, watermelon, radishes and leeks are now a part of campus — and grown by the University’s own students, faculty and staff.

Taking part in the Adopt-a-Plot program, initiated and administered by the Research Institute for a Sustainable Environment (RISE), AUC community members cultivate and harvest their own vegetable plots.

“I’ve always wanted to expand my knowledge in gardening, but on a more community-oriented level,” said Frank Bartscheck, a journalism and mass communication graduate student. Through Adopt-a-Plot, RISE provides each gardener with a plot of land. Under the guidance of Muhammad Wahba, a RISE researcher, gardeners are responsible for their personal plots for an entire semester. Classes on cultivation are also offered. “Participants learn by doing,” explained Tina Jaskolski, head of the research unit at RISE. “We want people to experience the environment. You get your hands dirty. It’s hands-on work.”

While AUC community members hope to find out about simple gardening practices, for students, the program is the perfect opportunity for hands-on learning. “Class course work includes students having practical sessions with us; it becomes part of their assignments,” said Jaskolski. “We’re hoping to involve students more and more in sustainability research projects on campus.”

In addition to its educational aspects, Adopt-a-Plot also works to bring the AUC community together. Gardeners share plots and work alongside one another, building relationships across department and student-teacher affiliations. “The program connects students, faculty and staff in sustainability work that is not only educational, but also fun,” noted Jaskolski.

Upward Bound: Dean Seghir in the Business of Excellence

Karim Seghir, dean of the School of Business, sets impact, thought leadership in the Arab region and global positioning as priorities for the next juncture of the school’s journey. “Although much has been accomplished, as demonstrated by accreditation and ranking bodies, there still remains much work to be done in our continuous quest for excellence,” said Seghir. “We will capitalize on the school’s geographical context and long-standing reputation to make it the globally recognized knowledge hub and gateway to the Arab world.”

Seghir is not new to AUC or the School of Business. For the past three years, he has served as associate dean of undergraduate studies and administration at the school. This familiarity with the school is an asset for its future development, noted AUC President Lisa Anderson. “In his capacity as associate dean,” Anderson said, “Seghir played an instrumental role in securing international visibility for the school, and his unique combination of insider-knowledge and innovative thinking promises to serve the school well as it continues to win even greater recognition.”

And that is what Seghir is aiming for — taking the school to new heights. “I look forward to working with faculty, staff, students, alumni, employers, Strategic Advisory Board members and friends to nurture the international and diverse intellectual environment at the AUC School of Business, enhance the quality and impact of research, ensure a practical and innovative approach in all we do and strengthen the positioning of the school on the global map of business education,” he said. “I am honored and privileged to lead such an outstanding and diverse team of academic and professional staff. This is a great school, and together we will fulfill its potential.”
AUC Students Win Local Round of $1 Million Hult Competition

After winning in the local edition of the Hult competition, which was hosted for the first time at the University, a team of AUC students is now advancing to the regional round, which will take place in March 2015 in five cities simultaneously: Boston, London, San Francisco, Dubai and Shanghai. The AUC team will compete in London.

The winning team, Forward, includes marketing students Nouran Soliman, Farah Derbala and Nariman Helal, as well as Yasmeen Abouel-Nour, an architectural engineering major. Trained and advised by the student-run International Conference on Global Economy, which organized the local round on campus, the team presented its solution to this year’s challenge, education in urban slums, by integrating recycling and education. The team’s idea is for families to pay for their children’s education in the form of recyclable trash, such as paper, plastic and metals, which will be collected weekly and sold to recycling associations.

“In Egypt, we have more than 1,500 slums, so we can easily access these areas for field research and prototyping,” said Alyaa Younis, a public policy graduate student at AUC and campus director for this year’s competition. “We also have the most to gain, if prototypes succeed and the enterprises launch locally.”

The Hult competition is the world’s largest student crowdsourcing platform for social good that awards $1 million in startup funding to a student team that develops the most radical and innovative idea to solve one of the world’s toughest social challenges. Following the regional round, one team from each city is selected to take part in a summer business incubator program in Boston. At the final round in New York, a winning team is selected by delegates of the Clinton Global Initiative. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton presents the winning team members with a $1 million prize, donated by Philip Hult, to kickstart their idea.

New Master’s to Break New Ground in Educational Leadership

In response to the increasing demand for educational leaders who can serve as pioneers of change across Egypt and the region, AUC’s Graduate School of Education has introduced the new Master of Arts in educational leadership.

“This program is suitable for current or aspiring principals and administrators in schools or universities, as well as for people who plan to pursue PhDs and become professors,” explained Russanne Hozayin, professor of practice and chair of the Department of Comparative and International Education in the Graduate School of Education. “Psychologists and others have made amazing discoveries over the last 40 or 50 years about how people learn and how the brain works, and professors need to know these things. They also need to be aware of new pedagogies and the influences of technology on educational theory and practice.”
At AUC’s English Language Institute, one of our teachers brought in a painting of a clown and asked us to write about it, without giving us specific instructions or directions as to what to write. I wasn’t sure what to do because it was the first time I encountered something speculative that would require going beyond the picture and its colors. I had to think abstractly: Who is this clown? Is he happy or sad? Does he feel the pain we feel? Is he rich or poor? My brain got moving, thinking, imagining. This train of thought lingered with me throughout college — that there is more to life than what we see in front of us.

I became interested in theatre, the arts, opera and literature; the clown opened up my mind.

I worked for Saudi Aramco, the world’s largest oil producing company, for 41 years. I first worked as a mail boy during high school summer vacations. After earning a degree in political science, I joined the company as an English-Arabic translator and developed from there, taking up several jobs in relations, human resources, international operations and, finally, taking the helm for more than 13 years as president and CEO. I was the first non-engineer to run the company, and the motto I constantly raised was to “unleash the genie,” to use our innovative talent and brainpower to the fullest. Being a good engineer is not just about fixing or enhancing a process. It’s re-inventing a process, creating a new process or doing away with a process that has outlived its usefulness. That is why we created an Idea Management System for employees to present creative solutions, even in issues outside their area of responsibility. Innovation became a corporate imperative.

When it comes to innovation, “soft” skills, which are most often developed in the humanities and social sciences, are just as important as the technical or “hard” skills. In my view, harnessing the power of innovation and ingenuity hinges on a depth of intellect, a capacity for analysis and an agility of thought that comes with the liberal arts.

The humanities and social sciences also stimulate a lifelong love of learning, maintaining our sense of curiosity to actively seek out the knowledge or skills we need, enhancing our ability to think and reason, to articulate our own views and values to others, and to engage with people from other cultures. Operating from that premise, Saudi Aramco established the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture as a creativity hub for Saudi students and professionals who have a passion to become innovators. We have to invest in our youth to help them realize their full potential.

And it’s not just about youth. The key to success, for any individual, is to let the genie out of the bottle; magnificent things happen once the genie is released from captivity. At the opposite end of the scale, dictating methods and directing details are the surest way to put the stopper back in the bottle and imprison the genie.

