



International
Studies
in action
p.13

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COMMENT

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WHEN THE HEAT IS ON

THE long and, it is to be hoped, hot days of summer are not, for many OU students, their most productive time. School holidays, family holidays and a nationwide slowing down, not to mention the distraction of major sporting events, can make it a season more conducive to partying and sunbathing, than to study. But OU students can and do carry on in the most difficult circumstances – although few can be as difficult as those of James Jones, featured in this issue pages 24-25, who’s studying DD100 *An Introduction to the social sciences: understanding social change* while serving as a soldier in Iraq. James, like many students, is driven by intellectual curiosity. Another example of the persistence of OU students is Philip Sully (pages 8-9), who holds the record for the most OU courses ever completed by one individual – achieved, in part, thanks to a highly developed time management system.

The good news is that most students don’t have to be as determined as James or as organised as Philip to make it through their course; and it is likely that over the summer your carefully planned schedule will slip, if it hasn’t already. Perfectionism can be the enemy of progress (see page 32): the trick is to carry on, skimming and skipping if that’s what it takes, in the knowledge that you are following in the footsteps of thousands upon thousands of students who have succeeded.

This is my final column as editor of **sesame**, as I will be leaving The Open University for a new life abroad. It has been a privilege to get to know so many members of this unique student body. A warm thank you to all readers, especially those who have been in touch with their comments and their experiences, and success to all of you in your studies.

Yvonne Cook, Editor



Summer holidays can be a productive time to study

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IN BRIEF

New OUSA President

REBECCA Rosenthal was elected as the new President of the Open University Students Association (OUSA) at the 2006 OUSA Conference which took place on 7-9 April at Walton Hall. Rebecca, who was previously OUSA's Vice-President, Education, steps into the shoes of outgoing President Joan Jones, who has come to the end of her two-year term of office. For more on the 2006 OUSA Conference go to pages 37-39.

Disability equality

THE university needs your help to promote disability equality. It is seeking comments on its draft Disability Equality Scheme available on its website www.open.ac.uk/equalopportunities For details of how to get involved turn to page 34.

Honour for Astronomy's Barrie Jones

PROFESSOR Barrie Jones of The Open University's Department of Physics and Astronomy has become the first winner of the new David Wyn-Williams prize for Services to Astrobiology in the UK. Astrobiology is the study of life in the universe, and Professor Jones' research group has used computer models to identify planets most likely to harbour life. His undergraduate textbook *Life in the Solar System and Beyond* was hailed by a reviewer as 'probably the best bit of pedagogy on [astrobiology] in the solar system'. Professor Jones led the production of the astrobiology content of S103 *Discovering science*, contributed to S283 *An Introduction to Astrobiology* and helped found the OU's Interdisciplinary Centre for Astrobiology.

Stanley Collings Maths Prize

GRAHAM Saxby, a student in the West Midlands region, has won the 2005 Stanley Collings Prize, awarded for constructing an intriguing mathematical problem, task or challenge and providing a solution. Graham was studying MST121 *Using mathematics* and MS221 *Exploring mathematics* when he entered for the prize, which is open to any student on a maths or computing course and is worth £100. The prize is named after Stanley Collings, a member of the original OU Mathematics faculty and an inveterate setter of mathematical problems.

NEWS

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

The other World Cup

GIRLS from Amberfield School near Ipswich won the RoboCupJunior UK finals held at Cranfield University on 29 March, with their robot dancing performance *The Flight of the Phantom Phoenixes*.

The team, coached by Nicky Hughes, an OU Associate Lecturer in Information Technology, is representing the UK in Primary Robodance in the robot equivalent of the World Cup, Robocup 2006, held in Bremen, Germany in June. Other teams will compete at RoboSoccer and RoboRescue. See www.robocup.org for more details. For more about the OU's Robotics Outreach Group see <http://robots.open.ac.uk>



Girls from Amberfield School will take part in the World Cup – robot style – in Germany

Are we fair to all?

THE OU is seeking the views of students to help assess the impact of OU policies and decisions on people from different racial groups.

The consultation is open to all OU 'stakeholders' including alumni, students, staff, ex-staff and anyone working in partnership with the university and the general public, and is part of the university's drive to promote equality of opportunity.

Will Swann, Director, Students said: "The OU is a large institution, with many different people taking decisions all the time. Equality impact assessment ensures that staff across the whole organisation better understand how the decisions they make are likely to affect different groups of people".

The university, like all universities and public bodies, is legally required to consider the effect that policy

decisions are having or may have on different racial groups, and to promote race equality. The university's Policy Officer for Equality and Diversity, Tony O'Shea, said: "We welcome this and have already identified which of our policies are most relevant to the race duty, and are improving our understanding of how some decisions could affect some groups negatively.

"Now we are taking the positive steps of publishing our findings to date in line with the principle of openness that the legislation encourages, and requesting views from students and the wider public to inform future impact assessment work".

The consultation, available by post and on the Equal Opportunities website until 31 July 2006, will help shape the university's next race equality strategy. For details see www.open.ac.uk/equalopportunities If you do not have access to the web, you can request an information brochure by post: email pdg-eo@open.ac.uk or telephone +44 (0)1908 652566. You can request information in large print or another format that meets your needs.



All OU stakeholders are being consulted about how university policy impacts on different racial groups

Adult Learners' Week 2006

FOUR Open University students were presented with an Individual Learner Award by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) during Adult Learners' Week in May. Christopher Stone, 49, from Wellington, Somerset, who left school with no qualifications, is studying for a maths degree despite being diagnosed with testicular cancer. A single mum on benefits, Jacqui

Veazey, 57, of Brighton, East Sussex, has completed a BA and MA with the OU and is about to embark on a PhD. As a serving prisoner, Michael, 40, has studied for a Masters degree and has now become a peer tutor to other students while in prison. Denise Jenkins, 47, from Stockton-on-Tees, studied while caring for her mother – for more on her story see 'Students who care' on page 14.

Even more open

THE Open University is to join the growing 'open content' movement and become the first UK university to make a selection of its learning materials available free of charge via the internet.

During the first phase of the initiative, which launches in October 2006, the university will select and make available educational resources at all study levels from access to postgraduate and from a full range of subject areas.

But although it will be possible to access selected OU course materials for free, it will still be necessary to register for an OU course if you want to have the support of an OU tutor or to sit exams and gain qualifications.

The OU Open Content initiative is supported by a grant of \$4.45 million from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The Foundation, which promotes the free availability of information on the web, supported a well-publicised open content move by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). But the OU is planning to go a step further

than MIT and add learning tools as well as course content.

There will be one site primarily for learners, where material with suggested learning pathways will be offered. A second site will be mainly for other course creators.

The Vice-Chancellor of The Open University, Professor Brenda Gourley said The Open University will be the first in the UK to offer Open Content materials under a so-called Creative Commons licence, which allows much freer use of the material than the traditional copyright model. "The philosophy of open access and sharing knowledge is a wonderful fit with the founding principles of The Open University and with the university's very strong commitment to opening up educational access and widening participation," she said.

"The university will be developing forms of open content e-learning which will reach less experienced learners and, we hope, encourage an appetite for further learning." For more information about the Open Content initiative go to <http://oci.open.ac.uk/>

New features for Screensaver

THE OU Life Screensaver keeps more than 32,000 Open University students, alumni and staff up to date with the latest university news and services. And thanks to their feedback, it's just got even more user-friendly.

A new desktop viewer allows screensaver users to click through from weblinks on the screensaver slides directly to the websites featured. What's more, users can send emails to those who 'own' the slide, and get access to related electronic documents and any audio files that the OU might make available in the future.

More relevant

And the screensaver will be more relevant to users' interests, thanks to a new system which tailors the slides shown to specific groups such as students only, or users in only one region.

If you don't already have the screensaver, you can download it at www.open.ac.uk/oulifescscreensaver/ If you have any technical queries we've added a new guide to help you – click on 'troubleshooting'.

We're always open to new ideas. If there are any features you would like to see added to the screensaver, or any slides you'd like us to run, drop an email the OU Life Screensaver team at Oulifescscreensaver@open.ac.uk.

Action suspended

THE Open University is working 'flat out' to try and minimise the delay in issuing course results, in the wake of the university lecturers' pay dispute.

Industrial action affecting all the country's universities was suspended following a meeting between employers and trades union representatives on 6 June. But the dispute, which began in March, has lead to a significant number of assignments remaining ungraded and delayed the processing of exam results due on 22 June.

A pay deal agreed at the 6 June meeting now has to be put to a ballot of members of the newly formed University and College Union representing university staff.

Will Swann, the OU's Director, Students, said: "I am absolutely delighted that action has been suspended and I very much hope that the ballot will result in an acceptance of the pay offer.

"This will allow us to recover as quickly as we possibly can, returning all the assessments which are awaiting grading and rapidly processing exams from courses that ended in April.

"We are working flat out to clear the backlog. There will be some delay in some course results, but we will be doing everything in our power to keep it to a minimum."

Students awaiting TMA or exam results can keep track of the latest situation via Studenthome on the internet. For specific enquiries they can email assessment-temporary@open.ac.uk or ring +44 (0)1908 655500.

PVC’S VIEW

Course ideas

THE Open University is currently developing its new Curriculum and Awards strategy for 2006 onwards, and as always is keen to listen to students’ concerns – whether it be the introduction of new courses, suggestions as to how the OU uses its curriculum in an international context, or how as a university we use research and scholarship to inform and underpin curriculum development.

Over the years students have held strong views about how the curriculum should develop. For example, the university introduced a creative writing course and we are now planning a new Level 3 course in this area. We are developing new options and responding to demand for health sciences and sports studies programmes.

Points of view

Students’ views certainly form an important element in setting priorities for the curriculum. Rebecca Rosenthal, President of the Open University Students Association (OUSA), has a strong understanding of curriculum and awards issues. She has contributed to a range of discussions about future directions and ‘scenarios’ and attended scenario planning workshops, which have been held throughout the university over the past few months. The message from these workshops is that we need to prepare for alternative futures and be flexible and responsive enough to survive in all of them.

But how will this affect a new Curriculum and Awards strategy? We want to refashion our postgraduate programmes for UK and international students and enhance our work-related learning pathways. In addition, we want to introduce more wide-ranging ICT courses and re-make some major Level 1 courses. We are also looking at developing the next generation of Openings courses.

We will continue to provide a broad and innovative curriculum. We will be concentrating on speeding up course production and looking closely at how new technologies can extend student choice. And in all this work, we will continue to rely on student feedback and ideas.

Linda Jones, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, (Curriculum and Awards)

NEWS

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NEWS

Earlier exam resits

THE university has made changes to the undergraduate examination calendar which will mean undergraduate students who need to resit their examinations will no longer need to wait a year to do so.

The changes will benefit several thousand students who are unable, for reasons outside their control, to take their exam in October, or who are offered the chance to resit.

Exams in April

Until now these groups of students were required to wait until the following October for the next examination opportunity; now most will be able to sit their exam in April, and get their course results in late June. April resits will be the norm on most undergraduate courses from this year.

However, these changes also mean the ‘special’ examination period in November is being abolished. This period was designed to allow students who missed their October exam through some cause such as illness to take it in November instead of having to wait a year to resit. These students will now sit their exam in April.

The university says this is a rationalisation of the examination pattern, as ‘special’ examinations have never been available for the increasing number of students on programmes of study which do not follow the

February to October presentation pattern – such as those on postgraduate courses and courses with more than one presentation a year.

These changes come in response to widespread student demand for earlier resit opportunities, and were made by the university’s Assessment Policy Committee, said a Student Services representative, who added: “In taking this decision the Committee appreciated that some students who are unable to take the October examination and who may previously have qualified to take the November ‘special’ examination may feel disadvantaged by the change; however, the decision was taken after careful consideration and in the light of the need to make the most efficient use of university resources.

Multiple exam periods

“Another reason for the change is to rationalise the growing number of examination periods, arising from the increasing multiplicity of course presentation patterns.”

More detailed information about the pattern of examination provision can be found on the Assessment website, www.open.ac.uk/assessment. This includes details of all the exam periods for 2006. Alternatively students with queries about examination provision can contact their regional centre.

“Now most will be able to sit their exam in April”

Who deserves an honour?

SERVICES to the university? Services to the educationally underprivileged? Work in areas of special educational concern to the university? Academic and scholarly distinction? Public services? Services to the Arts and Sciences? Exceptional contribution to education and culture of society? Who springs into your mind? We’d really like to know!

Like most other UK universities, the OU awards honorary degrees to people who have made a significant and particular contribution to society. All members of the university – and that includes all our currently registered students – are eligible and encouraged to make nominations.

“We all have our own ‘world view’ and by drawing on a large a pool of proposers from The Open University community, the university’s honorary degrees committee hopes to generate nominations that represent the broadest possible spectrum,” says Tony Barker, who is secretary to the honorary degrees committee, which draws up a list of nominations for the approval of the university’s academic governing body, Senate.

“So whether you are spending your holidays this year relaxing on the beach or catching up on writing your TMAs, do consider taking a little while to let your mind roam around thinking about who you would nominate.”

Nomination forms and details of those who have received honorary awards previously are available from Jane FitzGerald. Tel: +44 (0)1908 652903 or email Jane at: j.fitzgerald@open.ac.uk. The closing date is Friday 29 September.

More money available for more students

STUDENTS in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who qualify for a financial award could receive more money than ever before, and those who weren’t previously eligible may be now – thanks to significant increases in funding for part-time undergraduate students.

“Each year over 20,000 OU students receive a financial award to help them achieve their study goals,” said Jake Yeo, the OU’s Senior Assistant Registrar, Fees and Financial Support.

“This year we are hoping to support even more students, due to significantly more funding being available for undergraduate part-time study. This is great news, particularly at a time when most other English universities are nearly trebling their fees,” he said. If you haven’t received a financial award before, you may be entitled to one now – even if you’re working while studying. Below is an outline of what is now available in your area of the UK. More details are available from the website www.open.ac.uk/financialsupport Alternatively, if you live in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland please see the enclosed leaflet with this issue of **sesame**.

England and Northern Ireland

If you are living in England or Northern Ireland you may qualify for up to £1,125 towards your OU course fees in 2006/07, depending on household income and the number of courses you are studying. You could also receive £250 towards study costs, such as travel to tutorials, childcare and books. Try the ready reckoner on the OU’s financial support website to find out quickly and easily if you are eligible. If a computer is required for your course, the OU may be able to help you buy one and provide funds to access the internet and purchase software.

New fees support is also available for students in England with higher household incomes. You can now receive up to an extra £100 towards your fees if your household income is between £15,345 and £25,645 (more if you have a dependent partner or children). So, for example, if you have a partner and two children and a household income of £23,000, you could receive up to £579 (which includes the additional £100) towards a 60-point course fee and £250 towards study expenses.

Additional support is also available if you are studying a higher fee course (above the government fee grant level of £750); to help you finish your qualification if your studies have taken you beyond the six-year study limit set for government funding; or if you need to re-train in your career by taking a second degree.

And further good news is that even if you have already registered and paid for courses starting in 2006/07, you can still apply for financial support.

Some of this new funding is limited, so we’ll be allocating it on a first-come, first-served basis.

