The promotion and the use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace

The Syrian Virtual University

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Subject: Second report by member states on measures taken to implement the recommendation concerning the promotion and the use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace.

The following is a summary of the activities undertaken by Syrian Virtual University, Damascus, Syria, since its establishment in the context of the promotion and the use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace.

1- Introduction:

The Syrian Virtual University (SVU) is a public academic body of a legal entity status and enjoys financial and administrative autonomy. Headquartered in Damascus, it falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Higher Education as the fifth State-run University in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The SVU was established by Legislative Decree No 25 of 2002, Resolved by President Bashar al-Assad, to respond to the recent developments in the global patterns of higher education, to develop human resources in various scientific disciplines, to meet the needs of economic and social development and labor market and to keep abreast with the requirements for knowledge economy, especially in the areas of Information and Management System, E-Marketing, IT and Internet Technologies.

University Vision

SVU seeks to be amongst highly-ranked, world-class universities, a pioneer of the e-learning trend in the region, a trainer of human resources in accordance with international academic and professional standards, and a provider of national and regional labor market needs in various areas. Also, it seeks to attract the best instructors and researchers and use their expertise in an interactive academic network for communication among learners, teachers and graduates.

2- Development of Multilingual Content and Systems

Since its inception, the SVU has sought to partner with institutions and universities worldwide to meet its strategic goal in building an e-learning system that keeps pace with global systems. In this framework, the SVU established, at the beginning of its work in 2003, business partnerships with a number of universities

in the United States, such as the Baker University, the University of Ohio and Bellevue University. By virtue of such agreements, the SVU provided a high-speed Internet access and an authorized testing center to facilitate the communication between the students and these universities. But the process failed to achieve the intended goal because of the meager number of students who joined the American universities via SVU, mainly due to soaring annual fees of USD 14,000. SVU took this into account in subsequent cooperation agreements concluded with a number of international universities and institutions either by having local teacher participating in part or in whole in the teaching process and reducing significantly the cost. Within this framework, a cooperation agreement was concluded in 2005 with the **University of Greenwich, UK.** According to the agreement, the SVU awards top-up program (taught in English Language) for graduates of Higher National Diploma (HND) and recently to graduates with associate degree in ITC, business administration and marketing from Syrian universities to obtain:

Bachelor Degree in IT

Bachelor degree in Information Technology Business Administration

In this program, curricula, assignments and exams are designed by professors from the University of Greenwich whereas the delivery and students' supervision is carried out by approved SVU tutors. Syrian students have demonstrated superior performance among their peers at various centers of the University of Greenwich. Notwithstanding that peers are following the traditional education pattern and all students present the same homework, projects and exams. This proves the success of the virtual learning system adopted by the university.

A cooperation agreement was also concluded with Edexcel, the largest provider of educational programs in the United Kingdom, to provide program associate degree in IT and administrative applications. In this framework the textbooks were translated into Arabic language. The University offers bilingual learning options in Arabic or English, in line with the approach of the university to develop Arabic e-learning programs continuously updated through cooperation agreements between the university and chosen Arab and international universities and institutions. The university obtained a certificate of academic excellence from Edexcel organization which conducts a periodic review of the educational processes for programs provided in collaboration.

The university also has cooperation programs with French universities. The university embarked on a pilot project with the University of Paul Valery Montpelier III for students who have a scholarship to French universities. The training program takes into consideration the completely different styles and methodology pursed in the French academia in comparison with Syrian universities, often challenging for Syrian students studying in France.

SVU is constantly looking for opportunities to build relationships and joint educational programs with international bodies. In this regard it concluded an

agreement to deliver a **program leading to Master of Science in Communication** (taught in French Language) in cooperation with the University of **Paul Valery Montpelier III,** to be launched in fall of 2011. Another cooperation agreement was also signed with the University of Rouen, France, to deliver two master programs in: "Droit de L'entreprise, and "Economie Appliquí." (taught in French Language).