I take all this back to my encounter with the clown. I owe it all to AUC.

Abdallah Jum’ah ’65 reflects on liberal arts as the key to unleashing creative talent

Abdallah Jum’ah ’65 is the retired president and CEO of Saudi Aramco. He currently serves as board chair of the Saudi Investment Bank, board member of Halliburton Corporation and member of the MIT Corporation Visiting Advisory Committee, among other prestigious posts. He has been recognized internationally for his pioneering initiatives, including being listed in the Financial Times as the first of its Who's Who: Ten Top Powers to be Reckoned with in 2007. Jum’ah recently gave a gift to the University to support study-abroad opportunities for students in order to expand their horizons and broaden their cultural perspectives.
BREAKING
Ahmoud El-Gamal ’83, ’85, AUC’s new provost, is the first alum to serve in that post. He earned a bachelor’s in economics, with a minor in computer science, and a master’s in economics from AUC, and was professor of economics and statistics at Rice University before returning to AUC.

In 1982, he received the President’s Cup at the honors assembly and, a year later, graduated top of his class with a 4.0 GPA. El-Gamal also received a Master of Science in statistics from Stanford University and a PhD in economics from Northwestern University. He is a leading scholar in the field of Islamic economics and holds the endowed Chair in Islamic Economics, Finance and Management at Rice University.

As provost and vice president for academic affairs at AUC, El-Gamal shared with AUCToday his insights on the higher education landscape in Egypt.

What are the long-term reforms that need to be put in place?
The most critical reform is changing the mindset from the teacher-student relationship being one of master-apprentice to one where the professor is a mentor, giving students not only the frame of mind to think about and reflect on issues, but also the space to explore, investigate and discover new things on their own. The professor is there to give guidance, not to dictate and state technical facts. What most schools and universities are doing now is developing students to be better technicians, not better citizens. Take engineering, for example. This discipline is more than just learning to construct buildings or dig tunnels. It is essentially a profession that serves humanity, so engineering students need to understand the social side of their specialization, as well as how to write a business and marketing plan. Eventually, they pick it up on their own in real life, but university years are the best time to

What is the main obstacle facing the higher education system in Egypt?
The main problem is students overspecializing too soon, which is exactly the opposite of a liberal arts education. They do not learn to listen and read critically. The patriarchal nature of our society shapes the class dynamics, where the teacher knows it all and the good student is the one who is able to repeat what the professor says. The high school culture, which continues into college, emphasizes the notion that the book and teacher are always right and can’t be criticized. As a result, students are taught what to think, not how to think, which means they don’t develop into lifelong learners and can’t build on the status quo. The main issue is defining knowledge beyond just information. Knowledge is a person’s distinctive ability to use and apply information in everyday life, and that’s the value of a liberal arts education.
grow that side of the brain because students are able to explore what they are good at, seek their competitive edge and learn to make their own mark. They have enough elasticity and flexibility to accept new patterns and break the mold.

In AUC’s five-year strategic plan (2014 – 2019), leading up to the University’s centennial, the “student-centered approach” is the main focus. What is this approach, and what are its benefits?

With this approach, the best interests of students and society are at the center of everything we do. The typical learning approach is for teachers to deliver what they want in the way that they see fit and have students adapt to their system. With the student-centered approach, we first seek to understand student needs and abilities, then reverse engineer to find out the best system that would create a well-rounded individual who is able to handle real-world problems and complex issues in society. Students are, thus, active participants in the learning process. The easiest thing to do is to teach yourself, but what’s hard is understanding each student’s aptitude and skills, and allowing every student to learn and develop at his or her own pace. That’s why the Center for Learning and Teaching at AUC is constantly engaged in faculty development programs that employ new technologies and pedagogies to create a stimulating learning environment for students.

Blended learning is also part of AUC’s strategic plan. Why?

Students of the 21st century are accustomed to new media and innovative ways of learning, and we must capitalize on that. If we do not keep pace with modern methods of acquiring information, we will lose students and disengage them. Students aren’t reading books anymore, but are watching videos on YouTube, logging onto Facebook, tweeting their ideas, posting photos on Instagram and are constantly hooked online. The hybrid teaching methodology of blended learning, which combines the traditional classroom experience with new e-learning methods, has motivated us to think about learning in different ways. Digital course material, online discussions and web conferences are becoming the norm now. Even the word “teacher” has been commonly replaced with “facilitator,” which shows that modern learning styles place an emphasis on empowering and guiding students, rather than instructing them.

“The professor is there to give guidance, not to dictate and state technical facts.”

Should higher education reform begin at the grassroots, by improving the quality of primary education?

Absolutely. When you construct a building, you don’t begin at the 15th floor; you start at the foundations. If I were to choose between a student who had a good K-12 education, but poor university instruction and a student who had the reverse, I would go with the former because he or she would have been taught to learn, adapt, formulate arguments and make informed decisions. That’s why AUC is engaged in remedial education for first-year students, not just in English, but through the first-year program, which is one of the best I’ve seen, even compared to U.S. universities. Not only does the program prepare students from all disciplines — from the arts to the sciences — for life at AUC, it also works to enhance their reading, writing, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, helping them to become reflective and self-reliant in an educational environment where this is not the norm. Of course, everything can’t be fixed in one year, but we do the best we can. In the end, we are bound by the quality of education that incoming students have received.

How does AUC stand out in the realm of private university education in Egypt?

The difference is that AUC is a not-for-profit organization, and that’s how private universities should be. For-profit universities are a recent trend in the West and a source of controversy, since they largely operate as businesses, although they might also serve a social purpose. With a nonprofit such as AUC, the social mission comes first, and from that we create a sustainable business model to support the University. Of course, we don’t want to lose money, but profit is not the main drive. The ultimate aim is to develop well-rounded citizens who are productive and valuable in their fields.

Is there a quick fix to the issue of higher education in Egypt?

Unfortunately, there are no quick fixes, just long-term reforms. It’s all about changing mindsets and creating a new holistic vision for education in general, where a university degree is not a social status symbol and teaching is not about knowledge transmission, but lifelong learning.
Stemming from its deep commitment to ensuring that deserving students are able to receive a high-quality education, AUC awarded $27.7 million in scholarships and financial aid last year, and nearly 60 percent of AUC students received some form of financial aid from the University. With hopes to achieve individual and career goals, as well as dreams for their country, scholarship recipients are some of the top-performing students at AUC, and many have gone to prestigious graduate schools abroad. The following are what some of these scholars had to say about their University experience.

**Scholarship Stars**

Ahmad El-Nemr
“I left medical school, which I really wanted, to be part of the AUC community. This is how dream-fulfilling AUC is for me. And, indeed, it is worth it.”

— Saher Barsoum, mechanical engineering, Major General Ahmed Arafah Endowed Public School Scholarship

“We, as women in the legal realm, are capable of strengthening the rule of law and judicial system in Egypt. At AUC, I am taking the first step in the right direction.”

