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United Nations University Launches Online OpenCourseWare Portal

New initiative offers free online access to training courses

Today, 4 February, United Nations University launches the UNU OpenCourseWare Portal, accessible at <http://ocw.unu.edu>. Initially, the UNU OpenCourseWare Portal offers open access to about a dozen courses developed by three of UNU's Research and Training Centres and Programmes (RTC/Ps) and the Tokyo-based UNU Media Studio.

The intent of the UNU OpenCourseWare Portal is to make the course materials used by UNU RTC/Ps available on the Web, free of charge, to any user anywhere in the world. The initiative is not meant to replace degree-granting higher education or for-credit courses, but rather to provide content that can be used by educators for curriculum development, by students to augment their current learning resources, and by individuals for independent self-study.

The long-term goal of the UNU OpenCourseWare Portal is to promote the development, use and distribution of training materials under Creative Commons licenses. The initiative is part of the Global OpenCourseWare Consortium (<http://ocwconsortium.org>), a collaboration of more than 100 higher education institutions and associated organizations from around the world with a common mission of advancing education and empowering people worldwide through OpenCourseWare.

Expressing his support for this initiative, UNU Rector Konrad Osterwalder said, "This signifies our commitment to broadening access to high-quality educational materials and will contribute to the United Nations University's core mission, which seeks to further the generation and sharing of knowledge in order to strengthen individual and institutional capacities to resolve pressing global problems."

Resources available in the initial phase of the UNU OpenCourseWare Portal include six courses on electronic governance, developed by the UNU International Institute for Software Technology (UNU-IIST, Macao); five Ph.D. training courses on the economics of technical change, innovation and development, developed by the UNU Maastricht Economic and Social Research and Training Centre on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT, the Netherlands); and two courses on mangrove biodiversity and integrated water resources management developed by the UNU International Network on Water and Health (UNU-INWEH, Canada). Several more UNU system units are currently preparing course materials for inclusion in the portal later this year.

Project coordinator Brendan Barrett notes that UNU is committed to sharing the expertise developed through this initiative by offering support and guidance to universities in the developing world that are seeking to open up their courses.

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Philipp Schmidt, who is responsible for the project at UNU-MERIT and who recently participated in drafting the Cape Town Open Education Declaration, said, “So far, the OpenCourseWare movement has focused on distributing content from the developed to developing countries. Through our partnership with institutions like the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, we are trying to reverse this trend and make locally created content more accessible.”

In the Asia–Pacific, UNU is collaborating with several Japanese universities, including Keio University, Waseda University, the University of the Ryukyus and the Tokyo Institute of Technology, to jointly run open courses on such important topics as climate change, sustainable energy and disaster management. Many of these universities are members of the Japan Opencourseware Consortium (<http://www.jocw.jp>). UNU is very pleased to take this opportunity to announce its intention to officially join JOCW in March 2008.

For more information, visit the UNU OpenCourseWare Portal (<http://ocw.unu.edu>) or contact:

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