# ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 55, 6 APRIL 2011

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## 1 GRADUATENESS – WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT…

In the context of Unisa we often hear that we don't seriously consider employers' perspectives when developing curricula. "Employability" has become the sole mantra of many departments and academics, often forgetting that graduateness is much more than just being able to find a job. Is employability really the *only* thing that employers want? What *do* they want?

In an article written by Andrews and Tyson (2004), "The upwardly global MBA", they share their findings after sending a survey to over 100 executives in more than 20 countries to identify the knowledge, skills and attributes young business leaders will need to succeed. Writing from the context of the London Business School, the researchers define their objective as follows: "We needed to understand why and whether we were offering what they, and other employers throughout the world, needed" (Andrews & Tyson 2004:1). The research questions were phrased as follows: "What are the skills executives need? How might they change in the future? What must your people be able to do for your company to remain successful? And how can we help you meet these needs" (Andrews & Tyson 2004:3).

Andrews and Tyson (2004:3) express their surprise that they did not get the answers they expected… "The corporate leaders we interviewed indeed produced an extensive list of qualities they desired in future recruits, *but almost none involved functional or technical knowledge*. Rather, virtually all their requirements could be summed up as follows: the need for more thoughtful, more aware, more sensitive, more flexible, more adaptive managers, capable of being moulded and developed into global executives" (Andrews & Tyson 2004:3; emphasis added). This, according to Andrews and Tyson (2004:3) is in stark contrast to what business schools have been doing for the last four decades which was characterised by "content specialisation".

Instead of furnishing students with knowledge, business schools need to furnish students with “skills and attributes, the means by which knowledge is acted upon” (Andrews & Tyson 2004:3). This will result in the MBA curriculum becoming “more action oriented” in which ways are found to “nurture integrity, judgment, and intuition – a seemingly contradictory mandate that schools nevertheless must learn to prosecute” (Andrews & Tyson 2004:3). This research also indicates that “MBAs must be trained to think, decide, and act efficiently and innovatively in an unpredictable global business environment” (2004:3).

Andrews and Tyson (2004:4) point to the fact that business education has changed dramatically since the 1950’s when business schools were accused of not being “academic enough”. In those years, business schools were accused for “failing to produce original research and for falling out of touch with business”. In response to this criticism, business schools raised admission requirements and teaching standards. Key to addressing this criticism, business school curricula were changed to encompass a number of specific disciplines such as finance, accounting, strategy, and marketing. This was in line with the drive to make management a ‘science’. The result of this change was a two-ear MBA program with the first year dedicated to covering the basic disciplines and the second year allowing for a number of electives and specialisation.

According to Andrews and Tyson (2004:4) the 1990’s saw the accusation that the pendulum towards management as science “swung too far” and that business schools were “out of touch with the real world of business”. This time business schools responded by adding more practical modules to their curricula.

In 2002, the Management Education Task Force of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) recommended that the curricula be changed to include “basic management skills, such as communication… leadership development, and change management… and prepare managers for global adaptability” (Andrews & Tyson 2004:4).

With the number of corporate scandals, the increase in corruption and the economic downturn since 2009, a number of authors have pointed to the role of business schools in not preparing business leaders adequately (see for example Mintzberg 2004; Schumpeter 2010). Andrews and Tyson (2004:4) discuss the accusation that somehow business schools did not do enough to “set an ethical tone” and allowed the “quantitative … to have driven out the moral and the scientific… to have overwhelmed the human”.

Sumantra Ghosal, professor of strategic and international management at the London Business School state “Business schools do not need to do a great deal more to help prevent future Enrons; they need only to sop doing a lot that they currently do” (Andrews & Tyson 2004:4). The need, according to Professor Ghosal, is not to develop new courses, but to stop teaching some old ones (Andrews & Tyson 2004:4). But before anything else, business school faculty “need to own up to their own role in creating Enrons” (Andrew & Tyson 2004:4).