— Farida Ibrahim, first recipient of the Mostafa El Baradei Fellowship in International and Comparative Law (LLM)

“This past year at AUC has been amazing, full of ups and downs, which made me a better person. I realize now that success is the only option. I will dream big, work hard and believe in myself.”

— Marina Toma, undeclared, Public School Scholarship Fund

“Being at AUC is tremendously changing my life. I feel that a whole new future and world are awaiting me.”

— Walaa Mahmoud, undeclared, Shokry Diab Public School Scholarship

“The diversity of AUC, meeting different people, gives me a lot to write about. AUC offers much that other institutions do not; it approaches learning for the sake of learning and encourages intellectual development.”

— Mohamed ElShafie, philosophy, HSBC Bank Egypt Public School Scholarship for the visually impaired
“I want to play a role in ending illiteracy and improving education in Egypt. That is why I applied for this scholarship — to gain life experience from the civic engagement activities available.”

— Mohamed Ashraf, political science and anthropology, Empower

“Through the different activities I joined, I learned the value of teamwork and spirit of cooperation, and became more confident in public speaking. Studying at AUC is a life-changing opportunity.”

— Maha Ahmed ’14, economics, Thomason Family Public School Scholarship

“I’m really enjoying my liberal arts courses, and the prospect of fitting in within a new culture, language and environment is highly challenging, yet intriguing.”

— Bayan Hasan, communication and media arts, Middle East Partnership Initiative-Tomorrow’s Leaders

“One of my biggest dreams is to work for NASA, which I cannot achieve without an accredited degree. Studying at AUC will pave the way to NASA.”

— Paules Zakhary, physics, Misr El Kheir

“Through my research at AUC, I learned how important it is to be patient and never lose hope when experiments keep failing you, and to believe in what you are doing and that you are going to succeed.”

— Reem Al Olaby (MSc ’10, PhD ’14) Yousef Jameel PhD Fellowship in Applied Sciences and Engineering
A new Specialized Council for Education and Scientific Research tackles Egypt’s education crisis

In the 2014 - 2015 Global Competitiveness Report released by the World Economic Forum, Egypt was ranked 141 out of 144 countries for quality of both primary and higher education. This is a slight improvement from the 2013 - 2014 report, where Egypt was ranked last in the quality of primary education and 145th out of 148 countries in the quality of higher education.

After years of worsening conditions and improvement plans that do not come to fruition, it is clear that Egypt’s educational system is in desperate need of reform, but where should this reform begin? To address this question, a newly formed council, the Specialized Council for Education and Scientific Research, has been mandated to carefully study and advise the presidency on the problems plaguing the educational system and potential strategies for improvement. Out of a total of 11 advisers, four AUC faculty members have been chosen to serve on the council.

“To be frank, the educational system in Egypt is at its lowest point in terms of performance, quality of graduates and international indices of all shapes and forms,” said Tarek Shawki, dean of AUC’s School of Sciences and Engineering and head of the council.

“The scale of the problem is quite large because there are more than 20 million students in the pipeline, and 20 million students with their parents constitute most of the population. There are also around 1.5 million teachers in K-12, so this is a national issue and the implications are far-reaching indeed.”

Experts cite professional teacher development, public school assessment systems, integration of technology into the classroom and emphasis on analytical thinking rather than rote memorization as some of the areas
desperately needing improvement. “Education should help people reach their maximum capacities, know themselves and others, and be able to actively participate in their communities,” affirmed Joyce Rafla ’08, pedagogy and assessment officer at AUC’s Center for Learning and Teaching and the council’s youngest member. “Our education, with its design and content, limits our students. The curricula do not leave room for more than one answer, and the system does not accommodate more than one chance. Students are tracked based on their testing scores from one stage to the next. They rarely choose their ideas or vocation.”

**21st-Century Skills**

Educators and reform advocates use the term “21st-century skills” to describe capacities and traits seen as necessary in successful students, such as critical thinking, creativity, technological literacy and problem-solving abilities. “Egyptians need to ask themselves what skills the next generation needs to have in order to be successful,” Shawki noted. “The purpose is to produce graduates of that system who are global citizens, who are able to compete on an international scale. The world is really open now, and to be fair to future generations, we have to equip them with skills that guarantee they are part of an interconnected, global society.”

The first step for the council, and all stakeholders, is re-examining what the final product of the educational system should be. “Once we have determined what our goals are, we need to take a step back to the drawing board, look at the curricula and see if this content is properly crafted from an educational perspective to provide those skills,” said Shawki. “We have to examine the learning outcomes and existing curricula, rewriting the curricular framework for K-12. If we are reshaping the curriculum, we also really need to equip teachers because the pedagogy is going to change drastically.”

Encouraging the development of 21st-century skills would not only allow Egyptians to compete globally, but would enable them to contribute locally through entrepreneurship, research and innovation. “In such a fast-paced age, today’s educators cannot envision what tomorrow’s future is going to look like,” Rafla noted. “Thus, we can’t continue educating our children with the sole purpose of preparing them for the job market. Such a limited view toward education leads people to sustain the market rather than innovate and create new jobs and opportunities.”

Amal Esawi ’89, ’90, professor of mechanical engineering at AUC and one of the council members, acknowledged the importance of cultivating these soft skills, even in students who are pursuing science or math. “The poor educational and higher education systems that favor memorization and lack critical thinking are not conducive to producing innovators and scientists,” she said. “In particular, due to the poor quality of science education in schools, fewer and fewer students are opting to study science or engineering at the university level. There is also a serious brain-drain...
“We can’t continue educating our children with the sole purpose of preparing them for the job market.”
Joyce Rafia

“The problem in Egypt is that teachers and schools are not sufficiently encouraged to take risks and test new strategies.”
Malak Zaalouk

“The poor educational and higher education systems that favor memorization and lack critical thinking are not conducive to producing innovators and scientists.”
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“We have to invest heavily in teacher development to build a new generation of educators before we can build a new generation of graduates.”
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Tarek Shawki

problem, since many of the students who travel outside of Egypt for their PhDs take up posts in foreign countries because of the competitive incentives offered abroad and lack of state-of-the-art research facilities in Egypt.”

A change in the learning outcomes, pedagogy and curricula would also require a change in the system of assessment, potentially upending the thanawiya amma system, in which all public high school students are required to pass a standardized exam to graduate and enter college. “If we want graduates who have critical thinking skills and who are creative and able to learn for the rest of their lives, we have to assess them differently — not for what they have memorized, but for their ability to assimilate knowledge, think critically and come up with different solutions,” explained Shawki. “Currently, teachers are serving a different system, a system that is totally driven by the thanawiya amma. The entire business model, the entire ecosystem, is serving that. If we change the way we assess, it will have a ripple effect on everything.”

Professional Teacher Development
Changing the curriculum and method of assessment can only go so far, however, in the absence of educators who are trained in these new pedagogies and strategies, as well as in practical teaching skills and the psychology of knowledge acquisition.