Scotland

One in five Open University students in Scotland receives a financial award. Getting a financial award gives you a free place on any

undergraduate OU course, and you may also get some help towards study-related costs. You can get a financial award if your household income is less than £15,345 or if you are on certain benefits. To find out if you qualify visit www3.open.ac.uk/course/finance/scotland/ If you don’t qualify for a financial award you may be able to benefit from Individual Learning Accounts which The Open University in Scotland now accepts in part payment for the majority of OU courses. If your personal income is £15,000 or less, or you are on certain benefits, you can claim up to £200 a year towards the cost of your OU studies. You can find out more about the ILA scheme and how to benefit from it as an OU student at www.openuniversity.co.uk/scottishfinance

Wales

If you are living in Wales you may qualify for all or part of your OU course fees and/or study expenses if your household income is below £25,645 (more if you have a dependent partner or children). In addition to fee support of up to £885, you may be entitled to a learning grant of up to £1,000 to help you meet the costs of studying.

Visit our website www.open.ac.uk/financialsupport or call us on +44 (0)1908 653411 to see what support you could receive.

A variety of awards are available depending on household income



PEOPLE

PEOPLE

The OU addict

*Philip Sully has completed more courses than any other student in OU History. **Sheila Forman** tries to discover why and how*

ON first impression Philip Sully appears quite normal. Happily married to wife Janet for nearly 40 years, with two grown-up children, and running his own company – Method Solutions Limited – trading very successfully in consultancy and training solutions, no one would suspect that he suffers from a compulsive disorder. But he is the first to admit that he is, in fact, a “compulsive studier”.

Philip (60), who lives in Crawley in West Sussex, made history in April this year when he became the first Open University student to have an OU building named after him. The Philip Sully Building, at the OU’s Milton Keynes campus, was officially opened by OU Chancellor Baroness Boothroyd.

What could be more fitting than to name one of the OU’s three main Student Services buildings after the student who has completed more courses than any other

student in the history of the OU – 61 to date?

Philip said he was surprised that the OU wanted to name a building after him. “During my OU career I have met many people – some on their third OU degree – who have owned up to being compulsive studiers like myself,” he said. “I really had no idea that there were no other folk who had taken more courses than me. I am not a publicity-seeking type of person, but it was a great honour and I was delighted to accept. My wife thought I was pulling her leg when I told her. She has been very supportive throughout my studies, especially in the early days.”

Time-box secret

Along the way Philip has achieved a Graduate Diploma in Spanish, BSc Hons in Natural Sciences, BA Hons in Humanities, MSc in Industrial Application of Computers, Postgraduate Diploma in Computing for Commerce and Industry and a Diploma in

Information Technology. He has paid for all his courses himself apart from his MSc, which was partly funded by Panasonic, his employer at the time.

The first thing Philip Sully said to me as I arrived in his home town to interview him was that he had set aside a one hour “time-box” for the interview. The significance of this statement became clearer as the hour progressed.

He left school with a few O levels and it came as a bit of a shock to find out that he just couldn’t wait to leave. “I hated it,” said Philip. “But as soon as I left I did my Higher National Diploma in Business Administration and haven’t stopped studying since.

“Conventional university was not really an option for me. All that form-filling and references to find, I just couldn’t be bothered and anyway I wanted to work and travel.”

He started his OU studies in 1973 with the Science foundation course S100. He was surprised at the high quality of the OU course material – “the home experiment kit that came with the course was just superb.” In 1975 he took the Systems Behaviour course. “It was a much wider course than you would get in conventional university”.

No degree ceremony

During the early part of his OU career, while working for Unipart Systems, he got posted to Belgium. This was in the days before the OU’s special scheme for students in that country, so he had to take his exams at the British Council. It was during this time that his eldest son Gregory was born.

Despite having gained several OU degrees he has never attended a degree ceremony. “I never really had the time,” he said. “They were always on a weekend and I just never managed to time-box one in. Also, I’m not really one for dressing up.”

He claims he is not in it to get degrees. “That is just a label that the OU puts on the courses that I have done. I am just interested in continuing education. However, I’m not one of these people that spend 20 hours a week studying. My time-box for study is eight to 10 hours a week max.”

Not surprisingly, Philip puts his study

success down to rigid time-management. “It is the most important factor in doing a course,” he said. However, he is not willing to share his time-boxing secrets with the rest of the OU community quite yet, as he is planning to write a book on the subject.

Although he has never failed a course he did once have to drop out of one. He explains: “I had just started a new job as project manager with Canadian Pacific and there was a phenomenal amount of travel involved which I had not time-boxed in, so something had to go.” He has also had a couple of resits for similar reasons.

Despite work and study commitments Philip holds a private pilot’s licence and also lists orienteering, cycling, travelling and creative writing as his hobbies. “I managed to time-box the pilot’s licence in, although that has lapsed a bit,” he said, almost apologetically. However, he is planning to remedy that soon because his youngest son Eugene is currently doing his pilot’s licence. “His mother doesn’t know this yet but we are thinking of doing a couple of long-haul trips together,” said Philip.

Arts eye opener

Eugene has achieved fame by appearing in the last series of the TV reality show *Big Brother*. He was lucky enough to come second, netting himself £50,000 in the process.

“We can’t go anywhere together now without Eugene being recognised,” Philip laughed. “Whether we’re cycling in Wales or

climbing up Snowdon, we tend to get mobbed. People are always shouting ‘look there’s Eugene but who’s the old fart with him?’”

The biggest change that Philip has seen in his 33 years of studying is the online studying revolution. However, despite gaining an MSc in The Industrial Application of Computers, he does not necessarily think this is a good thing. “For folk with a lower income, having to have access to a computer creates a barrier, making it impossible for them to participate.

Harold Wilson was a key progenitor of the OU ideal and I have tremendous respect for his mission to push it through. But, the initial charter was to make it more accessible for people than it has become now and I think that is a great shame.”

Although Philip has crossed over many faculties in his OU career, he claims that it was in fact the Arts courses that really changed his life. “The Arts foundation and the Enlightenment courses really made me reassess what I was doing with my life. They made me think about where I was going and opened my eyes to a lot of stuff I hadn’t thought about before,” he said.

“I think conventional universities have got it wrong because they cultivate people in one thread and I just don’t think they gain any life skills while they are there. My son, for example, knows all there is to know about engineering, but his skills outside that area, apart from Media Communications, one would be critical of. I think you should pick your own agenda, and the OU lets you do just that.”

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Philip at the naming ceremony for ‘his’ building



LETTERS

Why do I have to buy?

I HAVE recently started course K257 *Mental health and distress: perspectives and practice*. However I was surprised that I have had to buy my own text books. Is this the same for the other courses that start with the letter K? On the previous courses that I have done the text books are already provided.

Melvin Crutchley
Bracknell, Berkshire

EDITOR'S NOTE:

THERE are more than 100 OU courses for which you may have to buy set books, and they don't all have K codes. See story on page 33.

Not enough Honours

I HAVE always been very satisfied with the teaching and materials from the OU. However I do find the named degree system very restrictive compared with most other universities.

My local university allows students to put together a degree from across its programmes. Students have the option of studying one subject in depth (Single Honours), or taking two subjects in equal proportions (Joint Honours). So a student could choose to have a BA (Hons) degree in History and Politics. However with the OU you cannot create this degree unless you go for one that is unnamed. I could create a sort of Joint Honours degree within a particular faculty area, e.g. BA (Hons) Humanities with History and Spanish, but I could not create a BA (Hons) History and Politics. Why am I not allowed to create a named Joint Honours degree from subjects in the Social Sciences and Humanities?

Stephen Garbett
Worcestershire

TONY BARKER, ASSISTANT REGISTRAR, AWARDS AND CEREMONIES, REPLIES:

THE range of Honours degrees in

subjects that are offered by the University is conditioned by the scope of its curriculum, by the structure of its courses (into 60-point, 30-point and so on chunks) and by the perceived student demand for various subject combinations. In all cases, the Programme Committee that is responsible for the presentation of that degree must ensure that the learning outcomes for its students are in accordance with the benchmarks set in that subject. To allow students to pick and choose subject clusters that together would meet these rules would be more difficult. Rather than do that, for students who do wish to choose to construct their degrees from a diverse range of courses, the University has always offered the Open degree which stands uniquely within the sector as an award that can be as wide as each of our students wishes within the overall limits of the curriculum.

Pale imitation

I DO not like the new award certificate. The old one had the OU shield bold in the centre, my name and the qualification were in large print, and a small OU logo appeared at the bottom. Now the shield, somewhat paler, is offset, the name and qualification are in smaller print and there is a horrible wishy-washy pale – but large – OU logo at the top. I suppose this is part of the 'Design created by world-renowned brand consultants Wolff Olins [no doubt at considerable expense!] to fit in with OU's 21st century aims' (**sesame** 224, p 4).

Alan Edwards
Princes Risborough

Late dates

I'M currently studying DD303 *Cognitive psychology* and enjoying the course. But I can't understand why the OU can't set the dates for its exams at the beginning of the year. I've been told the date for my course won't be decided until sometime

in April. All I know is it's normally during October. The bulk of OU students are fitting in courses around the rest of their lives, which requires a lot of organisation. Probably like others, my employer is generally supportive, but work comes first and I already know October will be extremely busy. If I knew the date now, I could feed it into the planning. If for some reason it proves impossible to sit the exam, I will have lost a whole year.

Gwen Hines
Surbiton

JENNY BULL, HEAD OF EXAMINATIONS, REPLIES:

BY now you will have received the specific date for your DD303 examination, both in hard copy and accessible via StudentHome. There are many constraints that need to be taken into account in timetabling over 300 course examinations in a 10-day period. In order to achieve the optimum timetable for the majority of students we need to wait until we have data on finally registered students – we don't get this until late February. Although we are not able to fix the dates of specific examinations until late March the dates for each examination period are available on the assessment website (www.open.ac.uk/assessment) well over a year in advance. Where students for good reasons, such as illness, are unable to take the examination on the scheduled date in October they can apply to be 'deferred' to the next opportunity – for most courses this will be the following April.

Why no ecology?

AT the end of Professor Tim

Richella Duggan
Clontarf, Dublin

STAR LETTER

Helping hand

I THOUGHT your readers might like to know of some financial help I've had from my trade union, Unison's, Open Learning College.

They have given me £120 this year towards my studies

Halliday's article (**sesame** 229 p24) there is a bullet point, which reads – 'Follow it up – Ecology and related issues are covered in OU courses U216 *Environment* and S328 *Ecology*'. Much as I would like to follow this advice I'm unable to do so, because the January 2006 intake of students on the S328 *Ecology* course was the last opportunity for students to sign up for this course – it has been discontinued.

I am a student on the S103 *Certificate of Natural Sciences* and I had hoped to work my way towards an eventual honours degree in Life Sciences. My options at third year are now very restricted as *Ecology* and *Animal physiology* have both been removed from the syllabus. I would have thought that until an alternative became available that *Ecology* should have been kept on as an option for students mid-degree. I believe that the U316 *Environmental web* – has some ecology in it but it can't be looked on as a alternative to *Ecology*.

I believe that Ecology is a fundamental aspect of any Life Science or Environment Degree. The Open University really doesn't cater for students with a particular interest in conservation, wildlife and ecology. I am now looking at options outside of the OU. When you look at the amazing expertise that the OU has in the area of Ecology and the amount of research going on at the OU in this area, it just seems nonsensical.

DR PHILIP POTTS, DEAN OF SCIENCE, REPLIES:

THE Science faculty made the decision in 2003 that it could not sustain the number of 30-point Level 3 courses it was then offering, given the cost of maintaining these courses for the relatively low numbers of students taking them. Regrettably, in the area of Biological Sciences, S328 was one of the courses with lowest student numbers and was reluctantly selected by the department and faculty for withdrawal.

Ecology as a course in its own right is therefore not going to feature in the Science curriculum after the end of 2006. There are elements of other courses which do cover ecological themes: the 60-point course U316 *The environmental web* provided a partial replacement for S328, and the residential school course SXR375 *Plants, pigments and light* is a new course on plant biology.

Both count towards the Life Sciences degree. We recognise however that the withdrawal of S328 is disappointing for some students. This is unfortunate but the inevitable result of the requirement to channel our resources into areas of higher student need. One of the faculty's aims is to develop a suite of named awards in Environmental Sciences. There is a possibility this will bring a new 30-point course at Level 3 with an ecosystems slant. Plans for this course are in the very early stages and it will not be on stream until 2009, but it will certainly be designed to contribute not only to a new Environmental Sciences degree but to the Life Sciences degree. While not a direct replacement for S328 it should enable students to study whole organism biology and numerical methods at Level 3.

When we have more information we will publish it in sesame. In the meantime, please do not send in any enquiries because we will not be in a position to answer them!

Degree too long

FROM my understanding of how traditional university courses work, Honours degrees are obtained almost by default if the student has attended a specified

number of tutorials or handed in a certain number of assignments. I find it slightly frustrating that to gain an Honours degree through the OU a further year of study and financial commitment is needed, when at a traditional university no such extra work is involved.

As most students graduating from traditional universities will automatically obtain an honours degree, I feel compelled to complete the six years of study, rather than risk obtaining a non-honours degree and giving the impression to potential employers that I was in some way less committed to my degree course.

Rachel Winbow
Poole

TONY BARKER, ASSISTANT REGISTRAR, AWARDS AND CEREMONIES, REPLIES:

HONOURS degrees awarded by universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are required to comprise 360 points. This is set out in the Quality Assurance Agency's Higher Education Qualifications Framework and equates to three full-time academic years of study. Normally, this would be broken down into 120 points at each of the three Levels 1, 2 and 3. Unclassified degrees awarded in the same system require 300 points of which at least 180 must be above Level 1 and, of those, 60 would be at Level 3.

At many universities, students enrol on a three-year honours programme at the outset. In many such programmes the option to take the award as an unclassified degree is not made available as an explicit, terminal qualification.

In terms of OU course credit, if Ms Winbow is making academic progress at a rate of 60 credit points a year, which is a very common workload for our students, she would qualify for honours at the end of the equivalent of three academic years of full-time study and she would have amassed 360 credit points. That is the same period and the same amount of work for the same credit as a student in a three year full-time honours degree programme taught elsewhere. However, the OU always has offered,

and continues so offer, an unclassified Open degree as an explicit terminal qualification. Should Ms Winbow wish to, she will have the option of taking that award as a terminal qualification when she has 300 points – equating to the successful completion of two and a half years of full-time work, or as an intermediate award on her way to achieving honours.

Let the young talk

MY daughter Katharine is 16 and has been studying with the OU for the last two years at the same time as attending her local secondary school. She is doing very well in school and additionally has completed successfully: three 10-point, Level 1 courses; one 60-point, Level 1 course and is currently studying one 30-point Level 2 OU course.

As a family we all support the idea of a conference for young OU students. From what we as parents see the OU offers a well-policed and secure online environment and see no reason why this would not continue for a younger age group conference.

Nigel Shapcott
Carmarthen

Recycle materials

HAVING been a student with The Open University since 2004 I have always found their course materials extremely useful. While studying A210, *Approaching literature*, I found the audio and video cassettes an invaluable resource.

After successful completion of A210 I contacted the OU offering to return these items in readiness for the next course

intake date. I was advised that the OU cannot accept the return or re-use of these items once despatched.

I think that this is ridiculous, if the course materials are in good condition. Further, would it not prove cost-effective to The Open University in reducing production costs?

