Vice-Chancellor’s first visit to prison estate

The Open University’s Vice-Chancellor Martin Bean took time out of his schedule to attend a graduation ceremony at HMP Dovegate recently.

Martin took up office in October last year and whilst he is no stranger to graduation ceremonies, this one was quite unique in that not only was it his first ceremony to take place in the prison estate, it was also his first opportunity to visit a prison and meet Open University and other students.

Also there to attend the ceremony were Mike Rookes, Regional Director of the OU in West Midlands, Margaret Hart, Head of Widening Participation and Offender Learning and other members of the Teaching and Learner Support team as well as the student’s staff tutor.

The Vice-Chancellor and colleagues were given a tour of the Education Department by Dovegate’s Director Wyn Jones as well as the facilities available for students studying vocational courses and had the chance to talk to Open University and other students.

Mike Rookes presented the graduand with a First Class Honours Degree in Social Sciences with Psychological Studies. Having completed GCSEs at secondary school his path to graduation began with DD100 “Introduction to the Social Sciences” in 2004, followed by a Business Course and other Social Science and Psychology courses. He’s now exploring the Arts with A210 “Approaching Literature.”

On this student’s outstanding achievement, Dovegate’s Director Wyn Jones commented “I firmly believe that the most important choice he made since arriving at Dovegate was to engage with the Open University and embark on an education. Of all offender interventions designed to reduce criminogenic risk factors, education is without equal.”

He went on to describe the Vice-Chancellor’s visit as one which “encapsulated the egalitarianism and values that the OU stands for.” And added “It was a privilege to host the Vice-Chancellor. Both prisoners and staff were hugely impressed that he found time to come and celebrate a graduation with a young man who had - up until then - made poor life choices.”

There are currently 40 Open University students at HMP Dovegate studying a variety of OU courses at a number of different levels from Openings courses to higher level modules in subjects from Arts through to Social Sciences and from Languages to Law all future OU graduates.

Our congratulations to all of you who have graduated to date and to those just embarking on an OU course or already working towards your chosen qualifications - we hope you are successful in your chosen path of study.
Season of changing fortunes

Andy from HMP Prescoed tells us about achieving his “goal”

In the last issue we asked for your views and experiences of OU study for our new letters page. Here Andy from HMP Prescoed tells us about achieving his “goal”

As a Bristol City (BCFC) fan I am used to hope, disappointment, frustration, re-evaluation and renewed optimism and it was with that in mind that I embarked on Open University study within prison. The results of my season of OU toil with materials and assignments mirror the present BCFC 2009/2010 season.

I started off with hope for a successful season with eyes only for promotion; hopefully constant progress and success. I ticked off the games, annotating scores and scorers on the fixture list on my notice board; the weeks of the OU study planner ticked by remorselessly until the first assignment suddenly had to be handed in. Both the football and study seasons drew parallels in that optimistic beginnings became dulled by the realism of mid-term achievement and planning. Like my football team that started with a procession of good results my ‘study plan’ was wildly optimistic and largely without specific planning; instead I relied on natural flair, resource and crisis time-management to achieve the planned goals.

As usual I left things to the end kidding myself that I always did that but then perhaps that is why I ended up in prison relying on chance, luck and fate rather than planning. In spite of this I managed to achieve an 80% mark for my first assignment. I wonder what I would have got with proper planning and time-management. Perhaps I let my mind wander in its concentration rather like City did in allowing the opposition to equalise so many times during injury time losing us numerous points in the process.

From that first assignment I received tremendous feedback from the Open University and felt really motivated to continue and improve my performance. The OU assessor recognised my solitary learning experience and congratulated me on my success in spite of not being able to interact with peer students on the online forum due to prison restrictions to access. My self-esteem increased immeasurably.

“IF YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO PURSUE OU STUDY GO FOR IT!”

City had been in danger of getting sucked into a relegation dogfight and finally had to get rid of their manager since then, at time of writing this article, we have gone on an unbeaten run too late to get into the play-offs but giving optimism for next season. Likewise I approached the second and final assignment with more planning and belief and because of this found the study more enjoyable than challenging and as a consequence drafted and redrafted my assignment until satisfied it was as good as I could get it, sending it off knowing I could not have improved on my performance.

