



MID-TERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

- UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM 7 (USP 7)
- HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP (HES) PROGRAM

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

MAY 2021

This document was produced for the United States Agency for International Development by Social Impact, Inc. under USAID Contract/Order No. AID-268-C-15-00001. It was prepared by Jehanzaib Khan, Karim Sahyoun, and Social Impact's Senior M&E Specialists, Tamara Nassereddine and Rana Taher.

Note: Limited redactions have been made to this version of the report in accordance with the principled exceptions to the presumption in favor of openness established in OMB Bulletin 12-01, "Guidance on Collection of U.S. Foreign Assistance Data."

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DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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ACRONYMS

AOR	Agreement Officer’s Representative
AUB	American University of Beirut
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CSP	Community Service Projects
DEC	Development Experience Clearinghouse
EQUI®	Evaluation Quality, Use and Impact System
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GE/FE	Gender Equality and Female Empowerment
GI	Group Interview
GPA	Grade Point Average
HES	Higher Education Scholarship
IDP	Individual Development Plan
IR	Intermediate Result
IRB	Institutional Review Board
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAU	Lebanese American University
LL	Lebanese Lira
LOE	Level of Effort
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PMSPL II	Performance Management and Support Program for Lebanon
RSS	Refugee Scholarship Support
SI	Social Impact
SI-HQ	Social Impact Headquarters
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
ULYP	Unite Lebanon Youth Project
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
USP	University Scholarship Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has supported merit-based scholarship programs for higher education in Lebanon since 2011. Its portfolio currently includes two programs: (1) the University Scholarship Program (USP 7): September 30, 2015 to September 29, 2023; and (2) the Higher Education Scholarship (HES) Program: September 30, 2018 to September 29, 2027.

The two scholarship programs are implemented by both the Lebanese American University (LAU) and the American University of Beirut (AUB). USP 7 provides full scholarships to academically exceptional and financially disadvantaged public-school graduates. Similarly, HES provides full scholarships to the same profile of students coming from public schools as well as low-private schools and to refugee students living legally in Lebanon. HES has two components: USP 8 and the Refugee Scholarship Support (RSS). Both programs aim to recruit an equal number of male and female applicants from across the country. Currently, there are 225 scholars funded by USP 7 and 256 scholars funded by HES attending AUB and LAU, as per fiscal year 2020-21.

Both USP 7 and HES support USAID/Lebanon's objective to increase private-sector competitiveness through increased workforce readiness linked to job opportunities.

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

Performance Management and Support Program for Lebanon (PMSPL II), implemented by Social Impact, Inc. under USAID Contract/Order No. AID-268-C-15-00001, conducted this mid-term performance evaluation at USAID/Lebanon's request. The evaluation assessed the performance—i.e., achievement of planned results—of the key activities of USP 7 and HES to date. It provides critical information and practical recommendations that will assist the primary intended users, USAID and its two partner universities, in deciding how to improve activities implemented under the current awards and possibly inform any future higher-education programs planned by USAID. To ensure the information from this evaluation is usable, Social Impact's evaluation team worked with USAID/Lebanon to refine the purpose and uses of the evaluation and agreed on the following overarching evaluation question and sub-questions:

To what extent have the USP and HES programs achieved their planned outputs and outcomes, and to what extent are they on track to achieve their objective?

Addressing this overarching evaluation question required addressing the following sub-questions:

- a. How diligently do AUB and LAU follow the overall criteria of selection, particularly with regard to selecting financially disadvantaged students from private schools?
- b. To what extent do the enrolled cohorts adhere to the award requirements of diversity, national/geographic representation, and gender distribution?
- c. What challenges—e.g., academic culture, mistreatment, discrimination or abuse—do scholars face in integrating into the regular student body and how are these challenges addressed?
- d. How well are the USP and RSS scholars performing academically relative to their peers (non-USP scholars)?
- e. How well are/have USP and RSS enabling/enabled scholars to become active leaders and potential leading change agents? (Emphasis on preparing individuals as change agents rather than actual transformation).
- f. How do scholars perceive their employment preferences and prospects? How well are the program components preparing scholars for entry into the labor market?
- g. In what ways have the current COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns affected program activities and/or progress, particularly activities related to civic engagement and community projects that

scholars are required to implement?

- h. What gender considerations have been taken into account by key program activities and what are the most visible discrepancies, if any?
- i. What factors have been crucial for the achievement or non-achievement of program results thus far?

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

The evaluation employed a qualitative approach comprising 24 key informant interviews (KIIs) and group interviews (GIs) with USAID, AUB, and LAU staff purposively selected for their roles. In addition, the evaluation team conducted 18 focus group discussions (FGDs) with scholarship recipients representing various USP 7 and HES cohorts and alumni. Participants were randomly selected for each FGD. The documents reviewed included program awards, quarterly and semi-annual reports, labor market surveys, assessment studies conducted by the two universities, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans, and other documents deemed relevant to answering the evaluation questions. The data analysis approach included preparing KII and FGD notes, creating and assigning codes, identifying themes, and developing an evaluation data analysis matrix to categorize themes and identify key study findings related to the evaluation questions. The team triangulated data where possible from interviews and focus groups with the USP 7/HES monitoring data.

KEY FINDINGS

As noted above, USP 7 and HES currently fund 225 and 256 scholars respectively enrolled in AUB and LAU. In addition to the academic training scholars receive as part of their undergraduate studies, both programs offer leadership and civic engagement training; opportunities to regularly conduct volunteer work; job readiness workshops; and internships with companies, hospitals, schools, non-profits, and various other public and private organizations.

EQ-a. Selection Criteria

The USP 7/HES programs require that applicants meet the minimum eligibility criteria to be considered for scholarships. This includes demonstrating academic excellence and financial need, proof of Lebanese citizenship or legal residency for refugees, sufficient scores on entry exams set by the universities, and prior community service experience. To demonstrate academic excellence, applicants must have a cumulative combined average score of 13.5/20 for public schools and 16/20 for private schools in grades 11 and 12, and at least 13.5/20 on the official Lebanese Baccalaureate exam. To be financially eligible, the applicant's family's annual income should not exceed \$30,000¹ and his/her parents must not earn an educational subsidy of \$3,600 or above. Given the economic crisis in the country, the subsidy threshold was changed to \$5,000 in the second year of HES. Initially, private school students were not eligible if the fee at the school they attended was equivalent to or exceeded \$3,326. Since this excluded financially needy applicants who attended these schools on scholarships, this condition was removed after cycle 1 of HES.

AUB and LAU have offered and vetted applicants for USP since 2011. Over the course of multiple USP awards, the admission and financial aid offices at these universities have developed and improved mechanisms to process, screen, and select USP applicants. Both universities ensure that the scholarship is provided transparently and fairly based on the set eligibility criteria.

The verification of applicants' financial records, whether from public or private schools, is an important step to ascertain their financial status. With their application for admission and financial aid, applicants

¹ Please note that all USD estimates in this document are based on the Lebanese official rate of 1507.5 LL for 1\$

are required to submit financial records. The financial aid offices at both universities thoroughly vet these supporting documents, which include parents' employment and/or business records, property ownership, vehicle registration, loan agreements, income tax statements, benefits received through employment, and bank statements. Once shortlisted, the applicants and their parents appear for financial aid interviews for further validation of their financial records. On average, both universities receive over 1,400 applications combined for a single cycle and admit around 11 percent of them to each cohort—depending on the target for a particular cycle. Under USP 7, both universities admitted 422 scholars combined, of which 240 are female. Under HES, they admitted 180 scholars for USP 8 (83 male, 97 female) and 76 for RSS (19 male, 57 female). USP 7 has met recruitment targets for each cycle. Similarly, HES achieved its targets as planned for cycles 1 and 2. (See Table 4)

EQ-b. Diversity

Both universities promote the programs in all 26 districts through radio, television, and online/social and media platforms. In addition, they each hire part-time staff/recruitment officers who visit all 267 public schools. While the programs require that both universities target Lebanon's 26 districts, not every cohort has scholars from every district. This is because either no one applied from a certain district or those who applied did not meet the criteria. Some districts in North and South Lebanon have generally lower representation relative to other districts. If a district does not have representation in one cycle, normally, it has successful applicants in previous and/or subsequent cycles. The programs aim to select an equal number of male and female applicants from each district. Traditionally, more female students apply for the scholarship and, as a result, the programs tend to have more female scholars than male scholars. Across both universities, female scholars make up around 58 percent of USP 7 scholars and around 54 percent of HES-USP 8 scholars.

According to USAID funding allocations, refugee students constitute around 30 percent of HES scholars. Relative to Palestinian refugees, Syrian refugees are underrepresented, at only 18 percent of the total scholars under RSS across both universities. Male scholars make up only 23 percent of the RSS component. The HES award does not specify the share of Palestinian and Syrian refugees or the male and female composition. To promote the scholarship to Palestinian students, both universities reach out to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and local organizations such as Unite Lebanon Youth Project (ULYP). The universities have not been able to carry out similar outreach activities to target Syrian refugees—i.e., they have neither identified any organizations to help target Syrian refugees nor developed strategies to increase the proportion of Syrian refugees.

EQ-c. Integration Challenges.

Many scholars found it challenging to transition from a highly structured high school life to a significantly complex and demanding university life. Many faced difficulties with time management, and some found it hard to choose the right major despite guidance from the programs. For some, living in dorms came with homesickness and/or with independence that required them to take responsibility of managing their lives without reliance on their families. Some found it difficult to adapt to a context of such diversity but ultimately were able to assimilate and considered it a valuable part of their scholarship experience. Others found building connections or social interaction with other regular university students was hard, at least initially.

AUB and LAU offer comprehensive integration support to scholars, including preparatory semesters to improve their language skills, orientation days, and workshops. Scholars viewed these activities and support as helpful for their integration. For many, participation in extracurricular activities like volunteering was helpful to integrate as it gave them opportunities to interact and build connections with students from a variety of backgrounds. Switching to remote learning, however, made it difficult to establish relationships, especially with regular students, due to limited opportunities. A common

perception among scholars and program staff was that both programs put significant emphasis on creating an environment that did not allow for any kind of discrimination, mistreatment or abuse and offered the same treatment and opportunities to all.

EQ-d. Academic Performance

The majority of the USP 7/HES scholars have high grade point average (GPA) scores, well above the programs' minimum requirement of maintaining a 70 percent cumulative GPA. Over 50 percent are on the Dean's honor or distinguished list. Around 84 percent of all USP 7 scholars in both universities have an 80 percent or higher GPA, which is above the program targets—set by the USP/HES awards—of 70 percent of scholars scoring sustained academic average and 80 percent of scholars having cumulative averages of over 80 percent upon graduation. For HES, around 77 percent of USP 8 and 69 percent of RSS scholars have a GPA that equals or exceeds 80 percent. Relative to male scholars, around 57 percent of female scholars have a GPA score of 80 percent or above across programs and universities. Evidence from LAU showed that USP 7/HES scholars' mean cumulative GPA was significantly higher than that of non-USP 7/HES students. Program staff explanations for scholars' high academic achievement include the selection of the best applicants, the training and support offered by the programs, and the motivation and resilience of the scholars.

EQ-e. Leadership and Civic Engagement

Through the leadership and civic engagement component, scholars engage in leadership training, volunteerism, and community service projects (CSPs). The traits/skills they develop include communication skills, team building, analytical thinking, time management, conflict resolution, and human rights awareness. Through CSPs, they learn about community problems and work with non-profits or municipalities to develop solutions for these problems. This allows them to have meaningful experiences and apply the skills they acquire through leadership and civic engagement workshops. Scholars also volunteer of their own volition in their community or with local organizations. Examples include providing volunteer services during the pandemic to raise awareness, and after the Beirut blast to provide food to affected families and remove rubble from damaged residential buildings.

Through civic engagement activities, the scholars develop the motivation to affect their communities and make a positive impact on society. Many feel a sense of fulfillment when they work to bring a positive change in a community. Others expressed that volunteer work had helped them achieve personal growth, learn about their personal efficacy, and motivated them to make a difference. Many continue volunteer work following their graduation. Across both universities, over 50 percent of USP scholars report assuming, at least once, a leadership position in their university—e.g., vice president of a university club. The program also reports that 100 percent of scholars participated/participating in CSPs—the minimum program target is 95 percent participation in CSP before graduation.

Scholars perceive adding civic engagement experiences and leadership skills to their resume as useful to their future careers, as these respond to employers' demands and help boost their profiles. For some, this helped them pursue higher education and/or develop connections and a professional network. For many, the single most challenging part of the experience was maintaining balance between leadership and civic engagement activities on one hand and academic work on the other. They found it stressful, particularly at times when they had to complete volunteer work or participate in workshops during exam weeks.

EQ-f. Preparedness for the Labor Market

As part of their career preparation, scholars receive job readiness workshops and soft skills and entrepreneurship training and complete internships at various establishments. The programs expect that

at least 75 percent of their scholars will be employed or pursuing graduate studies within three to six months after graduation. A total of 197 scholars have graduated under USP 7 from both universities so far. About 77 percent are either employed (40 percent full time; 2.5 percent part time) or pursuing graduate studies (17 percent full time; 18 percent part time). Both universities are on track to achieve this target. The combined average of the two universities of USP 7 scholars graduating successfully is approximately 96 percent against a program target of 95 percent.

The scholars participate in career counselling workshops for guidance on selected majors and their career prospects in the labor market. The majors offered are based on their high employability prospects in the job market. To determine which majors might be more marketable for scholars, each university separately conducts a labor market survey every year. Both universities were unable to conduct the surveys in 2020 due to the political crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to providing soft skills training, the programs require all scholars to complete their internships before graduating. AUB and LAU provide guidance and support to scholars to help them explore and secure internships with companies, corporations, educational institutions, and non-profit/community-based organizations. Internships are critical for scholars to secure jobs in the labor market, as they offer them an opportunity to apply the skills they learned in the job readiness workshops and leadership and civic engagement activities. All activities contribute toward the programs' target of preparing at least 95 percent of the scholars for the labor market through training and career guidance. The combined achievement for USP 7 from both universities is approximately 96 percent.

A unanimous perception among scholars is that the experience and skills they acquired through the leadership, civic engagement, and career readiness activities have improved their profiles and have a great value in the job market. They believe that the programs offered quality training that gave them a competitive advantage for securing employment.

EQ-g. The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic forced both universities to switch to remote learning. This was challenging at first, as neither were adequately prepared to do so. But they were able to adapt over time. Scholars generally favored in-person learning and expressed dissatisfaction with remote learning, as it forced them to miss the critical part of the scholarship experience, i.e., being at university, accessing its services, living in dorms, and having in-person interactions. It also affected some scholars' motivation to complete assignments and participate in program activities while it increased stress levels for others. Despite these challenges, many scholars valued remote learning, as it enabled them to continue their studies and develop skills. They described how recorded lectures provided them with easy access to information and how they had become independent learners, managing studies responsibly. Internet connection problems and power outages disrupted scholars' participation in virtual lessons and resulted in time losses during exams. USP 7/HES provided scholars with internet bundles, which reduced but not completely resolved connectivity issues.

