

General University Requirements (GURs) in Education Programs in Higher Institutions in Lebanon

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of a survey of the general university requirements (GURs) for undergraduate education majors as set by the Lebanese higher education institutions (HEIs). Since such requirements are not stipulated by a common regulation; each institution has set its own number of courses/credits that are required to acquire the BA in education. This study examines the different GURs from the twelve HEIs involved in the survey. Data have been gathered from literature supplied by the various institutions. The Lebanese HEIs follow American-style and French-style education programming. In order to simulate a meaningful relationship and analysis, the study looks into the GURs set by the American-style HEIs. The GURs have been arranged in five areas of interest: languages and communication, humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, arts, and information technology. The conclusions drawn are not evaluative but rather informative, upon which further analysis can be done and recommendations be made.

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I. Introduction

This paper reports the results of a survey of the general university graduation requirements set by institutions of higher education for undergraduate (BA) programs in education. These requirements are mostly referred to as “general education requirements,” but in order to differentiate them from major or core requirements, the term “general university requirements (GURs)” is used.

The paper is comprised of three parts. Part 1 lists the GURs set by 12 Lebanese institutions of higher education, including the government-run Lebanese University and 11 private institutions. Part 2 lists GURs set by samples of universities from Australia (2), Canada (2), and the United States of America(6). No universities that follow the French system are surveyed since the French system does not present GURs as a separate block of courses, but rather includes what is considered as a GUR subject within the total graduation regulations. In this regard, it worth mentioning that the French-style institutions used to follow an annual schedule instead of a course-by-course schedule. Yet, with the changes in the European educational system to adopt the LMD structure and the credit system, the Lebanese French-style universities are now making the transition. However, the literature supplied by these institutions did not specifically define GURs within their curricula. Finally, Part 3 draws some conclusions based on Parts 1 and 2.

II. Lebanese Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Lebanese Higher Education Institutions set their own GURs. The GURs set by the 12 HEIs covered by this study are presented in detail in Annex A, which illustrates the percentages of courses in relation to total degree requirements as well as the distribution of GUR courses into areas, namely: languages and communication, humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, arts, and information technology.

The French-system universities (USJ, KU) and the Lebanese University incorporate GURs into their annual curriculum. In these three universities

there are no stipulated sets of GURs separate from the other major and core requirements of specialization. Besides, since these universities do not follow the same credit system that is adopted by the American-style universities, it is impossible to include them in the analysis, using percentages: It would be like comparing apples and oranges. Consequently, the analysis in this part is limited to the 8 American-style universities and USEK which, although originally considered as French-styled, has recently been reverting to the American credit-system. The table in Annex A, however, presents the details of those areas considered GURs that are presented in the French-style universities curricula.

The analysis has taken into consideration the five areas of the GURs covered by the 9 universities that follow the American-style system. These areas are:

1. Languages and Communication;
2. Humanities;
3. Natural Sciences and Mathematics;
4. Arts;
5. Information Technology.

Each of the 9 Lebanese private universities stipulates its own GURs. There are no stated criteria for the selection of these GURs, however. The percentage of GURs to total degree requirements ranges from 22% (GU) to 40% (AUB). The other universities fall within this range: HU 31%, LAU 36%, MEU 30%, MUBS 35%, NDU 31.5%, USEK 25%, and UOB 26%, with 30.7% as a mean average. These percentages are computed by dividing the number of credit hours required for the GURs over the total number of credit hours required to attain the BA degree in education (Table 1).

The distribution of GURs into categories also differs from one university to another. In the first area, languages and communication, the range is between 25% (AUB, MUBS, USEK) and 57% (GU) of the total GURs. The other universities fall within this range: HU 30%, LAU 26.5%, MEU 41.2%, NDU 27.3%, and UOB 41.6%, with 33.2% as a mean average. In this area, language (English and Arabic) and communication course requirements are included.

The second area, humanities, includes courses that deal with social and behavioral studies, cultural studies, civilization studies, literature and citizenship. The percentage of these courses ranges from 25% (MUBS) to 54.5% (NDU) of the total GURs. The other universities fall within this range: AUB 33.3%, GU 28.7%, HU 50%, LAU 29.4-73.5%, MEU 44.1%, USEK 50%, and UOB 50%, with 43.9% as a mean average.

