

Interview:

Reporter: Good morning. I'm Angela Fahmy, an undergraduate student in the American University in Cairo. Let me start by introducing my interviewee Dr. Ashraf El Fiqi, the Vice President of student affairs at the American University in Cairo. Good morning.

Dr. El Fiqi: Good morning. How are you doing Angela?

Reporter: Good. Hmm As I know Dr. El Fiqi, prior to joining AUC, you were an assistant professor in the Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University, in 1981. You joined AUC in 1990 as a full time visiting faculty member in the physics department. And you served as chair of the physics department for two consecutive terms, which ended in Fall 2004. Starting January 1st, 2005 you were appointed as the Vice President of Student Affairs at the American University in Cairo.

Based on this long experience in teaching as well as managing AUC student affairs, you can provide me with useful information about "AUC during 1990s" since this kind of information is rarely known by my generation nowadays.

First, I want to ask you for a general statement on how the atmosphere was in AUC in 1990s? What are the main things that come to your mind whenever you remember AUC in 1990s and how was AUC viewed from the society during that time?

Dr. El Fiqi: Okay. In 1990 AUC was quite different from where we stand at the present time. We were operating on a very small campus 9 acres campus in Tahrir Square. We did not have school structure that we have at the present time, and we only had few departments and most of the departments you see at the present time were integrated within single departments. For example: Engineering we had only 1 department of engineering that included construction engineering and mechanical engineering. Science department, all this science department we did not have biology. It was mathematics, physics, and chemistry in a single science department and so on. So all what we had were {break} few, that's I'm talking about from the academic standpoints, so we had few departments only. We were a college trial undergraduate school not a research side education and this was mainly the history of AUC till the mid 90s I would say, we were this kind, or we were viewed from an academic standpoint and a college side institute. That's one aspect of the 1990s. We did not have that much research, we did not have any PhD programs and the community was a very small community in terms of number of faculty and number of students and so on. Also from the perspective of the society, I believe AUC was viewed as the society of the social economic elite of Egypt "iaani" (translates: meaning) at that time we did not have that many scholarships that did allow this social economic diversity we have at the present time. So this was viewed by the Egyptian society that this are the elite from a social economic stand point. We would like always to be an elite institute, but "ana" I would like very much to have this elite {breath} term associated with an academic elite okay? But at that time this was the way AUC was viewed by the Egyptian community. We had very high standards; the ethical standards, all the standards of AUC were always there. Deliver education definitely was the

main theme in our education at AUC that is still maintained to the present time but we did not have any professional programs when we're talking about the business or the engineering schools, these professional programs they did not exist at that time.

Reporter: Based on this answer that AUC was mainly for the elite or social economic, and based on your long experience with enrollment in AUC, if we could compare the students of AUC applying in 1990 and 2012, what have been changed?

Dr. El Fiqi: Well, first of all if we consider the social economic diversity, "ehna" (translated: we) in 1990 we started to have public school scholarship {breath} fund that allowed us to {breath} admit as many as, at the present time we are admitting 20 new students every year so at the present time we have between 80 and 90 students on that program. These are the top students from the "Sanaweya Amma" (Egyptian high school certificate) from public schools so that's one of the programs. And then 8 years back we again introduced the lead program, which was another kind of diversity at AUC. AUC was a Cairoian society; I mean most of the students were from Cairo, very few students from the governorate. With the LEAD program that accommodates 54 students from the 27 different governorates; a male and a female from each governorate. So at the present time we have actually, check South Sinai for example we have already 16 students from the South Sinai at AUC. So now the spreading of the AUC education or people learning about what AUC education stands for this is totally different form what we had in the 1990s, it was only within the Cairo elite social economical society, this was the {breath} real of AUC. So the diversity of the students body now this is quite clear. Again the study abroad students we get a lot of students from the states, who are joining AUC a lot of our programs from the middle eastern studies, and the political science and so on. So again this adds to the international diversity in our student body that was not that pronounced in the early 90s. So this is the main change. Again AUC at the present time is attracting with the new professional programs some of the best or most of our students "elhaiaa" (translated: trusthly) some of the best in Egypt and the region. In the 1990s you did miss a lot of students who did want to study Engineering or some professional programs like Business and so on and mass communication and all this kind of programs. At the present time all students they have as first priority AUC. Now that we have a pool spectrum within the Engineering programs starting from the basic construction, mechanical, and electronics, and then you get petroleum Engineering energy and so on, computer science and so on.

Reporter: Dr. El Fiqi, if we focused more on the proficiency of teaching in AUC regarding professors as well as students, would you personally think it increased or decreased over time?

