ABOUT SPHERE

Private Higher Education Institutions in Kuwait are relatively nascent with the oldest being around for just over a decade. Nonetheless, they are reshaping the higher education scene in the country by providing an alternative dynamic educational experience. With this potential educational experience come great challenges.

SPHERE, the Symposia for Private Higher Education – Road to Excellence, were started in an attempt to address the challenges facing this sector and provide a road map to better serve its goals. The SPHERE series were originally designed as a biennial event co-organized by the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS). The activities within SPHERE draw on the exchange of knowledge and expertise using presentations by speakers renowned in the field and round-table discussions on international best practices in higher education.

The theme for each SPHERE symposium sheds light on a particular challenge facing the private higher education. SPHERE 2015 was the first symposium; it addressed “Opportunities & Challenges”. The theme for SPHERE 2017 symposium revolved around the role of research and development in enhancing the mission of Private Higher Education Institutions in Kuwait. The evolution in educational technology has presented a pedagogical paradigm shift where e-learning has become an integral component. That is why this year’s topic will cover “E-Learning”.

E-Learning
ABOUT KFAS

The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences was established in 1976 by an Amiri Decree under the direction of the late Amir of Kuwait, H. H. Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with a vision to create and nurture a thriving culture of science, technology, and innovation for a sustainable Kuwait.

KFAS operations are funded by contributions from the private shareholding companies of Kuwait as part of their corporate social responsibility. The contributions currently amount to one percent (1%) of their annual net profit.

KFAS mission to “stimulate and catalyze the advancement of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for the benefit of society, researchers, and enterprise in Kuwait,” continues to be at the heart of all the Foundation’s activities and plans.

Since its creation, KFAS has successfully established a number of dedicated research and educational centers of excellence in Kuwait which are The Scientific Center, Dasman Diabetes Institute, Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness & Creativity, and Jaber Al-Ahmad Center for Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging. These centers are recognized as world-class facilities and pioneering scientific research institutes. In addition, KFAS has established Al Taqaddum Al Elmi Company, the Foundation’s publishing arm and most recently, KFAS Academy, an online university for continued education.

The limited resources for R&D and STI in Kuwait present constraints and challenges in the drive towards a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, the new 2017-2021 strategy aims to work with the government to help increase in multiple folds the rate of government funding of research to reach the minimum international average of 1% of GDP by the year 2020. With the conclusion of the previous five-year strategy and the commencement of the next 2017-2021 strategy, KFAS is continuing to contribute towards the creation of a rich scientific culture in Kuwait and to enable a sustainable and robust knowledge based economy.
ABOUT ACK

Established in 2004, ACK is one of the first private universities in Kuwait. The College offers world-class higher education on home ground through international learning partnerships. Courses of study are available at diploma and bachelor degree levels and in specializations within Engineering, Business, Aviation and Maritime studies.

ACK offers a personalized approach to learning where each student has an academic advisor who is available for scholastic and career guidance. At the same time, ACK places importance on the overall College experience and accordingly a wide range of sporting and club activities are available so that students can pursue their hobbies and interests with others and establish lifelong friendships.

The experiential model of learning at ACK enables students to graduate not only with academic knowledge but also with workplace related skills and attitude so they are job ready. Project Based Learning (PBL) and Conceive, Design, Implement and Operate (CDIO) are proven methods of learning whereby students work on team or individual projects to research an industry or business issue and then develop strategies, processes and products as solutions.

Internships within local places of employment, and even internationally, also create the opportunity for students to work alongside existing staff and gain first-hand experience in their desired career field.
SPHERE STEERING COMMITTEE

