

AUB UNIVERSITY FOR SENIORS

جامعة الكيلو

Feasibility Study

First Phases

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon: The demographic transition

Over the past three decades, declines in fertility and mortality in Lebanon have created a compressed demographic transition, a rapid increase in life expectancy and a larger share of older adults. Among the Arab countries, Lebanon has by far the highest percentage of persons aged 65 years and over (7.4%), and this is projected to increase to an estimated 10 per cent by 2025. The proportion of older adults in the Lebanese population is also increasing due to the out-migration of working-age adults who opt to build their careers and establish their families in more stable environments. In comparatively well-educated districts such as Ras Beirut, the departure of the young has created an apparently 'graying' neighborhood.

New visions of old age needed

Despite traditional cultural mores that give them respect, older Lebanese are often portrayed as frail and dependent. Indeed, the common Arabic words for older people or old age – *musinn*, *'ajouz*, *khitiar*, *sin al-y'as* - all have negative connotations.

Yet older people are a tremendous resource in their society. They possess precious historical and cultural memory in a rapidly changing world. Many remain energetic and healthy, and have valuable life and professional experience to share. They also have more time than their younger counterparts, who at their prime struggle to balance the dual obligations of work and family.

Inspirations from around the world

In recent years advanced industrial countries have begun to see their growing older populations as an important social force and resource. Instead of viewing this age group as categorically needy, or as passive recipients of social and medical services, older people are increasingly acknowledged "in the active voice" as workers, volunteers, and activists, transmitting their expertise, knowledge and wisdom to the younger generations and to their societies at large.

The past two decades have witnessed an explosion in inspiring initiatives for, and often led by, older people. In North America, for example, many universities have organized special programs to provide senior citizens new opportunities for learning in a friendly environment. Called by various names – Seniors Colleges, Institutes for Learning in Retirement, Life Long Learning programs – these programs typically are membership-based, volunteer-run and follow the peer-learning model, offering a range of non-credit study groups, lectures and other educational and cultural programs. In Europe, Universities of the Third Age have emerged offering similar opportunities but generally not formally connected to academic institutions.

OUR CONCEPT

Our vision is a program to provide older adults with educational, creative and leisure opportunities in a sociable environment. It would be a “university” in the original sense of the word: a community of people engaged in learning from one another. Encouraging “learning for the pleasure of learning” is its main objective, but the program would also provide older people with opportunities to be socially useful and socially connected.

OUR LEARNING PROCESS

Building on the perspective that sees older people “in the active voice,” and recognizing their increasing numbers in Lebanon, a small group at AUB* began in 2008 to explore the feasibility of organizing something for and with older people in Beirut.

Focus group discussions

Between June 2008 and March 2009 the team organized five focus group discussions to solicit reactions to and advice on our idea. The first discussion, over tea at the home of Dr. Sibai, brought together colleagues and friends interested in the subject of healthy aging. Participants in this discussion later volunteered to recruit their own friends for subsequent meetings, which were held in College Hall on the AUB campus. All meetings followed the same discussion guide, and were conducted in a mix of Arabic and English (see Appendices 1 and 2 for the concept paper and the discussion guide that were distributed). Nearly 50 persons participated in this phase of the feasibility study. Many resided in Ras Beirut, and not all had previous connections to AUB.

Survey of alumni

The focus group discussions provided us with valuable feedback, and raised questions and comments that were not thought of. These concerns were later presented to a broader audience in order to get quantitative information to guide our program. Working with the AUB’s Alumni Relations Office and the Computing and Networking Services, the team developed

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a survey for university alumni over 55 years of age (who had graduated before 1975). The survey was formulated in two versions; an on-line version and a paper version (see Appendix 3).

The on-line survey was sent to 3693 alumni for whom we had e-mail addresses. A total of 304 responded, the majority of whom indicated that they live in western Beirut, and in particular in the neighborhood of AUB.

Local alumni who did not have an e-mail address and for whom we had a postal address were sent a paper version of the questionnaire and an addressed envelope with return postage. Of the 875 questionnaires sent, only 18 responded.

