Mapping the Future for Workforce Development

Tomorrow is our near future and there are plenty of dreams and aspirations captured in our hearts. As we approach the start of a new decade, the American University in Cairo (AUC) signified the importance of mapping our youth future and trying to pave the roads for future leaders. The AUC Career Center held its first Regional Career Conference on December 7 and 8 aiming at uniting university and corporate representatives under the event’s slogan of “Mapping the Future for Workforce Development.”

The day started with a keynote speech by Farouk Dey, Vice Provost for Integrative Learning and Life Design at Johns Hopkins University, where he mentioned how the world of today is changing at a rapid speed and that it is essential that we keep up with these changes so that we do not fall behind, stressing that “shifts in economy, technology, and generational trends are changing how people make meaning of their personal and professional choices and growth.” Francis Ricciardone, AUC President, was very pleased with the strong start that the event was taking and pointed out that the annual entrepreneurship Rise Up summit was happening concurrently with the conference, emphasizing the university’s role in cultivating innovation in the MENA region. He also noted that the conference’s purpose was to look towards the future and specifically towards the concept of “life design” that was discussed by Dey in his speech as the next big objective of the United States’ higher educational system. Ricciardone elaborated by saying that “it’s having students design their lives, rather than planning it out in the sense that they acquire skills and networking abilities that would enable them to be resilient in the face of change. It doesn’t just stop at getting a job but it’s more about leading a purposeful meaningful life” and he hoped that AUC could foster this with its students.

Several sessions took place afterwards, each discussing topics that were relevant to both business professionals and higher education personnel such as “Designing Educational Prototypes for the Future of Work” and “The Consulting Network Experience: An Approach to Enhancing Student Career Readiness.” Participants got the chance to both attend the sessions and be the ones conducting them. Shahira Rifaat, President of the International Coach Federation’s Egyptian Chapter, summarized the general sentiment of the attendees by saying “I think it’s a very interesting concept, to just bring everyone together so that they could exchange their knowledge and benefit from collaborating with people that come from different backgrounds.”

These sessions acted as a platform for both parties to understand one another and communicate what they need in their future employees. Marawan EIShehaby, HR manager at Spinning Factory, said “there tends to be a wide gap between academic institutions and employers in terms of what they can offer for each other and I feel like this conference is the first step towards bridging that gap.” Employers were better able to deliver their expectations of the new generation while university representatives got to update their peers of the advancements happening in the educational system. Noura Galal, Recruitment Officer and Employer Relations at the UCCD center at Menya University, said “the conference was an eye opening experience because I got direct insights about today’s labor market and I got to know more about the kind of developmental projects that other universities have for their students.”

The two day event ended with a closing speech that was delivered by James Wilson, Director at PwC Middle East, who highlighted the technological advancements of the modern age, concluding that the nature of the workforce is bound to evolve accordingly and that it is necessary to adapt to the new way of things in order to stay relevant.

The conference was attended by 110 participants and 22 local and global speakers. Commenting on the conference, Maha Guindi, executive director of AUC Career Center said, “The inaugural conference sets a foundation and a model to keep the communication between career services practitioners and employers open to map the future for a successful and inspired generation in Egypt and the Region.”