



ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 16, 2 JUNE 2010

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS WEEK'S COMMUNIQUÉ

1. *Going online – flying or flapping?*
2. *Feedback on a meeting of ODL Task team 6: Student success and retention*
3. *Reflections on the pedagogical affordances of technology*
4. *Senate meeting 2 June*
5. *ODL repository and blog*

1 GOING ONLINE – FLYING OR FLAPPING?

A crucial element of this year's ODL implementation plan is to investigate ways and strategies to enhance Unisa's teaching, learning and student support with the effective *and* appropriate use of technologies. There is a concerted drive to encourage lecturers to optimally use *myUnisa* and a number of postgraduate modules are earmarked for full online delivery. Full online delivery, in the context of Unisa, means that there will be *no* printed materials for students, and the whole of the learning journey will be structured through online activities, readings and engagement with peers and lecturers. The report from **ODL Task Team 5: Technology enhanced teaching, learning and student support** suggests a distinction between three different modes of the use of online technologies namely *augmented*, *blended* and *online*. The report explains these three concepts as follows:

Augmented: The use of technology to *extend* existing paper-based courses by using audio CDs, multimedia DVDs, audio and video conferencing, satellite broadcasting or the basic functionalities of *myUnisa* such as resource uploading and discussion forums. Some academics even use externally hosted Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook and Blogger. Staff using the latter must, however, be wary of the following associated institutional risks: copyright, identity and information harvesting; academics must provide all technical and non-technical support themselves; the providers' right to terminate or change the service at will; higher levels of technology literacy among students, etc.

Blended: In the Unisa context this refers to the *replacement* of components of the existing paper-based distance education programmes with technology. These may include using the more advanced tools of *myUnisa*, podcasting, e-portfolios, etc. It could also refer to extending face-to-face interaction with students both physically and via bidirectional synchronous technology such as video conferencing and Skype.

Online: Technology *entirely replaces* paper-based *and* face-to-face education. Unisa currently has the capability to provide fully online programmes through *myUnisa*, *myLife* and associated Web 2.0 technologies. However, courses will have to be redesigned from the ground up and academics as well as support staff will have to acquire new skills to reap the full benefits of online teaching and learning.

A number of authors warn regarding the emphasis on using technologies and forgetting that the technologies are and should be in service of the curriculum and pedagogy. Gilly Salmon (2005:202) from the University of Leicester warns that often technology is included in teaching and learning experiences without due consideration for interrogating the “underlying assumptions about teaching and knowledge sharing”. Often the introduction of technologies does not result in a re-imagining of the pedagogy. Salmon (2005:205) warns that the emphasis often falls on technological “solutions” rather than “pedagogical innovation”. Teaching online and making use of technologies “has almost nothing to do with computers and everything to do with time, motivation, knowledge and the new agency of cyber-experience, as well as good, appropriate teaching” (Salmon 2005:215). Harris, Mishra & Koehler (2007:3) warn that many educators start with “technologies’ affordances and constraints, then attempt to discern how the technologies can be integrated successfully into content-based learning at different levels”. This results in a “technocentric” approach to the use of technology in education (Harris et al 2007:3). Focusing on the affordances of technology often leaves out thinking about the use of technology within the context of the curriculum and pedagogy (Harris et al 2007:3).

Salmon (2005:202) states that transferring existing teaching strategies to an institutional virtual learning environment (VLE) like *myUnisa* is comparable to *flapping your wings* but not yet *flying*. Going online fundamentally questions our conception of teaching as *transmission* to teaching as *collaboration* and *co-creation*. We cannot “just” put existing study materials behind glass and then boast that we have gone “online”. Going online, or to use Salmon’s (2005) metaphor, to really fly, would mean fundamentally restructuring a module and changing our beliefs, assumptions and strategies embedded in lecturer, tutor and learner roles, responsibilities and opportunities. Yes, technology does allow us to do things *differently*, but it also requires us to do *different* things...

Also see point 4 in this communiqué for an overview of an event hosted by the Institute for Open and Distance Learning (IODL) in which Prof Sam Naidu spoke on the pedagogical affordances of technologies.

