

The PodMag March 2015

Karen Foley:

Welcome to the PodMag, our monthly news audio magazine from the OU's Faculty of Social Sciences. I'm Karen Foley. And in this March episode I'll be interviewing Meg John Barker and Rachel MacLeod about the Activate Workshops. Georgina Blakeley about DD102 and Andreas Vossler about some research he's involved with about Internet infidelity.

Well it's March and on the 20th it's the first day of spring. The clocks go forward on the 29th and I know that always lifts my mood.

But there are lots of exciting things to look forward to this month so let me fill you in with the news highlights.

In the last addition we interviewed Richard Heffernan who was involved with Inside the Commons. And if you haven't already had a chance to watch it the four part series is still available on BBC iPlayer. Plus there are lots of behind the scenes videos and interviews available on OpenLearn which hosts a load of learning material from the Open University that anyone can access for free.

On 18th March Jonquil Lowe will be providing another commentary on the latest Budget Statement and on the 5th March it's World Book Day. And the latest in a long line of excellent books from the faculty comes from Engin Isin who has co-authored a book with Evelyn Ruppert called Being Digital Citizens. It develops a critical perspective on the challenges and possibilities presented by cyberspace and explores where and how political subjects perform new rights and duties that govern themselves and others online. It sounds very relevant in this day and age especially as we consider how we engage in a distance learning environment.

And if you've never tried a MOOC, a Massive Open Online Course, then why not enrol on the Forensic Psychology MOOC about witness identification which starts again on 16th March.

Graham Pike from Psychology is the educator for this and I've heard it's really good fun. In fact according to MOOC Tracker it's one of the top ten MOOCs starting in March 2015. And that's no mean feat when you see how many it's competing with.

But if that's not your thing then there's another MOOC that the faculty are involved with called Inequality and Personal Finance: the Baby Boom Legacy. Now this starts on

23rd March and it looks at the growing concerns surrounding rising inequalities in income and wealth in developed countries. Did the baby boomers generation have it all in terms of wealth and pension deals and affordable houses while younger generations struggled to find good deals for accommodation and retirement income? Well this MOOC looks at some of these issues and considers the implications of the growing economic inequalities. What can be done about them by individuals, communities and governments?

For more information about these and many, many other MOOCs visit FutureLearn.com.

Now on Fridays each week on the Faculty of Social Sciences Facebook page we have a Friday Thinker and in March we have an excellent line up. Nick Bingham from Geography is on the 6th, Eddie Wastnidge from POLIS is on the 13th, Louise Westmarland from Social Policy on the 20th and Jonquil Lowe from Economics on the 27th. And don't forget to check out the Brainwave App which has been developed by the Psychology Department. You can find out whether you're a morning or evening person and also add to their research.

There is also a new App for the OU Prospectus. So if you're considering future courses then it's a handy way to see what's on offer.

And in terms of news about Student Connections, well we're currently planning the date for the next online conference which will be some time in September. We'll keep you posted on that. But in the meantime we're running monthly Activate sessions which are online workshops. If there's anything you'd like us to focus on for a session or an academic you'd like to meet let us know by emailing me at PodMag@open.ac.uk

The next Activate session is on 17th March from 1:00 to 2.30 in the afternoon. And this will be about blogging. Our guest is Meg John Barker from our Psychology Department. Meg is a prolific blogger and writer. And I spoke to her on the phone about why blogging is generating so much interest. And here's what she had to say.

Meg John Barker:

So I think in general that blogging is generating a lot of interest because it's putting the media in people's hands and allowing for them to create their own media rather than relying on mass media so much. So it means that different opinions can get out there.

And I think for academics in particular it's really about public engagement. It gives us a chance to get our research and our theories out to much wider audiences than we've ever been able to before.

Karen Foley:

So can you tell us why are you blogging? I mean what's in it for you?

Meg John Barker:

Well for me I kind of regard myself as a public engagement academic. So the most important thing about the work that I do is really getting it out to a big audience. Because I'm a therapist and an activist as well as an academic. It kind of weaves all of that together.

So why I'm doing it is it just reaches so many people that way and engages people in the kind of stuff we're doing at the Open University much more than they would otherwise be.

Karen Foley:

And of course with blogs you get comments from a lot of people. Is that something that's stimulating your thinking right now?

Meg John Barker:

Absolutely. It's kind of like a feedback loop I suppose. I don't just use the blog to kind of put out information about my research or my ideas but rather the comments that I get, then kind of feedback in to the work that I'm doing. So they can help you figure out what are the important things to be doing research about. Or what people want to know more about in relation to the things I'm writing on.

