ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 30, 8 SEPTEMBER 2010

IN THIS ISSUE:

1   RICHARD BRANSON UNPLUGGED
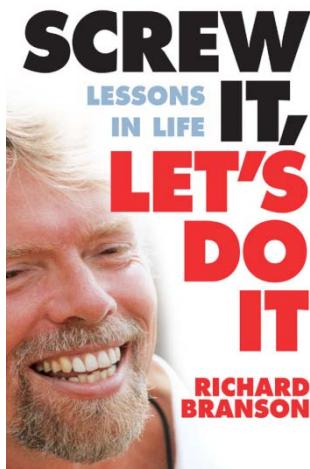
Somehow it just did not feel "academic" to repeat the title of this small book by Richard Branson (2006). Despite my unease with the somewhat crude title, this small book is worth reading. The book's subtitle is "Lessons in life" – and the short chapters (the whole book is but 107 pages long) include the following: Just do it; Have fun! Be bold; Challenge yourself; Stand on your own feet; Live the moment; Value family and friends; Have respect; Do some good.

It is really very light reading but somehow I enjoyed the "lightness", his honesty in sharing his fears, his successes and yes, some of his failures. This small book will most probably not be regarded as 'academic' enough or worth mentioning in certain conversations at Unisa, but I found some of the points Branson makes enlightening. Points such as …

- "What is the point of hiring bright people if you don't use their talent?" (2006:29)
- "Be bold but don't gamble" (2006:29)
- "Some you win and some you lose. Be glad when you win. Don't have regrets when you lose. Never look back. You can't change the past. I try to learn from it." (2006:37)
- "If you want milk, don't sit on a stool in the middle of a field in the hope that a cow will back up to you… Don't just sit around. Catch the cow" (2006:51)

Branson (2006), if I understand him correctly, will not support acts in service of egos or self-interest. Yes, he supports the philosophy of "just do it" – but he suggests that one should never gamble with the lives and futures of others (unless you will take responsibility for your acts and make amends if things go wrong), listen and respect others' points of opinions, and live adventurously!

UNISA | university of south africa

The book made me think of a number of staff at Unisa – academic, support and professional- who really *live* the title of the book. These staff members are at the forefront of a range of strategies and interventions to increase the effectiveness of teaching, learning and student support at Unisa – often against all odds. Despite the fear of excluding a huge number of staff by mentioning a few of these staff members – I really want to celebrate a number of them by mentioning them by name as examples of staff that live the title of this book, not for fame or self-enrichment, but in service of teaching, learning and the support of our students. I am thinking of

- The efforts of TSDL and the student support portfolio that have since the inception of student support at Unisa in the 1970's fought an uphill battle. Student support has always been seen as an "add on" by many academic, administrative and professional staff at Unisa and yet, they had and still have huge impacts on the lives of thousands of students.
- Ms Annelien van Rooyen in the Department of Financial Accounting who is exploring using a range of new technologies such as Mixit and SMS in the teaching of Accounting on second-year level.
- Mr Bernard Serfontein and Mr Willie le Roux of the Department of Economics who have made huge strides in the development and use of a DVDs and virtual tutoring in the teaching of Micro-economics.
- Mr Felix Fushai (CSET), Ms Hentie Wilson (DCLD) and their team in the Science Foundation Programme who are moving mountains (stone by stone…).
- Mr David Proctor and Prof Jurie le Roux who is really setting the pace in the use of tutor-markers despite huge draw-backs and lack of institutional support and processes.
- The *my*Unisa team who work relentlessly in providing support and leadership in the more effective and appropriate use of Unisa's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).
- Ms Dalize van Heerden in Computing who sets a wonderful example by her dedication in the use of *my*Unisa and exploring podcasts.
- Many staff in the regions who often feel side-lined but who render an invaluable service to our students.
- Ms Klarissa Engelbrecht (Computing) who has rolled out E-Tutors for 20 000 students in EUP1501 (End-user computing) without any systems in place.
- Many Academic Department Tutor Coordinators (ADTCs) who really provide a crucial link between academic departments, TSDL, the regions and tutors.
- The tutors who face students on Saturday after Saturday and who make a huge difference in the lives of these students.
- The counsellors and Peer Helpers who provide precious support to our students in moments of need.

I do apologise that I could not mention all of the staff who exemplify the title of Branson's book – but there are many of you at Unisa. It is people like you who are really blazing the trail for us to follow! Don't stop doing it!

