

THE OPEN STANDARD

The Newsletter of the Open Learning Division of Thompson Rivers University

Spring Convocation Issue

June 2008



Open Learning Students Graduate


Opportunity abounds in today's worldwide job market, a market now open to approximately 156 Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) graduates. At Spring Convocation Ceremonies* held June 5 and 6, 19 Open Learning graduates made the trek to TRU's Kamloops campus to march in full regalia alongside approximately 1,500 on-campus graduates.

Honorary degree recipients, valedictorians and medal winners spoke to the multitude of individuals garbed in gowns of blue at each of the four spring ceremonies marking the second round of Open Learning students to graduate from Open Learning's new home on the TRU, Kamloops campus.

"Graduates exiting their respective programs each had the opportunity to create a unique scholastic career that closes gaps put forth by proximity and circumstance," President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Roger Barnsley said regarding the last TRU on-campus and Open Learning students to graduate before his retirement this summer.

Proximity and circumstance by no means stood in the way of Open Learning graduates seeking to realize their educational aspirations.

After spending 14 years of her life in Zambia, a landlocked country in Southern Africa, Saman Waseem, moved to Canada as a fulltime mother of three. Motivation moved Waseem to seek out educational opportunities, which she continually strove to enhance despite the problems of access she faced due to her familial responsibilities and distance from established institutions. TRU-OL, formerly BCOU, was the answer which helped Waseem reach her goals and graduate this spring with a full degree. (Read more about Saman Waseem's story page 2)

Congratulations to the Open Learning Spring 2008 graduates who have earned their credentials through hard work and motivation, made possible by the flexible format offered through open education. 

* Students who did not meet the graduation requirements prior to the online spring convocation deadline for the Spring/June 2008 Convocation Ceremony, can apply for the Fall/October 2008 Convocation Ceremony held October 2, 2008 by applying online prior to the end of August 2008.

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ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

> New TRU President announced



THOMPSON RIVERS
UNIVERSITY
OPEN LEARNING



TRU-ly Inspired

OL graduates share their stories of success

“One of the teachers that I would like to mention here was Dr. Anton Dutoit, I don’t think that I have words to show my appreciation to him and the way he taught his courses.”

- Saman Waseem, Bachelor Of Business Administration

Saman Waseem

A whirlwind life in which circumstance seems to determine one’s fate, will not affect the fate of the determined. Saman Waseem’s resolve to succeed in her goals despite the hurdles life left in her path, speaks to the strength and perseverance the human spirit can offer when aspirations outweigh situation. Married at a very young age while still at home in her East Asian birthplace, Waseem moved away with her new husband to the landlocked country of Zambia in Southern Africa. Here, in a country where educational opportunities are limited beyond secondary school, she lived for 14 years.

“During my time in Zambia I was a fulltime mom to my three kids and had no opportunities to complete my education,” Waseem said reflecting upon life prior to her 1999 emigration to Canada.

Opportunity did not abound for Waseem as she followed her husband, a Chemical Engineer, to the small rural town of Castlegar, BC where once again, there was no University presence.


Determined to kick start her education, Waseem completed a three-year co-op Diploma in Computer Information Systems (CIS) from the local community college Selkirk College.

“My doors for further education closed at that point as I could not leave my three kids and move to another city for further university education,” Waseem said. It was at this point that she discovered Open Learning.

“I researched programs on the website and was able to transfer two years of my CIS Diploma towards a BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) Degree at TRU-OL,” she said. “It was a great opportunity for me as I was able to continue my education in a very practical manner that allowed me to keep a life/family/ education balance.”

Waseem, who completed her BBA (CIS) with the commendable GPA of 4.2, found the online medium of Open education “excellent in every way.” Moreover, her experience was heightened by the tutors she described as “more like mentors.”

“Everyone is really proud of me to have completed my degree while raising three kids and fulfilling my other family obligations. Well, I tell them that my secret is TRU-OL.”

The secret ends there, as Waseem happily divulged her future plan to achieve a Masters of Business Administration degree. 

