



**American University of Beirut
University Scholarship Program
HES Award**

**YEAR TWO
QUARTER THREE
NARRATIVE REPORT**

**COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT:
No. 72026818CA00002**

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A. Program Summary

The overarching goal of AUB, through the USAID Higher Education Scholarships (HES), is to increase the private sector competitiveness through increased workforce readiness linked to job opportunities.

The project specifically aims to increase access to quality education and equip the beneficiary scholars with the necessary technical, soft, and leadership skills needed to excel in the labor market. Higher Education Scholarships (HES) at AUB will provide undergraduate scholarships, covering educational costs including a housing/transportation allowance and stipends to attend high-quality universities that promote critical thinking, freedom, diversity, and respect. HES consists of two components:

Component 1: The University Scholarship Program (USP VIII)

The University Scholarship Program – Phase Eight (USP VIII) which aims at enabling meritorious and financially disadvantaged Lebanese public and private school graduates to access quality higher education to increase their job readiness and maximize their potential in supporting Lebanon’s democratic and economic development.

Component 2: Refugee Scholarship Support (RSS)

HES will offer scholarships to non-Lebanese, having refugee status and are legally residing in Lebanon, to complete undergraduate studies. RSS allows the recruitment, selection, and enrollment of non-Lebanese refugee students.

B. Executive Summary

This report summarizes all the activities that took place during the period extending from April 1st, 2020 till June 30th, 2020. Most of the planned activities for this period were delayed due to coronavirus precautionary lockdown measures in Lebanon and at AUB. The previously set deadline for receiving applications was extended till May 4th, 2020. In addition, applicants were advised that they can submit all requested supporting documents when curbs are eased or removed. Consequently, the application management process was extended till the end of June 2020 whereby AUB’s Office of Admissions followed-up on incomplete applications, performed data verification, data cleansing, and prepared USP VIII and RSS Cycle II eligibility lists to be presented to the HES Steering Committee for shortlisting purposes.

On May 19th 2020, the Lebanese cabinet approved the Minister of Education and Higher Education’s (MEHE) proposal to cancel the Lebanese Bac II exams and end the academic year 2019-2020 amidst the

increase in COVID-19 cases in the country. MEHE's proposal also included providing all public and private school students with a passing grade and promoting them to the next class.

Moreover, Grade 12 students will be provided official certificates from MEHE announcing their successful completion of the said grade. This decision necessitated the development of a contingency plan for the shortlisting and selection process. This plan will be clearly delineated in this report.

C. Pre-Shortlisting Activities

Submission of applications and supporting documents

The primary deadline for receiving complete applications set on March 31st, 2020 was extended till April 15th and extended further till May 4th due the tight restrictions on accessing AUB campus as a consequence of coronavirus lockdown measures. During lockdown period, AUB's Office of Admissions received HES-Cycle II filled applications as scanned copies sent to an email address dedicated for that purpose. Applicants who weren't able to secure the required supporting documents were allowed to submit these documents when lockdown measures implemented in the country are eased and schools and other governmental entities are open.

Data Entry and Verification

AUB's Office of Admissions started receiving HES-Cycle II applications at the beginning of March 2020. Before coronavirus lockdown measures, Grade 12 applicants from public and private schools were able to drop their applications by hand. However, starting March 26, 2020 the only means for USP VIII and RSS Cycle II applicants to submit their applications to the Office of Admissions was by email. The period extending from May 4th till June 19th, 2020 was dedicated to following-up on incomplete applications and finalizing data entry. To this avail, the recruitment and admission officers were trained by AUB's Office of Admissions team to fulfill the below mentioned tasks:

- Receiving applications to ensure that all applications are received by the deadline
- Verifying filled applications to ensure that all required fields are filled properly
- Verifying attached documents with each application to ensure that all supporting documents were submitted. Missing documents were recorded for follow-up once the country comes back to normal and students can secure these documents.
- Providing applicants with an "Application Acknowledgment Receipt Form" to acknowledge complete or incomplete applications. This document was provided to all those who sent their application to the designated email.

All USP Applications reached AUB Admissions Office either by hand or via email. Below is a brief description of each process:

- By hand: Applicants submitted their applications to AUB admission officers who immediately verified if the application was complete and checked if all the required documents were available. The admission officers issued then the “Application Acknowledgment Receipt Form.” On the receipt form, the admission officer indicated if all application documents were complete or incomplete. If “incomplete,” the applicant was asked to bring the missing document(s) while reiterating the submission deadline of the missing documents.
- By email: Applications that were received by email were verified by the admission officers for completeness of information and required documents. If the application was incomplete, the applicant was informed by email and/ or by phone about the missing document(s).

The “Application Acknowledgement Receipt Form” was regularly updated by the admission officers upon receipt of needed documents. At the beginning of June, 2020 the Lebanese government reduced the lockdown measures and most businesses and organizations reopened. The Office of Admissions and HES management set the deadline date for receiving HES-Cycle II applicants’ missing documents to June 19, 2020. Consequently, the Admissions’ Officers contacted all applicants who still had some missing documents and advised them to secure and submit these documents before the set deadline. All complete applications received beyond the submission deadline were not processed.

