

# Strengthening Research at AUC

Report of the Research Advisory Council

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Research and creative endeavors represent an important commitment of The American University in Cairo, which is reflected in its statement of mission: *“the university seeks to maintain a highly qualified faculty. Emphasis is placed on excellence in teaching as well as on research, creative work and faculty members’ intellectual contributions to their disciplines.”* Consequently, the University expects faculty to be involved in research and considers it as an important factor in promotion and tenure decisions. However, the importance of research is not only linked to promotion and tenure, faculty derive self-satisfaction from research, find it necessary for their credibility and being ahead in their field in addition to promoting their academic career. The research effort provides intellectual resources and contributes an intellectual rigor and discipline all of which affects the quality of instruction. Both teaching and research activities interact to strengthen each other rather than merely competing for faculty time. Research is also an important part of the services provided by the University to society.

This report presents some of the work of the Research Advisory Council during the academic year 2003-4 and is divided into the following 4 sections:

1. Proposal for “Research Mission Statement, Objectives, Outcomes and Methods of Assessment”.
2. Review of the current institutional support for research.
3. Recommended additional support for faculty. The main recommendations in this section include:
  - a) Institute a rigorous performance appraisal system for evaluating faculty performance.
  - b) Reform the structure of pay increases at AUC to recognize high levels of faculty performance.
  - c) Help faculty develop a realistic research agenda at AUC.
  - d) Establish a distinguished professor rank.
4. Recommended incentives for departments to support research. The main recommendations in this section include:
  - a) Change the way overheads are calculated.
  - b) Allow departments to receive a portion of the overhead charged to externally funded grants.

In addition to the above topics, the Research Advisory Council also discussed the following issues during this academic year:

1. Establishing departmental benchmarks for research productivity: A questionnaire has been sent to departments and some responses have been received. This issue will be high on the agenda of next year.
2. Comparison of the teaching load at AUC with similar institutions: The study showed that, on paper, our teaching load is not too different from the load in comparable institutions. However, discussion showed that our faculty often spend their time inefficiently as a result of inadequate administrative support, lack of qualified teaching assistants, and absence of trained research assistants. Teaching a large class can also consume more time in grading assignments and marking exams.
3. Training program for research assistants: The outline of a training program to prepare research assistants has been developed and will be implemented in collaboration with the library starting next year.

*Strengthening of research at AUC is an ongoing process. The Research Advisory Council intends to continue its discussions of this issue next year and welcomes suggestions for improvement.*

# **1. Research at AUC: Mission, Objectives, Outcomes, and Assessment**

## **Research Mission Statement:**

AUC is dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of research and creative work. Research and creative work are intimately related to excellence in teaching. They are, therefore, an integral part of the university's overall aim to generate and sustain a dynamic intellectual environment whose hallmark is a constant striving for excellence in both teaching and research. Whenever possible, research at AUC incorporates a community service dimension.

## **Objectives:**

The main objectives of research at AUC include:

- 1- Contributing to knowledge, with emphasis on Egypt and the region.
- 2- Serving society and development effort.
- 3- Participating in national and international intellectual activities, exchanging knowledge, and interdisciplinary work.
- 4- Professional development of faculty.

## **Outcomes of Research at AUC:**

The following outcomes are expected when the above objectives are achieved:

- 1- Faculty research productivity will be comparable or exceed that of similar institutions.
- 2- Increased national and international recognition of AUC and its faculty's research contribution and role.
- 3- Positive professional development of faculty that is reflected in their teaching.
- 4- AUC faculty are involved in research that leads to intellectual analysis, debate and possible solutions to national or international problems.
- 5- AUC faculty will participate in national and international conferences.
- 6- Distinguished professors and intellectuals will be invited to AUC's campus.
- 7- AUC faculty will collaborate with national and international researchers in various projects.
- 8- Faculty will work in teams on interdisciplinary projects.

## **Methods of Assessing Quality, Research Productivity, Institutional Support, and Satisfaction of Faculty and Students:**

- 1- The number of faculty publications: conference papers, journal publications, patents, research reports, books and book chapters, book reviews, exhibits and productions, editorial material and letters, and public lectures.
- 2- Reviewers' reports of faculty on tenure and promotion.
- 3- Book reviews and citations of research published by AUC faculty in Science Citation Index, the Social Science Citation index, and the Arts and Humanities Index.
- 4- Amount of institutional spending on research.
- 5- Awarded and sponsored research dollars received from internal and external sources.
- 6- Number of completed MA/MS theses.
- 7- Supervision of theses in other institutions.
- 8- Involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in research activities.
- 9- Surveying of opinions of faculty and students.
- 10- Services to the profession and society.

