

THE OPEN STANDARD

The Newsletter of the Open Learning Division of Thompson Rivers University

April 2008

Issue 4 Volume I

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THE OPEN STANDARD

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THOMPSON RIVERS
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OPEN LEARNING

Portal Offers TRU-LY Great Rewards

While generally accepted, the adage "two heads are better than one," somewhat misses the mark when applied to the digital age. At least when the two heads include the computer data handling systems *Colleague* and *Banner* - the legacy systems controlling Thompson Rivers University (TRU) on-campus and Open Learning (OL) central administrative information technologies.

Rather than maintain the dual systems, TRU's IT team implemented the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) project.

"Over a year ago it was realized that in order for TRU to properly provide services to our students, the implementation of an Enterprise Portal solution would be desirable," Anna Machaj, TRU's Manager of Administrative Information Systems, said at a TRU Portal project presentation.

Launching an ERP system is expected to integrate both the central administrative digital resources and processes of TRU and the Opening Learning division into a unified structure. Matthew Tarzwell, Software Analyst in TRU's IT Department, said the new ERP system will consolidate all of TRU's student information into one database. This will allow each University department to store and retrieve information in real-time and in a more reliable and accessible environment.

An integral phase within TRU's ERP renewal project is the implementation of a TRU-wide portal dubbed *myTRU*. This portal will replace the disparate portals originally utilized by TRU-OL students and tutors, as well as the *Colleague*-based web application initially used for on-campus students. Implementing the ERP system is necessary to successfully develop a single portal for TRU including on-campus students, OL students, alumni, faculty, tutors and staff.

"There are currently a number of inefficiencies that the portal will help eliminate when it is integrated into the new ERP system," Brian Mackay, Associate Vice President of IT Services and Chief Information Officer of TRU, said. "Many tasks currently performed



manually by (IT) staff will be automated or even made unnecessary once the portal is integrated, allowing the IT department to focus more time and resources towards student services and innovation."

In 2007, TRU's Administrative Information System team implemented Sungard's Luminis Portal platform to operate the new *myTRU* portal. Luminis will allow users to create a customized, personal online TRU account which is accessible 24 hours a day through a single sign-on.

Mackay explained the single sign-on feature was a major project motivator. "We want to abolish the need for campus constituents to have multiple accounts, usernames and passwords," Mackay said. "One day, a recently registered student, newly hired staff or freshly appointed faculty will be handed a single username and password granting them access to whatever website or online system the campus member requires."

If the portal goes as planned, users will be able to customize the portal and automatically sign on to WebCT (Blackboard) - the Learning Management System for online course information and presentation. This means avoiding multiple sign-on to both *myTRU* and WebCT, when users are accessing course material.

A paramount feature of *myTRU* is that Open Learning students will receive a personal TRU email account for the first time. This means OL students will no longer have to

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Student Success through Open Learning

With a little help from Open Learning, it took Graeme Beverley just under three years to discover more about his British heritage than he had in the 20 years his feet were rooted in UK soil. Amazingly enough, this rich educational experience was simply a side benefit of his true purpose for study with Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL). Beverley began his TRU-OL journey intending only to obtain a Health Science degree and thus satisfy his personal and professional need to be educationally equal to his peers. Achieving this goal meant more than mere overtime but yielded more than a mere degree.

Only four short days after moving from Newcastle, England to British Columbia in April 1983, Beverley began his Canadian physiotherapy career. In order to legally practice here, he had to join the College of Physical Therapists of BC. All physical therapy practitioners, from foreign and home soil alike, must be registered with the College in order to practice physical therapy in BC. Adding credence to the credentials, in 1993 it was provincially mandated that all new foreign-educated physiotherapists practicing in BC must be able to prove their education is equivalent to a Canadian degree in physiotherapy.

Having practiced physiotherapy in Canada for about 11 years prior to the legal amendment, Beverley was not affected by the new provision. However, his personal resolve led him to beat BC's credentialing bullet and in 1992 enrol in the Health Science degree course.

"I was still training students who appeared better qualified than I was and that didn't sit right with me," Beverley said. "I had a graduate diploma in physiotherapy from the



GRAEME BEVERLEY

UK but the majority of physios in BC have degrees... I felt I should be able to do this myself."

And achieve degree status Beverley did, although not without some challenges and, some unexpected benefits.

