

THE OPEN STANDARD

The Newsletter of the Open Learning Division of Thompson Rivers University

New Year's Issue

February 2012

Enrolments SURGE

2012 is off to a busy start in Open Learning

By Greg Link

The end of the 2011 holiday season brought to Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) a flurry of student activity, which resulted in a record number of enrolments. This high level of student demand began on January 3, 2012, the very day the University reopened from winter break. Staff at TRU-OL handled the work related to the record number of student calls and enrolments without a hitch.

When Enrolment Services receive a high level of student calls they require technical support and a dedicated student services sector to juggle the activity and successfully address every request, according to Hilary Parsons, Manager of Enrolment Services, TRU-OL.

"We do tend to worry at the beginning of semester but the fact that our staff handled record numbers of phone calls without any problems indicates their expertise at what they do," Parsons said. "It indicates that our systems and processes are working well for students. Our professionals have not only met student needs but they have also reduced the average time per phone call and reduced the number of missed calls. I'm very proud of the people here; they are very dedicated and quite efficient at helping students with registration."

In addition to receiving record phone-based enrolments for the first week of 2012, online web registrations (registrations that students complete online and independently) were also up.

Increases Across the Board

Students can enrol with TRU-OL either on a course-by-course basis or they can apply for a program and enrol in courses required for their credential. Both course registration and program application numbers grew in January 2012, according to Marjorie Budnikas, Manager of Admissions and Advising, TRU-OL.

"Generally speaking, program applications tend to spike when unemployment rates are high," Budnikas explained. "When you combine that fact with the advantages of TRU-OL learning options and an effective marketing plan, it's no wonder demands for program admission and advising are high right now."

The increased demand for enrolment into TRU-OL courses and programs was also evident within the realm of IT Services according to Anna Machaj, Director of Enterprise Systems, TRU.

"We were getting (during the first week of January 2012) between 40 to 60 more registrations per day compared to the past couple of years," Machaj said. Statistics support Machaj's observation as, during the first week of the 2012 semester (January 3 to 6, 2012), TRU-OL received 230 more phone calls than it did in 2011 and approximately 400 more calls were received in the first week of January 2012 than the number of calls that came in during the first week of 2010.

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Publisher:

Judith Murray

Editor:

Élise Desjardine

Contributors:

Élise Desjardine

Greg Link

Lindsey Norris

TRU Marketing and Communications

Layout & Design:

Julie Hall

Linda Komori

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THOMPSON RIVERS
UNIVERSITY
OPEN LEARNING

A Look: Psychiatric Nursing

Open Learning Faculty Member presents at prestigious congress.

Violence in clinical psychiatry is an area of expertise for Open Learning Faculty Member Melodie Hull, who shared her knowledge at the 7th European Congress on Violence in Clinical Psychiatry.

The Conference, held October 19-22, 2011, in Prague, Czech Republic, focused on clinically relevant and practically useful interventions used to treat and reduce the violent behaviour of psychiatric and forensic patients in addition to severe problem behaviours in persons with intellectual disabilities.

In support of the overall theme of "challenges for care and treatment," Hull presented a workshop entitled *An Overview of Canadian Psychiatric Nursing Strategies and Practices employed to Reduce Coercive Measures related to Violence* alongside colleague James Morton from Kwantlen Polytechnic University. According to Hull, psychiatric nurses have long been on the front lines of violence in care facilities and/or community settings, attempting to prevent injury to patients and others or damage to property.

Looking at approaches to violence management employed by psychiatric nurses in Canada, with a particular focus on British Columbia, Hull's workshop explored the practices and outcomes including seclusion, chemical and physical restraints and discussed post-modern psychotherapeutic interventions utilized to reduce the need for more coercive measures in violence management. She introduced the concept of the Code White nurse (a psychiatric nurse) in a general hospital setting in addition to the training and responsibilities required to deal with critical incidence involving verbal and/or physical violence. In closing, Hull demonstrated opportunities for interactive skill development based on 21st century Canadian intervention techniques including verbal and physical, non-violent crisis intervention techniques for dealing with violence. ■



Biography – Melodie Hull

Melodie Hull has a wealth of experience in Nursing and Psychiatric Nursing, which stems from her over 20 years as a Registered Psychiatric Nurse, as well as the English language, which she specialized in through her Masters of Education with a specialization in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Hull's CV is further enhanced by her Masters of Science in Administrative Studies, a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology/Sociology, a Provincial Instructor's Diploma in Adult Education, a Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing and an International Certificate: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESL). Over the past 16 plus years, Hull has been a Nursing Instructor specializing in teaching Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses at the college and university level. She was the Dean of Programs for a private health care academy where she developed and taught classes for practical nurses. Currently, Hull writes courses in nursing, health care and communication for two Canadian universities. She also owned her own counselling and therapy practice for seven years and has been on the Board of Directors for the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia as well as the BC Association of Clinical Counsellors. Hull is the author of two major textbooks with F A Davis Co. Publishers.

Enrolments Surge

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In total, there were 934 enrolments during the first week of January 2012, which represents 277 more than the 657 enrolments processed during the first week of 2011. This year approximately 572 of the total enrolments, or 61%, were made through online, self-service registration.

This increase from last year is significant and while some overall enrolment increases were expected, it was of interest that more than half of the registrants used online, self-service registration. The increase in independent registration is a positive indicator for TRU-OL, which strives to encourage as many students as possible to use the online option.

TRU-OL was using the WebReg system for online enrolments last year but has since converted to Flex-Reg, a new process

and software interface for students and staff to learn. Flex-Reg is a relatively new product for TRU-OL and as such, online registration was a point of concern moving into the busy January registration season. The positive growth in total enrolments and the successful use of the new online registration system indicates that Flex-Reg and the staff at TRU-OL are capable of handling rising demand.

This success in enrolments is expected to continue according to Parsons, who explained that in the second week of service in January 2012, TRU-OL Enrolment Services received 1,763 incoming calls, compared to the 1,161 calls it received the same time last year. ■

UNITED

We Give



Every year Thompson Rivers University (TRU) shows its support for community through its annual United Way Fundraising Campaign. In 2011, the Campaign, which kicked-off November 21, experienced one of its most successful years on record.

TRU raised an impressive \$57,000 in 2011 for the United Way, which supports a mission to "improve lives and build community by engaging individuals and mobilizing collective action." The University raised funds through a number of spirited activities such as: a pie throwing event at which individuals could pay \$5 or more to throw a pie in the face of a TRU senior leader; a tie cutting activity through which individuals could pay a donation to cut a senior administrator's tie; and soup days at the Culinary Arts Cafeteria with proceeds from soup sales going towards the Campaign. The dollar amount raised by donations from the TRU community resulted from a 62% increase in participation from 2010, representing the most important aspect of the 2011 campaign – a significant increase in employee participation.

In recognition of employee contributions, the TRU United Way Committee offered prizes for involvement. The "Green for Red" prize of a gift certificate for Art Knapps,

sponsored by Open Learning, went to Nancy Flood of the Faculty of Science while the i-Pad prize, sponsored by IT Services, went to Will Garrett-Petts of the Faculty of Arts. The early bird donation prize of a designated parking space, sponsored by Facility Services, went to Sofie Almers of the School of Business and Economics.

Finally, on December 15, 2011, Brenda Ansley, Executive Director of the Thompson Nicola Cariboo United Way, spoke at a TRU social celebrating the conclusion of the successful campaign and gave kudos to the increasing support provided by the TRU community. "The connections between TRU and the United Way are getting stronger each year as more students become engaged in the research and practical projects partnered by the Agency and the University," Ansley said.

To continue to support the United Way in its vision to help those who need help today and address the root causes of social issues, thus planning for a brighter tomorrow, you can still donate online at <http://unitedway.inside.tru.ca/donate/> or by phoning 250.372.9933. ■

Freeing up Education

Open educational resource strategies translate to the free and open future of education.

