Business opportunity

Do you think figures matter?

LighterLife operates a weight-loss Programme specifically designed for people with three stone or more to lose. Did you know that there are 13 million obese people in the UK? Each has their own reason for being overweight. Could you help them understand why?

We are expanding our network of Counsellors throughout the whole of the UK and are looking to recruit motivated self-starters to run their own business under the security of our national brand.

This business opportunity offers comprehensive and accredited training, business support and personal development, whilst providing a medically approved weight-loss Programme that offers an income of £50K+.

If you have a real desire to help people change their lives then call Samantha or Katie for an information pack on 0870 4424744 or email:new@lighterlife.com

www.lighterlife.com

NEW HORIZONS

YOU’LL notice that there’s a brand new name at the bottom of this issue’s comment. That’s because you have a brand new editor! I’m delighted to be taking over the reins here at sesame and feel very lucky to have inherited a great publication from Yvonne Cook.

And what an issue to start with! We’re delighted to report that once again, The Open University has been awarded the highest score for ‘overall satisfaction’ in the National Student Survey. How satisfied are you as an OU student? Let us know your views using the usual contact details. Turn to our news pages to read more about this, as well as some other news that might pique your interest. This includes a brand new BBC drama about a man who’s taking an OU course – written by celebrity OU student Lenny Henry – and a warning about TMAs being sold on eBay of all places.

OU students are a fascinating bunch. In this edition of sesame, we focus on some particularly interesting characters, including a man who travelled around Europe with his car running on vegetable oil (see page 17).

We also touch on some serious issues facing students including age discrimination and how the OU enriches the lives of older people (pages 24 - 25), plus one professor’s account of what it’s like to be a black student (page 27).

Don’t accuse us of not showing you the world – fancy a trip to Pluto? Discover what the OU’s views are on the recent decision to downgrade the heavenly body (pages 18-19). We’ve also launched a new travel page which will focus on attractions and destinations out there that can help you with your studies (page 35), starting with a focus on history.

I’ll be looking at ideas for future editions of sesame over the coming weeks – and I’m hoping you, the readers, will give me a helping hand. So if you have any thoughts and ideas, please do email me on T.L.Archbold@open.ac.uk. I look forward to hearing from you.

Tracy Archbold, Editor

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**IN BRIEF**

Pay dispute resolved

THE pay dispute which stalled the marking of some students’ assignments and delayed exam results has been resolved. However, at the time of going to press, there are still a small number of TMAs yet to be graded. Members of the University and College Union (UCU) voted by a substantial majority in favour of a pay deal that increases salaries for academic and academic-related staff by 10.37 per cent over the next two years, with further negotiations in year three.

European day of languages

CELEBRATE European Day of Languages on Tuesday 26 September with The Open University. The OU in London is holding free taster sessions in Spanish, German and French at its centre in Camden Town from 3.30pm. Call +44 (0)20 7556 6193 for more information.

The OU in the West Midlands is running a number of events at local venues, featuring information about the OU online language classroom. Lyceum. Email west-midlands@open.ac.uk or ring +44 (0)121 426 1661 for details.

And in East Grinstead, The Open University is launching a two-year project aimed at inspiring children from disadvantaged areas with an enthusiasm for languages. For more information email R3.14 outreach@open.ac.uk or phone +44 (0)1942 341049.

New graduate Senate representative

VERONICA Summers has been appointed as the graduate representative to Senate. Veronica was selected from more than 150 applicants, and has a strong background in HE. A committed supporter of the OU, Veronica considers her enthusiasm to be a key attribute for this role.

International Fellowship Programme

INTERNATIONAL Fellowship Programme students are being encouraged to apply for the OU International Fellowship Programme which gives people from the global community the chance to undertake a three to six month fellowship based in the UK. Log onto www.open.ac.uk/international-fellowship for details.

**NEWS**

**OU top again**

THE Open University has once again been awarded the highest score for overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey. The survey, which is conducted by the government’s Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website, found that the university achieved the highest overall score for assessment and feedback. The satisfaction level was based on responses from over 157,000 students. A total of 4,871 OU students took part.

Much of the national press, which interprets the survey results in different ways, also listed the OU as top for satisfaction including the BBC and The Guardian newspaper which both put the university at the top of their league tables.

Mr Will Swan – Director, Students for the University – said: “These results reconfirm the excellence of our teaching and of the personal support we give to our students.”

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**OU to feature in new TV drama**

CELEBRITY OU student Lenny Henry is using his learning experience to spearhead two major TV initiatives – a brand new comedy drama and The Joke Booth, a new OU/BBC TV programme.

The well-known comedian has announced that he is writing a new comedy drama about a man whose life changes for the better – when he takes an Open University course!

The comedian is currently working on the BBC drama, scheduled to hit TV screens in the autumn.

Lenny describes the new comedy, Berry’s Way, as “about a guy… who runs a dry cleaners and is having the worst possible life, until he takes an Open University English degree, which changes everything for the better (well, mostly thing)!”

The drama, co-written with his long-term collaborator Kim Fuller, is the 48-year-old’s first professional writing since finishing six years of study. And he claims taking an Open University degree has given him more confidence to write his own material and make suggestions in writers’ meetings.

Tell us your jokes

“Doing my BA has helped me structure my thoughts,” said Lenny. “It’s helped me to understand that good work is not an accident. The Open University has shown me that if you take the time to plan your work and structure it properly, you can do well. It’s just helped me to organise my thoughts a bit better and I think the challenge of producing an essay every month or so helped to keep me on my toes.”

Meanwhile, if you know any good jokes, Lenny would love to hear them because this autumn he’ll be travelling around the UK to collect jokes for a new OU/BBC TV programme, The Joke Booth. “Over the coming months, we’re asking people from all over the UK to enter the Joke Booth to tell us their favourite funny stories and jokes, and what has made them laugh most recently,” said Dr Marie Gillespie, an OU Senior Lecturer in Sociology and chief academic working on the series. “We’ll be analysing what makes a story funny and why some jokes are funny and others not. We’re going to show you how humour is a kind of a social barometer – it reflects the changing social and political climate of Britain.”

Are Glaswegians more capable of raising a chuckle than Brummies – I intend to find out all this and more, and by the end of it, I’m hoping to get a show out of it.

The Joke Booth will be presented at Lenny’s performances in Blackpool on 30 November this year, Wolverhampton on 15 January 2007; Swansea on 18 January 2007; and Glasgow on 21 January 2007.

Berry’s Way is scheduled to air on BBC ONE in October 2006; The Joke Booth is due to be broadcast on BBC ONE in spring 2007. Check listings for details.

**TMAs sold on eBay**

OU STUDENTS have been informed that owing to changes in college and even distributing free of charge, tutor-marked assignments (with or without tutor comments and grades) is against the university’s code of disciplinary conduct and will lead to penalties under its disciplinary code.

Sets of assignments from a number of courses have appeared on internet auction sites such as eBay. Apart from breaking the OU’s disciplinary code by encouraging plagiarism and cheating it can also infringe copyright laws and is therefore illegal.

Items for sale over the past three months have been offered for sale under such listings as ‘1000 TMAs – 2005/6 course GOOD MARKS’ and ‘1212 Childhood Essays 75-90%’. Despite many sellers warning buyers about the OUs rules on plagiarism, sesame has received a number of complaints from students concerned that the practice could lead to cheating. One wrote: “This is something I totally deplle. I have worked for my degree. However, I am aware that students can buy their essays via eBay – so where does that leave the value of my degree?”

Detecting plagiarism

eBay said it was impossible for the site to monitor all items for possible infringement but does run the Verified Rights Owners (VeRo) network which helps sellers to protect their intellectual property. “The Open University is welcome to sign up to VeRo, which is free,” said spokesperson Gillian Stark. “It means that if members spot anything on eBay that infringes their intellectual rights, including copyright, we can take it off the site immediately so they can investigate.”

The OU is currently working on ways in which to make students more aware of how to avoid plagiarism. Other forms of detecting cheating in assessments and software are also in use to stop collusion and over-use of course materials and internet sources, with penalties being applied when discovered.

In the meantime students should familiarise themselves with the relevant Student Regulations which include the Code of Practice for Student Discipline (available from StudentHome).
New European distance website

A NEW website and multilingual contact centre has been launched to promote European distance higher education worldwide. The centre, for which The Open University is among the partners, allows enquirers to gain information about distance higher education in English, French, German and Spanish.

Masters for 81-year-old

BY George, he’s done it! OU student George Murphy has earned himself a three-year masters degree at the grand age of 81. His master in Social Policy and Criminology joins the three degrees he has gained with The Open University. George was awarded his degree in a special ceremony at the regional centre in Sharrow, Manchester.

New Cardiff premises

THE Open University in Wales is moving to new, purpose-built premises in the centre of Cardiff in early 2007. The Welsh regional centre has been based in Cathedral Road, Cardiff for the past 27 years. Its new offices in Callaghan Square will be close to the railway and city centre, and more accessible for students and the 45 regional OU staff, says the university.

OU developing space technology

THE Open University is developing key technology to help the UK be part of the next European Space Agency (ESA) mission to Mars. The OU has a £100,000 grant from the Particle Physics and Astronomical Research Council to design an ultraviolet and visible radiation spectrometer for the lander vehicle on the ExoMars mission, part of ESA’s Aurora space programme, which launches in 2011.

Battle of the Geeks

UP Gear’s Richard Hammond is to host a 21st Century version of the TV cult game show, The Great Egg Race, which sees the cream of British and American inventors and scientists face off in a unique challenge. Battle of the Geeks, a new Open University/BBC co-production, gives the two teams just 48 hours to design, build and fly their own craft across the mighty Fish River Canyon in Namibia, aided by OU technology tutor Ian Johnston and American performance scientist Kal Spelletich.

“What’s in a name?”

THE Department for Education and Skills (DFES) is currently conducting research to find the most informative and appealing descriptions for use in forthcoming publicity campaigns around part-time study. Universities are currently using a variety of terms to describe part-time study including ‘non-traditional’, ‘lifelong’, ‘supported open’ and ‘distance’ learning. But it is doubtful that these labels mean much to the average student, or prospective learner. Among the terms that the DFES will be testing out for their pulling power are ‘flexible’, ‘portable’, ‘modular’, ‘work-based’, ‘mature’ and ‘on the job’ (students).

Negative connotations

Terminology is equally a headache for David Andrew, Director of Marketing & Sales at the OU. He says, “We once conducted research where somebody said ‘How can you describe The Open University as part-time study when it is taking over my life’? And the terms ‘supported open learning and distance learning’ have negative connotations; people think they will be studying on their own, even though we have the largest student body in the UK, who can talk and interact through associate lecturers, regional support and technology.”

Do you have any suggestions to describe part-time study? If so, email them to us at sesame@open.ac.uk.

Poster competition

UP and coming OU researchers are learning how to make their work eye catching – by competing in a competition to design the best poster illustrating their research.