Prof. Mohamed Al-Rumaihi
Head of Symposium & Board of Trustees Member - ACK

Prof. Tariq Al-Dowaisan
Professor of Industry Engineering at Kuwait University

Dr. Ziad Najem
Chief Executive Officer of KFAS Academy

Prof. Isam Zabalawi
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Dr. Usameh Jamali
Advisor to the President - ACK
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08:30-09:00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:00-09:05</td>
<td>Holy Quran</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| 09:05-09:30   | **Opening Session:**  
|               |  
|               | **Prof. Habib Taher Abul**  
|               | Secretary General- General secretariat, Private Universities Council  
|               | **Dr. Adnan Shihab Eldin**  
|               | Director General, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences  
|               | **Prof. Mohammed Al-Rumaihi**  
|               | Head of Symposium - Board of Trustees Member, Australian College of Kuwait |
| 09:30 - 10:00 | **Session 1: The International Experience of E-Learning, Status, Pros & Cons, Trends & Challenges.**  
|               | **Speaker:** **Mr. Alastair Dawson**  
|               | Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, International and Services Division at Central Queensland University (CQU).  
|               | **Chairperson:** **Prof. Isam Zabalawi**  
|               | President, Australian College of Kuwait                               |
| 10:00-10:30   | Break                                                                  |
|               | **Session 2: The current status and the Future of E-Learning; Advantages & Disadvantages, Challenges, Proposed Solutions & Recommendations.**  
|               | **Case Studies:**  
|               | **A. University of Jordan's experience in implementing blended learning**  
|               | **Speaker:** **Prof. Ahmad Majdoubeh**  
|               | Vice President for Humanities, University of Jordan (UJ).  
|               | **B. E-learning Evolution in Saudi Higher Education Institutions: KAU**  
|               | **Speaker:** **Dr. Hisham Bardesi**  
|               | Dean of Distance Learning Deanship at King Abdulaziz University (KAU).  
|               | **Chairperson:** **Prof. Tariq Al-Dowaisan**  
|               | Professor of Industry Engineering, Kuwait University                   |
| 12:00-12:30   | Break                                                                  |
| 12:30-13:00   | **Session 3: The Arabic Digital Content and the E-Learning Environment**  
|               | **Speaker:** **Prof. Ghassan Mourad**  
|               | Professor of Computational Linguistics at The Lebanese University.  
|               | **Chairperson:** **Dr. Ziad Najem**  
|               | Chief Executive Officer, KFAS Academy                                  |
| 13:00-13:30   | **Session 4: The Bridging to E-Learning Environment**  
|               | **Speaker:** **Prof. Thomas Ryberg**  
|               | Professor of Digital Learning in the Department of Communication and Psychology at Aalborg University (AAU).  
|               | **Chairperson:** **Dr. Usameh Jamali**  
|               | Advisor to the President, Australian College of Kuwait                  |
| 13:30-14:00   | **Discussion Session**  
|               | **Moderator:** **Prof. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh**  
|               | **Members:** **Mr. Alastair Dawson**  
|               | **Dr. Hisham Bardesi**  
|               | **Prof. Ghassan Mourad**  
|               | **Prof. Thomas Ryberg**                                                |
| 14:00-15:00   | Lunch                                                                  |
SESSION ONE

The International Experience of E-Learning, Status, Pros & Cons, Trends & Challenges.

Mr. Alastair Dawson
Vice President and Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor at CQUniversity, Australia

Biography

Alastair Dawson is a visionary and strategic execution specialist with extensive experience in business transformation, new business development, leading staff and organisational development, building organisational success through collaboration and creating financial and operational sustainability within sound governance frameworks. A Respected University Executive with more than 25 years’ of experience in driving organisational improvement through entrepreneurial goal setting and execution, business realignment, disruptive innovation and effective execution of strategy. His pre-university career includes experience as a Senior Water and Wastewater Executive, Marketing and Business Development Executive, Chief Executive Officer for a number of regional governments in Australia (Beaudesert Regional Council, Rockhampton Regional Council) and a national agricultural advocacy agency (Victorian Farmers Federation).

As Vice President and Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor at CQUniversity; He has applied his extensive experience in leading disruptive technologies to leading University’s response to the digital age over the past decade. During this period he led the development of campuses and IT platforms for CQUniversity, a national vocational and higher education provider with the largest Australian university footprint of 26 campuses and study hubs across Australia and now into South East Asia.

Today, more than 60% of the University’s student population utilizes, in some form, e-Learning as the basis of their education at CQUniversity and this has assisted the University in having one of the highest graduating salary level for students and employment level for graduates nationally. He is currently developing an online presence through South East Asia, supporting governments in regions like Indonesia who recognizes the future value of online learning.
Abstract

The higher education sector globally has undergone a period of rapid and potentially disruptive change since the turn of the century. The expansion of e-learning within the higher education sector has accelerated over the past decade, in part fed by advances in new technologies refined through the phenomenon of massive open and open courses (MOOCS). On a global scale it is expected that over the next twenty years the sector will face even greater disruptive change to the delivery of e-learning platforms as it becomes more universally endorsed as a vehicle for learning by governments and higher education providers across the globe. The changes will be driven primarily by constantly evolving technology, such as artificial intelligence, and almost certainly, in some part, by government policy as nations both come to accept the legitimacy of online learning and its ability to provide much greater access to quality education at a more affordable price point.

