LAU and the Community

Intellectual and ethical responsibilities are interwoven at LAU. Even as we expand our regional and international reputation for academic excellence, we are building our national reputation as a progressive institution passionate about — and responsive to — the needs of the community.

This responsibility takes many forms — from our commitment to a demographic diversity and a rich, varied student life to our fostering of local activism and civic engagement, from our cultivation of student leaders and our pursuit of international outreach and exchange programs to our efforts to design socially responsible curricula and disciplinary approaches in our new Schools of Medicine and Nursing. Ultimately, our goal is to send our graduates into the world as scholars, citizens, leaders and professionals with a sense of deep, passionate investment in the fate of their country and community.

While community responsibility has a long history at LAU, it has reached new heights in recent years, culminating with the creation of an Office of Outreach and Civic Engagement in 2010. Established by Student Development and Enrollment Management (SDEM), the OCE unit is galvanizing students and faculty alike, fostering a dynamic and extracurricular sense of community on campus, connecting LAU to sister institutions abroad, and stimulating leadership, community activism, and social and environmental awareness at the national and local level.

Leadership and civic engagement

Lebanon is a cultural, linguistic, and geographic crossroads between East and West, and LAU graduates are positioned as natural ambassadors. Whatever avenue of professional life they choose, as recipients of an American education in the heart of the region's most cosmopolitan capital, they present the best face of each culture to the other.

LAU fosters student leadership in countless ways, and at every stage of the university experience, from application for admission to the day after graduation. The students admitted through the USAID-funded USAP program, for example, were selected partly on the basis of their promise in professional fields — engineering, business, nursing, computer science, nutrition, education, and communication arts — deemed highly relevant to Lebanon’s future.

Similarly, the MEPI-funded Tomorrow's Leaders program renewed this year recruits its recipients — promising but needy students from various countries in the Middle East — with the understanding that they will return upon graduation to contribute their talents and experience to the development of their home countries.

Every year LAU’s NGO Fair exposes students to causes that animate their sense of justice and civic responsibility, which then carries over into other activities. This year LAU students have participated in a variety of awareness and fundraising campaigns, focused on specific issues such as autism, domestic violence, deforestation and residual cluster munitions in southern Lebanon.

This spring, LAU hosted youth leaders from nine universities in Lebanon participating in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) “Volunteerism and Youth Activism” peace-building forum. LAU students also traveled across the country conducting leadership-training workshops for students in Tripoli, Sidon, Bsharre and Baakline.

LAU students are distinguishing themselves as leaders in their chosen fields, and are increasingly looking for ways to make their studies socially and environmentally relevant. Our student chapter of the American Society of Mechanical Engineering (ASME) won the Best Student Section in ASME District J this year, for example, and our student chapter of the Institute of Industrial Engineers (IIE) won the gold award. The School of Engineering is signing a memorandum of understanding with Shell Global for the Department of Industrial and Mechanical Engineering (IME) to participate next year in Shell's Eco-marathon, an annual event challenging students to build a vehicle traveling...
the furthest distance using the least amount of fuel. This year, the annual IME-hosted Design and Manufacturing Day featured the successful unveiling of a touristic solar car.

The OCE unit affords extensive volunteering opportunities. LAU has over 200 student volunteers involved in programs and activities ranging from LAU–UN Day to the Youth Leadership Program at the Continuing Education Program’s summer school to the increasingly prominent Global Classrooms – Model United Nations program.

Also through the OCE unit, student leaders have participated in high-profile activist causes and events, ranging from the “One Day on Earth” campaign (a United Nations media and environmentalism project) to the White Ribbon and UNiTE campaigns opposing violence against women to the establishment of youth leadership schools in partnership with the Safadi Foundation.

LAU’s Global Classroom – Model United Nations program continues to be a spectacular success, winning top prizes all over the world. It is a source of special pride for the university as a whole and the OCE unit in particular. The number of students participating this year is up to 1300 from last year’s 1100, and the program has expanded to include a middle-school component.

