Welcome to your Students Association magazine, a place to share your stories, connect with other students, and find out what we’ve been up to.

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OU Students Association

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Charity Commission Registration in England and Wales: 1144251; and in Scotland: SC042840
Hello and welcome to your winter edition of OUstudents.

First off I would like to welcome all our new students just starting their OU journey. I know it all seems a bit scary now but it will be worth all the hard work in the end. Hopefully you were able to take part in our Freshers Fair. If not you can read all about it below, make sure you like our Facebook page and follow us on twitter!

In this edition you can read all about the success of our University Challenge team, maybe even consider auditioning for the team yourself in future years!

You can also read all about the OU’s part in the Rosetta comet landing. I think we should be collectively proud to be part of a University which has been so involved in this ground-breaking research.

Please read all about our new student support service, Nightline, on page 18. Nightline is there to help support you when you’re struggling and there is no-one around to talk to.

This is a new service which we are trialling and the student volunteers have received specific training from the Association to help them understand some of the challenges faced by OU students. Pop the number in your mobile - 020 7631 0101.

Finally, looking for Christmas presents?

Look no further than the OUSA web shop. There are lots of new items of all shapes, sizes and prices. Find your perfect Christmas present on page 9!

And finally have a lovely Christmas and a fantastic New Year. I look forward to seeing lots of activity on Facebook, twitter and the various OUSA forums!

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Freshers 2014

We sent a warm welcome and huge congratulations to all new OU students this autumn during our virtual Freshers Fair...

www.open.ac.uk/ousa/freshers

Our email went out to 25,591 new OU students! With facebook posts and tweets we had a total of 23,519 fresher visits to our website!!!

Inside, there was a chance to learn about linking up with other students, joining a student society, getting student discounts, being a volunteer, becoming part of the student community and how to find some student to student support at those pinch points that lots of us encounter. We also explained, in a nutshell, some of the great resources and services provided by the University, it’s definitely worth a look even if you’re not a fresher!

The Election results are in...

...for the OU Students Association 2014 Assembly Elections!

You can find out who was elected in your Region or Nation by visiting: http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/get-involved/elections/assembly-elections/results

If you missed the Elections information, here’s what it’s all been about...

The main student body in each OU Students Association region or nation is its Assembly and Assemblies are led by Assembly Executives. Elections for Assemblies and Assembly Executives take place annually in November and members take up their positions immediately following the elections.

Assembly Executives run Assemblies and are asked to keep OU students in the Region or Nation informed about central and local activities through newsletters, forums, social media and meetings. The role also includes running fun social events, using social media and promoting opportunities to get involved with the Association. So it’s a pretty interesting and varied role.

We’d like to say a huge congratulations to everyone who was elected and we’re really excited to be working with you!
As usual there are many fascinating articles in this edition and it will take a few cups of coffee to read them all.

Coming to the end of my degree, it was interesting to read about the OU Graduate Association and Mark Cameron’s experience of his graduation ceremony. Now I have to decide where to go for mine. Another decision is what to buy to celebrate, as there are lots of choices in the new merchandise range!

Congratulations to the OU researchers involved in Rosetta and their exploration into space as well as the University Challenge team.

I’ve become a fan of Vice President Student Support, Alison Kingan’s amusingly informative blog on the OU students website and in this edition she talks about the OU’s new Help Centre.

Cherry Day also gives information about the OU Students Association Disabled Students Group and how it can be of help.

And if anyone wants inspiration there’s the photo of the OU’s oldest student sky-diving at the age of 95!

My very best wishes to everyone for the New Year and I’m particularly looking forward to seeing our new logo in a few weeks.

I’ve become a fan of Vice President Student Support, Alison Kingan’s amusingly informative blog on the OU students website and in this edition she talks about the OU’s new Help Centre.

If you have an OU student story get in touch and share it with your fellow OU students. Contact: ousa@open.ac.uk

Join the team…
Communications Intern

• £15,765 per annum, pro rata (in excess of National Living Wage)
• Based on the OU Campus in Milton Keynes
• Temporary contract until September 2015
• Working for the OU Students Association

The Job
The position is intended to help bridge the gap between learning and employment; providing an opportunity to gain professional experience in the workplace. You will be given the opportunity to work on key projects including: exploring online events; developing podcasts; and enhancing our social media communities. Working within the Communications and Technology Team you will develop your technical skillset and gain experience in key employability skills.

The Person
You will be a recent graduate who wants to kick start your career in Communications, Technology or similar industry. To get on our shortlist, you will have to show your passion for one of these areas, either through your volunteering work or experience of publishing material to the web: on a blog, podcast or social media channel.

How to apply
An OUSA application form and further particulars with more information on the role, our organisation and how to apply can be downloaded from The Open University website: http://bit.ly/1y4zA34.

Applicants should note that CVs will not be accepted.

Closing date: 12 noon, Friday 5 December 2014.

As the New Year approaches, we thought what better way to welcome 2015 in than to say a great big HELLO to our shiny new OU Students Association look!

