

Al Akhawayn Newsletter

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Al Akhawayn Joins Consortium in Creation of New Online University



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Al Akhawayn Joins Consortium in Creation of New Online University

As technology advances, the world is becoming increasingly smaller as the barriers to global communication gradually dissolve. One area in which these new technologies are having a massive impact is education.

Mindful of these developments, Al Akhawayn University recently signed a memorandum of understanding to create a consortium that would pool resources and create a new online educational endeavor, Telematic Mediterranean University (TMU).

Additional signatories of the memorandum included International Telematic University Uni-Nettuno, a university employing instructors from around the world to offer language courses online and via satellite, as well as PianoDam Training, a vocational training company specializing in the field of management.

Ambitious in its scope, the memorandum calls for the consortium to utilize technology in order to disseminate e-learning and

distance education programs in five languages – English, Arabic, Italian, French, and Spanish – with the idea being to make the courses available to the largest population possible.

“Today, with new technologies and the Internet, we can truly contribute to the democratization of knowledge,” said Maria Amata Garito, President and Rector of International Telematic University Uni-Nettuno. “I believe that to achieve this goal, we have to build knowledge alliances; i.e., by making the different forms of knowledge available to the different cultures and universities through publishing them online. This is what will make a difference in the accessibility of knowledge.”

As part of the agreement, Al Akhawayn will contribute logistics and technology for the development of e-learning modules, engineering training and content development of specialized training, and academic and technical expertise for the development of e-learning modules, among other things.

Uni-Nettuno will contribute

technological platforms for the dissemination of e-learning modules via Internet and satellite, specialized training modules, expertise and methodologies for the development of e-learning modules, as well as solicit donations in Italy and Europe.

PianoDam will oversee the administrative and financial coordination of the consortium, conduct market analysis and identification of training needs, market development and communication initiatives, fundraise with potential stakeholders in Morocco, and supervise the activities of the consortium.

The activities of the consortium will last for three years and culminate in the establishment of TMU, at which point the consortium will be dissolved. The relationship with Uni-Nettuno and PianoDam coincides strongly with the university’s plan to accelerate internationalization on campus through collaborative partnerships with international universities.

Students Explore Idea Generation and Successful Start-Ups

Al Akhawayn Students in the School of Science and Engineering recently had an opportunity to be coached on developing innovative ideas and on how to turn those ideas into successful start-up companies.

In a workshop organized by the School of Science and Engineering within the framework of the fall 2013 Capstone Guest Speakers Series (CGSS '13), Ahmed Aboutajeddine, Professor and Member of Innovation City at the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) in Fez, and Amine Rachdi, CEO of Synaptic Maghreb, General Manager of Rtime, and President of IT School Vinci, conducted practical lectures on “How to find innova-

tive project ideas that can turn into successful start-ups.”

During his section of the lecture, Aboutajeddine provided a conceptual framework for innovative idea generation. He explained the contextual necessities for pursuing innovation and touched on the historical evolution of innovation methodologies. In addition, he introduced a business generation model for start-ups.

In the second part of the workshop, Rachdi focused on the hands-on aspects of the business generation model. He explained how start-ups can use a “business generation canvas,” an interactive tool that can help start-ups to explain, design, and retool

their business model in an interactive environment. Rachdi also discussed examples of successful business models, such as Skype, credit cards, the iPad, etc. and how bold innovation can sometimes reap huge rewards.

“Entrepreneurial endeavors involve risks, but with innovation risk taking is worth it,” said Rachdi.

In addition, Rachdi touched on the topic of the Maroc StartUp Cup, a competition where fledgling businesses can compete for a 100,000 MAD prize and receive mentoring and feedback on their start-up.



Al Akhawayn Awards 10 Scholarships for Academic Excellence

For students attending Al Akhawayn this fall, hard work toward a high GPA has paid off in the form of a tuition scholarship.

The newly enacted Academic Excellence Award for Continuing Students program disbursed scholarships for the Fall 2013 semester to 10 high achieving Al Akhawayn students. Recipients of the inaugural scholarship disbursement were as follows:

- Hamza Guessous
- Sasha Barrou
- Latifa Mahna

- Malak Sekkat
- Abdessalam El Ouazzani
- Mohamed Mehdi Benseghir
- Sofia Ababou
- Omar Sabil
- Idriss Said Alaoui
- Salim Khalil

The Academic Excellence Award for Continuing Students allows for continuing students to apply at the end of each semester to be awarded either a partial or full tuition scholarship based on cumulative GPA.