“Right now, training consists of an artificial setup of cascade programs, where you pull teachers out of their environment, put them in large halls, lecture them and expect them to use that in daily practice,” said Malak Zaalouk ’71, ’76, professor of practice in the Graduate School of Education, director of the Middle East Institute for Higher Education at AUC and one of the council members. “Or, you put them in faculties of education where they don’t have the opportunity to effectively practice what they’re learning in real schools within a robust, well-thought-out system of practicum.”

What compounds the problem, Zaalouk added, is that some professors in Egyptian faculties of education...
have never practiced teaching themselves. “They are not in touch with teaching as a profession and, therefore, don’t understand its complexities,” she explained. “They are specialists in their fields, but they’ve never dealt with children, so they write curricula that students cannot understand unless they are supported by their parents or take private tutoring lessons. Young students in faculties of education are taught various theories and comparative systems of education, but are not given enough space to practice teaching; hence, when they leave university, they are not equipped for their future profession.”

The best mode of tackling teacher education is to do it within their context — what Zaalouk described as “school-based professional development.” “It’s about training them on how to generate the knowledge they need to deal with children and students of all levels,” she said. “It’s not only about the subject matter at hand; it’s about psychology, human development, management, assessment and diagnosis of problems. These are very complex skills that require teachers to do extensive research and be in touch with their professional reality early on.”

In addition to reforming the ways in which teachers are initially prepared to enter the classroom, professional development for teachers must be seen as a continuous, lifelong process. “One of the ways to engage schools in professional teacher development is to create a modular approach, but to do this in what we call continuous professional development,” Zaalouk noted. “It is not a one-shot injection. These are modules conducted over several years that help teachers understand the theories behind what they should be doing in the classroom; the values, principles and pedagogies that work with children of different ages; as well as the subject matter at hand, which they need to integrate with other cultural themes. It’s all about using different methods and understanding how the brain works. The problem in Egypt is that teachers and schools are not sufficiently encouraged to take risks and test new strategies.”

Affirmed Shawki, “The council is looking at professional teacher training as a number one target because we need good teachers to help us write curricula and conduct new assessments. We have to invest heavily in teacher development to build a new generation of educators before we can build a new generation of graduates.”

**Scientific Research**

Scientific research is also an integral part of the reform process. “A strategic plan for scientific research in Egypt is urgently needed,” said Esawi.

To move forward, Esawi emphasized the importance of establishing an independent and impartial body to evaluate the outcomes of government-funded research projects in order to ensure a fair and effective utilization of resources; building the capacities and enhancing the skills of young researchers; as well as coordinating between the different entities involved in research, whether ministries or university research centers, to streamline activities and avoid duplication of expensive equipment. “Currently, scientific research equipment is often locked up in labs headed by the principal investigators of projects,” Esawi explained. “After the project ends, they turn into museum pieces, as the maintenance cost for keeping them in good working condition is not affordable.”

The solutions being proposed by the council, Esawi noted, are conducting a review of the administrative and funding mechanisms, restoring trust with the industry to increase nongovernmental spending and developing a web-based catalog of major research equipment currently available in research centers and labs across Egypt as an initial phase to maximize the use of equipment assets. This would be followed by the establishment of an “all-new national central laboratory,” housing state-of-the-art research equipment, to be shared by all Egyptian researchers. “Priority would be given to equipment that supports projects related to Egypt’s national research goals, and the management and operations of the lab would be independent of any university or institute to ensure efficiency and open access to everyone,” Esawi said. “The equipment would be looked after by well-trained staff members who can provide technical support to all researchers. Our ultimate aim is

“To be frank, the educational system in Egypt is at its lowest point in terms of performance, quality of graduates and international indices of all shapes and forms.”
to build a culture of strategic collaboration between researchers and scientists to strengthen their output, identifying niche areas in which Egyptian researchers can excel and stand out.”

**Winning Over the Public**

Egypt has witnessed a number of strategic plans for combating these issues over the years, so people are sometimes skeptical of any promises to overhaul the system, or even make small improvements. “The real problem is not to come up with ideas, it is to implement those ideas,” Shawki said. “Egypt has witnessed so many strategic plans for education that were never implemented. There are many solutions that people have discussed before, but there wasn’t enough political will to engage. The most promising thing is that, finally, the leadership in Egypt has the political will to do something about education.”

Even with these new efforts, previous reform plans are not in vain. “It is important to spend time understanding earlier reform efforts and how they have succeeded or failed, and capitalize on the experience of people who have worked in education,” explained Rafla. “We want to listen to people, ranging from teachers, students, parents and educators to governmental institutions, civil society organizations and international donors.”

While most Egyptians recognize that the educational system is deeply flawed, however, implementing real change is an intimidating prospect. In order for the reform process to succeed, all members of Egyptian society — parents, students, graduates and teachers — must voice their opinions and ideas. “The specialized council will not be working in a vacuum,” indicated Shawki. “We don’t have all the answers, and we have to listen to everybody. Part of the product will be based on this input from all stakeholders. People will accept the solution more if they are a part of it.”

Rafla also called on the Egyptian people to be engaged and optimistic about the reform process. “We know that fixing education is a huge challenge that lies ahead of us,” she said. “But we also know two important things: We can’t do it alone, and we can’t lose hope. Everyone has a role in this national reform project. Giving up is not an option.”
WHAT IS LIB?

Students and alumni reflect on the meaning of "liberal arts".

Diversity
Knowledge
Acceptance
Freedom
Choice
Harmony
Experience
Critical thinking
Writing
Western
AUC
Arts
Well-rounded
Accomplished
History
Exper.
**The meaning of a liberal arts education**

- **Purpose**
  - Babylon
  - Ancient Greece
  - Global trends
- **Culture**
  - Freedom
  - Multicultural
  - Tradition
  - Engagement
  - Diversity
  - Identity
  - National
  - Minded
- **Wide scope**
  - Freedom
  - Multicultural
  - Tradition
  - Engagement
  - Diversity
  - Identity
- **Idea**
  - Learning
  - Maturing
  - Experimental
- **Opportunity**
  - Interdisciplinary
  - Experiential
- **Exposure**
  - New perspectives
  - Coexistence
  - Adaptable
- **Reading**
  - Poetry
  - Better life
  - Imagination
- ** thinking**
  - Evolutionized
  - Initiative
  - Aspirations
  - Opportunity
- **Adaptability**
  - Unbiased
  - Broader
  - Horizons

"One of the main aspects I appreciate about my education at AUC.”
—Shaza Walid

“A student in a liberal arts university is a productive citizen in the making.”
—Ziad Arbad

"Little about everything I learned was predetermined."
—Shaza Walid

"Think outside the box."
**Transforming Teachers**

Successful teachers put student learning and discovery at the center

By Dalia Al Nimr
Photos by Ahmad El-Nemr

“When we think of education reform, we usually think of systems, programs, structures and plans, and we tend to skip the main component of any reform process — people,” said Ted Purinton, associate provost for academic administration and international programs and associate professor of international and comparative education in the Graduate School of Education.

Education has typically been looked upon, Purinton noted, as “knowledge transmission,” whereby instructors convey information to students, who take that knowledge and relay it back in tests, projects or assignments. Yet, research has shown that knowledge and skill become constructed in complex and variable ways. “Educational systems worldwide, unfortunately, are hindered by extraordinarily simplistic conceptions of human development and learning,” Purinton explained.