UNISA | university of south africa

2   THE APPOINTMENT OF TUTORS AND TUTOR- MARKERS: THE START OF THE CONVERSATION

On Thursday, 2 September representatives from the colleges and other stakeholders had a first conversation regarding the appointment of tutors and tutor-markers. What a conversation it was! The background to this conversation was as follows:

a. At the STLSC of 23 August CHS recommended the following: "Authority to appoint tutors and tutor-markers should be delegated to Colleges and needs assessed and addressed at programme and department level".
b. The Conceptual model for student support (accepted by Senate on 2 June) proposed that the appointment of tutors and their relationship with colleges be relooked.
c. Draft 4 of the current proposal for the implementation of the Conceptual model for student support at Unisa also proposes that the appointment of tutors and tutor-markers receive urgent attention.

The HR Boardroom was much too small for the number of representatives and the intensity of the discussions! Though the focus of the meeting was to explore the appointment of tutors and tutor-markers, it soon became apparent that an urgent rethink of the whole tutor system was necessary.

This does not mean that there are not many things that Unisa can be truly proud of with regard to our tutor system! The dedication of tutors, TSDL, Academic Department Tutor Coordinators, the regions and many others contributed to the success of tutoring at present. The conversation and different contributions however indicated that there is room for improvement and the sooner this is clarified, the better it would be for all of us.

Mr Tony Mays (CHS and SAIDE) was so kind as to take notes during the meeting and **Appendix 1** is a copy of his notes he kindly shared with us.

3   INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, COPYRIGHT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the issues that arise from the increasing use of social media or Web 2.0 technologies is the need for clarity regarding issues of intellectual property rights and copyright. A number of academic staff is at the forefront of exploring a range of new Web 2.0 technologies and it is clear that there is a need for guidelines regarding personal and business use of these technologies. A small group of Unisa staff met since the Senate meeting of 2 June and they have now submitted a document containing draft guidelines to the STLSC of 20 September 2010. For the sake of transparency and communication, I have decided to include their proposal in this ODL Communiqué. Their proposal will serve at the STLSC of 20 September after which it will be open for discussion and input before it will serve again on the STLSC of 18 October. Please find the *Guidelines* in **Appendix 2.**

4   AN OVERVIEW OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- The Nadeosa Conference takes place in Potchefstroom from 6-8 September. A huge number Unisa staff will be presenting papers and we wish them all of the best!
- There will be a seminal workshop for representatives from all the regions on Monday 13 September which will be the start of relooking at the function, role and structures of the regions in response to the ODL implementation.

5   TOWARDS AN ODL PEDAGOGY

For many years teaching at Unisa entailed the writing of study materials and to a lesser extent include a range of media into the learning journey of students. Huge parts of lecturers' time was dedicated to the development of study materials, setting of tutorial letters, choosing prescribed text books, setting and marking of assignments and examination papers, doing group discussions and answering student queries. In broad essence we can state that a huge part of teaching at Unisa was the production of documents which was to facilitate learning whether those were assignments, activities in study guides or tutorial letters containing feedback after assignments.

In recent years there is an increasing emphasis on the use of technologies and research-led and community engaged –teaching and it has become clear that teaching in an ODL environment is not for the weak and fearful, to the contrary. Let us explore briefly the impact of technologies on *being* a lecturer at Unisa.

As our students' connectivity increase and the institutional mandate to increase the use of networked environments in teaching and learning gather momentum, being a lecturer at Unisa is changing in character. The first change (not in an order of importance) is the change in "office hours". The number of e-mails lecturers has to answer is on the increase. Add to this the ubiquitous character of technologies, whether e-mail, the discussion forums on *my*Unisa, Twitter, Facebook, Ning, and a range of others – there is no longer a time when lecturers are not "on call". Mobile technologies allow lecturers to access all of these tools from their mobiles – and suddenly there is no such thing as "office hours", or "time-out". This may, if we are not careful, erode life "outside" teaching and contribute to "the cult of speed" (as explored in Carl Honoré's book "In praise of slow", 2004).
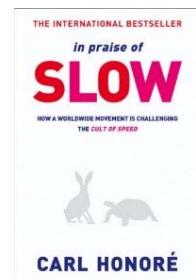
It is very easy for the institution to celebrate these lecturers who are "always on call", who sustain their online presences day in and day out regardless of holidays, family commitments, and so forth. In adopting Honoré's claim I suspect we should be careful what we praise and validate… Yes, online technologies do change the nature of our teaching time but we should be very careful that using technologies *adds* to the quality of our teaching and our lives in general, and not erode the quality of our lives (and those of our loved ones) and the lives of our students.

