Faculty Outlook on AUC’s Move to the New Campus

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A survey was posted on-line before the move to the New Campus, namely between May and September 2008, in order to learn how AUC faculty members felt about the move from the Downtown Campus to the New Cairo Campus. Ninety AUC teaching faculty responded to the survey, 57 of them females and 33 of them males. Among the participants 58.9% had a Doctorate degree, 40% a Master’s degree, and 1.1% a Bachelor’s degree. The different nationalities of those participating in the study were: 42.7% Egyptians, 34.8% Americans, 9% having a dual Egyptian/American nationality, and 13.5% having other nationalities.

Participants worked in various departments; the most represented departments in this study were the English Language Institute (14.8%), Rhetoric and Composition (13.6%), Arabic Language Institute (12.5%) and SAPE/Gender and Women/Forced Migration and Refugee Studies (12.5%). Other examples of departments that participated were Political Science, Journalism and Mass Communication, Management/Economics and Biology/Chemistry/Physics, among others not listed. These faculty members have been part of the AUC community for a number of years. Some of them for 5 years or less (26.6%), some between 6-10 years (20%), some between 11-20 years (22.2%) and some for more than 20 years (33.3%).

Degree to Which Faculty Wanted AUC to Move

There was a question on the survey requiring participants to state the degree to which they wanted AUC to move to the New Campus on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 meaning that person definitely does not want AUC to move and 10 meaning that person definitely does want AUC to move). There were 71 (out of 90) participants who responded to this question.

The results showed a variety of opinions, with the highest numbers being on either extreme and exactly in the middle. As seen in the graph, 12 faculty members (16.9%) gave a score of 1, 13 faculty members (18.3%) gave a score of 10, and 10 faculty members (14.1%) gave a score of 5.
On the survey participants were asked: “When you think about AUC’s move to the new campus, what three words best describe your feelings? For example, excited, pleased, frustrated, tired, etc.” There were 71 participants (out of 90) who fully answered this question.

The total amount of different words generated by faculty members was 91. Out of all the words “excited” was the most common, making up 14.6% of all participants answers (see Table 1). Many of the words showed concern and worry about moving to the new campus (37.3%). Words like “worried”, “nervous”, “concerned” and “anxious” are examples of these. Other common themes were: being hesitant/unsure (16.4%), annoyance and frustration (10.9%), hopeful/anticipating (10.9%), indifferent (8.7%) and “isolation” most likely due to the New Campus’s remote location (7.6%). Many people also used words showing that the move was giving empowerment and inspiration. These included words like “empowered”, “inspiration”, “looking forward”, “motivated”, “powerful” and “ambitious”. Some participants suggested that the move was burdensome, using words like “cumbersome”, “inconvenient” and “time consuming” while others expressed interest (e.g., “interested”), curiosity (e.g., “curious”) and “relief”.

Three Words Describing Feelings towards the Move
Table 1: Top 5 commonly mentioned words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tired</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hopeful, Frustrated</td>
<td>3.3% (each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Curious, Concerned</td>
<td>2.8% (each)</td>
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Positive Perceptions about the Campus Move

The survey asked faculty members about their general positive and negative perceptions about moving to the New Campus. The positive comments showed that, among the many things that faculty members anticipated, was the prospect of better facilities. This included smart classrooms, better technology, sports facilities, better services, and private office space. Quotes that illustrate this theme include “Smart classrooms, more up to date equipments.”, “Better resources; the ability of AUC to belong to higher world rank of universities due to facilities that would enhance teaching & learning; more sports facilities..”

Faculty expected the new campus to be much bigger than the Downtown campus. Some were looking forward to bigger offices (e.g., “…office space for conferencing with students”), while others were anticipating more space both inside and outside the campus itself (e.g., “More space, inside and outside campus”).

Many of the faculty were also looking forward to a more beautiful environment with modern buildings, and greenery. They commented on things like “less pollution” and “The vision of a beautiful place in the desert, instead of a crowded dirty place in the midst of chaos in the center of the city”.

