

By Elaina Loveland

Realization of a New Campus in New Cairo

**An interview with David Arnold,
president of the American University in Cairo**

DAVID ARNOLD became the tenth president of the American University in Cairo (AUC) in September 2003. During his tenure at AUC, Arnold has overseen the construction of the university's new campus, which opened in September 2008. Built over a period of five years at a total cost of \$400 million, the new campus offers modern classrooms, laboratories, lecture halls, and other essential facilities to support current and future teaching methods, curricula, and educational technologies.

Under Arnold's leadership, AUC has partnered with prominent universities around the world, including Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of Pennsylvania. AUC was the only university in the region chosen to partner with the recently established King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia, where it is collaborating on research in desert development technology, nanotechnology, and Red Sea marine ecology.

A number of new scholarship and fellowship opportunities were created under Arnold's tenure, including the Leadership for Education and Development Program, which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Egyptian Ministry of International Cooperation, and offers full scholarships to two students from the public schools—one male and one female—from each of Egypt's 27 governorates. Similar opportunities for students in the Arab Region were expanded with the Tomorrow's Leaders Scholarship Program, co-funded by the U.S. State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative, which will provide scholarships for students from the Middle East and North Africa.

Prior to joining AUC, Arnold served for six years as executive vice president of the Institute of International Education. From 1984 to 1997 he worked for the Ford Foundation, serving initially as its first

program officer in the field of governance and later as the foundation's representative for India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

Arnold holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a master's degree in public administration from Michigan State University.

IE: What role do the U.S.-style institutions of higher education play in the Middle East?

ARNOLD: There are really three different dimensions of the types of education that U.S. liberal arts institutions provide that are especially relevant to the Middle East right now. First, we pride ourselves on producing and educating future leaders in a variety of different fields. People who are not just going to be well-trained in single fields or disciplines but who are truly going to be well-educated and have the skills to think critically, communicate effectively, and to work well on teams with anyone, from anywhere. These are all the things that we associate with graduates from top-notch U.S. liberal arts institutions. Certainly, places like the American University in Cairo (AUC), The American University in Beirut (AUB), and the Lebanese American University (LAU), have been training and educating successive generations of leading figures for the Arab world for many decades—some say more than a century. So, that process of leadership



David Arnold, president of the American University in Cairo

development is a critically important role of what U.S. universities contribute to the region today.

Second, we have a tradition of extending the resources of the universities beyond the campus itself in a variety of different community service and outreach programs that connect the universities organically to the society that we serve. The important role that universities play in community service and community development can take different forms, including student volunteer services, community outreach programs, continuing education, community-based research—a variety of different roles and activities. The main point is to recognize that these well-established, well-respected universities do not exist in isolation but, in fact, are an integral part of the society that we serve.

And third, and I think this is an especially important aspect of who we are and what we do, is that we really serve as educational and cultural bridges between East and West, and in particular between the United States and the Middle East. I think at this moment, that bridging role, connecting people and cultures through education and through academic programs, is a critically important element in the development of U.S. education in the region.

IE: How does the American University in Cairo serve as a bridge between East and West and how do you think your university, in particular, builds understanding about the United States and Egypt and in the Middle East as a whole?

ARNOLD: Well, I think for many, many years, AUC has been both the window for people from the West to understand more about Egypt and the Arab world, and the window on the world for people from Egypt and the Arab world. The work that we do in terms of training and educating Egyptians and students from the Arab world provide a broad-based general education that exposes them to the best thinking not just of the Western scholars, philosophers, and scientists, but also really offers students a global perspective. In recent years, we've added to that a program that has been supported by Prince Alwaleed, which is the new Center for American Studies and Research that is specifically targeted toward providing a broader and deeper understanding of U.S. society and culture and history. The aim of the Prince Alwaleed American Studies Center how is to get beyond the stereotypes of America that most of our Egyptian students come across through the popular media, which has been, the primary channel of information about the West in the Arab World.