Student Sara Berrada Talks about Her Passion for Astronomy



Sara Berrada ('15) is a junior at Al Akhawayn University majoring in Engineering and Management Science. She spent two weeks in the summer of 2013 completing an internship at the Austrian Space Forum located in Innsbruck, Austria. Heavily involved in the Astronomy Club at Al Akhawayn, Sara is applying the skills she has gained during her internship to raise the profile of astronomy in Morocco. She is currently acting as a liaison between the university and the Austrian Space Forum for the launch of World Space Week on October 4-10.

We interviewed Sara to learn more about her passion for astronomy and her internship experience.

Can you explain what the Austrian Space Forum is?

Sara: The Austrian Space Forum is a national network of aerospace scientists and space

enthusiasts who carry out research on planet Mars, future missions there, and equipment to use. The scientists are always on the quest for territories similar to the Martian terrain to do research. But mainly the Forum is a network between space sciences and the public.

What did you do for your internship there?

Sara: I had the chance to learn so many skills and so many things. I improved my computer science skills, my thermal engineering knowledge, and more. The new thing for me was to work with and use the 3-D printer to make different designs. It was very fruitful.

What was the most intriguing skill you have learned?

Sara: Using Ubuntu, the Unix

language, and terminals. In my curriculum, I didn't have the chance to learn about Ubuntu and Unix, so I had to look deeper into computer science skills and try to find ways of compiling binary data into spreadsheets, and then into one file.

One more important thing that I learnt is organizational skills especially through the planning of the World Space Week. I had to brainstorm with Dr. Gernot Groemer, the President of the Austrian Space Forum, about promoting the World Space Week in Morocco.

Along that note, what do you hope to do for World Space Week, or what do you plan to contribute?

Sara: Al Akhawayn Astronomy Club organizes many activities such as the recent 2013 Festival of Astronomy of Ifrane. It was the second edition, and it was

a success based on the number of people turning out and their feedback. The festival was a really good opportunity to transmit knowledge of astronomy to the public, especially the youth.

One of the activities that we are planning and where I am taking the leadership is the World Space Week. This year is going to be special since we will be the representatives of Morocco for the launch of the World Space Week all over the world. We will try to include new activities, too.

In collaboration with the Austrian Space Forum, we will use teleconferencing with space flight controllers in the Austrian Space Forum and in the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah so that students here can benefit from the scientists' knowledge.

Also, there is another kind of teleconferencing which entails the controlling of rovers in the desert of Utah. The Mars Desert Research Station in Utah is a mission that the Austrian Space Forum, the Kiwispac Foundation, and the Mars Society have organized and planned in order to have a Mars simulation, just like the one done in the Moroccan desert in Erfoud last February.

Could you briefly explain what the Mars Mission Analog in Erfoud is?

Sara: In collaboration with the Ibn Battuta Center in Marrakech, the Austrian Space Forum selected Morocco to be the test-

ing ground due to the similarity of its terrain to the Mars desert. The Austrian Space Forum carried out simulations of life in Mars, some life-saving and other experiments related to controlling [the rovers] and the spacesuits designed.

Why are you passionate about astronomy? What interests you about it?

Sara: The passion of astronomy is not recent for me – I had this passion since my very early age. I was always looking up to the sky, the stars, and trying to spot shooting stars. I always looked to learn more about astronomy. My parents always helped me with that, with books, and different kind of things.

I remember once, I was very young, maybe 12 years old, and my father bought me a very big book on astronomy, flights, asteroids, and a lot more. I was amazed at how I could like that at an early age. It was like a starting point for me to start thinking there are no limits. Just go for whatever you want and just try it. Why not?

How does the education you are receiving at Al Akhawayn help you explore that passion?

Sara: One of the reasons I joined Al Akhawayn University was the existence of the Astronomy Club. I enrolled at al Akhawayn University as an engineering student but I was even more interested in the club's activities

than in what I was studying. Every time I thought maybe I will have a chance in the astronomy field later on in my career. I said to myself "Let's do it. Why not?". I have been very active within the Astronomy Club.

Also, I got a scholarship with UCLAN (University of Central Lancashire), which is one of 12 scholarships awarded to citizens of African countries to study astronomy. When I applied for this scholarship, I was again just trying it – just doing it. And then I received the email informing me that I was selected among the eleven other people. So, I feel like astronomy is pulling me into it. Really, I feel that astronomy is calling for me.



Al Akhawayn Academics Examine Syrian Crisis in Roundtable Discussion



The Syrian civil war has been a constant item in recent international news, and the topic was brought before Al Akhawayn students for an intellectual discussion.

Al Akhawayn professors Jeremy Gunn, Ahmed Rhazaoui, Angelos Sepos, and John Shoup took part in a roundtable discussion on the topic, September 17, 2013, in a lecture organized by the North African and Middle Eastern Studies (NAMES) program. The panel was moderated by faculty member Driss Maghraoui.

