

UNIT FOR OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

The BUZZ @ UODL

Quarterly Newsletter



AT TIMES, WE WEAR AND INTERCHANGE 'MULTIPLE HATS' TO ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS!

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"To truly understand a business, you have to wear all the hats before you can take some of them off!"
-Jim McNelis



Message from the UDL Teaching & Learning Director

Dr Joany Fransman

Our "Chief Hat Wearer"

As we move towards year end it is important to reflect on the past year and highlight areas where we experienced difficulties so that we may be better equipped to tackle these and similar challenges next year. We should also celebrate our successes as we worked tirelessly to achieve these victories.

It was the morning of the 8th December that we held our last EXCO meeting for 2021. Difficult to fathom how quickly time has passed. All the glory goes to God for extending his mercies, both in our working environments and in our personal lives. Many have lost our loved ones during this year, but we have also gained new loved ones and additions to our family units. We are fortunate not to have lost any staff member due to the pandemic. The new variant of the virus is rife amongst us, and we need to exercise extra precautions to safeguard our families and selves.

Amidst all the uncertainty and anxiety, we at the unit stood together, and have overcome many hurdles thus bringing stability and a sense of calmness by putting our students first in all that we do. Some highlights worth mentioning would include, our first colloquium, the trip to Namibia and the "Know yourself, know your colleague" information session held with the Management team. We got to understand our students and staff better. It has been a year of exploration both personally and professionally.

I want to thank each staff member, no matter the level you are at, for all the hard work and dedication. Kindly relay my sincere gratitude to your loved ones whose support enabled and encouraged you to do your work to the best of your ability. Special thanks to the UODL EXCO for their continued support throughout the year. A special shout-out goes to Mr Yaseen "Yaya" Rassulmia, the editor of this newsletter, for his invaluable contributions to creating and opening up this channel of communication with this publication.

I sign off wishing you a blessed festive season with your families and loved ones. Stay safe, be blessed and take care. Till we meet again in the New Year!

"We wear many hats but it is impossible and unnecessary to wear them all at once. The spirit helps us determine which work to focus on today"

- Joy D. Jones



Season's Greetings

May you have a blessed festive season with your loved ones and a happy New Year!

Thank you for your hard work and commitment during the year!

Dr Joany Fransman &
The UODL Staff



Retrospection of Year 2021

In this Edition we wish to shed some light on the focus areas of our operational, support and service divisions. In any working environment, staff juggle between tasks and responsibilities to ensure that we service our stakeholders to the best of our abilities. We wear many hats that are required, to ensure that the job gets done timeously. The reality of life is that all we do, has a ripple effect and as such in this edition the lives and experiences, struggles and victories of all our students, staff and stakeholders intertwine to create this ultimate bigger picture and purpose for our existence.

From the Applications & Registrations Desk



1. Focus of the Applications and Registrations Desk.

To improve on service levels to students and stakeholders, the new application- and registration processes were implemented which were positively embraced by all staff members and meaningful contributions were made by staff to ensure successful implementation.

2. Inter-departmental updates- changes that added value to 2021.

Worked closely with eLearning department on creating a “one-stop” registrations submission portal and virtual queueing system to ensure that the registration submission and closing dates are adhered to, thus improving our level of service to students. The Call Centre had access to this system which ensured more efficient turnaround times for handling registration enquiries. Staff members from the registration’s office accompanied the Projects Office on a few roadshows to provide support regarding the applications process.

3. Staff highlights and noteworthy activities

Staff continue to exceed expectations considering the pressure and challenging circumstances brought about by this constantly changing work environment. Staff’s attitudes remain positive, and the quality of work is always a priority. Negative experiences are highlighted occasionally which allows us to rework our approaches. We have a lot more satisfied students who are grateful and appreciative for our assistance. The Applications and Registration division is the first step in the student’s study experience and as such our teams display their competence and knowledge in all their interactions.

