

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCE

1 ODL RESEARCH PROJECT

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ODL EXPERIENCE OF BA: COMMUNICATION SCIENCE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA)

Unisa's Department of Communication Science has embarked on a study to map and audit challenges that undergraduate students, in the Department of Communication Science encounter in the ODL arena at Unisa. In addition, possible ways to manage such challenges will be investigated in order to ultimately improve throughput.

The study set out to examine the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as an interactive communication tool of exchanging meaningful messages with students in the Department of Communication Science. In addition, students' views of the study material as a tool for meaningful tuition in the department will be explored. Furthermore, the department's engagement and interaction with students within an ODL system will be examined and ways of improving quality services in tuition in the department will be explored. Finally, the study will examine students' views on formative and summative assessment within the department.

This study focuses on a student-centred approach in order for ODL to be successful. By and large, the investigation focuses on the student experience from the initial enquiry to the final examination, in order to assess and improve where necessary, the effectiveness and efficiency of the Department of Communication Science's ODL practices at Unisa.

Since no similar studies have been conducted in the Department of Communication Science at Unisa, the researchers believe that this study will benefit analysts who are researching and framing policies about ODL practices. Scholars who are not involved in

such policy analyses may also find this study of interest. In addition, by soliciting the views of the students who are the key informants of this study, the outcome is also intended to benefit the Department of Communication Science.

Collapsing the transactional distance includes the use of technology, study material, assessment and engagement. It is therefore important to assess whether the needs and concerns of undergraduate communication science students are addressed to their satisfaction.

Questionnaires and focus group discussions will be used as data collection instruments to gain an insight on the flow and quality of tuition practices in the Department of Communication Science at Unisa.

Thus far, the necessary samples have been drawn and the researchers are awaiting ethical clearance from Unisa's College of Human Sciences to administer the questionnaires and conduct the focus group discussions, which are scheduled to commence on 24 May 2010.

Participants: Prof George Angelopulo

2 COMMUNICATION SCIENCE AFRICANISATION PROJECT

The Department of Communication Science embarked on a project to investigate the unique contributions Africa has to make with regard to the theory and practice of Communication.

The question to be investigated:

Does Africa have a unique contribution to make to the development of Communication Science as a discipline, communication theory, media theory and in terms of its methodologies and practice?

The project started off with a seminar under the banner of the College of Human Science's *Africa Speaks* series of seminars in which prominent African scholars are brought to Unisa to address different topics. In this first seminar for the Department, Dr Levi Obonyo, the Chair of the Department of Communication Science at Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya, spoke to the topic: *Towards a theory of communication for Africa: the challenges for emerging democracies*. The respondent was Mr Wilson Ugangu, a lecturer in the Department of Communication Studies at Moi University in Kenya, specialising in the teaching of media theory. Mr Ugangu is also a doctoral student in Unisa's Department of Communication Science.

This seminar represented the initial stages of a bigger project during which the question of indigenisation of communication theory is investigated. Dr Obonyo's paper will be distributed widely on the continent with an invitation for papers that will be selected and presented at a colloquium in October 2010. At the colloquium, the question on whether Africa has a unique contribution to make to the development of the discipline will be thoroughly investigated in workshops addressing the various specialisation areas in the discipline.

The plan is to select at least 8 papers of scholars from Africa – and to invite them on our budget to present their papers at the colloquium.

The format of the colloquium will be to present and workshop the papers over the course of 1.5 days (leaving the rest of the second day for a closed session where representatives of Communication Science Departments investigate the possible formation of a consortium of departments that can negotiate collectively as a single unit with other stakeholders – such as partnerships with prestigious institutions on the other continents).

The presenters will be requested to revise their papers in accordance with the responses received during the workshop of their specific papers – and submit it for publication in a third dedicated edition of *Communicatio* in 2011 (for which the normal

peer review procedure will apply). In this way it will then also be possible to have an impact on our curriculum – from the research into tuition.

3 E-LEARNING PROJECT

The Department of Communication Science is embarking on a project to offer one module (COM304B: New Media Technology) fully electronically. The project serves as a pilot for a larger project that Unisa is considering. The project consists of two dimensions:

- Investigating the ways in which hardware (Netbooks) and data access can be made available to students. This very specifically investigates different models of making hardware available and the infrastructure associated with the distribution and maintenance of the technology. This will include looking at different models of financing the hardware and analysis of costs involved in a project of this nature.
- Developing a new tuition model for online learning – and very specifically also the pedagogical challenges of teaching new media technology theory and practices in a very dynamic and changing environment – by applying new media technology (a principle of practice what you preach).

The investigation is currently in the process of studying different alternatives (the technology and accessibility) and for the first part will culminate in registering a strategic project for funding of experimental technologies and making it available to students. The pedagogical dimensions will be developed in cooperation with the Directorate for Curriculum and Learning Development. The target date is to implement the new module in 2012.

Participants: Prof Danie du Plessis, Prof Petrus Potgieter

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Participants: Ms Lynette Naidoo, Mr Blessing Mbatha