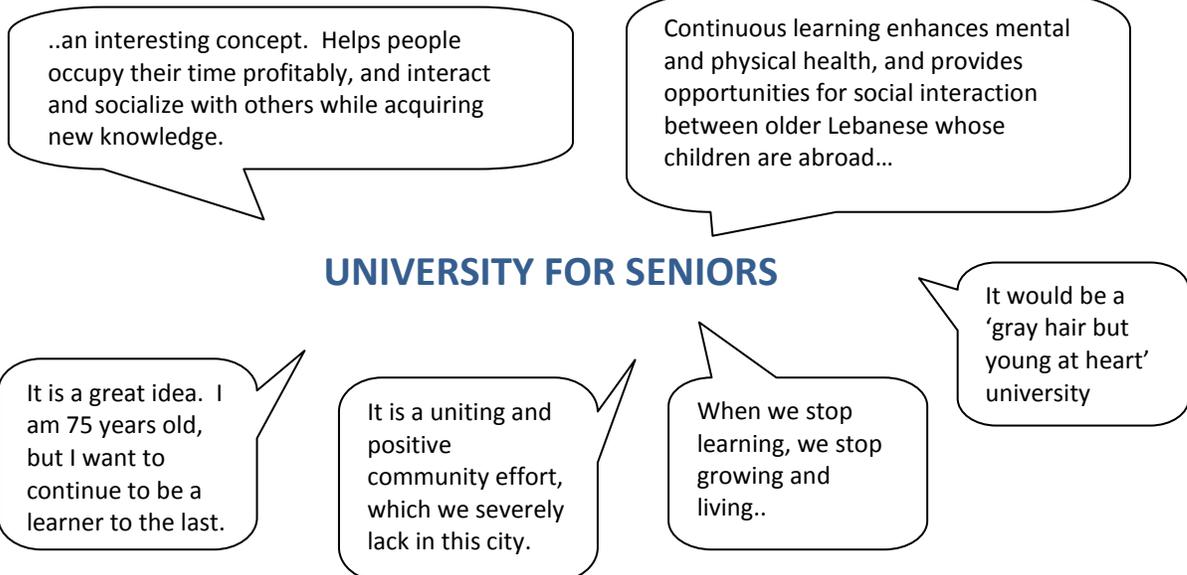
Questionnaire to university-based programs

The final phase of our learning process was a review of similar programs in other countries. Some information was also gathered from websites. Four universities* responded to a detailed questionnaire about the history, governance, financing and functioning of their programs. (See Appendix 4 for the questionnaire – Responses available on request).

MAIN FINDINGS

General appeal of the idea

More than two thirds of the respondents living in Beirut found the idea of a University for Seniors to be highly appealing; and most of the remaining said that they would like to know more about it. The following quotes offer a selection of their responses.



* Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement (USA); University of Minnesota-Duluth University for Seniors (USA); McGill Institute for Learning in Retirement (Canada); Seniors College of Prince Edward Island (Canada)

