

L'Université Internationale de Rabat mise à l'honneur dans « The Chronicle of Higher Education ».

Basé à Washington, l'hebdomadaire, le *Chronicle of Higher Education* est le plus important journal en langue Anglaise qui traite de l'enseignement supérieur dans le monde (<http://chronicle.com>).

Le *Chronicle of Higher Education* a été fondé en 1966 et au fil des ans, a remporté ou a été finaliste de nombreux prix de journalisme. Ursula Lindsey, envoyée spéciale au Moyen Orient pour le magazine américain, s'est intéressée de prêt à l'Université Internationale de Rabat.



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In Morocco, Visions of a Silicon Valley Campus



Noureddine Mouaddib, president of the International University of Rabat, in front of a model of the new university.

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By Ursula Lindsey

Rabat, Morocco

Noureddine Mouaddib left Morocco to pursue his university studies in France over 30 years ago. He became a professor of computer science at the University of Nantes and a member of the French national council for higher education and research.

Yet Mr. Mouaddib's thoughts turned often to his native country, where, he says, emigration has remained unavoidable for those who want

to pursue higher education. "In the global South, as soon as you graduate from high school, you wonder: Where will I go? Canada, France?" he says. "If you look at world rankings, there isn't a single internationally visible university in Africa, with the exception of South Africa."

Yet even as more and more young people in the region aspire to a good higher education, opportunities such as the ones he enjoyed have shrunk, he says. "Moroccan students and African students from modest backgrounds are no longer able to come to France or Europe to study. ... The door's been closed. With what they ask to get a visa—it's impossible."

It was those realizations that led him, in 2005, to envisage the creation of the first global research university in Morocco.

Mr. Mouaddib undertook a feasibility study and began talking with government officials, colleagues, and members of his country's diaspora about the need to create an internationally oriented, R&D-driven university in Morocco.

This September the International University of Rabat, here in the capital city, is set to welcome its first 200 students.

"Rather than young people traveling toward knowledge"—and finding their path littered with obstacles—Mr. Mouaddib says, "we'll move knowledge toward them."

The university is a public-private partnership. Mohammed VI, the Moroccan king, donated the 20 hectares—about 50 acres—in a new technology park on the outskirts of the city. Classes, which this fall are being held in temporary offices, will move there next year, and the campus should be completed by 2015. The university plans to have 280 faculty members and 5,000 students by 2020.

Two pension funds, one French-run, the other operated by the Moroccan government, are the two main investors, contributing over a third of the university's planned five-year budget of 1.12 billion Moroccan dirhams (about \$130-million).

Moroccan Context

The curriculum has been conceived to complement government development plans and with emerging sectors in the Moroccan economy in mind.

The country is in a construction boom. In recent years, Moroccan authorities have begun major infrastructure developments focused on transportation, tourism and affordable housing. The government is also committed to developing local sources of alternative energy; plans are to have about 40 percent of the country's energy be wind- and solar-generated by 2020.

The new university has responded accordingly. "Many students can't find the degrees they want in Morocco," Mr. Mouaddib acknowledges. "We are focusing on disciplines that are new and that respond to national development needs."

In addition to business, political science, and information technology, Rabat will offer programs in renewable energy; railway, naval, automobile, and aerospace engineering (several airplane manufacturers have set up facilities in Morocco recently); and architecture and design.

Fifteen faculty members are in place for this fall, and the university plans to hire 20 more for next year, and to continue increasing the faculty ranks year by year.

The number of university students in Morocco has risen steadily over the past decade, to more than 300,000 today, and is projected to as much as double by 2015. Yet public universities here remain largely focused on humanities and social-science degrees that, critics say, give graduates no marketable skills. Morocco has only nine engineers per 10,000 people (compared with 40 in Jordan and 130 in France). The government has not yet met its goal of devoting 1 percent of gross domestic product to research and development.

Mr. Mouaddib says his standing in the academic community and decades-old network of contacts helped him get his project going quickly.

