

2020

2019

2018

2017

2016

2015

2014

2013

2012

2011

2010

2009

2008

2007

2006

2005

2004

2003

2002

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[AUB Home](#) > [News](#) > [2016](#) > [Book panel focuses on the role AUB plays in the region](#)

## Book panel focuses on the role AUB plays in the region

12/5/2016

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### Story Highlights

- The American University of Beirut (AUB) and Dar Nelson have organized a panel discussion about the book *One Hundred and Fifty* at the 60th Beirut Arab Book fair held yearly at the Beirut International Exhibition and Leisure center.

### Related Info

- Delving back into 150 years of AUB histories

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The American University of Beirut (AUB) and Dar Nelson have organized a panel discussion about the book *One Hundred and Fifty* at the 60th Beirut Arab Book fair held yearly at the Beirut International Exhibition and Leisure center.

The book, which is published by AUB Press, is a collection of articles examining the history of the University. The book was launched in March 2016 as part of AUB's 150th anniversary celebrations, and was edited by Drs. Nadia El Cheikh, Lina Choueiri and Bilal Orfali.

On the panel spoke Dr. El Cheikh, who has since been appointed dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Philosophy Professor Bashar Haydar, Director of the Issam Fares Institute Dr. Tarek Mitri, and AUB Alumnus Mohammad Mattar. The panel was moderated by Suleiman Bakhti.

Bakhti opened the panel stating that in this book all sides of the history of the AUB were explored and portrayed objectively, showing the instances that made AUB an institution that changes the lives of people for the better.

"AUB is a book that doesn't end; it's an institution that doesn't stop growing and producing novelty," he said.

Dr. El Cheikh then took the stage to further elaborate on the content of the book, which she described as a token of appreciation presented by her and her co-editors to AUB on its 150th anniversary.

"The book contains a photo essay showing the first females at AUB after it was an all-male university," she said. "It shows the first female head nurse at the nursing school in 1905, the first veiled woman to join AUB in 1924, among other firsts, and this highlights the important role AUB played as the first university in the region to open its doors to women."

Dr. Mitri spoke about the relationship between the University and Ras Beirut. According to him, the university helped shape the old Ras Beirut, back when the area was quasi-empty. However, the modern Ras Beirut as we know it today is different compared with the old one, and the University has little to no effect on its modern constitution. The split between the once twins area happened after the civil war, he said, when AUB's main concern was to survive the war, so the university's focus became internal rather than open to its surroundings.

"What hit Lebanon and the Arab region of wars and hardships during the past few years hit AUB as well, but we should all be proud of what AUB was able to accomplish during the past 150 years despite all odds," he concluded.

Dr. Bashar Haydar added that AUB has entered a phase of individual success, stating that this success, although notable and important, should not preclude involvement of society outside or the wider picture of Beirut and the region.

"AUB deals with itself as a knowledge generator, comparing itself with universities abroad, missing the point that we are not in the US, where communities are advanced, but we're rather in Lebanon where the government doesn't properly function and basic human rights aren't applied," he said. "We have to admit that we have failed on this level, and must start focusing on the role that AUB can play in the society, all while trying to overcome the obstacles and the hard circumstances the region is going through."

In his turn, Mr Mattar spoke about the important role AUB plays in providing its students with a degree of political awareness. According to him, AUB is multifunctional, it does not only provide its students with skills to take over the market place once they graduate, but it also equips them with tools to play important roles in their societies.

He referred to the strike that happened in the 1970s and in which he took part, stating that although most universities in the region are apolitical, AUB allowed its students a chance to be political activists.

"FAS is the spirit of this university, where social sciences and humanities are main components allowing students to learn about their societies," he said. "Those fields provide the students with critical views on studies and theories that can later be applied in civic engagement and not only in the professional fields they choose to pursue."

The panel was followed by a book signing at the AUB Press stand in the fair, where Dr. El Cheikh signed copies of the book. One Hundred and Fifty is currently available for \$40 from AUB Press. It is also available through the AUB Bookstore and other Librairie Antoine stores (including [www.antoineonline.com](http://www.antoineonline.com)).