So, I think the important role that the university plays is really to give texture, nuance, and meaning to an appreciation of the West and of the United States, in particular. We do not do this in a propagandistic way but in an academic way that enables people to take a closer, and in some cases, more critical, look at the U.S. society, culture, history, and politics. Similarly, we do a lot to help make Egyptian culture and Arab culture transparent and accessible to people from the United States and the West. We do that through our academic programs where we're bringing about 500 study abroad students from the United States and Europe every semester to study Middle East studies: Islamic art and architecture, Middle East history, politics, religions of the region, and Arabic language.

We also have a very active publishing program through the AUC Press, which is the largest English-language press in the region. Aside from publishing scholarship on the Middle East, it also specializes in the translation of Arabic literature into English and other languages, thereby making the important literary tradition and legacy of the Arab world available and accessible to Western audiences.

IE: What role do universities play in building civil society in general? Specifically how does the American University in Cairo contribute to building a civil society?

ARNOLD: We pride ourselves in educating people for not just productive employment and successful careers but also to be active, engaged global citizens. I think that's the first requirement for building a functioning civil society—to have citizens who understand and are aware of the conflicts, issues, and challenges that are confronting their societies and the world. We aim to produce graduates who are able to think critically about those issues and challenges and to have a commitment to being change-agents within their respective societies. We work very hard to give our students an exposure to the communities through a variety of community-based learning and service-outreach programs.

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More than 60 percent of our students are engaged in some form of community service activity as a part of their undergraduate experience at AUC, and we have incorporated service learning courses as part of the undergraduate core curriculum.

In recent years, we have gone to the point of creating a new Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, which is actually named for my predecessor, former President John Gerhart. The Gerhart Center does two things: first, it helps faculty and student leaders to develop service learning and community-based learning courses; and second, it's really trying to build and develop a network of emerging philanthropies throughout the Arab world. It is pursuing this agenda by working with foundations, NGOs, and community-based organizations to help strengthen and develop civil society institutions throughout the region.

IE: How do international students at the American University in Cairo contribute to the campus community?

ARNOLD: Well, it is a wonderfully diverse community of learners. AUC has students from more than 60 different nationalities. We have, as I mentioned, about 500 study abroad students or intensive Arabic language students at the undergraduate level, and we have about 250 international graduate students out of about 1,000. So, about 25 percent of our graduate students and about 15 percent of our undergraduates are students who are coming from outside of Egypt, the largest group of which is coming from the United States. We have African students from Sub-Saharan African, we have students from other countries throughout the Arab world, we have students from East Asia, from South Asia, and many from different European countries, so,

it's a wonderfully diverse mix and blend of students on the AUC campus. And I think that really enriches the experience and enables people to develop the kind of cultural skills that are needed to function effectively in an increasingly global economy and in an increasingly interconnected world.

IE: In recent years, the popularity of studying Arabic has risen. How has that affected the enrollment on your campus and also in your summer study sessions?

ARNOLD: We've seen a tripling in the number of students who are coming to AUC either to study Arabic or to spend the semester doing Middle East studies and usually having an Arabic-language program as a part of that. That's over the six years that I've been at AUC, there has been a significant increase in international students either in the Arabic Language Institute or in the study abroad program where they are taking courses on Middle East history, politics, religion, or related subjects.

So, it's very dramatic. We actually have had to cap the number of students that we can accept in our Arabic-language program because of the need to maintain the high standard of quality and small class size. We have also had to limit the number of study abroad students that we are able to accommodate. Summer study is increasingly popular. It's always been an important element in terms of the summer language programs but we are now seeing a growing number of students interested in coming to have a study abroad experience during the summer months.

IE: How does AUC encourage education abroad among its students? How many of your students go abroad?

ARNOLD: We are very keen to try and increase the number of our undergraduate

students who are able to have a study abroad experience. At the moment, a very small percentage of our students study any place other than in Egypt. We have had exchange agreements with about 130 universities in Europe and in the United States, and frankly, for a variety of reasons (some of which are financial, some of which are family reasons) we have not been as successful in getting our Egyptian students to study at those institutions as we are in getting students from those universities to come and study at AUC. We are not doing as good a job as we need to in terms of filling our slots in our reciprocal study abroad positions as we should.

