DEEP IMPACT – AUC Faculty’s Response to the Move to the New Cairo Campus

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Introduction
Fifty-one faculty members filled in the AUC “Another University Campus” – FACULTY version POSTMOVE survey. This survey was only available online and the majority of participants (84.3%) completed the survey in March 2010, which was during the second year on the new campus. A majority of the participants were full-time employees, with only 6 respondents indicating they were part-time. The majority were also relocated faculty, with 12 respondents indicating they were hired on a local basis, and 2 respondents answering “not applicable” to this demographic question.

The majority of respondents were American (29 respondents), 12 indicated they were from “other” nationalities, nine were Egyptian and one was of dual American/Egyptian nationality.

By far most respondents came from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Seven respondents came from the School of Public Affairs, two from the School of Sciences and Engineering and one each from the Core Curriculum and the School of Business.

The respondents were almost equally divided between male and female, with 26 males and 25 females answering the survey.

Survey Results
This report looks at the faculty responses to three questions assessing faculty attitudes after the move to New Cairo had taken place.

Q. On a scale from 1 (extremely negative) to 10 (extremely positive), how would you rate your overall feelings towards AUC’s New Cairo campus? A score of 5 or 6 would indicate mixed feelings.

Participants were asked to give a rating on a scale from 1 to 10 of what their overall feelings were towards the new campus. All rating options were selected by at least one person, with only 1 person from the 51 respondents giving the campus the lowest score (1, extremely negative) and 7 people (13.7%) giving the campus full marks (10, extremely positive). Eight participants (15.7%) rated their feelings towards the new campus as a 5 while another eight participants rated their feelings as a 7. These were the most selected ratings. The second most selected ratings, with 7 (13.7%) respondents each, were 8 and 10. A majority of the participants (58.8%) gave a rating of 6 or higher. Results are depicted in Figure 1.
The results from this question are especially interesting when compared to the answers given in the faculty survey before the move. At that time the participants were asked to rate how much they wanted to move to the new campus, with 1 meaning they definitely did not want to move and 10 meaning they definitely did want to move. Ninety faculty filled in the survey but 19 (21.1%) did not answer this question. Of the remainder, 12 (16.9% of 71) answered 1 (definitely did not want to move), 13 (18.3% of 71) answered 10 (definitely did want to move), and 10 (14.1% of 71) answered 5 (mixed feelings). So we can see that the strongest opinions were either completely in favor of the move, or completely against it. This shows the faculty were quite polarized in their opinions towards the impending move. Figure 2 illustrates this pattern.

In comparing results from the surveys before and after the campus move, we can see that before the move faculty members were divided in their opinions and a significant percentage did not want to move, whereas after the move attitudes towards the new campus were generally more favorable.
Q. What three words best describe your feelings towards AUC’s New Cairo campus? For example, proud, excited, calm, exhausted, etc.

Participants were asked to give three words that best describe their feelings towards the new campus. Since each participant had the opportunity to write 3 words, there was the potential for 153 total words. Forty-four participants (86.3%) fully answered this question by giving 3 words, while the remaining seven participants gave one or two words, adding up to 144 responses/words. Not counting duplicated words, the total amount of different words generated by the participants was 76.

A majority of the respondents (30, 58.8%) focused their answers on personal feelings about the campus (a personal, inward response) and gave answers like “stressed”, “depressed” or “challenged”, while 13 respondents focused on their feelings towards the campus (a response to the actual physical buildings) and gave responses like “beautiful” or “spacious”. Eight respondents included words that were a mix of both campus building related and personal feelings.

From all of the 144 words given, those synonymous with expressing exhaustion and isolation were the most common, with 17 and 15 responses respectively, while words expressing pride also scored high with 9 appearances.
There were common themes amongst the personal feeling responses. Fifty-four of the 144 words given (37.5%) were evidence of the faculty members working under some degree of stress. Examples of these types of words were: “fed-up”, “overwhelmed”, “depressed”, “disgusted”, “embarrassed”, “scrutinized” and “resigned". Other respondents expressed more positive feelings towards the new campus, as seen by forty-five (31.3%) of the words, examples of which are: “excited”, “encouraged”, “pleased”, “happy” and “impressed”.

When we look at the words that focused on the actual campus buildings, we again see common themes in the positive and negative feelings described. Twelve words (8.3%) referred to the location of the campus, using words such as “far”, “big”, “desert” and “long commute”; twelve words referred to the architecture/design of the campus, using words such as “beautiful”, “spacious” and “expansive”, as well as “soulless”. Five words (3.4%) referred to the facilities on the campus and the problems some faculty faced, especially during the first semester. Those words were poor “facilities/ internal design”, “technologically supported”, “unfinished”, “unsafe” and “uncomfortable”.

Q. Please describe how AUC’s New Cairo campus (or the move to the new campus) has impacted your commitment to, or interest in, teaching at AUC.