Including a new logo, colours and overall appearance, we’ve been working hard over the past year to gather your thoughts and to find a new logo that represents you as OU students and what we stand for as an organisation. And, we think we’ve just about done it!

Now, the new look won’t be to everyone’s taste, let’s face it we all have favourite colours and styles, that’s what makes this world so great, choice and opinion. But, what we’re hoping you’ll be able to see is a much more visible, united and active OU Students Association, one that works closely with the University but has a separate and strong identity.

So, it’s all change… your next edition of OUstudents will look very different, we’ll also be updating our website, Facebook page and Twitter profile too.

As always, we’d love to know what you think so you’ll be able to provide your feedback in the next edition of your magazine.

A new look for your OU Students Association

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Overlooked cost of study. Teabags. Seriously!’
Graduation day: my proudest achievement

It's a month after my graduation ceremony and I'm thinking back on what has been an amazing few months! From passing my final module to getting the confirmation on Student Home and booking my ceremony; it's been a weird and nice feeling all at the same time.

I passed my final module towards my BA (Hons) Business Studies in June and soon after booked the London ceremony being held at the Barbican Centre. My certificate arrived through the post just a few weeks’ beforehand so I made my travel arrangements (which included first class travel – why not, it was a special occasion!) and made sure my guest tickets were booked.

The day itself was quite emotional but very special. I had my cousins with me to see me graduate and a number of current and former OU Students Association colleagues cheering me on.

At 6am on the morning of the ceremony I got dressed and made sure I had everything with me before going to catch my train into London, as usual the train was delayed which did panic me but only briefly!

I registered, visited colleagues at the OU Students Association merchandise stall and picked up my graduation t-shirt (it’s a must buy) then went to get my gown and apparently I looked very ‘Harry Potter’!

My family arrived, we took pictures and then the ceremony began... I don't remember much of it apart from it took me ages to find my seat! I had a chat with fellow graduates sitting next to me and we all remarked that we couldn't do each other's degrees. But there we all were having achieved something that I never thought I could do at the start of my journey!

It really hit me what I had done when the ceremony began. When video started to play, I was reduced to tears! This really was happening! Going across the stage, I couldn't stop smiling especially as I had met the Pro Vice Chancellor (pictured) who was presiding over the ceremony. She commented on how glad she was that it was me because she knew me which made my smile even bigger.

My family had organised a meal after the ceremony and everyone signed my menu (an odd thing, I know!) which was a great end to the celebrations.

After a long day I got back around 7pm and instantly fell asleep. It had been a very long but a very special day and without doubt my proudest achievement to date.

I’m now very proud to be an OU Alumni. It makes you realise that anything is possible!

By Mark Cameron, Student Association Representation (SAR) for Scotland

Where is the best place to study?

We ran a poll on Facebook asking where OU students thought the best place to study was. Some lovely OU students tweeted and Instagremed their study spaces (below). Share yours using @oustudentslive #OUstudents
Here’s the results...

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Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘I’m happy my brain didn’t explode with my first essay.’
Research at the OU: Zoning in on space

By the time this magazine lands in your mail boxes, the European Space Agency’s comet-chasing spacecraft, Rosetta, will have completed touchdown of the Philae lander on comet 67P/Churyumov–Gerasimenko. This marks the end of 20 years of OU research into tools for space, which are now also being used on Earth.

A team of researchers at the OU’s Centre for Physical and Environmental Sciences (CEPSAR) developed a suite of tools to monitor the atmosphere around the comet. In the process, the team identified other applications for the devices, such as monitoring air quality and in health sciences, where they have used the tools to aid the detection of TB and cancer.

OU researchers have led the development of Ptolemy, an instrument which is attached to the lander which will bond with the comet and take samples of ice and gas on its surface and will perform its function whatever way it lands. CEPSAR scientists also contributed to MUPUS (Multi-Purpose Sensor), an instrument which will also form a part of the lander and will measure the physical properties around the comet, and to a Dust Instrument, which is attached to Rosetta, and is the first instrument ever developed to measure the dynamics of space dust around a comet.

The Rosetta team is made up of senior academics and several members who studied at the OU and did their PhDs around aspects of Rosetta and benefited from the OU’s very advanced laboratory environment. Watch the Rosetta video here: http://bit.ly/1vonNdw

OU research into space ranks among the top three universities in the UK. Based at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, the OU team lead major planetary missions such as the hunt for dark matter and the search for life on other planets.

OU space researchers elaborated more on this during World Space Week 2014, when they described the search for life on comets, moons and on exoplanets. You can watch the video here: http://bit.ly/1FvuY4T

The next public milestone for OU research is the result of the Research Excellence Framework 2014 which assesses the research carried out in UK universities in terms of research quality, impact and the environment for research. The results will be announced on 18 December 2014.
How many 28 year olds can say that one of their earliest memories is of the Open University? Well, I can.

In 1984 my mum gave up her dreams of attending university and moved with my dad (a member of HM Forces) to Germany. Six years later, at the age of 24, a then ‘stay at home mum’ with only 3 small children for company, she discovered the OU.

In the next few years she took on several part time jobs – dinner lady, teaching assistant (in my class, how embarrassing!), child-minder… anything that fit in around our school day.

