YOUR STUDENTS ASSOCIATION NEEDS YOU!

UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE
It’s time to warm up your buzzer fingers, as we meet the University Challenge team

THE MAIN EVENT
We look forward to Conference 2016 and tell you all you need to know about standing for election

ONE MEMBER ONE VOTE
A huge change for the Students Association explained
Welcome...

to your OU Students Association magazine, a place to share your stories, connect with others and find out more about your Association.

It only seems a while ago that we had Conference, but here it is on the horizon again. Students gathering on campus over a June weekend to get to know other students, catch up with old friends or have a chance to meet people you’ve only known online. Those who haven’t been to the OU before are always surprised that there is a campus and how big it is. There are talks on various subjects and tours to show students around, so why not consider coming?

Before Conference is also the time to vote for new officers of the Students Association who will take it forward over the next two years and vote for changes in the Constitution. For the first time in our Association’s history every member can vote. This is your chance to make a difference - don’t vote by the colours candidates wear, read what they have to say and make a considered decision. I find it exciting and I hope you’ll grab the chance to have your say. Read about it in David Humble's article on page 4 and listen to our radio show on March 21. Keep your eye on your inbox for emails from oustudents@electoralreform.co.uk who will be sending out voting instructions in May. More details about our elections, including how you (yes, you!) can stand for a role can be found on our special elections website: www.ersvotes.com/oustudents

There is interesting information about societies in this edition. Many students find it a great way to be in touch with like-minded students and the interests are widely varied as you can see from the articles.

Our new OU students shop is coming soon and I’m looking forward to browsing through the range of products there.

I hope you enjoy this edition and I’d love to hear your feedback. So relax with your preferred beverage, take some time out to read and have a go at the crossword!

Lorraine Adams
Vice President Communications

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COMING UP...

21 March
OU Students Radio 6-7.30pm

Let's be change-makers! Join our student presenters for another jam-packed show. Get involved by listening to the show live and chatting to other OU students on social media. Be sure to use #OUstudentsRADIO in your messages!

You can listen live at: oustudentsradio.com

25 - 28 March 2016
OU Students Association Office closed for Easter Break

17-19 June 2016
OU Students Association Conference

Please register your interest here and we’ll keep you up to date with details!
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Affiliated or just emerging - there’s sure to be a Society that’s right for you
On the evening of 22nd January, on the OU campus in Milton Keynes, there was a buzzing lecture theatre, filled with OU staff and students awaiting some quiz action.

The Deputy President of the Association, Nik Morris addressed the audience – explaining how we’d first approached students in August 2015 looking for volunteers brave enough to be considered for The OU’s University Challenge team. Over 700 applications later, and after a truly tough audition process, the five students sat on stage had been chosen.

Despite having only met a couple of hours before the event, the team were ready to get quizzing. Distance can be a challenge for OU students, but our team proved that this potential barrier could be easily overcome. What’s more, this was the challenger’s only chance to flex their buzzer fingers in advance of their audition with the TV production company in London the next day.

As Nik mentioned, we couldn’t have a University Challenge event without a Jeremy Paxman. That evening the OU’s very own Monica Grady, Professor of Planetary and Space Sciences was our quick-witted quizmaster.

The teams competed in two action-packed matches. First the students took on a group of OU Students Association reps, collectively known as the Central Executive Committee (CEC) who were happy to be joined by the University’s Vice Chancellor, Peter Horrocks.

Before long it was time for Monica to announce: “OK teams, fingers on buzzers… Here’s your first starter for 10!”

Despite the student team’s strong start, the CEC put up a good fight and it wasn’t long before it was neck and neck. In the end the student team just pipped their opponents to the post, with a nail-biting score of 125 to 120.

There was just a quick moment for the students to reassemble their thoughts before they took on a brave team of five OU staff. This time round it was a landslide win to the student team with an impressive 210 points, to only 60 for the staff.

We finished the evening by wishing our team good luck in their interview… but whatever happens, our promising team have proved just how brainy OU students can be!

Coming soon...

...your brand new OU Students Shop!! Keep an eye out for the launch of the new Students Shop in the coming weeks!
The biggest event in the OU student calendar is coming... your OU Students Association Conference!

It only happens once every two years, so don’t miss out on the chance to be there, either in person at the Open University campus in Milton Keynes, or online. Conference weekend, **Friday 17th - Sunday 19th June** (get the date in your diary now!), will be bursting at the seams with opportunities to meet other students, get involved in your Students Association, take part in key Association business, hear from inspiring speakers and find out more about some of the fascinating projects happening at your University.

For a taste of what Conference feels like, take a look at the highlights video from 2014 on our Conference webpage, where you’ll also find some useful info in the FAQs.

Hundreds of students have registered their interest in attending Conference already, so don’t delay, get your name and email address on our list today! Registration for places will open after Easter, but by getting your name on the list you’ll be sure to be one of the first to receive all of the early information.

If you’re one of the lucky students to get a place at the face to face element of Conference, the Students Association will cover the cost of your travel, accommodation, and main meals for the weekend.

If you have any questions about Conference not covered in our FAQs, please don’t hesitate to contact us at ousa@open.ac.uk.

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Democracy is a Good Thing. Elections are a Good Thing. More often than not participation is a Good Thing. So One Member One Vote – giving every member of our Association a direct say in electing our leaders must be a Good Thing.

I’ve supported that argument ever since I started studying with the OU back in 2004. More than that along with loads of other members I’ve gone on about it over and over again beating my head against what sometimes seemed a brick wall.

Finally, at the 2014 Conference, I had the honour of proposing the motion that gave all of us the right to vote for our officers from the President downwards. So the decision isn’t down to a self electing group who happen to attend Conference or an electoral college or even those of us who fire off an email asking for the right to participate.

