

**MANAGEMENT OF OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING AT UNISA:**

**MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS**

by

AGGRINETH ZODWA SEBENZILE NTULI

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the subject

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF LJ VAN NIEKERK

APRIL 2008



## ABSTRACT

Open and distance learning (ODL) institution should always keep in mind the fact that their learners are separated from lecturers and peers. To emphasize this point Moore (1997) states that separation between distance students and their institution leads to special patterns of learner and teacher behaviour since learning in this kind of environment requires mediation by means of media and technologies (**specifically in Chapter 1**). This means that management of activities facilities and process in an ODL institution should aim at providing access to its programs, facilities, resources and staff. They should also afford students autonomy to be in control of their learning.

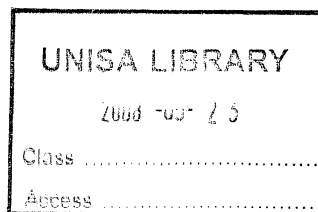
The argument is how then, the University of South Africa (UNISA) as an ODL institution manages its different systems and activities (**specifically in Chapters 2**).

Literature on what other scholars have published on this topic is in **Chapter two**. This chapter also discussed how UNISA manages process and activities such as enrolments, fees, assignment, learner support and examinations.

Research design and methodology were discussed in **Chapter 3**. **Chapter 4** dealt with data analysis and interpretation of the results while **Chapter 5** presented conclusions and recommendations.

## KEY TERMS

Management; open and distance learning management; management functions; ODL planning; organising; leading; control; institutional policies; distance education; distance learners; open learning; open and distance learning; flexible learning; learners' expectations; learner's needs; learner support services in open and distance learning; technology; media; accessibility; ODL learners' autonomy.



UNISA  
LIBRARY ARCHIVES



ARV  
378.1750968 NTUL

## DECLARATION

I declare that **MANAGEMENT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AT UNISA: MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS** is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of South Africa. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university.

Signed at Pretoria on this .....day of ..... 2008.

.....

AZS Ntuli

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My heartfelt thanks go to:

My promoter, Prof L.J. Van Niekerk for his expert guidance and encouragement.

Dr W.A. Van Schoor for his constant and instant support.

Proff A Louw, C. Bodibe, L.M. Molamu, M.S. Makhanya, Z. Motsa, M. Shahia, Titus, Mr N.A. Phathlane for kindly permitting me to interview them.

Mr JK Moloto, the UNISA Human Resources Executive Director for kindly giving me permission to involve staff members in this study for data collection purposes.

Mr L.R. Morodi for his constant support and motivation.

Mr T. Tshilowa for his constant and instant support and contribution.

Colonel (Revd) B.A.M. Ndwandwe for editing this dissertation and also for his encouragement.

Mr O.V. Kilpert for his untiring support especially, for developing me in terms of statistics expertise.

Ms A.M. Daweti for her constant support and motivation.

Colleagues in the UNISA library, especially, Ms B. Ramasodi and Ms B.D. Motsatsi for their instant and constant support.

Mr NR Raselekoane for his devoted assistance especially, at an early stage of this study. Mr Aubrey Phala, for his ever willingness to assist, especially, technologically.

Dr Godfrey Netswere, a professional statistician who professionally analysed data for this study.

Mr Oscar Kilpert, a professional statistician who assisted me to structure a questionnaire for this research.

Ms Amanda Lai, my PA for her dedication and unfailing support she gave me throughout the process of typing and shaping of this document. Mrs Magda Botha, for her devoted assistance in ensuring a professional layout of this dissertation.

My family, relatives, friends and colleagues.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of my late father, Mr Hamilton Tony Khumalo, a man of God who instilled the love for education in me at my tender age and to my remaining parent, Mom, Mrs Andrinah N. Khumalo whose prayers keep me going each day. Above all, Praise be to the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii	
Key terms	iii	
Declaration	iv	
Acknowledgement	v	
Table of Contents	vi	
<b>CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY</b>		
1.1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.2	PROBLEM STATEMENT	2
1.3	THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION	3
1.4	AIM OF THE STUDY	4
1.5	DELIMITATION OF THE OF STUDY	5
1.6	DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS	6
1.6.1	Distance education	6
1.6.2	Open learning	6
1.6.3	Open and distance learning (ODL)	7
1.6.4	Flexible learning	7
1.7	MANAGEMENT OF ODL	7
1.7.1	The concept “management”	7
1.7.2	Management of ODL at UNISA	8
1.7.3	Students’ needs and experiences of openness and flexibility in distance education	8
1.8	THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA	10
1.9	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY THE STUDY	11
1.10	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	13
1.11	THRORETICAL FRAMEWORK	13
1.12	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOG	15
1.12.1	Introduction	15
1.13	PLAN OF STUDY	15
1.14	CONCLUSION	16
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>		<b>17</b>
MANAGEMENT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LARNAING		17
2.1	INTRODUCTION	17
2.2	DISTANCE EDUCATION	17

2.2.1	A brief history of distance education	18
2.2.1.1	Distance education internationally	18
2.2.1.2	Distance education in South Africa	19
2.3	OPEN LEARNING	20
2.4	OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING(ODL)	22
2.5	FLEXIBLE LEARNING	23
2.6	MANAGEMENT OF ODL	23
2.7	WHY IS MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT AT UNISA?	24
2.8	HOW DOES UNISA MANAGE OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING	25
2.8.1	Management of enrolments/registrations	25
2.8.2	The Management of fees	26
2.8.3	The Management of assignments	26
2.8.4	The management of examinations	27
2.8.5	The management of learner support services	28
2.8.6	Opening up learning opportunities through learner support in distance education	31
2.8.6.1	Introduction	31
2.8.6.2	Types of learner support strategies in distance education	32
	(I) Strategy 1: Tutorials	32
	(II) Strategy 2: Tutor-marked assignments' comments	39
	(III) Strategy 3: Print study materials	41
	(IV) Strategy 4 : Students Online/MyUnisa	42
2.9	CONCLUSION	43
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</b>		<b>45</b>
3.1	INTRODUCTION	45
3.2	UNISA DOCUMENTS, INTERNET AND WEBSITES	45
3.3	INTERVIEWS	46.
3.3.1	Individual interviews	46
3.3.2	Focus Group Interviews	46
3.4	QUESTIONNAIRES	47
3.5	TECHNOLOGIES USED TO ANALYSE DATA	51
3.6	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	52
3.7	CONCLUSION	52



<b>CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS</b>	<b>53</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION	53
4.2 CONCLUSION	90
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>91</b>
5.1 CONCLUSIONS BASED ON QUESTIONNAIRES	91
5.1.1 Introduction	91
SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	92
1. Type of respondents	92
2. Gender Aspect	92
3. Age aspect	92
4. Choice of period to write examinations	93
5. Choice of time register	94
6. Choice to register at a nearby learning centre	94
SECTION B: INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES	95
1. Provision of pre-registration counselling	95
2. Choice to combine course/modules according to needs	95
3. Choice on the materials despatch method	96
4. Study materials always ready when requested	97
SECTION C: ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS	97
1. There is openness in UNISA programmes	97
Students experience a flexibility in UNISA programmes	97
2. Choice to choose modules relevant to theory and skills needed	98
3. Students are free to say what they think without fear	98
4. Students are allowed to send assignments whenever convenient	98
5. Students have a say on examination period	99
6. Students have a say on content of examinations	100
7. Students have a say on the structure of examination papers	100
8. Students have a say on the method of examination	100
9. Students can write examinations whenever they are ready	101
SECTION D: CURRICULUM ISSUES	101
1. Students have a say on how curricula are designed	101
2. Evidence that learners participate in programme development	102
3. Programmes to promote only the institution's points	102
4. Study workload was manageable for students	103
SECTION E: STUDENT SUPPORT	104
1. Tutorial classes were conducted in the venues within students Reach	104
2. Alternative means of learning facilitation were available To students who could not attend face-to-face tutorials	104
3. I (student) interacted with fellow students	105
4. I (student) felt free to communicate my learning needs with the Lecturer	105

5.	I (student) found the lecturer supportive	106
6.	Access to the lecturer was easy	107
7.	The lecturers played a positive role in my studies	107
<b>SECTION F: COMMUNICATION WITH LECTURERS</b>		<b>107</b>
1.	Telephones	108
2.	e-mail	108
3.	Fax	108
4.	Face-to-face meeting	109
5.	Use of learner comments section on the assignment cover	109
<b>SECTION G: GENERAL COMMENTS</b>		<b>110</b>
1.	Students	110
2.	Academic Staff	110
3.	Administrative staff	110
4.	Management	111
5.2.	<b>INTERVIEWS: RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>111</b>
5.2.1	Introduction	111
5.2.2	Results, conclusions and recommendations	111
5.2.3	Conclusion	117
5.3	<b>DOCUMENTS, INTERNET AND WEBSITES</b>	<b>119</b>
5.4	<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE STUDY IN GENERAL</b>	<b>119</b>
5.5	<b>RECOMMENDED TOPIC/S FOR FURTHER STUDY</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		<b>121</b>
<b>ADDENDA:</b>		
A.	Interview UNISA academic (a lecturer at UNISA)	125
B.	Interview with Administrative staff from the former Department of student Support (now known as TSDL)	135
C.	Interview with former CDEP Students : Gabarone – Botswana	149
D.	Interview with study materials developer at UNISA	162
E.	Interview with Professor X: Vice Principal :Learner Support Unisa	166
F.	Interview with the Vice Principal: Student and Alumni Affairs	173
G.	Interview with some Unisa Management members, academics, and Deans.	176
<b>APPENDICES:</b>		
1.	A questionnaire to students	179
Section A : Biographical information		180
Section B : Institutional systems and processes		181
Section C : Assessment and evaluation systems		182
Section D : Curriculum of the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP)		183

Section E : Student Support	184
Section F : Communication with your lecturer	185
Section G : General comments	186
2. Questionnaire to Management	187
Section A : Biographical information	187
Section B : Institutional systems and processes	188
Section C : Assessment and evaluation systems	189
Section D : Curriculum of the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP)	190
Section E : Student Support	190
Section F : Communication with your lecturer	192
Section G : General comments	193
Interview schedule: Management of ODL at UNISA (for student)	194
Interview schedule: Management of ODL at UNISA (for management and staff)	196
A letter to the Executive Director: UNISA Human Resources	198

#### TABLES:

1. Type of respondent	54
2. Respondents according to Gender	54
3. Respondents according to Age	55
4. Respondents according to Occupation	56
5. Type of current employment institution	57
6. Write exams when suited best	58
7. Students' to register at the time that suited them	58
8. Students' choice to register at learning centres next to the workplaces or homes	59
9. Pre-registration counselling that met the needs of students	60
10. Students choice to combine courses/modules of study materials	61
11. Students' choice on despatch methods of study materials	62
12. Study materials were ready whenever students requested for them	63
13. Existence of openness in UNISA programmes	64
14. Students' experience of flexibility in UNISA programmes	65
15. Students' choice in choosing modules or parts of modules	66
16. Students' ability to state what they thought about issues without fear to contradict authors	67
17. Students' freedom to send assignments at convenient times	68
18. Students' say on the examination period	69
19. Students' say on the areas of content for examination	70
20. Students' say on the structure of examination paper/s	70
21. Students' say on whether to write examinations or to be evaluated by means of alternative modes	71
22. Students' choice of writing examinations at venues of their choice	72
23. Students' say on the design of curricular	73
24. Evidence that learners participated in the Development of the Programme	74
25. Evidence that the programme only promotes one viewpoint	75

26.	Manageability of students' workload at UNISA	76
27.	Tutorial classes are conducted at venues within the reach of students	77
28.	Availability of alternative means of facilitation of contents	78
29.	Students' interaction with fellow students	79
30.	Students' freedom to communicate their needs with their lecturer	80
31.	Lecturers were positive	81
32.	Access to the lecturer was easy	82
33.	Lecturer played a positive role in students' studying	83
34.	Communication with lecturers by means of telephone	84
35.	Communication with lecturers by means of e-mail	84
36.	Communication with lecturers by means of fax	85
37.	Frequency of face-to-face meetings or tutorials	86
38.	Use of learner comments section/space by students	87
39.	Students	88
40.	Academics	88
41.	Administrative staff	89
42.	Management	90

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Due to current economic conditions in South Africa, distance education has attracted many people particularly those from the historically disadvantaged communities, who need to further their studies without having to attend classes full-time in conventional education institutions. For these people, distance education is a workable alternative which provides them with the opportunity to complete or improve their qualifications while continuing with their other commitments such as jobs, family and community responsibilities - something they could not do on a full-time basis.

In South Africa, attraction to distance education is also due to the emphasis of the present government on the importance of easy access to higher learning to ensure the redress of the past inequalities in providing higher education opportunities to all citizens according to their interests, needs and potentials (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996:14). Distance education stands to benefit both the worker and the employer in terms of acquisition of new and advanced knowledge and skills for high quality service since highly skilled employees become competent and productive.

Distance education also comes to the aid of conventional higher learning institutions in terms of accommodating larger numbers of students. Conventional higher learning institutions can only accommodate stipulated numbers of students due to space limitations while for distance teaching institutions space is not a problem since distance learners study at the space of their choice.

Despite the good intentions which come with open and distance learning (ODL), there are tough challenges that go against its strong points; such as management of programmes in such a way that the balance is struck between meeting the needs of students for openness and flexibility on the one hand, and ensuring the smooth-running of the institution through enforcing adherence to the institutional rules and regulations by students and staff on the other.

In the rest of this chapter there are discussions of sub-topics such as background to the problem, problem statement, the role of distance education, aim of the study, demarcation of the field of study, definition of key concepts such as management, distance education, open learning, open and distance learning, flexible learning, planning of open and distance learning, management of open and distance learning, management of assessment at UNISA and management of fees.

Other headings and sub-headings which form part of this chapter are students' expectations, and experiences of openness and flexibility at UNISA, the University of South Africa, significance and limitations of this study.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Distance students experience isolation due to separation from their institution, lecturers and fellow students (Rumble 2000 : 1; Moore 1997 :1; Willis 1992 (b). This requires clear and strong management of activities and programmes in an open and distance teaching institution. One of the problems in an open and distance learning institution is trying to strike a balance between being open and flexible and ensuring the smooth running of an institution by enforcing policies to be adhered to by students and staff.

Success in closing or at least narrowing the gap between distance learners and their institutions in order to eliminate isolation in an ODL institution, is dependent on good or effective management of admission processes, registration processes, assignments as formative assessment tools, learner support services, examinations and portfolios (summative assessment) and fees or funds generally.

Against this background the problem investigated was at study was at two levels, namely, to investigate how UNISA manages open and distance learning and how the students and staff experience openness and flexibility at the level where policies are implemented. This was important to find out whether UNISA had policies which addressed the needs of distance learners and therefore were meant to minimise or eliminate students' isolation and furthermore, to find out if those policies were actually implemented to meet the needs of students in practice. This is very crucial to make students' learning barrier-free in an ODL

institution. The problem was thus investigated in terms of the following more specific questions:

- Why is it necessary to manage open and distance learning activities in a distance teaching institution?
- What is open and distance learning?
- What is the role of distance education?
- What is the role of open and distance learning?
- How UNISA manage open and distance learning in terms of :
  - admissions and enrolments/registrations;
  - Tuition (teaching and extensive feedback on assignments)
  - Learner support such as information for tutors, tutor development, learning centres
  - Assessment systems
  - Funds including fees.

### **1.3 THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Different circumstances nationally and internationally such as the need to keep ones job, carrying out family and community responsibilities as well as redress the past inequalities which resulted from racial discrimination which affected the education system in developing countries like South Africa, create the need for distance education as a rescue mode of education delivery, especially at higher learning level (Daniel 1996: 47). Distance education rescues people from having to choose between leaving their jobs and family responsibilities to attend classes full-time and facing the reality of never accessing higher learning anymore. The /researcher is also of the opinion that as a distance education institution, UNISA should be responsive to among other things, its students' need for openness in order for it to be as accessible as possible (Daniel *ibid.*) and flexible to afford its students their autonomy which if make it possible to take control of their learning and make choices about what to learn, where and how. This study attempted to find out how this University manages to meet these needs which are in her opinion, among the very crucial needs of distance learners.

Distance education also affords the country the opportunity to have a highly-skilled workforce, and is therefore, expected to guarantee stability in the country's economy (Thorpe 1994:2). It goes without saying that since properly skilled employees become competent and efficient in their professions. In other words these employees have expertise to render quality services. Productivity and high quality services result in a stable economy. There seem to be common circumstances across countries in terms of the value or role of distance education. For example, according to Thorpe (ibid.), in Britain it is changed circumstances that made the government see it as imperative to promote distance education and open learning, making these central to higher education and training.

Actually, like other South African education institutions, especially, institutions of higher learning, UNISA has to respond to the call by the African National Congress, as the ruling party that higher learning institutions should ensure to make themselves as more accessible as possible, to ensure that the inequalities of the past (of the apartheid era) are redressed even in terms of obtaining of higher learning qualifications by the previously educationally deprived population of South Africa in particular. To this effect the discussion document entitled "*A policy framework for education and training of the ANC*" emphasises the importance of a high-quality national system of higher education (ANC 1994 :113-115). In this document, it is stated that, in order to provide a larger proportion of the population with the opportunity to study further, provision should be made for distance education.

What comes to light in this document is also the fact that higher learning institutions are not only urged to ensure accessibility but they also have to provide high quality systems which will enable the National Department of Education to have a high-quality national system of higher education (ANC 1994: 113-115).

#### **1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The focus of this study was on how UNISA manages and ODL to meet the needs of its students such as accessibility and autonomy (Sampson 2003 : 104).

The objectives of this study are to:

- establish how the University of South Africa (UNISA) manages open and distance learning.



- briefly describe the concept of management in relation to open and distance learning;-
- determine how UNISA manages processes such as enrolments/registrations, tuition, assessment, learner support and fees.
- highlight, analyse and interpret information from documents about management of ODL at UNISA,
- analyse and interpret the views of some of the UNISA students, academics, administrative and professional staff members as well as some of the UNISA management members with regard to management of ODL in this University.
- come up with conclusions and recommendations on the basis of the findings.

## **1.5 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

This study was undertaken at UNISA, where the researcher has been both the lecturer and coordinator of the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP) for since 1998. A sample of students who participated in this research consisted of some of the former learner of the CDEP. The CDEP is a one-year programme which provides students with the basic theory and skills on distance education. It consists of five modules which cover areas such as adult learner and adult learning, distance education, study materials, learner support services in distance education, administration and management in distance education. It is has been offered by the Institute for Continuing Education at UNISA since 1997.

This study was limited to establishing how UNISA manages open and distance learning activities and programmes and also to establish whether it meets the needs of its students through openness (accessibility) and flexibility (learners' autonomy). To solicit information about policies and procedures UNISA has put in place to manage open and distance learning, the researcher studied the UNISA documents which have information about policies related to among other things, admission/registrations, tuition, learner support services, assessment and fees.

The researcher also used questionnaires and interviews to solicit information for this study. This exercise was restricted to sixty former students (fifty participated in questionnaires and ten participated in interviews), nine members of the UNISA Executive Management Committee, three Executive College Deans, one Manager: Logistics, one Senior Lecturer the

Department of English, fifty one UNISA academics, and fifty five UNISA administrative staff members. The full distribution analysis according to the sample's participation in questionnaires and interviews was presented in Chapter three where research methodology was discussed.

## **1.6 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

### **1.6.1 Distance Education**

Verduin and Clark (1991:8) define distance education as any form of approach to learning in which most of the instruction occurs while the educator and learner are at a distance from each other. Garrison (1989:2) postulates that the term "distance education" came to exist due to a need for a concept broader than "correspondence study". This study agrees with Garrison and Verduin and Clark's views in terms of the definition of the concept of distance education. A detailed discussion of the concept "distance education" is given in Chapter 2, where the literature review is undertaken.

### **1.6.2 Open Learning**

There are many definitions of the concept "open learning". Open learning provides the learner with an opportunity to learn according to the time, space and pace which suits him or her as an individual, and also to learn that which the individual person needs to learn (Freeman1997:1). For some individuals, this might create the impression that, in a distance teaching institution, it is possible to enjoy total freedom of choice with regard to time frames for activities, as well as the pace and place in which a student can study; therefore, the student has control over what and when to study, (Graves1993:2). Graves speaks of 'learner - managed learning' when referring to open learning. It is clear that, according to this author's definition, the student is in full control of his or her learning. A detailed discussion of how different scholars define, describe and use "open learning" was also given in Chapter 2 where the literature review was undertaken.

### **1.6.3 Open and Distance Learning (ODL)**

It is true that the concept ‘open and distance learning’ (ODL) does not have one single definition. Instead, there is a number of approaches for defining it, namely “correspondence, home study, independent learning; external studies; continuing education; distance teaching; self-instruction, adult learning technology based or mediated education learner-centred education, open learning, open access; flexible learning or distributed learning” (Commonwealth of Learning: 2000). More details about this concept were presented in chapter 2.

### **1.6.4 Flexible Learning**

Flexible learning emphasises learning which is individualised (Hodgson 1993:53). In this study, flexible learning is thought of in terms of finding out if there could be a way of making arrangements for catering for extraordinary circumstances which may make it impossible for the student to stick to the University policies as stipulate. The example could be that the student could not write his or examination on a set date due to illness. If that student has a proof that indeed he or she was ill on that date, does the University has an alternative way of ensuring that such a student gets the opportunity to write examinations and so does not have to re-register and write during the next examination period. There should a standard policy about this instead of students relying on the discretion of individual lecturers.

Usually, the term “flexible learning” is used as a synonym for “open learning”. However, they do not mean exactly the same thing. A comparison of the terms “distance education”, “open learning” and “flexible learning” is presented in Chapter 2 of this study.

## **1.7 MANAGEMENT OF ODL**

### **1.7.1 The concept “management”**

The term “management” refers to the process of planning, organising, leading and controlling resources of the organisation in order to achieve the stated organisational goals as productively as possible (Smit and Cronje 1992 : 10). The researcher also agrees with Robbins and Coutler (1999 : 8) who define management as the process of coordinating and

integrating work activities so that they are completed efficiently and effectively with and through other people.

### **1.7.2 Management of ODL at UNISA**

Even in ODL, management is very crucial for the smooth running of the activities and programmes in the institution as an organisation. It is important to plan who should do what, why, how and when.

UNISA as an organisation also should be managed in such a way that it is clear as to what policies are in place to be carried out by whom for what purpose, when and how. To achieve its institutional goals and objectives UNISA should have some or a group of people who are in charge. They are referred to as management. This body has a duty to combine, allocate, coordinate and deploy resources in such a way that its goals and objectives are achieved as productively as possible. One of the signs of achievement of goals and objectives is satisfaction of the clients, the students. One of the ways of meeting those needs is through establishing learning centres and appointing coordinators and administrative staff to manage each learning centre and carry out administrative tasks, respectively. This would provide students with accessibility to the tutors and other resources and facilities. In that way UNISA would be open and giving student's choices to attend tutorial classes and meet tutors and their fellow learners if they choose to do so. This study investigated what management role UNISA play to meet its student's needs and expectations of accessibility and autonomy so that learning is barrier-free and students take control of what to learn, where and how.

### **1.7.3 Students' needs and experiences of openness and flexibility in distance education**

In this study, students' expectations and experiences of openness in distance education refers to what students expect and what they actually experience in distance teaching institutions, in terms of enhancing access which goes with openness (accessibility) and flexibility (students' control or autonomy over their learning).

UNISA students, like any other distance learners in higher learning, join the University with a lot of expectations such as the possibility of experiencing accessibility to programmes.

Distance students come with expectations of the freedom and autonomy to study at the time, place and pace which suit their individual circumstances. For example, they expect among other things, that distance teaching institutions would be flexible and open and therefore, negotiations over the due dates for sending in assignments can take place, if the students come with valid reason for the request concerned or right from the planning phase, management would come up with alternative ways to cater for situations in which students cannot meet the stipulated dates for sending in assignments or sitting for examinations or even for enrolments. The study investigated if UNISA makes such provisions.

Furthermore, students also seem to expect the registration dates and admission requirements to be such that they do not deprive them the opportunity to access programmes at UNISA. For example, prospective students from outside South Africa come with qualifications such as “O” or “A” level from Namibia, which are not at the same level with South African matriculation. This study investigated what UNISA does to manage such situations, to ensure its “...access to all learners” (UNISA Annual Report 2004).

About the entry requirements into Unisa programmes, the study found out that UNISA has policies and provisions for students who do not qualify to register directly into the bachelor’s degrees. There is an Access Programme which students first have to register for and pass before they are admitted into the bachelor’s degree <http://www.unisa.ac.za>. There is also a policy on Recognition of Prior Learning. This assists students who do not qualify for the Access Programme but have School leaving certificates or they do not have matriculation at all. They compile portfolios of experience they have gained and those portfolios are assessed. After that they sit for examinations. When they have succeeded they register for an Access Programme after which they get admitted to the mainstream programmes such as bachelor’s degrees <http://www.unisa.ac.za>. So, UNISA is accessible in terms of admissions to programmes. More details about Access Programme and PRL were presented in chapter 2 where literature review for this study was discussed.

Before the researcher went further with the study she considered it imperative to describe as an institution in which this study was conducted and whose management of ODL was being investigated. The University was briefly described below.

## 1.8 THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA)

UNISA is a distance teaching higher education institution. Its main campus is in Tshwane (previously known as Pretoria). As a distance teaching institution, UNISA has students scattered all over South Africa and abroad. Since UNISA serves as a setting for this study, it is essential that it is described as clearly as possible. In this study, the abbreviation of this institution namely, UNISA, will be used most of the time.

UNISA was designed as a distance education institution over 61 years ago. This University functions on a four-fold mission statement, namely, teaching, research and development, community service and student support.

The above-mentioned functions are decentralised into colleges, schools, departments, institutes, centres and bureaus. UNISA fulfils the principle of distance education through integrated use of print media, radio and television, video and audio-cassettes, and face-to-face interactive sessions. In addition to these, the UNISA system of distance education has established regional offices in Cape Town, Durban, Polokwane and Umtata, where study centres have also been set up. UNISA has done all this because of its learner-centred approach and with an aim to close or at least narrow the gap between the institution and its students that are far from the main campus. As a result, it has also established learning centres in different parts of the country, for Saturday classes to be attended by students who choose to do so.

UNISA is now a comprehensive University after the recent merger with the former Technikon Southern Africa (TSA) and the institution has incorporated the former VISTA Distance Education Campus (VUDEC), The three institutions now form one new University of South Africa. On 1 January 2004 UNISA was declared a merged institution (UNISA 2004:9). This merger formed part of the South African National Plan for Higher Education to create South Africa's single dedicated institution of open and distance learning and the country's pioneering comprehensive university (UNISA 2004 :1).

On 26 May 2004 when he did the opening of the first meeting of the Senate, the Vice-Chancellor and the Principal of UNISA, Prof Pityana, he reflected on the challenges which the University was facing in building a sustainable higher education institution. He pointed

out that UNISA's focal points were inter alia, to cultivate a culture of intellectual engagement, of curiosity to learn, to seek, search and discover. He also stated that staff members needed to change their attitude towards the institution by embracing it and recognising the fact that their lives were tied up with it. He finally drew staff's attention to the fact that South Africa was celebrating its ten years of democracy which also posed new challenges for the University. He also drew staff's attention to the preamble of the South African constitution of 1996 which posed the challenge to all to "build a democratic and open society" and to improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person (UNISA 2004 : 4)

These points which the Vice-Chancellor and the Principal of UNISA, made above have implications for management of ODL at UNISA since it is through making the institutions and its programmes accessible that potentials of students can be made free and exploited to the best.

## **1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This research attempted to contribute to drawing attention of the UNISA Management and staff to pause and reflect on how openness and distance learning is managed and whether policies which are meant to make learning accessible to learners are practised at implementation level and also to what extent they meet the needs of the students. The needs focussed on in this were openness and flexibility. For example, investigation was focused on how UNISA manages students' need for negotiations over time frames like assignment submission dates, examination dates as well as due dates for registrations when they have valid reasons for being unable to keep the deadlines for those activities. This is where flexibility in ODL comes in. Flexibility also applies in terms of registrations closing dates as well as examination dates and periods. How does UNISA manage situations where students have valid reasons to keep the set dates, be it assignment due dates or examination writing dates or registration dates? It is important to have policies on alternative routes students can take, to cater for unforeseen but possible circumstances which may make normal policies difficult or impossible to adhere to, especially in an open and distance learning institutions where students have work and family responsibilities in addition to their studies. It can be a barrier to the learning of a student if those alternative arrangements are there not there or are there, but not they are not in writing. This is also very important since one of the resources which UNISA an organisation should manage is information to all the stakeholders,

especially the students and staff. Management members need to reflect regularly since it is the body which takes decisions and formulates policies which serve as the yardstick for all the activities carried out by academics with the aid of administrative and professional staff in order to meet the goals of the University.

There is a gap in terms of for example, the policy which specify as to how many additional days academics can get give for an extension for sending in assignments after an official closing date. It depends on the discretion of the lecturer as to how long an extension for sending an assignment after the closing date can be. It is good if all lecturers understand the problems of students and grant extensions. However, since there is no clear policy to that effect, the lecturer may give only one week extra after the closing date, when actually, the student needs more time than that to write and submit a thoroughly worked on assignment. The researcher is also mindful of the possibility that students can abuse openness and flexibility. For example, they may neglect their studies and hope to negotiate for new due dates for assignments. That is why management is even more important in ODL since students cannot really be monitored closely by the lecturers whether they have genuine reasons for not meeting the deadlines of assignments' submission, for example. This is just one example of where the researcher identified gaps which make this study necessary. Another example is that of negotiations over the examination period or granting of special examination period permission by the University to students who have valid reasons for failing to write examinations at set periods. There is also a gap in terms of information flow from the University to students. It is important for the University to have systems for disseminating as much information as possible to its students to avoid possible confusions which may arise even about the issues which have clear policies which give guidance on them (Freeman 1997:10). Communication between students and the providing institution is therefore, very crucial in ODL.

To solicit information about the above highlighted issues, the researcher consulted the UNISA documents and website.



## **1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Students who form part of the sample for this study came from only one UNISA programme, namely, the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP). This means that the results of this study were used to generalise about the extent to which UNISA practises openness and flexibility in its delivery of programmes.

For further research on this topic, a sample should comprise students on the programmes from all UNISA colleges, to be more representative than the sample of this study.

## **1.11 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical foundation of this study stems from Rumble's conception that distance-educated, university students experience isolation due to their separation from both teachers and peers (Rumble 2000:1) Accordingly, distance students receive none of the consumptive benefits which are enjoyed by the campus-based students. This scholar has the same observation as the researcher on that distance education/correspondence generally, has had a poor reputation because of failing to support students effectively (Rumble 2000 In the researcher's view, one of the most important ways of minimising or eliminating isolation of the distance learners is provision of effective learner support interventions such as counselling, face-to-face tutorials, extensive tutor comments on assignments, availability of learning centres, library within the reach of UNISA registered students and clearly as well as well communicated University policies to ensure that students are aware of services available to them. All these require clear and strong management of activities and programmes in an open and distance teaching institution. More so, because one of the problems in an open and distance learning institution is trying to strike a balance between being open and flexible and at the same time ensuring the smooth running of an institution by enforcing policies to be adhered to by students and staff. It is for this reason that this study was conducted at two levels, namely, to investigate how UNISA manages open and distance learning and how the students and staff experience openness and flexibility as practised in this University. This was important to find out whether UNISA policies implemented and whether they are contributing to close or narrow or if possible even eliminate isolation on the part of the students, to make their learning become barrier-free. Learner support interventions are very important for making leaning at a distance easier.

It is also important to keep in mind “distance education is not simply a geographical separation of learners and teachers, but more importantly, is a pedagogical concept” (Moore 1997:1). Accordingly, distance education is a concept which describes the universe of teacher-learner relationships which exist when learners and instructors are separated by space and/or by time (ibid).

What this theory emphasises is that there is a psychological and communicational space to be crossed between the learner and the teacher during their interaction which may result in misunderstanding of the inputs from either side (ibid). That is why the researcher felt the need to investigate the how UNISA manages different areas such as admissions or registrations, learning resources such as study materials and equipment, learner support such as tutorial classes, learning centres, tutors, tutorial classes, coordinators, management of assessment systems, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and management funds, including fees.

For this study, it was not enough to know that policies were there. What was also considered significant was to find out how their implementation contributes to making UNISA accessible and enable students to take charge of their learning by making their choices on what they learn where and how. To find out how effective the policies were the researcher investigated how students and staff viewed the extent of openness and flexibility at UNISA. The study also investigated how UNISA managed to the practice of openness and flexibility in such a way that it makes learning barrier-free through autonomy (Moore 1997:2), without losing sight of the necessity for ensuring order and direction in the running of the University programmes by applying policies as yardsticks.

