

For Immediate Release



## **CSR in Action: AUB student-led team develops app that helps offer a safer driving experience**

Beirut, Lebanon- 19/03/2014 - An AUB-led team has developed a mobile phone application that bars any text messaging applications when mobile users are in a vehicle that goes over a preset speed. App developers recommend the speed to be set at around 10-20 km/hr.

Dubbed “Text or Drive,” the much-needed application was a finalist in the 2014 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) competition, whose results were announced during a ceremony on March 14, 2014. Led by AUB student Christel Abi Akl, who came up with the idea for the app after getting into a minor car accident while texting, the team also include co-developer Charbel Maroun, a student from the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik.

The application received second prize after fierce competition with another project that helps disabled people to become financially independent, created by students from the Ecole Supérieure des Affaires (ESA).

Held at the Olayan School of Business’ Maamari Auditorium, the ceremony wrapped up a four-month program called CSR in Action whose aim is to develop and enhance the practice and awareness of CSR activities among practitioners and increase students’ understanding of the concept. The program engages academia and the public and private sectors to develop strategies that are more responsive to public needs.

“CSR in Action is in line with the university’s strategic objective of fostering its students’ responsibility towards the community and encouraging them to lead and develop creative initiatives that would exemplify this responsibility,” said OSB Associate Dean Dima Jamali.

On November 14, 2013, UAE-based Al Ahli Holding Group’s CSR division, in partnership with AUB and Ecole Supérieure des Affaires (ESA), organized the four-month “CSR in Action” program in Lebanon, with 60 participants (20 percent CSR practitioners and 80 percent students) at AUB and ESA.

CSR Al Ahli Holding Group’s main aim is to develop Arab youth, building their skills and widening their horizons and exposure. Al Ahli Holding Group is a multi-disciplined national company with a total of 20 diverse and growing businesses. The group’s latest mixed-use development is the Dubai Outlet City.

“We had the opportunity to be in what I call severe training to become agents of change providing a path to a future that is more sustainable, equitable, and desirable,” said team leader Christel Abi Akl, “The roots of change are in our spirit now and we are willing to go forward into

making this world a better place. It is thanks to such initiatives that youth can be given the opportunity to feel professional, knowledgeable and able to achieve on their own.”

Abi-Akl, along with co-developer Charbel Maroun, wanted something with a different angle, away from the usual routine of catering for the underprivileged, poor, and elderly. Being part of the “connected” generation who are always “on the go,” they wanted to give their peers, who are always chatting, playing, taking pictures and following the news on their mobiles, a safer driving experience. Most motorists in surveys support the ban on texting while driving and were highly in favor of such an application.

The closing ceremony included prominent guest speakers, a showcase of the projects developed by the participants and a keynote speech, titled “Building a Sustainable future: Helping Social Entrepreneurs Grow to Scale,” by Rana Salhab, the regional talent and communications partner at Deloitte & Touche Middle East, and a range of short presentations in relation to CSR projects with practical and social implications.

“Businesses should drive development by identifying the obstacles to social and economic progress and becoming part of the solutions to these obstacles,” said Salhab. “There are opportunities for big business to learn from, and benefit by association with, a sector that is leading perceptions about social and environmental responsibility.”

Salhab, who is an active champion of women’s advancement, corporate social responsibility, and youth skills-building initiatives in the MENA region, considered that serving unmet needs such as employment, environment, housing, infrastructure and other challenges require all stakeholders to work together, and these include governments, businesses, NGOs, and social entrepreneurs in addressing these challenges.

The four projects that made it to the finals, including “Text and Drive,” were the winner LB Bags, a project designed to empower people with disabilities and offer them financial independence; “Paper Use” meant to prolong the life of paper in circulation and thus save trees and the environment; and “Donate A Pen,” an action aimed at supporting and revamping public schools through gifts and donations.

The panel of judges consisted of: Leila Sawaya El Khoury, Project Manager at Investment Development Authority of Lebanon; Khalil Gebara, Political Finance and Anti-Corruption Consultant at Free-Lance; Rami Majzoub, Advisor to the minister of Telecoms, Fundraiser at LAU, President of Rotary Club Beirut Cedars; Afif Tabch, Deputy Operations Manager at CMCS, Advisor at Aie Serve, VP at PMI Lebanon; and Samir Azizi, Phd Candidate in CSR at Copenhagen Business School.

The judgment criteria were based on impact, project implementation, sustainability and reach.

“This action is crucial as we cannot constantly keep copying from the West but need to develop our own concepts,” said jury member Azizi, a PhD candidate at the Copenhagen Business School. “It might seem a bit chaotic at first but order will soon arise out of the chaos.”

“The core message lies in empowering students to steer for change in their surrounding communities and be innovative in tackling social and environmental challenges, developing and enhancing the practice and awareness of CSR activities,” said Jamali. “We hope to inspire AUB students by the projects that were developed by this year’s CSR in Action participants, which in turn will motivate them to come up with novel ideas in the future for the benefit of society.”

## Story Highlights

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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 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 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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