The pandemic also forced scholars to look for volunteer work online, which was hard due to the limited options and the fact that some non-profit organizations temporarily stopping work. When possible, and with the help of the universities, scholars made use of opportunities to volunteer on the ground, particularly doing work related to the pandemic such as participating in awareness raising campaigns or to the Beirut port explosion such as distributing food and clearing rubble. The two universities had planned approximately 63 CSPs for 2020, however, one third of these CSPs had to move to a hybrid approach—virtual with in-person components—or fully go online. The pandemic delayed around 18 percent of CSPs. USP 7/HES took measures to tailor the CSPs in a way to allow scholars to implement them safely while still creating an impact on their communities.

EQ-h. Gender Considerations

Both universities make efforts to respond to the needs of all scholars and provide equal opportunity, support, and guidance to both male and female scholars. Where necessary, the programs use gender-based messaging to support equal participation and offer opportunities that already exist but may not be taken up because of stereotypes. For example, nursing is typically considered a profession for women as opposed to engineering for men, but through gender-based messaging, both universities promote majors that otherwise might be avoided because of gender-biased perceptions.

Male and female scholars report no differences in the support and treatment they receive from program staff. In addition, they perceive that the programs help break down stereotypes, if any, and say they exposed them to a culture that promoted and provided equal opportunities to scholars to realize and reach their full potential.

CONCLUSIONS (EQ-i: Factors crucial for the achievement of program results)

Adhering to the selection criteria, the USP 7 and HES programs successfully recruit diverse groups of applicants from across the country who are academically the best and financially the neediest. Opening up the scholarship to refugees brought in more inclusivity. However, the different approaches to outreach to target refugee populations likely contributed to the underrepresentation of Syrian refugee scholars in the HES program. Overall, USP7 has achieved its target of recruitment, and HES is on track to do so as well.

Scholars are able to assimilate without major problems. The comprehensive support offered to them possibly contributes to their successful transition and integration. While there are no reported instances of discrimination or mistreatment, building relationships with non-USP/HES students has been challenging, likely due to socio-economic differences. The shift to remote learning further limits opportunities to interact and build relationships with regular students

Academically, the scholars are high achievers at both universities and outperform their non-USP 7/HES counterparts. There is variation in achievement between USP and RSS scholars, with the latter trailing the former. The academic training and systematic support offered by the programs possibly play a significant role in their achievement. The programs are on track to achieve their targets regarding academic performance.

The USP 7/HES programs systematically focus on building scholars' leadership skills and offering them opportunities for growth and learning through training and hands-on experiences. This likely enables scholars to become potential leaders who have the ability to affect their communities. USP 7 has achieved its targets of 50 percent scholars assuming at least once a leadership position during their term, and 95 percent scholars participating in CPSs.

The programs invest significantly in providing scholars with learning experiences that are sought-after in the labor market. The fact that over 77 percent of USP 7 graduates are either employed on a full- or part-time basis or pursuing graduate studies indicates that the program is on track to achieve its target. The program is also on track to achieve the target of 95 percent of scholars graduating successfully and preparing at least 95 percent of the scholars for the labor market.

The COVID-19 pandemic unavoidably affected the scholars' experiences. The programs have adapted and are responsive to the scholars' needs. The two universities' adaptive approach during the pandemic possibly minimized its effects on CPSs. The hybrid (virtual and in-person) approach to implementation is likely the optimal solution given the circumstances.

Overall, the programs have largely been able to provide equal opportunities to male and female scholars to both participate in and benefit equally from all program activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. USP 7/HES should continue following the current selection criteria and retain their flexible approach to ensure applicants have fair opportunities across the country. As the economic crisis continues, financially vulnerable families will likely suffer further, and more changes in the criteria might be necessary in the future.
2. The programs should maintain their approach to meeting the requirement of diversity for Lebanese applicants, as it generally yields desired results. With increased outreach and promotion effort, the programs should improve the number of scholars from the relatively under-represented districts.
3. While diversity is not a requirement for RSS under the HES award, the program could benefit immensely from making the RSS component more equitable and inclusive. To diversify its body of refugee scholars, HES should consider expanding its outreach to target more Syrian refugees. To do so, AUB and LAU should (a) consider identifying and coordinating with local organizations that work with Syrian refugees to help recruit scholars, (b) continue working with public schools but with increased focus on those with large numbers of Syrian refugee students, and (c) increase the involvement of current RSS scholars in outreach and award promotion activities.
4. To make integration smoother overall, USP 7/HES should consider exploring ways to detect the early challenges to integration—e.g., inability to interact with others virtually or uncertainty about the choice of majors—and offering these students targeted support to enable them to respond to these challenges. The programs should explore ways to increase opportunities for USP 7/HES scholars to interact more frequently with regular students. Examples may include the desegregation of dorms, the introduction of joint events such as seminars, projects, and early on increased participation of scholars in university clubs and societies.
5. Given the academic performance of scholars, USP 7/HES should continue with the current approach of training and support. To close the gap between USP and RSS scholars' performance, the programs should consider exploring areas where they can provide targeted support to RSS scholars for further improvement in their academic achievement. In addition, the universities should consider avoiding scheduling workshops or other civic engagement activities during midterm weeks to allow scholars to focus on their exams.
6. The USP 7/HES programs should maintain the current approach to preparing scholars for the labor market. In doing so, the two partner universities should explore areas where they can collaborate—e.g., jointly conducting labor market surveys instead of conducting separately—to eliminate any duplication of effort.
7. The USP 7/HES programs should consider conducting regular studies (surveys, focus groups) to assess the impact of the pandemic on scholars' learning and mental health, the challenges they face while working remotely, and the quality of their participation in extracurricular activities. The information from such studies will likely enable AUB and LAU to develop additional solutions and work towards minimizing the effects of the pandemic on the programs.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) currently funds two higher education scholarship programs in Lebanon, implemented by both the Lebanese American University (LAU) and the American University of Beirut (AUB). They are:

- The **University Scholarship Program 7 (USP 7)** – September 30, 2015 to September 29, 2023 – which is a continuation of the USAID-funded USP program which launched in 2011.
- The **Higher Education Scholarship (HES)** program – September 30, 2018 to September 29, 2027 – which is comprised of two components: **USP 8** and the **Refugee Scholarship Support (RSS)** program.

Both scholarship programs support USAID/Lebanon's objective to increase private-sector competitiveness through increased workforce readiness linked to job opportunities.

USAID/Lebanon has tasked Performance Management and Support Program for Lebanon (PMSPL II²), implemented by Social Impact, Inc., with conducting a mid-term performance evaluation of the USP 7 and HES (covering USP 8 and RSS) programs at LAU and AUB. The study has two main objectives: first, to provide the USAID mission with input on these programs' effectiveness in achieving outputs and outcomes; second, to offer relevant evidence to guide ongoing and future program design.

The evaluation was conducted within the context of SI's Evaluation Quality Use and Impact (EQUI®) approach, processes, and protocols. EQUI processes are designed to achieve a quality evaluation that incorporates learning and utilization. The evaluation will highlight lessons learned and provide actionable recommendations for the programming of future higher education scholarship projects in Lebanon. To support utilization, PMSPL II will include a post-evaluation action plan.

The evaluation began in February 2021 and was completed around mid-May. The evaluation team was supported by PMSPL II's Lebanon team and SI Headquarters (SI-HQ), as needed.

² USAID Contract/Order No. AID-268-C-15-00001.

ACTIVITY BACKGROUND

Higher education in Lebanon is dominated by the private sector. Of the approximately 42 higher education institutions, 41 are private,³ constituting more than 60 percent of the total enrollment in the sector. A good-quality higher education is beyond the reach of public school graduates who are mostly from low-income backgrounds and cannot afford the cost (e.g., tuition, relocation or commuting, participation in campus life) associated with joining a reputable higher education institution.⁴ Yet, university education is linked to economic opportunities in the labor market and fosters economic growth.⁵ Similarly, public school graduates have limited ability to access quality private higher education that provides them high quality academic training and skills with high value in the labor market. There is neither a notional scheme of financial assistance in place to support access to higher education across the country nor a public lending program for students in higher education.⁶

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided direct support to higher education in Lebanon through scholarship programs since 2011. The University Scholarship Program (USP) was developed in 2010 and since then, through various iterations, has granted comprehensive scholarship awards to more than a thousand high school graduates—mostly from public schools—to complete their undergraduate studies. Currently, this support consists of the University Scholarship Program (USP 7; 2015-2023) and the Higher Education Scholarship (HES; 2018-2027). Both scholarships are implemented by both the Lebanese American University (LAU) and the American University of Beirut (AUB). USP 7 provides full scholarships to academically exceptional and financially disadvantaged public-school graduates; HES includes those coming from low-fee private schools and refugee students living legally in Lebanon. The comprehensive scholarships provide tuition, stipends, books, laptops, lodging, and incidental charges. The two programs seek to increase the private sector’s competitiveness through improved workforce readiness linked to job opportunities. Results from the USP and HES programs contribute to Development Objective 2 (DO2), *Inclusive Economic Growth Enhanced*, of USAID/Lebanon’s 2014-2019 Country Development Cooperative Strategy (CDCS).

USP 7

USP 7 provides AUB with \$17,814,894 and LAU with \$17,870,007⁷ to grant full scholarships to academically exceptional and financially needy Lebanese public-school graduates. The main objective is to give young students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who would otherwise have no means to attend the top higher education institutions in the country, access to quality higher education. USP 7 is different from earlier USPs in that it moved from funding individual cohorts to funding multiple cycles (three cohorts with awards over three years). It is an eight-year program allowing the recruitment, selection, and enrollment of three student cohorts during the first three years of implementation—one each year. Through USP 7, AUB planned to recruit 207 scholars in three cohorts—each varying in size between 53 and 82 scholars; and LAU planned to recruit approximately 220 scholars in three cohorts. The performance period of the USP 7 agreement is from September 30, 2015 to September 29, 2023.

³ World Bank. (2013). Higher Education in Lebanon.

http://wbfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/TED/SABER_TED_Brief_Higher_Education_Lebanon.pdf

⁴ USAID - USP 7 Award. (2015).

Nahas. Charbel. (2009). Financing and Political Economy of Higher Education in Lebanon. Charbelnahas.org.

⁵ OECD (2017), In-Depth Analysis of the Labour Market Relevance and Outcomes of Higher Education Systems: Analytical Framework and Country Practices Report, Enhancing Higher Education System Performance, OECD, Paris.

⁶ The European Commission. (2019). National Report. The Higher Education System in Lebanon. http://www.meric-net.eu/files/fileusers/3760_Lebanon_National%20Report_MERIC-Net.pdf

⁷ USAID Award AUB USP7 #268-A-15-00001; USAID Award LAU USP7 AID-268-15-00002;

HES: USP 8 AND RSS

HES provides AUB with \$23,966,200 and LAU with \$23,958,010⁸ to support the implementation of the HES program. The performance period of this agreement started September 30, 2018 and is expected to end on September 29, 2027. The HES program consists of two components: USP 8 and Refugee Scholarship Support (RSS). The objective and implementation design of HES is the same as that of USP 7. However, HES introduced two significant changes:

- i. For USP 8, the program allows private high school graduates to benefit from the scholarship program;
- ii. For the RSS component, the program extended the scholarship opportunities to non-Lebanese students who have refugee status and are legally residing in Lebanon.

Like USP 7, HES selects high school graduates who demonstrate academic excellence and high financial need. The HES program consists of four cohorts. LAU and AUB plan to recruit 48 and 40 scholars for each USP 8 cohort respectively. Similarly, the two universities plan to recruit over 180 refugee scholars over four cohorts. The number of total targets for each cohort can go up as each university recruits additional scholars through cost-saving strategies. The HES program initially set a cap of 5,000,000 Lebanese Lira (approx. \$3,315) for the schooling tuition fees to consider candidates from private regular schools. This condition was later removed.

Recruitment: For both USP 7 and HES, diversity is a critical feature of selecting scholars, aiming at achieving a balance both between female and male recipients and among different confessions and districts in Lebanon. For each cycle of the two programs, both universities carry out extensive recruitment campaigns that include visiting all public high schools in Lebanon. They vet and select diverse groups of meritorious and economically disadvantaged applicants.

Orientation: Scholars receive orientation and integration support, academic training, and leadership and civic engagement training to ensure that those chosen for each cycle will graduate, be employed, and succeed in contributing to their communities and Lebanon. Both universities continue to monitor scholars after they graduate. The following interventions constitute the core of the USP and HES programs:

Academic Program: Once matriculated, the scholars are integrated into an American-style education committed to critical thinking, open exchange of ideas, self-exploration and realization, and resolving conflicts by peaceful means. Staff and student mentors have the task to guide and support the scholars since pre-registration in terms of orientation, integration, and academic advising so that each cohort is academically ready. A preparatory program for up to one year is available if needed, including English language instruction, ongoing tutoring, mentoring, and oversight to help guarantee that, once enrolled, the scholars succeed academically and graduate according to plan within the cycle for each cohort. All scholars enroll in academic programs that potentially support Lebanon's development and with majors expected to lead to gainful employment after graduation. The programs offer Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) majors, as well as business, nursing and education. (See Annex 6 for a complete list of majors offered)

USP Civic Engagement Component: Scholars complete mandatory workshops and training in leadership skills, civic engagement, citizenship and advocacy, gender and human rights, and entrepreneurship. Regular community service experience and community service projects are considered key building

⁸ USAID Award AUB HES #72026818CA00002 ; USAID Award LAU HES #72026818CA00001

blocks in developing leadership skills and ensuring that students will not only have an accredited undergraduate degree and be employable but will be functional citizens and leaders in Lebanon.

Job Readiness Training: Scholars participate and complete career counseling workshops and job readiness training—e.g., communication and presentation skills and job interview techniques. In addition, they complete meaningful internships prior to graduation—an internship is mandatory for all scholars, including those whose major does not require one.

DEVELOPMENT HYPOTHESIS

There is no explicitly stated hypothesis for the USP 7 and HES programs. However, the project is built on the premise that supporting economically-disadvantaged young people who cannot attend private tertiary educational institutions will contribute to sustaining democratic practices and impact economic development by improving workforce development and communities’ livelihoods. Table 1 below graphically presents program goals, intermediate results (IRs), sub-IRs, and key indicators.⁹

Table 1: USP Results Framework

USAID PMP DO2: Inclusive economic growth enhanced
USP Goal: Meritorious and Financially needy public schools’ graduates, with maximized potential to support democratic practices and economic development.
USAID PMP IR2.1: Increased Private Sector Competitiveness
USP Purpose: Improved achievements of students coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds accessing higher quality education
USAID PMP Sub-IR 2.1.3: Increased workforce development linked to job opportunities
<p>USP Sub-Purpose 1: Improving access to quality education USP Sub-Purpose 2: Scholars better equipped with the necessary technical, soft and leadership skills needed to excel in the labor market</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub-Purpose 1.1 Improved ability of students to apply to USP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Output 1.1.1 – Schools informed of the USP opportunity</i> ▪ <i>Output 1.1.2 – Outreach/Promotional materials developed</i> ▪ <i>Output 1.1.3 – Students’ Shortlisting and Selection Completed</i> ○ Sub- Purpose 2.1 – Improved educational formation of students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Output 2.1.1 – Monitoring the graduation of all USP students</i> ○ Sub- Purpose 2.2 – Expanded job readiness skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Output 2.2.1 – Monitoring the USP students career preparedness</i> ○ Sub- Purpose 2.3 – Enhanced leadership potential of students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Output 2.3.1 – Students gained knowledge about civic engagement and leadership</i>

The remainder of this evaluation report is structured as follows: The next section presents the evaluation purpose and intended users and key evaluation questions guiding this work, followed by evaluation design and methodology. This is followed by a section on findings and conclusions by evaluation questions, followed by recommendations.