Other theorists who also conceive separation as the cause of isolation in distance education were discussed in chapter two where literature review was presented. The researcher could not discuss all of these theories here due to space constraints and need to focus.

## **1.12 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.12.1 Introduction**

Research methodology was qualitative approach since the study was descriptive and did not attempt to establish cause and affect relationships between variable under experimental conditions. Instead it attempted to understand the ODL management at UNISA, in an existing situation or set up (Neser et al 1995:53). The researcher relied on the subjects (the participants in interviews and questionnaire completing) as well as UNISA documents, website and internet to understand how this institution manages open and distance learning activities and processes to meet the needs of its learners.

The sample was purposefully chosen from the former students who had studied the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners which is offered by the Institute for Continuing Education at UNISA, some of UNISA Management members, some of UNISA academics and administrative staff. Details of selection and components of the sample; instruments used to solicit information and technologies used to analyse data for this study were presented in chapter three where research design and methodology were discussed in full.

## **1.13 PLAN OF STUDY**

The following programme was followed:

- **CHAPTER 1**

Chapter 1 outlines introduction, problem statement, definitions of key concepts, demarcation of the study and research methodology.

- **CHAPTER 2**

Chapter 2 gives a brief historical background, a literature review on distance education and related terms, descriptions on the value of distance education, as well as the significance of learner support to distance education.

- **CHAPTER 3**

This chapter describes in detail the research methods of this study. Data was collected from the participants by means of questionnaires and interviews.

- **CHAPTER 4**

Chapter 4, an exposition of data analysis is given. The analysis of the data collected is described, and the results in terms of openness and flexibility in open and distance learning are set out.

- **CHAPTER 5**

This chapter includes a synopsis of conclusions drawn after data analysis, as well as recommendations arising from this study.

#### **1.14 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided the background information. It also provided the problem statement of the research. The significant of the study and its delimitation were also explained in this chapter. It provided the theoretical framework of the research. It also highlighted the research design and methodology which were used. Lastly, it described the plan of study. The plan of study outlined what each chapter would be about.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **MANAGEMENT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

For any organisation to achieve its goals there is a need for effective management. Open and distance teaching institutions also need to be well managed if they are to achieve their goal of making learning accessible and also make distance students take control of their learning. The first thing that a distance teaching institution should keep in mind right from the planning phase, is that distance students are separated from their lecturers and so, there will be a need for some kind of mediation of their learning through effective learner support such as advice and counselling during registration time, extensive comments on their assignments, proper management and coordination of learning centres within the reach of students, clear policies about assignment submission, examination processes and management of fees. These are few areas which need to be well managed in a distance teaching institution, if it is going to make students experience learning as barrier-free. Before getting into more details of management of open and distance learning it is important to understand what distance education is and also to get its brief history nationally and internationally

#### **2.2 DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Keegan (1996:50) defines distance education as a mode of education delivery which is characterised by:

- “the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process.
- the influence of an educational organisation both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and the provision of student support services; this distinguishes it from private study and teach yourself programmes.
- the use of technical media; print, radio, video and computer, to unit teacher and learner and carry the content of the course.

- the provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit, or even initiate dialogue; this distinguishes it from other uses of technology in education
- the quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialisation purposes.”

This study investigated how UNISA manages all the aspects highlighted in Keegan’s definition to meet the needs of its learners. For example how UNISA mediates learning to address the issue of separation which results in isolation of its learners. The study investigated if UNISA in playing its management role of deploying resources, does provide its learners with facilities such as learning centres, tutors, coordinators technologies and media within their reach. Learning centres provide learners with a sense of belonging since they meet their tutors and peers during tutorial classes. This provides both didactic and social fulfilment. What follows is a brief history of distance education nationally and internationally.

## **2.2.1 A brief history and development of Distance Education**

### 2.2.1.1 Distance education internationally

Some reviews of the history and development of distance education in Europe, America and Australia have been presented by Fundel et al (1996:19).

The authors trace the origins of distance education back to the 1830s in Sweden. Accordingly, this was followed shortly afterwards by the provision for teaching shorthand in the United Kingdom around the 1870s. At that stage, universities did not provide distance education directly; instead, individual teachers and later, institutions of correspondence study, provided tuition. University of London, for example, only registered students who were referred to as external students, and awarded qualifications after completion or satisfying the requirements for a particular programme or degree (Fundel et al 1996:19). Another European country which came up with initiatives for distance education is Germany, as early as the 1850s. In Sweden, a correspondence school for languages and accounting was established (Fundel et al, 1996:20). Accordingly, success of this correspondence school inspired the

Scandinavian countries to embark on the establishment of correspondence schools. In Australia, many universities began to offer courses to external students. For example, the University of Queensland established a department of external studies in 1911 (Fundel et al 1996:20).

#### 2.2.1.2 Distance education in South Africa

As mentioned above, distance education in any country is, or is meant to be, responsive to educational needs which conventional education cannot cater for, or cannot sufficiently cater for, given the nature of the target group of distance education. This target group refers to students who cannot be physically present in the classroom or lecture hall with the lecturer for immediate educative interaction.

It is for this purpose that South Africa also felt the need to establish distance education institutions. For example, the University of South Africa, the Technical College of South Africa, and commercial correspondence colleges (SAIDE1994:1) are such institutions.

The University of South Africa was the first distance teaching higher education institution in South Africa. Like other institutions of distance learning, UNISA was initially a correspondence institution of higher learning, in the sense that it provided education purely by means of print materials. UNISA only introduced face-to-face tutorials in 1995. This was in response to a call by the new South African Government for distance learning institutions to strengthen distance education to address the backlog in education. SAIDE, commissioned by the ANC, recommended mediated learning by introduction of, among other things, face-to-face tutorials (SAIDE 1994:1). UNISA was established in 1916 as a federation of colleges, however, its roots can be traced back to the foundation of the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1873 (SAIDE 1994:1). UNISA is autonomous and falls under its own statute. It is governed by its own council. It also tries to make access possible for its learners who are spread all over the country and abroad, by means of learning centres, regional hubs, and satellite centres for student support purposes. UNISA has five colleges, namely, College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CANRES); College of Economics and Management Sciences (CEMS); College of Human Sciences (CHS); College of Criminal Justice (CLCJ) and College of Science, Engineering and Technology (CSET). UNISA also consists of different departments, bureaus, institutes and centres.

UNISA has now become a comprehensive university after the merger between the old UNISA and the former Technikon Southern Africa (TSA), and the incorporation of the Vista Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) on 1 January 2004. This means that UNISA now provides both academic and technical related programmes.

What follow are definitions and discussions of concepts such as open learning, open and distance learning, flexible learning, management in relation to open and distance learning and learner support services in open and distance learning.

### **2.3 OPEN LEARNING**

According to Hodgson (1993:87), the term “open learning” refers to “a wide range of learning opportunities that aim to assist learners in gaining access to knowledge and skills they might otherwise be denied and to give the learners the optimum degree of control over their own learning”. This study agrees with Hodgson in pointing out that, in open learning systems, the key elements are “the removal of barriers and timing of courses “, as well as “entry requirements which make it difficult or impossible for people to take advantage of learning opportunities”. This definition focuses more on meeting the needs of individual learners, rather than overstressing the importance of requirements of institutional structures (Hodgson (1993:88) and Thomas (1995:28)).

Like Hodgson (1987:40), in her definition of open learning, Thomas (1995: 29) emphasises the importance of involving students in decisions that the delivering organisation takes, if those decisions affect learners. This author extracts six key characteristics which she believes are embedded in the philosophy of open and distance learning (ODL), namely,

“student-centred approach

students encouraged to take responsibility for their learning

learner choice

opening up learning opportunities by overcoming some of the barriers to course attendance

flexible education provision to meet individual requirements

the use of specifically prepared or adapted learning materials”



This study agrees that the open learning approach brings together sound educational principles which are suited to the needs of our time, and the fact that ‘success of open and distance learning approach is dependent on the provision of effective learning materials specifically designed to enable students to take responsibility for their learning’ (Thomas 1995:28). This is true, since it is, for example, only study materials which were developed for the unique characteristics of distance learners, that can better address or meet the needs of distance learners. Thomas (1995:28) also stresses an important aspect related to open and distance learning, namely learner support. Learner support in ODL is crucial in the sense that learning is mediated.

Thomas (1995:29) is also correct, in this study’s opinion, when she also emphasises the importance of flexible, adaptable and responsive organisational structures, as well as the reduced reliance of learners on teacher availability at specific times and places. This study agrees with Thomas that sometimes lecturers or institutions have a tendency to exert more control over the learning process by “determining what is studied, broadly when it is studied (fixed programmes -start and finish dates), and how and when learning will be assessed” (Thomas 1995:29). Though this study acknowledges the fact that having a situation where each learner can choose, for example, when to write his or her examinations, is almost impossible in an institution as an organisation, it still believes that circumstances sometimes call for negotiation of examination dates. For example, if a student cannot write his or her examination, that student should be given the opportunity to write his or her examination in the next sitting period, such as in January, if he or she had missed the November examination period for legitimate reasons. He or she should not have to repeat the paper in the following academic year. Fortunately, at UNISA, in cases like that, the students with clear proof of a genuine reason for failure to write an examination at the set time are afforded a special examination opportunity.

This study looks at, among other things, the dilemma which UNISA has in having to satisfy distant students’ needs for flexibility or elasticity, as well as the institution’s autonomy and satisfying or adhering to the ODL- providing institution. This study agrees with du Preez (1998:59) that some closing dates should be negotiable in a distance teaching institution.

Sewart (1995:66) defines open learning as “a generic descriptor for a whole family of non-traditional learning methodologies. Accordingly, these methodologies include student-

centred learning, resource based learning and flexibility.” This study also agrees with Roger Lewis, in that learners who have been used to a conventional set up of teaching and learning usually find it difficult to adapt to learning in an open learning set up where the tutor is only present “intermittently” or not at all (Lewis 1984:8).

In light of the above description of the concept of open learning, one can safely deduce that the success of the learner in doing or completing the programme by means of an open and distance learning (ODL) approach depends mainly on the extent of flexibility and autonomy which the providing institution makes possible for its learners. This study agrees with Rowntree (1992) and Mackenzie et al (1995), that open learning is an imprecise phrase to which a range of meanings can be attached, and it ‘eludes definition’. Rowntree (1992:13) rightly postulates that open learning is “a philosophy - a set of beliefs about teaching and learning and a method - a set of techniques for teaching and learning.”

#### **2.4 OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL)**

This study agrees with Freeman’s (2004:6) definition of open and distance learning as “an amalgamation of two approaches which focus on expanding access to learning”. Accordingly, the first factor is ‘a philosophy’ whose purpose is to “remove barriers to learning and allow students to study what they want when they want and where they want”, and the second factor is that systems of ODL mediate learning by means of technologies such as print workbooks, audio cassettes, radio and the website. Open and distance learning can be delivered via correspondence, in which case the learner studies on his or her own, or via interactive radio or in the form of distance training, where learners meet at certain times.

The benefits for students of open and distance learning are, inter alia, access, flexibility and suitability for adult learners (Freeman 2004:7). As indicated above, ODL aims at removing barriers to learning, and thus provides access to learning. The researcher does not believe in total openness. As a result there is a need for management of processes and activities in an ODL institution to ensure that there is order and direction for students and staff. Complete openness can be detrimental even to students themselves and it can be very costly since it would mean for instance, that each student may have an examination paper set for him for whenever he or she is ready to write examinations. This can be expensive since it would mean appointing many lecturers to set many different examination papers. This is just one

example of many implications complete openness can have for the institution. It can be detrimental to students in a sense that they may keep on postponing examination dates and end up dropping out of the programmes. Therefore, for cost-effectiveness it is important that ODL is managed effectively to work towards meeting its goals of among other things, providing access to learning and affording students choices to study and succeed in obtaining their qualifications (Freeman 2004 :7).

## **2.5 FLEXIBLE LEARNING**

Another aspect which this study considers important is the elasticity or flexibility which distance learners should enjoy in an institution which declares itself as an open and distance learning (ODL) institution (Graves1993:2; Freeman1997:1; Clerk in Thomas 1995:26). Clarity on what flexibility means is very important in this study since it focuses and how UNISA manages its activities in such a way that its policies afford students choices and take control of their learning. It is very important that distance students are afforded choices and what, how and when they learn since they have different circumstances, personalities and learning styles (Moore 1997:1).

This study agrees with Thomas (1995:5) when she defines flexible learning as “the dynamics of the learning process which takes place between the expert, the learner and the learning resource”. This study also uses flexible learning according to its definition by Hodgson (1993:53). In this definition, flexible learning refers to “... a means of making it possible for learners to gain access to education and training provision tailored to their needs”.

## **2.6 MANAGEMENT OF ODL**

The concept “management” refers to the process of planning, organising, leading and controlling the resources of the organisation to achieve the stated organisational goals as productively as possible (Smit and Cronje 1992:10). The researcher also agrees with Robins and Coulter (1999:8) who define management as the process of coordinating and integrating work activities so that they are completed efficiently and effectively with and through other people. Since UNISA is an ODL institution, it is important to discuss management of this institution’s activities and systems in the context of open and distance learning.

## 2.7 WHY IS MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT AT UNISA?

Even in the context of open and distance learning, management is very crucial. For example it is imperative to plan, organise, lead or influence and control activities and resources of an ODL institution in order to achieve the goals and objectives of an institution. It is necessary to plan what needs to be done, by who, when, when and how. For UNISA as an organisation to achieve its desired goals there is need for someone or a group of people to combine, allocate, coordinate and deploy resources (Smit and Cronje 1992:8) in such a way that its goals are achieved as productively as possible.

The main reason why UNISA as an ODL institution exists, is to meet the needs of its learners through providing sound quality learner support. Some of these needs are openness and flexibility. Openness goes with access. Access means that there are no barriers to students' learning. The key management areas at UNISA as an institution of higher learning with open systems are: advising, enrolling and induction of students; providing course materials; learner support appointment, induction, training and monitoring tutors; assessing learners; monitoring and evaluating and finally, managing finance (Freeman 1997:6). This study set out to establish as to how UNISA manages these systems. Management of these systems is very important for this study since it aims at establishing if UNISA indeed, manages these systems well and whether students do not experience barriers to the learning, and therefore experience UNISA as not open.

For openness and therefore accessibility, UNISA has two programmes which cater for prospective students who do not qualify for direct admission into bachelors degrees. Those programmes are Access Programme (Access brochure 2006:6) and Recognition of Prior Learning (<http://www.unisa.ac.za/rpl>). Those are Access Programme and Recognition of Prior Learning. An access programme provides admission to bachelor's degree studies to prospective students who do not qualify for direct admission Access brochure 2006:6). Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is defined as the identification, assessment and acknowledgement an individual's skills and knowledge within the context of a specific qualification, irrespective of how and processes where they were acquired (<http://www.unisa.ac.za/rpl>).

## **2.8 HOW DOES UNISA MANAGE OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING?**

For UNISA to achieve its goals of providing access to higher learning it should manage processes such as enrolments or registrations, finances (fees), assignments (tuition), learner support services (e.g. by providing learning centres for tutorial classes and appointing as well as training tutors, administrative staff and coordinators, assessment (e.g. examinations) and put in place resources for monitoring and evaluating its programmes regularly to maintain high quality tuition standards. The researcher read documents containing information and policies related to how all these processes and activities are managed at UNISA. Discussions of how each area is managed at UNISA are discussed below:

### **2.8.1 Management of enrolments/registrations**

It is very crucial for the institution to take care of its students right from the moment of registration. That alone gives a good impression that an institution cares about its students. Learner support students receive before, during and after registration goes a long way. If students receive full support during those periods of studying in an institution, it is more likely that they will not drop out easily.

After getting information about admission into programmes, students begin with the process of registration. That is managed very well since UNISA has student counsellors who help to guide students with regard to programmes available, filling in of registration forms, payment of fees and getting their materials after registrations.

Students are furnished with an information brochure which assists them with information about services available at UNISA. For example, regional centres, learning centres, campuses of the University, UNISA agencies as well as where they can mail their assignments. Information brochure (2007: 4).

UNISA also has two important departments which support learners during registrations and through out the academic years, namely, the Bureau for Student Counselling and Career Development and Tutorial Services, Discussions Classes and Work integrated Learning (TSDL) (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>). They are based on the main campus in Pretoria. Each has a director who works with a number of specialists in the area of student support. To make

access easy for all students, UNISA has made provision to assist students who are physically challenged. For that purpose, there UNISA has established a section called the Advocacy and Resource Centre for Students with Disabilities (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>). Staff members from that section assist students who are physically challenged during registrations and throughout their period of study in the University whenever the need arises.

### **2.8.2 The management of fees**

One of important management areas in ODL is that one of finances. This study did not look at broader finances. Instead, it focused on the fees. Some of the areas of interest in this regard were the forms of payment of fees and financial aid schemes for students to access learning despite their poor financial backgrounds. The study discovered that UNISA has a section handling the financial aid for students. There are two kinds of financial aid available to UNISA students. One of them is the National Students Financial Scheme (NSFAS) (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>). For control purposes there are criteria which students should meet to be eligible to this funding, namely, South African citizenship, studying towards a first tertiary qualification or for a second tertiary qualification, able to demonstrate a potential for academic success and financially needy (Information brochure 2007 : 35). It became clear that UNISA has clear management strategies for the fees since there are control mechanisms such as criteria which are stipulated to select the students who really need this aid. Some of those criteria are that an applicant must be really needy and also demonstrate a potential for academic success. The latter is good to ensure that the student succeeds and give others who are in need to benefit from the financial aid. It will also benefit the student who succeeds to accomplish his or her goals instead of dropping out.

### **2.8.3 The management of assignments**

Another aspect which the researcher investigated was the management of tuition at UNISA. The focus was on assignments. The aim was to find out how UNISA manages the flow of assignments from students to the institution and back from the institution to the student in time. This is one of important activities a distance education institution should take good care of in order to win the confidence of students and keep them in the programmes. If students do not know where to submit assignments and also if they do not receive feedback in time about their assignments, it is more likely that they will be demotivated and drop out.

For assignment purposes UNISA has put facilities and human resources in place. For example, students can send in assignments by mail or Unisa online/MyUnisa or in person (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>). To send assignments, UNISA students can use assignment boxes provided on the UNISA campuses in Pretoria, Florida and Sunnyside. Similar boxes are available in different regional offices, learning centres, to mention a few. This shows that UNISA is accessible to its learners and therefore, is open.

For control purposes UNISA has deployed staff members to handle recording of assignments from and back to students. There is a whole section responsible for supervising the assignment section. Before assignments are handed over to the lecturers, they are recorded in the assignment section and after marking, marks are recorded in the assignment section before they are returned to students. The University has Tuition Committees who decide on the procedures to be followed in terms of granting extensions and special permission for resubmission of assignments whenever necessary. So, it means in this case UNISA is flexible and does take needs of students into account when they take decisions for controlling processes for the sake of order in the activities of this institution.

#### **2.8.4 The management of examinations.**

Assessment is one of management areas in an open system of teaching and learning (Freeman 1997:6). It is very therefore, important that examination activities are managed properly, especially where distance learners are involved since these students by virtue of being separated from their lecturers, experience isolation. This is because they are not with their lecturers and administrative officers to ascertain issues like examination venues, times and issues relating to the invigilators. Hence, this study also attempted to establish what UNISA has in place in terms of resources, to ensure that students get support and they do not end up not writing their examinations because of inconveniences such as uncertainty about venues for writing examinations.

Other inconveniences may need policy related attention. For example, in cases where students have valid reasons not to sit for their examinations on the set dates or during the set period. At UNISA examinations for semester programmes are written in May/June while those for year programmes are written in October/November of each academic year. The

researcher tried to establish as to what policy is there to cater for students who have valid reasons not write their examinations on the set dates or during the set or normal examination periods. This is very important in order to avoid unnecessary drop out of students due to rigid sticking to policies unreasonably. To this effect, the study found out that there is official provision for such cases. For example, UNISA has aegrot and special examination options which students who cannot write during normal examination periods, can apply for. However where possible, arrangements should be made in advance with the Department of Examinations. Where it is not possible, the student should apply and produce evidence that she or he could write on that day. Doctor's certificate can serve as proof that a student could not write on that day, if that student was absent from examination due to illness. Furthermore, to make itself accessible to its students UNISA has examination centres which are divided into three, namely in the Republic of South Africa, in other countries and in overseas countries (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>).

So, there is a range of UNISA examination centres nationally and abroad. The student has a choice to write examinations at the centre which is (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>) convenient to him or her. Openness on this one is very clear. To manage this, UNISA instructs the students to inform it in advance and normally as during the filling in of the registration form as to which examination centre he or she will be writing his or her examinations (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>). Therefore, in this case UNISA's facilities and services are accessible. So, it is open.

### **2.8.5 The management of learner support services**

Tait (1992: xii) defines learner support as 'a conversation and community' In this definition, one can sense a tendency towards 'personalisation' or a 'humane' flavour. This can probably be attributed to Tait's previous experience as a counsellor and coordinator. In both positions, activities were carried out by communicating a lot with human beings most of the time (ibid.). (Holmberg op.cit.), a former didactician, defined learner support as 'a guided didactic conversation'. His point is that guidance is integral to teaching. Accordingly, it is very important to keep in mind that interaction or conversation between the learner and the educator should be different from mere transference of a certain body of knowledge. However, what also becomes clear, is that both parties are participating. As a result, it is not a situation whereby the educator pours information into the ears of a passively listening learner.



Instead, both the learner and the educator contribute to the process of teaching and learning, though the ‘educator has more information on the subject than the learner at that moment’ (Hodgson 1993:5).

This study agrees with the idea that distance learners are not completely empty in terms of knowledge and experience (op.cit.). Instead, they bring with them experiences and a relative level of knowledge of the subject, though not yet at the same level as the lecturer, tutor or educator (Holmberg *ibid.*).

The above statement that learners come with experience into the class but are still not at the level of the tutor makes it clear that the learner needs the institution or tutor to assist with enhancing his or her learning. This can be carried out through learner support to “counterbalance the absence of dialogue”, as mentioned above.

Separation between distance learners and their institution, makes it imperative that teaching also be “...mediated through various technologies (print, audio, video, broadcasting, and computers” (Hodgson 1993:12). Technologies play an important role in facilitating learning of distance learners. These interventions attempt to narrow or close the gap which exists between a distance learner and a distance teaching institution. The UNISA annual report (UNISA Annual Report 2004:7) cites that this institution “...provides quality general academic and career-focused learning opportunities underpinned by principles of lifelong learning, flexibility and student centeredness.”

The management of a providing institution has the responsibility of making resources available for the carrying out of learner support services, according to the unique nature of distance learners. The tutor should intervene by facilitating the learning of distance learners. Learner support in distance education is imperative and indispensable, if the learner is to attain his or her goals with relative ease. Management should provide tutor training and provide physical resources such as learning centres, equipment and appropriate feasible and relevant technologies to enable staff to support learners effectively and efficiently. For example, a computer assists the tutor to facilitate learning easily by enabling him or her to do presentation through Ms Word PowerPoint. Such a facility is very handy and motivating to students since students mostly understand illustrations easily when reading in PowerPoint while the tutor facilitates their learning live.

Due to the fact that distance learners are separated from their institution and peers they need a lot of support. Actually, learner support ODL overlaps with other processes such as registration activities and financial aid provision. ODL students need support in different areas and also throughout their period of study due to their separation from the institution. Without responsive, relevant and appropriate support services it can be difficult or even impossible for UNISA students to succeed in their studies. So, the researcher also tried to establish how UNISA manages its learner support systems. What transpired was that UNISA takes learner support very seriously. As a result it has an office of the Vice-Principal of Student Affairs and Learner Support (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>) and the office of the Dean of students. With an aim to meet support needs of the students, there are several sections of UNISA which the Vice-Vice-Principal of Student Affairs and Learner Support oversees. Some of them are Student Services, the Bureau for Student Counselling and Career Development, Tutorial Services, Discussions Classes and Work integrated Learning (TSDL) and the library (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>). Each of these sections has a director. To be closer to students in different regions and learning centres, those areas have coordinators manage the activities there. For example, the centre coordinators manage the recruitment of students and tutors (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>). They also manage the tutor workshops.

The regional and centre coordinators manage them setting up of tutorial class activities coordinators manage the setting of tutorial classes in terms of time tables and venues. This enable students to access UNISA services wherever they are in a well organised and planned manner. The fact that there are coordinators means that there is also control in terms of deployment and use of facilities and funds for the purposes of supporting students. This enables the students to access UNISA services wherever they are and as much as possible. The fact that there are coordinators means that there is also control in terms of deployment and use of facilities and funds for the purposes of supporting students.

Very recently, the Vice-Principal: Student Affairs and Learner Support commissioned two researchers to make a study of the analysis of the utilisation of UNISA's learning centres and future market potential. One of the findings of this survey was that one out of every three students participated in the learning centres activities (tutorial classes) (Tustin & Masemola January/February 2007:6). One can then conclude that learning centres are an effective tool to enable UNISA students to access the University's activities and facilities which in turn make learning easier for them.

Because for this study learner support was considered by the researcher as central to making learning within the reach of distance students by means of face-to-face tutorials or technologies and because it gives students choices of meeting their tutors and fellow learners personally, to make their learning barrier free or to study by themselves. In that way a distance teaching institution practises openness (access) and flexibility (autonomy/choice). This study investigated how UNISA manages resources and facilities for provision of learner support to its students. What follows is the discussion of the management role which UNISA plays in the provision of learner support to its students to open up learning opportunities for them.

## **2.8.6 Opening up learning opportunities through learner support in distance education**

### **2.8.6.1 Introduction**

Right from the onset, the current South African government has had the view of using open and distance learning as one of the main solutions for ensuring accessibility of higher learning to the masses (SAIDE1994:I). For this approach to bear the desired fruit, it is imperative to devise suitable mechanisms for enhancing learning in an open and distance learning environment. To cater for an isolated learner, one of these mechanisms would be learner support.

To emphasise the significance of providing learner support to distance learners especially in South Africa, in order to open up learners' opportunities and make up for the past circumstances which had put its mark negatively on the students since 1976, as much as possible, academically, the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of UNISA, Professor Pityana also stated that:

“With its sensitivity to students' special circumstances, Unisa is best placed to meet the needs of that army of erstwhile youth who gave so much to the liberation of our country and who sacrificed their own educational development after 1976. Many yearn to attain their lost dreams; some gave up hope a long time ago. Unisa may well be the instrument for restoring such lost hope.” (Unisa News-Vol.1:2002).

Many scholars have also written about the significance of learner support interventions for distance learners. Amongst them are McDonald and McAteer (2003); Gunawardena and McIsaac (1996); Dillon, Gunawardena & Parker (1992); Dillon & Gunawardena (1995); Gunawardena (1989; 1990; 1991; 1998); Willis and Gunawardena (1994); Tait (1986-1992; 2000); Holmberg (1989) and Simpson (2000), to name a few.

Before further discussion, it is imperative to define the concept, 'learner support'. It is also important to first point out that there is no one absolute definition of the concept 'learner support'. Different authors define learner support in different ways. This may depend on the focus or point that the author wants to highlight or emphasise. However, there are common elements which almost all authors agree on in their definitions of 'learner support'.

The types of learner support strategies at UNISA were discussed below.

#### 2.8.6.2 Types of learner support strategies in distance education

##### **(I) Strategy 1: Tutorials**

As Houdek (1990:31) states, the tutorial relationship between the course lecturer or tutor or instructor and the student is the element that distinguishes distance education from purely self-directed learning (ibid.). In distance education a providing institution intervenes through learner support. One of learner support interventions in distance education is tutorial or tutoring, an element that does not matter or form part of essentials of correspondence or self-directed learning.

Tutorial support in distance teaching can take different forms. It can be in the form of face-to-face interaction, whereby learners meet their tutor in a common setting or venue for the purpose of facilitating learning (ibid.). It can also be provided telephonically or electronically via e-mail for students who have access to computers.

The University of South Africa (UNISA) also provides learner support by means of tutorials. To be in line with the current emphasis of the South African government on the role that distance education has to play "in eliminating the backlog" in higher education, UNISA has

taken it upon itself to ensure that it improves on its learner support provision. It has done so by means of, inter alia, making improvements in the provision of tutorial interventions.

With the aim of improving learner support through the regional centres, UNISA has restructured its tutorial provision in the regions. It has done so by creating five hubs of substantial regional learning centres (UNISA Annual Report 2004:14).

An analysis of UNISA's 2001 examination results, which was carried out in 2003 (Bonzaaier 2003:1), shows the difference which the provision of face-to-face tutorial classes has so far made as far as through-put at UNISA is concerned, since their introduction in 1995. Tables 9.1 to 9.5 of the analysis show that learners who attended tutorial classes in the learning centres performed better than those who did not (Bonzaaier 2003:65). This survey has also indicated that not all the learning centres had learners performing in an outstanding manner compared to their counterparts (learners who did not attend tutorial classes) in their examination results (Bonzaaier 2003:65). In the other learning centres, learners who had not attended tutorial classes performed better than those who attended them (Bonzaaier 2003:65). The reasons for this may vary, since there may be many factors one could attribute to the poor performance of students. Some of these reasons may have to do with the accessibility of learning centres. Inaccessibility may result from the fact that learners have to board buses or taxis to attend tutorials, or tutorial classes may be at awkward times for other learners. If that is the case, does UNISA do something to consult with the learners before erecting or establishing learning centres, or does it have alternative ways of catering for groups of students who cannot attend on certain days and times, but can on other days and times?

This study did not intend to dwell on these questions, although it would be advisable that a subsequent study investigates this. This would help UNISA, which currently seems to be very keen to check where it needs to make improvements in order to ensure that it is "Towards an African University, in service of Humanity", in the true sense of the words (UNISA Annual Report 2004:8). This is demonstrated by, among other things, a survey which the UNISA Management commissioned one of its scholars to conduct on "Student Satisfaction" (Tustin 2005). That particular survey seemed to be closely related to this study in the sense that it investigates the experiences of students, and whether they are satisfied with the services they receive. This study however, as has been mentioned before, also focuses more on finding out

whether UNISA as an open and distance learning institution, is indeed open, and to what extent.

According to the findings from the analysis by Bonzaaier, a variety of factors may contribute to the ineffectiveness or fruitlessness of a learner support intervention such as face-to-face tutorials.

One of the advantages of face-to-face tutorial classes is that learners get an opportunity to meet their tutors and fellow learners face-to-face. This, on its own, brings about a sense of belonging and also motivates the learners. They get an opportunity to share common problems with their fellow learners or peers. In a face-to-face class, learners also enjoy the opportunity of getting immediate answers from their tutor, and they are even able to understand things better (Gunawardena and McIsaac 1996:362). The fellow learners also serve as a community in which a learner can realise that he or she is not the only one experiencing problems with regard to their studies. Referring to this, Gunawardena and McIsaac (1996:363) speak of the 'social presence'. This seems to be true, since being with his or her peers puts a distance learner at ease, and helps the learner to develop confidence in himself or herself. The learner may as a result, be determined to master his or her studies. In his speech which marked the opening of the 2008 academic year, the Vice-Chancellor reported that as the UNISA Management they have provided another regional centre for students who are based in Kenya (UNISA 2008). This demonstrated commitment Management has in providing facilities to students to make the University accessible through learner support services. What follows is a presentation of the role UNISA learning centres play in the management of ODL to make this institution and its facilities and resources accessible to learners and to afford students autonomy to take control of their learning by way of choosing whether to attend face-to-face tutorial classes or to study individually.

(i) The role of the learning centres at UNISA

To establish how the learning centres which UNISA Management established to make learning accessible to students are utilised, the researcher went through the findings of a recent study which was conducted by Dr Tustin and Mr Masemola (January/February 2007 : 49 & 58). The findings of that study exposed that there are those students who visit the learning centres and those who do not. Each of these two groups of students cited their

reasons. The details of the reasons for either visiting or not visiting the learning centres are presented below.

a. The reasons why UNISA students did not visit learning centres

According to Tustin and Masemola's study (2007:49), those students who did not visit learning centres cited their reasons as follows:

- Location too – too far away – transport problems;
- Students are not aware of the tutorial classes and its purpose;
- Library is sufficient for self-study;
- Concentration is distracted;
- Limited space – Overwhelmed – Not enough classroom;
- Full-time employment does not allow attendance;
- Not enough classes during the week;
- Too noisy;
- Classes too full – no individual attention;
- Late hours during weekdays;
- Distance learning students are dependent and prefer to work on their; own and rely on knowledge;
- Don't offer tutorials for all modules;
- Participation in tutorial classes are restricted to three modules;
- Affordability of attending (especially transport cost);
- Lack of equipment (e.g. computers);
- Lack of supervision over tutors;
- Presented during weekdays – inconvenient times;
- Inefficient and inexperienced tutors;
- Limited parking;
- No study materials at learning centres; limited space for learning and
- No campus life.

b. The reasons UNISA students have for visiting learning centres

The reasons which students cited for visiting the learning centres were attending tutorial classes, academic enquiries, administrative enquiries, visiting lecturers, examinations, financial enquiries, academic learning materials, access to computers and internet, collect materials, peer group contact, practical experience and research purposes (Tustin and Masemola 2007:49).

