Key Elements to Gainful Employment in Lebanon and the Arab World

Dr. Diane Nauffal, Assistant to the President for Institutional Research and Assessment, Lebanese American University

Dr. Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss, Institutional Development Officer, Office of the Provost, Lebanese American University

Conference on Programme design to address employability
Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Beirut, Lebanon
29 November 2017
Outline of this Presentation

1. Context
   • Lebanese Labor Market
   • Employment and Emigration
   • Lebanese Higher Education System
   • Lebanese American University
   • University Scholarship Program (USP)

2. Lebanese Labor Market Study
   • Aim
   • Methodology
   • Findings
   • Implications

3. Conclusion
Lebanese Labor Market

• The Lebanese labor market is service-dominated

• High unemployment rates
  – Total unemployment was 6.2% in 2013 and is 6.8% in 2017
  – Youth unemployment is high at 34 percent (World Bank, Press Release, 2013)
  – Women account for only 25 percent of the work force (World Bank, Press Release, 2017)

• High under-employment
  – The jobs the economy has created are concentrated in low productivity sectors that employ mainly low skilled workers (World Bank, Press Release, 2013)
The average number of years spent searching for one’s first job is 1.5 years for job seekers with tertiary education (World Bank 2011).

The length of unemployment for those under 35 years of age averaged 1.2 years for those with tertiary education (World Bank 2011).

For job seekers over 35 years of age, the length of unemployment were significantly higher at 1.7 years for those with tertiary education (World Bank 2011).
Lebanese Labor Market

– There are serious deficiencies in the dynamics of the labor market despite the fact that Lebanon is officially classified by the international community as an *Upper Middle Income Country* (World Bank, Press Release, 2013)

• Job creation lags behind the production of university graduates

• Quality university graduates emigrate after graduation in pursuit of further higher education, career opportunities, and/or higher pay (World Bank, 2012).
Emigration and Employment

• Approximately 32,000 Lebanese emigrated each year on average between 1996 and 2010 for a variety of reasons (Kawar & Tzannatos 2013).

• In 2016, 16% of Lebanese GDP was credited to remittances, making the country the leading recipient of remittances per capita in the Arab region (Byblos Bank 2016).

• Almost 76% of emigrants are between the ages of 15 and 34 (Chaaban, 2009).
• Founded as a women’s college in 1924, the Lebanese American University is a not-for-profit private institution of higher education in Lebanon rooted in the tradition of a liberal arts education.

• The two campuses together house seven schools. The schools common to both campuses are: Architecture and Design, Arts and Sciences and Business. The Byblos campus is home to the School of Engineering, Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy.

• Student enrollments were 8,528 in 2017 with 7,558 undergraduates, 737 graduates and 233 doctoral degree-professional practice.

• There are 380 full-time faculty, 645 part-time faculty and 825 staff.

• LAU was granted accreditation by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (CIHE–NEASC).
University Scholarship Program (USP)
University Scholarship Program (USP)

• The University Scholarship Program, funded by USAID, “offers university-bound students a unique opportunity to pursue quality higher education. The program aims to provide undergraduate scholarships to promising public high school students and technical school graduates from all six governorates of Lebanon.

• The primary goals of the program are to provide the opportunity for young people to experience LAU’s rigorous academic standards and a campus environment that promotes social equality and critical thinking” (LAU website).

• As of spring 2016, 325 students have benefitted from this scholarship at LAU
Labor Market Study: Aim

The main aim of the Labor Market Study is multifold:

– Identify majors offered by Lebanese American University (LAU) that are strongly correlated with gainful employment and income generating opportunities
– Explore the demands of the Lebanese job market that can be linked to existing majors at LAU to enhance the employability prospects of its graduates and in particular the graduates of the USAID-USP.
– Determine the specific soft skills students should acquire during their course of undergraduate studies based on employers’ needs in the various sectors of the Lebanese market.
– Identify private companies with social responsibility at the core of their mission that are interested in providing internships or apprenticeships for undergraduate students.
Labor Market Study: Methodology

With the little research conducted recently describing the labor market dynamics in Lebanon and the prospects of employability of its youth and with the absence of statistical data on labor market needs, this study although limited in scope and time uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain some insights into the current employability trends.

The qualitative approaches were designed to provide an in-depth description of the career prospects of LAU’s graduates based on job availability and country needs as perceived by those directly concerned, namely, the employer and the graduate.

The quantitative methodologies were used to quantify these opportunities and to confirm the findings of the qualitative approaches.
Labor Market Study: Methodology

A range of survey instruments and techniques were used for data collection.

- Alumni survey administered to graduates of the years 2010-2016

- Focus groups with employed and unemployed alumni

- Employer survey administered to employers of 11 sectors that corresponded to the majors offered to USP

- Semi-structured interviews with employers, representatives of NGOs, chambers of commerce and syndicates

- Content analysis of career opportunities advertised in print and online media.
Labor Market Study: Findings

Alumni survey

Approximately 80% of LAU students are employed 18 months after graduation.

For the graduating class of 2014-2015 the employment rate was 60% at graduation and six months after graduation. It was 63% for the graduating class of 2015-2016.
Labor Market Study: Findings

Alumni survey

• There was no difference in employment opportunities based on gender.
  – 56% of those employed are females
  – 50% of those unemployed are females.