The SVU also have cooperation agreements with number of universities and academic institutions summarized by the following table:

Country	University	Year	Active (A) / Non Active (NA)
Great Britain	University of Greenwich	2005	A
	University of Portsmouth	2005	NA
	Edexcel	2003	A
	UKEU	2003	NA
USA	Bellevue University	2005	A
	Baker University	2003	A
	Ohio University	2004	NA
	Washington State University	2003	NA
France	UniversitHde Montpelier III	2009	A
	UniversitHde Rouen	2010	A
Germany	Heidelberg	2004	NA
Europe	MEDNET'U Project	2005	NA
Saudi Arabia	Alkhaleej Training and Education (Exam Center)	2008	A
Russia	Moscow State Humanitarian University	2007	A
Malaysia	Multimedia University	2003	NA
Iran	Bayam Nour University	2007	NA
	IUI Virtual University	2005	NA

The University is currently considering cooperation prospects with a number of universities such as:

- University of Wales, UK to offer a joint program in Business Administration.

- University of Ohio, USA: to offer accreditation for the Mass Communication program to be launched in Spring 2011 by SVU.

- University of Bradford, UK: to offer accreditation for a Law Science program currently provided by the university.

It is hoped that the graduate programs in collaboration with international universities will help in the creation of academic relationships between the faculty

members and graduate students and their peers in foreign universities. The anticipated result is conducting research in different relevant fields such as activities on the Internet, distance education and interactive e-content.

Locally Developed Educational Programs:

The University has also developed many educational programs at the bachelor and master levels (both Academic and Vocational), to meet the needs of the national and Arab labor market, especially the recent demands in area related to activities over the internet. The university also introduced within these programs a number of units taught in English language, and demands a good level of spoken and written English from its graduate. The programs offered by the SVU are:

- Undergraduate Degrees:

A Bachelor's degree in Information Systems Engineering: Duration of study: four years in three disciplines: Networks and operating systems, multi-media, software, and intelligent systems (artificial intelligence). Degree holders work as an IT engineer and professional programmer and are able to perform all engineering computer and programming work.

Bachelor's degree in Information Technology: Duration of study is four years. Degree holders work in business management and development of IT solutions in companies and institutions.

A Bachelor degree in Economy: Duration of study: four years in three disciplines: Finance and Banking, Marketing, Management.

A Bachelor degree in Law: Duration of study is four years. Degree holders work in public service, judiciary, police, law and legal studies of all stages.

- Training and Specialization Diploma Program

Diploma in Education: Duration of study is one year. The certificate develops the pedagogical approaches and teaching methods of undergraduates of all disciplines.

- Academic Master Programs:

Duration of the study is two years. Holders can pursue higher studies to obtain a doctorate degree. The University offers currently: Master of Quality Management, Master of Technology Management, and Master of Web Science.

- Vocational Master Programs

Duration of the study is two years and involves a practical project. Graduates can work in Syria but do not qualify to pursue postgraduate studies to obtain a doctorate degree. The University offers currently: Master of Business Administration and Master in Web technologies.

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- Future programs:

The University is also planning to implement a range of new programs, namely:

Program in Mass Communication: In this context, a comprehensive description of program content was designed, taking into account that the proposed program keeps abreast with the latest developments in the media in general and in the field of the Internet in particular. It was also stressed that the program meets the standards of interactivity and quality while seeking to obtain accreditation for the program from international institutions and universities.

Lifelong Learning Program: Under the concept of lifelong learning, this program aims to provide hands-on training in fields and disciplines that meet the development requirements and the labor market needs. The program awards certificates in a variety of disciplines with an immediate focus on the following: Traditional Banking, Islamic Banking, Stock Market, Tourist Facility Management, and Project Management. The certificates will be of international standards and accredited by prestigious institutions.

