

**Report to the AUBG Board of Trustees**  
**David R. Evans, President**  
**October, 2021**

**Introduction:** The first month of the semester has mainly gone well. Our enrollment is right on the budget target, and we have considerably more students in the residence halls than were budgeted, which is helpful. Our budgeted FOREX rate of 1.6 BGN:\$1 is considerably below the current rate of 1.69 BGN:\$1, which also provides some budgetary relief, so on the financial side we are doing well. Startup activities were successful and positive (please see Dean of Students Sabina Wien's report for details), and we continue to learn lessons about blending virtual and in-person events and programs in a way that is both efficient and positive for the community. So far, the hybrid semester is working as planned, and smaller classes for which social distancing can be accommodated without hybrid delivery are being taught face-to-face in the traditional way.

**COVID and How We're Trying to Contain It:** It is a real pleasure to have the majority of our students back on campus after a very bleak period between November, 2020, and the end of the semester last spring, when there were very few in residence and essentially no public activities. We have implemented a variety of restrictions and procedures to allow maximum reasonable campus activities while still observing both Ministry of Health directives and our own precautionary policies. Most students have been more than cooperative and helpful in following these procedures, though a small minority have been recalcitrant, and we are slowly stepping up enforcement and penalties for not following the standards.

We continue to be concerned about how to prevent and, failing that, manage any significant outbreaks of COVID infections on campus. Thus far we have been able to control the situation successfully, and there have been very few cases on campus and, so far, little or no evidence of community transmission. However, as noted in Dean Wien's report and elsewhere, there has been some slacking off among certain members of our community who have become less diligent in following safety precautions. This situation mirrors the overall circumstances in Bulgaria, where observance of COVID precautions has never been particularly good. Thus, the national situation has worsened, which poses follow-on risks to AUBG in particular. We are especially concerned that we have limited capacity for quarantine on campus, and if any community spread occurs, we will be hard-pressed to provide sufficient safe space, particularly if a substantial portion of international students are involved. (In general, we can send Bulgarian students to their homes to quarantine.) Several of our vaccinated employees have had breakthrough infections, though no one has so far become seriously ill, attesting to the effectiveness of the vaccines in preventing severe cases.

We continue to advocate for vaccinations; as Dean Wien notes, our student vaccination rate is between 45-50%, which is extremely high relative to the general population (+/- 20%). We are working with the student government and club presidents to apply peer pressure, and are discussing how we might best implement a vaccine mandate for students, at least those who want to study on campus. There are numerous constraints, legal, political, and cultural, that are much more difficult here than they would be in the United States, but I think it is ultimately inevitable that we will at some point issue a vaccination mandate. Depending on the legal situation, I am inclined to start with employees and move to the students, with a probable implementation for the fall semester, though a modified version is still

President's Report to the AUBG Board of Trustees, October 2021, Page 2

possible for the spring. Meanwhile, we are scheduling a series of informational programs for employees, where Dr. Daskalov will address their concerns and dispel misinformation about vaccines and COVID. He piloted this program recently, resulting in several new employee vaccinations. Most faculty who are medically able to be vaccinated are.

**30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:** The development office and the Office of Communication and Marketing teams have been diligently working on the various events celebrating AUBG's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary across the entire academic year. The continued uncertainty about COVID adds significant complications, because it appears that we may again be headed for travel restrictions, limits or bans on gatherings, and other similar circumstances that will derail some or all of our plans. However, early in the year, for the Kristalina Georgieva event (September 8) and the Alumni Mega Reunion and associated celebrations, we should be able to hold most or all programs outside, which mitigates the risk of disruption somewhat.

The teams have finalized venue selection and date for the spring Gala and the kickoff conference for the Center for Democratic Citizenship, which will occur at the National Palace of Culture (NDK) on April 7. Their preference has been to hold both in the same venue, which makes a lot of sense. I have met with Ambassador Mustafa about potential guests from the U.S. government, and we are now working on extending invitations.