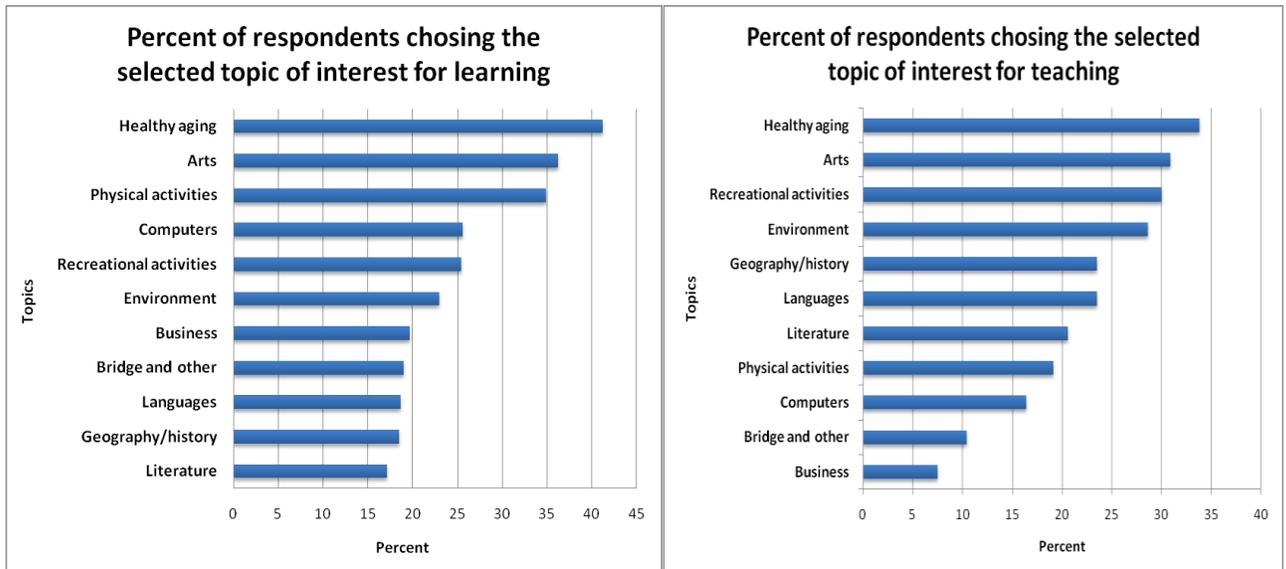
Preferred names in English and Arabic

We sought English and Arabic names for the program that are both dignified and welcoming. Our respondents generally liked ‘University for Seniors’ in English and ‘Jamia’t Kibaruna’ in Arabic. One respondent, however, a Professor of Arabic at AUB, advised that “Jamia’t Al-Kibar” is grammatically more correct, and hence, this is our preference for the Arabic name.

Topics of interest

Respondents were willing to play both roles: as learners and study group leaders. The survey asked them to identify which three topics they would most like to study or to teach. The chart below gives an indication of their preferred topics. Overall, ‘healthy aging’ and ‘arts’ topped the list as topics for both learning and teaching.

“... When you grow older and retirement age approaches you start wondering “Where am I?” I have so many things yet I want to *learn*, and a vast experience I want to *share* with others ...”



Logistical questions

In general, the majority of survey respondents favored one-to-two months terms and two 1 ½ hour sessions per week. Women were more likely to prefer the morning sessions, whereas men the afternoon ones.

Logistics		Per cent
Term Length	One month	36.3
	two months	35.5
	Three months	28.2
Number of sessions per week	One session	41.5
	Two sessions	58.5
Length of each session	One hour	34.1
	One and a half hour	43.9
	two hours	22.0
Time of course	Morning (9-11 am)	29.8
	Noon (12-2 pm)	16.9
	Afternoon (4-6 pm)	29.0
	Evening (6-8 pm)	24.2

Finances

One of the most critical questions about the program is how it will be financed. Even if much of the work is carried out by volunteers, the program will have some real costs such as paid staff, and modest operating and publicity costs. In other programs membership fees are paid annually or more frequently and usually allow the member to participate in as many activities as they would like. At McGill, for example, the annual membership fees of \$255 cover 100% of the program operating costs. At Harvard, the annual membership fees of \$800 cover 70% of the program operating costs.

Membership fees, as opposed to payment by activity or course, are a new concept in a university setting in Lebanon, and yet strongly supported by the experience of the other programs we studied. Membership fees emphasize the idea that one is joining a community rather than paying for a product.

In our survey, we asked how much people would be willing to pay yearly for participation in such a program. Their responses ranged in the majority between 100,000 LL and 3,000,000 LL annually. A full 50% were willing to pay more than 500,000 LL annually.

Connections across generations desirable

Participants in the focus group discussions stressed the persistent need for older people to feel useful and needed. A number expressed discomfort that a program expressly for older people might 'ghettoize' and even devalue them. Still others said what a pleasure it would be to be back on campus at AUB and among the youthful student body.

