



## MEMORANDUM

February 5, 2010

**TO:** Campus Community  
**FROM:** Neil Kerwin, President  
**SUBJECT:** Mid-Winter Update

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With spring semester well underway, I offer a mid-winter report on topics of interest.

### **Condition of the University—Start of Spring Semester**

We open the new academic term with indicators of institutional health both solid and encouraging. Enrollment for the spring semester continues to be strong in most categories. The retention figures I reported in my October 2009 campus letter (among the highest in university history) have not changed significantly. Revenues from tuition and other sources that support our budget are also consistent with targets. Given current trends in expenditures, we are confident that we will end the fiscal year in balance (or better).

Trends for the fall 2010 entering classes are also positive. We again have a record number of applicants for our freshman class, including the highest number ever of early decision candidates. Overall, freshman applications have increased by 12 percent, with early decision applications up by an even larger percentage. While it is much earlier in the enrollment cycle for transfer and graduate applications, these also are showing increases at present. In short, nothing we see in the current numbers suggests that the trends are inconsistent with the targets we have set for the next academic year.

As I noted in December, our relative strength must be considered against a backdrop of a still troubled economy. Many people, both in the U.S. and abroad, face serious financial challenges, if not outright hardship. We remain concerned about the effects of these conditions on our current students and applicants. Our Financial Aid and Student Accounts offices remain ready to assist current students facing financial challenges. A key part of our strategic plan is a commitment to enrolling and supporting a diverse student body. This commitment will be reflected in the financial aid strategies we employ during each of our student recruitment cycles.

### **Strategic Plan Implementation**

In my December letter I reported on the progress to date on the strategic plan and included a link to my recent update to the Board of Trustees. Implementing the plan is our highest institutional priority, and every member of the community has a role to ensure that we make progress toward our goals. Over the coming months Provost Bass and I will meet with the

deans and faculties of each school and college to discuss their plans and what can be done to facilitate their work. I plan similar meetings in each of the other major divisions and will reach out to student organizations, Staff Council, and our Alumni Board to hear their views on progress under the plan. I will meet periodically with the Strategic Plan Measurement Project Team to review their work. They recently selected a software tool to assist in their measurement activities, which will, among other things, allow community members to monitor our progress. The membership and agenda for the University Council will be adjusted to enable informed discussion of strategic plan topics and issues. For the plan to be a serious force in the development of the institution, it must, at the very least, be a regular and widespread topic for discussion. I intend to ensure that happens.

### **Graduation Update**

Planning for commencement (May 7–9 and May 23) is well underway, as students, family, and guests begin to make travel arrangements for the six ceremonies and supporting activities. Three ceremonies will be on Saturday, May 8—School of Communication at 9:00 a.m., Kogod School of Business at 1:00 p.m., and School of International Service at 4:30 p.m. Two ceremonies will be on Sunday, May 9—School of Public Affairs at 9:00 a.m. and the College of Arts and Sciences at 1:00 p.m. The Washington College of Law commencement will be on Sunday, May 23, at 1:00 p.m. We are currently working with the deans on speakers and honorary degree recipients and plan to announce them later in the semester after spring break. Other changes for this year include student singers performing the national anthem at each ceremony and the diplomas for bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral students being “sized up” to 11 inches by 14 inches. As a reminder, students expecting to graduate in May must complete the Application to Graduate form on the [my.american.edu](http://my.american.edu) portal by February 12. Other information is available via the commencement Web site ([www.american.edu/commencement](http://www.american.edu/commencement)).

### **Development and Alumni Relations**

Development and Alumni Relations continues to excel in their activities and programs. Final numbers from January will indicate that the *AnewAU* campaign has reached nearly \$196.7 million, and cash donations to date this fiscal year already top \$15 million—compared with \$15.7 million for *all* of the last fiscal year. A component of this, alumni giving, is up substantially—by nearly 60 percent in dollars and 9 percent in donors. Forecasts for the remainder of the fiscal year are strong, with major gift conversations (including multiple gifts in the seven-figure range) nearing successful conclusion.

This growth can be attributed in part to the substantial increases in alumni programs and activities undertaken by the alumni board, regional alumni chapters, and the Office of Alumni Relations. Recent successes have included a Faculty on the Road program on January 26 in Miami featuring associate professor Parthiban David, the George and Maureen Collins Chair in Strategy and Consulting, and our third D.C. Networking Event on January 12. This year’s 75 events (to date) already exceed last year’s by 260 percent. The number of alumni engaged by these programs totals 3,720 or 66 percent more than *all* of last year.