Stacey Thomas
Warrington, Cheshire

CHARLES CLEVERDON, DISTRIBUTION MANAGER, REPLIES:

IT has never been considered an option to send used products out as part of the learning materials pack. The costs of receiving materials back in to the distribution site, disassembling them, checking whether the content is current for future presentations and putting back in to storage would exceed the value of the materials. Equally, all materials would have to be checked to ensure they don't contain annotations.

My advice to students who no longer wish to retain course materials is to offer them to a local public library or school. This however can only relate to printed materials and videos/DVDs containing moving images. Course elements containing software are for the use of students only and for copyright reasons may not be given, sold or loaned to third parties.

CLARIFICATION

IN sesame 229 we published a response from the Arts faculty to letters on the subject of e-tmas, which explained that students on 'all but a tiny minority of Arts courses will have the option to submit their TMAs electronically' from 2007. We have been asked to make clear that there will be a minority of courses across most subject areas for which electronic submission will not be suitable.

Please send your letters to: Letters to the Editor, sesame, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.

Fax: +44 (0)1908 652247 Email: M.D.France@open.ac.uk

Include your address and daytime telephone number. We reserve the right to edit letters.

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Readers write

We asked if there were any readers out there who would be interested in writing a regular column for **sesame** – and you responded with a varied and interesting selection of writing.

Sadly we can only have one columnist, so we've asked **Toby Boyd**, a student who's recently joined the OU, to become our student columnist and chronicle the highs and lows of his journey towards, hopefully, a degree in French and German. Toby lives in Bath and works as a freelance writer and editor. You can read Toby's first **sesame** column below.

However other pieces of writing we have received were too good to keep to ourselves so we will be sharing them with readers by posting them on the web (see www.open.ac.uk/sesame) and in future editions of **sesame**.

Thanks also to all those who contributed to the debate on 'What is a university for?' – sadly we ran out of space to print them in this issue, but will be doing so in the next one.



OU AND I

It all seemed so easy when I accepted the editor's kind invitation to write for **sesame**. So much to say, so much time in which to say it. The deadline was a mere speck on the horizon.

Of course I should have known that I would end up frantically bashing something out at the last minute. I always do.

It's the same with TMAs. However far in advance I plan to start one, however good my intentions, deep down I know I'll wind up legging it to the post office to send it off in the nick of time.

For some reason, I can't get anything done until the deadline is looming over me like an immense black cloud.

My big problem

My big problem is displacement activity. Although I enjoy coursework, some perverse natural law seems to prevent me from cracking on with it when I should. The more pressing the task, the more I find myself compelled to do something – anything – else. I've even been known to bath the dog rather than tackle a perfectly interesting assignment.

It's hell – for me and the dog.

But despite the stress they cause me, I've come to appreciate deadlines as a necessary evil. I hate the pressure, but I know I need it in order to function.

That's why, I tell myself, I've never managed to produce that great novel. Left to my own devices, I just can't get

down to it. It would be a different story – quite literally – if some obliging publisher gave me a huge advance and a rigid deadline to meet. (A subtle hint to any publishers out there.)

It's also one of the main reasons why I decided to study with the OU. In theory, I could accomplish my goal – to learn two foreign languages – without putting myself through all the hard work of a degree. Bookshops are full of teach-yourself language courses. I could just work through a couple of them and avoid the hassle of regular assessment.

In practice, however, I know that's not an option. If I didn't have the structure of a carefully designed study programme to drive me on – not to mention the support of tutors and my fellow students – I would never go the distance.

So I'm resolved to face many more years of TMA deadlines. I don't always like the medicine, but I know it's good for me. And it should keep the dog relatively clean too.



Spring of hope

VILLAGERS in Ethiopia are enjoying their first taste of clean drinking water from a capped spring – after an International Studies degree inspired an OU graduate to set up her own charity.

Tigist Grieve (pictured right on our front cover) has also helped to supply residents of remote Addis Alem with medical equipment for their health clinics and books and computers for their schools.

And she says her Bristol-based charity For-Ethiopia is inspired by her BSc (Hons) in International Studies – particularly U213 *International development* and DU301 *A world of whose making?* Her studies and her tutors, Dr Mike Heath and Rodney King, made her understand the best ways in which to help.

"I learned that it's by doing small, individual things that you really make a difference," she said. "I've got some friends who have worked with aid agencies and they agree it's more effective to do development in a small yet significant way."

For-Ethiopia is certainly personal to Tigist – the village she chose to help is where her grandparents were born. "I wanted to be really involved, and the best way to do that was to go back to my roots," she said. "I visited Addis Alem – it's three hours on horseback from the nearest town, so it's really remote!"

"This wasn't about me going in and suggesting to the villagers what I thought they needed"

"The fact that many of the people I met had known my grandparents meant I was made very welcome," she added. "But I had learned from my courses about participatory development. This wasn't about me going in and suggesting to the villagers what I thought they needed. I just chatted to them – no computer, no notebook, not even a pen – and asked them what their priorities were."

"They told me – first was water, then

healthcare, and then other things such as roads, electricity. And there were a lot of other things. But they told me what they needed and we've taken it from there."

Tigist enlisted the help of her husband Robert, friends Gary and John and fellow OU student Janet Mills, who also studied U213 and U216 *Environment*. Tigist and Janet have also engaged local communities back home, twinning the schools in Addis Alem with St Joseph's RC School in Bristol.

"It's a charity peopled entirely by volunteers, including myself, and I'm hoping my degree can get me a job in international development," said Tigist. "Many of the organisations want experience and For-Ethiopia has certainly given me that."

"But more importantly, our approach is 'bottom up' development, allowing us to make a real difference based on the community's needs."

For more details about the charity, visit www.for-Ethiopia.com

Before and after: collecting water from the original spring and (inset) villagers at the new piped spring water supply



Students who care

Six million people – one in eight adults in the UK – are estimated to be carers, providing essential day-to-day support for a relative or friend who is too ill, frail or disabled to look after themselves. As the population ages, it's estimated that two out of three of us will be carers some stage in our lives. We look at the pressures facing those who are studying while caring for a loved one

THE individual situations of carers can make study even more difficult than usual. A recent OU conference for carers' organisations highlighted the facts that many carers have low incomes; a significant number may have difficulty accessing a computer; and personal crises can mean carers struggle to submit their assignments on time.

But help is available – a carer's allowance is among the benefits that qualify students for financial assistance with courses. And carers with good reasons for submitting late

assignments will always have their situation taken into account. But moves are afoot within the OU to ensure not only that more help is available, but that carers know it's there.

New initiatives

The carers' conference, held in April at the OU's South West Regional Centre in East Grinstead, West Sussex, saw the launch of a number of additional initiatives. These include the design and issue of an OU leaflet specifically for carers' organisations and

relevant web links from the OU site.

A recent report to the OU's Student Policy Board said: "Many carers have successfully completed Open University courses and qualifications. Their case studies show clearly how the OU has been the only viable higher education option available to them. They speak of the benefits of the support they received from their tutor and the motivation they have gained from successfully completing their qualifications step by step, taking on as much study as they can realistically manage."

Support is the key

"CARERS often don't see themselves as entitled to support because they think it's their duty. But you can get help and you should take it."

So says Jane Green, who has completed a degree and is just about to finish her PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education). She's also a single mother of two boys, the elder of whom, 14-year-old Joshua, has Asperger's syndrome and other complex disabilities – yet it was his various conditions that prompted Jane to begin studying in the first place.

"I was left on my own to deal with this when Joshua was five," she said. "I wanted to find out how to help him. I couldn't go out so I started reading up. I became a bit of a night owl, and became interested in the idea of doing an OU course."

And as the issues faced by carers became more widely recognised, so the OU was able to offer Jane more and more help. "The OU were fantastic," she said. "I didn't get any financial assistance in my first couple of years and that was very tough, physically and emotionally. I had to do all of this on a really tight budget. At one point things got so bad we didn't even have anywhere to live."

"But I wrote and explained my situation and I received help," said Jane, who lives near East Grinstead, West Sussex. "Finance is an enormous issue for carers and now the OU offers help with books, and with travel. And if I'd known Openings courses were available I'd have jumped at the chance to start with one of those, because they really help to build your confidence."

Aim for Masters

"But also important was the support I received from my tutor. So many things were out of my control that I had to ring my tutor about delaying the course. She asked what the matter was. I told her about my circumstances, and how hard everything was, and how I felt I was failing. She told me to carry on with my studies, because then that would be an area in which I could feel I'd succeeded. It was only a little thing, but it gave me such an enormous boost."

Jane's confidence rose so high that she's now about to achieve her PGCE and is looking for a place to use it. "I'm keen to combine my newly acquired teaching skills with my practical experience of handling Joshua," she said. "I just like helping people." And with Joshua now in a residential school five days a week, Jane is able to give her son the support he needs while finally having a little more time to pursue her own dreams – which include doing a Masters.



Jane (centre) pictured at her graduation with: Liz Gray, Regional Director, South East; and Will Swann, Director, Students

Survival tips

If you are a student with caring responsibilities, there are ways you can help yourself to find more study time. Jane Matthews, who interviewed a number of OU student-carers as part of her research for a carers' resource book, advises

Learn to say yes to every offer of help. Your friends and family may not be able to do your TMA but they could cook you a meal, do your shopping or gardening, read to your loved one or take them for a drive... anything that frees up a slice of time so you can study. Draw up a list of such small tasks so you're never tempted to say "I can cope, thank you," when someone asks what they can do to help you.

Connect with other carers for practical and emotional support. One of the biggest problems for carers I interviewed was their sense of isolation. As an OU student you're already part of a worldwide electronic network, so use it to find others with whom you can share your frustrations, successes, problems and tips. You may even find someone in a similar situation living nearby with whom you could share the caring role to give each of you a break for study.

Pursue every possible source of respite care. Whether your caring role takes up a few hours or means being on hand all day every day, you are entitled to a carer assessment from your local social services department. The assessment sets out what your support needs are, how they'll be met and who will do what. And crucially, the law is clear that the assessment should look at your whole life –

work, learning, family and leisure. Respite may come in many shapes and forms even when social services are stretched for resources: ask about day centres, holiday services (useful at exam time), 'sitters', home helps and any local voluntary organisations who run respite or sitting services.

If you're among the 80 per cent of carers who are financially worse off since becoming a carer – or the two out of three who worry about making ends meet all the time – talk to the OU about whether any **financial support** is available. If you are receiving certain benefits you may qualify for free courses (see news item on page 7). If not, but you can't see how to afford to continue your studies, it may still be possible to apply to the Open University Students Association's hardship fund. Some charities linked to particular medical conditions also have small hardship funds.

If you're also juggling a job with study and caring, consider whether **flexible working** would help you manage better. Employment law means your organisation must respond to your need for flexibility if practical, and you have the right to take a 'reasonable' amount of time off to deal with an emergency involving a dependant. Possible variations could be to compress your day,



taking shorter breaks or starting and finishing earlier or later to free up a chunk of time at either end of the day; extend your day with a long break in the middle to accommodate study or carer time; spread your working week over six rather than five days to free up more time each day; or explore with your employer the practicalities of joining the growing army of remote workers.

For more suggestions, advice and resources see *The Carer's Handbook: essential information and support for all those in a caring role* by Jane Matthews (HowtoBooks 2006, £10.99) www.howtobooks.co.uk

CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

PROJECTS reaching out to carers are being run by a number of OU regions around the country. One example is in Stockton, in the north-east of England, where two carers, two care centre staff and a hospital worker formed a study group centred on Stockton carers' centre, to study K100 *Understanding health and social care*. The tutorials and informal meetings were held at the centre, and the project was so successful that one student, Denise Jenkins, left her job in a call centre to become a carer support worker at the centre. Denise, who had been out of education for 30 years before joining the OU, won a Individual Learner Award from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in May for her achievement.

"K100 empowers carers," said the project co-ordinator Katrina

Coleman. She is an OU employee based at Bridges to Learning, a partnership project providing learning opportunities for health and social care workers, volunteers and carers. "The carers who studied the course say that if they had had the knowledge gained from K100 when they started caring, it would have changed the way they dealt with the health and social care professionals who provided care for their relatives."

Building on the success of the Stockton scheme, carers at the new Middlesbrough Carers Centre are now doing a variety of OU courses. Katrina says it is important that carers are not pigeonholed as students who only want to do courses relevant to caring. "Some say that they want to study something completely different from what they are dealing with day to day," she said.

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OU the best medicine

OU student and advertising director **Renée Myerson** wins a place to study medicine at Barts, London

RENÉE Myerson is living proof that the OU changes people's lives – she's about to fulfil a long-cherished ambition to train to be a doctor, at the age of 39.

Her BSc (Hons) Health Studies from the OU so impressed tutors at St Bartholomew's Hospital – known worldwide as Barts – that they've offered her a place on their MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) degree in September.

Renée is currently an Advertising Director responsible for negotiating and concluding multi-million pound advertising contracts on celebrity magazine *OK!* – but she is now simultaneously fulfilling a lifelong dream few people contemplate.

Different turn

"I always wanted to be a doctor but I met my son's father at 18 and my life took a different turn," she said. "But throughout the last 20 years I have maintained an interest in medicine and decided that when my son was old enough I would do something about it. So when he was 14 I started my OU degree."

Renée achieved a First – while also doing AS levels in biology and chemistry – which is impressive enough, but more so after being diagnosed early in her degree course with a tumour in her thyroid. The next year saw two operations and two radioactive treatments but, said Renée, "this just deepened my determination to succeed and work in the health sector. And because it was an OU degree I was able to study at home and in hospital".

Impressed

And Renée says her OU experience was key to landing a place at Barts, which has been caring for the sick in London for nearly 1,000 years. She got through to the interview stage after finishing in the top one per cent of 3,000 applicants who took a test that included essay writing. "We were invited to Barts for an application day which comprised a group exercise, an interview and a written exercise," she added. "My experience with OU tutorials, online

conferencing and revision weekends made the group exercise reasonably familiar and at the interview I explained how tutorial contact enabled us to share ideas and work together – and how distance learning had developed my self-motivation, determination and discipline."

"As well as changing my life, I think it has inspired the kids"

Renée says her OU experience obviously impressed the Barts admissions team. "I think they recognised that I had achieved this qualification while having a high-

pressure job and running the family home for myself, my husband (Stan Myerson, Managing Director of the *Daily Express*) and our three children. The interviewers saw that I was organised and could rise to challenges and cope with the stress of juggling a lot of things at once.

"But as well as changing my life, I think this has inspired the kids," added Renée, who has a son and two step-children. "My son is doing his A-levels at the moment and he's seen his mum working hard and attending every one of her OU tutorials. It's a good example for them – and it shows you that if you work hard enough, you can do anything."

Renée Myerson: fulfilling a lifelong dream



results

Course results 2005

Below is **sesame's** guide to the results of most of the 30- and 60- point courses that ended in October 2005 – they do not include results of other completion periods earlier in the year and some very low population courses. Don't be put off by a low pass rate, as results vary from year to year and an aggregate figure gives little guidance to any individual's chance of success.

Key to abbreviations

- Fin Reg** Number of finally registered students on course
- Freg E/ECA (%)** Percentage of finally registered students examined/submitting end of course assessment (E/ECA)
- Freg pass (%)** Percentage of finally registered students who passed
- E/ECA pass (%)** Percentage of those examined/submitting end of course assessment who passed

* A103, DD121, DD122, MU120 and M150 have continuous assessment only on the course. The figures in the pass columns reflect those who passed on continuous assessment.