After more than a decade away from the school environment, Beverley returned but this time he shouldered much more responsibility. It wasn't just the strain of entering into a student mentality in a new country and in a new learning format; it was also the challenge of doing so with a young family and full-time job. With these commitments in tow, Beverley knew his course work would have to be very flexible so that it could be organized into his minimal amount of 'free' time. "Face-to-face learning doesn't have that flexibility," he explained. In order to fit education in, Beverley utilized time when he could, like early mornings and evenings after the kids were tucked tightly in bed.

Despite his tenacity, Beverley initially found the course work difficult to adjust to. "From my first introduction, courses seemed quite difficult," he said. However, Beverley said that communication with tutors provided the guidance required to understand the format coursework was expected to be in as well as the nuances inherent to course expectations.

"Contact with the tutor was important as they were able to direct me towards the course goals and they were quick to push me to learn more and express myself in more eloquent terms."

Tutor communication and guidance as well as the straightforward layout of course instruction, added to Beverley's positive and successful experience; as did his ability to gain credit for courses he previously gained at the College of New Caledonia. Beverley simply had to send his course transcripts to Open Learning in order to transfer credits toward his OL degree, reducing his total course load.

Open Learning not only offered Beverley the ease of study that allowed him to quickly realize his goal, it also awarded him social awareness. Course content not only satisfied degree requirements, it also opened his "eyes to some of the disparities in our health system and the cultural diversities which exist in BC health care." This awareness was further embellished through his course electives.

Being from Britain, Beverley was drawn to a fine arts elective on English history which encompassed the industrial revolution and rise of the British Empire.

"I learned more about my heritage during this course than I had during my 20 years of living there," Beverley said.

Learning and self realization were the most notable outcomes of Beverley's Open Learning journey. "I felt more professional and better able to carry out all the aspects of my work," Beverley said of his position as Professional Practice Leader for the Physical Therapy department in Merritt, where he has been practicing for the last 20 years.

Téluq and TRU-OL Partnership

On February 14, 2008, Téluq (Télé-Université, Université du Québec à Montréal) and Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) signed a memorandum of agreement.

The purpose of the agreement is to encourage collaboration between the two institutions



in the following domains: information related to teaching, study strategies and techno-pedagogical use in distance learning; the facilitation of student enrolment in courses offered by the other institution; project partnerships and resource sharing; and research project development, specifically related to distance learning, techno-pedagogy and administration.

The agreement is an exciting opportunity for TRU-OL as it provides us with the ability to broaden our offerings to students by way of additional courses and improved learning pedagogy. It also facilitates both innovative exchange and research sharing between the two institutions.

Gordon Tarzwell
Associate Vice-President, TRU-OL



AWARD WINNERS: Leena Niemela (left) and Debbie Wasylyshyn

Open Learning Celebrates Good Times

On March 31, 2008, just shy of their one year anniversary on the Thompson Rivers University Kamloops campus, Vice President of Open Learning Judith Murray welcomed Open Learning (OL) staff, faculty and associated university personnel to the Open Learning Celebration of Accomplishments. The celebration, held at Open Learning's new and progressive home - the British Columbia Centre for Open Learning, recognized the hard work and dedication of OL staff and highlighted the past year's achievements.

Vibrant posters displaying images pulled from OL's current advertising campaign were designed to represent every OL department. Each poster highlighted the achievements of a particular department. Managers utilized these posters to visually present the achievements of all OL departments including: Marketing and Communications; Business Intelligence; IT Services; Program Delivery; Academic Directors & Program Coordinators; Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and Credit Bank; External Agreements; Exams; Program Advising; Library Services; Instructional Development and Research Group (IDRG); Strategic Partnerships; and Enrolment Services.

Not only were the multitude of amazing accomplishments from each department shared, Cameron Beddome, Chief Recruitment Officer for Open Learning, also revealed OL's overall accomplishments for the past year.

OL successfully:

- Hired and trained over 100 people, including new staff
- Launched in Kamloops, July 1, 2007 without disturbance
- Maintain a focus on the "best interest of learner"
- Established an Open Learning Program Committee ensuring better course and program development
- Established a Strategic Partnership Committee to coordinate information and efforts
- Established two Student Advisory Committees to represent and interpret student views and needs

While the ceremony highlighted the accomplishments of the Open Learning team, it also rallied to promote two individuals who demonstrated exceptional abilities and went above and beyond their call of duty.