The implementation of the registrations portal for 2021 is the perfect testament to the successful collaboration between the registrations and e-Learning department. Continued collaborations will further improve operations and ultimately enhance the student experience at UODL.

3. Interesting statistics

Previously, it was not possible to determine the number of registration forms that were either e-mailed or posted to various staff members across the UODL. In 2021, due to the implementation of the registration’s portal, it has become a more efficient and transparent process. It is easier for our departments to view the volume of registration forms submitted and as a result it can be better managed. A total number of 10 930 students were registered for 2021.

For the 2022 intake we have already seen a dramatic increase in the number of applications received in comparison to previous years. For 2022 a total of 64 826 applications were received compared to the 30 177 for the 2021 intake which is an increase of 115%.

4. Email Contacts for our students to utilise:

Students and prospective students may refer their queries to the relevant email addresses.

General inquiries - DistancePotch@nwu.ac.za
Grade R inquiries - UOLDGradeR@nwu.ac.za
BED inquiries - UODLBE@nwu.ac.za
ACT IP & SP inquiries - UODL-ACT@nwu.ac.za
ACT FP - UODLACTFP@nwu.ac.za
ADE inquiries - UODLADE@nwu.ac.za
PGCE inquiries - UODLPGCE@nwu.ac.za
BEDHons - UODLBEDHons@nwu.ac.za

For study material inquiries - Please contact UODL-studymaterial@nwu.ac.za



University Preparatory Programme (UnivPrep)

What's happened in the Univprep Division since we last checked in?

The UnivPrep department is a bridge to achieving academic success at NWU by providing access opportunities to formal degree study that otherwise would not have been available.

Beyond our mission to provide access to formal degree study through our preparatory programmes offered, UnivPrep also seeks to contribute toward national building efforts by providing youth with access to an education that will help transform and develop communities through their own success. Based on this critical role played by this department, it was essential that when providing equal access opportunities for NWU students, we do so using progressive technologies and methods that will optimize our performance and improve our service delivery.

Since its inception in 2012, the department had been utilising traditional labour-intensive administrative processes that lagged behind in embracing the benefits provided by technology and innovative solutions.

Here is where our journey evolves:

The prevalence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) demands that transformation occurs to ensure we move away from outdated methods of delivery and instead employ modern digital solutions. In response to this and with the incredible support from the eLearning department, UnivPrep has now digitised the applications and registrations process.

On 20 August 2021, the department went live using the OpenCollab online system.

UNIVPREP APPLICATIONS AND REGISTRATIONS IS NOW A PAPERLESS PROCESS!



The digitization of our processes will positively influence our productivity by providing efficiency gains through the user-friendliness of the system that will result in the following:

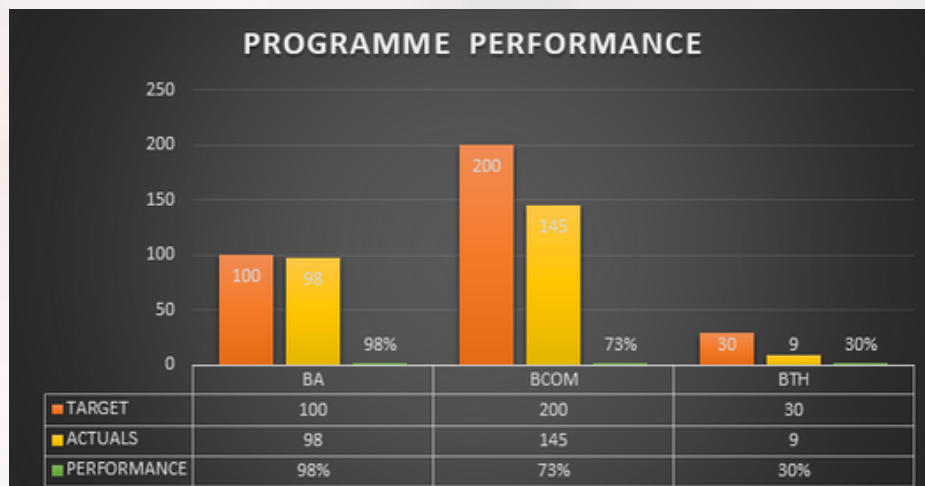
- Creates consistency in task delivery
- Allows for real-time processing and communication
- Ensures transparency in our operations
- Reduces the time spent processing and completing tasks
- Reduces human error