⁹ AUB MEL Plan for USP 7, USP 8, RSS- last submitted Oct 6 2020

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND INTENDED USE

Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is both that of accountability and learning. It aims to (a) understand ways in which the USP 7 and HES programs have been effective thus far in terms of achieving the planned results; and (b) generate knowledge about these two programs' successes and failures and related contributing factors. The information from this evaluation will assist USAID and the two partner universities in deciding how to improve USP and RSS components in the remaining life of the current awards and may help inform the design of future awards. This evaluation covers the period from September 2015 through February 2021.

Intended Users

The primary users for this mid-term evaluation are the USAID/Lebanon Mission, particularly the Education Office, the Economic Growth Office, and the USP 7-HES implementing partners AUB and LAU. Secondary users may include the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon and other stakeholders working in the higher education sector.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

During the kickoff phase, the evaluation team worked with USAID/Lebanon to review, clarify and revise the original evaluation questions posed in the Scope of Work (SOW). The following are the revised, agreed upon questions. The overarching question this evaluation aims to address is:

To what extent have the USP and HES programs achieved their planned outputs and outcomes, and to what extent are they on track to achieve their objectives?

This question addresses the effectiveness of the USP 7 and HES components thus far. The evaluation explored the following to answer it:

- a. How diligently do AUB and LAU follow the overall criteria of selection, particularly selecting financially disadvantaged students from private schools?
- b. To what extent do the enrolled cohorts adhere to the award requirements of diversity, national/geographic representation, and gender distribution?
- c. What challenges—e.g., academic culture, mistreatment, discrimination or abuse—do scholars face in integrating into the regular student body and how are these challenges addressed?
- d. How well are the USP and RSS scholars performing academically relative to their peers (non-USP scholars)?
- e. How well are/have USP and RSS enabling/enabled scholars to become active leaders and potential leading change agents? (Emphasis on preparing individuals as change agents rather than actual transformation).
- f. How do scholars perceive their employment preferences and prospects? How well are the program components preparing scholars for entry into the labor market?
- g. In what ways have the current COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns affected program activities and/or progress, particularly activities related to civic engagement and community projects that scholars are required to implement?

- h. What gender considerations have been taken into account by key program activities and what are the most visible discrepancies, if any?
- i. What factors have been crucial for the achievement or non-achievement of program results thus far?

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation used a primarily qualitative approach to answer the evaluation questions. Qualitative methods included conducting key informant interviews (KIIs), group interview (GIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). This approach was highly suitable for this evaluation because, apart from providing insights into the stakeholders' unique perspectives and understanding regarding the objectives, implementation processes, and achievements of the various components of the two programs, it helped explore and understand scholars' experiences of and perspectives on learning, personal growth, and the challenges faced during and after their undergraduate studies. The evaluation supplemented the qualitative inquiries with a program document/desk review including monitoring data provided by both universities that informed key aspects of this evaluation and was also used in triangulating primary data. For details about how each evaluation question is mapped against data sources, collection methods, and analysis methods, please see Annex 2 for the Evaluation Matrix. Data collection started on March 15, 2021 and concluded on April 1, 2021. All KIIs and FGDs were conducted in English.

The evaluation team has conducted this evaluation in accordance with Social Impact's Evaluation Quality Use and Impact (EQUI®) approach, processes, and protocols. EQUI processes are designed to achieve a quality evaluation that incorporates learning and utilization. To support utilization, this evaluation will be followed by a post-evaluation action plan.

In compliance with USAID's Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (GE/FE) policy, gender was an important component of the evaluation design and methodology in order to identify program achievements and/or discrepancies related to gender and address them in its recommendations for corrective actions, if any. The evaluation methodology and tools followed a gender-sensitive approach and, to the extent possible, disaggregated evaluation and program data to assess whether male and female scholars received program benefits equitably.

The evaluation team collected the data remotely for this evaluation as it was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when Lebanon was under partial lockdown with restrictions on group gathering and the practice of social distancing in place. International travel was not recommended, and movement within the country was restricted. Furthermore, the wave of protests across major cities over Lebanon's political and economic crises further disrupted life throughout the country.

The Evaluation team is composed of team leader Dr. Jehanzaib Khan, and team member/local expert Dr. Karim Sahyoun. Because of flight restrictions due to COVID-19, they both worked remotely. The Evaluation team is supported by PMSPLII staff Dr. Rana Taher and Dr. Tamara Nassereddine based in SI local office in Lebanon,

DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The evaluation employed both primary and secondary data collection methods to triangulate findings at multiple levels and generate credible evidence to answer the evaluation questions. The proposed methods included the following:

- I. Desk Review:** The evaluation team conducted a structured review of the program documents and program data and used the review to refine the evaluation design and develop data collection tools

during the inception phase, and triangulated primary data monitoring data during the analysis phase. The quantitative information available from monitoring data, provided by the universities, helped assess the programs' progress and achievement of outcomes thus far. To the extent possible, the quantitative data was used to disaggregate program results by gender. The documents the evaluation team reviewed included USAID/Lebanon's CDCS, program awards, quarterly and semi-annual reports, labor market surveys, assessment studies conducted by the two universities, M&E plans, and other documents deemed relevant to answering the evaluation questions. Both universities shared those documents with the evaluation team, for both USP 7 and HES programs.

- 2. Key Informant Interviews:** KIIs are one of the primary and critical sources of data for this evaluation. The evaluation team conducted a total of 24 KIIs and group interviews (GI) with purposively selected program staff and managers—female respondents made up more than half of the total 40 participants. The KIIs included key USAID staff members, and main points of contact, program leads/directors and key staff from both AUB and LAU. Table 2 below presents the distribution of KII and GI respondents by organizations. For a full list of KII and GI respondents, see Annex 3.

Table 2: KII and GI Respondents

Stakeholders	Number of KIIs	Number of GIs	Number of Participants
USAID	2		2
LAU - USP/HES Staff	7	3	16
AUB - USP/HES Staff	7	3	14
NGOs		2	8
Total	16	8	40

Although conducted remotely, the interviews captured insights into the process and effectiveness of the USP 7 and HES activities and provided an in-depth understanding of the factors that influenced their effectiveness. The KIIs were semi-structured using predefined tools, enabling the evaluation team to follow issues relevant to the evaluation and yet allowing space to (a) obtain more in-depth information through open-ended responses from participants and (b) pursue information not explicitly covered by the planned questions. See Annex 4 for data collection instruments.

- 3. Group Interviews:** The evaluation team conducted eight remote GIs with AUB and LAU program staff who have specific roles and particularly informed perspectives on certain aspects/activities of the program. (See Table 2) For some of the same program activities, the universities have assigned two or more staff. GIs were critically efficient in capturing the perspectives and experiences of those program staff and provided deep insights into the effectiveness of some of the key USP 7/HES activities. The group interviewees included M&E staff, cohort coordinators, academic coordinators, community service project coordinators/facilitators, and civic engagement/volunteering coordinators. Two GIs were conducted with representatives of eight non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that frequently facilitated the scholars' volunteer work. The aim of these interviews was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the scholars' civic engagement experiences and triangulate data collected through KIIs and FGDs.

4. Focus Group Discussions: The evaluation remotely conducted 18 FGDs with selected scholarship recipients representing different USP 7 and HES cohorts, graduates/alumni of USP 7, and student mentors at AUB and LAU. The FGDs with scholars of different cohorts and alumni provided (a) comprehensive information on the respondents’ reflections on and observations of personal growth, knowledge development, skill building experiences, and the challenges faced before and during the pandemic, and (b) solicited perceptions about the effectiveness of the key USP 7 and HES activities. Each focus group consisted of four to six individuals. Female participants constituted approximately 49 percent of the total 97 respondents. The FGDs were conducted using Microsoft Teams. The evaluation team pre-tested the FGD tools and made minor modifications before full implementation.

FGD Sample:

To identify a representative set of direct beneficiaries for interviews that can give diverse points of view, the evaluation team employed a stratified random sample of USP 7 and HES scholars for the FGDs. Aside from aiming to include participants from all 26 districts in Lebanon, the sample takes into account the male-female and rural-urban composition of scholars spread out over several cohorts of USP 7, USP 8, and RSS.

The evaluation planned and conducted 18 FGDs with USP 7 and HES scholars and student mentors. The total consists of an equal number of focus groups from each university categorized by sex, cohort, and rural-urban characteristics. Refugee male and female scholars from the 2019 and 2020 cohorts from both universities constituted four FGDs. In addition, the team conducted four FGDs with male and female alumni groups from USP 7 representing both universities. The sample also includes two FGDs—one male, one female—with student mentors that AUB and LAU have assigned to fresh scholarship recipients. The evaluation team used the lists of scholars from the M&E data as a sampling frame for each university to randomly select participants for each FGD with scholars. Table 3 presents all categories of FGD participants:

Table 3: FGD Sample

Program	Cycle Year	AUB		LAU		Number of FGDs
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
RSS Cycle 1& 2	2019, 2020	Syrian			Syrian	2
RSS Cycle 1 & 2	2019, 2020		Palestinian	Palestinian		2
USP 8	2020	Lebanese Y1 ^U	Lebanese Y1 ^R	Lebanese Y1 ^R	Lebanese Y1 ^U	4
USP 8 & 7	2018, 2019	Lebanese Y2/3 ^R			Lebanese Y2/3 ^U	2
USP 7	2017		Lebanese Y4 ^U	Lebanese Y4 ^R		2
USP 7	2016	Alumni ^U	Alumni ^R	Alumni ^R	Alumni ^U	4
USP 7, 8 & RSS	2019, 2021	Student Mentors			Student Mentors	2
Total		5	4	4	5	18

Y1 – 4 indicates the study year / Superscript R and U refers to rural and urban respectively

Data Collection Tools:

The evaluation team also conducted FGDs with RSS scholars. Since refugee scholars fall under the category of vulnerable populations, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Social Impact was required. As part of the IRB application process, the evaluation team completed their Human Subjects training. The training is a requirement to demonstrate basic knowledge of the ethics

related to research involving human subjects and of regulations and laws prior to collecting data. Once the evaluation team received the approval, FGDs with RSS were conducted strictly following IRB guidelines. The evaluation team pilot-tested the FGD guides for the USP and RSS students. As a result, the team made some necessary adjustment to the tools that included reorganizing and clarifying some of the sub-questions, and ensuring terms used in the FGDs are consistent with the one used by the award/universities—e.g., civic engagement instead of social engagement.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The evaluation team obtained oral informed consent from all participants including RSS scholars strictly following the IRB protocols (See Annex 7 for the IRB-approved consent forms). The team informed the KII respondents and FGD participants about anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provide and that any attribution in the report would be indirect. The team administered oral informed consent scripts and asked the respondents for their verbal consent to ensure that they understood the purpose and voluntary nature of the KII/GI/FGD. For RSS scholars, the consent forms—both in English and Arabic—were emailed to them as part of the FGD invitation and the consent was again displayed on shared screen and read out loud before administration the FGD tool. All participants were informed about the potential risks (minimal, if any) and notified that they could withdraw from the evaluation at any time with no negative consequences. The evaluation team also informed the KII and FGD participants that there were no right or wrong answers, and that there would be no negative consequences for sharing candid information about how the scholarship program was designed or implemented.

The respondents' safety and confidentiality are of utmost priority for Social Impact. The evaluation report does not attribute any information collected through KIIs or FGDs to individual study participants, whereby all data are reported at the aggregated level. During FGDs, the participants were asked to respect each other's confidentiality by not discussing the content of the discussions with community members who did not attend. No individual data were shared outside the evaluation team.

DATA PROTECTION

The privacy of all participants who took part in the data collection was respected throughout the evaluation. The evaluation team stored all notes from FGDs and KIIs, and any identifying information, in password-protected folders that were only accessible to the evaluation team. The team used the 7zip software for secured electronic transfer of information. Social Impact used SharePoint to store all data and reports, which were only accessible to authorized personnel on this evaluation. Strong passwords to protect against unauthorized access were used and shared via a different mode of communication (e.g., Skype, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, separate email). Social Impact uses several data security measures, including the physical security of any hard-copy materials and the secure storage, transfer, destruction, and access of digital materials, all of which are applicable to this evaluation as well.

DATA ANALYSIS

The evaluation team conducted qualitative data analysis of the findings and provided conclusions and recommendations accordingly. The evaluation team used a structured and systematic approach to analyzing the qualitative data and triangulated information across methods and sources to ensure the reliability and validity of results. Specifically, the team prepared initial notes during and after KIIs using prepared data collection tools (interview guides). The notes were reviewed and updated using audio recordings of the interviews and FGDs. The analysis included creating and assigning codes to identify themes—both explanatory and some inferential—relevant to each evaluation question and identified relationships between themes. The team prepared an evaluation data analysis matrix classifying the themes that emerged from qualitative data to facilitate systematic and rigorous analysis aimed at

identifying key study findings related to the evaluation questions. The team also prepared a detailed outline summarizing key findings based on the analysis of data, conclusions for each study question, and a number of illustrative recommendations.

GENDER ANALYSIS

In line with USAID's evaluation policy and recognizing that the effects of integration and the success of the activity might vary based on gender, to the extent possible, the evaluation team applied a gender perspective to ensure that research activities include female study participants. The KIs, GIs, and FGDs included questions to assess the extent to which gender has been integrated into the program. In order to capture different perspectives, FGDs were separated by sex, and the evaluation explored ways in which both male and female recipients had opportunities and experiences that were equitable and equally rich.

LIMITATIONS AND BIASES

Response Bias: Key informants and scholarship recipients are the primary sources of information for answering the evaluation questions. The evaluation team recognizes that the participants' responses may carry systematic but possibly unobserved non-sampling biases specific to each participant's role in the project, cultural considerations, and/or other factors. It is possible that some respondents, like the program staff for example, overestimate the effects on scholars' growth and learning because they are saying what they think the evaluation team wants to hear (response bias/social desirability bias). It is also possible that some scholars might have not felt comfortable sharing negative feedback about the university running the program. The evaluation addressed this issue by ensuring anonymity to respondents which might have reduced the likelihood of over-reporting of positive data. In addition, the evaluation team carefully designed instruments and triangulated evidence across methods and sources systematically to minimize potential bias and ensure the validity and reliability of findings.

Remote Data Collection: The evaluation took place in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Lebanon was experiencing civil unrest due to ongoing political and economic crises. As a result, virtual interview format (using Microsoft Teams) was the optimal approach for efficient data collection under the political and public health context. Some of the FGD participants faced some interruptions due to power outages and/or internet connection issues. Video conference was, therefore, not an option and data collection primarily relied on audio calls to maintain call quality. The team allowed extra time for FGD participants who faced interruptions. While the voice-only calls were a practical option, they resulted in the team's inability to assess facial expressions that normally provide cues about respondents' discomfort, exhaustion, or irritation and allows for a change of questioning approach.

DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION

At the conclusion of the data analysis, the evaluation team presented their preliminary findings and conclusions to USAID/Lebanon during a remote out-brief session. They later submitted a draft version of the evaluation report for USAID/Lebanon's review. After USAID provided its feedback on the draft version, the team made the necessary changes and finalized the report.

The final mid-term evaluation report will be disseminated within USAID/Lebanon. The evaluation team has made actionable recommendations for improvements in the USP 7 and HES programs to help ensure they meet their goals as well as for longer term use in the development of future programs. PMSPL II will also upload a redacted version (excluding any potentially procurement-sensitive information) onto the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) repository for dissemination among partners, stakeholders, and the general public within three months of USAID's approval of the final report. Any personally identifying information of evaluation respondents will be appropriately de-

identified from data and from the evaluation report per Social Impact's and USAID guidelines prior to upload to ensure respondent confidentiality.

As a part of its Post-Evaluation Action Plan, and at the discretion of USAID/Lebanon, PMSPL II will follow up with AUB and LAU to facilitate and enhance their use of the evaluation's findings through one or more of these steps: Distribute the approved evaluation report to AUB, LAU, and/or other USAID implementing partners; facilitate learning events in Lebanon to disseminate the findings; conduct a client satisfaction survey three months after the evaluation's completion; and conduct a utilization/tracer survey six months after the final report.

EVALUATION FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings in this section are based on three distinct sources: (1) key informant interviews conducted with USP and HES program staff from AUB and LAU, and USAID officials, (2) focus groups discussions with current scholars and alumni, and (3) program documents and M&E data.

Counts from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions are cited next to their corresponding findings below. The counts include the number of KIIs and/or FGDs in which the finding was present out of the total number of relevant KIIs and FGDs—for example, (KII 7/12; FGD 11/13).

EQ a. How diligently do AUB and LAU follow the overall criteria of selection, particularly selecting financially disadvantaged students from private schools?

Applicants must meet the minimum eligibility criteria to be considered for the scholarship. In addition to the academic and financial requirements, the selection criteria include (KII 4/7; Desk review):

- Having Lebanese citizenship (for USP) or legal refugee status (for RSS);
- Having attended public or private school in Lebanon for at least the last three years of secondary education;
- Scoring sufficiently well on a leadership assessment;
- Having prior community service experience;
- Obtaining the minimum required scores on entrance exams;
- Not having siblings who have benefited or are benefiting from USP (See Annex 8 for the complete list of requirements of the selection criteria)

Demonstrating academic excellence and high financial need are the key selection criteria. To be considered for the scholarship, the programs require applicants to have a cumulative combined average score of 13.5/20 for public schools and 16/20 for private schools in grades 11 and 12 school exam. In addition, applicants are required to have obtained at least 13.5/20 on the official Lebanese Baccalaureate exam (BACC II) or an SAT score of 1350 for USP and 1250 for RSS for private schools (KII 7/11; Desk review).

According to the financial eligibility requirements, the applicant's family's annual income should not exceed \$30,000, and his/her parent must not earn an educational subsidy that's equivalent to or exceeds \$3,600 (KII 5/11; Desk review). Lebanon is experiencing a severe economic depression. As a result, the gross domestic product growth decreased by 20 percent in 2020, inflation reached triple digits, and the Lebanese Lira keeps losing value. Overall poverty is on the rise.¹⁰ Taking into account the economic crisis in the country and its effects, particularly on low-income families, the subsidy threshold was moved to \$5,000 after cycle I of HES (KII 5/11).

Like their public-school counterparts, applicants from private schools come from underprivileged backgrounds. According to program staff, most applicants attend low-fee private schools or charity-based schools run by community organizations or religious groups (KII 3/7). At the beginning of the program, private-school students were not eligible for HES if the annual fee at the schools they attended was equivalent to or exceeded five million Lebanese Lira (LL) or \$3,326. Later on, USAID and the partner universities decided to eliminate this requirement because it excluded applicants from financially disadvantaged families who—through a scholarship—attended private schools whose annual fee was

¹⁰ The World Bank. (2021). The World Bank in Lebanon – Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview> accessed on (please put the date)

equivalent or exceeded the LL five million ceiling (KII 5/7). AUB removed this requirement for the selection criteria for CI and LAU for C3.

Additionally, the HES program requires applicants from private schools to contribute toward their university tuition even if an applicant spent only one of the last the years of secondary schooling in a private school. Applicants are required to contribute toward the university tuition an amount that is proportional to their average school fee in the last three years (KII 6/11; Desk review).

AUB and LAU have offered and vetted applicants for USP since 2011. The admission and financial aid offices at both universities predate USP. Over the course of multiple USP awards, these offices have developed and improved mechanisms to process, screen, and select USP applicants. Both universities report that they ensure that the scholarship is provided transparently and fairly based on the set eligibility criteria (KII 4/7).

The verification of an applicant's financial records—whether from public or private schools—is a critical step to screen applicants and ascertain their financial status. With their application for admission and financial aid, applicants are required to submit supporting financial records. To determine an applicant's financial need level, the financial aid offices at both universities thoroughly vet these records (KII 5/7). These may include parents' employment/business records, property ownership, motor vehicle registration, loan agreements, income tax statements, benefits received through employment (e.g., accommodation), and bank statements (KII 5/7; Desk review). (See Annex 9 for the complete list of financial aid documents).

In addition, the shortlisted applicants and their parents are required to appear for financial-aid interviews that aim to clarify and validate the information submitted in the financial-aid application. Once the universities determine the applicants' financial needs, they offer scholarships to the neediest meeting all criteria (as indicated above on page 13). Following the selection process, applicants are only admitted to the programs if they fully meet all the requirements and the needed score on the selection percentage distribution (KII 3/7):

- Financial-academic composite score: 75 percent
- Leadership assessment: 25 percent

On average, the USP/HES programs receive more than 1,400 applications at both universities combined for a single cycle. Of the total applications received, approximately 40 percent get shortlisted for AUB and LAU entrance exams and about 20 percent make it to the interview stage. On average, approximately 11 percent are admitted—depending on the target for a particular cycle. Currently, there are 225 scholars under USP 7 and 256 scholars under HES attending tertiary institutions (AUB and LUA) as per fiscal year 2020-21 (Desk Review). USP 7 has met recruitment targets for each cycle (See Table 4 below).

For HES too, the reported data indicate that the program achieved its targets as planned for cycles 1 and 2. The admissions for cycle 3 were on at the time of this evaluation. The difference between targets and achievement in the below table is because both USP 7 and HES recruited additional scholars for every cycle as a result of savings/cost saving from previous USPs and/or ongoing programs. The difference in RSS achievement is due to the increase in funding.

Table 4: USP and HES Enrollment Achievement Across LAU and AUB

Award		Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Total
	LOP* Target	109	109	109	327
USP 7	Male	57	57	68	182
	Female	69	90	81	240
	Total Admitted	126	147	149	422
HES					
USP 8	LOP Target	88	88	88	176**
	Male	38	45	Currently Enrolling	83
	Female	51	46	Currently Enrolling	97
	Total Admitted	89	91		180
RSS					
	LOP Target	27	27	27	54**
	Male	11	8	Currently Enrolling	19
	Female	25	32	Currently Enrolling	57
	Total Admitted	36	40		76

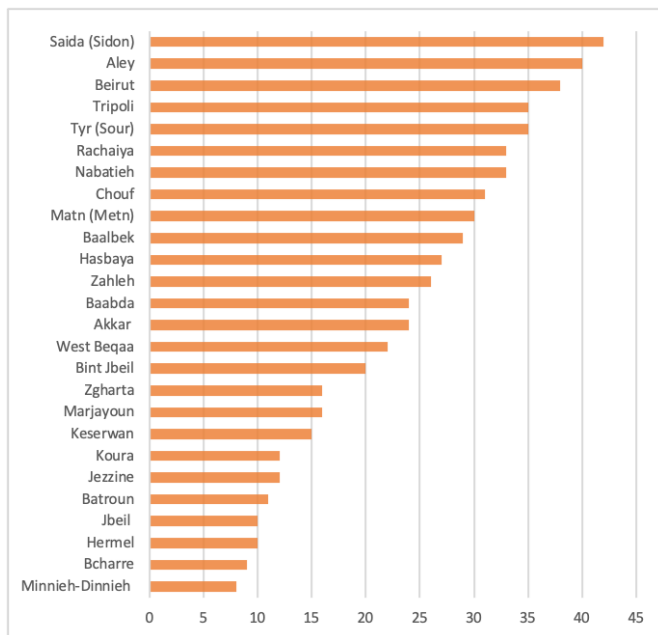
*Life of Project

** The total is based on cycle 1 and cycle 2 figures only. Cycle 3 is not added to the total, as enrollment was on at the time of the evaluation.

EQ b. To what extent do the enrolled cohorts adhere to the award requirements of diversity, national/geographic representation, and gender distribution?

Diversity:

Figure 1: Number of scholars by district - USP7 & 8 combined



The USP 7/HES programs aim to select an equal number of male and female applicants from across the country—30 percent from Beirut and Mount Lebanon and 70 percent from the rest of the country. Both universities promote the programs in all 26 districts through different media outlets, including radio, tv, and online/social media platforms. In addition, the two universities hire part-time staff/recruitment officers who visit all 267 public schools (pre-COVID) for the promotion of the scholarship. Because private schools are more numerous (more than 500), AUB and LAU conduct their

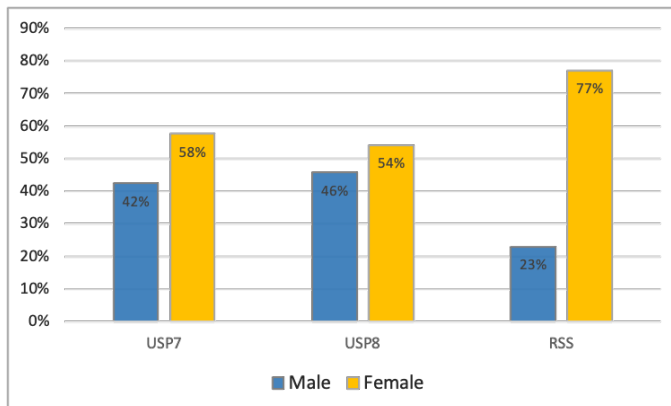
outreach and award promotion campaigns there virtually (even before the pandemic). Since the outbreak, both universities moved all their outreach and award promotion activities online (KII 9/11). Lebanon is very diverse religiously. There are 18 different Muslim and Christian sects that are largely geographically defined.¹¹ The programs expect the applicants will represent different religious sects as a result of promoting the award in all 26 districts (Desk review). Applicants' religious affiliations do not factor into the process of selection (KII 3/7).

Geographic representation:

While the programs target all 26 districts, not every cohort has scholars from every district (KII 9/11; Desk review). This is usually due to (i) the programs not receiving applications from a certain district for a particular cycle or (ii) the applicants from that district not meeting the selection criteria. In such cases, universities, in consultation with USAID, may consider applicants from the most adjacent district for selection (KII 3/11). KIIs with program staff responsible for overseeing the selection process at both universities and program data indicate that if a district does not have representation in one cycle, normally it has successful applicants in previous and/or subsequent cycles (KII 3/11; Desk review).

It is more challenging to recruit applicants from some areas in the North, South, and Beqaa than elsewhere (KII 4/11). According to USP 7/HES data, the Bcharre and Minnieh-Danniyeh districts (in the North governorate) and the Hermel district (in the Baalbeck/Hermel governorate) have a lower representation compared to the rest of the districts (See Figure 1). In some districts, it is not unlikely that conservative families hesitate to allow their daughters to live in dorms or travel alone by bus. Boys, on the other hand, are expected to start working after finishing high school (KII 3/11).

Figure 2: USP7 & HES male/female scholar distribution



Gender:

The USP 7 and HES programs aim to select an equal number of male and female applicants from each district. The extent to which the two universities are able to achieve this depends on the number of male and female potential candidates who apply from each district and the number of candidates who meet the selection criteria. Traditionally, more female students apply for the scholarship, and as a result the programs tend to have more female scholars than male scholars on board (KII 6/11). For USP 7, female scholars make up around 58 percent of the total number of scholars (LAU-AUB combined average). For USP 8, female representation stands at around 54 percent (See Figure 2).

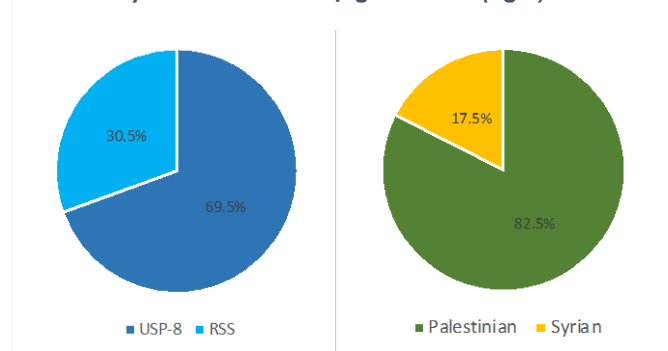
The RSS component is funded separately from USP 8. Its objective is to offer quality higher education to refugee youth from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds that are displaced from their home

¹¹ El Rajji, Rania. (2014). *The leaves of one tree: Religious minorities in Lebanon*. Minority Rights Group International. CJPME. Factsheet (2007). *Understanding Lebanese Confessionalism*. Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East.

country due to a political conflict (Desk review). According to USAID’s funding allocations, refugee scholars make up around 30 percent of the total scholars currently enrolled in cycle 1 and cycle 2 of the HES program. Compared to Palestinian refugees, Syrian refugees are markedly under-represented. They constitute approximately 18 percent of the scholars currently enrolled in the RSS component at both universities (See Figure 3). In addition, 77 percent of the scholars enrolled in it are female (KII 5/11; Desk review). The HES award does not specify the share of scholarship for Palestinian and Syrian refugee groups. Moreover, the diversity criteria related to gender do not apply to the RSS component (KII 4/11/Desk review).

With regard to the low representation of Syrian refugee scholars, senior program staff at both universities report that it is hard for the programs to target Syrian refugees, as these are scattered across the country. Palestinian refugees, on the other hand, have lived in Lebanon for decades and are relatively more integrated into the Lebanese society than their Syrian counterparts (KII 5/11). Currently, the estimated number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is around 1.5 million¹² and Palestinian refugees are around 192,000.¹³

Figure 3: Share of RSS and USP8 in HES (left), Share of Syrian/Palestinian refugees in RSS (right)



To promote the scholarship to Palestinian students, AUB and LAU reach out to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and local organizations such as Unite Lebanon Youth Project (ULYP) (KII 7/11). UNRWA manages about 65 schools in 12 camps in Lebanon providing education services to approximately 37,000 Palestinian refugees.¹⁴ ULYP (is a nonprofit local organization that works with children and youth providing them with opportunities to access quality educational programs.¹⁵ The HES program has not, however, identified any organization to help it target Syrian refugees (KII 5/11). There many NGOs working with Syrian refugees, but there is not one particular organization (such as UNRWA) that specifically works within Syrian refugee students within the formal education system and can help student through the application process. For RSS cycle 3, the two universities have recently started communicating with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to promote the scholarship to Syrian refugees (KII 2/11). Respondents from both universities report that the two would like to reach out to and admit more Syrian refugees for the remaining two cycles. Currently, besides coordinating with UNHCR, they have no strategies to increase the proportion of Syrian refugees in the RSS component (KII 4/11).

