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EdData II

Task Order 15: Data for Education Programming in Asia and the Middle East (DEP/AME)

University Scholarship Program: Where Are They Now?

Profiles of Lebanon's USP Scholars

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University Scholarship Program: Where Are They Now?

Profiles of Lebanon's USP Scholars

Prepared for

Christine Capacci-Carneal, Senior Education Advisor, Middle East Bureau

Mitch Kirby, Senior Education Advisor, Asia Bureau

Contracting Officer's Technical Representative

Data for Education Programming/Asia and Middle East

USAID / Washington

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20523

Prepared by

AMIDEAST for RTI International

3040 Cornwallis Road

Post Office Box 12194

Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194

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Introduction

Since 2010, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided undergraduate scholarships for approximately 745 Lebanese public school graduates. These scholarships, under the University Scholarship Program (USP), cover full educational costs, including a housing and transportation allowance, when needed, and stipends, to allow public school scholars to attend high-quality universities that promote critical thinking, freedom, diversity, and respect.

With two-thirds of Lebanese students enrolled in private schools, the poorest youth in Lebanon are found in the public schools. Those who graduate from public schools often have limited choices in accessing reputable private higher education opportunities, regardless of their academic merit and performance. They often cannot afford the financial costs of attending the reputable universities found in Lebanon, including tuition, books, relocation or commuting, and participating in the regular campus life activities. These institutions offer students quality education that provides them with academic subject expertise together with skills in critical thinking, communication, and leadership that increase job marketability. It has long been established that university education is tied directly to expanding economic opportunities and the potential of graduates in the job market. Unfortunately, meritorious public school students with high financial need have limited access to the higher education that can expand their potential. Thus, USP aims at enabling these worthy Lebanese public school graduates to access quality higher education and thereby increase their job readiness. That readiness, in turn, will maximize their potential to support Lebanon's democratic and economic development.

Under USP, over 700 scholarships have been awarded, and 267 students have graduated so far. While many graduates are currently working in interesting jobs, USAID up until now did not have much documentation on their career trajectories aside from anecdotal stories about their employment paths.

The USAID Asia and Middle East Bureau and the USAID Lebanon Mission partnered with RTI International and AMIDEAST to develop profiles of USP scholar graduates to document where they are now and how the USAID-supported scholarship contributed to their professional development and success. It is always a challenge to follow up and track students after they graduate, and this effort will fill some gaps in knowledge and build a library of "stories" about who USP scholars are, what they are doing today, and how they got there. It will create scholar profiles that can be used primarily for outreach and external distribution and as a resource for answering the question, "Where are they now?"

The following 60 profiles in this compendium are a representative sample of the 745 scholarship recipients. They come from across all walks of Lebanese life, representing all regions, religions, and sects. Developing authentic stories that genuinely and passionately describe the journeys that scholars have experienced is most successfully done when the storytellers are the scholars themselves. AMIDEAST initiated the story collection process by sending a survey to 256 scholars who had graduated to gather information needed to develop a profile story about the individual's USP journey. Following the survey, AMIDEAST invited scholars to a writing workshop where they were guided in developing their own stories about their experience as USP students and their work and activism post-graduation. For those scholars who were unable

to attend the workshops, the team conducted detailed semi-structured interviews over Skype or by phone.

These workshops also served as a venue to generate professional photographs and videos of all participating students. The profiles and videos were developed so that each could be shared publicly by USAID on its Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, Instagram accounts, and other social media platforms. Each profile includes shorter social media profiles with suggested hashtags to be used together in an integrated media campaign. The purpose of the social media campaign is to market the USP scholarship opportunity and promote the achievements of select USP graduates, create awareness about the scholarships among the general Lebanese public, and publicize all the good work USAID is doing in support of Lebanese students and underprivileged communities.

The 60 scholars featured in these profiles are from the three universities that hosted USP scholars as follows: 11 from the American University of Beirut (AUB), 26 from Haigazian University, and 23 from the Lebanese American University (LAU). Out of the 60 profiles, 40 scholars are women and 20 scholars are men. Four are from the class of 2014, 29 are from the class of 2015, and 27 are from the class of 2016.

With regard to employment status, 43 scholars are currently employed (29 women and 14 men). Of the 29 employed women, 1 has already finished her master’s degree, and 5 are currently pursuing their master’s degrees while working. Of the 13 employed men, 3 are currently pursuing their master’s degrees while working. As for the remaining scholars who are not currently employed, 9 are currently looking for jobs, and another 8 are pursuing their master’s degrees full time. Of the 17 scholars currently pursuing their master’s degrees, 3 are on full scholarships, 8 were awarded graduate assistantships from their respective graduate universities, and 1 has received a partial scholarship to complete her medical studies.

Following is a breakdown of the undergraduate majors for the 60 scholars profiled in this compilation.

Number of Scholars	Major
16	Business Administration, Finance, Marketing, Human Resources, Management Information Systems
13	Medical Laboratory
5	Biology
6	Computer Science
4	Nutrition
3	Civil Engineering
3	Mechanical Engineering
3	Education
2	Computer Engineering
1	Economics
1	Environmental Health

- 1 Chemistry
- 1 Psychology
- 1 Mathematics

Profiles of USP Scholars

Abir Haydoura

Degree: B.A. in Psychology
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2016
Status: Looking for a job

Abir Haydoura, from Mayss El Jabal, Marjeyoun in South Lebanon, has always been fascinated with psychology, particularly human behavior and how the mind operates. She was anxious to find funding or scholarship opportunities so she could attend one of Lebanon's renowned universities.

When USAID's University Scholarship Program (USP) representatives visited her high school, she felt she had found just such an opportunity.

Although psychology was not a subject that was highly respected in her community, Abir applied to USP to pursue a degree in this field, understanding that the scholarship would provide a valuable opportunity to expand her knowledge and play a significant role in society. Her perseverance, good grades, and enthusiasm for learning, opened the door for Abir to get accepted by Haigazian University and to major in Psychology with a full USP scholarship. During her undergraduate years, Abir volunteered at the Special Olympics Center, helping children with intellectual disabilities both demonstrate courage and experience joy through physical fitness. This allowed her to gain experience in assessing the needs of disabled children for psychosocial support.

In addition to her Special Olympics Center volunteering, she also participated in the "Second Chance" project. The project was designed to provide unemployed women with work opportunities by training them to sew clothes, and then sell their products. At the end of the project, the clothes were exhibited for sale at the university. Abir notes that the volunteer activities gave her the opportunity to "understand life from a deeper perspective."

A positive attitude, patience, and confidence are three main attributes that Abir feels she gained from the scholarship program. To Abir, the USP experience was just the beginning of a meaningful and productive journey. In 2017, she will start her graduate studies in Clinical Psychology at Lebanese University. Abir is looking forward to pursuing her PhD in Psychology and opening a clinic to help people in need of this type of support.



Ali El Safadi

Degree: B.S. in Biology, with a minor in Chemistry
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Pursuing his studies in General Medicine

On his 18th birthday Ali received a call from the admissions office at the Lebanese American University (LAU) to inform him that he had won a full scholarship from the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).

Eager to fulfill his long-standing dream of becoming a successful medical researcher specializing in cancer treatment, Ali pursued a major in biology and a minor in chemistry. Always a hard worker, this Beirut native believes that the USP scholarship gave him a life-changing opportunity to study at one of the top universities in Lebanon and obtain an excellent education. He notes that he would never have been able to consider LAU otherwise, due to his family's financial situation, with his only alternative being to enroll in Lebanon's only public university.



Ali dedicated his university years to volunteer work, internships and community service activities, all of which provided him with experience and broadened his horizons on both personal and professional levels. He was active in LAU's Model United Nations (MUN) and Model Arab League, assisting students improve their communication and public speaking skills. As a volunteer at Mmkn ("It's Possible," in Arabic), he supported the NGO's work on civil rights, women's empowerment, and support for public schools, as well as cultural activities and youth empowerment.

Ali engaged in research with his professors on several topics, including the proliferation of cancer cells, alcohol and its effects on the human body, and the characteristics of certain plants and fruits. He had the opportunity to present his research results at three local and two international conferences, one in Indonesia and the other in Slovakia. He has also published two of his research papers in well-known academic journals, *Al-Raniry Journal* and the *International Journal of Islamic Studies*.

Because of his outstanding academic record, Ali received a partial scholarship to continue his graduate studies in General Medicine at LAU. He is thankful to USAID and the American people for enabling him to become the person he is today, well on the road to becoming the successful professional he had always dreamed of becoming.

Antonella Al Eflas

Degree: B.E. in Mechanical Engineering
University: American University of Beirut
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

Antonella Al-Eflas grew up in Mastita in Jbeil, north of Beirut, before moving to Beirut during her high school years. She attended the Lycée Official High School for girls in Jdeideh. During her senior year, representatives from the American University of Beirut (AUB) visited her school to introduce students to the USAID's University Scholarship Program (USP).

A few months later, she was selected along with fifty other students from across Lebanon receive a scholarship that would enable her to pursue her undergraduate degree at AUB. Antonella chose to major in Mechanical Engineering since she loves cars and was interested in the design, production, and operation of machinery. Her acceptance to the USP was a major turning point in her life.



Being a USP scholar allowed Antonella to take part in a unique experience, one that combines education with civic engagement, workshops, and professional training. She notes that “attending AUB was a farfetched dream, which was made possible through USAID. It was a platform for an unforgettable adventure.”

Throughout her AUB years, Antonella engaged in numerous volunteer activities and social events. She notes that one of the most rewarding experiences was participating in the Mechatronics Competition organized by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers during the Student Professional Development Conference. She took first place in the competition for designing a circuit to filter and measure the intensity of noise.

As for her community-based activities, she participated in a project with the Center for Civic Engagement and Community service (CCECS) at AUB. The project entailed installing solar panels at Baysarrieh Official High School in southern Lebanon. Antonella believes that this was a strategic intervention, since its approach entailed supporting sustainability.

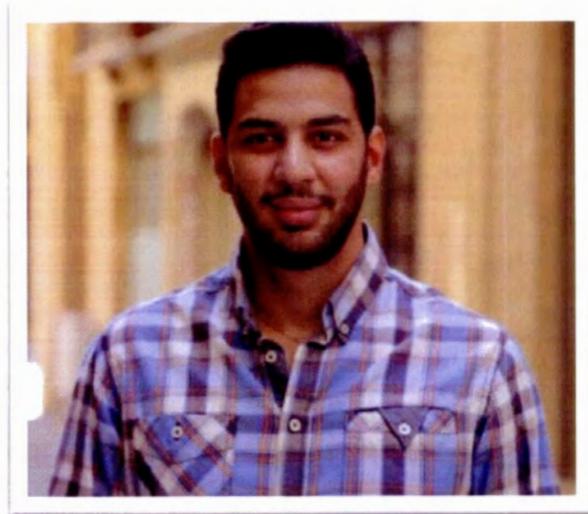
Currently, Antonella works as a mechanical engineer at AJB Hightech, a Beirut-based engineering company that specializes in automation solutions for industrial plants and commercial buildings. Her passion for languages and music prompted Antonella to teach herself Spanish and German, while learning to play the violin.

Antonella says that “no one could be certain of how the years would unfold. Some days you will live in the glory of your success and other days you will witness glory from the side lines.” She stresses that the USAID scholarship experience was very rewarding, and contributed to creating the person she is today.

Antonio Nehme

Degree: B.S. in Computer Science, with a minor in Mathematics
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed + pursuing his master's as part of a graduate assistantship

Antonio Nehme coded his first Java computer program at the age of 14, having been interested in computer networking and programming for years. His interest in technology motivated him to pursue a bachelor's degree in Computer Science at Lebanese American University (LAU), supported by a full scholarship from the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).



Antonio, who graduated with honorable mention, took part in a variety of workshops and trainings on leadership skills, time management, and entrepreneurship while at LAU. “This is really what makes USP such a special opportunity,” he notes. According to Antonio, the USP scholarship not only offered him a high-quality education, but also encouraged him and other students to develop their capabilities and undertake civic engagement initiatives.

After earning his bachelor's degree in computer science with a minor in mathematics, Antonio was granted a graduate assistantship at LAU to pursue a master's degree in Middle Eastern Economics.

Antonio was also able to find work as a software engineer at the Beirut-based Interactive Life Company, a company specialized in mobile app development and website enhancement.

Antonio was also able to find work as a software engineer at the Beirut-based Interactive Life Company, a company specialized in mobile app development and website enhancement.

Today, as he juggles a full-time job and a full-time master's program, he manages to maintain an excellent academic record. He is starting to think of what he will do after he finishes his master's, and is contemplating pursuing doctoral work.

The USP opportunity greatly influenced Antonio's life. Among the things he is thinking about, is possibly establishing his own scholarship fund to help students with their university tuition fees. He hopes he can be of help to others by allowing students to have a university experience similar to the one granted to him by USAID.

Bilal Yazbeck

Degree: B.S. in Computer Science
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Growing up in Abadieh, a village east of Beirut in the Mount Lebanon region, Bilal Yazbek was passionate about innovation and development. Receiving a scholarship from the USAID University Scholarship program (USP), he combined these interests by pursuing a degree in Computer Science at Haigazian University.

“I can’t forget that day,” Bilal explained when remembering how he received the news of his acceptance. “I can’t forget the joy that filled my heart when I saw my father proudly looking at me, and my mother shedding tears of joy.”

Bilal learned about the USP program from his school principal. Bilal stressed that “it was not easy being a public school student, particularly since the schools are not equipped with libraries or computer laboratories.” He remains, however, still grateful to and proud of his public school, since public school enrollment was one of the requirements for being accepted by USP.

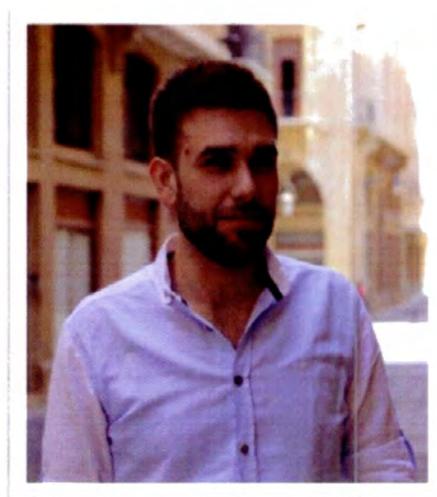
The USP scholarship was Bilal’s only chance to pursue a degree from a reputable university. Being an excellent student, and having such appreciation for this opportunity, Bilal continued to excel at university. Throughout his undergraduate years, he made the President’s Honor List three times and the Dean’s Honor List twice.

Bilal engaged in several team projects at LAU. He received a Certificate of Appreciation for the completion of the Youth Career Toward Successful Community Workshop, in recognition of his efforts to organizing a project to prepare youth to become leaders, while raising awareness about the importance of recycling in light of the garbage crisis that swept Lebanon.

He also earned the Certificate of Achievement Award for ranking 10th in the Lebanese Collegiate Programming Competition at the American University of Beirut (AUB). This contest provides an opportunity for students majoring in Computer Science, Computer Engineering, Management Information Systems, and IT-related subjects to show their skills in programming and also to meet students from other institutions.