Susan Jenner

Exams often cause the stomach to knot and churn with nervous butterflies, but Susan Jenner's jitters may have been more symptomatic of the kicking and growing going on in her belly. "By the time I was writing my last exam in August 2007 I was seven months pregnant," Open Learning graduate Jenner said. "It is one thing to come home after a full day of work and refocus your mind to critical thinking for coursework but it's another thing to do that and deal with the fatigue and other physiological changes pregnancy throws at you."

Despite the physical challenges Jenner faced, in just one year she was able to upgrade her Registered Massage Therapy education to a Bachelor of Health Science Degree through Open Learning.


"I was a Registered Massage Therapist who had been practicing for six years at the time I started the TRU program," Jenner said and further reflected on her original intent to complete a Bachelor of Science through traditional on-campus university and college courses at both Camosun College and the University of Victoria. Rather than continue her plan to complete a degree through an on-campus format, Jenner



Susan Jenner and baby

was directed to TRU-OL through a partnership formed between her former school, West Coast College of Massage Therapy, and TRU.

"Having the Bachelor of Health Science from TRU-OL now allows me to consider other paths within and outside

my profession," Jenner said. "The Bachelor program opens up many doors for me and the HEAL courses I took opened my eyes to the challenges my colleagues in the health profession face daily and I have greater respect for their work." 


Tanya Ninaus

Work, family and life in general are guaranteed to complicate a schedule, tangling one's life aspirations into a web of responsibilities and routine. However, a good dose of open-mindedness and flexibility can loosen up even the busiest of schedules, allowing the educationally minded the means to realize their

goals. TRU's open format of learning allowed Open Learning student Tanya Ninaus to upgrade her Massage Therapy diploma to a Bachelor of Health Science degree in just one year. Low residency requirements and distance learning meant Ninaus could realistically juggle work, family and school into her daily to-do list.

"I enrolled in TRU-OL because this was the only program which gave me three years of credit for my previous diploma," Ninaus said. "The transfer credit helped a lot and ... was the quickest route for me to a Bachelor's degree."

Credits Ninaus earned at West Coast College of Massage Therapy, Simon Fraser University and Douglas College were "easily" transferred towards her TRU-OL Bachelor's Degree meaning Ninaus was left needing only three TRU-OL courses to upgrade her diploma and reach her Degree dream.

"Open Learning is really just learning on your own, at a pace directed by the teacher," Ninaus said explaining that while Open Learning might not be for everyone, it is an effective way to actualize your ambitions and evolve your career goals. "Now that I have a Bachelor's degree I am able to apply to a Master's program in Occupational Therapy, this is my career goal." 

Of Note

"Amila Grace Urbayo was my student in the Registered Nurse Refresher program. She was a student who overcame many personal and professional hurdles to attain her Certificate which she did with persistence and commitment. She was a pleasure to have as a student and I am very proud of her accomplishments, wishing her every success as she practices in the profession of her choice."

- Donna Rosentreter, TRU-OL Tutor

Brenda Sue Duggan

Life is tough at the best of times but it is hard to imagine just how challenging it could be for the life of a single mother of three in small town BC. Brenda Sue Duggan can tell you exactly how daunting such a situation is but more importantly, she shares how exhilarating it can be to overcome the obstacles and fulfill a great and demanding life goal - gaining a degree.

Guidance from an employment advisor led then stay-at-home mother Duggan to Open Learning. Duggan needed options in order to change her circumstance and support her family but the options needed to fit her terms. "I did not want to move to go to school because of the expense and I did not want to uproot my children," Duggan explained, "I did not want to be at school all day especially because I was home schooling one child already."


Through creative time management and cooperation, Duggan was able to juggle her responsibilities to her three young children and a full course-load and gain both a Bachelor of General Studies Degree in 2005 and, just

this spring, a Social Service Worker Certificate. Despite the challenges Duggan happily engaged in her coursework and felt tutor support enhanced her experience which will allow her to access a Teacher Certificate program.

