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WSIS Assignment

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WSIS Submission: Submission Two

The World Summit on Information Society is a two-phase initiative to form a concrete road-map that bridges the digital divide. This UN group encourages the free creation, access, utilization and sharing of information and knowledge, thus enabling the creation of an Information Society. In creating such a society, however, major difficulties may arise. A global information society is difficult to form from the current range of world ICT capabilities, where countries in sub-Saharan African don't have so much as an enabled telecommunications channel, while richer nations are taking initiatives to be on the cutting edge of technological innovation. Therefore, the WSIS should form practical initiatives to bridge the digital divide and fulfill its goals, while enabling the open sharing of information between the developed world and the developing world. The way to fulfill those goals is to implement OpenCourseWare – an effective framework for sharing information and knowledge across the world.

OpenCourseWare is a university-led educational initiative that promotes the effective sharing of knowledge and information, via open access to University courseware, faculty and students across the world. Initiated by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and adapted by numerous other educational institutions, the free and open sharing of high-quality and copyright-free material is a great resource to students, educators and academics everywhere. The most important implication of OpenCourseWare, however, is the effect it has on the digital divide.

The digital divide refers to the socio-economic gap between societies that do have internet access and those that do not. Perhaps the biggest misconception of the digital divide is that it is caused by the gap between the rich and poor. However, the modern digital divide may or may not be related directly to the economic divide. It is to vital realize that societies that do have internet access are not necessarily wealthier societies; often, the wealthier societies have access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) simply because of their reliance on them and the understanding and appreciation that internet is a gateway to

greater opportunities. In contrast, poorer countries do not see direct advantages of ICT access, and hence, do not take initiatives to access the internet.

For example, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa often do not see the importance of having internet access; internet does not provide direct advantages to them. Hence, even the richest families in these countries do not often see the need to avail themselves of the internet and high-speed ICT access. In contrast, countries such as India and Bangladesh, the use of ICT is so well-regarded and appreciated that poorer families also recognize the importance and need of having internet access. This opens them to facilities such as job-searches, outsourcing work, access to information and educational opportunities. Therefore, the digital divide is automatically bridged if societies recognize the importance of internet and begin to use it.

The best way to provide societies the motivation to acquire internet access is to create a global educational initiative that will represent the epitome of intellectual use of Internet. OpenCourseWare is the very initiative that will provide every student, educator and academic with the motivation to acquire internet access in order to make use of the free and open educational content.

The use of OpenCourseWare was supported in the WSIS Thematic Meeting Tokyo Ubiquitous Network Conference, in May 2005. Moreover, OpenCourseWare is in direct agreement with the WSIS Declaration of Principles *"We recognize that education, knowledge, information and communication are at the core of human progress, endeavour and well-being"*. OpenCourseWare is further supported by the very core of the United Nations values: the Declaration of Human rights. Article 26 of the Human rights says *"Everyone has the right to education……Technical and professional education shall be made generally available…"*. Sadly, most of these education goals have not been achieved. Education is not open and free, not even at the elementary level and doing well at school does not guarantee a place at University. OpenCourseWare, however, does. OpenCourseWare is

the path towards the successful implementation of Article 26. It will provide open and free access to education; merit and hard-work will avail dedicated learners of a wealth of unlimited and high-quality educational material. Those who work harder and spend more time making use of OpenCourseWare material will gain more knowledge and hence, be better prepared to face the challenges in their careers.

OpenCourseWare has the potential to receive funding and support in order promote the development goals of the Millennium Declaration, one of which is the achievement of universal education[2]. Education, as UN Millennium Declaration affirms, is a key component to achieving the goals set-forth, and OpenCourseWare will provide pathways to fostering higher education level and hence, contribute towards the UN Millennium Declaration goals.

The WSIS and its numerous sub-committees should do everything in their power to tailor, adapt and synthesize the idea of OpenCourseWare to meet the goals and objectives of the respective organizations. OpenCourseWare is the first step towards creating a sustainable educational initiative that not only increases effective education and intellectual growth, but also provides a boost towards narrowing the digital divide. OpenCourseWare will be an effective step towards creating the envisioned Information Society that allows for equal, free and unbiased access to a wealth of Information, across cultures, societies, borders and races.

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[2] WSIS Declaration of Principles, http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html, accessed 18th September 2005

Bibliography

[1] WSIS Declaration of Principles. http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html.

[2] World Summit on Information Society. http://www.itu.int/wsis/basic/index.html

[3] Tips on Effective Writing, by Diane Hendrix.
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[6] UN Millennium Declaration

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