Heiskell Award Category: International Exchange Partnerships or Internationalizing the Campus

Name of Institution: University of Georgia

Name of Program: The UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership: A Complex Systems Approach to International Education and Development

Nomination Submitted by:
Name: Dr. Takoi K. Hamrita
Title: Associate Professor
Organization: Director of the UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership
Address: Driftmier Engineering Center
Tel: (706) 308 7460
Email: thamrita@uga.edu

Program Website (if applicable): www.tunisia.uga.edu

Summary of Program (50-100 words):
The UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership is a university wide international collaboration based on an innovative complex systems approach. Engaging and integrating university, government, and community resources for substantial and sustainable international development and university globalization, the partnership is supporting reform efforts of the Tunisian ministry of higher education, fulfilling UGA’s global mission of public service and outreach, and furthering campus internationalization, while contributing to better understanding between the US and the Arab world and to the openness, interconnectedness, and internationalization of higher education.
Expanding the bounds of university international cooperation through leadership, collaboration and learning.

An international cooperation portfolio...
The University of Georgia (UGA)-Tunisia Educational Partnership was initiated in 2002 when Engineering Professor Takoi Hamrita created a vision for a university wide international collaboration with her home country Tunisia following a complex systems approach. Engaging and integrating university, government, and community resources for substantial and sustainable international development and university globalization, the partnership aims to:

Support reform efforts of the Tunisian ministry of higher education and Tunisian universities in:
- Increasing impact on social and economic development and tuning to international standards
- Building a sustainable e-learning environment
- Promoting civic engagement among elementary, secondary, and university students
- Strengthening the connection between higher education and K-12

And support UGA’s efforts in:
- Fulfilling its global mission of public service and outreach
- Furthering campus internationalization
- Building UGA’s capacity to collaborate with an Arab Muslim country

Through:
- Enabling human resource development programs and creative pilot projects
- Fostering of multidisciplinary international networks and learning communities
- Creation and stimulation of opportunities for joint research, teaching, and service projects
- Engagement of graduate and undergraduate students in project goals through teaching, research, and service learning opportunities

While:
- Promoting faculty leadership in campus globalization and international development
- Expanding the role of the Engineering Professor in social and global development
- Promoting the scholarship of international education and engagement
- Creating an innovative model for international education and development using a complex systems approach, therefore contributing to the openness, interconnectedness, and internationalization of higher education.
- Contributing to better understanding between the US and the Arab world

Within a few years, the UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership has become one of UGA’s most successful, productive, and visible international programs. Similarly it is praised by Tunisian higher education leaders and the U.S. State department as one of the most innovative and effective educational partnerships between Tunisia and the US. A number of special characteristics have allowed this program to distinguish itself:

Innovative Complex Systems Approach

Several competing and complex factors come into play in international partnerships particularly when the partners come from vastly different backgrounds. A critical factor in the success of the UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership is that, from its inception, it has been based on a thoughtful conceptual framework. The program was designed with the primary focus of advancing higher education in Tunisia. Considering the interconnectedness and complexity of the work involved in this high-level undertaking, we’ve had tremendous and unique opportunities for resource and knowledge integration, improved connectivity of all university functions, and overcoming of institutional, disciplinary, and role barriers. This has contributed to a climate in which individuals from an array of disciplines, universities, specialties, languages, titles, and affiliations, contribute to the program in a way that benefits them while adhering to the partnership’s strategic focus and a greater common good as opposed to individual interests. The success of the UGA Tunisia educational partnership is the culmination of efforts of this passionate alliance of people and their communal investment of energy and dedication is what allowed the program to flourish. The attached table provides an overview of the partnership network and the diverse backgrounds of its members.

Timeliness of Program and Need for Action
No one would deny that building bridges between Arab countries and the U.S. has become more important and more urgent than ever. Moreover, according to the UNESCO higher education in the Arab world is “under considerable strain” and has fallen short of producing graduates that are capable of anticipating social problems and contributing to solving them. The report attributes this in part to the weakness of links between higher education institutions, secondary and elementary education, local communities, and societal and human development needs. Additionally in Tunisia, the number of students seeking higher education is expected to grow from 300,000 to 500,000 by the year 2010. Therefore, one of the highest concerns of the Tunisian government is increased access through e-learning. This is a very interesting time in Tunisia as the entire country is engaged in higher education reform. It’s a very exciting time for UGA because we earned the respect and trust of the Tunisian Government and our partner universities and they are counting on us to engage with them in this massive undertaking of almost doubling access to higher education and revitalizing and modernizing the education system.