Bilal sees the USP scholarship as pivotal to his life, providing him with a platform to showcase his passion for community service.

Bilal currently works as a software engineer at “Et3arraf SAL.” He is very happy with his post which calls for him to apply the skills he learned in college. Bilal looks forward to greater achievements, and thanks USAID for brightening his dreams about his future.



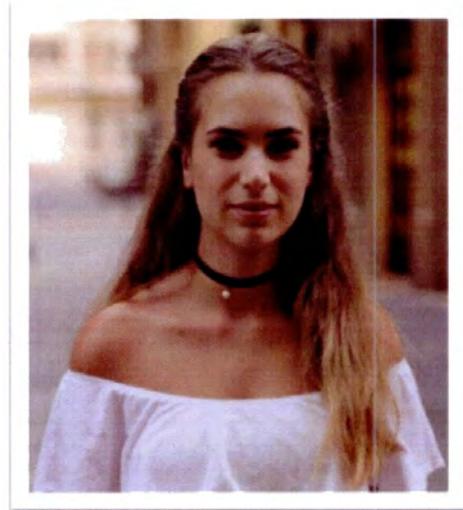
Chantal Choucair

Degree: B.S. in Business
University: LAU
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed and pursuing her master's as part of graduate assistantship

When Chantal Choucair received a phone call at her home in Safra, north of Beirut, from the Lebanese American University (LAU) notifying her of her acceptance by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP), she recalls “I cried out of joy that day!”

Because she ranked at the top of her high school class, her school principal and family had encouraged her to apply to the USP. “My family was of great support and encouraged me a lot,” she says.

“I always wanted to study banking and finance” since it’s a growing sector in Lebanon she says. However, Chantal was not sure if she would be able to study finance at a good university. USP allowed her to do this.



During her years at LAU, she joined the Model United Nations (MUN) and participated in numerous extracurricular activities. One of her best memories is taking part in the AIESEC exchange program in Egypt. This program that provides young people with cross-cultural leadership skills enabled her to work on a global community-development project entitled “Save My Youth,” a health-awareness campaign to encourage youth to have regular medical checkups in order to improve their quality of life.

Chantal was very keen on building her professional CV while at LAU, so she interned at BLC Bank, Fidelity Insurance, and Deloitte. During those internships, she gained specialized skills in financial management and planning, and acquired the qualifications needed to embark on her career path.

After graduation, she completed her master’s degree in Finance as part of the Graduate Assistantship (GA) program at American University of Beirut (AUB). She now works as a credit risk analyst at Byblos Bank, after completing a five-month internship as a bank teller.

Chantal, reflecting on the USP experience, wants to thank USAID for this opportunity. This scholarship helped her build her character, discover her potential, and become a more confident person who takes initiatives. “I realized that I am capable of pushing my limits to reach my full potential,” she notes.

Dareen Nasr

Degree: B.A. in Education
University: LAU
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed and pursuing her master's degree

Dareen Nasr believes that her strong personality and her excellent academic performance were the main reasons behind her acceptance by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) to Lebanese American University (LAU).

Dareen was raised in Hasbaya, in the southeast part of the country, with her two sisters and brother. Being passionate about improving the quality of public-school education in her hometown, she chose to major in Education.

Dareen, who graduated from Qusayr Public High School in Hasbaya, hoped to find an opportunity that would offer her a high-quality university education to allow her to contribute to the advancement and further development of her community.



She decided to apply for the USP scholarship after USP representatives from LAU visited her high school. The day she received the news of her acceptance was a turning point in her life.

During her time as a USP student at LAU, Dareen completed a number of workshops, trainings, and internships, all of which solidified her strengths and unleashed hidden capabilities.

She volunteered with the NGO MMKN (“possible” in Arabic) where she taught 9th graders math at Raml al-Zarif Public High School in Beirut. She also tutored ninth-grade students after school in Tyre.

Dareen, now a math teacher at Wellspring School in Beirut, is pursuing her master's degree in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) at LAU.

Dareen advises students never to give up, since hard work will eventually pay-off. She is grateful for USAID for having given her the chance to continue her education at an academically solid university.

Douaa Charaf

Degree: B.S. in Nutrition and Dietetics
University: AUB
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

Douaa, who attended Tammine El Tahta Public High School, was not planning on leaving her hometown Beit-Chama in the Bekaa Valley to pursue her university education in Beirut. Every time she heard about a scholarship, she would ignore it, thinking that nepotism or special connections were the only roads to being accepted by any of these programs.

She was, however, part of the English Access Microscholarship Program, a US Department of State project that helps underprivileged youth from public schools in Lebanon improve their English language skills. During one of the Access sessions, Douaa was introduced to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).



Like many students, she proceeded with the application process hoping that her strong academic performance would earn her the scholarship. Indeed, Douaa was selected from among the 500 candidates who had applied in 2012. She chose to pursue a degree in Nutrition and Dietetics at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

“My four years at university were marked with many changes. Being a USP scholar at AUB entailed participating in a number of civic engagement and volunteer activities,” Douaa explains. She participated in the community-based project for Kayani, a school that offers psychosocial support to Syrian refugee students in Saadnayel in the Bekaa. She also took part in establishing a mobile library at AUB to teach English to Palestinian children, and to encourage them to read.

Douaa’s character developed during her USP experience. She says, “I am now a completely different person due to the USP experience. My personality has changed and I gained many skills that made the person I am today.”

Douaa is currently completing her nutrition and dietetics internship at Dar Al Amal Hospital in Baalbeck, and hopes to open her own dietetics clinic in the future. She aims to enhance her capabilities and invest more in herself. She notes, “I am now armed with characteristics that distinguish me from other university graduates thanks to USAID.”

Elie Abdel Massih

Degree: B.E. in Mechanical Engineering
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

As he was waiting tables at a restaurant in Beirut's Ashrafieh district, Elie Abdel Massih got the news of his acceptance to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP). He was ecstatic, and everyone who knew him was proud, being aware of the dedication he had demonstrated throughout high school.

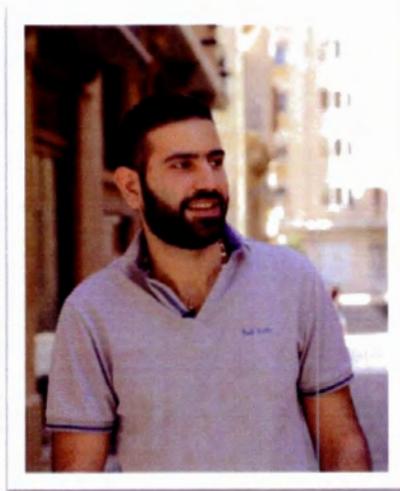
Elie enrolled at Lebanese American University (LAU) to major in Mechanical Engineering. The choice of major mirrored Elie's passion for anything related to engines and mechanical systems. His passion dates back to when he was a child and used to secretly explore the make-up of his father's car and its engine.

Elie's family comes from Qartaba, a village located on the mountains above Byblos, surrounded by vineyards and olive and mulberry orchards. He believes that his academic excellence and leadership skills were among the factors that facilitated his acceptance by the USP scholarship.

Elie exemplified his commitment to academic excellence in his second year of university. His academic performance prompted his university advisor to include him in a project developing an artificial exoskeleton. The project, which is still ongoing at LAU, seeks to develop a low-cost human exoskeleton to help paralyzed people move. Elie, who was commended for his work, presented the project at a seminar that was attended by the Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education in 2015. Elie notes that the USP experience allowed him to develop emotional intelligence and leadership skills, and helped him overcome his fears and face challenges.

Following his graduation, Elie completed his internship in mechanical engineering at the CAT group in Saudi Arabia, which provides construction and project management services. There, he analyzed engineering blueprints and attained an understanding of professional and ethical responsibilities.

Currently, Elie teaches a special electronics class for students aged 6-15 years at the International College (IC) in Beirut. The class utilizes Little Bits electronic kits which are modern electronic devices that introduce children to the world of engineering and technology. Elie believes that success requires dedication, hard work, and focus. He notes that his success thus far is owing to the USAID USP scholarship.



Enas Hasan

Degree: B.S. degree in Biology
University: Haigazian
Graduation: 2014
Status: Pursuing her medical studies

Enas Hasan's long-standing interest in science had prompted her to dream of becoming a doctor. She was eager to learn how diseases manifest themselves and how to alleviate human suffering.

As a high school student in her hometown of Al-Benney in the Aley region of Lebanon east of Beirut, however, she had difficulty imagining how she could earn a degree in medicine at one of Lebanon's private universities, since her parents could not afford the tuition. Enas looked for scholarships and considered bank loans, even though repayment of a loan would have been an immense financial burden on her and her family.

Representatives from Haigazian University visited Enas's school in Al-Benney to introduce students to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP). "As I had this opportunity I could not miss it," says Enas, who was the top student in her high school, which gave her hope that she might win a scholarship.

Her journey toward becoming a doctor started the day she received the news of her acceptance. Enas enrolled in the pre-med program at Haigazian University where she also benefited from the chance to participate in leadership workshops, and become involved in community service programs. These engagements helped develop her communication and leadership skills, and stirred her enthusiasm for community service.

"Don't lose hope" is the simple vision that guides Enas Hasan's life. Armed with her skills, strength, intelligence, and commitment to her dream, she took the MCAT exam, in the hopes of continuing her studies in medical school.

Despite others' suggestion that she was aiming too high, Enas kept her hopes up and worked hard for what she had always dreamed of. At the end of her pre-med undergraduate studies at Haigazian University, she was accepted to continue her studies at AUB, the greatest moment in her life, according to Enas. She is currently a third-year medical student at AUB.

"Looking back six years ago, I have definitely changed as a person, yet my dream hasn't changed and this is something I am proud of," she explains. She says how grateful she is for the USAID scholarship program which removed the financial burden she would have otherwise faced. As Enas reflects on her future, she says, "I am excited about my first clinical practice year, trying to help others in the best way I can and putting a smile on people's faces."



Farah Madi

Degree: B.S. in Environmental Health
University: AUB
Graduation: 2015
Status: Pursuing her Masters with Philippe Jabre scholarship program

Every year the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) offers university scholarships to around 50 promising public school students. Fortunately, in 2013 Farah Madi was chosen to pursue her Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health at the American University of Beirut (AUB) by the USP.

Born and raised in the village of Abadiyeh, Mount Lebanon, northeast of Beirut, Farah initially chose to major in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS), being inspired by her favorite television show, “Crime Scene Investigation.” After realizing how strongly she felt about environmental issues, however, she decided to transfer to Environmental Health.

Soon Farah was ready to take part in her first community work by assisting Palestinian students with their preparations for the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). Then, confident in her abilities, she decided to run for the Student Representative Committee (SRC) elections for the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) as part of the Campus Choice Independent Student List. She won.

During her university years, she constantly sought to put her passion for the environment into practice. She participated in a number of environmental awareness campaigns, including a seminar about air pollution in Lebanon. The seminar was organized in partnership with United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Lebanese Ministry of Energy, and IPT Energy Center.

Her hard work and dedication paid off when Farah was awarded the Kiram Siniora Memorial Prize for graduating with the highest GPA in the Faculty of Health Sciences. Farah believes that the USP experience further solidified her strengths, giving rise to the near-superhero she feels herself becoming.

Her impressive academic performance as a USP student allowed her to be accepted to the Philippe Jabre scholarship program to pursue her masters in Health Management and Policy at AUB.

To shed light on the importance of environmental issues, Farah decided to cofound a branch of the Arab Youth Climate Movement (AYCM.com) in Lebanon. The AYCM Lebanon branch has been organizing interactive awareness-raising sessions on climate change. Recently, AYCM Lebanon launched a campaign called “change climate change” that urges people to turn off their lights for an hour between 20:30-21:30 every year on March 19. This past October, Farah took part in the student government elections at AUB, also as part of the independent student campaign, Campus Choice. She was elected to the highest student body at AUB, the University Student Faculty Committee, as a representative of her faculty.

As she reflects on her journey with USP, Farah notes that no one should feel stress over failures or get mired in regrets. She notes that “life is a learning process and *with each downfall we learn to approach problems with a little more wisdom.*”



Fidaa Al-Fakih

Degree: B.S. in Business
University: LAU
Graduation: 2014
Status: Employed

USP scholar Fidaa Al-Fakih, recipient of the LAU President's 2014 Torch Award for High Leadership and Service Spirit, had long possessed a burning desire to study business. At a relatively young age, he was driven by an interest in community service and self-development. Born and raised in the city of Aley, east of Beirut, Fidaa became a member of the Lebanese Red Cross at 16.

Fidaa, who attended Aley Public School, was accepted to the Department of State's English Access Micro Scholarship Program, which helps Lebanese public school students learn English. It was during an ACCESS workshop that a USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) administrator informed Fidaa's class about the USP scholarship.



Fidaa moved to Beirut following his acceptance by the USP to pursue his studies in Business Management at the Lebanese American University (LAU).

As a USP scholar at LAU, Fidaa was able to exert himself successfully. Based on his commitment to his community, Fidaa founded LAU's Safety Awareness Club, which seeks to educate and influence people about road safety. He also became a member of the Youth Association for Social Awareness (YASA), which also focuses on road safety.

Fidaa was chosen as the director of public relations of the LAU Model Arab League program. He also became the Assistant Director of School Relations at the LAU Model United Nations (MUN).

Following his graduation, armed with new skills, specialized knowledge, and qualifications, Fidaa assumed the role of an assistant education advisor and junior trainer at AMIDEAST/Lebanon. Fidaa was subsequently selected for the role of Alumni Coordinator at the Public Diplomacy Department of the US Embassy in Lebanon.

Fidaa believes he would not be the skilled and successful person he has become had he not received the USP scholarship. For that he thanks the American people and USAID for giving him the best, professionally and academically. He believes that "an individual is a product of hard work and relentless pursuit of excellence, and not a product of circumstances."

Ghinwa Monzer

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Ghinwa grew up in Aley, Mount Lebanon, east of Beirut, surrounded by a loving family and loyal friends. She had always wanted to pursue a bachelor's degree at a reputable university, but she had to consider her family's financial situation.

Ghinwa was part of the English Access Microscholarship Program, a US Department of State project that helps underprivileged youth from public schools in Lebanon improve their English language skills. During one of the English sessions, Ghinwa was introduced to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP). She decided to apply, with the hope of majoring in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS).



Her academic journey commenced after she received a phone call from Haigazian University informing her of her acceptance by the USP program. Responding to the news, Ghinwa says she “started crying right through the call.”

Passionate about dance, Ghinwa decided to join the University Dance Club. “I was kicked out from my very first dance class. The instructor did not see any potential in me,” Ghinwa notes. Feeling discouraged, she was about to give up, but the Student Life Coordinator advised her to do otherwise.

After months of practicing, Ghinwa not only re-joined the Dance Club, but became its chairperson. Thanks to her hard work, she got the chance to learn different genres of dancing and to perform solo on stage.

As a USP student, Ghinwa volunteered at the Lebanese Red Cross, assisting the emergency response unit. She also interned at Teach for Lebanon, a local NGO, where she currently works as a teacher in a disadvantaged school. As a teacher, she is greatly dedicated to helping students develop their creative skills and capabilities. She is also spreading her passion for dance by giving free Tango classes in her hometown, Aley.

