Collaborative Opportunities in Morocco

January 2015

International University of Rabat

An MSU administrative delegation visited Rabat, Morocco on January 27-30 to discuss a range of potential academic, research, and outreach collaborations with several private and public sector institutions in the country.

The primary purpose of the visit was to establish a dual academic degree program between MSU and the International University of Rabat (UIR) in mechanical and automotive engineering at the undergraduate and Masters level. This innovative program is the largest of its kind for both MSU and UIR.

Under this program, UIR students are expected to complete their first three years of their undergraduate curriculum on the UIR campus in Rabat. Students will then travel to the MSU campus for their fourth year, completing their B.S. in Mechanical Engineering during the spring and fall and working toward their Masters Degree in the summer term. By working together on graduate committees this partnership is expected to stimulate collaborative research between the faculty at the two universities.

While in Morocco, MSU officials fielded several questions from UIR students expressing interest in pursuing graduate education in all disciplines at MSU.

Department heads and graduate coordinators from across campus are encouraged to provide the International Institute with informational materials detailing their Masters and PhD programs for dissemination to UIR administrators.

During meetings leading up to the January visit to Rabat, UIR representatives expressed an interest in collaborating with MSU faculty in several thematic areas including: computational modeling, materials research (particularly composites), precision agriculture (related to both water and mechanization), industrial engineering, human and animal health and sustainable energy.

The specific areas of expertise to be developed at UIR in aerospace engineering include fatigue, lightweighting, and sensing.

Within agriculture, issues addressed included post harvest loss, food safety and transport, and soil modeling and analysis. UIR is also interested in agricultural improvements, value chain, and agribusiness management.

In business, topics of interest are supply chain management, behavioral economics, corporate finance and entrepreneurship.
United States Agency for International Development

A visit to the United States Agency for International Development Mission in Rabat revealed several funded research opportunities in Morocco. The agency’s priorities over the next five years include workforce development and primary education.

The Mission, in consultation with Moroccan government ministries, has identified a poorly prepared labor force as a source of economic underperformance in the country. While technical skills exist in many industries, the lack of other ‘soft skills’ such as communication, leadership, presentation skills, and professionalism have prevented the level of investment necessary to stimulate continued economic growth.

The Mission has also identified a deficient primary educational system as a main driver of high youth illiteracy and poor numeracy in the country. USAID plans to make significant investments in teacher training programs and curriculum development.

USAID administrators indicated these priorities would also be the focus of a new compact between the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the Moroccan government, which will provide additional funding for research and outreach in these areas.

Another focus area for MCC in the coming years will be land reform. As the country moves toward a more market-driven economy traditional land tenure rules and land use practices represent a constraint on growth in both industrial and agricultural sectors.

Contact the International Institute for more information on USAID and MCC funding opportunities in Morocco.

High Commission on Forests and Waters

While in Rabat, the MSU delegation visited with members of the High Commission on Forests and Waters concerning potential collaborative research and outreach projects centering on natural ecosystems and environmental sustainability.

High Commissioner El Hafi, noting that the country is the most bio-diverse of any in the MENA region, identified four research priorities in the coming years.

Given the growing economy and population, managing the country’s ground and surface water resources, both in terms of quantity and quality, is a primary concern.

Insuring against extreme climate events and managing resources in the face of climate change represents a second priority area.

Forest fire prevention, especially in the Atlas and Rift Mountains is a third research need.

Finally, the nation’s large tourism industry and the competition it faces from competing land uses, has generated substantial need for research on the economic valuation of ecosystem services.

The High Commissioner expressed enthusiasm for collaboration with MSU’s experts in natural resource and supporting fields.

Contact the International Institute for more information on collaborative opportunities.

Ministry of Higher Education

The Ministry of Higher Education in Morocco provides public funding to universities for:

1. basic and applied research aimed at producing new scientific or technical knowledge
2. projects geared toward human or social development, which aim to create new products or services, and
3. industrial development projects in specific priority sectors in support of business innovations.

Given the growing economy and population, managing the country’s ground and surface water resources, both in terms of quantity and quality, is a primary concern.

