

THE TRANSFORMATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION GENERATES SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES

NEWSLETTER #7 – MARCH 2022



Photo: FAFS presentation video on YouTube

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

The American University of Beirut, founded in 1866, is distinguished for being the top ranked university in Lebanon, and among the top 200 universities in the world. Its graduates reside in more than 100 countries.

Currently, AUB works on various initiatives for environmental conservation, refugees, civic engagement, actions against COVID and more, and from this, it was more than natural for the AUB and its Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences (FAFS) to get involved in a process of transformation that as the lead institution of the Transforming Higher Education project, as a founding members and promoter of the initiative.

The search for excellence and learning drives the university to collaborate and exchanges knowledge with universities from around the world, through its own leadership and as an Associate Member of GCHERA, including EARTH University and the pilot institutions of the project.

“We aim to learn from their perspective on teaching and their experiential learning activities and how we can move things forward on our campus and the other institutions we are collaborating with, using the model we have at AUB,” says Dr. Ammar Olabi, FAFS' Interim Dean.

Regarding community engagement, FAFS created in 2014 the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service, with the intention of supporting vulnerable communities and a Unit for Sustainable Development.

“For more than 20 years we have implemented the Environment and Sustainable Development Unit -known as [ESDU](#)-, a regional research and development center at FAFS-AUB, has been promoting sustainable rural livelihoods and food security across Lebanon & the region, through large community development projects. In 2021, we worked with small-scale farmers and small businesses and cooperatives, where we directly benefited approximately 300 producers,” says Dr. Olabi.

Additionally, through its initiative “Ardi Ardak” (My land, your land in Arabic), they have benefited more than 2,500 farmers with seeds, training, and baskets with basic need products to survive, impacting small producers and women and young entrepreneurs who have managed to gain added value to their small portions of land.

Regarding teamwork and alliances with external stakeholders -Amaar mentions- alliances have been established with various sectors, including some AUB's graduates' companies who want to continue linked to the institution and their student projects through research initiatives or donations, to benefit work related to food health in African countries (improvement of post-harvest and product storage, especially).

In order to understand which initiatives to support or which parameters to follow, the FAFS is guided by the Sustainable Development Goals, however, they also execute an internal exercise on issues that directly impact the interests of the university.

“Currently we want to do more research on data science and artificial intelligence, topics that have been talked about a lot at other universities. There are also other aspects that are specific to our region, such as historical work and the conservation of our cultural values in a sustainable way”, Dr. Olabi closes.

The Transforming Higher Education project is proud to have such a critical ally as AUB for the continuity of the higher education transformation efforts globally through the five elements of success, as we highlight its valuable efforts in leading by example for other institutions around the world.

On our [website](#) you can read the full interview with Dr. Ammar Olabi, Interim Dean of the Faculty of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the American University of Beirut.

TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF CONKAL

Appropriation and empowerment: Actions that generate co-responsibility for the success of the Transforming Higher Education Project.

Author: Jorge Gamboa, facilitator of the Transforming Higher Education project at the Technological Institute of Conkal, Mexico.

The Transforming Higher Education project is an educational initiative that seeks to transform the educational model of universities to graduate ethical leaders and "Agents of Change" by enhancing the learning culture and participation of students, based on five key elements of success: experiential learning, entrepreneurship and innovation, community engagement, conflict resolution and values and ethics. However, is the inclusion of these transformational learning elements enough to achieve the desired educational transformation and goal of the education of ethical leaders and "Change Agents"?

At the Technological Institute of Conkal, one of the main objectives and challenges has been to empower the students, so that they are the ones who proactively get involved and promote the change that benefits them. The university must change the culture and create an open environment where they can openly question and express opinions, moments of reflection and self-analysis together with colleagues and professors, to evaluate the actions implemented in each of their projects. Participation in an open and conducive environment empowers students and creates self-confidence to express opinions or make decisions that allow them to channel their learning. Thus, by being an active participant, co-responsibility is created to promote their ideas and initiatives, demand the changes that they consider necessary and maintain a constant and proactive participation.