¹² Lebanon: Action Needed on Syrian Refugee Education Crisis. (2021). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/26/lebanon-action-needed-syrian-refugee-education-crisis>

¹³ Palestinian Programme, UNICEF. (2021). <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/palestinian-programme>

¹⁴ Education in Lebanon. (2021). UNRWA. <https://www.unrwa.org/activity/education-lebanon>

¹⁵ ULYP. (2021). <https://www.ulyp.org/>

EQ c. What challenges—e.g., academic culture, mistreatment, discrimination or abuse—do scholars face in integrating into the regular student body and how are these challenges addressed?

AUB and LAU, offer comprehensive integration support specifically to USP 7/HES scholars. This includes preparatory semesters to improve their language skills, orientation days, and workshops. Scholars view these activities and support as helpful for their integration (FGD 15/16). For ensuring smooth integration, both universities have a significant body of staff and experienced students supporting the integration of USP 7/HES scholars specifically. These include student mentors, coordinators, and academic advisors. In addition, both universities avoid duplication of existing services and ensure that the scholars are aware of the availability of university support staff—such as psychological or career counsellors—and that they have regular access to them (KII 11/12).

The programs offer up to two semesters/a preparatory year to scholars focusing on intensive English language training and/or remedial classes. Generally, about 50 percent of scholars enroll in a preparatory semester or year based on their need. The purpose is to improve their academic readiness prior to enrolling in the actual field of study (Desk review). Strengthening English language skills, through additional preparatory semesters based on skill levels, was identified by both scholars and program staff as a critical component of the program’s current integration support since these represent a barrier for

“The staff when we first entered university helped us a lot to transition from high school to a university life. My friends at university who were not scholarship students had a lot of difficulty to know how to register their courses, what to do, how to adapt to this new lifestyle, whereas I, and the other scholarship students had a smooth transition because we had someone helping us, making sure everything is fine and that we’re not having any difficulties or any problems.” (Male FGD participant)

scholars from public schools and especially those educated at public or private schools in French (KII 6/12, FGD12/16).

According to FGD participants, scholars experience some challenges in their adjustment to the academic culture, especially after moving from highly structured school life to a significantly more complex university setting (FGD 10/16). The respondents cited time management as one of the single most important issues (KII 5/12; FGD 5/16) and highly valued the workshops they were offered. Some scholars struggle to make decisions about their majors. They perceive this uncertainty consumes their energy and adds to their integration challenges.

The scholarship provides the opportunity to stay in dorms for students from distant districts. HES-USP scholars do not share dorms with regular students. A majority of staff reported scholars initially having challenges with living in a dorm. These included feeling homesick and/or adapting to a different culture (KII 8/12). The scholarship recipients reported finding living in dorms came with independence that demanded taking responsibility for managing their lives without unnecessary reliance on their families (FGD 4/16). Many viewed being independent as a positive transition in their lives. (FGD 7/16).

“I’m living in a town far from the university in Beirut. I got to live at the dorms, it was lonely at first, but then I adapted.” (Female FGD participant)

“One of the best experiences was being able to meet new people, especially in the dorms since we were like a family.” (Female FGD participant, female scholar)

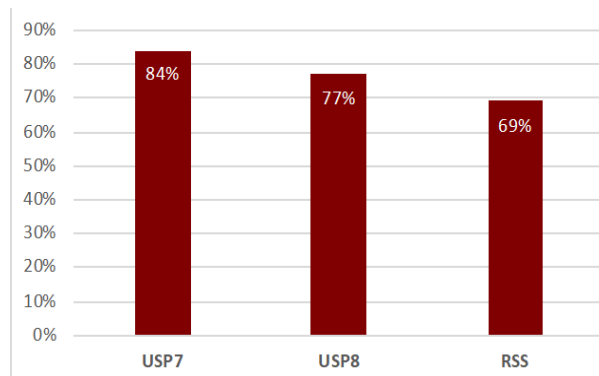
Whether residing in dorms or not, a majority of scholars said they experienced the exposure to students from different backgrounds, regions, religions positively (FGD 11/16). Some found it difficult at the beginning to adapt to a context of such diversity but eventually were able to assimilate and described the transformation as a valuable part of their scholarship experience (FGD 6/16). Regarding building connections or social interaction with other regular university students, scholars say they found it initially hard to integrate with non-USP/HES students who come from a different socioeconomic background (FGD 10/16). Scholars saw participation in extracurricular activities such as volunteering as a very helpful opportunity for integration. It gave them the time and opportunity to interact and build connections with and relate to students from a variety of backgrounds (FGD 10/16).

Many FGD participants believed that integration into university life became more challenging as a result of switching entirely to remote/online learning. Scholars find it hard to establish relationships, especially with students outside the scholarship group, due to the lack of or limited opportunities (FGD 8/16)

Both programs’ staff and scholars unequivocally express that they saw no gender-related differences concerning the challenges faced during the integration phase and that there have been no cases of gender or any kind of discrimination (KII 9/12; FGD 10/16). USP 7/HES scholars said they neither felt discriminated against by academic staff nor singled out for who they are (FGD 10/16). Some even expressed that they had in fact experienced the opposite of discrimination: being treated well (FGD 5/16). Scholars and university staff explained that both institutions put significant emphasis on creating an environment that did not allow for gender-based discrimination and offered the same treatment and opportunities to all. (KII 7/12; FGD 6/16).

EQ d. How well are the USP and RSS scholars performing academically relative to their peers (non-USP scholars)?

Figure 4: Percentage of scholars with cumulative average of 80% or above



The programs expect high academic achievements from scholars throughout their scholarship period. All scholars are required to maintain a minimum of a 70 percent cumulative grade point average (GPA) to remain in good academic standing. Program staff from both universities report that the majority of USP 7/HES scholars have high GPA scores (KII 8/13), and more than 50 percent are on the Dean's honor or distinguished list having GPA of over 3.5. The Dean's honor or distinguished lists serves as an award or notation to recognize the high level of academic performance demonstrated by the scholars.

Approximately 84 percent of all USP 7 scholars in both universities have an 80 percent or above GPA. This is above the program targets of 70 percent of scholars scoring sustained academic average and 80 percent of scholars having cumulative averages of over 80 percent upon graduation (KII 4/13; Desk review). For HES, approximately 77 percent of USP 8 scholars and 69 percent of RSS scholars have a GPA that equals or exceeds 80 percent. Generally, female scholars' GPA scores are higher than those of male scholars. About 71 percent of the total male scholars and 84 percent of the total female scholars have an average GPA score of 80 percent or above across both universities. Of the total scholars with an average GPA score of 80 percent or above, the proportion of female scholars is 57 percent (combined for USP 7 and 8 and across the two universities).

Generally, the key program staff from both universities share a common perception that USP 7/HES scholars academically perform better than regular students do, at both universities (KII 6/13). A comparative analysis shared by LAU indicates that USP 7/HES scholars' mean cumulative 3.48 GPA is significantly higher than regular students' 3.13 GPA. (AUB did not share such comparative analysis). The program staff from both universities offer various explanations for the USP 7/HES scholars' high achievements relative to other students. Some perceive that these scholars are more motivated and resilient as compared to regular students (KII 3/13). Some say the scholars do not have a choice, as performing below the required grades may result in probation (KII 3/13). Others associate the scholars' high achievement with the selection of the best applicants for the scholarship. (KII 9/13). Most respondents from the two universities agree that the training and the support the programs offer to the scholars play a role in their academic achievement (KII 11/13).

The USP 7/HES programs provide coordinated support to scholars to ensure they are able to demonstrate high academic achievement during the course of their scholarship. The programs assign student mentors to scholars—in most cases these are senior USP scholars—who provide regular support and guidance, particularly during the first two years (KII 11/13). In addition, the program staff/academic coordinators at both universities regularly interact with the scholars to keep track of

their academic performance and offer them support if necessary. Monitoring the scholars' performance includes regularly collecting information and/or progress reports (e.g., grades, attendance) from faculty, student mentors, and also directly from scholars. Scholars needing extra help or those underperforming are provided with appropriate support that includes tutoring (KII 10/13). Besides the overall support that is available to scholars through the scholarship, like regular university students, the scholars are also assigned academic advisors (faculty members) to get academic advising and support (KII 5/13).

EQ e. How well are/have USP and RSS enabling/enabled scholars to become active leaders and potential leading change agents? (Emphasis on preparing individuals as change agents rather than actual transformation).

Both USP 7 and HES require scholars to engage in leadership training, civic engagement and volunteerism, and university-based clubs or societies. USP 7 requires scholars to complete up to 15 hours of volunteer work per month, while HES scholars complete eight hours of volunteer work every month during year one and 12 hours per month in subsequent years. In addition, all USP 7/HES scholars must participate and complete community service projects (CSPs) before graduating (KII 3/17; Desk Review).

Scholars develop individual development plans (IDPs) during their first semester to set objectives for their personal growth, volunteer work, and leadership skill development. The programs use IDPs to monitor and assesses the scholars' growth and also as guides to customize skill-building workshops to the scholars' needs (KII 5/18). The leadership and civic engagement workshops cover different topics ranging from time management and communication skills to problem solving, community development, and project management. In addition, USP 7/HES have designated staff who follow up with the scholars on a regular basis and offer them guidance and support to participate in volunteer activities, help them identify NGOs to work with, build soft skills, and develop and implement CSPs (KII 9/18).

“The flavor of the programs is the leadership and civic engagement component.”
(A senior program staff)

Many staff members expressed, and many scholars agreed, that the leadership and civic engagement component provides transformative experiences and learning through volunteer work and participation in CSPs (KII 15/18; FGD 10/17).

According to the program staff and scholars, the skills and attributes the scholars develop through the leadership and civic engagement component include (KII 17/18; scholars FGD 10/ 17):

- Communication and social skills (e.g., skills to interact with different communities)
- Team building and team work
- Time management
- Conflict resolution
- Analytical and critical thinking
- Enhanced professional profile
- Tolerance: accepting diversity
- Awareness about social justice, human rights
- Motivation to give back to their communities

Early on, scholars are encouraged to start brainstorming possible projects that they will implement to address their selected community issue/need. Scholars work in teams—not more than seven in each team for each CSP. In most cases, the projects they identify to implement target a community or neighborhood of one of the team members (KII 5/18). Through CSPs, the scholars learn about community problems and work with NGOs, community initiatives or municipalities to develop solutions for these problems. This work allows them to have meaningful experiences and apply the skills they develop through leadership and civic engagement workshops. Many scholars may have additional opportunities for learning and training at organizations/NGOs with which they work (KII 10/18; FGD 10/17).

“It doesn’t only give you an education, it also gives you an opportunity to actually grow on a personal level and build connections with people. Now that I’ve graduated, I look back and mostly think about the connections I made and I think about the stories of other people that I’ve learned from, so this is what’s rewarding.”
(A female Alumni FGD member)

Program staff and scholars report that through volunteer work and CSPs, the scholars develop the motivation to affect their communities and make a positive impact in society (KII 7/18; FGD 8/17). They feel a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction when they work to bring a positive change in a community. Many scholars expressed that volunteer work helped them achieve personal growth and learn about their personal efficacy and motivated them to make a difference (FGD 9/17).

Scholars report volunteering of their own volition in their community or with local organizations. According to program staff and scholars from both universities, scholars volunteered during the pandemic to raise awareness, and after the Beirut blast to provide food to affected families and remove rubble from damaged residential buildings (KII 6/18; FGD 8/17). Many continue doing volunteer work following their graduation (KII 5/18; Alumni FGD 2/4).

A common perception many scholars share is that the experience they gain and the skills they build under the leadership and civic engagement component will be beneficial to their careers in the future, as incorporating volunteer experience in their resume highlights their skills and accomplishments (FGD 10/17). Similar to other scholars, USP 7 alumni in both universities report that the program gave them leadership and soft skills that respond to employers’ demands and helped boost their profile and showcase their professional capabilities. Some also shared that it helped them pursue higher education (Masters, PhD) and develop connections and a professional network (Alumni FGD 4/4).

While scholars find volunteer work useful, they also report facing challenges. Some report lacking clarity about CSPs or having difficulty thinking of innovative ideas for the projects in the beginning (FGD 3/17). Others find the process of planning and implementing CSPs hectic and demanding (FGD 3/17). Some also report facing delays in receiving feedback on their ideas/proposals and/or approval of their CSP proposals (FGD 4/17). The universities help students find volunteer work through their network of NGOs, municipalities as well as schools. The students are also free to find their own volunteer placement opportunities.

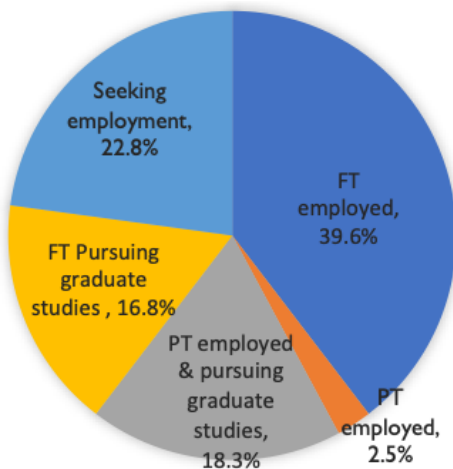
For many, the single most challenging part of the experience is maintaining balance between leadership and civic engagement activities and course work. They feel overwhelmed with course work, the program’s requirement to maintain good grades, and time management to meet deadlines (FGD 11/17). Many find civic engagement work gratifying but associate it with an increased level of stress, particularly

at times when they have to complete volunteer hours/volunteer work with NGOs or participate in workshops during mid-term/exam weeks (FGD 11/17).

USP 7/HES scholars participate in university student clubs and societies. Some assume leadership responsibilities such as treasurer, vice president, or president of clubs and societies (KII 6/18; FGD 2/17). According to the program target, 50 percent of USP scholars report assuming at least once a leadership position in their university-based activities. The program also reports 100 percent scholars participated/participating in CSPs (Desk review). Scholars have to submit CSP final report. This is cross checked against reports submitted by CSP staff and advisors to confirm CSP participation and completion.

EQ f. How do scholars perceive their employment preferences and prospects? How well are the program components preparing scholars for entry into the labor market?

Figure 5: Post-graduation employment



For career preparation, USP 7/HES scholars receive job readiness workshops and soft skills and entrepreneurship training. In addition, they are required to complete internships—irrespective of whether a major requires it or not. (KII 5/14; Desk review). Scholars whose majors require internships are placed at organizations related to their majors—e.g., scholars majoring in nursing intern at hospitals. Others intern at different types of organizations, including NGOs, community initiatives, schools, and banks. These and other activities (below) contribute toward the program target of preparing at least 95 percent of the scholars for the labor market through training and career guidance. The combined achievement for USP 7 from both universities is approximately 98 percent (Desk review).