Ghinwa hopes to go on to complete her master's degree in Health Management and pursue work in her field. She thanks USAID for giving her the opportunity to earn a degree and to fulfill her dream of becoming a dancer.

Grace Al Najjar

Degree: B.A. in Education
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed, pursuing master's degree as part of Graduate Assistantship

Grace was raised in Niha, a small village in the eastern Bekaa Valley. She moved with her family to Beirut and continued her high-school education at Sin El Fil Public School, where she was an excellent student. She wanted her efforts to be recognized, and decided to apply to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).

Grace was looking for backup plans, in case she wasn't chosen for the scholarship, but, to her surprise, she was accepted by USP before applying to any other university. She notes, "from then on, I could stand on my own two feet and achieve my goals."

She chose to major in Education, aiming initially to work in the field as she completes her masters in Clinical Psychology.

As a USP student, she volunteered with Grain de Blé (Grain of Wheat), a non-governmental organization (NGO), helping children from underprivileged communities in Lebanon grow morally, socially, and spiritually. She also volunteered for Dar al-Awlad School teaching math to Syrian refugee children.

Today, Grace is pursuing her master's degree in Clinical Psychology, through a graduate assistantship at Haigazian University. Grace hosts an English-teaching program aired on Sat 7 TV channel that helps Syrian refugee children learn English. She also works as a program coordinator at the Dar al-Awlad School in Mansourieh, northeast of Beirut.

She is thankful for the USP experience, as she notes that she recommends the USP scholarship to all the high-school students she knows, including her younger sisters. The USP scholarship paved the way for Grace's personal growth, academic fulfillment and professional success.



Hajar Al Rifai

Degree: B.S. in Nutrition
University: LAU
Graduation: 2014
Status: Employed

USP scholar Hajar al-Rifai was raised with her two brothers and three sisters in Azki, a small village in Dennieh area of northern Lebanon. Hajar moved to Byblos to earn her undergraduate degree in Nutrition from the Lebanese American University (LAU), after being accepted by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).

Hajar chose to study nutrition, as she has always been dedicated to promoting healthy eating habits among her family and friends. After being encouraged by her mother, Hajar applied to the USP scholarship.

Early during her university days, Hajar discovered an affinity for humanitarian and volunteer work. She participated in a community-based project to renovate houses in Beirut's Burj Hammoud, volunteered to help orphaned Lebanese children, and participated in the reforestation campaign at the Cedar Reserve in Bchareh in the north of Lebanon. She emphasizes that the workshops offered as part of the USP scholarship made her independent and ambitious.

To prepare for her profession, Hajar interned at the Central Hospital of the North (CHN) in Zgharta, just south of her home in Dennieh. During her internship, she gained experience as a clinical dietitian, and in using proper techniques for dealing with patients.

Following her graduation with honors, Hajar began her six-month dietetic internship at Haykal Hospital in Tripoli, simultaneously with her part-time job as a private physics and chemistry instructor at the STAR educational center. As a child, she had dreamt of becoming a teacher. She plans to make this come true by enrolling in a PhD program in the near future.

Currently, Hajar works as a hygiene promoter at Solidarity International, an international humanitarian NGO working on the Syrian Refugee crisis in Lebanon. As part of her work, she visits Syrian Refugees camps to assess their basic needs for water, food and shelter. Meeting people living in difficult circumstances has allowed Hajar to become even more grateful for the USP scholarship. She notes "if it wasn't for this experience, I wouldn't be where I am today."



Hamza Denny

Degree: B.S. in Biology
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed and pursuing master's degree

Hamza Denny became the first student to be accepted by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) in his hometown Saadnayel in the western Bekaa Valley, where he had distinguished himself as the leader of the Al-Jarrah Scout troop. His acceptance to the program allowed him to pursue his undergraduate degree in Biology at the Lebanese American University (LAU).



At first, his family and friends were skeptical about the likelihood of his acceptance by USP, since he is from a relatively small, remote village. Having long dreamt of studying biology at a private university, Hamza was adamant, so his community's negativism did not stop him from applying. He

believes that his academic profile and his involvement in community-based activities were the main reasons for his earning the scholarship.

During his university years, Hamza improved his interpersonal skills, learnt about time management, and became an active member of his community in Saadnayel. He was the first among the USP students to sponsor a community project in his hometown, celebrating Mother's Day. The event showed appreciation to the mothers in his community.

As a child he had been fascinated with the study of living organisms: their structure, function and evolution. This love has remained, as Hamza pursues his graduate degree in Ecosystem Management at the American University of Beirut (AUB). He is also a part time teacher of biology and chemistry at Al-Najat Al-Hadithah Public School in Majdal 'Anjar in the central Bekaa.

Hamza plans to pursue his PhD abroad in order to fulfill his dream of becoming a university professor. Hamza's family, skeptical at first, is now proud and supportive of his academic and personal accomplishments. Hamza took it upon himself to urge students in his school in Saadnayel to apply to the USP, hoping that maybe one day others will embark on a successful journey similar to his.

Hanan Jammaz

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: AUB
Graduation: 2016
Status: Looking for a job

USP scholar Hanan Jammaz is from Chwaya, a small town in the Hasbaya District of South Lebanon. Hanan notes that “very few girls in my hometown leave their homes chasing after education,” due to social and financial restraints. Hanan sought to be an exception to the rule and applied to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) after USP representatives from the American University of Beirut (AUB) visited her school, Hasbaya Public School.



Hanan believes that her outstanding academic record allowed her to receive the USP scholarship and major in Medical Laboratory Science. The scholarship gave Hanan the opportunity to participate in a variety of workshops that focus on strengthening communication and leadership skills.

She volunteered in a community service project to install solar panels at Baysarieh Public High School, a project which is currently being implemented. Of her volunteer work at the St. Jude Cancer Center, she emphasizes that her biggest accomplishment “was being able to draw a smile on the faces of children.” She also volunteered with the Nasma Learning and Resource Center as a tutor helping disadvantaged public school students in Beirut.

Hanan, who graduated with distinction, moved back to Chwaya. There, she emphasizes the importance of academic achievement to local students, but she also urges students to engage in volunteer activities and join university clubs, so as to also prepare themselves for the “real world.”

Robyn Buehler’s statement that “She needed a hero, so that’s what she became” is Hanan’s favorite quotation, inspiring her to derive happiness from the journey rather than the goal. Hanan notes that “in five years, I want to see myself working to improve the living conditions in Chwaya. I am thankful for this opportunity that completely changed my life and prepared me to adapt to new circumstances.”

Hassan El-Dor

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2016
Status: Looking for a job

Reflecting on his childhood growing up in Kharayeb, in the southern part of Lebanon, Hassan El-Dor says that his family was supportive of his dreams and aspirations. They emphasized the importance of education from the time he was very young.

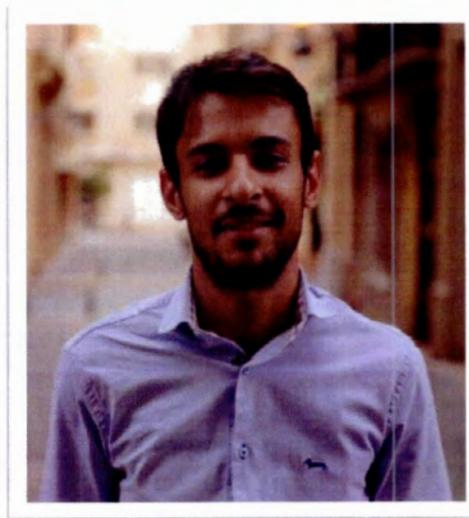
Following his secondary education at Abbassiyeh Official Public High School, Hassan was accepted to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) to major in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) at Haigazian University.

Hassan regards his move from the South to Beirut as a challenging step, since he had to leave his comfort zone. The new path was rewarding, however, since it allowed him to become responsible and to engage with people from different backgrounds. Hassan's gratitude over this experience drove him to overcome many challenges, and, subsequently, to try to inspire the youth in his village to pursue higher education.

Hassan completed a one-year training at the medical laboratory of Trad Medical Center in Beirut, where he worked as an assistant to the lab technicians. He also volunteered at the USAID-funded Developing Rehabilitation Assistance to Schools and Teachers Improvement (D-RASATI) project, which works in cooperation with the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education to improve Lebanon's public schools.

Hasan has also participated in workshops about stress management organized by Management Mix Company, a European firm that provides training solutions in management and development.

Hassan believes that his USP experience helped him become optimistic and positive in his life outlook, and that this change in attitude has opened his path towards progress and success. He is thankful for the USP for the opportunity that has opened so many doors and given him the confidence to pursue his ambitions.

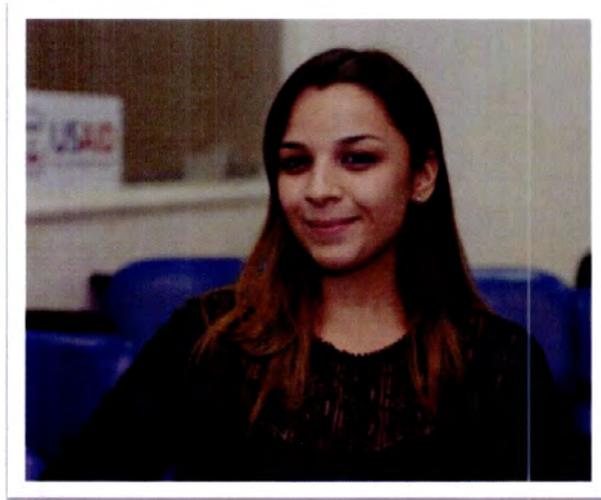


Hiba Bazzal

Degree: B.S. in Business
University: LAU
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Hiba Bazzal grew up in a conservative environment in Baalbeck, in the Bekaa Valley. She expresses how living there was hard, especially when her mother was the only person who supported her ambition to pursue higher education.

Hiba was promised to marry her cousin, since her father was strictly against her pursuing higher education. He was convinced that she should marry at a young age like other girls in the village. After her parents were divorced, her mother and siblings moved to Saida, South Lebanon, and Hiba visited them only on weekends.



Hiba went to Douris High School for Girls, and found out about the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) when Lebanese American University (LAU) representatives visited her school. She notes that “I knew deep inside that the scholarship was going to be my savior.”

The day Hiba was accepted by the program was the happiest day of her life: “I remember that I screamed and cried,” she says. Persuaded by her uncles and mother, her father agreed to allow her to enroll at LAU.

She moved to Beirut to pursue her bachelor’s degree in International Business. The three years spent at LAU allowed Hiba to engage in social life, workshops, events, internships and community service, as well as pursuing her love for the fine arts. She became independent as well as more responsible and confident about what she could accomplish. Of her USP experience, Hiba says, “I was always respected. My professors believed in my capabilities and never let me settle for less.”

As she had always had a passion for the arts, Hiba has continued to create beautiful paintings inspired by real characters and moments. Her work has been exhibited at LAU and she is now preparing for another exhibition.

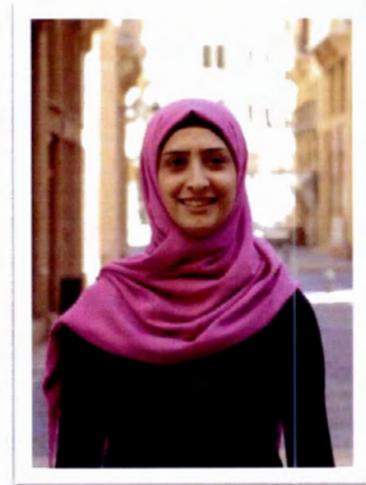
Hiba now works as an Accountant at Leo Burnett, a globally active American advertising company. She hopes to continue her studies next year and earn certification as a Certified Management Accountant (CMA).

Without the scholarship, Hiba would have faced numerous challenges regarding university and tuition fees, which, she says, would have provided her father with the excuse he needed to keep her in the village. Hiba concludes, “I was seeking education and left gaining so much more.”

Hiba Hojeij

Degree: B.A. in Education
University: LAU
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed and pursuing her master's degree as part of graduate assistantship

Hiba Hojeij was raised in a family of six in Deir Amess, south Lebanon, and attended the Kamal Chalhah public school in Ain Ba'al. She moved to Beirut in 2011 after being granted a University Scholarship Program (USP) scholarship to begin her undergraduate studies at the Lebanese American University (LAU).



Hiba's mother and father encouraged her to set education as a priority in her life. Throughout her years in high school, Hiba was part of the English Access Microscholarship program, a US Department of State project that helps underprivileged youth from public schools in Lebanon improve their English language skills. She found out about the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) from a school announcement.

Both of her parents being teachers, Hiba wanted to follow in their footsteps. For this reason, she applied for a USP scholarship to pursue a career in education.

When she heard the news of her acceptance, she could not believe it. She says, "I was surprised at first and asked the speaker to repeat the sentence. When I heard the news for the second time, I started shouting, jumping, and immediately called my parents."

As a USP student, Hiba interned as a shadow teacher at the German School and Makassed School in Beirut. Hiba also volunteered with MMKN (Arabic for "possible"), giving English reinforcement classes at Shakib Erslan and Raml al-Zarif Public Schools in Beirut. She also participated in the USAID's Lebanon Reforestation Initiative (LRI) as a volunteer to preserve the forests in the northern city of Bcharre.

Following her graduation, Hiba worked at Wellspring Learning Community School as a Math Support Teacher for one year. She is currently an Assistant Teacher at the American Community School (ACS) in Beirut. She is pursuing her master's degree in Education at LAU as part of the Graduate Assistantship (GA) program.

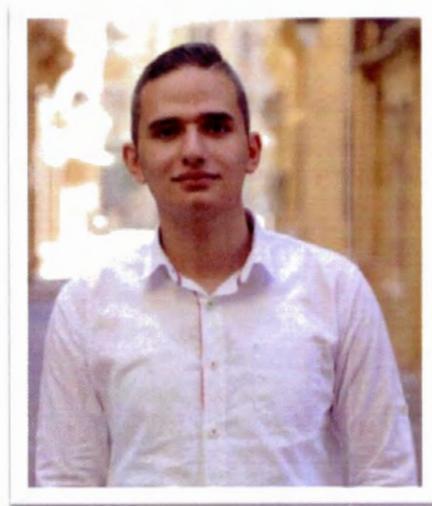
Hiba notes that "if I hadn't been granted this scholarship, I wouldn't have been able to earn this quality education in one of the best universities in Lebanon." The experience itself made her confident and eager to achieve her full potential.

Hussein Shamiyi

Degree: B.E. in Mechanical Engineering
University: LAU
Graduation: 2015
Status: Looking for a job

Hussein Shamiyi grew up in Hasbaya, a district in southern Lebanon. He was inspired by his father, a farmer “who sacrificed all his life to make ends meet for his family.” His eldest brother saw Hussien’s potential, and was the one who accompanied him to Lebanese American University (LAU) in Beirut to set in motion the application process for the USAID funded University Scholarship Program (USP).

Hussein’s hard work paid off and he was selected to receive the scholarship to major in Mechanical Engineering. The USP experience improved Hussein’s leadership and social skills, as well as convincing him that a bright future could await him. Hussein was a member of the Safety Awareness Club at LAU, and took part in its road safety awareness campaign.