With the above as background, Andrews and Tyson (2004:4) continue to discuss "what companies want". The primary requirement from the side of business is the need to provide executive education that is "global in its outlook and content". There is therefore a need to prepare business leaders with "global business capabilities". This is in stark contrast to current curricula (in the UK context) which emphasises national or continental needs. Business leaders are increasingly required to contribute to multifunctional teams "and work on projects that draw on a range of disciplines". Compare this to current business school curricula which are still "organised according to communities of scholarly interest" (Andrews & Tyson 2004:5). In this respect, business schools resemble the rest of higher education which exalted the discipline as the core of all curricula. In stark contrast, business in the real world is not based and organised on and according to core academic disciplines but managers is increasingly inquired to "draw on a range of disciplines" and work in multifunctional teams. While academia has been organised along "neat functional lines" and disciplines, business increasingly sees knowledge as "a commodity – and a highly perishable one at that". Knowledge, although still prized, is no longer enough or the only thing. There is an increasing need to focus on skills and attributes which will change not only "the *what* of management education, but also the *how* and *who* of the process" (Andrews & Tyson 2004:7).

Employers still expect "a certain level of knowledge, memory muscle, and understanding" and future employers assume "that their recruits will have the necessary basic knowledge". A major new need, according to research done by Andrews and Tyson (2004:7) is action-oriented and skills-focused education. "The skills required of executives are global and complex, and they require professional rather than ad hoc training" (Andrews & Tyson 2004:7). It is therefore no longer enough for business schools to provide employers with graduates with a basic level of knowledge, but increasingly employers want a basic foundation of skills from the onset.

The interesting aspect of the findings shared by Andrews & Tyson (2004:8) is the new emphasis on attributes such as integrity, "thriving on change", "judgment and intuition", "perseverance and tenacity", "curiosity and creativity", and the "capacity and desire to learn" amongst others (Andrews & Tyson 2004:5, 8).

Based on their findings, Andrews & Tyson (2004:8) suggest that business schools much change on three fronts:

- They must become more global.
- They must rethink the learning process, "moving away from functional silos designed for delivering knowledge and embracing interdisciplinary learning methods to deliver the capabilities required.
- They must become action oriented (Andrews & Tyson 2004:8).

Interestingly, Andrews and Tyson (2004:9) state that key to the success of this approach is for business schools to become “more selective” with “screening” becoming a prelude to a “much more individualised process”. “The MBA curriculum of the future will be highly flexible, a bespoke design fitting skills and attributes to the career goals and aspirations of the students” (Andrews & Tyson 2004:9). A second characteristic of this new approach would be to move away from a functional approach to embracing interdisciplinarity and ethics. Ethics and integrity will not be stand-alone modules or issues, but integrated in the total learning experience (Andrews & Tyson 2004:9). The third and last characteristic that Andrews & Tyson (2004:10) discuss is the need for “action oriented” curricula and pedagogies. “Executives need the capacity to take action; the capacity to build personal energy for taking action; the capacity to develop and maintain focus in the midst of distracting events. They require action-taking ability – call it emotional capital if you wish”. Business schools therefore have to “develop a set of virtual decision-making experiences that emulate the real world of business” (Andrews & Tyson 2004:10).

Andrews and Tyson (2004) make a number of points we can seriously consider such as

- Many of our modules and programmes are focused (if not driven) by a seeming obsession with discipline knowledge. In the light of Andrews and Tyson’s (2004) article is this criticism also applicable to Unisa? How will we address this (if true?)
- How does one teach skills and attributes in a distance education environment?
- How do we include more opportunities for action in our curricula?
- How do we assess our students’ graduateness?

## 2 ACCOUNTABILITY AT UNISA: A PARADOX

Why a paradox?