In fact, the seniors programs at other universities have developed strong connections to the regular student body. At Harvard, seniors support undergraduates on their Green Initiatives and join undergraduate drama societies by performing alongside younger actors. In Minnesota, the Sharing Across Generations (SAGE) program provides many opportunities for seniors to help regular university students. This is achieved by: participating in medical and pharmaceutical research projects of students; conducting practice or mock job interviews for graduating students; and providing welcome programs for international students. At McGill, the seniors teach foreign students English, and award a prize to the best social work research involving older adults.

The University for Seniors is different from traditional Continuing Education, but belongs under its umbrella

The University for Seniors shares with Continuing Education the commitment to lifelong learning. Therefore its logical home in the university would be AUB's Center for Continuing Education, and it would complement the existing programs and courses offered.

Traditional Continuing Education programs provide adult learners with valuable opportunities for personal and professional development. AUB, LAU and St. Joseph University all offer a wide variety of courses under the rubric of Continuing Education. The Université pour Tous at St. Joseph University is a particularly large and well-known program in Beirut. Continuing Education typically relies on paid lecturers and exams and other methods of evaluating students, and often leads to professional diplomas. Students pay fees and receive, in return, an educational 'product.'

However, university for seniors-like programs highlight a different approach in four main areas. Firstly, peer-learning is the guiding principle; older people share what they know and learn from each other. Secondly, there are no professional or paid teachers. Seniors with a passion for a certain subject volunteer to facilitate the study group. Thirdly, membership fees, rather than tuition paid on a course-by-course basis cover the cost of the program at least partially. This reinforces the idea that one is joining a group and is part of the community of the University for Seniors. Finally, member-volunteers govern the program through elected offices and committee participation.

NEXT STEPS

1. Recruit two volunteer committees: content and logistics
2. Finalize logistical arrangements with the AUB Continuing Education Center/Regional External Programs
3. Spring 2010: Organize pilot study group
4. Summer 2010: Hire a director
5. Fall 2010: Launch the program

".. It will give me an opportunity to enrich my knowledge, when are you starting?..."

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Concept Paper

Jamia't al-Kibar
AUB UNIVERSITY FOR SENIORS
A feasibility study proposal

Introduction

Over the past three decades declines in fertility and mortality in Lebanon have created a compressed demographic transition and a rapid increase in life expectancy. Recent projections suggest that those over 65 years of age will constitute more than 10 percent of the population by the year 2025. The proportion of older adults in the Lebanese population may well increase for another reason: the proportions of working-age adults are declining from the emigration spurred by Lebanon's unstable political and economic conditions.

Despite their increasing importance in the Lebanese population and traditional cultural mores that give older people respect, negative stereotypes increasingly portray elders as frail and dependent. Indeed, the common Arabic words for older people or old age – musinn, 'ajouz, sin al-y'as - all have negative connotations.

Yet older people are a tremendous resource in Lebanese society. They possess precious historical and cultural memory in a rapidly changing world. Many remain energetic and healthy, and have valuable life and professional experience to share. They also have more time than their younger counterparts, who at their prime struggle to balance often impossible obligations of work and family.

In recent years advanced industrial societies have begun to see their burgeoning elderly populations as an important social force and resource. Instead of viewing this age group as categorically needy or as passive recipients of social and medical services, older people are increasingly acknowledged "in the active voice": as workers, volunteers, activists, that is, as active contributors to society.

Building on the perspective that sees older people "in the active voice," and recognizing their increasing numbers in Lebanon, we propose the establishment of a new outreach program for AUB: Jamia't Kibaruna or University for Seniors. The idea is simple: older people teach courses to their peers, and in so doing, create new opportunities to give, to learn and to widen their ever shrinking social world.

AUB's University for Seniors would offer a totally new angle on the concept of life-long learning, and would represent the coming together of the university's Continuing Education Center, its Neighborhood Initiative, and faculty in Health Sciences and Medicine interested in successful aging. The University for Seniors would provide intellectual and cultural stimulation and growth of older persons, reduce isolation and loneliness, and promote empowerment and inclusion.

