

Designing for Gender Studies in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) Context

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Abstract

Gender is a social construct that continues to shape individuals' life experiences in ways that are both subtle and profound. Unisa's College of Human Sciences has committed itself to developing a cutting-edge interdisciplinary honours programme in gender studies in the context of open distance learning (ODL) under the auspices of the revitalised Institute for Gender Studies (IGS). The IGS hosted a stakeholder consultation workshop on 19 March 2012, at which leading gender studies experts provided invaluable input into how we should design a degree with which students will graduate as knowledgeable and effective gender change agents. The presenters of this paper will explain the philosophical and pedagogical imperatives that led to the design of the new course, which has, as its most important outcome, the production of effective graduates.

These graduates will be aware of existing and new knowledge in the field of gender studies; possess an extensive understanding of gender theory; have advanced critical thinking and writing skills; and will be able to act as agents of gendered social transformation from a solid base of knowledge concerning the impact of gender on all aspects of social existence, including individual and social identity, sexuality, representation in various media, policy, religion, health and politics. The designers, teachers and students of this programme will respond to the requirements of an ODL context, taking into account Unisa's decision to embrace the virtual learning environment as our chosen method of delivery. In 2012 the teaching team has adopted a number of alternative and innovative forms of assessment, particularly the use of a blogging assignment, which is being piloted this year. The critical learning outcomes of this assignment include familiarising students with complex theoretical arguments and the skills required for constructing such arguments via the use of new and interactive learning media.

This paper will chart the development of this curricular initiative, and the presenters will seek feedback from conference participants to enrich this continuing ODL project.