

UNIVERSITY OF BALAMAND

5-10 Minutes Speech

ON

ACADEMIC QUALITY ADVANCEMENT
@ UOB

PREPARED FOR:

Tempus Project Launching

“Towards a Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency”

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Your Excellencies, Dear Partners, Students, and Colleagues;

Let me begin by pointing out Balamand's view on "Academic Quality":

- Quality matters! It is what we want to be known for.
- Quality is the core business of this University.
- Quality is the job of everyone.
- Quality can not be done one time and forgotten about. It must be sustained!
- Quality is a collective and a team effort.
- Quality is supported from the top.
- Quality processes must be lived and practiced daily.

Quality assurance/advancement is a culture based on accountability and continuous improvement. Processes and procedures need to be put in place in a culture that is committed to such concepts. Therefore, practicing and living quality are instrumental to its success in producing desired results. Our major goal at the University of Balamand is the creation of a culture that is founded on continuous improvement.

A few years ago, Balamand engaged its constituents and proposed the creation of three major entities: (1) Academic Quality Assurance/Advancement Team, (2) Office of Evaluation and Measurement, and (3) Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning. All three entities are centered around continuous improvement and around quality.

ACADEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE & ADVANCEMENT TEAM (AQAT)

The Academic Quality Assurance & Advancement Team is made up of 21 pre-screened representatives from programs at the various UOB Faculties. These representatives are entrusted with the following roles and responsibilities:

1. Plan and implement a continuous improvement process toward meeting International QA and Accreditation Standards
2. Assist in assessing the extent of the continuous improvement implementation process
3. Scrutinize the evidence that demonstrate academic quality.
4. Monitor internally the progress of QA initiatives' implementation.
5. Assist in setting internal metrics and standards that are consistent with benchmarks and external requirements of QA and accreditation.
6. Hold training seminars and workshops on executing QA and accreditation initiatives.
7. Provide guidance and support to their respective Faculties and academic programs to undergo an internal review/self-study.
8. Communicate updates to their programs on the requirements of external QA and Accreditation agencies and boards, and
9. Communicate, promote and display success stories on the implementation of QA initiatives.

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING & LEARNING (CETL)

On the other hand, the mission of the CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING & LEARNING is to encourage professors, departments, and Faculties to strive for excellence in teaching and learning by providing support, training, guidance, and necessary resources for assessment and professional development. Its vision is to foster an environment in which high academic quality and effective teaching and learning processes are achieved, recognized and rewarded.

OFFICE OF MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION (OME)

The Office of Measurement and Evaluation supports the measurement, assessment, and evaluation of UOB's learning and teaching activities and handles activities related to institutional effectiveness (e.g., governance, QA and accreditation). This office conducts:

- **Institutional Assessment**
- *Instructional & Outcomes Assessment & Evaluation*
- *Educational Measurement Research*
- **Workshops & Training on Assessment & Evaluation**

The information and data resulting from these services guide the institution in making sound and informed decisions and also in allocating resources to achieve aspired goals.

Areas of Quality Initiatives:

Balamand has identified seven areas to promote the notion of “Quality” and to spread awareness on Quality Assurance and Advancement:

1. **Faculty Training and Capacity Building**
2. **Consistency Across the University on Academic Quality Assurance**
3. **Students’ Involvement:** Students are affected the most by QA initiatives. The concept of Learning Outcomes works well in terms of transparency of expectations and accountability of the whole system. Students are motivated to work towards achieving a goal once that goal has been identified.
4. **Conferences:** Engage the university community in holding and contributing to national and international conferences on quality assurance.
5. **Rewards and Recognition System:** Best practices and the commitment and participation of faculty members in QA initiatives need to be acknowledged and recognized.
6. **Communication Platform for Sharing Experiences:** A web site, an e-mail, a social media account, a blog, a chat room, etc. are necessary nowadays for awareness and engagement purposes.
7. **Teaching/Learning Resources.**

The fruits of our labor have contributed to the creation of an outcomes-based assessment culture and produced a number of documents, for example:

1. Course Notebooks and Files
2. Automated Student Evaluation Forms
3. Report on Grading Systems and Schemes

4. Report on Procedures for Conducting an Internal Academic Review Process
5. New Policy on Academic Integrity and Copyright Policies
6. Campaign for Combating Plagiarism.
7. Promotion Criteria for faculty members of Professorial Ranks
8. Workshops on Assessment & Evaluation

I would like to also share with you that between 2003 and 2008, three UOB programs have volunteered to be “examined” by a UNDP project on Academic Quality Assessment in Arab Countries. The three programs are Business Administration (2003), Education (2006), and Mechanical Engineering (2008). A number of recommendations have been communicated to these programs to drive continuous process improvement. These examinations had an additional goal of capacity building and thus more faculty members at UOB have become evaluators and programs’ assessors themselves. This is in addition to getting recognized by UNDP as having very good programs.

V. The Road Ahead

In summary, instating quality-based measures is founded on healthy accountability and professional responsibility. Thus, in our quest to create a genuine Quality Assurance culture, much needs to be done to respond to the needs of constituents. We must also be context-aware and not become copy-cats as to find ourselves boxed up within rigid boundaries, even if such practices are successful elsewhere in the world. We must encourage creativity and innovation in providing our students with a great learning experience, featuring our unique attributes and living up to our stated mission. Constructive efforts, built around continuous improvement, tend to be a fertile ground for advancement and ultimate international recognition and accreditation.