In today's flailing global economy, students are rebelling against the inflating cost of education. This insurgency is in protest over the reality that, based on inflationary pressure and the current model of higher education in Canada, the cost of post-secondary education will likely continue to increase until students simply cannot pay the cost of tuition. However, in the current uncertain and deteriorating state of world economy, a reduction or stabilizing of institutional fees seems implausible.

Bloomberg Businessweek recently reported that the turmoil resulting from Europe's debt crisis is hurting global growth and this, in addition to a weak US economy, means Canada's economy is facing a real threat. The Bank of Canada's semi-annual financial stability review, released December 8, 2011, warned that "an adverse outcome for Europe would also raise the risk of a significant impairment of funding conditions for Canadian institutions." Thus it stands to reason that economy and a stable job market are on the minds of many Canadians, not the least of which are students who are finding that access to post-secondary education is moving further out of reach due to financial restrictions and an

impending debt associated to studies in higher education. Exemplifying this is the two-day strike in early December 2011, which involved more than 200,000 Québec post-secondary students who protested tuition hikes that promised a provincial increase of \$1,625 over the next five years.

Academic inflation and student debt are real issues in today's troubled economy and the question is, what can be done to address the issue of affordable access to education not just within Canada, but worldwide, particularly in developing nations and communities.

"Quality assurance and institutional accreditation provided by registered anchor partners is the foundation stone on which the OER university collaboration will be built."

– WikiEducator

SIDEBAR 1

Open Educational Resource University Anchor Partners

Athabasca University (Canada)

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU) (India)

State University of New York (SUNY)

Empire State College (United States)

Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (New Zealand)

NorthTec (New Zealand)

Open Polytechnic (New Zealand)

Otago Polytechnic (New Zealand)

Southern New Hampshire University (United States)

Thompson Rivers University (Canada)

University of Canterbury (New Zealand)

University of South Africa (South Africa)

University of Southern Queensland (Australia)

University of Wollongong (Australia)

OER Foundation (non-teaching) (New Zealand)

BCcampus (non-teaching) (Canada)



OERu Founding Anchor Partners: Representatives of the OERu founding anchor partners of the OER Tertiary Education Network (OERTen), met from November 9-10, 2011, at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand for the OERu Inaugural Planning Meeting, hosted by the OER Foundation.

Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and 14 other anchor partners (See Sidebar 1) have formed the Open Educational Resource University (OERu) project to address this exact issue. According to WikiEducator (http://wikieducator.org/OER_university/Home), OERu aims to provide "learning to all students worldwide using OER learning materials with pathways to gain credible qualifications from recognized education institutions."

A not-for-profit foundation, OERu does not offer formal teaching nor does it confer degrees or qualifications; however, it does work with accredited partner universities such as TRU. Currently, OERu is exploring methods to provide credit for open educational resource (OER) learning using their existing processes and policies (See Sidebar 2), thus augmenting and adding value to OER courses coordinated through the OERu partnership. Through the community service mission of participating institutions, OERu intends to "enable accredited educational institutions to provide assessment and credit pathways for formal academic credit at reduced student fees, which may lead to recognized credentials" for OER learners. OERu's mandate to support the estimated 100 million learners worldwide who are qualified for tertiary education but do not have the funding or provisions required to access credible qualifications, dictates that it will promote open curriculum, open student support, open assessment and open accreditation to ensure educational growth amid increasing educational costs. Therefore, OERu focuses on more than just the materials or learning objects, it adds value by developing options for faculty participation, student support mechanisms, assessment and credit and recognition. Not only is OERu therefore utilizing the free and accessible nature of OERs to facilitate affordable learning and academic growth for students in all echelons of society and at any place in the world, but it is also providing pathways for such students to pay reduced amounts to secure credible and recognized post-secondary credentials, which will enhance their potential in the global job market and their financial potential in an increasingly struggling world economy.

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SIDEBAR 2

Open Educational Resources

Any educational resources, including curriculum maps, course materials, textbooks, streaming videos, multimedia applications, podcasts and any other materials that have been designed for use in teaching and learning, that are openly available for use by educators and students, without an accompanying need to pay royalties or license fees (Source: OER Africa). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) explains that the openly provided educational resources are for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users, which addresses the fact that different options are emerging defining how OER are licensed for use and adaptation. Different licensing includes copying as well as provisions for users to adapt the resources, which they use, or not. One way to consider how OER are licensed is David Wiley's "4Rs Framework" – Reuse, Revise, Remix and Redistribute – which defines the basic rights that may be provided to a user of OER by the content developer (depending on the nature of the Creative Commons license they select). So while there is usually no or little fee associated to OER, there are conditions that must be considered.

Some examples of OER projects include Wikipedia – www.wikipedia.org Creative Commons – <http://creativecommons.org> and the OpenCourseWare Consortium – <http://ocwconsortium.org>

Freeing up Education

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OERu Offerings

OERu aims to make courses and programs available based “entirely on OER and open textbooks licensed under free cultural works approved open content licenses” and is currently in the first stages of developing and implementing its inaugural credential and prototype course offerings.

The anchor partners of OERu met at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand, from November 9-10, 2011, to discuss the actions required to implement the first OERu credential. Judith Murray, Vice-President, Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) and Irwin Devries, Director, Instructional Design, TRU-OL, joined 22 senior education leaders, decision-makers from OERu anchor partners and representatives from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Commonwealth of Learning representing six countries and four continents, at the planning meeting. In addition, 148 individuals from 41 countries registered as virtual participants to “assist the meeting in charting more affordable and sustainable post-secondary education alternatives.”

Murray spoke at the opening panel session explaining that at TRU-OL open education is conceptualized through the student (from inquiry to alumni), faculty (from first hire to retirement or resignation) and curriculum (from idea to maintenance and/or closure) lifecycles. “Where these three lifecycles intersect is where learning occurs,” Murray told the audience. “That is when we have a TRU student working with TRU courseware and being supported by a TRU faculty member. This learning is then subjected to TRU assessment for TRU credit and ultimately, a TRU credential.”

Murray explained the traditional OER movement, which is focused on students taking a specific institution’s courseware and learning resources and then making them freely available on the web for anyone to use, offers minimal cross-institutional collaboration. She added however, that there is now a “growing movement toward reuse of OERs, building service models around open content, the recognition of learning achieved through OERs and incorporating peer collaboration models when assembling courses from existing OERs.”

Based on the prevalence of OERs in higher education, Murray explained that TRU-OL is contemplating the next evolution of open learning and is thus conceptualizing a new model for open education. “In keeping with our outcomes based philosophy of higher education we can envision a truly open model for higher education,” Murray said referencing this new model as Open Learning 2.0. The new model requires individuals to think not only in terms of the “Traditional Model,” but also to envision a parallel model where any learner, using any material and being supported by anyone, can achieve learning which is then subjected to an individual institution’s assessment, in order to receive that institution’s credit, which can be applied towards that institution’s credential (See Sidebar 3).

The OERu is facilitating the first step towards realizing this model through its prototype courses, which will see each of the 13 OERu founding anchor partner institutions contributing two or more courses. Therefore, all anchor partner institutions will have access to an additional 24 courses in return for their original contribution of two courses. According to WikiEducator, the 2012 first-year level prototype courses could:

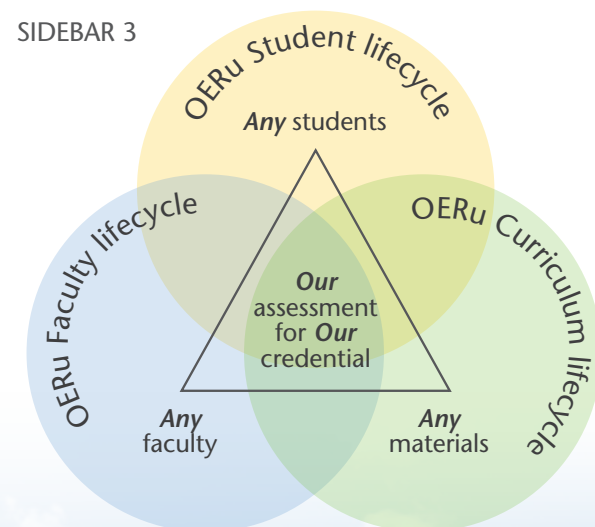
- > Carry credit for a “pre-degree” exit credential (for example the Diploma of Art at the University of Southern Queensland); and/or
- > Carry credit towards an existing credential “on the books” of the relevant anchor partner; and/or
- > Ladder towards an Associate or Bachelor Degree of General Studies / Trans-disciplinary studies for those partner institutions who offer this type of credential.