The third area, natural sciences and mathematics, includes courses in the fields of biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, statistics, astronomy, and geology, nutrition, health, physical education, and environmental studies. Each university decides on the courses that the students have to take, and most of the universities give students the possibility of choosing from a set pool of courses. The percentage of the courses in this area ranges from 0% (GU) to 35.2% (MUBS) of the total GURs. The other universities fall within this range: AUB 25%, HU 10%, LAU 14.7-32.4%, MEU 2.9%, NDU 18.2%, USEK 4.2%, and UOB 4.2% with 14.7% as a mean average.

The fourth area, arts, ranges between 0% (GU, HU, MEU, NDU, UOB) and 16.6% (AUB) of the total GURs. The other universities fall within this range: LAU 8.8-17.6%, MUBS 8.3%, and USEK 12.5% with 6.4% as a mean average.

The fifth area, information technology, includes computer and other related courses. The percentage ranges between 0% (AUB, NDU) and 14.3% (GU) of the total GURs. The other universities fall within this range: HU 10%, LAU 3%, MEU 11.8%, MUBS 8.3%, USEK 8.3%, and UOB 4.2% with 6.7% as a mean average.

Although the French-style universities do not stipulate a specific set of university requirement courses, the courses stipulated by American-style universities as GURs are included in the curricula of the French-style universities individually and within the general curriculum requirements. These are usually courses in language and communication, humanities (religion, ethics, etc.), the sciences, technology, environment, health and nutrition. However, they cannot be included in this study since they are not grouped into specific areas as such.

III. Non-Lebanese HEIs

This part is skeletal at best. It is included in the study as a backdrop only, in order to put the GURs in Lebanese HEIs within an international frame. The researcher compiled information on GURs offered by American-style universities in Australia, Canada and the United States, to be considered as samples only. The universities have been chosen randomly and the information is not to be regarded in any evaluative manner.

The universities sampled compare with the Lebanese American-style HEIs as follows. The GURs offered by the Lebanese HEIs range between 22% and 40% of the total degree requirements compared to 20% and 44% of the total degree requirements offered by the 6 US universities, and to 8% and 47% of the total degree requirements offered by the 4 Australian and Canadian universities.

The area distribution is also comparable between Lebanese and non-Lebanese HEIs. However, most notably, US universities do not include information technology as a separate area. The other four areas as offered by 5 US universities compare well with the distribution set by the Lebanese HEIs. For languages and communication, American universities range between 12.5% and 31% of the total GURs offered compared to 25% and 57% in Lebanese HEIs. The humanities GURs offered by American universities range between 25% and 44% of the total GURs they offer, compared to 25% and 55.4% in Lebanese universities. As for the third area, natural sciences and mathematics, American universities offer courses within 24% and 50% of their total GURs, compared to the Lebanese range of 0% to 35.2%. The fourth area, arts, ranges between 0% and 12.5% of the total GURs offered by American universities, compared to 0% and 16.6% in Lebanese universities.

It is worthy to emphasize that the percentages presented are based on a very small sample of non-Lebanese HEIs.

IV. Analysis, Summary, and Conclusion

1. General

The researcher chose a very small sample of American-style institutions from Australia, Canada and the US that cannot be considered a full literature review. However, this lies within the scope set for this study and it may be indicative of the general trend toward showing what is referred to as General University Requirements (GURs). The GURs considered in this study are those that are required for the Education Degrees given by higher education institutions in Lebanon. These GURs are in most cases those required courses by the university for all students regardless of their major. They are comprised mainly of language and communication courses, introductory courses in the humanities and social studies, basic math and introductory science and technology courses.

Higher education institutions around the world differ in the importance they give to GURs. This difference is also evident within the same system (American or European), as well as within the same country (e.g., USA). As such, it is not strange to note some disparities among the American-style Lebanese HEIs.

Universities that follow the American style of higher education stipulate which courses they consider as GURs. Most allow students to choose from a pool of courses in a certain field. These courses cover both humanities and the sciences.

Universities following the European style of higher education (most notably French and British universities) have a set program with few electives within which some courses that may be classified as GURs are included.