One of the things that we have been able to do is to use some scholarship programs such as our Leaders for Education and Development Program, which brings students to study at AUC from each of the 27 governorates throughout Egypt. One-third of the students are being supported for a semester abroad in the United States and they have phenomenal experiences. It's transformative for them, and they are bringing back to the wider AUC student community the value and importance of that kind of experience.

So, we're hoping over time to do fundraising for financial aid to support travel grants and study abroad stipends so that we can see the number of undergraduate students who study abroad increase. Our aim is to try to get to a third of our undergraduate students to have had some study abroad experience as a part of their undergraduate curriculum at AUC by the time they graduate, but it's going to take us a while to get there.

IE: What kind of international partnerships does AUC have, and what has made the most impact in fostering intercultural connections?

ARNOLD: AUC has many different partnership arrangements and agreements with universities. I think some of the most successful have been those where there's been a long-standing institutional commitment from both sides. A wonderful example is the CASA program, a Center for Arabic Study Abroad which is a consortium of universities in the United States that have Middle East studies programs. They're sending students to study Arabic at a very high level for the entire academic year. That program has really set the gold standard in terms of Arabic language study, and I think it really is on its way to become the leading Arabic language destination for students from the United States and from the West.

We've also had a long-standing relationship with the University of California system where they bring about 30 to 35 undergraduate students for an entire academic year. And importantly, they send us faculty members to be based at AUC to teach one course a semester usually (but really they are

sent to be a resource and to be connected with the students).

So, I think the most successful programs go beyond just one of semester-long study abroad experience. It's really about building and developing a more meaningful institutional connection so that the students are prepared before they come to study. There is a continuing institutional link and connection from that time in Egypt and then they go back and are a part of an ongoing community that can support them as they move to the next stage of their education.

IE: The American University in Cairo has recently completed constructing a new campus. What does the university hope to offer using these new facilities, and what future goals and generally what does the university have in upcoming years?

ARNOLD: This is an extraordinary opportunity for our university. Very few institutions have a chance to build and create an entire new campus literally from the ground up. The

campus that we've moved into in September 2008 has been designed and planned over the last decade. It gives us the opportunity to really expand and develop new academic programs, to create a real sense of campus community life in a way that our old facility downtown in the center of Cairo never really permitted. We have gone from about a 7-1/2-acre set of disconnected facilities in the center of downtown Cairo to a 260-acre campus in the center of New Cairo, which is anticipated to become a city of three to four million people over the next 10 to 15 years. We have invested about \$400 million in the development of this new campus, and we actually began classes in the new facilities in September 2008. The new campus buildings, sports complex and residential facilities are now fully operational and the campus is truly spectacular; this facility positions the university to take off and thrive for many years into the future.

IE: As a president of an American university abroad, what are the greatest

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challenges you have faced in leading this unique institution?

ARNOLD: I think that part of the challenge for leaders of American institution abroad is the growing antipathy, in some ways, of people outside the United States toward U.S. foreign policy. That, I think, is starting to change in the wake of the new administration in Washington. AUC has always stood outside of the political arena. I think we're seen in Egypt as truly an academic institution, not an instrument of U.S. foreign policy or an instrument of the U.S. government. Certainly, the impact that U.S. foreign policy has in terms of overall environment and climate of public opinion toward U.S. institutions, generally I think, has not been an easy situation, particularly for those of us working in the Middle East.

At the same time, that if there is one thing for which the United States still has tremendous respect, it's for the high quality of our educational system and our educational institutions. So, even people who may feel strongly about the direction of U.S. foreign policy, especially in the Middle East, are

also people who will quickly acknowledge and recognize the value and importance of the high-quality of American higher education and American institutions abroad. So, our challenge has really been to keep people focused on the academic mission of the university, our role and contributions to the Egyptian society and Arab society, and to steer clear of some of the more controversial aspects of U.S. foreign policy in the region.