Wayne Mackintosh, founding Director and member of the Board of Directors of the OER Foundation, explained the November Open Planning Meeting concluded with a decision to “prioritize first-year (course) subjects laddering towards a Bachelor of General Studies (degree) or similar.” Naturally, he said, credits from these would thereby qualify for a local credential, for example a first year Art History course could be used towards a Bachelor of Arts.

Early in the New Year Mackintosh said the OERu anchor partners plan to collaboratively discuss the development process and deadlines of the prototype courses.

Currently, it was decided that a small number of courses from those submitted by the anchor partners will be selected for the 2012 prototype project and will be trialed in 2012 in preparation for the official international launch of OERu in 2013. ■

SIDEBAR 3



Educational ACCOLADES

Open Learning Faculty Member wins Research Scholarship.

As a mentor it is essential to practice what you preach or teach in the case of Kathie Ross, an Open Learning Faculty Member who not only teaches online and distance learning courses but is also a Masters of Education (Distance Education) candidate.

Ross is a very accomplished M.Ed. candidate who recently received a 2011 Excellence in Research Scholarship from Athabasca University (AU) while working on her thesis and juggling her work as an Open Learning Faculty Member with Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) and an Associate Faculty Member at Royal Roads University. The Scholarship is awarded to current AU graduate degree program students who have achieved a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.60 or higher; Ross currently holds an impressive GPA of 3.95.

Emphasis for students selected for the award also include those who have demonstrated the potential to make a significant contribution to research in their area of study. A number of accounting associations have already shown interest in receiving the results of her thesis research, which looks at “the factors that influence modality selection in accounting professional development in Canada,” Ross explained. “In layman’s terms that means that I am interested in why accountants take continuing professional development in the mode that they do (i.e. a face-to-face seminar or a webcast, etc...).”

As a graduate degree student, Ross is an exemplary model of the very TRU-OL students she teaches as she juggles a busy schedule with work and post-secondary studies.

“I am mainly a contract instructor and curriculum developer (she developed TRU-OL courses including ACCT 1921, Accounting Systems 1 and BBUS 323, Income Tax 2) and I am active as a volunteer with the Southern Vancouver Island CGA (Certified General Accountants) Chapter,” Ross said.



When she is not teaching or working in the field of income tax in both public practice and the Canada Revenue Agency (for which she developed and taught courses for both new and experienced auditors), Ross may be authoring an e-book such as *Who Gets my Tax Dollar* (a tax guide for US professionals doing business in Canada) or writing her blog about practical aspects of international tax treaties (visit <http://kathie-ross.blogspot.com>). ■

CAMERON VINCENT BEDDOME

DECEMBER 4, 1966 TO DECEMBER 16, 2011



Enjoy the fond memories and photographs shared by Cameron Beddome's family and colleagues who were, above all, his friends and those who miss him dearly.

"Cameron was as unique as a snowflake and just as beautiful. There is no one else in the world quite like him. I loved his laugh, his smile, his twinkling brown eyes. I loved his hair; he had such awesome hair. I just loved him for who he was and all he was."

– Jacqueline Beddome



"Cameron's spirit will live on in Open Learning through his legacy of having created a culture of caring for our students. His commitment to service excellence is indelible. He will be forever missed but never forgotten."

– Judith Murray, Vice-President, TRU-OL

"Cameron enjoyed boating and living in Rayleigh on the North Thompson, he was very keen on getting to know this complex river. One day I received a call from Cameron stating that he was out boating with his family and needed a little help. It took a while to get my boat in the water and get up to him, by that time people on shore had seen his boat stuck in the middle of the river for some time and had called Kamloops Search and Rescue. We both ended up arriving on the scene at the same time and found Cameron with his father, wife Jaqueline, daughter Sage and infant son Colton sitting in the absolute middle of the river. His boat was stuck in a sandbar in ankle deep water. I am not sure as to how many subsequent family trips Cameron took up the tricky North Thompson? My lasting memory of Cameron will be that in every situation he chose to do the right thing regardless of difficulty or consequence. It was a pleasure spending time with him; his intellect, humor and infectious smile will be but a few of the many gifts from Cameron that we will miss and will carry on in our memories."

– Bryan Daly, Academic Director, Science, TRU-OL

"During the four years that I worked as Cameron's Assistant, there were so many times that I was in awe of his intelligence, problem solving skills and respect for others. An example of 'Classic Cameron' is a time last spring that, while on vacation, Cameron phoned me at work to say hello, ask how I was doing and to share the news that he was in a tattoo shop getting 'inked' to commemorate the birth of his son. May peace be yours my friend."

– Deborah Sproull, Assistant to Chief Recruitment Officer, TRU-OL

"During my first year at TRU-OL, Cameron somehow got his hands on a picture of myself and a few other co-workers. What he did with these pictures was cut and paste our faces into a jib jab video e-card, which showcased us in the office as caricatures wandering around farting. In good jest, Cameron sent the e-card around the BC Centre for Open Learning. For me this was a funny, red-faced but very jovial introduction to the Open Learning team!"

– Elise Desjardine, Editor, Marketing and Communications, TRU-OL



"On my first day at TRU I wore red high heels. Shortly after, I hung a poster with a giant red heel in my office. The poster reminded me of my first day and a new beginning for me. When Cameron came to Open Learning, he, of course, loved the poster, loved the shoes and loved the colour! He would always be checking out my footwear and commenting on my latest indulgence. He would also be sure to model his newest techno-colour-stripped shirt for me because he knew I would appreciate his inner-fashionisto. On a trip to New York with Judith Murray and Kristin Smalcel Pederson, he found a pair of red, patent leather stilettos while window-shopping. He took a picture on his Blackberry and immediately sent it to me with a note that said he found the perfect shoes and 'what was my size again?' At work and in his life, Cameron had a unique ability to connect with people. No matter who you were, he took the time to get to know you and uncover the things that really made you smile. In turn, that connection was reciprocated with admiration, respect, friendship and a genuine interest to make him proud. That is what was so special about him and that is what I will miss dearly. He left behind very large shoes to fill. Rest peacefully my friend."

– Jennifer Read, Director, Marketing and Communications, TRU-OL



"I first contacted Cameron in the late spring of 2008, when I started at TRU. When speaking with him on the telephone, we found out that we had gone to the same high school, had a lot of acquaintances in common and had played for the same rugby team, albeit at different times. We decided to have lunch together and walked over to Subway in Sahali mall. On the way back it started to rain heavily, so we ended up jogging back but we still got totally drenched. For some reason I had my wife's hair dryer in my office, so I offered Cameron the opportunity to dry his clothes. Since we were totally soaked, we stripped down to our underwear and began drying our clothes with the hair dryer. At that point someone knocked on my door and Cameron and I looked at each other (with both of us just in our underwear) horrified. We worried about the rumours that would fly around about our first meeting together if we did indeed open the door to this unknown knocker. Cameron put his forefinger to his lips uttering quietly 'Shh.' We stood paralyzed; not moving for what seemed an eternity while the knocking persisted. Finally the person went away. Cameron and I drew a huge sigh of relief. As we got to know each other, we often recalled our first meeting with a chuckle."