Data Entry

Complete applications were processed for data entry by recruitment officers and supporting staff members from AUB Office of Admissions while ensuring that the biographical data and chronological sequence of school years were clearly and accurately reflected on AUB Banner. Newly added public schools’ and private schools’ names were also coded on the Banner as per respective district(s). The data entry of all information related to applicants’ academics, biography, and financial data wasn’t completed before the end of June 2020 in view of the deadline extension for receiving applicants’ required documents extension till June 19, 2020.

Data Entry Verification

After the completion of data entry of each completed application, a verification sheet was prepared per application. This sheet included a summary of the applicant’s biographical data and academic background as well as date and place of birth, nationality, school(s) attended, mother’s full maiden name, grades, home address, and many other biographical information. This sheet was verified for accuracy against the scanned and

emailed application. Financial information that was provided by the applicant and/or his/her parents was also entered on the Banner. Financial information was then verified to make sure that all needed information was documented properly. Inconsistencies, such as a difference between the documented parent's job and the job statement provided by the employer or a discrepancy between the income documented in the application and the income listed in the 'Income statement', were equally verified for accuracy. For this year, the data verification process was continuous and the verification sheet was updated regularly with receipt of every missing supporting document that was secured by the applicant. The Office of Admissions wasn't able to generate the comprehensive excel file inclusive of all data before June 2020 due to the multiple extensions of set deadlines for submitting applications and supporting documents.

Internal Control Procedures

i- Eligibility Criteria

Internal control procedures were installed to ensure that eligibility criteria were met, for both components of the HES award, through file verification once all data entry was completed. As per HES Award, eligibility criteria consist of the below:

For USP VIII-Cycle II:

- Applicants must be Lebanese citizens
- Applicants must be attending a public high school or a private high school for the last three years
- Applicants must earn at least a cumulative combined average of 13.5/20 in their first two years of secondary schooling (Grades 10 and 11)
- Applicants must graduate from their respective schools in the summer of 2020
- Applicant parents must not receive an educational subsidy of \$5,000 or more

For RSS:

- Applicant must be residing in Lebanon and holding a valid and legal Lebanese residency permit issued by the Lebanese authorities
- Applicant must be attending a public high school or a private high school for the last three years
- Applicants must earn at least a cumulative combined average of 13.5/20 in their first two years of secondary schooling (Grades 10 and 11)
- Applicant must not be an asylum seeker
- Applicants must graduate from their respective schools in the summer of 2020

ii- Number of Applications Received

The total number of USP VIII-Cycle II applications that were received by AUB Office of Admissions was equal to 440, and the total number of RSS-Cycle II applications received was equal to 172.

D. Contingency Plan

On May 19, 2020, the Minister of Higher Education announced the cancellation of the official Baccalaureate exams for academic year 2019-2020. Consequently, a contingency plan was developed to tackle this issue especially that passing Bacc II exams with a minimum average of 13.5/20 is one of the major eligibility criteria for HES scholars. Towards this end, HES management team met with AUB's Admission's Office and assessed the various routes available to effectively implement HES-Cycle II selection process. A contingency plan was developed and approved by USAID-AOR taking into consideration the following challenges:

- 1- More than half of the received applications by AUB's Admissions Office were missing the official high school grades (G10 and G11) as well as the requested financial records; applicants weren't able to secure these documents due to precautionary lockdown measures.

- 2- Access to AUB campus is still restricted. Even if AUB reopens during summer 2020, as part of Lebanon's government schedule for phased reopening, it will only be for conducting academic activities that cannot be otherwise completed remotely, e.g., lab courses, practicums, and internships within new set measures. This has a direct impact on the planning and execution of Open Days activities such as the financial interviewing sessions for applicants and their parents, the leadership interviews for applicants, and the English Entrance Exams (EEE).

Accordingly, the below contingency plan for both the shortlisting and selection process was developed and shared with USAID-AOR:

Shortlisting process:

A- Shortlisting of applicants:

- 1- AUB to provide HES-Cycle II applicants until Friday, June 19, 2020 to secure all missing academic and financial documents.

B- Open Days:

- 1- AUB to schedule, organize, and conduct virtual financial interviews with shortlisted applicants and their respective breadwinners.

- 2- AUB to schedule, organize, and conduct virtual leadership interviews.
- 3- AUB to waive the English Entrance Exam.
- 4- AUB to consider give online the introduction to AUB and the career orientation sessions.