**(ii) The role of tutors in distance education**

Lewis (1984:40) postulates that ‘a tutor carries out activities such as providing information, defining learning goals collaboratively with the learner, arranging enrolment, allocating learning materials, induction, providing study guidance and advice, individualising study package, marking assignments, making contact and communicating, record keeping and monitoring, examining and referring.’ According to Lewis (ibid.), a tutor plays a wider role than a subject teacher, in the sense that he or she tutors and counsels depending on the need of the students concerned at a certain point in time. Counselling is very important in open and distance learning, because it brings with it advice and encouragement which distance learners need, “in addition to subject-specific support” (Hodgson 1993:31).

Lewis (op.cit.) also has a point when he postulates that a tutor should be available and contact the learner on a regular basis to make the latter feel cared for.

In order for the tutor to be in a position to play his or her role efficiently and with confidence, to the benefit of the distance learners, it is crucial that he or she gets appropriate training and development regarding, among other things, how to facilitate the learning of distance learners in a face -to-face tutorial. Such classes normally comprise small groups of learners (Lewis1984:43). Some skills which a tutor needs training in, are approachability, openness, care, a listening ear, empathy, warmth and unconditional acceptance of all learners in a tutorial class.

This will help encourage learners to open up and voice their difficulties regarding their learning (ibid.). This training should equip tutors with skills such as “knowledge of the subject matter; ability to communicate subject matter to distance learners in a clear, helpful



and friendly manner, the ability to assess and convey the strengths and weaknesses in learners' work and determine how best to respond to learners' needs" (Commonwealth of Learning 2003:31 - [www.col.org](http://www.col.org)).

To respond to the need for training staff, including tutors UNISA has made attempts. One such attempt is that this University made last year (2007) by deploying financial resources for staff training through the Certificate Course for Distance Education (CDEP) by way of staff development have been made. For this purpose, the office of Staff Training and Development at paid 75% towards the fee for twelve UNISA staff members who participated in the CDEP. The total fee for this programme was R1600-00 (CDEP Information brochure 2006. UNISA pays R1200-00 for each staff member who participated in this programme.

Though this may not be enough, but it shows that UNISA is trying to meet the needs of having competent staff to facilitate learning effectively since the five modules of this one-year programme provide basic theory and skills on adult education, distance learning, quality distance study materials, open and distance learning, learner support services in distance education, administration and management in distance education. It provides It is at NQF Level 5. So, UNISA has begun providing for tutor and general staff training to equip them as distance education practitioners in different areas and at various levels.

The tutor can also be either the co-author of the study materials covering the content he or she is facilitating, or just a person who was never involved in the development and writing of study materials (Hodgson 1993:121).

In terms of this study, it makes sense for tutors to get involved in the development of study materials for which they will facilitate learning (ibid.). However, other authors prefer that a tutor be a person who was not part of the study material development, as long as he or she will receive sufficient support to do that successfully (ibid.). At UNISA it not always the case that tutors are involved in the process of development of study materials on which they facilitate the learning of students.

In the light of all the above-mentioned advantages of learners meeting tutors face-to-face, one might ask the question as to whether all learners enjoy this benefit at UNISA. It is noted that

the University of South Africa has made huge improvements in terms of having facilities such as learning centres, especially after the recent merger which commenced on 1 January 2004. Learning centres have actually always been there, even before the merger, but there were only a few of them. Previously, learning centres only existed in Durban, Johannesburg, Polokwane (previously known as Pietersburg), Cape Town and Umtata. There were also a few satellite and regional centres. UNISA's registrations used to take place at regional offices of UNISA. However, now a lot has changed in this regard. UNISA now has what are called regional centres, hubs, satellites, regional centres and learning centres, in all of the nine provinces of the Republic of South Africa.

It is noted with appreciation that UNISA has just started to show care towards the physically challenged students and staff, by, among other things, installing devices which indicate audibly when a lift is moving and what floor it is moving from. This is one of the signs which show that UNISA is an ODL institution. UNISA has also facilities meant for the physically challenged students and staff. For example, wheel chairs for those students who have difficulty in terms of walking. This is important because it makes the institution and learning accessible to the physically challenged students as well. In other words, it removes unnecessary physical barriers. Another sign of UNISA's commitment to removing barriers in the institution, is its launch of a braille directory on HIV & AIDS for staff and students with disabilities, which is believed to be "the first of its kind in South Africa" (UNISA Annual Report 2004:41).

Another important area that needs attention, is the training and development of tutors at UNISA. It is crucial that tutors get appropriate training and development, in order to facilitate learning with confidence, and in turn win the confidence of the learners. This study agrees with the scholars who believe that tutors need training on the programmes they are facilitating. It is important for them to have confidence and also to gain the confidence of the learners they are appointed to assist.

At UNISA, in order to have a tutorial class, students have to be fifteen or more in number. A concern which this study has regarding this stipulated minimum number for a tutorial class, is that it looks as if UNISA is of the opinion that if the numbers are less than fifteen, it means that those few students should not get face-to-face tutorial intervention. Thus, the number of students qualifying for a tutorial class at UNISA seems to be a barrier to learning for some

learners. These are some of the concerns that this study has related to the openness experiences of learners in terms of tutorial learner support. It should be kept in mind that face-to-face tutorial classes are among the distance learning interventions which should be opening up learners' opportunities to fully explore their learning potential, succeed in their studies, and ultimately have confidence in themselves in terms of learning and taking decisions. This study agrees with Ntuli (in Chadibe et al 2004:67), when she emphasises that "learner support interventions should empower learners not only to adapt to change but to become change agents". In other words, distance learners are not expected to be passive and be influenced, but they should also be influential to the situations since they are believed to have experiences which can help influence situations or people around them.

Apart from face-to-face tutorials, a distance teaching institution has a responsibility to provide counselling before registration, during the course of learning, and on completion of study (CDEP, 1997:72). For student counselling purposes, UNISA has the Bureau for Student Counselling and Career Development. The staff in this department is specialists in counselling. Students go there and they are given group or individual attention, depending on the nature of support they need. So, this area is managed very well at UNISA to make learning easier for students.

What follows is a discussion of tutor-marked assignments' comments as a learner support tool and a form of two-way communication between the learner and the tutor.

## **(II) Strategy 2: Tutor-marked assignments' comments**

Hodgson (1993:22) defines an assignment as "any piece of work that a learner is required to complete for assessment ... a piece of work submitted by a learner to a tutor". A tutor provides feedback and grades an assignment (ibid.). At UNISA assignments are marked by both lecturers and tutors, depending on the arrangements made between these two. So, tutor comments refer to comments made by either tutors or lecturers on the students' assignments.

Since distance learners are geographically separated from the providing institution or tutor or lecturer, one of the ways in which they can have an academic dialogue with their tutors or lecturers, is through assignments. This study agrees with Holmberg's theory or definition of learner support as a "guided didactic conversation" (Holmberg 1986:5). This scholar's

definition forms the main basis of this study's argument in as far as assignments' comments are concerned. The reason is that this study is of the opinion that, when a tutor comments on the assignment, he or she is in conversation with the learner whose assignment he or she is marking.

The conversation is meant to guide the learner, who has given his or her understanding of what the assignment required him or her to do. One could say that the learner and the tutor are in dialogue through the assignment.

When the lecturer sets an assignment and sends it to the learner, he or she initiates the dialogue. The learner is expected to respond by answering the questions in the assignment. After sending in an assignment, the learner waits in anticipation for feedback on his or her performance in the assignment. It is clear now that whatever written words the tutor-marker writes down in the form of comments, will either encourage or discourage the learner. This means that the tutor should be careful about what comments he or she makes, and should comment as fully as possible. Comments should be guiding, constructive and motivating, to make communication a worthwhile exercise (op.cit.).

On the assignment the lecturer confirms what is correct and gives guidance on what he or she is convinced needs improvement. Like in correspondence, in distance education the nature of the tutor's comments on and response to assignments can be the deciding factor in motivating and assisting the student succeed in his or her studies (Houdek 1990:37) It is for these reasons that the tutor or lecturer should make sure that they write both specific and general comments, in such a way that they assist the learner in understanding and eventually becoming confident about his or her learning. It is also for these reasons that the comments on the assignments should be clear, motivational, constructive, honest and as extensive as possible. Comments on the assignments should also be personal and specific.

This study agrees with Hodgson (1993:22) when she postulates that assignments should be marked by tutors, since they are the ones who meet the learners face-to-face mostly. However, some quality monitoring mechanism should be put in place to ensure that there is consistence between what the lecturer of the course and the facilitating tutor are emphasising and how they do it. This study also concurs with Hodgson (ibid.) that tutors should be

involved in the development of distance teaching study materials. A brief discussion of distance teaching materials and their role in learner support follows below.

### **(III) Strategy 3: Print study materials**

Since distance education study materials are meant for students who are not necessarily attending classes everyday, they should be developed in such a way that the learner experiences interaction with the authors through activities. For example, there should be activities which the learner must work on. These activities should be accompanied by questions and possible solutions which the authors should provide to guide the learners during their involvement with the activities.

This means that print study materials need to stand in the place of a live teacher, who in the conventional set-up would stand in front of the class and interact with the students. This could help to close or at least narrow the gap between the distance learners and their lecturers or tutors.

It is for this reason that study materials should have, inter alia, a clear and attractive layout, as well as simple and understandable language. Thus, study materials which will adequately meet the needs of such a learner, should be interactive in nature and allow the flow of the process of learning on the part of the learner. For example, they must be in clear and simple language. Well-designed study materials for distance education should, for example, have well-organised content with clear objectives, clear structure, and two-way communication. They must also have a clear presentation and layout, in which the style of language is user-friendly. Furthermore, well-developed study materials meant to cater for distance learners should equip them with learning skills and should also have stimulating activities, and finally, they must teach the ability to eventually learn independently.

At UNISA, for the most part, in semester courses or modules, there is a gradual shift from the use of textbooks to the use of print modules, which are usually developed by course or module lecturers. These print modules are usually accompanied by audio-cassettes. The latter are helpful to learners in terms of, inter alia, the pronunciation of concepts. Another advantage of print modules is that they are developed specifically for distance learners. This means that, in writing these materials, the authors take into consideration the characteristics

and general or common circumstances of distance learners. For example, the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners, which is used as a case study in this research, is taught via print materials and the latter are accompanied by audio-cassettes.

#### **(IV) Strategy 4: Students online/MyUnisa**

One of the means of learner support in distance education is technology. Technology allows distance learners the opportunity and the flexibility to study at the time, place and pace of their choice. For this study, focus will only be on the use of SOL/MyUnisa as one of the technologies used by UNISA as a learner support intervention.

In its quest to provide its students with flexible learning opportunities, UNISA introduced among other media, Students-Online, now known as MyUnisa (Smit 1997:3). Thus UNISA also responded to calls for enabling students to access learning through enhanced technology (ibid.). These calls were made by, among others, Dr NR Mandela, the former President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Jay Naidoo, the former Minister of Telecommunications, and Dr S. Bhengu, the former Minister of Education (ibid.).

According to Smit (ibid.), SOL/MyUnisa serves as one of the communication and teaching delivery systems which provides flexible learning, to improve UNISA's administrative, teaching and support services to registered and prospective students. This is true for UNISA, since as it is, students are now able to send their assignments via SO/MyUnisa.

UNISA students can also apply for registration, register, pay fees, check assignments and examination-related matters through SOL/MyUnisa. Thus, students save money since when they use SOL/MyUnisa, they do not have to travel to do all these things physically on the campus. Immediacy in terms of communication between students and the institution makes SOL/MyUnisa a more convenient tool or means. It provides easy and immediate access to the University for the students.

However, one may ask whether all UNISA students do benefit from SOL/MyUnisa, considering the fact that some learners are from rural areas, where there is often no electricity or even access to computers. By providing this facility, the University seems to assume that all learners have their houses electrified and have access to computers. What provision is

made to open up opportunities to those students who do not have electricity in their homes, and also who do not have access to computers?

This study looked at opinions of both students and the university, each from their own perspective. Each of them were asked how they perceive the service delivery through SOL/MyUnisa, and what might be the solution to the problem that not all students benefit from SOL/MyUnisa, which is meant to open up learning opportunities to learners, by making access to UNISA easier for them. For this purpose, the researcher conducted interviews with some members of UNISA Management holding portfolios which necessitate them to deal with issues of students.

## **2.9 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter a literature study was undertaken to explore the meanings and definitions of open and distance learning as well as the related terms such as distance education, open learning, open and distance learning, management, flexible learning and learner support.

A brief history of distance education in South Africa and internationally was discussed. Management of open and distance learning generally and more particularly at UNISA was discussed.

The findings were that UNISA policies which it uses to manage open and distance learning (ODL) activities and process. For example, it has policies and procedures which serve as guidelines for admission of students into programmes. For example for students who do not qualify for direct admission to bachelor's degrees, UNISA the admission policy allows them to register for an Access Programme after which they can register for the bachelor's degrees. There is also programme called Recognition of Prior Learning. The University has set aside the department which handles RPL students (<http://www.unisa.ac.za/rpl>). These students compile portfolios which demonstrate experience students have gained which may enable them to register for a qualification. These students compile portfolios and write examinations. If they pass they register for and Access Programme. Once they pass an Access Programme they register for bachelor's degrees like students who had matriculation exemption at a go. So, UNISA provides access in terms of admission to programmes. Thus it is open. It provides means of breaking barriers to learning. This chapter also discussed how

UNISA managed fees. For example UNISA has made arrangements for financial aid schemes for students who cannot afford paying for themselves. For control purposes there are criteria which are used to determine as to is eligible to such funds.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

For this study, qualitative research method was used. This research method is relevant since this study was designed to be descriptive, thus no attempts were made to establish cause and effect relationships under experimental conditions. The researcher also chose to use qualitative approach since she relied on the subjects who participated in the research exercise to understand the situation at UNISA with regards to management of ODL.

The primary aim of the inquiry was to capture, understand and describe how UNISA manages ODL to afford its students accessibility and autonomy to it and all resources which are required for effective teaching learning.

A sample of all participants was selected purposely. Instruments used to collect data for this study were UNISA policy and information documents, interviews, questionnaires and literature surfed from internet and websites. Interviews were also conducted with the former students of the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners which the researcher has taught and coordinated for ten years at UNISA. Other participants were some of UNISA Management members, academics, administrative and administrative staff members. Details of their distribution are discussed later in this chapter.

#### **3.2 UNISA DOCUMENTS, INTERNET AND WEBSITES**

Other sources of information for this study, especially in relation to management of ODL generally and at UNISA in particular, were UNISA policy and information documents, internet and websites. This was helpful since it had valid information about the developments related to ODL broadly and institutionally. As a result, the researcher was able even to get recent information about among other things, the utilisation of UNISA learning centres as well as the findings of a very recent survey which was conducted about the 2007 students' satisfaction about services they received then. In this survey, students made a number of

comments about their reasons visiting learning centres. Details on this were presented in chapter 2 where literature review was discussed.

More about information solicited from literature, documents and website about policies and learner support services rendered by UNISA to manage ODL were discussed in chapter two as part of literature review for this study.

### **3.3 INTERVIEWS**

The researcher interviewed participants individually and in groups. Interviews were recorded in audio-tapes which were later transcribed for closer examination. Analysis and interpretation of the findings took place simultaneously; that is, during and not only after data collection (Lemmer1989:14). The data was finally analysed by a process of systematised searching and arranging of the interview transcripts and notes accumulated by the researcher. Interviews had been conducted individually and in groups. The purpose of these interviews was to increase the researcher's understanding of management of ODL at UNISA, as perceived by the stakeholders, namely, management, students, academics and administrative staff members (Bogdan & Biklein 1982:145). Details of individual interviews were presented below:

#### **3.3.1 Individual interviews**

Two Vice-Principals who were holding learner support portfolios (VP: Learner Support and VP: Student Affairs and Alumni) were interviewed individually. Interview with the VP: Learner Support was tape recorded while for one with the VP: Student Affairs and Alumni notes were hand written. The permission to interview staff and management members at UNISA was obtained from the Executive Director of Human Resources. He was very supportive of the process of data collection for this study. He signed a letter of approval for the researcher to conduct interviews with staff members. Interviews were conducted in English. What follows is a presentation of the focus group interviews conducted for this study.

### **3.3.2 Focus Group Interviews**

To save time, for cost effectiveness and also for the sake of creating an open environment for the interviewees, as well as for studying participants in a natural, real-life setting, focus group interviews were conducted (Marshall 1995:84). Focus group interviews were conducted with two Executive Deans: one for Human Sciences and one for Business and Economic Management, one Executive Director: Institutional Forum, one Registrar: Academic, one Manager: Logistics and one Senior Lecturer: English. Another focus group interview was conducted with ten former students of the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDP) in Botswana where the researcher and the selected former CDEP students were attending a conference. For this interview session, the researcher had made arrangements with the Coordinator of the Centre for Continuing Education in the University of Botswana for a venue. Five participants were from Botswana, two from Zimbabwe, and three were from Lesotho. South Africa was not represented since two of them had formed part of the focus groups' participants who worked in the administrative department at UNISA (Focus Group Interview with Department of Student Support, ADDENDUM B.)

The significance of all the interviews was to enable the researcher to get the views of interviewees with regard to their observations of how UNISA manages ODL and how they experienced openness during their period of study.

These interviews were also helpful to enable the researcher to get the students' recommendations for improvement, where they see necessary. The group of the former CDEP students who were interviewed in Botswana was inclusive of students from different SADC countries, except those from Swaziland who could not make it to the conference which the participants and the researcher were attending at the time of this interview. It was due to financial constraints on the part of the researcher, that the arrangements were made to coincide with the conference which the former students and the researcher were attending.

### **3.4 QUESTIONNAIRES**

The questionnaires were semi-structured and was written in English. For construction of a questionnaire and an interview schedule, the researcher was guided by her promoter and it was ultimately, they were sent to a professional statistician to do their final versions which

were used to collect data for this study. The questions were focusing on A. Bibliographical information of the participants, Institutional systems and processes, C. Assessment and evaluation systems, D. Curriculum, E. Student Support, F. Communication with lecturers and G. General comments.

With regard to distribution of questionnaires to the sample of former students, 10 questionnaires were distributed to Swaziland and 10 of them were completed and returned by mail in one envelope, 10 were sent to Lesotho, all of them were completed and returned together by mail in one envelope, 10 questionnaires were sent to Botswana by mail. Nine of them were returned by mail in one envelope. Ten questionnaires were sent by mail to Namibia. Six of them were returned. Ten questionnaires were distributed to former students based in South Africa by mail. All ten questionnaires were returned.

A sample of management members to whom the questionnaires were distributed consisted of five Vice-Principals and one Registrar: Academic. All these participants were males. Three Vice-Principals were Black and two were White (Afrikaans speaking). The Registrar was Black. Questionnaires were distributed by hand in person to the offices of the Vice-Principals and the Registrar. All the six questionnaires were completed and received back by the researcher. They were all collected by the researcher personally, from the offices.

Forty eight of fifty administrative staff members to whom questionnaires were distributed were Black. Two were White. Both were based on the UNISA main campus in Pretoria. Forty five of Black administrative staff members were based on the Pretoria campus. Two of the forty eight Black members of the administrative sample were based in the Umtata Learning Centre, a Centre Coordinator and her Deputy Coordinator. They were both Black females. Another member was based in the Polokwane Learning Centre (the then Pietersburg Learning Centre). He was a Black male who was also a Learning Centre's Coordinator.

Questionnaires were helpful in data collection for this study in a sense that it was a cost-effective method of soliciting information even from participants who were far from the where the researcher was based during research (Leedy 1993:187). It also enabled the researcher to probe below the surface of a problem (ibid.). For example, the last question of the questionnaire was open. It allowed respondents to give views and comments or what they thought about the management of ODL at UNISA.

Section A of the questionnaire was about the profiles of respondents. The examples of the questionnaire are attached at the end of this document (ADDENDUM H).

To respond to each of the subsequent questions under Sections B to E, each respondent had to tick the relevant box where details were as follows:

1. Strongly Disagree (SD)
2. Disagree (D)
3. Agree (A)
4. Strongly Agree (SA)

To respond to each of the questions under Section F, the respondents had to tick the relevant box where details were as follows:

1. Never (N)
2. Rarely (R)
3. Sometimes (S)
4. Frequently (F)

In Section A, statements 1 to 4 sought participants' personal particulars such as occupations, gender, age and type of place of employment which are important because theyan idea of how and why each person or people in a particular category or group, perceived at UNISA. For example, a person from the Management category responded to the question with an understanding that the University has a policy that promotes openness and flexibility in terms of negotiating for extension of closing dates for registration or submission of assignments for instance. On the other hand the academics and the administrative staff responded to the question on the same aspects from an implementation point of view and therefore, say exactly what happens practically at their levels. The students also responded from their angle as the actual recipients of the services from the University. So, responses from all these four groups or categories were very important for this study since they gave the collective picture of what exactly is happening at UNISA in terms of management of systems, activites and processes , as an open and distance learning institution.

In Section B, statements 1 to 6 required participants to choose relevant statements about UNISA's institutional systems and processes, such as registration venues, counselling support services, curriculum choices, materials despatch methods and readiness of study materials at any time that registered students need them.

In Section C, information is sought on assessment and evaluation systems at UNISA. For example, the participants from Management, administrative and academic staff were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements on whether there is openness at UNISA, in terms of examination period determining decisions, whether there is flexibility in terms of face-to-face tutorial class dates, assignment due dates, writing of examinations whenever students were ready, and whether students had a say in the structure of the examination paper. In the same section, participants were asked to state whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed or strongly agreed that students should write examinations in the examination centres of their choice. Another statement asked whether the students had a choice between writing an examination and being evaluated through an alternative mode, such as portfolio compilation as well as oral examination.

In Section D, the participants from the four groups were asked to state whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed or strongly agreed with statements about openness and flexibility in relation to the curriculum issues at UNISA. They were asked to respond on whether students have a say on how curricula should be designed, whether there is evidence that students participate in the development of the programmes, whether the programmes at UNISA promote lecturers' views only, whether students were free to state what they thought about issues in the text, without fearing contradicting authors, and whether students found the workload at UNISA manageable.

The statements in Section E sought information on the views of the four groups or categories of participants about learner support at UNISA. Participants were asked to state if they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that tutorial classes are conducted at venues within the reach of students, and that alternative means of facilitation in terms of course content are available to students who cannot attend regular face-to-face tutorial classes. They were asked to state whether students had a say in the arrangement of suitable tutorials according to their circumstances, e.g. by telephone, e-mail or individual tutorial support, whether students were enabled to interact with fellow students

during their studies, whether students were free to communicate with their lecturers, whether they found lecturers supportive, whether access to lecturers was easy at UNISA, and also whether the lecturers played a positive role in the learners' studies.

Section F sought information on communication between the students and lecturers. The participants were asked to indicate by means of a tick, whether communication by means of telephone, e-mail, fax, face-to-face meeting or through learners' comments in the space provided in the second last page of the assignment cover, happened. For this statement, each respondent was asked to state whether each communication method never happened, happened rarely, sometimes or frequently.

In Section G, participants were asked to give general comments on the management of ODL . This section included invitation to point out or identify gaps, weaknesses and strengths and also recommendations, which they thought, would bring about improvements in the open and distance learning practices or openness at UNISA.

### **3.5 TECHNOLOGIES USED TO ANALYSIS DATA**

To analyse questionnaires' results of this study SPSS was used.

For this study to be carried out professionally and accurately, the researcher sent the responses from participants to a specialist who could use the SPSS technology to analyse the data. This was done in order to ensure that no human error crops in during analysis and of the data. At the time this analyst was working for NRF in South Africa. Now he is working at UNISA. His name is Dr Godfrey Nentswere. He is currently working in the UNISA Research Directorate. So, calculations were not done manually and may only be understood by statistical specialist. He is more than will to come and explain in person why the numbers seem not to be the way one would have expected them, had calculations been done manually.

The researcher sent responses to questionnaires since she has not studied statistics. Instead, she paid a professional statistician to assist her by analysing this data by means of aninstrument called SPSS.

### **3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

As mentioned above, it was not easy to obtain information from the participants due to, inter alia, financial constraints. As a result, travelling to conduct interviews in different countries where the former students of the case study programme (CDEP), was difficult to do. The researcher could only interview those eight former students who could be reached during an annual meeting in Botswana. Getting inputs of more than eight students through a focus group interview could not happen due to financial constraints.

Another limitation of this study was that the sample of students came from only one programme of the University of South Africa (UNISA). This might make the study to be not representative enough. A further study on the same topic which will include students from more departments and colleges or schools at UNISA is recommended, to make it more representative.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter explained the research design and methodology which were used to investigate how UNISA manages open and distance learning activities and processes. It explained the research design which involved the use of questionnaires, interviews as well as documents, literature, websites and internet which were used to solicit data for this research. It explained sampling and the technology which was used to analyse to analyse the data. Data analysis and interpretation of results were presented in the next chapter (chapter 4).



## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter analysed and interpreted the results of the responses to the questionnaire and interviews which were administered for this study. Some participants agreed on certain aspects of the study while others did not. As mentioned earlier in chapter three, participants or a sample of this study included some of the former students of the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners, some UNISA academics, some of UNISA administrative staff members as well as some members of Management.

The questions in the questionnaire were about the following aspects: Biographical particulars like gender, occupation, age, place of employment, type of place of employment; institutional systems; assessment and evaluation system; curriculum; student support; general comments. This chapter gives the analyses of the responses of the respondents from all the four mentioned categories (Students, Academics, and Administrative Staff and Executive Management members of the University of South Africa). The focus was on finding out how members from each category perceived UNISA's management of open and distance learning in terms of addressing the need for accessibility (openness) and autonomy of students (flexibility) by managing processes such as admission to programmes through flexible registration dates, providing learner support which makes learning barrier-free through establishing learning centres within the reach of students and managing assessment and time frames for assignment submission. The sequence of the analysis of the results was as follows: Students, Academics, Administrative Staff Management members.

The following table illustrates actual numbers of responses and percentages received from each category of respondents to questionnaires.

**Table 1: Type of respondents**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	Students	45	45.5	45.5	45.5
	Administration	24	24.2	24.2	24.2
	Academic	24	24.2	24.2	24.2
	Management	6	6.1	6.1	6.1
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	100

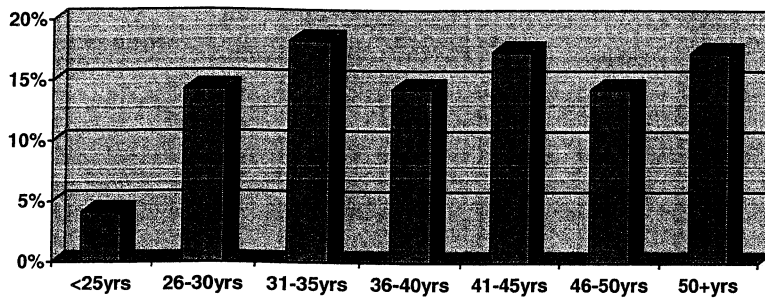
The above table (Table 1) relates to the types of respondents. The sample comprises of 45 (45.5%) students; 24 (24.2%) administrative staff; 24 (24.2%) academic (teaching) staff and 6 (6.1%) were University's Executive Management Committee members. The total number of respondents was 99.

**Table 2: Respondents according to Gender (N=97)**

	Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	63	63.6	64.9	64.9
	Male	34	34.3	35.1	35.1
	Total	97	98.0	100.0	100.0
Missing in the system	2	2.0	2.0		
Total		99	99.9		

Table 2 indicates the gender composition or distribution of the respondents. Sixty three (63) (64.9%) of them are females while thirty four (34) (35.1%) were males. The total number of respondents in terms of gender was ninety-seven (98%). The standard deviation is 0.48, while the mean is 1.35%

**Table 3 : Respondents according to Age (N=98)**



The researcher with regard to Table 3 has grouped the age variable into three (3) age groups, as follows: 21-30, 31-45 and 46-71+. Percentages in the age groups were as follows: 21- 30 = 18.3%, 31-45 = 52.9% and 46-71+ = 28.3%. Therefore, the total percentage of respondents in terms of age variant equals 99.5%. Most of the responses recorded were from the middle age group (31-45) followed by those in the age group between 45–71+. The group with the least number of participants was between 21-30. This showed that most participants were adults and they had more experience of working an learning in an ODL institution and they are also matured. Their judgement about how ODL is managed at UNISA is reliable

Distribution according to age:

**Age 20 - 30**

- 1 = Aged 21
- 2 = Aged 23
- 3 = Aged 25
- 4 = Aged 28
- 8 = Aged 30

**Age 31 -45**

- 2 = Aged 31
- 4 = Aged 34
- 5 = Aged 36
- 10 = Aged 37
- 3 = Aged 39
- 1 = Aged 40
- 1 = Aged 43

12 = Aged 45

**Age 46 – 71 and above**

5 = Aged 46

7 = Aged 48

5 = Aged 50

3 = Aged 53

3 = Aged 55

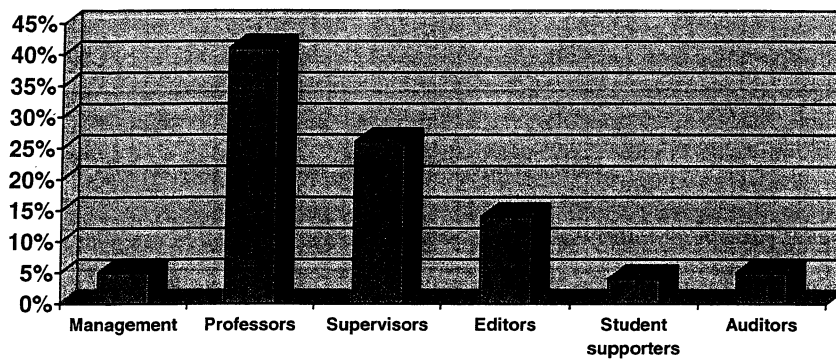
1 = Aged 59

1 = Aged 60

2 = Aged 63

1 = Aged 64

**Table 4 : Respondents according to Occupation**



As far as Figure 4 is concerned, the respondents were grouped into six (6) categories, namely; A, B, C, D,E and F.

A = Vice Principal (VP) N=3 (3.0%), Deputy Vice Chancellor (VP) N=1 (1.0%), Registrar (R) N=1(1.0%), Executive Director (ED) N=1 (1.0%),

B = Associate Professor (Ass. Prof) N=1 (1.0%), Senior Lecturers (CL) N=2 (2.0%), Lecturers (L) N=20 (20.2%), Tutors (T) N=17 (17.2%) and Academic Assistant (AA) N=1 (1.0%).

C = Supervisor (S) N=1 (3.0%), Administrative Officers N=11 (11.1), Coordinators (C) N= 8 (8.1) and Learning developers N=6 (6.1%)

D= Editor N=3 (3.0%), Chief Despatch Clerk N=10 (10.1%), Radio Programme Producer N=1 (1.0%).

E= Student Support Officer N=2 (2.0%), Learner Support Officer N=1(1.0%), Librarian N=1 (1.0%).

F= Auditor N=2 (2.0%) and Accountant N=3 (3.0).

A: N=6 (6.0%)

B: N=41(41.0%)

C: N=26 (26%)

D: N=14 (14%)

E: N=4 (4%)

F: N=5 (5%)

Total = 96

**Table 5: Type of current employment institution**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Higher Education	65	65.7	69.1	65
	Secondary School	12	12.1	12.8	12.5
	Private Company	4	4.0	4.3	4.0
	Other	13	13.1	13.8	13.5
	Total	94	94.9	100.0	95.0
Missing	System	2	5.1		
Total		96	100.0		

Table 5. relates to the employment institution variable. Sixty five were in Higher Education institutions, twelve were in Secondary Schools. Four were in Private Companies while thirteen were in other institutions.

**Table 6: Write my exams when suited best**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	53	53.5	53.5	
	Disagree	27	27.3	27.3	80.8
	Agree	12	12.1	12.1	19.2
	Strongly agree	7	7.1	7.1	
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	100

With regard to Table 6 strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together (under disagree category) and strongly agree was grouped together with agree (under agree category). The total number of respondents under disagree category was 27 while the percentage under this category was 27.3%. Eighty (80) which represents the overwhelming majority of the responses (80.8) disagree with the statement “I could write my exams whenever I was ready”, whereas less than twenty percent of the respondents (19,2) agree with the statement because there is a protocol/policy and procedures to be followed in the University statute.

