We are very excited to announce that the *first* Unisa International ODL conference will take place on the Pretoria campus of the University of South Africa (Unisa) from **Wednesday 5 to Friday 7 September 2012**.

The conference will create a space for African and international ODL scholars, practitioners and researchers to share experiences, research and insights into digital and mobile futures in open distance learning.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

- Faculty (academics, researchers and tutors)
- Library personnel
- Administrative and professional staff
- Management of ODL institutions, departments and institutes
- Institutional researchers
- Quality assurance staff
- Various stakeholders in the production and delivery/dissemination of ODL learning resources
- Regional staff
- Anyone with an interest in teaching and learning in digital, open and mobile futures

ENVISAGED OUTCOMES

The conference aspires to achieve the following outcomes:

- Create interactive spaces where African and international ODL scholars, practitioners and developing and established researchers can celebrate, interrogate, share and disseminate information and research findings.
- Contribute to theory development in ODL and enrich ODL praxis.
- Provide a platform to solicit and forge collaboration, partnerships and networks.
- Support novice ODL researchers, scholars and practitioners.

RATIONALE FOR THE THEME: "OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING IN DIGITAL, OPEN AND MOBILE FUTURES"

Different and often contesting opinions and views are in circulation about, amongst others, the state of the "digital divide" on the African continent; the relationship, if any, between the use of technologies in ODL teaching and learning contexts and increases in student participation, success and retention; and the ways in which technology is increasingly challenging our assumptions regarding curricula, pedagogy and the respective roles of open distance learning (ODL) practitioners, scholars, researchers and students.

Despite and in the midst of the different and often contesting views of *how* technology is shaping teaching and learning in ODL contexts, there is no doubt that the future most certainly will be *digital*.

The future of ODL is furthermore not only digital but increasingly 'open' with open educational resources becoming an essential ingredient in the provision and design of learning. While "openness" had been a defining characteristic of ODL since the beginning, the notion of "open" in ODL increasingly implies more than just open admission requirements, but also challenges traditional assumptions regarding curricula, learning resources, assessment and accreditation.

As globalisation as geopolitical, social, cultural, legal, environmental and technological phenomenon continues to unfold, student and faculty mobility is becoming increasingly 'natural'. Migrations due to climate change or political upheaval (to mention but two factors) continues to increasingly shape student profiles and intercultural contact; contribute to the plurality of identity of students, ODL researchers and practitioners and the character of their respective communities. Student and faculty mobility also contributes to the increasing globalisation of higher education with cross-border and transnational education becoming an essential ingredient for most higher education institutions.

'Mobile' however also refers to the impact of advances in technology deconstructing and redefining traditional definitions of space, time and location. Teaching and learning have become mobile – with students accessing teaching resources from a range of mobile devices.

The foregoing raises a number of key questions for consideration:

- What are the underlying assumptions and beliefs in the current discourses surrounding the notion of a "digital future"?
- How will we prepare our students for a digital future where what they study today may be obsolete in the very near future? How do we prepare our students for participation in a digital future which will require different skill sets, capabilities and values that they currently encounter in their studies?

- What kind of student support will students need to prepare them for teaching and learning that will be increasingly digital?
- How prepared are ODL staff (whether faculty or professional) for a digital future which will require different epistemologies, assumptions, roles and ways of seeing the world? How does a digital future shape *what* we know and teach, *how* we teach and assess and how we see our roles, whether as faculty or as professional staff in ODL contexts? How does professional development prepare all staff for different roles and identities?
- How should different stakeholders (e.g. libraries, regional centres, etc) in the value network of delivering ODL teaching position themselves to serve staff, students and broader society in a digital age?
- In the light of the increasing risk of obsolescence, how do ODL scholars, researchers and students prepare for a digital future?
- How do ODL institutions ensure that the so-called digital future serves humanity and social justice and not only serve neoliberal notions such as the commercialisation of knowledge production and academic capitalism? How do we ensure that a digital future is more just, sustainable and compassionate compared to our current age?
- How does a digital future shape our research methodologies and foci?
- How will different knowledge claims be validated, accredited and quality assured in a digital future?
- What does "quality" teaching and learning provision look like in a digital age for the whole value network of ODL including library services, production, ICT, student support and a range of others? How will we assure quality?
- How do we deal with the proliferation of plagiarism in the work of students in a digital and mobile era?
- What are the implications of a digital age for intellectual property rights, the commercialization of knowledge and open educational resources?