Regarding his USP experience, Hussein notes that the scholarship program taught him “to be successful not only academically but also socially.” He emphasizes that the workshops and volunteer activities he engaged in at LAU “taught me the importance of kindness and helping others.” As part of his community-based project, he tutored high school students at his school, Alkfeir Public High School, in English.

Despite the challenges he is currently facing as he looks for work in Lebanon, Hussein continues to keep his dreams and aspirations alive. He derives strength from the capacities he built during the USP workshops. His journey from the South to his graduation from LAU transformed Hussein into a strong-willed individual capable of becoming a successful engineer.

Isamar Mattar

Degree: B.E. in Civil Engineering
University: AUB
Graduation: 2016
Status: Looking for a job

“There are no limits to what we can do and to what life has to offer,” says Isamar Mattar. Isamar grew up in Mijdlayya, a small village in Aley, Mount Lebanon, east of Beirut. Her father passed away when she was eight and her mother struggled to cover the family’s expenses and public school fees. Isamar chose civil engineering as her major, after her high school teacher had encouraged her to select it.



She learned about the possibility of earning a college scholarship the day representatives from the University Scholarship Program (USP) visited her high school. Isamar, afraid she would not be accepted, was not motivated to apply. However, the same high-school teacher who had advised her to major in civil engineering also encouraged her to apply for the scholarship.

Without the scholarship, Isamar could not afford a renowned private university education and was already looking at other options as a backup plan.

As she was getting ready to attend her friend’s graduation party, Isamar received a call from the American University of Beirut (AUB) announcing her acceptance by the USP. “To my shock I didn’t know what to say, I got so excited and ran to break the good news to my mother,” she says.

Isamar soon adapted to her new environment at AUB. Of her USP experience, Isamar says, “I had friends from different areas, ethnic backgrounds, religions and cultures. I was living in harmony with myself and with the surrounding environment.”

She participated in a community-based project that equipped a bakery in Bayssour, Mount Lebanon, which employs only illiterate Lebanese and Syrian widows. One of her accomplishments was participating in a project investigating the implantation of geothermal piles as alternative energy sources, which ranked second among 28 other groups. Isamar is also a volunteer at USAID’s D-RASATI II education-reform project.

“I am proud of what I have become and of being able to make my dreams come true,” Isamar says. In a few years, Isamar hopes to pursue her PhD.

She concludes “I came from an underprivileged area, yet thanks to USAID I was able to graduate from a top-notch university without having to seek the help of political parties or influential figures.”

Jennifer el-Hajal

Degree: B.S. in Business
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

On her prom night, Jennifer el-Hajal realized that the time had come to start taking solid steps down her yellow brick road. Jennifer grew up in Bsalim, Mount Lebanon, north of Beirut, and attended Jal el-Dib Public High School.

Her first solid step was applying to and being accepted by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) to major in Accounting at the Lebanese American University (LAU). On receiving the news of her acceptance, Jennifer says that “I still remember that moment. I woke up to the most exciting news ever! I was very happy and thankful.”

Her acceptance by the USP program allowed her to achieve what she had long wished for: a high-quality education and community involvement. This was coupled with workshops, trainings, and internships that allowed her to gain the skills and confidence needed to excel on both personal and professional levels.

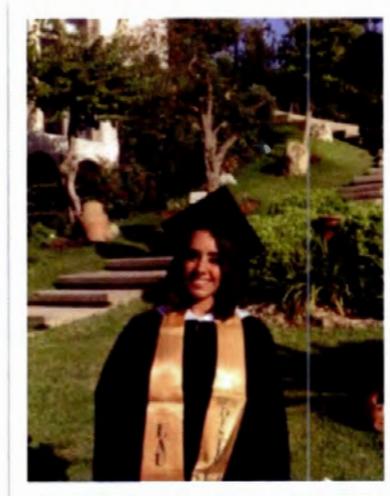
As a USP student, Jennifer participated in a community-based project at SOS Children’s Village, an NGO that provides care for children in need. As part of the project, Jennifer and fellow USP students gave English sessions to children and encouraged them to read by providing them with books.

She also participated in USAID’s Lebanon Reforestation Initiative to help restore the cedar forest of Bcharre in the north of the country. Jennifer’s passion for photography led her to become president of the Photography Club. She was responsible for organizing photography tours to various regions of Lebanon.

Jennifer was able to graduate with a 3.91 GPA, engage in a very successful community project, and complete an internship at Deloitte, where she currently holds the position of audit associate. She notes that she is looking forward to becoming a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) in the near future.

“My journey as a USP student at LAU was very memorable and exciting. I am now able to stand on my own two feet, armed with a quality education and leadership skills,” Jennifer notes.

Jennifer, who graduated with high distinction, expresses her gratitude to USAID, the USP team, her professors, and, most importantly, her family for their support throughout the USP journey.



Jinan Arab

Degree: B.S. degree in Nutrition
University: LAU
Graduated: 2015
Status: Employed + pursuing her master's degree

Growing up in the harbor city of El-Mina, next to Tripoli in north Lebanon, Jinan Arab was raised by loving and caring parents who worked to provide their three children with everything they needed. As a child, Jinan suffered from a medical condition which required several hospital stays and on-going treatment. During this period of her life, Jinan used to memorize the names of her medications and their functions, stirring her passion for biology and chemistry.

Jinan was a very strong student, constantly ranking first in her class. Her academic performance allowed her to join the English Access Microscholarship Program, which is sponsored by the US Department of State to improve English language skills among talented and underprivileged public school students throughout Lebanon.

In order to continue her education, Jinan applied to a scholarship program, reaching the last selection phase; however, she was not accepted. Despite this disappointment, her mother encouraged her to apply to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP), certain that Jinan's character and academic accomplishments would be of interest to the USP university partners. Her mother's assumptions proved to be true. Jinan was accepted to study Nutrition at the Lebanese American University (LAU).

As part of the scholarship program, Jinan participated in a number of workshops, team-building activities, and fundraising events, in addition to engaging in practical internships. The workshops and internships enhanced her confidence and made her realize the importance of tailoring her academic journey by developing practical skills.

Among her accomplishments, Jinan was able to replicate an animal study conducted by one of the professors. Her study sought to investigate past and present relations between humans and animals. She succeeded in actually improving the outcomes of this study and subsequently wrote a report that ranked first among other senior students in her class.

Following her graduation, Jinan was accepted along with eleven other students to pursue her graduate degree in Public Health with an emphasis in Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the Lebanese University. Jinan simultaneously works at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), an international non-governmental organization, as a senior livelihood officer. This work has broadened her understanding of humanitarian aid.

Jinan hopes eventually to integrate her expertise in public health with the humanitarian work she is experiencing, hoping to assume a decision-making position within an NGO. Of her commitment to humanitarian work, Jinan notes that “[s]ince we live in a discriminatory society, our duty is to serve and help those in need with a huge smile, loving words and a caring heart.”

She adds, “I plan on finishing my master's, pursuing my PhD abroad, and then build a career to help those in need.” Jinan believes that her strength and dedication are an outcome of her USP journey, which helped her become an independent, committed, responsible, and positive young woman.



Joumana Aouf

Degree: B.S. in Nutrition
University: LAU
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Joumana Aouf was raised in Tripoli, second largest city in Lebanon, where she attended Lycee Fadel Mokadem High School. As a child, she had wanted to become a pharmacist to help people with illnesses, having been inspired by the situation facing her father who later passed away. Learning more about health-related issues, she realized that the best way to prevent and treat disease starts with healthy nutrition. Based on that, she decided to major in Nutrition. The new challenge was to find a way to graduate from a reputable university and to pursue quality education despite her family's limited financial capabilities. Joumana notes, "In the last year of high school, a big shift happened in my life, that is, my acceptance to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP)."



During her university years, she was the treasurer of Lebanese American University's (LAU) Nutrition Club and organized an on-campus event called "Love Your Body Day." Joumana also volunteered at Haykel Hospital in Tripoli, where she organized two campaigns, World Diabetes Day and a Breastfeeding Awareness Campaign.

Following graduation from LAU, Joumana completed internships at Tripoli's Nini Hospital and Albert Haykel Hospital, thereby fulfilling a prerequisite for the nutrition colloquium examination.

She is currently working as a Hygiene Promoter at the Norwegian Refugee Council, an independent humanitarian organization that works on enhancing international protection of refugees. Joumana plans to earn her master's degree in Nutrition and to continue to practice her profession through NGOs and hospitals.

As she reflects on her USP journey, Joumana stresses that "my university years were the best years of my life, wherein I got the best education anyone can ask for, and met people from different backgrounds and countries." She adds, "this allowed me to accept diversity and surely prepared me for the real world."

Joumana Moodad

Degree: B.E. in Computer Engineering
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

Jomana Moodad graduated from Dhour Shweir Public Secondary School in her hometown, Bteghrine, in the Metn District, just northeast of Beirut. She found great satisfaction in learning and from making her parents proud of her academic accomplishments. Her excellent foundation in math and physics and her interest in technology prompted Joumana to choose Computer Engineering as her major.

Joumana was introduced to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) following a visit from USP representatives to her school.

Joumana decided to apply despite being discouraged by her friends because she had received her education in French.

She believes that the USP scholarship is granted to students not only because of their academic records, but also because of their interest in making a positive change in their communities.

During her years at the Lebanese American University (LAU), she was accepted to two internships, one with Wavemark Cardinal Health in Lebanon, and the other with Air France Industries in Orly, France.

During her internship with Wavemark she researched unit-testing techniques, developed scenarios for automated testing, along with Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) web services, and writing Java Programs. During her internship with Air France Industries she was responsible for developing a database for equipment management and processing. The experience of traveling alone and living abroad for two months was a new experience that made Joumana more responsible.

The scholarship program gave her the chance to travel to New York with the LAU Model United Nations (MUN) team, attending the International MUN Conference that took place in the UN General Assembly Hall. Committed to making a difference, Joumana developed software for LAU MUN that helps MUN organizers prepare for conferences by assigning appropriate countries to applying schools based on the size of their delegation.

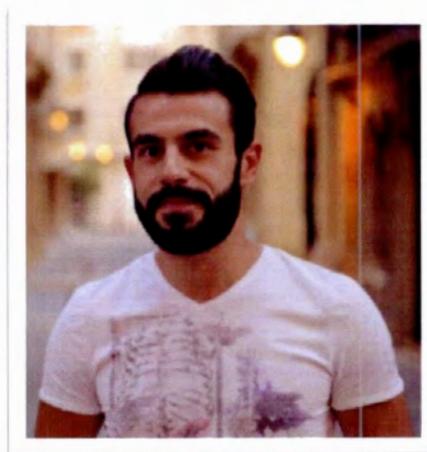
Joumana currently works as a Software Engineer at Digital Solutions Pro, a project with Murex, an international company that specializes in the development of software management programs. Following her graduation, Joumana realized that the USP scholarship had enabled her to strengthen her skills and abilities, and thereby overcome the challenges she has faced.



Khodor Zehri

Degree: B.B.A in Finance
University: Haigazian
Graduated: 2015
Status: Employed

Born and raised in Nabatiyeh, southern Lebanon, Khodor attended Hassan Kamel al-Sabbah Public School, where he was introduced to USAID’s University Scholarship Program (USP). Following his acceptance to the USP scholarship, he moved to Beirut and enrolled at Haigazian University. Growing up in a town with few educational opportunities, the move from Nabatiyeh to Beirut was a chance for Khodor to pursue a high-quality undergraduate education.



Interested in mathematics and aspiring to open his own business, Khodor chose to pursue a degree in Finance. Believing he was accepted due to his strong academic performance and his leadership skills, Khodor had feared not being able to obtain an adequate university education. Receiving the scholarship, thus, was a turning point in his life.

The workshops, trainings, and internships boosted Khodor’s self-confidence, leadership, and communication skills. As a USP student, he completed workshops offered by LOYAC, a nonprofit organization supporting youth development, about event management, business management analysis, and public speaking. He also interned at the Central Bank of Lebanon, where he was introduced to the world of banking and financial operations.

As a way to give back to the community, Khodor volunteered at Zahia Kaddoura School where he gave math reinforcement sessions for students studying for the *Lebanese Baccalaureate* Secondary Certificate.

The best part of his university life was living in the dormitory with students from different backgrounds, which helped Khodor see the world with an open mind.

Khodor is currently working as a finance and administration assistant at Management Systems International. He is thankful for USAID for offering him this exceptional, life-changing opportunity to strengthen his skills and his self-confidence.

“Use your smile to change the world, and don’t let the world change your smile” is Khodor Zehri’s motto, emphasizing the way optimism can change one’s life. Khodor aims to pursue his master’s degree in the future.

Lamya Ayyad

Degree: B.B.A. in Finance
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Lamya Ayyad was raised in a family of four in Beirut. She notes that “at school, I was a science nerd,” and she wanted to pursue a degree in pharmacy. Yet, after seeing many pharmacy graduates struggling to find a job, she decided to major in finance. According to Lamya, it was a major that offers a wide range of job opportunities.

She was introduced to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) when USP representatives from Haigazian University visited her school, Omar Farroukh Public High School. According to Lamya, this opportunity came at the perfect time, since the scarcity of funds and opportunities was worrying her. Lamya says, “I was so desperate. As I was entering a critical phase in my life, I was afraid that I might not be able to pursue my undergraduate studies.”

Describing the moment she received the call announcing her acceptance to USP, Lamya says, “I asked the speaker to repeat himself three times, because I could not believe my ears.” She says that “I knew that getting this scholarship came as a reward for all the hard work I had put in during my school years.”

Through the USP experience, Lamya strengthened her leadership and communication skills, and also introduced her to professionals who served as role models for her. Lamya also attended a number of workshops about stress management, emotional intelligence, and entrepreneurship.

She volunteered at the Union of Relief and Development Association where she was a member of the SAWA (a Lebanese NGO) team which provides psychological counseling for Syrian refugee children. She says, “we went to a number of camps where we organized activities for Syrian children to help them cope with their current psychological situation.”

Lamya worked on a social business project called “Excelling Young Entrepreneurs” (EYE) with eight other Haigazian students. The project raised awareness about the importance of recycling used tires. “We developed a business plan and a feasibility study,” she explains, “The whole project took around two years. The idea was to recycle tires by transforming them into raw material that can be used in other industrial products, such as tables, chairs, mats, carpets, flower pots, and other garden decorations.” The project took second place at the Social Entrepreneurship Competition held at Haigazian University.

After taking a social media workshop, Lamya decided to use the skills she gained to launch her own fashion blog. She notes “in my blog I share fashion inspirations and tips. It is a platform that allows me to pursue my dream of becoming an international fashion blogger.”

Lamya currently works as an Administrative Assistant at the USP office at the Lebanese American University (LAU). She is planning on pursuing her master’s degree in the near future. She stresses “the scholarship has indeed changed me on so many levels; I learned to never stop exploring, dreaming, and striving for the better.”



Layan Al-Ghizzawi

Degree: B.S. Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

“Seize opportunities that come your way; you never know what impact they might have on your life,” Layan Al-Ghizzawi says. Born and raised in Beirut, Layan attended Abdallah al-Alayleh Official Public School for Girls and recently graduated from Haigazian University, thanks to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).