**Table 7: Students’ register at the time that suited them**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	43	43.4	44.8	44.8
	Disagree	22	22.2	22.9	20.2
	Agree	26	26.3	27.1	31
	Strongly agree	5	5.1	5.2	
	Total	96	30		96
Missing		4	100.0		
	Total	100			

In as far as Table 7 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together ( N = 65.. While strongly agree and agree were also grouped together (N = 31. Sixty seven (67) which represents a large number of responses disagree with the statement “ I was allowed to register at the time that suited me whereas only 26 agree and 5 strongly agreed with the statement. This may be because at UNISA there is a policy about registration dates. Registrations are not done at any time one wants to register. A protocol in the University statue is followed. The thirty percent that agreed with the statement shows that for certain programmes and for special reasons provisions are made to register students later than the closing date of a period, for example. This indicates that there is flexibility at UNISA and therefore in this regard UNISA manages ODL in a way that enables students to take control of their learning according to their circumstances and preferences. In this programme this was possible because it consisted of a small numbers of students and it depended partly on funding from COL.

**Table 8: Students’ choice to register at learning centres next to the workplaces/homes**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	35.4	35.7	35.7
	Disagree	21	21.2	21.4	21.4
	Agree	21	21.2	21.4	42.9
	Strongly agree	21	21.2	21.4	
	Total	98	99.0	100.0	100
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		99	100.0		

With regard to Table 8 strongly disagree and disagree responses were grouped together under “disagree” category and agree and agree were also grouped together under “agree” category. The total number of respondents under “disagree” category was 56 (56.6%). Fifty six percent (56%) which represents more responses to the statement “I registered at a UNISA learning centre next to my home/work whereas a less number (42.8) agree with the statement. There is no much difference between respondents who disagree and those who disagree with the statement. Because UNISA has learning centres in many towns where it has students, the

inference regarding the large number of respondents who disagree with the statement may be that the learners (respondents) were not aware that they could register in the learning centres next to their homes or workplaces.

**Table 9: Pre-registration counselling that met the needs of students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	10	10.1	10.2	10.2
	Disagree	31	31.3	31.6	41.8
	Agree	33	33.3	33.7	48
	Strongly agree	24	24.2	24.5	
	Total	98	99.0	100.0	100
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		99	100.0		

In as far as Table 9 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together under category “disagree” (N=41) and agree was also grouped together with strongly agree (N=57). Fifty six (56) respondents which represent 58% of respondents agree with the statement “I was given pre-registration counselling that met my needs to understand course.”

Significant difference has been discovered between those who agree with the statement (58%) and those who disagree with the statement (42%). This indicates that more students do receive pre-registration counselling at UNISA. Responses which disagreed with the statement indicate that some students did not know about the existence of that learner support strategy or they did not seek it from the Student Counselling Section of the University. A recommendation is that students should be guided and encouraged by student counsellors to read information documents such as the University calendars and prospectus which the university supplies to students before and during registration.



**Table 10: Students choice to combine courses/modules of study materials**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	35	35.4	36.5	36.5
	Disagree	24	24.2	25.0	24.4
	Agree	26	26.3	27	25.5
	Strongly agree	11	11.1	11.5	13.6
	Total	96	97.0	100.0	100
Missing	System	3	3.0		
Total		99	100.0		

Regarding Table 10 strongly disagree (35) which is 35.4% was grouped with disagree (24) which was 24.4% under category “disagree”. The total number of category “disagree” was 59 (59.8%). Fifty nine (59) which represents which represents about 60% (59.8%) of responses disagree with the statement “I was allowed to combine courses/modules which I felt would meet my needs of skills development.” whereas, less than 35% (37) agree with the statement. This study infers that the fact that more respondents disagree with the statement shows that students know that combination of modules and courses for a particular programme or qualification is decided on by the University. Students choose from combinations already suggested in the year calendars. A reasonably high number of respondents who agreed with the statement indicate that learners are allowed to register subjects or modules for non-degree purposes. In that way one may infer that there is flexibility at UNISA in as far as choice of registration of modules are concerned.

**Table 11: Students' choice on despatch methods of study materials**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	13.1	13.3	13.3
	Disagree	17	17.2	17.3	30.6
	Agree	17	17.2	17.3	48.0
	Strongly agree	51	51.5	52.0	
	Total	98	99.0	99.9	91.9
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		99	100.0		

With regard to Table 11 strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together while agree and strongly agree were also grouped together. Significance difference has been discovered between those who disagree and those who agree with the statement “ I had a choice on the despatch methods of study materials.” Sixty eighty (68) which represents the majority of the responses (68.7%) agree with the statement “I had a choice on the despatch method of study materials.” whereas, only thirty (30) which represents 31.3 disagrees with the statement. The inference this study makes out of this is that the University does give students a choice to receive materials personally or by post. The minority which disagree with the statement indicates that some students are not aware of the different methods through which study materials are dispatched to the registered students. The University should make students and prospective students aware that materials may be despatched personally or by post to registered students.

**Table 12: Study materials were ready whenever students requested for them**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	4	4.0	4.0	
	Disagree	13	13.1	13.1	18
	Agree	60	60.6	60.6	82
	Strongly agree	22	22.2	22.2	
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	100

With regard to Table 12 strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together while agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significance difference has been discovered between respondents who agreed with the statement “Study materials were ready whenever I requested for them as a registered student.” Eighty two (82) which represents the overwhelming majority of responses (82.8%) agrees with the statement “Study materials were ready whenever I requested for them as a registered student. This may be because the University normally prepares study materials in advance to make sure they are available when students need them. The less than eighteen (17.2%) of the responses which disagree with the statement indicate that in only a few occasions students request for study materials when they are out of stock. May be this happens very late in the academic year. Those students who request for study materials after misplacing them late in the year or perhaps materials which are offered for the first time where not all modules are ready during registrations.

**Table 13: Existence of openness in Unisa Programmes**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	9	9.1	9.5	
	Disagree	36	36.4	37.9	49.4
	Agree	35	35.4	36.8	50.6
	Strongly agree	15	15.1	15.8	
	Total	95	96.0	100.0	100
Missing	System	4	4.0		
Total		99	100.0		

Regarding Table 13 strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together while agree and strongly agree were also grouped together. Fifty (50) which represents more responses (50.6%) agrees with the statement “There is openness in UNISA programmes.” whereas, forty five (45) which represents less than fifty percent (45.5%) of the responses disagrees with the statement. There is no significance difference between those who agree and those who disagree with the statement. This indicates students some times experience openness and some times not, depending on the programmes and the needs they have at a given time. So, the University cannot be undoubtedly said to be clearly open or clearly not. This means that though openness is some times there it needs to be improved in different areas of service delivery to students.

**Table 14: Students' experience of flexibility in Unisa Programmes**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.2	
	Disagree	24	24.2	25.0	33
	Agree	50	50.5	52.1	67
	Strongly agree	17	17.2	17.7	
	Total	96	97.0	100.0	100
Missing	System	3	3.0		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 14 is concerned strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant difference between those who disagree and those who agree with the statement. “I experienced flexibility in UNISA programmes.” was discovered. Sixty seven (67) which represents the majority of the responses (67.8%) agree with the statement whereas, only thirty percent (30.1%) disagree with the statement “I experienced flexibility in UNISA programmes.” This shows that although UNISA has policies to be observed provisions are made for negotiations around special circumstances of students at given times of their study period. For example, students negotiate for due dates of assignments with lecturers for a reasonable extension if they come with reasonable reasons for inability to meet the stipulated closing dates. In some occasions, students are given opportunity to be examined orally if for some reasons they cannot sit for their examinations. Another example is that of audio-tapes transcriptions which are made for those students whose hearing sense is impaired. Such provisions by UNISA show flexibility of services received by its students. The minority that disagree with the statement (29) which represent 30.1% indicates that some students are not aware of provisions that the University makes for special circumstances. The University should make students aware of these provisions available to students.

**Table 15: Students' choice in choosing modules or parts of modules**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	39	39.4	40.6	
	Disagree	37	37.4	38.5	79.2
	Agree	15	15.2	15.6	20.8
	Strongly agree	5	5.1	5.2	
	Total	96	97.0	100.0	100
Missing	System	3	3.0		
Total		99	100.0		

With regard to Table 15 strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences between those who disagreed and those who agreed with the statement “I had a choice to study modules or part of the modules relevant to the theory and skills I needed.” Seventy eight (78) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (79.1%) disagree with the statement “I had a choice in choosing to study modules or parts of the modules relevant to the theory and skills I needed.” Whereas, just over twenty percent of the respondents agree with the statement. This may be because there is a protocol, policy and procedure in the University’s statute to be followed. The lesser number of respondents which agrees with the statement indicate that UNISA has provisions to meet the needs of those students who want to register for certain modules, not with a purpose of complete the qualification as such. For example, students at UNISA are allowed to register for non degree courses or modules. This shows that UNISA is flexible in as far as registration of modules is concerned. So there is flexibility at UNISA’s programmes delivery.

**Table 16: Students' ability to state what they thought about issues without fear to contradict authors**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	5.0	5.5	
	Disagree	7	7.1	7.7	21
	Agree	55	55.6	60.4	79
	Strongly agree	24	24.2	26.4	100.0
	Total	91	91.9	100.0	
Missing	System	8	8.1		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 16 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered. Seventy nine (79) which represents the overwhelming majority of respondents (79.8%) agree with the statement “ I was able to state what I thought about issues without fear of contradicting the authors.”, whereas, less than fifteen percent (12.2%) disagree with the statement. The inference this study makes here is that criticism of study materials is allowed at UNISA. So, there is openness at UNISA in as far as criticism of study materials is concerned. The small percentage (12.2%) that disagreed with the statement may be a result of the fact that they have not thought of criticising study materials, may be because they did not know that the University welcomed that. In future, the University should indicate that in documents like Tutorial Letter 101 which contains information about modules each academic year.

**Table17: Students’ freedom to send assignments at convenient times**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	47	47.5	48.0	
	Disagree	26	26.3	26.5	73
	Agree	20	20.2	20.4	27
	Strongly agree	5	5.0	5.1	
	Total	98	99.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 17 strongly is concerned, disagree was grouped together with disagree and agree was grouped with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered. Seventy three (73) which represents an overwhelming majority of the respondents (73.5%) disagree with the statement “I was allowed to send in assignment at times that were convenient to me”, whereas, just over twenty five (25.6%) agree with this statement. This may be because at UNISA there are rules and regulations applied to assignment submission dates. The fact that there is that less percentage which agreed with the statement indicates that there are provisions made at the University for extra ordinary or unique circumstances which prevent students from meeting assignments deadlines, for example death in the family or when the student was seriously ill at the time and there is proof like a doctor’s note, the due date is negotiated. This means that there is flexibility at UNISA.



**Table 18: Students' say on the examination period**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	49	49.5	50.0	
	Disagree	29	29.3	29.6	78
	Agree	12	12.1	12.2	22
	Strongly agree	8	8.1	8.2	
	Total	98	99.0	100.0	100.0
Missing in	System	1	1.0		
Total		99	100.0		

With regard to Table 18 strongly disagree was grouped together with disagree and agree and strongly were grouped together. Significant differences between those respondents who disagree and those who agree were discovered. Seventy eight (78) which represents the majority of the respondents (78.8%) disagree with the statement “I had a say on the period of writing my final examination.” whereas, only about twenty percent (20.4%) agree with the statement because there is policy which applies with regard to the University Examination periods, which have to be adhered to. The small number of respondents (20.4%) that agrees with the statement indicates that special provisions are there at UNISA, which are meant to cater for the needs of students with unique circumstances that prevent them from writing their final examinations on the normal stipulated dates. For example, at UNISA there is a section called “Examination Arrangement Section”. This shows that flexibility is there at UNISA.

**Table 19: Students' say on the areas of content for examination**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	68	68.0	68.7	
	Disagree	29	29.0	29.3	87
	Strongly agree	2	2.0	2.0	13
	Total	99	99.0	100.0	100

Regarding Table 19 strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and strongly agree stood on its own since there was no response to under “agree” category. Significant differences were discovered between those respondents who agreed and those who disagree with the statement “I had a say on the areas of the content for examination”. Eighty (87) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (98%) disagree with the statement “I had a say on the areas of content for examination” whereas, only two percent of the respondents (2.2%) agree with the statement. This is because students do not form part of the team which decide on the contents of the examination papers at UNISA. In relation to this implies that UNISA is not open in terms of involvement of students in what should be included in the contents on which students are examined. The small number of students who agreed with the statement may not have understood the question.

**Table 20: Students' say on the structure of examination paper(s)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	47	47.5	47.5	
	Disagree	26	26.3	26.3	73.7
	Agree	8	8.0	8.0	26.3
	Strongly agree	18	18.2	18.2	
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	100

As far as Table 20 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those who disagree and those who agree with the statement “I had a say on the structure of the examination paper”. Seventy three (73) which represents the majority of the respondents (73.8) disagree with the statement “I had a say on the structure of examination paper.” whereas, only twenty-six (26.3%) agree with the statement because it is the lecturers who decide on the structure of examination papers. Students are informed about the structure of examination papers. The small percentage that agree with the statement may be confusing the fact that lecturers inform them about the structure of the examination papers with the that have a say on how the examination papers should be structured. UNISA and flexible in terms of involving students in decision making with regards to the structure or structures of the examination papers.

**Table 21: Students’ say on whether to write examinations or to be evaluated by means of alternative modes**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	49	49.5	49.5	
	Disagree	47	47.5	47.5	96.0
	Agree	2	2.0	2.0	3.0
	Strongly agree	1	1.0	1.0	
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	100.0

Regarding Table 21, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly disagree. Significant differences were discovered between those respondents who disagreed and those who agreed with the statement “I had a say on whether to write examination or to be evaluated by means of alternative modules.’ Ninety six (96) which the overwhelming majority of the represents (96%) disagree with the statement “ I had a say on whether to write examination or to be evaluate by means of alternative modes.” whereas, only three percent of the respondents (3%) agree with the statement. This is because at UNISA there is an assessment policy at UNISA. Academics act according to it and

students do not form part of people who decide on how they should be evaluated or examined. The small percentage (3%) of respondents who agreed with the statement indicates that provisions are made in the University to cater for learners who cannot be examined through writing examinations. For example, some are examined through oral examination if for valid reasons they have sight problems or they have injured their hands. This also shows that UNISA is flexible. It makes special provisions for special needs of its students.

**Table 22: Students' choice of writing examinations at venues of their choice**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	53	53.5	53.5	
	Disagree	27	27.3	27.3	80.8
	Agree	12	12.1	12.1	19.2
	Strongly agree	7	7.1	7.1	
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	100.0

As far as Table 22 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those who disagree and those who agree with the statement "I could write my examination whenever I was ready." Eighty (80) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (80.8%) disagree with the statement "I could write my examinations whenever I was ready." Whereas, less than twenty percent of the respondents (19.2%) agree with the statement because there are University procedures, policy, rules and regulations which should be adhered to with regard to examination periods. The small numbers of respondents (19.2%) who agree with the statement indicate that there are special provision, which the University has made for unique needs and circumstances. Thus special arrangements can be made for the student to postpone examination period.

**Table 23: Students' say on the design of curricular**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	64	64.6	66.0	
	Disagree	29	29.3	29.9	93.0
	Agree	3	3.0	3.1	7.0
	Strongly agree	1	1.0	1.0	
	Total	97	98.0	97.0	100.0
Missing	System	2	2.0		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 23 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those who disagree and those who agree with the statement "I had a say in how the CDEP (programme) curriculum should be designed." Ninety three (93) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (93.9%) disagrees with the statement "I had a say on how the CDEP (programme) curriculum should be designed." whereas, less than five percent of the respondents (4.1%) agree with the statement because students get study materials ready during registrations. It is the relevant personnel in the University who develop study materials. The small percentage of respondents who agreed the statement were referring to the fact that during the course of their study the students who did the Certificate for Distance Education (CDEP) which is used in this research as a case study, they were asked to comment on the quality of study materials both print and cassettes. That was during evaluation time before evaluation of the programme for improvement and upgrading. UNISA does not involve students in the processes or activities of curriculum design. This implies UNISA is not open in this regard.

**Table 24: Evidence that learners participated in the Development of the Programme**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	37	37.4	38.1	
	Disagree	23	23.2	23.7	61.9
	Agree	27	27.3	27.8	38.1
	Strongly agree	10	10.1	10.3	
	Total	97	98.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	2	2.0		
Total		99	100.0		

With regard to Table 24 strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences between those respondents who disagree and those who agree with the statement. “There is evidence that learners participate in the development of the programmes.” was discovered. Sixty (60) which represents the majority of the respondents (61.8%) disagree with the statement, whereas, only thirty eight percent (38.1%) agree with the statement. This is because it is study materials developers in the University who develop study materials and the learners find the study materials already developed on registration. So, they do not contribute on the development of their study materials. The smaller percentage that agrees with the statement (38.1%) may be thinking about questions they receive about the quality of study materials after they have been participating in the programme. UNISA should set up structures for doing needs analysis from students before it develops programmes. The University must finance academics to carry out research to get the views of students before a programmes is developed.

**Table 25: Evidence that the programme only promotes one viewpoint**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	17	17.2	19.1	
	Disagree	29	29.3	32.6	51.7
	Agree	34	34.3	38.2	48.3
	Strongly agree	9	9.1	10.1	100.0
	Total	89	89.9	100.0	
Missing		10	10.1		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 25 is concerned, strongly disagree was grouped together with disagree and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were not discovered between those respondents who disagree and those who agree with the statement “The programme only promotes one viewpoint (institution’s viewpoint).” Forty-six (46) which represents the majority of the respondents (51.7%) disagree with the statement “The programme promotes one viewpoint (institution’s viewpoint).” whereas, another huge number though less than the other group, agrees with the statement. This indicates that although it is the University staff members who develop and deliver programmes, students are allowed to express their views about the programmes at UNISA there is communication between the University and students at UNISA. This indicates UNISA manages information well in this case.

**Table 26: Manageability of students' workload at Unisa**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	6.1	6.5	
	Disagree	9	9.1	9.8	16.3
	Agree	63	63.6	68.5	83.7
	Strongly agree	14	14.1	15.2	
	Total	92	92.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	7	7.1		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 26 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those respondents who disagreed and those who agreed with the statement "I found the workload manageable." Seventy seven (77) which represents an overwhelming majority of the respondents (83.7%) agree with the statement "I found the workload manageable." Whereas, less than twenty percent (16.3%) disagree with the statement. This indicates that workload in UNISA programmes is manageable. The minority of the respondents who disagree with the statement may have reasons for that. May be they do not communicate with the lecturers for guidance or they do not attend tutorial classes where learning is facilitated on certain days at UNISA. They need counselling. The University has to make the learners aware that there is counselling facility in the University and may also have to encourage the students to contact their lecturers whenever they experience problems as to how they can manage their workload.



**Table 27: Tutorial classes were conducted at venues within reach of students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	6.1	6.4	
	Disagree	19	19.2	20.2	26.6
	Agree	33	33.3	35.1	73.4
	Strongly agree	36	36.4	38.3	
	Total	94	94.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	5	5.0		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 27 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those respondents who disagree and those who agree with the statement “Tutorial classes were conducted at venues within my reach. Sixty nine (69) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (73.4%) agree with the statement, whereas, less than thirty percent (26.6%) disagree with the statement. This is because UNISA Management has provided learning centres almost in every city, town or village within the reach of its students. The less number which disagree with the statement (26) indicate that though UNISA has learning centres in many areas where it has students, there are areas where there are no learning centres nearby. The University still has a task to establish more learning centres where its students reside.

**Table 28: Availability of alternative means of facilitation of contents.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	13.1	14.3	
	Disagree	46	46.5	50.5	64.8
	Agree	24	24.2	26.4	35.2
	Strongly agree	8	8.1	8.8	
	Total	91	91.9	100.0	100.05
Missing	System	8	8.1		
Total		99	100.0		

With regards to Table 28, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those respondents who disagree and those who agree with the statement “Alternative means of facilitation in terms of course content were available to students who could not attend face-to-face tutorial classes.”

Significant differences were discovered between those respondents who disagree and those who agree with the statement. Fifty nine (59) which represents the majority of the respondents (64.8%) disagree with the statement, whereas, less than forty percent of the respondents (35.2%) agree with the statement. The high percentage which disagrees with the statement may be indicating that students are not aware of the alternative ways of contacting their lecturers to seek facilitation if they cannot attend face-to-face tutorial classes on set days. The University should make students aware of the availability of alternative facilities and encourage them to use them to communicate with their lecturers. The recommendation is that it must be compulsory that emphasis is made about the importance of contacting lecturers during the course of study of each student. This should appear in a certain section of Tutorial Letter 101 of every module or course.

The smaller numbers of respondents who agree with the statement (35.2%) indicate that some students are aware of the existence or availability of alternative facilities for contacting the

lecturers to seek tutorial assistance from the lecturers. The University should make it compulsory that information about availability of alternative means contacting their lecturers to the students. This must be monitored by regular reports to relevant committees such as Tuition Committees at different levels.

**Table 29: Students' interaction with fellow students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	1.0	1.1	
	Disagree	11	11.1	11.5	12.6
	Agree	38	38.4	40.0	87.4
	Strongly agree	45	45.5	47.4	
	Total	95	96.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	4	4.0		
Total		99	100.0		

Regarding 29 strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences between those who disagree and those who agree with the statement "I interacted with fellow students during my studies at UNISA." were discovered.

Forty three (43) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (87.4%) of the respondents agree with the statement whereas, less than fifteen percent (12.7%) disagree with the statement. This is because in the UNISA registration form there is a column provided for students to indicate if they do want to communicate with other students during their academic year in the University. This is provided by the University to the students to make them aware that they may work collaboratively with their fellow students. The less number of respondents which disagreed with the statement indicate that other students either prefer to study by themselves or they have an oversight about the fact that they may contact their fellow learners. The University should encourage students to work with their fellow learners. For this purpose, the University should make it a rule that lecturers add a note on the

tutorial letters they send to students during the course of the year or they may add it in Tutorial letter 101 for each module in each academic year.

**Table 30: Students' freedom to communicate their needs with their lecturer**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	1.0	1.1	
	Disagree	4	4.0	4.2	5.3
	Agree	48	48.5	50.5	94.7
	Strongly agree	42	42.4	44.2	
	Total	95	96.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	4	4.0		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 30 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those who disagree and those who agree with the statement "I felt free to communicate my learning needs with the lecturer." Ninety (90) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (94.7%) agree with the statement, whereas, less than six percent (5.3%) disagree with the statement. This is because students are allowed to communicate with their lecturers for tuition related needs. For example, they can appointments to see lecturers in person, they can phone or e-mail lecturers or even fax them to seek assistance they need. The smaller numbers of respondents who disagree with the statement indicate that other learners are not motivated to contact lecturers or not even aware that they can use the above-mentioned means to communicate with their lecturers. The university should intensify awareness on the part of students that it is useful to communicate with lecturers regularly.

**Table 31: Lecturers were positive**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	2.0	2.2	
	Disagree	6	6.1	6.6	5.3
	Agree	44	44.4	48.4	94.7
	Strongly agree	39	39.4	42.8	
	Total	91	91.9	100.0	100
Missing	System	8	8.1		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as table 31 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those respondents who disagree and those who agree with the statement: "I found the lecturer supportive." Eighty-three (83) which represents an overwhelming majority of respondents (94.7%) agree with the statement. This indicates that students get support from lecturers. A small percentage of respondents who disagree with the statement (8.8%) may have not received support in time or they needed support when the lecturer was not available. Recommendation on this is that provision should be made for taking care of learner support when the lecturer concerned is not available. More training and development needs to be made to lecturers so that all of them have the same mindset and attitude to have a sense of duty to support students. They need to be developed and trained to understand the rationale for support distance learners, that is minimising or eliminating isolation usually experienced by this kind of students. Staff development is a managerial role.

**Table 32: Access to the lecturer was easy**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	2.0	2.2	
	Disagree	12	12.1	13.0	15.2
	Agree	45	45.5	48.9	84.8
	Strongly agree	33	33.3	35.9	
	Total	92	92.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	7	7.1		
Total		99	100.0		

With regard to table 32, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Seventy-eight (78) which represents the majority of respondents (84.8%) agrees with the statement: "Access to the lecturer was easy." whereas, less than fifteen percent (13%) disagree with the statement. This is because students at UNISA are encouraged to have access to their lecturers. The small percentage of respondents who disagree with the statement indicates that some students are not aware of access means to their lecturers. For example, using e-mail, if the lecturer is not available telephonically at the time the student needs assistance. Recommendation is that lecturers should make students aware of alternative means of accessing them at any time. Management should devise means to monitor that this information is always in the tutorial letters sent to students.

**Table 33: Lecturers played a positive role in students' studying**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	4.0	4.4	4.4
	Agree	33	33.3	36.3	88.8
	Strongly agree	54	54.5	59.3	
	Total	91	91.9	100.0	93.2
Missing	System	8	8.1		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 33 is concerned, strongly disagree and disagree were grouped together and agree was grouped together with strongly agree. Significant differences were discovered between those respondents who agree and those who disagree with the statement: "The lecturer played a positive role in my studies.", whereas, less than five percent (4,4%) disagree with the statement. An overwhelming majority of respondents (88,8%) agreed with the statement. This indicates that lecturers at UNISA play a positive role in the studies of the students. The smaller number of respondents who disagree with the statement indicates that there is still room for improvement in the influence the lecturers have on the studies of the learners. This may be those students who try to get hold of the lecturer in vain when he or is not available. Recommendation is that the lecturer should make provisions like arranging with another colleague to take of the students when he or she is not available, so that the students do not experience loneliness and neglect when they need help with their studies. The University Management should provide for appointment of programme coordinators who assist by taking inquiries of students and link them with their lecturers. This will ensure that whenever students phone, they will get a coordinator to attend to their queries and communicate information to responsible lecturers. The researcher is aware that this has financial implications, but to provide efficient services to students is more important than saving money in an ODL set where students suffer isolation due to separation from their providing institution and peers. Paying more is an investment if it will make learning barrier-free for students.

## SECTION F: COMMUNICATION WITH LECTURERS

**Table 34: Telephone**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	13	13.1	14.9	14.9
	Rarely	10	10.1	11.5	26.4
	Sometimes	33	33.3	37.9	58.7
	Frequently	31	31.3	35.6	
	Total	87	87.9	100.0	100
Missing	System	12	12.1		
Total		99	100.0		

With regard to Table 34 thirty-three (33) which represents the highest respondents (33,3%) use telephone sometimes. The next highest number of respondents (31), which represents 31.3% of the respondents, said that they used telephone frequently. Ten (10) which is 10.1% of respondents said that they used telephone rarely while thirteen (13) which represents 13, 1%, respondents said that they never used telephone to communicate with staff members in the University. This means that most students. This means many students use telephone.

**Table 35: E-mail**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	24	24.2	28.6	28.6
	Rarely	19	19.2	22.6	19.2
	Sometimes	30	30.3	35.7	35.7
	Frequently	11	11.1	13.1	13.1
	Total	84	84.8	100.0	96.6
Missing	System	15	15.2		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as 35 is concerned, thirty (30) which represents the majority of the respondents (35.7%) said that they used e-mail “sometimes,” eleven (11) which represents only 13.1%



respondents said that they used it frequently while nineteen (19) which represents 19.2% said that used e-mail rarely and another huge number 24 which represents 28.6% of the respondents said that they “never” used e-mail to communicate with the University. Significant differences were discovered between respondents in these four categories. The fact that the majority (35.7%) said that they used e-mail frequently indicates that many students use e-mail to communicate with the learners. Twenty-four (24), which represents 28.6% of the respondents, which said that they never used e-mail, may be from a group of students who do not have access to computers or who reside in areas where there is no electricity at all. Recommendation of this study would be that these students are encouraged to use what they have at their disposal like a telephone or a letter to communicate with the University. They may also be encouraged or made aware that they may to use café shops in the towns or villages next to their homes or workplaces to access Internet or computers

**Table 36: Fax**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	23	23.2	27.7	23.2
	Rarely	22	22.2	26.5	22.2
	Sometimes	24	24.2	28.9	24.3
	Frequently	14	14.1	16.9	14.0
	Total	83	83.8	100.0	83.7
Missing	System	16	16.2		
Total		99	100.0		

With Regard to Table 36, twenty four (24), which represents the majority of the respondents (24.29%), said that that they used fax “sometimes” whereas, twenty three (23), which represents 23.2% of the respondents, said that they never used fax. Twenty two (22), which represents 22.2% of respondents, said that they “rarely” used whereas, fourteen (14), which represents the lowest percentage of respondents, said that they used fax frequently. The fact that the highest number of respondents said that they used fax sometimes indicates that on average students do use fax to communicate with the University. The lowest percentage that said they used phones frequently may be because many students do not own faxes or do not have access to them. It may be that those who use faxes have access to them at work or cafés.

The second highest percentage of the respondents (27.7%), which said that they “never” used, indicate that many students do not have fax machines or do not have access to fax. This study recommends that students should be made aware of and encouraged to use fax machines in the café’s in their areas. This information should be included in Tutorial Letter 101 of each module each academic year.

**Table 37: Face-to-face meeting**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	18	18.2	20.7	20.7
	Rarely	8	8.1	9.2	9.2
	Sometimes	26	26.3	29.9	29.9
	Frequently	35	35.4	40.2	40.2
	Total	87	87.9	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	12	12.		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 37 is concerned, thirty five (35) which represents the majority of the representatives (40.2%) said that they received face-to-face tutorials “frequently,” twenty six (26) which represents second more respondents (29.9%) said that they received face-to-face tutorials “sometimes”, while eighteen (18) which represents 20.7% said that they “never” received face-to-face tutorials and finally, eight (8) which represents the lowest number of respondents (9.2%) said that they received face-to-face tutorial classes rarely. This means that UNISA provides learning centres which make learning accessible to students in their areas.

**Table 38: Use of learner comments section/space for comments by students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	3	3.0	4.5	4.5
	Rarely	12	12.1	17.9	22.4
	Sometimes	28	28.3	41.8	64.2
	Frequently	24	24.2	35.8	
	Total	67	67.7	100.0	91.1
Missing	System	32	32.3		
Total		99	100.0		

As far as Table 38, twenty eight (28) which represents the overwhelming majority of respondents (41.8%) of the respondents they used the space for learner's comments on the last page of the assignment cover. Twenty-four (24) which represents the second highest percentage of respondents said that they used the space reserved for learner's comments on the last page of the assignment cover. These two high percentages indicate that most students comment on the space reserved for learner's comments to express their views about the assignments or issues related to assignments. Twelve (12) which represents the second lowest percentage of respondents (17.9%) said that they used the space reserved for learner's comments at the end of the assignment cover whereas three (3) which represents the lowest percentage of respondents (4.5%) said that they never used the space reserved for learner's comments on the last page of the assignment cover. Significant difference was discovered between those respondents who used the space reserved for learner's comments on the last page of the assignment cover sometimes and frequently on the one side and those who used the space for learner's comments rarely and never on the other. The smallest percentage (4.5%) which represents those respondents who said that they "never" used the space for learner's comments may be representing those who are not aware of the significance of making comments on the space provided or may not have anything to comment about or they may have written their assignments late and they did not have enough time to write comments after writing assignments. Recommendation is that learners should be encouraged to make comments in the space provided on the last page of the comments.

**SECTION G: GENERAL COMMENTS (on whether openness and flexibility are practised at UNISA)**

**Table 39: Students**

27 (82%) of the sample made general comments, and some of them made recommendations.

Statement	No	%
There was openness and flexibility	22	48,8
No openness and flexibility	3	6,6
Not enough openness and flexibility	12	26,6
No comments	8	17,7

As far as Table 39 twenty two which represents the majority the respondents (48%) said that there were openness and flexibility at UNSA. Twelve (26,6) said that there is no enough openness and flexibility. Only 3 respondents (9%) said that there was no flexibility. Eight (17,7%) did not comment.

**Table 40: Academics**

Statement	No	%
There is openness and flexibility	5	20
Not enough openness and flexibility	2	8
No openness and flexibility	1	4
No comments	17	18

General comments indicate a high percentage (20%) of agreement with the statement that there is openness and flexibility at UNISA. This is clear in the responses like (“... flexibility is excellent, ...openness is there. ...that is openness a student can ask for...”).

**Table 41: Administrative staff**

21 (84%) of the sample made general comments, and some of them made recommendations, while 16% did not make any comments or recommendations.

Statement	No	%
There was openness and flexibility	9	36
No flexibility	2	8
Yes, but improve openness/flexibility	10	40
No comments	4	16

What came to light in Section G from comments made by respondents on whether there is openness and flexibility at UNISA, is that generally the administrative staff consider the university to be practising openness and flexibility effectively. This is shown by the fact that only eight percent of them said that there is no flexibility at UNISA, while 36% confidently said that UNISA is open and flexible. In addition to this, forty percent said that yes, openness (accessibility) and flexibility (learner autonomy) is there at UNISA, but there is a need for improvement. Four participants did not comment at all. Their views on the question at hand are not known. Fortunately, they are in the minority. Therefore, their silence should not weaken the findings and outcomes of this study.