These individuals were presented with the inaugural *Outstanding Achievement Award*. Individuals being nominated for the award had to display the following qualities:

- Innovation in the development and implementation of Open Learning initiatives
- Enrichment of campus life, directly or indirectly, to students, tutors, staff or the community, through outstanding service
- Significant contributions to TRU-OL that have been deemed exceptional and have enhanced the reputation of TRU-OL
- Highly regarded integrity and professional conduct

The peer-to-peer award went to Debbie Wasylyshyn, Enrolment Services and Advising Assistant, who, amongst her regular duties, stepped up to handle all the tough warehouse issues and did it with a smile on her face. The staff-nominated award went to Leena Niemela, Enrolment Service Advisor, for her team work, outstanding service and her efforts to initiate and co-ordinate staff lunch-and-learns.

The awards will be given on a quarterly basis with hopes of including an Outstanding Service Award for OL Tutors.

"The purpose of the event was to truly realize how much has been accomplished over the past year despite some adversity and thank all those who had a hand in the successes" Jennifer Read, Director of Marketing and Communications, said. "We look forward to the next one and strive for an even better year than the last."

For those who could not attend, the celebration was recorded by the TRU media team and will be posted for viewing on the Open Learning website.



Under Construction: BCCOL Building Update



Dust settles as the sheets come down in the BC Centre for Open Learning (BCCOL), revealing the most recent results of renovations.

Until the end of February, plastic sheeting - vibrantly bedecked to brighten up the potential gloom of an office 'under the knife' - hid the latest stage of BCCOL's facelift. Braving the drone of buzzing saws, staff persevered through the dust and dirt with a more than healthy attitude.

Gord Tarzwell, Associate Vice-President, Open Learning, explained staff even had a bit of fun by "drawing all over the plastic sheeting." Tarzwell commends staff, tutors and students for their patience during the most recent, and most difficult, stage of

renovation which resulted in additional office space, a visitor reception area and enhanced electronic security.

Recent nips and tucks to the building have bestowed eight staff members with private offices as opposed to cubicle space, while students choosing to physically contact the Open Learning Division will now have a real point of access. In addition, the newly introduced electronic security key feature for each floor will allow staff to enter and exit the building more freely while also tightening the safety of exam

and file rooms, allowing for secure student information and identity.

While all major construction is complete, although about a month behind schedule, some final cobbling is required as a slight amount of millwork for the reception area, lighting and interior design are all still left on the To Do List. Reshuffling of the office layout and furniture, specifically the Enrolment Services area and Student Advisor discussion space, is

also slated to continue.

Marketing and Communications recently relocated allowing their original office space to be transformed into a meeting area for students and Student Advisors to acquaint themselves and address educational concerns and ponderings.

Sounds of screeching saws and pounding hammers should cease by May this year if the extended construction schedule is met.

Retrofitting of BCCOL began January 4, 2008, a mere seven months after Open Learning staff and faculty filled in the newly constructed building.

Further refurbishments were deemed necessary in response to inadequacies in the original design that did not take into account the new organizational structure of Open Learning, according to Tarzwell.



Paramount to the BC Centre for Open Learning (BCCOL)'s structuring process was the development of a fourth floor reception area. This newly enabled space offers an open welcome to all Open Learning visitors. Students entering the BCCOL will receive answers and information here, however all financial



transactions will still be funnelled through the Old Main building where enrolment service officers will be available to provide guidance.

While the doors are unlocked and open for business, the summertime slowdown diminishes demand for a permanent

receptionist however, on the occasion the reception area is unmanned, visitors have access to a service button to request entry. The reception area doors will remain unlocked from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday. Cameron Beddome, Chief Recruitment officer for Thompson Rivers University, Open

Learning, says any student on campus seeking personal aid will be accommodated through the office's new facilities. However Beddome further explains "students are not required to come directly to the office to receive advising as they are still able to receive service by phone."

Open Learning: IN THE NEWS

LAS VEGAS

On March 8, 2008, the Nevada Board of Education blocked requests by three groups seeking to open or expand distance learning schools. Virtual Academy and Nevada Connections Academy requested that distance learning be introduced to students in kindergarten through third grade. In addition, the Insight School of Nevada is aiming to launch an online education program for at-risk students. Laura Granier, attorney for the Nevada Connections Academy, said distance education is lawful for all grade levels.