The move to the new campus gave many the impression that they would be opening a new page in their lives. Some were very proud to have been part of this historical event. Faculty wrote about “…making history” and being “among the world’s leading university campuses and pioneer in the region.”
NegATIVE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CAMPUS MOVE

The majority of faculty members agreed that the location of the new campus would be a major problem for them, especially the transportation used to get there and the road safety. They complained about, for example, “...all the lorries on the highway” and “...commuting daily from across the capital!”

Some faculty expressed that the location of the new campus would be affecting people’s sense of community and would make them feel isolated from the rest of Cairo. They were worried that because the campus would be so detached from Cairo that the students would be isolated from the larger population and they wouldn’t be exposed to the poorer community that was around the old campus. This theme is seen in the following quotes: “...students will live in an oasis totally detached from their community”; “...feeling somewhat disconnected from Cairo, especially since we are moving to an area in which it will be easy for the students to ignore poverty and other social problems.”

Related to community isolation is that many faculty members thought that the new campus would be a drawback for international students that come here to experience Cairo: “An international University should not be isolated from the beating centres of culture, politics etc for students, particularly foreigners, to appreciate it and better understand the place they selected to come to.”

Also a considerable amount of faculty members thought that the move was not thoroughly planned for, as seen from this quote: “Reflects unartistic, unclutured, unauthentic, unacademic, undemocratic, unloyal, unobjective attitude of decision makers.” Some expected the new campus not to be ready at the time the move would take place saying “The new campus isn’t ready. It will take at least a year to move in, it will take two more years to settle in, and then it will take a decade to fix everything that they did wrong the first time...” They mentioned that many adjustments would have to be made and a lot of inconveniences would occur. Many faculty stated that their voice had not been heard by the administration and that their ideas, suggestions and complaints were not taken into consideration in the process of planning for the move.

A couple of faculty members expressed their concern about the university experiencing a shift from “a respectable liberal arts college” to a business that is only concerned with making profit. They feared that to compensate for the high expenses of the move, the university would have to lower its standards and accept any students who can afford to pay but are not necessarily good students: “...I am worried about the corporatization of AUC. Food service has been contracted out, donors get to name buildings, departments and gates.. I am worried that the upper level administration only cares about providing a flashy new campus without providing the support needed to provide a quality education to students.” As one faculty member wrote, “It seems that AUC is intent on becoming a McUniversity, which is a pity.”
**Impact on Faculty Commitment to Teaching at AUC**

Another question on the survey asked how AUC’s move to the new campus impacted faculty’s commitment to, or interest in, teaching at AUC. There were a lot of differing opinions on this issue but some of the common themes were that the move would make little or no difference in commitment (e.g., “No impact. Same commitment”), a long standing commitment to teaching in general (e.g., “It did not change my commitment to perform my work and to excel in teaching my students at AUC”), uncertainty about commitment (e.g., “..my commitment is somewhat tenuous as it is. AUC is on probation, as far as my contract goes, and I’m keeping an open mind with the new campus”), and planning to leave AUC (e.g., “Will retire sooner than expected.”)

Some people showed a decrease in their level of commitment to AUC because of the move (e.g., “I am less committed to AUC than I would be if we were staying downtown”), while others’ commitment improved due to renewed interest and excitement about the New Campus (e.g., “It has strengthened my interest in teaching at AUC.”) A few faculty members questioned AUC’s commitment to faculty. For example, one person said, “Yes I am willing to commit to AUC but what if AUC suddenly does not commit to me? What if my contract is not renewed.”

Finally, with regards to specific factors that influenced faculty commitment to the university, many said that their level of commitment decreased because of the long commute to the New Campus. For example, “The move to the new campus makes me less committed to teaching at AUC due to the long commute involved”.

**Conclusion**

The preliminary results from this research show us that the AUC faculty as a whole had mixed feelings about moving to the New Campus. This demonstrates the genuine diversity of opinions among the faculty. While many showed excitement and certainty about wanting to move, an equal proportion of others discussed major problems and drawbacks about relocating. In addition to faculty being split in their differing opinions, many faculty also felt mixed feelings within themselves. The next step in this research is to find out how the faculty feel after the move has taken place. A question to ask is: Is there validity to the high expectations and serious concerns of the faculty regarding the move to the New Campus?