**Documented Results and Large-Scale Impact in Short Time Frame**

*Cultivation of Substantial Financial and Programmatic Support:* The partnership’s complex systems approach has enabled the leveraging of substantial University, State, and federal resources for large scale impact. So far, the U.S. State Department alone has invested about 1 Million dollars in this program. The partnership has also been successful in cultivating invaluable support of UGA and Tunisian leaders.

*Substantial Results in Meeting Increased Access Demands Through E-Learning:* Through dozens of intensive and holistic human resource development programs, continuous dialogue and self assessment, state-of-the-art teaching pedagogy, fostering of a collaborative framework and leadership opportunities, and building of social and human connections among participants, our partnership has created a large multidisciplinary collaborative network of highly trained, highly mobilized professors and e-learning professionals who have been promoting and advancing e-learning in Tunisia. This network has become a national driving force in Tunisia, and has so far developed dozens of courses and multiple degree programs many of which are currently on-line serving hundreds of students. They have been disseminating e-learning expertise throughout the country. Recently, they have established an e-learning NGO called APREV. This NGO is ensuring the sustainability of the collaborative effort among its members and expanding the network on a continual basis. The NGO will hold its first international conference in December.

*Expanding the Role of Tunisian Higher Education through Community Engagement:* While the Tunisian higher education system has a history of outreach in agriculture, and a growing commitment to business development, there is little precedence for the extension of university resources to the community. Unlike the American system where the university is intertwined with the community through both research and service, Tunisian universities have traditionally been removed from social and community concerns. Through workshops and community based projects, the UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership has been working to strengthen the links between the higher education system, K-12 education, and the community in Tunisia and promoting civic engagement.

*A Service Learning Course* for multidisciplinary teams of UGA and non-UGA students was recently created to provide undergraduate and graduate students with the opportunity to work side by side with UGA and Tunisian project network members, and Tunisian university and K-12 students to contribute to partnership objectives while gaining a unique international experience at UGA and in Tunisia. In particular, the course is aimed at promoting collaboration between university and K-12 education in Tunisia and addressing community and civic engagement needs through arts and sciences. Several UGA and Tunisian faculty will rotate taking the lead for this course which has already begun to attract students from many countries with diverse and interesting backgrounds. Similarly, we are working with the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education to introduce service learning for credit into the university curriculum.

*Supporting the Creation of a New Culture of Self Evaluation, Assessment, and Accreditation:* The partnership Program has been working with the Tunisian higher education system to increase institutional effectiveness through university management and leadership development, establishment of effective mechanisms within Tunisian universities for self assessment, increased accountability and evaluation of institutions, programs, and
educational outcomes, quality assurance and accreditation. We have so far hosted several workshops and exchanges which connect Tunisian administrators with UGA counterparts, showcase the American higher education system, and emphasize assessment and leadership development. Our efforts have attracted additional collaborators from European universities, and we are looking forward to the synergy that will develop as three distinct university systems collaborate on this important issue in higher education.

**Substantial Benefits to Students- More than Just Study Abroad:** The Partnership Program has provided an excellent multidisciplinary platform for graduate and undergraduate students from both countries to work with a diverse group of experts from both countries and to be immersed in an ongoing international experience. Whether through participation in the program as graduate research assistants, workshop trainers and presenters, service learning course participants or volunteers helping with partnership logistics and participating in social and cultural programs, students from both countries are having a unique international educational experience while contributing to very important national reform initiatives of the Tunisian higher education system.

**Community Building, Campus Enrichment, and Increased Understanding:** The partnership’s systems approach has allowed for community building and the promotion of cultural understanding to be a deliberate and integral part of the program design and not just a casual byproduct. We have built collaborative ties with schools of music and fine arts and performing art centers to enrich our programs with cultural exchange. We have hosted multiple cultural events and receptions involving guests from UGA and Tunisia. We have made arrangements for intensive Arabic language training for UGA project participants, and English training for Tunisian Participants. We have provided several opportunities for the Tunisian Ambassador in the U.S. to visit our campus and give public lectures about U.S. Arab relations. Similarly, we have provided opportunities for the U.S. Ambassador in Tunisia to interact with program participants in Tunisia. We have engaged the Athens community in our programs including the Mayor of Athens, and recently there has been interest in making Athens a “Sister City” to the coastal Tunisian city of Sousse. We have built collaborative ties with the Tunisian-American community; recently over 100 Tunisian-Americans from all over the U.S. gathered on the UGA campus to celebrate the UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership.