INDIA, Tamil Nadu

The State Bank of India (SBI) is working with administration from Periyar University to develop a branded function allowing students from Periyar Institute of Distance Education to pay course fees through ATMs. The new system is expected to enable students to pay fees in SBI ATMs nationwide, providing the student has an SBI account. The new system will eradicate the practice of remitting fees through electronic or land mailed demand drafts. The new system should expedite matters as it will eliminate paper work, speed up processing and ensure instant credit.

AUSTRALIA

Murmurings of methods to integrate schools virtually and enhance digital education within current curriculum are being heard throughout Australian federal and state governments. Recently, New South Wales Premier Morris Lemma promised millions to, in part, provide a universal email system with an address and secure web environment for every pupil. In addition, an AUD\$66 million interactive whiteboards strategy is expected to connect classrooms to provide subjects not previously available at some schools. The addition of video conferencing, internet access and laptops are meant to allow the whiteboards project to take part in online "field trips" with experts.

NAMIBIA

This March, the Namibian College of Open Learning (Namcol) began to implement a directive issued by Education Minister Nangolo Mbumba. Paramount to this initiative was a driven, countrywide enrolment plan. In order to encourage enrolments, the college began registering pupils who did not qualify for admission to Grade 11 in 2008 and wanted to repeat subjects.

KENYA

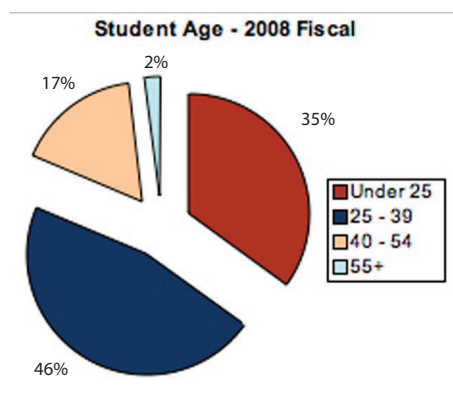
Flexible program formats are drawing women back to school in Kenya according to Dr Gabriel Katana, Academic Registrar at Kenyatta University. Katana said the majority of open learning students at Kenyatta are female and, in many cases, are studying for their second degree. The surge in female enrolment is, according to Katana, in part due to the fact that women have finished raising their small children and as such feel an "urge to go for higher education. To others, it is the availability of an opportunity."

SRI LANKA

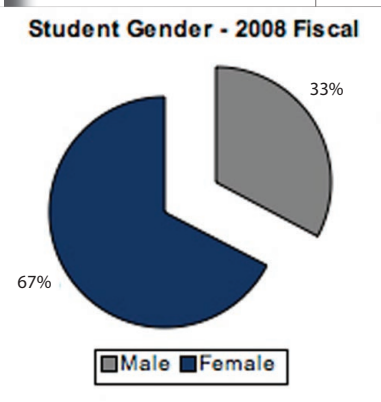
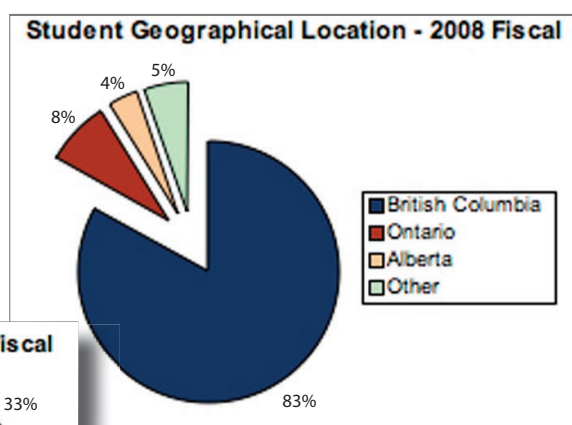
Currently in Sri Lanka an initiative involving the Ministry of Higher Education and the National Distance Education is being developed in order to create online, distance learning. The program dubbed NODES is funded by the Asian Development Bank. NODES is meant to promote access to degree, diploma and post graduate programmes of partner educational institutions.

