

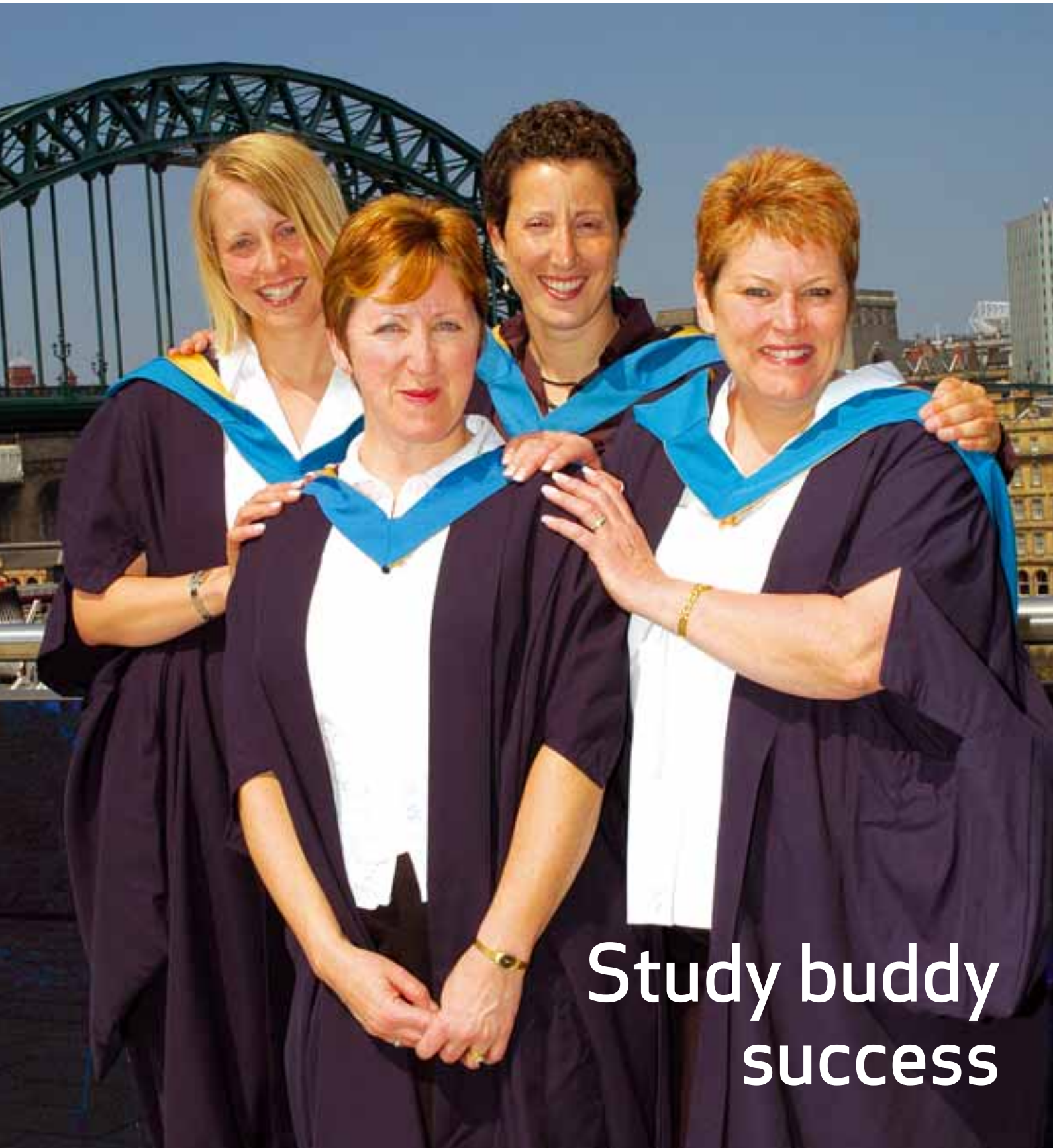
sesame



The Open University

Reaching the OU community worldwide

Autumn 2006 Issue 231



Study buddy
success

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?

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www.lighterlife.com



COMMENT

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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 reigns 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



Were astronomers right to demote Pluto?

Picture: Lunar and Planetary Laboratory, NASA

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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's 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 R13-Outreach@open.ac.uk or phone +44 (0)1342 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 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

More news online at
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More news online at
www.open.ac.uk/sesame

NEWS

OU top again

THE Open University has once again been awarded with 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 Swann – Director, Students for the university – said: "These results reconfirm the excellence of our teaching and of the personal

support we give to our students. Once again, Open University students have shown very high levels of satisfaction with their OU experience, and we are delighted that the university's overall satisfaction score of 4.5 – a top-ranking achievement in 2005 – has been maintained this year."

He added: "In reviewing the survey results, it is important to note that the

average age of OU students is 32, and so they tend to be experienced and demanding consumers."

You can see the full results by visiting the TQi website at www.tqi.ac.uk

Are you one of those people who is 'satisfied' with the experience offered by The Open University? Or maybe you're not! Email your thoughts to sesame@open.ac.uk

"The results reconfirm the excellence of our teaching and of the personal support we give to our students"

TMAs sold on eBay

OU STUDENTS have been informed that buying, selling 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 'K100 TMAs – 2005/6 course GOOD MARKS' and 'U212 Childhood Essays 75-90%'. Despite

many sellers warning buyers to 'observe the OU's 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 deplore. 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 copyright 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).

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, most things)".

The drama, co-written with his long-term collaborator Kim Fuller, is the 48-year-old's first professional writing since he finished 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"

Lenny is also planning to use material collected in the Joke Booth in his performances. "I'll be talking to people about what is distinctive about the humour of their particular region," he said. "Are Scousers

funnier than Cornwellians? 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 present 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.

Do you know any good jokes? If so email them to sesame@open.ac.uk Not only will you make us chuckle but we'll pass them on to Lenny



IN BRIEF

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.