UNISA | university of south africa

Another change that technology brings is the fact that students who are connected, can find the latest and the best (if they only know how to judge…) on the Web. They actually don't need our materials. Many (most?) students don't do the self-assessment activities in our study guides – their aim is to be able to regurgitate the 'content' in assignments and in the examination. So actually, if they know where to look, they can find equally excellent materials and 'content' online. Many lecturers at Unisa are now prescribing textbooks produced overseas because we just cannot compete with authors who have more time (and often expertise) than we do. We therefore write "wrap-around" study materials.

If all our students had affordable and sustainable connectivity to the Web, there may not be a need for "wrap-arounds". We can provide guidance online. Which brings me to the point … if our lecturers in an ODL environment will one day (soon?) no longer write materials, will we know how to teach? Are we ready?

6   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 6 September 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
31 August 2010

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

UNISA | university of south africa

Appendix 1

Notes from the meeting on the appointment of tutors and tutor-markers – By Mr Tony Mays

It became clear from the discussion that a consideration of tutoring at Unisa needs to take cognisance of three kinds of contract appointment:

- Tutors – who interact directly with a group of students but do not mark their assignments
- External markers – who mark student scripts (assignments and examination papers) but do not interact directly with students
- Tutor-markers – an innovation from the former power course model in which tutors interact directly with a group of students and also mark their assignments. (Some tutor-markers may also be involved in examination marking.)

Traditionally the mode of interaction has been face-to-face and the handling of scripts has involved working with hard copies. Improved access to ICT means that such activities can now be managed increasingly in a digital way. Both EUP1501 (End-user computing) and the Science Foundation Programme (SFP) are already working with e-tutors.

The process of appointing tutors
There was some debate about the process of appointing tutors. Part of the confusion arises from the fact that TSDL currently manage a budget for tutors but from about 2009, a small provision for tutors is included in ACHRAM calculations for each department. From 2011, this provision increases to a total of R61 million across the institution.

Therefore the STLSC has approved that authority to appoint tutors be delegated to Colleges who will need to manage and report on the utilisation of the tutor funds made available. The following steps arose from the discussion with regard to the appointment of tutors from the budget currently managed by TSDL:

1. Academics or students may identify modules requiring tutorial support. (After consultation with regional centres, TSDL is able to compile a list of likely tutorial needs in different centres for different modules based upon current and past requests and is able to proactively advertise for new tutors in June of the preceding year.) When academics wish to have tutors appointed, they can stipulate the requirements.
2. TSDL interact with academic departments via designated ADTCs (usually junior lecturers). There are regular meetings between TSDL and the college-based ADTCs.
3. Prospective tutors submit applications and CVs to Regional Centres. Regional Centres compile and forward the applications to TSDL who distribute them to the relevant ADTCs.
4. Written approval from the relevant academics is required for the appointment process to proceed.

5. TSDL complete the appointment forms (ACA1) and check that the necessary funds are available. (SFP already manage this process independently from but in consultation with TSDL.)
6. Completed applications are forwarded to EE to check against the EE profile overall. EE inform TSDL which appointments can be proceeded with.
7. TSDL then draw up the MoAs and Task Agreements (generic but with added expectations if academics have requested such).
8. According to policy these offers of appointment should be signed off by the Director for TSDL but currently they are signed off by the ED: Learner Support.
9. The offers of appointment are then sent back to the relevant Regional Centres who contact the prospective tutors to come and sign their contracts.

Until 2009 this process was largely managed digitally with Regional Centres scanning and disseminating digital copies of applications and CVs. The average turn-around time for appointment was then about 3 days. In 2010, however, for legal reasons, the process has reverted to the manual handling of hard copy which has slowed the process considerably.

It is noted that the appointment of External Markers follows a different process in that these are recruited directly by Departments who complete and submit ACA1 forms for approval within the College structures and then for approval by EE, HR etc. With the decision to decentralise authority for appointment of tutors to Colleges, and with the expectation that tutorial support will be integrated into curriculum design, the role of TSDL in supporting the process will need to be clarified. It seems likely that there will still be student-initiated requests for (additional) tutorial support that will need to be managed.