– Peter Hilton, Vice-Provost, Students, TRU

"This is a picture of Cameron (aka 'Helga'), on the right, and I (Rosalind Flockhart; aka 'Hilda') on Halloween in October 2010. I told my 'sister' Helga that I was the younger one and the prettiest by far. I mean, how could 'she' argue with that."

–Rosalind Flockhart, Enrolment Services Advising Assistant, TRU-OL



"The goofy face Cameron is making in this picture is how I will remember him – as the jokester. My other memory is how Cameron made a point of introducing himself and welcoming me to Open Learning personally when I was still wandering around, lost."

– Gerald Fink, Enrolment Services Advisor, TRU-OL

"Cameron was an amazing person. On behalf of the Ministry, I would like to extend my sympathy to his family and co-workers. I will never forget that presentation he gave us on the amazing work TRU-OL has been doing to improve delivery and marketing of programs. His passion shone through very clearly."

– Deborah Hull, Executive Director, Universities and Aboriginal Programs Branch in the Ministry of Science and Universities



TRU *story:*

Single mother and TRU-OL student succeeds through passion for higher learning.

“The flexibility of online learning allows me to study and complete my educational goals where I would not otherwise be able to. It would be impossible for me to attend lectures in the evening being a full-time employee and single mom of three.”

By Lindsey Norris

Of all the concepts students are exposed to during their education, the one that may be most important to the distance learner can't be learned from a textbook. For mature learners, balance – achieved by the juggling of work, family and education, while still finding time to enjoy life – may be the single most difficult exercise to master.

Rebecca Merino maintains harmony in her life by placing an artful twist on work-life balance. While many would place schoolwork firmly on the work side of the equation, Merino equates completing courses as taking time for herself.

“People often ask me why I take all these courses on top of everything else I do,” she explains. “But for me, learning new things and improving my education is something I do for me. I enjoy learning.”

As a mother of three, a full-time employee and the pursuer of a Bachelor of Commerce, it's an invaluable attitude to have. After a full day of working with clients at the BC Pension Corporation, chauffeuring her children to sports practice and other activities, at home she turns her attention to the study of business and management principles, her first venture into formal education in over 15 years.

“I completed a business administration (accounting) diploma at Camosun College straight out of high school and intended to continue in the CGA program,” she says. But first came marriage, followed by three children, and Merino put further education on hold. It wasn't until 2009, with her children

growing more independent (her daughter is seven and her two sons nine and 14, respectively) that she was able to enrol in an Open Learning course.

She acknowledges that even with a positive mindset and the flexibility inherent in online courses, it has not always been a smooth journey. “I am notorious for thinking I have more time to do things than I actually do,” she says. “I have just registered for a paced course, and I am looking forward to the paced experience.”

Even the best plans occasionally have to be modified. Merino was in the middle of a course when her youngest son became seriously ill and had to be hospitalized. He is now fully recovered, but Merino had to put her coursework aside for an extended period, which could have led to a mark on her transcript in a traditional educational environment.

“I was able to take an extension, but if I had been enrolled at a traditional university, I would have failed the course,” she says. “I simply could not do what I am able to do without Open Learning.”

With three courses left to complete before she is granted her long-awaited bachelor's degree, Merino has eagerly set her sights on an MBA – proving that anything, even a demanding program and busy life, can be manageable with the right mindset. ■

Grading POLICY CHANGES

In late October 2011, Thompson Rivers University (TRU)'s Senate passed a revision to the grading policy for all graduate studies, affecting both on-campus and Open Learning courses and programs. The amendment, which brings TRU's graduate offerings more in line with the expectations of graduate students at other Canadian universities, is one of the requirements for accreditations through the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS).

The policy change (Policy Number ED 3-5), which became effective January 1, 2012, applies to both graduate courses and graduate programs. With regards to graduate courses, the new graduate grading scale will apply to all courses that began in winter 2012; students enrolled in fall 2011 courses were not affected. Under the new grading scale, the minimum passing mark in a course is 70% or 'B-' (See Table 1).

With regards to graduate programs, under the new grading policy graduate students must maintain an overall 'B' average in their programs. In a letter to TRU staff and faculty, Andrew McKay, Director Graduate Studies at TRU, explained that graduate students are allowed to receive only one 'B-' grade. “Graduate students getting a second 'B-' or lower course

grade will be required to repeat the course for a grade of 'B' or better or withdraw from the program,” McKay wrote, explaining that exceptions may apply if “compelling reasons” are brought forward to the Associate Vice President, Research and Graduate Studies, recommending otherwise.

The provisions to graduate programs do not apply to TRU graduate students enrolled in 2011 or earlier. McKay explained that program students at TRU are bound by the program requirements that were in place when their program commenced. The new graduate program requirements apply only to students beginning their graduate program in winter 2012 and thereafter.

While the new graduate policy applies to all of TRU's graduate programs it represents a minimum expectation; individual programs can set standards that are higher provided that students are informed of these higher standards in writing prior to admission. The notice of higher standards can be disseminated in materials such as the application package or on mediums including the program website, among other locations.

The revised policy can be viewed online at: www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/Grading_Systems5647.pdf ■

TABLE 1: Graduate Programs Grading Structure

Letter Grade	Numerical Grade	Grade Points	Letter Grade Definitions
A+	95-100	4.33	Excellent. First Class Standing.
A	90-94	4.00	
A-	85-89	3.67	Very Good. Second Class standing.
B	80-84	3.33	
B	75-79	3.00	Satisfactory.
B-	70-74	2.67	Minimal Pass. A passing grade indicating marginal performance. Student not likely to succeed in subsequent courses in the subject.
F	0-69	0.00	Unsatisfactory. Fail. Knowledge of principles and facts is fragmentary; or student has failed to complete substantive course requirements.



UPDATE: Material Shipping Costs

Students enrolling in Open Learning courses offered through Thompson Rivers University (TRU) will notice new shipping costs. The new costs, which took effect November 17, 2011, are different depending on the geographical location of the student. ■

Mailing Address Location	Acronym	Cost
Canadian / Domestic (Shipping within Canada)	MACA	\$21 flat rate per course
United States (Shipping to any/all states or territories of the US)	MAUS	\$70 flat rate per course
International (Shipping anywhere other than Canada and the US)	MAIN	\$140 flat rate per course

TRU News

By TRU Marketing and Communications



TRU builds educational bridges to China and India.

As a result of the province-led BC Jobs and Trade Mission to China and India, which took place in early November 2011, Thompson Rivers University (TRU) opened a recruitment office in Bangalore, India. The office is slated to serve as a business development centre and student recruitment office for the country. The University also launched a social media campaign aiming to facilitate networking between Indian students both before and after arriving in Canada. Before heading to India with the BC Jobs and Trade Mission, TRU delegates were in China where they met with representatives from Chengdu Polytechnic in Guangzhou to develop an agreement for an architecture and engineering technology diploma program.

The BC Jobs and Trade Mission to China and India saw participation from 250 individuals representing more than 120 companies and organizations, including TRU. According to Premier Christy Clark, the delegations were the largest in BC's history and represented the widest range of sectors to ever participate in a provincial trade mission. Clark explained that the Mission set out with three goals "strengthening our existing relationships in the Asia-Pacific region; opening new doors; and setting the stage for future opportunities with China and India."

In addition, Clark said the Mission intended to attract new investment into the province, promote BC as a destination for international students and tourists, and continue to build on the historic, cultural and business ties between BC and the peoples of China and India. ■

TRU forms partnerships with Colombia-based universities.

In early December 2011, Thompson Rivers University (TRU) President and Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Alan Shaver and Associate Vice-President for TRU World, Dr. Wesley J. Koczka, implemented efforts to strengthen international ties. Travelling to Colombia, Shaver and Koczka worked to enhance partnerships with post-secondary institutions in the cities of both Medellin and Bogota.