Today’s researchers are increasingly being asked to submit their research in poster form at conferences. The OU competition saw entries from across the academic spectrum, from arts to social sciences to space research to maths and computing.

The five winners go forward to represent the OU at the regional stage of the national competition organised by the UK GRAD Programme, which supports the development of personal and professional skills as part of postgraduate research programmes.

Log on to www.open.ac.uk/research-school/events.html for more information on this year’s winners.

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IN BRIEF

NEW  ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING  AWARD

A new distance learning degree

THE Open University in Scotland has launched a new distance-learning degree in social work. The new honours degree replaces the diploma, formerly offered by the OU, as the required professional qualification for social workers in Scotland. It is aimed at unqualified staff already working in the social care field, who may not be able to access traditional routes to a qualification. Students must be entered for the degree by their employing agency. For details email scotland@open.ac.uk or ring +44 (0)31 226 3851.

Awards for Janet Grant

JANET Grant, Professor of Education in Medicine at The Open University, has been awarded an honorary membership of the Royal College of Radiologists. Professor Grant is director of the OU’s Centre for Education in Medicine, which researches and develop medical education, and she has developed distance learning courses in medicine in Bangladesh and India.

Fond farewell to Ecology

THE S328 Ecology course has come to a close after running for 32 years. Its last summer school was held earlier this summer. Dr Eric Bowers, one of the original course team, and Dr Joseph Arau, among the most recent tutors to get involved in the course, were present.

OU TV series commended

EPISODES from the Open University TV series African School won two awards at the One World media awards held in London on 6 June. Show me the money took the Millennium Development Goals Award and Running for your life scooped the Children’s Rights Awards. The juries also commended the series as a whole.

Nursing student runner up

AARON Ramsey, who is studying the OU’s Diploma in Nursing, has been named as runner up in the Northern Ireland Royal College of Nursing Student Nurse of the Year Awards.
Benefits of eLearning

THERE is much talk and questioning across the OU about the new Virtual Learning Environment and the eLearning that it can deliver. A common question is: what can eLearning provide for OU students? The many particular activities that constitute eLearning can for me be grouped under two major headings: interactive learning and independent or autonomous learning. So what are they?

The ability to discuss new ideas, to explore different perspectives with other students and the tutor, or to collaborate in group work of different kinds, are prime examples of interactive learning that the VLE through forums, blogs, audio conferencing or instant messaging, extends to a much larger proportion of our student body. Online group work develops valuable online collaboration skills and reduces the sense of isolation for the distance learner.

Independent learning

As for independence, connection to a range of online resources – some provided explicitly by the OU VLE and library, others available on the web – allows the teacher to construct a sequence of activities that develops the student’s independent learning skills that will be of value for professional or personal development. The OU used to be criticised for providing every bit of learning material that a student would ever need (“spoon-feeding” was the epithet often used – not quite “higher education”). But our students can now use our online library, and the web as well, to search for information and study materials that they select, analyse and evaluate in relation to the task of a student at hand. With experience the student can exercise more independence in study.

Through interactive learning and independent learning, the use of online communication can bring new dimensions to the OU’s student learning experience for professional or personal advantage.

Paul Clark, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, (Learning and Teaching)

VC visits residential schools

THE Vice-Chancellor of The Open University, Professor Brenda Gourley, has visited three residential summer schools this year – the OU Business School’s B822 Creativity residential school at Milton Hill House (just outside Oxford) in June, the Bath residential school in July and a residential course for level 2 Spanish students in Santiago de Compostela, north-west Spain.

During her week-long stay in Spain, the VC highlighted the benefits of joining a residential school in the country where the target language is spoken, commenting: “You need immersion to catch the musicality of the language and you need to hear it spoken.”

She also found the destination itself fascinating: “Santiago, as a city, is a beautiful place. It’s a place of huge historic and cultural interest and I found it very uplifting talking to pilgrims coming onto the [Cathedral] square at the end of their long journey.”

Mooting success

IT’S success all around for OU Law Programme students who have experienced achievements in a number of national and international law competitions.

These include being quarter-finalists in the national ‘Incorporated Council of Law Reporting’ competition where students mooted in front of Neil Davidson QC, the former Common Sergeant of London. They were also semi-finalists in the international ‘London Law Review’ moot, which was held over two days in the distinguished setting of the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand, as well as enjoying an international competition at Milton Keynes Magistrates’ Court.

Nick Everitt, Chairman of The Open University Law Society, said: “Our achievements in the national and international moots are, I believe, remarkable and underline the relevance of the skills taught in the law programme courses. It is a tremendous confidence boost to take those skills out of the box and use them in a ‘real world’ environment and compete favourably with students from other universities.”

To discover more about the OU law programme, log onto www.open.ac.uk/law/

First student to benefit from ILA

SHONA Sharp from Oban has become the first person in Scotland to benefit from an Individual Learning Account (ILA) to study with The Open University.

The Open University joined the ILA Scotland scheme in June, enabling people on low incomes to get up to £2,000 a year towards the cost of an Open University course. Shona’s ILA is helping pay for her first OU course, A103.

An introduction to the humanities, giving her a head start in her ambition to become a teacher.

ILA Scotland is a Scottish Executive scheme to help fund learning, and is available to anyone in Scotland who is earning £15,000 or less. If you earn more than £15,000 a year you could receive up to £100 a year towards several different courses. It is not a loan, so the money does not have to be repaid. Further information is available on 0800 100 1090.
At the end of their studies, the RBS Graduate Royalties account aims to support students making the transition from full-time study to working life, predominantly by recognising that they may still be managing some debt accrued during the course of their study.

Where customers have different needs to their less experienced full-time students, we have a range of accounts, which may be suitable to their circumstances and are happy to discuss these with them.

The Students Loan Company bank the Income Revenue for not supplying annual statements on time! I have been assured that eventually, they will calculate any overpayment and reimburse but until they do I still have to make monthly repayments (I will then have to re-claim).

So students beware, enjoy your studies, but check your accounts, keep an [open] eye on the Students Loan Company.

Sue Haley
Dunstable, Bedfordshire

OUSA directed sesame to the Student Loans Company, which offers loans separately from The Open University.

The Open University

Spanish nationals

I have recently attended my last day course prior to attending a residential school in Santiago, Spain. In the group of about 20 students, there were five Spanish nationals and a lady who had lived in Mexico for some 10 years, all fluent in the language and therefore leaving less learning material in the class ‘miles’ behind. I gather that they are here to get a qualification to subsequently teach in the UK. With a third of the class being nationals of Spain, I wonder just why the OU allows them to attend classes when they have such a high academic level in that tongue? There is a wide chasm of student ability on the course, and even depressing to other students trying so hard to learn a foreign language at over 50 years of age.

Mike Kelly
Kings Heath, Birmingham

RAQUEL MADRIGOMO, L204

A possible team chair, replies:

Like most OU courses, L204 Viento en Popo does not prevent certain students from taking it. The materials in the course pose different challenges for all students – native and non-native speakers alike – and it is often the case that native speakers lack the academic skills required for a level 2 course. Tutorials and residential school take mixed ability into account and our experience over the years, non-native speakers report having learnt from native speakers in these situations. Ultimately, all students have their work assessed against the course criteria and not against each other.

Word of caution

I would like to issue a word of caution to fellow OU students. If you are fortunate enough to be offered a student loan via the Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) scheme is conducted by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), formerly Inland Revenue. The Students Loan Company (SLC) administers the ICR process in partnership with HMRC and repayments collected by HMRC are transmitted to SLC on an annual basis after the end of the tax year.

The joint administration of the repayment scheme means that SLC will not receive notification of any repayments until beyond the end of each tax year. As a result, any borrower who thinks that their loan is likely to be fully repaid at a point within the tax year must contact SLC to make this known. When the pay slips which show this to be the case are submitted to SLC, they will confirm the overpayment. SLC will then immediately advise HMRC to stop repaying until the overpayment is paid and any refunds due, including any undisputed interest payment which may have been paid by SLC (I will then have to re-claim).

So students beware, enjoy your studies, but keep an [open] eye on the Students Loan Company.

Sue Haley
Dunstable, Bedfordshire

The Open University

Security scare

I’ve been studying with the OU for a few years now, but this year is my first occasion on a residential course. I chose T2R246: Experiencing systems, a course that is run at Nottingham University.

At one of the course centres, a student, who has had past experience of Nottingham University, warned us of the poor security provided for vehicles parked on campus. Tales of cars being broken into and damage being done are common.

I’m quite shocked at Nottingham University for allowing this to happen, and especially disappointed with the OU for seemingly accepting the situation and putting students at risk. My point is, if students are aware of the poor security in the first place we can choose not to attend courses run at Nottingham University.

David Connor
Stockport

30 miserly points

In response to the Why no ecology/letter published in issue 230 of sesame. I feel sure that S prefixed courses would be more popular if they were worth more points. A substantial effort is required for many of the science courses. For what? 30 miserly points.

Christopher Cornwall
Holmer Green, Buckinghamshire

THERMOCOLLECTIVE CONTRIBUTION CONTINGENT REPAYMENT

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Sue Haley
Dunstable, Bedfordshire

The Open University

Opinions invited

The article written by Rochelle Jones about her soldier husband James works hard in Iraq and being a carer is a very tough job – and she has inspired others.

She wrote about the frustration she experiences with the OU, which we have already highlighted in issue 229, and in fact in 2006 we are aware of only 30 (but also 60) point courses I spent the first year of my degree studying, a distinction, and a year ahead of every other course. It was inspiring to read about Renée Myerson who is achieving her life long dream of studying medicine. Good luck to her and to all the other students.

Rochelle Jones York

Letters and comments

We welcome your contributions to sesame, but all contributions must be in English. Please send contributions to sesame, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. Fax: +44 (0)1908 652247 Email: T.L.Archbold@open.ac.uk

The issue cuts off 11:00 midnight on the 17th of each month. We reserve the right to edit all contributions. Mail for publication should include your name, address, and daytime telephone number.

Letters

I am a new student to the OU and am studying Y160 Managing sense of the arts. It was with eagerness that I read my first issue of sesame (issue 230).

I was inspired to read about Renée Myerson who is achieving her life long dream of studying medicine. Good luck to her and to all the other students.

Rochelle Jones York
Glorious Gateshead

An eco-friendly degree ceremony in Gateshead impressed Sheila Forman on a recent visit.

The Graduates

The sun has got her hat on!

One reason for the glorious weather on the day may well have been graduate Trai Anfield (pictured below left), a weather presenter for BBC Look North as well as BBC radio. She studied environmental science subjects covering topics including pollution modelling and the geological record of climate change, and collected a First Class Honours degree at the ceremony. She began studying with the OU in the early 1990s and says that, thanks to its flexible system, she was able to take time out to study forecasting with the Met Office. “I have ME which meant I had to be away from work for seven years,” said Trai. “Studying with the OU kept me going, helping me to focus and giving me the hope that I would come through it. There were times when I was too ill to even sit up and write notes. I used a dictaphone, then wrote the notes up later when I was feeling stronger. The OU revolutionised and kick-started my career – otherwise I wouldn’t have had the qualifications that the Met Office was looking for. It also gave me the confidence to go out and tackle postgraduate studies in forecasting.”