The equipment will help scientists judge whether the surface environment is habitable for human explorers, or any other kind of life. The OU's instrument will form part of a UK bid to be included in ESA's Mars mission. OU Professor of Space Science, John Zarnecki, says it's not guaranteed that ESA will select the UK instrument, but he is confident because of the experience the UK has. The ExoMars mission was featured in **sesame** 229; you can also find out more on the ESA website: www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Aurora

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 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 Sharston, 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.

NEWS

More news online at
www.open.ac.uk/sesame

More news online at
www.open.ac.uk/sesame

NEWS

IN BRIEF

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)131 226 3851.

Awards for Janet Grant

JANET Grant, Professor of Education in Medicine at The Open University, has been awarded an honorary fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians for her services to medicine. She has also been awarded honorary membership of the Royal College of Radiologists. Professor Grant is director of the OU's Centre for Education in Medicine, which researches and develops 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 Yoseph Araya, 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 8 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.



The DfES is currently trying to come up with terms to describe part-time students

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', 'portfolio', '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.

Battle of the Geeks

TOP Gear's Richard Hammond is to host a 21st Century version of the TV cult gameshow, *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.

"The show demonstrates that bright, imaginative engineers and technologists can turn their knowledge and skills to solving strange problems in amazing places," said Ian Johnston. "And they do it with good humour and not too much shouting"

The show will be broadcast on BBC TWO, date and time to be confirmed.

Richard Hammond, famous for being a presenter on Top Gear, is to host Battle of the Geeks



PVC'S VIEW

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 study task 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 personal or professional advantage.

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

NEWS

More news online at
www.open.ac.uk/sesame

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 Denison 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 internal 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 £200 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 18 or over who lives in Scotland, and is earning £15,000 or less.

If you earn more than £15,000 a year you could receive up to £100 a year towards various computer courses. It is not a loan so the money does not have to be repaid. Further information is available on 0808 100 1090.

Not studying next year but still want to keep in touch?

For just £8 (£15 overseas) you can be added to **sesame's** list of subscribers. You will receive all copies published in 2007 and be invited to renew your subscription annually. Don't forget all OU students receive **sesame** free while they are studying. If you wish to subscribe just fill in the form below and return to: **sesame** subscriptions, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Please send me **sesame** in 2007. I enclose my subscription of £8/15
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Advertisement

Memory Like a Sieve?

A FAMOUS international publisher reports that there is a simple technique for acquiring a powerful memory which could pay you real dividends in both business and social advancement. It could work like magic to give you added poise, self-confidence and greater popularity.

According to this publisher, many people do not realise how much they could influence others simply by remembering accurately everything they see, hear or read. Whether in business, at social functions, or even in casual conversation with new acquaintances, there are ways in which you could dominate each situation simply by your ability to remember.

WHAT THIS FREE BOOKLET COULD SHOW YOU

How to remember names, faces, facts, and figures!

How to earn more — get a better job!

How to learn faster!

How to concentrate and overcome absent-mindedness!

How to increase your personal efficiency!

How to speak fluently without notes!

How to succeed in examinations!

For example, you need never forget another appointment — ever! You could learn names, faces, facts, figures and foreign languages faster than you ever thought possible. Whole books and plays may be indelibly imprinted on your memory after a single reading. You could be more successful in your studies and examinations. At parties and dinners you may never again be at a loss for appropriate words or entertaining stories. In fact, you could be more poised and self-confident in everything you say and do. These are only a few of the ways in which you could benefit by possessing a trained memory.

To acquaint all readers of *Sesame* with the easy-to-follow rules for developing skill in remembering, we, the publishers, have printed full details of this interesting home-study method in a fascinating booklet, "Adventures in Memory", sent free on request. Either phone 0800 298 7070 (free in the U.K.) or send an e-mail to 'SSM76E@bowdenhall.com'. Or simply post the Free Memory Booklet coupon on the right (no stamp is needed if posted in the U.K.).



Forget names, faces?

Free Memory Booklet

To: Memory and Concentration Studies,
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Please send me your free "Adventures in Memory" booklet.

NAME.....
(Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms)

ADDRESS.....

.....Postcode.....

POST TODAY OR CALL 0800 298 7070 FREE
OR E-mail: SSM76E@bowdenhall.com
with your name and postal address

No stamp needed in U.K.

LETTERS

No to OU degrees

I AM writing to you as a previous Open University student who graduated in May this year in Glasgow with a BA (Hons) degree. This is just to make you aware of a situation that I have come across which involves OU students being discriminated against and also undervalued as graduates.

I have been told by my bank, Royal Bank of Scotland, that I am not eligible to have a graduate account due to Open University degrees not being acceptable. A graduate account offers various preferential rates for graduates. I feel incredibly annoyed at this and feel that this is discrimination against OU students. I hope that you can make students aware of this and maybe provide me with any information on this subject.

Claire Reilly
Glasgow, Scotland

ANITA BALLANTYNE, MEDIA RELATIONS, THE ROYAL BANK OF SCOTLAND, REPLIES:

THE Royal Bank of Scotland’s Student and Graduate Royalties accounts are designed specifically to meet the banking and lifestyle needs of full-time students. Throughout their full-time study period, it is presumed that such students will be in a position to earn little or no income because of their course commitments. As such, applicants are required to present proof of their full-time student status in order to qualify. We accept such applications from students at a range of institutions and courses, including vocational ones such as nursing.

I appreciate the point that Ms Reilly raises given her recent graduation. However, the diversity and flexibility of The Open University courses obviously allow part-time distance learning for people, often over a longer period. Such part-time study could allow OU students to achieve their degree and work full-time concurrently should they choose. As such, on this part-time basis, students are not eligible for our Royalties Student and Graduate accounts.

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 those experienced by full-time students, we have a range of accounts, which may be suitable to their circumstances and are happy to discuss these with them.

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 the lesser mortals in the class ‘miles’ behind. I gather that they are here to get a qualification to subsequently teach in the UK.

With over a third of the class being nationals of Spain, I wondered 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 which becomes depressing to other students trying so hard to learn a foreign

language at over 50 years of age.

Mike Kelly
Kings Heath, Birmingham

RAQUEL MARDOMINGO, L204 COURSE TEAM CHAIR, REPLIES:

LIKE most OU courses, L204 *Viento en Popa* 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, in 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 OU, take care to monitor the repayments once your course has finished.

