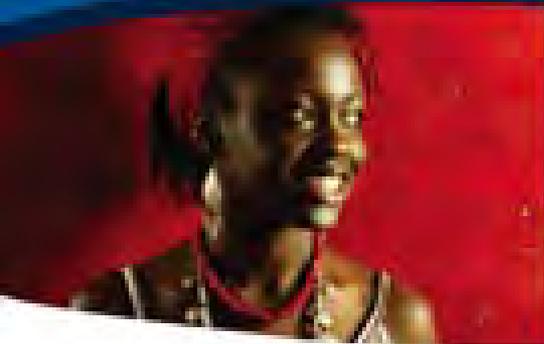# From Bricks to Clicks: A New Model for Higher Education

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Critical Question

How can large numbers of people be educated in an responsible way to equip them with the skills and knowledge to participate meaningfully in the global economy?

Why are new forms of higher education provision required?

- Traditional systems are too costly to meet the requirements of large numbers.
- Nature of the student body is changing from residential to commuter and non-traditional types
- Skills and knowledge required for meaningful participation may not be taught in localised environments

What educational criteria should the new forms of higher education meet?

- **Community** – allow for socio-constructive learning in a group tradition that allows for sharing and cooperative learning.

- **Communication** – groups with common objectives enable interaction between people to share and learn together.

- **Commodity** – allows for adequate quality control which enables verification of the value of qualifications.

What is the solution?

- Traditional residential systems should not be discarded because they serve and continue to serve important needs.

- Distance education seems to provide the answer to meeting the needs of higher education in a globalised world though it can not be business (or traditional distance education) as usual.

If distance education then how?

- The use of technology particularly the internet is the key to responsible delivery and it should not become another form of exclusion.

- Distance education should meet the generally accepted educational principles of community, communication and commodity.

- Students should be taught skills and knowledge that transcend boundaries and are globally useful.

- Institutions that profess the provision of responsible distance education should accept it as the common vision and strive to meet all the requirements.

The University of South Africa (Unisa)

- Unisa is not yet able to meet all the demands as stated but it has accepted the challenge and is starting to work in the desired direction.

- Unisa has formulated a new vision with a first target date of 2018. It includes a developmental framework which states the following:

This model sees a complete shift to open, distance and e-learning at Unisa with corresponding implications for all operations and systems. In this model the entire institution's "transactional environment" with students is transformed so that all aspects of that environment are fully digitised and thus underpinned by robust, effective and integrated ICT applications (Baijnath, 2013:355).

- An experiment in support of the above vision is the Signature Courses.

Characteristics of the Signature Courses

- Create self directed students – heutagogical approach
- Students have to apply knowledge in practical situations.
- Delivery is fully online though participation can also be asynchronous by means of the Digi-bands.
- Tutors are teaching assistants dealing with smaller groups, grading assignments and providing guidance on the study material.
- Assessment is formative (every week or two) and summative (final assessment is an e-portfolio)
- One module at level 1 in each of the 6 Colleges was developed and taught in 2013.

Pass rates in the Signature Courses
Second semester 2013

Module	AFL 1501	EUP 1501	GGH 3708	SJD 1501	SUS 1501	BPT 1501
Students registered	3486	14436	261	751	3583	5693
Exam admittance	2952	12509	248	620	3406	4460
Students written	2957	8294	203	608	3429	4767
Students passed	2030	5946	142	293	2256	2520
Students failed	141	2348	61	315	1173	2247
Written registered	85%	57%	82%	81%	95%	84%
Passed written	69%	72%	70%	48%	66%	53%
Average exam %	54%	56%	69%	44%	52%	51%

Reasons for drop-out from Signature Courses

Module code	No device	No computer skills	No internet access	No money	No transport to region	Accepted else-where	Personal (health, time, etc)	Unisa systems
SUS 1501 (90)	17	1	20	3	0	1	11	74
AFL 1501 (50)	10	2	12	0	1	0	0	47
EUP 1501 (100)	19	11	24	0	0	0	1	88
BPT 1501 (50)	16	2	17	2	0	0	6	40
TOTAL	62	16	73	5	1	1	18	249

Positives taken from the experience with the Signature Courses

- Language through the African Lens (AFL1501) was rated highly by international students – it gave them some socio-linguistic insight into Africa.

- AFL 1501 also won an international award of excellence for distance education materials.

- Ethical ICT's for development solutions taught intermediate computer skills in an innovative way.

- Environmental awareness and responsibility (GGH3708) was commended for student centredness.

- Sustainability and greed (SUS1501) raised awareness of ethical behaviour in business contexts.

Challenges experienced with the Signature Courses

- The EUP1501 experienced problems with the online examination due to incompatible software.

- The module on Being a professional teacher (BPT1501) of the College of Education suffered due to unbalanced student teacher ratios.

Conclusion

- The experiment with the introduction of the Signature Courses can be viewed as a step in the right direction.

- Much more nuanced research and analyses are under way to provide support for or against this way of teaching.

- Unisa is commended for its courage to face the challenges of globalisation and to equip its students to participate meaningfully in the benefits of the new world order