USP 7/HES require the two universities to keep track of the scholars after they graduate to check whether they are employed or pursuing graduate studies (KII 5/14; Desk review). The programs expect that at least 75 percent of the scholars will be employed or will be pursuing graduate studies within a period of 3-6 months post-graduation. A total of 197 scholars have graduated under USP 7 from both universities so far. Figure 5 shows that, of the total graduated scholars, approximately 77 percent are either employed (40 percent full time; 2.5 percent part time) or pursuing graduate studies (17 percent full time; 18 percent part time) (Desk Review). The combined average of the two universities of USP 7 scholars graduating successfully is approximately 96 percent. The program target is 95 percent (Desk review).

As part of their job readiness training, the scholars participate in career counselling workshops early on to get guidance on selected majors and their career prospects in the labor market. The majors offered are based on their high prospects in the job market that AUB and LAU determine through market surveys. (KII 5/14). To understand the trends in the Lebanese labor market and determine which majors might be more marketable for scholars, each university separately conducts a labor market survey every year. Both universities have not conducted any labor market surveys since 2019 due to the political and economic crisis, and COVID-19.

The job readiness workshops are designed to teach scholars the skills needed for career success. Some of the key themes these workshops target include problem solving, public speaking, and interpersonal skills. In addition, the workshops train scholars to be able to market themselves in the job market through teaching them resuming writing, job interview techniques, professional networking, personal branding, and developing online/LinkedIn profiles (KII 5/14; FGD 5/12; Desk review).

Apart from providing soft skills training, the programs require all scholars to complete their internships before graduating. AUB and LAU provide guidance and support to scholars to help them explore and secure internships with companies, corporations, educational institutions, and NGO/community-based organizations (KII 5/14). Programs staff consider internships critical for scholars to secure jobs in the labor market as they offer the scholars an opportunity to apply the skills, they learned in the job readiness workshops and leadership and civic engagement activities. They also allow them to develop new skills and build professional relationships (KII 9/14; FGD 5/12).

Scholars say that academic achievement alone is not enough for securing a job, as it needs to be complemented with leadership skills and experience in civic engagement (KII 8/14; FGD 9/12). USP 7/HES scholars unanimously perceive that the experience and skills they acquired through the leadership, civic engagement, and career readiness activities have improved their profiles and have a great value in the job market and for their professional lives (KII 4/14; FGD 15/17). In addition, for many, participation in these activities also help them network with associations, NGOs, and other agencies (FGD 5/12). After graduation, some scholars report ending up working with the organization where they interned (KII 3/14). Some also note that the internships helped them identify a future course of action—i.e., whether to choose a career path or pursue graduate studies such as a Master's/PhD (FGD 5/12).

Many scholars express appreciation for the support and the learning opportunities USP 7/HES offered them through workshops, training, and building social and professional networks. They also recognize and value having easy access to and regular follow-up meetings with program staff for support and guidance (FGD 9/12). They believe that the programs offer quality education and give them a competitive advantage for securing employment in the job market (FGD 7/12).

Some scholars believe that the programs focus a lot on extracurricular activities and not as much on career-oriented activities (FGD 3/12). Some also report that the programs do not provide them with enough guidance regarding their future, particularly in relation to further education and employment (FGD 3/12). Some program staff and scholars share that under the current economic crisis in Lebanon, securing employment is very hard for graduates and even harder for refugees since career options are already limited for refugees (KII 5/14; FGD 2/12).

Some scholars face difficulties as they feel uncertain about selecting the right major (FGD 7/16). This may be related to them not understanding their future career options well enough or simply having concerns about whether the major's subjects would match their interests and skills. Some students described how the inventory test they were offered as part of their scholarship had helped them in their choices. They valued the staff's guidance in their decision making (FGD 4/16), and some recommended increasing support (FGD 4/16). Some alumni noted that connecting fresh scholars with alumni can

provide further guidance to scholars to improve their understanding of the impact of choosing their majors early on.

EQ g. In what ways have the current COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns affected program activities and/or progress, particularly activities related to civic engagement and community projects that scholars are required to implement?

General effect of the COVID-19 pandemic

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability had already forced AUB and LAU to switch to remote learning (KII 13/17). The onset of the pandemic forced the universities to continue with their distance-learning mode, and this was still challenging for both universities at first as both were not adequately prepared for going online completely. The program staff report that they adapted and improved over time and are now managing well to make online learning for scholars as smooth as possible (KII 9/17).

“On campus, we had the chance to attend workshops, see and meet people etc. Now online everything is different. We just have the screen in front of us and we have to adapt to it and do everything on it.”

(FGD, female student)

The majority of scholars clearly said they preferred face-to-face learning and expressed dissatisfaction with remote learning, as it limited their interaction with others and increased their emotional disconnection/social isolation (FGD 11/18). They feel that they are missing the most critical part of the scholarship experience, i.e., being at university, accessing its services, living in dorms, having in-person interaction and learning. For some, the remote learning affected their motivation to complete assignments, participate in program activities and their level of efficiency has decreased (FGD 6/18), while others said it increased their stress level (FGD 8/18). Some students perceive that their online courses are not as effective as in-person courses in terms of learning (FGD 7/18). However, in about half of the FGDs, the scholars shared that they valued remote learning since it allowed them more time and opportunities to take online courses and workshops and continue developing skills (FGD 9/18). Scholars also appreciated that their lectures were recorded, as they provided them easy access to information anytime, which was very convenient (FGD 5/18). Some described that they had become independent learners, managing studies responsibly (FGD 5/18).

Many scholars report facing internet connection problems and power outages that impact their participation in virtual lessons and result in time losses during exams (KII 5/17; FGD 5/18). Online exams were therefore experienced as more stressful which was further negatively impacted by strict security measures to prevent fraud (e.g., not being able to correct earlier answers, less time to prevent opportunities for cheating). In addition to laptops, USP 7/HES provide scholars with internet bundles so that they have reliable access to the internet. This has reduced but not completely fixed connectivity issues. (KII 5/17)

“Sometimes I have to tell my parents and family not to make too much noise because I have a lecture or exam, especially that my house is not big enough.” (FGD, RSS scholar)

“It was better in the dorms and we had a library. Better to study there than at home.” (FGD, RSS scholar)

While only a few (FGD 3/13) Lebanese scholars complained about an inadequate learning environment at home (e.g., noise, lack of privacy to study), the majority of refugee scholars reported facing this challenge (FGD 3/4). This was particularly challenging during exams. Dorms and access to the university’s library and other facilities offered a significantly more conducive learning environment.

Effects on civic engagement and CSPs:

Traditional in-person volunteer work in many cases suffered since the onset of the pandemic. After some NGOs stopped working, the scholars had to look for alternative online volunteering opportunities, in some cases including the implementation of CSPs. Due to limited options, it was challenging to find online volunteer opportunities (KII 11/17; FGD 10/18). However, scholars were able to conduct some volunteering activities on the ground, which were either related to the pandemic such as volunteering with the Red Cross and participating in awareness raising campaigns (KIIs 9/11) or to the Beirut port blast—e.g., distributing food or cleaning rubble. Some of the NGOs managed to adapt their work to the given situation and created online volunteering opportunities, such as teaching public school children remotely (KII 15/17).

Across both universities, approximately 63 CSPs were planned for 2020. About one third of these CSPs (32 percent) had to move to a hybrid approach, combining virtual with in-person components, or fully go online. Approximately 18 percent of CSPs were delayed due to the pandemic. Some CSPs fell behind schedule as a result of the delay in the leadership workshops which usually precede them (KII 9/17). The support from the USP 7/HES programs including making efforts to tailor the CSPs in a way to allow students to implement the projects safely while still creating an impact on their community (KII 4/17).

EQ h. What gender considerations have been taken into account by key program activities and what are the most visible discrepancies, if any?

The programs require that universities ensure that male and female applicants have equal chances of being accepted and provide equal access and opportunity to scholars to make use of all that the scholarships have to offer. According to the Program staff both AUB and LAU are continuously aiming to increase male scholars’ representation. Currently, female scholars outnumber male scholars in both USP 7 and USP 8 (KII 6/11). In the RSS component, the number of male scholars is significantly lower than the female scholars (See EQ-b for details)

The program staff shared that the universities are sensitive to the needs of all scholars and provide equal support and guidance to both male and female scholars. There is no stereotypical approach to the scholars’ choice of participating in activities based on gender. For example, for CSPs, male and female scholars work in teams focusing on various topics such as women’s rights, gender-based violence, teaching children with disabilities, and cleaning beaches (KII 7/11). Many program staff observe that male and female scholars are equally committed to serving their communities, and that their participation in activities is based on their commitment rather than their gender (KII 9/11). Scholars’ accounts from the FGDs generally corroborate these assertions (FGD 15/17).

Where necessary, USP 7/HES use gender-based messaging to support equal participation and offer opportunities that are there but may not be taken up by some scholars based on stereotypes. For example, nursing is typically considered a profession for women as opposed to engineering for men. Through gender-based messaging videos, flyers, and posts on online platforms, AUB and LAU promote majors that otherwise might be avoided because of gender-biased perceptions (KII 3/11).

Male and female scholars report no differences in the support and treatment they receive from program staff. In addition, they perceive that the programs help breakdown stereotypes, if any, and say they exposed them to a culture that promotes and provides equal opportunities to scholars to realize and reach their full potential (FGD 6/12).

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Factors crucial for the achievement of results

1. The selection criteria are comprehensive. They enable the two universities to assess scholars against an adequately defined set of requirements to ensure that the USP 7/HES programs select those who are academically the best among their peers and financially the most deserving. USP 7 has reached its target number for individuals attending tertiary education institutions with a United States Government (USG) scholarship. HES is on track to achieve its target.
2. While the two universities follow the selection criteria, they maintain enough flexibility to consider factors for offering fair opportunities to all applicants. For example, taking into account the economic crisis, they modified the subsidy threshold and removed the private school fee limit to accept students from poor families who attend private school.
3. The enrolled cohorts under USP 7 and USP 8 largely meet the diversity criteria. The programs have scholars from all 26 districts even though some districts might have a lower representation compared to others under a certain cycle. While scholar distribution by gender has traditionally tilted in the favor of female scholars, the distribution has shown significant improvements in recent times—i.e., male scholar representation increased from 42 percent in USP 7 to 46 percent in HES.
4. Opening up scholarship opportunities to the refugee population under HES brings more diversity and inclusivity. However, there is significant disparity in representation between Palestinian and Syrian refugees, and between male and female scholars within the RSS component. There are significantly fewer Syrian refugees than Palestinian refugees, and fewer male scholars than female scholars, in the program across both universities.
5. Outreach to UNRWA and other local organizations working with Palestinian refugees appears effective. However, the absence of a clear strategy to recruit more Syrian refugees likely contributes to the disparity in representation between the two groups of refugee scholars.
6. USP 7/HES scholars face the same initial challenges as any student transitioning from school to university. However, in contrast to regular students, the comprehensive support offered to USP 7/HES scholars likely makes significant contributions to their successful transition.
7. Exposure to diversity is enriching for the scholars. The programs enable them to connect to and build relationships with other scholars. While there are no reported instances of discrimination or mistreatment, building relationships with non-USP/HES students has been challenging, likely due to socio-economic differences. The shift to remote learning further limits opportunities to interact and build relationships with regular students.
8. Overall, USP 7 and HES scholars at both AUB and LAU are high achievers academically. On relative terms too, they appear to outperform their non-USP-HES peers at both universities (*Note: The conclusion on scholars' performance relative to the regular students is based on partial evidence: only one university shared the evidence*). There is variation in achievement between USP and RSS scholars, with the latter trailing the former. Overall, the programs are on track to achieve their targets regarding academic performance.
9. These scholars come mostly from public schools and economically disadvantaged backgrounds and yet are able to outperform regular students at both universities. This could be unrelated to the program's effects given that these students have competed for their scholarships and were selected

based on their academic excellence. However, it is also possible that the program additionally enhances their achievement, given that the comparative advantage the scholars have through their scholarships is unavailable to regular students.

10. There is a systematic focus of USP 7/HES on building leadership skills and providing opportunities for growth and learning through training and hands-on experiences that likely prepare the scholars to become potential leaders capable of acting as catalysts of change in their communities and beyond. USP 7 has achieved its targets of 50 percent of scholars assuming at least once a leadership position during their term, and 95 percent of scholars participating in CSPs.
11. CSPs are an effective way to utilize the scholars' prior knowledge and experience in community service as well as their interest in and passion for social good. They also give the students the chance to apply the skills they learn through the programs. The outcome likely benefits both the scholars and the communities with which they work.
12. Overall, USP 7/HES scholars do not face major challenges when planning and carrying out volunteer/community service activities, although they likely encounter minor obstacles. Scheduling workshops and/or other volunteer activities during mid-term weeks likely puts unnecessary pressure on scholars.
13. The programs invest greatly in providing scholars with learning experiences that are sought-after in the labor market. Graduates are able to pursue higher education (Master's or PhD) or acquire jobs despite the severe economic crisis the country has been facing for some time now.
14. The current achievement of over 77 percent of USP 7 graduates being either employed on a full-time or part-time basis or pursuing graduate studies indicates that the program is on track to achieve its target. The program is also on track to achieve its target of 95 percent of scholars graduating successfully and preparing at least 95 percent of scholars for the labor market.
15. The leadership and civic engagement component supplements the contributions of the job readiness activities in preparing scholars for the labor market and enhancing their self-confidence and likely their employment prospects there.
16. The benefits of labor market surveys cannot be overstated for the two programs. However, each university conducting a separate survey every year appears to be a duplication of effort.
17. The pandemic has affected the academic as well as the extracurricular aspects of the scholars' experiences. USP 7/HES have adapted and are responsive to the scholars' needs. However, structural constraints such as power outages, crowded households, and lockdowns pose challenges for the two programs.
18. The two universities' adaptive approach during the pandemic likely minimized its effects on CSPs. The hybrid (virtual and in-person) approach to implementation is likely the optimal solution given the circumstances.
19. Overall, the USP 7/HES programs have largely been able to provide equal opportunities to male and female scholars to both participate in and benefit equally from all program activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. USP 7/HES should continue following the current selection criteria approach and process adopted since 2011 and retain their flexible approach to changes in response to external factors—i.e., the economic crisis in Lebanon—to ensure applicants have fair opportunities across the country. As the economic crisis continues, financially disadvantaged families will likely suffer further, and more changes in the criteria might become necessary in the future.
2. The USP 7/HES programs should maintain the current approach to meeting the requirement of diversity for Lebanese applicants, as it generally yields desired results for the programs. With increased outreach and promotion effort, the programs should increase the number of scholars from the relatively under-represented districts.
3. While diversity is not a requirement for RSS under the HES award, the program could benefit immensely from making the RSS component more equitable and inclusive. To diversify its body of refugee scholars, HES should consider expanding its outreach to target more Syrian refugees. To do so, AUB and LAU may:
 - a. Consider identifying and coordinating with local organizations that work with Syrian refugees to help recruit scholars.
 - b. Continue working with public schools but with increased focus on those with large numbers of Syrian refugee students.
 - c. Encourage and increase the involvement of current RSS scholars in outreach and award promotion activities.
4. To make the scholars' integration smoother overall, USP 7/HES should consider:
 - a. Exploring ways to detect the early challenges to integration—e.g., uncertainty about the choice of majors or inability to interact with others virtually—and offering these students targeted support to enable them to respond to these challenges.
 - b. Exploring ways to increase opportunities for USP 7/HES scholars to interact more frequently with regular students. Examples may include the desegregation of dorms and the introduction of joint events such as seminars, projects, study groups, etc.
 - c. Encouraging and supporting increased participation of scholars in university clubs and societies.
5. Given the academic performance of scholars, USP 7/HES should continue with the current approach of training and support. To close the gap between USP and RSS scholars' performance, the programs should consider exploring areas where they can provide targeted support to RSS scholars for further improvement in their academic achievement.
6. The USP 7/HES programs should consider avoiding scheduling workshops or other civic engagement activities during midterm weeks to allow scholars to focus on their exams.
7. The USP 7/HES programs should maintain the current approach to preparing scholars for the labor market. In doing so, the two partner universities should explore areas where they can collaborate—e.g., jointly conducting labor market surveys instead of conducting separately—to eliminate any duplication of effort.
8. The USP 7/HES programs should consider conducting regular studies (surveys, focus groups) to assess the impact of the pandemic on the scholars' learning and mental health, the challenges they face while working remotely, and the quality of their participation in extracurricular activities. The information from such studies will likely enable AUB and LAU to develop additional solutions and work towards minimizing the effects of the pandemic on the programs.

