



ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 5, 12 MARCH 2010

GENERAL NEWS

This week was another very busy week with regard to the different initiatives of different ODL task teams. This communiqué includes

1. A progress report on *ODL Task team 1 (Admissions)*
2. A progress report of *ODL Task Team 3 (Assessment)*
3. A report on a visit to the Satellite broadcasting centre by *ODL Task Team 4 (Student Support)*
4. A progress report of *ODL Task Team 6 (Student retention, success and throughput)*

PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING TASK TEAM 1: ADMISSIONS

Task team 1 will have their first team meeting on Friday 12 March. The team will then discuss, amongst other things, the feedback of the colleges regarding admission requirements. In next week's communiqué I will report on the team's discussions and their next steps.

PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING TASK TEAM 3: ASSESSMENT

This task team, under the leadership of Dr Gugu Moche met for the first time on Wednesday 10 March. One of the advantages this task team has is the fact that many of its members also served on the ODL Task Team on Assessment in 2009. The team did a lot of preparation in 2009 and the team is almost ready to provide the Unisa community with a robust rationale for alternative assessment practices in ODL. The ODL Implementation Plan (Point 11) mandates the "[t]ask team appointed by STLSC to document and propose use of alternative assessment practices". At the meeting all colleges and stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on assessment practices describing current assessment practices and reflecting on the following questions:

- What are the *educational* advantages of this practice?
- What are the *educational* disadvantages of this practice?
- What is the feedback from *lecturers* about this practice?
- What is the feedback from *students* about this practice?
- How do different systems/procedures at Unisa impact on this practice? (This is not about blaming, but to get a sense of the constraints)

The next meeting on 29 March from 10:00-12:00 will provide an opportunity to engage with the feedback from the different colleges and stakeholders and plot the next steps. The team will also scrutinise a preliminary report on good ODL practices prepared for the ODL assessment task team in 2009 by Prof Johann Dreyer and Prof Marietha Nieman.

The team celebrated the efforts and progress made in 2009 and is very enthusiastic about its mandate for 2010. The photograph below shows a team ready to set the pace!



From left to right (back row): Prof Sunette Lötter, Prof Ansie Minnaar, Prof Ann-Mari Hesselink, Ms Ilze du Plooy, Mr Robert Bezuidenhout, Ms Margaret More, Prof Loui Swanepoel, Ms Saliem Abdullah, Prof Marietha Nieman, Ms Elfriede Boshoff, Ms Manoko Serane, Prof Solly Magano, and Mr Nicholas Maluleke. *In the front row:* Dr Gugu Moche, Prof Johan Dreyer, Ms Mpho Tshesane, and Mr Cornelius Bothma.

TASK TEAM 4 (STUDENT SUPPORT) VISITS THE SATELLITE BROADCASTING CENTRE

The ODL Implementation plan (point 15) foresees this task team to, amongst other things, to “[d]evelop guidelines on offering group discussion classes and moving towards only using satellite and videoconferencing facilities in future (guidelines to also deal with DVD, podcasting, etc)”.

In order to be able to develop guidelines as part of the broader conceptual framework, the team decided to visit the satellite broadcasting facilities on Tuesday 9 March 2010. The team will now look at different reports and research done on the use of satellite broadcasting before submitting a report as part of their mandate. The recommendation to replace *all* group discussions with satellite broadcasting will have major implications, for the current available resources. In professional training such as social work, nursing, counselling, teacher development ... some element of face to face contact with small groups is likely still to be necessary from time to time. Training all lecturers in the effective use of satellite broadcasts will require careful planning (to prevent lecturers from being trained and not using the training, or lecturers wanting to use the facilities and not getting access). In considering the appropriateness of using satellite broadcasting it is crucial to see satellite broadcasting as *one of many possibilities*. When modules are designed and developed, all the different possibilities should be carefully considered based on the student profile and distribution, HEQF level of the module, appropriateness of using satellite broadcasting for the specific characteristics of the module/discipline, the exact content of the broadcast, how it fits into and speaks to the broader learning experience, and the available resources.



From left to right: Prof M Montesh (first presenter) shakes the hand of Prof M du Toit (as second presenter) while the rest of the team looks on.



From left to right: Ms R Negota, Ms Molatlhegi, and Dr Eleanor Johannes



From left to right: Prof M du Toit, Ms H Ms H Wilson and Mr R Mauries

PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING TASK TEAM 6: STUDENT THROUGHPUT, RETENTION AND SUCCESS

At the first meeting of ODL Task Team 6 on 10 March, Prof Subotzky provided a rich and detailed historical overview of the processes regarding an institutional response to student retention, success and throughput. He started by asking the question *“Why should we take student retention, success and throughput seriously?”* Among the reasons provided were

- Unisa has a moral obligation to take student success seriously.
- There is the risk of a potential loss of revenue.
- Increased student satisfaction is correlated with student success and person-environment “fit”
- It is crucial not to underestimate the reputational risk of student failure (lower prestige and staff and student morale). Student throughput and success are very public issues
- Student success is also correlated to operational efficiencies and structures
- There is strong external pressure for higher education, and Unisa in particular to take student retention, success and throughput seriously

Prof Subotzky then introduced a number of very sobering questions, of which the last question really got the team thinking – *“Are you using student success as your lens to view EVERYTHING?”* T

At present the ODL Implementation plan (point 19) states the mandate of this task team as follows: “Investigate the necessity of developing/allocating a system/unit to monitor drop out and completion.” Prof Subotzky proposed the mandate to be broadened to: *Develop an institutional success and throughput strategy for Senate approval by June.* A smaller team will, in line with the broadened mandate, compile a draft strategy addressing student retention, throughput and success at Unisa. The team will consist of Prof George Subotzky, Ms Yuraisha Chetty, Ms Hentie Wilson, Dr Moeketsi Letseka, and Dr Paul Prinsloo.



A picture of a part of ODL Task Team 6



Prof Subotzky chairing the team meeting

Drafted by Dr Paul Prinsloo

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