There is an entire suite of programming throughout the year, and we will keep you informed about it as plans are finalized.

OCM has developed an array of 30<sup>th</sup>-Anniversary commemorative goods, which will be in the bookstore and available at events.

**Development and Alumni Meetings in the U.S.:** Ani Manavyan and I were on the East Coast (Washington, New York, and Boston) in late July and early August meeting with donors and friends, and will be visiting DC again the week of October 11-15. We also held two successful alumni events, one in the Bulgarian embassy in Washington and one at our hotel in Boston, both of which had over 20 alumni in attendance and featured good conversation, networking, and (re)building of connections that have been challenged by the COVID pandemic and its associated travel restrictions. Mike Marvin kindly joined us at the embassy, which added to the success of the evening, and we were graciously welcomed by H.E. Ambassador Tihomir Stoytchev, who reiterated his support for AUBG and the importance of the university to Bulgarian-American relations.

At the embassy event, I also had an extended conversation with Economic and Trade Counsellor Ivo Konstantinov, who provided several leads on projects that correspond nicely to our strategic priorities, and support our collaboration with the Municipality of Blagoevgrad, discussed below.

Among others, we met with past Board and current UC member Tom Bird, generous donors Bob and Nelly Gipson, and UC member Borianna Handzhiyska. We had an excellent lunch meeting with Marianne Keler where we updated her on a variety of issues and learned more about her continued philanthropic interests, and met with Annie Pforzheimer (longtime diplomat and daughter of previous ABF board chair) about the situation in Afghanistan and how AUBG might help, per my recent communication with the board.



We also met with the IMF staff about Kristalina Georgieva's upcoming visit to campus, and Nina Ognianova ('98; <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ninaognianova>), Senior Program Officer at the National Endowment for Democracy, to discuss plans for the Center for Democratic Citizenship and how we might work with the NED to support the Center's programming. Nina has extensive experience in journalism and journalists at risk, including serving for over 14 years with the Committee to Protect Journalists, and will be a valuable contact for the CDC.

*As I write this (October 7, 2021), I am waiting to board a flight to Washington, DC, for a series of follow-up meetings and events, and will be prepared to summarize these at the board meeting.*

**Student Support/Emergency Fund:** As you know, we received a \$500,000 grant from ABF to provide COVID relief for Bulgarian students who have been adversely affected by the pandemic, either through inability to participate in Work & Travel in the U.S. or through family financial hardships. Thanks to the generous matching grant ABF is also providing, which is unrestricted, we have been able to offer support to a significant number of international students as well, as follows:

- \$312,040 to 165 Bulgarian Students - will be coming from the ABF \$500K COVID Relief Fund
- \$270,800 to 121 International Students - will be coming from the matching challenge of ABF

Thus, the total amount granted so far has been \$582,840 to 286 students, for an average grant of \$2,038. The average grant to Bulgarian students was \$1,891 and to international students \$2,238. Grants were made based on an analysis of financial need by a committee including members from admissions, financial aid, and the development office, and documentation from students has been required to complete the process of crediting student accounts.

It is not possible to determine precisely how these grants have affected fall enrollment, but based on conversations with Ani Manavyan and Boriana Shalyavska, I am reasonably certain that a number of students receiving our special additional support would have had to take leaves of absence without the funding. The Student Support and Student Emergency Funds have also been a concrete way for AUBG to demonstrate our support for our students and their families during this extremely challenging time, and will surely have downstream benefits in terms of alumni goodwill.

**Increased/Improved Collaboration with the Blagoevgrad Municipality:** Sabina Wien and I met with the new mayor of Blagoevgrad, Ilko Stoyanov, and members of his advisory staff on August 5. Mr. Stoyanov is a member of the TISP/ITN party. Towards the end of the meeting, I invited Karina Ulucheva to join in her role as VP for strategy. We have met with the mayor and his staff several times since, most recently with Deputy Mayor Damyan Kuchulski, and continue to develop plans to work together for the betterment of AUBG and the city.