True son of the north east

As with all other ceremonies, one award was reserved for someone the university wished to honour, either for their services directly to the university, or to other aspects of public, cultural or educational life. The OU in the North chose to honour one of their own, former staff tutor, Dr Eric Wade, “a true son of the north east, proud of his roots, but who achieved in academe, just as you have,” his presenter, Rob Clifton told the audience. Brought up in the mining village of Broons, Eric Wade left school at 16 to become an apprentice mining surveyor at the local pits before going on to gain a degree in mining and then a PhD on the subject of “Thin seam mining in County Durham.” He then either worked on, or was a member of, the Examination and Award Board at the OU for every subsequent level 1 social sciences course up to D103, until his retirement.

Apart from his unfailing commitment to students, Dr Wade also committed himself to his colleagues, becoming President of the OU in the North west region, said “like all the founding fathers of the OU, Eric Wade took a substantial career risk when he joined the fledgling Open University in 1970.” In accepting the award of Honorary Master at the university, Dr Wade said: “It is for an honour and a privilege to share this moment with the graduates here that have been part of my life for so long.”

Study buddies

Graduating together was so important to four women who were at the ceremony that one of them put off graduating for two years so that she could graduate with her ‘study buddies’.

Pictured on our front cover (left to right) are Joanne Atkinson, Sue Duffield, Jo Coote and Jennie Rees. The four met in February 2000 at the first tutorial of An introduction to the social sciences. They formed a study group which turned into a life-long support and friendship group. “We didn’t all study the same course but we have been there for each other through thick and thin, relationship traumas, employment changes and family illness,” said Jennie. Jennie, who left school 35 years ago without any qualifications, says she was full of doubts about whether she would cope with studying. “At first I found the coursework hard but I persevered and here I am, 41 years after leaving school, having gained a BSc and some lovely friends too,” said Jennie.

“We selected Gateshead because The Sage centre was new and we had heard the graduation ceremony the previous year had been really good in this venue,” Jo Coote told sesame. “We wanted to make a weekend of it, because we felt we deserved it as there were times when we didn’t think we would complete the award. We also wanted to share our success with our families and friends who had supported us so much,” she added.

They all agreed that OU study had changed their lives. Sue Duffield, who started studying at 40 because she wanted a challenge, said: “I’m now more confident both personally and professionally, and am applying for jobs which I wouldn’t have dreamt of applying for before. Life definitely begins at 40!”

Wedding bells

When Markus Hirmke enrolled for an MBA course in Austria he ended up with one certificate that he hadn’t actually signed up for… a wedding certificate.

Markus and his coordinator in Austria, Sarah Shaw, first met in 2002 at a presentation Sarah was giving at an OU open evening. He registered for the course and, recalls Sarah who was completing her PhD with the University of Vienna at the time: “We spent three years bonding over the tops of our respective piles of books, and in April this year we got married.”

Sarah adds that studying alongside Markus had given her a unique additional perspective on the OU experience: “I have experienced through him the doggedness required for an OU degree, coupled with the incredible sense of accomplishment at the end.”
Explaining the inexplicable

What impact will the possible introduction of teaching religion as a science have on the reputation of British research? Peter Taylor-Whiffen speaks to OU lecturer Dr James Moore about his views on this.

A MOVEMENT to re-introduce religion into American schools by teaching it as science is taking a foothold in Britain – and could seriously damage the UK’s reputation as a great science nation.

That’s the view of The Open University lecturer Dr James Moore, who believes the British government’s plans to create independent trust schools – which currently need not adhere to the National Curriculum – will see an explosion in the number of pupils being taught so-called intelligent design (ID).

“It’s being promoted in the name of ‘better science’,” said Dr Moore. “And of course we all want better science in this country – you, me, Tony Blair. But in my opinion the widespread introduction of the teaching of ID as science will blunt the cutting-edge of British research, particularly in the life sciences.

Intelligent design is broadly speaking, the doctrine that life could not have evolved by chance, and is put forward by religious groups (from a number of faiths) to question Darwin’s theory of evolution. It has made headlines across America because its champions label it ‘science’, not ‘religion’ – therefore enabling it briefly to duck under the US Constitution’s First Amendment, which states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion” and so effectively bans the teaching of religion in America’s state schools.

But supporters of intelligent design argue that using scientific evidence to dismantle a scientific theory such as Darwin’s is, by its very definition, science.

“This is a dangerous notion because ID supporters are encouraging people to believe that science has finally discovered God,” said Dr Moore, an American-born Reader in the OU’s Department of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine. “It’s precarious to argue that, because we can’t explain something, God must have created it. What happens if the inexplicable is explained?”

The push for teaching intelligent design in US schools is a continuation of a movement that, said Dr Moore, has been around for decades. “People have been arguing that creationism is science since the 1960s, and trying to get schools to teach it.

“The intelligent design movement is politically adroit. It doesn’t deny evolution directly, but instead offers itself as a broad church, so it can attract support from all these factions. ID gives them a new angle for getting religion into schools, but it still breaks the First Amendment.”

The ID movement has had a mixed reception in the States. ID has been introduced into some schools, particularly those whose boards of governors, or regional politicians, have a right-wing fundamentalist Christian bias. In Dover, Pennsylvania, ID was introduced in 2004 after the school board declared ‘students will be made aware of gaps/problems in Darwin’s and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, intelligent design’.

But eleven parents sued, and weeks later District Judge John Jones III ruled the teaching of ID was unconstitutional, declaring that what ID calls “the science of design detection” was “a religious view, a mere re-labelling of creationism, and not a scientific theory.”

Dr Moore, joint author of a best-selling biography of Darwin, was quoted after the case in the New York Daily News, observing that the US was a “very religious nation”, with 60 per cent of the population regularly attending church. In contrast, perhaps five per cent of Britons are regular churchgoers, yet in Britain religious education is mandatory in schools. So why is Dr Moore so concerned about ID teaching at these schools?

“It’s precarious to argue that, because we can’t explain something, God must have created it”

“It is already here,” he said. “I understand it is taught in some independent trust schools, and my concern is that there is no legal barrier, as in the US, to teaching ID within schools that can operate outside the National Curriculum. And Tony Blair’s dream is to see more and more schools become independent trust schools.”

But does the introduction of ID really matter, if so many Britons aren’t bothered about religion? “I would use a biblical phrase,” said Dr Moore. “At ease in Zion People say – sometimes with a hint of cultural superiority – ‘creationism can’t happen here’. They are wrong. It’s dipping under the radar. ID is ‘stealth creationism’.

“Don’t get me wrong” Dr Moore added. “It is possible to be a good engineer or cyber-gEEK and still believe in intelligent design. ID holds great appeal for fundamentalist Christian young people who want to remain ‘faithful’ and be ‘scientific’ at the same time.

“But how far can you get as a scientist believing that certain things are scientifically inexplicable? What sort of biologist believes that the basic components of life are too complex to have evolved? If you bring up a generation to reject Darwinian evolution – the central premise of the life sciences today – that must inevitably compromise Britain’s future as a scientific nation.”

The Open University has launched a new third-level undergraduate course on evolution for details of this and other Open University courses on science and religion see www.open.ac.uk/courses.
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Have veg oil, will travel

One OU student discovered an alternative to traditional fuel to take him across Europe

E

VIRONMENTAL sciences student Antony Berretti has made history by becoming the first person to drive across Europe in a car fuelled by vegetable oil. But how did he get hold of all this vegetable oil? He simply asked various restaurants that he passed to give him their waste oil – all for free!

The OU student made the month-long journey to prove his fuel was a cheaper and greener alternative to diesel and other more traditional fuels. “I’d been aware of the concept for some time,” he said. “The BBC’s Top Gear programme had run an item on it five years ago as a sort of spoof – but while at the research library in Milton Keynes last year, I twigged this was a journey that could be made. And as an environmental scientist, I have an enthusiasm for finding ways of reducing the environmental impact of modern life.”

Antony, from Newton Stewart in south west Scotland, drove through France, Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar, Italy, San Marino, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium in a modified Fiat Scudo 1.3 Turbo Diesel van but says the modification to the engine was so relatively simple that it could have been done by anyone, in virtually any diesel car. “All you need is a kit, which costs about £500 and, if you can’t fit it yourself, it should be an easy task for any good mechanic,” he said. “I’ve spent the last 30 years repairing engines so I know what I was doing and what could be done.”

But while it’s one thing getting the car to run, it’s quite another to bag free vegetable oil across Europe. “I think I did a Dudley Moore impression on most of the people I asked for help,” said Antony. “I come from a Tuscan family so speak Italian, and gave a reasonably close rendition of Spanish and French, but when someone did understand me I asked them to write down the proper question I should have asked, and I just showed that at the next restaurant!”

Considerably cheaper

He was interested to see how much reaction to his request varied between countries. “Many of the French restaurateurs couldn’t believe what I wanted it for – some looked as if they wanted to stop me for the sake of my car! Others rang their friends to tell them to come and watch me pour the oil in. But in Germany several people said they had heard of it and understood that it was possible. And other countries I visited are interested in learning more. Four TV stations covered the story when I was in Portugal, and the Italians have invited me back to an expo. ”

So how effective was the switchover from diesel to vegetable oil? “It’s possible for virtually all of us to run our cars on vegetable oil,” said Antony. “It’s possible for virtually all of us to run our cars on vegetable oil, which would be so much cheaper for us and better for the planet, but regulations including the high tax rate mean there is little financial incentive for people to do so.

“All it needs is for the government to change the law and that incentive would be there. This trip was about raising awareness and showing how green we can be – if we really want to!”

To learn more about using vegetable oil as a fuel, visit www.macharsoft.co.uk/rmp/freefuel.html. This includes a diary of Antony’s trip and links to how to get a converter kit and the law about buying diesel. “It’s possible for virtually all of us to run our cars on vegetable oil, which would be so much cheaper and greener,” he said. “I think I did a Dudley Moore impression on most of the people I asked for help,” said Antony. “I come from a Tuscan family so speak Italian, and gave a reasonably close rendition of Spanish and French, but when someone did understand me I asked them to write down the proper question I should have asked, and I just showed that at the next restaurant!”

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So how effective was the switchover from diesel to vegetable oil? “It was just as effective, according to Antony. You start the vehicle when the engine is warm and has heated the oil to the required temperature, you switch it over to run on oil. Vegetable oil produces only a fraction of the harmful substances created when burning diesel; it’s non-toxic and it’s actually safer – its flashpoint is higher than that of diesel, which reduces the risk of fire. And it’s biodegradable and using it protects our fossil fuels.

And it’s considerably cheaper – at least in theory. “Vegetable oil costs a fraction of the price of a litre of diesel,” said Antony. “But in the UK you have to declare that you are using it as a fuel, and you get taxed for doing so – so heavily that it’s actually no cheaper than buying diesel.” Regulations in other European countries vary – in France, says Antony, you can be fined for putting vegetable oil in your tank. Portugal, on the other hand, has just reduced its tax in the hope of encouraging a recovered vegetable oil industry.