Some results still pending at time of press, resulting in minor discrepancies.

Course Code	Fin reg	Freg E/ECA (%)	Freg pass (%)	E/ECA pass (%)	GRADE			
					1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
A103	3347	88.9	63.3	71.2				71.2
A207	1272	72.8	66.6	91.5	8.3	26.0	41.3	16.0
A209	721	65.0	63.4	97.7	17.6	44.2	26.3	9.6
A210	1741	72.2	68.4	94.8	15.1	30.1	38.2	11.5
A211	514	58.3	55.4	95.0	10.9	34.0	37.6	12.5
A213	708	62.8	53.2	84.7	10.2	32.8	26.3	15.3
A214	463	73.0	65.7	90.0	16.6	29.5	30.1	13.8
A216	942	66.0	64.5	97.8	10.3	34.5	36.9	16.1
A218	397	72.3	61.6	85.2	8.4	21.5	36.7	18.5
A220	949	54.8	52.1	95.1	11.5	27.2	31.9	24.5
A221	722	65.7	63.3	96.3	6.2	29.7	46.6	13.7
A296	438	54.1	49.1	90.8	46.2	17.9	13.3	13.3
A297	693	49.3	45.3	92.0	27.6	27.6	21.3	15.5
A300	770	82.2	79.4	96.5	16.9	29.4	35.2	15.0
AZX300	150	82.0	80.7	98.4	19.5	31.7	33.3	13.8
A354	407	63.2	60.8	96.2	9.2	33.0	41.8	12.3
A396	178	66.7	63.9	95.8	18.3	37.5	29.2	10.8
A424	257	73.2	71.6	97.9	18.1	35.6	33.5	10.6
A425	89	74.4	71.1	95.5	13.4	43.3	25.4	13.4
A433	121	74.4	72.7	97.8	11.1	36.7	35.6	14.4
A811	75	89.5	85.5	95.6	27.9			67.6
A813	82	85.7	83.3	97.2	15.3			81.9
A817	137	85.4	83.2	97.4	31.6			65.8
A821	67	88.1	86.6	98.3	22.0			76.3
A822	78	80.0	67.5	84.4	20.3			64.1
A827	70	87.1	80.0	91.8	16.4			75.4
A837	37	91.9	86.5	94.1	32.4			61.8
A840	136	66.2	64.7	97.8	10.9			87.0
A841	136	80.9	72.8	90.0	10.0			80.0
A850	121	64.6	57.5	89.0	8.5			80.5
A851	44	80.0	75.6	94.4	22.2			72.2
A857	40	75.0	72.5	96.7	26.7			70.0
A860	52	71.7	62.3	86.8	13.2			73.7
A861	47	87.2	85.1	97.6	9.8			87.8
A867	22	81.8	81.8	100.0	38.9			61.1
A870	81	66.7	63.0	94.4	11.1			83.3
A871	46	82.7	71.2	86.0	16.3			69.8
A877	45	91.1	68.9	75.6	19.5			56.1
AA300	247	77.3	70.1	90.7	4.6	34.5	27.8	23.7
AAZX300	59	74.6	69.5	93.2	6.8	29.5	43.2	13.6
AA302	285	73.6	58.9	80.0	10.7	25.1	31.6	12.6
AA303	246	79.1	73.6	93.1	13.7	27.9	29.9	21.6
AA305	385	79.8	73.1	91.6	15.9	32.5	33.4	9.7
AA306	360	88.4	84.4	95.5	14.1	29.3	22.5	29.6
AA307	395	76.7	72.4	94.4	5.3	25.1	40.6	23.4
AA308	426	65.0	61.3	94.2	10.8	32.9	37.5	13.0
AA309	451	78.2	75.2	96.1	13.6	33.1	38.2	11.1
AA310	571	76.1	74.7	98.2	15.6	31.4	43.8	7.4

Course Code	Fin reg	Freg E/ECA (%)	Freg pass (%)	E/ECA pass (%)	GRADE			
					1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
AA312	433	82.5	77.2	93.5	10.8	41.1	26.9	14.8
AA314	214	71.2	66.7	93.6	7.7	31.4	33.3	21.2
AA316	982	76.0	65.0	85.5	9.7	32.9	26.4	16.6
AA318	308	78.1	76.2	97.5	19.8	46.5	22.6	8.6
AA810	175	73.8	69.9	94.8	13.3			81.5
AA820	126	66.9	61.7	92.1	7.9			84.3
AD317	317	78.9	74.5	94.5	9.4	33.9	39.8	11.4
AS208	267	71.2	69.7	97.9	21.5	37.9	28.2	10.3
AT308	219	86.1	78.9	91.7	7.8	32.8	36.8	14.2
AXR271	142	71.1	69.0	97.0	10.9	52.5	27.7	5.9
AXR312	213	90.6	89.2	98.4	18.1	45.1	26.4	8.8
B200	959	54.2	45.1	83.2	6.4	20.4	31.3	25.0
B202	520	62.0	57.4	92.6	6.2	26.3	29.3	30.8
B300	319	69.1	50.3	72.8	5.0	26.8	27.6	13.4
B615	665	73.4	62.3	85.0				85.0
B680	651	64.6	40.1	62.1	6.1	27.9		28.1
B700	549	74.7	61.8	82.7	1.4	22.6		58.8
BZX700	58	58.1	43.5	75.0	2.8	13.9		58.3
B713	487	81.9	64.7	79.0	1.6	16.2		61.2
B820	556	78.9	71.9	91.1	2.2	6.5		82.4
B821	389	83.0	71.0	85.6	4.2	14.4		66.9
B822	524	86.7	84.3	97.2	1.5	16.7		79.1
B825	584	89.6	77.1	86.0	0.6	16.0		69.4
BM240	192	53.9	48.2	89.4	18.3	28.8	21.2	21.2
D214	396	68.4	65.4	95.7	18.8	39.4	27.1	10.5
D215	414	74.0	69.3	93.6	13.2	23.2	39.9	17.4
D218	877	60.5	53.5	88.4	10.5	30.0	28.9	18.9
D315	1043	73.8	64.7	87.7	6.0	20.1	33.1	28.5
D317	2026	71.3	66.6	93.5	15.6	31.5	31.6	14.7
D318	316	76.9	74.4	96.7	15.0	45.1	26.4	10.2
D319	325	76.1	73.6	96.8	12.7	36.7	39.8	7.6
D820	390	67.1	56.7	84.6	5.0			79.6
D830	111	77.7	73.2	94.3	11.5			82.8
D832	72	68.1	65.3	95.9	10.2			85.7
D844	217	78.8	76.5	97.1	5.3			91.8
D850	82	62.2	58.5	94.1	9.8			84.3
D852	46	60.9	52.2	85.7	14.3			71.4
D860	142	74.6	68.3	91.5	6.6			84.9
D862	52	80.8	71.2	88.1	4.8			83.3
D864	94	80.9	72.3	89.5	5.3			84.2
DD100	6672	90.2	59.4	65.8				65.8
DD122	1177	94.8	78.0	82.3				82.3
DD200	269	69.3	66.1	95.3	14.7	47.9	26.3	6.3
DDZX200	79	64.6	62.0	96.1	29.4	33.3	25.5	7.8
DD201	700	68.3	61.7	90.4	8.2	28.1	35.5	18.6
DD202	653	60.6	47.9	79.0	7.6	24.8	20.7	26.0
DD203	584	66.1	60.4	91.5	4.4	29.8	39.9	17.4
DD302	185	78.1	75.9	97.3	8.2	52.7	26.7	9.6

Course Code	Fin reg	Freg E/ECA (%)	Freg pass (%)	E/ECA pass (%)	GRADE			
					1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
DD303	1284	81.5	77.7	95.4	5.7	48.5	34.1	7.1
DD304	498	85.4	85.0	99.5	12.9	44.0	36.1	6.6
DD305	515	76.9	67.9	88.2	9.8	28.3	36.2	13.9
DSE212	3659	61.0	53.0	86.8	11.1	21.7	35.5	18.5
DT840	258	69.1	61.8	89.4	2.2			87.2
DU301	546	79.9	77.2	96.6	13.1	33.6	35.1	14.6
DU310	483	78.9	76.7	97.2	7.4	33.3	45.0	11.5
DXR220	84	90.5	66.7	73.7	10.5	28.9	11.8	22.4
DXR222	1054	87.0	81.2	93.3	8.1	33.5	38.3	13.5
E115	426	68.1	62.7	92.1				92.1
E123	1348	73.2	61.0	83.3				83.3
E124	1277	75.0	66.1	88.2				88.2
E243	530	67.6	66.3	98.1	11.3	40.2	37.2	9.4
E300	362	77.1	71.4	92.7	14.7	28.0	36.0	14.0
E303	418	62.4	57.2	91.6	11.1	26.8	39.1	14.6
E801	291	64.5	57.7	89.4				89.4
E804	281	77.9	64.8	83.1				83.1
E831	123	72.6	64.5	88.9				88.9
E835	161	80.1	68.4	85.4				85.4
E836	194	75.3	71.1	94.5				94.5
EZX836	86	76.7	72.1	93.9				93.9
E839	151	83.4	70.9	84.9				84.9
E841	206	73.1	56.7	77.6				77.6
E842	88	80.7	79.5	98.6				98.6
E844	179	88.3	77.8	88.1				88.1
E845	187	74.9	63.6	85.0				85.0
E848	129	76.7	72.9	94.9				94.9
E849	305	81.6	78.4	96.0				96.0
E858	26	26.9	26.9	100.0				100.0
E859	130	86.9	83.8	96.5				96.5
ED209	3072	64.9	59.2	91.2	13.8	27.7	34.8	14.9
ED840	401	77.3	63.3	81.9				81.9
EK310	646	76.7	67.7	88.3	2.3	28.6	41.7	15.7
H802	41	81.0	76.2	94.1	17.6			76.5
H804	38	87.2	79.5	91.2	11.8			79.4
H805	15	66.7	66.7	100.0	0.0			100.0
H806	19	100.0	100.0	100.0	26.3			73.7
H850	41	81.8	70.5	86.1	0.0			86.1
K100	2618	63.1	59.1	93.6	15.9			77.7
KZX100	323	62.2	58.2	93.6	18.8			74.8
K111	360	92.8	86.4	93.1				93.1
K201	453	65.0	59.0	90.7	6.0	36.2	30.6	17.9
K202	380	62.7	58.9	93.9	3.3	26.6	39.3	24.6
K203	361	72.7	61.4	84.5	2.3	17.8	29.2	35.2
K204	866	67.1	59.5	88.6	5.6	26.5	34.7	21.7
K205	222	70.6	58.0	82.1	9.5	11.9	28.0	32.7
K215	920	94.8	92.2	97.2	2.3	24.5	37.3	33.1
K221	287	68.3	60.6	88.8	24.5	37.8	21.9	4.6
K223	130	62.3	49.3	79.1	3.5	31.4	25.6	18.6
K257	529	61.0	51.0	83.5	3.2	27.4	29.1	23.8
K260	436	66.1	58.4	88.3	4.9	18.2	37.7	27.6
K267	62	76.9	70.8	92.0	4.0	28.0	40.0	20.0
K269	384	73.8	67.2	91.0	7.4	27.8	36.5	19.4
KYN271	25	96.0	96.0	100.0	4.2	29.2	58.3	8.3
KYN275	89	94.4	89.9	95.2	13.1	19.0	33.3	29.8
KYN276	89	94.4	93.3	98.8	3.6	4.8	56.0	34.5
K301	647	75.8	69.2	91.4	7.6	22.0	38.6	23.1
K302	378	72.2	61.6	85.3	5.2	26.9	25.2	28.0
K303	436	69.3	63.4	91.6	4.1	28.7	38.1	20.6
K307	167	76.3	63.0	82.6	7.6	13.6	34.1	27.3
L120	1005	58.7	54.7	93.1	19.4			73.7
L130	340	61.1	54.4	89.0	24.9			64.1
LZX130	112	50.9	47.3	93.0	26.3			66.7
L140	855	56.5	53.6	94.8	23.3			71.5
LZX140	224	54.0	51.8	95.9	23.1			72.7
L192	1349	57.4	52.2	91.0	24.4			66.5
L193	369	59.4	55.2	92.9	29.5			63.4
LZX193	124	58.7	57.9	98.6	23.0			75.7
L194	1151	58.0	54.2	93.4	27.0			66.3
LZX194	387	51.7	45.8	88.7	27.1			61.6
L203	157	78.4	74.1	94.5	31.5	32.3	28.3	2.4
LZX203	22	90.9	90.9	100.0	50.0	20.0	20.0	10.0
L204	298	81.9	73.9	90.2	10.2	43.7	29.1	7.1
L211	479	77.1	71.9	93.3	9.4	42.4	33.5	8.0
LZX211	85	55.8	51.2	91.7	12.5	47.9	27.1	4.2
L310	337	75.6	66.5	87.9	3.4	36.4	39.0	9.1

results

Course Code	Fin reg	Freg E/ECA (%)	Freg pass (%)	E/ECA pass (%)	GRADE			
					1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
S804	84	76.2	61.9	81.2	10.9	17.2		53.1
S807	97	91.8	86.6	94.4	33.7	42.7		18.0
S809	74	78.7	74.7	94.9	11.9	49.2		33.9
S810	36	88.9	88.9	100.0	37.5	21.9		40.6
SD226	1678	54.7	51.6	94.4	10.0	22.4	39.6	22.3
SDZS226	59	89.8	86.4	96.2	5.7	24.5	45.3	20.8
SD329	501	72.0	65.3	90.6	17.4	30.8	27.3	15.0
SD805	195	84.3	80.2	95.2	11.4	24.7		59.0
SEH806	92	82.6	79.3	96.1	13.2	21.1		61.8
SM355	349	51.6	43.6	84.4	23.3	30.6	21.7	8.3
SMXR355	121	80.2	66.1	82.5	29.9	35.1	13.4	4.1
ST240	306	70.6	63.6	90.0	23.1	24.4	33.5	9.0
SXG390	120	73.3	73.3	100.0	34.1	33.0	25.0	8.0
SXM390	41	78.0	70.7	90.6	37.5	31.2	15.6	6.2
SXN390	51	73.1	67.3	92.1	28.9	23.7	26.3	13.2
SWP390	49	66.0	60.0	90.9	18.2	45.5	9.1	18.2
T171	1207	51.7	49.7	96.2				96.2
T172	452	61.6	58.1	94.3	16.1			78.1
T173	342	59.0	52.4	88.9	17.4			71.5
T180	89	61.8	56.2	90.9				90.9
T183	424	68.2	67.7	99.3				99.3
T184	136	78.7	77.2	98.1				98.1
T185	72	37.5	37.5	100.0				100.0
T186	61	68.9	67.2	97.6				97.6
T187	124	77.4	75.8	97.9				97.9
T205	476	59.7	56.4	94.5	12.1	29.1	38.4	14.9
T206	404	72.4	61.6	85.1	10.3	26.2	37.7	10.9
T207	436	70.0	60.4	86.2	13.5	28.1	24.5	20.2
T209	1079	70.5	65.0	92.1	11.6	31.8	27.3	21.4
T210	345	72.6	68.0	93.7	4.4	24.1	40.7	24.4