“There is an enormous body of knowledge available to guide educators and educational systems in accomplishing much more ambitious learning and development targets, yet reform strategies continue to be based on limited knowledge of the ways in which students of all ages and ability levels learn and demonstrate skills and knowledge within particular subject domains.”

For education reform to be effective, teachers should be at the core of the process, affirmed Purinton. Teachers must not only have a solid knowledge base of the subject area they are teaching, but must also understand the cognitive, social and emotional development of students. For many decades, educational researchers have looked to the theories of the late Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, who suggested that learner “readiness” is central to effective teaching. Recently, however, the concept of readiness has expanded to very concentrated domain-specific knowledge, such as readiness for a particular concept of mathematics.

“If students have not reached the appropriate stage of cognitive and domain development, it will be difficult for them to understand various new concepts; furthermore, it is important to understand that cognitive development does not always match age,” said Purinton. “This means that teachers must structure learning with a distinct understanding of what the individual students already know and do not know. Teachers who understand potential cognitive misinterpretations will undoubtedly be more effective in the classroom. Even the most brilliant mathematicians, as teachers, for instance, may lead students astray if they do not recognize how students at different cognitive levels and with varying forms of prior knowledge misconstrue specific mathematical concepts. Sadly, many teachers across the globe do not know how to reach students who struggle with typical governmentally imposed age-benchmarked concepts, and thus we start losing students who don’t express their comprehension in the same ways expected by the educational system.”
Quite recently, researchers have begun to see that it is often more important that a teacher be effective at responding to misinterpretations or misunderstandings of students. Knowing the content — and perhaps some instructional strategies and general pedagogical skills to deliver it — may be completely insufficient. A new discipline-specific body of knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, is being developed in a variety of subjects — reading, mathematics, social studies, and even in some subjects delivered at the university level, such as medicine — that provides teachers with understandings on how current cognitive levels and domain knowledge of students enhance or obstruct efficient learning.

Teacher training, therefore, should focus on how a certain subject should be taught at a certain developmental level, according to how students cognitively, as well as socially, process and learn the subject, argued Purinton. “With current systems of educational labor across the globe, it’s not very difficult to become a teacher in most countries,” he said. “You just need to have a good grasp of the subject and perhaps a bit of generalized pedagogical training. But that shouldn’t be the case. A highly qualified teacher will constantly ask: How should I adjust my instructional approach to combat domain-specific misinterpretations or misunderstandings? Just like a good physician asks a lot of questions to dig deep into a patient’s history, a good teacher needs to know a lot about students’ cognitive development within their particular academic subjects in order to ask the right questions. And that level of skill only comes through careful and thorough preparation, which is only available and mandated as a result of systemic and cultural recognition that effective teaching is a cognitively demanding task.”

But it’s not just teachers who need to be trained. According to Purinton, “in the field of organizational theory, we often talk about how reform is made more challenging by people’s perceptions of what an institution should look, feel and act like. Parents, students and others expect schools to look, feel and act one way, but when we innovate and enact reform, we change those things, and parents, students and others are not sure how to think about those changes.”

Teachers who want to be more engaging and creative face difficulties because parents and students often are confused about such approaches and believe that they are inappropriate, given their prior experiences with schools and classrooms. Purinton explained, “Parents, often for lack of alternative information to make appropriate decisions, are forced to focus on superficial things when selecting schools, such as brand name, curriculum, facilities and class size. If you ask many parents which is more important — a highly trained teacher or small class size — they will often say small class size. Research has shown, however, that a very competent teacher...
with 35 students in class can achieve higher learning gains than a moderately effective teacher with far fewer students. And by competent, I mean knowledgeable of not just the subject area, but also students’ cognitive development and subject-specific pedagogical theories.”

When teachers enact varied and innovative instructional strategies, they quite often face parental resistance. For instance, a recent educational trend has been “flipped” classrooms, whereby students watch online lectures at home and discuss the concepts with their peers, online and in class, with the instructor’s guidance. This form of experiential learning makes use of various forms of educational technology, enabling students to increase interaction in the classroom with one another through simulations, projects and hands-on activities — all of which allow learning to become simultaneously internalized and externalized more easily. “Parents are not always willing to pay for what they see as experimental, even though research can prove its benefit,” said Purinton. “Because it has not infiltrated educational culture, it is not seen as normal practice. Indeed, parents cannot be blamed for this. They are acting in the best interest of their children based on the knowledge they have about teaching and learning, which, like the system they are part of, is outdated. They want teachers to provide knowledge, but if they are not aware of how students actually learn best, they will likely not see that a modified form of student-teacher classroom interaction can actually provide teachers with more efficient and targeted ways of individually increasing knowledge and skills in each of their students.”

Because parents have little choice but to focus on the “superficial” aspects of education, schools are conditioned to enhance these aspects, and since it is often hard to see genuine teacher quality, it becomes less of a priority within the system. “Parents, students and teachers are trapped in educational cultures that do very little to reliably, equitably and efficiently increase creative, critical and knowledge-intensive learning gains,” said Purinton. “Teachers must be given the responsibility, skills, knowledge, incentives and support to make better decisions regarding their students’ development, as they are the people who are on the frontline of that process. Only then will we achieve the aspirations of our educational systems by equitably developing imaginative leaders and thinkers who can solve the most challenging problems of this world.”
Dina El Mofty ’98 knew she would work in development ever since she was a child. “I grew up abroad and never understood why there was such a huge gap between Egypt and the other countries where I had lived,” she said. “It shocked me from a young age, and I wanted to do something to help.”

Today, El Mofty is the co-founder, along with Dahlia Helaly ’88, and executive director of Injaz Egypt, a nonprofit organization that has educated and trained more than 400,000 students across Egypt in entrepreneurship, job preparation and financial literacy.

It all began at AUC, where El Mofty majored in international relations and business. Through her studies, she began to question why corporations in Egypt had not established a system whereby they could give back to the same communities that had made them so successful. “This was long before the concept of corporate social responsibility existed in Egypt,” she said.

During her work with Save the Children, El Mofty was asked to launch a joint pilot project with Junior Achievement Worldwide that would establish a volunteer-based mentorship program between local corporations and public schools. “I had to find interested schools, get approvals from the Ministry of Education and recruit companies,” she said. “I got 10 volunteers from two major companies, and we agreed that their social contribution to the community would be to use their staff members as trained volunteers in the schools.”

The pilot program soon reached 300 students in three schools. “It was like striking gold,” El Mofty said. “The volunteers shared their life experiences and how they made it in their careers, and the students were thrilled to have someone other than their teacher come in and speak to them about something real and relatable. The volunteers became like role models to them.”

El Mofty soon began receiving calls from other companies and schools that wanted to be involved. “It grew organically from there,” she said. “And 11 years later, from impacting 300 students, we’ve reached more than 400,000 in schools and universities, with thousands of volunteers working as mentors, and from those two companies, we now have 35 partners. There’s a huge need for this type of education.”