And that was one of the several issues Antony wanted to raise on his journey. “The tax is artificially high, which can only be to protect commercial interests,” he said. “It’s possible for virtually all of us to run our cars on vegetable oil, which would be so much cheaper for us and better for the planet, but regulations including the high tax rate mean there is little financial incentive for people to do so.

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Antony Berretti is pictured here holding his suggested alternative to diesel – vegetable oil.
‘Planet’ is just a word

The controversial decision to strip Pluto of its status as a planet has divided OU scientists. Peter Taylor-Whifffen speaks to three leading lights about their views about this.

I’ve been telling schoolchildren for years that Pluto isn’t really a planet,” says The Open University’s Dr Andy Norton. “They love the idea that we’re letting them into a secret – that their textbooks have got it wrong.

But it’s not a secret any more with the recent and controversial decision by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) to strip Pluto of its status as a planet – a decision that has divided OU scientists.

“We have four terrestrial planets – Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars – and four gas planets – Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune,” said Dr Norton, Senior Lecturer in Astrophysics and Chair of the OU Astronomy Club. “Pluto doesn’t fit into either category, but some satellites, some of Jupiter’s and Saturn’s moons, and UB313 are all larger than Pluto.

“I think we should have broadened the definition of what a planet is. I would have liked us to have more planets.”

Pluto is still fascinating

There may well have been more if the IAU’s general assembly had voted differently. Had delegates at the Prague event voted for another of their options, not only would Pluto’s status have been maintained but three other bodies – the largest known asteroid Ceres, Pluto’s moon Charon and an even further outlying object 2003 UB313, known colloquially as Xena after the popular television character – would ‘be upgraded’, giving a total of 1.2 planets.

“I think it’s a shame that Pluto lost out,” said Dr Norton. “But there are also very good reasons for narrowing the definition – especially in terms of making it easier for people, in particular schoolchildren – to have a basic understanding of space.”

In what observers called a ‘stormy’ meeting, the majority of the 2500 delegates opted to define a planet as being in orbit around the Sun, large enough for its mass to break down into a spherical shape and clearing its orbit of other objects – and the latter two criteria disqualified Pluto.

Dr Dave Rothery, Chair of OU courses 5296 Planets: an introduction and 5283 Planetary science and the search for life, is adamant that common sense prevailed. “It was absolutely the right decision,” he said. “I was horrified that they might be upgrading asteroids and moons to planet status. In 1930, when we didn’t know any better, scientists were right to call it a planet, but any decision to keep it that way with the knowledge we have now would have been purely sentimental.”

And he said the situation did have a precedent. “When Ceres was discovered between Mars and Jupiter in the early 1980s it was called a planet, but when scientists learned it was an asteroid they sensibly downgraded it. I’m appalled that the IAU even considered broadening the definition of a planet that would have upgraded it again. To do so, in spite of having 200 years’ more knowledge behind us, would have been madness.”

But Dr Rothery is keen to stress that losing its status does not make Pluto any less fascinating. “Pluto lies on the edge of an outer region of the Solar System called the Kuiper Belt,” he said. “Over the last 15 years we’ve discovered many more objects out there and we’re finding more all the time.

“The BBC’s online report about downgrading Pluto said it would lead to the planet being ‘abridged out of school textbooks’: That’s a stupid thing to say. It remains a very exciting field of research.”

Professor Jehn Zarenecki from the OU’s Planetary and Space Sciences Research Institute (PSSRI) is an IAU member. Family commitments meant he was unable to attend the meeting but he says: “I would have voted to keep things as they are. Changing the definitions will probably confuse non-astronomers – although for those who went to school before 1930, it will be a case of ‘as you were’.

“We’ve known for years that Pluto is anomalous, and that there are thousands of objects orbiting our Sun, I feel sorry for Venitia (see the fact box) as she was the only living person who could claim to have named a planet, but I don’t imagine she’ll lose much sleep over it.

“After all, planet is just a word. Whatever it’s called, Pluto will keep doing what it’s always done. It’s not as if it’s going to be bored to death, we’re finding more all the time. The IAU’s online report about downgrading Pluto said it would lead to the planet being ‘abridged out of school textbooks’: That’s a stupid thing to say. It remains a very exciting field of research.”

Peter Reid

Discover more about Peter Reid by logging onto www.rosemaryandpeter.com

Do you have a gripe or would like to share something interesting? Send us an article of no more than 250 words to The Editor, Sesame. The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA or email sesame@open.ac.uk. Include contact details and a daytime telephone number. We pay £50 for each contribution used.
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Psychology is a valuable subject for any job and will be translated to make the slower pace and four features exercises help you make sure you’ve understood everything you’ve heard. And just for fun, we’ve added a special feature— in English—in which we use several wonderful and international students to search for full-time and part-time vacancies, as well as work experience and voluntary work. This will be live on the website in autumn 2006.

The revamped site, which was launched by the Careers Advisory Service in 2005, also includes a section titled Have You Seen? which contains all the latest career news, including conferences and workshops, and guides to career planning resources. Other new features include an A-Z site map and search facility to provide alternative ways for users to find what they are looking for.

The site offers advice under the headings Prospective Student, Current Student, Former Student, Employer and Member of Staff which contain sections with specific relevance for the different types of visitors. Current and former student areas are password protected, and alumni can use the Careers Advisory Service for up to two years after their last course.

One of the key developments has been making this a needs-based site”, said Ellen Cocking of the OU’s Careers Advisory Service. “A large proportion of our students are already in work and want to develop their career or change job. But one in five OU students is under 25 and is looking for advice at the start of their career, so we need to address a wide range of needs.

There is also a redesigned section for employers wanting to recruit OU students or develop their existing staff. “We are in contact with over one thousand employers” added student services manager, Wendy Woolery.

To learn more visit www.open.ac.uk/careers

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GET TALKING!

The OU’s new Careers Advisory Service website has a wealth of new features and valuable information for both students and employers

OU AND I

Our new student columnist discusses his highs and lows in OU life...
Happiness is…

He’s already made the people of Slough happier, now he wants the government to help do the same for the rest of us. Neil Baker talks to a leader in the new science of happiness, Dr Richard Stevens

Dr Richard Stevens certainly sounds happy enough. He whistles a jolly tune from the kitchen as he makes a cup of tea, stopping only to apologise for having soya milk, not dairy. The Open University psychologist is a guru in the emerging field of ‘happiness science’. With a team of five other happiness experts, Richard accepted the challenging task of raising the happiness levels of 50 volunteers from the Berkshire town of Slough, location of that agonising carnival of human misery, The Office. The results formed a series of programmes for BBC TWO, Making Slough Happy.

Working with two other OU academics – Dr Jane Henry, Senior Lecturer in applied psychology at The Open University Business School and Linda Corlett, a social psychology tutor – as well as a psychotherapist, Nevia Mullan, Richard’s role was to run five all-day happiness workshops with the volunteers, drawing on ideas from positive, humanist and evolutionary psychology, combined with a bit of Buddhism and a dash of old-fashioned showmanship – in a previous career Richard directed episodes of Z Cars.

He also took volunteers on a series of ‘away days’ covering approaches such as ‘housework therapy’ which is aimed at making mundane work more enjoyable. Richard and his fellow academics used a combination of measures to determine how happy the volunteers were at the start and end of the project. The results were much better than expected. ‘I thought we’d be lucky to get an increase of 10 per cent, but we actually got 33 per cent,’ he says. The various measures were rigorous enough for Slough Borough Council to start monitoring the town’s happiness levels. But Richard wants the steps undertaken to improve national happiness to play a role in government policy. For example, he’s concerned about the psychological damage caused by a surfeit of choices – whether it be of soap powders or primary schools. Not knowing which to choose, and worrying about whether you’ve made the wrong choice, can be big sources of misery. Rather than restricting available choices, Richard wants to teach people how to cope with them. One of the tricks is to accept what is good enough, instead of always looking for the best – what psychologists call being a ‘satisficer’ not a ‘maximiser’.

The most important role for happiness science in government policy is education, he says. “Schools should be helping children to develop skills and techniques for dealing with the world and increasing their own wellbeing”.

But he doesn’t want everyone to be happy in an unthinking, happy-clappy sort of way. Melancholia, the Greek mood of non-specific brooding, can be a positive experience, if it produces constructive reflection about the nature of existence. Richard wants the steps undertaken to improve national happiness to play a role in government policy. For example, he’s concerned about the psychological damage caused by a surfeit of choices – whether it be of soap powders or primary schools. Not knowing which to choose, and worrying about whether you’ve made the wrong choice, can be big sources of misery. Rather than restricting available choices, Richard wants to teach people how to cope with them. One of the tricks is to accept what is good enough, instead of always looking for the best – what psychologists call being a ‘satisficer’ not a ‘maximiser’.

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Dr Richard Stevens and Dr Alex Linley will be among the speakers at the next Open University Psychological Society annual conference, on the psychology of wellbeing, at Nottingham University on 22–24 June 2007. For more information visit www.oups.org.uk.

Happiness tools

Try these regularly for two months:

1. Take half an hour of exercise three times a week
2. Count your blessings. At the end of each day, reflect on at least five things you are grateful for
3. Have an hour-long, uninterrupted, conversation with your partner or closest friends each week
4. Pray something: even if it’s in a window box or pot. Keep it alive!
5. Cut your TV viewing by half
6. Smile at and say hello to a stranger at least once a day
7. Make contact with at least one friend or relation you have not been in contact with for a while and arrange to meet
8. Have a good laugh at least once a day
9. Give yourself a treat every day. Take time to really enjoy this
10. Do an extra good turn for someone each day
**CASE STUDY**

**Age is just a number**

Peter Taylor-Whiffen delves into recent research on age discrimination and discovers more about the part played by the OU in enriching older people’s lives

Why are today’s blockbuster movies all targeted at a young audience? Why do high street stores think that fashions for older ladies always mean flowery patterned dresses? And why, when today’s 70-year-olds grew up in an era when the Rolling Stones were strutting their stuff on the stage, do organisers of entertainment assume they’ll like songs from the Second World War?

The answer, according to OU researchers, is that age discrimination is everywhere – and it’s time older people were seen and respected as individuals with a major part to play in modern Britain.

A team from the university’s Centre for Ageing and Biographical Studies joined forces in 2004 with Help the Aged to launch ROAD (Research On Age Discrimination) – and although the project will not be complete until later this year, it’s already clear the results will point to a form of ongoing, affecting discrimination of which most younger people are not even aware.

The project team, financed by grants from the Big Lottery Fund, asked 40 older people to keep diaries and also issued a general invitation to other older people to send accounts of their experiences of age discrimination. Their stories are already available as a series of vignettes and show that older people have fewer choices not only for employment, but also for holidays, leisure – even the way they have their hair cut.

