



## ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 51, 9 MARCH 2011

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### 1 A SHORTER VERSION IN RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK

There were several requests in the corridors that the ODL Communiqués are getting too long to read. I have therefore tried to cut down on the amount covered in this communiqué as well as tried to make the different topics shorter and more to the point. The overview of the contents of this communiqué also provides hyperlinks to the different sections to make your navigation through the document easier.

### 2 NO ODL PODCAST 4



I do apologise, but the ODL podcast was uploaded last night, but access to the Podcast is impossible this morning.

It is deeply frustrating but these teething problems do happen.

### 3 SINKING DEEPER INTO MEDIOCRITY

#### *Adjusting expectations downwards is very dangerous*

Feb 23, 2011 11:46 PM | By Jonathan Jansen

(Source: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/opinion/columnists/article932787.ece/Sinking-deeper-into-mediocrity> Retrieved 8 March 2011)

## NEWS FLASH

Jonathan Jansen: I have in front of me the 2010 "Statement of Results" for the National Senior Certificate statement of a youngster who demands to study at university. They are: Afrikaans 43, English 39, mathematical literacy 38, life orientation 78, business studies 41, computer applications technology 31, life sciences 28

At the bottom of the certificate is this unbelievable statement: "The candidate qualifies for the national senior certificate and fulfils the minimum requirements for admission to higher education."

Understandably, this young woman takes these words literally, and correctly demands a seat in any place of higher learning. With the young woman's claim to study I have no problem. With the society that sets the bar for performance so low, I have serious problems.

Slowly, slowly we are digging our collective graves as we fall into a sinkhole of mediocrity from which we are unlikely to emerge. [...]

This young (incidentally black) person did not achieve anything above 50% in her Senior Certificate results for any exam subject, but we tell her she can proceed to higher studies. What are we saying? That black students are somehow less capable and therefore need these pathetic results to access higher education? No, I am sorry, but today I am angry about the messages we send our children. [...] Our society, schools and universities have adjusted expectations downwards, especially in relation to black students, and that is dangerous in a country with so much promise for excellence. [...]

Small wonder young people with better results than those above are without work. The marketplace, and serious universities, know this child will not succeed with these kinds of results, even if Umalusi does not "get it".

Read the full report on <http://www.timeslive.co.za/opinion/columnists/article932787.ece/Sinking-deeper-into-mediocrity> (retrieved 8 March 2011)

## 4 MUMBO JUMBO 8: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT @ UNISA AS CONTESTED SPACE

We often despair when hearing of the latest curriculum changes in the school curriculum. Some of these changes just do not make curriculum sense. It often feels that the school curriculum has become the vehicle for political elite making educational decisions.

*But then we forget that this was always the case...*

And what about the curriculum at Unisa?

Once upon a time, so we are told, academics had the sole right to determine what goes into a curriculum, whether on modular or programme level. Those were the times (of course) when standards were high and the quality of teaching was above reproach. It was also the time when academics were not forced to work with others in developing a curriculum. How we miss those days...

But let us not forget that memory is never neutral. The nostalgia for a lost empire of academic independence also has an element of amnesia regarding the legacy of this period of academic freedom. This period was also often characterised by a proliferation of the number of modules based on and depending on the latest research interest (however fleeting...) of an academic. For example: A particular professor had a passion for a particular author or research focus and deemed it necessary to develop a series of modules on this author or topic. The professor considered knowledge of this topic to be an *absolute prerequisite for gradueness* in a particular field.

Often this professor left after a while, or found new foci which *absolutely* had to be in the curriculum. And so the story continues that as professors came, saw, conquered and (often) left – that the number of modules Unisa has pays witness to the shifts in foci and shifts in personal tastes, dislikes and likes. While tales of this period is often related as the Shangri-La of curriculum development (“where academics were permanently happy”), we often forget the lack of curriculum coherence, the immense task of trying to maintain and support all these developed modules; and lastly, we forget that the curricula of that era was not untainted by ideologies and orthodoxies of the time but dutifully serving these.