As a result, an agreement was signed between TRU and Universidad EAFIT in Medellin, which offers a dual TRU/EAFIT bachelor's degree in Computer Science and Systems Engineering. This agreement will allow TRU and EAFIT students to earn a dual degree following three years of study at their home institution and one year of study at the partner institution. The partners also signed an agreement to facilitate the exchange of students between the institutions. Universidad EAFIT is a private, government-accredited institution offering undergraduate, graduate and PhD programs. EAFIT has an active international relations program with 116 international agreements, including dual degrees with American, French and German universities.

While in Bogota, Shaver and Koczka formalized an agreement to strengthen educational links with the Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad (ICETEX). Under this agreement, TRU will provide three annual scholarships, funded by international sources, to Colombian students entering the University's graduate programs while ICETEX will provide educational loans to Colombian students attending TRU. The agreement will also facilitate opportunities for TRU faculty to participate in conferences and workshops as well as engage in visiting professorships at Colombian universities. Another agreement, which was signed while in Bogota with Universidad La Sabana, aims to explore areas of cooperation between the two institutions. ■

INTERNATIONAL Experience

TRU-OL students study global while staying local.

Multiculturalism is a reality in the business world. One must be cognizant of social nuances and cultural norms in order to be successful in negotiations and to understand what degree of social formality is expected at a meeting.

A group of Thompson Rivers University (TRU) students learned firsthand how cultural differences might affect interpretation and experience in the world of business. Students enrolled in Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL)'s new virtual international exchange courses had the unique opportunity to gain international experience and study globally while staying local.

Through a partnership with the Virtual University of Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico, TRU-OL developed a virtual international student exchange through which TRU students studying through Open Learning completed online paced courses alongside their peers in Mexico. The virtual exchange courses, which commenced in early August 2011 and ended in November 2011, included BBUS 4451, E-Commerce and NI 2001, International Negotiation.

The business students enrolled had the opportunity to learn more about business within a multicultural dynamic, which facilitated bona fide exposure to the principles of international collaboration. Estefy Vazquez, a third-year student studying at Mexico-based Tecnológico de Monterrey, enrolled in BBUS 4451 as she felt that the international online experience would provide a new cross-cultural interaction enriching both her perspective and knowledge.

"It is important to have an international experience during a business education because, given the actual economic system, barriers are fading and the different economies are becoming closer and more linked together," Vazquez said. "What happens here (in Mexico) matters on the other side of the world, so it is important to be informed and to know how businesses are operating both here and elsewhere, so we don't get left behind."

Brigit Weischedel, the Open Learning Faculty Member who instructed the TRU-OL course BBUS 4451, said she received positive feedback from students like Vazquez who "enjoyed the class" that promoted cross-cultural exchange and dialogue. In guiding the course's term project, Weischedel found it most productive to have the students partitioned into two culturally defined groups as it allowed for productive coordination of communication and meetings.

"They (the Mexican and Canadian students) all communicated through the discussion forums and contributed ideas that were sometimes new and surprising due to the different cultural environment," Weischedel said. "It was great to see the Mexican students share how their experiences with E-Commerce are different from ours (Canadians)."

Vazquez recalled one instance when both the Canadian and Mexican students were analyzing a webpage for the class. "The first thing we, the students from Mexico, criticized was the webpage layout while the students from Canada did not consider the layout a weakness of the webpage at all," Vazquez recalled. "That situation caught my attention because I did not imagine that the appreciation of a simple webpage could be dependent on cultural differences."

In promotion of the inaugural virtual exchange course offerings, TRU-OL offered the first 10 students to register in either course \$250 off the cost of tuition. ■



Online Learning: Mistakes to Avoid

Growth in online learning means more students may be exposed to common errors.

Growth in the world of online education is an inevitable reality perpetuated by the advancement of technology, the need for flexible learning options by an increasingly busy student demographic and a forward thinking post-secondary education sector. According to the market research firm Ambient Insight, by 2015, 25 million post-secondary students in the US alone will be taking classes online. The report entitled *The US Market for Self-paced eLearning Products and Services: 2010-2015 Forecast and Analysis*, states that the "real growth" in the post-secondary sector is slated to occur among students taking courses exclusively online, predicting that by 2015 a staggering 3.86 million US students will be studying solely online.

While the numbers indicate a state of advancement and success for online learning, it is up to the students and institutional student support services to translate the success of these masses into success in these virtual classes.

A 2009 meta study conducted by the United States Department of Education suggested that "students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction" (*Evidence-Based Practice in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies*, 2009). However, it is important to note that this is not always the case. Online learning requires students to be independent in the learning process as it is up to the student alone to engage in, prioritize and complete their lectures, studies and projects.

According to *Business 2 Community Magazine*, there are some major mistakes students should avoid while taking online courses.

Here is a summary of the "Five Biggest Mistakes" *Business 2 Community* cautions against.

Mistake #1 DISTRACTIONS

When working on class material from studying and lecture review to term projects, students should leave the TV and other Internet browser windows off. Students should be cautious of distractions that surround them while completing coursework as they are designed to fight for their attention whether they are in their peripheral view or sitting directly in front of them. Distractions such as TV and Internet browsing or social media should be used as a reward for completing designated course tasks and assignments. Note, however, that new research from France indicates that students may learn more when listening to classical music. In an experiment, students who heard a music-enhanced lecture scored significantly higher on a subsequent quiz than the students who listened to the version of a lecture without music. "It is possible that music, provoking a change in the learning environment, influenced the students' motivation to remain focused during the lecture, which led to better performance on the multiple choice quiz," the researchers, led by Fabrice Dosseville of the Universite de Caen Basse-Normandie, speculated.



Mistake #2 LACK OF COMMUNICATION

While online students do not have to be physically present to take a course and therefore are not faced by early mornings and traffic jams, it is important to note that they may sacrifice communication for innovation and convenience. As they are not physically present in a class setting it is harder and more important for them to work at maintaining a good, communicative relationship with their instructors. They should use multiple methods to maintain this communication from email and message boards to phone calls, which are more personal, and be sure to discuss expectations for the course and assignments as well as take the time to clear up questions they may have.



Mistake #3 LACK OF REVIEW

The principles behind home assignments are much the same for online courses as they are for traditional campus-based courses. Online students must ensure they have fully read and understood material and assignment requirements before submitting to their instructor or taking a test or final exam. Materials such as lectures and assignments should be reviewed more than once to ensure they catch smaller concepts and potential mistakes they may have missed in the first read. By reviewing material more than once, students will have a better overall understanding of the course and the knowledge necessary for success.

Mistake #4 POOR TIME MANAGEMENT

Proper planning is one of the most important, and most difficult, aspects of online learning. It is up to the student alone to make sure they review lectures and complete homework and assignments before final exams and course completion. Online students often have to juggle personal responsibilities with course requirements such as study time, daily reading and assignment completion, so it is essential they manage their time carefully. Planning ahead and penciling in time for course preparation, daily assignments and lectures is therefore essential. Students should plan to check in online at least once daily as well as monitor discussion boards, look for new announcements and course updates the instructor may have posted. A good tip is to use paper as well as digital planners in addition to a to-do list.



Mistake #5 FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

Students who are studying online for the first time might assume this mode is easier because there is leeway in regards to time, flexibility and freedom. These, however, are advantages that can translate into devastating results if students misuse them. Online courses require more independence with not only the course materials but also the technologies they are using. Some students may actually find online courses more difficult as they are left to their own devices to review materials and get the work done and submitted.

Students must take action and initiative to ensure success in the online learning environment. Making the most of the experience and avoiding common mistakes necessitates: self-discipline, motivation, goal setting, time management, communication (with both instructors and peers through phone calls, message boards, chat rooms, emails and other virtual resources) and maybe even some extra work such as additional reading, web resources and practice exercises. Students who fully engage in the online learning experience will be successful and gain more than just credits; they will gain independence and life skills. ■



Dare to Believe

A new recruitment video animates Open Learning's offerings.