EVALUATION TEAM

TEAM COMPOSITION

Team Leader: Jehanzaib Khan, a PhD holder from New York University in Sociology of Education, has more than 18 years of professional experience in international development, humanitarian intervention, education research, performance evaluation, and public and private education in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Lebanon. His skills include rigorous quantitative and qualitative research and evaluation methods and analysis, grant and project management, and in-depth field experience. Jehanzaib has extensive experience evaluating education projects and has worked recently on evaluations and assessments carried out remotely. Jehanzaib is familiar with the MENA region, Lebanon in particular, where he led two education project evaluations with PMSPLII. Hence, he is familiar with the context, the situation and the challenges faced by Lebanon’s education system and labor force requirement. Furthermore, Jehanzaib brings extensive experience working with USAID on education related evaluations at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level as well as knowledge of similar scholarship programs applied elsewhere.

Team Member/Local Expert: Karim Sahyoun, a senior international consultant with more than 20 years of in-depth experience in the humanitarian and development fields including leading complex evaluation processes, research, strategic reviews and measuring sustainable impact. He has experience with using a variety of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis tools for studies, baselines, mid-term, end of program and ex-post evaluations. Karim has recently led many evaluations remotely. Karim brings in knowledge of the education system in Lebanon, familiarity with AUB and LAU student graduates and student life as well as extensive experience working on evaluations and assessments in Lebanon and the region. Furthermore, Karim’s knowledge of Arabic helped the team leader navigate the process. Karim holds a PhD in Agriculture economics and Social Science from Humboldt University in Berlin.

EVALUATION MANAGEMENT

Three SI-HQ management personnel with distinct roles and responsibilities supported the successful implementation of this evaluation. Project Director, Deepika Chawla, provided short-term technical assistance and quality assurance on all evaluation deliverables. Project Manager, Anika Gallo, was responsible for coordination between the evaluation team, the PMSPL II office, and SI-HQ to ensure the timely submission of deliverables. Project Assistant, Kim Ryan, provided logistical and coordination support to the evaluation team and any needed copy-editing of evaluation deliverables.

A more detailed description of these roles is included below:

Table 5: SI-HQ Management Team Members

Position	Role	Responsibilities
Project Director (Short-term technical assistance)	Provide high-level technical support to the evaluation; engage with client as needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide technical support and quality assurance to the USP evaluation team through review of evaluation deliverables• Support implementation of Social Impact’s EQUI® approach in close coordination with Team Leader & PMSPL II M&E Specialist(s)• Ensure overall client satisfaction with evaluation

Position	Role	Responsibilities
Project Manager	Manage evaluation team personnel and evaluation activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise evaluation Team Leader in coordination with PMSPL II office to ensure on-schedule completion of deliverables and compliance with Social Impact procedures and USAID regulations • Coordinate between the evaluation team, PMSPL II office, and Social Impact's headquarters • Oversee evaluation budget, produce projection forecasts, and maintain tracking system for Level of Effort (LOE) expenditures • Approve invoices and ensure that expenses are allowable and consistent with contractual requirements • Supervise Project Assistant
Project Assistant	Provide administrative and logistical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare consultant agreements • Process consultant travel advances, invoices, and expense reports • Provide knowledge management support through Social Impact's online SharePoint intranet system • Copyedit and format deliverables for submission to USAID • Onboard and orient consultants to Social Impact standard operating procedures and security protocols • Complete international travel mobilization for consultants and Social Impact staff

TIMELINE OF DELIVERABLES

Table 6: Timeline of deliverables

Deliverable	Expected Delivery Date
Inception Report	March 12, 2021
Field Work	March 15 to April 1 2021
Remote Preliminary Findings Presentation	April 23, 2021
Draft Report	May 5, 2021
Final Report	May 17, 2021

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: EVALUATION TIMELINE



ANNEX 2: EVALUATION DESIGN MATRIX

Main Question	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection methods and tools	Data analysis plan
<p>To what extent have USP and HES program achieved their planned outputs and to what extent are they on track to achieve their objectives?</p>	<p>a. How diligently do AUB and LAU follow the overall criteria of selection, particularly selecting financially disadvantaged students from private schools?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Individuals attending tertiary education institutions with USG scholarship or financial assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUB and LAU relevant staff; USAID staff (AOR+ Ed Dir) Eligibility/selection criteria templates/documents Reported outputs/M&E data. USP and RSS scholars; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key Informant Interviews (KIs); Desk review of relevant documents and M&E data. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative data analysis of KIs and FGDs; Examination of relevant (M&E) data and the required criteria of selection.
	<p>b. To what extent do the enrolled cohorts adhere to the award requirements of diversity, national/geographic representation, and gender distribution?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50% Female scholars 50% Male scholars <p>(Note: Given that the number of female scholars is traditionally higher than male scholars, the difference in distribution should not exceed 60% for female and should not be less than 40% for male scholars.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUB and LAU program staff; USAID staff (AOR+ Ed Dir); Currently enrolled scholars; Program data and activity documents related to outreach, recruitment, and admissions; Social media platforms used by AUB and LAU; M&E plans; Program reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KIs; Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); Desk review of reports, activity documents, and M&E data; Review of social media platforms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative data analysis of KIs and FGDs; Examination of desegregated M&E data; Comparison of relevant quantitative/M&E data to program targets/planned outputs.

Main Question	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection methods and tools	Data analysis plan
	<p>c. What challenges—e.g., academic culture, mistreatment, discrimination or abuse—do scholars face in integrating into the regular student body and how are these challenges addressed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUB and LAU program staff including student advisors; • USAID staff (AOR+ Ed Dir); • USP and RSS scholars; • Student mentors; • Surveys/studies conducted (if any); • Records of complaints/requests for help by scholars, and program response to address issues and results achieved. (e.g., student complaint/grievance redressal system). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KIIs; • FGDs; • Group Interviews (GIs) with advisors; • Review of program documents, records, surveys, and steps taken/systems developed to address complains. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative data analysis of KIIs, GIs and FGDs; • Examination of scholar complaint management systems and results achieved; • Mapping of most common/frequent complaints/issues.
	<p>d. How well are the USP and RSS scholars performing academically relative to their peers (non-USP scholars)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 70% of the scholars have demonstrated a sustained academic average throughout the project lifetime as reflected in their cumulative averages or GPAs. • At least 80% of the scholars have cumulative averages upon graduation over 80% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUB and LAU program staff including student advisors; • Student mentors; • USAID staff (AOR+ Ed Dir); • USP and RSS scholars; • Scholars performance data • Program reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KIIs; • GIs; • FGDs; • Review of relevant document and M&E data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative data analysis of KIIs, GIs, and FGDs; • Comparison of scholars' performance data (primarily CGPA) with regular AUB/LAU scholars' performance.

Main Question	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection methods and tools	Data analysis plan
	e. How well are/have USP and RSS enabling/enabled scholars become active leaders and potential leading change agents? (Emphasis on preparing individuals as change agents rather than actual transformation).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 95% of the scholars will have actively participated in the completion of meaningful community service projects; At least 50% of the scholars will have assumed at least once a prominent position in their university-based leadership activities by the time of graduation; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUB and LAU staff including staff responsible for leadership, voluntary services, community projects, and civic engagement activities; USAID staff (AOR+ Ed Dir); USP and RSS scholars; Graduated USP7 scholars; Program documents, activity reports, social media records, media files (e.g., videos). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KIIs; FGDs; GIs Review relevant program documents (e.g., volunteer, leadership, civic engagement community service projects); M&E data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative data analysis of KIIs, GIs and FGDs; Examine/map competencies and/or skills these activities aim to develop in scholars.
	f. How do scholars perceive their employment preferences and prospects? How well are the program components preparing scholars for entry into the labor market?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -At least 95% of the scholars will be prepared for the labor market through training and career guidance; -At least 75% of the scholars will be employed or will be pursuing graduate studies within a period of 3-6 months post-graduation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> USP and RSS enrolled scholars; Graduated USP7 scholars; AUB and LAU staff; USAID staff; Survey data on post-graduation employment rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KIIs; FGDs; GIs; Program documents; Review of results of surveys IPs conducted on scholars' professional aspirations, and post-graduation employment rates; M&E data on Individual Development Plans (IDPs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative data analysis of KIIs and FGDs; Examination of employment rates among USP graduates; Comparison of employment rates between USB scholars and regular AUB and LAU scholars
	g. In what ways have the current COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns affected program activities and/or progress, particularly activities related to civic engagement and community projects that scholars are required to implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUB and LAU relevant staff; USP and RSS scholars; USAID staff; Program reports/activity modification documents (if any); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KIIs FGDs; GIs; Review program documents particularly civic engagement and community projects; Progress reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative data analysis of KIIs and FGDs; List/map changes made particularly to the implementation of civic engagement and community projects.

Main Question	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection methods and tools	Data analysis plan
	<p>h. What gender considerations have been taken into account by key program activities and what are the most visible discrepancies, if any.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% Female scholars • 50% Male scholars • (Note: Given that the number of female scholars is traditionally higher than male scholars, the difference in distribution should not exceed 60% for female and should not be less than 40% for male scholars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUB and LAU staff; • USAID staff; • Program documents including gender integration plan/strategy documents. • M&E reports/data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KIs • Review of gender considerations/integration requirements for various program activities; • Male and female participation in program activities; • Documents on gender messaging for promoting certain majors; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative analysis of KIs; • Examine program's planned gender integration steps/gender messaging/accomplishments; • Examine gender consideration in development of program activity material, volunteer work, leadership workshops, civic engagement and community projects; • Analyze undergraduate major selection support/guidance mechanisms and gender messaging

Main Question	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection methods and tools	Data analysis plan
	i. What factors have been crucial for the achievement or non-achievement of program results thus far?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUB and LAU staff; USAID staff; Program progress reports; M&E plans and M&E reports/data. Award modification documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KIs Review of program progress to date, and program medication documents (if any); M&E reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative analysis of KIs; Analyze, categorize and document likely factors for program achievement/n on achievement. The analysis for this question will take into account information on likely factors of achievement/n on-achievement generated by all sub-questions (sub-question a through sub-question i).

ANNEX 3: LIST OF RESPONDENTS

KII and GI respondents:

	Name	Official Title/Designation
USAID		
1	Benjamin Garrett	Education Office Director
2	Ahmad AlAmine	AOR and Project Manager
LAU		
1	[redacted]	
2	[redacted]	
3	[redacted]	
4	[redacted]	
5	[redacted]	
6	[redacted]	
7	[redacted]	
8	[redacted]	
9	[redacted]	
10	[redacted]	
11	[redacted]	
12	[redacted]	
13	[redacted]	
14	[redacted]	
15	[redacted]	
AUB		
1	[redacted]	
2	[redacted]	
3	[redacted]	
4	[redacted]	
5	[redacted]	
6	[redacted]	
7	[redacted]	
8	[redacted]	
9	[redacted]	
10	[redacted]	
11	[redacted]	
12	[redacted]	
13	[redacted]	
14	[redacted]	
15	[redacted]	

FGD respondents:

FGD #	FGD Group	Gender	Year	Area	University	# of cazas Represented	Total Male Participants	Total Female Participants	Date
1	RSS	Male	C1&C2	N/A	AUB	2	3	N/A	1/4/2021
2	RSS	Female	C1&C2	N/A	AUB	4	N/A	5	1/4/2021
3	RSS	Male	C1&C2	N/A	LAU	2	5	N/A	29/03/2021
4	RSS	Female	C1&C2	N/A	LAU	3	N/A	4	30/03/2021
5	USP 8-	Male	Year 1	Rural	AUB	6	6	N/A	25/03/2021
6	USP 8-	Female	Year 1	Urban	AUB	4	N/A	6	25/03/2021
7	USP 8-	Male	Year 1	Urban	LAU	3	5	N/A	24/03/2021
8	USP 8-	Female	Year 1	Rural	LAU	6	N/A	6	24/03/2021
9	USP 8&7	Male	Between 1st and Final	Rural	AUB	5	6	N/A	25/03/2021
10	USP 8&7	Female	Between 1st and Final	Urban	LAU	4	N/A	5	23/03/2021
11	USP 7-	Female	Final Year	Urban	AUB	4	N/A	5	26/03/2021
12	USP 7-	Male	Final Year	Rural	LAU	6	6	N/A	23/03/2021
13	USP 7-	Male	Alumni	Urban	AUB	3	5	N/A	26/03/2021
14	USP 7-	Female	Alumni	Rural	AUB	4	N/A	5	26/03/2021
15	USP 7-	Male	Alumni	Rural	LAU	4	4	N/A	23/03/2021
16	USP 7-	Female	Alumni	Urban	LAU	2	N/A	5	23/03/2021
17	Mentors	Male	N/A	N/A	AUB	N/A	5	N/A	30/3/2021
18	Mentors	Female	N/A	N/A	LAU	N/A	N/A	5	29/03/2021
Total	18 FGDS	9 Male FGDS 9 Female FGDS					45	46	

ANNEX 4: DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOLS

Note: The following protocols are general guides with questions to ask across respondents/groups from each category of stakeholders, such that certain results can be compared across these groups. Depending on the stakeholder, particular questions may be omitted if they are not relevant. Ultimately, protocols will be specifically tailored for each respondent and group. These protocols were finalized during the inception report development phase.

University Scholarship Program (USP7), Higher Education Scholarship Program (HES – USP8 and RSS) Mid-Term Evaluation

Qualitative Interview Protocol (Program Leads/Directors/Asst Directors)

Introduction:

We (Names) work for Social Impact, a USAID contractor that provides performance monitoring and evaluation support for various projects in different countries around the world. The purpose of this interview is to gain further knowledge and insight into the work of the USAID supported USP and HES. As a knowledgeable person within your university/organization, we value your input to our evaluation. We anticipate that your responses will help us gain valuable insights into USP & HES contributions to higher education sector and workforce development in Lebanon. We hope to understand challenges faced during implementation and develop recommendations for future programming. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your answers will be used for data analysis purposes only and will be kept strictly confidential. **No interview respondents will be identified by name in the report.**

Before the interview begins, I would like to ask your permission to take notes to capture your responses and to audiotape the interview so that we can further enhance our notes for data analysis.