REFERENCES

Harris, J.B., Mishra, P. & Koehler, M.J. 2007. Teachers’ technological pedagogical content knowledge: curriculum-based technology integration reframed. Paper delivered at the American Educational Research Association, April 9 - Friday, April 13, Chicago, http://mkoehler.educ.msu.edu/OtherPages/Koehler_Pubs/TECH_BY_DESIGN/AERA_2007/AERA2007_HarrisMishraKoehler.pdf Accessed 1 June 2010.

Salmon, G. 2005. Flying or flapping: a strategic framework for e-learning and pedagogical innovation in higher education institutions. *ALT-J*, 13(3): 201-218.

2 FEEDBACK ON A MEETING OF ODL TASK TEAM 6: STUDENT SUCCESS AND RETENTION

On 24 May ODL Task team 6: Student success and retention had their first post-STLSC meeting. The scope and scale of the mandate of Task Team 6 was significantly expanded to focus on the drafting of a framework and strategy to enhance student success at Unisa. It was acknowledged that this is a larger, more medium-term task and that this would therefore impact on the timeline of the task teams which aimed at submitting draft reports to the meeting of the STLSC on 10 May. As a result, the work of the Working Group was highly constrained time-wise. The end result was a draft report completed by Prof Subotzky and submitted to the STLSC. There was not sufficient time to consult properly with both the Working Group and the Task Team. The understanding was that the document was regarded as a draft and that the task team will resume work after the 10 May meeting. The team will then also address the responses of the STLSC. The STLSC approved most, but not all the recommendations. In particular, the matter of a suitable structure for the day-to-day operation of the student success initiative was referred back to the Task Team for further consideration. The meeting therefore was called upon to focus on the framework and strategy document and specifically the recommendations that were not approved.

Prof Subotzky gave feedback on the process so far, and indicated that due to the Easter break and the tight time-line, detailed feedback and consultation was not possible in order to meet the deadline for the 10 May STLSC meeting. The structure and the processes of looking after student success therefore still need to be resolved. The main concern is how we will manage student success and retention on a *day to day* basis. The document that served before the STLSC of 10 May was presented and discussed. At present the tracking system tracks performance on qualification level, and the process is under way to track students on modular level. The important thing is “then what?” - which highlights the need to discuss various options, eg. automated responses, etc. A huge advantage of having an *integrated* intelligence platform is that we will have daily access on how well we are doing and where there is need for intervention.

Therefore, for example, a head of department will have an immediate overall view of the timeous sending out of tutorial matter, students’ assignments, number of times students have attended tutorials, made contact with a student counsellor, phoned the call centre, etc. “The goal is to ensure the ongoing institution-wide coordination of Unisa’s student success initiative, compliance with approved procedures & framework, operational effectiveness of all aspects of the process & information sharing. Without an integrated and coordinated initiative, efforts will remain localised, sporadic and less than optimally effective” (ODL Task team 6 Report to the STLSC: page 21).

The deliberations that followed included the following:

- Who will take responsibility for what? In the case of automated responses, coordination may lose out. Will there be a central agency which will screen the alerts, although this will be very resource intensive?
- We should not dichotomise between automated and personal, but maybe make a distinction between centralised and decentralised.
- We should not forget the students' agency – the have (and should be made aware of) the responsibility to respond to institutional attempts to provide support, guidance. We need to grow students' personal responsibility.
- Will students have a choice? Or will they be compelled to attend extra tutorial support? Can we compel students?
- There are a number of initiatives in the other ODL Task teams that may have an impact on the need for interventions, and the type of support students will need. The role and responsibility of the academics should not be forgotten. Course design will play a crucial role in integrating the institution's response into the overlap between the student profile and the academic requirements. The modules are "owned" by the academic department. Should students not get appropriate counselling, for example, it is therefore an **academic** concern.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the representation of academics in the task team.
- The content of the PQMs is still in process and may also have an impact on the initiatives.
- The issue of how the representatives on the different task teams give feedback to the colleges they represent was raised. Where the failure rates of students are discussed, academics have to report. Therefore student success and retention are of academic concern.
- The implementation of the Framework for a Team Approach in Curriculum and Learning Development is the starting point where *everyone* will be involved.
- What is the possibility of having a student Success Committee at college level? There are different levels of management of student success and retention. The proposed Student Success committee will most probably look like the current task team. And then at college level, they will be responsible on academic level. The structure and composition of the different levels of management of student success should also integrate with the QA committees.
- Though student success is primarily an academic issue, student success encompasses non-academic factors.
- How does monitoring and evaluation of student success relate to and dovetail with the initiatives of quality assurance on institutional and departmental levels.