Aspects of the tutorial support services would still be most effectively managed in a coordinated way e.g. general advertising, managing a database of tutors that might be called upon at short notice, ensuring standardisation of generic items in appointment contracts, provision of non-subject specific tutor training … It is noted that sometimes prospective or established tutors withdraw or resign and there is then a need to find a replacement at short notice. It is also noted that it is sometimes difficult to recruit suitably qualified tutors in some areas or that there may be too few students in a particular area to make a contact-based tutorial group viable. A move towards e-tutoring will help to obviate the challenges of such skewed distributions. It is also noted that there seems to be some discrepancy about the rates at which tutors are remunerated – R120 vs. R250/hour. This needs to be clarified and standardised. It is noted that the ACHRAM allocation assumption is linked to an hourly rate derived from the salary of a C1 lecturer, and will therefore change annually. It was also noted that the location of fundamental modules will determine the allocation of cost points for tutors – this should not be a problem for fundamentals offered **within** a College but some creative thinking may be needed regarding fundamentals that might be offered **across** Colleges (e.g. proposed HC generic modules).

It was noted that tutors in Ethiopia will be paid from the budget of the Ethiopian satellite campus.

It is noted that CSET use some of the staff points allocated to tutors to finance additional staff responsible for ongoing communication with appointed tutors.

The decentralisation of tutor recruitment, appointment, training and monitoring to Colleges will allow for greater flexibility in responding to the needs of different modules and programmes and will link decision-making accountability to the level at which finance has been provided and payments will be approved.

Tutors should then have a greater sense of belonging to a community of practice. It should also resolve the challenge of low academic involvement in tutor training – SFP cite an average academic attendance at tutor training at only about 30% - on the one hand, and low rates of tutor-initiated communication with lecturers on the other. Tutors need to be linked to myUnisa on appointment so that opportunities for ongoing communication can be maximised. Systems will be needed to help monitor tutor performance and impact e.g. module pass rates differentiated by tutorial group.

Professor Mosoma who also attended the meeting observed that:

- The ways in which tutors are appointed should not create the expectation of permanent employment and possible unionisation
- The recent policy initiatives have moved learner support from the periphery to the centre of the university's activities
- Tutorial support need not necessarily involve physical contact
- Among the 310 000 headcount students currently enrolled, there will be a range of needs for tutorial support ranging from none to extensive (and not necessarily recognised on the part of the student) – therefore decisions about tutorial support need to be informed by feedback from students themselves – possibly through a survey.

It was noted that it may be necessary to consider holding a 2-day workshop to explore current and future practice regarding tutors in more detail.

APPENDIX 2

GUIDELINES REGARDING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, COPYRIGHT AND SOCIAL MEDIA

1.   OVERVIEW

Unisa recognize that social media tools are increasingly accessible to and used by staff and students as a means of connecting with the public, other higher education institutions, colleagues and peers. The university recognizes and protects the concept and practice of academic freedom as essential to the proper conduct of teaching, research and scholarship within Unisa. Digital media delivered via an ever increasing variety of platforms are being integrated into the everyday lives of students and staff.

This document was developed to provide a set of guidelines in the use of social media applications for and between Unisa staff and students.

2.   GENERAL GUIDELINES

These guidelines distinguish between private and business use scenarios for both students and staff. Business use refers to all instances where a staff member, in the course of his/her employment with Unisa, contributes content to or prepares information related to his/her work or the primary business of the University for use in social media.

The term "social media technology" encompasses a variety of services delivered via Internet and mobile, including video, photo or podcasts hosts, instant messaging sites or chat rooms, wikis, blogs, online discussion forums, etc.

We encourage communication among our employees, students, partners, and others - and Web logs (blogs), social networks, discussion forums, wikis, video, and other social media - such as Twitter - can be a great way to stimulate conversation and discussion.

These guidelines apply to:
- All blogs, wikis, forums, and social networks hosted or sponsored by Unisa
- Your personal blogs that contain postings about Unisa's business, products, employees, students or partners
- Your postings about Unisa's business, products, employees, students or partners on external blogs, wikis, discussion forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter
- Your participation in any video related to Unisa's business, products, employees, students, or partners whether you create a video to post or link to on your blog, you contribute content for a video, or you appear in a video created either by another Unisa employee or by a third party.

Even if your social media activities take place completely outside of work, as your personal activities should, what you say can have an influence on your ability to conduct your job responsibilities, your colleagues' abilities to do their jobs, and Unisa's interests.

The decision to establish a social media presence and initiate public conversations must be carefully considered. Participation in social media carries a commitment towards making regular contributions and monitoring comments and activity on your profiles. The success of social media relies on constant communication.

2.1   Personal Responsibility

Unisa staff and students are personally responsible for the private content they publish on blogs, wikis, image and video hosts or any other form of user-generated content. Be mindful that the content you publish will be available for a long time— protect your privacy.

