In the summer of 2011, more than two years after AUC’s move from Tahrir to New Cairo, a survey was distributed to students in order to gain a view of how AUCians were adjusting to the New Cairo environment. This report aims at understanding this outlook by analyzing both open-ended and close-ended responses from the students about how they felt about the New Cairo campus. The data was collected using both paper and online versions of the survey, with the paper version distributed in classrooms and around campus. The online version was advertised through the university email announcement list as well as announcements posted at Facebook pages relevant to AUC students.

We had 209 respondents; 66.5% were females and 33.5% were males. The participants were more or less evenly divided among freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors; 60 graduate students comprised 28.6% of the total. The average time spent at AUC was 2.8 years and there were four study abroad respondents. Our sample covered a variety of majors ranging from accounting and actuarial science to nanotechnology and theatre.

**Student’s Overall Feeling towards AUC’s New Cairo Campus**

Participants were asked on a scale from 1 to 10 how they would rate their overall feeling towards AUC’s New Cairo campus. Values of 1 indicated extremely negative feelings, 5 and 6 indicated mixed feelings towards the campus, and 10 indicated extremely positive feelings. There were 209 participants who answered this question; the mean score was 7.07 (standard deviation = 2.02). As displayed in Figure 1, the majority of students (44.9%) gave a score of 8 or 9, indicating that most students were generally satisfied with the AUC campus. On the other hand, 12.86% gave a score between 1 and 4.
Feelings Towards the New Cairo Campus in One Word

The respondents were asked to write three words that best described their feelings towards the AUC New Cairo Campus; 203 students responded to this task. We then analyzed the first word that students wrote as an illustration of their primary feelings towards the campus. A total of 58.6% students responded with a positive depiction of their overall feeling (e.g. “excited”, “comfortable”, “homy”) while 38.4% responded with a negative perception (e.g. “exhausted”, “far”, “isolated”, “disappointed”). A total of 6 students responded with other words that were either ambiguous in nature (e.g. “shock”, “different”) or “neutral”. However the most used word was “proud”; it was used 47 times which made up 23.2% of the total words.

AUCians in the New Cairo Environment

We asked our participants three sets of questions that would allow us to analyze:

1. Their sense of pride and affiliation with AUC
2. How well they have adjusted to the New Cairo campus
3. Their social interactions with other students in the AUC community and Egypt

Pride and Sense of Community with AUC

A modified version of the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (Miller, Allen, Casey, & Johnson, 2000) was used to assess the respondent’s sense of community with AUC. There were 25 statements that the student had to respond to on a 5-point scale where 1 was “Strongly Disagree” and 5 was “Strongly Agree”. Some statements were obvious in their intention to evaluate pride in AUC (e.g. “I am proud to be an AUCian”) while others related to affiliation with AUC and sense of connectedness with the university (e.g. “I find it easy to identify myself with AUC”). To determine the student’s sense of connection with AUC, we calculated each student’s average score, and then calculated the mean of that amount across all respondents, which was 3.21. This score was not statistically significantly different from the score on this questionnaire found in a previous assessment of AUC students at the Downtown campus before the move to New Cairo (which was 3.32). This indicated that the overall sense of community and attachment to AUC was similar at both campuses.

Adjustment to the New Cairo Campus

A set of statements was developed by our team to assess how well students were adjusting and settling in to the new campus, whether they had come from the old campus or from high school or had transferred from a different university. There were 21 statements and the students had to respond on a 5-point scale in which 1 was “Strongly Disagree” and 5 was “Strongly Agree”. The statements covered points like feelings of safety, happiness, and appreciation of the students in the new campus, the commute, the facilities, and of course, how adjusted they felt overall. A total of 185 students answered this section and the mean score was 3.29, indicating an average to above average level of agreement with the adjustment items.
The highest-rated item was “I use the New Cairo campus library to fulfill my academic needs” (mean= 4.08). Other positively rated items related to feeling safe while on campus (mean= 4.02), feeling proud of the state-of-the art campus (mean= 3.77), and having become used to the commute to the campus (mean= 3.71). On the other hand, issues that were rated lower were bringing their non-AUC friends to visit the campus (mean= 2.61), feeling that AUC genuinely supports the student in adjusting to the campus (mean= 2.96), and feeling excited to come to campus in the mornings (mean= 2.98).