Every member, every registered student, will be getting a say in the future direction of the Association – electing the people who represent us in talks with the University when it comes to stuff like qualifications, module delivery, student support and the ever popular student regulations that hardly anybody reads until it’s too late.

That’s not all our leaders do they talk to Government, push student interests more generally, provide social opportunities both online and face to face, proactively seek our opinions, help introduce newbies through Freshers activities, help facilitate University consultations, provide financial support to individuals through OUSET, produce branded goods, finance the Nightline support service etc, etc.

So it’s important who gets elected to do those jobs. Democracy doesn’t guarantee the right people will get elected. But what makes that much more likely is the participation of loads of members taking a few minutes out to take a look at those candidates and then vote.

Let’s do just that – take charge of our joint future and vote.

David Humble
Vice President Administration

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One member one vote
It’s our Students Association let's take control of its future.

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Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Biscuits are a very important part of being an OU student!’
A Tale of Two OU Students...

I've heard good things about the OU Student Conference. I really want to be there this year!

Don't you have to be into student politics?
Not at all. You care about what it's like to be an OU Student don't you?
Yes but I'm not sure about any changes that I could help make happen.

It's not all about big change. Small improvements can make a huge difference to OU students.

Don't you need some experience or be involved with the OU Students Association?
The paperwork says it's open to everyone and you can get your experience along the way.

I wouldn't want my studies to suffer.
Well it's a commitment that's for sure. But think of all the added extras you can put on your CV.

Such as?
Such as going places, meeting people, talking to important folk, working on projects, being part of the debate.

Do you have to be good at public speaking?
Sounds to me like a great skill that you'd develop. It's bound to be a huge confidence builder.
No wonder employers really rate student officers.

I can see why that would be true. But who would vote for me? I don't know any other OU students. Apart from you of course.

Well all OU students can vote online in these elections. Write a good statement about why you want to take on a role and get out there my friend.

Will OU students bother to vote? Haven't they got enough to do?
Of course OU students will vote. It will only take a few minutes and could make a big difference to OU Student life in the next couple of years.

You make it all sound so simple.
That's because it is my friend. That's because it is!
Conference 2014 Memories
Here’s what OU students had to say about their time at the last Conference...

I got out of it what I hoped to and more besides: I was interested and inspired, I learnt and laughed a lot and came away completely exhausted!! A great weekend!

“My first conference and it was absolutely amazing! I met new people and enjoyed the workshops, debates and visiting speakers…”

It was a wonderful opportunity to see campus, get involved with the Students Association, hear from OU staff at first hand and of course network with other students...

The whole affair was an almost magical time, I thoroughly enjoyed each and every moment...

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘TMA writing is always better with chocolate’
It could be YOU!

Sue gives you five things to think about before standing for election...

Hi! I’m Sue, Vice President Representation. When it comes to standing for a role, you should look at all the options and...

1. Consider your study for the coming 2 years.
2. Look at the latest role descriptions for an idea of the requirements.
3. Contact the current holder of the role and see what they are doing in reality. If their role is to answer emails for example then ask as to how many and what that means in time etc.
4. Think about your own strengths and weaknesses. We all need a bit of guidance when doing something new. But if you can look at the job spec and think yes I can do that and I want to be part of that then GO for it.
5. Its then up to YOU to decide which if any are a good match for you. And then GO for it.

The next steps...

Nominations for all places on the Student Association’s Central Executive Committee open on 18th March. Keep an eye out for emails from oustudents@electoralreform.co.uk for more information.

For details of what’s involved and how to nominate yourself go to the Elections Website: www.ersvotes.com/oustudents

Want to get involved but not sure which role would suit you? Head over to page 13 for an in-depth look at all the roles available!

Here’s how the elections work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominate yourself for a role!</th>
<th>18th March - 15th April</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OUstudentsRADIO Elections Special</td>
<td>21st March</td>
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<tr>
<td>Send your questions for candidates!</td>
<td>19th - 27th April</td>
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<tr>
<td>OUstudentsRADIO Elections Special</td>
<td>9th May</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voting open!</td>
<td>9th May - 10th June</td>
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Election results announced at Conference! 17th - 19th June
As far as OU students go, I suppose I'm a little bit unusual... Although it hadn’t really occurred to me that I was, until I thought about writing this article. I’m halfway through the second year of my degree, doing my final year at work and sticking them in an ever-growing stack of notebooks, coffee shop, and eggs (kitchens are especially useful when you have speaking TMAs and are too embarrassed to sit in a coffee shop, speaking bad Spanish at your laptop). I could probably put down a deposit on a small house with the money I have spent on coffee (well, OK, maybe more like a leaky shack on a beach, but still). It’s nice though, packing your things and heading out the house to study. Sitting in the corner of a café, typing away, with a refillable mug of coffee next to you, it can make Uni work feel like a treat, instead of a slog.

Recently though, it’s started to make life difficult. There was TMA02-Gate, where I ended up camped out in my boyfriend’s kitchen, because the group of teenagers on the table next to me kept laughing at my attempts to speak Spanish inconspicuously. Then there’s the fact that I live in Cornwall, with no late night coffee shops, which means my TMAs have to be organised with military precision. Last minute, late night tweaks become next to impossible when they mean you have to sit in the corner of a pub, or else overstay your welcome at a friend’s house. Add to that the fact that I’ve gone from working four days a week to five, losing eight hours of daytime study on a Monday.

I cracked two weeks ago, after a week of typing a TMA on my lunch hours, and ordered a shiny Sky Broadband Hub. This Saturday was spent in my pajamas, drinking free coffee, snuggled up on the sofa with my books. Studying right I feel like a treat, and nobody gave me evil looks for spreading myself out across a table for four. At least at the moment, I’m definitely a convert, and the twenty-something pounds a month feels like a small price to pay for never having to take my poor laptop outside in the rain, again!