This paper examines the pros, cons, trends and challenges associated with the ongoing development of e-learning across the globe and seeks to briefly examine the future direction of e-learning as technology evolves and intersects with new modes of learning, with some focus on considering the role technology has played juxtaposed to that of policy and place. The challenge that emerges is an unresolved paradoxical tension between three key drivers of disruptive change impacting the higher education and vocational education sector: policy and politics, technologies, and the power of online against the traditional power of place.

This paper will hopefully demonstrate that, whilst there are many challenges in providing high quality online education (e-learning), it is increasingly becoming one of the most sought after and effective modes of delivery of higher education across wider markets. In particular, e-learning delivers quality educational outcomes at reduced cost, consistent quality with equal access, more rapid and up to-date information sharing with dynamic and responsive delivery which can be deeply customized to suit individual needs and preferences.

Keywords: E-Learning; Higher Education; Technology; Disruption.
SESSION TWO

The University of Jordan’s Experience in Blended Learning

Prof. Ahmad Majdoubeh
Vice President for Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Jordan (UJ)

Biography

Vice President for Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Jordan (UJ) (September 2016 – present). He was Prof of English and American literature at UJ since 1994, Director of Language Center, Chairman of Modern Languages Department, Director of International Relations, Dean of Arts, and then Dean of Foreign Languages till 2011. Established the Ph.D. Program in English at UJ, in addition to several MA and BA Programs.


Set up language communication-skills program at UJ, managed ASOL Program, helped set up CIEE program, set up a series of BA programs: Spanish/English, Korean/English, Chinese/English, Russian/English, and Turkish/English at UJ.
Abstract

The presentation focuses on the University of Jordan’s experience in implementing blended learning. The initiative to adopt blending learning at UJ as a strategic objective started three years ago, in Fall semester 2016/2017. During the said semester, two faculty members from one college were trained on what blended learning is, how to implement it, and what requirements are needed.

The implementation started with two courses only in Spring semester 2016/2017. In light of the successful experience, 6 courses were offered on the basis of blended learning in the following two summer sessions, and then in Fall 2017/2018, the number of courses jumped to 42. At the end of Spring semester 2018/2019, the number reached 221.

The presentation will provide all important facts and figures pertaining to this successful initiative, the major challenges in implementation, the solutions to these challenges, the advantages gained, and the good practices and positive stories. There will also be a brief account of teachers’ and students’ comments and testimonies.
E-learning Evolution in Saudi Higher Education Institutions: KAU Case Study

Dr. Hisham Bardesi
The Dean of Distance Learning Deanship at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Biography

Prior to his appointment as Dean, Dr. Bardesi served as the Director of Academic Affairs and the Vice-Dean and the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Administration. During his tenure, he successfully established and led a number of pioneering projects and educational simulations, among which was the most popular Virtual e-Stock Market for training students.

Following a flourishing tenure of sustained and constant development at the Faculty of Economics and Administration, Dr. Bardesi was appointed as the Dean of e-Learning and Distance Education (eLDE) in 2009. Since then, he has played a significant role in the development and implementation of a number of initiatives including a highly systematic online Learning Management System and an e-exam system which are available for all KAU students to learn and evaluate their progress. Under his direct supervision and guidance, the Deanship of e-Learning and Distance Education was able to receive the European Accreditation for e-learning programs at KAU.

In his capacity as the Dean of eLDE, Dr. Bardesi managed all KAU activities pertinent to planning, implementing, and evaluating the processes of developing e-learning and distance education in all Colleges of KAU and its branches. His responsibilities also include managing several e-learning service units such as the Learning Management System (Blackboard), electronic exams (Question Mark), depository storage, e-course development and faculty-training unit for integrating technology in the classroom. In addition, he supervised more than 1,300,000 e-exams, which have been conducted in the university along with training more than 6600 KAU faculty members.
Abstract

King Abdulaziz University (KAU) has recognized the impact of e-learning adoption on the quality of its regular program, therefore, planning and integrating such adoption practices in the university curricula have become an integral part of KAU’s strategic plan and consequently an important transformative practice that was encouraged institutionally and on the level of colleges and departments.