**Frequency of Social Interactions with Other Students**

This section was composed of five questions that asked students how often they interacted with students (inside AUC itself and out). A score of 1 meant “Never” and 5 was “Always”. A total of 182 students answered this section. As shown in Figure 2, students were more likely to interact with other students within their own majors whereas interaction with students from other universities was less common.

![Figure 2. Percent of Respondents Interacting with Other Students](image)

The Old Campus Versus the New

This section was specifically for students who had also studied at the Tahrir campus and was designed to compare how students who had studied at both campuses felt about certain aspects of their new environment. We analyzed 14 questions to get an idea about how last-generation Tahrir AUCians felt about becoming first-generation New Cairo AUCians. A total of 85 students answered one or more of the 14 questions. Each question mentioned a characteristic (e.g., time of commute) and asked respondents to compare the new campus against the old (e.g.,
more time or less time). Additionally, many respondents wrote comments in the survey that were related to these issues.

Transportation and Food Services

We asked our participants “How much time does your transportation take between home and AUC?”, “How stressful is your transportation between home and AUC?” and “How much money do you spend on food/drinks?” Fifty-two percent of students responded that transportation takes more time at the New Cairo campus compared to Tahrir; however 48.2% said that the transportation was less stressful. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority (90%) responded that they spend “more money” on-campus. Many students, in the final comments section, seized the opportunity to comment on their disappointment at the expensive meal plans and lack of variety compared to what that used to be available at the old campus. Two of these comments were “There needs to be a cafeteria. The SOB’s have monopolized food, and heck even space at our new campus. I wish there was REAL and AFFORDABLE food at AUC, like Tahrir days!” and “food at campus for dorm students is very poor! fast food like mcdonalds is not healthy to eat everyday! and quick24 does not have any of the essentials we need!”

Health and Well-being

We analyzed the answers to the two questions “How often have you become ill?” and “How healthy do you feel?” to see whether the less polluted New Cairo environment had affected student’s health. From the respondents, 44% indicated that they felt about the same regarding their health, and, similarly, 70.6% said that they felt ill about as often as they did at the Tahrir campus. Some of the students commented on how the new campus had affected their general health, such as: “since every department is far from the other I have to walk daily around 30 minutes which is good for my health yet very irritating during summer or when I am wearing the wrong shoes”. Some students expressed that while losing weight might be good, perhaps forced exercise between classes wasn’t what they needed; for example: “I lose weight because i have to walk a lot under the sun just to go to class. even during days when i am fasting, this becomes even harder. sometimes, i feel like i have a headache to the point that i cant concentrate in class any more”. Other students commented that their health was being negatively affected, for example: “[…]the FOOD!!!! the coffee is also bad! […] I got sick once or twice last year from AUC food!” Other students still, felt that their psychological health was also being affected, as one student commented: “the very long road i have to take everyday has affected [my] health in the sense that i am always exhausted and tired, as for my psychological health i became more stressed”.

Academic Studies and Productivity

Our participants were asked “How much work do you take home to do?” , “How often do you “skip” your classes?” and “How productive are you in your studies, in general?” Compared to their experiences at the Tahrir campus, a total of 38.8% took about the same amount of work home to do and 56.6% indicated that they skipped classes about the same amount of times. Those that did skip classes more than they did at Tahrir gave reasons such as: “It has made me skip more classes due to the rush hours and traffic while going home to 6th of October”. A total of 42% indicated that they were more productive in the new environment and this could be due to
the updated facilities (libraries, labs, etc.) and its quiet location. For example, students commented: “It's a state of the art facility that is supporting students in their academic needs” and “I feel that the New Campus has affected my study in one major way; I did not feel safe in the old campus because I had to cross a busy street multiple times and was subjected to harassment. Now I can focus on ‘what to do when I get there’ rather than ‘I hope I get there safely’. Some commented, however that the campus itself had little to do with the standard of education that is provided; for instance: “The campus hasn't impacted how I feel towards studying at AUC, the academic quality is what would influence the above.”