She continued, “The reason behind Injaz’s growth over the years is that we have a phenomenal team of high-energy, passionate people who have helped scale up the organization to where it is today.”

Injaz also initiated the Adopt-a-School program, whereby companies and individuals may sponsor a school, training the teachers and coaching parents. In addition, many of the alumni from the university mentorship programs have opened private businesses and startups, and Injaz has helped them network with mentors and qualified trainers.

“We’re creating a paradigm shift with young people who are graduating and have a great sense of hopelessness about finding a job,” said El Mofty. “We are empowering them from a young age to create their own businesses and forge their paths. We want to be a source of inspiration for all the young people out there.”

By Sally El-Sabbahy
When seeking candidates for jobs, around 65 percent of employers are looking for problem-solving skills, adaptability and the ability to learn new concepts quickly. They are also searching for applicants with effective analytical and communication skills (particularly oral communication), strong work ethics and a positive, collaborative attitude.
These findings were part of a July 2014 LinkedIn study that surveyed more than 1,400 hiring managers at Fortune 500 companies.

“Employers aren’t just searching for direct, job-related technical skills; they are looking for the potential that candidates have,” explained Maha Fakhry ‘88, ’94, director of recruitment and employer relations at AUC’s Career Center. “Skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative, leadership, flexibility, integrity and willingness to learn are valued by recruiters across all industries, no matter what the candidate’s major is.”

While some of AUC’s degrees are more popular than others, Fakhry noted that “the nature of AUC’s liberal arts education opens doors to students beyond their academic majors; Students are encouraged to be open to exploring career options.”

Helping students with self-discovery and exploration is one of the key functions of the Career Center and is also built into the educational system at AUC. “The Core Curriculum gives students a chance to explore different things, and this is one of the University’s main strengths,” Fakhry affirmed. “This holistic approach to education is valuable in the global and diversified job market that exists today. Companies, public entities, NGOs and governments worldwide see the significance of this kind of education. Even if you want to be a doctor or an engineer, you need this well-rounded approach to be able to go out and work with people.”

Important educational opportunities also exist outside of the classroom, and taking advantage of extracurricular activities, volunteer or community service opportunities, and internships is crucial for building and maintaining a résumé. What’s more important for job seekers, whether they are fresh graduates or mid-career, is to begin their search by looking inward at their own values, interests and dreams in order to find their passion. “Working with passion is what will make them different,” Fakhry said. “It will motivate them to do their best.”

“Social media can definitely help your job search, but it can also hurt it, so you have to be careful of your online social presence.”

Once job seekers have determined the kind of position they are looking for, they must actively search for any opportunities in this field, no matter how small. “People can’t just wait for the right job to approach them; they must extend out and look for opportunities,” Fakhry noted, adding that social media has changed how people find jobs. “LinkedIn is a very powerful tool, and networking has become a must in this digital age,” she said.

A social recruiting survey conducted by Jobvite in August 2014 testifies to this. Out of 1,855 recruiting and human resource professionals in various industries, almost three-quarters of recruiters have hired a candidate through social media, mostly LinkedIn (79 percent), followed by Facebook (26 percent) and Twitter (14 percent) to a much lesser extent. In addition, 93 percent of employers examine a candidate’s social media profile before making a hiring decision, looking not just for professional experience and industry-related posts, but also spelling and grammar mistakes, and the use of profanity. More than half of the recruiters surveyed have
actually reconsidered a candidate based on their social profile, with most being negative reconsiderations.

“Social media can definitely help your job search, but it can also hurt it, so you have to be careful of your online social presence, including Facebook and Twitter accounts,” explained Fakhry.

After the job search, landing an interview is a positive step, but can be daunting even to seasoned professionals. However, a little self-discovery can ease this process, said Fakhry, noting, “If you have a strong self-assessment base and know your strengths, you can match your skills with what the job requirements are and pitch yourself well, making it clear how you can contribute and make a difference.”

She added, “Definitely research the company because a lot of people make the mistake of going into an interview

Infographics extracted from LinkedIn survey, What It Takes for a Young Professional to Get Hired Today, July 2014
without gathering information about the company. If you know people who work there, ask them what it is like. If you can, research the person who will be interviewing you online; look at their LinkedIn profile to find out who they are. You have to do your research, on top of knowing your own strengths, know the job requirements and be ready to show how you fit the required role.”

Fakhry encourages all members of the AUC community to take advantage of the services offered by the Career Center, from job shadowing, internships, career advising and work-study programs to self-assessments, résumé critique, career development workshops and conferences, and the employment fair. “Those who use the career services go out with a clear vision of what they want to do,” indicated Fakhry. “This decreases their job hopping and exploration on the job, and gives them an edge because they know their skills well, they know what they are good at and they know what they can contribute. This helps them in selling themselves during an interview, connecting with employers and branding themselves in the world of work.”

“If you have a strong self-assessment base and know your strengths, you can match your skills with what the job requirements are and pitch yourself well, making it clear how you can contribute and make a difference.”

To deepen the connection between AUC and the professional world, the Career Center is currently piloting a practical learning program. “We have partnered with faculty members to bring in employers to classes to conduct business simulations and give real-life applications,” said Fakhry. “This industry-academic collaboration is crucial to strengthen student engagement in a real-world context.”

LOO King for the perfect job?

Résumé Writing Tips
• Limit your résumé to one page or two.
• Keep contact information updated.
• Focus on achievements.
• Tailor your résumé to the position you are applying for.
• Include additional activities such as community service.
• Proofread and make sure it is error-free.

Job-Search Tips
• Assess your personal preferences and interests.
• Develop a well-structured résumé.
• Polish your interviewing skills.
• Network with people who work in your prospective fields.
• Utilize the power of social media.
Online education is changing class dynamics

The historical trajectory of education methods, marked by major shifts in pedagogy and the emergence of new technologies, has recently taken a new turn. The “classroom” in the classical sense has expanded beyond the bounds of physical structures to incorporate innovative teaching methods that challenge the traditional teacher-led class system, whether through purely online instruction or a combination of online and face-to-face interaction.

**MOOCs Momentum**

Communities without the means to attend university — whether as a result of social factors, financial constraints or limitations due to physical distance — are now able to engage critically in online classes from anywhere in the world. “The major benefit of online courses is their ability to disseminate knowledge to a wide spectrum of people,” said Aziza Ellozy ’64, ’67, professor of practice, director of AUC’s Center for Learning and Teaching and associate dean of Libraries and Learning Technologies.

An expansive form of online learning, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), is gaining momentum throughout campuses worldwide. MOOCs are free, interactive web-based classes spanning a wide range of topics and featuring prominent professors and lecturers from top U.S. universities such as Harvard, Princeton, University of California, Berkeley and the Massachusetts Institute of
The major benefit of online courses is their ability to disseminate knowledge to a wide spectrum of people.

“The online course, Arabs: Where and Where To, delivered by Al-Ississ, tackles development challenges in the Arab world.”