I received a small loan in 2001 and began paying it back in December 2004. To date, payments are still being taken from my monthly salary even though I have more than repayed the loan and associated interest.

The Student Loans Company blame the Inland Revenue for not supplying annual statements on time! I have been assured that eventually the company will calculate any overpayment and reimburse me but until they do I still have to make monthly payments (which I will then have to re-claim!).

So students beware, enjoy your course, keep on studying, but keep an (open) eye on the Student Loan Company.

Sue Heley
Dunstable, Bedfordshire

OUSBA directed **sesame** to the Student Loans Company, which offer loans separately from The Open University.

THE STUDENT LOANS COMPANY REPLIES:

THE collection of monies lent under the Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) scheme is conducted by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), formerly the Inland Revenue. The Student Loans Company (SLC) administers the ICR process in partnership with the 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 payslips which show this to be the case are presented to SLC to confirm the overpayment, SLC will immediately advise HMRC to stop repayments and will process and pay any refunds due, including any undue interest payment which may have been deducted.

Wherever possible, SLC will attempt to forecast when a loan balance is likely to be repaid in full and will write to borrowers advising that SLC believe they are nearing completion of repayment. It is a requirement that, before SLC stops repayments, the customer must contact SLC to confirm that calculations are correct. If they do not do this, repayments continue until SLC receives notification from HMRC of the deductions made in the tax year. This may cause overpayments but these will eventually be reconciled and refunded.

Because a student loan is not a commercial undertaking, it is not repaid in the way that a bank loan is. Several different options were fully examined when the ICR scheme was set up and the method using the existing tax collection processes of HMRC was determined to be the fairest, most efficient and most cost effective both for borrowers and for UK taxpayers, who provide the funding for student finance.

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 Cornwell
Holmer Green, Buckinghamshire

PAT MURPHY, SCIENCE PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, REPLIES:

THE Faculty of Science accepts that some of our 30 (but also 60) point courses are perhaps a little too much of a good thing! Mainly this reflects the enthusiasm of the authors for their subject and their desire to share this with students.

However, we have been assiduous in recent years in reining back authors to try to ensure that the average student can study the material in the time specified (i.e. 10 hours per point). Furthermore, this usually includes some ‘consolidation’ time. We believe that courses first presented during the past couple of years or so are not overloaded. Unfortunately, a few of those that have been around for a while probably do contain rather more material than they should. The Life-Cycle Review procedure is enabling us to identify and quantify such overloading, which will be put right as courses are revised or replaced.

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 TXR248 *Experiencing systems*, a course that is run at Nottingham University.

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

TESSA HOLROYDE, HEAD OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, REPLIES:

WE do advise students attending residential school at Nottingham (in the Residential Schools booklet and on the Residential Schools booking and information website) not to take their cars as there is very limited parking on campus, priority not unreasonably being

given to Nottingham staff.

OU students and staff are asked to park in the Hall of Residence car parks. It is true that last year there were a number of break-ins, hence our warning in the 2006 booklet, urging students not to leave valuables in their cars

In fact in 2006 we are aware of only one attempted car break-in at Nottingham University – from a school involving about 2,000 students and staff over a five-week period. Undoubtedly this is a result of Nottingham University and the local police working together to clamp down on this type of crime – this as a direct result of concerted efforts by staff in the OU East Midlands regional centre to resolve this issue through meetings with them in the months leading up to the residential school.

Nottingham is an important site for residential schools, offering specialist academic facilities which would be difficult to replicate elsewhere, so we prefer to continue to work with the Nottingham University authorities to overcome any future difficulties.

Readers inspired

WE had a number of letters from people who were inspired by the articles that appeared in the last issue of **sesame** (230), in particular the ‘Studying under fire in Iraq’ feature. Here are a couple of those letters.

ROCHELLE Jones’ article about her husband James, who is studying whilst serving as a soldier in the British army in southern Iraq, certainly made me re-evaluate my own studies.

Never again will I feel that a TMA is insurmountable, living in the pampered peacetime civilian conditions of York. My resolution – no more whining,

just get on with it!

The article also made me realise dramatically that the wives and partners of our soldiers endure a daily hell with each and every news bulletin. I read the weblog referred to in the article and certain sections of it must be among the most heart-wrenching things I’ve ever read.

I would like to wish James and all his colleagues a safe return from Iraq and both James and Rochelle all the best in their OU studies.

Richard Greaves
York

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

It was inspiring to read about Renée Myserson who is achieving her life long dream of studying medicine. Good luck to her in her studies.

The article written by Rochelle Jones about her soldier husband James in Iraq invoked a sense of pride. James Jones is doing a difficult and demanding job – an understatement surely if there ever was one. James is carrying out his duty and is making a real difference but, despite this, is finding time to study. James and Renée are true inspirations.

I eagerly await the next issue of **sesame** and, like Toby Boyd, the date for my TMA has drawn close and passed. Hope the Royal Mail has got it there in time.

Janet Smith
Cheshunt, Hertfordshire

Please send your letters to: Letters to the Editor, **sesame**, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. Fax: +44 (0)1908 652247 Email: T.L.Archbold@open.ac.uk Include your address and daytime telephone number. We reserve the right to edit letters. £20 book token for published **Star Letter** £10 book token for published **letters**

PEOPLE

PEOPLE

Glorious Gateshead

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

THE long journey to today's celebration has been a demanding one for the audience at Gateshead degree ceremony. "But today you shine in the delight and the pride that we all share with you," Will Swann, Director of Students, told them in his address. The graduates themselves almost certainly didn't need a reminder of the long journey, as the years of early mornings and late nights, exam nerves and anxious waits for results came to fruition in the magnificent Tyneside setting of The Sage in Gateshead.

With The Open University gaining a reputation as a leading academic authority on climate change, the OU in the North (which covers the north east and Cumbria) did its bit to reduce global warming by making its 2006 degree ceremony eco-friendly.

The region worked with green experts CarbonNeutral Newcastle to implement eco-friendly measures, which included encouraging graduates to use public transport to travel to the ceremony and making a financial contribution to CarbonNeutral Newcastle's local renewable energy projects.

