

For Immediate Release



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ABLE Summit 2022 sketches roadmap to digital accessibility in higher education

With the aim to shed light on digital accessibility in higher education, boost awareness, charge collective momentum, trigger related initiatives, and create a ripple effect on a national and regional level, the ABLE Summit 2022 was held at the American University of Beirut (AUB). This year's event came after two years of quarantine and socio-economic challenges.

ABLE (Accessibility for a Bolder Learning Experience) is an initiative by the Office of Innovation and Transformation (OIT) in collaboration with the Student Affairs Accessible Education Office (AEO) at AUB. It works on opening the doors of higher education for all through digital accessibility, increasing the retention and success rates of students with disabilities, and supporting their readiness for life after university by developing and deploying accessibility to campus-wide IT resources. ABLE tackles these issues on various levels and from different angles, including assistive technologies, learning content, services, resources, policies, IT facilities and learning spaces, collaboration platforms, and inclusive IT support.

The event

The two-day event brought together renowned international experts from leading organizations around the globe. The speakers worked on transferring the knowledge of digital accessibility to the MENA region, as well as building capacity through practical themed workshops. The event also included an assistive technology exhibition that showcased accessibility solutions for users and organizations.

The two-day event kicked off with a keynote address delivered by AUB Chief Information Officer Yousif Asfour on behalf of AUB President Fadlo Khuri. He said, “The Accessibility for a Bolder Learning Experience initiative is a success story we are all proud of and it is an example of how vision and dedication can lead to meaningful action and subsequent positive change.”

He added, “This includes access to quality, state of the art higher education and employment beyond that. It includes the right to access civic, recreational, political, and participation opportunities that we fervidly champion through accessibility offices, programs, and initiatives.”

Ford Foundation President Darren Walker, the event’s guest of honor, also addressed the attendees in a video message saying, “The good news is that digital applications are often seen as offering hope, helping enhance efficiency and effectiveness in all its walks of life. Digital economies are drivers of growth and accumulation of wealth on individual, national, and global levels. The bad news, however, is if we fail to exercise heightened vigilance, digitization will be yet another human endeavor that makes some services efficient, and some people rich, while leaving societies unequal, and polarized with millions of people unable to fulfil their potential.”

Walker continued, “Digitization needs to be purposely attentive to inclusion. Inclusive digital accessibility in education, the subject of this summit, is a way to ensure that we do no harm and expand the good. Inclusive digital accessibility in education can integrate students with disabilities, and open doors to everyone, leaving no one behind.”

Sessions were held in various collaborative formats between talks and panel discussions covering human rights, abled experiences and success stories, leading practices and trends, and new outlooks. While the capacity building workshops covered key pillars for accessibility implementation such as governance and institutional policies and regulations, e-accessibility, student success, and independent living. The closing session featured the ABLE Advisory Board’s recommendations and suggested roadmap to achieving digital accessibility in higher education in Lebanon. The summit ended with prize distribution for the 4 accessibility competitions and a donation of assistive technologies by DASS Solutions.

The event was crowned with artistic greetings by the Lebanese School for the Blind and Deaf (LSBD) choral, Acsauvel’s "The Prophet" play performance, with Dalia Friefer singing and Tony Jadoun on violin.

Event accessibility arrangements included accessible website and registration forms, personalized accommodation, live streaming, multi lingual dimensions, Lebanese sign language, American sign language, international sign language, live transcription, English to Arabic translation, braille printed program, and escort services for attendees who requested on-site assistance. The audience also had the opportunity to use color-coded cards for inclusive engagement with speakers, to indicate that they understood what was being said, they agreed, they requested that the speakers slow down, or that the speakers provide further explanation.

In an effort to ensure continued knowledge dissemination and access to all, content delivered during the summit will be made available for the public on the ABLE Library page at a later stage.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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