## **2. Current Institutional Support for Research**

During the past few years, the university has adopted a variety of incentives for faculty to encourage research. These include:

1. Faculty can apply for a variety of support grants including conference, research, and mini grants. In 2002-2003, 188 faculty members benefited for such grants, which amounted to more than \$400,000.
2. Faculty can apply for research development grants which will generate information needed to develop proposals for external funding.
3. Faculty can use research grant funds – received either from AUC or externally – to hire research assistants/associates. Research assistants can be hired from among our own students or from the Egyptian national universities. Research associates can be post-doctoral fellows or colleagues from the national universities.
4. Faculty may receive payments for work done through externally financed grants based on the task and the budgetary conditions of the grant.
5. Faculty can apply to AUC for release time from teaching to carry out research in addition to including funds in externally funded grants to buy time out of a class.
6. Faculty members who teach one summer course may receive additional compensation equivalent to teaching one course in support of an acceptable summer research proposal to be carried out in Cairo during the summer session.
7. Eligible faculty members may apply for a Preparation for Tenure Award, which releases them from teaching and administrative responsibilities for the equivalent of one semester.
8. Excellence in Research Award, which was offered for the first time in February 2003.
9. Most departments have strong graduate programs, which create a dynamic intellectual environment and provide research assistants.
10. Graduate students are eligible to apply for research and conference grants.
11. The AUC library provides support to faculty and graduate students in performing their research, but more resources are needed.

## **3. Recommended Additional Support for Faculty**

The following recommendations, if adopted, would allow faculty to make better use of the above institutional support or would provide additional motivation for research:

1. Institute a rigorous performance appraisal system for evaluating faculty performance. Appendix I gives a proposal for assessing the level of faculty performance.
2. Review the structure of pay increases at AUC. Appendix II gives two alternative proposals to recognize high levels of faculty performance.
3. Establish guidelines for limiting administrative responsibilities for junior faculty. The teaching load at AUC is three courses per semester. In addition, faculty are also expected to serve on committees and to teach overloads when asked. Such additional responsibilities reduce the time available for research. Explicit guidelines should be established to limit the number of administrative responsibilities taken on by untenured, junior faculty. Also, junior faculty should not be asked to take an overload, unless they specifically request an overload.
4. Help faculty develop a research agenda at AUC, see Appendix III.
5. Continue to strengthen graduate education and encourage new and interdisciplinary programs.
6. Encourage faculty to write and submit proposals for externally funded grants by:
  - i. Providing proposal writing workshops.
  - ii. Helping faculty identify external sources of funding.

- iii. Taking research proposals that have been submitted to funding agencies and the research funds that have been received from AUC and external funding agencies into consideration when making decisions on merit evaluation, contract renewal, promotion and tenure.
  - iv. Allowing faculty to receive release time or overload payment when writing major proposals for external funding if high prospects of funding can be demonstrated.
7. Create a Distinguished Professor rank, see Appendix IV.

#### **4. Recommended Incentives for Departments to Support Research**

We also need to introduce incentives for departments so that they encourage their faculty to be involved in research. The following initiatives are recommended in order to provide additional incentives for departments.

1. Allow departments to receive a portion of the overhead charged to externally funded grants. Overhead rates ranging to 45% of Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC) should be considered and requested on all grant proposals where the funding agency will allow indirect costs (these rates should be considered on all non-federal proposals). The current approved rate should be charged on Federal Projects. MTDC is based on all direct costs other than Participant costs (stipends, books, tuition, and fees, any equipment purchases in excess of \$5,000, and any subcontracts in excess of \$25,000). Indirect costs should be charged on all other cost categories, i.e. salaries, wages, fringe benefits, supplies, equipment, travel and other.
2. With externally funded grants involving release time, allow departments to have access to the difference between the money received by the university to buy out courses and the money used to hire a replacement.
3. Encourage faculty to include funds for research assistants, which will be used to hire and/or pay some of the tuition fees for graduate and undergraduate students from the department.

## Appendix I

### Assessment of the Level of Faculty Performance

The Research Advisory Council recommends the following general recommendations regarding the assessment of faculty performance:

1. The performance of all faculty has to be assessed on some timeline and problems in performance have to be identified.
2. It is important to integrate the whole picture and include in the performance evaluation of all criteria on which granting tenure was based.
3. Expectations of performance levels have to be advanced by the respective constituencies so that objective measures can be obtained.
4. Devices for recognizing performances above the expectations and for performances clearly below expectations have to be advanced.

Throughout the discussions of these recommendations, it became evident that most of the members favor the following general concepts:

1. The aim of the assessment is to recognize, assist, and promote high quality performance of faculty in all areas of activity, namely:
  - ∅ Teaching
  - ∅ Research
  - ∅ Services within AUC
  - ∅ External professional activities
  - ∅ Students extracurricular activities
2. The distribution of weights should be in accordance with the PPP. A department will define its own expectations for faculty performance based on the above criteria, which will depend on the rank and status as mentioned above.
3. Since the purpose of this process is to recognize levels of performance, it should include all faculty.
4. Although the assessment process should be able to reveal below-, within-, and above-expectation performance, the main aim of the process is to recognize and reward exemplary faculty who demonstrate excellence in all activity area.