Any readers wishing to submit Open Learning: In The News Items can email: edesjardine@tru.ca

Open Learning Student Demographics:



Facts and Figures



New to the Open Learning Team

Trina Valin

Enrolment Services Officer, Open Learning

From kiosk visage for Open Learning to purveyor of guidance for student concerns, the camera-shy service guru Trina Valin happily returns to her special place where academia meets professional vocation. With an Early Childhood Education certificate and a BA from our very own Thompson Rivers University (TRU), newly appointed Enrolment Services Officer Valin has spent her fair share of time in the academic environment. From daycare and preschool to special needs programs, Valin developed her technique of communicating with an array of students and adapted it to her new role at TRU, Open Learning (OL). So when Valin is not shying away in attempts to escape the wild gaze of Open Learning's digital camera, she is addressing the multitude of issues, concerns and questions inherent to the job. But before TRU-OL, Valin realized her predilection to help when she began to work with Convergys. "I enjoy helping people and I believe that education is very important," Valin said.

"With my current role, I get to help people further their education... the best of both worlds for me!" The other world Valin appreciates is right at her doorstep. "I've lived in or near Kamloops most of my life and love our summers and our (usually) mild winters."



Jacquy Meersman

Enrolment Services Officer, Open Learning

To happily suit and successfully fill the role of Enrolment Services Officer (ESO), conversing is essential and so Jacquy Meersman, aka the "talker," was the perfect candidate. Already attuned to the details and nuances of the Kamloops campus, having graduated from the University College of the Caribou (UCC) with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Meersman easily moulded a spot on the fourth floor of the British Columbia Centre for Open Learning. In hiring Meersman, Open Learning (to stray from the traditional) grabbed all their eggs from one basket. Meersman, like Trina Valin, also developed her service skills and honed her talking abilities while working at Convergys. However, the call of the caribou (i.e. TRU, formerly known as the University College of the Caribou) seems to have remained in Meersman's psyche, resulting in the proverbial repetition of history. Originally Meersman moved from her hometown of Valemount, BC to Kamloops for school, and once again after about seven years away, she returned to Kamloops' cozy campus.

Brianna Swayze, Web Designer, Open Learning

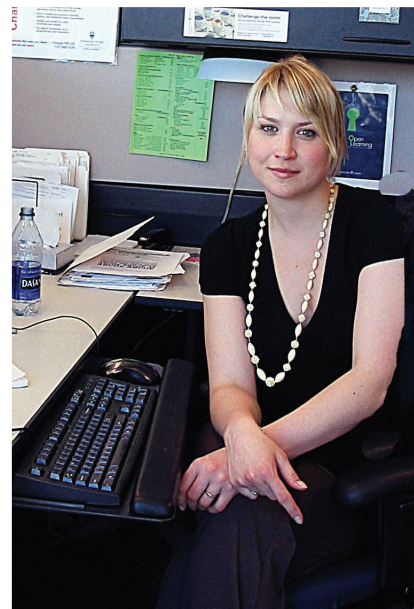
Common thought says caffeine is the source spurring Coca-Cola's energy eruption; however those who have met Brianna Swayze might have a different opinion as to Coca-Cola's true energy supply. After saturating Calgary-based Coca-Cola Bottling Ltd. with energy inspired product marketing, Swayze joined the online company *Adventure Touring* as Web Developer. It is this marriage of marketing and web design experience that sent Swayze full-speed ahead to Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) as the new Web Designer with Marketing and Communications. Born in Revelstoke, BC, Swayze left the nest in early 2000 and bounded to Calgary, AB to wow the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) with her eager gusto. And where to put all of that energy... enter Coca-Cola. From promoting Coke products on-campus to representing the brand at SAIT sporting and educational events and organizing Coca-Cola sponsored karaoke and concert nights at campus pubs, Swayze was there, likely brimming with that "oh-so Swayze" zeal. Never having enough it would seem, she evolved her education and experience by enrolling in SAIT's New Media Production and Design Program and working in web and graphic design for Student Connections – a government funded program offering students work experience and small businesses discounted manpower. Before joining her family in Kamloops, Swayze spent two years working with *Adventure Touring* where she took virtual control of their online advertising campaign, invoking her repositioning as Marketing Director. A little Pay-Per-Click here, a little analytics software research there, and Swayze was ready to apply her skills elsewhere. And here, at Open Learning, Swayze aspires to redesign and restructure the OL website and move www.truopen.ca up the search engine ladder by way of Search Engine Optimization, online advertising and web analytics.