Layan was part of the English Access Microscholarship Program, a program sponsored by the US Department of State to improve English language skills among talented and underprivileged public school students throughout Lebanon. She found out about USP during an ACCESS class, and applied to pursue a degree in Medical Laboratory Sciences at Haigazian University.

Although the number of applicants to the scholarship was high, Layan was accepted. She believes that her strong personality and positive outlook earned her the scholarship.

Having participated in numerous workshops and trainings through USP, Layan gained skills such as social entrepreneurship, self-reliance and management. Those skills nurtured her personal growth and made her the person she is today.

Layan also completed two hospital internships, one at Trad Hospital, where she learned laboratory techniques, and the other at Mar Elias Laboratory where she performed procedures in bacteriology and parasitology. As for her community-based activities, she visited Akkar and Baalbeck municipalities to offer trainings to public school students about writing resumés and strengthening interview skills.

Layan currently works at the American University of Beirut Medical Center as a medical laboratory technologist in the Serology Department. She was recently promoted to train AUB medical lab students, and says she enjoys this new duty. She is thankful to USAID for believing in her potential and for changing her life for the better.

Leen Al-Yaman

Degree: B.A. in Human Resource Management
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Leen al-Yaman attended Nazih Bizri Public High School in her hometown Saida, in the south of Lebanon, and was part of the US Department of State's Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program. She found out about the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) from her school administration, and was motivated to apply. Fortunately, she was accepted.

Leen considers her parents to be her role models, noting that "though they never had much money, they always made sure we got everything we wanted. They taught me to be confident and to always go after my dreams."

She has always been curious about human behavior in the workplace. For that reason, she chose to major in Human Resource Management (HRM) at Haigazian University.

During her university years, she completed numerous internships with non-governmental organizations (NGO), in addition to several trainings and workshops. All of these allowed her to gain the skills appropriate for the HR field.

Her first HR internship was at the USAID Lebanon Reforestation Initiative. Leen also interned at Nawaya Network Beirut, which works with Syrian refugee children, and AMIDEAST/Lebanon as an HR assistant.

Following her graduation, she assumed a position at AMIDEAST as a YES scholarship program specialist. Leen says, "Getting this job is a dream come true. As a YES alumna, I am very proud that I was chosen to work on a program that I used to be a part of." Leen is planning to pursue her master's degree in Talent Management in the near future.

The USP experience helped her gain self-confidence. She is grateful to USAID for giving her this opportunity, and for allowing her to take solid steps toward a successful future.



Linda Bechnak

Degree: B.S. in Chemistry
University: AUB
Graduation: 2016
Status: Pursuing graduate studies

Linda Bechnak was born and raised in Saida, south Lebanon, where she graduated from Nazih El Bizri Public High School. After being accepted to the American University of Beirut (AUB) as part of the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP), Linda majored in Chemistry, which her passion for science and her interest in pharmaceuticals had led her to study.

“AUB’s reputation for providing students with outstanding academic resources and its commitment to fostering excellence in teaching makes it a dream to many students,” Linda says. Due to her strong academic profile, her school supervisor motivated her to apply for the USP scholarship. Linda was initially overwhelmed by the idea of pursuing her education at AUB, knowing the environment would be totally different from her home life. However, Linda overcame her concerns and made the best of this opportunity, eventually graduating with distinction. She states “the ground is yours do whatever challenges you the most.”



She made sure to leave her mark by engaging in various volunteer activities through the Community Service Center at AUB. Linda was a volunteer at the St Jude Children’s Cancer Center, during which she learned about the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction such experiences provide. She also volunteered at ABAAD, non-profit association aiming to achieve gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa region. There, she participated in a fundraising initiative to raise public awareness about violence against women. Linda’s senior year was a turning point during her three years at AUB, as she learned how to be a true leader and decision-maker through her work as Public Relations Officer for the Chemistry Student Society. She also developed her writing skills through working as a staff writer at *AUB Outlook*, tackling various topics related to university life.

“AUB and USAID offered me a platform to work on my self-esteem and critical thinking,” Linda says. “You can always be a student with a very good academic standing, but it takes dedication and commitment to be an effective leader.” Linda is currently pursuing graduate studies in physical chemistry at AUB as part of the Graduate Assistantship (GA) program. She is writing her thesis on Nanoscience and Applied Fluorescence Spectroscopy, and is a tutor for Chemistry courses at AUB and Lebanese American University (LAU). In the future, she plans to pursue her PhD, then work as a chemistry professor or a researcher.

“I am grateful to my mother and family, who always supported me throughout this journey, to my supervisor in school who drew my attention to this opportunity, and to all the staff and coordinators at the AUB-USP office who were always supportive and helpful,” she says.

Maha Mrad

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Looking for a job

Maha Mrad grew up in Ghobeiry, a southern suburb of Beirut, and graduated from Ghobeiry Public School for Girls. She was eager to continue her education at a high-quality university, prompting her to work hard to excel at school.

Maha heard about the University Scholarship Program (USP) from a school announcement. At first, she wasn't motivated to apply, assuming that she needed to have "connections" to get the scholarship. However, her mother insisted that she apply, strongly believing in her daughter's potential and capabilities.

To Maha's surprise, she received a call from the USP office at Haigazian University informing her of her acceptance. She was ecstatic about the news and decided to make the most of this opportunity.

Maha pursued a degree in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS), a major that closely relates to her interest in sciences and forensics. She believes that USP scholars have a "richer" university experience than non-USP students, due to their participation in various workshops and trainings on leadership, character building, and entrepreneurship.

Maha was a member of Desert Stream Club, where she helped organize charity events and blood donation campaigns. She also took part in fundraisers for Home of Hope, a local NGO that serves underprivileged and orphaned children in Lebanon. To strengthen the skills she gained as part of her degree, Maha interned at Trad Hospital for 5 months, where she gained basic knowledge about laboratory methods and general procedures.

During her university years, she met people from a variety of backgrounds with many different world-views, and made many friends whom she now considers as family. Maha believes that the USP experience changed her for the better, noting that "today, I am more mature, and I see obstacles as opportunities that help me evolve and grow stronger."

Maha saved the scholarship stipend given to her as a USP scholar to help her parents pay for her younger brother's education. She says the USP scholarship helped her build a professional resumé rich in internships and workshops, which meant that she would not need "connections" to find a job in Lebanon, laying a strong foundation for her future.



Manar Hammoud

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

USP graduate Manar Hammoud was born and raised in Tripoli along with her two brothers and sister. Of her life in Tripoli, Manar notes that despite her family's limited financial resources, she enjoyed a healthy, happy and peaceful childhood.

As a child she dreamt about becoming a lawyer. The lack of opportunities in Tripoli, however, prevented her from pursuing this dream. Manar worked hard and remained unwavering in her pursuit of academic success, an attitude that allowed her to find out about and apply for the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).



She was accepted by the USP scholarship to major in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) at Haigazian University. Manar believes that her leadership skills, academic record, and strong personality were the main factors that got her the scholarship.

Regarding her USP experience, Manar says that it exposed her to people from different backgrounds. This allowed her to become part of an environment that fostered harmony and tolerance. Her journey allowed her to gain confidence in herself and her involvement in clubs and in various social and civic activities helped her gain empathy toward others.

Manar was a member of the Social Club at Haigazian, and eventually became its chairperson. Manar solidified her dedication to volunteer work by engaging in volunteer activities at the St. Jude Cancer Center and at the civil society organization, Mmkn ("possible" in Arabic), where she taught English, Math and Sciences to 9th graders at Renee Mouawad Public School.

Manar currently works as a teacher at Teach For Lebanon (TFL). She says that her professional experience has helped generate a stronger version of herself. She notes that USP students are able to completely focus on strengthening their capabilities since they do not have to worry about university-related financial issues.

Manar plans to pursue her master's degree in the near future to gain specialized skills and knowledge in MLS. Manar says that she will continue to live life to the fullest, and she remains optimistic about the future made brighter through the USAID scholarship.

Mary Joul Abed Al-Ahad

Degree: B.S. in Biology
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Pursuing her master's as part of Philippe Jabre scholarship program

Mary Joul grew up in Kfour, Keserouan, just northeast of Beirut, and attended Zahia Kaddoura Official School for Girls in Ras Beirut. She graduated at the top of her class and passed the Lebanese official exams with honors. Representatives from the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) visited Mary Joul's school and informed students about the scholarship, its application process, and requirements.



Fascinated by evolution and human anatomy, Mary Joul wanted to major in Biology. Her only option was to attend a public university and pursue a degree in Medicine. Mary Joul preferred not to enroll in a public university since education there did not include social events and community-based activities. Fortunately, she received a call from Haigazian University informing her that she had been accepted by the scholarship program.

Mary Joul was on the Honors list throughout her university years, and she also received an Academic Excellence Award presented to her by the US ambassador to Lebanon. She says those were the biggest achievements in her life, so far.

Mary Joul, who plays the oud and the piano, joined the university's Music Club, which provided a means for her to meet students who shared her passion for music. She volunteered at Blessed Evangelical School for children with mental disabilities, helping teachers with in-class activities. Mary Joul also participated in "Healthy Libanista," a project in which students met to raise awareness about nutrition by selling healthy Lebanese food. Additionally, she completed an internship at Expand Your Horizons (EYH) project where she gained skills on data collection and survey analysis.

She is currently completing her master's in Environmental Health at the American University of Beirut (AUB) as part of Philippe Jabre scholarship program. Mary Joul, who plans to enroll in a doctoral program in the future, advises students to apply to the USP program, particularly since it changed her life and opened the doors to many opportunities.

Mohammad Youniss

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

During his school years at Zahia Salman Public School, Mohammad Youniss was worried that, following graduation, he would be just an “ordinary person incapable of making an impact on society.” His only option was to attend a public university while working to ensure his financial stability. Mohammad, who had an excellent academic record, was encouraged by his principal to apply to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).



Following his acceptance, he chose to pursue a degree in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) at Haigazian University. As a USP student, Mohammad served as the chairperson of the Environmental Club for three years in a row. He launched several campaigns and events, including raising awareness about smoking hazards and promoting the health benefits of organic fruits and vegetables. He also organized up-cycling and re-cycling workshops at public schools in Burj Hammoud, a neighborhood on the eastern edge of Beirut.

USP enabled Mohammad to become an active member of his community. He completed an internship at Modern Laboratories in Ghoubeiry, a Beirut suburb, where he conducted research on sickle cells that was published in the *Journal of Hematology* in Lebanon, and in *PubMed*, a service of the US National Library of Medicine comprised of more than 26 million biomedical literature. The objective of this study was to assess the prevalence, gender differences, and time trends of Sickle Cell Trait in the southern suburbs of Beirut, as well as to highlight the importance of screening for Sickle Cell Trait carriers in this population. Another objective was to describe a new screening technique for Sickle Cell Trait carriers.

He volunteered at the Children’s Cancer Center, where he organized activities for children to brighten their days. Commenting on his experience as a volunteer, Mohammad notes that “success is not measured by how much you gain but by your willingness to give.”

Currently, Mohammad Youniss is working as a teacher at Teach for Lebanon, and he hopes to complete his PhD in the future. He is thankful for USAID for giving Lebanese public school students a chance to follow their dreams.

Mona Ramadan

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

Mona Ramadan wanted to be an independent, educated and successful individual. She knew that her aspiration would be possible only through a high-quality education. She says that “when I was young, I used to dream about becoming a flight attendant, because it would allow me to travel and explore the different traditions, cultures, and customs around the world.”

She was raised in Bekaa, in eastern Lebanon, and was not very optimistic about her future due to the scarcity of educational opportunities in her hometown. However, Mona was introduced to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) during the English Access Microscholarship program, a US Department of State project that helps underprivileged youth from public schools improve their English language skills.

Mona, who attended Bar Elias Public High School, says the people around her criticized her decision to apply to the USP program, since it would entail moving from Bekaa to Beirut. They believed she could not manage on her own. She took this negativity as a challenge, hoping to prove everyone wrong. Mona was accepted to the scholarship program by two universities, Lebanese American University (LAU) and Haigazian University. She chose to major in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) at Haigazian as it was the closest major to her interest in science.

On being part of the USP program, Mona notes that “I made my family proud. To this day, I can still see the sparkle in my parents’ eyes when someone asks about my achievements.”

For three years in a row, Mona was the Orientation Assistants Team leader at Haigazian. Her participation in workshops and trainings developed her communication skills and improved her social skills. She explains that “I got introduced to new students. During those three years, I learned how to be responsible, and how to make new students feel welcomed at university. I also experienced how one can be a passionate leader without expecting anything in return.”

As a USP student, she volunteered at St. Jude’s Cancer Center, where she created a fun and engaging atmosphere for young patients. Mona was also part of the Desert Stream Club at Haigazian, participating in a fundraiser selling beanies to help support Syrian refugees living in Bekaa.

From her internships at HDC laboratory in Bekaa and Trad Hospital in Beirut, Mona gained knowledge of practical laboratory skills and medical testing.

Grateful for the USP experience, she says, “If I hadn’t been accepted to the scholarship, I think I would have attended another university in Bekaa, without being able to develop my skills. I probably would have chosen another major, or maybe be married with kids!”

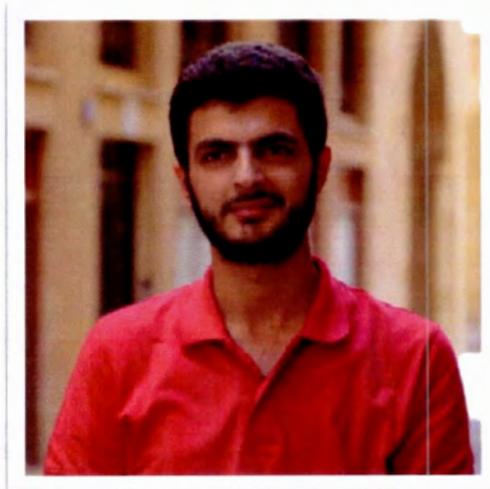
She is currently working as a full-time Office Assistant in the Center for Continuing Education office at Haigazian University. Although she graduated with a degree in MLS, Mona has taken an interest in Human Resources (HR) and Project Management. She now hopes to earn a diploma in these two fields, and to incorporate her knowledge on MLS and HR by working in the HR department at a hospital.



Mustapha Hamad

Degree: B.S. in Computer Engineering
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed, pursuing graduate studies as part of the Graduate Assistantship

Mustapha Hamad, who went to the Bar Elias Public Secondary School in the Bekaa Valley, used to spend his nights dreaming about a brighter future. “It was,” he says, “a mere dream until USAID changed my whole life and made this dream come true.” He graduated from the Lebanese American University (LAU) as a University Scholarship Program (USP) scholar with a degree in Computer Engineering in 2015.



Attending LAU not only allowed Mustapha to excel in a top academic institution, but it also gave him the opportunity to gain skills related to leadership development, tolerance and acceptance of others, and perseverance. He participated in numerous environmental and social activities, such as cleaning Byblos beach, engaging in reforestation activities in South Lebanon, and visiting orphanages around Lebanon to spend time with the children.