Alongside working and caring for us, she decided that she would also embark on a degree with the OU. An ambitious choice for anyone let alone a working mother with small children and a husband often away.

She would put us to bed, and then stay up late studying. Long before the internet and email, I have memories of eavesdropping on late night calls to tutors, and frantic trips to the post office to post TMAs. It was actually my mum that suggested the OU to me. After leaving school at 16 I tried college several times, but despite having the desire to study I never managed to stick at it. I spent several years working in customer service and it wasn’t until I went on maternity leave with my first child at the age of 23 that I really thought about studying again. I enrolled on a Social Science module, and it went from there really. I’m now about to start the 4th module in my BA (Hons) Combined Social Sciences.

It’s funny as I sit here writing this, with my son at school and my 9 month old daughter sat beside me blowing raspberries, that I realise my OU journey is starting to mirror my mum’s.

I too will have to juggle family life whilst finding time to study, to write TMAs, attend exams etc. but I know that if she can do it, then so can I. In fact we all can. It may take a while, but she’s proof to me that it’ll be worth it all in the end.

Emma Burgess,
OU student

I have memories of eavesdropping on late night calls to tutors, and frantic trips to the post office to post TMAs

Oldest OU student falls 2.5 miles for charity

In the last edition of OUstudents we told you about Clifford Dadson, the oldest OU student who, at the age of 95, was about to undertake another challenge for charity… a skydive!

Well he did it! Jumping from 2.5 miles up, Clifford raised money for Action for Children.

Well done Clifford!
I am a single parent to four young children and I was recently featured on the front cover of single parent charity, Gingerbread’s, newsletter because I am a full time Open University student.

For the first time since becoming a single parent I felt that the hard work I’m putting in to my English Literature degree with the OU, alongside raising four small children and the challenges I face in daily life because I am raising such a large number of children alone, was recognised.

Studying for an Open University degree has given me the opportunity to create a better future for my children. Being a single parent can be lonely at times and by becoming an Open University student I have the chance to socialise online with other students without having to leave the house and pay for a babysitter. It is also a cheaper and a more practical alternative to a bricks and mortar university.

Doing the degree has given structure to my life – my life revolves around the next TMA deadline – and this is a good thing for me. As a parent it is easy to lose your identity, when I am studying I am ‘Michelle’ and not just ‘mum.’

For someone on a tight budget I recommend the Open University as good value for money. You can gain a degree, meet new people without leaving your house, develop confidence and new interests and The Open University can really open doors for you - for example, if I had a greater scope of general knowledge I would have the opportunity to go on University Challenge representing The Open University, it’s not often an opportunity like that comes along!

Michelle Fox, OU student

When OU students think of this year’s University Challenge team, the overwhelming emotion is one of pure, unadulterated pride.

Our team represented just what we love best about OU students – they were clever, of course, but also, they didn’t stop smiling throughout the whole process, even after their defeat to Magdalen College, Oxford in the second round of the show. Paxman summed it up when bidding farewell to our team, he said he was “sorry to see such a fun team go”. Our weekly University Challenge fix won’t be quite the same without them.

It all started when Lynne, Kate, Daniele, Stuart and Gary (our reserve team member) became the first team of OU students to reach the televised rounds of the programme since 1999.

Their initial match, against the University of Leicester, ended in defeat but the team’s whopping score of 190 points, by far the highest score of the losing teams, was easily enough to see them through to the play offs for a place in the second round. Victory was grasped from the London School of Economics in a closely fought and exciting game where our team scored 180 points to LSE’s 140.

Team Open’s second round match came soon after and it was with a heavy heart that we had to say goodbye to the team on Monday 24th November when Magdalen’s 225 points proved too much, against our team’s 130 points.

A huge “thank you” and big “congratulations” are being sent to the team from students everywhere. You have done us proud!

Team OU, you did us proud!

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Got my TMA in with 21 mins to spare; personal best.’
Do you have a book in you?

I’m writing this because I think that you all have a book in you!

Friends of mine who, after hearing about our family holiday disasters, said, ‘you should put all this in a book.’ ‘no can do I used to say - no time, no plots, no talent. Has anyone heard of JK Rowlings? Not following that act, thank you very much.

The module I was studying at the time was Advanced Creative Writing and I loved it but it did highlight, very quickly, my strengths and weaknesses in each discipline. Each TMA was set in very stringent boundaries but I still loved it.

Then there was the wonderful TMA 5 in which we could step out of the constraints and fly, indeed soar using any discipline we felt comfortable with.

I chose to write about a particular holiday where we had a few disasters and my tutor loved it and told me to find a publisher. So I did. I found a publisher and my first book is now available from Amazon, libraries and ebooks!

I have studied with the OU over many years and continue to do so because it has been an inspiration, fulfilled a dream and enabled me to find so many friends.

My book is not for the faint hearted. By that I mean it is not War and Peace, nor Enid Blyton, it will make no demands on literary ability but I hope it will make you laugh.

The book on Amazon is called ‘We did it our way – Unfortunately’. I write under the name of Mags Wyper.

