

CoLab: The International Collaboratory for Emerging Technologies

The International Collaboratory for Emerging Technologies (CoLab) was established in March 2007 by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), and involves the participation of The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) and a number of Portuguese institutions. The CoLab program is one of three partnerships with U.S. universities aimed at driving forward the reform of Portuguese universities. The main aim is to strengthen Portuguese institutions and establish thematic networks between them by adopting best practices from the USA, and thereby to enhance scholarly research, graduate-level education, industrial links, and entrepreneurship.

Originally the focus of the CoLab program was on the topic of Digital Media, but an assessment study carried out in 2006 by UT Austin identified two additional themes in which collaboration was likely to be effective and aligned with the goals of the CoLab program: Advanced Computing and Mathematics. All three of the themes selected build on existing collaborative links between UT Austin and Portuguese universities. Another important aspect of CoLab is the University Technology Enterprise Network (UTEN), which provides training for entrepreneurs and technology transfer officers, and related technology commercialisation activities.

To have a transformative impact on the participating universities and the country as a whole, CoLab will go beyond developing a traditional academic educational and research collaboration between UT Austin and individual Portuguese universities, and pursue those specific avenues that demonstrate and develop the international relevance of the CoLab themes. To achieve this, the CoLab program has established thematic networks in Portugal, the transfer of technology to commercial ventures, and the introduction of Portuguese companies to the U.S. market.

In the second year of its program CoLab has achieved a considerable degree of success in recruiting high quality postgraduate students. In the future, such students will benefit from the dual degree programs that will soon be initiated between UT Austin and Portuguese universities. In addition, joint degrees will soon be established between Portuguese universities, testifying to the type of institutional innovation that CoLab is helping to bring about.

Another strong element of the program has been its support for workshops and symposia – a good example being the *Future Places* festival which provided a venue for digital media artists, designers, and engineers to compete and display their work through film screenings, live performances, and interaction installations. The program has fostered several research collaborations between Portuguese universities and UT Austin which has resulted in a number of joint papers and research proposals.

UTEN is active in establishing Portuguese SMEs and startups in the U.S. market by creating links with venture capitalists and synergistic U.S. companies. Prime examples include *Bioalvo*, *Fluidinova*, and *YDreams*, all of which are Portuguese companies that UTEN has helped to establish a U.S. presence in the past year, and which are opening offices there, hiring new staff, and negotiating venture capital investment with U.S. companies.

To provide a sustainable institutional infrastructure for its international partnerships, FCT is investigating the setting up of a foundation supported by private enterprise. This foundation would be agile and entrepreneurial in nature, and serve as an umbrella organisation for managing the various independent consortia and programmes that make up FCT's international partnerships.

Further details of the CoLab program can be found at <http://www.utaustinportugal.org/>.