Various e-learning projects were executed in such fields as readiness to adopt e-learning, instructional design and e-assessment, as well as ones related to quality assurance and analytics. These various projects have ultimately resulted in a wide and successful adoption of e-learning in KAU.
Prof. Ghassan Mourad
Professor of Computational Linguistics at the Lebanese University

Biography

Ghassan Mourad is a Professor of Computational Linguistics at the Lebanese University, former Director of the Center of Language Sciences and Communication, and a Coordinator at the Laboratory of Language Engineering.

Head of the translation, language sciences and communication research team at the Doctoral School of Literature, Humanities and Social Sciences, Lebanese University.
Researcher at LALIC Laboratory, Sorbonne, He holds a PhD in Applied Mathematics to Humanities, Sorbonne (2000), a Diploma in Language Engineering, INALCO (1997), a Diploma in Communication Sciences (1991), and a Diploma in Computer Engineering, Sofia University (1988).

He organized and participated in Arabic and international conferences. He published in national and international scientific journals, as well as publishing the following books:

- “Digital Humanities: Taming the language in order to be processed automatically”, in Arabic, by “All Prints Distributors & Publishers”, Beirut 2014.


- “Punctuation and Diacritics in Arabic”, editing and preface by Ghassan Mourad, Nahda publishing house, August 2019, Beirut.
Abstract

In August 2019, Arabic digital content ranked 17th among other languages present online by 0.6%, while it ranked 9th by 1.6% in January 2011 (W3techs.com). This decline in presence simply means that digital publishing increased in some languages, which changed its degree of presence, while Arabic digital publishing has not increased.

International organizations, such as UNESCO, and Arabic organizations, such as ALECSO and ESCWA, among other governmental and non-governmental organizations, are working on initiatives to nurture Arabic digital content in order to preserve local cultures and heritage, whether tangible or intangible, on one hand, and to disseminate knowledge, on the other. Digitalization raises epistemological questions regarding educational methods (this means it has changed knowledge and educational practices) in using computers and the internet as an educational tool, or in creating methodologies of internet use for different public and private educational institutions.

However, despite all these statistics and studies, the actual utilization of Arabic digital content, regardless of the rates mentioned above, will only be fruitful through the cross-fertilization between informatics as a science and culture in its broad sense. This cross-fertilization led to the emergence of the concept of digital humanities.

Informatics and culture intersect each other through the logical organization of thought. Digital humanities are a matter of creativity in science to establish new science, by building new concepts based on previous concepts, which is called meta-epistemology, and the creation of concepts that commensurate with changes in science. The first of these interrelationships (multidisciplinary studies) is computational linguistics, which aims to build software that manipulates the language automatically in order to help the user in several areas, including e-learning. E-learning is a mechanism built by digital humanities, which relied on informatics and has led to designing software and applications that help in education.

In our paper, we will first identify the linguistic difficulties when applying computational linguistics in Arabic digital content in order to make it productive. Second, we will talk about the annotation of Arabic digital content and will demonstrate examples from e-learning applications. Third, we will talk about the importance of computational linguistics in preserving Arabic digital culture and investing it in the learning process and in the dissemination of Arabic digital content.
His primary research interests are within the fields of Networked Learning, Problem Based Learning (PBL), Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). In particular, he is interested in Problem Based Learning, and how new media and technologies transform our ways of thinking about and designing for Networked and Hybrid Learning.

He is Co-Chair of the International Networked Learning Conference (http://networkedlearningconference.org.uk/) and Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Problem Based Learning in Higher Education (JPBLHE). He has participated in European and international research projects and networks (EQUEL, Kaledioscope, COMBLE, PlaceMe, EATrain2, ODEdu), and in development projects in South East Asia and Latin America (VISCA, VO@NET, ELAC). Currently, he is engaged in the PBL future project which is developing new directions for PBL in a digital future.
Abstract

In his presentation Prof. Ryberg will provide an overview of contemporary developments and challenges within the wider landscape of ‘digital learning’ or ‘e-learning’. As digital technologies and access to online networks are becoming increasingly ubiquitous, both on and off campus experiences for students and teachers are being re-configured and transformed. This opens for new ways of designing online or hybrid courses, rethinking notions of place, presence and modes of participation, but also challenges teachers and students in terms of digital competences and literacies to navigate in such hybrid spaces.

In the presentation Prof. Ryberg will present insights and preliminary findings from the large, AAU-funded PBL future research project, as well as discussing new educational formats being developed as part of this project.