I’m not using this as a vehicle for advertising but to let other OU students see what can be achieved with the OU’s support and resources!

Margaret Flory,
OU student

Finding the OU was like opening the door to paradise

Over seven million times - that is how often my historical fiction novels, published online, have already been read. When I started to study History and English Literature at the OU, I never would have imagined this.

Becoming a writer has always been my dream. Suffering from chronic illness, I needed special support to complete my school education. When this was denied in my home country, I was devastated. I thought that my dreams of an academic or literary career were over.

Thank God for the internet: on the spur of the moment, I looked online for another way to complete my education, and came across the OU. At first I couldn’t believe it. A university that doesn’t require a-levels to enter? That allows you to study at your own pace, and work from home? For a moment I thought the door to paradise had opened!

I attribute this success in no small measure to my studies at the OU.

Thank you. And to all my fellow students: don’t be afraid to follow your dreams!

By Robert Thier
OU student, Germany
My OU student Christmas list!

- Military Style Baseball Cap - £9.00
- OU T-shirts - £12.00
- Travel Mug - £7.00
- OU Mug - £6.00
- OU Hoodies - £26.50
- OU Shoulder Bag - £15.00
- OUSA Teddy bear - £6.00
- OU Varsity Scarf - £12.00
- OU keyring - £5.00

www.open.ac.uk/ousa/shop-ousa
As leaps into the unknown go this is right up there

My new year’s resolution this year was to do more for charity. I had set up a couple of direct debits, signed some petitions and even baked a rather lovely cake.

For some reason this just wasn’t cutting it and when I saw a tweet to say that Cricket Without Boundaries were looking for volunteers to go to Africa; it just made sense. I’m a huge cricket fan and although I’ve never played the game at any level, what I lack in ability I make up for in enthusiasm.

Cricket Without Boundaries is a charity that works in five African countries (Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda) as you may have guessed they teach children to play cricket but they also use these coaching sessions to pass on vital information about HIV/AIDS aimed at preventing infection and making sure that people are regularly tested.

I completed an application and was surprised to be invited to an interview in London. This went swimmingly and I am now confirmed to be travelling to Africa next autumn. I haven’t been told which country yet but I’m hoping for Rwanda.

© Cricket Without Boundaries

My spare time is now split between studying (I’ve just started A219) and coming up with ways to raise the funds I need. I am a bit nervous but at the same time I can’t wait to get out there and contribute in some way.

I honestly don’t think I would have done something like this before I joined the OU. Studying has given me much more confidence and has made me more willing to throw myself in at the deep end.

If you’d like to donate to my trip please visit: www.justgiving.com/ben-holmes3 or if you’d like to volunteer yourself visit: www.cricketwithoutboundaries.com

By Ben Holmes,
OU student

Student Satisfaction

The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) are in and we’re delighted to announce that for the second year running student satisfaction with us, your OU Students Association, has risen by 3% - meaning that overall satisfaction now stands at 64%, moving us up 11 places!

We’d like to say a great big thank you to our previous and current elected Student Teams for all their hard work in raising the Association’s profile and overall student satisfaction.

Ruth Tudor, President said:

“With over 300,000 students we are in a unique position compared to most other universities so the more students we reach the happier we are. We are also pleased to see that the OU remains in the top ten universities in the UK. The previous officer team worked hard to improve student engagement so we will learn from that and aim to improve for the next survey. Keep a watch out for us on Facebook and Twitter and for your student newsletter due out soon. We want to hear what you think so don’t be shy!”

A note from the Author... ‘Rita and Gerald: Adult Learning in Britain Today’

A little while ago we put a call out for OU students to get involved with a project for a book and, you did!

The Author, Phil Stevens would like to say a few words...

“I would like to thank all past and present students who contributed their story to the ‘Changing Lives’ project.

The book is now in production and will be published on 10 February 2015 under the above title. The book includes a chapter on the OU which includes a selection of your stories.

A book launch is organised at the Institute of Education, University of London for 1st March next year - details to follow.

Thank you all once again and I hope you enjoyed contributing to the research.

For further information please contact me directly on: philstevens06@gmail.com

© Cricket Without Boundaries

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Day off. LOVE days like this.’
What happens inside a faculty? Getting up close and personal with FELS

I was really pleased to be asked to write this piece for OUstudents, as any chance to engage with our students is an opportunity to be prized – after all everything we are about rightly begins and ends with you!

The Faculty of Education and Language Studies (FELS) is a very diverse faculty. We have 7 areas of study: education studies; early years; primary years; youth work; sport and fitness; childhood studies and child psychology plus 7 languages – English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese and Welsh.

When we create curriculum we spend a lot of time sourcing good case studies to keep content relevant and current. As Dean, I’m really proud of our inclusive approach with a strong equality and diversity element evident in all of our curriculum.

It takes an average of two years to produce a new module - occasionally up to three – and a huge amount of effort goes into the research that underpins the writing to ensure it is cutting edge.

We always engage an external expert to advise us and help to bench-mark us with other universities. Importantly, we use students to developmentally test any new material to make sure they are at the right level of difficulty and workload.