On the one hand individual performance contracts and strategic plans are drawn up to the finest details to ensure accountability and on the other hand we can make claims in institutional forums without providing any evidence or being held accountable. On the one hand we are held accountable for our office hours, our outputs, and the number of times we sneezed during which month, and on the other hand, we can make claims about processes or stakeholders (often not present when the claim is made) without being compelled to provide evidence.

I realise that often we making these sweeping statements in moments of frustration or desperation, but I suspect we may do well to briefly think about how accountable are when saying these things?

Let me provide some examples of sweeping claims I heard and overheard this week:

- Academics are not available to help students.
- Administrative staff members get much bigger salaries than academic staff.
- Students don’t get their study materials in time.
- MyUnisa cannot do what academics need it to do.
- We are forced to dumb our courses down.

Making such claims, often in public forums, create the impression that these statements are in true to everyone in the mentioned group. And often (if not mostly) the statements apply only to individuals or smaller groups of people and *not* to the whole population or section referred to in the original claim.

It may be true that some academics are more available than others to help students. It is simply not true that in general *all* academics are not available to help students. Many academics are making extra effort to be available, often providing mobile numbers to students to ensure that students’ queries are addressed. Some departments have instituted departmental “hotlines” providing service to students to leave messages after hours with a promise to respond as soon as possible. It is simply not true that academics, in general, are not available. If evidence is provided of individuals or times when an academic or department was not available, we can do something about it. Making sweeping claims don’t help.

While I do not know the detail of the salaries of all administrative and all academic staff – I simply cannot believe that the statement is true of all administrative and/or all academic staff. I simply don’t have the evidence (and understanding) to make sense of different appointment regimes, and compare the financial implications of sabbaticals and study leave and the other minutiae of appointment contracts –whether academic or administrative. *I just think it is not fair to make these claims without providing evidence.* Especially if the claim is a proxy for insinuating that the particular group don’t deserve the salary or benefits they get…

At a recent Senate Tuition and Learner Support Committee (STLSC) it was tabled that students in two modules did not get their study materials in time. The issue was followed up and according to all the evidence that we have to our disposal such as track and trace numbers, amount of study materials on the shelves at the time of registration and despatch records, the materials were despatched on time. No one would suggest that the postal services in the country is optimal or necessarily equally efficient everywhere. Many students make use of postal addresses that are not their own. Many of the postal addresses belong to family members, or employers or other community structures. Many of the addresses students provide are incorrect. Many students don’t update their postal addresses in time.

It is certainly true that Unisa can do some things better and the stakeholders involved in the sending of study materials are on paper to have committed to continuously increase their efficiency. If 299 000 students got their materials and a 1 000 students had problems, surely this is a major achievement? Yes, we need to ensure that no students have problems, but let us just either have the evidence and/or see the bigger picture? *So if you have evidence, let us have it so that we can do something about it?*

MyUnisa is not perfect. No one claims that it is. Talk to academics at different institutions using Blackboard, Moodle, WebCT, or FirstClass and you will hear complaints and suggestions on how these learning platforms can be improved. I have done online courses using all of these and there is nothing much that these platforms could do that myUnisa cannot do. I know there are issues regarding Scientific Editor but this is, at present, a very high priority at ICT. Many of the claims made regarding the access tutors have to myUnisa is not a myUnisa issue, but relate to the appointment regimes and identity management. I have been at countless meetings where the myUnisa team has invited input and suggestions. All colleges have representation on the myUnisa advisory board. If there are issues, take it up with them? Furthermore, the myUnisa platform has to cater for the needs of the majority of academics first. So if you have a specific need, and somehow you are the only one with such a need, it just makes sense that ICT has to prioritise and get to your need in due time?

Lastly, let us address the claim that Unisa is forcing academics to “dumb down” their courses…

Creating learning journeys that create opportunities for under-prepared *and* over-prepared students is a tall order. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to provide, in a distance education delivery mode, equal opportunities and challenges for students of diverse backgrounds, learning styles, aspirations and support. In a face-to-face teaching situation, it is relatively easy to ‘know’ when the students in front of you “get it” or don’t. But when you develop study materials three years in advance for 14 000 different students, it is almost impossible.