“It’s time older people were seen and respected as individuals”

“It’s very revealing just how much discrimination older people face,” said Professor Bill Bytheway. “In the past, people measured different social groups by age – and even the way they have their hair cut. Older people don’t always adhere to the stereotypes – especially Open University students.

### Old people don’t always adhere to the stereotypes – especially Open University students

**CASE STUDY**

**Mabel Lainson**

IT’S a few years since now OU student Mabel Lainson last picked up a textbook.

47 years, to be exact.

Mrs Lainson, who celebrates her 92nd birthday this year, caught the learning bug when she began an Open University Openings course last summer – Y152 Living arts – her first formal education experience since leaving school at the age of 17.

“When I left school I never went to university or anything,” said Mrs Lainson. “I’m ashamed to say I spent a few years living off my mother, and I suppose I wasted a lot of time. But then I met my husband, who was setting up a business, and I became a director there. But I’ve loved reading all through my life!”

And she enjoyed the reading on Y152. “I found the subject matter fascinating,” she said. “I must admit I never had a lot of time for Wordsworth at school – I preferred Byron and Shelley – but I really enjoyed discovering his work on this course. I’d never done a critique of a painting before, so that was also new. And of course we didn’t study things like philosophical arguments when I was at school, so I was interested to learn about that too.”

She says that she began her OU course “because I am on my own and it was something interesting to do. I am alone but I’m not lonely – I have a large family (three daughters and six grandchildren). In fact it was my family that encouraged me to do a second OU course. They saw how much I’d enjoyed the Openings course and bought me A103 An introduction to the humanities as a Christmas present!”

**CASE STUDY**

**Dr Merton Seigleman**

“AS you get older, you have to keep doing something to exercise your brain,” says Dr Merton Seigleman. “If you don’t, it would be quite easy to become a vegetable.”

Not that this is likely to happen to Dr Seigleman. He’s just achieved a BSc with The Open University at the age of 82 – to add to the BA he earned when he was 77. Dr Seigleman studied arts and social science courses on his way to his OU qualifications – a completely different form of study from the medicine degree he achieved at the start of his medical career in 1953. “The most significant difference is that when I qualified as a doctor I needed to write very few assignments, as much of the training was practical. Writing TMAs for the OU took a little getting used to and I wasn’t very good at first, but I got better when I realised what the tutors wanted.”

Dr Seigleman completed his BSc despite a series of illnesses. “I told the OU I was too ill to travel to the tutorials, so arrangements were made for my tutor to visit me at home. And as I now can’t walk very far, the OU agreed that I could sit the examination at home. This was just as well, as two weeks prior to the exam, I was readmitted to hospital to have a pacemaker fitted.”

But Dr Seigleman duly took the exam – with an OU invigilator sitting with him in his lounge – and managed an upper second class degree. And while he may be determined, he needed to write very few assignments, as much of the training was practical. Writing TMAs for the OU in enriching older people’s lives

**CASE STUDY**

**Dr Edward Brech**

THE oldest Open University student to earn a PhD was awarded the MBA in the Queen’s Birthday Honours list in June. Dr Edward Brech, 94, achieved Britain’s first doctorate in British management history nine years ago and was cited for services to the history of management in the list.

Dr Brech teamed up with The Open University Business School’s Andrew Thompson and Derek Rugh – now Emeritus Professor of International Management – a collaboration which led to the founding of the Business School’s history of management research group.

Dr Brech’s key work is his 16-year project to research, collate and write a five-volume work, The Evolution of Modern Management in Britain 1852 to 1979, which was published last year. Dr Brech spent most of his working life as a management consultant.

“It became clear that the history of management was such a large area that I should really work with the support of an organisation,” said Dr Brech, who lives in Esher, Surrey. “The OU was the only institution that encouraged me and the doctorate gave me a framework in which to do my research.”

Professor James Fleck, Dean of The Open University Business School, believes that management history will become increasingly important in the future, as practitioners seek to develop a more systematic view of management. He added: “And from a practical point of view, it will be very important to help avoid fads and fruitless reinvention of the wheel!”

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Unmarked Identities?

The Open University’s first black academic to be promoted to a professor, Ann Phoenix, reflects on what being a black student really means after studying an OU course for the first time.

Those of us who contribute to OU courses are, quite rightly, encouraged to try out what it feels like to be an OU student. I decided not to mention it, but then felt I had to be careful how I thought I would take the first steps towards finding out what our students have to do. I completed two 10-point courses – A174 Start writing fiction and A173 Start writing family history – and started the 60-point course A215 Creative writing. I immediately learned firsthand a number of things that have been sobering, salutary and uplifting. It prompted me to reflect deeply on how students generally feel when doing our courses, especially those of us from minoritised ethnic groups.

Both 10-point courses are e-courses and have e-tutorials as an optional, but integral, part. I was surprised that, in the exercise to introduce ourselves to the other members of the tutor group, I found myself agonising about whether or not to mention that I am black. While I agonised, I noted that other people did not mention their colour. What did that mean? Was it that they were all white and taking for granted their unmarked identities or were some from minoritised ethnic groups who had either not thought about this or who had similarly agonised and decided to go along with the apparently de-racialised form of introduction?

Family history

Part of my indecision was because I couldn’t see or tell how other people would receive my declaration and, in everyday life where colour certainly matters, I am expert at gauging reactions. Here I had no cues and I alone mentioned my colour. I would probably be making the other students and tutor think about issues they didn’t want to and would mark myself out as ‘different’ in many ways without wanting to.

I decided not to mention it, but then felt I had to be careful how I described people in my fiction so that I did not inadvertently remove the racialised dynamics that operate in society. I learned firsthand a number of things that have been sobering, salutary and uplifting. It prompted me to reflect deeply on how students generally feel when doing our courses, especially those of us from minoritised ethnic groups.

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The world is our library

Trooper James Jones is studying the OU social science course DD100 while serving in Iraq. In the second of two articles his wife Rochelle, also an OU student, describes how his study helps make sense of his experience.

A

fter his last posting in Camp Smitty, Al Muthanna, southern Iraq, James witnessed and shared in Iraqi history. Al Muthanna, under British control, was the first Iraqi province after the war that got returned to full control of the Iraqi Government once again. In the last days of June and early weeks of July, James’ contact with me and the OU was very limited due to the frantic preparation for the handover.

Concept of identity

The Iraqi army and police personnel trained by his regiment took over and every important official from both the coalition forces and the Iraqi government including Prime Minister Maliki took part. James said that emotions ran high in those weeks: apprehension, elation, worry and pride. Finally, he said, he got to really understand the concept of identity, one of the topics in DD100 An introduction to the social sciences: understanding social change.

On witnessing the handover in mid-July, James said, “Thousands of people attended the event, and although security was tight, they were all there. Suddenly, when the Task Force Commander handed the ‘symbol’ of control of Al Muthanna over, there was a collective joy in all present. For a moment I felt a part of something important, that all our hard work and their [Iraqis’] sacrifices meant something.”

He acknowledges the sacrifices and excellent job done by his regiment. 1st The Queen’s Dragoon Guards (the Welsh Cavalry) with forces and the Iraqi government including the Iraqi army and police have taken over responsibility for the area. The control of Al Muthanna over, there was a collective joy in all present. For a moment I felt a part of something important, that all our hard work and their [Iraqis’] sacrifices meant something.”

James is filled with gratitude towards the very supportive OU community that has taken James’ situation into account and have given him leeway in the deadlines set. The Open University is one of the education providers acknowledged by the Ministry of Defence. As such, James’ academic dreams have become an impetus to jumpstart their own.

Making friends

Some time last June, James was in the company of Japanese and Australian soldiers while preparing for the handover. He said he found it a funny yet apt coincidence that he was studying the DD100 chapter on globalisation, studying and reading on issues of world politics, economics, culture and migration. For James, his DD100 studies have somehow given a more vivid meaning to what it means for him to be a soldier in the British army in the current context. Whilst deployed in Iraq, British soldiers observe a strict protocol for him to be a soldier in the British army in the current context. Whilst deployed in Iraq, British soldiers observe a strict protocol that protects them from doing acts that would be disrespectful to local customs and cultural sensitivities.

Before being deployed, the soldiers are trained in local languages and are taught local culture. James, while on patrol, wears a beret, not a helmet. His weapons are pointed down in a relaxed manner. The soldiers always greet the locals with respect, civilian and military alike. As a result, James has made friends with the locals, the local army, even getting as close as sharing stories and jokes with them about their families and their aspirations.

James is filled with gratitude towards the very supportive OU community that has sent us both emails that left us with a great feeling of community. Several were from veteran soldiers, who like him have struggled to study while serving. A number were from OU faculty and staff: but of course, the most memorable ones came from our fellow students who above all have found inspiration in James’ current challenges to continue their own. More than ever my firm belief in the excellence of The Open University is made real in the kind of people that make up our community – real people whose academic challenges are steeped in experience. With the OU, humanity becomes more vivid; the world is our library, our source and repository of knowledge. Learning is a haven of endless possibilities. James has recently registered for D218 Social policy: welfare, power and diversity. Due to several delayed and lost TMAs however, he is still on hold for his DD100 course results. However, credit must be given to Graham Parkin, his tutor and the DD100 course team. They have taken James’ situation into account and have given him leeway in the deadlines set. The Open University is one of the education providers acknowledged by the Ministry of Defence. As such, James’ academic dreams have become an impetus to jumpstart their own.

W01 Gilles Powell, the Regimental Sergeant Major of the Queens Dragoon Guards, and Staff Sgt. Phil Martin, James’ former squadron leader, acknowledge the positive changes in James since he started his studies with The Open University. A good soldier does a good job; an excellent soldier, however, does not only try to do a good job but also struggles to understand the value of his work and what it means to his country and to the world in his passion to serve. Thank you to The Open University for giving James the opportunity to live that.
Discover more about Troy

The epic legend of the fall of Troy is a main focus of the OU’s new language course A397 Continuing classical Latin. As the name suggests, this is an intermediate-level course following on from the beginners’ course Reading classical Latin and develops students’ confidence in reading various styles of text.

Much of the 30-point course is built around Virgil’s Aeneid II, which course chair Naoko Yamagata said should be an attractive text for many students.

“It’s the most extensive version of the fall of Troy and is a wonderful story,” she said. “We chose it because many of our students will have studied this Greek legend through Homer. The Aeneid is a Latin retelling of the story and students can observe Greek influences on Latin literature.”

But a knowledge of classical Greek texts is not necessary to enjoy the course, added Naoko. “A lot of people are familiar with the story and it’s being taught in many primary schools. It’s as popular as ever further, “ she said. “The Latin language continues to fascinate people and it’s being taught in many primary schools. It’s as popular as ever and we’re giving people the opportunity to learn more about it.”

A397 Continuing classical Latin continues to be extremely popular and I think many people want to sign up to Continuing classical Latin to develop their knowledge further”, she said. “The Latin language continues to fascinate people and it’s being taught in many primary schools. It’s as popular as ever and we’re giving people the opportunity to learn more about it.”