Many people don’t realise that we offer curriculum at postgraduate level. We have our masters in education which is just undergoing a radical overhaul to create a fast-track 2 year model alongside the standard 3 year one.

You can study a generic masters or specialise in one of three pathways: leadership & management, equality & diversity, and applied linguistics.

We also have a popular masters in childhood & youth. Some of our postgraduate students go on to study a professional taught doctorate with us (EdD).

All FELS academics spend some of their time on research and scholarship. An area of growth for us is International Development Education and we currently have projects in Africa, India and Bangladesh.

Have a look at some of our other research at: http://www.open.ac.uk/creet/main/ where you’ll find scholarship around education futures, language and literacies, childhood studies and technology enhanced learning.

Finally, FELS is very committed to student involvement in the faculty. We try hard to reduce workload and avoid too much policy paper overload by tailoring involvement to those areas where the student voice can make the biggest difference.

We really value your perspectives so do get in touch if you are interested in sitting on our committees and/or advisory groups – or even if you just want to give us general feedback.

By Professor Mary Kellett, Dean and Director of Studies

OU Careers now on Twitter and Facebook

We’re delighted to announce that our colleagues at the Open University Careers Advisory service are now on social media!

Their move to social media will mean you can receive more careers themed information each weekday, whether you’re starting out in your career, looking to move jobs or progress in your current role.

So, don’t forget to follow them to join in their careers chats and events, as well as receiving job vacancies, labour market news and expert-led information and advice to help you with your career.

You never know how it might help you.

Find them on Twitter at: @OpenUniCareers

Find them on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/OpenUniCareers.

● Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Just got my OU hoody, it’s super comfy and warm!’
We met with Pam Pearce, Publicity Officer at the Association to find out a little bit more about what Graduates can get involved in.

Q. So, tell us a little bit more about the Association of Open University Graduates (AOUG).

AOUG is an independent Association, run by OU graduates for OU Graduates. It holds a wide range of social and educational events within its Regions and Nations, publishes OMEGA, a hard copy magazine, and local electronic newsletters three times a year (for each area), and has a Members’ only Forum on its website.

Q. Who’s in the photo?

Well we also have our own charity, The AOUG Foundation for Education, which is funded by donations and interest from its investment accounts.

The charity funds three kinds of Awards: Research Awards, occasional Bursaries and Awards for new graduates who have gained their first degree with the OU while overcoming adversity above that of the average student.

The Foundation currently offers nine Research Awards to all The Open University Research Faculties and Research Centres. They are named after people who have been prominent within the OU.

This year’s Research Awards Ceremony on 3rd October at the OU campus in Milton Keynes featured four Award winners:

The AOUG Vice-Chancellor Sir John Horlock Award for Science was presented to Jon Gregson for ‘LOw Frequency ARray (LOFAR) studies of the Galactic Plane’.

The AOUG Vice-Chancellor Sir John Daniel Award for Education and Language Studies was presented to Mark Mukorera for ‘Exploring the influence of Zimbabwean teachers and learners’.

The AOUG Baroness Lee of Asheridge Award for Mathematics, Computing and Technology was presented to Simon Butler for ‘An Approach to the Structural Analysis of Java Identifier Names’.

The Ceremony was attended by the four Award winners and the audience was made up of the winners’ families, friends, supervisors, other OU staff, AOUG members and guests.

Q. How do we find out more and get in touch with the Association?

If you are close to graduating or already have an OU degree, you can find out about joining the AOUG on our website at www.aoug.org.uk or by phoning the AOUG Office T: 01908 653316.

...What three things would you tell fellow students about the OU Library?

At the OU Library we’re creating a new introductory video for OU students. Before we begin our planning, we would love to get your feedback on what you think should be included in the video.

Please tell us what top three things you would tell a fellow student to help them get started with the OU Library!

Just fill in this online form and let us know what you think: http://www3.open.ac.uk/forms/3topthings

It could be our 24/7 helpdesk, online training sessions, online content, or something completely different! Let us know your thoughts and help us create a great video that will help support OU students in their studies.
Changing Faces: Tackling unconscious bias

The OU recently hosted a workshop for staff run by Changing Faces (CF), a charity that provides support and information to people with disfigurements to the face, hands or body, and their families.

The workshop explored the “unconscious bias” that people have towards disfigurement, and outlined the positive steps that we can all take to tackle this prejudice. Unconscious bias can operate in all kinds of situations, and in response to a wide range of personal characteristics, such as age, ethnicity and gender.

In terms of disability, the OU has done much to advance opportunities for students: in fact, we have more disabled students than any other university in Europe. However, disfigurement is not captured in the categories used by UK universities.

As part of their pioneering work to transform confidence and expectations around disfigurement in organisations, including Higher Education institutions, Changing Faces are keen to extend their support to OU students. The charity are able to provide advice on topics that affect students who may encounter unconscious bias as a result of disfigurements; for example, engaging with peers in tutorials or succeeding at job interviews.