Course Code	Fin reg	Freg E/ECA (%)	Freg pass (%)	E/ECA pass (%)	GRADE			
					1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
T211	512	68.9	64.0	92.9	16.9	31.6	28.2	16.1
T224	842	65.3	59.5	91.1	12.2	32.5	25.6	20.7
T305	786	73.4	65.0	88.6	10.9	30.2	30.2	17.3
T306	437	68.6	65.9	96.1	7.2	35.9	29.3	23.7
T308	232	75.4	69.8	92.6	6.3	29.7	38.3	18.3
T353	236	66.7	57.6	86.4	18.5	30.9	17.9	19.1
T354	230	58.8	52.9	90.1	16.3	42.6	11.3	19.9
T355	213	70.9	69.0	97.4	23.8	27.8	34.4	11.3
T396	692	55.8	51.2	91.7	17.1	26.6	28.4	19.6
T397	230	87.5	82.3	94.1				94.1
T402	111	93.7	92.8	99.0	12.5	36.5	38.5	11.5
T450	70	84.7	73.6	86.9	14.8	37.7	21.3	13.1
T834	60	77.1	74.3	96.3	0.0	31.5		64.8
T835	49	75.8	67.7	89.4	4.3	14.9		70.2
T837	41	82.6	56.5	68.4	0.0	2.6		65.8
T840	177	84.6	75.5	89.3	3.8	35.2		50.3
T842	30	78.4	51.4	65.5	0.0	13.8		51.7
T846	47	73.1	59.6	81.6	15.8	13.2		52.6
T850	43	64.6	41.7	64.5	3.2	12.9		48.4
T851	35	65.7	62.9	95.7	0.0	47.8		47.8
T852	23	69.6	60.9	87.5	25.0	18.8		43.8
T853	35	65.7	45.7	69.6	4.3	30.4		34.8
T860	56	82.8	77.6	93.8	18.8	56.2		18.8
T862	58	76.7	71.7	93.5	10.9	32.6		50.0
T882	34	65.7	62.9	95.7	4.3	56.5		34.8
TA225	437	52.2	43.0	82.5	17.9	29.2	18.8	16.7
TM420	78	73.1	71.8	98.2	3.5	22.8	49.1	22.8
TM421	105	73.3	67.6	92.2	11.7	33.8	26.0	20.8
TM422	233	72.1	67.8	94.0	2.4	29.2	41.1	21.4
TM423	99	84.8	81.8	96.4	8.3	35.7	44.0	8.3
TM424	42	81.0	76.2	94.1	0.0	41.2	38.2	14.7
TM426	63	76.2	76.2	100.0	4.2	39.6	39.6	16.7
TM427	62	61.3	61.3	100.0	0.0	47.4	39.5	13.2
TU870	123	73.8	68.3	92.5	7.5	40.9		44.1
TU871	108	70.5	65.2	92.4	7.6	48.1		36.7
TU872	89	68.1	59.6	87.5	6.2	35.9		45.3
TUXX872	39	75.6	63.4	83.9	3.2	25.8		54.8
TU874	35	88.9	80.6	90.6	12.5	46.9		31.2
TUXX874	22	90.9	90.9	100.0	5.0	40.0		55.0
U205	498	63.4	51.8	81.6	7.1	18.7	30.1	25.8
U210	1524	69.6	62.2	89.4	10.1	23.5	39.1	16.7
U212	876	72.7	66.4	91.3	5.5	28.9	39.3	17.6
U213	596	68.5	65.2	95.2	16.0	39.2	24.2	15.8
U216	892	74.4	71.6	96.2	8.4	29.8	39.9	18.0
U316	420	77.9	75.1	96.4	9.3	49.7	28.3	9.0
W200	1087	62.7	47.1	75.1	14.5	17.8	24.6	18.1
W201	677	73.9	56.0	75.7	8.2	17.5	28.0	22.1
W300	684	76.8	58.5	76.1	10.2	22.6	22.6	20.7
W301	546	80.3	69.4	86.5	23.2	30.4	25.2	7.7
Y152	564	61.7	54.3	87.9				87.9
Y153	317	58.0	50.8	87.5				87.5
Y154	486	53.7	44.7	83.1				83.1
Y155	210	55.7	42.4	76.1				76.1
Y156	845	59.1	54.9	93.0				93.0
Y157	628	57.0	51.9	91.1				91.1
Y158	658	55.6	46.5	83.6				83.6

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Look after the pennies...

Can I afford a mortgage? What pension should I choose? How can I reduce my debts? Managing your finances has become so complex that you need a university course to do it effectively – and now there is one

YOU and your money: *personal finance in context* combines a practical approach to dealing with the key financial decisions – saving, borrowing, insurance, pensions, long-term planning – with an overview of the wider economy and how you fit into it. So you can understand not just how interest rates go up and down, but why.

And if the thought of studying finance makes you yawn, think again, says the course chair, Dr Ian Fribbance. “You will see how you link into the wider social and economic picture. You are part of a pattern of change which affects society.

“For example, the traditional family unit of 40 or 50 years ago has transformed into a diversity of household types. We now have many more people living alone, and we now have civil partnerships, which would have been unthinkable not so long ago. Changes like this have enormous financial implications for those involved.”

No more than a basic knowledge of maths is necessary. The course has four main themes: developing financial planning; changes over time (such as how your income and spending may vary in different stages of life); the interrelationship between households and individuals; and the impact of wider society and the economy on personal finance. Course materials include an interactive DVD with financial tools and a calculator to help you with your personal

“The UK has record levels of debt”

budgeting and financial planning, long after you have finished the course.

One reason why many of us struggle is that managing personal finances really is more complicated than it used to be, said Dr Fribbance. “The last 20 or 30 years have been a period of liberalisation in financial services. There are more products, we have a bigger choice, and people are expected to take more responsibility for pension provision, insurance and areas where the state has withdrawn from some of its functions.”

Most of us are ill-equipped for the challenge. The UK has record levels of debt – currently we owe, collectively, a staggering £1.1 trillion – and many of us are not saving enough to provide an

adequate pension. Yet most people learn about finance through trial and, all too often, error. The government has only just announced plans to teach financial literacy to 14 to 18 year olds. In creating the course the OU has worked closely with the Financial Services Authority, the regulatory body which now has a duty to promote financial education.

You and your money: personal finance in context counts towards a degree in social science, business studies, economics or mathematics.

First presentation: November 2006. Registration deadline: 16 October 2006.

Lightening the Languages load

OU LANGUAGE courses are getting lighter – with the introduction of new technology which will also bring learners closer to the interactive experience of real-life language.

Instead of a stack of coursebooks, CDs and videos, future students of L120, L130 and L140 will need only three textbooks and one or two DVD-ROMS to complete their course in French, German or Spanish.

One medium

The main advantage of using DVD-ROMS is that everything to do with developing students’ listening and speaking skills is in one place. DVD-ROMs can ask the student questions, record their replies and then play them back to the student. The student can also watch video clips and interact with the materials or take part in oral dialogues – all without having to move from their computer screen.

“All the listening and speaking takes place in one medium, so there is a lot less chopping and changing, from CD to video to cassette recorder,” said Valerie Demouy, course chair of L120 *Ouverture: A fresh start in French*.

The new courses will also have a revised structure which will allow students to identify and focus on the particular areas of language learning they are interested in, said Carolyn Batstone, course chair of L130 *Auftakt: Get ahead in German*.

The German course is the first to undergo the remake, with the new version launching in 2007, when L130 students will become the first in the university to have the option to submit written and spoken TMAs electronically. Audio files will be available to download so students can burn CDs to listen to away from their computer, at home or in their car, they can also play

them on their iPods.

Face-to-face

This does not mean that the courses are for hi-tech students only, added Carolyn. “These are not ‘online’ courses: students can choose between two versions with face-to-face or online tutorials. And we are using DVD-ROMS so that students who don’t have broadband will not be disadvantaged.”

The new version of L130 launches in February 2007. L120 *Ouverture* and L140 *En Rumba: A fresh start in Spanish* follow in 2008.

For more information about these and other OU courses visit www.open.ac.uk/courses or call Courses Information and Registration on 0870 333 4340.

The OU has launched two new postgraduate courses for e-Learning professionals – see page 31 for details.

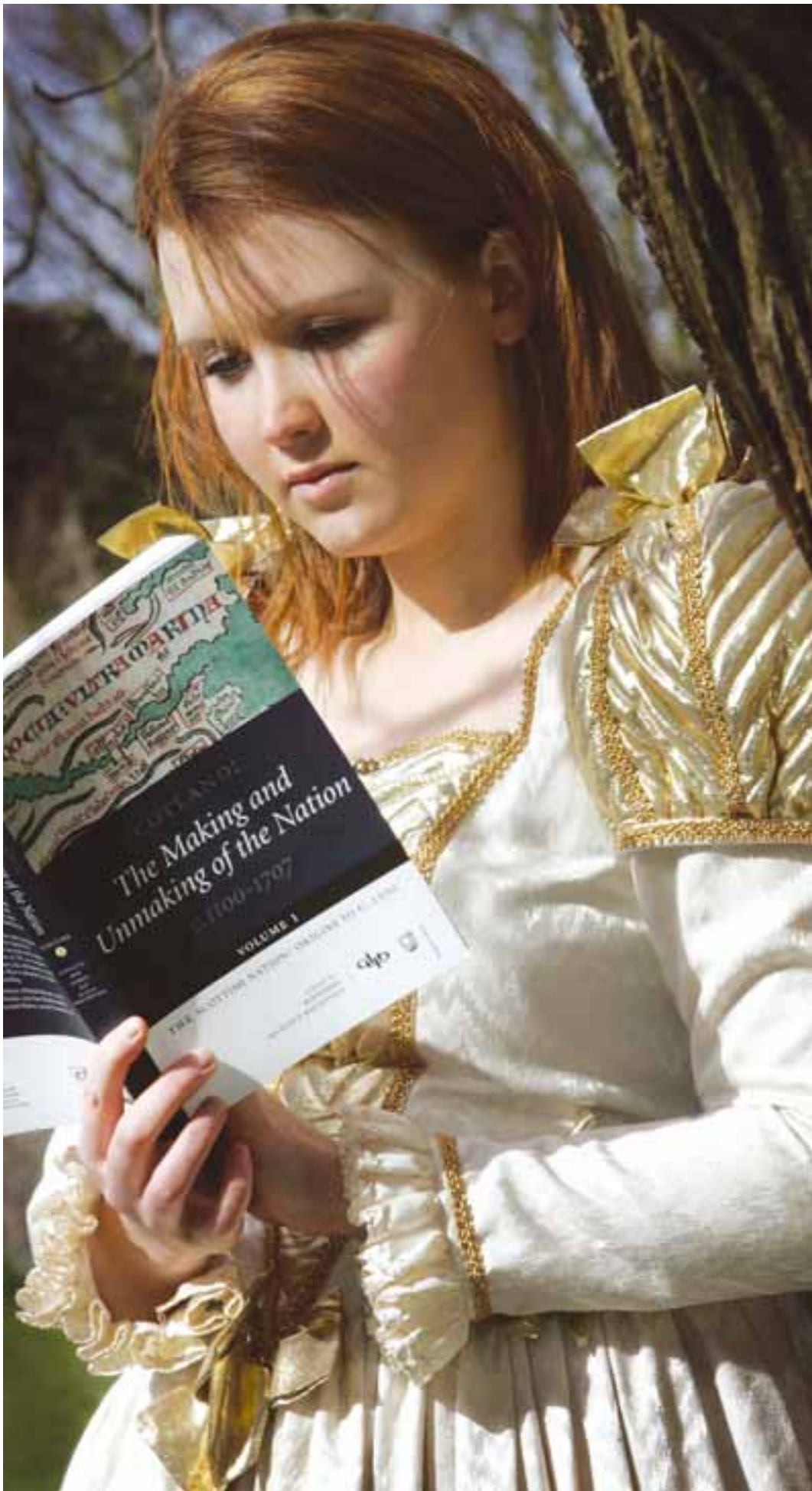
Land of your heart?

ATALE of conflict, kingship, church, town, country, architecture, literature... If you have a passion for Scotland, a new course which throws light on the nation’s formative years could be for you. *Medieval Scotland 1100–1500 and Early Modern Scotland 1500–1707* is a distance learning Scottish history course offered by the University of Dundee in collaboration with The Open University. It launches in 2007, the 300th anniversary of the Union of the Parliaments of Scotland and England. The 60-point course begins next February; closing date for registrations is 15 December 2006.

The course is supported by a new five-volume set of textbooks, *Scotland: The Making and Unmaking of the Nation, 1100–1707*. The books, which are being published by Dundee University Press, are available at www.dup.dundee.ac.uk or through all good bookshops.

The new course is an expansion of the Scottish history distance learning programme run by Dundee in collaboration with the OU. A course in *Modern Scottish history 1707 to the present* has been running since 1997.

More details of the course and how to enrol can be found at www.dundee.ac.uk/history/distancelearning/ See the Introduction section for information specifically for Open University students.



PEOPLE

PEOPLE

Studying under fire in Iraq

Rochelle Jones and her husband James (pictured top left) are OU students facing an unusual challenge. James, 22, a British Army soldier, was posted to southern Iraq in April. With Rochelle's support, he opted to carry on studying. In the first of two articles, Rochelle captures his experiences of study under fire

JAMES is a soldier for the 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards and a veteran of a number of battles in the Iraq invasion of 2003. At 16, after high school he went to the Army Foundation College in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, and after a year saw his first war. He has been a gunner and driver of tanks, trained as a demolitions expert and is a very able soldier in hand-to-hand combat and weapons handling. At the moment he is half of a sniper pair, providing security to the Commanding Officer of his regiment currently posted in Al Muthanna, southern Iraq.

He started studying with the OU in September 2005, pursuing a degree in social policy. He is currently registered on DD100 *An introduction to the social sciences: understanding social change* and is due to start D218 *Social policy: welfare, power and diversity* after that. James usually finds himself studying under a landrover to avoid the direct assault of 40 degrees of desert heat. He usually finds himself on call 24/7, getting only precious few hours to attend to personal business. Most soldiers would be nodding off to catch some sleep – my husband however attempts to study. His DD100 books are as much a part of his daily kit as are his machete, guns, full body armour and rifle. He has custom-fit his Bergen and body armour to allow room for his books. It's a funny thought somehow. Somewhere out there in Iraq is a soldier running around fully armoured with his weapons and his Open University textbooks.

For him, however, it is natural; he has to balance work and study, and it so happens that his trade is as a soldier. His study table is the hood of a landrover, a foxhole he dug out in the desert or any corner in a camp or in the buildings he patrols that can offer shade.

Being an OU student myself, I understand. I started studying for my MA in social sciences with the OU in May 2005; to understand some concepts better, I would discuss them with my husband. To further support me, he registered with the OU's programme for family members of students. From then on my OU studies became an integral part of our lives, and there was never a day when we did not talk about certain topics from an academic point of view. Somehow to James, philosophies and theories on sociology, knowledge and geography explained the mechanics of war and the global situation. It allowed him to see beyond the pictures in the papers; it gave him a sociological imagination.

Before The Open University, he was an uninterested student. His grades in school were poor; his interest was to join the army, play soldiers and be a hero. When we met, I was a UN volunteer in Cambodia as part of my graduate

course with Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. I remember him saying: "What can a social scientist do to make life better? Most academics are stuck on books and never really experience life." It urged me to show to him what academics and social scientists really do, how we contribute to the world.