It was decided to form a smaller working team to re-look at the recommendations that were referred back to the team. The smaller working team will consist of: Prof George Subotzky (convenor), Dr At van Schoor (DCCAD), Ms Yuraisha Chetty (DISA), Ms Hentie Wilson (DCLD), Dr Paul Prinsloo (ODL Coordinator), Mr Moketsi Letseka (CHS), Prof Divya Singh (Deputy Registrar, co-opted), Ms Hanrie Botha (ICT), Dr Japie Heydenrych (Convenor, ODL Task team 4, co-opted).

3 REFLECTIONS ON THE PEDAGOGICAL AFFORDANCES OF TECHNOLOGY

On Thursday 27 May the *Institute of Open and Distance Learning* (IODL) at Unisa hosted Prof Som Naidu from Charles Sturt University, Australia. Prof Naidu spoke on the topic “Unpacking the affordances of technology on eLearning”. Under the affordances that the use of technology offers, he mentioned:

- Information storage and retrieval
- Communication and collaboration
- Engagement and interaction

Prof Naidu discussed a number of strategies for optimising technology affordances, and emphasised the need to “carefully integrate ICTs” into the learning experience. He made it clear that the careful integration of technology into the learning experience implies that “the choice and use of a technology is closely aligned with the intent of the learning and teaching transaction” He suggested that we answer three questions in order to optimise technology affordances:

1. What are the key learning and teaching questions to ask?
2. What are the most powerful and suitable learning designs? **And only then...**
3. What are some of the appropriate technologies?

There is a danger at Unisa that we look at the technologies and their affordances FIRST without due consideration of the learning and teaching questions, and learning designs. Prof Naidu acknowledged that there are a number of challenges in using technology like: with regard to discussion forums he stated that “educators, often erroneously, believe that by making the communication channel accessible to the learners, discussion and debate among them will be raging and hot. More often than not, they are surprised to find out that there is silence while they continue to call for learners among themselves”. Prof Naidu stated that “The truth is that learners are not going to talk for any reasonable length of time about anything. Their time is precious and most of them will only do what is necessary and required of them.” He also referred to the fact that many learners find articulating their ideas in an online environment traumatising. He referred especially to non-native speaking learners who may agonise over phrasing their responses correctly.

The IODL is congratulated on a very successful seminar and workshop! We look forward to the next one!

4 SENATE MEETING 2 JUNE

All the recommendations from the different ODL Task teams will serve before the meeting of Senate on Wednesday 2 June 2010. In the next ODL communiqué I will provide a personal reflection on the outcomes regarding the recommendations.

5 ODL REPOSITORY AND BLOG

All the ODL task team reports, the overview of the recommendations of the STLSC and other ODL documents are available on the Unisa Library's Institutional Repository at <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/dspace/handle/10500/3072> (accessed 1 June 2010). The repository is updated on a regular basis and if you register on the repository, you will get notifications of any new uploads.

You are also most welcome to comment on this (and previous) ODL Communiqués on the Unisa Staff website. On the right hand side of the Unisa Staff website, you will see a section titled "Important links" under which you must then click on "Blogs". On the blog page, you will notice two links namely "E-connect" and "Open Distance Learning". If you follow the latter you will be able to read and comment on the ODL Communiqués.

Drafted by Dr Paul Prinsloo

ODL Coordinator

Office of the Vice-Principal: Academic & Research, Unisa

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+27 (0) 12 4293683 (office), +27 (0) 823954113 (mobile), prinsp@unisa.ac.za