We have established a joint working group with two municipality staff along with Karina Ulucheva, Albena Kehayova, and Sabina Wien to work with the city to plan a variety of initiatives, including the establishment of a Bulgarian-American center of some kind to promote business development and collaboration as well as intercultural understanding; other forms of economic development including a business accelerator/incubator (intersections with Elevate to be determined); and generally to improve Blagoevgrad's overall economic, social, cultural, and built environments.

President's Report to the AUBG Board of Trustees, October 2021, Page 4

Ambassador Mustafa is interested in creating more “nodes” of Bulgarian-American cooperation, and the current municipal administration’s interest in such a project will provide us with valuable opportunities to build the kinds of ties that enable success. We will also bring AmCham into the discussion in due course.

These activities are all fully aligned and compatible with our strategic goal of increased civic engagement and collaboration with the municipality, and carry the added benefit of helping us protect against negative effects from any future property development on Svoboda Bachvarova St. on the southeast edge of campus. This collaboration will also help us as we develop plans for additional space to accommodate strategic enrollment growth.

We are developing an MOU with the municipality to formalize and publicize this arrangement.

**Museum Project:** Another program partly supported by the ABF COVID relief funds, and indicative of the kinds of collaborations we hope to develop with the municipality of Blagoevgrad, has been our pilot partnership with the Blagoevgrad Regional History Museum—the funds enabled us to provide financial support to Bulgarian students residing in Blagoevgrad this summer who did not have the opportunity for other adequate employment.

This partnership was originally suggested by Tsvetana Haydushka ('20), a native of Blagoevgrad, who had worked with the staff during her time as a student at AUBG. The project this summer consists of seven current students working with the museum staff to digitize the collection, translate the signage into English and modernize its language, and support the museum’s presence on social media.

There were 28 applicants for these seven slots. Participants were selected according to skills required for the project and financial need.

The Museum Project is a prototype for a program we hope to institute much more widely in the future to provide AUBG students more intellectually substantive summer work as at least a partial substitute for Work & Travel, while also supporting NGOs around Bulgaria with our students’ skills. Such a program dovetails perfectly with several of ABF’s initiatives, including building a more robust tourist economy in the country and retaining educated young people to support Bulgaria’s economic and social development. As I write, this program is still ongoing, so the results are not yet in, but I believe we will be able to use it as a model for future endeavors that create multiple synergies for our students and supporters, as well as genuinely enhancing our country and region.

*Additional details and perspective are available in Dean of Students Sabina Wien’s report.*

**Planning for Summer 2022:** One reason why the university’s summer programs (especially recruitment-oriented events such as camps) have never had much momentum is because we have not succeeded in planning them far enough in advance. As a result of some restructuring and reorganization in the Admissions and Dean of Students offices, we have increased our capacity to plan ahead to organize and publicize summer programming in a way that should take advantage of new and existing relationships and partnerships. For example, a program that will partly grow out of the Museum Project, above, is an archaeology camp offered in partnership with the Balkan Heritage Foundation and Field School



## President's Report to the AUBG Board of Trustees, October 2021, Page 5

([www.bhfieldschool.org](http://www.bhfieldschool.org)) for high school and college students. This program will provide students from all over the world with the opportunity to come to Bulgaria to learn about the country's deep history and participate in genuine anthropological inquiry, as well as serving as a recruitment tool for AUBG. It also aligns with the data we have received from various surveys about student interest in potential new programs (in this case, tourism and hospitality) and creates additional links with the community.

We will also offer a camp in game design in collaboration with ARC Academy, and plan for a residential, for-credit Maymester that we had been planning for the summer of 2020 until COVID prevented its execution. We are developing several other options that should, COVID permitting, bring us a lively campus life in the summer of 2022.

