



Academics without Borders

USF-AWB

Universitaires sans Frontières

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Visits in Algeria

Recently four Algerian universities were visited, The University of Biskra, The University of Sciences and Technology of Oran (USTO), and then two university centers recently promoted to the rank of full universities in the cities of Bordj Bou Arreridj and of El Oued. The recent transition to the Bologna system pushed a certain number of them to reconsider their missions and their organization.

Something important is that more than 60% of the students are women, which is a promise of profound changes in the future when they are in position of responsibilities. Second, the inadequacy between the socio-economic needs and the given education is obvious: too much often the syllabi were designed according to professor's competences and not according to economic needs. And this for two reasons.

The first reason is that universities seems to be assigned for the largest majority of the students objectives to give high level and too often theoretical education, reinforced by the existence of few practical works. The second reason is due to the low number of companies likely to engage the graduated students. The consequence is that there are too many students in research-oriented Masters and too few in business-oriented Masters; one of the reasons being that university seems to be the only sure employer.

In Biskra, the rector asked us to write a report on the formation and the evaluation of the PhD students in complement with thematic seminars. Our proposal was related to the setting of a syllabus including courses such as the world organization of research, the methodologies for information retrieval, and webliography, the analysis of scientific papers, the meeting organization, the processes of paper submission for conferences and reviews, the organization of the states of the art, the drafting of scientific articles both in French and English, the art of the oral presentation in English, the drafting of the theses, etc.

In El Oued, the issue was the inception of a research laboratory in information technology. As this city is famous for its 3 million date palms, it is adequate that research in theoretical computing takes precision farming as a privileged domain of application. This decision implied the local governor (wali) and of the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce who were very enthusiastic by this proposal. A subsequent videoconference made it possible

to better determine the long-term research (10 years) lines, and a second videoconference will make it possible to define the PhD topics of to be given next academic year.

In Bordj Bou Arreridj, one of the problems was the reinforcement of Master syllabi to integrate more professionals and foreign professors; but this encounters a too bureaucratic foreign currency exchange control.

Many discussions at the USTO stressed the importance to anchor education in the socio-economic landscape. Within a view to sustainable development, a university must at the same time feed the companies in intermediate managers and executives, but also anticipate the needs, in particular by reconsidering education according to socio-economic needs. A possible mandatory course should be centered on the effective steps for the creation of companies (legal framework, need analysis, creation of products or services, production management, marketing, etc).

One of the big identified obstacles is the bureaucracy weight which largely handicaps initiatives whereas financial means are present. A rector told us to have had to return 50% of his budget either because initial targets were inoperative, or because the projects were refused by bureaucrats. In addition, another professor has declared that the rector himself blocked initiatives. Whom to believe?

In such a context, the reader can see very well that USF-AWB by its international network of university consultants considers Algeria as a country in which many missions could be carried out so not only to modernize, but also to promote syllabi in adequacy with the needs for this country within a view to sustainable development. ■

Pr. Robert Laurini, President of USF-AWB.

Partnership agreement with GREF

With more than 500 members out of which around fifty coming from universities, GREF (French association of pensioned teachers without borders) regroupes on a basis similar to USF-AWB, volunteers putting their competences for the service of developed countries or regions. Our expertise coverage and field of activities being largely complementary, a partnership agreement was signed on January 26, 2012 especially for sharing information able to lead to actions totally or partly in common. ■

Pr. Paul Rousset, Member of USF-AWB and of GREF.