

*Our priority lies in your living conditions, the quality of the education you receive and the value of your diplomas.*

## The Rector's Message to the Student Community 2020-2021



Dear students,

I am writing this letter on the eve of the new lockdown, effective from August 21 to September 7, 2020, ordered by the outgoing government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. September 1, 2020, which commemorates the centennial of the declaration of the State of Greater Lebanon, will be lived in silence and meditation. It is perhaps a fitting moment for us all to reflect on both the bright white pages and the countless black pages in our country's history. **But as with any jubilee, an optimistic, confident and hopeful glimpse of the future is far more interesting than a glance at the past.** We are left with no choice: we cannot give up. We have to be optimistic. We will learn how to make possible the impossible for the benefit of our people.

I know that your studies are heavily impacted by **the drastic repercussions of the healthcare crisis, the economic crisis, the socio-political uncertainties and the aftermath of the explosion of the port of Beirut.** I know that some of you are wounded, ill, or even distressed. Some of you have lost loved ones. I would like to send them, on behalf of myself and the entire USJ community, a special thought of compassion and care. Wounds often leave scars on our identity, our manners, and especially our reactions and behavior with others. Certainly, we must not overlook them, but ask ourselves if our reactions strengthen or weaken our values, measure our beliefs, our self-esteem or even our self-confidence? These are the notions that, are in fact, the pillars of our personality.

As always, USJ has proved itself to be a **school of solidarity** in every crisis and will forever remain so. I would like to thank all our students, teachers and administrative staff for their involvement in solidarity campaigns; as well as our doctors, our medical interns and the hospital staff of the Hôtel Dieu de France for the care and assistance they provide to the sick and the wounded. How could I possibly forget to thank all those who are involved at various levels and in various ways in local solidarity actions or within associations, and all of you who respect measures that act as barriers to combat the pandemic. Our University cherishes the growth of our inner and outer being in volunteering, **in line with our motto that we train ourselves to be men and women for others**. I am sure that new students are already familiar with actions of solidarity and volunteering. You will be solicited to join this school of citizenship and social involvement for the benefit of others.

The University is fully committed to help you pursue your studies. **Rising to the challenge of the crisis means for all of us to pursue academic continuity in excellence**. The word crisis carries two overtones: it is a catastrophe that destroys an existing system, but it is also an opportunity to rebuild the future! This continuity is underway and is being renewed thanks to the relentless efforts of the teaching community and the various departments working to support the now digitally dominated educational approach: this continuity is underway and is being renewed thanks to the relentless efforts of the teaching community and the various departments working to support the now digitally-dominated educational approach: faculties, secretariats, IT services, etc. A guide to distance learning and teaching has been drawn up and distributed to everyone. With the Moodle platform and other tools, you will keep in touch with colleagues and teachers. You will even be able to interact with each other as a “classroom”, attend classes or engage with your lecturers. Many of the library resources have been made available online. However, we are well aware of the limitations of hybrid face-to-face and remote learning and of the digital gap that exists for some of you. The University is taking action to bridge this gap.

The times we are going through are upsetting our daily lives and raise many questions. **Overcoming the crisis means, among other things, perfecting our skills and directing them towards the common good**. The University remains by your side to guide you during this challenging period. Two or three aspects will be privileged: trying to overcome the negative as quickly as possible by setting small positive goals to achieve. This is a life-changing experience. Another aspect is to support yourself and let others support you in case you feel down. The Department of Social Services, the Counseling Center, the Family Medicine Center at HDF, the Department of Student Life, and the Chaplaincy are there, always vigilant, to support you in any way you wish. Furthermore, to answer your questions, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section is regularly updated on the USJ website.

To fight isolation, relax and stay in shape, the University also gives you access online or in person to sports activities, relaxation and meditation sessions, cultural tips and advice on how to take care of yourself. Special editions of CampusJ, USJ's digital student newspaper, will be sent to you on a regular basis to help you start your university studies and organize your life. **Our priority lies in your living conditions, the quality of the education you receive and the value of your diplomas**. You can be sure that we are fully committed to ensuring that your studies are accredited and that you will be able to resume your studies in person, in a timely manner and under the best possible conditions. All in all, do what you have to do with love, dedication and passion.

**Let us remember the words of Pope Francis:**

*“The risk of contagion from a virus should teach us how the “contagion” of love passes from one heart to another.”*