Since then he has been a faithful student. One winter's day last November while on training in Bavaria, he and a few of the lads in his squadron sat in their tents with their boots frozen, discussing political ideologies and their effects on the world.

His OU studies are as much a part of his daily life as cleaning his weapons. He will wake up at 5am, get ready for the day, put his kit and weapons together (including

"His Open University studies are as much a part of his daily life as cleaning his weapons"

his OU materials); attempt to read a page while eating his breakfast and after that, whatever task he is assigned for the rest of the day, he will

try to catch a few minutes to read. This would be all right if not for the fact that his job is a dangerous business. James is a part of the 12-man Commanding Officer's Rover Group. Their task is to protect their commanding officer, the representation of leadership of the coalition forces in Al Muthanna province in southern Iraq. Recently, while the CO was due to appear at the local TV station, they got trapped inside. A massive number of roused Iraqis were rioting outside, unhappy about the lay-off of a number of police officers that the local council had fired. Luckily the soldiers were able to hold their position for three hours on the roofs until they were able to be extracted.

Emergency disrupts TMA

His TMAs are always late. Mail is never on time. There is never any time to sit down and contemplate academic essays; every time he starts something, an emergency comes up. Although he has been given a certain day each week to devote to reading, this is not always the case in the field. A soldier's life, although precise, is never predictable, especially in Iraq. Recently, after James had been up for more than 24 hours, due to lack of manpower, part of his squadron were sent to Nasiriya, a city 200km from Al Muthanna, to pick up equipment. James fainted from heat and exhaustion. And although he was told to take a rest day, he was sitting up in the medical quarters, attempting to finish his latest TMA.

The Open University has been extremely helpful to James. It allowed for his late submission of TMAs, and provided him in advance with DD100 textbooks so he could take them with him to Iraq and somehow follow an improvised timetable that takes his particular work

challenges into account. Being away from the comforts of home and family and the facilities of a comfortable study space while constantly facing life-threatening situations is a challenge not many can rise up to. The Open University understands this and has bent over backwards to accommodate his needs.

For James, his OU studies keep his mind on the level. They keep him grounded and allow him to understand situations that would otherwise baffle and induce panic. After the battle for Basra in 2003, while on patrol, James and his partner were approached by a little girl who asked them for food. His partner gave her a bottle of water and James gave her a bar of chocolate. The little girl happily thanked them and ran back to the alley where she came from. An hour or so later when they approached another side of town, they found this little girl hung up on the gate, strangled, with bits of chocolate still in her mouth and the bottle of water thrown to the ground. She was murdered in cold blood by a group of women who apparently found her behaviour of liking the chocolate bar an affront. It took a while for James to move on, and his studies have allowed him an explanation of why things are the way they are in the world.

I am extremely proud of him. His unflinching belief in education and his sacrifices to balance work and study are admirable. His dream is to finish a degree to better himself, to gain knowledge and skills that would allow him to contribute to his regiment, to his nation and to the

world. British soldiers are usually stereotyped – James however does not fit in those boxes. Although his situation might be extreme, he is an OU student personified.

To see James' weblog go to <http://jwjones.multiply.com> or if access is difficult <http://xrjones.multiply.com>



FIFTH COLUMN

Set realistic TMA times



I PONDERED over the misprint in my TMA paper. "Try to write your plan and essay in about 2.5 hours" it said. Must mean 2.5 days, I thought. No

one can plan, construct and write a perfect academic essay of more than 1,000 words in 2.5 hours. I picked up the TMA guidance sheet for my other course, which also asked for an essay. "Endeavour to plan and write your essay within 45 minutes". What! So not a misprint after all, just completely unrealistic...

Being now in my seventh year with the OU, I have written quite a few essays. I tend to read the advice sheet for a TMA (either on the paper itself or in the *Study Guide*) long before starting it, to get an idea of how much time I need to leave. When the times given turn out to be unrealistic, it disrupts any schedule I may have.

You might think I'm simply a dunce at writing, or at sticking to deadlines. Neither is true – for the past couple of years, I have financed my studies and supported myself by writing magazine articles on specialist subjects (to deadlines). No one could write a 1,000-word magazine article in this time. The minimum time even seasoned experts would allow to construct an article of this length is one full working day – a bit different from 2.5 hours!

I am aware that this time doesn't include assembling the facts and references to be included in the essay. I'm also aware that writing fast essays is good practice for the exam, but let's face it, an exam-quality essay won't get you many marks if presented as a TMA!

Anna Robinson is currently studying S328 Ecology and S365 Evolution

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.

RESEARCH

Vital work must go on

In the last issue of **sesame** (229) we highlighted the work of the *Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force* (DAPTF). Now its International Director **Professor Tim Halliday**, who is Professor of Biology at the OU, explains why it is being wound up

THE Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force (DAPTF), whose international office has been hosted by The Open University since 1993, is to close this summer. Established under the auspices of the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN (World Conservation Union) in 1991, DAPTF has initiated and supported vital research into the dramatic declines and extinctions among amphibians (frogs, toads, newts and salamanders) throughout the world, and contributed to the 2004 Global Amphibian Assessment (GAA), which revealed that 1,856 (32 per cent) of the world's 5,743 known species are threatened with extinction.

More species found

Largely as the result of the intense study of amphibians that has taken place, the number of described amphibian species has risen from 4,015 in 1986 to 6,011 today, a figure that is increasing by one or two species each



The newly recognised Sri Lankan frog *Philautus hallidayi* named in honour of the OU's Tim Halliday

week. A major factor in gathering data for the GAA has been the DAPTF's global network of volunteers. We communicate with our membership via our newsletter, *FROGLOG* and our website (www.open.ac.uk/daptf).

New research funded

Our most important contribution has been our Seed Grant programme, which awards grants of US\$500 to US\$2,000 to projects that further our objectives, to enable recipients to set up lines of research that will attract funding from conventional sources. Since 1992, we have funded 167 projects, distributing US\$321,534 to researchers in 49 different countries. More than 100 papers, most of them in high-impact journals, acknowledge the DAPTF as a source of funding. We have reached parts of the world that many other organisations have not, and the great majority of DAPTF grant recipients are young people starting their research careers.

Given our considerable successes, why are we closing? First, because we have achieved the function for which we were set up. The DAPTF has played a leading role in making the world aware of the serious plight that faces a group of animals that, for many people, is obscure. More importantly, we have been able to provide funds, albeit in modest amounts, to fill the time-lag between identifying the problem and the provision of funding.

Now that we have defined and largely understood the problem, a different kind of organisation is required to try to remedy it. The IUCN Amphibian Specialist Group starts work next year to take action to conserve amphibians and their habitats.

Amphibian declines are a symptom of a deep malaise that afflicts the world's freshwater habitats. They are a concern in themselves, but their implications for the future health of life on this planet should be the cause of much greater concern.

ni New Internationalist Magazine www.newint.org

CO₂NNED!

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People are being conned into thinking that offsetting their carbon emissions in an attempt to become 'carbon neutral' is a solution to climate change.

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CAREERS

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CAREERS

CASE STUDIES

WHILE **Louise Eaton** doesn't think of her blindness as an obstacle to a career, not every prospective employer can see beyond her disability to her OU honours degree and broad work experience. She is currently seeking a volunteer placement with a school which could support her application to train as a teacher.

Says Louise from East Sussex: "I have done voluntary work before. I used to do reflexology and massage at a home for ex-servicemen, as well as Braille teaching and after I'd been there six months they started to pay me. I was looking for paid work but for me it was also about being involved and getting out of the house. And when I was going through some problems of my own it helped take my mind off it

"Now I've just completed a term as a classroom volunteer at a primary school for students with physical disabilities and am looking for my next placement. It's a good way of starting, especially if you are disabled, it's all material for my CV and you never know what may come of it."

Fiona Nicolson worked in marketing management for 20 years but is taking a career break following some major life changes. She divides her time between studying for an OU degree in humanities and volunteering with the Parks Trust in Milton Keynes where she is helping to set up, organise and administer a photographic library.

She says: "I wanted a role that was local and fun and would take at least some of my work experience on board. Having worked in marketing and sales I know the sorts of images that might be required for a publication or for promotions, plus it helps to be computer literate and able to pick things up quickly.

"For me there's a social element to volunteering, being in the office environment, plus it gives structure to my week. There are still weekdays and weekends.

"I may go back to work and volunteering provides some continuity and keeps me in touch with the world. Having interviewed staff myself over many years I know the kinds of things that help. You don't want to look at someone and think, what have you been doing for the last five years? I know the value employers like me attach to what people do with their spare time."

Not a rattling tin in sight

Whether it's counting bats or campaigning for social justice, voluntary work nowadays is not only rewarding and diverse but can help you in almost any career

If you're already juggling OU study with a job, family or any other of the usual life commitments, the last thing on your mind could be taking on voluntary work.

And yet volunteering can offer you the chance to put your learning to practical use, acquire valuable experience for your next job application, or even test out some of the ideas you have about a future career.

A recent survey by the Institute of Volunteering Research for the OU found 29 per cent of the students interviewed were volunteering, while a further 35 per cent had volunteered in the past.

Of those who currently volunteer more than half also had full-time jobs, which seems to prove the claim often made for OU students that their time management skills extend to squeezing 25 hours out of every 24.

Volunteering hits...

According to Ellen Cocking of the OU's Careers Service, there are a huge variety of volunteer roles which could give you a step up the career ladder, or let you try out a role before committing to studying for a career in it.

She says: "The Samaritans or Victim Support are just two examples of counselling and advice organisations offering opportunities which will help you develop listening and interpersonal skills, as well as learn to hold your own boundaries, all of which are useful for careers in the counselling, psychology, social or community work professions.

"Practical volunteering such as with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers helps you develop the teamworking, problem solving, practical and leadership skills which may help you into a career in conservation."

It's a common misconception that undertaking voluntary work means making a choice between rattling a tin or delivering Meals on Wheels. Most large towns and cities have a volunteer bureau which operates rather like any other employment office and boasts literally thousands of widely different opportunities.

Whether you already know what you'd like to do or have only the vaguest notion that you'd like to use certain skills, or acquire relevant work experience to support future job applications, you'll be offered an interview and the chance to talk through dozens of relevant opportunities.

At the Volunteer Centre close to the OU's Milton Keynes headquarters the volunteering roles on offer include surveying the local landscape for bats and insects, using digital media to record local residents' life stories, mentoring young offenders, campaigning for social justice, book-keeping for a sports club and assisting with educational visits and reconstructions – something for absolutely every subject area and every career route.

...and myths

Among the drawbacks identified by students in the survey were that volunteering takes up too much time, but while some agencies, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Welfare Rights, do ask for a minimum number of hours in return for a high quality and comprehensive training programme, others are happy to negotiate the number and pattern of hours to suit your commitments. It's far more important to them to have a regular commitment from you and know they can rely on you turning

up, than to have any number of volunteers promising the earth and quickly discovering they can't honour the hours they agreed.

Lack of appreciation, inadequate training and a sense that they were doing work the organisation should really have employed someone to do were among the other drawbacks OU students mentioned.

But higher numbers of students mentioned a range of returns on their time investment: almost 90 per cent said they got a sense of satisfaction from volunteering, while more than half also cited the chance to meet people and make new friends, and to gain new skills and broader experience.

Says Ellen Cocking: "Any volunteering opportunity is useful for personal development, whatever career area you're aiming for. The communication skills you develop from talking to bereaved people or fundraising for Oxfam can be transferred to a wide variety of roles: almost all jobs require communication skills.

"And volunteering can be empowering. It can help develop self-worth, a sense of belonging, give you a chance to explore new situations, make new friends, help others, make a difference and grow and develop yourself."

Next steps

A key issue to emerge from the survey was that 59 per cent of students would welcome support and encouragement to volunteer from the OU. Based in the OU's London Region, the Active Community Project is rising to the challenge by organising a volunteering fair for OU students at the London centre in Camden on 6 July. It also funded a Volunteering FirstClass conference in May, which can be viewed on a read-only basis. Visit www.open.ac.uk/careers/conferences for details.



Counselling and advice organisations offer opportunities to develop interpersonal skills

The Project is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and is working to promote volunteering opportunities to students through its website www.open.ac.uk/acp where you'll find links to a number of websites about volunteering. These include the national database www.do-it.org.uk which can tell you whether there's a volunteer centre near you.

The OU Careers Service's own website also lists some of the best-known volunteering bodies at www.open.ac.uk/careers/downloads/ou_studycareer06.pdf

And don't forget that both the OU's Students Association (OUSA) and the Alumni Association are always on the lookout for volunteers to assist with everything from helping out at events and student and career mentoring to standing for office.

Your degree in... Business Studies

YOU'LL be gaining a wide range of sought-after skills as you work towards a degree in Business Studies. Among those you could list on your CV or job application are: business analysis, research methods and marketing, good quantitative skills and recognition of an organisation's needs.

Other marketable skills and experience are part and parcel of studying with the OU: the ability to work and learn independently, leadership and teamworking, communication and information technology skills.

Particularly valuable in many of today's careers is experience in project management, which you may also acquire through your Business Studies degree.

Obvious routes with this degree include purchasing and supply,

human resources, production management, retail management, marketing and logistics. If you do opt for one of these you may want to consider studying for a professional qualification while working. But commercial awareness is so integral to today's working world that whichever sector you choose, many employers will place value on your studies.

For a leaflet on *Your Degree in Business Studies* and many other subjects visit www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options If you already have an idea of the sector you'd like to work in, get more information at www.prospects.ac.uk/links/sectorBs The Careers Advisory Sservice website at www.open.ac.uk/careers has an A-Z for a range of career areas plus details of relevant resources and links to useful external sites.

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CAREERS

Labour of love

A PASSION for books fuelled by studying with the OU has led to four students launching individual bookselling businesses.

Catherine Hawley, Sara Williams, Heather Lawrence and Margaret Hessay all studied different courses, and only realised their OU connections when they joined booksellers' co-operative ibooknet.

"I've spent most of my life thinking about books one way or another," said Catherine, of Shipley, West Yorkshire, who achieved an English degree at a conventional university, then taught the subject in a secondary school before taking an MA in Literature with the OU.

"When I started the MA I immediately realised two things – I found both the history of the book and bibliography really fascinating, and as I was stuck out on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales, academic books were hard to find. Before I finished the MA I had begun dealing online in academic books and in 2002 I joined ibooknet."

Catherine, whose specialist secondhand books business can be found at www.clhawley.co.uk, added: "The MA gave me the critical skills to judge which academic books are worth stocking, up-to-date knowledge of literary theories, and online

research skills to help me work with online sales."

Sara (www.yesteryearbooks.co.uk) also changed careers. "My dad has a bookselling business and was struggling to carry heavy works to and from book fairs," said Sara, from Dunstable, Beds. "I'd just done T171 *You, your computer and the net* and designed him a basic website and uploaded all his books in catalogue format. This led him to the world of online bookselling and to thank me he gave me a pile of books and encouraged me to do the same thing."

Heather (www.peakirkbooks.com) began OU study in the early 1990s and started her own secondhand bookselling business in 1997. "I was working part-time in an academic library, and could see that the students were struggling to find secondhand books. Unfortunately there is no university in Peterborough, where I live, so I wasn't going to be able to make a living selling this type of book – so I switched our main stock to children's books. But I do still stock a quantity of students' books and still get a tingle when I handle the ones that are of interest to me personally – geopolitics, cultural studies and sociology.