Meet my goats: Elma, Joan and Gladys. Not only much-loved pets and vital hedge trimmers but also my most recent study partners. What am I talking about? Let me explain.

As we were having a series of long overdue renovations completed on the house (a 140-year-old farm which was starting to literally crumble in parts) I was unsure where I could relocate to ensure maximum peace and quiet. I’m not suggesting that my four-legged companions were much use when it came to drafting TMAs or loading up Word documents but I was forced to make use of their outside barn space whenever my studies for DD308: Making Social Worlds were coming to an end.

Animals as study buddies
I’ve seen plenty of pics on social media of fellow OU students working on their computers while cats, dogs and all other manner of creature proudly perches on top of textbooks or proceeds to rapidly destroy their carefully crafted paperwork. Some of these snaps are amusing, others cute while the odd ones get an eye roll. But I am now a convert to the therapeutic qualities that animals can provide as study buddies. Quite often one of the goats would plant their hooves on top of the pallet door and peer over the top to check on my wellbeing. Of course that’s what was happening, I mean they weren’t just looking for another bundle of hay or bucket of food – no not at all.

Where is your favourite study space?
David from survingtheou.com talks about his favourite places to study

Your favourite Study Space
My change in scenery was of course enforced but I am sure that whenever you started with The Open University one of the first things you do is designate a spot to do the bulk of your work. During the summer perhaps you gently recline under the shade of a tree in a field or out in the back garden? Yeayah, sure. Or, say, more like on the kitchen table at 10pm with the unwashed dinner plates pushed against the wall. Whether it's kitchen tables, the library, bedroom, coffee shop, back of the car… I would argue that we NEED a comfortable, familiar study space to focus and get the best out of ourselves.

Moving back into civilisation
The time eventually arrived when my housing renovations were complete and I had to move back into the house. I suppose I wasn’t compelled or cajoled into returning across the yard to my de facto study room/play room, packed full of the kids’ toys, but my wife was starting to get a little concerned about the amount of time I was spent hunched outside in my new domain. The dog was also a little miffed as I was using the roof of his sleeping quarters as my desk. Elma, Joyce and Joan were probably not too bothered. A TMA passed for me and a bundle of straw for them. Everybody’s happy.

David Wells
The Golden Years...

I graduated with an OU degree in Humanities with Philosophy in 2001 – having previously flunked out of university in the 1970s. That was a mistake on my part, but they were turbulent times and other things seemed more compelling. But later on the lack of a proper degree became more and more problematic, and The Open University proved perfect for me.

I particularly liked the module system, which meant that you didn’t ever feel trapped, and home study complemented by the tutorials was great for me.

I’d always worked as a freelance writer, with an interest in politics and literature and in the first half of the 1980s I edited two editions of the speeches and sermons of Desmond Tutu – I was so proud to feel that I was contributing something to the struggle against apartheid. I
also sometimes contributed to the Guardian and Independent, but behind all this was an abiding interest in the poet Shelley, his times and his contemporaries Keats, Byron and Leigh Hunt.

I had particularly enjoyed the module on 5th century Athens that had been part of my OU studies, and this was useful in getting a better understanding of Shelley’s mindset which was deeply influenced by his immersion in classical literature. In fact, most of what I knew of the classics came from Shelley, and this proved an interesting experience in terms of my studies.

There had of course been major archaeological developments since Shelley’s day, so there is now much more background knowledge around - some of which contradicts some of his ideas. But sometimes he was very modern: one of the taped lectures maintained that no one before the mid-20th century objected to slavery or the low status of women in ancient Greece. Actually, Shelley did, seeing both as major limitations.

So through the OU I got a sense of the strengths and weaknesses in Shelley’s thinking, as well as (through a module on the Enlightenment) getting some perspective on the philosophical background that informed his outlook.

I’m now publishing a DVD called ‘Shelley’s Golden Years in Italy’ which I’m hoping will be a good resource for secondary schools and further education colleges – the script for this was written before my time at the OU but the online notes have benefited from the broadening of perspective that the OU gave me. It’s in an innovative format with song settings of Shelley lyrics and narration, voiced by Shelley admirer Benjamin Zephaniah who kindly consented to participate. I’m hoping that before long every secondary school in the English-speaking world will have a copy!

Incidentally, after graduating I remembered a joke told on the radio after Harold Wilson’s death in 1995. ‘What did you think of Harold Wilson?’ a youngish man was asked.

‘Well of course he totally failed to understand the ramifications of post-industrialisation together with the new movement of global capital and shifts in labour practices, not to mention the new post-colonial realities of his era’, came the reply (or something along those lines). “That’s interesting. How did you arrive at that conclusion?” “Oh, er, I studied politics at The Open University!”

Good things still happen in this world of ours, and I will always count The Open University as one of them.

John Webster

Lessons Learnt

One of the reasons that I had embarked on an OU course was because I was curious to find out, and experience for myself from the perspective of a learner, the effectiveness of online learning. The OU’s reputation as the leading university in open and distance education is well known even as far as South East Asia. Since I am currently working and teaching in Open University Malaysia, I wanted to enhance, improve and acquire some digital skills that could make me a better teacher, facilitator and ultimately, become a reflective practitioner.

What I learnt from 3 years of hard work, after achieving a Masters of Arts (MA) in Online and Distance Education (ODE) this year is that the emphasis isn’t on ME (the teacher) but rather on learning and the LEARNER (the student). This has been a humbling experience because the focus on attention is not on me. The other lesson that I learnt is that knowledge resides not only in books, journals and printed materials but is embedded in individuals through discussion, chats and debates. Therefore, my rather naïve assumption that I need to only read and understand journal articles and books had to be thrown out of the window. The studies opened my eyes to a myriad of other credible sources such as blogs, Wikis, and forum postings, to name a few. Participation in forums then became crucial. Thus, the value of posting in forums became clear and a cultural reticence on my part of being just a ‘lurker’ had to be overcome.