The GC–MUN program is just one of the ways LAU reaches out to talented students who have yet to begin their university years. The School of Arts and Sciences, for example, this year selected and invited 33 talented high-school students to participate in its Computer Science Summer Institute on the Byblos campus, where they learned a wide range of IT skills.

The Continuing Education Program (CEP) signed a partnership agreement with the Safadi Foundation to offer educational programs in Tripoli, and has partnered with the Lebanese Development Network to offer a capacity-building program for financially strapped NGOs.
Student life

We believe that quality of student life is central to the university experience. This is manifest not only in our approach to personal, academic and career counseling. It is a pervasive ethos, guiding everything from campus regulations to the planning of new facilities to the institutional use of social media.

On the Byblos campus, the recently inaugurated Frem Civic Center promises to be a vibrant hub of student life. At LAU Beirut, plans are underway to create a multi-use student center, which will include a fitness center, music room, guidance offices, advising services, student lounges, and a cyber café. As the Nicol Hall cafeteria is renovated to become an outdoor patio dining area, it too promises to be a convivial social space.

With student wellbeing in mind, as of fall 2011 both campuses have become smoke-free. Our health services personnel regularly advise students on issues of body weights, cardiovascular health, and the ill effects of smoking, while our counseling services address challenging such as depression, family problems and learning disabilities.

LAU keeps an eye on students’ career track well before graduation. Every year students at every level are exposed to career fairs, recruitment presentations, CV and cover-letter writing workshops, and so on. The university actively encourages student groups and cultural clubs, hosting over 60 of them. The university years are a time of synergy. Intellectual development nourishes emotional development, which in turn shapes the social self and fosters creativity, which then further stirs the intellect. Our vision of education is therefore a holistic one, in which personal, social, and creative development is interwoven with academic training.

With numerous student plays staged every year, opportunities abound to participate in LAU’s celebrated theater scene. Casting is open to students of any academic major. The university’s creative writing programs are similarly renowned, with several former students in recent years going on to publish acclaimed novels.

LAU’s athletics teams are distinguishing themselves more than ever before. In this year alone, LAU has come out on top in rugby, taekwondo, kick-boxing, handball, women’s futsal, women’s volleyball, tennis, track and field, and men’s basketball.

We are committed to maintaining and increasing the socioeconomic diversity of our student body. As of this spring, 2134 students — 25% of all LAU students — benefitted from Entrance, Honor, and Merit scholarships, work-aid, loans, and/or grants. SDEM also created a new position in the New York Office, a Federal Financial Aid Coordinator, to focus on financial aid available to American students through the U.S. Department of Education.

The SDEM office indeed plays a central role in the quality of student life at LAU. It cultivates students’ development at every stage of their time here, from freshman orientation to academic advising, athletics, student honor societies, study abroad, professional and NGO fairs, career placement services, on through to graduation.

At the administrative level SDEM enhanced student life in several ways this year. It created three new websites — one for recruiting prospective students, one for addressing the needs of current students, and one for financial aid and scholarship information. Student elections have been reformed in line with a one-student, one-vote prerogative.
International outreach and exchange

This year LAU became an official member of two prestigious international networks of higher education, the Institute of International Education (IIE) and the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE). These memberships link LAU to over 300 universities worldwide and raise our visibility as an institutional destination for foreign students.

Our students are increasingly availing themselves of LAU’s myriad study-abroad opportunities. The OCE unit facilitates LAU’s international exchange programs, providing both logistical support and student advising. Ten students were nominated or chosen this year as for various Fulbright scholarships, and four students were chosen to attend Sciences Po in Paris. LAU has signed exchange agreements and memoranda of understanding with eighteen institutions of higher education abroad, including Sciences Po; Richmond, the American International University in London; Ruprecht-Karls-Universitaet, Heidelberg, Germany; the University of Michigan; the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; the Ecole Speciale D’Architecture in France; and the University of Camerino in Italy.