Enrol in online and distance education; we dare you. While this isn't exactly the messaging the Marketing and Communications (MARCOCOM) department at Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) is broadcasting through its new recruitment video, it does sum up the video and its origins quite nicely.

In an effort to visually entice prospective students to the TRU-OL website and to ultimately enrol in a course or program, MARCOM elicited the expertise of Vancouver-based advertising agency Dare.

The North American Division of Dare (www.thisisdare.com/NA) – which is an international agency with offices in London (England), Vancouver, Toronto, New York and, soon, Los Angeles – comes with great accolades as it has received over 95 international, national and local awards over the past two years. With a mission to “create work that inspires emotion and action,” Dare successfully produced a recruitment video for TRU-OL that addresses a diverse audience.

Corey Wiwchar, Marketing Coordinator, MARCOM, TRU-OL, explained that Dare was selected to produce TRU-OL's new recruitment video after “scouring the province for production companies and agencies” who could best visually interpret TRU-OL, its benefits and offerings.

Three companies were shortlisted based on their portfolios and each company was given the opportunity to pitch their creative ideas. Each presentation was rated by the TRU-OL MARCOM team based on factors such as innovation, creativity and appeal. Two of the videos were traditional in their technique and approach, according to Wiwchar, while Dare's video sample was a bit “outside the box” using a paper-cut animation style that was very different from any other styles submitted. Jennifer Read, Director, MARCOM, TRU-OL, explained that the untraditional style of the video gives a nod to the uniqueness of the Open Learning Division of TRU and its offerings, differentiating it from other distance education providers.

“The paper-cut animation is entertaining and shareable,” Read said. “It speaks to who we are at TRU-OL: innovative, open, flexible, accessible and ready to serve the needs of all learners at any time. Open Learning is unique in that it operates under an ‘open’ philosophy that means anyone, anywhere can access quality education on their own terms.”



The animated video showcases the stories of three types of TRU-OL students including: a course-taker looking to add to their credential at another university; a professional looking to advance in their career by utilizing prior learning assessment and recognition towards a post-secondary credential; and a full-time worker looking to gain a credential that will allow them to upgrade to the career of their dreams. Thus, the whole gamut of benefits and options available through TRU-OL are highlighted in this succinct and entertaining video.

All TRU-OL staff and faculty are encouraged to view the new video by joining MARCOM at the Open Learning Recruitment Video Launch Party on Monday, February 13, 2012. Pizza and cake will be available at the launch to be held at the BC Centre for Open Learning in room 127.

“The goal of the party is to have staff see the video and then help us get it out to the world by sharing with their colleagues, teams and partnerships through social media and email,” Wiwchar explained.

Read further explained that sharing the video might “help someone advance in their job, change their career or fulfill their lifelong goal of earning a degree.”

View the video after February 13, 2012, at www.truopen.ca/openness and forward the link to others to encourage a viral launch of this exciting new product. ■

LIFE in OL

Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) welcomes **Sheri Ann Ressler** to her position as Program Assistant II. Ressler began working with TRU in 1998 as a Research Assistant in the Natural Resource Science department. Two years later, in 2000, she began working with TRU Library.

The Project Management Office welcomes **Eric Youd** to the position of Senior Data Coordinator and **Andrea Rhodes** to the position of Business Analyst. Youd previously worked with TRU-OL in the Enrolment and Admissions Business department. In his new position, he will be working on Plan B, Project Phoenix, for which he will provide overall technical direction and oversight. Rhodes previously worked with TRU-OL in the Program Advising department. In her current position, she will concentrate on support requirements development, stakeholder engagement and testing.

The Business Systems Support department bids a fond farewell to **Martin Voelkening**, who recently resigned as Production Supervisor of the department. Best wishes are sent to Voelkening in his new endeavor as a Systems Analyst with the Province of British Columbia. **Carolyn Teare** has taken over the role of Acting Production Supervisor until further notice.

The entire Open Learning Division offers best luck to **Liz Brydges** who has resigned from her position as Administrative Assistant for the Business Intelligence and Operations department. Brydges, who has been working for TRU-OL since 2009, will be enjoying a new career with Arrow Trucking.

TRU-OL wishes **Janet Nystedt** the best in her retirement, effective February 13, 2012. Nystedt began her position as Budget Officer with TRU-OL in January 2008. “Janet is a consummate professional and has displayed exceptional skills and dedication to her role during the four years she has been with Open Learning,” Judith Murray, Vice-President of Open Learning, wrote in an email announcing Nystedt's retirement. “She has been a great asset to our organization and her efforts have helped us to achieve many of our goals.”

In the spirit of giving and community support, Open Learning (OL) encourages all staff and faculty to donate to the **TRU student food bank** for the Kamloops campus. Ideally, OL would like to make continuous group contributions to the food bank with the ultimate goal of donating once per month. Individuals interested in contributing packaged and dried food items can leave their donations in the box located by the reception area on the 4th Floor of the BC Centre for Open Learning (BCCOL) building. Those who would like to make a monetary donation can contact **Roz Flockhart** by phone at 250.852.6419 or by email at rflockhart@tru.ca or visit her at cubicle OL 440L, which is located on the 4th Floor of the BCCOL. ■



OL *Award* Winners



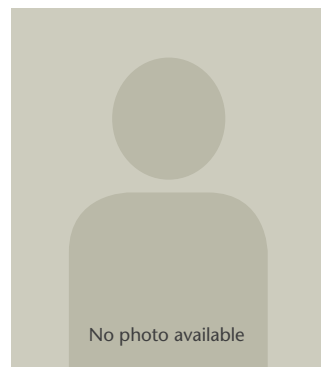
Glenn Read
Associate Director,
Ancillary Services
Non-OL Award
Nominated by Barbara Hubert



Keith Whitmore
Open Learning Faculty Member
*Open Learning
Faculty Member Award*
Nominated by
Danielle McFadden (student)



John Patterson
Open Learning Faculty Member
OL Executive Award
Nominated by Gord Tarzwell



Eric Youd
Senior Data Management
and Records Coordinator
Peer-to-Peer Award
Nominated by Margaret West



WHAT'S NEWS

IN OPEN LEARNING

The number of students taking at least one online course grew substantially for the ninth straight year, according to a new survey from the Babson Survey Research Group. The new survey, which was previously sponsored by the Sloan Consortium and administered by the Babson Survey Research Group, is the ninth iteration of an annual poll of academic administrators about online learning. Previously, the survey was commonly known as the "Sloan-C survey" but this year Babson produced the survey itself. The researchers garnered responses from 2,512 colleges and universities, including both non-profit and for-profit institutions. Results indicate that online enrolments grew 10%, as the number of students taking at least one online course crept past six million. Meanwhile, views on the quality of online education compared to traditional courses have shifted by 10% over the last eight years. In 2003, the first year the Babson group and Sloan-C conducted the survey, 57% of academic leaders estimated that learning outcomes in online courses were equal or superior to those of face-to-face courses. This year the figure was 67%. Online enrolments now account for nearly a third of all enrolments in higher education.

US News & World Report published its inaugural guide to online degree programs in early January 2012. The magazine's new guide does not provide lists based on overall program quality but instead it produced "honor rolls," spotlighting colleges that consistently performed well across the ranking criteria, which include student services, student engagement, faculty credentials and admissions selectivity. To ensure the rankings were reliable, *US News* formulated its ranking methodology after the survey data was collected. Doing so allowed researchers to be fair to colleges that interpreted questions differently, a data research analyst with the magazine explained. Some distance-learning experts criticize that technique, arguing that the methodology should have been developed before the surveys went out. Visit www.usnews.com/education/online-education to review the rankings.