So, after this, what next? I would say, with confidence, whatever comes, BRING IT ON!

Zorah Abu Kassim
Almost five years ago, having retired after working for forty years in Financial Services, I enrolled for A100, the entry level course for an Open University degree in Humanities. Why? Because I wanted to learn to write. I'd graduated in Pure Maths back in the 1970s and over the three years at university we used more Greek letters than English ones certainly it felt like that. I can't recall having to write a whole sentence in those days. Before then I hadn’t learned to write in a way that made sense to anyone reading what I wrote. This was always a bit strange as, from a young age, I read more avidly and more widely than anyone I knew. From eight to eighteen I was forever visiting the public libraries in Hull. My reading, which started with Jennings and Darbishire, progressed through Nevil Shute, Hammond Innes and on to Dickens and Hardy.

As, in my thirties and forties, I started to manage a younger generation of mathematicians, I found they too struggled to write in a way that made sense to the reader who by then was, in the first instance, me. They were all extremely bright and could understand and solve complex problems they just couldn’t explain their work effectively to others. The main problem was they all (I too) wrote naturally from their own perspective and without regard to their intended readership. By the time they wrote their reports they were so familiar with the background to the problem, often the most important piece of information, that it was not at the front of their minds and so they didn’t include it in their reports. Instead they concentrated on the difficulties they had faced in carrying out the work: things like data being wrongly coded or programming glitches which needed to be rectified, those sorts of things that were important in their own way, but not of material interest, say, to the Finance Director. Editing reports my staff had written certainly helped me to become a better writer even if, sometimes, pedantry got the better of pragmatism.

Now I’m halfway through my final OU course, having studied a mixture of English and History modules, and it’s going OK. I still write the TMAs based on what’s at the front of my mind (from the other day: ‘How the actor delivers this line will indicate whether he takes it at face value or ironically the line does not appear in the DVD version of the play’) but then I switch into my managerial role and start editing. Other than TMA 01 of A100, I don’t think I’ve submitted a TMA with a version number less than 3.0 and mostly it has worked. I believe I am a better writer now thanks to the OU and to learning to edit. Of course, all this re-writing takes time and, like everyone else studying at The Open University, I have a life outside of TMAs. That’s why there are unread novels, travel literature and memoirs which have nothing to do with the OU which are piling up literally for some, metaphorically in the case of those downloaded impulsively to my tablet (Read a book review in the paper, two seconds later the book’s there ready to read - when you have the time.) Hence I’m ‘Yearning to Read’ as I did before I retired, though that means not quite the close reading that TMAs require. I still work part-time and have more than my share of poorly written reports to read, but nowadays, in this part of my life, pragmatism gets the better of pedantry.

I have also set up an educational foundation for disadvantaged students from Hull, where there is so much talent which does not come to the fore for one reason or another. We have just embarked on the process of awarding the 2016 bursaries and at the beginning of January I spoke to about ninety students. They included the disabled, minorities, carers, those in care and young parents - all talented teenagers whose lives have been difficult and who need a helping hand onto the ladder. We are also funding classes for vulnerable young girls to help improve their self-esteem. But the thing I really want the foundation to do, and this ties in with my OU study, is to sponsor a literary award for children aged between eight and sixteen who are studying at a school in Hull. Oh, and learning how to set up a charity is another skill I’ve acquired in retirement after I thought I was through with the world of bureaucracy.

John Cliff
john@jvennfoundation.org
The National Student Survey

HaveYourSay

Every year thousands of students across the UK are asked to complete the National Student Survey (NSS). Students nearing the completion of their study are invited to give their opinion on their University, from the teaching of their course to personal development opportunities, as well as satisfaction with their Students Association. (That’s Us!)

Once the survey has closed, the results of each University are published on the Unistats website. This is not only helpful information for prospective students making their decision on where to study – the NSS helps students already at University. The information gathered by the survey is used by Universities to help shape the future of courses and support services.

Who can take the survey?

Around 30,000 Open University students will be contacted to take part in the NSS. Eligible students have been sent an email with a link to the survey, so if you received this email we strongly encourage you to complete it.

The NSS is independently run by a company called Ipsos MORI on behalf of the UK Higher Education funding bodies, so it’s one of the best opportunities for students to give their open feedback and honest assessment of their experiences at University.

How long does it take?

The NSS is an important survey and consists of around 23 questions, which cover teaching, academic support, learning resources, careers, course delivery and workload.

So grab yourself a cuppa as it will take about 15 minutes to complete. As an additional incentive for completing the survey, The Open University will be giving away 20 Amazon vouchers of £25 in value to randomly selected students!

The NSS will close on the 30th April 2016.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘I think I’m just addicted to study’

Central Executive Committee

VP Communications, Lorraine, gives an insight into a CEC weekend

The CEC weekend started well on the Friday night with the OU University Challenge team warming up before their first interview in London. They were up against CEC members (including roped-in Vice Chancellor, Peter Horrocks) for 30 minutes, then OU staff for another 30 minutes. I’m pleased to say that the CEC members did better than the staff and even more pleased to say that the University Challenge team beat both the other teams.

Saturday morning started with a presentation from Pat Atkins, Acting Director, Student Support, about the student journey and how best to support students on that journey. It was followed by a mini workshop where we discussed and added our thoughts on when and how best to help and advise students.

Dates for Regional and National face to face consultative meetings have been set for Spring. Keep an eye out on the website for when yours takes place. Extra time has been added this year to make sure everyone attending can participate.