Participants were asked to describe the impact that working at the New Cairo campus had upon their commitment to AUC. The comments were categorized into a perceived positive impact response, a perceived negative impact response or a mix of both positive and negative impacts. Eleven (21.6%) respondents didn’t answer this question.
at all. Of the remaining 40 respondents, 11 described a negative impact, 8 described a positive impact, 15 described a mixed response, and 6 described their commitment as having no change. The descriptions given to this question tended to be quite short, from a few words to a sentence or two. Interestingly, those who perceived the impact as mixed or as negative tended to write longer comments.

Of the 11 respondents who indicated being negatively impacted, four of them did not elaborate on the reason, writing comments like “definitely lessened commitment” or “job satisfaction is way down”. Four people stressed the New Cairo location or the campus facilities as the reason for their negative feelings, like the one respondent who described the new campus as “… a fortressed barren monolith in the middle of a desert …”.

Other issues that negatively impacted peoples’ commitment to AUC related to the administration, with three people perceiving a troubling change in the university’s direction and/or attitude towards faculty. An example of this is the respondent who wrote:

“The working atmosphere in the 10 years that I’ve been here has shifted from one of trust and encouragement to one of mistrust and hubris … and until the language of the administration shifts from that of self-congratulation to that of service and commitment to the true work of a university, it will not feel like a university at all, and I will continue to feel as I do: marginalized, attentive and committed on the micro-level; but alienated from any institutional identification.”

Of the eight people who indicated that the new campus had a positive impact on their commitment to teaching at AUC, three gave a non specific answer, for example one participant who wrote “I feel good coming to work.” Four people credited the geography and environment as the reason, like one respondent who wrote “I love the environment, clean and fresh, quiet and calm. Therefore I am much more relaxed and happy in my work”. One person appreciated the new campus facilities, writing “the classrooms in the new campus are better than in the old one in the tech. system (data show, terminals, internet)”.

Similar negative and positive impact statements, like those listed above, are seen in the comments from the 15 people with a perceived mixed impact on their commitment. However, one theme that came through in many of these responses was that the New Cairo/desert setting made people feel disconnected from the wider Cairo community. For example, one respondent wrote “… I do feel that benefits of being in a beautiful, large, new campus are seriously compromised by the university’s being hermetically sealed off from the rest of Cairo.”

Finally, two participants took the time to give longer, detailed responses reflecting how the new campus has had a negative impact on their commitment to AUC. When we look further into their survey responses we see some similarities but also great differences. For both respondents, their main commitment was to the students. The first respondent had been with AUC for 10 years and their statements focused on a perception that the
university administration no longer supported the faculty as they had previously. This person gave the new campus an overall rating of 2 (extremely negative) in the first question discussed above, and when describing their feelings towards the campus this person wrote “alienated”, “scrutinized” and "untrusted". On the other hand, the second respondent had only been with AUC since 2009 and their perceived negative impact stemmed from the New Cairo location and the ripple effect from that; for example the restricted after-hours office access and having to ride a crowded bus to work. This person gave the new campus an overall rating of 8 (extremely positive) and described their feelings towards the campus as “distant”, “expansive” and “appreciative”.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

One participant wrote “I love the job, love the institution, love my colleagues and administrators. There are just some frustrating aspects ...” Moving is stressful – that goes without saying. And that stress is only magnified when you take an institution like AUC, that has been in the heart of Cairo for almost 100 years and move it to the middle of the desert. People all react differently to stress and the variety of opinions expressed in this survey is an example of that. Strong emotions were expressed before the move, as well as the sense of not knowing what the future could bring. Opinion was very much divided with many people either loving or hating the prospect of moving.

Now we see a much greater range of emotions and responses, including a great proportion that are positive, albeit combined with the stresses involved with moving and adjusting to a new place. For some people their fears were realized, like having to endure a long bus commute every day, but for others the new campus brought a literal breath of fresh air.

One common theme expressed throughout this survey is that AUC is now removed from the heart of Cairo, and people do not feel the same sense of connection to the city that they felt before. For nearly 100 years AUC has been a visible presence in the day to day life of Downtown. When change like this comes our way people have two main choices – change with it and adapt, or leave. Perhaps that is, in part, why the post-move survey had many positive answers – some of those who did not want to work in this new environment left, like the one participant who wrote “To be honest, new campus is reason I am searching for new job.”

Further studies could be done on the impact the relocation has had. For example, the faculty who chose to leave could be contacted and asked to what extent the move had on their decision to leave AUC. For faculty that continue to teach at AUC, more research would be useful on how they are utilizing the New Campus and how the environment contributes to their work productivity and other aspects of employment. It would also be interesting to see what impact there has been on the Downtown community, restaurants, shops, and other aspects as well as differences between faculty who continue to work at the Downtown campus compared to those who moved.