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MIT offers free access to e-learning experience



Her Majesty Queen Rania speaks to participants in the MIT-organised 4th Annual Conference for Education Networks on Sunday (Petra photo)

By Linda Hindi

DEAD SEA - The majority of the world's population cannot access higher education but anyone who can use the Internet can obtain a quality tertiary education with hundreds of free courses offered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

By logging on to www.ocw.mit.edu, educators and students can access over 1,700 MIT courses including exams through their OpenCourseWare (OCW).

The free publication of course materials offers the opportunity to study a great variety of subjects through downloads which include lecture videos, notes and demonstrations.

Urging students from around the globe to utilise this educational tool, MIT's Learning International Networks Consortium (LINC) brought its fourth annual conference to the Dead Sea yesterday, the first time outside of the US, to focus on technology-leveraged higher education in emerging nations.

The conference, whose academic host was the University of Jordan, was held under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania just after a visit by the Queen to the MIT campus this week.

LINC is a consortium of international educators who are interested in using distance and e-Learning technologies to help developing countries increase access to quality university education.

The MIT-managed international initiative began in 2001 to operate under a premise that is "simple and compelling".

“With today’s computer and telecommunications technologies, every young person can have a quality education regardless of his or her place of birth,” according to an MIT statement.

The founder and director of LINC, Richard Larson, conveyed this message during his opening address to hundreds of participants, many of whom were local professors and high school teachers.

“Until recently, the assets of a country lie buried underground, such as oil, gas, gold, silver and diamonds. Today, the key assets of a country lie buried between the ears of its citizens... Educating the mind is the key to a better tomorrow for all,” Larson added.

OCW does not grant degrees or certificates but several professors who attended the symposium told The Jordan Times that it was an excellent resource for educators who want to learn different approaches and new information for their students.

Deputising for Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Khalid Touqan, Secretary General of the Ministry of Education for Educational and Technical Affairs Tayseer Nahar told participants that e-Learning is part of Jordan’s overall 2007-2012 educational strategy.

“The overall aim of the strategy is to make the sector more relevant in programmes... and, hence, more competitive, both regionally and internationally. One major component is devoted entirely to technical and technological education, within which the expansion of e-Learning is a key element,” Nahar said.

Earlier this year, conference organisers agreed to hold the event in Jordan, describing the Kingdom as “the centre of change in the Middle East”. The LINC director told The Jordan Times in August that “the conference was also invited to Mexico and to Ireland, but we selected Jordan, a country that values highly quality education for its people and has launched major initiatives in education”.

The conference, which ends today, brought together scientists, scholars, researchers, education and business leaders and university professors from around 40 nations.

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