Yes, we do go the extra mile for students that may struggle or not have the necessary background. Yes, we can and should create more opportunities for students that are over-prepared and/or very bright. Nothing prevents departments from identifying such students and offering master-classes. Nothing prevents departments from creating forums where these students can excel and be celebrated. But I cannot believe that because we try to create learning experiences for a range of abilities we are “dumbing down” our courses.

Accountability is much more than just performance contracts. It also has implications for what we say in meetings. This is not to plead for a situation where we cannot call a spade a spade or speak truth to power. But let us have the facts and evidence ready when we make these claims, *then we can do something about it.*

# 3 WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW IN THE ODL PROJECT?

With all the hype and buzz of 2010, this year seems strangely quiet and you may be wondering what is happening? I think the major difference between last year and this year is the fact that ODL is now in the process of being operationalised in the different functional units of Unisa. The six different ODL task teams generated more than 66 recommendations which were approved and most of these were given to colleges and different professional departments to put into action or develop further.

- Prof Subotzky has convened an ODL Task Team 6 meeting for 11 April and the team is in the process of finalising their proposal for a framework for dealing with student success and retention in the context of Unisa. We look forward to their report!
- A huge 'new' project is the development of an ODL pedagogy for Unisa. We have, at present, a Tuition Policy, an Assessment Policy, and ODL Policy, a Framework for a Team Approach, a Seven year 2$^{nd}$ order CESM directed development cycle, a Conceptual model for student support at Unisa as well as an Implementation framework. In process is an initiative to table a five-year plan for ICT enhanced teaching and learning. It is crucial that all of these documents, frameworks and plans be coherently linked into an overarching framework. In my view, this is what the framework for an ODL pedagogy will be and maybe should be. Developing a framework for an ODL pedagogy will also allow us to sort out the overlaps and outdated information in the other policies related to teaching and learning at Unisa and address the gaps.
- A consultant has been appointed to work in close collaboration with a team from Unisa to urgently address the need for a coherent understanding of the regions in an ODL model. We should have a report before the end of this year.
- The E-tutor pilot project in CEMS is making huge progress and will see the appointment of more than 80 E-tutors for over 4 000 students in Management and Cost Accounting. Although there are other E-tutor projects at Unisa such as in the Science Foundation Project and in End-user computing, we are learning some unique lessons in the E-tutor pilot in CEMS.

  By August this year we will be able to make sense of the three E-tutor projects and put systems into place which will allow for all first-year students at Unisa to have an E-tutor from the second semester of 2012. It will be important to provide standardised systems and processes, but also allow for the unique nature and requirements of different disciplines, colleges and student profiles.

- Before the end of the year myUnisa will be running from an enhanced Sakai platform, and although this initiative is not an 'official' part of the ODL project, it will allow many of the initiatives related to Elearning to become a reality.
- Different colleges are also in the process of developing a range of higher certificates which will create alternative pathways to students not meeting the new raised generic admission requirements.

So, while you may think things have quieted down a bit, I must confess that it is difficult to keep up with all the initiatives and developments! I would like to express my appreciation to everyone who engages in the challenges and opportunities flowing from this ODL project.

# 4 THE STRANGE PREFERENCE FOR LOW-QUALITY OUTCOMES

**ODL Communiqué Disclaimer:** Although somewhat uncomfortable with the word "kakonomics", I tried to locate the word on Wikipedia and the Online Oxford English Dictionary – to no avail. But on Google, the search for "kakonomics" delivers 2 400 results.

