



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC

CORNELIUS KERWIN  
PRESIDENT

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**TO:** Campus Community  
**FROM:** Neil Kerwin, President  
**SUBJECT:** Midsemester Update

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As we reach the fall semester midpoint, I am pleased to share a number of developments worthy of your attention and consideration.

#### **Current Condition of the University**

Consistent with what I reported at the beginning of the year, AU continues to experience strong enrollment. Summer course registrations exceeded expectations; fall enrollments of freshman, transfer, graduate, and law students are also larger than the targets set during last year's planning and budgeting processes. Nondegree and Washington Semester enrollments are somewhat lower than expected, but on balance the summer and fall experience strongly indicates we are on track to meet the revenue budget for the year. Soon we will arrive at the midpoint in our fiscal year and the time to assess trends in expenditures. While we should remain alert to unanticipated circumstances, all current indications show that we are demonstrating our traditional professionalism in managing expenditures within the ranges set in the budget.

One notable item is our recent retention data. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment reports that our retention rate for freshman to sophomore year stands at 90.5 percent—the highest in AU history. Similarly, we have strengthened sophomore to junior retention from 78.6 percent to 82 percent, our second highest rate ever; and our six-year graduation rate now stands at 77 percent—also the highest in AU history.

These positive indicators occur in a larger economic climate that remains very difficult for many. The unemployment numbers have worsened, and that trend may continue for some time. Our financial aid office reports a 28 percent increase in calls, 12 percent increase in walk-in traffic, and 15 percent increase in appeals over last year. We also received a 6 percent increase in financial aid applications from our currently enrolled students. American University will continue to make a concerted effort to assist our students and families adversely affected by the economic downturn.

We have set aside funding for emergency situations and have dedicated ourselves to assisting students who face unexpected hardships to maintain their matriculation. But we cannot assume from our current condition there is no need for concern. We are moving ahead on

the course set for AU in the strategic plan and budget. Nevertheless, we must remain vigilant and communicate any significant developments as they occur.

### **Strategic Plan**

We are in the first full semester of implementing our strategic plan, *Leadership for a Changing World: American University in the Next Decade*. The implementation report contains a number of objectives that we expect to accomplish during the next two years and which are supported by a budget that explicitly links expenditures to the plan's major goals. The Strategic Plan Measurement Project Team has begun considering methods to measure and report on progress in each area of the plan, and at the November meeting of the Board of Trustees, I will present the first overview of the work that has been accomplished to date. I will ensure that the plan remains a prominent topic of campus discussion and that we understand it is a living document open to change as opportunities and challenges emerge. We will approach its implementation with the same spirit of informed, open discourse that characterized its development. And, as I note later in this letter, over the next two years we should have the sufficient resources to make substantial progress on the plan.

### **Board of Trustees Meeting**

The board met on September 24–25; board chair Gary Abramson has published a summary of the meeting which is posted on the board Web site ([www.american.edu/trustees](http://www.american.edu/trustees)). To recap briefly, on September 24 the trustees heard presentations and engaged in discussions with Molly Broad, president of the American Council on Education (ACE), and John Lippincott, president of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). The discussion ranged from the substantial challenges facing U.S. higher education to strategies for increasing external support in this new economic climate and engaging our students as future alumni. The board also heard a presentation from Dean Claudio Grossman on the status of the Washington College of Law—the third in series of presentations to the trustees by the leadership of major divisions of the university. At previous meetings the trustees heard from Dean William LeoGrande of the School of Public Affairs and from Caryn Mathes, general manager of WAMU 88.5. Prior to the opening of their business meeting (on September 25), 19 trustees divided themselves into five groups and attended classes along with AU students. Special thanks to the students and faculty members who were great hosts for these trustee visits to ECON-100 (Macroeconomics), taught by John Willoughby; GNED-140 (Explorations), taught by Patrick Jackson; SIS-105 (World Politics), taught by Sarah Cleeland Knight; PERF-115 (Theatre: Principles, Plays, and Performance), taught by Gail Humphries Mardirosian; and SOCY-100 (American Society), taught by Andrea Brenner. Following their classroom sessions, the trustees toured Bender Library for an update by librarian Bill Mayer on the recent renovations.

The next meeting of the board will be held November 19 and 20. In addition to the regular agenda, the board will tour the new School of International Service (SIS) building and hear a presentation on SIS by Dean Lou Goodman. Board chair Gary Abramson and I will host the traditional fall town meeting on Thursday, November 19; details on the exact time and location will be forthcoming. Other trustees and members of the AU administration will also attend.