Coupled with this, UnivPrep underwent cross-functional training as part of this initiative to ensure talent development and creating a flexible workforce that is adequately proficient on all UnivPrep processes and systems. The benefits of this are to develop a department wherein the following benefits can exist for the team:



2021 Performance Stats

The statistics reflect the 2021 targets for the various preparatory programmes against the actual number of students that we have registered for each of the respective programmes offered.



The Project & Tender Management Division reviews 2021: Challenges, Progress, and a Path Forward

The year 2021, has been full of challenges due to the ongoing restrictions of Covid 19, and this has been difficult for our project stakeholders, particularly our Diploma in Grade R teaching students. However, the work ethic, dedication, and assistance shown by the Project & Tender Management Team (P&TM) have made this bumpy ride far smoother for our Bursary Students, Provincial Education Departments and our Bursars in general. As we look back to this challenging year, we are very satisfied that every activity that was planned for 2021, has been implemented successfully. The main focus for the P&TM team in 2021 was to increase student retention and enhance academic performance, integration and satisfaction.

Here are some of the highlights of 2021

Roadshows

The Project & Tender Management Office embarked on a series of roadshows, to reach out and establish communication with our students, with the aim of offering support and addressing their queries and concerns. Roadshows were conducted in Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, and Eastern Cape. A total of 1200 students attended our Roadshows.

Additional Support Sessions

Working closely with LSC Office, we were able to start with face-to face sessions again for the Additional Support Sessions, and these have been contributing to the excellent throughput of bursary students. A total of 84 sessions were conducted in 7 provinces for our Grade R students.

Over 440 Bursary students were part of the virtual graduation ceremony that was held on October 29, 2021. This is a great achievement, considering that 204 Students completed their Diploma in Grade R Teaching in record time, 72 students passed with Distinctions.

Bursary Groups

In total, 21 bursary groups were registered for 2021, ranging from Grade R, BEd Foundation Phase, ADE and School Leadership and Management. These Bursary projects are worth over R90 million.

CEO of Royal Bafokeng Institute visits the UODL

The DVC for Teaching and Learning, Professor Robert Balfour, together with Mr Simon Tankard, CEO of the Royal Bafokeng Institute (RBI), visited our office at UODL in Potchefstroom. The delegates engaged in an informative discussion which was followed by a tour of our facilities and an online simulation.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NWU and Royal Bafokeng Institute has been signed. A pilot for our very first learning hub will be set up at RBI in Rustenburg in 2022.



Learning Support Centres (LSCs)

Our Learning Support Centres(LSC's) would like to reaffirm their continued support to all our students and stakeholders. Just like all other departments at the university, our LSC's were also affected by Covid_19 pandemic in 2021. Indeed, it was a challenging year, however we managed to sail through. As much as our centres were not opened due to the pandemic, the centres are functional nonetheless.

Our students were allowed to submit assignments at our different LSCs.

The attendance reports from the centres reflect that, +- 15 000 assignments were received from +-3200 students. This clearly shows that our LSCs were effective even under difficult circumstances. PPEs (masks, sanitisers, temperature thermometers) were sent throughout all our Learning Support Centres.

The team at the LSC's shared an African Proverb that they apply in their unit, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."



Quality Office

Our Quality Office has been busy with much of our compliance regulations and protocols.

Activities within the Team:

This office is currently working in collaboration with the Quality Enhancement office and the DVC: T&L office on the CHE Institutional audit for the years 2018 - 2020.

