

## BULLETIN

November 2014

FROM THE GUEST EDITOR, JENNY ROBERTS, UNIVERSITY OF

SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA)

*OUT OF AFRICA*

Once again, it is my privilege to edit the November bulletin of ODLAA and present an African perspective on distance education.

I am writing this bulletin from the middle of the African bush at a place called Mabula Game Reserve which is situated in the North West province of South Africa, only a 2 hour drive from Johannesburg.

Mabula comprises 12000 hectares of malaria free reserve and is home to an abundance of wildlife and birds, including the world famous Big Five. Here, all natures' wonders are revered - from the 'Big Five' (lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant and rhino) to the 'small five' (ant lion, leopard tortoise, buffalo weaver, elephant shrew and rhino beetle).

The following photo was taken from the veranda of the house I am staying in and this is my view while writing this bulletin, reading through 2 master's proposals and editing a book chapter. To me this is the beauty of being able to work at a distance – anywhere (in the bush) and anytime (over the weekend), and also for our students who too can make use of flexible working hours and the separation of lecturer and student.



## ODLAA WEBINARS

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Once again, Jo Osborne will be facilitating another exciting webinar on topics that are important to the future of open and distance education as the political and economic landscape changes around us quite rapidly.

The next webinar is scheduled for Tuesday 9th December, 1-2pm (AEST):

### **“Open Educational Practice (OEP)– what, why and how?”**

OERs are only a part of the wider topic; OEP includes a different way of thinking, planning and managing for the open sharing of teaching practices. But how much is aspirational and how far have we got with implementation?

The growing diversity of Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives coupled with better understanding of the limitations of open content, without open practices, has led to an important shift in thinking in the field. A narrow focus on OER per se may not be enough for educational institutions to fundamentally embrace and establish effective open pedagogical practices.

Open Educational Practices (OEP) are defined as practices which support the production, use and reuse of high quality open educational resources (OER) through institutional policies, which promote innovative pedagogical models, and respect and empower learners as co-producers on their lifelong learning path. OEP address the whole OER governance community: policy makers, managers and administrators of organizations, educational professionals and learners.

Presenters will be from the Australian National Symposium on OER, including Luke Padgett and Dr Carina Bossu, OLT Project leader for Adoption, use and management of OER to enhance teaching and learning in Australia.

Registration information for this webinar will be circulated by email shortly.

For any comments and suggestions (and volunteer speakers!) relating to the ODLAA Webinar program, please contact [Jo.Osborne@utas.edu.au](mailto:Jo.Osborne@utas.edu.au) on forthcoming events that may be of interest to ODLAA members.

We were delighted to welcome webinar participants from the USA and New Zealand, as ODLAA webinars are now also advertised to members of DEANZ.

A link to all the webinar recordings can be found on the ODLAA website:

<http://www.odlaa.org/>

Watch out for forthcoming information on the next ODLAA Webinar scheduled for next year.

The focus of these webinars will continue to be from a practitioner aspect; we want to share experience and advice from the field rather than propose theoretical positions.

If you would like to help refine (or diversify!) the proposed topics and/or suggest possible presenters, please contact Jo directly at [Jo.Osborne@utas.edu.au](mailto:Jo.Osborne@utas.edu.au)

## CONFERENCES AND OTHER EVENTS

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### *ICDE International Conference 2014, Moscow 25-26 September 2014*

South African delegates were well represented at the recent ICDE conference which was held in September in Moscow. The conference was hosted by the Moscow State University for Economics, Statistics and Informatics (MESI).

Keynote speakers included Gard Titlestad, secretary general of the ICDE and Diana Laurillard from the University of London. In addition there was a panel discussion on Open, Distance, e-learning and MOOCs. This session was chaired by Prof Rory McGreal from Athabasca University and also included presentations from Wayne McIntosh (Otago Polytechnic), Darco Jansen (European Association of Distance Universities (EADTU)), Dmitry Guzhelya from Russia and Jenny Roberts (University of South Africa (UNISA)). Jenny Roberts' paper was on a student perspective of undertaking MOOCs which is often not fully considered in the MOOC debate.

In addition, Prof Mandla Makhanya, the Principal and Vice-Chancellor from UNISA, presented a paper on the narrowing or widening digital and cognitive gaps, where he highlighted the challenges in Africa and other developing nations with regard to online teaching and learning. These challenges include the low levels of digital literacy, the high costs of connectivity and general bandwidth problems.

### *ICDE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2015*

The International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) World Conference is held every two years, hosted by a member institution. During the closing ceremony of the most recent world conference in Tianjin, China, in October 2014, it was announced that Unisa will host the 26th ICDE World Conference in 2015. This is the first time the event will be hosted in Africa, and follows Unisa's hosting of a highly successful ICDE Standing Conference of Presidents meeting in 2010.

The conference is being held at the acclaimed Sun City resort which is a 2-hour drive from the OR Tambo international airport in Johannesburg. Sun City neighbours the famous Pilansberg Game Reserve which is also host to the Big 5. If the photo above of the zebras whetted your appetite for practicing distance education among the wildlife of Africa, then here is your opportunity to do just that.