The Institute is working to formalize the creation of a student committee that gives voice and opinion to the students and enables their participation in decision-making with directors and representatives of the higher levels of the institute, which empowers the students, provides them a sense of support and -above all- demonstrates respect for their viewpoints, emotional state, and role as the central focus of the university mission. This is important if we consider that university education involves the development of academic learning as well as the development and growth of the emotional capacities of the students, which, together, account for their academic success.

The empowerment of students involves creating a student learning culture where student learning, maturation and growth takes place within a learning environment focused on respect for the student viewpoints, ideas, thinking, questioning, and providing them the opportunity to take proactive leadership on behalf of the student community. The creation of this learning environment will promote the development of professional and personal skills that together stimulate personal growth into "Agents of Change" and ethical leaders.

Sensitive, human beings, who feel secure and confident in their decision-making, are key characteristics for students to take co-responsibility and allows students and teachers to be allies in directing and promoting the pertinent actions for the success of the educational model. The results achieved so far have demonstrated excellent acceptance as expressed by former students, as they have observed the opportunities and improvements available to the new generations of students at the Institute.

Although this change in the educational culture takes time to fully implement, it is worth mentioning that by the very nature of changes in knowledge, society and generations, the process is dynamic, and will be constantly changing, where the active participation of teachers and students will allow identifying areas of opportunity and proposing actions that allow continuous improvement.



SUMMARY OF THE SHARED EXPERIENCES BETWEEN THE PILOT UNIVERSITIES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

On December 8 - 9 - 18 and 19, 2021, representatives of the Pilot Universities involved in the Transforming Higher Education project participated in a workshop where they shared their experiences in transforming their educational models.

They had the opportunity to present and discuss their achievements and challenges in implementing the five elements of success in their institutions, hoping to learn from each other's experiences. Here we will reveal some of the conclusions by element of success. You can go to [our website](#) and examine in more detail the more relevant observations and conclusions attained from the meetings.



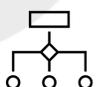
Experiential learning

All the pilot universities consider experiential learning to be the central didactic methodology of their new educational model and that it is transforming the processes and quality of student learning and training at their institutions. All of the pilot universities place the students and their learning at the center of the university activities.



Community engagement

The Universities are all implementing and/or strengthening community engagement but taking different paths. Some include applied research, community development projects, internships, management of agricultural plots, field days, technical consultancies, and volunteering, as components of their community engagement activities. These offer students the opportunity to understand and analyze reality, create networks, visualize project opportunities, critically analyze problems and design ways to solve these problems. It forces students to get out of their comfort zones and to develop and promote their leadership capacities. Students learn to understand and empathize with the issues confronting the communities that they come from.



Entrepreneurial learning

The pilot universities recognize the importance of training graduates with the ability to develop their own businesses and with an entrepreneurial mindset for the purpose of generating self-employment and community employment, developing added value throughout the value chain, and generating greater dynamism for local economies and communities. Therefore, one shared objective is the training of agricultural professionals as entrepreneurs and with an entrepreneurial mentality.



Ethical and value-based education

We must institutionalize the education of ethics and values as an integral part of the educational model of the university. To achieve this, it must be integrated systemically within the university educational experience, and it must be treated systematically across university activities. All the pilot universities recognize that training in values is the task of everyone in the institution, from gardeners, drivers, cooks, administrators, teachers and even the senior university presidents.

To summarize, the elements of success are essential to the training of "Agents of Change." We find that they are interrelated with each other and therefore it is more efficient and effective to treat them comprehensively and not individually. The four universities are introducing each of the elements of success, while producing more committed graduates, sensitive to the problems of communities and with the ability to lead and agree on their decisions for the benefit of others.

Contact us



Transforminghigher.education



transform.edu@aub.edu.lb