Changing Faces are also working to build their portfolio of case studies, and would like to invite any OU students who have been affected by disfigurement to contact them. Please email (in confidence): annie.bryan@open.ac.uk and visit: whatsuccesslookslike.org.uk

The Changing Faces workshop was hosted by the OU’s SeGA (Securing Greater Accessibility) project; a cross-unit initiative supporting faculties in embedding accessibility for disabled students in modules and qualifications.

By Annie Bryan, SeGA Project Officer

I don’t like the word ‘disabled’...

Here’s why: The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following (short) definitions:
1) Deprived of some ability - and;
2) Rendered incapable of action or use; incapacitated; taken out of service.

I can ‘live’ with the first one because it’s true. I am ‘deprived’ of some of my ‘abilities’: like being able to walk; cut up my own food; type fast or speak clearly. But I certainly cannot agree with item (2) and have yet to meet any other OU student with any sort of ‘disability’ who falls into that category either.

For more than six years now, I’ve been part of a wonderful group of students who make up the OU Students Association Disabled Students Group (DSG) and if any experience can prove item (2) wrong, it’s that. Through the Group I’ve met hundreds of students, both face to face and online, who, like me, battle through their obstacles to studying and win through. They also give their time and energies to maintain the DSG’s unofficial motto of ‘Students Supporting Students’ by offering their support, help and advice in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) forums and the DSG’s active Facebook Group.

Since the Students Association Conference in 2003, when the DSG became a fully constituted unit, the Group is now at the heart of the Association and is regarded as a centre of excellence. Given that there are nearly 18,000 students (17,974 to be exact) with some sort of ‘disability’ studying with the OU, our standards and our ethos will not change.

The OU says: ‘You may not think of yourself as disabled but if you have a long term health condition, specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia) or mental health difficulty then you are entitled to support. We use the single term ‘disabled’ or ‘disability’ to cover all these conditions’.

You might also like to know that the Group will be holding their Annual General Meeting (AGM) in the DSG’s VLE forum for two weeks from Tuesday December 2. Here’s the link: http://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=8193

By Cherry Day, OU student, PR & Communications Officer for the Disabled Students Group (DSG)
Help set-up the OU Feminism Society

“A feminist is anyone who recognises the equality and full humanity of women and men.”
- Gloria Steinem

My name is Alex Lily and I am interested in forming an OU Students Association Feminism society.

In recent years feminism has increased in popularity due to awareness being raised via the internet and social media regarding issues women around the world face in their everyday lives. Despite the abundance of information surrounding feminism, there is still the common misconception that its true message is to hate men and to hate femininity, which is incorrect.

The aims and objectives of the society will be:

- To promote understanding and clarity of intersectional feminism amongst OU registered students, along with their family and friends.
- To provide support to and to unite people that identify as women and people that identify as feminists.
- To raise discussion and debate surrounding topics and issues that affect women, either raised by the individual themselves or issues brought to light by the media.
- To organise bi-annual meetings where possible, to allow the group to form relationships and interact face-to-face.

I am looking for students and staff of the OU community to help with the organisation and the running of the society. Some men may think that the society is for women only. Wrong, men are ALWAYS welcome to join and support.

If you are interested please get in touch via my email: alexlilyprice@gmail.com or alternatively, my Twitter handle is @bokett0

By Alex Lily Price, OU Law student

LOUPS Conference - Jan 2015

The London regional branch of the Open University Psychological Society (LOUPS) is holding their annual psychology conference on 31st January 2015 in Central London. Open to everyone, (society members receive a discount) the weekend will consist of 4 lectures and the opportunity to ask questions.

Each year we take a topic that is important in psychology and invite speakers to give different perspectives on the theme. This year we are looking at relationships and Meg Barker, author of “Rewriting the rules” will be one of the speakers at the event.

The fee is £35 for OUPS members and £45 for non-OUPS members. Anyone can take out membership to OUPS for £15 per year which entitles them to discounts off a range of events and also a subscription to the magazine.

To book your ticket or find out more visit: www.oups.org.uk/regions/24 or email: londonloups@googlemail.com

Awakening Society

Ever wondered how art and spirituality can bring about positive thinking?

Many artists and thinkers discuss strong moments of inner-inspiration, as a force of innovation.

The Awakening Society was set-up to explore creativity and raise awareness to the ingenious potential inside.

We are a group of positive thinkers, exploring questions through art activities and online informal lectures (broadcast live, Friday evenings).

Open to all. There is no need for you to have any previous knowledge.

Contact Dr. Gil Dekel on: g.dekel@open.ac.uk or visit: www.poeticmind.co.uk/contact-us

New Dr Turin Society

The Dr Turing society is a new computing society for OU students. The name comes from the late Dr Alan Turing OBE FRS 1912-1954. The society will offer trips to places of historical computer interest. We will also have exclusive interviews with computer professionals from companies and universities. Our aim is to bring support and fun to computers, whether you are a Computer Science student, a Law student it does not matter as everyone is welcome.