**Outline of Plans for the Year:** As we continue to complete the strategic planning process, nevertheless there are a number of initiatives underway to support AUBG's progress towards evident strategic goals. In broad categories, these are as follows:

**Infrastructure:**

- Select and begin implementation of Student Information System (in FY22 budget)
- Evaluate and revise all processes and integrate with ERP planning
  - RFP/evaluation process for full ERP system
  - ERP funding in FY23 budget
- Replace WiFi infrastructure on campus, Main Building, and Elieff (in FY22 budget)—this project is underway and should be completed during Fall Break
  - Develop replacement cycles and budget plan for all campus technology
- Complete RFP process for new website and develop project (vendor selected, contract to be signed in October, project to begin ASAP with a five-month development schedule)
- Inventory/evaluate all space on campus and MB to determine capacity (no cost)
- Campus Master Plan:
  - Consider revising Skapto III plan to include classrooms, faculty offices, and more single rooms for students; finalize capacity under new configuration
  - Develop Skapto III funding plan: cost estimate, refinance of OPIC loan, USAID support, etc. (We have a cost estimate for the building itself--\$8.5M—net of finishes and furniture)
  - Make go/no go decision on Skapto III in time to begin work in May 2022 if approved (building permit expires in the fall; will either need to get another extension—unlikely—or reapply)
  - Define overall space needs (including completed Skapto III) to accommodate 1,500 undergraduate students (\$150k estimate, including Skapto architect and US master planning consultant)
  - Determine what AUBG means by “residential” (to determine how many total beds are needed for full enrollment)
  - Begin planning for new Skaptopara Campus “Main Building,” including defining total space needs; if plausible, select an architect for initial concept-development to support fundraising (\$100,000 estimated cost)

President's Report to the AUBG Board of Trustees, October 2021, Page 6

**Academics:**

- Following survey data, develop new undergraduate academic programs according to demand and AUBG capacity to develop and offer them:
  - Prioritize programs that build on existing strengths (e.g., cybersecurity, digital marketing, heritage/hospitality management, etc., that require only incremental additions to faculty)
  - Faculty hiring to support these enhanced programs
  - Develop plan for new programs not building on current depth (e.g., graphic design)
    - Search for faculty and/or consultants to develop curriculum and define needs
  - Finalize plan for Game Design program and ARC partnership
  - Present packages of programs to board for approval at January and/or May meetings
- Following environmental scan of Sofia market, develop plan for enhanced graduate programming, particularly building on existing EMBA (tracks/emphases; more than one cohort per year?)
  - Any new program will require NECHE approval through "Substantive Change" process. This will take, at least, several months after board approval of any new programs
  - How important is Bulgarian accreditation for graduate programs?
  - Develop plan for continuing education/lifelong learning in collaboration with AmCham, corporate partners, and other interested parties

**Other Programming:**

- Plan and implement Center for Democratic Citizenship
- Enhanced summer programming for recruitment and visibility, including increased number of camps, summer sessions, etc.
- 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations
- Continue to develop alternatives for Summer Work & Travel to support students

**Service:**

- Define roles and lines of responsibility and communication among offices, including functional descriptions of each office and process maps for multi-office processes such as hiring, procurement, etc.
- Revamp HR Office to provide enhanced onboarding and professional development for staff
  - "Customer Service" training for student-facing offices
  - Succession planning in key offices
  - Evaluation of salary structure
  - Evaluation and revision of annual evaluation process; link to salary increases
- Institute collaboration between HR and Provost's office to develop recruitment and onboarding strategies and programs for new faculty
- Engage all offices in process revision and ERP education

**Recruitment:**

- Develop plan to increase new-student enrollment parallel with infrastructure, capital, and staff growth, with benchmarks for all aspects

President's Report to the AUBG Board of Trustees, October 2021, Page 7

- Tighten links between ELI and main academic programs, including Pathways program and University Preparatory Program
- Prioritize and develop funding plan for new markets and enhancing existing markets

**Financial Aid:**

- Finalize EIB loan program for international students (proposed agreement is in hand now)
- Continue to develop and promote ABF forgivable loan program for Bulgarian students

**Fundraising: See Ani Manavyan's report**