A new mix of faculty and regional representatives were on the CEC this time and it will continue, as we feel it’s a more effective way to be fully representative of students and gain views in different ways.

The people who attended the Student Engagement project day all wrote about it in their reports (here) and how other universities engage their students. The OU has started to work on how it can adapt some of these ideas with 3 workstreams. The OU asked for 2 Association students and staff on each one, however we negotiated and now have 5.

Progress has been made on being able to replace the unfit-for-purpose VLE forums (the platform that all students have to use for their studies). CEC members will be trying it out to see how suitable it is.

One of the major discussions was on how 1 member 1 vote will be carried out at Conference to elect officer candidates and a presentation was given by the company that will be conducting the elections for us. Preferential voting (S.T.V.) will be used and a lot of questions were asked about how it will work. Information about Conference and voting is now on our website.

This is my personal summary of the meeting. If you want to have further information or know what other members thought about it, send me an email and I’ll either answer or pass on your query.

The next CEC meeting will be 18 – 20 March.

Lorraine Adams

Vice President Communications
You Said
We Did

The National Student Survey feedback is very important to the Students Association. Here are just a few things we’ve done with it...

“Your election process is confusing”
We changed the voting rules and simplified the process! Our Central Executive Committee (CEC) proposed an initiative to remove our electoral register and allow all students to vote in our elections - one member, one vote (see page 4 for more). The motion passed at Conference 2014 takes effect for the first time this year when you’ll be voting on the students standing for election to the next CEC.

“There’s nowhere to turn for help”
We became affiliated to Nightline - providing you with access, for the very first time, to a confidential listening and information service. We also relaunched our dedicated Peer Supporters forum, providing you with a space to connect directly with other students (our volunteer Peer Support team,) who are there to give a wise word, a helping hand, or just some friendly chat if you’re feeling alone or negative about your studies.

“It’s lonely being an OU student”
We throw a Freshers week! By creating a special Freshers website with links to our societies and volunteering opportunities, as well as organising a week of live chats on Facebook, we’re trying to help you connect with likeminded students.

“I didn’t know you existed!”
We had a makeover and introduced a new identity to set us apart from the crowd! We continued to invest time in our online communities, as well as explore exciting new spaces like Radio and Podcasting.
We also supported lots of events across the UK, handing out our goodies and providing info on the Association.
Roles up for grabs!

Not sure which role in your Students Association would suit you best? Look no further...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It could be you...</th>
<th>President</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you passionate about the student voice? Do you want to strengthen your organisational skills and learn to be able to confidently communicate and negotiate with others? As the elected head of the OU Students Association, you will lead discussions with the University on issues around Higher Education, and work towards the effective functioning of the Central Executive Committee. Eager to represent OU students at the University's top-level governance structure? Then maybe you could be our next OU Students Association President!</td>
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| Deputy President | Are you a confident communicator with good organisational skills? Want to give your best to developing the OU Students Association and coordinate our participation in University activities? Keen to lead the Association in special projects such as the University student consultations, and ensuring student representatives are provided with the best possible training? Then perhaps you could be our next Deputy President! |

| Vice President Administration | Are you an experienced hand at managing budgets with a passion for getting the details right? Would like to further your understanding of the OU Students Association and how it operates? Can you lead on setting the annual budget of the Association and allocate grants for Association activities for both central and local activities? Ready to be our go-to Officer when it comes to the Association’s Constitution? Then perhaps you could be the next Vice President Administration! |

| Vice President Communications | Are you creative, with good communication skills and attention to detail? Are you keen to explore the world of social media, radio, blogs and newsletters as you make sure that the OU Student Association communicates effectively with its students and with OU staff? Can you lead on the Association’s branding and communication strategy, and enhance its online presence? Then perhaps you could be the next Vice President Communications! |

| Vice President Education | Are you a confident communicator, with a passion for ensuring that students have a voice about their learning experience? Would like to develop a keen understanding of the Higher Education climate and represent student concerns and aspirations to the University? Ready to take on a varied role that includes active collaboration with the Association’s student representatives on the University’s academic committees? Then perhaps you could be the next Vice President Education! |
Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Stop underestimating your capabilities!’

Vice President Representation and Research

Are you passionate about research and understanding what students are thinking? Do you want to lead on ensuring that the OU Students Association is engaging with the student body? Would you like to explore the factors that promote or inhibit OU students’ learning experience and work with Association representatives to ensure better action on student feedback? Then perhaps you could be the next Vice President Representation and Research!

Vice President Community

Do you have good communication skills, with a passion for getting students involved in their Student Association? Would you like to refine your organisational skill as you facilitate events and activities to meet Association-wide and local needs? Keen to develop our Freshers events, enabling the work of affiliated Societies and representing the Association at day schools and award ceremonies? Then perhaps you could be the next Vice President Community!

Vice President Equal Opportunities

Do you have a passion for Equality and Diversity, and for supporting the interests of your fellow students? Would you like to advance your communication and organisational skills within the area of widening participation? Are you keen to foster diversity and inclusion within the Association, representing the interests of ethnic minority students and students with disabilities? Then perhaps you could be the next Vice President Equal Opportunities!

Vice President Student Support

Are you a good communicator with a passion for helping and supporting your fellow students? Would you like to develop your organisational skills and understanding of Higher Education in the UK? Are you determined to help students overcome problems that affect their ability to study and act as a Trustee for the OU Students Association Educational Trust (OUSET)? Keen to work with our outstanding Peer Supporter and coordinate the training of our dedicated student volunteers? Then perhaps you could be the next Vice President Student Support!

Faculty Association Representative

Are you interested in representing the views of students in your Faculty? Are you friendly and approachable and like networking with students in your faculty both face to face and online? Then perhaps you could be one of the new team of Faculty Association Representatives.