"I had a lot of great tutors who were very helpful and made great efforts to get back to me if I was calling/ emailing for help outside of their hours," Duggan notes. But despite all the support Open Learning can offer, self determination and persistence is what makes the difference between victory and defeat.

"If I could accomplish this, anyone could," Duggan said in reflection.

"I am not known for being exceptionally organized and I did not have amazing grades in high school but I think that if you are determined and motivated, then you can succeed in Open Learning."

Succeed Duggan has. Both her Bachelor of General Studies and Social Service Worker Certificate contributed to her current position as an Education Assistant. "My employers were also impressed with the fact that all of it was completed through distance learning, which demonstrated to them dedication, self-discipline, good organization and determination," Duggan said. 

"Tutors helped me to understand what the expectations for assignments and tests were and they gave advice on how to improve my work. Some of them were so enthusiastic and passionate about the subject they were teaching that it made the material all the more interesting and appealing."

- Brenda Sue Duggan, Social Service Worker Certificate Program

Leah Hubensky

In the remote environment of Northern BC, Open Learning is a common household term as many people are physically removed from access to campus-based universities and must therefore rely on distance education. However, Open Learning doesn't stop when we exit the North.


Even after moving from her Northern BC birthplace, Leah Hubensky found Open Learning a viable option to upgrade her educational credentials. "Open learning was more flexible when I was working fulltime," Hubensky said explaining however, that setting priorities is essential if one is to succeed in this type of learning.

While working fulltime for Canada's Federal Government, Hubensky enrolled in the Bachelor of General Studies Degree program at Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning in order to fit education into her schedule.

Already boasting a Certificate in Public Management and a Diploma in Public Sector Management, both from the University of Victoria (UVic),


Hubensky was able to transfer existing credits toward her TRU-OL degree.

Hubensky transferred a multitude of credits towards her Open Learning education which she began in 1992, revisited in July 2007 and completed in March 2008. In addition to credits transferred from UVic, Simon Fraser University (SFU), the College of New Caledonia and Capilano College, she was also awarded three credits toward her BA through a partnership between the Federal Government and Open Learning. These three credits were based on training provided by Hubensky's employer, Human Research and Social Development Canada.

With two diplomas and a new Bachelor's degree from TRU-OL in hand, one might deem Hubensky's educational career complete but stay tuned for one more addition to her bright record. Hubensky has only one course to complete before she receives her Diploma in Sustainable Community Development from SFU. 

Rajvinder Mattu

With little more than a breath of alumni air, Rajvinder Mattu jumped from his second diploma in Financial Management directly to a Bachelor of Commerce, Accounting Degree through Open Learning. Mattu's educational journey, which began with a Business Administration Diploma, most recently arrived at the "best degree option," which for him meant Open Learning. By recognizing and transferring his existing credit, Mattu was able to complete his third post-secondary program in just two years. "I was able to transfer almost everything and only had to do an additional four courses to complete my degree," Mattu said. "The program was very flexible to my needs."


Despite responsibilities deemed necessary through fulltime work, Mattu's Open Learning adventure allowed him to add a degree to his educational roster. After graduating from Open Learning this spring, one might wonder what Mattu has on his educational agenda. "Now I'm enrolled in the CGA (Certified General Accountants) program." 

Sandra Saric

Prior to enrolling in the Bachelor of Commerce degree program through Open Learning, Sandra Saric was working part-time and struggling to fit traditional University courses and their rigid timetables into her schedule. Complicating her already hectic life, financial constraints forced Saric to take on more and more hours at work which posed an obstacle to her educational goals. Saric's financial situation eventually forced her to take a fulltime job as a customer support representative at a call centre.

Despite adding a full course load onto her busy schedule of family, work and kick-starting a home-based business, Saric persevered and continued to work toward her educational goal. "I chose Open Learning because of the flexibility it provided me while working a full- and a part-time second job." Saric said. Not only did Saric succeed in her goal to graduate with a degree through Open Learning, she was also promoted in her office and became the Supervisor of 22 employees. "While taking my courses I found I was able to better perform as a decision maker in my company and it allowed me to critically analyze the organizational structure and provide solutions and change to areas where our

company needed improvement," Saric said. "The concepts and theories that I learned through the courses that I took helped me achieve change, credibility, responsibility and elevated my status in the company."