The proposal

There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that AUB's own neighborhood has a considerable population of elderly residents. Some are active and visible at university, committees, seminars, and concerts, others less visible and isolated. We propose here a modest feasibility study to assess whether there would be sufficient interest in such a program, and how it might work. Among the questions we would explore:

Precedents: What are the most important lessons from North American elder learning programs, and from European universities of the Third Age? What can be learned from local experiments, such as in the community service programs of IC or ACS?

Partners: Are there any obvious local institutional partners for such a program?

Reaching the right audience: What are the most effective means of reaching older people in the AUB neighborhood, and in Beirut more generally?

Content: What sorts of courses and activities would be in greatest demand?

Logistics: How would the program work? (Who would be selected to teach, what topics, and would they be paid? Would 'students' pay fees? Would the program follow university terms? What would be the language of instruction? When and where would the courses be held?)

Management: How would the program be administered, and where would be the optimal location for the program within AUB?

Business plan: What would it take to make the University for Seniors a self-supporting initiative?

The feasibility study would be led by Professor Abla Sibai, Faculty of Health Sciences. For the past ten years Dr. Sibai's research interests and service activities have focused on the health and well-being of older persons; she is currently spearheading a national taskforce for the establishment of a centre for research and development on aging in Lebanon.

Dr. Sibai would form a small interfaculty team to guide the proposed feasibility study. The team would gather information through key informant interviews and group discussions with the AUB alumni association, the Women's League, the AUBMC Women's Auxiliary, professors emeriti and other local resource persons. The Neighborhood Initiative would support the feasibility study from its Ford Foundation/ Commissioned Research fund.

January 31, 2008

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Appendix 2: Discussion guide for focus group discussion

AUB UNIVERSITY FOR SENIORS

Feasibility study

Winter 2009

Discussion Guide

1. Do you have any comments on the concept paper?

2. What do you think about the general idea of the University for Seniors: older people teaching and learning among their peers.

3. Participants: Who are likely participants?

4. Content: Thinking about your own interests, what sorts of courses and activities would be of most interest?

5. Connecting: What would be the most effective ways to reach likely participants?

6. Logistics:
 - ⇒ Should there be eligibility criteria?
 - ⇒ How should 'learners' pay? (by the course, through yearly membership?)
 - ⇒ How long should courses last?
 - ⇒ What should be the language of instruction?

7. Potential partners and sponsors: Are there any obvious local institutions and individuals that should be involved?

8. Other questions or suggestions?

Appendix 3: Survey of alumni

University for Seniors

Jamia't Kibaruna

جامعة كيارونا

Dear Alumnus/Alumna of AUB,

We are currently conducting a feasibility study for a new initiative at AUB, the "University for Seniors". The program would provide older adults with educational, creative and leisure opportunities in a sociable environment. It would be a "university" in the original sense of the word: a community of people engaged in learning from one another. Encouraging "learning for the pleasure of learning" is its main objective, but the program would also provide older people with opportunities to be socially useful and socially connected.

As part of our feasibility study, we are sending this survey to local alumni. It is important for us to hear your views on whether the idea would be relevant and appreciated, and your comments on specific content and logistical issues.

We would be grateful if you would take a few minutes of your time to participate in our survey. We have enclosed a stamped, addressed envelope for your use in returning the survey to us through the Lebanese post. We appreciate having your responses by Monday July 13, 2009.

Thank you and best wishes,

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The 'University for Seniors' builds on a simple idea: older people participate in activities as teachers and as learners. Any older person interested in offering a course may propose it, and interested learners may enroll. Courses would entail no exams, grades or certificates, stressing instead the pleasure of learning with and from peers.