Area Association Representative

Are you interested in representing the views of students in your area? Are you friendly and approachable? Do you enjoy networking with students in your local area both face to face and online? Then perhaps you could be one of the new team of Area Association Representatives.

Council Member

Do you want to be one of the student members of the OU Council? Do you want to be involved in the strategic planning and monitoring effectiveness of the OU? Then perhaps you could be the next OU Student Council Member.

Student Trustee

Do you want to be part of the team of students who take all the full legal and financial responsibilities for the Association? Then perhaps you could be one of our new Student Trustees.
University Mental Health Day took place on Thursday 3rd March 2016. There were a number of online activities that took place throughout the day. Here, OU Students Association Representative, Nicci Simpson discusses the ways she tries to keep her mind healthy.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Just as we are encouraged to eat five pieces of fruit and veg a day to help keep our bodies healthy, an organisation called Mindapples encourages us to think about the five things we can do regularly to look after our mind.

As someone with a chronic illness (Fibromyalgia) I am all too aware of the links between physical and mental wellbeing. Coping with the challenges of a physical illness can lead to negative thinking, feelings of helplessness and low self esteem. It is all too tempting when you are in pain to close the door and stay away from challenging situations.

Here are some of my ‘mindapples’ - the things I try to do regularly to keep my mind healthy.

Get Active
Being active is about more than exercise (although that can be good for your mind too). Getting active can be about meeting people with similar interests, getting active in your community and helping to address a particular need.

Connect with others
One of the challenges for me, when my health was deteriorating was staying connected with others. OU tutorials were a lifeline, I rarely missed the opportunity to attend and was lucky that my tutorials were usually no more than a mile from my front door.

Now in my role as an OU Students Association representative I organise student socials in my region and meet students from around the country at lots of Association events, from presenting the OU student Radio show to showing students around our campus in Milton Keynes.

Be adventurous
Last year I had a big adventure, taking part in a tall ships race sailing from Northern Ireland to Norway. I quickly realised when I got home that I hadn’t suddenly become an adventurous person, but would have to keep challenging myself every day to do new (and slightly scary) things. Adventures don’t have to be big, they can be as simple as trying a food you haven’t had before, wearing a different shade of lipstick or taking a new route to work. Doing something different gives us a new perspective on life and something to talk about when we are with other people.

Get Outdoors
Like being adventurous there are lots of ways that you can get outdoors. Going for a walk at the beach, doing some gentle gardening or sitting quietly observing the world around you can all help keep your mind healthy. Whether it is getting away from electronic devices, the physical movement or just getting into the elements, being outdoors helps to banish negative thoughts and improve your mood.

Be Patient
Patience they say is a virtue, all too often I find I am least patient with myself. I need to remind myself every day that I am not super human, change happens slowly and to be patient with myself if things don’t always go the way I want them to.

Nicci Simpson
Student Association Rep for Northern Ireland

For more on Mental Health and Wellbeing...
Read part one of Vice President Student Support’s blog trilogy on our website

This is my life, this is me

A poem by Jennifer Roseway

You don’t know how hard it is, just being M.E. It’s not a laughing matter seeing what I see, And feeling what I feel, People who can run, people who can walk, People who don’t have problems when they talk, Watching life slipping by, stuck in this rut with blurry eyes, Brain doesn’t work properly anymore, Always forgetting things, feeling dizzy till eventually I fall to the floor, Can’t hear what you say, unless you are looking at me face to face, Then there’s the shakes that start on their own, so uncontrollable that I don’t want to leave home, Ears hurt and buzz with loud noise, sometimes I can’t even stand hearing my own voice, Different smells make me feel ill, To the point I just can’t eat anything at all, Natural daylight and synthetic lights hurt my eyes, I need to wear dark glasses whenever I am outside, It looks like I am wearing a disguise, My arms can barely lift up a mug of tea, It feels as though they are being pulled from their sockets you see, I don’t like to sit and I don’t like to stand, My hip hurts so much I can’t get my socks on without needing a hand, Meeting people is a big milestone I can’t shake their hand, it hurts that much it makes me moan, Some days I can’t even drive my car, Even going to the bathroom is going too far, Go to bed exhausted and wake up feeling the same, no amount of sleep helps in anyway, There are many more symptoms lying in wait, to creep up on ME This is my life, this is M.E, Maybe now you will start to understand how hard it is just being ME.
Changes to Disabled Students Allowance for Students in England

A statement for OU students regarding the change for Academic year 2016/17

Please note that students in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are not affected by these changes, although a consultation on the Welsh DSA scheme is expected to take place in 2016.

On 2nd December the Government response to the Consultation on Targeting Funding for Disabled Students in Higher Education from 2016/17 onwards (in England), to which the OU contributed a detailed response, was issued by Jo Johnson (Minister of State for Universities and Science).

Students can be assured that they will continue to receive the support required to complete their studies. In the future DSA will continue to fund many aspects of this support but Higher Education providers including The Open University will be required to fund some additional areas of support previously covered by DSA.

Please note that existing DSA students and DSA students for 2015/16 will remain on the current system of support for 2016/17.

As the university with the largest number of disabled students in Europe, the OU is committed to supporting students to achieve their full potential. If you have a disability or long-term condition which affects your ability to study we would encourage you to apply for DSA, which is a non-means tested grant and will not affect other benefits you may receive.

If you need information or support to do so please contact the DSA Office/DSA Disability Advisor on 01908 654036.

Please contact your Student Support Team if you are experiencing any other issues in relation to your disability.
In 1982, the OU Students Association established the Open University Students Educational Trust, more commonly referred to as OUSET, to help those students who were in financial need but did not qualify for assistance from elsewhere. It is a registered charity, Charity Commission Registration Number 285189. The funds OUSET generates are raised directly by students and used to benefit students in financial hardship.