Arabic Teaching Program for Foreigners: This program aims to serve the Arabic and its learners by using the internet in bridging the gap in the demand for learning and mastering the language and the lack of reliable centers that can meet the demand. In addition, to allow those who wish learn Arabic in their country, especially the expatriate communities, who cannot attend in person to the Arabic Teaching Centres. It will also contribute in

- bridging the growing global need to learn Arabic language and culture.

- enabling the Arabic language locally, regionally and globally.

- Establishing a valid authority of standard Arabic language and literature for foreign learners.

- Providing an international standardized test on mastering fluent Arabic as a foreign language as an accredited test in international universities and institutions.

3. Facilitating Access to Networks and Services

The use of Internet in education has become a strategic trend for many universities around the world. More educational programs and activities are available for students by using the Internet. This trend is supported by studies showing that blending traditional education with modes of communication and the various possibilities offered by the Internet leads to developing the educational process and gives the learner the skills that is growing in demand in the light of the widespread use of the Internet in most human activities. The Syrian Virtual University has played a leading role, since its establishment, in raising awareness of this type of education, which represents the future. It also provides a great

service to Syrian universities being the largest training workshop for hundreds of teachers from these universities on this type of modern education. The SVU also provides constant consultation to other countries in the region in the area of Virtual Learning.

The SVU played as well an active and successful role in the negotiation in 2009, with major Internet Service Providers (Syriatel and Syrian Computer Society, as well as the Ministry of Telecommunications, to get reduced price internet services for students and teachers in Syria.

The SVU provide students with access points inside and outside Syria. The SVU has eighteen centers in Syria servicing every corner of the country. It has also five centers for females and five for males in major cities in Saudi Arabia, and one centre in Dubai. These centers have fast internet access to facilitate attending on line lectures by students, and also used as approved examination centers.

4. Development of Public Domain Content

Syrian Virtual University follows education methods based on scientific material available to the student on the Internet, in addition to synchronized, lectures for direct communication between the student and the instructor that can be recorded and can be accessed by students over the internet anywhere, anytime.

The SVU also provides through its website a specialized electronic libraries and is expanding the options available to help students and researchers to gain access to the latest relevant information.
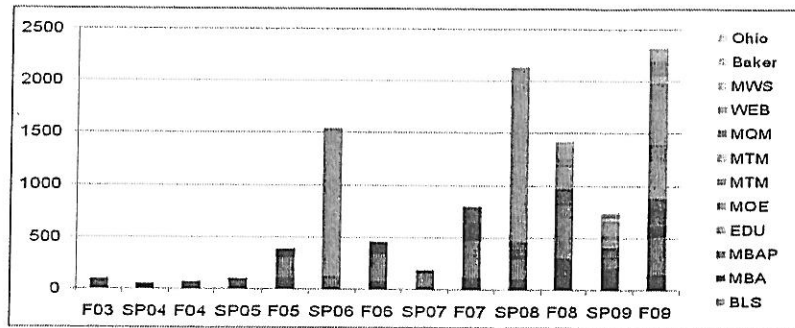
5. Reaffirming the Equitable Balance between the Interests of Rights-holders and the Public Interest

The SVU teach students the importance of Copyright and consider plagiarism as a very serious offence with sever consequences.

6. General Notes

-The SVU success is evident from the growing demand for its services and demonstrated in the following figure showing the number of intake in each term since the foundation of the university. It is currently offering its services to 9000 students.

- Despite the accelerated progress of the Internet services in Syria, it is still costly, limited in availability and insufficient in speed to provide a visual communication between the student and instructor. It is expected to overcome this obstacle, given the rapid progress in the ITC technology worldwide and locally.

- There are misconceptions about virtual education and a need to develop legislation in Arab countries to take it into consideration (regulations and standards). This will enhance the employability of graduates from one line educational programs. It should be emphasized that the output of virtual learning does not differ from the output of traditional education in terms of the level of knowledge and skills that must be demonstrated by the graduate; on the contrary it is superior in areas related to activities over the internet.