



## ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 19, 22 JUNE 2010

### AN OVERVIEW OF THIS WEEK'S COMMUNIQUÉ

1. *Some interesting statistics and general information regarding the Open University*
2. *Third Conversation Forum offered by the DCLD*

### 1 GENERAL REFLECTIONS REGARDING COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE OU AND UNISA

I am in the process of wrapping up the first part of my International Fellowship at the Open University (OU) and I thought of sharing some reflections on differences between the OU and Unisa. These reflections are my personal views sitting in a particular location on the OU campus, namely the Michael Young building where the OU Business School (OUBS) is situated.

- Since I have joined Unisa in 1995, the OU was regarded by many of my colleagues as the “gold standard” in distance education. The OU is a ‘younger’ distance education institution than Unisa, smaller, with less offerings, a different student profile and different ways of doing things. Despite these and other differences, it was and still is interesting to witness that many of the issues the OU faces are *similar* to the issues Unisa faces. Both institutions are at present investigating the factors that impact and shape student retention and success. Both institutions are at present reimagining student support. Both institutions are facing an increasingly younger and diverse student population than they ever had. And both institutions are grappling with funding formulas from central government.
- The focus at the OU, if I understand it correctly, was until recently very much on focused on module level and not on programme level. The total curriculum pathway or journey as per programme at Unisa was less obvious at the OU. Students at the OU could chose freely on how to proceed and which courses to take in whatever order. In the service of openness, the OU provided students with maximum choices. This is very different from Unisa where students’ pathways are mostly very structured where modules build on preceding modules. The OU is in the process of considering making the curriculum pathway much more structured than before in an effort to increase students’ throughput and success. But that would mean being less ‘open’...
- All students at the OU have access to personalised tutoring which may involve face-to-face tutorials. The OU, like Unisa, is very cognisant of the fact that very few students (taking into consideration the total student population) actually attend these tutorials, and that the evidence that these tutorials always make a difference in student success is *not* forthcoming.

The OU is therefore critically reflecting on ways to optimise personal contact between students and tutors using different types of technologies. Traditionally tutoring at the OU always had a very strong element of pastoral care and they are looking at ways to increase the non-academic or pastoral element of their student support.

- One of the major differences between OU tutors and Unisa tutors is the fact that all assignments are marked by tutors. These tutors do not automatically mark examination papers but can if approved. At Unisa we will most probably have to look at a mix of tutors, tutor-markers, and markers as not all tutors would like to be involved in the marking of assignments and not all (current) markers would like to tutor. Or is this something that is an untested assumption?
- The OU has made a fairly strong distinction between course development and delivery (or what they call 'presentation'). Tutors are on the presentation (tutorials, personal contact and marking of assignments) end of the teaching model, and most academics are on the development (research and writing of course materials) end of the teaching model. Is there a way we at Unisa, could rethink academic and tutor responsibilities?

This is my third visit to the OU and every time I am amazed at how much I learn just from being exposed to this, at times, very different environment. I sincerely believe there are some things that we can learn from them. I also believe that there are some things they can learn from us (although they may not necessarily think so! 😊). Considering the developments at Unisa with regard to our thinking about the team-approach to the development of curricula and courseware, a longer development cycle, the curriculum policy, and the implementation of ODL I really think that Unisa have a lot to be proud of.

## **2 THIRD DCLD CONVERSATION FORUM**

The theme for the conversation forum will be "Preparing Unisa graduates for an unflat world...". The forum will be hosted in Pretoria on 24 June in the Dr Miriam Makeba Concert Hall, and in Florida on 29 June in the Genmin Auditorium. Both of the conversation forums will take place from 09:30-11:30.

This forum has as background the following:

### **How do we prepare graduates for an unflat world, where ...**

- The degree that they have received this year will be obsolete within the next 7 years.
- Innovation will be happening on the periphery of industry and society often possible due consideration for the ethical implications of the innovation.

- Graduates will change occupations at least 3-5 times in the next ten years, picking up different habits, skills, and vocabularies.
- Access to natural resources will be contested and be the reason for wars and massive migrations.
- Water will be the scarcest resource and countries will disappear and appear.
- The rich will be richer and the poor, even poorer.
- The HIV virus may mutate and new diseases and pandemics will spread faster than ever
- Medical science will produce artificial life forms
- Those with access to medicines and healthcare will become older than ever before; those without access will die younger than ever before; and because the poor have nothing to lose, they will form vigilante groups; poor nations and individuals will pirate on the rich and the affluent.
- Today's cutting edge technologies will be laughed at, with new technologies pushing constant change. People will migrate easily to using new technologies and those excluded today will be more excluded and marginalized than ever before.
- New geopolitical and cultural formations and alliances will develop, often with closed borders.
- Increasing religious and cultural fundamentalism will polarize and stratify society.

The panel on the Pretoria campus on 24 June will include Dr Gugu Moche (Mathematics), Mr Jason Ming Sun (ICT), Prof Petrus Potgieter (Decision Sciences), Dr Neil Eccles (Centre for Corporate Citizenship) and Mr Tsepo Constable (Library). The panel for the Florida campus will be communicated closer to the date.

Bookings for the Forums on **both** campuses can be done by sending an e-mail to Ms Liz van der Westhuizen (vdwesesj@unisa.ac.za) or reserve a seat by phoning her at 012-429 6244.

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