Original article written by Gloria Origgi, Institut Nicod, CNRS, Paris
(Source: http://www.edge.org/q2011/q11_10.html#origgi)

[…] Kakonomics is the strange — yet widespread — preference for mediocre exchanges insofar as nobody complains about. Kakonomic worlds are worlds in which people not only live with each other's laxness, but expect it: I trust you not to keep your promises in full because I want to be free not to keep mine and not to feel bad about it. What makes it an interesting and weird case is that, in all kakonomic exchanges, the two parties seem to have a double deal: an official pact in which both declare their intention to exchange at a High-quality level, and a tacit accord whereby discounts are not only allowed but expected. It becomes a form of tacit mutual connivance. Thus, nobody is free-riding: Kakonomics is regulated by a tacit social norm of discount on quality, a mutual acceptance for a mediocre outcome that satisfies both parties, as long as they go on saying publicly that the exchange is in fact at a High-quality level.

Take an example: A well-established best-seller author has to deliver his long overdue manuscript to his publisher. He has a large audience, and knows very well that people will buy his book just because of his name and anyway, the average reader doesn't read more than the first chapter. His publisher knows it as well…Thus, the author decides to deliver to the publisher the new manuscript with a stunning incipit and a mediocre plot (the Low-quality outcome): she is happy with it, congratulates him as she had received a masterpiece (the High-quality rhetoric) and they are both satisfied. The author's preference is not only to deliver a Low-quality work, but also that the publisher gives back the same, for example by avoiding to provide a too serious editing and going on publishing. They trust each other's untrustworthiness, and connive on a mutual advantageous Low outcome. Whenever there is a tacit deal to converge to Low-quality with mutual advantages, we are dealing with a case of Kakonomics.

Paradoxically, if one of the two parties delivers a High-quality outcome instead of the expected Low-quality one, the other party resents it as a breach of trust, even if he may not acknowledge it openly. In the example, the author may resent the publisher if she decides to deliver a High-quality editing. Her being trustworthy in this relation means to deliver Low-quality too. Contrary to the standard Prisoner Dilemma game, the willingness to repeat an interaction with someone is ensured if he or she delivers Low-quality too rather than High-quality. […]

But the major problem of Kakonomics — that in ancient Greek means the economics of the worst — and the reason why it is a form of collective insanity so difficult to eradicate, is that each Low-quality exchange is a local equilibrium in which both parties are satisfied, but each of these exchanges erodes the overall system in the long run. So, the threat to good collective outcomes doesn't come only from free riders and predators, as mainstream social sciences teach us, but also from well-organized norms of Kakonomics that regulate exchanges for the worse. The cement of society is not just cooperation for the good: in order to understand why life sucks, we should look also at norms of cooperation for a local optimum and a common worse.

Read the full article on http://www.edge.org/q2011/q11_10.html#origgi (Accessed 5 April 2011)

## 5 WIKIPEDIA NOW AVAILABLE IN ALL 11 SA LANGUAGES

*Sourced by SA - The Good News via MediaClubSouthAfrica (link to article)*

Next time you search for South Africa in Wikipedia, you may do so in any of the country's 11 official languages. That's because South Africa is getting its own Wikipedia chapter, the first of its kind on the continent. A group of local Wikipedians, as they are known, have made it their mission to make Wikipedia more accessible and relevant for South Africans. Kerryn McKay, director of the non-profit African Commons Project, said the chapter is a bringing together a number of Wikipedians to represent the goals of the Wikimedia Foundation, which runs the massive online encyclopaedia.

[…] "There are lots of watchdogs on Wikipedia. It is difficult to write rubbish on topics as it needs citations. There is a strong discipline of monitoring on the site," said McKay.

Read the full article on the link provided above.

## 6 TEACHING AT UNISA IN 2020 – WHAT WILL IT BE LIKE?

What will it be like to teach at Unisa in 2020? While a huge part of a lecturer's time and effort is dedicated to the development of learning experiences and printed study materials, what will lecturers in 2020 be required to do?

Before you think that I have eaten something that affected my thinking, thinking about 2020 is not so farfetched – it is nine years from now… I have been employed at Unisa since 1995. So, for Unisa staff appointed in the recent past or in the near future, 2020 is just around the corner!