### **Board of Trustees**

The Board of Trustees will hold their winter meeting on February 18 and 19. The plenary session will feature an update by vice president of finance and treasurer Don Myers on the

status of the university's campus planning process. After the meeting, chairman Gary Abramson will post his meeting summary on the board Web site.

### **Campus Plan**

Our campus planning process continues to evolve as the university administration refines its focus on which facilities projects are the highest strategic priorities to enable AU to thrive in the decades to come. The Facilities Planning Project Team has provided recommendations on facilities needs and priorities and will finalize its report in the coming weeks. The exhaustive and multifaceted exercise is one that aligns institutional needs, building sites, and funding potential in a process that requires campus involvement, community review, and governmental approval. Significant discussions are underway with the neighboring community and D.C. government officials, and public meetings are being scheduled with the two Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC-3D and ANC-3E). Summary documents and information are posted on the Web site devoted to this topic ([www.american.edu/finance/fas/2011-Campus-Plan.cfm](http://www.american.edu/finance/fas/2011-Campus-Plan.cfm)). You will be reading more about AU's project ideas and planning objectives in the weeks to come, in both university and community news outlets. Our goal is to file the plan in the second half of 2010.

### **American University of Nigeria**

In the past I have updated you on the progress we have made in our consultations with independent universities in developing areas of the world, consistent with elements of the strategic plan related to international activity. For the past six years, we have worked with the American University of Nigeria (AUN) to establish American-style higher education in western Africa, where poverty and literacy rates stand in the way of Nigeria building and sustaining democracy and prosperity. We can be proud of our work to assist AUN to secure leadership, establish a campus, build enrollment (now 1,100 students), develop board governance, and graduate successful undergraduates, to note just a few of the outcomes of our consulting relationship (detailed information is online, [www1.american.edu/ia/pdf/AU\\_AUN\\_Achievements.pdf](http://www1.american.edu/ia/pdf/AU_AUN_Achievements.pdf)).

I must inform you of a development with AUN. As part of a long-standing inquiry, the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (PSI), has been studying the business practices of several influential foreign officials and their financial transactions with U.S. entities. AU has participated in the inquiry and has been fully cooperative with the PSI. They have issued a report and held a hearing (February 4) to review four case histories, including one focused on AUN's founder. For more information on the report and our response, please refer to my statement on the matter ([www.american.edu/president/announcements/upload/Statement-020510.pdf](http://www.american.edu/president/announcements/upload/Statement-020510.pdf)).

### **Army Corps**

The Army Corps of Engineers continues their work on and adjacent to the AU campus, with the most visible projects around the Public Safety building (low-probability work) and on the university-owned residential property at 4825 Glenbrook Road (high-probability work done under a safety shelter). At both sites, the Corps continues to find lab glassware and metal debris from the World War I-era almost daily. It is removed and then tested for hazard or risk potential. Recent "larger finds," for example, include an empty and unfused shell found four feet underground in the Public Safety yard (January 4), which the Army classified as

debris; intact glass bottlenecks found some three and a half feet underground on the Glenbrook property (January 26), sent to Edgewood Arsenal for testing; and additional laboratory glassware and bottles (February 2), also to be tested. The glass bottlenecks prompted a stir of speculation in some local news outlets; for perspective, please read the background information provided by the site project manager (Dan Noble) that was sent to the neighborhood Restoration Advisory Board on January 29 and to AU on February 2 (see [www1.american.edu/usace/020210.pdf](http://www1.american.edu/usace/020210.pdf)).

The Corps has nine test pits remaining out of the 52 they identified at 4825 Glenbrook. They will follow with geotechnical borings under the house. At Public Safety, they continue to comb through the soil around the building and remove the debris; they also plan to remove some soil in the back of the property that has a higher than normal range of mercury. At a time to be determined, the Corps plans to assess the soil beneath the Public Safety building via sideways drilling to remove soil samples. During the first two weeks of February, the Corps will perform previously identified (low-probability) trench work adjacent to the soccer field and in the radio tower area.

