

## **President's Speech**

**May 18,2024**

**Pentecost day**

### **Positioning statement and impact on society and students (based on USEK mission):**

As stated in its mission, USEK is committed to providing high-quality, American-style education and research, ensuring all of our students receive rigorous academic experience and innovative teaching. By emphasizing leadership, professional growth, and ethical values rooted in our Catholic tradition:

- We provide our graduates with opportunities to become life-long learners, ensuring they remain competitive in a dynamic job market.
- We also prepare them to become future leaders who drive societal progress in Lebanon and beyond.

On another hand, our community engagement initiatives and social entrepreneurship programs demonstrate our active role in supporting societal well-being and economic recovery.

### **Strategic Decisions:**

To confirm our positioning and the University's impact on its students and broader community, we had to take strategic decisions during the current academic year.

1. Making education affordable: this decision builds on our previous strategy to keep tuition fees affordable for students and consists of waiving 50% of these fees along with offering flexible installment plans and scholarships. Our aim

is to provide financial relief and ensure that financial barriers do not hinder access to education.

2. Offering new job training and tailored certification programs (SDC, ...): this decision is allowing us to support upskilling for professionals in need of updating their skills based on market requirements.
3. Engaging with the community: Through service projects, community partnerships, and agreements, we are addressing pressing societal challenges and bridging the gap between academia and the workforce. By forging strategic alliances with businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies, we are facilitating knowledge transfer, fostering innovation, and driving economic growth.
4. Diversifying our revenues: To advance our academic mission, we are attempting to secure the resources needed to fuel our journey of transformation. Targeted fundraising campaigns and strategic partnerships aim at investing in the short term in infrastructure improvements and scholarships. Moreover, we are strengthening our ties with our graduates and fostering a sense of pride and belonging among our extended family.
5. Enhancing USEK's reputation and visibility: Marketing and branding have been pivotal in elevating our global profile. Using adequate communication channels is helping us showcase our unique points of strength, with dynamic approaches that enhance our visibility, through digital marketing campaigns and targeted advertising. By always expanding to new audiences around the world, we build on data-driven insights and analytics, to optimize performance and ensure maximum impact.

On this occasion, I have two great news to announce. The first is the recent establishment of the USEK New York Center, tasked with maximizing the University's visibility on the US higher education landscape.

The second good news is our work to establish a Branch Campus in Dubai, as an extension of our main campus in Lebanon, to nurture both local and global talents within an environment fostering innovation and academic excellence.

### **Journey of transformation:**

2023-2024 was not limited to strategic decisions, it has also been a time of achievements. Over the past academic year, USEK embarked on a journey of transformation. Today, I can proudly say that our transformational approach has set us on a path of exponential growth and success, powered by the dedication and perseverance of our local community and broader stakeholders.

Let me walk you through the six key headlines of success for our institution. The first aspect I would like to talk about is **shared governance**. Almost 10 years ago, USEK started redesigning its decision-making process. This model was implemented progressively to better assess the impact of any change and mitigate potential negative consequences, while acting on our core belief of improving decision-making by empowering people. Every voice is heard and valued to foster collaboration and inclusivity among all stakeholders: the OLM, the BOT, the University's constituents (I mean here, the Office of the President, the Academic and Research Council, the Provost Council, the Faculty Senate, staff representatives, and student representatives) along with USEK alumni, industry advisors, employers, and stakeholders, the ultimate aim being to harness our collective wisdom to drive meaningful changes.

Another equally transformative aspect is our **academic endeavors**. By coupling the power of data analytics and predictive modeling, we gained valuable insights into different academic areas, which enables us to make informed decisions grounded in evidence and aligned with our strategic goals.

Even as we continue to prioritize accreditation at both programmatic and institutional levels, we have placed a renewed emphasis on quality through rigorous internal program reviews. All USEK schools are fully engaged in uplifting their existing programs and developing new curricula, diplomas, and certificates. They are all designed or redesigned not to only address current market demands and anticipate future trends, but also to embrace the latest advancements in technology and industry practices.