Selection Process:

A- AUB proposes the following scoring matrix for HES-Cycle II programs:

1- USP VIII and RSS - Cycle II as follows:

- Composite score of financial need and 10th and 11th grade averages: 65%
- Leadership and Financial Interview: 35%

2- All selected USP VIII scholars will be enrolled at the University Preparatory Program (UPP) for up to two terms (Fall 2020 and Spring 2021). While, all RSS selected scholars will be enrolled at the University Preparatory Program (UPP) for up to three consecutive terms (Fall 2020, Spring 2021 and Summer 2021). Scholars who earn a cumulative average of 90% on their 1st term results at UPP will be eligible to be enrolled as regular AUB students during Spring 2021. This is a policy already implemented at UPP. Therefore, the UPP team will develop a comprehensive and structured program to compensate for various disruptions during the 2019-2020 academic year, especially for scholars coming from public high schools whose academic year in terms of physical classroom attendance was minimal (less than three months).

Tentative Calendar of shortlisting and selection activities:

Date	Activity
Friday, June 19, 2020	Deadline for HES-Cycle II applicants to submit all missing supporting documents
Monday, July 6, 2020	Selection Committee Meeting
Thursday, July 9, 2020	USAID approval - Lists to be posted on AUB-USP webpage
Friday, July 10, 2020	AUB- Admission Office to call all shortlisted candidates
Monday, July 13 till Friday, July 17, 2020	Online Financial and Leadership Interviews
Thursday, July 23, 2020	Selection Committee / Final Selection of shortlisted candidates
Monday, July 27, 2020	USAID approval and Vetting
Wednesday, August 5, 2020	Welcoming and meeting with all HES-Cycle II

	accepted candidates
Friday, August 7, 2020	HES-Cycle II accepted candidates to confirm acceptance of Scholarship by written, signed and scanned emailed documents
Monday, August 10, 2020	Selection of HES-Cycle II candidates from waiting list
TBD pending AUB Fall semester start	HES-Cycle II orientation

USAID Approval

The above detailed contingency plan was shared with USAID-AOR who recommended that an exception is made for HES-Cycle II selected applicants with outstanding background to be directly enrolled as Regular AUB student as of Fall 2020. The contingency plan was approved by USAID provided that it is in line with HES award requirements and that the costs incurred to implement this plan did not exceed the award total estimated cost for HES-Cycle II.

E. Open Days Preparations

Preparing for Open Days

During the month of June 2020, HES team started planning for the Open Days. As per the contingency plan, both the financial and leadership interviews will be conducted virtually. A number of meetings were held between HES management team, the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS), and the Financial Aid department to discuss and agree on the logistics of both the leadership and financial interviews of shortlisted USP VIII and RSS cycle II shortlisted students and their breadwinners scheduled between Monday, July 13 and Friday, July 17, 2020. It was agreed that the Leadership interviews will be conducted via zoom and all shortlisted students will be contacted by both phone and email to be advised on the date, time and link of the scheduled meetings. As for the financial interviews with HES-Cycle II shortlisted students and their respective breadwinners the same process will be followed as the leadership interview but in case parents weren't not able to join the scheduled zoom meetings the interview will be conducted over the phone.

Based on lessons learned from last years' open days and Leadership interviewing sessions, HES team revised the leadership interview questionnaire to better probe into HES applicants' leadership potentials and their readiness to take part in community and civic engagement activities. A number of questions were added to the different sections included in the questionnaire to give the interviewer a variety of options to inquire about the same criteria but in a different way to different applicants. Moreover, a new section was added including a

number of questions inquiring about a student's chosen major and career path and its impact on applicant's community especially with the current emerging challenges.

F. Conclusion and Challenges

In conclusion, this quarter started with receiving HES-Cycle II applications and ended with the completion of data management process and preparation for the shortlisting and selection process. This quarter was extremely volatile due to the coronavirus epidemic which caused a great deal of workflow disruption. The deadline set for receiving applications was extended a couple of times which delayed the shortlisting and selection process. Applicants weren't able to physically submit their applications as hard copies due to strict measures on accessing AUB campus which prompted the Office of Admissions to move the process of receiving applications from a process based on hand submitted hard copies of applications and supporting documents to a one that is dependent on emailed scanned applications and documents.

Moreover, AUB's Office of Admissions had to contact HES-Cycle II applicants several times by email and over the phone to follow up on missing supporting documents since applicants' ability to submit these documents with their applications was hindered by the nationwide lockdown.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the increase of infections in Lebanon had also its direct toll on the HES-Cycle II selection criteria and process. The cancelation of the Bac II official exams and the limited access to AUB campus were the two major reasons behind adjusting the selection matrix and the decision to waive the English Entrance Exam (EEE) in the proposed contingency plan submitted to USAID. The contingency plan also proposed conducting the Financial and Leadership interviews virtually in lieu of physical ones.

Although the shortlisting and selection process was highly affected by the repercussions of COVID-19 precautionary and lockdown measures implemented in Lebanon, HES team and AUB's office of Admissions were able to achieve the set objective for this period in the most effective and efficient manner. This was made possible through introducing new means and tools to facilitate the whole process of receiving applications and compiling the required information and data to recruit HES-Cycle II scholars for the upcoming academic year 2020-2021.