Director of OU in the North, David Knight, said: "We hope these measures will drastically reduce the environmental footprint left by the degree ceremony."

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 local 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 Broomhill, 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 Association of University Teachers from 1985 to 2000 and serving on their National Executive for seven years. He was also geological and economic adviser to the National Union of Miners and advised

both the German and American Miners Union. He continues

his lifelong mission with the mining industry and The Open University as a visiting senior research fellow specialising in mining history. Mr Clifton, a staff tutor in the OU's 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 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 Rees.

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.

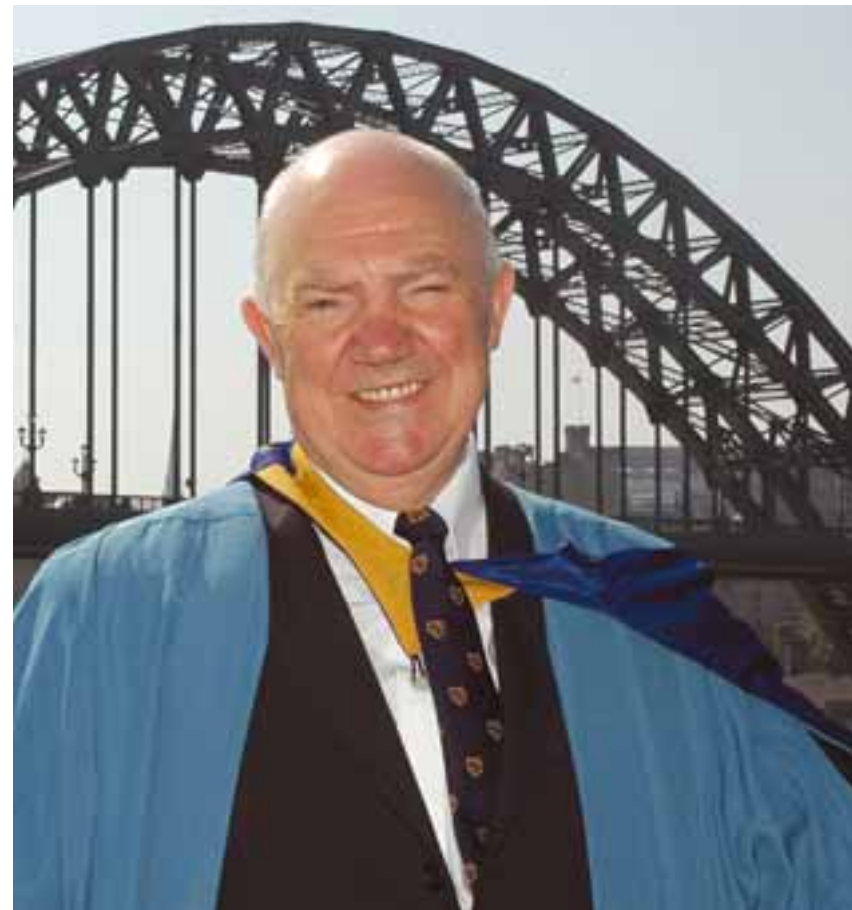
They all agreed that OU study had changed their lives. Sue Duffield, who started studying at 40 because she wanted a challenge, said: "I'm now more confident both personally and professionally, and am applying for jobs which I wouldn't have dreamt of applying for before. Life definitely begins at 40!"

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."



Dr Eric Wade was awarded for his services to the OU at the ceremony



Markus and his wife, Sarah, met at a presentation Sarah was giving at an OU open evening



RESEARCH

RESEARCH

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 reaching these shores?

"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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Dr Moore believes that children are already being taught ID in a number of independent trust schools within the UK

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PEOPLE

Have veg oil, will travel

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

ENVIRONMENTAL 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 1.9 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 knew 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 blag 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 was just as effective, according to Antony. You start the vehicle with a small amount of mineral diesel, he explains, then 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.

"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 using it.

Antony Berretti is pictured here holding his suggested alternative to diesel – vegetable oil



RESEARCH

RESEARCH

FIFTH COLUMN

'Planet' is just a word

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

"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 I'm 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 mass 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 12 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 2,500 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 disqualify Pluto.

Dr Dave Rothery, Chair of OU courses S296 *Planets: an introduction* and S283

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 1800s 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 'airbrushed out of school textbooks'. That's a stupid thing to say. It remains a very exciting field of research."

Professor John Zarnecki 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 been doing. It's not as if it's going to be bothered that we've called it something else."

Outdated study materials



MY box of books and support material for TUX870 *Capacities for managing development* arrived in April, a few weeks earlier than expected.

I am an education consultant for the Ministry of Education in Kathmandu, Nepal and worked for VSO for two years, so my OU course suits me completely. Thirty per cent of the Nepal education budget is provided by donor nations and I work in the ministry section responsible for liaison with them.

Better still, I had my new books for the two weeks of government curfew and Maoist blockade of the Kathmandu Valley, so I sat in the warm sunshine on our roof terrace and began my reading. Less than a mile away, on the ring road around the city, 250,000 people were flouting the shoot-to-kill curfew, and we heard their shouts and saw the smoke of burning tyres used as blockades.

What I hadn't allowed for when we left the UK in August 2005 was VHS and cassette tapes. Our laptop has our photos, our emails, our contacts, our music and all our documents, but there's no function on it that can deal with the outdated way that the OU sends audio and video materials.

Once the King stood down and Nepal returned quickly to normal I was able to buy a cheap radio cassette player made in China (£8) and have the VHS put on to DVD (£16). But surely it's time for the OU to move forward and either offer a choice or send material like this in CD-rom and DVD format?

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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PLUTO FACTS

Measurements

It is oval-shaped, only one-fifth the size of the Earth, with an eccentric orbit that occasionally takes it closer to the Sun than its nearest planetary neighbour Neptune.

How was it discovered?

Pluto was discovered on 13 March, 1930 by American Clyde Tombaugh at Arizona's Lowell Observatory when he took two photographs which revealed the movement of a celestial body and the existence of the hitherto mythical planet.

How did it get its name?