Before studying the set text, students will focus on grammar, consolidating what they have already learned and introducing them to new features. They will also read selections of passages by authors including Catullus, Cicero, Horace, Ovid and Pliny the Younger, as well as medieval Latin and hear interviews and lectures on the history of the language.

Naoko said she was hopeful the course would prove popular. “We started the beginners’ course in 2000 and more than 1,000 students registered. Reading classical Latin continues to be extremely popular and I think many people want to sign up to Continuing classical Latin to develop their knowledge further,” she said. “The Latin language continues to fascinate people and it’s being taught in many primary schools. It’s as popular as ever and we’re giving people the opportunity to learn more about it.”

A397 Continuing classical Latin is a specified course in the OU’s BA (Hons) Humanities, BA (Hons) Humanities with Classical Studies, and Diploma in Classical Studies. Registration costs £295 and the course will run for the first time from February 2007. Registration closes 15 December 2006.

E VERYTHING from medieval madrigals to hits by The Darkness is explored in the OU’s new course A179 Start listening to music.

This fascinating 12-week course, worth 10 credit points, teaches its students how to listen perceptively, understanding how the music is constructed by appreciating metre, rhythm, structure, timbre and texture. It covers the relationship between musical sounds and styles and the cultural, social and historical contexts in which different pieces of music have originated.

“Start listening to music aims to develop people’s ability to listen and to describe what they are hearing,” said course chair Kirsten Gibson. “We’re not asking people to rate the music as good and bad, but more to understand what they are listening to.”

The most eye-catching element of the course is the diverse mix of music studied. There are certainly few, if any, other places you can experience medieval, flamenco and world music alongside that of The Darkness, Queen and The Doors.

“We really enjoyed selecting the music to study,” said Kirsten. “In one part of the course we ask students to compare two different versions of the same song. People might not believe, for example, Paul Anka has covered Nirvana’s Smells Like Teen Spirit – but he has, and that’s in the course!”

The course will also ask students to think about how they hear music differently in different contexts and will include comparisons of live performances by jazz diva Ella Fitzgerald, folk legend Dave Swarbrick and classical violinist Nigel Kennedy.

The course tuition is developed online through the OU’s FirstClass system and students will write two tutor-marked assignments. A179 Start listening to music costs £135 and will be presented for the first time in February 2007. For further details visit www.open.ac.uk/courses and key in A179.

BEYOND GOOGLE

Want to make the most of all that information out there on the internet? A new short course from The Open University shows you how to go beyond Google and make the best use of databases and search engines to find what you want. The course also helps you to evaluate what you find, present it clearly, write a bibliography and work in a more systematic way.

Study is mostly online and includes interactive activities, podcasts and blogging. TU12 Beyond Google: working with information online is a 10-point course with two start dates a year in May and October.
Spread the costs

Sheila Forman provides an insight into the postgraduate funding that’s available out there

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O YOU’VE got your degree, and even your masters, but you’ve
caught the bug and don’t want to stop learning. Is that the
sound of a PhD calling? But there’s a catch – research can be
an expensive business. So why not find someone to help you share
the cost?

One option is funding. Some courses are advertised in the national
press complete with funding. Sometimes you get financial support
from the university that’s running the postgraduate course; sometimes
you need to apply to an external organisation. Awards are available
for a range of subjects, both for taught courses and research
programmes and cover a variety of different durations, amounts
and restrictions. There are strict eligibility rules and
deadlines for applications, and competition for funding is fierce.

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Research Council and the Medical Research Council; government
study including research councils such as the Arts and Humanities
Department of Trade and Industry. Once funding is approved, the
partners recruit a student who, with the aid of an academic
supervisor, is employed by a company on a temporary basis (anything
from one to three years) to further a specific area of research. The
graduate is paid a salary and the university receives funds from the
DTI for the academic’s time and overheads. For more details email
PDG-IPM0@open.ac.uk.

The Crowther Fund
The OU offers students support for further study through The
Crowther Fund. The fund, named after the university’s first
chancellor Lord Crowther, helps graduates “to build upon
the work already undertaken (for their degree) either by
formal study or research or by a general broadening of
experience” The fund gives a total of about £60,000 a
year, and usually this is split up to about £1,000 per
student. Students are not obliged to do their further
study at the OU.

Applications are judged, says The Crowther Fund
Awards Advisory Board, ‘solely on their merits’ and
the board emphasises that this is not a fund to
relieve financial hardship.

For an application form write to: The Secretary,
The Crowther Fund Awards Advisory Board, PO
Box 197, The Open University, Milton Keynes
MK7 6BJ; call 01908 652930 or email
OU-Crowther-fund@open.ac.uk

The Research Council
The Research Council is government-funded and invites applications for postgraduate funds from
students in a number of different fields. Depending on their
degree and the topic of their proposed research, students might
receive funds from one of the Department of Trade and Industry’s
eight different research councils.

Application for Research Council funding is strong and the awards
are made to various academic departments and institutions which
then invite applications from candidates. To find out more visit
www.rcuk.ac.uk and check higher education supplements in the
national press.

What loans are available?
To help fund your studies there are specialist postgraduate loans
available. It is possible to find employment whilst you are studying
but it is worth noting that full-time students are expected to spend
approximately 40 hours per week on their studies (20 hours for
part-time postgraduate students).

UK applicants can apply for a Career Development Loan (CDL)
which is a deferred repayment bank loan available through the
Department for Education and Skills (DfES). All UK applicants
applying for a taught masters programmes are eligible but
DPhils and MPhil applicants are not eligible. For further information
Freephone 0800 585 505 or visit:
www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/cdl/index.htm

UK and non-UK taught and research applicants can apply for a
postgraduate and professional studies loan from the HSBC Bank.
Freephone 0800 520 420 or visit: www.hsbc.co.uk/1/2/personal/
current-accountsgraduate-student-loan

Disabled students’ allowances
If you have a disability and you live in the UK, you may be eligible
for a postgraduate disabled students’ allowance. The DSA is not means
tested and is designed to help with extra costs you may have in your
course of study as a result of your disability or specific learning
difficulty. To find out whether you are eligible and how to apply for
the allowances for 2006/2007, please ask staff at the Student
Registration & Enquiry Service by phoning the DSA Office at
+44 (0)1908 654136 or emailing DSA-Queries@open.ac.uk

Students in Scotland can find out whether they are eligible by
liaising with staff in the Disability and Additional Requirements Team
on 0131 226 3851 or emailing scotland@open.ac.uk

Financial Assistance Fund
The Financial Assistance Fund provides financial support for
students who are experiencing hardship. The money is provided from
voluntary donations by the trustees of The Open University
Development Fund. Students can apply for support towards living
expenses and unfunded study costs. Unlike the Access to Learning
Fund, this fund has no citizenship restriction: both UK and non-UK
students are eligible to apply as long as they’re resident in the UK. You
may not apply for financial support for expenditure already incurred.
Applications can be submitted at any time. Forms are available by
calling +44 (0)1908 654882 or emailing research-school@open.ac.uk

Access to Learning Fund
The Access to Learning Fund is provided by the Department
for Education and Skills (DfES) to enable institutions to give
discretionary support to eligible students who might not otherwise
be able to afford a course of further or higher education, or who
have difficulty in meeting their living costs during their studies. If
you meet the residence requirement for a ‘home’ student you are
eligible to apply. More details can be obtained from
www.open.ac.uk/research-school/prospectus/p2_11.shtml

OU Scholarships
OU scholarships include a maintenance grant and cover the annual
research degree fee. The grant is £12,000 a year in 2006/07. There
is also a Dependents’ Fund, a scheme established by the university to
help full-time students who have financial dependants. Full details
and conditions will be sent to successful applicants. Visit the OU
website at www.open.ac.uk and visit the relevant subject area to
discover which scholarships are available. Studentships are also
advertised at www.open.ac.uk/employment

Useful websites:
@ www.dfes.gov.uk @ www.hotcourses.com @ www.prospects.ac.uk
@ www.thesc.co.uk (subscribe to the Times Higher Education
Supplement’s database of funding opportunities)
Next time you’re planning a day trip, short break or holiday, keep the following ideas in mind to aid your history studies.

City spotlight – York

VISIT York, which was once the Roman capital of Northern England, and you’ll be spoilt for choice if you’re a history buff. With a variety of museums and attractions to quench your historic tastes – including the famous JORVIK Viking Centre and the stunning York Minster, the largest Medieval Gothic cathedral north of the Alps – you won’t run out of attractions to visit in the city. Guided tours of this pretty city are all you need for OU history students. Open-bus city sightseeing tours are offered throughout the year which provide an interesting commentary on York’s turbulent past. Continuing with the Halloween theme, there are also the obligatory ghost tours including one that is hosted by the ‘ghost detective’ and is described as historically funny. Call York Tourism on +44 (0)1904 550099 or visit www.visityork.org for more information.

Overseas spotlight – Rome

AS the saying goes, ‘Rome was not built in a day’ – nor can you visit the huge variety of historic sites in the city in just one day! You can also feed your thrill for historic knowledge with visits to the variety of attractions – many of which are free.

From the days of the Roman Empire to the rule of Mussolini, there are plenty of museums and monuments covering a number of eras. Any tour must include the Piazza del Campidoglio, one of the famous Seven Hills of Rome and the seat of divinity and power. The Travi Fountain part of the Vergine aqueduct built by Agrippa is also a must. A highlight for OU history students is the Roman Forum which was the heart of this ancient city. Not only is it home to a variety of historically important buildings but you can also see items that have been discovered at the site in the Antiquarium. Visit the Rome Tourist Board’s Tourism on +44 (0)1904 550099 or visit www.visityork.org for more information or call +39 06 488991.

Step back in time

TS not too long before all the ghosts and ghouls come out to play for Halloween. You can combine spooking yourself with educating yourself at Ham House in Surrey, a stunning Stuart mansion that sits on the river Thames. Associated with Civil War politics (it was owned by Royalist William Murray during the Civil War) and Restoration court intrigue, it is also one of the most haunted houses in Britain. So what better way for OU history students to spend their Halloween? Cost: £8 (guided tours are free). Call +44 (0)20 8940 1950 or log onto www.nationaltrust.org.

The World Heritage site of New Lanark in Scotland is a 200-year-old conservation village set in the scenic Clyde Valley. The cotton mill village came into its own when Robert Owen was a mill manager there from 1800 to 1825, and in that time he brought about many pioneering changes, from banning child labour and corporal punishment to providing free health care. It offers students a ‘living’ sense of the first industrial revolution with a number of attractions. Cost: £5.95 (for a Passport Ticket). Call +44 (0)1555 661345 or log onto www.newlanark.org.

Next time you take a trip to London, make sure you visit the Sir John Soane’s Museum which is located just off Aldwych and was the home of the famous 18th-century architect. It is a particularly useful visit for those studying A207 Enlightenment to romanticism. The museum holds a huge number of items from Soanes’ collections, and personal effects which he acquired between the 1780s and his death in 1837, including paintings by Hogarth. There are also regular exhibitions and lectures. Cost: free. Call +44 (0)20 7405 2107 or log onto www.soane.org.

