



# HAMID SWAPS CLEANING FOR TECHNOLOGY

## CISCO NETWORKING ACADEMY PROGRAM

## SUCCESS STORY

Lebanon

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Hamid

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*Hamid, academy student*

*Once, by his own admission, he was "desperate and hopeless" at finding himself far from home and in an apparent career dead-end. Little more than a year later, Hamid Hajar is today on the brink of a promising career as a networking engineer.*

Hamid Hajar looks forward to the future with optimism, thanks to the Cisco Networking Academy® Program. After he was forced by political and economic turmoil to leave his native Sudan for Lebanon, his refugee status meant he was reduced to working as a cleaner, despite a talent for technology. Fortunately, however, the cleaning job was in the IT Department of Beirut's Business and Computer University College (BCU), where a perceptive manager spotted his potential and encouraged him to join the University's Networking Academy program.

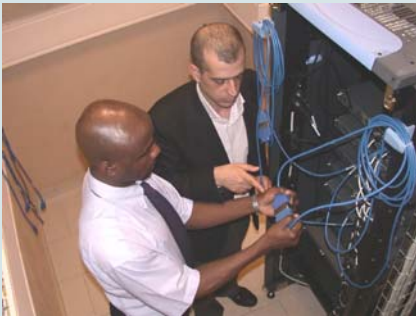
Now Hamid aged 31 is completing studies leading to Cisco Certified Networking Associate (CCNA™) certification. Studying and working at the same time hasn't been easy but Hamid - who is not in any case the kind to be daunted by hard work - says that the support of the course director, staff and fellow-students has made all the difference. He sums up: "Before I began my studies with the Academy, I had almost lost hope. The program was like a candle to light my way through life."

### The Struggle to Find Work

Hamid was born in Darfur, Sudan, in 1979. He completed his education at Baghdad Communication and Telecommunication College, emerging with a Diploma in Microwave Communication. It was while studying in Iraq that he first became interested in computer technology, but he did not have a chance to get involved at that point.

On his return to Sudan towards the end of the 1990s, he searched long and hard for a job, but was unable to find one owing to the economic and political situation. In 2001 he moved to Lebanon. It was still impossible for him to find employment commensurate with his qualifications, but being unable to return to Sudan, he accepted a job as a cleaner.

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**Hamid (on left) with instructor Issam**

“This is an extraordinary course. The way we were taught and in particular the structured way the material was delivered, gave us great self confidence as well as the feeling that we were learning something valuable.”

## A Stroke of Luck

It was a low point for someone with Hamid's potential and ambitions, and understandably he started to feel that life was a burden. As fate would have it, however, the cleaning job was with the IT department of BCU, and his luck suddenly changed when he was spotted surfing the Net by departmental manager Engineer Issam Maarouf on his daily tour of the labs. On striking up a conversation with this unusual "cleaner", Issam quickly realised what kind of man he was talking to. "I could see how keen he was. He was an intelligent, ambitious person and I wanted to see him grow."

Issam is also director of BCU's Computer Centre and Co-ordinator of its Cisco Networking Academy program, which back then was just starting up after a year of intensive preparation. Most participants in the Networking Academy program are students or graduates of the university, interested in adding professional certifications to their IT degrees. Others are employees of Lebanese companies.

Even though Hamid did not fit the usual pattern, he struck Issam as an ideal candidate for the Networking Academy program. When Issam described the program, Hamid liked what he heard.

His financial situation did not make it easy for him to participate, but the University did everything it could to help. He was awarded a scholarship for 50% of the course fees and allowed to defer payment of the remainder. Having spotted Hamid's potential, Issam was determined to give him the help and encouragement that would allow him to succeed.

## Going into Battle

So it was, that in August 2003 - just a week after the fateful encounter in the lab - Hamid embarked on the CCNA course at BCU. He was able to attend the lectures and labs regularly because they took place outside his hours of work. "It was hard, though," he recalls. "I had to work all day long and then attend my classes, so I was short of time to study the material."

Hamid's tutors were immediately impressed with his determination. "The instructors used to say that studying for the CCNA course was like a battle for him - his great desire to learn allowed him to overcome his tiredness from the day's work," says Issam. Once again, the university helped, on occasion allowing him to study during his hours of duty, while the Academy instructors gave him every encouragement to persist.

On the plus side, Hamid found that his knowledge of communication equipment, gained in Baghdad, helped him with his Cisco studies. He had also taken English classes since his arrival in Lebanon, and these language studies proved valuable, since BCU, as an American System University, delivers the Cisco Networking Academy program in English.

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## Finding a New Family

Hamid places a high value on the support he has had from both staff and fellow-students. "The Academy became a family to me," he says now. "I came to Lebanon alone, leaving my own family behind, but once I joined the Academy, everything changed. I was surprised how nice my colleagues and instructors were. They all helped me, especially when I had language problems. Whenever they could, they would devote time outside the classes to helping me understand the course materials."

BCU prides itself on providing a multicultural environment that is free of discrimination. "We have students and employees from many different nationalities and races, and we treat them all equally," comments Issam. Hamid agrees, and says he was never made to feel an outsider. "I was always treated as a friend, and as a member of this wonderful community. That gave me the motivation to continue struggling to improve my life." He is particularly grateful to Issam: "He guided me and gave me the facilities I needed to continue this sometimes hard journey. He has helped me become the person I always wanted to be."

The style and content of the training, too, were very much to Hamid's liking. "This is an extraordinary course. The way we were taught, and in particular the structured way the material was delivered, gave us great self-confidence, as well as the feeling that we were learning something valuable. We had practical labs, and professional, dedicated instructors.."

## Hard Work Brings Results

It was not long before new opportunities began to open up for Hamid. "There is a big market for Cisco technology and skills in Lebanon, and I was offered a job in an Internet café soon after I finished CCNA 1", he says. Sadly he was unable to fit this work in with his studies and existing job at BCU, but it was certainly an encouraging sign for the future.

Now Hamid is studying hard for the CCNA exam, and is looking forward to the career that it will open up. "As soon as I have received my certificate I will start applying for work". Of course, it would be great to have an IT career in Sudan, but I think it will be a while before things improve enough for that."

Nevine El Kadi, Cisco Area Academy Manager, North Africa & Levant, is confident that Hamid will succeed at last in finding suitable work. "The skills and knowledge which he will acquire from the program will become his greatest companion in the job marketplace". The Cisco certification can unlock many job opportunities. IT Companies respect CCNA Academy graduates, and there is high demand for CCNA/CCNP academy graduates in our region.

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"In my view, Hamid will not only benefit by being economically rewarded : communities and companies will also respect him and respect his knowledge. I believe that through hard work and perseverance, Hamid can show young people of his generation who are in the same position that it is possible to achieve success."

Issam agrees that Hamid's prospects are bright: "Companies in the Middle East are always asking us to send them CCNA graduates, to whom they offer very good salaries. We pass on these opportunities to any students who send us their CVs."

Hamid is well aware of the value of continuing to improve his knowledge and credentials. "As soon as I have settled down and earned some money to support myself and my family back in Sudan, I plan to study more." As a next step, his sights are set on the Cisco Certified Networking Professional (CCNP™) qualification.

It is no exaggeration to say that his studies at the Academy have turned Hamid's life around. "I used to feel that my time was useless, but now I can't bear to waste a minute of it. And for the first time in my life, I can think about the future in a positive way," he says.