Margaret (www.hessaybooks.co.uk), who lives in York, said: "I did the 'Homer' course,

then Athens in the 5th century, and enjoyed them very much. My growing interest spurred me on to learn some Ancient Greek, which was very enjoyable and very useful when I was listing many boxes of classics books on to my database. Listing them, and dealing with the customers, has been a great pleasure."

All the sellers' books can be found on the ibooknet site www.ibooknet.co.uk as well as on their own websites.



E-LEARNING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

ARE you teaching or otherwise supporting learning in higher education, and seeking to develop your expertise? The OU has two new courses which could help.

The eLearning Professional (H808) – examines questions such as what are the major influences that shape the evolving practices of e-learning professionals? How appropriate are tools such as e-portfolios for recording and demonstrating learning achievements and how do they support the personal and professional development of learners? What does professionalism as an e-learning practitioner imply and how can competence be demonstrated? This 30-point postgraduate course explores the potential of software tools that are increasingly being employed, and examines the potential of e-portfolios, personal development plans, wikis and blogs. You will undertake a number of online group activities as well as receiving individual guidance on the development of your own e-portfolio.

First presentation is September 2006. Registration closes 24 August.

The Postgraduate certificate in academic practice – PCAP – (H812) is a 60-point course which gives you opportunity to examine and appraise your educational practices in the light of research-informed knowledge of learning, teaching, assessment and other aspects of the curriculum. It builds on your experiences and understandings, challenges you to reflect on them, invites you to improve them, and encourages you to support enhancement in higher education in general. PCAP acknowledges uncertainty in the educational process, and portrays well-informed professional judgement as a way of dealing with it.

You will examine a variety of valued practices and consider ways of fostering them. You will investigate and apply technologies and practices to support student learning in distant, virtual, blended and face-to-face modes of teaching. Open University practices are a point of reference but you can fully engage with PCAP if you work elsewhere in higher education.

First presentation is October 2006. Registration closes 15 September.

For more information on both courses see www.open.ac.uk/courses

SUPPORT

SUPPORT

Behind? You need a SPUD

By **Ormond Simpson**

If you started your OU course in February you're now nearly halfway through. And like 62.7 per cent of OU students at this stage you're a bit behind with your course (actually I made that figure up – but I bet it's not too far wrong). So what you need is a course on time management. Well, actually no, because the last thing you've got time for is another course. So this is the world's shortest guide to how to catch up with your studies. Just remember the word SPUD:

S stands for Simpson's 3S study system (pat. applied for):

Skim bits of the course – you don't have to read everything thoroughly. You can sometimes get a good idea of what's important by skimming through a unit.

Skip – you can actually skip some bits if

you need to. Ask your tutor's advice.

Scrape – you don't have to do well at everything. Sometimes it's OK to aim to scrape through a bit of the course if you need just to catch up.

P stands for the slogan:

'Perfectionism is the enemy of progress', which is another way of saying it's OK to scrape. You really don't have to get 90 per cent on that assignment...

D stands for various ways of finding the time:

Defer – there may be things you think you have to do which you can put off for a while.

Delegate – there may be things you can get someone else to do.

Downgrade – there may be things you don't have you do to such a state of

perfection – see P.

Decommit – a fancy way of saying there may be things you don't have to do at all.

U – ah, you noticed the absence of **U**. I couldn't find a **U** – suggestions welcome. But I did find a number of quite fascinating words – did you know that the rounded elevation in the tympanic membrane of your ear is called the umbo? And that a uropod is an abdominal appendage of a crustacean? And – oh sorry – I've just increased the number of students behind to 71.6 per cent...

Ormond Simpson is Senior Lecturer in Institutional Research in the OU's Institute of Educational Technology

New online tools for 2007

THE OU Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Programme is now well underway with significant consultation and development activity taking place across the university.

So what does this mean for students? Well, initially they will not notice much difference – though the underlying technical infrastructure has been enhanced considerably to allow new learning tools to be 'plugged in' as they are developed over the next two years. But course teams in every faculty are deciding how best they can utilise the functionality being developed for the VLE in future courses and presentations. Some of these tools are aimed at bringing distance learners together – and closer to staff with the use of asynchronous communication and collaboration tools. These include blogs, which can be used for students to keep learning diaries, and wikis, where learners can carry out collaborative project work.

Other synchronous tools provide more immediacy for distance learners. Along with videoconferencing and audioconferencing facilities, the OU is developing tools to see who's online, where they're located and whether they are happy to be contacted. Students can then engage in an instant messaging dialogue with others on their course.

Students will soon have access to better online library facilities through the VLE, including enhanced methods for searching multiple library catalogues simultaneously. They will also be able to test their knowledge with the online assessment tools being developed. They can store anything created digitally in the course of their studies in their online portfolio.



The technical infrastructure will be invisible to students, but they will see improvements in facilities

The increasing number of online tools will need to work together seamlessly and logically so that learners can find the information they need easily and be able to adapt its appearance and positioning on the screen (particularly if they have a disability). The Integrated Online Experience project within the VLE is ensuring that learners' requirements are put first as the new systems are integrated.

Much of the VLE functionality will be available by February 2007 – the remainder is planned for February 2008. The OU will by then be very well positioned to exploit the many interesting online learning possibilities that are emerging to provide a more interactive and engaging experience for our learners.

All about set books

STUDENTS may sometimes have to buy books which are essential to their study but not supplied as part of the course material.

'Set books' are books which students have to pay for in addition to their course fees, just as students do at other universities. The books are available from bookshops – not from the university. There are 350 set books which are used by 150 different courses in the OU. The Arts faculty makes by far the greatest use of this scheme, with 190 books on 47 courses.

Don't rely on borrowing. Set books form an essential, assessable part of the courses which use them. As these books are used continuously throughout the course it is not practical for students to borrow them from libraries, since they may not be available when students most need them.

Get the right edition. Because the coursework is written around these books it is of the utmost importance that students get the right editions. For instance, if you are studying *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, it is not good enough to buy just any copy, because the edition used in the course may have a particular introduction and extensive notes which you will need to study. Course material may also refer to specific page numbers in the set book and, if you do not have the right edition, you will have difficulty in following the course.

Read the letter. Students receive a Set Book Requirements letter when they are finally registered, which contains all the information they need about finding set books. In addition, the requirements letter, StudentHome and the set books webpage

(see below) all carry my phone and email details, to enable students to contact me direct if they are experiencing difficulty.

If a book becomes difficult to obtain, alternative supply arrangements are made by the university, which include buying stock in and supplying the book via an order form. With the advent of new 'print on demand' technology some books are printed only in response to orders – they are still ordered through local booksellers or on the internet, but may take a little more time to arrive.

A complete list of courses with set books is available on the set books webpage at www3.open.ac.uk/about/setbooks/ which is also accessible via Studenthome.

Aileen Cousins
Set Books Co-ordinator



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CORNWALL

In May this year Jamie Oliver opened his latest restaurant *Fifteen Cornwall* at Watergate Bay near Newquay, putting this stunning beach location firmly on the map. **sesame** is delighted to have negotiated special offers for summer and autumn breaks staying at both Watergate Bay and Porth.

TREGURRIAN is a family-run hotel situated just 100 yards from the golden sands of Watergate Bay. Amenities include a bar, lounge, sea-view restaurant, non-smoking conservatory, separate games room plus jacuzzi and sauna and a car park. All bedrooms have private facilities, TV and tea/coffee tray. Prices per adult for three-night stays on a B&B basis start from £75. These prices include admission to the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan and there is even an option to stay a fourth night for FREE on most dates. Seven nights start from £125 B&B, including the garden admissions and the FREE night offer. Further details on these hotels and others which are included in this offer can be found

at www.breaksincornwall.com For special prices to **sesame** readers quote **Holiday offer C163**

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The charming village of Arillas on the north-west coast of Corfu makes an ideal holiday resort for couples and families.

THIS special explorer holiday includes private airport transfers to/from Arillas, self-catering in the privately owned Elena-Stella apartments, a full-day boat excursion to one of the offshore islands, a half-day excursion to explore Corfu town or



Fifteen Cornwall

Sidari, plus one Greek evening meal (three courses with wine). Charter flights are available from most UK regional airports and prices start from £335 per adult for seven nights based on four sharing a two-bedroom apartment. **Holiday offer C151/OU**

For further details contact ABTA and ATOL bonded operator, Travelsmith Ltd. ABTA V1290. ATOL 1917. Telephone +44 (0)1621 784666 quoting the holiday offer number.

Disability – have your say!

THE university needs your help to promote disability equality. Along with other public authorities it is currently developing a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) and action plan and is involving disabled students and staff in its development.

“With more than 9,000 disabled students studying with the university, we need to ensure that our services support individual requirements wherever possible, and that potential students are aware of these services,” said Derek Childs, the OU’s Head of Equal Opportunities.

“We have already had valuable feedback on the way our policies and practices are operating from disabled students and staff in response to messages posted on our websites. This feedback is helping us to identify what is working well, what is not working well, where there are gaps in our provision, and priorities for action. The OU DES and action plan are being developed in light of responses from the consultation.

“It is essential that we continue to receive ongoing feedback from current, prospective and past disabled students about how our policies and practices are working, and the impact of the actions that we are taking, if we are to be successful in developing and delivering our DES.”

Although the development of a DES by December 2006 is a new statutory duty under disability legislation, the OU has had a commitment since its foundation to widening participation for people

who have found it difficult to access traditional higher education provision, including disabled students.

The draft OU DES will be posted on the OU’s Equal Opportunities website www.open.ac.uk/equalopportunities/ in June. The OU

welcomes comments and feedback on the scheme and action plan, what the priorities for action should be, and other actions that might be appropriate, either by email to Pdg-Equality-Voice@open.ac.uk or by writing to DES Consultation, EO Office, Offices 6, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA (Minicom 01908 653970). Views and experiences of studying with the OU, and/or comments on OU policies, practices and course materials are also welcome.

● The development of a new national website to help higher education staff better understand the needs of disabled students has been led by the Open University’s Student Services (Teaching and Learning Support) unit.

The Making Your Teaching Inclusive website at www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/ gives site visitors an insight into what study is like for disabled students through a series of case studies and video clips, and offers information on what staff can do to find solutions to many of the common barriers to learning.

The website is part of CARS (Creating Accessible Resources for Staff), a three-year programme for improving disability provision in higher education, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

“It is essential that we continue to receive feedback from students”

competition

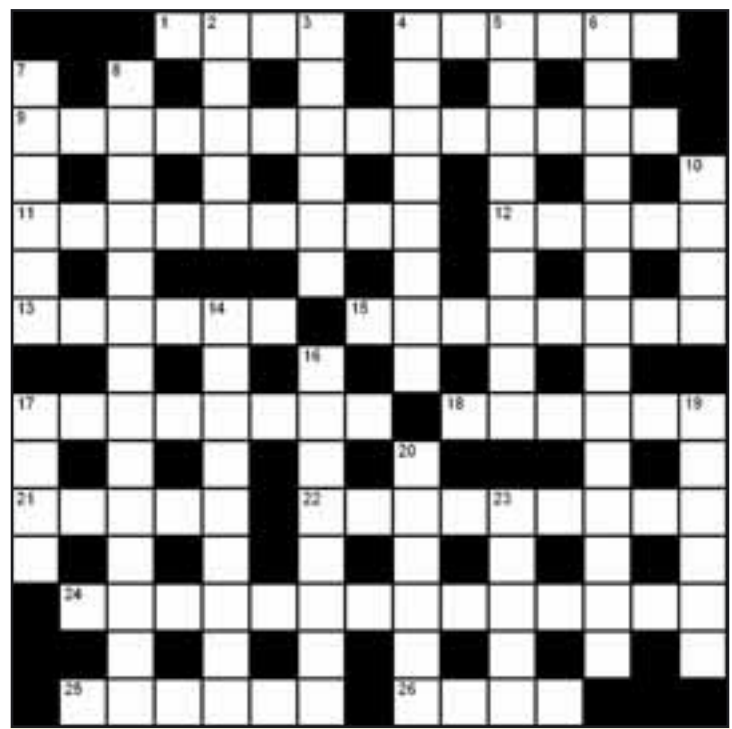
sesame crossword competition

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solutions drawn out of the hat on 24 July 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



SESAME SUMMER CROSSWORD ENTRY FORM

Send your entry with the completed coupon to: Cullen Crosswords, 19 Cyncoed Place, Cardiff, CF23 6SG Closing date 24 July 2006. Only one entry per person.

Name: _____
Address: _____
Postcode: _____ Tel Number: _____
Email: _____

Across

- 1. Old donkey climbing a Greek mountain (4)
- 4. Sectarian – a believer in anonymous names, primarily (6)
- 9. College with no student bar? (4,10)
- 11. Powerful potential talent seen in two articles (9)
- 12. Audience’s dislike for music-hall (5)
- 13. Spirits provided by good landlords? (6)
- 15. Want a little time (8)
- 17. Gather round and study a battleground (8)
- 18. African novelist offers cup-bearer on account (6)
- 21. Tot taking the lead in Aristophanes’ play (5)
- 22. Softly hold forth after girl is made to disappear (9)
- 24. Dodgson’s Guide to the Underground (3,5,6)
- 25. Wear a rather revealing top emerging from the water (6)
- 26. Viewers often have it said (4)

Down

- 2. Turn down branch line heading for Newquay (5)
- 3. Whispers ‘Like a date?’ (6)
- 4. Means of making a cut on the leg side? (5,3)
- 5. See one store occupying most of block (9)
- 6. Accordingly, open and shut? (2,3,4,3,2)
- 7. Make report of a Japanese board-game (6)
- 8. Hero left her all confused, going flat out (4,3,7)
- 10. Wigeon announcing itself so carelessly (4)
- 14. Struggle that ended with hard workers being sacked (6,3)
- 16. Peak order for eggs (8)
- 17. Partly financed investment in African capital (4)
- 19. Shock treatment by English judge leads to a matter being thrown out (6)
- 20. Skin inflammation round horse’s tail found in riding-school (6)
- 23. Rebuffed very mature Indian (5)

Spring crossword winners

The winner of our spring crossword was R.D. Jackson from Preston who wins £75 plus a copy of the *Chambers Dictionary*. The two runners-up were Anna Surgey from Reading and A. Sinclair from Edinburgh who each receive a copy of the *Chambers Dictionary*.

Answers - Across: 10 Costa brava, 11 Anteater, 12 Likeness, 13 Tetrahedra, 14 Balm, 15 Afrit, 16 Neophyte, 17 Hogshead, 19 Uttermost, 21 Ajax, 22 Demonic, 24 Sack, 27 Eiderdown, 30 Exorcist, 33 Poitiers, 34 Loris, 35 Sink, 36 Fanny Adams, 37 Altruist, 38 Defender, 39 Eye-catcher

Answers - Down: 1 Solidago, 2 Stream, 3 Abnegated, 4 Cats-cradle, 5 Partita, 6 Castanet, 7 Steam open, 8 Face the music, 9 Detritus, 18 Six feet under, 20 Cob, 23 Icebreaker, 25 Idle hands, 26 Mousetrap, 28 Idolater, 29 Wiseacre, 31 Sinister, 32 Glisten, 35 Sluice

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION An administration fee of £20 applies to every new membership. Restrictions on access apply to some memberships, check the website or speak to an operator for full details. Lines are open 8.30am-8pm Mon-Friday, 9am-5pm Saturdays and 11am-4pm Sundays.