### **Faculty Retreat**

Nearly 300 faculty members attended the annual fall faculty retreat on October 16–17 at the National Conference Center in Lansdowne, VA. Much of the initial discussion focused on the strategic plan and its emphasis on more intensity and impact in all aspects of teaching, research, and service. Faculty members spent time in smaller group sessions, discussing ways to prepare students for the future through innovations in the curriculum; exploring new environments to enhance teaching and learning; identifying ways to make faculty research more meaningful; proposing ideas on ways to support faculty members in achieving the “scholar-teacher” model; and discussing ways to strengthen faculty leadership at AU. At the end of the retreat, faculty facilitators from the sessions summarized the recommendations for me and the provost. The dinner keynote speaker was Freeman A. Hrabowski III, president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, whose talk reaffirmed the elements of the AU strategic plan and the steps that the faculty were discussing. Videos of the presentations and the written summaries from the sessions will be posted on the Web for the campus community to review and discuss.

### **H1N1**

We continue to monitor all H1N1 cases reported to the Student Health Center, which are approximately 35 cases or fewer per week. We have focused considerable attention on the residence halls and plans to maintain the instructional program should the volume affect normal operations. A dedicated H1N1 information page ([www.american.edu/emergency/H1N1-Flu-Information.cfm](http://www.american.edu/emergency/H1N1-Flu-Information.cfm)) has been created to provide up-to-date information and background on the virus; the site can be accessed via the AU home page, Student Health Center site, Emergency Preparedness site, and other prominent links. Other ongoing communications efforts have been implemented, including a weekly update in *Today@AU* of cases reported. Information updates will be ongoing throughout the semester or as long as needed or helpful. In addition to H1N1 preparations, approximately 4,000 seasonal flu shots were given on campus via the program administered in the opening weeks of the semester; special thanks goes to the Student Health Center staff for administering this program and for all their special efforts this semester. Credit also goes to the entire AU community for implementing the advised precautions to inhibit the spread of the flu virus—which includes frequent hand washing, using hand sanitizer, covering the mouth if a sneeze or cough is imminent, and staying home if you feel ill.

### **Marketing and Communications Initiative**

Consistent with the 10th goal in the strategic plan, we are ramping up efforts to communicate more effectively about AU’s distinctive strengths. To that end, the University Marketing Advisory Council has completed its work with Simpson Scarborough Inc. on a research study of attitudes and perceptions of important AU constituencies, including faculty, staff, and students. This work helped to identify important elements of an emergent brand strategy that will be relevant, authentic, and distinctive. Recommended key messages about the university have been shaped from analysis of the data. The research findings have been reviewed with many faculty, staff, and alumni groups in recent weeks; these presentations will continue through the fall so that all interested can review the process and contribute input. Recommendations were shared with the Board of Trustees at their September meeting. We are now preparing to engage a creative firm to bring the strategy to life through an integrated communications and marketing campaign. We expect the creative

concepts to be developed during the fall and refined and tested this winter. A campaign launch is targeted for spring 2010.

### **Development and Alumni**

At the end of September, vice president Tom Minar announced that Raina Lenney was named assistant vice president of alumni relations and Jane Chittick assistant vice president of development. We welcome both to the AU community and look forward to working closely with them. To date, the Campaign for *AnewAU* has raised \$188 million towards the \$200 million goal; we anticipate reaching the goal in 2010. Meanwhile, we continue to increase our outreach to AU alumni; from June into October 2009 we have hosted some 24 events, which is close to the total for all last year. And at the October 22 President's Circle Dinner, we will honor two dedicated AU alumni—trustee Jack Cassell (SOC/BA '77), who will receive the President's Award for his extraordinary service and philanthropy to AU; and Esther Benjamin (SIS/MA '92 and CAS/MA '95), who will receive the Cyrus Ansary Medal, which recognizes one who has made significant contributions to his or her profession, public service, and philanthropy at AU and the broader community. Jack Cassell is president and CEO of the Visual Aids Electronics Corp.; Esther Benjamin is director of global operations for the Peace Corps.