This year we were able to assist the Marketing and Communication office with the Webinar for distance students.

The Quality office also did LSC visits and will continue to do so in the next semester.





Also joined the road shows in the beginning of the year.

A trip to Namibia was crucial to observe the daily operations and assist with creating an action plan to better assist these centres going forward.

Call Centre

Statistics

85%+ pick up rate is outstanding for the call centre.

2021-01-01 to 2021-12-31 between 12:00 AM and 11:59 PM Search:			
	Type	Calls	Calls ratio
1	Answered Calls	40394	 86.2%
2	Abandoned Calls	3797	 8.1%
3	Overflow Calls	2662	 5.7%
Total Calls		46853	 100%



Let's get talking with the call centre

Our new norm places much emphasis on the role of contact centre, call centre and email units to become the channel of direct communication.

Our Call Center has grown and evolved into a hub of communication. Over the years this desk has helped countless students through their academic journeys. Words cannot begin to describe the appreciation received from students expressing their gratitude for all the guidance throughout their stay with UODL.

The call centre, email and social media agents were able to continue the normal operations of the university throughout the national state of emergency and lockdown, thus enhancing our student experience.

Record show that this year alone, our Facebook page was able to reach 75 thousand people, comprising of prospective students, current students and alumni. Our Facebook page has also seen an organic growth rate of 20% year on year!



Faculty of Theology: Caring in all that we do!

The academic manager from the Faculty of Theology, Dr Petria Theron shares her insightful thoughts on the impact of our daily actions.

Encounters

We have everyday encounters with people. It may be that we bump, quite unexpectedly, into a colleague in the corridor. It may be that we “meet” someone via an email, a telephone call or on social media. Or we may meet someone physically who comes into our office for a quick chat or a scheduled meeting.

The circumstances, does not really matter. The fact is that these encounters have an impact on us and on the person(s) we meet. It is as Carolyn Kizer said: “No matter how brief an encounter you have with anybody, you both change.”

Let us be attentive to see what we can learn from our encounters with people. Let us take the decision to make every encounter meaningful. I agree with Guy de Maupassant when he says: “It is the lives we encounter that make life worth living.”

Let us also take the decision to be the one blessing that someone else needs through our encounters. Indeed, true words were spoken by the well-known Albert Schweitzer when he said: “In everyone’s life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being.” Let us be resolute to be the ones who rekindle the inner spirit of those we meet, whether in person, through an email or through a telephone call.

An actual email sent to the Faculty of Theology. It sheds light on UODL students experience.

The Load Shedding E-mail

It was in November during the time of final assessments that an email with the following subject “load shedding-submission time for assignments” was sent to me. Expecting the worst, especially whilst in Stage 3 and 4 of load shedding, I opened the mail with much tribulation. (The original email has been shortened and edited.)

“Dear Dr Theron,

I would like to use this opportunity to thank the lecturing staff of the Faculty of Theology for their flexibility in the teaching and learning environment. It was difficult for us as students this year to earn a living, to study and to submit assignments with the corona virus and load shedding havoc.

I was touched by the words of one of our professors when he was asked to re-schedule the test. He said: “this corona-virus and load-shedding has also affected me, so I know what you are talking about”. This week, during heavy load-shedding, we had to submit four tests/assignments. Our professor postponed the submission dates to accommodate us. Some lecturers even went the extra mile to allow re-submissions. This shows the empathy on their side.

We are also grateful for lecturer-students WhatsApp groups as an additional teaching and learning devise. As we (students) were discussing problems, someone said: “don’t worry, the Professor is listening to our problems”. Despite this difficult year, we can say Ebenezer, for we have witnessed God’s help during the difficult year.

Your student “

It is great to see the NWU ethic of care in big and small things!

Faculty of Education: Multi-tasking-the order of the day!