So, the majority of respondents (10) which represents 40% said that there is openness and flexibility at UNISA but there is need for the University to improve on this. The second largest number of respondents (9) which represents 36% of the responses said that there is there is openness and flexibility at UNISA.

**Table 42: Management**

6 (100%) of the sample made general comments, and some of them made recommendations, while 16% did not make any comments or recommendations.

Statement	No	%
There was openness and flexibility	3	50
No flexibility	0	0
Yes, but improve openness/flexibility	3	50
No comments	0	0

What came to light in Section G from comments made by respondents on whether there is openness and flexibility at UNISA, is that generally Management consider the university to be practising openness and flexibility effectively. This is shown by the fact that only 50 percent of them said that there is flexibility at UNISA, while 36% said that flexibility and openness are practised at UNISA but there is room for improvement. This means that UNISA manages ODL well but it should continue making improvements in deploying resources and facilities in such a way that all students experience accessibility to its programmes and they enjoy autonomy to take control of their learning because the systems enable them to make choices to study according to their needs, personalities and learning styles (Moore 1997 : 2).

## **4.2 CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed the research data collected for this study. It presented the analytical results, the interpretation and the implications for the research problem. This chapter led to the final chapter of this study which provided conclusions of the research, and presented recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 CONCLUSIONS BASED ON QUESTIONAIRES**

##### **5.1.1 Introduction**

The objective of this chapter is to highlight the major findings of the study, to analyse its limitation, discuss the implications of the findings and to make recommendations and suggestions for further study. These findings were analysed in the order of aspects such as biographical information, institutional systems, assessment and evaluation systems, curriculum issues, student support, communication means with the University (UNISA). The order was as follows:

- A. Biographical information
- B. Institutional systems
- C. Assessment and evaluation systems
- D. Curriculum issues
- E. Student Support
- F. Communication means with the University

## **SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

### **1. Type of respondents**

The fact that the Management Committee formed the highest percentage of respondents to the questionnaire. This indicates that UNISA Management is interested to find out how students feel about the services it offers to its students.

**Recommendation:** UNISA Management should keep up the spirit of wanting to know about the needs of students. It should also see to it that recommendations of this study are considered for implementation as much as possible, for the good of the organisation and the community UNSA sets itself to serve.

### **2. Gender Aspect**

**Conclusion:** Most respondents were females (63) which represented 64.9% of the respondents.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should allow the closing dates to be negotiated when there are sound reasons like inability of the student to write examinations because she had been on maternity leave, for example.

### **3. Age aspect (Figure 1)**

**Conclusion:** The fact that most of the responses recorded were from the age group 31-43, indicates that UNISA's average number of students are at their middle age. This is the age in which people are engaged in different activities such as jobs, raising children at home, taking care of family needs. They really do not have much spare time.

**Recommendation:** UNISA Management should keep in mind the needs and possible or likely circumstances of its learners. It must do that by being more open and flexible, for example by allowing closing dates to be negotiable and have policy which the teaching staff should base their negotiations of assignments closing dates on. It should not be a lecturer's discretion to understand and give extensions to students who have genuine reasons for failing



to submit assignments in time. There should be policies to this effect for the sake of consistence.

Furthermore, UNISA Management should not consider only medical doctors' notes as valid for reporting that a student was really ill, for example and therefore could not write examinations or submit assignments in time. Policies should be in place to validate confirmation from traditional healers also should be accepted as proof.

However, there should be an agreed sign that will ensure that students do not abuse that means of reporting to the University for professional purposes. This study does not have a possible sign. Therefore it suggests that further study be done which will come up with the strategy or sign to avoid anarchy in this regard.

#### **4. Choice of period to write examinations**

**Conclusion:** The fact that an overwhelming majority of eighty respondents which is 80.8% of the respondents said that they were not allowed to write examinations whenever they were ready indicates that there is no flexibility at UNISA in terms of examination writing period.

However, the fact that there is at least a small number of respondents who agree with the statement, can be inferred to the presence of flexibility at UNISA, though to a limited scope or extent. This means that though there are policies which rule the examination writing periods, UNISA does have special provisions for unique circumstances and needs of students who cannot sit for their examinations on the set dates; such as in cases of learners who fail to write exams due to illness or death of the next of kin, just before the date of writing examination. Special arrangements are also made for oral examinations on a set date, rather than saying that the student concerned should wait until the following academic year.

**The recommendation:** UNISA should increase the extent of flexibility and openness with regard to final evaluation of the learners. This may be done by means of alternative final assessment such as compiling of a portfolio or working on project to demonstrate the grasp of the programme concerned. This recommendation ties in with the one about use of alternative evaluation means method. It should not be only the lecturers who decide on whether evaluation for a programme is by means of formal examinations or a portfolio. The

management must make it a policy that each programme be evaluated by means of examinations or a portfolio and students should have a choice to choose the method he or she is convinced is convenient for him or her, according to his or her learning style.

#### **5. Choice of time register**

**Conclusion:** Registrations are not done at any time one wants to register. Therefore there is no flexibility at UNISA in as far as registration periods are concerned. However, thirty percent of respondents said that they were allowed to register at the time that suited them. It could be that at that time they had saved money in advance, unlike those who might have been unable to register due to different reasons such closing dates that were before pay dates. That thirty percent that agreed with the statement shows that for certain programmes and for special reasons, provisions are made to register students later than the closing date of a period, for example. This indicates that to a certain extent there is flexibility at UNISA in as far as registration periods are concerned.

**Recommendation:** Policies for negotiations of closing dates of registration should be formulated. The closing date should be extended by two weeks since some students get their money from people who get their salaries on the fifteenth of the month, while others get money or their salaries at the end of the month.

#### **6. Choice to registered at a nearby learning centre**

**Conclusion:** The inference regarding the larger number of respondents who disagree with the statement despite the fact that is that UNSA has learning centres in many towns might be that respondents were not aware that they could register in the learning centres next to their homes or workplaces. The fact that some students did not know about the existence of learning centres near their homes or workplaces justified an inference was made by the researcher that information management is lacking at UNISA. Information is not communicated to all students about available facilities whose purpose is to make UNISA accessible (open) and to give students a choice or autonomy (flexibility) to attend classes or visit learning centres for other purposes such as using computers for internet, if they need to. Management of information should be improved at UNISA.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should establish more learning centres in the areas where it has students. All Tutorial Letters from the University (not only Tutorial Letter101) should include information on the availability of learning centres in different areas. UNISA should also have an orientation week for students to assemble and be informed personally on the main campus or regional and learning centres about availability of learning centres and other facilities for learner support such as libraries with UNISA sources in the areas where students reside.

## **SECTION B: INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES**

### **1. Provision of pre-registration counselling**

**Conclusion:** More students do receive pre-registration counselling at UNISA. Responses, which disagreed with the statement, indicate that some students did not know about the existence of that learner support strategy or they did not seek it from the Student Counselling Section of the University. That may also be because their employers registered on their behalf to use the programme as part of staff development. So, they could not get direct pre-registration counselling, as it would have happened if they had registered for themselves with UNISA. This shows lack of communication between employees with their organisations about the programme before hand.

**Recommendation:** Institutions which register their staff members with UNISA should provide pre-registration counselling to them or send them to UNISA to get pre-counselling. Learners (generally) must be made aware of the availability of pre-registration counselling at UNISA. That should be included in the material/prospectus which is meant to market the University to prospective students or parents of prospective students. Here also, management of information features.

### **2. Choice to combine courses/modules according to needs**

**Conclusion:** The fact that modules and courses for particular programmes or qualifications are decided on by the University indicates that at UNISA flexibility in terms of choice for students to combine modules as they would like to for their programmes of choice is limited. It is limited to a choice to register for non-degree purposes. Other than that, students find

curricular ready on registration. For example they are instructed as to which group of modules to choose modules for a particular qualification and how many modules, minimally they are allowed to register per year.

However, as indicated above, there are some respondents who agreed with the statement “I was allowed to combine courses/modules which I felt would need my needs of skills development.” These students might be referring to the fact that at UNISA, students are allowed to register subjects or modules for non-degree purposes. In that way one may infer that to some extent, there is flexibility at UNISA in as far as a choice of registration of modules are concerned.

**Recommendation:** The University should continue to group modules for students for specific qualifications, it should also make students aware that they can register for modules for non-degree purposes. It should also involve students by enclosing questionnaires in Tutorial Letter 101 of each module each year. As well as flyers, Internet and information brochures which students and prospective students may receive for information. Input or responses to questionnaires would be useful for future development of each programme.

UNISA does communicate information by the above-mentioned means, but there is a need that it is done even more to reach almost all the prospective students in different areas nationally and abroad.

### **3. Choice on the materials despatch method**

**Conclusion:** The University does give students a choice to receive materials personally or by post. The minority, which disagree with the statement, indicates that some students are not aware of the different methods through which study materials are dispatched to the registered students.

**Recommendations:** The University should make students and prospective students aware that materials may be despatched personally or by post to registered students.

#### **4. Study materials always ready when requested**

**Conclusion:** The higher percentage (82.%) of responses, which agree with the statement, indicates that to a larger extent, study materials are ready for the students whenever they need them. However, a certain percentage (17%) of students do not enjoy this support.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should keep the good work of ensuring the availability of study materials at any time the students need them. There is need though for all departments to make sure that materials are always available for students. The University must also ensure that programmes are offered only after the completion of development of study materials.

### **SECTION C: ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS**

#### **1. There is openness in UNISA programmes**

**Conclusion:** The fact that there is no significant difference between those who agree and those who disagree with the statement that there is openness in the UNISA programmes indicates students some times experience openness and some times not, depending on the programmes and the needs they have at a given time. So, the University cannot be undoubtedly said to be clearly open or clearly not.

**Recommendation:** Though openness is some times there it needs to be improved in different areas of service delivery to students.

#### **2. Students experienced flexibility in UNISA programmes**

**Conclusion:** The fact that 67% respondents agreed with the statement “ I experienced flexibility in UNISA programmes indicates that to a larger extent UNISA programmes are experienced by students as flexible.

Provisions are made for negotiations around specials circumstances of students at given times of their study period (Examination, Rules and Timetable 2006:3). For example, students negotiate for due dates of assignments with lecturers for a reasonable extension if they come with reasonable reasons for inability to meet the stipulated closing dates. In some occasions,

students are given opportunity to be examined orally if for some reasons they cannot sit for their examinations. Another example is that of audio- tapes transcriptions which are made for those students who are physically challenged in terms of hearing. Such provisions by UNISA show flexibility of services received by its students. However, some students seem to be unaware of provisions that the University make for special circumstances.

**Recommendations:** UNISA should make a policy, which stipulates the time of grace with regard to negotiations of assignments' due dates and examination periods. This will benefit all students who find themselves in situations where they cannot meet assignments' deadlines and cannot sit for their examinations on the set dates. Furthermore, the University should make students aware of these provisions available to them. Information in this regard should be made available in the Tutorial Letters and the website of the University, among other sources of information about UNISA.

### **3. Choice to choose modules relevant to theory and skills needed**

**Conclusions:** UNISA has provisions to meet the needs of those students who want to register for certain modules, not with a purpose of completing the qualification as such. For example, students at UNISA are allowed to register for non-degree courses or modules. The conclusion is therefore; that UNISA is flexible in as far as registration of modules is concerned. So there is flexibility at UNISA's programmes delivery.

**Recommendation:** Prospective students should be made aware of the availability of choice to register for non-degree purposes if one does not intend to study for a full qualification (see 12. above).

### **4. Students are free to say what they think without fear**

**Conclusions:** There is openness at UNISA in as far as criticism of study materials is concerned. The small percentage (12.2%) that disagreed with the statement may be a result of the fact that they have not thought of criticising study materials, may be because they did not know that the University welcomed that.

**Recommendation:** In future, the University should indicate that in documents like Tutorial Letter 101, which contains information about modules each academic year.

#### **5. Students are allowed to send assignments whenever convenient**

As far as Table 15 strongly is concerned, disagree was grouped together with disagree and agree was grouped with strongly agree. Significant differences were this means that to a certain extent, there is flexibility at UNISA in as far as assignments due dates are concerned. Another conclusion that can be made here is that not all students are aware that they can negotiate for extensions of due dates.

**Recommendation:** A standing policy of the University should be made which states clearly the extent to which closing dates for assignments can be negotiated. This will protect the students and lecturers as well as administrative staff members who manage the assignments submission processes. This must be written in the University's policy documents and information about should be made available to students through Tutorial Letters and electronically.

#### **6. Students have a say on examination period**

**Conclusion:** The fact that seventy- eight (78), which represents the majority of the respondents (78.8%), disagree with the statement "I had a say on the period of writing my final examination." indicates that at students at UNISA do negotiate examination periods.

However, there are a small number of respondents (20.4%), which agrees with the statement indicating that special provisions are there at UNISA, which are meant to cater for the needs of students with unique circumstances, which prevent them from writing their final examinations on the normal stipulated dates. For example, at UNISA there is a section called "Examination Arrangement Section".

This shows that to a certain extent, flexibility is there at UNISA in as far negotiations over examinations period are concerned, but only a few students know about that.

**Recommendation:** Information about the possibility to negotiate the examination periods if a student has convincing reasons, should be made available to students through relevant documents like Tutorial Letter 101 and the University's website.

#### **7. Students have a say on the content for examination**

**Conclusion:** Students at UNISA do not have a say on the areas of the content of examination. This is because students do not form part of the team, which decides on the contents of the examination papers at UNISA.

**Recommendation:** It is fine that only academics should decide on the contents of examination papers.

#### **8. Students have a say on the structure of the examination paper(s)**

Students do not have a say on how the examination paper should be structured. They lecturers informed them about the structure of the examination paper.

**Recommendation:** The lecturers should continue to be the ones who decide on the structure of examination papers.

#### **9. Students have a say on the method of examination**

**Conclusion:** The fact that ninety six (96), which the overwhelming majority of the represents (96%) disagree with the statement "I had a say on whether to write examination or to be evaluate by means of alternative modes." indicates that to a large extent, UNISA is not flexible as far as assessment modes are concerned.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should allow the students a choice to be examined through a method which makes them feel comfortable to be able to give their best to perform excellently. For example, students should be assessed through compiling portfolios when they choose to do so.



## **10. Students can write examinations whenever they are ready**

**Conclusion:** UNISA students cannot write examination whenever they are ready. This may be because total openness in terms of examinations can have serious negative financial implications for the University. Closeness in terms of examination periods at UNISA is fine.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should keep the policy of stipulated closing dates, but be prepared to negotiate with students who for reasonable reasons cannot write their examinations on set periods. UNISA should keep the facility of examination arrangements as it does. It must however, make students aware that it is possible to make such arrangements if a student has valid reasons like being ill on the examination day or death of a family member on a day closer to the examination date

However, total openness in terms of examination writing dates is impractical and therefore, should not be attempted at all if the University is going to be sustainable financially.

## **SECTION D: CURRICULLUM ISSUES**

### **1. Students have a say on how curricula are designed**

**Conclusion:** The fact that ninety three (93) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (93.9%) disagrees with the statement “I had a say on how the CDEP (programme) curriculum should be designed.” whereas, less than five percent of the respondents (4.1%) agree indicates that students do not have a say on how the programmes should be designed. The University designs the programmes curricula and the learners register and select modules, which are readily there. This means that there is no openness to students at UNISA in terms of curriculum design with the statement because students get study materials ready during registrations. It is the relevant personnel in the University who develop study materials.

The small percentage (4.%) which said that students had a say in curriculum design of the programme might be referring to the fact that in most programmes modules’ assignments, the students are asked to comment about the module and state how they view the content of the module and make suggestions for improvements. That activity is in a form of a questionnaire

subsequent to the end of the last assignment of each module at UNISA (see the addendum attached). So, to a large extent, there is no direct openness at UNISA with regard to involvement of students in the study materials design process.

**Recommendation:** Tutorial Letters 101 of each module should contain a questionnaire about it at the end of the last assignment. This would enable that lecturers and materials developers to have an idea as to how the students experience the modules. Suggestions and comments made by the students about the modules should be implemented, since it will be of no use to have comments piled up and not used to improve the quality of modules to meet the needs of students.

## **2. Evidence that learners participated in programme development**

**Conclusion:** The fact that sixty (60), which represents the majority of the respondents (61.8%), disagree with the statement indicates that there is no openness at UNISA in terms of programmes development. Students find the study materials already developed on registration. So, they do not contribute on the development of their study materials.

**Recommendation:** The students should be given the opportunity to contribute to the development of programmes indirectly. They should be required to complete questionnaires at the end of the last assignment of each module. Actually, UNISA has started with this process in other modules. It must be compulsory that this questionnaire is there in Tutorial Letter 101 of each academic year.

## **3. Programmes to promote only the institution's points**

**Conclusion:** To a larger extent, UNISA does not practise openness in terms of involving students in the delivery of its programmes. The fact that forty six (46), which represents the majority of the respondents (51.7%), disagree with the statement "The programmes promote one viewpoint (institution's viewpoint)." indicates that to a larger extent, the views of students are not sought to influence decisions the University take with regard to programmes delivery. The small percentage, which agreed with the statement, may be inferred to the fact that Tutorial Letter 101 contains questionnaires about modules at the end the assignment questions.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should involve students in terms of the views about the programmes it delivers. Views, which students raise when they respond to questionnaires contained in the Tutorial Letter 101 of each module, should be implemented to ensure improvement of the quality of programmes delivery. This can also make students own the institution and activities taking place in it. That in turn may make students protect the University and market it to prospective students.

#### **4. Study workload was manageable for students**

**Conclusion:** The fact that seventy seven (77) which represents an overwhelming majority of the respondents (83.7%) agree with the statement "I found the workload manageable." whereas, less than twenty percent (16.3%) disagree with the statement which indicates that to a large extent, workload in UNISA programmes is manageable.

The minority of the respondents who disagree with the statement may have reasons for that. May be they do not communicate with the lecturers for guidance or they do not attend tutorial classes where learning is facilitated on certain days at UNISA. They need counselling.

**Recommendation:** The University should make the learners aware that there is counselling facility in the University and may also have to encourage the students to contact their lecturers whenever they experience problems as to how they can manage their workload. That information should be contained in Tutorial Letter 101 of each module. The lecturers should also inform students about the availability of counselling learner support strategy when they make remarks or comments on the students' assignments. The University should make it compulsory for the lecturers to do this when they comment on assignments, especially the first assignments.

## **SECTION E: STUDENT SUPPORT**

### **1. Tutorial classes were conducted at venues within students reach**

**Conclusion:** The fact that sixty nine (69) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (73.4%) agree with the statement, whereas, less than thirty percent (26.6%) disagree with the statement indicate to a large extent that UNISA learning centres where tutorial classes are conducted are accessible to the students. However, a small percentage of students do not have learning centres in their areas. As a result they are deprived of this learner support intervention opportunity.

**Recommendation:** The University should continue to establish learning centres where its students reside.

### **2. Alternative means of learning facilitation were available to students who could not attend face-to-face tutorials**

**Conclusion:** The fact that fifty nine (59) which represent the majority of the respondents (64.8%) disagree with the statement indicates that students are either unaware of the possibility to use alternative means of facilitation of their learning or are not motivated to use those facilities such as e-mails which are meant to support learners who do not have learning centres where they reside.

Currently, UNISA does not have a policy, which makes it compulsory for all lecturers to tutor their students by e-mail or telephone, if those students do not reside where there are learning centres

**Recommendation:** UNISA should make students aware of the existence of learning centres in their areas. Students should be motivated to attend tutorial classes in the learning centres in their areas. UNISA should come up with a policy, which makes it compulsory for lecturers to conduct tutorials through alternative means such as e-mail and telephone for students who do not have learning centres where they reside. This will make sure that there is consistence and fairness in the provision of tutorial support to all students.

UNISA should also work towards establishing learning centres in all areas, towns and villages where it has students. This is important to provide support to students.

In addition to Tutorial Letter 101, which contains information about the existence of learning centres, UNISA should make it compulsory for lecturers to add this information in their general comments on the first assignments of students.

### **3. I (student) interacted with fellow students**

**Conclusion:** The fact that forty three (43) which represent the overwhelming majority of the respondents (87.4%) of the respondents agree with the statement “I interacted with fellow students during my study at UNISA.” whereas, less than fifteen percent (12.7%) disagree with the statement indicates that UNISA opens up learning opportunities for students to form study groups through linking them right from the beginning of each academic year. Therefore, there is openness in the delivery of programmes at UNISA in this regard.

However, there are a less number of respondents, which disagreed with the statement. They said that they did not interact with their fellow learners. This also indicates openness at UNISA. Students have a choice to form study groups or to study as individuals. It may also indicate that other students may have had an oversight about the fact that they may contact their fellow learners.

**Recommendation:** The University should encourage students to work with their fellow learners. However, those who feel comfortable to study by themselves should be allowed to do so. To ensure that all students know that they have a choice about forming study groups or study individually, lecturers should add a note on the tutorial letters they send to students during the course of the year or they may add it in Tutorial letter 101 for each module each academic year.

### **4. I (student) felt free to communicate my learning needs with the lecturer**

**Conclusion:** The fact that ninety (90) which represents the overwhelming majority of the respondents (94.7%) agree with the statement, whereas, less than six percent (5.3%) disagree with the statement indicates that the lecturers open up learning opportunities for students by

being approachable and making them free to communicate with them for tuition related matters. In this case UNISA practices openness through its academic staff members that are welcoming and free to students.

The smaller numbers of respondents who disagree with the statement indicate that other learners are not motivated to contact lecturers. Other students might be having an oversight and do not read Tutorial Letters 101 of the modules they have registered for. This document contains information about the contact details of the lecturers of each module at UNISA.

**Recommendation:** The University should intensify awareness on the part of students that it is useful to communicate with lecturers regularly. To do that, the lecturers should include encourage students to read Tutorial Letter 101 to get contact their details. Lecturers should in their comments on the first assignment of each module ensure to stress the significance of communication between the students and the UNISA staff on the part of the students.

## 5. I (student) found the lecturer supportive

**Conclusion:** The fact that eighty-three (83), which represents an overwhelming majority of respondents (94.7%), agree with the statement indicates that students get support from lecturers. Therefore, through support from the lecturers, students experience UNISA as open and opening up their learning opportunity through learner support.

A small percentage of respondents who disagree with the statement (8.8%) may have not received support in time or they needed support when the lecturer was not available. This may be because students sometimes come to the University without any appointment or when they phone, nobody attends to their phone. This may also be due to the fact that students phone after hours or when the lecturers are on leave and the students are not aware.

**Recommendation:** Provision for taking care of learner support when the lecturer concerned is not available should be made. When the lecturer is on leave, arrangements should be made in advance to get someone to help out. This may have financial implications since the University should probably have a lecturer and his or assistant to help out when he or she is officially on leave. Another strategy could be that students are informed in advance that the lecturer will be on leave for a particular period of time. This is the most reasonable in terms

of finances, but might frustrate students when they need assistance immediately while the lecturer is on leave. Communication by telephone and leaving message on the voicemail or by e-mail where possible can also a faster and reasonable alternative, though these will still have to wait until the lecturer concerned is officially back from leave.

#### **6. Access to the lecturer was easy**

**Conclusion:** The fact that seventy-eight (78) which represents the majority of respondents (84.8%) agrees with the statement: "Access to the lecturer was easy." Whereas, less than fifteen percent (13%) disagree with the statement indicates that UNISA lecturers make it interesting to study at UNISA and therefore open up the opportunity for them to succeed in their studies. So, through easily accessible lecturers to a large extent, UNISA practises openness in its delivery of programmes. The small percentage of respondents who disagree with the statement indicates that some students are not aware of access means to their lecturers. For example, using e-mail, if the lecturer is not available telephonically at the time the student needs assistance.

**Recommendation:** Lecturers should make students aware of alternative means of accessing them at any time. This information must be in the tutorial letters sent to students as well as in the comments lecturers make on the first assignments.

#### **7. The lecturers played a positive role in my studies**

**Conclusion:** The fact that 95,6% of respondents agreed that lecturers played a positive role in their studies indicates that UNISA practises openness to its learners through positive support students get from most of the lecturers.

The smaller number of respondents (4,4) who disagree with the statement indicates that there is still room for improvement in the influence the lecturers have on the studies of the learners. This may be those students who try to get hold of the lecturer in vain when he or is not available.

**Recommendation:** Lecturer should make provisions like arranging with another colleague to take care of the students when he or she is not available, so that the students do not experience

loneliness and neglect when they need help with their studies. There should be a policy to this effect and it must be discussed in the Tuition Committees of different UNISA.

## **SECTION F: COMMUNICATION WITH LECTURERS**

### **1. Telephones**

**Conclusion:** The fact that the majority of respondents (78) which represents 84.8% of the respondents said that they agreed that they used telephone indicates that most students have access to telephone and prefer it for communication with the University. It may be preferred because of its ability to provide immediate answers and it also helps the learners with pronunciation of terms they might be struggling with in their learning because communication the lecturer is live and immediate.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should ensure that when students phone do find staff members they need in the office and the staff members concerned should be warm in motivational to students.

### **2. E-mail**

The majority (35.7%) said that they used e-mail frequently indicates that many students use e-mail to communicate with the learners.

**Recommendation:** Students are encouraged to use what they have at their disposal like a telephone or a letter to communicate with the University. They may also be encouraged or made aware that they may use café shops in the towns or villages next to their homes or workplaces to access Internet or computers.

### **3. Fax**

**Conclusion:** The majority of the respondents (28.9%) said that that they used fax “sometimes” The fact that the highest number of respondents said that they used fax sometimes indicates that on average students do use fax to communicate with the University. The lowest percentage that said they used phones frequently may be because many students



do not own faxes or do not have access to them. It may be that those who use faxes have access to them at work or cafés.

The second highest percentage of the respondents (27.7%), which said that they “never” used, indicate that many students do not have fax machines or do not have access to fax.

**Recommendation:** Students should be made aware of and encouraged to use fax machines in the café’s in their areas. This information should be included in Tutorial Letter 101 of each module each academic year.

#### **4. Face-to-face meeting**

**Conclusion:** The fact that the majority of the representatives (40.2%) said that they received face-to-face tutorials “frequently,” indicates that most students receive face-to-face tutorial classes frequently. So, through frequent face-to-face tutorial classes intervention UNISA practices openness by opening up students learning opportunities. Therefore UNISA is open in its delivery of programmes in this aspect.

**Recommendation:** The small percentage of respondents (8%) who said that they never received face-to-face tutorial classes indicates that UNISA should continue to establish learning centres where its learners reside and also make students aware of the significance of attending tutorial classes, in case there are those who have learning centres nearby but do not attend tutorial classes on set dates. Lecturers should also encourage students to attend tutorial classes. Lecturers should make this information part of their general comments on the first assignments.

#### **5. Use of learner comments section on the assignment cover**

**Conclusion:** The fact that twenty eight (28) which represents the overwhelming majority of respondents (41.8%) of the respondents said that they used the space for learner’s comments on the last page of the assignment cover indicates that most students write their comments on learners’ comments column. So through this column UNISA makes it possible for its students to communicate with their lecturers. So, UNISA practises openness in this regard.

**Recommendation:** Lecturers should encourage students to comment on this column. To encourage the students to communicate through completing the column, lecturers should acknowledge receipt of those comments or suggestion and sign after reading them. If there is need to respond, lecturers should do so. That will make the student concerned feel that his or her comments are of value and will be motivated to comment again when necessary.

## **SECTION G: GENERAL COMMENTS**

### **1. Students**

**Conclusion:** Most students experience openness and flexibility in the delivery of programmes at UNISA. It is not clear why the 3 respondents chose not to respond to this statement. They might have run out of time before sending copies of questionnaires back to the researcher or they had other reasons for that.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should keep up its good work of practicing openness and flexibility. It should also make improvements for the future.

### **2. Academic staff**

**Conclusion:** The highest percentage (20%) of agreement with the statement that there is openness and flexibility at UNISA. Therefore, majority of academics are of the opinion that there is to a larger extent openness and flexibility at UNISA.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should continue to be open and flexible. It must also improve on this.

### **3. Administrative staff**

**Conclusion:** To a larger extent, there is openness and flexibility in the delivery of UNISA programmes.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should keep up the good work of being open and flexible in its delivery of programme as a distance teaching and learning institution. However, it should also work towards being more open and flexible.

#### **4. Management:**

**The conclusion:** Openness and flexibility are to a large extent there or practiced at UNISA.

**Recommendation:** UNISA should improve the extent of openness and flexibility.

## **5.2 INTERVIEWS: RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

The objective of this part of Chapter 5 is to highlight the conclusions drawn from interviews the researcher had with participants from four categories, namely UNISA students, academics, administrative staff and management committee members. Interviews were open ended in nature. The main focus was on whether UNISA does or not practice openness and flexibility in the delivery of programmes and support services to its students (cf, Addendum 10 attached). Findings, conclusions and recommendations are summarized below:

### **5.2.2 Results, conclusions and recommendations**

#### **(i) Students:**

Students who responded to the questionnaire were disposed positively to management of ODL at the University of South Africa. That is evidenced in their responses to Institutional systems:

- Fifty-one percent agreed that students are registered at the times suitable for them. As mentioned above, this may be because the programme used as a case study for this research is coordinated. So, the arrangements for registrations are made between

- the Directors of institutions where the participants are employed the Coordinator at UNISA.
- Registrations are not done at any UNISA learning centre near the students' homes and workplace. It would be recommended that UNISA consider that students register in the learning centres nearby their homes and workplaces.
  - Understanding of the concepts openness and flexibility and the fact though openness and flexibility can assist distance learners when they are faced with critical situations, they as students do not believe that complete openness and flexibility can yield well. As a result, the learners pointed out that if abused openness and flexibility can result in unnecessary high drop rates. One can conclude in this case that students in distance teaching institutions do not expect the institution to be completely open and flexible, though they value more openness and flexibility.
  - Expression that they experienced openness and flexibility during their periods of study with UNISA (see the first two responses to the questions during interview in Botswana – between the researcher and former CDEP students in Gaborone-Botswana) “I witnessed openness part of the programme in that I enrolled late but I managed to write, to sit for examinations with those who started earlier than I”. One can therefore conclude that at UNISA lecturer’s discretion of granting extensions to students after assessing the situation is there and it helps to meet the needs of students and avoid unnecessary dropping out of students because of circumstances beyond their control.
  - Emphasis on the part of the students that though there was flexibility and openness, there was also control on the part of the lecturer or coordinator to ensure the smooth running of the programme. This shows existence of balance between openness and flexibility and order and control at the same time on the part of the institution through the lecturer or coordinator.
  - Concern that openness some times tended to be too much.

- The suggestion from another respondent was that there needs to be some limit to the extent of openness and flexibility. The idea is to guard against drop outs which might result from too much flexibility (cf. Addendum B, respondent 6) “There has to be a limit as to how far”. “The drop out rate becomes too high and you just have a record of drop outs which is not necessary”. One can conclude then that though flexibility and openness are important in order to meet distance learners’ needs, it is also important to guard against too much openness and flexibility. They can be detrimental to the students if they are not under control.

Students also gave different reasons that made them register with UNISA.

### **Conclusion:**

In the light of responses of interviewees in Addendum B, this study practises UNISA but for the smooth running of programmes, there needs to be some control. Accordingly, too much openness may be destructive in that students may end up dropping out of programmes.

### **Recommendation:**

In the delivery of the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP), UNISA managed ODL even more than expected. For example had a coordinator. The coordinator gave them extensions for assignments’ due dates. Other participants suggested that the coordinator should not be too lenient in terms of granting extensions due dates since some learners could end up neglecting their studies and ending up dropping out of the programme. For control purposes, it was suggested that there should be a cut-off date for extensions.

### **(ii) Academics**

Academics are of the opinion that UNISA manages ODL well in terms of openness (accessibility) and flexibility (learner’s autonomy or control over their learning), but it is not enough. That is evidenced by the among other things the responses they gave to questionnaires and the responses by a UNISA academic.

Responses to questionnaire show that:

- there are set dates for registrations, examination and sending in of assignments. Recommendation concerning sending in of assignments is that there must be consistence with regard to the additional time students are given to send in their assignments after the stipulated closing date if there is evidence that the student had circumstances beyond his power which prevented him or from sending in an assignment on the due date. One respondent stated that some lecturers send assignments back unmarked if assignments reach the University seven days after the closing date for submission. Others grant longer time than that. There is also perception that inconsistency with regard to lecturer's discretion in this regard may cause unnecessary tension between learners and academics. The suggestion is that it must be in the University policy as to how long the time of grace after the due date should be.

Another recommendation has to do with examination dates, one lecturer who was interviewed indicated that students are not given enough time before they write their examinations, especially the semester programmes. Actually, the suggestion is that the semester system should be done away with since it does not leave students with enough time to study, internalize the programme and be ready to be evaluated or examined.

About the issue of allowing students to write examinations whenever they are ready to do so, the answer was negative. The reason was that that would not be realistic and cost effective. It would be costly for the University to fund the setting of individual examination papers (See interview with UNISA academic). It would also be strenuous for academics to set different examination papers. Another recommendation was that UNISA should go back to year system.