“The objective here is to clarify to our community what are the issues, what are the questions, what are the challenges, and to bring some perspective to it,” said Nizar Messari, Dean of Al Akhawayn School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Shoup discussed the history of Syria, including its status as a regime state and the religious makeup of the country. Rhazaoui discussed the country’s mentality as an Arab leader, its status as a haven for refugees, its lack of foreign influence, and the dichotomy between the have- and have-nots in the country.

“Syria thinks of itself as the leader of the Arab world, as the anchor nation of Arab unity, or pan-Arabism, or Arab socialism,” said Rhazaoui. “Syria considers itself to be the only genuine pan-Arab leader in the region.”

Sepos provided a recap of Libya’s revolution and drew parallels between that nation’s revolutionary story and the current story being played out in Syria. Gunn attempted to holistically examining

the current crisis before reaching a conclusion that it is hard for the outside public to truly understand what is going on in Syria.

Toward the end of the discussion, Maghraoui helped to summarize the viewpoints of the various speakers and provide a summation as to what effect the Syrian civil war may have on the region.

“If you put it in a regional context, whether we are speaking about Syria, or Egypt, or Tunisia, the ultimate success or failure of these different scenarios is going to play an important role for the future of the region,” he said.

President Discusses Core Educational Values and Future Projects



Al Akhawayn President Driss Ouauicha addressed faculty during the General Faculty Convocation held on September 24, 2013, at Al Akhawayn campus.

In his speech, President Ouauicha welcomed new faculty and reminded the attendance of the institution's core values, focusing on recent achievements and future plans. View the full text [here](#).

Al Akhawayn Students Earn Top Honors at International Energy Symposium



Al Akhawayn students rose above the competition to earn top honors at a recent international symposium on renewable energies.

The students, Asmae Berrada ('14) and Aicha Slassi Sennou ('14), spent August 26 to September 6 at the International Summer University on Energy 2013 (ISUenergy 2013), organized by Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin and

conducted in Falera, Switzerland.

They were ranked first in the program among the 53 international Ph.D. and MS students from countries such as Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. The students were awarded a thin film photovoltaic panel as a prize.

The symposium was a two-week interdisciplinary seminar on renewable energies that involved different academic fields and covered topics as diverse as solar cells and materials, photovoltaic systems and applications, sustainability, and smart grids. The students had the opportunity to attend lectures by leading professionals and academics in the field of renewable energy from companies such as Siemens Switzerland and schools such as Princeton University and the University of California, Berkeley.

Student participation in conferences such as ISUenergy 2013 coincides directly with the university's strategic plan to expand co-curricular international experiences for students as well as increase communication and interaction at

the international level.

Academically, Al Akhawayn is fast becoming a leading figure in renewable and sustainable energies in North Africa. In 2011, the university began admitting students to a newly created Master of Science in Sustainable Energy Management program. In May 2013, the Mediterranean Institute of Renewable Energies organized "The First Training Symposium on Renewable Energies in the Mediterranean Region" at Al Akhawayn University. The symposium brought together leading figures in the renewable energies field for an exchange of ideas on how best to manage and develop renewable energies.

In addition to its academic developments, Al Akhawayn is also promoting sustainability internally with projects such as taken the initiative of developing the first "green" educational campus in Morocco and the installation of Africa's first wind hydrogen system .

Spotlights

An article examining the Algerian strategy against Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was recently published by **Djallil Lounnas**, Assistant Professor of International Studies in **Al Akhawayn School of Humanities and Social Sciences**. The article, titled “La Stratégie Algérienne Face à AQMI,” is the third recent contribution Lounnas has made to international journals dealing with the topic of North African politics.

Djallil Lounnas, Assistant Professor of International Studies in **Al Akhawayn School of Humanities and Social Sciences**, has recently published two new articles in prestigious journals. The article, “The regional fallouts of the French intervention in Mali,” appears in Volume 18, Issue 2 of *Mediterranean Politics* and explores the consequences of the January 2013 French military action in Mali. A second article, “Islam et pouvoir dans Lybie Post Khadafi,” appears in Issue 86 of *Confluence Méditerranée* and deals with the theme of religion in a post-Khadafi Lybia.

Christopher Evan Longhurst, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at **Al Akhawayn School of Humanities and Social Sciences**, published an article titled “Forty Years of Modern Art in Vatican City” in *L’Osservatore Romano* (The Roman Observer), the Vatican’s official newspaper, on August 28, 2013. The article takes the reader through the Contemporary Arts Collection at the Vatican Museums and pays tribute to the uninterrupted connection between modern art and religion.