### **Army Corps**

The Army Corps operation has been part of daily life in Spring Valley and the AU campus for 17 years. We continue to work with the Corps and project partners, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, D.C. Department of the Environment, D.C. health and political officials, and our own science advisor, Dr. Paul Chrostowski, to ensure the work continues to be done thoroughly and safely. The university has a Web site ([www1.american.edu/usace](http://www1.american.edu/usace)) devoted to the project which serves as an information resource; this is in addition to the Army Corps' own Web site and extensive information available in the AU archives for anyone seeking background. Regarding the current operation:

- 4825 Glenbrook Road—Work was suspended in August to address the discovery of a small quantity of chemical warfare agent (mustard) while the Army Corps was digging in the backyard of this university-owned house. The Corps has created a new work plan for the site, which includes a “vapor containment structure” under which future digging will occur (and which is similar to what was there previously). When work resumes, “shelter-in-place” protocols will be established for those properties closest to the site. This will not affect the main AU campus.
- 4835 Glenbrook Road (President's House)—The property was returned to American University earlier this year for use as the president's house.
- Public Safety Building—The Corps continues to dig for World War I-era debris (glassware, lab ware, and ceramics) in the ravine behind the building and will do so until the soil is free of debris. Following this, horizontal drilling will be done underneath the building to assess if anything of interest is beneath the structure.
- Other Campus Areas—Based on curiosity aroused by some 1920s-era photos, the Corps dug trenches on the Nebraska Parking Lot and in the Osborn-Beeghly building yard areas but found no World War I-era debris. The Corps did a similar operation in the radio tower area and found some glassware and debris that is being assessed for relevance; they may return to this area after doing a similar trenching operation in the Reeves soccer field area in late December or January.

We were pleased to coordinate with D.C. congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton and host a community meeting on the Army Corps project on October 6. We appreciate and commend Congresswoman Norton's direct involvement and interest in seeing the project through to a safe and thorough conclusion.

### **Athletics**

Fall semester has been a strong one for AU athletics, with three teams—men's soccer, women's soccer, and field hockey—either tied or leading the Patriot League at midseason. Women's volleyball set a school attendance record at their first home matches of the year against cross-town rivals Georgetown and George Washington, when 1,818 fans watched them play. Volleyball coach Barry Goldberg won his 500th match this season, and his team has won 109 and lost only 3 in Patriot League competition over the past eight seasons. Meanwhile, our field hockey program has won 46 consecutive matches against league competition and this year has been nationally ranked as high as number 14. In September, the department introduced a new design for AUeagles.com to make all athletics information more timely, plentiful, and easier to access.

### **Campus Plan**

In support of the objectives outlined in the strategic plan, AU is working to create a new master plan to guide our facilities improvements over the next 10 years. The on-campus process began earlier this year with the creation of the Facilities Planning Project Team, led by university architect Jerry Gager and Washington College of Law professor Andy Popper, who gathered information from the schools, colleges, and programs to create a list of physical space needs to achieve AU's future objectives. The university leadership will assess the potential sites and cost considerations in an effort to establish a priority order, which we will share with the campus as it begins to take shape. An ongoing review also is underway with the surrounding off-campus community, as they also are an integral part of the planning process. The end result will be a new campus plan document filed with the D.C. Zoning Commission in mid-2010 and reviewed before that body in public hearings to be held after the filing.

As the on- and off-campus discussions continue, materials and handouts are posted and available for review at the Web site devoted to the campus planning project ([www.american.edu/finance/fas/Campus-Plan.cfm](http://www.american.edu/finance/fas/Campus-Plan.cfm)).

### **External Reviews**

We recently submitted a "midterm report" with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, which granted AU's 10-year accreditation in 2004. As is typical of these processes, the commission identifies areas for the university to work on, and we file a midterm report on our efforts to address them. Led by director of institutional research and assessment Karen Froslid-Jones, a university-wide team of faculty and staff prepared and submitted our report to the review team, which praised AU's strategic plan that builds on the university's strengths to further its mission; notes its strong fiscal position and the budgeting process that supports the strategic plan; the open and transparent communication and governance processes; and the foundation for continued success in the future. They were particularly complimentary of AU's progress in establishing a meaningful and sustainable process for assessing institutional effectiveness and student learning. We take considerable

satisfaction in the external review team's assessment and await the final comments and closure by the commission in a few weeks.

As you may have read on our Web site or in various press reports, in late September, Standard & Poor's Rating Services raised its long term and underlying ratings from A to A+ for American University, based on AU's "consistently strong operating results." Additional factors included our strong financial performance in FY09, continued enrollment growth, and a low debt-service burden. In addition, Moody's Investors Service reaffirmed our A-2 rating and stable outlook—crediting AU's proactive financial management for the optimistic rating during these challenging economic times. Special thanks go to vice president of finance and treasurer Don Myers and his team for their substantial efforts in this university achievement.

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Much work remains to bring our individual and collective work for the semester to successful conclusions. I will report again just prior to the start of the final examination period and before, if developments merit. In the meantime, all the best.