We will provide updates on next steps as specific actions and timelines are established. As a reminder, in addition to the university's own site ([www1.american.edu/usace](http://www1.american.edu/usace)), the Army Corps has a Web site dedicated to the full scope of their work in northwest Washington (including AU), which includes reports, maps, news releases, and photos. It can be accessed at [www.nab.usace.army.mil/projects/WashingtonDC/springvalley.htm](http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/projects/WashingtonDC/springvalley.htm).

### **Haiti**

We have seen the horror and sorrow that the devastating earthquake brought to Haiti. The AU community has responded in numerous ways to this crisis, and we will continue to do so. As outlined in my January 15 campus memo, a variety of reputable organizations are organizing relief activities, and I urge everyone to do what you can to assist the people of Haiti in their courageous efforts to survive the immediate crisis and rebuild their society and nation. Our Web site provides information for members of our own community in need of university assistance. To that end we are in the process of developing a grant program to provide financial assistance so that affected Haitian students can continue their studies and complete their degrees at American University. We also are greatly aware of the innovative public policy academic partnership between the School of Public Affairs' Center for Public Finance Research (CPFR) and the Central Bank of Haiti that has been affected by the devastation and is now on hold. The Central Bank has been badly damaged, the training institute where the courses were taught is completely destroyed, and students, staff, and our Haitian program director have suffered personal and property losses. Our thoughts and condolences are with our extended AU family in Haiti, as the School of Public Affairs explores ways to assist the program, its staff, and its students and get the program up and running again as soon as possible.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability initiatives are in our strategic plan and are important if we are to comply with the Presidents' Climate Commitment provisions and other major environmental efforts AU is pledged to support. To that end, a number of new policies deserve special mention and attention; these were developed jointly by the Office of Sustainability in the division of the assistant vice president for facilities and administrative services and the two university

project teams—Environmental Issues and Climate Action. The new policies ensure that all new construction or major renovations meet LEED silver or better standards (Green Building); high performance cleaning (Green Cleaning); and sustainable purchasing and benchmarks, with timelines for waste reduction, recycling, and reuse (Zero Waste). Full descriptions of these policies can be found online at [www.american.edu/policies](http://www.american.edu/policies). They represent significant steps toward the ambitious goals we have set for ourselves.

Also significant is a student initiative—Clean Energy Revolving Fund (CERF). Supported solely through voluntary donations, CERF will, in the words of its founders, “act as a simple and direct means for funding on-campus renewable projects.” Recently I met with Student Government president Andy MacCracken and Student Government environmental policy director Drew Veysey to discuss CERF and various aspects of its operations. The program has the support of several university offices, and we continue to seek ways to support this worthy endeavor. In the meantime, additional information about CERF is available.

### **Recognition**

We learned in January that we received the Web Marketing Association’s “Best Education Web Site” in their international Web Awards competition. One of the premier awards for Web site recognition, Web Awards recognize the most effective sites in 96 industry sectors and set the standard of excellence for all Web site development. American University is the first higher education institution to take top honors in the industry; previous winners include National Geographic and Disney Online. Sites nominated for the awards represented entries from 47 countries across the globe. According to the association, a Web Award “provides a benchmark by which all Web site development can be judged.”

This week the Office of Merit Awards announced that Rebecca Ernest, a graduate student in the SIS international communication program, and David Courchaine, a Washington College of Law student, have been named 2010–11 Robert Bosch Foundation fellows. They are among 20 fellows chosen from a national applicant pool of more than 300 candidates. Ernest and Courchaine were among five students who applied from AU; a third applicant, Sehar Raziuddin (SPA), was a finalist. By providing young American professionals with firsthand experience in the political, economic, and cultural environment of Germany and the European Union, the fellowship offers the opportunity to complete a high-level professional development program in Germany involving two work stages and three traveling seminars. We appreciate the efforts of professors Bill Davies, Todd Eisenstadt, Craig Hayden, Patrick Jackson, and Stephen Silvia, who served as faculty mentors for our candidates, and the time and expertise invested by the faculty and staff who helped prepare these students through workshops and mock interview panels.

And finally, I hope that everyone saw my recent memo regarding the launch of the 2010 awards process; I encourage AU community members to nominate a deserving student, faculty or staff member, or alumni for these annual honors. More information is available on the University Awards Web site ([www.american.edu/universityawards](http://www.american.edu/universityawards)).

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I will write again near the spring break or earlier if circumstances warrant. In the meantime, all the best for a successful semester.