The university's faculty has been largely drawn from the Moroccan and North African diaspora. It was "something personal I wanted to do," says Mokhtar Ghambou, a professor of literature at Yale University, of his decision to help shape the Moroccan university's core humanities component. "At a certain point you feel nostalgia. You start to wonder, What can I do for my native country? To think about what you can contribute."

Many of the scholarly recruits have helped structure partnerships between Rabat and their own colleges, and have brought corporate research sponsors to the new university. Mr. Ghambou himself hopes to divide his time between Yale and Rabat.

International Orientation

In the new university's name, "the word 'international' is not rhetorical," says Mr. Ghambou. "This is a unique project. People are joining from all over the world."

Marcia C. Inhorn, a professor of anthropology and international affairs and chair of the Council of Middle East Studies at Yale, visited Rabat last year in a delegation led by Mr. Ghambou.

As part of its mission to promote understanding of the contemporary Middle East, she says via e-mail, the council is looking to collaborate with "promising partner institutions" in the Middle East and North Africa. Yale hopes to engage in student and faculty exchanges with the university in Rabat, she adds.

"Moroccan-American relations are being strengthened as well, and [the Council of Middle East Studies] wants to be a part of this hopeful moment," she writes. "Yale is currently in a major process of internationalization/globalization, and the Middle East is near the top of its lists of priority areas."

Most of Rabat's partnerships are with major French universities—not surprising, given Morocco's historic links to France. The goal is to "combine the French and U.S. systems, pick the good things from both," says Mohammed Cherkaoui, a professor of mechanical engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology, who will lead the Moroccan university's engineering department.

Rabat hopes to offer dual degrees with many of its foreign academic partners. Students will be required to spend two semesters abroad, and instruction is to be in both French and English.

The new university's other defining characteristic is a focus on applied research.

Morocco's ministry of energy will finance a five-million-euro (about \$6.5-million) project to increase the efficiency of solar cells, says Mr. Cherkaoui, who adds that the university will make research on renewable energy "part of its identity." Rabat's corporate research partners include the engineering giant Siemens AG, the media company Vivendi, and the aerospace company Thales Group.

Alongside government and corporate-backed research and development, says Mr. Mouaddib, the university will focus on "niche" research.

"We won't produce super-high-tech products," he explains. "We'll work on products that meet the needs of the local, of the African, market. In other words, inexpensive innovations."

The engineering department has already patented three alternative-energy devices. Designed to produce power for domestic use, they are a wind turbine that will function even with very weak breezes; a light panel that shuts off automatically when it detects other sources of light; and a solar-powered water heater.

There is demand for such devices in Morocco and other African countries, where many rural areas remain off the electrical grid, says Mr. Cherkaoui. In fact, Rabat is already negotiating their commercial mass production.

Regional Ambition

The university hopes that at least 20 percent of its student body will come from sub-Saharan Africa. And it wants to offer opportunities to deserving student of limited means. It will give academic scholarships, covering the approximately \$7,500 yearly tuition, to a fifth of its students, as well as help them get bank loans to cover living expenses.

Dina El Khawaga, the Ford Foundation's program officer for higher education in the Middle East and North Africa, says the university has the potential to create a "more human and more egalitarian face to the internationalization of education in Africa."

But even South African universities—by far the best in the continent—haven't had an easy time attracting students from other African countries, she notes. Rabat's administrators will have to address a number of questions: "Will they offer remedial classes? Who says Morocco will facilitate visas for students? Will scholarships be available to non-Moroccan students? What kind of institutional partnerships will allow them to reach this 20 percent [target of sub-Saharan African students]? When you are in a Dar el-Salam high school [in Senegal], what will encourage you to get up and go to Morocco?"

"There's a whole strategy that needs to be put into place," says Ms. El Khawaga, sounding a cautious but still optimistic note. "I'm really dreaming that this will be a nice initiative by a non-oil country to make a research hub in the next decade. But we have to be patient. Our expectations have to be low."

Mr. Mouaddib's vision is nothing if not ambitious. He envisages his new university as a catalyst for national and regional development and innovation, the center of a North African Silicon Valley. "Morocco can be a regional leader," he says, "given its potential, its position, its stability."

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