The National Waterfront Museum in Swansea only opened in October of last year, and provides a fascinating insight into the history of the area and its people. Particularly useful for students exploring the Industrial Revolution and maritime history. OU students can explore 13 themed areas including the ‘People’ area which includes interiors of typical houses of the times, and gives access to public records. Cost: free. Call +44 (0)1792 638950 or log onto www.waterfrontmuseum.co.uk

Can you recommend a particular visit for OU students? Email sesame@open.ac.uk
sesame crossword competition

Win £75 cash plus a copy of the Chambers Dictionary

COMPLETE the sesame autumn crossword and be in with a chance of winning £75. Senders of the first three correct solutions drawn out of the hat on Friday 20 October will receive a copy of the Chambers Dictionary. In addition, the first one drawn will receive £75 cash courtesy of sesame.

Winners will be notified by telephone or email. Details of Chambers dictionaries can be found at www.chambers.co.uk

Across
1. Greedy old chap in our opinion (8)
2. Furniture put up on time – that’s outstanding (4)
3. Favourable maternity report for Mary’s husband (8)
4. Finish on top? (6)
5. Court session could be a harrowing experience (6,4)
6. Left one without a mobile phone? That's really way out! (8)
7. Greedy old chap in our opinion (8)
9. Princess who fell for a neat trick by Zeus (6)
10. Flag officer chases a group of women (4)
11. Unpaid workers put up with eccentric views (10)
12. Part of dance to look on an old hat in France (6)
14. Quarters Ottoman leader ordered a girl into? (8)
15. Nymph starts to shed clothing? Yes and everyone turns up! (6)
16. Underling showing a lot of leg?... (6)
17. Stock-farmer managed to get her into business (8)
18. Works in college (6)
19. Milk man’s wife to be... (6)
20. Pulled in for a service? (6)
22. Well-heeled or well-oiled? Such a question is unfair (6)
23. Sheridan’s woman so upset, being out of place (10)
24. The white rabbit, 25 Ararat, 26 Eyes
26. Second volume came first? That’s dotty! (8)

Down
1. Get into trouble over a glass of sherry (6)
2. As the case may be, 7 Gobang, 8 Hell for leather, 10 Smee, 4 Skean dhu, 5 Bishopric, 6 As the case may be
3. Favourable maternity report for Mary’s husband (8)
4. Finish on top? (6)
5. Court session could be a harrowing experience (6,4)
6. Left one without a mobile phone? That’s really way out! (8)
7. Greedy old chap in our opinion (8)
8. Furniture put up on time – that’s outstanding (4)
9. Princess who fell for a neat trick by Zeus (6)
10. Flag officer chases a group of women (4)
11. Unpaid workers put up with eccentric views (10)
12. Part of dance to look on an old hat in France (6)
14. Quarters Ottoman leader ordered a girl into? (8)
15. Nymph starts to shed clothing? Yes and everyone turns up! (6)
16. Underling showing a lot of leg?... (6)
17. Stock-farmer managed to get her into business (8)
18. Works in college (6)
19. Milk man’s wife to be... (6)
20. Pulled in for a service? (6)
21. Live broadcast includes the Spanish medieval instrument (6)
22. Well-heeled or well-oiled? Such a question is unfair (6)
24. Writer heard to be full of bitter irony (4)
25. Strike out when allowed to plunge into the river (6)
26. Second volume came first? That’s dotty! (8)

In under 200 words... what does OUSA do?

Every student studying with the OU is automatically a member of OUSA (from the date you register for your course to the 31 December of the year of the course end). OUSA is a membership-led organisation – led by its members, for its members. We strive to provide an environment of equal opportunity and work to represent the views of our members to the university. We hold our independence close to our hearts, and firmly believe that it gives us that little more room for manoeuvre in allowing us to concentrate on the educational and support issues for our members.

Our network of local branches and our large suite of social conferences on FirstClass. This social environment provides students with not only access to other students, but also to our representative function, which gives students access to personal and professional development opportunities.

OUSA, the official publication of the Open University Students Association

Editions published three times a year.

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Letter from the editor...

Welcome to the Autumn edition of OU Student

At the time of writing we are in the throes of the Residential School period. OUSA plays an important role at Residential Schools, and in this edition I hope to bring more information and views from those involved. Myself and some other members of our Officer Team undertook a series of visits to as many of the Residential Schools as was possible. I’ve certainly been left with some memorable experiences myself!

Feedback from members

One of the common questions I was asked at the Residential Schools was “what exactly does OUSA do?” With the variety and diversity of activities that OUSA undertakes, that was not an easy question to answer, I can tell you! One student challenged me to let people know what OUSA does in less than 200 words (am sure he is planning to become an OU tutor one day). Not being one to turn down a challenge, I have to admit that I came in at 204.

As a result of feedback from our members, this and future editions will include shorter articles, more information on what OUSA does and the services it provides, and more profiles of students engaging in activities and roles for OUSA.

Keep that feedback pouring in!

Good luck if you are taking your exams this autumn/winter.

Rebecca Rosenthal
OUSA President
IN BRIEF

Calling for ideas!

DO you have a fundraising idea that would work well within a branch or region? An idea that students could get involved with individually or collectively? If you do then please contact our Vice President Student Support, Chris Bell, on FirstClass: Ousa VP Student Supp; by email: ouasa@student.open.ac.uk or by letter to the OUSA Office.

Rt Honourable Baroness Boothroyd

Many of you will have heard that Baroness Boothroyd has chosen to retire from Office as the Chancellor for The Open University. She will be sadly missed by all in OUSA. The search is now on for a new Chancellor of the OU, and the President has been elected by Senate to serve on the Chancellor Appointment Committee. Watch this space!

Record your thanks

Many students have been recording their thanks to Baroness Boothroyd on a FirstClass conference. You can reach the conference by clicking on the following on your FC desktops: OUSAUOUSA Live OUSA Thanks to Baroness Boothroyd. This will help the OU in their search for a new Chancellor.

What do you think this role means for the students in the region?

I hope that I am there for both those students in the region actively involved in OUSA, and those students who like to know that OUSA is there when needed. I am a point of contact between them and the rest of the organisation, in addition to being able to provide information and support.

Representative profile... Executive Committee Member

N the last edition of OU Student, we asked you to share a moment when you discovered an inspirational story with our readers. Here are just a few from the selection that you sent on to us...

Maureen Collier

Maureen is now nearing the end of her BA (Hons) in History with the OU at the age 70. Maureen is keen to see the university develop dual start dates: “I changed to the new October starting date last year and have my first free summer in six years!” What next I wonder?

Ann Dinedale

Ann Dinedale found that her Open University degree helped her to take on new challenges. “I completed my final year with the OU in 2003 with a BA (Hons) in Humanities in the following year. My prospects improved shortly after completing the Arts foundation course (A102) when I was promoted to Librarian at the Bronte Parsonage Museum where I had worked for several years. A few months after graduating, I was approached by a publisher and asked to write a book about the Brontes. Although I was selected because of my work at the museum, it was all those years of researching and writing TMs which gave me the confidence to accept the challenge. My book will be published in the autumn. The knowledge and experience I gained with The Open University has enriched my life in so many ways, and I am currently considering the possibility of working towards an MA with The Open University.”

Jerzy Lando

Jerzy Lando found that his aspiration to attend university was doused in November 1939, two months after the Germans occupied Poland, when Jews were banned from all schools. That December, Jerzy and his family were deported to Cracow from Lodz where his thirst for education led him to the only publicly available courses: for locksmiths and secretaries. Jerzy later escaped for two years, with his only method of survival being to live under a false identity. In 1946 Jerzy escaped to England as a refugee. Although keen to pick up his academic studies where he had left off, the need to earn a living prevented Jerzy from following his dream of gaining his degree. Over the next 30 years, Jerzy built up a successful textile business but still yearned to learn two “wounds remained. In addition to being robbed of all my family’s properties by the [then] Polish governments, I was deprived by the Nazis of what I had always considered most precious, a university degree. At the age of 79, having read a prospectus of The Open University, I took my revenge. I decided to apply. On 31 December of last year, four years after becoming a student, I got a BA degree. By a strange coincidence, the certificate was issued on my 83rd birthday. My best ever birthday present!”

Semesterisation

The university is currently looking at their course presentation formats with a view to providing a consistent, recognisable pattern of start and completion dates for students. OUSA has been involved from the start, and in order to address the variety of student experiences we set up a short term focus group to look at the implications of the various possible options. Many thanks to those students who took part. The university will soon be introducing a discussion paper to its committee structure for the university community to comment on, and OUSA will of course continue to be involved. Your views are welcome on this and other issues to the OUSA general email address or by letter to the OUSA Office.

NUS-OUA Associate card 2006/2007

FOLLOWING a successful first year of working in partnership with the National Union of Students (NUS), OUSA are pleased to announce that the 2006/2007 NUS-OUA Associate card is available from September to all current OU students on application. At a cost of £10, the Associate card gives OUSA members a valuable national student ID affording them access to the widest range of student discounts across the UK. It is also accepted as ID at all Open University exams. The 2006/2007 NUS-OUA Associate card is valid until 31 December 2007, so the earlier you apply the more you can save.

Application forms are downloadable online at www.nusonline.co.uk/associate or available from the card hotline on 0870 2242458 (state OU Student).

* Discounts are provided at the discretion of the retailer except when a negotiated agreement is in operation. Further information will be included with your card.

In addition to responsibilities to the decision making body of OUSA that acts between conferences, Executive Committee Members for Geographical Areas also engage in a very practical role within their regions. Here’s a few words from Patriona Douglas, Executive Committee Member for the North. Patriona is also a member of the OUSA (Services) Ltd Board of Directors.

What do you do as Executive Committee Member (ECM) for your region?

Although I’ve only been doing this for a couple of months, it has already been a somewhat varied and interesting experience. In my role I support the active branches in our area, and help out branches trying to re-activate. This is one of my favourite activities, as it brings me into contact with a number of students, I may otherwise not get to meet. I get to hear students’ views on study with the OU, and their experience as a member of OUSA. I have also been recently supporting our Residential School Co-ordinator. It has been fascinating to see what goes on behind the scenes at a Residential School and the work that goes into organising the events, and making them a success. I have also helped out at the Degree Ceremony in our region. It has been fantastic to meet some students who have reached the end of their degree, and it has certainly inspired me to keep going with my own studying.

What does this role mean to you?

Well, I believe in a small way that I am helping to make the OU experience a better one. Not just for those studying now, but also those who will study at a later date. Part of my role is also to pass on issues raised by students; I feel I can represent the views of students to the people who matter in the OU.

What do you think this role means for the students in the region?

I hope that I am there for both those students in the region actively involved in OUSA, and those students who like to know that OUSA is there when needed. I am a point of contact between them and the rest of the organisation, in addition to being able to provide information and support.
IN BRIEF
Have you been inspired...