Will we still develop printed study materials or will all teaching be done online? Will lecturers still develop curricula, or will we make use of the best the international academic world has to offer as open educational resources? Will we share our course materials as open educational resources? If our students can get all the "content" they need to pass Economics 101 at Unisa for free online, what will be left for lecturers to do? Do we still need permanent lecturing staff? Will we still require our academic staff to sit in offices on either the Pretoria or Florida campuses or will our lecturers work from home?

Let us start thinking…

## 7 WHAT COUNTS AS KNOWLEDGE? A REPORT BY DR GERDA MISCHKE

Dr Gerda Mischke (DCLD) recently attended the Knowledge 2011 Conference in Cape Town.

When I read her report, I requested her permission to share the report with you. The report follows:

This report focuses on the views of two keynote speakers. The last paragraph refers very briefly to 'authentic assessment'.

**Prof Nic Burbules** (University of Illinois), talked about 'Ubiquitous learning and the ubiquitous learner'. He talks about the shift from structured time bound learning opportunities versus the 'anytime, anywhere' opportunities in terms of 'ubiquity' and refers to the radical impact it has for curriculum development.

His point of departure is that the increased use of handheld and portable devices, along with pervasive wireless networking, means that structured learning opportunities are becoming an 'anytime, anywhere' enterprise. He is of the opinion that in an era when people can carry the Internet in their pocket, teaching and learning must obviously be reconsidered. It means developing new e-learning pedagogies that match the changing styles and rhythms of learning for all students, on-campus and off-campus.

It means developing blended courses and programs that bring these diverse student populations into close connection with each other and using their diversity and distributed locations as an educational resource in the learning environment.

How learning is changing in this new environment and how teaching and course design need to change in response, raise a host of empirical questions that 'desperately need rigorous and systematic investigation'.

For instance, the ‘augmented’ (extended, enlarged) community, which results from wireless networking, provides new opportunities for teamwork and places the university in the centre of the community. The result is that the university is required to assist the community to solve prevailing problems through direct dialogue and practical projects.

Thus, learning and knowledge creation is a continuous process involving students, teachers and community practitioners (across spatial and temporal barriers). Within this context, it is vitally important that curriculum designers should reconsider the question: ‘What knowledge should students carry around in their heads?’

**Prof Leon Tikly** (University of Bristol) is leading a research team looking at education quality in developing countries. Their research led them to conclude that instead of adopting ‘human capital’ or ‘human rights’ models of quality assurance, such countries need to adopt ‘social justice’ models. According to him, the focus of a *human capital* model is on the contribution education quality can make to economic growth. The focus of *human rights* model is on securing educational rights for minority and disadvantaged groups.

The *social justice* model builds on the human rights models, but considers wider democratic goals. According to Prof Tikly, ‘justice’ in education means ‘dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction’. Thus, the social justice model of quality focuses on ‘parity of participation’.

Matters considered in this model include: recognition, participation, relevance and inclusion. ‘Recognition’ means identifying and then acknowledging the claims of historically marginalised groups (e.g. women, rural dwellers, victims of HIV/AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children, refugees, cultural, linguistic, religious, racial and sexual minorities and indigenous groups). ‘Participation’ refers to the rights of individuals and groups to have their voices heard in debates about social justice and injustice and to actively participate in decision-making. ‘Relevance’ is concerned with the extent to which learning outcomes are meaningful for all learners, valued by their communities and consistent with national development priorities in a changing global context. The ‘inclusion’ dimension is concerned with the access that different individuals and groups have to a good quality education, modes of instruction and the opportunities they have for achieving desired outcomes.

A **general theme** at the conference was also the matter of ‘authentic’ assessment. In this regard, it was interesting to note than the ‘Alternative Assessment Report’, which the DCLD presented to the STLSC, is conceptually on par (if not ahead) of many of the views expressed in a variety of papers.

## 8 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.

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