IE: Prior to becoming the president of AUC, you were executive vice president at the Institute of International Education. What do you feel are the greatest challenges in promoting international education in your career? What has improved and what work still needs to be done?

ARNOLD: Well, I think the trends that I have witnessed over many years of working in this field are very encouraging. I've seen more students studying outside of their country of origin than in any other time in history; the numbers being reported in terms of foreign students studying in

the United States are up after having been stagnant during the immediate post-9/11 period. And importantly, we're seeing more and more U.S. students studying abroad. It really is quite a significant growth in the number of Americans having a study abroad experience as a part of their undergraduate and graduate education. So, I'm actually very heartened and encouraged by the directions that we are seeing at the aggregate level.

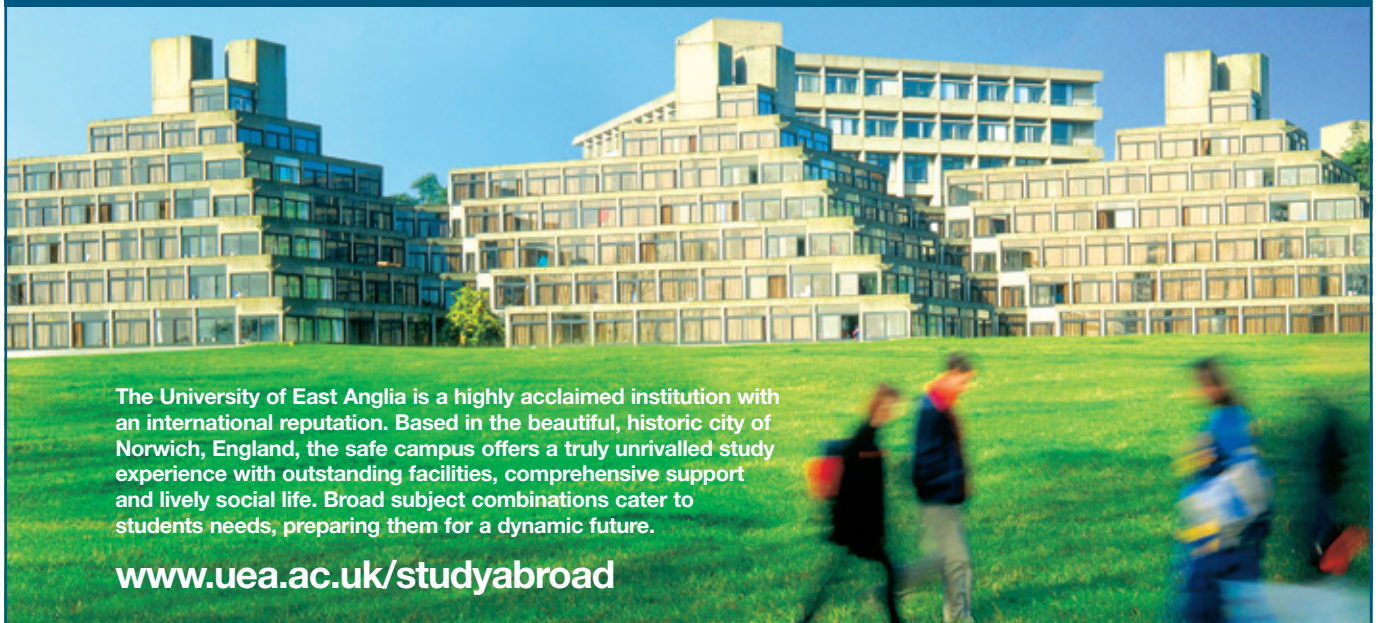
I think the challenge is really this: how do you make sure that the cultural exchange and personal transformation that accompanied international education is accessible and available to the widest segment of students from different countries? Studying abroad should not be something that's only limited to a certain elite segment of different societies. So, I think the process of trying to provide scholarship support in order to democratize international education is perhaps the next challenge to the field; we need to focus on and concentrate our efforts on this. **IE**

ELAINA LOVELAND is managing editor of *IE*.



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