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Partnership to Further Global Quest by N.Y.U.

By TAMAR LEWIN

New York University, well on its way to becoming the first truly global university, is starting a new partnership with the [University of the People](#), a unusual nonprofit online school offering free classes to students around the world.

With the collaboration, students who show exceptional promise after at least a year of studies with the University of the People could apply to [N.Y.U.'s Abu Dhabi campus](#) and be eligible for financial aid.

The University of the People, created two years ago by Shai Reshef, an Israeli entrepreneur, offers programs in business administration and computer science, using mostly volunteer professors and course materials available free online; it is not yet accredited. The programs have attracted 1,000 English-speaking students from 115 countries, including Haitians who have been living in tent cities since the earthquake in January 2010, Sudanese refugees, and a considerable number of students from China, Indonesia, Nigeria and Vietnam, university officials said.

"When I met Shai last year, I told him that we are so committed to his agenda that we have to be partners," John Sexton, the president of N.Y.U. said in an interview. "Our mission is spreading our education and knowledge, and if we can find some amazing kids from sub-Saharan Africa or Haiti through this wonderful vehicle of the University of the People and set an example among elite schools with resources, so much the better."

Mr. Sexton said there were no specific promises of slots for University of the People students, but he expected a few might be admitted to the [Abu Dhabi campus](#) in the entering class of 2012.

N.Y.U.'s highly selective campus there, paid for by Abu Dhabi, the richest of the United Arab Emirates, has just finished its first year of operations, with 150 students from 39 countries, including some from wealthy Emirati families and others who were raised in poverty. The university uses outside groups to scout for top students and flies hundreds of likely candidates to Abu Dhabi for weekend visits.

For next year's entering class, Mr. Sexton said, N.Y.U. Abu Dhabi received 5,854 applications and offered admission to 196 students, or 3.3 percent. (By comparison, Harvard admitted 6 percent of its applicants this year, and 7 percent last year.) Although the cost of attending N.Y.U., whether in Washington Square or Abu Dhabi, is among the highest in the United States, at about \$53,000 a year, the Persian Gulf campus offers generous financial aid.

"In Abu Dhabi, we're able to give financial aid at the same level as places like Harvard and Princeton," said Mr. Sexton, who announced this year that N.Y.U. planned to open a campus in Shanghai in 2013.

Several N.Y.U. faculty members and administrators have been working with the University of the People on a volunteer basis since it began. Russell Winer, chairman of the marketing department at N.Y.U.'s Stern School of Business, is chairman of the University of the People business administration department; Alexander Tuzhilin, a professor of information systems at the Stern School, serves as chairman of the University of the People computer science department; and Paul Affuso, an associate dean at the Stern School, is the University of the People's chief financial officer.

Mr. Sexton said he hoped the collaboration would encourage more N.Y.U. faculty and graduate students to work with the online institution.

"It's almost unbelievable," Mr. Reshef said. "Most of our students had no alternative for higher education before we opened the gates for them, and now the most successful may be able to further pursue their dreams by attending one of the best universities in the world."