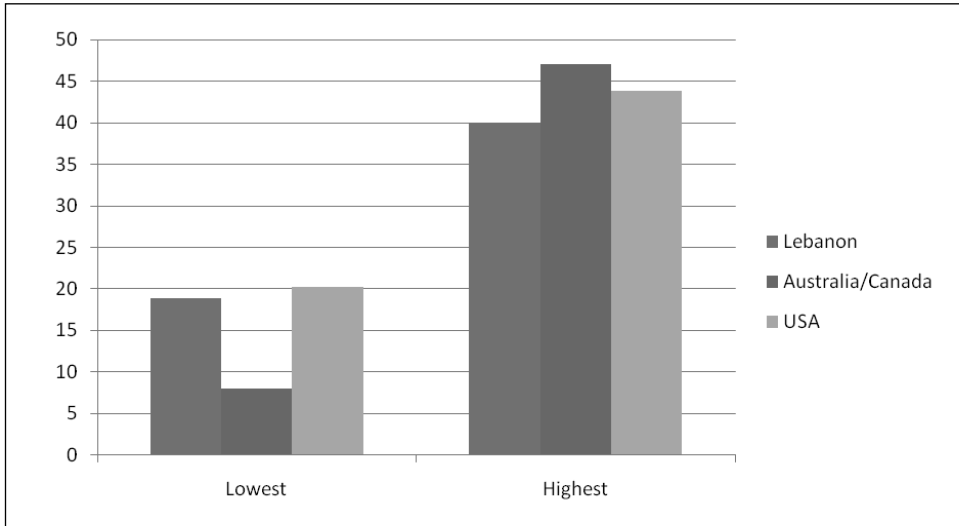
2. Lebanon

The twelve Lebanese higher education institutions included in this survey follow both the European (mainly French) and the American styles. One of the French-style universities, Université St. Esprit de Kaslik (USEK), stipulates a set of GURs, similar to the stipulated sets in the other American-style universities. However, although the other two French-style universities, Kafaat University (KU) and Université St. Joseph (USJ), and the Lebanese University do include GURs within their degree requirements, they do not set these GURs off from the other requirements. All of the American-style universities covered in this survey stipulate a specific set of GURs for their undergraduate education degrees.

Table 1: Percentage of GURs to the total degree requirements by university

University	Total number of credit hours required for the degree	Number of GUR credit hours	Percentage
AUB	90	36	40%
GU	95	21	22%
HU	97	30	31%
LAU	95	34	36%
MEU	112	34	30%
MUBS	103	36	35%
NDU	105	33	31.5%
USEK	96	24	25%
UOB	92	24	26%
Mean	98.3	30.2	30.7%

Figure 1: Lebanese HEIs & non-Lebanese HEIs: Lowest and highest percentages of GURs to total degree requirements



3. GURs Subject Areas by University

All Lebanese universities tend to agree on the importance of language as a general requirement. From 25% (AUB and MUBS) to 57% (GU) of the total GURs are dedicated to “Languages and Communication.” These universities include English and Arabic as requirements. The same is true for “Humanities”—from 25% (MUBS) to 50% (HU) of the total GURs. The ranges for “Natural Sciences and Math” and “Computer/Technology” vary from 25% to 3% of the total GURs. As for “Arts”, only 4 of the 12 universities include up to 16.7% (AUB) of the total GURs. The US universities sampled also make a similar distribution, except for “Technology and Computers.”

Table 2 shows the percentage that each area is given of the total GURs.

**Table 2: The percentage of each area in each university
of the total GURs**

University	Languages and Communication		Humanities		Arts		Natural Sciences and Math		Computer/ Technology		Total GURs	
	# of c/h ²	%	# of c/h	%	# of c/h	%	# of c/h	%	# of c/h	%	# of c/h	%
AUB	9	25%	12	33.3%	6	16.7%	9	25%	0	0%	36	100%
GU	12	57%	6	28.6%	0	0%	0	0%	3	14.3%	21	100%
HU	9	30%	15	50%	0	0%	6	20%	0	0%	30	100%
LAU	9	26.5%	10-25	29.4 - 73.5%	3-6	8.8 - 17.6%	5-11	14.7 - 32.4%	1	3%	34	100%
MEU	14	41.2%	15	44.1%	0	0%	1	2.9%	4	11.8%	34	100%
MUBS	9	25%	9	25%	3	8.3%	12	33.3%	3	8.3%	36	100%
NDU	9	27.3%	18	54.5%	0	0%	6	18.2%	0	0%	33	100%
USEK	6	25%	12	50%	3	12.5%	1	4.2%	2	8.3%	24	100%
UOB	10	41.6%	12	50%	0	0%	1	4.2%	1	4.2%	24	100%

² Number of credits/hours.