New to the Open Learning Team

Élise Desjardine, Editor, Open Learning

A little work here, a little work there, everywhere she worked, worked the corners of the earth. From Toronto (T.O.) to Syria, Elise Desjardine began her journey, cultivating a career in Archaeology that began with an Honours BA from the University of Toronto and continued with work at the Royal Ontario Museum. The next stretch of the journey was actually a return, a revisit to T.O. where a post-graduate in Journalism led to an extended stint of editorial positions and professional growth. Next, from the peaks of the Rockies, her career discovery led to the United Kingdom and from there it seemed only sensible to hop, skip and jump to magnifico Milan. After enjoying this career-inspired journey, which spanned a comprehensive cross-section of the globe, Desjardine recognized her TRU calling in British Columbia. With travel bags in tote, she journeyed from Toronto to join Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) as the new Editor with Marketing and Communications. The ease of surrendering her passport surprised this tenacious traveller who had jumped at the opportunity to enter a professional environment of academia and live the Kamloops lifestyle. After working with *Integrated Health Retailer Magazine*, *Canadian Underwriter Insurance and Risk Management Magazine* and *Associated French Press Global Diary 2008* as Editor, as well as at *Style at Home*, *Homemakers*, *Balance TV* and *Canadian Living Magazines* as Editorial Assistant, Desjardine fervently welcomed the opportunity to work in a new, non-Magazine environment. Not only was the environment new and fresh, it just happened to exist in a quaint city offering natural nourishment for her adventurous habit of the outdoor kind.



... Cont'd from page 1

converse with tutors and school advisors. The TRU-specific email is created upon initial registration and is offered for life.

Other standout benefits of the single source portal include features such as an online calendar that's not just any pencil whittling date highlighter. This interactive online date taker can track events and tasks as well as allow students to post assignment deadlines, exam dates, meeting schedules and disseminate reminders.

"The portal also contains a Group feature allowing students to interact and collaborate online," Tarzwell said, explaining students can create open membership interest groups accessible to all *myTRU* users. As an example, Tarzwell explained if there was a group of *myTRU* users helming the hobby of "small, wrinkly faced dogs," then these "pug lovers could create a group dedicated to their interest" and do things such as share photos, files, chats and messages about their toy dog pedigrees. "Of course Groups can also be used for other purposes, like project teams and study groups," Tarzwell added.

Students can also look forward to accessing TRU's library online and thus have the ability to view personal library account information, such as return dates, and search article databases. But it doesn't end at the student benefit. As alumni, past students will be awarded access to a planned alumni-focused *myTRU* application. Alumni currently does have access to an online community website; however it is hosted by the University of Victoria and as such is not integrated with TRU systems or any portal features.

Staff and faculty are also expected to be awarded a distinct *myTRU* portal page. Currently, all online faculty and staff resources - including GroupWise, Telbook, finance as well as benefits information and forms - are openly accessible from the main TRU homepage. This is expected to change with the development of a dedicated staff and faculty portal page.

Additional attractions posed by the new portal include the ability to target TRU campus and Open Learning announcements to specifically characterized groups of students. Staff members often ask IT, "How can I get this message to that group of students?" According to Mackay,

the portal will have sufficient student details to allow staff to send messages to: a single student; all students registered in a specific course; all students in a specific program; or to every student campus-wide.

"Announcements can also be programmed for automatic delivery," Mackay said, providing the example of e-notices regarding overdue library books.

At its zenith, the portal will improve communication across all TRU campus and Open Learning communities, an important feat for a potentially global student population.

"Open Learning serves students from around the world so it's difficult to maintain a consistent, high level of service and a feeling of community for students," Tarzwell said. "To meet our vision and provide the best learning environment possible, we must bring together our people, processes and technologies. The portal allows us to do this by integrating existing disparate systems, enhancing communication and providing tools to help students learn."



Life In Open Learning

Braving the April 20 cold, Maria Lynch, Open Learning Business and Economics Tutor, completed the *Vancouver Sun Run* in 98 minutes and 41 seconds; a three minute improvement over her 2007 *Sun Run* time. Not to outshine her own achievement, this 60-year-old overachiever nobly highlighted another runner. "I was approaching the finishing line when they announced that an 81-year-old lady finished just before me," Lynch gallantly mentioned, "She became my new role model." Lynch plans to continue entering the community-centric run, and this time around she'll have more time for training. This year Lynch retires from her six years of work with Open Learning. Toting a BA in Economics and a Bachelor of Education, Lynch's professional roster has swelled to a 28-year vocation in education, culminating with a career at Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning. In March 2002 Lynch accepted a tutorial position with the former British Columbia Open University, now TRU. Lynch plans to continue her work in education through consulting services as well as her involvement with First Nations' projects.