"With the skills, knowledge and applicable concepts that I learned through my Open Learning program, I feel more comfortable and in control of my career. My experience has allowed me to manage and develop business start-ups I am pursuing." 

"I need to thank my Program Advisor Tony Kuzma for helping me achieve my educational goals. He was always so helpful and always provided positive reinforcement during my time with TRU-OL."

- Sandra Saric, Bachelor of Commerce



Bedecked in blue graduation gowns, off-campus tutors including Open Learning Math and Physics Tutor Derek Knox (far left), Open Learning Business and History Tutor Mark Salopek and Open Learning Economics Tutor Rocky Mirza (far right) celebrate spring Convocation at TRU, acknowledging the approximately 156 Open Learning students who graduated from an array of programs. Open Learning Vice President Judith Murray (second from right) welcomed the group of tutors at the BC Centre for Open Learning after the convocation ceremonies ended.

A Presidential Welcome

Enthusiasm reigns with new president's arrival

"The stage is set, and come September the curtain will rise on a new era in the history of Thompson Rivers University," the Chair of the TRU Board of Governors Ron Olynyk said in his June 2, 2008 announcement which introduced the appointment of Dr. Kathleen Scherf as the institution's fifth president.

Dr. Scherf, who is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Culture at the University of Calgary, will officially assume her new role as President on September 1st.

A highly accomplished educator and administrator, Scherf completed her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Toronto in 1982 and her MA and PhD degrees at the University of British Columbia before joining the Department of English at UBC as a lecturer in 1988.

The following year she crossed the country to spend the next decade at the University of New Brunswick, where she was appointed Associate Dean of Arts and full Professor of English in 1995-1996. She joined the University of Calgary as Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Culture in 1999 and was reappointed for a second term as Dean in 2004.

Her extensive teaching portfolio includes more than two dozen different courses in English, Theatre and Communications. Most recently, Scherf helmed the largest first year class in her Faculty at the University of Calgary where, as Dean, she believed it was important to remain connected to students and the classroom. This commitment to the student experience – one of TRU's pillars – is one of the reasons the Board chose Scherf to lead the university.



Photo Credit: Ken Bendiktsen, University of Calgary

Dr. Kathleen Scherf

As a senior administrator she has served on a wide range of Boards, Committees and Councils at a national level, including her current appointments on: three different Editorial Boards; the Board of the Women's Television Network Foundation; and the Van Horne Institute.

As one of the most senior Deans at the University of Calgary, Scherf has served as Chair of Deans' Council and as the Deans' representative on the University Budget Committee and the University Planning Committee. In addition, she has taken a number of other significant, pan-institutional leadership roles.

Internationally, she is the coordinator of a group of academics from 11 different institutions in six provinces working collaboratively to address obstacles related to implementing academic business in India. Just last month, Scherf was one of only eight Canadian delegates invited to the fifth annual Canada-India Policy Dialogue in New Delhi, India.

"I am honoured to accept the position as President of TRU," Scherf said in her introduction speech to the TRU community on June 2. "The evolution of the institution is impressive, its comprehensiveness, its financial

management and its beautiful campus is second to none. My interest in engaging students, community and faculty and staff resonates perfectly with TRU. Kamloops is a fantastic, friendly city and I am very comfortable in the region, so I am very much looking forward to September."

Scherf is the author of seven books and an impressive list of journal publications, reviews and lecture presentations to national and international organizations. Earlier this year she was the recipient of an Asia Pacific Foundation Policy Research Grant.

In 2004, she was honoured with the Calgary "Woman of Vision" award for her leadership and energy in successfully transforming and building the academic and research work of an interdisciplinary Faculty at the University of Calgary, and for connecting its work to the community.

"Our selection committee put in many hours and I would like to thank them for their commitment to this process. We have an incredibly qualified, and capable new President, and we are all extremely excited to see her take this institution to the next level," Olynyk said. 