Dr Susan Greyling the Academic Manager for the Faculty of Education would like to introduce Ms Neo Thebe, her administrative assistant. She began her journey with Dr Greyling in a permanent position since September 2018. Neo is currently studying, the BEd in Foundation Phase. She is always friendly and offers great assistance to lecturers and students.

Successful Collaborations

Worked on the paper-based programmes for 2021.

All new 1st year students registered for the Dip in Gr R Teaching have already been linked to e-Fundi in 2021 for the download and upload of assessments. The students received communication on this site.

The ACT Snr and FET phase also got permission from faculty to roll out this phase totally online. Collaborations assisted us in moving from a paper-based platform to an online portal for our paper-based programmes. A phased in approach will be done over the next few years.

Masks & Hats

Neo and Dr Susan always wear their face masks and put on their various hats as they attend to the needs of staff members and students throughout the day.

Study Material Division: Developments

Study Material has once again opted to use Takealot as our supplier of choice. We came a long way from sending material via postal addresses to it being delivered on our students' doorstep. For 2022 we are also testing the options of digital transformation with regards to 4IR. In selected programs and modules, students will receive their material in E-book format to ensure a faster turnaround time. Service delivery and Transparent Communication is the material departments main concern.

With the new drive to online learning and the rapid advancement of technology, the question of whether hard copy study material is still a viable option at any institution of higher learning, becomes inevitable. As such, it was imperative that the study material processes be adequately reviewed at the Unit for Open Distance Learning (UODL). This process was kick started this year, with a lot of discussions and consultations with relevant stakeholders and will continue in the new year.

Staff Highlights

- Exploring the possibility of a Short Course in Creative Writing in Indigenous Languages.
- Hoping to continue pursuing this possibility in 2022.

A Positive student experience

- "Everything I needed for studying was available" - Source Quality Office Survey

Successful Collaborations

- Mostly with the Faculty of Engineering regarding the new program that will start in 2022.

Study Material statistics

- Approx 11300 parcels sent (first & Second semester) with +- 200 undelivered parcels.



e-Learning Division: Year 2021 Review

The past year was a busy and productive period for the e-Learning Team. Implementing initiatives, collaborations and project development were some of the activities that featured prominently. In keeping with the theme, “wearing many hats”, the team found itself responding to specific and unique needs from its stakeholders.

The e-Learning Team comprises of:



Nathanael Friesling



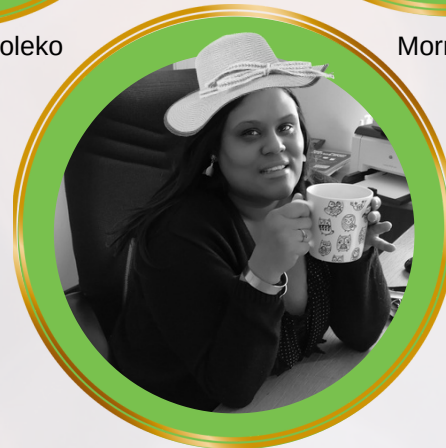
Simphiwe Moleko



Morné Korff



Magna Heymans



Zanobia Kanjee

** Other Team Member: Uzair Haffejee

Below are highlights of some of the team’s activities:

Lecturer Support

The e-Learning Team continues to provide technical support, training and assistance to lecturers recording their lecture sessions via their own devices. There were also specific requests regarding recordings and live interactive sessions that have been accommodated.

Student Support

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in our students having to function fully online and it was therefore important to ensure that they are fully aware of the online resources available to them. The e-Learning Team conducted live interactive student sessions where it was demonstrated how online resources can be accessed. It also provided an opportunity for students to interact and ask questions. It is our intention to continue with these interactive sessions next year due to the value that is derived from same.