### **Conclusion:**

It is optional to lecturers. Openness is not enough.

### **Recommendation:**

UNISA should have standard policy which applies to all academics in terms of being allowed to grant students extensions for assignments' due dates and making alternative arrangements for examination periods in cases where students have valid reasons for failing to sit for examinations during set periods or dates.

### **(iii) Administrative staff:**

### **Conclusion:**

Participants in the interview the researcher held with administrative staff members from the former Department of Student (cf. Addendum B) pointed out the following about management of ODL at UNISA:

- People prefer studying with UNISA because:
  - it is an internationally recognized distance teaching institution of higher learning
  - it is less expensive.
  - It does not have age limit
  - It is the only distance teaching higher learning institution in South Africa
  - UNISA is easily accessible since it also provides those who do not have full exemption with an opportunity to access higher learning through, Access Programme, Mature age exemption and Recognition of Prior learning for those who do not have Grade twelve at all ([www.unisa/rpl.ac.za](http://www.unisa/rpl.ac.za).)
  - For example there are closing dates for registration, sending in assignments and writing examinations make UNISA closed and inflexible.
  - Some academic staff members do not understand the characteristics and needs of distance learners. Therefore, they stick to the rules and regulations even to the detriment of the students. Alternative routes for unexpected situations which affect students' learning should be decided on by Management and information disseminated to students and staff for consistence and clarity.

**Recommendations:**

- Some training of academics and their assistants needs to be done by the University in order to equip them with skills of and knowledge about characteristics and needs of distance students open and distance learning.
- UNISA should have corner library in every city or area where it has students. Students should be granted extension for submitting assignments since they are adults they have a sense of responsibility.

**Conclusion:**

The general feeling the sample of administrative staff members had was that UNISA does not practice enough openness and therefore, the recommendation is that UNISA should improve openness and flexibility in its delivery of programmes. Accordingly, if there are genuine reasons why a learner could not keep the closing date, rules must be bent.

**Evidence:**

It became evident that UNISA and its staff especially academics recognize only the doctor's note as the evidence that a person could not submit assignments in time because he or she was ill.

**Recommendation:**

Recommendation was made that it should not only be the letters from medical doctors which are recognized for the purposes of granting of extension for assignment submission. Other forms of evidence should be recognized for granting extension to a student who could not submit his or her assignment in time or show up for his or her examination. Accordingly, "more than anything, the University should trust its students that they are adult and therefore, have a sense of responsibility." (cf. Addendum B).



#### **(iv) Management**

##### **Conclusion:**

Basically, the rest of interviewees (except two) agreed that UNISA manages registration process well. For this purpose, it has Access and Recognition of Prior Learning programmes in place to help students who do not qualify for direct admission to bachelor's degrees at UNISA (cf. Addendum D).

##### **Recommendation:**

To a larger extent, UNISA is open and flexible in its delivery of programmes but there is need for it to make improvements in this regard.

#### **5.2.3 Conclusion**

This study established that UNISA plays its managerial role well, in all the activities such as admission to programmes or enrolments. It has provisions for those students who do not qualify for direct admission to degrees. For them to have access, there are two programmes to go through first, namely Access Programme and RPL. In that way this institution affords students accessibility to higher education.

UNISA also deploys resources such as learning centres with coordinators to manage them and administrative staff to carry out duties meant to support students. Existence of UNISA learning centres gives students more access to its facilities and staff. This creates a sense of belonging since students meet their peers and share ideas about learning at a distance and at UNISA particularly. Since attending classes is not compulsory, students are given a choice to learn where, what and when they want to, as they see fit. This is what is referred to as students autonomy.

This institution also has in place, the section which takes care of the needs of the learners with disabilities. This enable these learners to access learning. Though not sufficiently, UNISA has begun developing its staff in the theory and skills of practitioners in an ODL environment. This is done payment of 75% to the fees of staff participating in the CDEP. This is good to

improve quality of tutorial and administrative services UNISA staff renders to students. UNISA has tuition and assessment policy. Assessment is carried out by means of formal examinations at the end of the semester or academic year. UNISA has examination centres for students to write examinations where it is convenient for them to do so. If for valid reasons like illness, students cannot write examinations at the set period, the University has provision such as aegrotat or special examinations to be applied for in advance.

During interviews, this study also discovered that none of the participants considers complete openness as the solution to the problem of distance learners (See Addendum C). Extensions for the due dates of assignments should be more than seven days after the closing date. It is suggested that it should be the University's policy instead of being a lecturer's discretion to give an extension of two weeks after the closing date for the assignment. Some lecturers might not be willing to understand the student's problems or others may be too lenient and give students an extension of more than a month. This inconsistency may have negative consequences and some students may keep on postponing and end up dropping out of the programmes (see an interview with Thomas, DSS/TSDL staff and CDEP former students held in Botswana – Addendum C).

Most participants agree that UNISA practices openness and flexibility, but it is not enough (see interview with Mr Phil, Proff B and L, DSS/ICDL, T – Addenda A; B; D and F). The striking thing is that a group of former CDEP students expressed their feeling that openness and flexibility were too much.

### **Conclusion:**

If a programme is coordinated students get enough support.

### **Recommendation:**

UNISA should consider to Appoint coordinators for all its programmes in order to ensure their smooth running while students enjoy openness and flexibility. This will ensure good management of tuition and learner support.

### **5.3 DOCUMENTS, INTERNET AND WEBSITES CONCLUSIONS**

This study discovered that UNISA has policies such as admission policy, tuition policy and assessment policy, to mention a few. These policies are used to manage systems to make learning accessible.

### **5.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

**This conclusion covers both the summary of chapter 5 and that of the whole study. Chapter 5 dealt with conclusions related to data collected through questionnaires, interviews and the UNISA documents, internet and website.**

This research comprised a descriptive study management of open and distance learning (ODL) at UNISA. Distance students are sometimes overwhelmed by isolation and other responsibilities apart from their studies. As a result, some of them find themselves unable to keep to the stipulated rules and regulations of an institution. They expect a distance teaching institution to have understanding of their unique needs, characteristics and possible circumstances, such as work and community responsibilities.

This study discovered that UNISA manages ODL well. For example, it has provision for student counseling. This helps students before and during registrations or enrollments with regard to selection of programs and information related to financial aid for needy and deserving students. UNISA has put in place learner support facilities and resources. Learning centres are managed by coordinators. It also has policies such as those for tuition, assessment and admission. To ensure improvement in providing quality tuition and making its services accessible to its learners wherever UNISA has students, tutors get training and development on ODL practices for example through the certificate for distance education practitioners and other programs. UNISA also mediates learning through technology such as My Unisa and also by means of media.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDED TOPIC/S FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Since this study has suggested that an open and distance learning institution should appoint coordinators for all its programmes, a study of implications of having all programmes coordinated on the through-put of students after a certain period of time is suggested.

The next study on this topic should be inclusive of students from all five UNISA colleges.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Access brochure. 2006. *UNISA Access Brochure*. Pretoria: UNISA
- African National Congress (ANC). 1994. *Discussion document: A policy framework for education and training*. Braamfontein: ANC.
- Freeman, D. 2004. *Open and Distance Learning: Managing Open Systems*. London: Kogan Page.
- Fundel at al. 1996. *University Level Distanced Education in Europe*. London: Kogan Page.
- Garrison, D.R. 1989. *Understanding Distance Education: Framework for the Future*. London: Routledge.
- Hodgson, B. 1993. *Key terms and issues in Open and Distance learning*. London: Kogan Page.
- Hodgson, V.E.. 1987, *Beyond Distance teaching towards open learning*. Milton Keynes, England: Philadelphia: Open University Press [for Society for Research into Higher Education]. Freeman, R. 2004. *Planning and Implementing Open and Distance Learning systems: A handbook for decision makers*. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning.
- Holmberg, B. 1986. *Growth and Structure of Distance Education*. London. Routledge.
- Holmberg, B. 1989. *Theory and practice of distance Education*. London: Routledge.
- Houdek E. 1990. *Managing distance education courses*. Champaign, II Office of Continuing Education, University of Urbana Champaign.
- Keegan, D. 1996. *Foundations of Distance Education*. London: Routledge.
- Leedy, P.D. 1993. *Practical research. Planning and design*. New York: MacMillan.

- Lewis, R. 1984(b). *Open Learning Guide 3: How to Tutor and Support Learners*. Huddersfield hd 1JJ: H Charlesworth & Co Ltd.
- Marshall, C. 1995. *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks. CA: SAGE Publications.
- McDonald, J and McAteer, E. 2003. *New Approaches to supporting students: strategies for blended learning in distance education and campus based environments*. Journal of Educational Media 28 (2-3): 129-146.
- Moore, 1990. *Contemporary issues in American Distance Education*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Moore G. 1997. "Theory of transactional distance." Keegan, D., ed. "Theoretical Principles of Distance Education (1997). Routledge, pp. 22-38. MyUnisa, In: www.unisa.za.
- Neser, J.J. Joubert, S.J. & Sonnekus, F.F. 1995. *Introduction to Methodology: Criminology, penology & police practice*. Pretoria: UNISA.
- Robbins, S.P. & Coutler, M. 1999. *Management*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Rumble, G. 2000. Student Support in Distance Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Learning from Service Management. *Distance Education*, 21 (2); 216 – 235.
- SAIDE. 1994. *Open and Distance Education in South Africa*. Braamfontein: SAIDE.
- Sampson, N. 2003. Meeting the needs of Distance Learners. *Language, Learning and Technology*. September 2003, Volume 7, Number 3 pp. 103 –118.
- Scriven, B Lundin, R & Ryan, Y. 1993. *Distance education for the twenty-first century*: Queensland University of Technology
- Sewart, D. 1995. *One World many voices : quality in open and distance learning : selected papers from the 17<sup>th</sup> World Conference of the International Council for Distance Education*. United Kingdom : Birmingham.

- Smit, L. 1997. *Students On-Line. From experiment to implementation*. Pretoria: UNISA
- Smit, P.J. & Cronje, G.J. 1992. *Management Principles: A Contemporary Edition for Africa*. Lansdowne: Juta & Co. Ltd
- Tait, A. 2000. In: *Open Learning*. Vol. 15, No. 3 2000. *Planning Student Support for Open and Distance Learning*. UK: Carfax Publishing.
- Tait, A. 1992. *Key issues in Open and Distance Learning A reader: An anthology from the journal of Open Learning*.
- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa-Act 108. 1996. Pretoria: Republic of South Africa.
- Thomas, D. 1995. *Flexible Learning Strategies in Higher and Further Education*. London: Cassell.
- Thompson. M. 1998 In: The World Bank Site. *Distance Learner in Higher Education. World Bank Global Distance Educationet: Thorpe, M.1994. Distance Education and the Mainstream*. Great Britain: Longman Group Limited.
- Thorpe, M. 1994. *Open Learning in the Mainstream*. Longman Group Limited: Great Britain.
- Tustin, D.H. 2005. *Student Satisfaction Survey 2005*.
- Tustin, D.H. & Masemola, M.E. 2007. *A Regional Analysis of the Utilisation of UNISA's Learning Centres and Future Market Potential*. (Unpublished) UNISA: Pretoria.
- UNESCO 1987. *Higher Level Distance Education: Perspectives for International cooperation and New Developments in Technology*. New York: UNESCO
- UNISA. 2004. *Principal's address to Senate. Confronting the challenge of change and innovation*. (Unpublished)

UNISA Annual Report: 2004. Pretoria: UNISA

UNISA Information Brochure. 2007.

UNISA News. Vol.1. 2002. Pretoria: UNISA

Verduin, J. R. & Clark, T. 1991. *Distance Education: The Foundations of Effective Practice*.  
Jessy-Bass Inc. Publishers, San Francisco.

Willis, B. 1992 (b). *From a distance: making distance learning effective. Key roles and responsibilities. In: Educational Technology, 32 (6) : 35-37.*



## INTERVIEWS ADDENDUM A

### Interview 1

#### **Interview with Unisa academic (a lecturer at UNISA)**

Interviewer: Thank you for affording me this time to conduct an interview with you. Thank you so much. As I've just mentioned to you regarding the aim of my study is to find out whether at UNISA there is openness and flexibility in the delivery of programmes and how the academic staff feel about the kind of openness that is offered to students in a distanceteaching institution such as UNISA. In your view, what is openness? What is meant by openness in relation to distance that the university is eh... that much open, more especially, in as far as mh... (*the phone rings*). I'm sorry for that. In as far as the requirements and eh... the programmes are being run. For example, I've never heard of a situation where the university sets a date and invites veteran education? (*a pause*) When you say that the institution is open or the programmes are offered in an open way, what do you mean? What do you understand by this?

Interviewee: I think I view openness in the context of admission requirements, specifically the way in which the students are admitted, and the way in which programmes are being run. For example the issue of admission with regard to whether students are given access to financial assistance. We should remember that students are not coming to the university on a daily basis. Sometimes it might be difficult for them to get financial advice and then they sit at home without even knowing that the university (or other organizations) might offer such assistance. On the one hand, I understand openness in terms of the admission requirements that the university has set, and on the other hand, I understand openness in terms of the way the programmes are being run, the due dates for assignments, the set dates for exams, and the communication between lecturers and students.

Interviewer: In your view, how are all these things being done at UNISA?

Interviewee: Well, it's a little bit difficult, I don't think students or any students already registering for the second time, for an orientation day. The purpose of this would be to

orientate the new students, or to offer any kind of assistance that the university can provide – I've never heard of such a thing.

Interviewer: Admission requirements? What do you say regarding that? Are they pen or are there some restrictions? If so, do you think they are justified?

Interviewee: Well, in terms of requirements, I think it's because the university has created the called Access Courses and Access Programmes. When using the term "requirements", I was basing it mainly on financial assistance, because one of the requirements that the university has is money.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, definitely!

Interviewee: And most of the students are from poor backgrounds, and I can't see the university playing a major role in terms of assisting these students.

Interviewer(*softly*): Financially

Interviewee: Yeah!

Interviewer: So, the due dates? What do you think about the due dates . Regarding assignments and the set dates for exams?

Interviewee: Yeah, from my experience, the due dates are too hectic. I think the university has service-oriented approach to a business-orientation approach because they are looking at making money.

Interviewer(*softly*): Mh...

Interviewee: ... because I don't think that distance learning as it is, qualifies to offer the semesterised modules, since we are dealing with students who are not here. It can take two to three weeks or even two months for a student to get the Tutorial Letter, and by that time, the due date has arrived. I don't think it is fair and open towards students, because the student is receiving the tutorial letter which has the assignment topics four days before the due date.

Some of them are even residing abroad/overseas. Then, I'd think that the issue of due dates would be addressed by means of going back to the yearly courses instead of sticking to semesterised ones, because then it would give more time to students for submitting assignments. I've personally this year received a number of calls from students claiming that they didn't receive tutorial letters on time. They received them two days before the assignment was due. They then can't write the assignment. And apart from that, we should also remember that legally speaking, in terms of the principles of the university, the client of the University of South Africa is someone who is working. That was the reason why the University of South Africa decided to be a distance learning institution, to cater for those who are working.

Interviewer: Not to leave their jobs.

Interviewee: Yeah, we should also remember that these people do not have much time to study, because some of the employers do not even recognize the issue of studying. However, the person wants to further his or her studies. I think that the person should be given more time to write assignments, and I think the way the assignment due dates are being set should be reviewed, because they are chasing the semesterised period. I think the period is too short for someone who is working. My clients are people who are working. For example, in the Police Department. Sometimes they are being deployed to other sections to work there for three to four weeks, and when they come back they find that the due dates have already passed because the university is chasing the semesterised period.

Interviewer: Okay. So what do you think about the examination dates? The setting of examination dates?

Interviewee: Yeah, it is also ... the same applies to examination dates. They are chasing the semesterised periods. They want it to be done in a short space of time. A person, for example, registers in July. (he counts) July, August, September, and then in October he is starting to write exams. In other words, he has registered for 3 months. I do not think that this is a move that a tertiary institution, especially a university, should adopt. I think that that is a technical institution's way of doing things.

Interviewer: Practically.

Interviewee: Yeah. I don't think that a tertiary institution should go that way. I think that the university should also go back to the yearly courses, and maybe should even extend or push back the examination period. If the examination period is around October, then it should start rather around November, because people finish writing around the last two weeks of November, if I am not mistaken.

Interviewer(*softly*): Mh.....

Interviewee: Academics are not doing anything in December and we close on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December. What are we doing in December? I think we should give students more time by means of keeping us busy in December. The results should be out around the last week of December, and they should start to write exams around November.

Interviewer: There is also..., thank you so much! There is also an argument by other students who say that they should be given the opportunity to write their exams when they feel they are ready. What do you think about that? (*a pause*), meaning that there should be no set date, but the students should write when they feel that they are ready. Whether it takes longer or shorter, because our students eh..., the student body consists of different people from different levels of cognitive development. Others are postgraduate students but they do undergraduate programmes for certain reasons.

Interviewee(*agrees softly*): Yeah.

Interviewer(*continues*): So, you find that that person becomes bored and thinks that it's a waste of time for him or her to have to wait till the end of the year, whereas he can see that within three months he is ready now to write his exams. What do you think about the openness in terms of the exam dates?

Interviewee: Yeah! well, that one I'll be ... in the sense that anything might be good, depending on the person. But personally, that is going to be a lot of burden on the university. Here I'm just thinking of the study guides of two hundred pages. A lecturer must then set different exams each year. Because, say there are twelve students who want to write exams at different times. In other words, you have to create twelve question papers (*they both laugh*).

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: That is my thinking, and the other thing would also be the workload that the Exam Department is going to face. Because currently they are using contract workers during the examination periods. In other words, they will then have to hire people on a permanent basis.

Interviewer(*affirms softly*): Yeah..

Interviewee (*continues*): ... throughout the year, because from what I'm sensing, there would be exams throughout the year (*they both laugh*). So, I personally, unless someone convinces me otherwise, think that that one will be too much of a burden on the university.

Interviewer (*softly*):... on the university?

Interviewee: Yeah! Yeah.

Interviewee: Financially, and also in terms of human Resources.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. Now we have covered the openness aspect in this interview. Now we come to flexibility. Flexibility has to do with the possibility of negotiating if circumstances force the student to not keep to the due dates. We are interested in understanding the genuine reasons for the students' inability to do things as expected, especially in terms of time. Do you think that, at UNISA, we have that flexibility, especially as an academic?

Interviewee (*laughs a little*).

Interviewer (*continues laughingly*):... fortunately, an academic is talking to another academic.

Interviewee: Wow! I'm even afraid as to whether this conversation will be as confidential as possible because ... (Interviewer *laughs*, Interviewees *continues*), because you make me hit?

Interviewer: Very, very! It's confidential.

Interviewee: Allow me, allow me to be crazy here.

Interviewer: Yeah! Very, very confidential.

Interviewee: You see, at the university, the issue of flexibility is there, depending on who you are.

Interviewer: Okay!

Interviewee: Yeah, if you phone any department and tell that department that “ I am the Professor and I want this thing to be done”, it will be done. More especially if mh... , if my accent sounds Afrikaans and I’m Professor, then it will be done, but if I’m nobody ,it’s not going to be done. I cannot quote a number of things that have been done, but I know (he clears his throat)

Interviewer: (*encourages him to quote those things*) Feel free, but don’t give the names of people.

Interviewee: Yeah!

Interviewer (*continues and explains*) ... so that we know the actual things that have happened.

Interviewee: Eh... if you are a Professor, for example, and you want to break a certain principle, and the person realizes that you are a Professor, the principle is going to be broken. I have seen a number of students who were not qualifying for the supplementary or agrotat exams, and because the person who was negotiating was a Professor, they got a chance to write. To me, you find that at some stage the principle or the policy is broken, they allow it to be broken. As I am saying, they will say let’s stick to the principle. So well, there is flexibility but there is not consistency in flexibility, because it depends on who is suggesting to break the policy, eh...

Interviewer: What would be your suggestion if you try to address this situation?

Interviewee: You see, the policy has been made to govern or rule people, and has been made by people. So, it should be allowed to be changed by people under certain circumstances.

Interviewer: *(softly)* Okay

Interviewee: Eh.....

Interviewer: So, you're worried about consistency?

Interviewee: Yeah. consistency is not there, because before they allow you to break that rule, they start to check who you are. The person who wants or who's suggesting eh...m

(Interviewer completes the sentence) "bending of the rules"

Interviewee: Yeah, who he is, but then sometimes you find that even if the reason for breaking the rule or law is reasonable, just because it has been approved as a policy, they don't allow it to be bent. This year I was involved in a certain case. I was expecting that a student was going to sue the university, and I'm still waiting to see whether the student is going to sue them or not, because, if I were her, I would sue the university.

Interviewer: Yeah!

Interviewee: They have designed a degree, and in terms of that degree, there is a certain module that needs to be done before the person can do a certain module on the third year level. I'm not sure you'll understand me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: ...but those two modules of the degree do not appear in the curriculum of the degree. This student followed all the curriculum stream, only to be told that even though those two modules are not appearing in the degree, she should do those two modules. In other words, that degree comprises thirty modules.

Interviewer *(softly)*: Yeah.

Interviewee: Now, because they want the students to register for the other two modules which are not appearing in the degree, that student is going to finish her degree with thirty two modules, although the curriculum is saying thirty modules.

Interviewer (*softly*): Oh!

Interviewee: Yeah! It is there, and the student phoned me and I tried to solve the problem. I realized that it was then beyond my authority, and I took it to whoever was above me. He tried to solve the problem, only to be told that this was the university policy. So, for this thing to be changed, Senate or Council should sit and approve it. I can't understand why a student should have to wait for Senate to approve something which at face value, anyone can see is wrong.

Interviewer: Yeah! yeah! Yeah.

Interviewee: I don't know where that student is. The student is starting to face the problem at 3<sup>rd</sup> year level!

Interviewer (*seeming surprised*): Mh..., mh..., mh!

Interviewee: One student complains, and you wonder how many others didn't complain and had the same problem.

Interviewer: Yeah, and kept quiet, didn't have the guts to...

Interviewee: So, to me, we shouldn't make the policy a Bible. The policy has been made by people to govern people. We can change the policy.

Interviewer: So, thank you so much! I'm just listening to this touching story. Would you then, eh... say that there should be a way of communicating officially with the university and saying : Here are the rules, but you must weigh the circumstances, and these are the kinds of circumstances, though we don't know the time, but when they are at this level, you can bend the rules. Do you think that there should be some way of discussing and deliberating on this, and influencing the policy makers by telling them what is really happening, and



coming up with suggestions? What do you think about that? So that they know that we are here, the people down here sometimes use the rules and their powers.

Interviewee: Yeah. Let me borrow from the legal implications of making laws.

Interviewer: Yeah!

Interviewee: I think the university, when making policies, should also borrow from that technique. For example, they'll say that a policeman is not allowed to search without a warrant. That is a general rule.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Under that, they make a provision that says: except under these conditions, or except under a reasonable circumstance.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Interviewee: In other words, a reasonable man should be reasonable mind and the circumstances.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Interviewee (continues):...to do away with the law and apply a reasonable mind, and he should be able to justify the action that he took, if it deviates from the so-called general law. The same applies to the policy. The policy should be followed, but at the same time there should be provision for deviating from the policy under reasonable circumstances.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you so much! It's so interesting. And then I understand, although UNISA seems to keep students for a long time because it is a distance teaching institution, still, students seem to prefer studying with UNISA. What do you think is the reason for the interest in studying with UNISA?

Interviewee: The main reason is financial. Eh... I should congratulate our university on that score. It is still eh... very, very affordable compared to other universities, because we are looking at R670-00 per module, and a student is required to take ten modules per year. (*A phone rings*).

Interviewer: I'm sorry for that.

Interviewee: Yeah. I was still saying, we are standing at a cost of six hundred and seventy rand per module and a student is required to take ten modules per year. That is, semesterised modules. If you multiply ten by six hundred and seventy, it should give you six thousand seven hundred rand, which is still very low compared to other universities. I wanted to do a certain diploma with the University of the Witwatersrand. I paid twenty four thousand rands. So, that is why students prefer our university.

Interviewer: Financial.

Interviewee: Yeah! Financial. Secondly, the user-friendly aspect. It is being favoured by more students, especially those who are somewhat lazy. Yeah, because they don't want to go to classes every day. They just want to study from wherever they are staying. And they don't want to write a couple of tests and a couple of assignments.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So, they get eh...two assignments, out of which they write one and that's it, then they go to write exams. So, according to what I am seeing, it's user-friendly.

Interviewer: Thank you, for your time and contribution to this study.

## **ADDENDUM B**

### **Interview 2**

#### **Interview with Administrative staff from the former Department of Student Support (now known as TSDL).**

Interviewer: Thank you for making time for us to have this interview. I'll ask you a few questions about openness and flexibility as applied to UNISA as a distance teaching institution. Please tell me, what do you understand by the term "openness" in relation to distance education? Just what comes to your mind when you think about a distance education programme being open and flexible?

Interviewee I: I think it means eh... studying at your own pace and choosing courses you know, based on eh... on what? Yeah, but basically studying at your own pace. That's all.

Interviewer: Thank you .

Interviewee II: My understanding of the terms "openness" and "flexibility" is the type of education that is offered and can be accessed by anyone who is eligible to register. There are no restrictions. And so, there is accessibility.

Interviewee III: For me, openness, the way I understand it, eh... I think the access part in a way, the meaning maybe can vary, but tutoring by means of video conferencing and whatsoever, even online you can access anything at any time. And then, even when it comes to exams, it should come from a learner. When a learner feels that he's ready, then openness would mean that the lecturers can set up exams according to the readiness of the student.

Interviewee II: Mh... *(confirming understanding of the point)*.

Interviewee III: Openness is in a sense that there is no age restrictions in terms of registration. Everybody qualifies to study in an open institution.

Interviewer: Thank you. It is very interesting. Tell me, would you say that openness applies to UNISA, according to the descriptions that you've given of an open institution? Is it happening at UNISA, in reality?

Interviewee II: Not really. I don't think so, not really. To a certain extent it is, because, for instance, I can take the example of one subject I registered for, as open, compared to the rest – CEM.A student studies at his/her own pace. You know you're going to write exams on a certain date, but you shall be writing certain papers. Yes, you see So... (*she stops*).

Interviewer: What is CEM?

Interviewee II: Eh...End User Computing Course. And it goes beyond the universities and centres, to private centres where students can just go and do it for a paper. Not necessarily from within.

Interviewer: Mh...

Interviewee II: I'd say it's open. I'd say "yes" it's open – at the same time I'd say "no". No in the sense that my understanding of openness is that you register, then study at your own pace ...But when you look at the openness that UNISA is granting, there are certain times when you are expected to register and certain times when you are expected to sit for exams. So, to me, it would be that it's not totally, totally open.

Interviewer: Okay (*softly*).

Interviewee II: And one other thing, as I said that I didn't think UNISA is that open. I don't think even the academic understand openness in a distance learning institution, because they are not really supportive. If eh...you are supposed to submit an assignment by a certain date, you know, they can refuse you an extension. I mean, most of the learners here are adult learners who've got, eh...commitments you know, what?" (*from the background*) "personal responsibilities". Oh! personal responsibilities. So they can become very strict and very unsupportive, regardless of your state or situation.

Interviewer: Thank you very much and that is very interesting.

Interviewee II : The other thing I want to add is the issue of registration closing dates.

Interviewer: Mh...?

Interviewee II: There's one time when you find that by the time registrations close, you find that you don't have money, or it was not really clear what the deadlines for registrations are. And you go after a day or two to register. They will tell you about the procedure of going to the module head of Economics and Management if you are doing B Com , etcetera. And one time I went to student advisors on the third floor. There was a queue for sure of a hundred students. I believe that those people, if they can make the decision of going to register even a week or a month later, it's something for them to know that they can still make it. It is very bad for us as UNISA to tell them: You know what? You are late and the first assignment is due next month or whatever. They are adults and they understand what they are doing, you know. They know that, "If I register today, I don't sleep the whole night preparing for the first assignment.

Interviewer: So, in your suggestion, in your opinion, what do you?

Interviewee II: My suggestion: we need to be open enough to understand that our clients are not children, you know, they are not that irresponsible that they are forced to register at UNISA. They have their own objectives and their own reasons. And we need to understand that it's not a matter of us having to have deadlines. Yes, to achieve something you must have deadlines, but we must be flexible enough so that we don't end up losing more clients to achieve this. You know, that's my suggestion.

Interviewer: What would be the suggestion? The extent of flexibility?

Interviewee II: Okay, let me give an example. The second semester registrations. Eh...they were closed on the fourteenth of July which was on Thursday. At least if it was on Saturday afternoon, it was going to be much better by giving the people from Mpumalanga and other regions the time to come here and register on Saturday (pause)

Interviewer: Okay (*softly*).

Interviewee II: And besides, neh..., I think that because that eh..., I don't know, it's open because it's a technology- subject.

Interviewer: Mh...

Interviewee II: Therefore, there is a system in place to control it. That subject eh...is not implemented anywhere else. You find it only there. So, I think at UNISA, it will be very difficult to be that open and flexible, because there are other things involved. There will be blah! blah! blah! a whole lot of things. So, they must have a closing date, so that they have everything under control. You see? But if they had, I don't know whether to say... technological (*other interviewees in the background add*). I think the system, because the reason behind that is that it has to do with dispatch, production and so on, is programmed to allow us to register today, and any materials that I, as a student need, will be sent within a certain period. I can't register today and find everything that I must have today. NO! The closing date is today, I'll tell you, we won't help you because the system won't pick you up.

Interviewee II: So, maybe we must start with our system.

Interviewer: Mh...The system.

Interviewee II: The system. Let's program it in such a way that it must be flexible. You know, it doesn't have to put in a deadline. NO!

Interviewee III: (*in the background, adds*) because it is programmed to behave in that way and there is no flexibility. It doesn't have openness.

Interviewer: That's your understanding of that particular issue.

Interviewee II: No. Yeah. In terms of flexibility, it does not exist, in the sense that if you don't have the minimum level of flexibility, you've got to be able to bend some of the rules. Say, for instance, we closed yesterday but they can register today.

(*Other interviewees affirm from the background*): Mh...

Interviewee II: We bend rules so that we can accommodate students. It doesn't happen because we've got time frames. They say registration must open on this day and close on that day. In terms of flexibility, it does not exist, because my understanding would be that, say, they register today, it will take eight months to complete the course. If I registered today, they must just count okay, eight months from now until the examination period. To say that in March there is one, in April there is one, may be that academic period. It's up to you which one. Either you sit for the March one or whenever. That is an open system.

Interviewer: Don't you think there are some implications like resources? What do you think? I'm just suggesting.

Interviewee II: It would be costly. There are other institutions that do use it. I think it's a marketing strategy for them and I think, with courses, like S. said, you are not can't pay the fee for the supplementary or whatever, or you must go to feel that: I am going to write exams and I am ready.

Interviewee III: I think it won't be costly because I think the benefits are far beyond the disadvantages of cost.

Interviewer: Yeah. Do you agree that most people prefer to study with UNISA than with any other institution?

Interviewee II: I think many postgraduate students do - I came to UNISA because I had nowhere else to go, but I had not planned my things properly after high school. But then, once I was in university, I thought maybe the subject was structured differently, you know, compared to conventional universities blah! blah! blah!, and now that you're working, you're the father. You know, those kinds of people will prefer UNISA compared to other universities.

Interviewee III: Yeah, most students study with UNISA because it is an internationally recognized institution. And eh..., furthermore, if you look at the education system in South Africa, we've got only one distance education institution. We don't have many choices, for example, to say that I want to study with the University of Johannesburg because they are an open and distance education institution. Look at them, look at the structure, UNISA is the

only distance education institution in the country. We don't have many, like before. We had Vista University's VUDEC and TSA which also offered distance education. Right now, we have only one distance education institution in South Africa. You don't have a choice when you want to study. It's either you study at UNISA, if you want to study via the distance education route, not at those non-recognized, kind of institutions.

Interviewee II: But my personal view is that a person or learner who's doing standard ten does not think about distance learning or going to a distance learning institution. I think every learner who is in high school who aims at finding himself or herself in a tertiary institution, has in mind a full-time institution, you see? Apart from the fact that it is a distance education institution, it is also cheaper.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee II : There are some people who came here to do obviously conventional Access courses and then go to other universities.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee II: And the other thing I'll add is that we don't really have eh...difficult criteria for admitting students, compared to other institutions, you know. So, as she said earlier, you come here because you find yourself having not planned your things in a proper way, and the only place where you can get accepted is UNISA, because Tuks is closed, and they would calculate that: we wanted eleven thousand students for the first level, and we have them already. When you come to UNISA, you find that they are still adding more students, you know, they don't really say: this year we want two thousand new students and that's all. No, we add and add and add.

Interviewer: Okay (*softly*).