According to MOOC News and Reviews website, the first MOOC began in 2008 with an online computing course, Connectivism and Connective Knowledge, offered as an offshoot of a for-credit course at the University of Manitoba, Canada. The course, for which 2,200 people signed up, used different online platforms to engage students, including Facebook, Wiki pages, blogs and forums.

In 2012, dubbed “the year of the MOOC,” according to The Economist, the idea of MOOCs became more widespread with the launch of edX, Coursera and Udacity, which was co-founded by Sebastian Thrun, who delivered an online computing course at Stanford. “The big three,” The Economist noted in “The Future of Universities: The Digital Degree” (June 2014), “have so far provided courses to over 12 million students. Just under one-third are Americans, but edX says nearly half its students come from developing countries.”
**Blended Learning**

For students enrolled in classroom-based university courses, blended learning is an innovative option that combines both face-to-face instruction and online course material, whether in the form of Wikis, blogs, pre-recorded lectures or Blackboard — all of which contribute to more interactive learning.

With pre-recorded lectures, for example, students can watch lectures at their own pace and faculty members can use class time for peer-to-peer discussions and examining the information more critically, rather than just delivering the course material. This “flipped classroom” concept is increasingly gaining popularity in the West. According to a 2014 online survey of more than 2,350 educators, conducted by Sophia website and the Flipped Learning Network, the number of teachers who used the flipped classroom concept in at least one lesson rose from 48 percent in 2012 to 78 percent in 2014. Of those, nine out of 10 teachers noticed a positive effect in student engagement since implementing the flipped classroom system, and 71 percent noted that student grades had improved.

As part of AUC’s 2014 – 2019 strategic plan, leading up to the University’s centennial, the Center for Teaching and Learning will supervise and support the introduction of blended and online courses, with quality standards in place and appropriate analytics used to track student success. A three-year pilot program for blended courses will also be implemented, as well as a monthlong training workshop for faculty members who will be designing blended courses. In addition, the Center for Learning and Teaching and AUC Press will examine the use of e-textbooks and open-source class materials.

Blended learning, like many of the resources that the Center for Learning and Teaching offers, is highly adaptable; what it means for any given course depends on the specific needs of the instructor, students and material. “We take a holistic approach to helping faculty, acting as consultants on a case-by-case basis,” said Ellozy. “Our work is not focused on technology, and we advocate its use only if it facilitates or enhances pedagogy.”

“In the first offering of this class, we catered to more than 7,000 Arab students from around the globe, which shows the high demand and thirst for quality education in the Arab world.”

Al-Issis delivered one of the first MOOC classes offered by AUC in partnership with Edraak.
When Bassem Fayek ’08 was studying for his MBA at the London Business School, he took time off for the MIT Pan–Arab Enterprise Forum startup competition in Qatar and had to drop one of his classes as a result. When he returned, he found a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) that was similar to the one he dropped. He wondered if there were enough MOOCs to develop an MBA track and, to his surprise, found enough that would customize the equivalent of an MBA degree. This is when he decided to launch SkillAcademy.com, an online education startup.

“SkillAcademy.com is basically a search engine for online courses,” explained Fayek.

Because MOOCs are becoming increasingly popular and diversified, Fayek noted, “an organized system of categorizing them was necessary for easy user navigation,” he said, adding that SkillAcademy.com was launched with the help of AUC faculty members, as well as industry experts in Cairo, London and San Francisco. It was awarded second runner up at a 2013 Startup Weekend London Edu event.

With SkillAcademy.com, users may log in using social media or their own emails, and have the option of searching for courses by subject and other criteria, as well as studying in groups with people from around the world. “You can think of it as a TripAdvisor for online courses,” explained Fayek, “where you would compare all available courses based on certain search criteria in the same way that you would compare hotel facilities and rates through TripAdvisor.”

Fayek is currently working to create “playlists” to build degrees, whereby learners who wish to take courses that would constitute the equivalent of a diploma-earning degree at a university campus can take a similar set of courses online. “This is by no means the same as a student receiving an actual university degree,” Fayek pointed out. However, the playlists symbolize the larger shift from the classic model of a traditional, formal university learning system to a more Do-It-Yourself mode of education.

“Online learners have a specific end goal that is somewhat different from classroom learners; the focus is on acquiring knowledge that is very relevant,” Fayek affirmed. “We hope to contribute, even if only a tiny bit, in making world-class education accessible to the world.”

By Veronika Edwards
For Iman El-Zayat, studying at AUC’s School of Continuing Education (SCE) in the 1980s (known as the Center for Adult and Continuing Education back then) was not just a memorable experience, but one that left an imprint on her career and helped her become who she is today — chief of Arabic translation at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the past 11 years.

“The basic, and most valuable, difference between the School of Continuing Education and formal education was that it was more career-oriented rather than theoretical,” explained El-Zayat. “It provided students with a practical toolkit for immediate application in real life, and this particular emphasis has enriched my versatility and breadth of knowledge in a positive and focused manner, which was reflected in my fast career progression, whether as an instructor at the school, a translator and interpreter, or chief of Arabic translation later on at the IMF.”

Established in 1924 as the Division of Extension, the School of Continuing Education at AUC is now celebrating its 90th year of adult education in a broad range of areas. The Division of Extension was first envisioned by Charles Watson, AUC’s founding president, as a public service component of the University.

“Although in Egypt, only a few young men, largely from the upper class, could attend AUC’s preparatory or university courses, Watson realized that a public-service program of lectures, evening courses or fieldwork, similar to extension programs in the United States, would benefit many additional people and enlarge the impact of the institution,” stated Lawrence R. Murphy in *The American University in Cairo: 1919 – 1987*. “A Division of Extension was accordingly established in 1924, one year before the opening of university credit courses.”

As Murphy noted, the Division of Extension began as a forum for lectures by well-known speakers, such as the late Egyptian intellectual Taha Hussein, on topics of “immediate concern to Egypt,” including population growth, education, and social and economic reform. In addition to lectures and film screenings, it worked on improving...
people’s well-being through village health contests and a campaign to prevent blindness. In the 1940s, the Division of Extension became the “evening college,” targeting those who completed college work and would like to earn another degree. Almost 20 years later, it was renamed the Division of Public Service (DPS), offering noncredit evening programs in business, consumer education, playwriting, language studies, secretariat, administration, accounting, fine arts and family education. Sponsored lectures and seminars, as well as public film showings and art exhibitions, highlighted cultural aspects of Egypt and the Arab world.

In the 1980s, the center grew tremendously under the guidance of Ralph Nelson, dean of adult and continuing education, expanding its offerings in Arabic and business; creating its own English-language curriculum, tailored to the needs of Arabic speakers; introducing one-year and two-year professional certificates, not just individual courses; and initiating evaluative techniques for faculty members, as well as English proficiency entrance exams for participants. Its off-campus extension in Heliopolis was also established to accommodate the increasing number of students. As Nelson said at the time, the work of the DPS focused on “the development of career and vocational programs and the upgrading of all courses and programs.”