Central to our academic mission is also our commitment to our faculty academic progress. Through robust policies and procedures, we aim at safeguarding their rights, challenging them to open up new opportunities, and providing them with the support they need to make meaningful contributions to their respective fields. Our policy of attracting talented instructors from around the world brings diverse perspectives and expertise to our academic programs.

This brings us to our third aspect: **research**. USEK has witnessed a remarkable enhancement in key metrics and figures during this academic year thanks to its target efforts in funding research projects, facilitating collaborative workshops, fostering interdisciplinary research groups, and encouraging related international collaborations. At the doctoral studies level, we remained committed to fostering a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration by facilitating interdisciplinary partnerships and dialogue among academia, industry, and the wider community.

This has led to a giant step for USEK: commercializing research innovations is now a reality through intellectual property management, patent drafting and submission, industry partnerships, startup incubation support, technology commercialization assistance, and the facilitation of knowledge exchange and technology transfer agreements.

The fourth aspect is **internationalization**, a cornerstone for our vision in global engagement, as it promotes a dynamic and inclusive educational environment that transcends geographic boundaries and enhances the University's reputation, global visibility, and ranking.

Through strategic partnerships and collaborations with universities and institutions worldwide, we promote academic exchanges (study-abroad, exchange programs), joint research projects, and faculty/staff mobility, cultivating cross-cultural understanding and advancing knowledge creation and dissemination. Our dedication to internationalization extends beyond academia to encompass cultural exchange and community engagement. Through events, workshops, and cultural programs (Ajyal), we celebrate diversity and promote intercultural dialogue, enriching the fabric of our campus community. Furthermore, and as we strive to create a more interconnected and mutually beneficial world through education, research, and collaboration, we actively engage with governmental agencies, diplomatic missions, and international organizations to advocate for policies and initiatives that promote international cooperation and mobility in higher education..

On another hand, significant efforts were invested to ensure successful pursuit and execution of grants and projects through a quality-driven process. Throughout the

last year, numerous projects have been awarded, concretizing the University's dedication to interdisciplinary collaboration and impactful research endeavors.

Our performance on the international stage has contributed to enhancing our global reputation and yielded tangible results in University Rankings. USEK secured the 4th rank in Lebanon with the highest rate of international faculty in the country as per the latest QS World University Rankings. It also maintained its 2nd rank in Times Higher Education Impact Ranking whereby it ranked top 1 in SDG 1 (No poverty), Top 1 in SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and also Top 1 in SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The fifth aspect I would like to tackle is **student development and support**. Transformation in this area began with a wide restructuring of offered services to cater to the evolving needs of our student body. Our institutional commitment to equity and inclusivity is strengthened by various initiatives to attract diverse student populations, create a more accessible and equitable learning environment, and ensure that every student has the support they need to stay at USEK and succeed academically and personally.

The holistic development of our students also extends beyond the classroom, with extracurricular activities providing ample opportunities for them to pursue their passions, develop leadership skills, and build lifelong friendships.

Last but not least, USEK has been focused for years on **sustainable development**, preparing students to become responsible global leaders and active contributors to a more sustainable world. This sixth aspect spans various environmental activities and goals. As a laureate of multiple international green awards, the University runs its own zero-waste project with full-scale recycling and composting programs.

In keeping with the United Nations' SDGs, it promotes energy efficiency on campus, sustainable water use, ethical food sourcing, animal-friendly practices, and carpooling initiatives, among others. While eco-debates, blood drives, and reforestation campaigns are just a few examples of how USEK is leading by example to show that a better future for all is possible, the latest private-to-private power purchase agreement to buy solar electricity over ten years is a groundbreaking initiative that demonstrates USEK's commitment to sustainable energy practices and long-term environmental stewardship.

In closing, I want to express again my profound gratitude to each and every one of you for embarking on this journey of transformation. Together, we have achieved remarkable progress, but our work is far from over. As we look to the future with optimism and determination, let us continue to strive for excellence in all that we do and uphold the values that define us as a community.

Thank you and God bless USEK.