

Université St. Joseph offers new graduate degree

BEIRUT: Université St. Joseph is launching a new Master's degree in Political Communications and Marketing for students who are looking to stand out in the overlapping industries between media and politics.

"Any way you look at it, history is heading in the direction of democracy. Humankind does not regress. And a democratic conscience requires politicians and experts to organize their ideas, platforms and programs, and present these [for public consideration]," said Pascal Monin, a political science professor and the director of the new program.

The two-year program is not just for aspiring politicians and advisers, though. Its coursework aims to prepare the next generation of journalists, pollsters, public relations specialists and humanitarians.

"It's important for people who want to do political journalism to have a kind of a hybrid training about communication in the political-public arena," said Carole al-Sharabati, dean of the university's Political Science Institute. "A journalist who doesn't have this certain background on political institutions, public policy, human rights, and so forth – they will know how to communicate in the form, but not the substance."

Students will benefit from the Institute's ties to universities in France, Canada and Italy, through student exchange programs and faculty loans. Jacques Gerstle, tenured at the prestigious Paris I – Sorbonne University, will hold a two-week

residency this semester to present seminars and lectures.

"Jacques Gerstle wrote the theory on political communications," Monin told The Daily Star.

Courses are offered on surveys and polling, human rights, journalism, public relations, public speaking, international relations, history, political campaigning and other topics. Students can embark on a research trajectory or a professional one, though all courses will contain a mix of theoretical and practical components.

Yet politics is not strictly a matter of communications. There is an intrinsic ethical component to it, as well. "Isn't there a contradiction between political science and political marketing, which is the marketization of political ideas and programs?" Sharabati told The Daily Star. "When I'm running a campaign, is this ethical? Isn't the candidate supposed to campaign on the basis of his real image, et cetera?"

"We are trying to build the critical thinking so that people when they go on the political market they have in them the initiative to build things that are constructive. We have courses on communications and ethics, and on political philosophy. But this theme is in all our courses, too."

Master's students in the Institute can select into the new program in the coming months. Monin reported that interest was even greater than faculty anticipated. – *The Daily Star*