The fund can help with grants towards module fees, travel and child/dependent care costs associated with placements/tutorials/residential schools, set books and the purchase, repair or maintenance of essential IT equipment. Any student studying with The Open University is eligible to apply to the Trust, including students studying outside the UK and on postgraduate courses. However, the Trust bases their decision on a set of criteria.

To find out whether you are eligible to apply and for further information on the Trust and OUSET please visit our website.

You can contact the OUSET team via email using OUSET@open.ac.uk or alternatively you can call 01908 652026.

"It really made all the difference, I couldn’t have begun studying and improving my quality of life without OUSET’s help. Now I am looking forward and planning a career in environmental science, something made possible by OUSET.

OUSET's help also gave me moral support in a time when few people believed that what I was trying to achieve had any value and was reasonable, as it in a way legitimised my study effort and boosted my self-confidence.

Truly, my qualification achievement was made possible through an OUSET grant and that has changed my life for better. Long live OUSET!!!

It helped to mitigate some aspects of a long period of mental illness that had an impact on my studies at the time."
Fun and games...
All study and no play is no fun!

ACROSS
4. Name of an otter’s home
5. Time period, just after sunset
6. Noisy or mischievous spirit
7. Gallons (or beer) in a firkin
10. Hindu elephant headed God
13. Gain greater understanding or knowledge
14. Charlie Chaplain’s nationality
15. Surname of Apple co-founder
16. American state that is closest to Russia
17. The name of molten rock before eruption
19. Planet, also known as the ‘Morning Star’

DOWN
1. Both male and female.
2. Fear of moths
3. The ‘C’ in the computer acronym CMOS
8. US President who coined the term ‘The White House’.
11. The study of earthquakes.
12. A number which is not a fraction.
14. Area of study regarding how the brain affects behaviour.
18. Staple ingredient in cider

Crossword designed by Dave Milliken

See page 23 for crossword answers!
Best overheard student comments

OU students say the funniest things...

We ❤️ Instagram!

Here’s just a few of our favourite images taken from our Instagram account. Remember to share your pics with us by using #OUstudents in the caption!
Hi everyone and welcome to the Societies’ section of OUsstudents Magazine.

As at any university, societies can be an important part of life for OU students! There are societies focused around academic areas (such as OUPS, the Psychology Society), societies offering an outlet for your creative side (such as Write Club) and societies about your interests (such as Central Region Arts Club or Mountaineering Society). There’s a full list of affiliated societies on the OU Students Association website here.

So why join a society? Societies offer all sorts of different things - from support for your academic work (revision events, specimen answers), to newsletters, to day visits and longer trips away. Most of all, they put you in touch with other students who share some of your interests.

Societies can help make your OU journey easier and more enjoyable.

If you’d like to join a society, just use the details on the link to get in touch! All the societies love to have new members. You can often go along to an event without joining, just to get a “feel” for it, if you like. Later on, you might want to help out in some way, or join the committee; that’s another way to make new friends and can even enhance your CV.

Cath Brown
Societies Committee Chair

Join a society!
Joining or starting a society is a great way to meet other OU students, have fun and enrich your OU study. We have so many diverse societies that you’ll want to join a few...

http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/societies

The views and opinions of the authors who have submitted articles to OUsstudents Magazine belong to them alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the OU Students Association or all of its members.
As a student ambassador for Fashion revolution this means I will be arranging an event on Fashion Revolution Day 2016 on 24th April. I want to help educate and raise awareness to you about the social, political, economic and environmental effects of fast fashion.

I grew up being oblivious to where my clothes had come from. This changed from the moment my purchases meant that someone had lost their most loved ones. In 2013 the Rana Plaza disaster lead to the death of over 1000 people in a factory producing clothes where prominent high street labels were found. I knew that I had contributed to these deaths and casualties because those were a few of many unethical choices I used to make. I would buy a top and forget about it because it was meaningless to me. It was cheap so I bought it. I gave no consideration to the person who had made it or their family. This is the fast fashion effect. It forces us to become unaware of our own actions.

Show your label on your social media and ask the brand #whomademyclothes? Help me raise awareness and show your friends, family and colleagues the effect of the clothes they bought have had on 24-year-old Raihan from Bangladesh who can no longer be the provider of his family - www.afterranaplaza.com

Read more about Rana Plaza, Fashrev and learn about ‘The True Cost’ of fashion here.

Please join this Facebook group if you are interested in being involved. Want to learn more or can help me plan an event for the 24th of April? www.facebook.com/groups/openunifashrev/

The event on the 24th of April will be a Swapshop at the Hornbeam Café from 1PM. More event details and RSVP here.

Register for all Fashion revolution resources here.

You alone can make a huge difference. Join me and let me help you take the first step.

Khadija Syeda

The Fashion Revolution

The Open University Society of Change Ringers has continued its successes over recent months and plans are set for this to continue into 2016.

In September last, we held a Quarter Peal day in Leicestershire. 4 successes were achieved.

And last November, we held our annual AGM in Gloucestershire (which included general ringing in surrounding towers).

But we need to look to the future. So at our AGM, we outlined our plans for 2016:

February - a TRAM TRIP – visiting and ringing in 7 towers in Nottingham

April - a special day in Kettering to ring ‘unusual methods’

June - a visit to ring in towers in Northern Ireland

September - a day ringing “Quarter Peals” in Essex

November - our AGM in Coventry

All of the above are outlined in our Web Site: www.opuscr.org.uk

OU Psychological Society

What do you know about OUPS?

The Open University Psychological Society is a volunteer-run charity that exists to encourage and support students through their OU psychology degree and beyond, by providing a range of day and weekend events which will enhance their learning, as well as giving them the opportunity to meet and socialise with other OU psychology students and tutors. OUPS is open to all psychology students and aims to be inclusive by offering cheaper regional day events as well as some funded places at revision weekends.