1. Is the idea of the "University for Seniors" appealing to you?

1. Highly appealing
2. Moderately appealing
3. Need to know more about it
4. Not appealing, Can you provide a reason: _____
_____ (Go to question 13)

2. If such courses were to be offered at AUB, would you like to be involved as a learner/student?

1. Yes
2. No.....(Go to question 4)

3. Circle three subjects that would you be most interested in as a learner/student

1. Healthy aging: physical/mental health, nutrition, use of vitamins
2. Physical activity: exercise, swimming, yoga, ballroom/ dabke dancing
3. Arts: music/opera appreciation, painting, photography
4. Literature: creative writing, or book clubs
5. Languages
6. Geography and History
7. Environment
8. Business: investment for seniors, planning your retirement
9. Computers: word processing, internet search, e-mail, Skype, facebook
10. Recreational activities: gardening, cooking, traveling
11. Games: Chess, bridge, billiards, scrabble, table tennis
12. Others: specify _____

4. If such courses were to be offered at AUB, would you like to be involved as a teacher/tutor?

1. Yes
2. No.....(Go to question 6)

5. Circle three subjects that would you be most interested in as a teacher/tutor

1. Healthy aging: physical/mental health, nutrition, use of vitamins
2. Physical activity: exercise, swimming, yoga, ballroom/ dabke dancing
3. Arts: music/opera appreciation, painting, photography
4. Literature: creative writing, or book clubs

5. Languages
6. Geography and History
7. Environment
8. Business: investment for seniors, planning your retirement
9. Computers: word processing, internet search, e-mail, Skype, facebook
10. Recreational activities: gardening, cooking, traveling
11. Games: Chess, bridge, billiards, scrabble, table tennis
12. Others: specify _____

6. In which language would you prefer to have these courses?

1. Arabic
2. English
3. No preference

7. In your opinion, what would be the optimal length of each course?

1. One month
2. Two months
3. Three months

8. Ideally, how many times should the class meet per week?

1. Once
2. Twice

9. In your opinion, what would be the optimal length of each session?

1. One hour
2. One hour and a half
3. Two hours

10. If you were to participate in these courses, what is the most convenient time for you?

1. Morning (9-11 am)
2. Noon (12- 2 pm)
3. Afternoon (4-6 pm)
4. Evening (6-8 pm)

11. In your opinion, what do you think would be the best way to cover the cost of the program?

1. Membership fee only, where members can register as many courses as they would like
2. By-course only
3. Membership fee and then by-course

12. What would be the total cost you will be willing to spend participating in “University for Seniors” on a yearly basis

