

AUB STUDENT SPENDING SURVEY 2007

Introduction

One of the great advantages of studying at AUB is its location in Beirut, a lively, historic and cosmopolitan city. The 'AUB experience' is rarely limited to the university's stimulating classrooms and spectacular campus, but extends to many other of the city's cultural and leisure destinations. Beirut as a city has a great influence on AUB student life. And so too, AUB students have an effect on Beirut. Recognizing that AUB students have considerable 'spending power,' one of the first questions asked by President Waterbury's Neighborhood Initiative team was: where do AUB students live? And that was quickly followed by: where do they spend their money?

Early in the spring semester 2007, Dr. Moueen Salameh AUB Registrar conducted an on-line survey of students to answer the first question – where students were living during term time – and how they commute to AUB, if living off campus. The general findings of that survey may be found on this website, and more detailed analyses are being conducted by AUB's Transport Research Unit.

The Student Spending Survey also asked students about where they live and how they get to AUB, but the focus of the survey is on basic spending patterns: how much students spend on accommodation, meals, shopping, services, and leisure and entertainment, and whether they are spending their money in neighborhood enterprises, or beyond. The survey ended with two open-ended questions: how they would spend an extra 500,000LL a month, and, what would they like to see in the neighborhood that does not now exist. Answers to these questions are reported below.

The survey was planned, carried out and analyzed through the collaborative effort of Caroline Chalouhi, Office of Students Affairs; Monia Hamzeh, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment; Elie Kahale and Nada Sbaiti of Computer Networking Services; and Cynthia Myntti of the Neighborhood Initiative, President's Office.

Methods and sample

Preparation for the survey included a focus group discussion, where students were invited to provide feedback on a draft questionnaire and to suggest other questions for inclusion. Once the questionnaire was designed for on-line use, an on-line pretest was organized, with student participants highlighting any difficulties they had answering the survey. On average the questionnaire took 15 minutes to complete.

On Monday 23 April 2007 Dean Kisirwani sent an e-mail inviting all students enrolled at AUB for spring semester to participate in the survey. His message contained a link which would take the respondent directly to the survey, after authenticating his or her student ID details. (Each student could complete only one survey). The AUB website homepage also publicized the survey and included a direct link to the questionnaire for students.

When it was closed on 14 May, 657 students had completed the survey, representing almost ten per cent of the students enrolled in the spring term 2007 at AUB.

Of the 657 who responded to the survey, 135 (20.5%) reported to be living on campus and 522 (79.5%) off-campus. Of the 522 off-campus respondents, 416 reported to be living with family. The large majority of respondents (78%) reported to be Lebanese citizens, with other respondents citizens of the USA, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Just over half (51.6%) of the respondents were male; 48.4% were female. A full 85% of the respondents were undergraduates, with the rest (15%) graduate students.

It should be noted that the small number of respondents and voluntary nature of the survey do not provide a statistically representative sample. Therefore generalizations of these findings to AUB students at large cannot and should not be made. That said, these results do offer interesting insights into the spending patterns of those students who responded, and they provide information to serve as the basis of future research.

Main findings

Overall budgets

- While 60 per cent of respondents are completely dependent on their parents for their monthly budget, 34 per cent reported to be working to contribute at least a portion of their monthly needs.
- A full 68 per cent of respondents report paying nothing for accommodation. Of those who do pay for accommodation, the median cost is \$277 per month. (Approximately 10% of those students living with family reported paying something for their accommodation).
- Not counting rent, the median monthly budget controlled by the student is \$200, with students living on their own spending more than the others in general, and especially on groceries and entertainment.
- After accommodation and food, next biggest expenditure is mobile phones, with median monthly expenditure \$43.

What students buy most *in* the Hamra/Bliss Street neighborhood:

- snacks
- books, newspapers, and school supplies
- photocopying services

What students buy most *outside* the Hamra/Bliss Street neighborhood:

- electronics equipment
- groceries
- toiletries
- clothes
- accessories and jewelry
- gifts
- beauty/barber services

Meals: Respondents favor Bliss Street/Hamra for snacks and lunch over the AUB cafeteria. And they go outside the neighborhood for nice meals and entertainment.

Parking: Approximately 27 per cent of survey respondents living off campus drive their own car to campus, and the majority (almost 77 per cent) pay to park in local car parks. Median daily expenditure is 3,000LL, and the favored car park is on Bliss Street. The remaining students park on the Corniche or on the streets surrounding

AUB. And a small number use the valet parking service of a restaurant opposite the AUB Main Gate.

Cultural events such as concerts or theatre: Just under 10 per cent of respondents stay in the neighborhood for cultural events, and the rest are divided between activities on campus and those outside Hamra.

What respondents would spend an extra 500,000LL on, in decreasing order of importance:

- o they would save it
- o general lifestyle improvements
- o more shopping, general
- o more entertainment
- o new clothes

Worth noting: 17 respondents reported that they would pay it toward AUB tuition; 12 responded that they would use the money to help their families; and 11 would give the extra to charity.

What would respondents like to see in the neighborhood that does not now exist?

- o cinemas
- o cafes, bookstores and libraries where it is possible to sit quietly and study
- o cheaper parking
- o more sports facilities
- o healthier eating options

Implications

Those who know AUB's neighborhood before 1975 might be surprised that today's students do not find cinemas or nice restaurants near campus, and that they now go elsewhere in Beirut for cultural activities, and much of their shopping and entertainment. Bliss Street is now dominated by fast-food eateries.

Clearly some of the student spending takes place near where students live, and most AUB students live with family members across municipal Beirut and its suburbs. Even so, there appears to be a market for more diverse offerings than currently exist in the neighborhood near AUB, judging from how students 'vote with their feet' and what they say they would like near the university. Student spending is an important resource for the neighborhood, and more entrepreneurs should take note.