#### Recommendations for Implementation

##### Target faculty

All faculty of a given department should be subject to the assessment. However, since expectations would depend on the level and status, we recommend that expectations should be designed taking into account the status (tenured/non-tenured) and rank (Assistant, Associate, and Full Professors).

##### Sources of Data for Assessment

A variety of sources exist including the Annual Faculty Report, student evaluation of instruction, peer evaluations and other detailed information submitted by the faculty member. The nature and extent of detail of the data have to be uniform across all disciplines. Departments have to come up with the models of the data that can be unified later by the university.

##### Who does the Assessment

A departmental or a school device (e.g. a committee) is to be designated by the department to do the assessment. The nature of this device is to be unified across the university.

## Appendix II

### Recognizing High Levels of Faculty Performance

As the university continues the process of self-evaluation and continuous improvement for total quality, it must replace the current faculty pay increase practice that provides across-the-board raises to all faculty equally, without consideration of individual quality of performance. The current policy is not only inherently unfair, but it is inconsistent with sound managerial principles such as total quality management (TQM).

Two alternative proposals to recognize high levels of faculty performance are presented here:

#### A. Merit Pay Increase Plan

Under this plan, annual increases would be divided into a cost of living adjustment (COLA) portion and a merit pay portion. The COLA portion is distributed to all faculty equally. The merit pay increase portion would be based on the quality of teaching, research, and service as is done with tenure and promotion distributed to all faculty equally. The remaining portion should be considered as merit increase and should be distributed among faculty based on the individual faculty member's performance in teaching, research, and service. To make the decision process less subjective, there may be a need to develop some type of point system that quantitatively represents quality within the categories of teaching, research, and service. For example, each faculty would be classified into one of three groups such as: (a) exceeding expectation, (b) meeting expectations, and (c) meeting the minimum job requirements. It is this latter group who will receive only COLA. The merit pay portion of the budget will be distributed among the other categories in a decreasing scale. The merit pay increase plan should be implemented through a process of evaluation of faculty and subsequent pay increase recommendations by the Provost in consultation with deans and department chairs. This would ensure that the different expectations of different schools are adequately addressed in the process. This would also ensure as much campus-wide equity in implementation of the plan as possible.

#### B. Meritorious Performance Awards

The Meritorious Performance Awards are intended as rewards for faculty who exhibit high performance in a given year. The awards are offered annually and the criteria for selection include excellent performance in teaching, research or service during the previous year. About 10 percent of the faculty in each school will receive the award. The value of the award is \$2000 and a certificate. With the approval of the department and dean, the monetary value of the award may be replaced by a release from teaching of one course. Such course release may be taken individually or accumulated. A faculty member may receive the award more than once.

Candidates may be nominated by their department chair, a colleague, or apply for consideration for the award. Deadline for receiving nominations: first week of October. Selection: School-wide committee of senior faculty and/or department chairs recommends to the School Dean and Provost.

Names of the recipients of the award will be announced at the end of the fall semester, during the commencement.

## **Appendix III**

### **Helping Faculty Develop a Research Agenda at AUC**

Having a realistic research agenda that matches the faculty member's research interest with the available resources is an important first step towards a more focused and productive research effort, especially for new assistant and associate professors. The following are recommendations to help such faculty develop or update their research agendas at AUC:

1. Whenever possible, hire faculty with well established research record and help them adjust to conditions at AUC and Egypt.
2. Make faculty aware of the importance of research in contract renewal, promotion, and tenure decisions. This issue should be included in the general orientation of new faculty and in the seminars recommended in point 3, below.
3. OGSR will encourage schools and departments organize regular research seminars in which more established faculty discuss their research agendas and the results of their research projects. OGSR will provide support if needed.
4. RAC will develop interdisciplinary areas of research and invite faculty to participate in team research projects.
5. OGSR will encourage schools and departments to organize seminars/conference in collaboration with local institutions to help faculty network with colleagues in Egypt. OGSR will provide support if needed.
6. OSP will encourage faculty to make use of the search results of IRIS and SPINS within their field of interest.
7. OSP in collaboration with OGSR will organize regular proposal writing workshops for faculty.
8. Deans and department chairs will encourage faculty to give serious thought to filling out the research section of their annual faculty reports and will give them appropriate feedback.
9. OGSR will make faculty aware of the funding and release time opportunities offered by AUC.
10. LLT will make faculty aware of the resources for research in the library.

## **Appendix IV**

### **Distinguished Professor Rank**

To give incentives to senior faculty to conduct research, AUC should establish the “Distinguished Professor” rank. What is envisaged here is a permanent title to be given to a professor with an excellent research record. These awards are university-wide but are not annual. A professor can either apply, or preferably be nominated, for the award at any time. The standards and procedures for these awards should be created. But it should be realized that the standards here are higher than those for the annual excellence in research awards described above. It should be noted that this is different from the Distinguished Visiting Professor program that is currently operational at AUC.