Mustapha is currently pursuing his master’s degree in Computer Engineering at LAU. In parallel, he works as a lab instructor as part of a graduate assistantship at LAU to pay his tuition and fees. He also works as a full-time systems engineer at one of Lebanon’s leading computer engineering companies, Computer Business Machines (CBM).

Others’ pride in his accomplishments is clear to Mustapha whenever he is with his family, colleagues and friends. “The amount of respect and self-esteem that I get from their looks and words is uncountable and its value is priceless,” he says.

Mustapha’s experience with USP Scholarship taught him to dream big, work hard, and unleash his capabilities. He says that “ambition is the path to success and persistence is the vehicle you arrive in.”

Enjoying several recent successes, Mustapha sees that this is just the beginning of his long journey. Once he completes his master’s degree, Mustapha hopes to pursue a PhD.

Nathalie Said

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

University Scholarship Program (USP) graduate Nathalie Said was born and raised in Tripoli, north Lebanon. Nathalie had high hopes for her life, but the lack of opportunities in Tripoli stymied her hopes.

After hearing about the USAID scholarship from her school principal at Bedawi Public High School, Nathalie decided to apply, since the scholarship would support her dream of enrolling in a reputable university. Despite criticism of her plan to leave Tripoli by community members, Nathalie, armed with her family's support, withstood the criticism and applied for the scholarship.

Her acceptance by Haigazian University to major in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) was the gateway to an exciting, dynamic life. Through the USP workshops, she became equipped with leadership and communication skills. She notes that her new "family of friends" at the university supported her throughout the journey and helped her gain confidence and feel at home, even so far away from home. Aside from the workshops, Nathalie shared her passion for dance by becoming an oriental dance instructor for the Haigazian Dance Club.

She also volunteered at the St. Jude Cancer Center, where she initiated activities such as drawing and painting to entertain the young patients. Nathalie emphasizes the fact that the scholarship program not only offered her a great education, but also allowed her to realize the importance of giving back and thereby keeping the cycle of positive change going.

She currently works as a teacher for Teach for Lebanon, a local NGO. Of her experience as a teacher, Nathalie says, "I teach students at Bezbina pre-school in Akkar. What motivates me to go to work every day is the potential that I see in my students."

Nathalie continues to rise above the expectations of the small community in which she was raised. Her USP experience taught her to live her life, take risks, and never be afraid of change.



Nour Bedran

Degree: B.S. in Economics

University: LAU

Graduation: 2016

Status: Employed

Nour spent her childhood in Yahchouch, a village in Keserwan District northeast of Beirut that is known for its beautiful landscape and river. After being accepted by USAID's University Scholarship Program (USP), she moved to Beirut to pursue her undergraduate degree at the Lebanese American University (LAU).

Due to her strong academic record, people encouraged Nour to major either in engineering or medicine. However, she went after what she really wanted and chose to pursue a degree in economics. In her view, economics allows one to critically think about and gain an understanding of the global economy.

Nour's father was the one who told her about the scholarship, after he, by coincidence, helped the USP representative find Ghazir Public High School, Nour's school. Nour felt that this was a sign that she should apply for the scholarship.

As a USP student, she participated in a number of workshops and internships that improved her organizational, management, and leadership skills. Nour interned at Fransabank in the Operation and Commercial Department, and at SABIS International School, where she reviewed and drafted test banks for the economics department.

Nour engaged in community-based events organized by the Outreach and Civic Engagement (OCE) Department at LAU, including reforestation initiatives at the Cedar Reserve. As a way to give back to her community, she organized a workshop to promote anti-bullying, teamwork, and personality development for children in her hometown.

Nour was a member of the LAU Model United Nations (MUN). She got the chance to travel to Rome and participate in the Harvard World MUN as a delegate to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, which tackled ways to resolve issues involving disputed territories.

Of her overall USP journey, Nour says, "Today I am a different person, a better version of myself. USP taught me how to dream big and believe in myself." She adds, "I am grateful for all the challenges that I accepted the success I have tasted, and the failures I endured. All of this paved the way for my becoming the person I am today."

Currently, Nour is an intern at Beirut-based Financial Markets Association ACI. She will start her MBA in January 2017 at LAU, taking her a step closer to the PhD she hopes to earn.



Nour Khoudari

Degree: B.S. in Mathematics
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Pursuing her master's degree in Mathematics as part of the Graduate Assistantship

Nour Khoudari attended Shakib Erslan Public School in Beirut, where her academic performance was very strong. Her parents and teachers encouraged her to pursue a degree in Engineering. She, however, had a different plan. Inspired by her mathematics teacher, she wanted to teach math.

Having decided on her major, she was faced with the challenge of selecting a university. Considering the high tuition fees at the universities she was interested in, Nour's educational aspirations seemed almost unachievable. One day, however, University Scholarship Program (USP) representatives gave an orientation about the USAID scholarship at her school.



Nour applied and was accepted to pursue a Bachelor of Science in mathematics and a minor in computer science at Lebanese American University (LAU). To her, that was the first step toward fulfilling her dream.

At the beginning of her junior year at LAU, she volunteered with Mmkn (“possible” in Arabic), an NGO that aims to enhance education at public schools; she taught math to 8th and 9th graders. She also launched the LAU Mathematics Club, in collaboration with her professors and classmates.

In addition, Nour completed an internship at the USAID-funded project D-RASATI, which worked to improve student achievement by training teachers and developing extra-curricular activities. Her favorite experience was teaching at Beirut Baptist School for a full academic year. This experience brought her closer to her dream of following in the footsteps of her math teacher.

Today, Nour is completing her master's degree in Mathematics at the American University of Beirut (AUB) as part of the Graduate Assistantship (GA) program. She plans on pursuing her PhD in the future.

“Not only,” Nour says, “does the USP program offer students quality education, but it also creates generations of leaders.”

Patricia Matar

Degree: B.S. in Business
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

Recipient of LAU's "Spirit of Service Award" for 2016, Patricia Matar, grew up in a supportive family, and attended Antelias Public High School in Mount Lebanon, just north of Beirut. Having a strong academic record, she decided to apply to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) to major in Accounting at the Lebanese American University (LAU). She was excited about the opportunity, particularly since one of her classmates had been granted such a scholarship.



Armed with the support of her parents, Patricia demonstrated confidence, intelligence, and enthusiasm during the USP interview phase. Her subsequent acceptance by the program, she says "was one the most memorable moments" of her life.

She promised herself to make the best of the opportunities LAU provided her. She was adamant to learn, to ask questions, to participate in every workshop, and to benefit from her professors' expertise. Her efforts were crowned by her earning second place for the Adnan Kassar School of Business President's Award.

During her university years, she won the "Spirit of Service Award" for her volunteer activities, including a community-based project at SOS Children's Village Orphanage in Ain El Sefsaf and her work with the USAID Reforestation Initiative that promotes conservation and reforestation in Lebanon through collaboration with the Lebanese Army.

Currently, Patricia is a full-time Associate Auditor at Ernst & Young, which is ranked one of the top four multinational audit firms. Patricia lives by the motto "come with curiosity, live with conscience, leave with pride." She plans to become a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and then to pursue her PhD.

Rami Hatoom

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

“I wanted to follow a path less travelled, particularly since I wanted something bigger and better for myself, and I got my chance with USP,” says Rami Hatoom. Raised in Rashaya al-Wadi, in the west Bekaa, Rami is the youngest of three children.

During his senior year at Haramoun Public High School, Rami came across an ad for the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) in a local newspaper. He saw this as an opportunity to pursue a challenging and worthwhile experience.

After receiving the news of his acceptance to major in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) at Haigazian University, Rami was determined to make every second count. Rami says that “I chose my major because I had excellent grades in biology during my senior year in high school. I was drawn to scientific topics, and I wanted to be involved in the medical field.” In order to apply the knowledge and skills he had acquired in his coursework, Rami interned as a medical lab technician at Trad Hospital in Beirut.



He joined a number of clubs and attended numerous events and workshops, in which he gained leadership, communication, and entrepreneurship skills. Rami emphasizes how important it is to “stay busy even if that means working from 8 am to 8 pm every single day. Be more open minded, and as cliché as it sounds, step outside the box.”

Rami was able to further develop his self-confidence when he joined the Haigazian Dance Club, where he opened shows and performed various genres of dance to live audiences. Rami volunteered with MMKN (“possible” in Arabic), a local NGO, where he taught biology to 9th graders at public schools. He says that his university activities allowed him to step outside his comfort zone and soak up every second of every new experience.

During his senior year, Rami received the “Presidents Reception Award,” which is granted to students who make a difference in the Haigazian community and possess a positive attitude and strong leadership skills. Rami explains that his success is owing to the fact that he “realized that I am capable of accomplishing more than I thought I could, and I was able to remove the restraints I had put on myself.”

Currently, Rami is working as a teacher at Teach for Lebanon, and he plans on pursuing his master’s degree in the near future. He hopes eventually to establish his own NGO with the mission of enhancing development and education in his hometown. Rami says, “I am thankful for the great memories I made, and the great friends and inspiring professors I met. USP allowed me to witness the proud look on my parents’ faces every time they saw me giving a speech, dancing on stage, and eventually walking to receive my degree.”

Rani Obeid

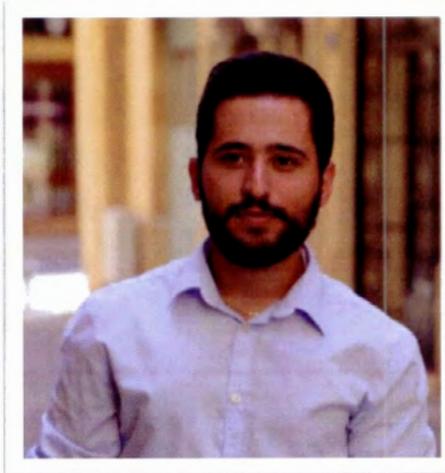
Degree: B.S. in Biology
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2014
Status: Employed

Rani grew up in a loving family in Aley, a town in the mountains just east of Beirut. When he applied to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP), Rani wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father, a pediatrician, hoping to pursue a career in medicine.

Rani's gratitude for being accepted by the USP to major in Biology at Haigazian University prompted him to make the best of his university experience. He attended his classes with the drive to learn and grasped every opportunity to develop new skills. He says, "the USP experience taught me to appreciate what I have and make the best out of every opportunity."

He notes that being part of the program gave him the chance to engage in multiple workshops on leadership, and entrepreneurship. Rani also volunteered at MMKN ("possible" in Arabic), a non-governmental organization (NGO) for which he tutored elementary school students in biology and math. During his university years, Rani interned at the pharmaceutical company HUMANA, where he gained on-the-ground experience related to his major. Rani currently works as a science teacher for Teach for Lebanon at Aley West Official School and is dedicated to the NGO's commitment to fight inequality in education. He notes that the USP experience strengthened his sense of belonging to all of Lebanon, not only to his community. On this note, he says "now I see potential in people no matter where they come from," adding that "change starts in the mind."

Rani lives by the motto "fight for what you want and appreciate what you have." He is planning to pursue a degree in medicine in the near future. Rani notes that the USP scholarship changed his life for the better, as he thanks USAID for making all of this possible.



Rihab Al-Mohammad

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Rihab Al-Mohammad was born in Kab Elias in the Bekaa Valley, but eventually moved with her family to Sarafand in southern Lebanon. The fact that she lived in two areas with diverse demographic compositions allowed Rihab to blend with people from different religious and geographic backgrounds.

A tragic death in her family marked a low point in Rihab's life. Of this, she says, "I faced a number of difficult challenges that made me stronger and helped me become a person who can accept changes and overcome difficult circumstances."

During her school years, Rihab was a strong student with an interest in sciences. She was part of the Department of State's English ACCESS Micro scholarship program, which teaches Lebanese public school students to learn English. When she heard about the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) from her English teacher she decided to apply to study Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) at Haigazian University.

The scholarship helped Rihab build her leadership skills and confidence, and allowed her to make solid decisions about her future. At Haigazian, she was a member of the Environmental Club and the Social Club, and represented both clubs on the Student Life Committee. She participated in organizing an Environmental Club plantation initiative in Nabatieh, as well as launching workshops on the importance of recycling.

After her graduation, Rihab found work at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) as a medical laboratory technologist. Her on-the-ground experiences in the MLS program, however, had helped her recognize her interest in management, so she left this job to give herself time to reflect on what she truly wants.

Rihab now works at Al-Hadi Medical Center as a quality officer and a technologist. She plans to pursue her Master's in Business Administration in the near future, which will allow her to integrate her skills and interests. She suggests that it's best to "choose a career that you love and you feel is right for you." She recommends that students apply for the USAID scholarship, which offered her so many opportunities.



Rima Metri

Degree: B.S. in Business
University: AUB
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed + pursuing her master's degree

Rima Metri hoped to take part in an excellent educational experience when she applied to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP). She was inspired to apply after a student from her public school in Zaatari, a small village located in Mount Lebanon northeast of Beirut, was accepted by the program.

Rima was raised in a modest family, and studied with her two siblings at Kfour Official Public School in Keserwan. Because she had a strong academic record, her teachers encouraged her to apply to the USP. She found information about the program requirements on the Internet, determining that she was eligible, since candidates were required to have good grades, good social and leadership skills, and a modest financial background.



During the series of USP interviews and examinations, Rima worked hard to prove that she deserved a scholarship. Her efforts were rewarded by her acceptance to the American University of Beirut (AUB) to major in Business Administration.

The challenges Rima faced after relocating away from her family empowered her to become the independent and successful woman she had always wanted to be. She participated in a number of workshops and community service activities, including helping Palestinian students prepare for their SAT tests. She also participated in various activities to support and assess the needs of public schools in Lebanon.

By attending numerous sessions about women's empowerment, leadership skills, and public speaking, Rima was able to meet remarkable people at AUB, as well as acquiring valuable social skills. "I couldn't be the person I am today if it wasn't for this experience," she says.

After graduating from AUB, Rima started working at the Securities Department at the Bank Med Headquarters. She is simultaneously pursuing a graduate degree in Finance at AUB.

Her previous accomplishments include working as an Audit Associate at Deloitte, a multinational professional services firm. She also completed an audit internship at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), a multinational professional services network.

Rima advises students to apply for a USP scholarship because the program offers opportunities that could change their lives, as it changed hers. To Rima, the USP scholarship opened many doors, allowing her to reach her full potential.

Riva Saredine

Degree: B.B.A Management Information Systems
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

Born and raised in the picturesque village of Baakline in the Chouf, southeast of Beirut, Riva moved to Beirut to major in Management Information Systems (MIS) at Haigazian University following her acceptance by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP).

When she first applied to the USP, her friends and teachers were skeptical about the selection process. Riva continued with her application, and her acceptance motivated some of her friends and relatives to apply.

Riva's character and personal outlook changed because of the USP experience. She explains that "I was a shy girl who only cared about academic performance. However, today I have become more confident and am highly driven to fulfill my potential."



Riva gained leadership and interpersonal skills from the USP workshops, which contributed to her personal growth. She says, "I try to set an example for my society by constantly seeking opportunities to improve, while embracing and learning from the challenges that come along."