If you’re interested in helping get this Society get underway email: richard@dralanturingsociety.org.uk or visit: http://drturingsociety.org.uk/

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Coffee. Biscuits. 7 child-free hours. TMA, let’s dance.’
Computer Club all set to support OU students

Most OU students use some sort of technology. You’re probably reading this on a computer as soon as you heard the OU students magazine was out! You can send TMA’S immediately over the interweb and your phone is more powerful than the computer that put a man on the moon! Technology is fantastic, but it can also be daunting, we’re not all experts who know the best app for note-taking, and what is a ‘RAM’ anyway!

Every question is a good one and since you’ll be talking to OU students, you know that you’ll get tried-and-tested tech advice!

If you’ve found a great new note-taking app, have a super-duper reference manager that you want to share, then we want you to let us know. You could even pitch in and help run the group. If you want to promote the group or help moderate activity, help run a live Q&A or just have a fantastic idea that will help more OU students find out about us then just get in touch.

“
The OU Computer Club is a place for OU students that are having tech issues, need advice on a good computer for studying and want to learn more about apps and gadgetry.

”

You can find us at the following places:

Facebook Group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/openunicomputerclub
Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/OUAOpenUniversityComputerClub/
Twitter: https://twitter.com/ITSupport_OU
Website: http://www.ousa-computerclub.org/
Email: Ousa-computerclub@outlook.com

Also, coming soon will be our new OU Students Association VLE Forum so keep a look out for this on the Computer Club website.

New Literature Society launches

If you love escaping to other worlds through words and pages, spending hours browsing around your local book shop and sharing your latest read with others then the Literature Society is just for you...

The Literature Society is for past and present OU students, their friends and families who love books and enjoy reading.

By joining the Literature Society you will be able to:
• Access a quarterly online magazine which will feature book reviews
• Get involved in our independent forum for book-related discussions
• Post your own book reviews (which can be featured in the magazine)
• Join the monthly book club (your studies obviously must come first so don’t feel you need to join in with this every single month)

A separate forum in the OU forums, where updates and announcements will be posted, will also be available for you to access.

In the future we hope to organise group visits to places of literary interest and maybe even ‘meet ups’ for coffee and cake! We will try to organise this in a place which is geographically central to everyone.

Oh, and did I mention membership is absolutely free?! This group is exclusively for members so you can join in with as much or as little as you like depending on how much time you have.

Head on over to: http://literaturesociety.org.uk and download a membership form today.

My name’s Victoria and I’m the founder of this society, I hope to see you over there soon!

Help set-up a new OU students Robotics Club

Robotics is entering our lives more and more nowadays. In some fields, like the automobile industry, robotics has already become a must. Robots not only hold potential in big industry but also in the domestic field.

I intend to create a new OU club dedicated to robotics. If you are curious, interested, or passionate about robotics please email me at robotics4ou@gmail.com. The purpose of this club is to develop and share knowledge between its members. This club also holds the possibility of designing our own robots and participating in robotics competitions.

By Anas Achouri, OU student

• Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘When I’m not studying, you’ll find me sleeping!’
New help centre pot of gold...

During my many years of OU study, I have been amazed at how much help and support is available. In addition to support, there is information ranging from applying for jobs to working with zip files.

Until recently, trying to locate that information has been a bit like panning for gold - took some time, not always easy to spot, but wonderful when you uncovered that little nugget you needed!

However, a magic fairy or two have created the new Help Centre, available on your Student Home, under the aptly titled ‘Help Centre’ tab.

We can put our gold panning equipment away because the information is there at the touch of a few buttons. You can either type a few appropriate letters in ‘Search’, click through the menu down the left hand side or browse through the help topics. The OU suggests the information is targeted to the individual student’s needs.

Unfortunately, if you explore the new Help Centre, you won’t find gold or even chocolate money. You should get the next best thing – information that will be of use or interest.

One exciting aspect - well exciting for me - is that the OU has offered to include information about the OU Students Association’s Peer Support Service, which provides a listening ear to students. Until I heard that, I thought the Help Centre would only include services provided by the OU. More information about our Peer Support Service is available on our Website: http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/help-and-support/peer-support

One reason I enjoy being Vice President Student Support is responding to students seeking information. Although that might decrease with the introduction of the new Help Centre, I still feel I have some interesting information to share. Hence, the recent appearance of my weekly Blog, available on the OU Students Association’s website http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/news-and-events. Please feel free to have a read.

By Alison Kingan, Vice President Student Support

New book shares intricate details of the OU’s history...

‘The Open University - A History’, reveals detailed information about the personalities and politics behind the OU and focuses on learners’ experiences. We caught-up with the author, Daniel Weinbren, to find out why it is a must read for OU students...

It was when I was a teenager that I first noticed the OU. I walked into the kitchen and my mother, instead of cooking my meal, was doing a complicated OU experiment. Despite, or perhaps because of, this introduction I went on to become an OU student, an Associate Lecturer and to hold full-time posts at the OU.

These personal reflections indicate why it was that, when I was commissioned to write the history of the OU, the first thing I did was to put learning and learners at the heart of the account. I created an online site where students and staff could post their stories.

I have learnt from them about how the OU has transformed not only individual careers, confidence and contentment but also our communities and the wider society.