Events include:

• Revision Weekends

• Mid-course overview days and weekends

• Preview weekends prior to the courses starting

• Psychology conferences (2016: Evolutionary Psychology)

• Research Methods and Statistics Workshops

• Skills workshops

• Social events

To find out more about our events please go to our website or email us.

www.oups.org.uk

info@oups.org.uk

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Keep your mind busy.’
Hello from FUSION!

Hello and Happy New Year to everyone from Fusion – the OU Student Physics and Astronomy Society.

It has been an exciting year for Fusion with an active and growing list of members. We are delighted to welcome Professor Andrew Norton on board as our President which will help us build even stronger links with the Department of Physical Sciences and we would like to thank Professor Monica Grady and DPS for hosting the Fusion Physics Weekend at Milton Keynes in 2015.

We would also very much like to welcome Dr Sally Jordan to her role as Head of Department and we were delighted we had the opportunity to meet with her last year to discuss how we could work better together.

Fusion is keen to build on these links with the Department staff and postgraduate students at Milton Keynes for the benefit of our members. To help focus our efforts, we have refreshed our goals which are to: help OU students of physics and astronomy succeed in completing their chosen courses; foster a sense of community among OU students through visits, events, and social gatherings; help OU students achieve their broader career aspirations, and of course, to link in effectively with the Department to exchange information and views on all areas from developments in the curriculum, to keeping up to speed with the latest research and PhD opportunities.

We are also linking in with the South East Physics Network (SEPnet), of which the OU is a member, and also with the careers service to help raise awareness of the many physics and non-physics related opportunities available for OU graduates.

We had a great visit (jointly with our chemist friends in Alchemy) to the Diamond Light Source, RAL, Oxfordshire in January and on the weekend of 5-6 March Fusion ran a highly successful physics weekend at Manchester University. It was great to see so many people, welcome new members, and visit the Jodrell Bank telescope. A fuller report of the weekend will be included in the next magazine.

We are very keen to hear from you to get your thoughts and ideas about what more we could be doing either to help you in your studies or more socially.

We look forward to meeting you either in person or on Facebook!

Best wishes & Cheers,

Dywn, Digby, John, Diane, Cath, Greg, Iain, Dan, Gerard (aka the Fusion Committee!)

Website: https://oufusion.org.uk/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/oufusion/

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OU Pro-Life Society

The Open University Pro-life Society is a new and growing group and we welcome you to join us.

We aim to do the following:

Provide friendly support, advice and connections to mothers and fathers concerned about balancing both parenthood and the commitments of studying towards a qualification.

Help arrange society member attendance at pro-life events and conferences around the country (and have great fun while doing it!).

Offer a warm and inviting environment for pro-life students to chat, meet-up (online or in person), exchange stories and offer a helping hand to each other.

Raise awareness of important issues and concerns.

We are excited to meet new students and are welcoming to anyone from any background who identifies with the society aims.

We are all students ourselves and would love to banter about all things OU and have a brilliant time. Distance learning can be lonely, so why not join a vibrant group of like-minded people and make friends who will see you through your time with the OU and beyond?

Help us grow as a society and become part of a fun community.

Search for us on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/groups/1703841919839731/

Alternatively, shoot us an email at: ouprolifesociety@gmail.com
Welcome to your latest issue of OU Students. A particular welcome goes to the students who are just embarking on their study journey with the OU. You have a daunting task in front of you but it’s also very rewarding. From my experience, the good outweighs the bad and it is worth all the blood, sweat and tears that will be experienced over the next few years!

I hope that those of you reading this for the first time will take inspiration from some of the stories but also consider whether you want to be more involved, in the long term. There are many ways of being involved, some that involve regularly being in Milton Keynes and some that mean you never have to leave the comfort of your sofa! Find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We are always looking for student input.

2016 is a big year for us, as it is Conference year. Every two years we bring together students both online and to campus so it’s a great opportunity to see the university you study with. We hope it will be an opportunity to meet with some of the staff who are responsible for your study experience but also a chance to meet with the Student Association representatives who attend meetings on your behalf and represent your view to the University (myself included!). This will also be your chance to vote for the senior representatives who will take over those representative duties in August. There will also be an opportunity to discuss and influence the way your Student Association is run.

Of course the most important thing that coming to Conference does for you is bring you into contact with fellow OU students. Students who, like you, squeeze their study around families, jobs, caring responsibilities and ill health who meet the same challenges you do. You get to share views, argue with them and hopefully make friends and keep in contact when you go back home! All you need to do is make sure you keep an eye out for the publicity and put the dates in your diary!

See y’all in June!!

Ruth Tudor
President of the OU Students Association

OU student life can be tough and if it all gets a bit too much, don’t forget Nightline is there for all OU students wherever they are. Student volunteers are on the hotlines from 6pm each evening waiting to take calls. No topic is off bounds and they’ll listen as long as you need.

It could really help to talk your problems through, whatever they’re about and however difficult they feel right now.

Hundreds of OU students have already made that call so you’ll be in good company.

Call: 020 7631 0101
Instant message (Skype): chat.nightline
Skype Phone: londonnightline
Text: 07717 989 900

Want to come to Conference 2016?
Pop your name and email address down on our mailing list, and we’ll be sure to send you early information on Conference 2016! (This mailing list will only send you messages about the event.)

Sign up here!

Sign-up to our mailing list
To receive information about the Students Association, be the first to hear about up and coming events and to get your opinions heard, just click here:


Want to write for OUstudents Magazine?
If you would like to share your story, we’d love to hear from you!
Get in touch by emailing:
ousa-comms@open.ac.uk

Crossword answers