University/Organization:	Date:
Respondents' Names:	Respondent's location:
Official Titles:	
Interviewer:	Note-taker:

Questions	Prompts
<p>1. Could you describe your role within your university/organization and your involvement in USP and/or HES?</p> <p>a. How long have you served in this position?</p> <p>b. How long have you been involved with USP/HES and in what ways?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsibilities: - Overseeing program staff - Ensuring timely implementation of program activities - Coordination with USAID
<p>Q1a</p> <p>2. Could you describe some of the key outreach activities the USP 7 and HES program undertake?</p> <p>a. Please tell us ways in which the program targets public and private school students, and refugee students.</p> <p>b. Tell us how targeting refugee students is different (e.g., more challenging than) from targeting public and private school students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting the award - Launching recruitment campaigns - School visits - Social media and other examples of award promotion

<p>3. Could you describe the criteria for the selection of scholarship recipients?</p> <p>a. Public school students</p> <p>b. Private school students</p> <p>c. Refugee students</p> <p>d. In your opinion, how thoroughly is AUB/LAU following the overall criteria of selection? Give examples.</p> <p>e. Please tell us the key elements of the criteria for the selection of students from private schools?</p> <p>f. Could you explain how AUB/LAU determines financial eligibility of students from private schools and those shortlisted/recruited meet the financial eligibility criterion completely?</p> <p>g. Are there any criteria beyond financial and academic to exclude students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lebanese citizens/other nationalities? - Refugees - Academically high achievers (GPA/SATs) - Financially disadvantaged - Married/unmarried
Q1b	
<p>4. What is your understanding of the diversity requirements of the scholarship program?</p> <p>a. In your opinion, how well do the currently enrolled cohorts meet the requirement of diversity? (e.g., gender, national/geographic representation, refugee populations)</p> <p>b. Are there any groups (e.g., male/female scholars, Syrian/Palestinian refugees, people of different gender identity currently underrepresented? If yes, which ones and why?</p> <p>c. Were there impediments to recruitment from certain areas? If yes, what was done to overcome these? Does this require more effort?</p> <p>d. Could you walk us through the steps that AUB/LAU took to ensure that the currently enrolled cohorts meet the diversity requirements?</p> <p>e. What are the key factors that enabled AUB/LAU to achieve the desired diversity in USP and HES cohorts?</p> <p>f. Can you think of any measures that USP-HES can introduce to further improve diversity/proportion of underrepresentation groups?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % male scholars; % female scholars <p>C. Lack of community knowledge about/awareness of the scholarship programs; inadequate award promotion</p>
Q1c	
<p>5. In your experience, what are some of the major challenges' scholars face to assimilate into academic culture at your university?</p> <p>a. What kind of challenges do scholars report when integrating into regular study body and weather these challenges vary by gender?</p> <p>b. Does AUB/LAU have systems in place for scholars to report problems/abuse?</p> <p>c. In your opinion what might be the causes of these challenges?</p> <p>d. Could you explain what steps LAU/AUB has taken to assist and guide scholars to respond to these challenges?</p> <p>e. In your opinion has reports of discrimination/abuse/other challenges increased/decreased over the past three years? If yes, what do you think is the reason for the increase/decrease?</p> <p>f. What the primary causes of dropouts? Do they vary by gender?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integration particularly during the first year <p>5.and 5a. Examples of programs/challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in adapting to demanding academic culture • Social/cultural barriers • Homesickness • Discrimination • Mistreatment • Abuse <p>C. Examples of mechanisms the universities might have developed: Student complaint centers/student wellness/grievances redressal systems or student wellness centers etc.</p>
Q1d	
<p>6. Please describe how AUB/LAU measures and tracks USP and HES scholars' academic performance? (Examples of assessment and tracking systems)</p> <p>a. What is your impression of the overall academic performance of the USP and HES scholars and how they fare relative to non-USP/HES scholars at LAU/AUB?</p> <p>b. In your opinion what might be contributing factors that enable these scholars to do better than the rest of the student body?</p>	<p>B. Resources available to scholars and provided through the scholarship program (mentors, academic advisors, academic coordinators, participation in the preparatory year etc.)</p>
Q1e	

<p>7. Please describe the type of extracurricular activities or projects USP and HES scholars undertake during their terms at AUB/LAU?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Civic engagement Leadership skills Volunteer work and community projects? How does LAU/AUB ascertain that the scholars are not only learning new skills (e.g., leadership or community project management skills) but demonstrate practical applications of those skills? What characteristics (e.g., leaders, catalyst for change) do male and female tend to develop by participating in these extracurricular activities? Relative to regular students, how well do the USP and RSS recipients demonstrate these characteristics (of leaders/change agents) in and outside the campus? Examples? How does male and female scholars' participation vary in these activities and to what results? 	
QIf	
<p>8. In your opinion what are the main elements of the scholarship program that focus on preparing scholars for job market?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How often does AUB/LAU collect information on scholars' career goals and their perceptions of achieving those goals? What do you do with that information? What activities/initiatives do AUB/LAU have in place as part of USP/HES to train male and female scholars for the job market? Please tell us about the kind of challenges USP graduates report when trying to enter into the labor market? What does/can AUB/LAU do to allow current scholars benefit from data related to post graduation employment achievements and challenges. 	<p>8b.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting job market surveys to inform student career choices; - Improve program activities focusing on job-preparedness <p>8d. For example, career counselling services focusing both male and female aspirations, and job market prospects.</p>
QIg	
<p>9. Please tell us how LAU/AUB has responded to current COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns generally?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways has the pandemic affected program activities and what solutions has LAU/AUB put in place? Examples? Tell us about the civic engagement activities—how the pandemic affected them and what solutions/alternative activities have you put in place? Tell us about the community projects—in what ways are activities related to community projects affected and what solutions have you introduced? How would you compare the outcomes of the current civic engagement activities and community projects for scholars with those before the pandemic? In your opinion, how can AUB/LAU further improve these activities and their outcomes for scholars given the pandemic restrictions? 	-
QIh	
<p>10. Please describe the program's gender integration plan and the strategies AUB/LAU use to ensure gender is given due consideration in all key program activities.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the kind of gender messaging you use to achieve gender balance in selection of scholarship recipients, and in selection of certain majors? What steps has AUB/LAU taken to ensure male and female scholars equally benefit from the project activities particularly from, volunteer work, leadership workshops, civic engagement activities and community projects? 	
QIi	
<p>11. In your opinion, what are the key factors that contributed to achieving planned program targets/results?</p> <p><i>(Note, the answer to this question will mainly come from the responses to questions 1a to 1g above. However, the interviewer deems necessary, he/she can further elicit information and explore factors behind achievement or non-achievement of results under QIi.</i></p>	<p>Examples of planned program result is successful recruitment of cohorts of scholars; meeting gender and geographic representation requirements; scholars maintaining high GPA; active participation in extra-curricular activities; graduation of scholars as planned;</p> <p>(For more specific examples, check IRs and sub-IRs in the RW)</p>

Focus Group Discussion Protocols

Introduction:

We (Names) work for Social Impact, a USAID contractor that provides performance monitoring and evaluation support for various projects in different countries worldwide. The purpose of this interview is to gain further knowledge and insight into the work of the USAID supported USP and HES. As a knowledgeable person within your university/organization, we value your input to our evaluation. We anticipate that your responses will help us gain valuable insights into USP & HES contributions to higher education sector and workforce development in Lebanon. We hope to understand challenges faced during implementation and develop recommendations for future programming. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your answers will be used for data analysis purposes only and will be kept **strictly confidential**. **No interview respondents will be identified by name in the report.**

Before the interview begins, I would like to ask your permission to take notes to capture your responses and to audiotape the interview so that we can further enhance our notes for data analysis. The recordings will not be shared with USAID, your University or anyone else outside the evaluation team.

Introduction:

Please briefly introduce yourselves, giving your name, the name of your casa of origin and its characteristic you love most and your major at university.

FGD # _____

Date _____

FGD Group: _____

Total Participants: Male _____ Female _____

Number of cazas Represented _____

Majors represented: _____

Moderator: _____

Note-taker: _____

Focus group discussions with **USP7/8 SCHOLARS**

Introduction: In this meeting, we want to learn about your journey.

- We will be starting back home with your application process for the USP scholarship,
- look at the preparatory year,
- moving to the first year of your undergraduate studies,
- highlighting the following study years and
- your final year also discussing
- your civic engagement as part of your studies.
- We finally want to learn about your experiences after completing these studies, coming to the point where your life journey has taken you now. / learn about what you expect for the future.

We will take you through this journey, step by step. For each phase of your journey, we will ask you about the positive experiences you have made and the challenges you have faced.

1. Journey phase I: The application process

- 1.1 How did you learn about the scholarship program?
- 1.2 Considering all students in your school's final year, how many do you believe knew about the USP? Please estimate and give a percentage.
- 1.3 Describe your two most positive experiences during the application process
- 1.4 Describe your two greatest challenges during the application process

Use the following follow-up questions in case the issues have not already been explored to probe further:

- 1.5 How clear and understandable was the information provided to you about the program?

2. Journey phase II: Preparatory Year I

2.1 How many terms did you study during the preparatory year?

2.2 Describe your two most positive aspects of the preparatory year

2.3 Describe your two greatest challenges during the preparatory year

Use the following follow-up questions in case the issues have not already been explored to probe further:

2.4 Was the preparatory year relevant for you? Explain.

2.5 Can you describe the support provided by the University during the preparatory year, if any was provided?

3. Journey phase III: Year I – your first year of undergraduate studies

3.5 Describe your two most positive experiences during the first year of your undergraduate course

3.6 Describe your two greatest challenges during the first year of your undergraduate course

Use the following follow-up questions in case the issues have not already been explored to probe further:

3.7 Can you describe the university's support during the first year of the undergraduate course, if any was provided?

3.8 How did you experience the workload throughout the first year of the undergraduate course (too little, good, too much)?

3.9 How well were you prepared for your studies compared to other non-USP students?

3.10 How well were you able to integrate with other students outside the USP? What helped? Were there any challenges? If so, how were these addressed?

3.11 How did you feel treated by the academic staff – the same or different from non-scholarship holders? If different, please describe. In case of any challenges, how were these addressed?

4. Journey phase IV: The in-between years – after your first year and before your final year

4.1 Describe your two most positive experiences during the "in-between" years

4.2 Describe your two greatest challenges during the "in-between" years

Use the following follow-up questions in case the issues have not already been explored to probe further:

4.3 Was there any difference in the support provided by the University before? If so, please describe.

4.4 How did you experience the workload throughout this phase (too little, good, too much)?

5. Journey phase V: The final year

5.1 Describe your two most positive experiences during the final year

5.2 Describe your two greatest challenges during the final year

Use the following follow-up questions in case the issues have not already been explored to probe further:

5.3 Was there any difference in the support provided by the University before? If so, please describe.

5.4 How did you experience the workload throughout this phase (too little, good, too much)?

5.5 How did the task to plan and implement a Community project impact your studies?

6. If graduated: Journey phase VI: Experiences after completing studies

6.1 What are you currently doing?

6.2 Describe your two most positive experiences after completing your studies

6.3 Describe your two greatest challenges after completing your studies

Use the following follow-up questions in case the issues have not already been explored to probe further:

6.4 How well were you prepared for the labor market after completing your studies?

6.5 In case of post-graduate studies: how easily were you able to access further studies?

6.6	Where do you currently live? (In caza of origin, outside caza but in Lebanon, outside Lebanon)
6.7	How relevant are your studies' social engagement components in the current phase of your life? Describe why these are still relevant or not.
7. If still studying: Journey phase VI: Expectations for your future	
4.1	What are you planning to do after completing your studies?
4.2	What are your two major hopes for the time after completing your studies?
4.3	Describe your two greatest fears for the time after completing your studies?
<i>Use the following follow-up questions in case the issues have not already been explored to probe further:</i>	
4.4	How well do you feel prepared for the labor market through your studies?
4.5	Do you expect the social engagement component (volunteering, community project) to have any relevance for your future?
4.6	Do you believe the social impact component will have any impact on your future?
8. COVID-19 implications	
8.1	Please share the two most positive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on your studies
8.2	Please share the two most negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on your studies
<i>Use the following follow-up questions in case the issues have not already been explored to probe further:</i>	
4.7	To what extent did the pandemic affect your volunteering, civic engagement and community project?
9. Any further comments	
8.3	Is there anything you would like to share about the scholarship program that we have not discussed yet?

ANNEX 5: INCEPTION REPORT



USP Mid-Term
Eval-Inception-Rep

ANNEX 6: MAJORS OFFERED



Majors offered at
LAU and ABU.docx

ANNEX 7: IRB-APPROVED CONSENT FORMS

Consent:

We (Names) work for **Social Impact**, a USAID contractor conducting this evaluation **for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Lebanon Office**.

We are evaluating the University Scholarship Program (USP 7) and the Higher Education Scholarship Program (HES including USP8 and RSS). This interview aims to gain further knowledge and insight into the work of the USAID supported USP and HES. As a knowledgeable person within your university/organization, we value your input to our evaluation. We anticipate that your responses will help us gain valuable insights into USP & HES contributions to higher education sector and workforce development in Lebanon. We hope to understand challenges faced during implementation and develop recommendations for future programming.

For this evaluation, we will facilitate **18 focus group discussions with USP 7 and HES scholars** from AUB and LAU, approximately 100 students in total, representing all cohorts. Also, we will conduct **22 Key Informant Interviews and Group Interviews with relevant staff** from both Universities and USAID.

Your **participation in this interview is completely voluntary** and you are free to decline to respond to any question for any reason and to end the interview at any time.

You will not be provided with any payment for your participation in this interview.

Your honest responses will help USAID inform and improve its future programming in Lebanon.

Your name will not be connected to any information you provide in this interview. The data from this interview (excluding your personally identifiable information) will be used by the Social Impact team for analysis purposes only and your answers will **only be reported to USAID as part of an aggregated data set**.

To ensure all your responses are captured accurately and can be reviewed during data analysis and report writing, **we would like to record the interview**. The recordings will be kept in a secure data storage and **will be destroyed** after submission of the report. The report may be made public upon finalization.

This interview will last approximately **one and a half hours**.

Do you understand that your participation in this interview is voluntary, unpaid, and that you can end the interview at any point?

If you have **any questions** about the study or your rights as a participant, you may **contact Mrs. Tamara Nassereddine** from Social Impact by phone on 03- 751337 or email at Tnassereddine@socialimpact.com.

If you have any questions for me, you are free to ask them at any time during the interview.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Are you willing to participate? Yes___ (check) No___ (check)

Do you allow voice recording of the interview? Yes___ (check) No___ (check)

ANNEX 8: SELECTION CRITERIA



Selection
criteria-RSS.docx



Selection
criteria.docx

ANNEX 9: FINANCIAL AID DOCUMENTS



Adobe Acrobat
Document

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