

For Immediate Release



AUB trains high school math and science teachers on free, interactive teaching tools

Beirut, Lebanon- 30/01/2013 -The American University of Beirut Science and Mathematics Education Center (SMEC) conducted a special two-hour workshop for high school teachers to introduce them to an interactive, free, downloadable teaching tool for science and math education.

Entitled “MIT BLOSSOMS: Video-Enhanced Teaching of Science and Mathematics in High School Classrooms,” the introductory workshop took place on January 28, 2013. Developed by two US educators, the BLOSSOMS initiative, which is an acronym for Blended Learning Open Source Science or Math Studies, now boasts a free online repository of “interactive” video lessons created by gifted volunteer educators from various countries for high school math and science classes. The BLOSSOMS lessons are available in a widely accessible video format.

“With today’s computer and telecommunications technologies, every young person can have a quality education regardless of his or her place of birth or wealth of parents,” said Richard C. Larson, BLOSSOMS principal investigator, MIT Engineering Systems Division Mitsui Professor and founder and director of MIT LINC (Learning International Networks Consortium). “When viewed as a right rather than a privilege, this is the dream that open educational resources are directed to realize, as currently all are affected by the competitive forces of expanding economic globalization.”

“A BLOSSOMS lesson is not a lecture, or a typical lesson from a textbook, or a passive experience for students,” said Elizabeth Murray, BLOSSOMS project manager. “It is an active learning experience for students which approaches the topic from a new direction, connects math and science with the real world, offering an interactive learning experience.”

“We consider a BLOSSOMS lesson to be a very powerful tool, a means for high school students to access ideas that are of interest to researchers in universities,” said Tamer Amin, AUB assistant professor of education and SMEC director. “It offers students a way to see the topics of their curriculum from a new perspective; from the point of view of investigators trying to understand something new about the world. The BLOSSOMS videos make this available in classrooms wherever they are.”

BLOSSOMS founders Larson and Murray came up with the concept while watching a videotape which enlivened the cold bleak atmosphere of a rural classroom during a visit to China. The teacher, pausing the videotape from time to time to engage with the class, appeared

effective but awkward, prompting Larson and Murray to wonder what would happen if they created video lessons that were designed to be interactive.

“Widely misunderstood, difficult to teach subjects that have real world application are good BLOSSOMS model candidates,” said Murray.

“The most valuable natural resources of a country lie buried between the ears of its citizens,” emphasized Larson. “We want to move away from memorization and rote learning to engage students in non-textbook situations like observation, experiment and discussion, and fuel their critical and lateral thinking.”

To date, partnering universities include University of Jordan, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Pakistan Virtual University, University of the Punjab (Pakistan), AUB, Notre Dame University (Lebanon), UTM -Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (Saudi Arabia). Classes are conducted and available in English, Arabic, Urdu and Portuguese with other languages soon to be included.

While MIT faculty members and partnering educators in Jordan and Pakistan created the first BLOSSOMS lessons, today, educators from around the world, create and submit BLOSSOMS modules. MIT BLOSSOMS will soon partner with 1001 Inventions to create 12 video lessons that explore early Muslim math and science thought leaders.

The workshop included presentation of BLOSSOMS classes prepared by Lebanese professors: Rabih Talhouk’s (AUB biology department) “Tissue Specific Gene Expression;” F. Jordan Srour’s (LAU business school) and George Turkiyyah’s (AUB computer science department) “Who do You Know? The Theory Behind Social Networking;” and Nabil Nassif’s (AUB mathematics department) “Rational Numbers Versus Irrational Numbers.”

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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 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the 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 420-bed hospital.

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