The planet was given its name by, somewhat improbably, 11-year-old English schoolgirl Venitia Burney. Inspired by her studies of mythology, she suggested naming the planet after the Roman god of the underworld to her grandfather, Falconer Madan. Madan ran the idea past his friend, leading astronomer Herbert Hall Turner, who then cabled the suggested name to his colleagues at Lowell and the rest, as they say, is history.

Venitia, now 87, recently told the BBC: "At my age, I've been largely indifferent to [the debate] – though I suppose I would prefer it to remain a planet."



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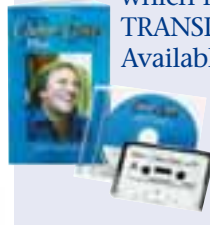
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CAREERS

OU AND I

Our new student columnist chronicles his highs and lows in OU and I...

It's been a good news, bad news kind of time for me recently. The good news was that I got a new job, starting imminently. And the bad news was, er, that I got a new job.

Actually, I shouldn't grumble. It's not just good news – it's great. After months scraping a precarious living as a freelance, full-time employment is just what the bank manager ordered.

Plus this looks like being a great job in itself: interesting, intellectually stimulating work in a pleasant environment for a worthwhile cause.

So why do I have mixed feelings?

For one thing, I'm not wild about the thought of returning to nine-to-five office life. It's going to be a real shock to the system. Freelancing has its financial challenges – I've spent weeks on end waiting for paying work to materialise, or for clients to pay for work I've done – but the great compensation is that one often has lots of spare time. Not any more. How am I going to survive without regular fixes of *Columbo*?

The other concern is, of course, my course. I'm reaching the final stage of studies for my first module, with the delightful prospect of my first ever ECA in September.

And in the longer term a full-time job is going to make everything that much harder. As a freelance, I've been spoilt. There's been the odd, mad 70-hour week rushing to complete a job, but in general I've been able to devote enough time to my academic work to stay comfortably ahead of the study calendar.

Now, though, I'll have to make much more of an effort to keep on top of things. I'll need organisation, time management, self-discipline – all those wonderful virtues that open learning helps to develop. Wonderful in the abstract, anyway. In practice, developing them is going to be a struggle.

As it is, I've already fallen behind in my studies. All the hassle of getting the job and organising a move to London has taken its toll. (Truth be told, the World Cup may also have been a factor. Ho hum.)

If you don't hear from me again, assume my brain has melted. The way I feel at the moment, it wouldn't be much of a loss.

Toby Boyd

Get clicking!

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

THE national careers team is currently developing a web-based vacancy service which will allow 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 now 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 ever-increasing numbers of employers," added student services manager, Wendy Woolery.

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



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Psychology is a valuable subject for any job that involves dealing with people, so you don't have to go down the professional psychology route – in fact, only a small proportion of

psychology graduates go on to practise as professional psychologists (15 per cent according to a survey conducted by the Learning and Teaching Support Network for Psychology). You can use your degree to work in areas such as healthcare, welfare, education, community services, local government, industry and commerce.

Whichever career path you choose to go down, you will need to demonstrate that you have the right mix of skills when applying for a particular job by drawing on examples from your studies, work experience and other areas of your life. The OU Careers Advisory Service can give you advice on how to go about it.

Visit www.open.ac.uk/careers or contact the careers adviser in your region.

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RESEARCH

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.

● 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. Plant 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



RESEARCH

CASE STUDY

Dr Merton Seigleman

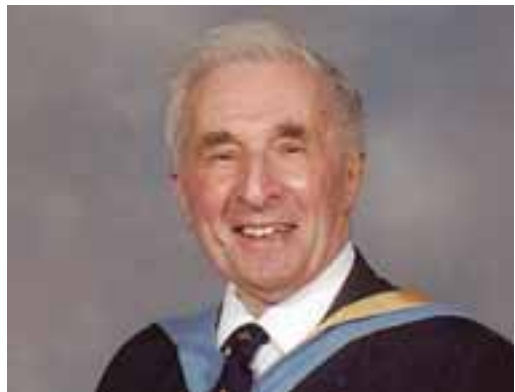
“AS you get older, you have to keep doing something to exercise your brain,” says Dr Merton Seigleman. “If you don’t, it would be quite easy to become a vegetable.”

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 Honours. And while he may be determined, he says the key to his success was the support and flexibility of the OU. “I want to praise The Open University,” he said. “Everyone has been so helpful in enabling me to complete my degree. The lesson to be learned from my ‘journey’ is that neither old age nor ill health need prove insurmountable.”

All Dr Seigleman’s hard work was rewarded when he received his degree in the summer, two weeks before his 83rd birthday.



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



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

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 Project Director Bill Bytheway. “In the past, people measured different social groups by generation, rather than chronological age, because the differences were clear-cut. But now people are

marginalised by chronological age. This is sometimes appropriate, but mostly it adds up to oppression, putting people down.”

The full results of the research are likely to be published at a major Help the Aged event in the summer.

To read the vignettes, which reveal everyday life is packed with age discrimination, or to contribute to the research by posting your own experiences of age discrimination, visit www.road.open.ac.uk

With no upper age limits for courses at The Open University, older people play an integral role in many courses – and, in turn, the university plays an important part in enriching older peoples’ lives, as these case studies prove...

CASE STUDY

Mabel Lainson

IT’S a few years since new OU student Mabel Lainson last picked up a textbook. 74 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!”

RESEARCH

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 Pugh – 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.

