Supercourse Newsletter
Nov. 3, 2012
www.pitt.edu/~super1/

Dear Friends,

"Look deep into nature, and you will understand everything better" Einstein

We have some wonderful news. In the Journal Nature this week there was a series of articles on "How to build science capacity". Eight global leaders proposed ways to boost research in the next decade. There were articles from Singapore, Switzerland, Spain, Russia, Brazil and South Korea. Of most importance there was a masterful article by Ismail Serageldin, the head of the library of Alexandria. In this article he argued that the BA Supercourse, and the SuperHELP desk are a means to "…use new technologies to empower those promoting science in the poorest countries". He discussed how we plan to build research skills and
productivity especially in Africa. It is very exciting to have the work of you and the total Supercourse team highlighted in one of the most prestigious journals. Nature is a powerful means to build capacity in science world wide. The article is presented below. We thank all of you for collaborating with us. Look deeply into his Nature article and the Supercourse and you will be able to understand things better" Please forward this newsletter to your friends

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?' (ML King)

Nature, 2012, vol. 490, page 333
Ismail Serageldin, Director, Library of Alexandria, Egypt
Egypt: Share knowledge online
Africa produces less science than it could. Its home-grown innovations are not being nurtured by governments. Bottom-up initiatives are needed. We must use new technologies to empower those promoting science in the poorest countries. I am involved in two such projects.
One is the Science Supercourse, a collection of more than 170,000 PowerPoint lectures available for free on the Internet (see go.nature.com/hlksfr). The project is the brainchild of Ron Laporte, an epidemiologist at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, in collaboration with the World Health Organization and the Library of Alexandria. It is supervised by Laporte along with Gil Omenn, a biomedical scientist at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor; Vint Cerf, vice-president at Google in Mountain View, California; and myself.
Our lectures — designed by Nobel laureates as well as young assistant professors — distil the latest knowledge in a field in an accessible way.
In epidemiology and public health alone, some 60,000 people have used them to reach 1 million students in more than 170 countries.
Egypt's Library of Alexandria is supervising the spread of online science courses in Africa.
The second project — a virtual help desk for researchers using the Supercourse — is still in gestation. Overseen by the same team, it will give researchers in developing countries, particularly in Africa, guidance on research methods and statistics so that they can conduct, evaluate and publish research in international journals. By assisting scientists at the outset and during analysis, such a program could markedly improve productivity.
Although the private sector has used help desks for decades, the concept has not, to our knowledge, been used to provide external support to individual scientists in their research.

Learning from private industry, we intend to begin with a prototype in epidemiology and health, and later expand to other disciplines.

We have already collected and placed in the Supercourse repository many lectures and books as well as software related to research methods and statistics (see go.nature.com/oqfrzg). We invite scientists to add materials and to use what is available.

"A prudent question is one-half of wisdom" R. Bacon BA SuperHELP desk: We are very excited about the interest in the Help Desk concept. We currently have 9 "Pioneer sites" who are prepared to move forward to build national help desks. .

http://www.pitt.edu/~super1/ResearchMethods/index10.htm There are several issues which we would like your thoughts. The simplest procedure would be to develop a question and answer help desk using email. With our help supercourse we have seen that 5280 lectures were provided to us from the

50,000 faculty, and excellent participation rate. It is a simple model where you send your lectures to Faina and I and we send these to Eugene, and the lecture is freely available in a day or so. For the help desk questions would be sent to a central source and then sent to experts around the world to answer. A second approach would be that which Reza Asady from Iran has done. This is a nice free help desk system, but perhaps a little difficult to install.

www.telehealth.ir/helpdesk . A third approach would be to use question and answering software such as:

http://www.question2answer.org/. There are several other Q and A softwares. Some are more difficult to install then others. What is nice about this is that the questions are posted and anyone can answer them.

The fourth approach is that of building a wiki, such as with wiki answer

http://wiki.answers.com/. We are talk with Robert Janz an IT expert to see what best suits or needs. There are advantages and disadvantages of each one of these, we would very much like your opinion. We do not want the "Best help desk" if people cannot use it. We want to have methods of operations for the Help desk established before we move forward. By this time next year we hope to have a fully functioning global help desk. With each one of these we could post at least some of the questions in the newsletter, and people could respond to the questions that they knew the answer.

We must never forget that the critical role with the help desk is to get the best possible experts to answer the questions.

Zombie Epidemiology: It appears that our Halloween Newsletter was a hit.

Now the world is much more concerned about this potentially very dangerous health issue. We have many email letters. Vint Cerf, the father of the Internet wondered "Surely there must be a Zombie Cafe where they specialize in cannibal cuisine?" Deb Nigra, sent to me a most important URL designed to make you a zombie http://makemezombie.com/. I am very glad you all liked our traditional Halloween Newsletter.

"We are all agreed that your theory is crazy. The question which divides us is whether it is crazy enough to have a chance of being correct" Niels Bohr

Faina's lecture of the week
Help desk
In the past several months, the Supercourse group has been busy developing the concept of Supercourse help desk. In our work, we find that many potentially excellent researchers cannot publish their findings simply because they lack formal expertise in research methods. The hope is to provide much needed help in research design using the concept of helpdesk.

Esra Al-Khasawneh (Oman), Zakiuddin Ahmed (Pakistan), Reza Asady (Iran), Eman Eltahlawy (Egypt), Ghada Farhat (Lebanon), Jihad Irani (Lebanon), Ron LaPorte (USA), Faina Linkov(USA), Francis Ohanyido (Nigeria), Kaushik Ramaiya (Tanzania), Eugene Shubnikov (Russia), Andrew Swai (Tanzania), Nabil Sulaiman (UAE) put their minds together to develop a Help Desk lecture It's a short lecture that provides interesting basic info about helpdesk concept. We are looking forward to having you join the helpdesk. Please share this, and present it to your students and faculty. We want to have feedback.
Access lecture from
http://www.pitt.edu/~super1/lecture/lec48411/001.htm

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO)
Best Regards: Ismail, Ron, Faina, Eugene, Francois, Casper, Kawkab,
Nabil, Esra, Zaki, Reza, Eman, Ghada, Jihad, Francis, Frank N. Stein, Kaushik, Eugene, Andrew, Eric, Nicolas, Olga, Mita, Robert, Vint, Gil, Jay, Mark, Benjamin, Pedro