Interviewer II: You don't have to pay residential fees, or meals, because eh... such things you find a single mother thinking of: It's better if he can use a train everyday and go to the library. It's better if he can sit here with me at home, and study. He'll get there to write exams. These are a few other reasons that I can think of. It also puts us at an advantage of being better than



other institutions.

Interviewee III: I don't think it's proper for us to... because we are talking about distance education eh... in South Africa. It would be easier to compare, but now we are comparing distance education and conventional education. What I think is correct is to compare potatoes with potatoes.

Interviewee II: But in that case, we did have VUDEC and TSA, and as far as I know, UNISA had a higher number of students than TSA and UNISA (*probably meaning VUDEC*). Even then. One reason that I might pick up, is the quality of services here at UNISA, the quality of qualifications, you know, and the fact that, as you said bro R, UNISA is an internationally recognized institution. That was the other reason. That was the main one, but in terms of cost...

Interviewee III With me it is in connection with the quality, because firstly, VUDEC was mostly only offering for teachers, not all the courses. And secondly, TSA, was only a technikon. It was not offering university type of courses. So, you cannot compare those two or three. Eh... VUDEC started offering other courses, not long ago. Mh...

Interviewee II: But in terms of costs, VUDEC was the cheapest.

Interviewer: If that is the case, how come so many people registered with UNISA even when there was VUDEC?

Interviewee I: I think the reasons mentioned are quite relevant. For instance, she's saying that it was providing education. Therefore, if you wanted to do a B.Com. obviously you'd go to UNISA, because the options were limited elsewhere, and TSA is a technikon. You know. And there isn't any other institution. Apart from all these, we have now Tuks and whatever other institutions, that offer a kind of distance education.

Interviewee III: But in terms of the law, they are not allowed.

(*Other interviewees affirm*): Yeah.

Interviewee III...because the government won't subsidize them for offering distance types of qualifications.

Interviewer: Thank you, and I'm observing something. I might be wrong. It looks like here, we are thinking about... We haven't talked about what draws adult people to study through UNISA, in your views. Are you thinking about high school? Then, we've got that angle, because I understand that one of you talked about the fact that UNISA is chosen because of there being no age limit for admissions. You haven't talked about other factors. What draws adult learners to distance education?

Interviewee III: I mean, most of the adult people are... they are committed. They've got to work for their children. They've got other commitments such as social responsibilities. For example, attending funerals, societies and the like. So, it becomes easier for them to study part-time, knowing that they can work and study at the same time. I think one of the main reasons why they would opt for UNISA is because they are family eh... people.

Interviewee II: That's where, again, openness is coming in, because most of the students are, you know, older people who don't have time to attend classes. There is no time. You know, they have to get up early in the morning, go to work, or you know, do those duties at home, come back and come back. It's late. But if there is openness, like online where a student can go and search for and get all the information in the evenings, during dinner, tea or whatever. You just log into your computer, get the information without having to phone the lecturer to say: Can I please come and see you in connection with one, two, three? No. That's where openness also comes in, especially with these older people. And even for postgraduate students, they also prefer it because they can get undergraduate qualifications anywhere else, but they come here for postgraduate studies purely because of the openness, you know. Now you're working, you want to improve your, your what? Yeah your education, blah! blah!, blah!

Interviewer: Thank you. It's very interesting to listen to you, especially as I didn't expect this from people in the Admin Section. It looks like you are saying that you want more openness. What prompts you to say so?

Interviewee I: Yes, there must be.

Interviewer: And then eh...how do openness and flexibility affect your daily activities as Admin staff?

Interviewee II: Eh... it affects us in this way, you know, you find that every day you're having appointments with lecturers in connection with one, two, three, whereas that person can maybe get the information, log in on that blah! blah! blah! You'll just get the information online. So, you know, every now and then, you will get students coming in to you or calling you to say: Can you please? We're looking for this information, whilst if there were eh... someplace on the computer where students can go at anytime. Whoever he or she is, can get information. And I think some of the things especially, we are agreeing on. You know, the workload would be cut, we would not have more work. Okay, perhaps even more work to gather the information and put it into the system. But it's only for a period of time (*One of the interviewees laughs*). In our department, there are times when you don't get your tea break or lunch. More especially, during registration periods, because they do affect us.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee I: know that January - February is very picky And even June- July is very. So, that will adjust things so that our workload will be small throughout the rest of the year. There won't be those days when you'll have to be in the office around seven, around ten, trying to push the workload which will reduce the sick leave (*they all laugh softly*).

Interviewer: You know!

Interviewee III: So, it would be much better. It will be actually, reducing the overtime hours and whatever, so that would be more flexible. It's not all about our job becoming less. No. The flow will be normal.

Interviewee II: It might be more, but it will be constant. Interviewee I: There will be a balance. There will be that consistence (*other agree in the background*).

Interviewee I: Yes, there will be a balance.

Interviewer: Though there is a lot of work, you still say there must be openness.

All (*agree*): Yeah! (*One adds*: because there obviously should be systems to support the openness. Then everything will flow accordingly. (All agree: Mh...).

Interviewee II: But now we're not really geared to do it.

All (*agree*): Yes!

Interviewer: Yes, and then eh... how does openness and flexibility as applied to UNISA affect your day-to-day duties ? . I've already asked that one. (*She indicates that there was no need to answer it again and they agree*).

Interviewer (*continues*): Can you suggest, just give any suggestion, on the reasonable openness and flexibility that you think can cater for both assisting learners and balancing things for the smooth running of programmes at UNISA? Anything that you think of, you can say: this is the balanced way of having openness in the delivery of programmes in an open and distance learning institution. Okay, just suggest anything.

Interviewee I: Okay. I think because our academic year is split into two, the first semester and the second semester. As Salome said, if the responsibility can start with the exams. If we say that we have four exam periods per year. You can write in January or you can write in March, and then you can write in May, September or October, whenever you feel ready. Even the flexibility of assignments would be controlled in this way.

Interviewer (*softly*):Okay.

Interviewee I: If you're writing next year June, it's then that you feel ready. Your assignments must be ready by April, and if you're writing next year October, your assignments must be ready by September. And then, if you're booking for October/November next year, you will have to attend your tutorials from this period to that period. Or you can attend for the whole two years, if you feel ready. Then you would be smooth. It would be controllable. It would be better. That's my suggestion.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Interviewee III: Well eh...I'll handle the issue of eh...centralization.. In a sense, we seem to think that everything is centrally done. And that requires some thought to be given to our students who are far away from the main campus. For instance, if a student is from the Eastern Cape, and is looking for a certain book, he/she will have to request that book from the main campus, which is not right. If we had, for instance, in public , you know, libraries, library corners, small library corners where the material from the main campus is sent to. It would go a long way in assisting students, because instead of them asking for materials from the main campus, they will simply go to the nearest library corner where they'll get the materials.

Interviewee II: I agree with R. If the university can form partnerships with the government.

Interviewee III: Yes.

Interviewee II: You know, municipalities, you know, MPCCs . All those things, so that it could be connected one way or the other, you know.

Interviewee III: If you look at the tutorial support. Yes, we do have a system in place and it's working, but look at the most rural of the rural. We look at the main towns like Cape Town, Durban and Polokwane, but take, for instance, a place like Idutywa.

Interviewer: So, for those people, the university is closed.

Interviewee III: Yes. There are people who travel two hundred or even five hundred kilometers to get to the learning centres. So, we're not visible. We need to decentralize this, and have places available so that we can assist in shortening the distance. (*One interviewee agrees in the background: Mh...*).

Interviewer: So thank you so much. Before I wrap up everything, we talked a lot about flexibility. What would you suggest in terms of flexibility? Let me just remind you about the term "flexibility". Let me say that with flexibility, we are talking about when negotiations are done and when the rules are bent for the sake of assisting the learner. What would you suggest should be the extent of flexibility given to the student, for instance, in terms of

assignment due dates and due dates in all other restricted things. To what extent can we have flexibility applying at UNISA, in your view?

Interviewee I We talked about registrations. Eh... It's not enough to say: you can still register today. How about those who fail to register next week? And we are talking about distance education. We are not talking about a full-time institution, where we would say that the class has started and you missed that class session, so you won't catch up. No. Can't we be flexible enough to understand that: you know what? The closing date we agreed was last month, the academic eh... what we call, the academic plan for this type of student and the college he's starting to register for, is a year course which starts in June and she's coming to register at the end of April. Why can't we pull her in? There must be a middle way. It can make sense if we say that we can't let you in because you were supposed to submit your assignments today, and we can't expect a miracle whereby you'll be able to register and submit the assignment, but we are talking about the closing date which was today, and the student is coming next week, and you're saying: No we can't help you.

Interviewee III: Much as I understand that, you know, operating without any restrictive rules, we might just encounter problems, but I think, you know, internally, there must be , you know, systems in place whereby you can say : Fine, we've got this date, the closing date for registration or for this assignment, and say some- times students are submitting. I know, for instance, that assignments are sometimes submitted a week after the closing date, but internally, it's better if we say that even after two or three weeks, we will still accept assignments. It would be better. I really understand that if you are flexible and say: I don't care when I receive your assignment, that might disorganize students in the sense that you gave them three months in which they can still submit the assignment, and more so if, for instance, a learner is a mentor or a tutor. Any- thing that we have concrete, must be accepted. Some of the assignments are returned unmarked two weeks after the due date, which is not good. Consider that the person sat down and, you know, researched, all that will be returned unmarked because he or she sent it in late. We can't. We can't!

Interviewee II: But I also feel that a study on how it's delivered is necessary, in order to have that flexibility all the way. How the system operates, the time that it takes, or whatever. That means flexibility all the way. If there could be a study done, maybe that would be easier.

---

Interviewer (*softly*): Yeah.

Interviewee IV: you are repeating the course, you shouldn't do assignments again, I just want to add. For somebody who is doing a course, eh., within a period of a year, he/she may have already submitted the assignments for the same course. So, for me at least it will give eh... lecturers time to mark the assignments for the new students on that subject, especially if that person has passed the course at UNISA.

Interviewee II: Look at what eh... see MBA. If you fail a test, then you can rewrite LMP. How is that, Haha! (*They all laugh, affirming*).

Interviewee III I tend to disagree with you on the issue of repeating a course. Say, for instance, you're doing a course and you are not supposed to submit an assignment when you have re-registered for it. That could be detrimental, because you might relax and, say you registered in February, and write exams in October/November, what are you going to do?

Interviewee I: There is flexibility in this case - I failed the course and I got forty-five percent.

Interviewee II: I tend to disagree with Louisa on, say, for instance, you're repeating a course and you're not supposed to submit assignments. That could be detrimental because you might relax and say you register in February, you're going to write say in June or October/November. What are you going to do in the meantime? You might end up relaxing, waiting for the examination.

Interviewee I: There is flexibility in the sense that I failed, and they gave me that exception to the rule that I don't have to write assignments. They gave me that supplementary exam. And the issue of assignments being late, there is that exception whereby you attach a doctor's letter. I don't know. You are not submitting assignments on time because you have a family problem. There was a disagreement between you and your husband. You were not home, you moved back to your mother's place or whatever. When you come back, your assignment is due. How can you put that as evidence? We've already heard in a way that you can still go to the doctor and he can say: yes, I saw Ms N on this day. She came here. She was depressed (*Interviewer softly adds*: And there comes in the relationship of trust between learner and educator. And the lecturer must understand the potential of the student. If I know

that you are my student, and that you have submitted three assignments of eighty marks each, and you are failing to pass the fourth one, and I judge to say; You know what? Because you didn't attach a letter, then it's out. I don't mark it (*a voice in the background: Yes*).

Interviewee II: What about if it's the first assignment? You don't have a reputation at all (*Interviewer adds softly : to back you up*)

Interviewee I: You must give me a chance. Like at UNISA . They give assignment answers and give you time to go through them and notice that: You know what? This is her focus. She researched this and no ... (*someone in the background adds: copying*).

Interviewee I: Yes. From what I'm observing as a lecturer, why don't you trust and mark the assignment rather than returning it because it might be an issue that I copied the lecturer's copy or I copied my friend's copy (laughingly) So, it's all an individual thing, whether this serves as an assignment or an original one different from the lecturer's or friend's or another student's.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much, I'm happy. If any of you have something to say in two seconds, you can say it. Otherwise, I'm done now. Interviewee II laughs, sighing at others. (*They all nod to indicate that they do not have anything more to say*). Thank you.



---

## **ADDENDUM C**

### **Interview 3**

**Interview with former CDEP students: Gaborone - Botswana: 18 September 2005**

**Interviewer: Researcher**

**Interviewees: A group of former students of the Certificate Course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP)**

**Kind of research: Ad hoc study**

Interviewer: Thank you for kindly giving me this opportunity to have an interview with you this afternoon. I would like to get some views from you regarding the experiences that you have had at UNISA in terms of openness, and whether you did experience openness and flexibility as you were studying. If yes, to what extent? Thank you.

Interviewee I: Thank you Ma'am. Being one of UNISA's students I witnessed the openness aspect of the programme, in that I actually enrolled late, but managed to write examinations together with those people who had started earlier than me. And the other openness part of it is that eh...m, eh..., due to the late submission of our assignments because of work pressures or whatever, we still all managed to make it. We as well as our colleagues. We didn't find any barriers.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you, and the others?

Interviewee II: Yes. Just to add on to what she has already said. We were in the same group. Eh...Yes, we registered late. And I actually registered later than the rest of the group members, because at the time I was about to register, I had to travel abroad for about four weeks, and I contacted UNISA. Initially, I had thought at the time that I wouldn't be able to register because I was traveling. But at some stage, I thought about challenging openness, and I called UNISA and talked to the coordinator, explained that I was traveling and I could

---

not start I was allowed to start late when I came back, and that helped me very much, because then I was able to join in, and had to finish within two months because I wanted to finish with the rest of the group. So yes, it's open in the sense that I was able to work hard, to set targets for myself, eh... in consultation of course with UNISA, and I was given that opportunity, and I really appreciate it. So, I ... it was open. And also, like she has said, in terms of assignments. There were times when we could not meet the deadlines and we would negotiate. And what I liked is that, as we were negotiating, we were being reminded that it's not like we can get away with anything in this programme. It's not like you're just making a call and everything becomes automatic. While the system is flexible, it's not like you can get away with anything. There's still yeah, there's still some element of eh...I don't necessarily want to call it control, because control would imply that you are forced to do something, but there is still some element of eh...(voice in the background adds: firmness).

Interviewee II: Firmness, yes. Thank you, firmness and assertiveness, that helps the learner to understand that, okay, although I'm negotiating and the system is flexible, I still need to observe certain rules, and that will be to the advantage of the learner as well.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. So okay.

Interviewee III: My experience was that I had enrolled for this course, and due to some work pressure, I was transferred from one region to the other, and as a result I dropped out of the system, but I was able to come back and register. And the problem or issue that I faced was in terms of tutorial attendance, because I had to travel every time that I had a tutorial to a place like Gaborone to attend the tutorial, and that put a lot of pressure on me. That is where I really had some problems, but in terms of being so flexible that you can go out of the system and rejoin it was...(another interviewee adds: was good).

Interviewee III (continues): Yes, was good.

Interviewer: Thank you. So, eh...would you say that you got the kind of openness that you had expected before enrolling? Did you find it to be more open than you had expected or less than...

---

Interviewee IV: Ah! It was more. It was a lot more open than we expected. Because, like everybody else... I think it's just the nature of us as adult learners, at least as far as module one says, about us having so many demands on our time etcetera. And also, having to reach a point where, for instance, in our situation, where there were ten of us doing the programme, the institution agreed to move even dates for all ten people and then get all that coordinated. That was very flexible, and I must say that I found it to be more than I expected. And it's a very comfortable kind of openness which we've learnt from as an ODL institution ourselves. That it actually makes life easier for the adult learner.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee I: I would say it was more eh...than expected, because in our group we had a situation where some people were not ready to sit for the examinations and eh... it was agreed that they would sit in the next (another interviewee completes sentence: semester) .

Interviewee I: To me a very big flexibility.

Interviewee V: In our institution, we still feel that there should be a limit as to how much flexibility is enough. Like, I am looking here at that which we found in the programme. When we abuse the system, that's when, yeah. There has to be a limit as to how far. The other thing that I think is too open is that I realize that we are getting the same questions, which are reappearing and carry exactly the same content .

Interviewee III: I remember one time, our coordinator Was saying that he had not yet sent our assignments, yet we had just had cross night working on those assignments

Interviewer: Mh...?

Interviewee III: Then we said: How come? What about if those have declined and our assignments were still sitting in his office, thinking that people are still coming to submit, and then we went to the exam being five. (*A giggle in the background*). You see? Too much lenience sometimes results in things becoming out of hand.

Interviewee IV: Or maybe we are better off without a coordinator. We submit our own work and make sure that we meet our deadlines (*she laughs*).

Interviewee V: The coordinators are still okay. It's just that I was trying to make an example to point out that even if she is too open or flexible, she should see to it that she narrows things down somehow.

Interviewee IV: Mh... especially, at the cut-off point. At the end, to say: You have a year to do this course, and if you can't finish it within a year, the maximum we can give you is another year. After that, you have stop, because we can't have people as permanent students. No, no, no. Then it loses its value (*all others agree in the background: Yes!*).

Interviewee IV: And it results in dropouts. The dropout rate becomes so high, and you just have a record of dropouts which is not necessary. You should encourage people to finish.

Interviewee VI : But it's good that there is a human element on the other side, because sometimes people come with genuine delays in submitting their assignments, eh... Maybe (*All agree: oh yes!*).

Interviewer: Eh, family problems which they need somebody to listen to, explain to, and maybe give some extension. Like you're saying, you need to be sure to say: This is not going to be carried on and on. There will come a time when either you have done it or not, and if not, you are out.

Interviewee IV: And I think that the kind of flexibility that you give, Ms N, with regard to this certificate for practitioners, must be accommodated, even in the system, because it's unlike these mainline degree programmes or whatever, which are focusing on students doing what... Here we are focusing on practitioners who are practising ODL, and therefore experiencing the pressures of that system and expressing what they are going through, through their reading etcetera. As one goes through one's work, one usually says: Ah! this is what I've been doing. This is what it is called. You are providing us with the labels for what we are doing, and even encourage us to improve here and there. So, I think that flexibility, particularly for this programme, should be accommodated even in the policy (*all others agree: Yes!*). It has to be!

Interviewer: I'm not going to ask questions. I just want you to talk.

Interviewee VII: Mine is related to what my friend was saying. I think that it is very critical for the institutional heads to understand this course. From the way Jane was talking, it is as if she was forced into doing this. She realised the value later on. So, those are some of the barriers that are overlooked by the institutions (*all agree: Yes*). I think it's still very important to give some advice and appeal to institutional heads by explaining the value of the certificate. Like, in our case, I've just heard that some of our people here didn't do this certificate at all, because they thought it was...(*someone completes the sentence for her in the background: more practical*). I think that it's some- thing that is a barrier, but those of us who have gone through it have seen the benefit which they can't even see because of this barrier (All others agree strongly: Mh...!). So, I think you have a responsibility to try to define and clarify how this certificate is going to benefit the individual institution, by going to the institutional heads.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee IV: In fact, in our case, as institutional heads, - I'm the Vice-Chancellor..., together with my Pro-Vice Chancellors, Registrars, Deans and everybody else, make sure that we all do the course first. Then we can get everybody else on board, because it is important that we go through it and appreciate it. Given the way we appreciate it now, I want in fact to take the course and run it for my institution (Interviewer *laughs softly*: Mh...!).

Interviewee IV: Everybody must have it if they claim to be of an ODL nature. I think some arrangements should be made. You can't be an ODL practitioner without going through it (*others agree in the background*): Yes, yes!

Interviewee IV: You just need that course so much! And this business of relegating it to lower levels by saying: Ah! We are too high for it. Nobody is too high for this kind of training. (*Others in the background*: No!).

Interviewee VIII: And there is one professor in my institution who was really fussy about this programme when I had to do it, because he was saying: You already have a degree in Adult Education, and here is this Distance Education course that you are doing, and the content is

similar. He was looking at the course outline and saying: This is similar. But I convinced him, because I said: No, I want to go through it. I want to be on the receiving end, so that I'm able to understand exactly what problems they have, and this has helped me a lot because now I am more open in terms of attending to the problems of the learners.

*All other interviewees agree: Mh...!*

Interviewee VIII: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you are saying now that there should be a balance. I would like to ask for suggestions as to how we can balance openness meeting the needs of the distance learners, with ensuring that things don't get out of hand in terms of the administration and management of a programme in an ODL institution? What would be your suggestion?

Interviewee IX: Need to set time limits, for example, by giving people one month to do assignment one. From the first, maybe, to the thirty-first of a certain month. somebody has an excuse, and says: I've not been able to submit it, then give them an extra month, but don't give them an extra six months to do the same assignment. I mean, that is why they end up dropping out of the course altogether.

Interviewee IV :And it should be built into the policy like she was saying earlier. So that we can define the level of flexibility that you want to exercise. (*Others agree in the background agree: Mh...!*). It has to be within the UNISA policy itself for ODL delivery, so that people would know that: This is how much time I can be allowed eh... outside the stipulated period (*Other interviewees agree: Mh...!*).

Interviewee X:And also to add on that, maybe you can develop that policy and make the students sign right at the beginning, so that they know exactly how they are supposed to be doing it (*Interviewer adds: the student's contract*). So, they understand in the end. What I'm just saying in the letter for examinations. If you receive the tutorial letter with regulations like that at the end, you have already been assisted. So, it could be part of the tutorial letter to say: This is how far you can get an extension.

Interviewer: So, what length of time would you suggest would be reasonable, as a group now, not as an individual? In your minds, what do you think? The reasonable length of time?

Interviewee IV: In terms of what? Assignments or ?

Interviewer: Assignment due dates.

Interviewee (*with laughter showing doubt*): Mh... Maybe an extra month. One extra month (*other interviewees also giggle a little, looking at the interviewer as if not sure she will accept that one*).

Interviewer: Because UNISA policy says seven days after the closing date.

Interviewees: (*talk softly among themselves in the background as if they were not sure about the reasonable time frame*).

Interviewee X: It's situational, because somebody might say: Well, my child got sick and I had to be with the child at the hospital. And maybe because of that, they are not able to write that assignment within the set time. So, if UNISA is giving seven days, you have been given fourteen days or twenty-one day. But then, if it's a month, why don't you just say maybe: I'll give you four extra weeks to do and submit it. After that, you'll not be allowed to submit the assignment.

Interviewer: Mm... and the others?

Interviewee X: But it must be clear and implemented. Otherwise!

Interviewer (*ascertaining*): It must be implemented.

Interviewee X:) Unless if there is eh... a situation where for some reason the student is around or available to do the assignment within the stipulated time. Either, it could be because of illness or something like that. But then, you could ask for proof or a document from the institution which says: This learner could not do this assignment because of this and that, but not just, you know, an excuse coming from the learner alone. If it is extended beyond the stipulated period, then you need supporting documentation. But I think it should still be open. To me, that should be accommodated, ie. evidence that the learner had problems because of which he or she could not do the assignment.

Interviewee: The other thing which I think causes people to delay, Is the late arrival of study materials, by which time the due dates are already long passed, and this makes people work under pressure to try and, and. you could give us some extra time, however, if we can all get the study materials within the stipulated time, that would mean you wouldn't be extending for so many people.

Interviewer: Sorry, how is UNISA with regard to the registration due dates? Did you find these open or closed?

Interviewee III : I think we found it open because of the fact that we registered late, since we didn't even know that we were going to enrol. We realised that some people had long since started the course, but here we are. We were able to register and sit for exams together with them. That means that it was open.

Interviewee V: For some of us, it's difficult to answer that one, because it is the institutions that actually did the registrations and all that, and we were informed that: These are people that have been enrolled in the programme. So, we wouldn't know.

Interviewee VII: I was going to say I don't know whether this is because of the institution or UNISA, in terms of openness, because eh... in our group, we had people who had very low educational levels and those who were in the professional cadre. But when it came to tutorials and support by the eh...the country coordinator, we really faced a lot of problems in terms of where to strike the balance, because we found ourselves and then in the end we were really...Maybe that is the reason I dropped out the first time that I had enrolled, because I got bored, it was too simple, and too diluted. But later, I joined these professionals. Then I was able to cope, because they were on the same level. But I don't know how this one could be done by, how UNISA could assist in this regard.

Interviewer : Mh... mh...

Interviewee VII: In that case.

Interviewer: Okay.



Interviewee VII (Cont.): Yeah. I think I was discussing that sometime today. I was talking to Professor about that. I have a problem with openness, because sometimes I don't know how open the programme should be, because, particularly in terms of educational qualifications like it was said just now, if you're going to have all those kinds of people in one programme, for example, PhDs, Masters, first degrees. What comes to my mind is, the person who'll be marking our assignments. What standards are there? Because if you're going to mark all these people's work, how are you going to do it? You still want to encourage the one with the lowest educational qualification to be in the programme, but the quality of the work of that person will definitely be below the quality of the work done by someone who has higher educational qualifications. So, I always have problems with openness in terms of educational qualifications. How do you strike the balance? And just...

Interviewer: I want you to discuss, to answer one another on this.

Interviewee VIII: Just to add to what she has just said, before we answer each other. I had a problem with the people who were marking my assignments. I realized that the first assignment was marked by a different person, and that person was a bit strict, while the other assignment had been marked by someone different. So, what standards are there in that regard? Because I also had some problems with that.

Interviewee II: I suppose the issue of openness and, particularly, if what comes to mind here is the definition they use at the Open University in the UK. They talk of openness to people, openness to qualifications, openness to whatever. And in other words, if you are by definition an open learning institution, there's no limit which says you have to have certain qualifications and with some of us, we are kind of setting some limits. And that defeats the purpose of openness. But it's essential at least that we argue it's necessary until you can come up with real openness, where you acknowledge prior experience, prior learning and things like that. That's when you have that system in place. But we're then putting forward the idea of a variety of people who are at different levels get into the institution. That's the nature of an open learning institution. It ought to be like that. But then, what that calls for is adequate training on the part of the tutor, marker or whatever, in order to be sensitive to these variances, and be able to then award accordingly.

Interviewee VII: Sometimes you'll find that somebody has done Form III, the other has done Form V, but the one who has done Form III beats the one who has done Form V. And sometimes a person who has done Form III is a lecturer at the university, has got an MBA, Masters and everything. And the one who has Form V did not manage to go through it.

Interviewee IV: And hence, the need for openness.

Interviewee VII: Let me take an example like myself. I'm just a mere Form III student. So, what I did was to go through my education doing the certificate, diploma, degrees, whatever. One day I said when in class: I am a National Accountant lecturer. I asked some of the students: How many of you have passed first-class at Cambridge? They didn't say anything. Then I said to them: The person who is standing in front of you has only done Form III. So, you can see that the qualification thing doesn't really count, I think. It depends on the individual.

Interviewer: Whether a person will be able to cope.

Interviewee IV: That's the whole concept of open learning, where you're saying to everybody: You could have the potential, and though you didn't go through the formal stages, the door is open. Eh... (*All the interviewees laugh showing that they agree*). And then, to take care to acknowledge prior learning, experience etcetera, and whatever *qualifications they may have*.

*All interviewees agree: Mh...!*

Interviewee VII: I still want to make a follow up on what you have said about qualifications. I thought maybe in the materials development and revision of the course, the qualification level of the learner can be taken into account, because to me, if I do a certificate course and the learner is at the level of a person who has only got a first degree and sometimes, for your information, in our class we have all got distinctions, what does it say?

Interviewee IX: Yes, with a certificate. So to me, it means that no, this could be a certificate at a very basic level. Maybe, I don't know how it can be done, but at some point as UNISA, you should consider looking at the background of the learner and design the material for a

certain level. What I'm saying is that the same material would apply for PhD holders as well as that because of ah! Ah! I don't know.

Interviewee IV: I see it differently, because if you are calling it a certificate, it's a certificate. If you're calling it a Bachelor's degree, it's a Bachelor's degree, and so on. And so, if it's a certificate and you have other qualifications, and you're looking at it and say: Oh! this stuff is not hard, it just costs you a lot of time thinking .It's having to express what in itself is very demanding. And you can actually fail, no matter how many doctorates you have.

All (*agree*): It's true!

Interviewee X For example, like myself, I have an MBA. So, I had to take this course. It was a little bit difficult for me to apply these educational eh...concepts.

Interviewee III: Yeah, it's true what she's saying, all of them got distinctions. They got distinctions because they were at a professional level. But then, before our group, we had some messengers and Dispatch people, the Form III 's and the Form V's, who did the certificate, and they will tell you how difficult that course was. The same course. They found it very difficult. And I understand. That is why they got (*pause*), some of them got credits, some of them got a pass, because to them it is difficult. It is easy for us, because we've gone through education before and we find materials easy to interact with.

Another interviewee: And yet it's so critical for us as practitioners in that very different area/field of ODL. You still need that certificate, no matter how many doctorates you have. You still need that certificate to give you a good foundation.

All interviewees (*agree*): Yeah!

Interviewee VII: I remember getting questions from my HOD who said: This should be a postgraduate course since you're have some degrees. I didn't have answers for him. He was saying: This is impossible as a postgraduate certificate. But today , I can understand, because he was thinking maybe that for us, who already hold degrees, it should be something else and then, those who are on that level, should remain and do the certificate .

Interviewee IV: Well, unless it gets upgraded to a postgraduate certificate.

All interviewees (agree): Yeah, yeah!

Interviewee IV: Then it can be postgraduate, but as it is, it is a simple certificate, and that's what it ought to be.

All (*agree*): Yeah!

Interviewee IV: I find it very useful because people like us (*all other agree in the background*). Mh...! MH...!

Another interviewee: All of us!

All others (*agree*): Yes!!!

Interviewee IV: It has helped me a lot!

Interviewee VIII: And we appreciate that we have done the portfolio part of it, because although we are educators, we were not aware that there is this type of assignment/assessment that will be done by administering the portfolio part of it. It has been so helpful!

Interviewee IX: And talking about a portfolio, it brings me back to the point that tutors also need some training. Because, it was the first time we had heard about the portfolio, and we were not sure how it should be done, and our tutor was also not sure. So, I think they need training so that they are able to assist us...

All (*agree*): Mh...! Mh...!

Interviewee IX: to go through.

Interviewer: Tutor training?

All (*agree*): Mh...!!!

Interviewer: People, I think we are done now. I just felt I had to mention it.

All interviewees (*agree cheerfully*): Mh...! Mh...!

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your time.

## **ADDENDUM D**

### **Interview 4**

**Interview with a study materials developer at UNISA: 23 May 2005**

**Interviewer: Sandy (fictitious name used for the interviewer)**

**Interviewee: Phil (Fictitious name used for interviewee)**

Sandy: Good afternoon Phil.

Phil: Hello Sandy.

Sandy: Thank you for your time. I'm here to conduct an interview with you regarding openness and flexibility in open and distance learning (ODL) institutions, particularly UNISA. It seems like there is some discrepancy between the perceptions that students have and the perceptions that the ODL institutions have, with regard to the extent of openness and flexibility in open and distance learning institutions. What do you understand by the term "openness" in relation to distance education, Paul?

Phil: I think Sandy, the term means that the learner has a choice regarding where to study, when to study, what to study, what goes into the curriculum, how he or she wants to be assessed, and when and what they want to obtain by the qualifications. So, I think openness worldwide in ODL means totally open. The learner determines in collaboration with the educator, that the curriculum, assessment and times of registration are open.

Sandy: Mh... Thank you Sean. Then, what do you understand by the term "flexibility" in relation to open and distance learning?

Phil: Flexibility, for me, is part of the open and flexible process, I would think it means ... Oh! yes, let me get back to openness. That's also *access*. So, openness has also the specific meaning of who's allowed to study at the institution. I forgot the most important one. With flexibility, I think it's the second aspect mentioning that the student is in charge of the *learning process*, and how she or he progresses through their studies. They determine when

---

they want to hand in their assignments. They determine when they want to write exams. So, flexibility has to do with that, while openness has to do more with *access*.

Sandy: Thank you, Sean. What do you think is the reason for the students preferring to study at UNISA rather than at other institutions, or other institutions of higher learning?

Phil: I think UNISA is known to be *cheaper* than other institutions. Secondly, I think UNISA's *name* counts. Students really believe in the brand of UNISA. Thirdly, the fact that students can study while at home and while working, or while not being close to residential universities.

Sandy: But one would say that there are other distance teaching institutions, so why UNISA?

Phil: I think it's the name.

Sandy: The name.

Phil: I think the name and the quality.

Sandy: The quality.

Phil: Of course, yes.

Sandy: Mh... Do you think there is openness in the delivery of programmes at UNISA. ?

Phil: Not in the sense that I described earlier. The student is bound to registering at certain times. There are set exam papers. The curriculum is predetermined. So, there's a lot of closeness, I suspect. I think we're more open than other institutions concerning access, but not as open as, for example, the Open University in the UK, where you can study even when you don't have matric or a school-leaving certificate. So, we're not that open.