During the previous cycle, research funding followed several themes: environment, health, energy, materials and nanomaterials, biotechnologies and animal breeding, humanities and social sciences, mechatronics and electronics, aerospace, and urban mobility.

Upcoming projects include those in Forestry and Water and Agriculture. Specifically, research is being solicited in the area of water filtration with an emphasis on nanotechnologies, and plant derivatives and extracts for medicinal purposes.

In addition, the Minister expressed an interest in developing institutional resources for supporting career development and career services.
Study Abroad program in Rabat, Morocco

Additional exchange opportunities for students of both universities will build on the core dual degree program.

This summer faculty from MSU’s Department of Anthropology and Middle Eastern Cultures will lead a 3-week course on the Culture of the Middle East and North Africa.

The course, to be based in Morocco’s capital city of Rabat will be co-taught by members of UIR’s Department of North African Cultural Studies.

Topics include the history of Islam in the region, Morocco’s cultural flowering, and traditional foods and entertainment. Site visits to Morocco’s commercial capital of Casablanca and the tourist and cultural hub of Marrakesh are planned.

Please encourage interested students to visit the International Institute’s Office of Study Abroad website for more information. Direct inquiries to Kristen Bloom at kbloom@international.msstate.edu.

Students, faculty and administrators from MSU and UIR listen to President Keenum’s presentation.

Ministry of Agriculture

A courtesy call from the MSU delegation on the offices of the Moroccan Minister of Agriculture resulted in discussion of several opportunities to engage with researchers both in the Ministry and in the country’s agricultural universities.

Morocco is the lead partner in a United Nations initiative to support research collaboration between governments and educational organizations in developing countries in Africa.

Under this arrangement Ministries in other west and central African countries can develop research or outreach proposals that address their specific needs and bring them to the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture for funding and research support.

Ministry personnel expressed an interest in working with MSU scientists to help provide needed expertise for these projects, which range across a wide spectrum of agricultural and support disciplines.

In addition to these partnerships, the Ministry also identified several other priorities including wildlife veterinary medicine, irrigation and watershed management, and attracting agribusiness investment, particularly from the U.S.

Finally, the Ministry of Agriculture is in the planning stages of a reform to the agricultural education, research and extension system in the country and is interested in visiting U.S. universities to gain insights for their restructuring.

National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA)

The MSU delegation had the opportunity to tour the Citrus Research Station of the Institute for National Research in Agriculture (INRA) and discuss potential agricultural research collaborative opportunities. INRA scientists expressed interest in a wide range of topics, particularly in renewable power sources for agriculture, water management and conservation, and mapping tools for agricultural productivity.

Moroccan Foundation for Advanced Scientific Innovation and Research

One of the more interesting visits while the MSU delegation was in Morocco was to the Moroccan Foundation for Advanced Science, Innovation and Research (see their website at http://www.mascir.ma/). This facility is jointly operated on behalf of the largest three research universities in Rabat, and serves as a core facility in biotechnology, nanotechnology, and microelectronics. This group can readily match up with some of the research topics of INRA scientists expressed interest in a wide range of topics, particularly in renewable power sources for agriculture, water management and conservation, and mapping tools for agricultural productivity.

The castle-like walls of Rabat’s Kasbah.
The International Institute is charged with facilitating and expanding international learning, research, and outreach efforts at MSU.

The unit is a hub for international activities and exists to serve faculty and students to engage globally, improving the lives of Mississippians and those around the world.

Our mission is to assist MSU’s eight colleges to achieve their internationalization goals.

The International Institute is involved in a wide range of activities at MSU.

We support outreach efforts that provide practical training to specialists around the world.

The International Institute works to broaden and deepen MSU’s partnerships with universities and other organizations abroad.

Currently, MSU has over 70 partner schools abroad allowing our students and scholars to work with and learn from a wide variety of international experts.

Maintaining these activities and relationships helps to expand MSU’s influence worldwide while increasing capacity domestically.

For more information on any of these opportunities contact the International Institute

116 Allen Hall
175 President’s Circle
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Phone: 662-325-8929
Fax: 662-325-4242
Email: international@msstate.edu