Riva was a member of the Environmental Club, where she participated in a number of community-based activities, such as an anti-littering campaign in Ashrafieh, and plantation activities around Lebanon. She volunteered at Balsam, a center for palliative care, where she participated in organizing an End of Life awareness campaign at Haigazian University. The campaign sought to raise awareness and open a conversation among Lebanese youth about the right to decide your end-of-life preferences. As part of a social business project funded by USAID, Riva, along with a group of USP scholars, visited public schools in Abadieh, Mount Lebanon, to promote volunteerism and community involvement.

Riva met the love her life, now fiancé, at a Red Cross training session. She believes that her life came full circle during her USP years, as she was blessed with a quality education, new friends, a partner, and a career. Riva says that if it weren't for the scholarship program she would have never been able to experience a private university education.

Currently she is managing the database department at the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), and plans to pursue her MBA in the near future. She thanks USAID for this opportunity, which allowed her to learn three important lessons: To believe in herself and her capabilities, to yearn for knowledge, and to value change.

Rodaina BouShaheen

Degree: B.B.A. in Human Resources Management
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Rodaina Boushaheen had taken the entrance exam at a private university, even knowing her parents could not afford the tuition fees. Rodaina was raised in an underprivileged part of Aley, just east of Beirut, which, she says, “had very limited resources and opportunities, and people came from the same background.”

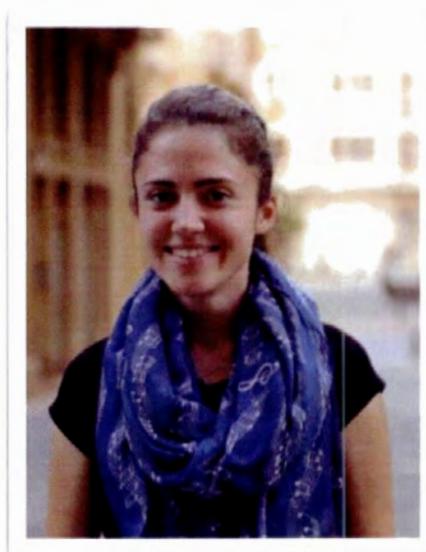
Her family’s financial situation did not, however, prevent Rodaina from looking for ways to pursue a university education. She found out about the USAID funded University Scholarship Program (USP) and decided to apply. Receiving a call from Haigazian University informing her that she was accepted by the program, she says, “was the happiest moment in my life.”

As a child, she had spent hours watching sports programs on TV and dreaming of becoming an athlete. At Haigazian, Rodaina joined three sports teams: table tennis, martial arts and swimming. She participated in three international table tennis tournaments and earned her black belt in Taekwondo. To Rodaina, this was a dream come true. She says, “when people are given chances and opportunities, they can do miracles.”

After changing her major three times—on what she calls a journey of self-discovery to find her hidden talents and passions—Rodaina eventually decided to stay with Human Resources Management.

Currently, Rodaina works as an “agent of change,” teaching with Teach for Lebanon, a local NGO. She also gives Taekwondo classes.

Rodaina emphasizes that the USP allowed her to pursue her passion in sports and earn a university degree, saying that it “made my childhood dreams come true and let me expand my potential.”

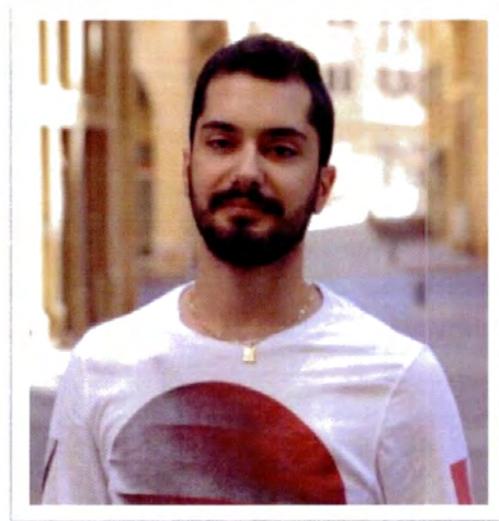


Romario Akiki

Degree: B.S. in Computer Science
University: LAU
Graduation: 2015
Status: Pursuing his Master's degree as part of the Graduate Assistantship program

Romario Akiki's parents were the ones to break the news of his acceptance by Lebanese American University (LAU) through the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP). Romario knew that his life was going to change for the better. He says, "I am grateful for having parents who always pushed me to further my education, despite their financial situation."

Romario is from Zahle, in the eastern Bekaa Valley, and grew up with his grandparents until he was fifteen. As a child, he had dreamt of becoming an actor and a director. However, his strong academic record and passion for technology prompted him to pursue a degree in Computer Science (CS).



Throughout his university years, Romario was able to unleash his artistic side by joining the LAU Dance Club. He felt sure that he was at the right place, since he was able to excel academically and develop his talents, interests and passions. He knew that he was part of a university and a scholarship program that valued individuality.

Romario danced his way to become the president of the LAU Dance Club, where he was able to demonstrate both his leadership skills and his smooth dance moves. As the president of the Dance Club, he launched an event called "Dancing with the Professors," which partners professors with students in various genres of dance and has become an annual university tradition. He also served as secretary of the Lebanese Red Cross Youth Department in Jal el Dib for two consecutive years.

Art, technology, and community service were Romario's three main interests at LAU. He notes that the USP experience offered him exposure and opportunities to evolve as a person. Without it, he says, "I would be stuck in the same old, small environment in which I grew up."

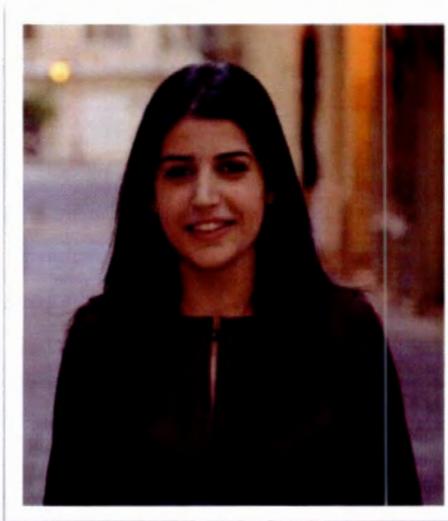
He says his attitude toward life changed because of the USP experience, noting that he is now armed with self-confidence, a great education, and a passion for dance. Romario believes that "everyone who has the potential and is ready to embark on exciting new challenges" should apply for a USP scholarship.

Currently, Romario is pursuing his graduate degree in Computer Science at LAU and teaching undergraduate courses and labs as part of the Graduate Assistantship (GA) program. In the future, he plans to pursue a PhD so as to become a university professor.

Sandy Fahed

Degree: B.A. Human Resources Management
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Sandy Fahed was born in Zgharta, northern Lebanon, and moved to Okaybe, closer to Beirut, when she was three years old. Growing up in a supportive family, Sandy always enjoyed interacting with people and was well-liked and trusted. Due to these personal attributes, she considered majoring in Human Resource Management (HRM), but was encouraged by her brothers to apply for a degree in Computer Science (CS).



When Sandy was accepted at the American University of Beirut (AUB) through USAID's University Scholarship Program (USP) to pursue a degree in CS, she was not confident about her choice of major. Sandy notes "When I got the acceptance letter, I had the USP representative standing next to me; she asked, 'Aren't you happy?' I didn't have an answer, so she asked again, 'Do you picture yourself sitting in front of a computer screen for a day, a week, or even months?' And that was the turning point, when I realized that what I really wanted was to major in HRM."

Sandy enjoyed engaging in volunteer activities as part of her USP experience. She helped children with special needs at the Birds Nest Orphanage in the city of Byblos, and travelled all the way to Kathmandu, Nepal, to volunteer at an orphanage.

She completed her internship at International Center for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), where she learned about project management. Sandy says that the cherry on the top of her USP experience was meeting friends from various backgrounds and religions.

Currently, Sandy works as a Human Resource Manager at Teach for Lebanon, a local NGO. In 2016, she became a member of the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) at the United States Embassy in Beirut. Sandy believes she couldn't have accomplished what she has if she hadn't been granted the USP scholarship.

Sara Hatoum

Degree: B.B.A Business
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Sara Hatoum grew up in Kfarselouane, Mount Lebanon, just east of Beirut. She had long dreamt about opening her own restaurant, having been passionate about cooking. She found out about the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) from her school, Hammana Secondary Public High School, and decided to apply.

She was selected, deciding to pursue a degree in Business Administration from Haigazian University. Her choice of major was inspired by her long-standing dream, since it would help her understand market conditions, develop a business plan and make realistic projections about the future.



During her university years, Sara was a volunteer at St Jude Children’s Cancer Center, where she read stories to young patients. She was also a member of the UNESCO Club, where she planned an awareness campaign on road safety in partnership with Kunhadi, a non-governmental organization focusing on youth awareness about road safety. She believes that “positive change is always possible if we work to achieve it,” as she continues to draw inspiration from her mother, who taught her the importance of transparency and respect.

The USP experience allowed Sara to join nine other USP students in the development of an application that links volunteers with NGOs; she was interviewed on a local TV channel about the initiative. As part of the pilot project, the team visited Abbadiyeh Public High School to heighten interest in volunteer work.

To strengthen her knowledge about business, Sara completed an internship at Deloitte, the largest professional services network in the world. Of her USP experience, Sara emphasizes how important it was for her to meet people from different parts of Lebanon.

She currently works as a Compliance Officer at the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) in Lebanon. Sara is also the co-founder and treasurer of the Lebanese State Alumni Community (LSAC), Mount Lebanon Chapter.

She plans to pursue her master’s degree in Business Administration after she becomes a Certified Internal Auditor. Sara says that she is grateful to USAID for giving her the chance to pursue her dreams.

Shatha Al-Hamra

Degree: B.B.A. in Finance
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2016
Status: Looking for a job

It was a turning point for Shatha Alhamra when she found out that she had been accepted by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) to major in Finance at Haigazian University. Shatha was raised in Hasbaya, a beautiful town in southeast Lebanon, where she had attended El Kfeir Public High School.

Prior to her acceptance by the USP, Shatha was hoping to study pharmacy, she says “I reached a point where I lost hope. But after I heard the news, I realized that nothing is impossible.”

Her acceptance by the USP marked a new phase in Shatha’s life. Armed with her family’s support, she moved to Beirut to pursue her degree in Finance at Haigazian. She says, “during my days at Haigazian, I learned that nothing is impossible with hard work and dedication.”

As a USP student, Shatha met people from different backgrounds, made long-lasting friendships, and engaged in volunteer work. Her internship at the BBAC Bank allowed her to gain knowledge about banking practices from banking professionals. She was also able to demonstrate her commitment to helping others by volunteering at MMKN (“possible” in Arabic), a local non-governmental organization, where she gave English reinforcement classes to 8th graders at a number of public schools. She was also the secretary of the Environmental Club, with which she participated in organizing tree-planting events in the Chouf and organized recycling campaigns.

Shatha participated in the Via –volunteer project, a pilot social business that links Lebanese youth to NGOs via a website. She says “we were nine students and worked on this project for two years. During this time, we prepared market and financial feasibility studies, and then piloted the project.”

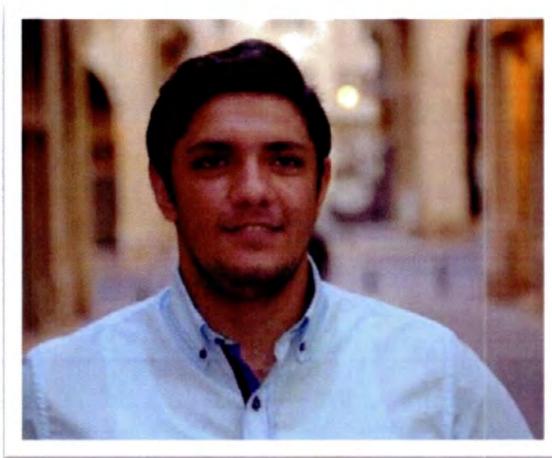
Shatha says that she is grateful for the USP experience since it made her independent and confident, and empowered her socially and academically. She is currently looking for work and plans to pursue her master’s degree in Finance in the near future. “USP taught me to never give up on my dreams!” Shatha says.



Sulyman AlTahera

Degree: B.S. in Computer Science
University: LAU
Graduated: 2015
Status: Employed

Receiving the Spirit of Service Award from the On-Campus Entrepreneurship (OCE) Department at the Lebanese American University (LAU) was Sulyman AlTahera's reward for his hard work on community service. The many workshops Sulyman attended helped develop his leadership and communication skills, and the numerous practical internships helped him hone other professional skills.



Sulyman grew up in Saida, south Lebanon. He had always been interested in how computers work and knew that he wanted to pursue a degree in Computer Science (CS). He hoped he could attend a high-quality university, but didn't want to put undue financial pressure to his parents.

When Lebanese American University (LAU) representatives visited Sulyman's high school to introduce the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP), he knew that this was an opportunity he could not pass up. Since he had been among the top three students in his class for three years in a row, Sulyman was optimistic about his chances to win a scholarship. He received news of his acceptance over the phone, which made him feel "the most amazing feeling ever."

Sulyman was elected president of the UNESCO Club at LAU, which gave him the opportunity to engage in numerous community-service projects. This also taught Sulyman patience, allowed him to gain self-confidence, and enabled him to practice his leadership skills.

"I realized that the key to success starts by believing in yourself," he says. Today, Sulyman is grateful for the opportunity offered to him by USAID and recommends the scholarship program to many other students. As for his own plans, Sulyman is looking forward to continuing his studies by pursuing a master's degree.

Suzan Mouhamed-Mourad

Degree: Bachelor's degree in Medical Laboratory Science
University: AUB
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

Suzan Mouhamed-Mourad thought that her chances for acceptance by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) would be limited because she is from Tripoli, a city with a volatile security situation, and one that has suffered from neglect. But her fears were put to rest after she won a USP scholarship, which gave her confidence in her capabilities and pride in her accomplishments.



In high school, Suzan was part of the English Access Microscholarship Program, a US Department of State project that helps underprivileged youth from public schools in Lebanon improve their English language skills. She learned about the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) during an English class, and decided to apply, hoping to pursue a bachelor's degree in Medical Laboratory Sciences (MLS) at the American University of Beirut (AUB). Of the moment she learned she was accepted, Suzan says, "I was speechless. I can't even vocalize how I felt at that exact moment."

Suzan, who graduated with distinction, says that she worked very hard at AUB. She emphasizes, however, that being a USP scholar also means taking part in workshops, volunteer activities, and community work, making for an overall experience that was very rich and worthwhile. Through her volunteer activities, Suzan learned how acts of kindness and generosity can cause a ripple effect in society, which helped her realize the importance of being mindful of all people's circumstances.

Suzan continues to attend seminars and training sessions, and will soon sit for an exam offered by the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health that will allow her to become a Certified Medical Laboratory Scientist. Currently, she works as a medical laboratory technician at Mazloun Hospital, one of the most respected hospitals in north Lebanon, and says this position and career would not have been possible without the help of USAID.

Suzan says that despite being a fresh graduate when she applied for the job, "the head of the Hospital's Medical Laboratory Division was impressed once he read my resume," particularly since it showed the many trainings and workshops she had participated in during the scholarship program.