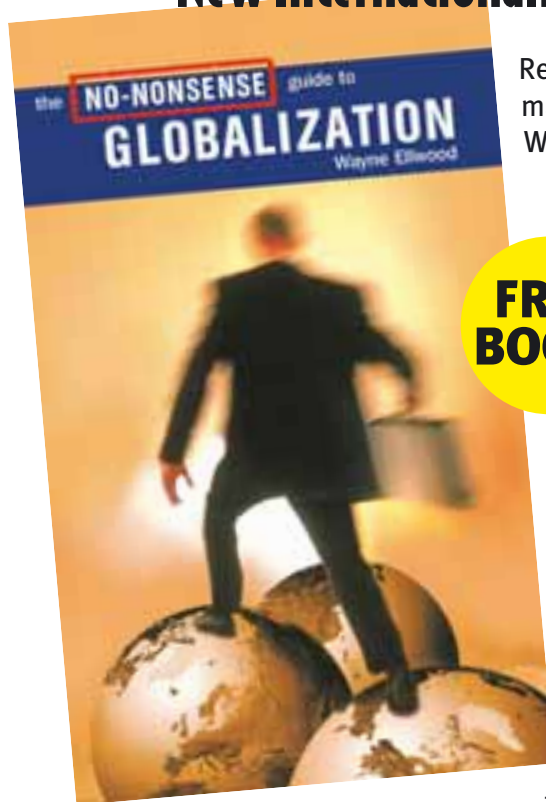
“It became clear that the history of management was such a large area that I should really work with the support of an organisation,” said Dr Brech, who lives in Esher, Surrey. “The OU was the only institution that encouraged me and the doctorate gave me a framework in which to do my research.”

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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PEOPLE

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 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 if I alone mentioned my colour I would possibly 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 communicate my colour. If this convoluted way of thinking seems extraordinary, I agree that it is, particularly for someone like me who has written a great deal about racialisation and who is comfortable addressing it in most settings. I learned that being online does not necessarily make people equal and remove barriers. It certainly does not remove the racialised dynamics that operate in society.

A harder lesson, and one that has to be addressed in course production, came from the second eTMA for A173. We were asked: 'With reference to a family history you have been investigating, demonstrate how you can use family history to understand the history of families more generally?' The alternative, in case students were not researching their family histories, was to use the census data presented in the course for one family and perhaps pair that



Ann's experiences as an OU student made her realise more needs to be done to recognise the processes of racialisation in courses

with other sources discussed in the course. I was immediately thrown into a state of anxiety because, if I was going to do an extended piece of family history, I wanted to trace a Caribbean family if possible. The difficulty was in knowing where to start when sources were limited.

A piece of serendipity helped me out of my anxious impasse. A family therapist friend mentioned the published genealogical account of a black family therapist from the USA, whom we had both met and sent me a copy of the paper. To my relief, Elaine Pinderhughes had given sufficient detail about her sources for me to find the data I needed using the Louisiana census online. I joined www.Ancestry.com and traced enough of her other sources to work back to slavery, and I obtained various texts and papers to contextualise black and white families in Louisiana.

The resulting TMA was, I thought, genuinely interesting. I learned something about black family history, albeit in a USA rather than UK context. But there were other lessons. I felt black students were put at a disadvantage. I learned very little from what is an otherwise excellent course about black families and nothing about those with histories in the UK or of Asian descent.

So my period as an OU student has been mixed. I am both delighted and sobered. However, I feel we need to do much more to recognise processes of racialisation in the courses we produce, to be more sensitive to the experiences and histories of others, and to be genuinely inclusive. To ignore racialisation is, paradoxically, to racialise in unhelpful ways.

"I feel we need to do much more to recognise processes of racialisation in the courses we produce"

PEOPLE

PEOPLE

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

As the Thai Airways stewardess hands me my menu for breakfast on the last leg of my flight to Bangkok, I think of how James and his fellow soldiers bounce around the back of a C130 Hercules, sat on the floor side by side with cargo boxes for backrest. On his last rest and recreation trip, in mid-July, he brought back with him vivid images of Iraq, of coalition force activities and stories that are both heart warming and alarming. As news of chaos and tragedy blast across TV screens all over the world, making Iraq seem like the new Wild West, James' stories and images are calming and humanising. On 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 pride. They suffered two casualties last May when two of his fellow soldiers were killed by an IED bomb while patrolling the streets of Basrah. He sees his fellow soldiers as heroes.

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 that protects them from doing acts that would be disrespectful to local customs and cultural sensibilities. 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 local Iraqi 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 who have 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 its 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' **sesame** feature has led to enquiries

from his fellow soldiers and several from his own squadron have registered or are planning to do so. Somehow to them, James' academic dreams have become an impetus to jumpstart their own.

W01 Giles 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.

"James is filled with gratitude towards the very supportive OU community"

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COURSES

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 of Troy through the recent film, and this is an opportunity for them to learn more about the legend."

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.

"Much of the 30-point course is built around Virgil's *Aeneid II*"

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 will 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.

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From medieval madrigals to The Darkness

EVERYTHING 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.



EQUIPPING STUDENTS IN LIFE SCIENCES

A NEW life sciences management course is aimed at students who want to influence the future direction of medical discovery and healthcare provision. BS811 *Strategic management in life sciences and health care* is a 60-point postgraduate course which forms part of the MBA (Life Sciences) programme, but can also be studied as a stand-alone course by any suitably qualified student.

It's designed for those involved in the purchase or supply of medicines or medical goods, in the public or private sectors, and sets out to equip students to challenge

conventional wisdom and make changes which could lead to more effective healthcare for patients.

Key skills

Areas covered include healthcare systems around the world, the role of pharmaceutical companies, regulation, finance, social policy, science and ethics. Students will develop key masters level skills including critical reading and analysis, the synthesis of complex ideas and the presentation of findings.

As with any MBA study, students must be aged 25 or over and have sufficient managerial experience. BS811 starts this November and registration closes 30 September so act now!

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.

SUPPORT

SUPPORT

Spread the costs

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

SO 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. There are various organisations that offer funding for postgraduate study including research councils such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Medical Research Council; government departments offer funding for postgraduate studies in a specific area; and charities and charitable trusts also offer funding.

Below is an overview of funding options to consider:

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships

A major potential source of funding for postgraduate research students at The Open University is Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. This is a part-government-funded initiative that gives students practical study opportunities and enables the company – and the OU – to put its name to valued research.

All projects – most of which are technology, science or business-based and typically include market research, production equipment processes or IT and computer systems – begin with the university and a company submitting a joint research proposal to the 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-IPMO@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 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.