I have been told I have passed the OU course and know that my second assignment achieved a higher mark than my first assignment so I at least learnt something from the process. The most important lesson learnt though was that Open University study was realistic and achievable and much more enjoyable and productive than lying on the bed staring at the TV!

“If you have an opportunity to pursue OU study go for it!”
Developing visual material can help your recall and also be a quick way to show lots of information. Practise drawing diagrams if this suits your course, and make sure you provide clear labels as these can earn you marks in the exam.

**Visualisation helps you remember.**

**Mind maps**

Mind maps help you to generate ideas and make associations. They can also act as a powerful memory aid in an examination because they are visual. The main principles are:

- Note down points in a spray pattern, starting from the centre and working outwards
- Use lines to show connections between things
- Keep your points brief – use key words, authors, theories or processes
  - Be prepared to re-work the map until you are happy with the organisation
  - Include colour, symbols and pictures to make it more memorable.

**Association**

Learn to link topics and ideas together. Try the following:

- Visual techniques
- Word association techniques
- Repetition - re-drawing, re-reading, re-writing, re-listening or repeating things aloud.

**Key words and phrases**

These can become prompts to your memory in the exam: ensure that you really understand what they mean and can associate some course examples with them. Also use elements of the course, such as introductions, summaries and key questions. Note whether there are alternative ways of looking at a concept that are covered in your course.

**Definitions**

Make sure you know the meaning of important words or specialised terminology. Write two or three sentences to define a process, argument or theory, and then add a course example and a diagram if relevant. If your course has a glossary of terms then include that in your revision.

**Mnemonics**

Mnemonics can help you remember factual material, as you’ll see from these examples. Develop one or two for your own subject.

- Acronyms for sequences or lists: here’s an example for remembering the system of classification in biology
  - Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species - becomes Kids Prefer Cheese Over Fried Green Spinach.

**Spelling acronyms**

- RHYTHM: Rhythm Helps Your Two Hips Move.

**Rhymes**

- 30 days hath September, April, June and November.

**Spelling associations**

- stationery (papers) – ‘e’ as in envelope.

**Summarising for revision**

Using summary sheets or cards is an effective revision technique. Use tabulated summaries to collect information from within or across course books or units – they’re a great way to compare or evaluate competing theories, grammatical rules or examples of themes in different parts of the course.

Continued on page 4...
Techniques for exam revision
- linear notes with bullet points and highlighting
- mind maps with pictures and colours
- summary tables.

Assignments
Assignments can be a very useful starting point for producing summaries. Look through them as you revise. What would the key differences be between an assignment and exam answer on the same topic? Think how you could use these ideas in an exam answer. Reduce the assignment by making summary sheets or cards for use in your revision.

Remember
Summaries on notes or index cards are particularly handy as you can carry them with you and review them any time.

Revision timetable
If you are taking exams soon we really hope that you have found this advice helpful.

We have enclosed a revision timetable to help you plan and prepare for your exams.

Inside News
Send your articles to:
The Editor, Inside News, The Offender Learning Team, Teaching and Learner Support, The Open University, Hammerwood Gate, Kents Hill, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BY

Inside News is published quarterly by The Open University

What can OUSA do for you?

Here the Vice President (Equal Opportunities) of The Open University Students Association gives you a chance, as part of their diverse membership, to add your views to the student voice.

OU Students Association

- When you register to study with the Open University, you automatically become a member of the Open University Students Association (OUSA). Whether you are looking for support or have issues you would you like to take up with the University - OUSA is here for you.

OUSA would like to hear from you as a group within the student community who do not often have the opportunity to have your voices heard. Previously we have been unable to provide support as we have not had a means of contacting students within the custodial system.

We would like to change that and as such we want to hear your feedback of your learning experiences as distance learning students. We would like to hear about the courses you have studied and any difficulties with the mediums in which the course work is presented and what barriers you may be trying to overcome to complete your studies. Also do you have any other experiences of further or higher education that you feel would encourage prospective students to begin their studies with the OU?

‘OU Student’, the OUSA Student magazine, is also looking for interesting suitable articles (anonymity protected) where your experiences can be shared with the whole student body.

OUSA is here for you so have your say!!

Past exam papers
Did you know past exam papers may be purchased from OUSA - contact the OUSA office at the address below for details.

Have your say
Please send your views to:
OU Students Association
OUSA Office
PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE

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