"It has been a great experience, like a dream come true," Suzan says, recognizing that this is just the beginning of her journey, and the best is yet to come!

Wael Al Rahal Al Orabi

Degree: B.S. in Computer Science
University: LAU
Graduation: 2015
Status: Pursuing Master's degree as part of the Graduate Assistantship Program

Wael Al Rahal Al Orabi grew up in Tarik al Jadida, Beirut, with his mother, father and seven brothers. Growing up in challenging circumstances, he helped make ends meet by working during summer breaks while focusing on maintaining his strong academic record during the school year. His family has been extremely supportive of him, particularly his brothers, of whom he remarks, "I had to depend on myself a lot, but my brothers were my backbone and were there for me whenever I needed them."



Wael first heard about the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) when representatives from Lebanese American University (LAU) visited his school. He decided to apply, since he had always wanted to pursue high-quality education and to become independent.

While jogging along Beirut's seaside not long afterwards, he received a phone call from the USP office at LAU informing him about his acceptance to the scholarship program. "I will never forget this phone call; it was one of the best moments in my life," Wael says. Wael's high grades, his extra-curricular activities, and his challenging financial circumstances were the reasons behind his acceptance by the USP program to pursue a degree in Computer Science at LAU.

His university journey started on September 24, 2012, his first day in his new home in an LAU dormitory. He says, "the USP experience gave me the chance to meet people from different areas, religions, and cultures. I engaged in a lot of activities and made a lot of friends. I participated in a number of civic engagement events, which gave me the opportunity to give back to my community and help those in need."

Wael was also able to pursue his passion for football by joining the varsity futsal and football teams at LAU. He traveled to Serbia with the futsal team to participate in the Futsal International Tournament, where LAU won 3rd place.

Following his graduation from LAU, Wael was granted a Graduate Assistantship (GA) from the American University of Beirut (AUB) to pursue his masters in computer science. Wael currently works as a teaching assistant at AUB and a research assistant at LAU. He says, "USP teaches you that when you demonstrate hard work and dedication, money no longer becomes an issue."

Wael plans on pursuing his PhD in Computer Science, since he would like to be a university professor. "I want to thank USAID for giving me this amazing and very important opportunity," he says.

Yara Teddy

Degree: B.E. in Civil Engineering
University: AUB
Graduation: 2016
Status: Employed

From the tranquility of Jezzine in southern Lebanon to the bustling of Beirut, Yara Teddy pursued her dream of becoming a Civil Engineer at the American University of Beirut (AUB) as part of the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP). Yara's high grades, involvement in social activities, and parents' financial situation contributed to her acceptance by the program. Her choice of major was influenced by her "ability to come up with new sustainable ideas for the design of buildings, while preserving the beauty of Mother Nature."

Yara notes that she had constantly sought "to be different from others." The visit by USP representatives to her school gave her a ray of hope that she might be able to overcome the financial circumstances that threatened her long-standing dream of receiving a good university education. After receiving the call of her acceptance in the scholarship program, she became more convinced that dreams can, in fact, be attained through hard work and a positive attitude.

At AUB, Yara became an active member in many university clubs. She also worked hard to stay on the Dean's Honor List, constantly ranking among the top 10 in her class.

Along with her impressive academic performance, Yara participated in a number of volunteer activities, most prominently with the Nasma Learning and Resource Center in Beirut. There she tutored underprivileged children, who considered her a sister, not just an instructor.

Despite her presence in Beirut, Yara did not forget about her hometown. As a way to give back to her community she worked on a project to improve the conditions of the river that flows through Jezzine.

Of this experience, Yara says "I worked with five USP students on a project to enhance the conditions of a river in Jezzine, South Lebanon. We performed a needs assessment where we interviewed the head of Jezzine municipality, along with many municipality members. Afterwards, we conducted a feasibility study to establish the social and economic impacts of the project. After forming a detailed bill of quantities, and performing regular site visits, we defended our proposal in front of USAID and Mercy Corps officials, and we received an acceptance to start the work," which entailed improving and beautifying access to a water point on the river.

Following her graduation, Yara started working as a civil engineer at Dar Al Handasah, a multidisciplinary consulting organization for architecture, engineering, planning, environment, project management and economics. Yara had known what she wanted to do and how she might accomplish this from her childhood. Her successful journey will soon be marked by another accomplishment, pursuing her masters in the United States, which she hopes to undertake soon.



Youssef Mourad

Degree: B.E. in Construction Engineering
University: AUB
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

The Lebanese author Khalil Gibran tells us to “Advance, and never halt, for advancing is perfection; advance and do not fear the thorns in the path, for they draw only corrupt blood.” This statement has long resonated with 22-year old Youssef Mourad. Youssef comes from Hadath el-Jebbe, a small village near Gibran’s home in the Bcharre district of north Lebanon. Raised in a loving family of seven and surrounded by cedar forests, Youssef was raised to believe in his potential and ability to succeed and influence his community.



He was prompted to relocate to Beirut after being accepted by the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) to pursue a degree in Construction Engineering from the American University of Beirut (AUB). He explains that “in November, 2009, I had to move to Beirut and live with my grandmother, away from my parents and my comfort zone, because receiving a good education was my top priority at that time.”

Youssef reflects on the day he got the news of his acceptance, saying, “I remember that day very well. I was at my family’s restaurant running from table to table, when my father received a phone call and called me seconds later. I had to climb a tree to maintain fair mobile connection. It was certainly the happiest day of my life!”

Youssef believes that attending AUB through the USAID scholarship allowed him to establish “a good social identity.” To honor his commitment to his community and his country, Youssef and a team of three fellow students created a video entitled “I love my community” to promote volunteering and blood donation across Lebanon. The video earned him the 2014 Volunteer of the Year Award from AUB’s Center of Civic Engagement and Community Service.

Youssef also worked with five USP students on a project to restore a major water source in Jezzine, south Lebanon. In the summer of 2014, Youssef participated in the Community Service Internship, which is a Civil Engineering Society volunteer camp that involves spending 10 days in a rural area and working on several construction projects. One of the projects he worked on was building a sidewalk in Tyre, and designing access ramps for disabled people.

Youssef, a Dean’s Honor List student, participated in a number of competitions. He won 2nd place in Bridge Design, 1st prize in Hydraulic Arm Design, 1st prize in Concrete Mix Design, and was a semi-finalist in the international “Shneider’s Go Green in the City” 2015 competition.

His commitment to making a difference in Lebanon inspired Youssef to establish the Mourad Group, which provides engineering and contracting services in his hometown. He notes that “since none of these achievements would have been possible without the continuous support of the USP team at AUB, and since no gift in the world can show true appreciation and admiration, we came up with the idea of planting a cedar tree in the Hadath el-Jebbe Natural Reserve. This tree, which will be the first to be planted in the forest, comes as a symbol of timeless gratitude.”

Youssef Bandak

Degree: B.S. in Computer Science
University: AUB
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Youssef Bandak, who is from Zgharta in northern Lebanon, has always been passionate about technology and math. He says, “I have a craze for algorithms, and have been fascinated by how scientists think. I am also very much interested in technology and everything related to computers.”

After representatives from the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) visited his school, Rachaya Public School, Youssef decided to apply to the USP to study Computer Science at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

He believes that he was chosen because of his sense of responsibility, ability to adapt to different situations, and dedication to helping others. When he received the news of his acceptance by USP on his 18th birthday, Youssef decided to make the best of this opportunity.

As a child, Youssef had had to move several times, learning to adapt to different environments. This experience smoothed his transition from northern Lebanon to Beirut for his undergraduate education at AUB.

Leadership and interpersonal skills were among the most important skills that Youssef gained from the workshops, internships, and volunteering activities offered as part of the USP. He notes that implementing a community-based project in his hometown was his biggest accomplishment. He partnered with the Zgharta Youth Movement to develop a cultural center equipped with a computer lab and a play room for children on Zgharta’s Hay al-Saydeh Street. In an effort to promote small-scale businesses, the center is also used by the local community to sell hand-made and locally-made products. Recently, the Mexican Embassy decided to use the facility to offer Spanish classes.

Youssef’s commitment to helping others was evident throughout his four years at university. He was an active member of the Red Cross, participating in blood drives, breast cancer awareness campaigns, and anti-drug campaigns. He also volunteered to teach English to Syrian refugee children through a collaborative initiative between AUB’s Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS) and Mercy Corps, an international non-governmental organization.

Following graduation, he began urging students in Zgharta to apply for the USP scholarship. Two students from his hometown have been accepted, placing them on a path similar to Youssef’s.

Youssef currently works as a software developer and junior consultant at EI technologies, and plans on pursuing his master’s degree in Computer Science in the near future.

“Be the change you want to see” is Youssef’s motto as it reflects the importance of change, and of seizing opportunities. Regarding his USP experience, he says, “the thought I get every time I remember that I was part of the USAID scholarship program places a smile on my face.”



Youssef Zeineddine

Degree: B.B.A. in Marketing
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Employed

Youssef Zeineddine, who was born in Brazil, relocated to Rachaya in Lebanon's Bekaa Governorate with his family when he was five. Youssef believes that the challenges he encountered following his move to Lebanon made him stronger.

Youssef attended Kawkaba Public High School in his hometown. His school principal introduced him to the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) as he was among the top students in his class. He calls his acceptance by USP "a turning point" in his life.

Youssef chose to major in Marketing at Haigazian University and moved to Beirut, where he was able to meet people from various backgrounds. Throughout his university years, Youssef was exposed to a variety of NGOs, paving the way for him to become Social Media Assistant at the Norwegian Refugee Council, an NGO dedicated to helping refugees in Lebanon. To strengthen his professional skills in marketing and advertising, he interned in the Public Relations Department at Jay Walter Thompson (JWT), an international advertising company, and in the Client Service Department at BBDO, also an advertising agency.

Youssef also worked on the Syrian Refugee Resettlement in Canada Project at the Danish Refugee Council. He was responsible for interviewing Syrian refugees and helping them complete their immigration forms. Of this experience, he says, "Syrian refugees were merely numbers to me - 1.5 million. They were just photos of ITS [informal tented settlements]. However, after meeting with them and listening to their stories, I learned more about their sufferings. I felt proud that I was helping, particularly since there is no bigger happiness than positively impacting people's lives."

As a way to balance work with community service, Youssef currently volunteers as a forum theatre actor with Fighters for Peace, which was established to promote peace-building and dialogue among Lebanese communities.

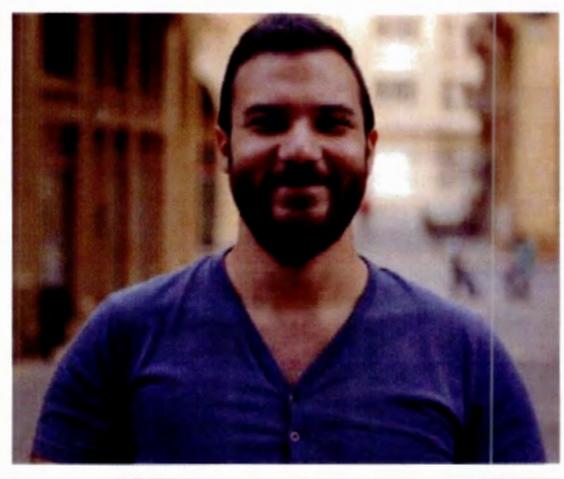
Youssef believes that his hard work in school, coupled with his passion and dedication were acknowledged by both USAID and Haigazian, both of which allowed him to acquire a high-quality education and start a career. Youssef, the first in his family to receive a scholarship, constantly encourages his friends and relatives to apply to the USP; one of his cousins has been accepted, and so become part of the USP experience.



Zaher Beani

Degree: B.S. in Business
University: LAU
Graduation: 2016
Status: Looking for a job

Growing up in a middle-class family in Beirut, Zaher Beani attended Chakib Erslan High School, hoping to become an engineer like his father. During his school years, Zaher was part of the English Access Microscholarship Program, a US Department of State project that helps underprivileged youth from public schools in Lebanon improve their English language skills. He found out about the USAID University Scholarship Program (USP) during one of the Access classes, and immediately applied.



On his way to visit a friend, Zaher received a call informing him of his acceptance by the USP scholarship to major in Banking and Finance at the Lebanese American University (LAU). At that moment, he says, his life changed.

Following his enrollment in LAU, Zaher found himself in a totally new environment. He was able to express himself freely, and profited from being surrounded by students from various parts of Lebanon.

Zaher went on to become the president of the Music Club, which unleashed the leader in him while allowing him to demonstrate his passion for music. As president of the Club, Zaher organized Spring Beats, an event that featured performances by Lebanese bands.

As a USP student, Zaher volunteered at Basmati, a local NGO, where he sold t-shirts at ABC mall in Beirut to raise money for underprivileged families in Lebanon. To strengthen his professional skills, Zaher completed an internship at Bank of Beirut (BOB), where he was trained in the operations of Lebanon's banking system. Reflecting on his overall USP experience, Zaher says that the program allowed him to become financially independent, and to explore his passion for music with like-minded students.

Zaher, who graduated with honors from LAU, is applying for scholarships to support his graduate studies. He says that being a USP scholar has made him more marketable, having developed the qualities and skills often sought by employers.

Zaher sees the friends he made at university as family, and says that the workshops and civic activities made him feel positive about his future. Zaher is currently satisfied with the superhero that he feels he has become, a person who focuses on making positive changes in society.

Zeinab El-Dirani

Degree: B.S. in Medical Laboratory Sciences
University: Haigazian University
Graduation: 2015
Status: Pursuing Master's Degree as part of Philippe Jaber Scholarship Program

Her fascination with science and the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of diseases, coupled with her strong academic record paved the way for Zeinab El-Dirani to apply to study Medical Laboratory Sciences at Haigazian University as part of USAID's University Scholarship Program (USP).

Zeinab grew up in the southern village of Ghazieh, where she attended Al-Ghazieh Public High School. Had she not won the scholarship, she says, she would have "definitely been married with kids, because people in Ghazieh expect girls to be married at a young age," which, in her view, "prevents girls from exploring the world and becoming influencers in society."



Zeinab says that getting the news of her acceptance by the program—"the best day of my life"—was a testament to her hard work in school.

Zeinab became independent at AUB, particularly as she experienced living away from her family and among a group of what she calls inspirational friends. One of her main accomplishments during her university years was participating in the social entrepreneurship project called "Second Chance." The idea behind the ten-day workshop was to offer underprivileged, unemployed women training as seamstresses, enabling them to redesign used clothes and sell them for reasonable prices.

Prior to her graduation, she interned as a medical laboratory technologist at Raee Hospital, Osseiran Health Medical Center, in the south, and at Trad Hospital in Beirut.

Upon graduating, Zeinab relocated to her home town, but then found that she had been granted a full scholarship by Philip Jaber Association at the American University of Beirut (AUB) to continue her graduate studies in Public Health with an emphasis on Community Health. Of this, she says, "I realized that whenever you reach a goal, you will desire more and more."

In addition to her master's degree, Zeinab is also pursuing her diploma in Project Management at the Center for Continuing Education at Haigazian University. Zeinab expresses her gratitude for the life-changing USP experience, which pushed her to dream big and plan ambitiously for her future.