OU STUDENT

Edited by

R. Rosenthal

The official publication of the Open University Students Association

Rebecca Rosenthal

First impressions

It gives me great pleasure to edit my first edition of *OU Student* as the new President of the Open University Students Association (OUSA). While at the time of writing I have only been in post for a few weeks, it's been a whirlwind of a journey already, and editing *OU Student* is one of many challenges I have faced recently.

With our annual Conference being our major event of the year, it seems fitting to dedicate most of this edition of *OU Student* to reporting to you Conference news and views, as well as introducing you to our new Officer Team and Executive Committee. A particular highlight this year was the attendance of Baroness Boothroyd at our Executive Committee reception at Conference, which was a huge honour for those present. Our thanks go out to her for the opportunity for some of our student representatives to meet our much loved University Chancellor at our most important event of the year.

Weight of responsibility

Conference is the time of year that holds joys and sorrows. There was a mixture of both when we said farewell to Joan Jones as she successfully completed her second term of office as OUSA President. Joan was a fantastic advocate for OUSA, and left behind many legacies including the beginnings of a valuable relationship with the National Union of Students (NUS).

The first impressions of becoming the OUSA President take me back to my first OU course (DD100 for those of you that are interested!). That feeling of excitement mixed with a little apprehension of what the next couple of months will bring, the commitment, the passion for the task you are undertaking, the responsibility to do well, and of course the knowing that a whole new world is on the verge of opening up. Although, somehow, this President feels a little over-weighted with TMAs!

What stood out for me at my first OUSA Conference, and continues to do so, is that we have so many students who feel passionate about their own education and representation, all in one place, with heartfelt debates and discussions taking place right throughout the Conference weekend. What also impresses me is that each and everyone of those students has given up their weekend voluntarily to come together to make decisions that will in turn guide their leaders and open many doors to progression and

change. Some of which I hope to introduce to you in this issue.

Perhaps, for an organisation like ours, one of the most important resolutions is the one we have nicknamed 'section 15'. We have so nicknamed it, because it becomes the new Section 15 of our Constitution. It presents us with an opportunity that we have never had before. It offers us the chance to try new ideas within our own structure, on a temporary basis, with the view to bringing forward more permanent changes as proposals for debate at our next Conference (why not be there, represent a unit, and take part in the debate yourself?). Not only does it give us the tools we need to deal with the practical issues of suspending parts of our Constitution so we can pilot new ideas, it also gives us the perfect opportunity to reflect on who we are as an organisation, and who we wish to be.



Rebecca Rosenthal (right), the new OUSA President, says a fond farewell to the outgoing President, Joan Jones

turn to page 38

First impressions

from page 37

How do we find the balance between acting as a provider of social forums and providing access to opportunities, experiences, skills and an environment to develop your talents through our Representative structure? These are questions we would like you to help answer. "Change is the only certainty within the OU," said Will Swann, Director, Students, as he addressed our Conference. Our student body is changing, and in line with this, we as an organisation need to change too. I have asked our new Vice-President, Constitutions, John Orchard, to explain a little more about our 'section 15' later on in this edition.

Another statement that stood out for me

in Will Swann's address was: "Younger students seek a strong student community – OUSA does that." He also thought our Conference slogan "Informing Policies, Transforming Practices" was particularly apt for our Students Association, as we strive to continue to inspire others. As a Welsh student, recognising national diversity is an issue I am determined we will address. While to an extent we must accept the regulation differences between different nations, we must also ensure we are able to respond to this ever-changing environment.

Before being elected as President, I spent two years in the post of Vice-President Education. I can't sign off without saying a heartfelt thank you to Professor Linda Jones, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum &

Awards) for the work we did together and the progress we made for OUSA and the OU.

As I write, our new Officer Team and I are about to embark on our plan of regional visits. To date my plans include visits to Belfast, Glasgow and Cardiff, as well as Cheltenham and some of the other English regions... and of course in line with our advancing society, a virtual visit to our Northern and Southern Europe regions. If you do happen to see us when we are on our travels, do come and say hello. At Degree Ceremonies and other events, the students are the VIPs – and there's no-one we would be more interested in meeting than you!

REBECCA ROSENTHAL
PRESIDENT, OUSA

IN BRIEF

Conference News

EACH year Conference awards Honorary Life Memberships to those who have dedicated a large part of their lives to furthering OUSA's objectives. This year the awards were presented to: Als Ryan, David Nevett and Jane Harvey.

Conference is the perfect opportunity to invite prominent speakers from both the University and from our external relationships. This year it was a great honour for us to accept the following as our guest speakers: Professor Brigid Haywood (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Staff), Alan Cadogan (Associate Lecturers' Committee), Kat Fletcher (President, NUS) and Will Swann (Director, Students).

Disabled Students Group

CONFERENCE brought in a change in name from the 'Enabled Students Group' to the 'Disabled Students Group'. The group has a very specific role to play and it is there to give a voice to disabled members of the Students Association on issues specifically related to how disabilities affect their time at The Open University.

Carole Brooks, Chair of the Disabled Students Group, feels positive about the name change. "The objective of the name change is to make the purpose of the group clear – what you see is what you get. The Disabled Students Group is the voice of the disabled student within OUSA." For more information on the nature of the group and how to become a member, contact the OUSA Office.

Areas of interest?

WHILE it would be impossible to highlight all the resolutions and debates of Conference (more than 100!), we've highlighted some below which may be of interest and which really do reflect the diversity of issues discussed at conference and the diversity of our student body.

We saw a large variety of debates, including:

- * how do we address the issue of providing social support for those under 18 studying with their school or college?
- * the demise of the Course Choice Meetings within some regions
- * the development of our FirstClass suite of conferences to address disability needs
- * protecting the facility of assignment extensions
- * a more flexible approach to course provision
- * the break down of 60-point courses over two years
- * feedback from students on tutors
- * an increase in day schools
- * clear information about financial support
- * the development of the Bologna declaration
- * should Residential School Representatives receive a daily allowance for refreshments?
- * Student Support

So... why not become involved in your local branch and be part of the body of students committed to debating and discussing these issues? Be there next year!

* *Summary of Conference resolutions*

More students elected to the Executive Committee

Carole Radcliffe (South Region), Roz Evans (South West Region), Felicity Lloyd-King (West Midlands Region), Kev Pettinger (East Midlands Region), Steve Blake (East of England Region), Malcolm White (Yorkshire Region), Petrina Douglas (North Region), Philip Edwards (Wales Region), Paul Noble (Scotland Region), Stephen Woodard (Northern Europe sub-region), Marianne Mitchell (Southern Europe sub-region), George MacFarlane (Student Member of Council), Karen Scott (Member for Student Academic Links) and Sybil Richardson (Societies Representative).

Ring in the changes

BY now it may be clear to you that change is in the air. Not change for the sake of it, but change brought on by a call from members; and there is



very little change more significant than that of the way in which our branches and regions are organised. Conference has voted for a series of experiments to take place; section 15 of the

Constitution allows for the temporary suspension of the parts of the existing Constitution to be replaced for the period of the experiment by locally devised alternatives. This is an exciting prospect and one which hopefully all Regional Forums and their constituent branches will embrace; this is the opportunity to re-write the rule book as it applies to your unit!

Regional forums and branches have guidelines on how to proceed with these experiments. These general guidelines indicate the matters that will need to be regarded to ensure that our Association remains legal and can demonstrate that we are being prudent with public funds – but beyond this it is hoped that units will be enterprising in the search for their ideal

structure. The Executive Committee will actively work to support units to introduce viable changes locally and will work jointly with the unit to monitor the success of the experiment.

So what are the prime objectives? Simple really – to achieve wider participation, to reduce bureaucracy and to make OUSA accessible to all. I have been charged with the responsibility of taking the lead on this 'Section 15 Project' within the Executive Committee. If you would like to contact me with feedback or questions on this project, then please contact me through the Office or via my FirstClass mailbox by typing in 'Ousa VP Constitut'.

JOHN ORCHARD
VICE-PRESIDENT CONSTITUTIONS

EDUCATION MATTERS

Empowering students

HELLO and welcome to my first edition of *Education Matters*. I thought I would take this opportunity to tell you a little bit about my plans and hopes for the coming year, and to share with you some of the passionate belief I have in the power of the student voice.

Conference recognised that the role of Student Academic Link (SAL) is not performing in the way it was envisioned it would, and called on the Executive Committee to bring forward motions next year to address the current issues. As Vice-President Education (VP Ed) SALs come under my remit, and in the coming months, working closely with the Executive Committee Member (ECM) for SALs, I will be performing a review of the role. The review will be fairly wide ranging and will look not only at how best to structure and utilise SALs, but also at their selection/election process, training and support, and just as importantly their promotion and advertisement to the rest of the student body and to the University. A review will be pretty meaningless and ineffective if it only involves ECM SALs and me so I'm hoping that you will participate and share your views and ideas with us. Look out in the next few months for information on how you can take part in the review, and when it starts please do get involved.

Student Reps vital

One of the primary functions of our Association is to represent the student view to the University. We do this in various ways, formally through our seats on their boards and committees, and more informally over pre- and post-meeting coffee, and any other opportunity that presents itself. The University has a vast and complex structure and the Officers of the Association couldn't possibly attend every event where it would be useful to have student representation and so we have Student Reps to fill many of the roles. Student Reps attend meetings and promote the views of

the Association, and after the meeting they send a brief report to VP Ed on matters of interest or import to the student body. VP Ed then makes sure that information is passed on to the appropriate people and filtered out through the various channels of communication to the student population in general. Our Student Reps are the people who wield the power of the Association, by articulating the student voice; they perform a vital role and in effect are the eyes, ears, and mouthpiece for the student body. The University committee year begins in September and the time is fast approaching when we begin the drive to recruit Student Reps so they can be trained and ready to take up their posts. The posts are available at both regional and central level and expenses are paid. If you think you could rise to the challenge of being a Student Representative then please keep your eyes and ears open for more information about the application process, or alternatively contact me directly either by contacting the OUSA office or by dropping me a line to my mailbox (OUSA VP Education – if using FirstClass, or ousao4@guest.open.ac.uk – if using another email programme).

Well that's it for this edition, I hope I have managed to give you a taste of the enthusiasm I have for my new role, and the passionate belief I have that as students we can influence our University. I would love to hear from you about ideas you may have for future editions or about issues that affect you as a student so please do get in touch.

POLLY POLLARD
VICE-PRESIDENT,
EDUCATION, OUSA





The newly elected Executive Committee and the General Manager at OUSA Conference. (Committee members Paul Noble, Stephen Woodard and Kevin Pettinger are not pictured)

Introduction to the Officer Team

Deputy President

Lisa Carson has been studying with the University since 2002. Having been involved with OUSA from early on in her OU career she joined the Executive Committee as the representative from Northern Ireland. Lisa says of her new role: “The Deputy President has a responsibility for communication and reviewing the Association’s current channels of communication with new and existing active and interested members, and working towards a framework of communication which encompasses old and new technology to effectively reach a greater number of our members.”

Vice President Constitutions

John Orchard has a history in change management and began studying with The Open University in 2002. He says: “One thing I am sure will be a common theme with the current Officer Team and the Executive Committee will be good communications. Conference has enabled regions and branches to experiment with our structure. My colleagues and I will be working together to ensure that we collectively learn something about how the membership sees the future of the Association.” John first joined the Executive Committee as the representative from the South region.

Vice President Education

Polly Pollard is a firm believer in participation, believing “OUSA needs you, and with you we can make a difference.” Polly started studying with the University in 1991 and her dedication to OUSA took shape in 2003. “My involvement at local level allowed me a glimpse of what the ‘student voice’ could achieve and my passion for developing that voice grew from there,” she says. Polly joined the Executive Committee in 2004 as representative from Yorkshire.

Vice President Finance

Julie Rains has been able to apply her study skills and qualifications to the role she has within OUSA. She says: “I have been studying

with the OU since February 1992. Since then I have done various courses, the last of which is the Certificate in Accounting. This course has given me more in-depth understanding of costings and budgetary matters, which in this role can be vital.” Julie entered the Executive Committee as the representative for her region and held that role for four years. This is Julie’s third year in her current role.

Vice President Representation

Keith Ward was re-elected after spending a couple of months in the role, being initially elected when a casual vacancy appeared. He says: “It has been a huge learning curve and one I have enjoyed immensely. My work includes branch restructuring and I am working on the idea of branches having the options both to meet face-to-face and virtually. I realise that some students cannot meet face-to-face for one reason or another and by including virtual options the maximum amount of students are going to be reached.” Keith first joined the Executive Committee as the representative for the East of England.

Vice President Student Support

Chris Bell started her studies with the University in 1995 and soon became involved in OUSA. This is Chris’ second year in this role. She says: “I have made some progress towards the goals I set last year. These goals included promotion of OUSA and student support, to facilitate our support groups, to have better communication and to encourage fundraising.”

Vice President Equal Opportunities

Louise Woosey began studying with the OU six years ago. She says: “I believe passionately that each and every student in the OU has the right to expect equal opportunities regardless of disability, gender, age, race, religion, etc. I bring to the role the ability to listen to both sides of the debate. I bring the determination to help rid our Association of inequality and inopportunity.”

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 31 July.

Central Events

Central Training Event 1- 3 September 2006, Wyboston Lakes Business and Leisure Centre

Executive Committee Meeting 8 - 10 September 2006, Wyboston Lakes Business and Leisure Centre.

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 (except August), 8.30pm, Grasshopper Pub, Poole Road, Lower Parkstone, Poole. Details Neil Walkling: neil.walkling@ntlworld.com Web: www.bournemouthpoole.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 First Wednesday of every month, 8.30pm, Horts Tavern, 49-50 Broad Street, Bristol and Third Tuesday of every month, 8.30pm, The Cornubia, Temple Street Bristol. 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

Devon South Branch Second or third Wednesday of every month. The Ship, Preston, Paignton. Details Peter: Petergibbo9@aol.com

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 (except August), 7pm, Trader Joe’s Pub, top of 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 Ghost walk around Guildford Town Centre, late June (date to be confirmed). Meal and drinks by the river – The White House, Thursday 27 July, 7.45pm. Picnic by the River Wey, Thursday 24 August, 7.45pm. Details guildfordousa@yahoo.co.uk Web: www.guildfordousa.org.uk

Gwent Branch Social Event, 4 July, Abergavenny. Social Event, 18 July, Newport. Details Celia: cpw73@student.open.ac.uk Tel: 01633 483423.

Haverfordwest Branch First Thursday of every month, 7.30pm, Haverfordwest Cricket Club, Dale Road, Haverfordwest, Pems. Online branch meetings will be held via FirstClass on Monday 10 July - Sunday 30 July. 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

Ipswich and Bury St. Edmunds Branch A varied programme of events is planned for the summer months; see web for details. Wednesday 16 August, 7pm, Cricketers Public House, Ipswich Details: www.ousasuffolk.org.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, Hogshead Public House, Newbury Town Centre. Details Rebecca: rc3354@student.open.ac.uk

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

Portsmouth 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, Prittlewell, 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@freemove.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



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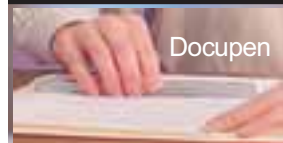
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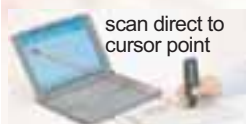
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