By the work done by the OUSA Representatives at Residential School? Would you like to give it a go? Did you enjoy the experience so much that you want to give something back? OUSA provides training and ongoing support for all of our Residential School Representatives. We currently have opportunities for local helpers and full-week Representatives. Contact the OUSA Office for more information and an application form.

Plagiarism
OUSA Policy over the past couple of years has raised the issue of plagiarism. The penalty for plagiarism is the possible repercussions in how it is dealt with by the university, and what the university can do to help students to avoid it. The university has now set up a Plagiarism Project which seeks to look at both university policy, and penalties and education.

Student Support Review
AT THE time of writing, students were the largest group of contributors to this project. Whilst the university is in this innings in terms of consultations with such large groups of people the fact that students were the largest group of contributors appears to indicate that students are very keen to be able to input individually, as well as collectively. Here in OUSA, we want to ensure that the university is able to learn from the experience, so that more and more students will be able to contribute to the wider consultations in future.

OUSA Conference 2007
OUSA Conference 2007 will be in Warwick and takes place over the weekend of 13 - 15 April. All OUSA members have a right to be represented at the annual Conference and a right to determine what is debated. Look out for further details of how to get involved in the next edition of OUSA Conference.

A message of thanks
STUDENTS at the Bath Residential School would like to thank Angela Clark, Psychology tutor in the Yorkshire Region who raised £130 for OUSEY by organising a Karaoke/Disco on 26 July.

OUSA website
FURTHER work is taking place on the OUSA website, and the most recent development is the introduction of a site map. The OUSA website can be found on www.ousa.org.uk

Residential profile
Residential School Representative

THIS was Lesley Scott’s fourth year as a Residential School Representative. Whilst this year she was acting on behalf of OUSA at Durham, she has also played the same role at Umiit and Stirting – both of these sites are no longer used (and she assures us that the sites no longer being used and her role there display no correlation whatsoever!)

What do you think Residential School gives to students?
I went to Stirring for my own Residential School as a student, and have to admit that it was my favourite site. I was terrified when I first went. Each Residential School is different in its own unique way. It’s a common situation that students come to their Residential School worried about what the experience will be like, and leave feeling confident, having progressed on their course and made friends.

Residential School offers an opportunity to get away from their every day pressures and to engage fully with their learning. It’s important for students to realise that spending time with other students who have the same interests is just as important as the learning itself!

What do you think OUSA provides at Residential Schools?
One thing that OUSA Representatives can provide is local knowledge. What to do on the afternoon off, where the local cash point is and so on. Our Representatives also provide a fresh face during the week, and importantly they are someone who isn’t tied down with the course and administration of the Residential School itself. They are also a shoulder to cry on when a student feels stuck or is missing their family.

Some students are leaving their children and partners for the first time, and this can be quite an emotional experience. The difference in students can be amazing, when you see how nervous they are at the beginning of the week, and watch their confidence grow and develop by the end of the week.

And of course the social events! Feedback from students is that this is a valuable opportunity for members to present their own papers on a variety of topics. Details Rosemary: terry@telcon.finet.uk

Central Events
Open University History Society Residential Weekend – Theme, Religion and History, 2 – 4 February 2007. Wedgewood Memorial College, Bariaston, Stoke on Trent. Cost approximately £92. An opportunity for members to present their own papers on a variety of topics. Details Rosemary: terry@telcon.finet.uk

Open University Travel & Study Society
Brighton Revision Weekend – only course can be coted for! The Courtlands Hotel, Brighton. Weekends throughout September. Send SAE stating course to: OUTS Society, 64 Buckingham Road, Brighton BN1 3RQ.

Local Events
Altrincham & Sale Branch: Second Tuesday of every month, 8.30pm, Famous Old Porterhouse, Stamford New Road, Altrincham. Details Edna: edna@fssnorthtern.com

Bournemouth & Poole Branch: First Thursday of every month, 8.30pm, Grasshopper Pub, Poole Road, Lower Parkstone. Details Neil Walking: neilwalking@ntworld.com Web: www.bournemouthousa.co.uk

Brighton, Hove & Lewes Branch: First Monday of every month, 7.30pm, Cricketers Pub, Black Lion Street, Brighton. Details Colin: colin@allcorn.com


Cheltenham Branch: Second Wednesday of every month, 8.30pm. The Somerset Arms, Leckhampton. Details: Alii: Alii21277@btinternet.com

Chipping Campden Branch: Second Monday of every month, 7.30pm. The Pheasant Public House, Chippingham (corner of A4 & Hungerdon Lane). Details Pauline Lock: paulineal@tun-lin.freeserve.co.uk

Exeter Branch: Third Wednesday of every month, 7.30pm. The Fox Inn, Exeter. Details Margaret: margaret35.wanadoo.co.uk

Glasgow & West of Scotland Branch: First Tuesday of every month, 7pm: Trader Joe’s, Hope Street, Glasgow. Details Catherine Macmillan: 0141 339 7906.

Gloucester Branch:
First Thursday of every month, 8.00pm. The Fountain Inn, Westgate Street, Gloucester. Details Paula: 01452 750416.


Haverfordwest Branch: First Thursday of every month, 7.30pm, Haverfordwest Cricket Club, Dale Road, Haverfordwest, Pembro. Details Nikki: mcs4@student.open.ac.uk

Huddersfield Branch: Third Wednesday of every month, 7pm, Huddersfield University, Howard Wilson Building, Room HWG03. Details Helen: hbd2598@student.open.ac.uk

Kendal Branch: First Monday of every month, 7.30pm, Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal. Details Brian Wright: 015396 21567.

Lancaster Branch: Third Wednesday of every month, 7.30pm, Bar of Gregson Institute, Moor Lane, Lancaster. Details Sybil: smc456@student.open.ac.uk

Liverpool Branch: Second Thursday of every month, 8pm, The Pump House on Albert Dock, Details Janet: park@ntsca.co.uk

Manchester Branch: Second Tuesday of every month, 7.30pm, Lass O’Gawrie, Charles Street, Manchester. Details Alan: 0161 292 7209 or alan.kinsey@ntsca.co.uk

Newbury Branch: Second Monday of every month, 7.30pm, The Canal Bar (7.30pm) followed by The King Charles (8pm). Newbury. Details Rebecca: rcs354@student.open.ac.uk Web: www.ousa-newbury.mysites.net

Northampton Branch: Second Wednesday of every month, 8.30pm. The Fish, Fish Street, Northampton. Details Emily: 07707 057681 or ea232@student.open.ac.uk


Plymouth Branch: Third Tuesday of every month. Winifred Baker Court, Addison Rd, North Hill, Plymouth. Details Pat: lousa4002@yahoo.co.uk

Portsmouth Branch: First Tuesday of every month, 7.30pm. Toby Carvery, Copnor Rd, Halsa. Details Keith: keith.2.grant@bt.com

Rochdale Branch: Last Thursday of every month, 7.30pm, Millers, Hollingworth Lake, Littleborough. Details Gill: gill@lheelaw94@freeserve.co.uk

Sheffield Branch: Last Tuesday of every month, 7pm, Ruskins, Tudor Square, Sheffield. Details Lucy: lc2935@student.open.ac.uk

Southport Branch: First Thursday of every month, 7.30pm. The Royal Navy Association Club, 73-79 East Street, Prittlewell, Southend-on-Sea. Details: Albert: albert.beaven@blueyonder.co.uk

St Helens Branch: First Wednesday of every month, 8pm, Charlon Bar, Barrow St, St Helens. Details John: 0151 493 1266.

Stockport Branch: Second Thursday of every month, 8pm, Little Jack Horner pub, Wellington St, Stockport. Details Marie: marie@freeserve.co.uk

West Cumbria Branch: Last Sunday of every month, 7.30pm. The Howgate Inn (on the A595 between Whitehaven and Workington). Details Tony: parkerstbees@aol.com

York Branch: Third Wednesday of every month, 7 – 9pm, St Johns College, Lord Mayors Walk, York. Details Elizabeth: ebc34@student.open.ac.uk
Fees and financial support

THE face and shape of fees and financial support within the university is set to change. The rules are a little different depending on whether students are studying in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. For students in Scotland, the most notable recent change is the introduction of the Individual Learning Account (ILA). For those studying under the English Funding Council, the news that fees will rise is often offset by the introduction of greater financial support. More students than ever will be entitled to Financial Support from the OU for the 2006-2007 study period, and you may be surprised at how many will now be eligible. Did you know that students earning up to £25,000 per year will now be eligible for financial support? You can find out quickly and easily if you will be eligible for financial support; and if so for what kind of costs (as an example, fees or study costs) by typing in your details to the ‘ready reckoner’ on the OU website. You can find this at www3.open.ac.uk/coursefinance.

OUSA has been campaigning for a number of years for better financial support, more recognition of additional study costs and easily accessible information. We continue to work closely with the university on what financial support is provided to whom, and how and where the information is being presented.

OU Student, the publication of the Open University Students Association, is edited by the OUSA President. Most of the articles are written by students of the University. It is produced on OUSA’s behalf by the Communications department of The Open University. Editorial enquiries and contributions should be addressed to: Als Ryan, Open University Students Association, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6BE. Telephone: +44 (0) 1908 652026 Fax: +44 (0) 1908 654326 Email: ouas@student.open.ac.uk OUSA website: www.open.ac.uk

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Join hundreds of other OU students in gaining specially negotiated and other student discounts with your NUS - OUSA Associate card. The card costs £10, and many students have reported they have recovered the cost of their card within the first few months of ownership through the discounts gained! The NUS-OUSA Associate card will provide you with a valid national student ID which will give you access to the widest range of student discounts across the UK. So if you want to save money on everything from films to music, from clothes to art gallery tickets, from sports to haircuts then make sure you get your card now. This card is also valid identification for OU exams. Tick the box for more information or go to www.nusonline.co.uk/assocate or www.nus.org.uk

NUS / OUSA DONATION
You can make a donation to support OUSA. OUSA OFFICE, DONATION... (circle area of interest)

REPRESENTATIVES AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS
If you are interested in being a rep at residential schools in the future, please tick the box for a recruitment pack and application form.

DISABLED STUDENTS GROUP
This group is open to all those disabled students interested in helping OUSA to achieve its equality policy. Please tick the box if you are interested in receiving details of how to register with the Disabled Students Group.

GRADUATION CEREMONIES
Tick the box for details of how you can represent OUSA at an OU Graduation ceremony.

OU STUDENT MEMBERSHIP CARD
Whilst all students are automatically members of OUSA, we do provide a free membership card. This may secure discounts from some retailers and service providers, and counts as identification for OU Exams. Please send in one passport sized photograph, proof of student identity/ correspondence from the OU with your PI number on and a 2nd class stamp for return of your card (or alternatively enclose 20p). Documents will be returned with your card

SUPPORT LINKS
Tick the box for further details about becoming a Student Support Link, Disabled Student Link or Student Academic Link (circle area of interest).

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