Staff Support

The e-Learning Team was successful in its application in April 2021, for NWU strategic funding that was granted for a period of 3 years. This project is focused on the e-Learning Team developing and facilitating ICT skills training for the UODL workforce. What is great about this project is that the e-Learning Team is able to develop the content and conduct the training sessions which essentially means that training can be aligned to the unique ICT needs of the UODL employees and their respective divisions. The team has already facilitated a few sessions and intends to increase the skills training offering to UODL staff in 2022.

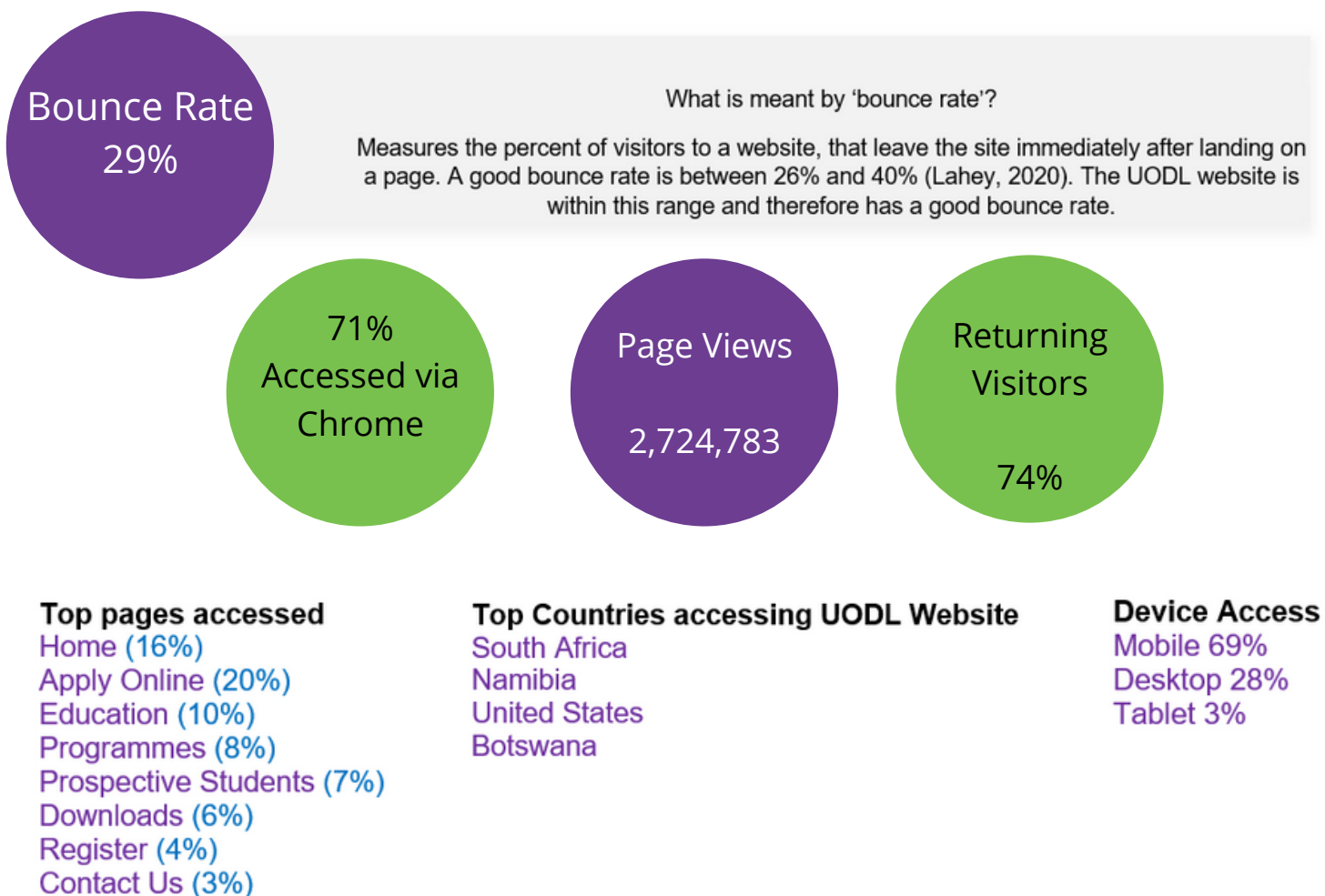
Other

The team works closely with other UODL divisions, initiating and assisting with projects that can contribute towards improved operations.