Dr. El Fiqi: I think we always had the best quality of teachers at AUC. Despite the fact that sometimes {break} I get from students some kind of, and from parents some complains, minor complains, "laken" (translated: but) having been at the faculty for a very long time at AUC and I studied as you mentioned I was at the Cairo University before, I think we have here some of the best faculty members at AUC. And then we have the privilege also even when we talk about, we have a combination of, first of all the faculty to students ratio at the

present “tabaan” (translated: of course) I think its about 11:1, which is extremely good. I mean “ah” (translated: yes) so this is a very good mix. And then we have a combination of full timers and part timers and sometimes {break} we get some complains or some criticism about the part-timers. Part-timers are a necessity and I believe we are able to recruit the best part timers from the national universities. “Ehna” (translated: we) we are privileged that “ehna” (translated: we) are in Cairo. We have Cairo University, Ein Shams University, El Azhar University, a lot of excellent universities all around so the advantage of having a part timer is sometimes you need someone who is an expert in a particular field and you like this person to teach one course. So it won't, the best deal would be to not hire that person as a full timer. So you get, so actually by choosing some of the best part timers to add actually to the spectrum of professors that exist at AUC. SO I think we have a very good, again international professors we have now some very attractive packages to attract international professors from abroad. Apart from, in some disciplines, its very easy to recruit some of the international best faculty because from that perspective I mean in social sciences, and political sciences, middle east studies and so on. This is the field where they would like to do their research here in Egypt. SO these are easy to recruit but in professional programs {break} its much more difficult to attract. But we have been recruiting actually some of the {break} Egyptian nationals who lived abroad for a very long time, most of them now are willing to return to Egypt and AUC is one of the places where they will find that research wise and teaching wise this is the kind of the best environment in which they can perform or go along with their lives or academic career.

Last but not least, do you think the development of students as well as faculty over time is the same till 2012 or do you think the 25th of January's revolution in 2011 influenced the AUC community? Do you think the number of strikes increased after the revolution or was it always like that?

Dr. El Fiqi: Ok. Definitely the revolution changed everything in Egypt including AUC but let me stress on the point that students of AUC have always been an integrated part of the Egyptian community. And I recall very well {break} in the year 2000 or 1999 when we had the Palestinian “Entefada”. At that time we got the AUC students actually they started by taking a lot, first of all we got demonstrations of the students in solidarity with the Palestinians and then they decided that the best way to do it is to support the Palestinians. So they started by, I recall very well in Mohamed Mahmud Street in front of Mohamed Mahmoud gate, they got a {break} container to just get some food and medical supplies to the Palestinians. Within 3 days “tabaan” (translated: of course) people started even from the streets not only for AUC to keep adding and we ended up with 11 containers in Mohamed Mahmoud gate and it was on all the news internationally and the students of the AUC striking and demonstrating for the cause of the Palestinians and at the same time preparing and this container actually move to Rafah they had to go thru the red crossing “ia3ni laken” (translated: but) this was in AUC. So AUC students have always been part of the Egyptian community. I think in *January 25* this was pronounced much much more because are part of the revolution and accordingly this revolution changed a lot of things. First of all we believe that we learned a lot from the youth actually after the revolution and the pattern of {break}

protesting I think this is becoming a pattern but I believe the way we are doing it at AUC is quite proper its thru discussions, negotiations and so on. I mean we need to listen (Reporter: reach conclusions, Dr. El Fiqi: Exactly) and I believe the way we manage between students administration, workers, security and everything to work out can most of the problems that {break} I think some of them are very relevant, which we did not think about but they were considered after the students raised these issues. They were actually addressed in a very proper way that I believe is a model “El 7a2i2a” (translated: truthly) that I would like to see in Egypt. I would like negotiations people sitting around the table, “tabaan” (translated: but) you can protest, you can do everything but then at the end we have to sit down around the table to try to find a solution and discuss it. So definitely it did change AUC but I think for the better “iaani” (translated: but) they way we are, the different issues we had so far, I think all of them are/ I would consider of them positive.

Would you like to add anything else about the University now?

AUC is a very special place. And I believe every day I believe that it’s a pride to be a member of this great community. And I hope that all the students do understand and when they look at the history of AUC and what as I told you if you just keep looking at the snapshots, things that had been coming thru AUC you’ll find out that this is a place, that first of all it is an integrated well an American University in Cairo and integrated part of the Egyptian community working “el 7a2i2a” (translated: truthly) for the best of Egypt. Students of AUC are part of the Egyptian people and the support they provide in terms of activities all the (fill and tropic) activities with their feeling about the problems of Egypt I think anyone who is exposed to the student activates would understand that I don’t see any other place in Egypt where students are so engaged with Egyptian problems as in AUC. So this is a very it’s a unique place and you cannot feel this uniqueness unless you live in it and I think the members of, I hope the students “el 7a2i2a” (translated: truthly), they would whether they have objections on things or whatever “laken” (translated: but) this feeling of the uniqueness of this place and they do belong to a place that has a very special value and ethics and so on I think this is something I would like to see in the future.

Reporter: To have a student union in a university this is something special these days. Dr. Ashraf El Fiqi, Vice president of Student Affairs at the American university in Cairo, I know your time is valuable hence I would like to thank you so much for the time you dedicated to provide us with a hint on how it used to be in our university 20 years ago. Thank you.

Dr. El Fiqi: it was a pleasure thank you very much for your time.

Reporter: Thank you

Dr. El Fiqi: Thanks a lot.