On-campus Emotions and Activities

In this section we examined the responses to three questions: “How comfortable do you feel on-campus?”; “How much time do you spend on campus?” and “How often do you attend campus events, such as lectures, productions, concerts, etc.?”. A total of 52% of students felt more comfortable at the New Cairo campus compared to the Tahrir campus. One student commented: “About the campus: it's awesome, marvellous... It feels like home” and another stated that she “LOVE[s] the AUC new campus and I'm proud of it and proud to be part of it”. Others, however, felt out of place at AUC as one student said “I am not Egyptian and quite often get dirty/strange stares from students (particularly, students of the same gender as me) when I am walking around the campus, either alone or if I am with my friend(s). All I can say is... I expect that (stares) to happen in the streets of Cairo, I do not expect it to happen at an American University”. Despite the fact that a large percentage of respondents felt more comfortable on the new campus, 43.5% attended campus events less frequently than they did at the Tahrir campus; even though 58.8% attested that they spend more time on-campus. One student mentioned that “I feel at home when I'm in AUC's new campus.. It almost feels like it's a country inside a country! This coziness, in addition to the beauty of the place, is more than enough to boost someone's enthusiasm about their studies and/or activities, making me and others energetic and productive. The sense of achievement makes you never wanna leave”. However, another student stated that “Well, the space is refreshing, but the commute makes me just want to stay in bed”.

AUCian and Egyptian Sense of Community

To get an idea of the sense of community both within the walls of AUC and beyond it, we asked our participants three questions: “How much collaboration and solidarity is there among students?”; “How often do you meet your professors or classmates off-campus?” and “How 'connected’ do you feel with the rest of Cairo?” For the first question, students were split; 38.8% responded that there was less collaboration and solidarity among students, and 38.8% responded that there was about the same level. In the same vein, 45.2% of students met professors/classmates off-campus less than they did at the Tahrir campus, and one student’s comment could provide an explanation for this: “because its a bit far from the city. mostly everyone spend their free time on campus. thats how i get to know people and interact with others”. However, while this may explain why students don’t meet as much off-campus, it should mean that collaboration and solidarity would be greater since so much time is spent together. It is possible that a sense of community within AUC is achieved less through classes and study sessions and more through activities and on-campus events.
While the AUCian sense of community may still be hanging in the balance, 80% of students indicated that their sense of community with the greater Cairo had diminished after moving to the New Cairo campus. Most felt that the new campus location had isolated them from interaction with anyone outside AUC’s ‘privileged’ community. Some of the students’ comments included: “in truth i think the auc community is too disconnected from the rest of the egyptian community as a whole. not only are most students out of touch with the rest of the community but being placed so far away from the bustle of cairo activity makes the AUC campus selectively reclusive. it almost helps nurture the gap that exists between the different classes of egyptian society” and “I feel completely isolated from the greater Cairo community. I often times call the New Cairo campus a "little America" because it is so isolated from the rest of the greater Cairo community. Furthermore, I feel that AUC’ians are not a clear or accurate representation of what Egypt is and often times I feel like the new campus has a "high school part 2" atmosphere to it. I would appreciate it more if the university was much more integrated in regards to both foreign and Egyptian students regardless of class standings”. One student put it so simply by stating that “I don’t have [a] sense of community”.

Conclusion

The results from this research show that AUC students are adjusting relatively well to the New Cairo campus. The new students seem to be very excited by the spaciousness of the campus and the facilities and opportunities they provide. While the older students may mourn the loss of leaving behind the old campus that they had developed an emotional bond with, most of these students seemed to have accepted that the new campus comes with its advantages and disadvantages, much like anything else. Upon moving to the New Cairo campus, many wondered whether students would be able to establish the bond that previous students had with the Tahrir campus. While there are students who have not yet reached that level of intimacy with the new campus and there are areas for improvement such as developing a higher sense of community with greater Cairo, there were those students who stated in their final comments “Best decision in my life was my enrollment at AUC” and “I love AUC :)

References