The Division of Public Service later became known as the Center for Adult and Continuing Education, and expanded under AUC President Richard Pederson’s tenure to include outreach and full-time career programs in different parts of Egypt, such as Alexandria and Tanta, as well as the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi. In 2006 – 2007, the center was renamed the School of Continuing Education, enrolling approximately 20,000 students per year.

“The School of Continuing Education is mainly in Tahrir,” said Deena Boraie ’78, ’82, ’88, school dean, “but we have a building in New Cairo, the Mr. and Mrs. Elias Hebeka Building, and after we closed down our operations in Heliopolis, we are witnessing a dramatic increase in our New Cairo enrollment. We are certainly part of AUC because the previous philosophy was that the SCE is a separate entity from the rest of the University. That’s why it was re-established as a school, to integrate it more with the rest of the academic schools, rather than continuing education being an isolated operation. For example, we are currently working closely with the Graduate School of Education in the enrollment management of their nondegree diplomas, as well as providing a range of services to the School of Business Executive Education. We are happy with these kinds of collaboration.”

With its diversity of programs, the School of Continuing Education is a real-life manifestation of Watson’s dream of AUC’s outreach and service to a wide spectrum of the Egyptian public. “Through the School of Continuing Education, the University opens its doors every year to thousands of Egyptians from all areas,” said Boraie, adding that the school’s main drive is being responsive to market needs. “We are a needs-driven business,” she explained. “We are conducting needs assessments all the time, working to identify and understand clients’ desires and requests, and use this information to develop new products and services. So in the 1980s, our focus was on secretarial certificates and IT, and we were one of the first institutions to offer courses in computer studies. Today, we still offer these courses, but our portfolio has expanded to include sales; marketing; human resource management; international accounting and auditing certificates; legal, UN, media and literary translation; TOEFL preparation; teacher training; youth programs and much more.”

And, of course, there are the English courses — written, conversational or customized — one of the hallmarks of an SCE education. “Right now, there is
a tremendous need for English-language training,” affirmed Boraie. “Within the SCE, there are thousands of students who want to learn how to speak and write English properly. It’s an unfortunate reflection of Egypt’s school and university system, and, in that sense, we are providing a form of remedial education.”

Besides English, one of the strengths of the School of Continuing Education is its professional career certificates, which complement, rather than duplicate, a four-year university degree, as Boraie put it. “We are giving our students the practical skills they need to understand the theory behind what they’re studying, or have studied, at their universities; this is an added value,” she said. “All of our certificates are called career certificates, and we mean this literally. The School of Continuing Education opens new career opportunities for its students, whether it is a pharmacist who wants to learn sales to become a sales representative for a medical company or a lawyer who wants to work in an HR firm.”

And students testify to that. “My studies at the School of Continuing Education have added value to my competencies and increased recruiter interest, so my AUC experience has always been a positive asset for me in receiving good job offers,” said Raafat Donia, head of compliance at Sandoz Pharmaceutical, a division of Novartis. “The diversity of students in terms of culture, work experience and demographics has also enriched my learning experience and outcome, both when I was a student and when I worked as a part-time instructor at the school.”

For Ahmed Kamel, regional sales director for Travco, the “sharing of experiences and exposure to different industries through the student mix” were some of the main benefits of studying at the School of Continuing Education. More importantly, the communication and presentation skills he acquired, in addition to time management, have helped him become “adaptable and flexible as a professional,” which paved the way for him to be in the leadership position he holds today.

Affirming students’ leadership potential, Boraie noted, “We have to give students the space and opportunity to talk about their experiences and express their ideas, and that is why we initiated the Dean-Student Council. We have 10 students on the council who act as advisers to the dean and school administration. I am learning a lot by listening to them, and it also a learning opportunity for them. Through this council, I inadvertently discovered that we are providing those students with a leadership experience that they never had before. I am very proud that we are able to do that. This is the power of AUC.”

HOMECOMING 2014

Photos by Ahmad El-Nemr
Citizenship education is the real education. It is not about teaching students how governments work or should work; it’s about educating them on a host of issues related to their role in society, from social and moral awareness and the environment to gender, power relations and racial discrimination. It’s about empowerment, making informed decisions and taking the lead.

In the 1970s, Paulo Freire started an adult literacy program in a rural area of Brazil called Pernambuco, not just to teach students how to read, but, more importantly, to create awareness of their rights. Freire believed that farmers have their own culture and dignity, and something valuable to contribute. It was a revolutionary approach that changed the purpose of education from a way of getting a job to a way of shaping individuals to become fully aware of their rights and fully engaged in society — that is, to become active citizens.

Today, the Paulo Freire Institute in the University of California, Los Angeles continues his legacy. The four weeks I spent there last summer with eight other AUC students from the Graduate School of Education were very rich. We had lecturers from different parts of the world — the United States, England, Brazil and Taiwan — explaining to us different facets of education: political, sociological and comparative. We were about 50 students from different countries, including Italy, Denmark, Egypt, Nigeria, the United States, Vietnam and Taiwan, so it was a great opportunity to exchange and share experiences.

The mission of the Paulo Freire Institute is to “build a community of scholars committed to social justice and to empower the oppressed through education,” which, according to Freire, places the student at the center. Students should learn by asking questions and trying to find answers with their peers. This student-centered approach takes more time, but promotes collaboration and yields more positive outcomes.

Sadly, the culture in Egypt is focused on education to get a job and succeed in life in a very materialistic way. Even with international schools that offer a quality education, the target is always the same: get a job and make money. Nobody is challenging the system, but all are part of it.

What’s worse is that society is causing a lot of segregation between rich and poor. Because of the quality of education that they receive, children in international schools use critical thinking, connectivity and artistic potential, but they do so only for the sake of pedagogy, not for the sake of societal transformation. On the other hand, children in poor educational systems learn to memorize, follow rules and do as they are told. People who live in economically poor situations are made to believe that they are culturally and intellectually inferior, that they have nothing to add to the system. We don’t teach the poor that they have an opinion and that their opinion can change things. As an English-language teacher in a Sudanese refugee school, my main focus is making students believe that they have their own identity and potential, and can contribute to society with their unique culture.

Change is needed both from the bottom-up and from the top-down. At the grassroots level, we need to have a new generation of teachers, and that’s where AUC can do a great job with its professional educator diplomas. This is a good way for the University to reach out to governmental and experimental schools and try to bring a change into classroom practice, not just in Cairo, but different governorates in Egypt.

Change from the top-down is more difficult, for it is useless to change learning and teaching if we don’t fix assessment methods, which usually come from the government. Policy advising is crucial here, and I am happy to know that four AUC faculty members are serving on a new specialized council that acts as a think tank to reform issues related to education and scientific research. The issue is bigger than an outdated system of thanawiya amma; it is the readiness for change that will make all the difference.

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Sherwet El Said, a student in the Photography for Designers class, produced a photograph (above) based on one of the illustrations made by Egyptian artist Helmi El-Touni (bottom right), whose works were recently exhibited in the Sharjah Art Gallery at AUC New Cairo.