The first call for papers and registration details will be published before **Monday 16 April 2012**. Registration for the conference will open on **Monday 7 May 2012.** ODL scholars, practitioners and researchers will be invited to submit proposals for

- Full research papers
- Research-in-progress papers
- Posters and exhibitions

On **Tuesday 4 September 2012** a number of pre-conference workshops will be held on the Pretoria and Florida campuses. More details to follow later.

KEYNOTES

The following keynote speakers have been confirmed

George Siemens

George Siemens is a writer, theorist, speaker, and researcher on learning, networks, technology, analytics and visualization, and openness in education. He is the author of Knowing Knowledge, an exploration of how the context and characteristics of knowledge have changed and what it means to organizations today, and the Handbook of Emerging Technologies for Learning. Siemens is the associate director of the Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute at Athabasca University and leads the learning analytics research team. Previously, he was the Associate Director, Research and Development, with the Learning Technologies Centre at University of Manitoba. Siemens pioneered open connectivist courses that have included over 12,000 educators and students as participants. He is a frequent keynote speaker at conferences detailing the influence of technology and media on education, organizations, and society, having presented at conferences in more than 30 countries. His work has been profiled in provincial, national, and international newspapers, radio, and television. Siemens has maintained the elearnspace blog (www.elearnspace.org/blog) for eleven years and www.connectivism.ca for six years [source: http://www.educause.edu/Community/MemDir/Profiles/GeorgeSiemens/57433]

Andreia Inamorato

Andreia Inamorato dos Santos holds a PhD from the Open University of the United Kingdom with her thesis in the field of Educational Technology focusing on the discourses of teaching and learning online. She also holds a Masters in Research Methods for Educational Technology from the same institution. Previously, in Brazil, she obtained a Masters in Languages by the University of São Paulo (USP), and a Bachelors in Languages and Literature.

Andreia has worked at the Open University as a research fellow in Open Educational Resources (OER) for four and a half years (2006-2011), her work including OER projects such as OpenLearn and OLnet. Her previous professional experience in Brazil includes teaching university-level English and American Literature at a number of private education institutions and running a language school. She has published papers and book chapters in the educational field, particularly in OER. Currently Andreia is

an international consultant in education, OER and technology-enhanced-learning [Source: http://virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Andreia_Inamorato_dos_Santos]

Laura Czerniewicz

Laura has been leading the good people of Centre for Educational Technology (CET) since it was formed in 2005. As director, Laura describes herself as a "deep generalist" overseeing all of CET's work and operating at multiple interfaces. She says her greatest talent is identifying exceptional people to work at CET. Otherwise she works on various local, continental and international collaborative projects.

Presently, she is the research leader on an intriguing project on students' technological habitus use in Higher Education Institutions within South Africa. She is also interested in the emergent knowledge domain of the field, mobile learning, the digital divide and ICTs and scholarly communication. [Source: http://www.cet.uct.ac.za/LauraCZ]

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Conference website live	Monday 16 April
First call for papers	Monday 16 April
Second call for papers	Monday 30 April
Last call for papers	Monday 7 May
Registration opens	Monday 7 May
Final date for submission of papers for consideration	Monday 4 June
Authors informed of acceptance of submissions	Friday 27 June
Early bird registration closes	Monday 9 July
Final date for registration	Friday 3 August
Preconference workshops	Tuesday 4 September
Conference	Wednesday 5 – Friday 7 September

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