• Over 80% of those employed are in jobs relating to their undergraduate major.

• Most employment opportunities were limited to the greater Beirut region and Mount Lebanon. Regions outside Beirut and Mount Lebanon provide employment opportunities to only 10% of LAU’s graduates.

• Around 27% of graduates from LAU are employed overseas.
# Labor Market Study: Findings

## Employability by Major Field of Study – Alumni Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Arts</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Design</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Architecture</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Engineering</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Engineering</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosp. &amp; Tourism Management</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Architecture</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Arts</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Labor Market Study: Findings

Employability by Major Field of Study - Employer Perspective
Labor Market Study: Findings
Employers and representatives of sectors

• Sectors that are recruiting university graduates include nursing, pharmacy including clinical pharmacy, accounting, banking and finance, marketing, marketing, tourism, telecommunications, information technology, construction, energy including renewable energy, industry including light and heavy manufacturing, services and agriculture.

• Graduates were reluctance to move to the rural areas because remuneration packages offered by the majority of employers were in general designed to match the lower cost of living in these areas with the exception of the banking sector, franchise operations or international organizations where remuneration packages were not affected by geographical location.
Labor Market Study: Findings

Representatives of sectors

• Employers believe that to a great extent, LAU degrees and experience match Lebanese and regional labor market needs.

• Employability is more challenging when the employee’s educational background is not aligned with organizational expertise.

• Graduates should diversify their choice of electives and minors to expand their knowledge base as the need is for graduates with diverse educational backgrounds, solid theoretical and technical field related knowledge and excellent soft skill sets.
Labor Market Study: Findings
Soft Skills: Alumni Perspective
Labor Market Study: Findings

Soft Skills: Employer Perspective
Labor Market Study: Findings

- Students who participated in the survey recognize the importance of soft skills.
- The specific soft skills students thought were needed in the workplace largely coincided with those sought in employees by employers.
- LAU did a good job of providing and developing career networks for its graduates.
- Three quarters of alumni reported completing an internship before graduating.
- Approximately a third of the students completing an internship were offered a job upon graduation.
- This demonstrates the importance of educating the “whole person” which includes the learning of soft skills and engaging students in higher order learning practices (internships, capstone projects, and civil society engagement)
Labor Market Study:  
**Findings for USP Cohort**

- 82% of USP alumni are employed within six months after graduation, which surpasses the institutional employment rate for the same cohort (60%).
- Almost all majors currently offered to USP students’ clearly link positively to employment.

*Although USP students often come to LAU disadvantaged vis-a'-vis soft skills the special training sessions and mentoring they engage in allow them graduate like regular LAU students.*
Labor Market Study: Implications

- This proliferation of higher education institutions in Lebanon reflects the strong demand for such tertiary education and training.

- The soft skills’ that the employers of LAU graduates seem to find so valuable are emphasized in American-style higher education institutions that offer a liberal arts education.

- A liberal arts education balances general education with technical or professional training.

- All students are required to take courses to educate them as ‘whole persons’ with an understanding of the arts, literature, social sciences, quantitative analysis, and ‘hard sciences’; and the mastering of oral and written communication skills as well as general ‘people’ skills.
Labor Market Study: Implications

- Research in higher education consistently demonstrates that many soft skills are tied to students’ socio-economic class, alumni network, family networks, and other non-university factors.
- While LAU emphasizes the liberal arts as well as leadership and citizenship education and promotes the value of participation in civil society, what students ultimately take away from their years at LAU regarding ‘soft skills’ may reflect factors beyond their higher education experience (Pascarella & Blaich 2013).
Labor Market Study: Implications

• USP students come to LAU however ‘disadvantaged’ vis-à-vis socio-economic class and soft skills. They graduate as regular LAU students with a very high employment rate, among other positive attributes.

• This result reinforces survey findings that ‘soft skills’ are important aspects of employability.

• Higher education institutions in Lebanon and the region should work to help students better understand the value of ‘soft skills’ for their future success.
Conclusion

- While from the perspective of employers, these soft skills are mainly those that contribute directly to career success, greater emphasis should be put on how these soft skills contribute to building and maintaining productive and stable societies.

- To do this, more aspects of the liberal arts education tradition should be included in university training as part of the core curriculum or at least as extra-curricular offerings.
Conclusion

- Universities must take the lead in facilitating better communication between employers/industry and universities regarding desired majors.

- This should not be understood as pushing higher education to be solely reactive to the market but rather recommending that the higher education sector should seek to better balance employers’ and society’s needs today with preparing university graduates who will drive innovation in industry and public life in the future.
Conclusion

• Universities should increase their efforts to get students internships prior to graduation to give students the opportunity to apply in the real world the ‘soft skills’ as well as discipline-based knowledge that they are learning about in the university setting.
References


Thank you

Lebanese American University (LAU)
Dr. Diane Nauffal,
Assistant to the President for Institutional Research and Assessment

[diane.nauffal@lau.edu.lb](mailto:diane.nauffal@lau.edu.lb)

and

Dr. Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiiss,
Institutional Development Officer, Office of the Provost

[Jennifer.Skulte-Ouaiiss@lau.edu.lb](mailto:Jennifer.Skulte-Ouaiiss@lau.edu.lb)