Grand Canyon University, a for-profit university based in Phoenix, Arizona, recently hired 98 full-time online faculty members. Full-time teaching positions are rare in online higher education, however Grand Canyon University felt that **having long-term online professors would offer a competitive advantage** as Brian Mueller, Grand Canyon's CEO, said it sends a message about "better teaching and better service." He said it is expected that the new full-time faculty will enhance the University's brand, reduce marketing costs and improve student retention. The new permanent online faculty will teach most of Grand Canyon University's entry-level classes, typically the first three courses in all academic programs, in order to support the retention of online students; a strategy based on the fact that online students are likely to drop out more quickly than their peers at traditional campuses. Another part of what the University describes as a "high touch" strategy involves having student advisers and financial aid counselors in the same building as the full-time online faculty. The University also requires on-site professors to conduct a "welcome call" to all new students. Some other colleges operate in a similar manner to Grand Canyon. The fully online University of Maryland University College employs 215 full-time faculty members and requires them to work in University facilities; filling the role that department chairs hold at traditional colleges.

A \$1 million donation to the University of British Columbia (UBC) will fund an online youth mental health outreach and research program. The \$1 million gift was offered to UBC by Bell in order to establish the Bell Youth Mental Health IMPACT Project, which will allow University researchers to conduct mental health outreach to youth in need. As part of the project, researchers will create a mental health web portal that provides educational and self-assessment tools, automated feedback, a list of treatment options, advice on accessing services and coping techniques. Additional features, such as video-conferencing and social media tools, will be introduced in the future based on research into the effectiveness of this outreach model.

The University of Education Winneba has opened 11 new Distance Education Centres, which will bring the number to 23 throughout Ghana, Africa. Professor Akwasi Asabere-Ameyaw, Vice Chancellor of the University, said the centres are Dambai, Techiman, Tarkwa, Assin-Fosu, Obuasi, Sogakope, Accra, Axim, Kumasi, Nkawkaw and Mampong. Asabere-Ameyaw said there has been significant and consistent growth in distance education student numbers, explaining that currently, the distance education student population is 23,626.

The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics reported in October 2011 that **students studying computer science and business had a higher enrolment in distance education courses than those enrolled in other degree programs**. The average online enrolment for other degrees is 20%, compared with 24% for business degree seekers and 27% for computer science degree seekers. Enrolment in online degree programs was also higher for computer science and business students, at 8% and 6% respectively, compared to the 4% of all students who are enrolled in online degree programs. Other degrees that also had higher enrolment in at least one online course were general studies, education and healthcare. Some careers – such as engineering, social science, natural science, math and agriculture – had lower than average enrolment in online courses or degree programs.

The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released a report, which was requested by Congressional Democrats, stating that it is uncertain as to which colleges enrol the most students through distance education programs, or which programs receive the most federal financial aid. As a result, the department has been unable to focus its monitoring on the highest-risk programs. The report recommends that the US Education Department develop a plan to use new data that the National Center for Education Statistics is collecting to guide its oversight efforts. US Representative George Miller of California, who is the top Democrat on the House of Representatives Education Committee and among those who requested the GAO report, said the findings show that “we must remain vigilant in our efforts to protect the integrity of these programs and the student and taxpayer investments in them.”

Newt Gingrich, after experiencing a surge in the polls for the Republican presidential nomination, said that – as president – he would teach a free online course. He said that the course would be distributed in a manner similar to the online offerings of Kaplan or the University of Phoenix. The subject matter would be his policies. Gingrich holds a Ph.D. in history.

The Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode (IIMK) held a three-Day Leadership Workshop for the heads of select universities from across Bangalore. **The workshop, which ran November 23-25, 2011, was organized in collaboration with the Canada-based Commonwealth of Learning (COL), an intergovernmental organization created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.** Throughout the workshop, entitled “Leadership Values and strategies for excellence in Higher Education Institutions,” participants looked at themes including: Leading with Values; Power and Influence in Leadership; Sources of Power and Influence for Institutional Leaders; Emotional Intelligence and Leadership; Strategies for Excellence; Leadership Styles; Managing Change and Transformation; Strategic Direction and Future Vision; and Stakeholder Relationships, Ethics and Accountability. Professor Madhulika Kaushik, Education Specialist, Higher Education, of the COL, Canada explained that learning for development is a major mission of the COL. “Higher education institutions today are faced with daunting challenges emerging from burgeoning demand and diminishing resources,” Kaushik said. “Academic leadership in such an environment requires multidirectional capabilities of leading knowledge workers with demonstrable stakeholder accountability and charting growth strategies for continual excellence when resources may be limited and expectations high. Leaders are expected to create visions and values, inspire commitment, challenge and transform ways of thinking and acting while managing academic values and operational efficiencies. We are quite hopeful that this workshop marked the successful beginning of a strong capacity building for leadership among the higher education sector in India.”

The Distance Education Association of New Zealand (DEANZ) is calling for submissions to present at their bi-annual conference ‘Shift Happens – Resilience, Relevance and Reform.’ “The choice of the conference theme reflects the context distance educators must practice in,” Mark Nichols, DEANZ Executive Member and Open Polytechnic Executive Director of Faculty, said. “The tragedy of the Christchurch earthquakes and how that affected tertiary education providers and their students, the call for accountability through education performance indicators, the need to embrace the future and other changes all point to the importance of a conference considering resilience, relevance and reform in and through distance education.” A line-up of leading international and national speakers will be presenting at the event including Dr Diana Oblinger (EDUCAUSE), Professor Paul Bacsich (Matic Media Ltd), Professor Kwok-Wing Lai (University of Otago) and Ken Kay (EdLeader21). DEANZ are also calling for non-refereed papers, posters, workshops and refereed papers to present at the

conference and papers accepted for the refereed stream will be published in a special issue of the DEANZ Journal in 2012 immediately after the conference. To find out more about the conference and how to apply, please visit the DEANZ website at <http://tinyurl.com/deanz2012>. The conference, slated to be held in Wellington, April 11-13, 2012, is New Zealand’s premier event for leaders and practitioners involved in open, flexible and distance learning.

According to a series of reports published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, **online forums can be effective instruments for reaching large numbers of post-secondary educators and serving as an impetus to bring high-level concepts into practice in the classroom.** The research observes that greater use of online forums to improve post-secondary teaching will need a cultural shift, among both educators and administrators. For example, when comparing the experiences of the Mathematics Knowledge Exchange Network program for college math instructors with US institutional peers, researchers found a significant difference in the level of visibility and priority. For such programs to be successful, they need to be aligned with institution values, mission and strategy. The findings suggest it is also crucial to engage related stakeholders such as government organizations, philanthropic foundations and non-profits to help broaden the base of knowledge and support the program’s growth.

A recent study, conducted by the Alberta Students Executive Council, calls for better communication tools for rural and northern students in Alberta. The study entitled *Unleashing Aurora: Increasing Accessibility for Alberta’s Rural and Northern Students*, which looked at the barriers faced by students from northern and rural Alberta communities, found that more than 94% of students surveyed have researched post-secondary institutions or programs with the intention of improving their knowledge and skills; the Internet was the most popular source for locating information. However, the majority of respondents believed they were not provided with enough resources about post-secondary opportunities and only 30% were aware of the level of financial aid that was available to them. **The report recommends targeting prospective students, parents and high schools and providing them with information about financial aid and post-secondary opportunities, including distance studies.** In addition, the report suggests that the Alberta Opportunities Bursary and Northern Student Supplement programs should be reinstated and communication tools to reach students from diverse backgrounds should be developed. Visit www.albertastudents.ca/unleashing-aurora to read the full report.



The Marketing and Communications department of Open Learning would like to offer a special prize to the sixth individual to **correctly answer the following question.**

Question:

- ▶ What did Estefy Vazquez criticize about a webpage she analyzed for her BBUS 4451 class?
- Answers should be sent to OLMarketing@tru.ca by 4:30 pm on February 14, 2012. The winner will be informed by 4:30 pm on February 15, 2012. Details about the prize will be sent to the winner thereafter.