Competition 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 DPhil 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-accounts/graduate-service/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 on +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 citizens 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 money 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 Studentships

OU studentships 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 studentships 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.thes.co.uk (subscribe to the *Times Higher Education Supplement's* database of funding opportunities)

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TRAVEL

Step back in time

Focus
on...
history

Next time you're planning a day trip, short break or holiday, keep the following ideas in mind to aid your history studies

IT'S not too long before all the ghosts and ghoulies 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 15 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

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 tastebuds – 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 also a must 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.visitthecityofyork.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 thirst 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 Trevi Fountain, part of the Vergine aqueduct built by Agrippa is also a must visit.

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 website at www.romaturismo.com for more information or call +39 06 488991.



competition

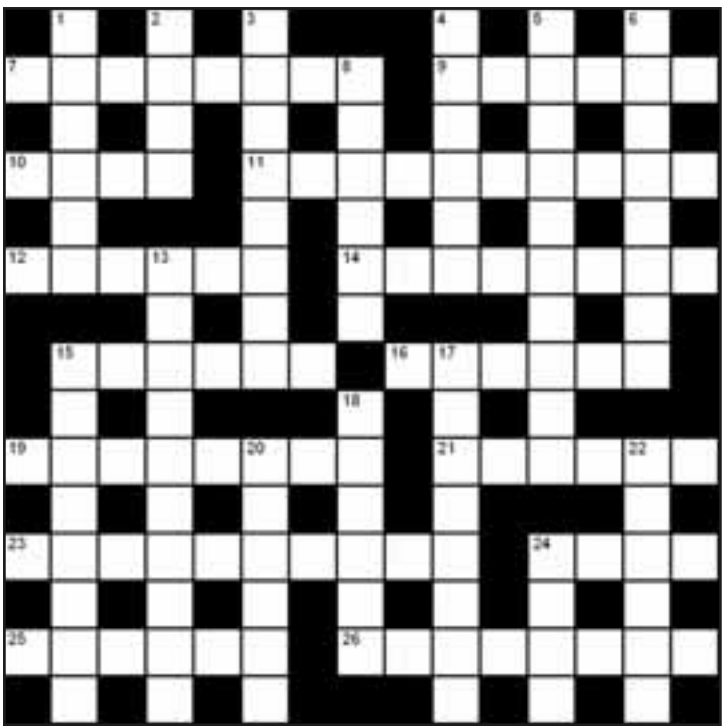
sesame crossword competition

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

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 as 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)
19. ...stock-farmer managed to get her into business (8)
21. Live broadcast includes the Spanish medieval instrument (6)
23. Sheridan's woman so upset, being out of place (10)
24. Bridge closure? (4)
25. Strike out when allowed to plunge into the river (6)
26. Second volume came first? That's dotty! (8)

Down

1. Get into trouble over a glass of sherry (6)
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)
8. Suppress activity in court (6)
13. This contains material for a great many stories (10)
15. Salt needed for cockles and mussels, right? (8)
17. Being installed in office, supplied capital (8)
18. Works in college (6)
20. Pulled in for a service? (6)
22. Well-heeled or well-oiled? Such a question is unfair (6)
24. Writer heard to be full of bitter irony (4)

SESAME AUTUMN CROSSWORD ENTRY FORM

Send your entry with the completed coupon to:
Cullen Crosswords, 19 Cyncoed Place, Cardiff, CF23 6SG
Closing date 20 October 2006. Only one entry per person.

Name: _____
Address: _____
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Summer crossword winners

The winner of our summer crossword was Frances O'Farrell from Croydon who wins £75 plus a copy of the *Chambers Dictionary*. The two runners-up were Anne Braithwaite from North Yorkshire and Mrs T. Alexander from Hertfordshire who each receive a copy

of the *Chambers Dictionary*.

Answers – Across: 1 Ossa, 4 Sabian, 9 Open University, 11 Atlantean, 12 Odeum, 13 Ghosts, 15 Shortage, 17 Culloden, 18 Achebe, 21 Drama, 22 Evaporate,

24 The white rabbit, 25 Ararat, 26 Eyes

Answers – Down: 2 Spurn, 3 Asides, 4 Slean dhu, 5 Bishopric, 6 As the case may be, 7 Gobang, 8 Hell for leather, 10 Smee, 14 Trojan war, 16 Benedict, 17 Cedi, 19 Ejecta, 20 Manege, 23 Osage

OU STUDENT

Edited by

R. Rosenthal

The official publication of the Open University Students Association

Rebecca Rosenthal

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 regional network enables us to ensure that students are in a position of support and guidance for other students, and able to channel the issues to those able to raise them directly with the university. In addition to our representative role we work to provide students with a social environment and space through our large 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.

Delegates voting at OUSA Conference



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: ousao8@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 desktop: OU > OUSA > OUSA Live > OUSA Thanks to Chancellor. OUSA will be looking for a way to present the comments from students to Baroness Boothroyd, but in the meantime, why not pop along to the conference and be part of the growing number of students recording their thanks? Maybe Betty Boothroyd made an impact on you at your Graduation Ceremony, or her work has inspired you? Alternatively, comments can be sent in by letter or email to the OUSA mailbox.

Semesterisation

THE university is currently looking at their course presentation patterns 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.

Representative profile... Executive Committee Member

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 Petrina Douglas, Executive Committee Member for the North. Petrina 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 reactivate. 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.

NUS-OUSA 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-OUSA 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 valid national student ID offering 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- OUSA 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 2422458 (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.

Inspirational stories

In the last edition of *OU Student*, we asked you to share some of your inspirational stories with our readers. Here are just a few from the selection that you sent on to us...

Maureen Coller, born in 1936, first discovered her love of reading when her family were bombed out of their home and they went to live in a top flat with her grandparents. After a varied career in teaching and working with children, 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 Dinsdale found that her Open University degree helped her to take on new challenges. "I completed my final year with the OU in 2003 and graduated 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 TMAs 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 found that his aspiration to attend university was dashed 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 have 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! In a few months time I hope to complete my current OU course leading to an honours degree, an encouragement to further study. The world feels a great deal richer... and easier to understand."