I am pleased to be able to share the discoveries I’ve made on my journey and I now recognise that, in addition to my formal learning, there has been another benefit: if it wasn’t for the OU, I’d have never learnt to cook for myself!

‘The Open University - A History will be available from our Web Shop from 1st December priced at £12.

Profits from the sale of this book will go directly to the OU Students Association Charitable Trust - supporting OU students in financial need.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Waiting on TMA results is the worst.’
I used to work as a professional dancer in Disneyland Paris, I had my HND Acting & Performance, and a plan to complete my degree. However, after a traumatic event I started to suffer from agoraphobia. This led to me being unable to work, or even socialise. I then developed fibromyalgia and began to suffer from daily pain which soon became so severe I was unable to walk and quite often couldn't even get out of bed. I've been in a wheelchair for around a year now and still have daily pain.

I felt like I was useless and starting to waste away. My only social encounters were with my two young daughters and husband. Fibromyalgia affects your memory and I was worried my brain was slowly becoming numb. I still wanted to complete my degree and then I remembered the OU.

I have a strong passion for criminology and all things psychology related so I found the perfect degree: BSc Criminology and Psychological studies. The OU is the perfect solution for someone in my situation as I can work through as much as I want on my good days and not worry about the bad days.

My tutors are fantastic and are aware of my illness and a whole new online social life has opened up for me as I can have a lot of interaction with my peers. I really do feel like myself again and it's down to The OU. I have a whole new lease of life and I would most certainly recommend the university to anyone, even people who believe they are unable to study.

By Sarah-Victoria Bayley, OU student

OU Students Radio will be broadcasting its Christmas Party on Wednesday 10th December so save a space in your schedule between 12 – 2 pm to listen live, or make time to listen again over the festive season.

Christmas Radio is going to be unmissable with full on festive study inspiration to get you right through to New Year. It's being presented by jolly jumper wearing OU students, who'll be serving you with sparkling conversation, fizzing chatter and cracking interviews. They'll be taking your calls and sorting sticky student problems all with a sprinkle of straight talking and light dusting of advice.

You could be a star on the Yuletide tree by writing us a four minute seasonal story, song or poem, providing a glitter filled glimpse into the life of an OU student. The best will be read (or sung) on air in exchange for an NUS Extra card to lend a hand with your Christmas shopping.

Following fantastic feedback after it premiered in Freshers Fortnight, we can honestly say that OU students Radio is back by popular demand. If you missed it then – don’t make the same mistake again.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘My day of Uni work = 2hrs of work, 2hrs of napping.’

Are you feeling lonely and negative about your studies? Well, there is a small group of experienced students and alumni who might be able to help you - OUSA's Peer Support team!

Peer Support is entirely confidential, so you have the assurance that anything you discuss with them about any study issues will be in complete confidence.

Please note, that for academic, financial and other material problems and advice, your first port of call should always be your tutor or study support team (SST)

Contact the team here: http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/help-and-support/peer-support
Nightline: students there for students

Why Not Save the Nightline Number to your Phone Right Now?

020 7631 0101

OU student life is not easy. You’re studying hard; you might be working full or part-time, have caring responsibilities and coping with all the anxieties that life throws at you. We all have mental health whether or not we consider it to be a problem and talking it out can make a great difference to your well-being.

If you need someone to talk to, who’ll listen to your thoughts and feelings in a non-judgemental way, OU students can call Nightline, a confidential listening and information service run by students for students.

Nightline’s highly trained student volunteers are available from 6pm to 8am through the night and they’re waiting to hear from you. No topic is too big or small and they’ll listen as long as you need.

Lines are open this year until 13 December and from 6th Jan – 21st March and 21st April – 19th June 2015.

Students outside the UK are recommended to use Skype to phone for free. If you ring outside of hours you’ll receive information about the Samaritans and a contact number to call. There’s a related email service operating alongside the hotline and outside of hotline hours. If you make contact in this way, you’ll receive a reply within 48 hours.

Call: 020 7631 0101
or Instant message
(Skype): chat.nightline
or Skype Phone: londonnightline

You can email the team at any time on listening@nightline.org.uk

• Don’t assume you’ll never need to call on a friendly listening ear.
• Don’t underestimate how much a chat might help.
• Do keep these details to hand… just in case!

Quick links...

Make a donation to your student charity

Get your NUS Extra Card

Get your OUSA membership card

Join your Disabled Student’s Group (DSG)

Volunteer with us

Merry Christmas and a very happy OU student New Year from everyone at the OU Students Association!

Please note that the office will be closed from midday on the 24th December 2014 and will re-open on Friday 2nd January 2015.

If you need any information during this time please visit our website at:

www.open.ac.uk/ousa

Note from the Editor: If you don’t want to receive future editions of OUstudents, unsubscribe by emailing your name and PI number to ousa@open.ac.uk. The editorial team reserves the right to accept or reject any article submitted to the OUstudents magazine and to edit submitted articles in any way deemed appropriate and necessary. The majority of the articles are written by students, for students, therefore, we can not guarantee the original source of all articles.