Dear Colleagues,

We write to you as the Board of Directors of the Lebanese Studies Association (LSA) to call your attention to the unfolding situation in Lebanon and how it might affect currently-enrolled students whose funding sources (such as family) are based in Lebanon.

The LSA was founded in 2017 to promote scholarship and teaching on Lebanon. The LSA is also committed to serving as a resource to institutions of higher education. Lebanon is currently experiencing a monetary crisis as part of a broader set of crises. In this context, local banks in Lebanon have implemented ad hoc policies of capital controls on dollar-denominated accounts. The most salient aspect of these policies are the drastic limitations on cash withdrawals and a near total ban on outbound international transfers. (More information can be found in this New York Times article from December 2019, though the situation continues to worsen).

In this context, many students with bank accounts in Lebanon or whose Lebanon-based family provides financial support are experiencing financial distress. These individuals' international student status also means they are unlikely to be able to seek or secure employment in their host communities to make up for the loss of income.

The LSA Board of Directors strongly urges colleges and universities to take the above-described circumstances into consideration and devise mechanisms to provide affected students with any form of financial accommodation possible, in addition to highlighting available counseling and other student services. While we recognize that the capacity to do so is dependent on the specific institutional context of a given school, the LSA Board of Directors recommends the following measures until the capital control measures have been lifted: waivers for tuition; cancellation of fees associated with late payments; relief from billing-related enrollment holds; and communication highlighting campus- and community-based support services, including academic counseling, sensitive assistance navigating their financial situation, mental health counseling, campus employment opportunities, assistance procuring necessary course books and supplies, and other resources.

The length or future contours of the current monetary crisis in Lebanon is unclear. We hope the above information provides some sense of the challenges faced by students at your institutions of higher education who depend on funds based in Lebanon. We urge you to keep aware of the situation in so far as it can shape your provision of the support necessary to ensure the continued enrollment and success of those students in your institution.

Sincerely,

The LSA Board of Directors

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