SINARC’s increasing recognition brought the attention of James Madison University, Virginia; this year JMU held its summer language program in Beirut for the first time, as a joint venture with SINARC. The two programs ran side-by-side at LAU, with students attending weekly lectures on current affairs together and visiting popular tourist sites around Lebanon.

The Department of Humanities has meanwhile established a Foreign Language Program, offering German, Spanish, Latin, Italian and Chinese courses for various levels of proficiency.
Ethics and the life of the mind

The pursuit of knowledge is not an isolated activity at LAU. It is embedded in a community context, a context of human connectedness and humane responsibility. It takes place not only in libraries, laboratories, classrooms, and lecture halls, but also in activists’ meetings, in rural medical clinics, in model United Nations debate forums, at NGO fairs and in the online forums of social media.

Our university is steeped in the liberal arts tradition, and for us this ethos is a natural extension of that. Even as our professional schools turn to address concretely the challenges and realities of the 21st century, they have their roots in — and draw their strength from — the knowledge, modes of thought, and ethical systems rooted in humanistic learning.

The new School of Medicine’s integrated curriculum, for example — along with its emphasis on social medicine — instills emerging physicians with a strong sense of responsibility to their community. Developed through a ten-year partnership with Partners Harvard Medical International (PHMI), the curriculum relies on small-group, self-directed learning, and aims to produce physicians with humane insight into their patients’ health from both an individual and a societal vantage point. This approach — in which the physician is both a wise, perceptive healer and a highly trained clinical scientist — is at the cutting edge of medical education today.

The new School of Nursing is closely integrated with the School of Medicine, and shares its philosophy. It is making strides in the area of interprofessional education, boasting a forward-thinking curriculum that emphasizes collaboration in courses, laboratory and clinical experience between students in the university’s medicine, nutrition, pharmacy and social work programs. Graduates of all the health professions programs will thus enter their practice with the confidence and experience to be equal partners in a health care team, thereby raising both the quality of health care. For nursing in particular, this will raise the status and draw as a profession in a region suffering from an acute shortage of nurses.

This kind of social awareness goes to the heart of what education is all about at LAU. The social, political, ethical and environmental challenges vexing today’s Middle East are acute, and for knowledge production — the combination of specialized training and the development of critical thinking skills that we call higher education — to be valid, vital, and authentic, it must take place in the thick of them, rather than in an ivory tower apart. A willingness to tackle them is central to the life of the mind.

When LAU engineering students, for example set their sights on an international prize for building a maximally fuel-efficient vehicle, the exercise fuses their intellectual ingenuity, competitive spirit and awakening sense of environmental responsibility into a single ambition.

Similarly, when LAU’s Institute for Peace and Justice Education (IPJE) holds a book launch for a newly published anthology of essays by peace-education pioneers, edited by a prominent and beloved faculty member, it tells students — and the LAU community in general — about something more than a new book. It tells them that visions of a better world are integral to what their university does, not some kind of feel-good adjunct to it.

In other cases, intellectual responsibility to the community takes more subtle shape, with scholars moving beyond the gates of the university not so much to confront social ills directly as to trace and elucidate their complexity. This spring, for example, LAU’s Urban Planning Institute — together with the School of Architecture and Design, in collaboration with the University of Applied Arts in Vienna — launched “Urban Strategies-PoroCity-Beirut,” an ongoing project which has students from both universities delving into the political, cultural, and architectural history of Beirut’s sometimes ideologically fraught suburbs. The same institute hosted a related lecture by a prominent American academic about the influence of sectarianism on the urban infrastructure of Beirut.

Meanwhile, SAS will soon be offering a master’s degree in women’s studies, to be coordinated by the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World. As part of the new academic strategic plan, moreover, IWSAW is designing and adding a gender component to a whole range of degree programs in the humanities and social sciences.