|__| |__| |__| , 000 L.L

13. Would cost limit your interest in the “University for Seniors” initiative?

1. Yes
2. No

14. Would transportation obstacles limit your interest in the “University for Seniors” initiative?

1. Yes
2. No

15. Would availability of time limit your interest in the “University for Seniors” initiative?

1. Yes
2. No

16. Would physical health limit your interest in the “University for Seniors” initiative?

1. Yes
2. No

17. Do you have any other reason that would limit your interest in the “University for Seniors” initiative?

1. Yes, Please specify: _____
2. No

18. We have tentatively chosen the name “University for Seniors” in English, what do you think of it?

1. Appealing
2. Not appealing, I have a better Idea: _____

19. We have tentatively chosen the name “جامعة كبارنا” in Arabic, what do you think of it?

1. Appealing
2. Not appealing, I have a better Idea: _____

20. Please feel free to add any question/comment about the idea for “University for Seniors”

Now, we would like to ask you few personal questions

21. Age: _____ years

22. Gender:

1. Male
2. Female

23. Highest degree obtained:

1. Bachelor Degree
2. Master Degree
3. Doctorate Degree
4. Completed at least two semesters but with no degree

24. Major of your highest degree:

25. Year of graduation from AUB:

1. Class of 19 |__| |__|
2. Not applicable

26. Current work status:

1. Working part-time
2. Working full-time
3. Not working or retired

27. Please specify your neighborhood



- | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Port | 22 | Tallet al-Khayat, Wata | 43 | Khaldeh |
| 2 | Mar Mikhael, Khodr | 23 | UNESCO, Ramlet al-Baida | 44 | Choueifat |
| 3 | Geitawi, Karm el-Zeitoun | 24 | Mar Elias, Dar Mouallimeen | 45 | Deir Koubel |
| 4 | Gemmayzeh, Saifi, Remeil | 25 | Bourj Hammoud (North), Dora | 46 | Dbayeh, Aoukar, Haret Bellane |
| 5 | Nasra, Furn al-Hayek | 26 | Bourj Hammoud (South), Nabaa | 47 | Rabieh, Raboueh, Ain Aar |
| 6 | Achrafieh, Mar Mitr | 27 | Sin el-Fil | 48 | Naccache, Tellel Srour |
| 7 | Sioufi, Aadlieh, Hotel Dieu | 28 | Jisr al-Bacha | 49 | Antelias, Haret Gharouar |
| 8 | Ras al-Nabaa, Mathaf | 29 | Furn al-Chebbak, Ain al-Roummaneh | 50 | Jal al-Deeb, Zalka, Deir Sa |
| 9 | Horsh, Qasqas, Chatila | 30 | Chiah | 51 | Bsalim, Nabay, Baikout |
| 10 | Tareek al-Jdideh, Fakhani | 31 | Ghobeiry, Haret Hreik | 52 | Roumieh |

11	Mazraa, Bourj Abi Haidar	32	Jnah, Bir Hassan	53	Ain Saade, Fanar
12	Basta Faouka, Basta Tahta	33	Ouzai	54	Mansourieh, Deychounie
13	Baladieh, Maarad, Riad al-Solh	34	Bourj Brajneeh	55	Jamhour Kahale, Bsous
14	Serail, Minet al-Hosn	35	Bouchrieh	56	Wadi Chahrour, Bdadour
15	Ain Mreisseh, al-Zarif	36	Jdeideh, Sid Bouchrieh	57	Ain Anoub, Bsaba
16	Hamra	37	Dekwaneh, Mkalles	58	Bchamoun, Sarahmoul
17	AUB/IC campuses	38	Hazmieh, Fayadyeh, Baabda	59	Yanar
18	Manara, Jal al-Bahr	39	Haddath, Laylakeh	60	Aramoun
19	Rawcheh, Qoreitem	40	KfarChima, BeitChay	61	Daouha, Naameh
20	Snoubra, Munla	41	Hay el-Sellom	62	Damour, Mechref
21	Moussaitbeh, Zaidanieh	42	Airport	63	Baaourta, Dakkoun

28. Would like to be involved in future planning meetings for the “University of Seniors”?

1. Yes
2. No

Contact Details:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our Survey.

Appendix 4: Questionnaire to other programs

American University of Beirut
Survey of University for Senior programs at other universities

Name:

Position:

Institution and Address:

E-mail contact:

1. What is the full name of your program and why did you choose it?
2. What is your stated mission?
3. How old is the program?
4. What was the main impetus behind the launching of the program? Who was its champion?
5. Where does the program sit institutionally, and why?
6. Has the program changed over the years?
7. What activities are offered (term-length courses, short term courses, lectures, trips, community service activities, other?)
8. Who is eligible to participate?
9. Do you find significant differences in interests and capacities between your younger-old and older-old members?
10. Do they pay to participate, and if so, on what basis (membership fee, per activity?). What are the fee levels? Was it this way from the beginning?
11. Is the program self-supporting or does it require extra funding? (if so, from which source)
12. How is the program administered (paid staff)?
13. What is the administrator's job description? (please attach)

14. How is the program governed? (do members participate in governance on a voluntary basis?)
15. Describe the sequence of events in determining which courses are offered? (Who determines which subjects are taught, how does registration work?)
16. What is the normal workload expected of participants in courses?
17. Are teachers/study group leaders paid or volunteer?
18. How do you assure quality of course offerings?
19. Do you have any programs that link seniors to younger people?
20. Are participants in your programs given other privileges at the university, or elsewhere (library, transport, parking, etc)
21. Which University for Senior – like programs, in your view, are the most highly regarded in the US or Canada? Where have you looked for models?

Thank you for sharing your experience!