

FOUNDERS' DAY 2019
HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY, Beirut
Monday, October 14, 2019

President's Word

We opened our 65th academic year a month and half ago, while preparing for our anniversary celebrations that start in three months, amid ongoing violent conflicts in our region, major socioeconomic troubles in our country, unsettled circumstances in Lebanese higher education, and the naturally ensuing demoralization amongst the younger generations.

Radio stations repeat every morning, and TV channels every evening, the same refrain that lists all that is wrong with Lebanon and the world. Indeed, much is not well, and plainly unfair, unethical, illogical, abusive or irresponsible. We often feel helpless.

When Haigazian University was founded and the years that followed, things were not necessarily better, and yet, thousands of young people got a good education, and moved beyond the limitations of their days.

In higher education, while we remain as a part of our larger society, we have the calling to see what could be right, if not for any other reasons, then just because we are teaching and learning to lead our world to advancement.

Let me be concrete:

- I cannot personally see how the electricity problem could be comprehensively solved, but I can save energy in my home.
- I cannot personally clean the streets and the garbage dumping sites of the country, but I can discipline myself not to throw trash from my car window.
- I cannot personally discipline those in governmental offices or companies or businesses or passers-by on the streets to be polite, but I can behave in a way that shows respect to all human beings indiscriminately.
- I cannot silence those who spread hatred across religious or political lines, but I can be a fair bridge-builder with my own attitude.
- I cannot silence the voices of ignorance, but I can limit overgeneralizations, unfair exaggerations and prejudices in my surroundings.
- I cannot feed all the hungry ones, secure positions for the jobless, care for the displaced, or heal the sick, or accompany the lonely, but I can prepare, with science and character in my hands, to prevent future ills, and help create fair systems.
- I cannot be asked to trust all others around me. But I can be an honest person who can be trusted in action no matter what the circumstances.
- I cannot easily change attitudes, but I can be a positive voice, the voice of the one who acts responsibly, with vision for the future.
- Education means hope. Higher education is even higher hope.
- Education means enlightenment. Higher education means even higher enlightenment.

Your country is not simply what others have made of it. It is what you plan to make of it as well.

Your future is not dictated by the limitations and the shortcomings of those others. Your future is dictated by how you break new ground, and faithfully fill the gaps of your world with things that are healthy, helpful, and sustainable.

I am afraid that without self-discipline, ethical education, and honesty, we are doomed to repeat the unfortunate subculture of carelessness and selfishness. It alarms me to see the differences between the educated and the non-educated to be dismal and insignificant.

Higher education should create in us a society of learning with each other. A university is not a kiosk of degrees, not is it an association of prestige. It is not a compulsory army. A university is a society of humility and sharing. Humility so that we may accept our limitations and learn. Sharing so that we may teach each other and learn from each other for the good of all.

In some way, the founders of Haigazian University, the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, and the Armenian Missionary Association of America, established the institution because they believed that such an American model liberal arts institution would take upon itself the responsibility of educating generations in the Middle East that would not succumb to limitation and conflict, but instead be positive players in every field they enter.

On Founders' Day, it is those values we celebrate, in faithfulness to God, and in service to humanity.