**Communication, Dissemination, and Advancement of International Education:** The UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership has been widely publicized and disseminated both nationally and internationally. So far, we have had 5 UGA and 7 Tunisian press releases, 16 feature articles, and 4 Tunisian National TV appearances. There have been 10 references to our program on other University websites. We have developed an educational website which in addition to publicizing our program and supporting and facilitating project management, collaboration, and network building is providing a venue for program dissemination. The website gets hundreds of hits on a regular daily basis, and we are often contacted by other faculty who are inspired by the program. Additionally, the Partnership Director was invited to present about the program at multiple international conferences including the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the International Conference on the University & Civil Society, and the IEEE International Conference on Web-Based Learning. She has given 18 presentations to professional groups including politicians, university leadership, faculty and students. Several books, conference papers, and manuscripts are being prepared by our network to further disseminate our programs to the international higher education community.

**Looking Ahead**

We have built a bridge with a “Super Highway” for sustainable mutually beneficial multifaceted collaboration between UGA and Tunisia. Our partnership is continually developing potential and momentum through intense collaborations with several different levels simultaneously and a large investment in individual relationships to create a sense of ownership and passion for partnership goals. With each person enthusiastically invested in our programs, a larger group of people become aware of the possibilities of the partnership’s work and push this initiative beyond our expectations towards shared goals. We have been contacted by other Arab countries and other U.S. universities who would like to join our efforts, and we are excited about the opportunities which lie ahead.
Tunisia honors UGA engineering professor for work on Middle East partnership

Writer: Alan Flurry, 706/542-7825, aflurry@uga.edu
Contact: Takoi Hamrita, 706/542-1973, thamrita@uga.edu
May 4, 2007, 14:35

Athens, Ga. – The president of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, has bestowed one of his country’s highest honors upon his fellow citizen and UGA engineering professor Takoi K. Hamrita. The Republic Medal of Merit in Education and Science recognizes Hamrita’s successful efforts to help shape the future of higher education in Tunisia through innovative pilot projects and training programs in distance learning, university management and evaluation and university public service and outreach.

The national award is a result of one of UGA’s most successful and productive international partnership programs, the UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership. As the project’s founding director, Hamrita leveraged support from the U.S. Department of State, the Tunisian government, UGA, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia and Tunisian universities to forge a new model of international educational collaboration. Since 2002, the partnership has provided for the exchange of more than 100 individuals including faculty, staff, administrators and students from UGA and several Tunisian universities, representing dozens of departments and disciplines.

By providing a forum for faculty from multiple disciplines and universities to collaborate on important national initiatives, the partnership has established a wide constituency within Tunisia. Inspiring a culture of active and engaged faculty eager to promote good teaching and affect institutional change culminated in the creation of a Tunisian e-learning association by partnership program alumni. For UGA, the project has created a sustainable presence for university-level collaboration in the Arab-Muslim world, representing crucial new opportunities for faculty and students.

“Tunisia honors UGA engineering professor for work on Middle East partnership”

“Tunisia honors UGA engineering professor for work on Middle East partnership”

“Tunisia honors UGA engineering professor for work on Middle East partnership”

“The UGA Tunisia Educational Partnership forged by Dr. Hamrita dovetails precisely with the UGA core missions of teaching, research and public service and supports UGA’s strategic direction toward competing in a global economy,” said Arnett C. Mace Jr., senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at UGA. "The scale and diversity of participants and disciplines Dr. Hamrita have engaged in this partnership has instilled it with a sense of innovation that serves UGA and Tunisian universities with remarkable ingenuity and an eye toward the future”.

Hamrita, 22 years after leaving her native Tunisia to study electrical engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology, is realizing in the partnership the means to achieve personal goals by creating opportunities for others.

“When you grow up in a developing country, academic achievement is central to your life and you grow up with aspirations to change the world,” she says. Where once she was concerned that her field of engineering would too narrowly define her career, the systems approach Hamrita uses to guide the partnership has opened new professional arenas as well as reconnecting her with Tunisia in a capacity in which she can help mold its future.

The UGA-Tunisia Educational Partnership was established by grants from the U.S. State Department’s Middle East Partnership Initiative and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs as well as support from the University of Georgia and the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education.

For more information on the UGA-Tunisia Education Partnership and Hamrita’s award, please visit www.tunisia.uga.edu.
** Indicates Number of People who Spent at Least One Week in Partner Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnership Participant Demographics</th>
<th>From GA</th>
<th>**</th>
<th>From Tunisia</th>
<th>**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Participants</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Participants</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Participants</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Administrators</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGA Public Service and Outreach</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Students</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomats</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA Board of Regents participants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGA schools and colleges involved</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of disciplines involved</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGA Administrative and outreach units</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisian Universities involved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>