A corporate loan of \$8 million was recently donated by the Board of Directors of the African Development Bank (AfDB) to Trustco Group Holdings Ltd to support the Trustco Finance student lending program. The program works to improve access to education, employability and job-earning potential of high school graduates in Namibia, Africa. In a statement December 9, 2011, the AfDB said **“selected students will be enrolled with Namibia’s largest private distance learning education institution – Institute for Open Learning – while Trustco Finance, through the provision of microloans, will ensure that all the Institute’s students can pursue their education without the burden of financial constraint.”** Citing a 2005 World Bank report on Namibia, the lender said 60% of primary school teachers and 30% of secondary school teachers are unqualified. Lack of access to finance is said to be denying many Namibians access to education, especially at the tertiary level. Trustco Finance, a wholly-owned subsidiary of publicly-listed Namibian company Trustco Group Holdings, focuses on microfinance and micro-insurance in the education sector.



A new book, *Courageous Learning: Finding a New Path Through Higher Education* looks at issues including: the financial and academic viability of traditional, campus-based education and the need for a comprehensive look at alternative approaches such as online education, earning credit by examination and aggregation of credit. The book, written by Excelsior College President Dr. John F. Ebersole and award-winning co-author William Patrick, offers crucial insight for educators and policy makers, as well as practical information for adults who want and need to complete their post-secondary degrees. Ebersole, a leading advocate for adult degree completion and post-traditional solutions to higher education challenges, said, *“Courageous Learning* was written to say, ‘Yes, you can finish your degree. Yes, you can do it affordably. Yes, you can do it with schools that have excellent credentials. Yes, you can do it on your schedule. And here’s how.’” This book is aimed squarely at policymakers, at the millions of men and women in the workforce who haven’t completed their college degrees and at colleges and universities looking for ways to adjust to the new economic realities of higher education. Highlights of *Courageous Learning*, which is available as both an e-book and a paperback, include interviews with

eight of the US’s most outspoken proponents for education reform including: Martha Kanter, US Undersecretary of Education; Mark Milliron, former deputy director for post-secondary improvement with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; and James Applegate of Lumina Foundation. The book also defines online learning, credit by exam, credit by assessment and transfer credit and offers guidance on taking a non-traditional approach to higher education degree completion. In a recent blog post, Empire State College President Alan Davis wrote that schools profiled in *Courageous Learning* “are making more and more sense in this new world of digital ‘open learning.’”



The international departments of Australian universities saw growth in online enrolments in 2010, while on-campus growth remained stagnant. Growth in online higher education exports accelerated with a 12% increase in students on the back of a 10% rise in 2009, according to Australian Education International research. However, the number of students in offshore campuses of Australian universities rose by just 1% following 7% growth in 2009. Growth in the number of international students on Australian campuses also slowed, from 10% in 2009 to 5% in 2010.



The inaugural speech at the National Conference on ‘E-education & Distance Education,’ organized by The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), focused on the need for technological innovation to revamp India’s higher education system. The speech, given by Pawan Aggarwal, Adviser (education), Planning Commission of India, on December 8, 2011 in New Delhi, suggested that while India ranks third in the higher education system, it still requires “innovative, creative models in distance education and collaboration with research partners from across the world” in order to transform the domestic higher education scenario. Vinay Rai, chairman, ASSOCHAM National Council on Education, also spoke at the Conference saying **“universities in India must focus on providing online degree programs as distance learning is gaining a firm base in universities across the globe.”**



Ugandan higher education authorities recently authorized the **Virtual University of Uganda to begin offering fully online programs, the first such programs in the region.** The University has created an open access virtual library and a course management system through Moodle. Instruction will be in English, but there are plans to expand to French as well.



Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is launching a learning initiative called MITx, which is slated to provide MIT courses through an online interactive learning platform. The new online initiative will allow students to study at their own pace, offer online laboratories and student-to-student communication and provide individual assessment of a student’s work and certificates of completion. In addition, the project operates on an open source, scalable software infrastructure. “MIT expects that this learning platform will enhance the educational experience of its on-campus students, offering them online tools that supplement and enrich their classroom and laboratory experiences,” the announcement released December 19, 2011, said. “MIT also expects that MITx will eventually host a virtual community of millions of learners around the world.” The new online learning initiative also plans to provide a research environment in which to study online teaching and learning. MIT Provost L. Rafael Reif is leading both the online learning initiative and the research around it. “Many members of the MIT faculty have been experimenting with integrating online tools into the campus education,” Reif said in the announcement. “We will facilitate those efforts, many of which will lead to novel learning technologies that offer the best possible online educational experience to non-residential learners. Both parts of this new initiative are extremely important to the future of high-quality, affordable, accessible education.” An MITx prototype is expected to be released in the spring of 2012, and when it’s stable, the open learning software will be available at no charge so that other educational institutions can take advantage of it for their online education efforts.



Enrolments in Ghana-based University of Cape Coast’s distance education program for the 2011-12 year have increased 18% from last year with almost half of the students representing a female student populace. Vice-Chancellor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang said the distance education program offers a unique opportunity for Ghana’s females who come from different backgrounds as it allows them to “upgrade themselves by acquiring university degrees.” Opoku-Agyemang said the University has plans to adopt a multimedia and electronic mode of delivery through the use of teleconferencing, radio broadcast and Internet in order to make their distance delivery more appealing.



Next Generation University (NextGenU), a free online University concentrating on health sciences, is targeting learners in the developing world. Erica Frank, a professor at the University of British Columbia’s School of Population and Public Health and founder of NextGenU, said that while the University’s free online courses are primarily directed toward people in developing countries, they can also be taken by anyone for either credit at an accredited post-secondary education institution or solely for continued education and training. The University’s course evaluations are conducted through peer and mentor assessment in addition to quizzes and final exams coordinated by NextGenU. Frank said part of the University’s plan is to award completely free degrees in the future.



Online educational upstarts are adopting systems of digital “badges” to certify abilities and skills.

Often these “badges” concentrate on areas of interest to employers such as mentorship or digital video editing. Many of the new badges are easy to obtain to keep students motivated, while others indicate mastery of fine-grained skills that are not formally recognized in a traditional classroom. Some traditional colleges and universities are considering badges and other alternative credentials. For example, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology announced plans to create MITx, a self-service learning system in which students can take online tests and earn certificates after watching free course materials posted by the University. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the biggest push for “badges” comes from industry and education reformers, rather than from traditional educational institutions. “Mozilla, the group that develops the Firefox Web browser, is designing a framework to let anyone with a webpage – colleges, companies or even individuals – issue education badges designed to prevent forgeries and give potential employers details about the distinctions at the click of a mouse,” the Magazine wrote in its January 8, 2012 article entitled “‘Badges’ Earned Online Pose Challenge to Traditional College Diplomas.” Hundreds of educational institutions, traditional and non-traditional, have flocked to a \$2-million grant program run in coordination with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, seeking financial support to experiment with the educational-badge platform. Some observers however, feel that “badges” turn all learning into a commodity and thus devalue the difficult challenge of mastering a new skill.

In early January 2012, the Québec government announced its intention to give the distance-education provider Télé-Université (TÉLUQ) its previous status of college and therefore its full autonomy within the Université du Québec network. Even after TÉLUQ receives full autonomy, current students will receive a diploma from the Université du Québec à Montréal. However, students admitted later will receive a diploma from uQuébec’s board of governors, as is the case with other institutions in the uQuébec network. The return to autonomy, which coincides with TÉLUQ’s 40th anniversary, will allow the institution to more effectively address its mission of teaching, research and service to society. ■



Story Ideas or Questions...

If you have a story idea or a question about Open Learning that you would like answered, please send an email with your ideas or questions to: edesjardine@tru.ca. Watch for your story or answers to your questions in the next issue of *The Open Standard*.