After spending most of her career in administration, **Moirá Reid** decided that she wanted to become a nurse and went onto the employment bank of the hospital as an auxiliary. It was a huge drop in pay which, as a single parent with two growing girls, made for difficult times. Even though Moira was able to progress in her career, she still wanted to know more. The prospect of a student nurse bursary was daunting, and seemed impossible. "I applied for a place on the OU Student Nurse Training Programme, where I could maintain my level of income as an HCA." Moira was invited to attend an interview: "I felt scared, excited, worried, too old to train and all of this combined with an underlying fear of failure. But putting on my uniform for the first day was the equivalent to me of that longed for designer outfit. I felt so proud; I had arrived. My first year went by in a whirl of TMAs (apparently that meant Tutor Marked Assignments – but my definition was Torture Me Again!), then came the end of year exam, which was a daunting task in itself. I am still learning to take responsibility for my own learning, a huge part of any OU course, and rely greatly on family, friends and colleagues for motivation and encouragement, which I get without exception.

Whirlwind tour!

AFTER promising my son that he could count on his mum not having to rush off to meetings during August, the last week of July provided me with my last opportunity for an exhausting, whirlwind visit to four of the OU Residential Schools. It provided me with an opportunity not only to show support for the valuable work undertaken by our Representatives, but also to meet with students and talk to them about their experiences of studying with the OU and to listen to their inspiring stories of how that has often influenced their lives.

Each Residential School has its own challenges in terms of geographical set up of the campuses used, but our Representatives have been doing a fantastic job of making students feel welcome, providing them with an opportunity to take away a momentum of their week at an OU Residential School, co-ordinating some of the evening activities, raising valuable funds for our charity and making sure that students realise that socialising with other students is also an important aspect of the Residential School experience.



Vice-Chancellor, OUSA Reps Jane and Roz and South West Regional Director at Bath Residential School

A warm hello and thank you to all of the students we all met whilst on our visits, to the representatives who looked after us so well and to the university for accommodating us, often at short notice.

REBECCA ROSENTHAL
OUSA PRESIDENT

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 on-going 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 and the possible discrepancies 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 its infancy 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 are able to contribute to the wider consultations in future.

OUSA Conference 2007

OUSA Conference 2007 will be in Warwick and takes places 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 *OU Student*.

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 OUSET 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

Representative 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 Umist and Stirling – 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 Stirling 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 students 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 experience and encourages students to mix with each other. The marketing that we do at the Residential Schools gives students a chance to take away a souvenir, something they can keep for the future as a reminder of their week away.

Most OUSA Residential School Representatives are students who have enjoyed their own Residential School so much that they want to come back and put something back in.

Lesley marketing at Durham Residential School with fellow OUSA rep



Dates for your diary

If you would like to see your event advertised here, please contact the OUSA Office. Deadline for the next issue of *OU Student* is Monday 16 October.

Central Events

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

Open University Travel & Study Society Brighton Revision Weekends – *any course can be catered 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@fdsnorthern.com

Bournemouth & Poole Branch First Thursday of every month, 8.30pm, Grasshopper Pub, Poole Road, Lower Parkstone, Poole. Details Neil Walkling: neil.walkling@ntlworld.com Web: www.bournepooleousa.co.uk

Brighton, Hove & Lewes Branch First Monday of every month, 7.30pm, Cricketers Pub, Black Lion Street, Brighton. Details Colin: colin.piper2@virgin.net

Bristol Branch Meets twice monthly, informally in a pub. Details: Kate: 0117 955 1992. Web: www.ousabristol.org.uk

Cheltenham Branch Second Wednesday of every month, 8.30pm, The Somerset Arms, Leckhampton. Details Alli: Alli12177@aol.com

Chippenham Branch Second Monday of every month, 7.30pm, Pheasant Public House, Chippenham (corner of A4 & Hungerdown Lane). Details Pauline Lock: paulinelen@pau-lin.freemove.co.uk

Exeter Branch Third Wednesday of every month, 7.30pm, Mill-on-the-Exe, Exeter. Details Margaret: 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.

Guildford Branch Thursday 28 September, 8pm. Laser Quest and Ten Pin Bowling, the Big Apple, Woking. Details: www.guildfordousa.org

Haverfordwest Branch First Thursday of every month, 7.30pm, Haverfordwest Cricket Club, Dale Road, Haverfordwest, Pems. Details Nikki: nsc54@student.open.ac.uk

Huddersfield Branch Third Wednesday of every month, 7pm, Huddersfield University, Howard Wilson Building, Room HWG03. Details Helen: hb2598@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: smr456@student.open.ac.uk

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

Manchester Branch Second Tuesday of every month, 7.30pm, Lass O'Gowire, Charles Street, Manchester. Details Alan: 0161 292 7209 or al.kinsey@tiscali.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: rc3354@student.open.ac.uk Web: www.ousa-newbury.rsmithers.net

Northampton Branch Second Wednesday of every month, 8.30pm, The Fish, Fish Street, Northampton. Details Emily: 07707 057681 or ea2332@student.open.ac.uk

Oldham Branch Third Saturday of every month, 2.30pm, Toby Carvery (Chadderton Park Inn) on Broadway, Oldham. Families (including children) welcome. Details: Michael: 07786 924758.

Oxford, Abingdon & Witney Branch Fourth Thursday of every month, 8pm, Rosie O'Grady's, Park End Street, Oxford. Details Tracey: ta85@student.open.ac.uk Web: www.ousa-oxford.org.uk

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

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

Rochdale Branch Last Thursday of every month, 7.30pm, Millers, Hollingworth Lake, Littlebrough, Details Gill: gill@kilshaw94@freemove.co.uk

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

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

St Helens Branch First Wednesday of every month, 8pm, Charlon Brasserie, 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@freerf.freemove.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: ousa@student.open.ac.uk OUSA website: www.ousa.org.uk

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☐

OUSET DONATION

OUSET, The Open University Students Educational Trust, is a registered charity, administered by OUSA, and is designed to help Open University students in financial need. Its funds are almost entirely generated by donations and fundraising activities of fellow students. Any donation is welcome.

☐

REPRESENTATIVES ON CENTRAL COMMITTEES

If you are interested in representing your fellow students on Open University central committees and boards, please tick the box.

☐

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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

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