

NDU and USAID Gather for Higher Education Financial Aid Initiative for Students

It is my honor to express our deepest gratitude to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for its collaboration with Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU). Thanks to this partnership, many students have been able to continue their studies and complete their education, which has had a significant, positive impact on their future prospects and the development of our country.

NDU is an accredited university that prides itself on providing high-quality education to its students according to the American liberal art model. This quality is guaranteed by the different accreditations earned whether at institutional or programmatic levels. As we all know, NDU, as an institution, is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) and it is the only Catholic institution holding such a prestigious quality label in the entire Middle East. We are currently undertaking a reaccreditation phase and the results will be as good as the initial accreditation. I was in the review meeting with the Commission two weeks ago and the outcomes will be announced very soon. At program levels, our engineering and computer science programs are ABET-accredited, and our school of Business is AACSB-accredited to mention only a few. The list is of course long, and this is a strategic vision for NDU. We are committed, by our mission, to offer the best service to our students, and we are facing major problems nowadays.

Our mission is derived from the mission of the founding order, or the Maronite Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and our founding fathers decided more than three hundred years ago to offer education to all at an affordable cost, not to say for free completely. They started since then building schools all over the country and the latest was NDU, which was officially established in 1987. The institution is very young by international standards and was able to move to the top tier thanks to the efforts of everyone, including the fathers, faculty, staff, students and of course partners and supporters, including USAID, which has been instrumental in helping us achieve our goals. By working closely with the American Embassy and USAID, we were able to provide opportunities for students to pursue their dreams and behind them to better serve the Lebanese community at large.

Offering our students quality degrees, recognized everywhere thanks to international accreditations, is a double-edged sword. They are getting degrees

in-line with the best standards in the field and at the same time a passport to safer heaven abroad. This is a dilemma for us and here again the support provided by USAID is playing a positive role indirectly, or at least we hope it will play the expected role. The students are getting direct financial support, and this is for them a responsibility. It is planting in them the seeds of responsible citizens as they become aware of social responsibilities towards each other. Our hope is that they will be more inclined to share with their peers and to act as good elements in their communities.

NDU is again a mission-driven institution, and our mission calls on us to serve everyone regardless of their gender, race, religion, color, social status, and the like. We fully believe in the trio: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, that is a la mode nowadays. Actually, we started a long time ago practicing diversity, equity and inclusion. The IDEAL program is a pioneer program in Lebanon we started few years back in collaboration with one US institution and aims at integrating people with special needs in a higher education setting. Currently the beneficiaries are getting special education and hands-on experience within the NDU premises and released to the job market with the required skills. In terms of diversity, we decided also long time ago to open branches in the rural areas of North Lebanon and Shouf with the objective of serving people from disadvantaged backgrounds and push them to pursue their academic goals and fulfill their potential.

Moreover, USAID has supported various initiatives and projects aimed at improving the quality of education at NDU. We are particularly grateful for all the efforts and contributions put forth by the Higher Education Capacity Development program (HECD), which has provided training and professional development opportunities for our faculty and staff members thus empowering them to enhance their teaching skills and knowledge. We need to add to that the in-kind grant to support the Career Center. This has resulted in a better learning experience for our students and has helped to ensure that our graduates are well prepared for the challenges of the job market.

The partnership between USAID and NDU has been a shining example of what can be achieved when organizations work together towards a common goal. We are grateful for USAID's continued support, and we look forward to building on this partnership to create even greater opportunities for our students and the wider community.

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to the EDC team for their guiding through the implementation phase of the grant. We look forward to continuing our partnership and working together to create a brighter future for all.

Thank you.