Curriculum development at Unisa in 2011 is an increasingly contested space. The demands of what goes into a curriculum is determined by a range of stakeholders including industry; broader society; the likes and dislikes of individual academics and departments; the orthodoxies of the Discipline (with a capital ‘D’); the increasing prescriptions from professional and accrediting bodies; government intervention; international fads and fashions; national and international crises; and last but definitely not least in its impact- the desires, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, ideologies of heads of departments, heads of schools, heads of tuition, and everyone higher in the hierarchy of the organisation.

While it is very disconcerting to witness how the fads and fashions of everyone in power change and impact on the curriculum; we should remember that the curriculum throughout the ages was always in service of the dominant and the powerful – whether religion, industry, and/or institutional and national politics. The history of curriculum development in higher education provides ample (and often disturbing) evidence to how these forces shaped and continue to shape curriculum development.

One of the reasons why Unisa developed a Curriculum Policy in 2010 was to provide a framework for curriculum development at Unisa. As different stakeholders laid claim to Unisa’s curricula (and continue to lay claim up to the present day), the need was expressed for an agreed-upon framework which will guide curriculum development at Unisa. For the first time in the history of Unisa there was an agreed-upon framework of what we aspire our graduates to look like and consensus on the key principles of curricula and curriculum development at Unisa.

I do not for one moment claim that the framework was perfect or neutral. But it does provide a framework based on responsiveness to Unisa’s mission and vision; responsiveness to our local and continental African context in an increasingly globalising world; our students’ prior knowledge, dreams and aspirations.

In next week’s communiqué I will explore the notion of “graduateness” as outcome of curricula at Unisa.

## 5 RE THE PROVISION OF PREVIOUS YEARS’ EXAMINATION PAPERS...

I am still waiting for the response and will include it as soon as I receive it.

## 6 THE SECOND CELEBRATION OF INNOVATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Join us on **Thursday, 17 March** (Senate Hall, 09:00-13:00) for the “Second celebration of innovation in teaching and learning”.

We would like to celebrate examples of innovation in teaching and learning (including student support, administration, etc) at Unisa. The programme is as follows:

<b>09:00</b>	Programme overview	<b>Dr Paul Prinsloo</b> (ODL Coordinator)
<b>09:10</b>	Official Welcome	<b>Prof Rita Maré</b> (Vice Principal: Academic & Research)
<b>09:20</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taking the “distance” out of distance education: going the extra mile: the role of group discussions</li> </ul>	<b>Mr Theo van der Vyver</b> (Department of Economics)

- The use of satellite broadcasting in bridging the cognitive and emotional divide

**Ms Rochelle Wessels** ( Department of Public Administration)
- 09:50** *Open discussion*
- E-learning as maieutic: teaching Philosophy in ODL.

**Mr Callum Scott** (Department of Philosophy)

  - Eish! Why a video conference? Using video conferencing in the teaching of Communication Studies

**Prof Elize Terblanche** (Department of Communication Science)
- 10:35** *Open discussion*
- The optimum use of myUnisa in the teaching of Computing: pitfalls and opportunities

**Mr Jan Mentz** (Computing)

  - The new face of tutoring at Unisa: A pilot E-tutor project in Management Accounting

**Mr Anton Jordaan** (Department of Management Accounting)
- 11:20** *Open discussion*
- 11:35** Response

**Prof Peter Havenga** (Executive Director: Academic Planning)
- 11:45** Closing remarks: Teaching and learning at Unisa: the next generation

**Dr Paul Prinsloo**
- 12:00** Lunch

Please RSVP before or on **Monday 14 March** at [mokoets@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mokoets@unisa.ac.za). We would like to provide a light finger lunch and knowing how many people will come will allow us to plan accordingly.

## 7 ODL REPOSITORY AND BLOG

All the ODL task team reports, the overview of the recommendations of the STLSC and other ODL documents are available on the [Unisa Library's Institutional Repository](#). The repository is updated on a regular basis and if you register on the repository, you will get notifications of any new uploads.

*Drafted by Dr Paul Prinsloo*

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**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this ODL Communiqué represent my personal viewpoints and do not represent the viewpoint of any other member of the Unisa community.