Tradition & transformation

Nehme Azoury explains how an historic Lebanese university has opted for a modern impact programme for its business school

1584

In 1584, the first Maronite (a Lebanese Christian community) college was established in Rome to promote intercultural exchange between east and west

In 1736, at a time when the idea of a young woman pursuing her studies was inconceivable, a Lebanese Christian community known as Maronites declared the adoption of a policy of free and compulsory education for both men and women.

In fact, this dedication to education stemmed from even earlier – 1584 when the first Maronite college was established in Rome to promote intercultural exchange between east and west.

Around this period the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) took root when the Lebanese Maronite Order (OLM), its founders, imported the first printing press to the Levant and created the first school in Lebanon, with the prime concern of spreading education as a mean to improving quality of life.

USEK is particularly attached to the global dissemination of a culture of education, peace and community service from Lebanon, the cradle of civilization and home to the Phoenician alphabet.

The strategic geographic location of the country has made for a fruitful dialogue and communication with various civilizations. Accordingly, Lebanon has always looked to bridge the gap between Arab and Western countries – two opposite worlds struggling to understand their mutual differences – in an attempt to avoid cultural clashes.

USEK believes that leadership is not only about a title. It is about impact in getting results, influence in spreading passion, and inspiration in motivating team-mates and stakeholders.

In choosing to be a pioneer in measuring and evaluating the impact its School of Business has on the local and regional community, USEK has turned to the EFMD GN's Business School Impact Survey (BSIS) programme, the first time this has been done in the MENA region.

The School of Business portrays the strong regional roots that characterise it and its education mission focused on the area. The school's central purpose is to ensure high-level education in the field of business administration to the youth of the region.

The school's mission has a significant social dimension thanks to its extensive scholarship programmes that help disadvantaged students to benefit from educational opportunities.

With a view to expanding its accessibility through an additional social outreach, three regional centres in remote parts of Lebanon (Chekka in the north, Zahle in the Beqaa and Rmeich in the south) offer a range of bachelor degrees.

"USEK believes that leadership is not only about a title. It is about impact in getting results, influence in spreading passion, and inspiration in motivating team-mates and stakeholders

With its presence in various districts of Lebanon, the School of Business is making a sizeable financial contribution to each of the cities where it is located. In numerical terms, the school represents approximately 25% of the university's budget (several million dollars), impacting all of Lebanon. This is a considerable achievement for a school with no more than 2,000 students.

With family-owned businesses, SMEs and international companies proliferating in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, and the area of Mount Lebanon, the School of Business is a key provider of skilled and qualified managerial resources.

Through tailor-made programmes that encompass a growing number of specialised courses essential to the economic prosperity of the region, the school provides a number of part-time masters programmes for employees of local companies. Pertinent examples are the Financial Engineering and the Banking Operations and Management degree programmes.

The relevance of these programmes lies in the business sectors they cater for, as the Lebanese banking industry has been internationally known for its resilience during harsh economic times.

Furthermore, the school has established collaborative links with national and international enterprises and institutions. In order to strategically administer these partnerships, which revolve around research collaboration, recruitment of graduates, participation of visiting professionals in the classroom and consulting activities, a Corporate Relations Unit has been put into place to explore further strategic alliances in the future.

The Centre International de Recherche en Applications Managériales et Economiques" (CIRAME) has committed to fostering academic research and publication activity that has so far only timidly existed in the Lebanese higher-education system.

25%

In numerical terms, the School of Business represents approximately 25% of the university's budget (several million dollars), impacting all of Lebanon – this is a considerable achievement for a school with no more than 2,000 students

Through tailor-made programmes that encompass a growing number of specialised courses essential to the economic prosperity of the region, the school provides a number of part-time masters programmes for employees of local companies

Faculty members are encouraged to be active in intellectual production pertaining to their academic field; to enhance a solid doctoral programme; to promote applied research relevant to the concerns of the regional community; and to involve companies in the funding of the research agenda through sponsored projects.

Among CIRAME's key areas of research specialisation are corporate governance, CSR, economics, entrepreneurship and strategic management, and marketing.

As an active contributor to the world of research, the CIRAME organises conferences for business leaders and invites visiting professors from internationally renowned institutions to share their expertise. It also administers three academic reviews that provide research outlets for professors.

USEK, the first university to become carbon-neutral in the region, is keenly aware of the ethical dimensions of CSR and is active both in raising awareness among staff and students and in taking concrete action to put the principles into practice.

> *"The added value of the BSIS label is ultimately recognised when our students step into the corporate world. We believe that our image as a school and university is exposed through the quality of our students*

There are a series of policies to position USEK as a model of environmental responsibility, including energy efficient buildings on campus and a sustainable procurement project.

The School of Business is firmly committed to CSR. Its mission statement highlights its objective of educating "a new breed of socially responsible managers", teaching future leaders sound ethics and concerns for CSR practices.

To support this cause, CSR concepts and ethical behaviour have been incorporated in a large portion of the curriculum of the School of Business. In addition, high-level international colloquiums are organised on a regular basis.

For an institution that has been based on tradition, the School of Business understands that it cannot exist without change while remaining true to itself and its beliefs remains vital.

Facing challenges is normal for any operation. However, dealing with and turning around these challenges is what motivated the school to engage with the BSIS. Our main objectives are built around four newly devised pillars:

Create: programmes, events and transparency documents based on research and real-life figures that interest corporations, academics and students

Involve: alumni and key persons from the corporate world in events and studies whereby their expertise can be used for the benefit of the school

Manage: relations with the micro and macro players of the school's environment to assure endurance

Transmit: all findings to whomever may be interested for the purpose of continuing the cycle of impact

The added value of the BSIS label is ultimately recognised when our students step into the corporate world. We believe that our image as a school and university is exposed through the quality of our students.

With the BSIS label, our level of education can only go upwards from here, providing our students with an extra edge in the market. Moreover, the BSIS is a key to be used for the possibility of gaining other international accreditations. Being recognised as such commits the school to further involvements in the Lebanese business and societal environments.

gf

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Nehme Azoury is Dean of the School of Business, USEK, Lebanon.