Two project stand out in this regard. Thanks to collaborations between e-Learning and UCE, an online system was implemented for the UnivPrep division to move away from manual processes. The system went live in August 2021.

In addition, e-learning continues to work closely with the UODL registration division to implement a process that will greatly assist and guide students to self-register. A step in the right direction!

Here are some statistics related to the UODL website that e-Learning tracked between January and November 2021:



The e-Learning Team should be commended for their hard work, great comradery and dedication as well as for embracing new challenges with much enthusiasm. The members of the team indicated that they are looking forward to the Year 2022 and are excited about the possible new prospects that await them!



Stepping into new territory: UODL Colloquium

On the 27 October 2021, the unit hosted its first virtual colloquium that focused on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and its impact on various facets - this is how the overall theme was established. Viewing the impact from a student, lecturer and technology perspective.

Professor Robert Balfour

The NWU DVC for Teaching and Learning welcomed everyone to the colloquium and highlighted the strategic approach of distance learning and what has transpired since 2017 to date. Professor Balfour stated that reputation of programmes in the sector is given high priority and this is established via surveys that gauge the students' experience. The short-term plan (1 to 5 years) is to integrate distance education offering in all NWU faculty environments; this was a key strategic goal over the past 5 years which has seen a greater variety of programmes now being offered. Professor Balfour indicated that the way forward is to increase market presence, which is paramount and attracting students to enroll for distance programmes.



Dr Joany Fransman

The history of UODL from the time that the unit opened its doors, to date, was highlighted. Dr Fransman shared how our unit has evolved from inception to our road ahead with technology and digitisation. She also delivered a heart warming, Vote of thanks and reiterated her commitment to enhancing our students learning experience.



Dr Hasan Darwish

The keynote speaker was Dr Hasan Darwish, the Head of Experimentation at UNDP Accelerator Labs and an Extraordinary NW Researcher and NWU Alumnus. Dr Darwish focused on "Distance Learning Revolution: Adapting to Digitisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution". The presentation was most insightful and delegates in attendance were treated to two interactive, practical exercises that further highlighted the opportunities that technology can provide from a teaching and learning perspective.





Mr Mike Hamilton

A discussion that focused on "Digitally Transforming Teaching & Learning" was presented by Mr Hamilton from Digital Inclusion. It was highlighted that technology is the 'enabler of the New Possible' - the New Possible being "New Teaching Methods" and "New Content Methods". Mr Hamilton further left us with the thought that we can only imagine the possibilities if we are exposed to technology.

Dr Dorothy Laubscher

A lecturer from the Faculty of Education who presents modules on the Distance mode at the UODL presented her experience as a lecturer using various digital tools, to interact and engage with students. Dr Laubscher highlighted that she adopts a flipped-classroom approach with her students as this ensures that participants can prepare for the lecture session in advance, which promotes engagement and self-directed learning. She further uses cloud computing as an online collaborative tool and WhatsApp groups for students to interact with each other. Dorothy emphasised that "in order for digitisation to be successful, students have to be digitally ready."



Professor Nico Schutte

Education is increasingly becoming "Just in time" rather than "Just in case," with a focus on what is needed for a specific period of time rather than accumulating knowledge that may never be used. There are seven principles of good practice:

- Encourage contact between students and faculty.
- Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students.
- Inspire active learning.
- Give prompt feedback.
- Emphasize time on task.
- Communicate high expectations.
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

These guidelines represent a philosophy of quality distance-learning education that can be widely used for both face-to-face courses and online learning.