Unisa is proud to host this conference and we are looking forward to welcoming guests from all over the world to join us under the beauty of the African skies.

Call for papers is now open and more information can be found on the official conference website [www.unisa.ac.za/icde2015](http://www.unisa.ac.za/icde2015).



### *DISTANCE EDUCATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (DEASA) Conference*

DEASA is represented by member countries from the Southern Africa Development Community regions (SADC). These countries are:

- Angola
- Botswana
- Democratic republic of Congo (DRC)
- Lesotho
- Malawi
- Mauritius
- Namibia
- South Africa
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

The 49<sup>th</sup> annual DEASA conference is due to take place from 4-7 December on the beautiful tropical island of Mauritius and is hosted by the Mauritius Open University.

The theme of the conference is: Open and Distance Learning (ODL): Towards sustainable development in the Southern African region.

I will be attending this conference and will report on the conference in the first ODAA bulletin in 2015.

## REPORT ON SPECIAL THEMED ISSUE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION VOL 36(2). MAY 2015.

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### ***DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TIME: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGING TIME, WORKLOAD, AND COSTS***

Drs Elena Barberà, Thomas Hülsmann and Jennifer Roberts (Guest Editors) invited contributions to the special themed issue of “*Distance Education*”, Volume 36/2, which will be published in May 2015.

After scrutinizing the many abstracts that were submitted by the deadline of 15 August 2014, the editors invited the authors with the most relevant and best quality abstracts to submit their full papers by 31 October 2014. At the time of going to press, many of these articles have been submitted and are now in the process of being sent for peer review. The editors are certain that this very important topic of time and workload in Distance Education will make a significant and necessary contribution to our field.

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### **Focus of special theme**

*While time, as in learning time and teacher workload, seems critical in most forms of distance education (including higher education, open schooling or non-formal education), it has rarely been examined in a comprehensive manner. The journal distance education seeks to address this gap by inviting contributions to a special issue on the theme “distance education and time: instructional and organizational implications for managing time, workload, and costs”.*

## SPECIAL PROJECTS AT UNISA

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Jenny Roberts (myself) from the Institute for Open and Distance Learning (IODL) at Unisa, recently received a project grant for a 3-year research study into the Changing Roles of Staff in Distance Education. The title of the project is:

### **Future and Changing Roles of Staff in Distance Education: a study to identify and implement training and professional development (CPD) needs**

This project will be investigating the future roles of staff in distance education in order to understand training needs and develop relevant CPD frameworks for these changing roles. In addition, we will seek to develop a Competency Framework for ODL staff.

As part of the grant we are encouraged to spend time with our international colleagues to discuss the topic with them and also to invite research co-operation.

To this extent, I will be travelling, together with my colleague Prof Adele Bezuidenhout, to Australia and New Zealand during April/May 2015.

We would welcome your assistance to provide us with the names and contact details of people from your institutions who are working in this area whom we could contact to assist us. If you are interested in being part of this project please could you contact me at [buckij@unisa.ac.za](mailto:buckij@unisa.ac.za).

Prof Ignatius Gous from Unisa has also received a grant for his project entitled:

**“Mind-Wise Edu-Engagement ” –**

**Metacognitive Teaching and Learning strategies in ODeL**

In a document published by the Commonwealth of Learning titled CREATING LEARNING MATERIALS FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: A Handbook for Authors and Instructional Designers (2005) the authors discuss instructional design, learning theories and how adults learn, but then add the following: “Whilst the above principles are widely quoted and followed in designing post-school courses, it has to be admitted that our knowledge of how people learn is very patchy. Much of the research on adult learning has been conducted on very small groups, often of middle-class learners in the developed world. The limitations of our knowledge are discussed further by Brookfield (1995).”

Student learning skills support programmes are needed. Many kinds of programmes are being established at Unisa, such as online tutors and support teams at regional offices. A student support program called “MindWise” has been provisionally developed by Prof Ignatius Gous and Dr Jenny Roberts on the basis of research in the fields of the cognitive sciences, metacognition and educational neuroscience. It entails seven aspects, namely

1. Self-knowledge and Self-management
2. Mindset (Grit and Focus)
3. Listening Skills
4. Reading Skills
5. Study Skills
6. Performance Skills
7. Creating Skills (Daydreaming and Flow)

This program needs to be evaluated and refined before implementation. To this end, and to provide effective support, three things need to be done:

1. Establish a baseline of how ODL students actually learn and study;
2. Based on the findings, develop support programmes for students taking into account the newest cognitive and metacognitive research; and
3. Develop training programmes for lecturers on how they can incorporate cutting edge study skills strategies as an integral part of their course delivery.

Prof Gous is also inviting interested people to work with him on this project and he is also planning a study visit to Australia and New Zealand in April/May 2015. Anyone who is Interested in collaborating with him can contact him at [gousigp@unisa.ac.za](mailto:gousigp@unisa.ac.za).

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