2.2   University Policies and Guidelines

The following Unisa policies and guidelines, amongst others, may inform behaviour towards the use of and access to social media:

- Internet, Electronic Communication and Web Management Policy and Guidelines,
- Unisa Code of Ethics and Conduct,
- Copyright Infringement and Plagiarism Policy, and the
- Student Disciplinary Code.

3.   PRIVATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA (POSTING AS AN INDIVIDUAL)

Students and staff of the university are encouraged to participate in social and other electronic media. The guidelines listed below apply only to those instances where there is the potential for confusion about your role as a Unisa staff member versus personal opinion or conflict with the interest of Unisa.

3.1   Identification of association with Unisa

In personal posts, you may identify yourself as a Unisa staff member. However, please be clear that you are sharing your personal views and are not speaking as a formal representative of Unisa. If you identify yourself as a staff member of Unisa, ensure your profile and related content are consistent with University policies and guidelines.

3.2   Disclaimer

If you publish Unisa-related content to any system or website outside of Unisa, and it is not an official Unisa site, but it is related to your position at the university, or the courses offered by the university, use the disclaimer below to indicate that you are expressing your personal opinion or operating in your personal capacity.

UNISA | university of south africa

Keep in mind that if you are posting with an identifiable university username, e.g. an email address, other users do not necessarily know you personally. They view what you post as coming from the university.

PROPOSED DISCLAIMER: The contents, including all opinions and views expressed, in my profile [or on my page] are entirely personal and do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of anyone else, including other employees in my department or at the University of South Africa. My department and the University of South Africa have not approved and are not responsible for the material contained in this profile [or on this page].

3.3   Unisa Logo and other Branding elements

You may not use the Unisa logo or any other official representations or images on your personal or non-official online sites. Consult the Policy on the Use of the University Coat of Arms and Other Brand Images for more details.

3.4   Respect University Time and Property

You should participate in personal social media conversations and content creation on your own time and equipment. Also consult the Internet, Electronic Communication and Web Management Policy and Unisa Code of Ethics and Conduct for guidelines on the appropriate access and use of Unisa's equipment and communication facilities.

4.   BUSINESS USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA (WHEN POSTING ON BEHALF OF UNISA)

The Unisa policies and guidelines regarding conduct, ethical behavior, internet use, sharing information and the right to privacy of information remains applicable for social media environments. In addition to the general guidelines the following should be considered when participating in a social media site on behalf of Unisa:

4.1   Notification obligation

Unisa staff members should seek departmental or directorate permission before creating an online presence that represents Unisa business, including teaching, discipline or research orientated initiatives. Departments, and thus staff members, are obligated to provide a secondary member of staff with the department or directorate with full access to the service, to ensure continuity.

The university accepts that its students have the right to participate in and collaborate with each other based on their association with Unisa. These sites are not considered to be official Unisa social media sites, but are for personal use by Unisa students. The Unisa Student Disciplinary Code will apply.

UNISA | university of south africa

4.2   Identification of/ or association with Unisa

In keeping with university policy, a student or staff member may post on a social network profile: the university's name, a university email address or University telephone number for contact purposes, or post official departmental contact information.

Any official announcements that represents or impact on the wider student audience should only be posted in conjunction with the Corporate Communication and Marketing or the University Registrar.

4.3   Branding and Use of the Unisa Logo

Official Unisa sites should comply with Unisa branding requirements. Staff should confer with CCM for assistance on branding requirements or consult the Visual Standards Manual.

4.4   Transparency and Responsibility

If you participate in or maintain a social media site on behalf of the university, clearly state your role and goals.

Responsibility for personal posts and opinion remains with the individual. Take cognizance of Unisa policies and guidelines regarding acceptable conduct, copyright issues and accountability. If the use of your official university title might imply endorsement, support or opposition of the University with regard to any personal statements, including opinions or views on any issue, an explicit disclaimer must appear close to the material.

4.5   Reporting Complaints

The Unisa Contact Centre e-mail address must be provided in all official social media sites for the registration of complaints.

4.6   Monitoring

The University of South Africa does not routinely monitor social networking sites, however, as with other electronic resources; Unisa ICT may perform activities necessary to ensure the integrity, functionality and security of the University's systems. (Unisa Internet, Electronic Communication and Web Management Policy, Section 7: Right to Monitor) Note that other employers, organizations, and individuals do monitor and share information they find on social networking Web sites. Posted information is public information.