Sandy: Thank you. Then you're saying we're not that open.

Phil: Yeah. More open than other South African institutions, but not open as understood internationally .

Sandy: I think there could be some reasons why we can't reach the level of openness of the UK's Open University.

Phil: I think there is the legislative environment. I think we're bound by the Higher Education Act, as far as I know. In fact, several educational policies. So, we cannot allow anyone into the institution as I see it, although we might like to. On the other hand, we cannot even handle the present openness. The quality of learners that come. We're not really ready to support them in their studies. So, yes, I think we would like to be open, but we're not ready for that.

Sandy: Is there anything that you think might be done to improve and try to...?

Phil: The openness.

Sandy: Yeah. In terms of openness.

Phil: Shuu... I think if we don't take learner support seriously. I don't mean as an "add on" , but as part and parcel of the curriculum planning process. We don't take that seriously enough. If we don't take learner engagement more seriously, and if we don't take formative assessment more seriously, then I think we would be stupid to be more open.

Sandy: Yeah. Thank you, Phil. And then, what policies does UNISA have that ensure its programmes are accessible.

Phil: All the policies are in the process of being redrafted and integrated- the old TSA policies with the old UNISA policies. So, there is a new policy being drafted on access, admission and what's the other "A"? That is the 3 A's . There's a new policy on "Active students", but as far as I know, there's no policy on openness per se, unless in the Access policy, I which I haven't seen it yet, but maybe.



Sandy: Thank you, Phil. One can understand and see that you're passionate about UNISA and practices and that...

Thank you so much for your input. Is there anything that you would like to say? Just to comment on both flexibility and openness at UNISA, or anything on distance education as practiced at UNISA, with regard to openness.

Phil: No. I'm very excited about where UNISA is at the present moment, because I think we are rethinking education. I'm very excited about the role distance education can play in South Africa. Eh... yes, I'm excited about the future of teaching and learning. Thank you, Sandy.

Sandy: Thank you so much!

Notes: This interview was conducted on 23 May 2005 at 15: 30 at UNISA on the Muckleneuk Campus. The interviewer was Sandy (interviewer and M student using a fictitious name) and the interviewee was Phil (fictitious name used).

## **ADDENDUM E**

### **Interview 5**

#### **Interview with Professor X : Vice-Principal: Learner Support – UNISA.**

Interviewer: Thank you, Professor. Thanks for giving me the time for this interview with you. The aim of this study is to look at the practices at UNISA or what UNISA does in terms of openness and flexibility in the delivery of programmes, as a distance teaching institution. And fortunately, you are in Learner Support. I'm lucky. That is why I asked to talk with you, because most of these things come straight to your office, from down there. Prof, what do you understand by the term "openness" in relation to distance education?

Interviewee: I think it is important to make a distinction between openness and accessibility.

Interviewer: Yes, Prof.

Interviewee: You know, because if we talk about accessibility, then in my mind it refers to the opportunity that the university provides for learners to enter the institution and to access the services that the institution offers. So, if you talk about accessibility, then we should look at a number of issues. Firstly, we should look at entrance requirements, you know. But, to my mind, access means more than just allowing people to enter. It must also include the necessary support services to enable people to have a reasonable chance of being successful. And for that reason, when we talk about access, we must create the infrastructure and the services for people, but also make sure that we understand who our learners are, and then provide typical services like life skills development, foundation arrangements, proper administrative services, professional services, career guidance, etcetera. This will enable them to make effective choices and prepare themselves effectively for the learning process, because a lot of our learners who are meeting the basic requirements, are not well prepared for higher education, and specifically for distance education.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So, we need to prepare them. The point I want to make this time is, if we talk about the university's position in terms of allowing people to enter, we talk about access, and access stands on two legs, namely, on the one hand, the infrastructure and the ability to get in; and on the other hand, the support to enable learners to develop the necessary competencies to learn effectively. So, I think we must consider both of them. If we move from access, eh...to openness, then openness in terms of distance education refers to the eh... opportunity for individuals to decide in terms of time, place, space, type of programme and specific options regarding utilizing services that are available. This relates to flexibility. Flexibility indicates that we have flexibility in our programmes or delivery arrangements, in the sense that we provide different types of programmes which learners can access, and it may be that the university decides to utilize specific delivery modes. In other words, in one case we may have a face-to-face contact situation, and in another just a DVD, while the other one may use other forms of delivery like peer group collaboration, supplementary instruction, whatever it may be. So, when we start to talk about flexibility, it relates to the various options that we provide for learners in terms of accessing the university's services to facilitate their own learning. I think the three concepts must be understood, you know, in context. Then, we talk about access, we talk about openness, and we talk about flexibility as separate concepts.

Interviewer: Eh...Prof. Thank you so much for your broad and detailed explanation. So, should I take it that this is happening in reality at UNISA, or is it something that is being planned?

Interviewee: I, I, eh... think we are in the process of implementing it. We started at the beginning of 2004, after the merger, to research the whole approach of creating a conducive environment for learning at UNISA. The result of that research was that we developed a learner support model for the institution, which includes all the aspects that are related to the engagement of learners to the institution, right from the marketing stage, decision-making stage and the channeling process to the registering process, skills development, professional support and the link to academic support, where we facilitate the learning process and also prepare people effectively for the labour market. So, in terms of the broad support process, yes, it has been designed and we are starting to implement it. It is not all in place yet. We're looking specifically at the moment at developing a model for effective access support,

because I think that we're not really there yet in terms of providing people with effective access support.

You see, the big problem is that often we make assumptions about who our learners are, what their needs are, and what their specific profiles are. We need to develop a better understanding of our learners and, for that reason, one of the important things that we bring in is a tracking system, whereby we will be able to get a better indication of the profiles of our learners, right at the time of registration. Based on that, we are then able to also revisit the approach that we follow in learning development for the didactical design process. In the learning development process, it is imperative for us to have a solid understanding in terms of learners' profiles, outcomes, intended outcomes and the types of learning environments that we want to create. So, we change the approach away from having "add on" services, you know, that people join on an adhoc basis . We plan these services as part of learning development. We integrate the support initiatives into, you know, a courseware. We start to look at integrated courseware that will basically take the learner through the process in a structured way. What is important in this will include effective support through access arrangements. Now, what do we do after that?

We are currently looking at, inevitably, extending our professional service scale, career guidance and all those things. We're making sure that people will have access to skills development. We're extending our literacy initiatives. We were only having language literacy, and we are now extending it to numeracy and also ICT or IT literacy, as well as information literacy. So, we've got a lot of activities aimed at seeing where a learner that enters the institution, will get access to the types of services they need to learn effectively.

Interviewer: Mh...

Interviewee: So, yes, in terms of access, we are working very hard to have everything in place, we're reconstructing the regional infrastructure. We're revisiting the capacity needs in the regions.

Interviewer: Mh...

Interviewee: We need to do that because the administration is only one of the areas. We're changing the profiles of our staff, everything. So, there is a lot happening.

Interviewer: Thank you for.... Then, still on openness, I'm just thinking about the closing dates that the university has ... You find that students are expecting their circumstances, their unique circumstances as distance learners, to be taken into consideration when the closing dates are set by the university. Closing dates for registration, admission, for submission of assignments and examination writing. What would you say?

Interviewee: You see. You see. There are various options in terms of openness issues. We can go totally open, where people can have five years to write their exams, like it happened with Indhira Gandhi, and arrangements like that. Eh..., in our environment, I think, we have openness, but defined openness. In other words, we say to people: you can register over the period. In other words: You can start in November and you can register after February. So, that already allows a degree of flexibility. A person who wants to enroll in November can do so, you know, that is open already. Then we say that we've got a structured academic programme, you know, in terms of either semester or year programmes.

Interviewer: Mh...

Interviewee: In other words, we do not have openness in terms of more than a year, but we allow sufficient opportunities to cover the usual hours that they're supposed to need in terms of completing a specific programme or achieving the learning outcomes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, still on flexibility, I have this thing I understand, which I think Prof understands, which is that flexibility also applies to negotiations around the due dates.

Interviewee: Mh...

Interviewer: Does that happen at UNISA in cases where there is an extraordinary situation that the learner is facing? Is it possible to negotiate the closing dates? If yes, to what extent?

Interviewee: It is being dealt with on an individual basis, and the Registrar: Academic does have discretionary powers, you know, for looking at that. We cannot say that all fifty

thousand people, you know, should come in late, but what we've done already this year, for example, after the merger, when we had unique circumstances, and realised at the end of the registration period, for all Technikon students and so on, that we had to make provision. So, we had discussions, and we decided that we would have a few extra days in order to accommodate people. For example, when registration closes just before the end of the month or the in the middle of the month, we would say: But that doesn't make sense. Allow the people to first get their salaries, you know, and come and register. So, we do consider these circumstances.

Interviewer: It's negotiable?

Interviewee: I don't think so (*a little pause*). We should manage it. This is a learning organization, which must facilitate learning. That demands an understanding of flexibility.

Interviewer: Eh... In my understanding, most people prefer UNISA as a university and academic institution. What is it that you think attracts people to register at UNISA?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think in the first instance, UNISA is an old and well-established institution. We've got a huge number of people, including alumni, and this is probably one of the marketing tools that we have.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Thirdly, UNISA has presented itself over the years as an institution with an acceptable level of academic standards. And this has been accepted by society at large. So, in other words, UNISA has got credibility, and people come here because it is convenient. They can continue with their normal lives from wherever they stay. They can continue with their employment and their typical family life, etcetera. And so, it is convenient.

Thirdly, I think precisely because we have flexibility. It allows people to pace themselves, you know, in terms of their specific needs. And another eh... I think the next instance is that we are more affordable than others, and our access arrangements, you know, are more open. People can get easy and greater access at UNISA. They would, for example, in a contact institution, limit numbers and take the best fifty. In our case, we take all hundred.

Interviewer: Mh...

Interviewee: In other words, people come here because they can get access where they probably, in other cases, can't. I'm comfortable that we have an open system in the sense that people have a choice in terms of selecting what to study. They have a choice in terms of pace. We don't force them to complete in three years or even five years. We allow them to, you know, pace their own studies. They have flexibility in terms of where they want to have their services. They have flexibility in terms of quite a number of services. I think flexibility in terms of curriculum options, where we have different articulation arrangements and so on. So, I think openness goes much further than just looking at flexibility. Yes, in terms of flexibility, yes, I think we've got lots of flexible options in terms of delivery arrangements and services that people can participate in, eh..., I think they've got a lot of options in terms of the way in which they can acquire services and so on. I think, in terms of flexibility, we've gone a long way.

Interviewer: Mh...

Interviewee: I immediately say that we are not at the level of individualized higher education yet. In other words, we do not have that level of flexibility here at UNISA. The level of openness where you say: Any day you're ready for exams, you can come. We're not there yet. This is probably a young, and in the first instance, a very complex system, and at the moment we're still working with learning cycles which suit our purposes very well.

Interviewer: Mh...

Interviewee: We will probably, in future, get to the stage where we say: Shouldn't we become even more open and flexible? At the moment, it seems to me that in terms of the change process that we're going through, plus the fact that we're still seeing that the profiles of our learners are changing radically, and we still have to make provision for some of them. So, we have to structure our services in a certain way to provide the types of services that we're talking about, and I believe that e... eh... in this process, you know, we allow sufficient openness and flexibility to enable people to move over through the process in terms of also the most challenging learning circumstances. of learning.

Interviewer: Thank you, Professor. I think I'm now about to comment. Where do you see UNISA in future in terms of openness? The dream that you have for UNISA.

Interviewee: (*Quickly answers*): I see that we need to eh... eh...to start to utilise our ICT capacity much more effectively.

Interviewer: Mh...Mh...

Interviewee: I see that through access, we have the dream that, by 2015, each and every learner should have access. Either by means of their own computer, or in another way, but they should have access. The moment that becomes true, we can start to look at our delivery market, and I believe that, through this, we can start to become more individualized in our approach. The moment we start to develop into that, it allows a difference in terms of openness, based on the options relating to time, place and so on, which is at the moment there, but I think it can be further developed if we can sustain and increase our support capacity. That will inevitably impact on flexibility, because it will provide an additional means of facilitating learning, and it will allow the learner to choose effectively from more options. Flexibility in terms of mh... (*clearing the throat softly*) contact and distance on the other hand, I think we will continue to have contact options. We will continue to have face-to-face. We will continue to have flexibility in terms of face -to-face options. I personally believe that we should have more tutorial availability. Eh...m and we should also like, if we can talk about real-time services. So, in other words, we'll have real- time or face-to-face options. We will also have real-time or just-in- time via technology. Therefore, we will allow flexibility in terms of that, but we will always have both elements, contact and ... We'll have to find the balance in terms of the ratios of the two dimensions as we go.

Interviewer: Thank you so much Prof. Thank you.



## **ADDENDUM F**

### **Interview 6**

#### **Interview with the Vice principal: Student and Alumni Affairs**

Interviewer: Thank you, Professor... for making it possible for me to have an interview with you today.

Interviewer: You are welcome Ms...

Interviewee: The topic of this study has to do with openness and flexibility as practiced by the University of South Africa in its delivery of programmes, as a distance teaching higher learning institution. Prof, what do you understand by the term “openness” in relation to distance education?

Interviewee: Three things about openness, namely, access, space and time. To access the university, there are certain criteria used to admit students to the university. UNISA is open compared to conventional institutions of higher learning such as Wits. UNISA students do not need accommodation or lecture halls to attend classes full-time.

Interviewer: Thank you Prof. You said UNISA is open compared to other South African universities like Wits. Part of my question is: if it is open, to what extent?

Interviewee: Though it is not totally open, UNISA is open in terms of access, space and technology which allows it to reach students, and allows students to access the information they need, like the information in the library and on the Internet, for a student who has access to a PC (personal computer).

Interviewer: Thank you, Prof. While it is good that a PC, among other facilities, opens up the opportunity for students to access the university's information easily, one wonders about the students who stay in rural areas quite remote from the university? I mean, some students do

not have electricity in their areas or homes. How do these students access the university and the information they need?

Interviewee: Yes, you are right, Ms Ntuli, those students do not enjoy easy access like those I have mentioned above. However, attempts are made by UNISA to overcome that via central regional offices and learning centres, but yes, that is not enough.

Interviewer: Thank you, Prof. Now, what do you understand by the term “flexibility” in terms of distance education?

Interviewee: Flexibility at UNISA is shown by means of the use of the modular system and year system. Students have a choice. Furthermore, registration periods are also flexible. Registration periods are from January to March and from August to September, while Pretoria registration periods are from December to February, and from July to August each year. Furthermore, the use of satellites is a very flexible method for students. Yes, there is still some rigidity in terms of closing dates for registration and examination periods, and sometimes posted materials reach students late, due perhaps to slow or irregular postal systems in their areas or countries.

Interviewer: How can the balance be struck between being open and flexible in meeting the needs of distance learners at UNISA, and ensuring the adherence to rules and regulations of the university for the smooth running of the institution and its programmes, as an open and distance learning (ODL) institution?

Interviewee: UNISA should equip students with the management skills to empower them in terms of study skills. This will help them cope with the dynamics of studying from a distance.

Interviewer: Thank you. Why, in your opinion, Prof, do people prefer studying at UNISA?

Interviewee: UNISA is cheaper. It also has easy access. When, for instance, students have been excluded by other higher learning institutions, perhaps because they do not have matriculation exemption, here at UNISA, they get access through the Access Programme, mature-age exemption and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

So, yes, UNISA is accessible. Access registration accommodates students, but more still needs to be done regarding rural students and students with disabilities, in terms of access to the university and its facilities. UNISA has started making attempts to meet the needs of these students.

Interviewer: Thank you, Professor... for affording me this time despite your hectic schedule.  
Thank you.

## **ADDENDUM G**

### **Interview 7**

**Interview with some UNISA Management members, academics, and Deans.**

Date: 08/ 09/05

Venue: Philadelphia Restaurant: Muckleneuk Campus

#### **Participants:**

Prof M: R. A

Prof S: B.M.C.

Prof M Dean - H.S.C.

Prof T...: Executive Director – Institutional Forum

Prof M: Prof - English Department

Mr P: Manager-Logistics

#### **Process of interview:**

Interviewer: Thank you for affording me this opportunity to have an interview with you, colleagues. Do you think UNISA as a distance teaching and learning institution is open?

Mr P: No. As far as I can see, UNISA is not open enough. Look at the question of closing dates. It does not take into account that distance students have other responsibilities.

Proff LM and S: Yes. It is open in terms of admission requirements. Students don't necessarily have to have matric exemption to register at UNISA like in conventional institutions. If a student has a school- leaving matriculation certificate, he or she goes through the Access Course for a year, and qualifies to register the next year, after passing the Access Course or programme.

Prof LM: In addition to the Access programme, there is also mature-age conditional exemption which students qualify for when they are twenty-three years old or above. So, UNISA, compared to other universities, is open regarding access and registration.

Interviewer: Closing dates for registration?

Prof LM: Even in this aspect, UNISA has different registration periods. Students register (for semester programmes) until February and also in July of the same year.

Interviewer: Examination dates? Do students have the opportunity to write exams whenever they are ready to do so?

Prof LM: No. That is not possible, since there are a lot of important implications. For example, resources like financial resources, which are also related to human resources. That kind of openness is impossible. It is impossible to have complete openness in that sense. There is a lot involved in that kind of practice, and I don't think we are ready for that. If there is a lot of openness, things can get out of hand. That may end up making students drop out.

Prof S: But having said that, we can only be open to the extent where we can still have everything under control, for the sake of order and direction in the delivery of our programmes at UNISA.

Proff S and M: Yes, we are open, but we need to inform students right from registration what to expect, so that they will be prepared to work hard and realize that studying at a distance is not easy, and therefore, they need to be prepared.

All others: Yes, yes.

Prof T: There, you are talking about pre-registration counseling. So, learner support, which Prof S talked about earlier, comes in again. Students should be counseled on what to expect when they register at UNISA, in terms of putting more effort into their learning process or activities as a distance learner.

All others: Yes, yes.

---

Prof S: UNISA is not open enough. We acknowledge that. There needs to be improvement along that line, and learner support may be one of the tools UNISA can use to ensure that students cope with their studies and get supported and guided on how to cope in a distance education environment as a learner.

All others: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Thank you so much, colleagues, for affording me this time and opportunity to have an interview with you for this study. Thank you for your contributions and support.

Dear Participant

**RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE: MANAGEMENT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE  
LEARNING AT UNISA**

**(QUESTIONNAIRE TO STUDENTS)**

This questionnaire is aimed at establishing the extent to which distance education institutions, particularly UNISA, strike the balance between meeting students' needs and expectations in terms of openness and flexibility and ensuring that institutional requirements, regulations and policies are adhered to. Kindly complete it honestly and fully.

Please note that this is my personal initiative and not that of the Institute for Continuing Education or UNISA. The information you provide may, however, assist in improving the extent of openness and flexibility in the programmes offered by UNISA.

**You are also assured the responses you will make will be treated very confidentially.**

Please return the completed questionnaire to Ms AZS Ntuli by e-mail: [ntuliazs@unisa.ac.za](mailto:ntuliazs@unisa.ac.za) or by using the enclosed self-stamped envelope by **17 June 2004**.

Thank you.

.....

Ms AZS Ntuli

Tel: 012 429 3253

**MANAGEMENT OF ODL AT UNISA**

**For office  
use only**

<i>Please answer all the questions by ticking ( <input type="checkbox"/> ) the appropriate box or filling in the information requested.</i>						<b>1</b>	<b>- 3</b>
<b>SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION</b>							
<b>1</b>	<b>What is your gender?</b>						
	• Female	<b>1</b>					
	• Male	<b>2</b>				<b>4</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>What is your age?</b>			Years		<b>5 - 6</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>What is your present occupation?</b>					<b>7 - 8</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>What type of institution are you currently working in?</b>						
	• Higher Education	<b>1</b>					
	• Secondary School	<b>2</b>					
	• Primary School	<b>3</b>					
	• Private Company	<b>4</b>					
	• Night School	<b>5</b>					
	• Other	<b>6</b>				<b>9</b>	
Please specify:							



**For office  
use only**

**SECTION B: INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES**

<p>The following statements are related to UNISA institutional systems and processes. Please place a tick (✓) in the relevant box according to the following scale:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1: Strongly Disagree (SD)</b> <b>2: Disagree (D)</b> <b>3: Agree (A)</b> <b>4: Strongly Agree (SA)</b></p>						
	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	
1	I was allowed to register at a time that suited me	1	2	3	4	10
2	I registered at an Unisa learning centre near to my home/workplace	1	2	3	4	11
3	I was given pre-registration counselling that met my needs to understand courses for the qualification of my choice	1	2	3	4	12
4	I was allowed to combine courses/modules which I felt would meet my needs of skills development	1	2	3	4	13
5	I had a choice on the dispatch method of study materials	1	2	3	4	14
6	Study materials were ready whenever I requested for them as a registered student	1	2	3	4	15

### SECTION C: ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS

<p>The statements that follow relate to UNISA assessment and evaluation systems. Please place a tick (✓) in the relevant box according to the same scale used in Section B above.</p>						
	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	
1	There is openness in Unisa programmes	1	2	3	4	16
2	I experienced flexibility in Unisa programmes	1	2	3	4	17
3	I had a choice in choosing to study modules or parts of the modules relevant to the theory and skills I needed	1	2	3	4	18
4	I was allowed to send in assignments at times that were convenient to me	1	2	3	4	19
5	I had a say on the period of writing my final examination	1	2	3	4	20
6	I had a say on the areas of the content for examination	1	2	3	4	21
7	I had a say on the structure of the examination paper	1	2	3	4	22
	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>For office use only</b>
8	I wrote in an examination centre of my choice	1	2	3	4	23
9	I had a say on whether to write examination or to be evaluated by means of an alternative mode like portfolio or assignments only	1	2	3	4	24
10	I could write my examination whenever I was ready	1	2	3	4	25

**SECTION D: CURRICULUM OF THE CERTIFICATE COURSE FOR  
DISTANCE EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS (CDEP)**

The statements that follow are related to the curriculum of the Certificate course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP). Please place a tick (✓) in the relevant box according to the same scale used in Section B above.						
	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	
1	I had a say in how CDEP curriculum should be designed	1	2	3	4	26
2	There is evidence that learners participated in the development of the programme	1	2	3	4	27
3	The programme only promotes one viewpoint	1	2	3	4	28
4	I was able to state what I think about issues without fear to contradict authors	1	2	3	4	29
5	I found the workload manageable	1	2	3	4	30

**SECTION E: STUDENT SUPPORT**

The statements that follow are related to Student Support. Please place a tick (✓) in the relevant box according to the same scale used in Section B above.						
	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	
1	Tutorial classes were conducted at venues within my reach	1	2	3	4	31
2	Alternative means of facilitation in terms of course content were availed to students who could not attend regular tutorial classes	1	2	3	4	32
3	I had a say on the arrangements for tutorial classes in terms of suitable dates and times as well length of periods	1	2	3	4	33
4	I interact with fellow students during my studies	1	2	3	4	34
5	I felt free to communicate my learning needs with the lecturer	1	2	3	4	35
	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>For office use only</b>
6	I found the lecturer supportive	1	2	3	4	36
7	Access to the lecturer was easy	1	2	3	4	37
8	The lecturer played a positive role in my studies	1	2	3	4	38

**SECTION F: COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR LECTURER**

Indicate how <b>frequently</b> you used each of the following avenues to communicate with your lecturer.							
	<b>Communication Methods</b>						
1	Telephone	1	2	3	4		39
2	E-mail	1	2	3	4		40
3	Fax	1	2	3	4		41
4	Face-to-face meeting	1	2	3	4		42
5	The assignment learner comments section/space on the last page of assignment cover	1	2	3	4		43

**SECTION G: GENERAL COMMENTS**

Please, briefly share with us in the space provided below, how you experienced flexibility and openness at UNISA during your period of study:		
<b>I would like to thank you for your time and contribution.</b>		
Please return the completed questionnaire to Ms AZS Ntuli by e-mail: <a href="mailto:ntuliazs@unisa.ac.za">ntuliazs@unisa.ac.za</a> or by using the enclosed self-stamped envelope by <b>17 June 2004</b> .		

(QUESTIONNAIRE TO MANAGEMENT AND STAFF)

MANAGEMENT OF ODL AT UNISA

For office  
use only

<i>Please answer all the questions by ticking ( <input type="checkbox"/> ) the appropriate box or filling in the information requested.</i>				1 - 3			
<b>SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION</b>							
1	What is your <b>gender</b> ?						
	• Female	1					
	• Male	2				4	
2	What is your <b>age</b> ?			Years		5 - 6	
3	What is your present <b>occupation</b> ?					7 - 8	
4	What <b>type of institution</b> are you currently working in?						
	• Higher Education	1					
	• Secondary School	2					
	• Primary School	3					
	• Private Company	4					
	• Night School	5					
	• Other	6				9	
	Please specify:						

**SECTION B: INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES**

**For office  
use only**

The following statements are related to UNISA institutional systems and processes.  
Please place a tick (✓) in the relevant box according to the following scale:

**1: Strongly Disagree (SD)**

**2: Disagree (D)**

**3: Agree (A)**

**4: Strongly Agree (SA)**

	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	
1	Students are allowed to register at a time that suit them	1	2	3	4	10
2	Students register at any Unisa learning centre near to their homes/workplaces	1	2	3	4	11
3	Students are given pre-registration counselling that meet their needs to understand courses for the qualifications of their choice	1	2	3	4	12
4	Students are allowed to combine courses/modules which they feel meet their needs of skills development	1	2	3	4	13
5	Students have a choice on the dispatch method of study materials	1	2	3	4	14
6	Study materials are ready whenever students request for them as a registered students	1	2	3	4	15



## SECTION C: ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS

The statements that follow relate to UNISA assessment and evaluation systems. Please place a tick (✓) in the relevant box according to the same scale used in Section B above.

	Statements	SD	D	A	SA	
1	There is openness in Unisa programmes	1	2	3	4	16
2	Students experience flexibility in Unisa programmes	1	2	3	4	17
3	Students have a choice in choosing to study modules or parts of the modules relevant to the theory and skills they need	1	2	3	4	18
4	Students are allowed to send in assignments at times that are convenient to them	1	2	3	4	19
5	Students have a say on the period of writing their final examination	1	2	3	4	20
6	Students have a say on the areas of the content for examinations	1	2	3	4	21
7	Students have a say on the structure of the examination papers	1	2	3	4	22
	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>For office use only</b>
8	Students wrote in an examination centre of their choice	1	2	3	4	23
9	Students have a say on whether to write examination or to be evaluated by means of an alternative mode like portfolio or assignments only	1	2	3	4	24
10	Students can write my examination whenever they are ready	1	2	3	4	25

**SECTION D: CURRICULUM OF THE CERTIFICATE COURSE FOR  
DISTANCE EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS (CDEP)**

The statements that follow are related to the curriculum of the Certificate course for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP). Please place a tick (✓) in the relevant box according to the same scale used in Section B above.

	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>		
1	Students have a say in how curricula should be designed	1	2	3	4		26
2	There is evidence that learners participated in the development of the programme	1	2	3	4		27
3	The programme only promotes one viewpoint	1	2	3	4		28
4	Students are able to state what they think about issues without fear to contradict authors	1	2	3	4		29
5	Learners find the workload manageable	1	2	3	4		30

## SECTION E: STUDENT SUPPORT

The statements that follow are related to Student Support. Please place a tick (✓) in the relevant box according to the same scale used in Section B above.

	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	
1	Tutorial classes are conducted at venues within students' reach	1	2	3	4	31
2	Alternative means of facilitation in terms of course content are availed to students who cannot attend regular tutorial classes	1	2	3	4	32
3	Students have a say on the arrangements for tutorial classes in terms of suitable dates and times as well length of periods	1	2	3	4	33
4	Students interact with fellow students during my studies	1	2	3	4	34
5	Students are free to communicate their learning needs with the lecturer	1	2	3	4	35
	<b>Statements</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>For office use only</b>
6	Students find the lecturers supportive	1	2	3	4	36
7	Access to the lecturers is easy	1	2	3	4	37
8	The lecturers play a positive role in students' studies	1	2	3	4	38

**SECTION F: COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR LECTURER**

Indicate how frequently you used each of the following avenues to communicate with your lecturer.

	<b>Communication Methods</b>						
1	Telephone	1	2	3	4		39
2	E-mail	1	2	3	4		40
3	Fax	1	2	3	4		41
4	Face-to-face meeting	1	2	3	4		42
5	The assignment learner comments section/space on the last page of assignment cover	1	2	3	4		43



---

## **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: MANAGEMENT OF ODL AT UNISA**

### **(For Students)**

Thank you for making time to be here with me at this time for an interview. This interview aims at establishing the extent to which distance education institutions, particularly UNISA, strike the balance between meeting students' needs and expectations in terms of openness and flexibility and ensuring that institutional requirements, regulations and policies are adhered to. Briefly, this interview aims at finding out how UNISA manages ODL. Kindly feel free to respond honestly and fully.

You are kindly assured that responses you will make will be treated very confidentially.

Please, note that this is my personal initiative and not that of the Institute my department or UNISA. The information you provide may, however, assist in improving the extent of openness and flexibility in the programmes offered by UNISA.

1. What do you understand about the term openness in terms of open and distance learning?

.....  
.....

2. What do you understand by the term flexibility in terms of open and distance learning?

.....  
.....

3. What do you think is the reason or are reasons for students to prefer UNISA to other institutions of higher learning?

.....  
.....

4. Do you think there is openness in the delivery of programmes at UNISA?

.....  
.....

5. If yes, to what extent? Please, give examples.

.....  
.....

6. If no, please give reasons for your answer.

.....  
.....

7. Do you think there is flexibility in the delivery of programmes at UNISA?

.....  
.....

8. Please, give reasons for your response.

.....  
.....

9. Please make your comments and or recommendations about Practices of openness and flexibility at UNISA.

.....  
.....

Thank you very much for your contribution to this study.

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: MANAGEMENT OF ODL AT UNISA (For Management and Staff)**

Thank you for making time to be here with me at this time for an interview. This interview aims at establishing the extent to which distance education institutions, particularly UNISA, strike the balance between meeting students' needs and expectations in terms of openness and flexibility and ensuring that institutional requirements, regulations and policies are adhered to. Briefly, this interview aims at finding out how UNISA manages ODL. Kindly feel free to respond honestly and fully.

You are kindly assured that responses you will make will be treated very confidentially.

Please, note that this is my personal initiative and not that of the Institute my department or UNISA. The information you provide may, however, assist in improving the extent of openness and flexibility in the programmes offered by UNISA.

1. What do you understand about the term openness in terms of open and distance learning?

.....  
.....

2. What do you understand by the term flexibility in terms of open and distance learning?

.....  
.....

3. What do you think is the reason or are reasons for students to prefer UNISA to other institutions of higher learning?

.....  
.....



4. Do you think there is openness in the delivery of programmes at UNISA?

.....  
.....

5. If no, please give reasons for your answer.

.....  
.....

6. Do you think there is flexibility in the delivery of programmes at UNISA?

.....  
.....

6. Please, give reasons for your response.

.....  
.....

7. What policies does UNISA have that ensure that its programmes are accessible, and therefore it is open?

.....  
.....

9. Please, make your comments and or recommendations about Practices of openness and flexibility at UNISA.

.....  
.....

Thank you very much for your contribution to this study.

DATE: 15/June/04

TO: Mr JK Moloto  
Executive Director: Human Resources  
UNISA: Principal's Office  
OR Tambo Building  
X 2558

FROM: Ms AZS Ntuli  
Dept: ICE  
Tvw: 10-162  
X3253

Dear Mr Moloto

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO ASK UNISA STAFF MEMBERS TO  
PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY ON OPENNESS AND  
FLEXIBILITY AS PRACTICED AT UNISA.

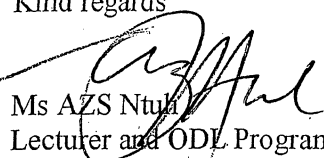
I write to ask for permission interview and ask UNISA staff members to respond to  
questionnaires for the above-mentioned topic.

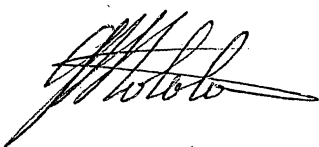
The study is for my own studies. However, I believe the University will benefit from  
its results since it investigates how students experiences openness and flexibility in  
this ODL institution.

I hope that my request will be considered favourably.

Thank you

Kind regards

  
Ms AZS Ntuli  
Lecturer and ODL Programmes Coordinator  
Institute for Continuing Education  
University of South Africa  
1 Preller Street  
MUCKLENEUK RIDGE  
P O Box 392  
0003 UNISA  
Tel: 012 429-3253  
Fax: 012 429-3630  
E-mail: [ntuliazs@unisa.ac.za](mailto:ntuliazs@unisa.ac.za)

*Approved*  
 15/6/2004