

DISPATCH *from* ABROAD



WHEN THE IRAN WAR broke out in February 2026, Lebanon was already struggling through other crises. In October 2019, the banking sector collapsed and political unrest erupted, with the upheaval still ongoing. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced institutions of higher education to move online in 2020, those of us

at the Lebanese American University (LAU) were deep into finding ways to maintain continuity of learning amid severe unrest, roadblocks, and other disruptions. In fall 2024, Lebanon experienced devastating violence as hostilities escalated between Israel and Hezbollah: Rocket attacks bombarded Beirut and the south of the country, killing and injuring thousands and displacing hundreds of thousands, including LAU students, staff, and faculty.

LAU had just completed two years of work on a comprehensive self-evaluation in preparation for a reaccreditation visit from the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), and we had to postpone the visit to the following year. When it finally took place in October 2025, it was a moment of institutional pride: an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with the NECHE team and showcase the

resilience and work of the LAU community. Then, in February 2026, we found ourselves once again in a war zone as the United States and Israel attacked Iran and its regional allies. So, when the NECHE affirmed LAU's continued accreditation against this backdrop in March 2026, the decision was especially meaningful.

The last week of classes and final exam period of the spring 2026 semester were relatively quiet with

a fragile ceasefire in place in Beirut. Still, we were constantly pivoting between threatened escalations and assurances of a ceasefire, and we had contingency commencement plans ready to go. Thankfully, the ceremonies at our Byblos and Beirut campuses went forward in June. My own son, Salim, graduated with a bachelor's in communication arts. It was a privilege to celebrate that milestone with him and more than two thousand other LAU graduates across various disciplines.

At the time of this writing, the ceasefire has collapsed and attacks have resumed. Nevertheless, summer classes are under way, and we are fully prepared to continue implementing our emergency and academic continuity plans as needed, while holding on to the hope that conditions will improve.

—Rula L. Diab, July 2026



LAU is more than a university. It is woven into the identity of the capital of Beirut.

LAU provides an American-style liberal education in Lebanon and the wider Middle East and North Africa region. Established in 1835 as the first school for girls in the then Ottoman Empire, in 1924 the school started a two-year junior college curriculum and eventually became the current LAU. Today, LAU continues to use education as a means of opening doors and improving lives.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY LAU



Our top priority is physical safety and well-being, followed by continuity of learning.

During fall 2024, LAU formed the Situation Management Group for senior leadership, which met daily online to assess developments and define the university's response. We also formed the Crisis Management Operational Task Force to handle various logistical issues, such as learning and teaching needs.

A crisis exposes the difference between having a plan and knowing how that plan works in real time.

As situations unfolded, we needed clarity on decision making, communication channels, and roles and responsibilities. We had to request that essential staff remain on campus and to motivate students and faculty to continue learning and teaching while many were displaced, worried about loved ones, and carrying the emotional weight of fear, injury, loss, and uncertainty.

Think beyond academic continuity to the broader realities your community is facing.



LAU offers mental health sessions to help students, faculty, and staff develop coping strategies and sustain well-being. We survey students and faculty to better inform strategies and contingency plans. We moved academic support services, including tutoring and mental health services, online while maintaining in-person sessions when feasible.



Prepare before a crisis makes preparation impossible.

→ Establish a clearly mandated

crisis task force composed of people who understand the institution, can make decisions quickly, and are ready to take charge of operations when circumstances are uncertain and pressure is high.

→ Develop plans for different emergency scenarios, review them regularly, and test and revise them through exercises.

→ Offer workshops and briefings for faculty, staff, students, security teams, facilities teams, student affairs professionals, and communication officers.

This was not routine academic administrative work. During both the fall 2024 and spring 2026 attacks, LAU sent students, faculty, and staff online forms to identify individual circumstances and needs, such as displacement, home damage, Wi-Fi access, and other essential information. LAU offered students, including some who left the country, close advising, online delivery, recorded synchronous sessions, asynchronous materials, and flexible assessment arrangements.

I reached out to displaced faculty members to connect them with temporary LAU housing support. I listened to their stories of damaged homes, of families making difficult decisions, of fear and uncertainty but also of determination to keep teaching and supporting their students.

Hope, for me, was there on the last day of class in spring 2026.

Hope was in students who lingered after the hour had ended because the conversation still mattered. We continued talking over coffee at a nearby café, and even that extra time did not feel like enough. Education is never only about content. Even, and perhaps especially, in times of crisis, it can become a space for connection, trust, and shared intellectual energy.

That is what gives me hope as I look ahead: students who continue to show up and engage, faculty who continue to teach and advance impactful research, staff who continue to support, health care professionals who continue to serve, and partners around the world who continue to reach out. ^[1]

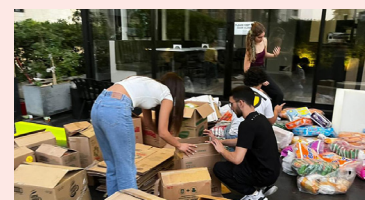


LAU has been deeply involved in supporting the wider community.

→ The LAU Mobile Clinic brings consultations, screenings, medication support, nutrition counseling, psychosocial support, and referrals to displaced families sheltering in schools across Beirut.

→ An LAU professor cocreated Lebanon Live Monitor, a real-time crisis-information platform that offers reliable updates on shelters, hotlines, traffic, emergency contacts, and available support.

→ Students and alumni have launched initiatives such as Laba3ed and One People, connecting people in need with medical support, food, clothing, and other essentials.



War and other crises, while deeply disruptive, do not have to stop innovation, growth, or institutional momentum.

Study abroad is more important than ever. It moves students beyond textbooks and their comfort zones to a firsthand understanding of diverse customs. Students develop the skills to not just live in but to actively lead and innovate within a complex, interconnected world. Companies operate globally, needing employees who can work with international partners, understand diverse markets, and leverage global talent.