Concluding Remarks

A key focus that came through quite strongly was the need to focus on people first - our students, lecturers and support staff. Ensuring that they are provided with the necessary skills and tools to effectively adopt digitisation. Bridging the digital divide to ensure 'access' for all is vital and adopting a holistic approach where digitisation is promoted from both a stakeholder and institutional perspective.

"The UODL is well positioned to address technological challenges and already has the necessary technologies to make the digital transformation possible"

- Ms Rolien Roos
Director: Planning and Special Projects

Click the icon below to watch the recording of the colloquium:





Rundu LSC

The Rundu Learner Support Centre (LSC) Manager, Mr Gabriel Kanyanga, who is also the Mayor of Rundu, was superb in welcoming and hosting our UODL team. He kindly took us to visit the Rundu Campus as well as the Teacher Centre that our students make use of. A student was interviewed and informed that she was happy with the services received from UODL which she rated as 8 out of 10. This centre will continue to be a great support for our students.



Swakopmund & Katima

We are exploring a partnership with a potential institution to open a learner support centre in the Swakopmund area. Our learner support centre in Katima Mulilo is also exploring options to best accommodate our students.



Windhoek Office

This office is frequently accessed by students in Namibia. An ICT evaluation is being done by e-Learning to improve connectivity and services to students. It is hoped that a partnership that is being formed with a new service provider will yield good results and will eventually assist with plans to expand our footprint into the rest of Africa. NWU Marketing will assist with ensuring that there is more visibility of our offices and learner support centres.



Ongwediva

There is a fully functioning in Ongwediva that is frequented by walk-in students and deals with many student queries. The improvement of services to students is being explored and an ICT evaluation is underway.

There is also a Learner Support Centre in Ongwediva that has a computer lab which can accommodate approximately 20 students.



University of Namibia

- University of Namibia (UNAM) Center for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) and UODL have agreed to interact and collaborate to share experiences and best practices.
- The Namibia Campus in Rundu was also visited and establishing a partnership with this institution is being explored.



Message from the Editor

“

Our time and efforts are never wasted if it is spent in the service of others...We at UODL are always ready to serve YOU!!!

- YRM

“

Even though we may wear different hats for the various roles that we portray in our lives, our colleagues are cognisant of not losing the essence of whom we are. When we switch between the multiple roles, we become conscious of which elements of our identity or personality that shows up. Always considering the interests of others is what makes us at UODL the best versions of ourselves. It is the many selfless acts, working extended hours and persistent efforts of our staff that have helped to mold our student confidence in the Unit to always do what is best for our learners.

To be understood, to feel loved, to feel valued and that you belong are our students most basic human needs and as such our leaders, staff and lecturers place much emphasis on our learners physical, spiritual and emotional well-being whilst within our care. We may struggle, but we do juggle between these roles to uphold an ethic of care.

The year 2021, has afforded us with invaluable experience and exposure to overcoming challenging situations. It has resulted in building a more diversified, committed and service oriented team as well the emergence of a new generation of resilient and adaptable learners and graduates.

To those that have completed their distance studies or graduated, we wish you every bit of success in your future endeavors with the hopes that we have inspired you to dream big, to work hard, to be passionate about your career choices and always give back to the less fortunate and help improve lives.

The UODL leadership teams have already begun planning for the 2022 academic year. We have workshopped our strategic goals and objectives and have embedded them into our continuity planning for 2022. We at your UODL would like to extend our warmest holiday wishes. We encourage you to relax, spend time with loved ones, feed your passion, play freely, unwind and tackle the new year all refreshed and geared for your active engagement in your learning experiences.

Our commitment to you is unwavering!

Yaseen "Yaya" Rassulmia
Special Projects
(Directorate)

We value your input!

We would like to hear your comments, thoughts and suggestions for our publication.

Kindly [click here](#) to submit your contributions. We look forward to hearing from you!