Karen Foley:

And we're starting to see the Open University using blogging as an assessment tool in some modules. Why is that important? Why is it useful for students to learn how to write a blog?

Meg John Barker:

A couple of the Psychology modules that I'm involved with producing at the moment are definitely using blogging in the assessments. And I think it's just because it would be really helpful for students as well to be able to start getting their ideas out there more widely and getting feedback from other people in that way that we're doing.

So by having assessments that involve blogging about the research that they're interested in, for example. It gives them those skills in terms of getting academic work in to the sort of language that's accessible to anybody.

Karen Foley:

And we'll all be starting to hopefully generate some blogs and look at blogs in the Activate session. But lastly what is the top piece of advice you would give students about getting started?

Meg John Barker:

It really isn't that complicated. I mean we all have a blog at the Open University, students and staff, that's available to us to start having a go. And of course you can

always start by just making it available to a small number of people, friends and family for example.

Probably the best piece of advice is to read other people's blogs and see the kind of thing that's out there and use the ones that you enjoy most as a model.

Karen Foley:

Great. And we'll be bringing some of those blogs to the Activate session. So that's on 17th March from 1:00 to 2.30 in the afternoon. Hope to see you there.

Meg John Barker:

Thank you. I'm looking forward to it.

Karen Foley:

Meg John Barker, thank you very much for talking to me today.

Meg John Barker:

Bye, bye.

Karen Foley:

Activate sessions are lots of fun and they're a great way to meet others and learn something new. You can just log on using your laptop, tablet or even a mobile phone. And you can take part in as much or as little as you like.

I asked Rachel MacLeod, a regular Activate attendee why she likes attending.

Hiya Rachel. Now you've been a presenter at the first Student Connections Conference and you've attended many Activate sessions. Why do you keep coming along? I mean what do you get out of it?

Rachel MacLeod:

Well firstly it's a lovely space to engage with, with students and academics. It's a process of actively engaging as well. So instead of just reading your books and sitting at home and not doing much other than just constantly reading you can actually get physically involved with your studies which is absolutely fantastic.

Karen Foley:

And we often have new students coming along regularly and some of them might not know what to expect. So what could you tell them?

Rachel MacLeod:

Well it's all done online. So first the most important thing is you can still sit in your pyjamas while you do it which is brilliant. And it's a great place where everyone can

come together to meet and chat, and there's students and academics. And the best thing about it is everybody is friendly. We're all equal.

And not everybody wants to talk. Some people just want to sit there quietly listening and that's absolutely fine. So the best thing I would say is just to pop along and find out because you're missing out on a lot of you don't.

Karen Foley:

And you're studying D100 at the moment. And you're going to come to the Activate session where Meg John Barker is going to be talking about blogging. What are you looking forward to about that session?

Rachel MacLeod:

I'm really interested in gaining some experience with blogging. Because it's a new part of the OU process of assessments. So it's changing it up a bit, so. It would be nice to see somebody who's an academic and, you know, really tried and tested in their field to sort of see how they blog and what they blog about.

Maybe it might give me some tips to help me with my blogging and especially when it comes to my assessments.

Karen Foley:

Well thank you for talking to us Rachel MacLeod. And please join Rachel, Meg, other students and me on 17th March at 1.00pm for the Activate session.

Our next interview is with Georgina Blakeley who is the Module Chair for DD102, our level one module Introducing the Social Sciences.

Georgina has a weekly audio. Hi Georgina. Can you tell us about your Mini Guide and why your students are enjoying it?

Georgina Blakeley:

OK. Well the main purpose of the Mini Guide is to highlight to students what to focus on in the coming week. I don't know if it's enjoyable, you'd have to ask the students that. But I think it's useful because students can often feel overwhelmed by what's on the module website and the number of tasks they have to do. So this kind of Mini Guide helps them to really know what to focus on.

And I think the other thing is that it also helps them to maintain a point of contact with me as Module Chair. And I get to meet the students as part of the welcome forum. And I'm also looking to meet students at day schools but of course I can't meet everyone.

So this is a nice way of them sort of hearing my voice or at least reading what I'm saying and just trying to keep that kind of dialogue going with the students.

Karen Foley:

And your module has two presentations. So some students will have started in October and some in February. Can you give our listeners some advice about how they can connect with others?

Georgina Blakeley:

Yes, of course. I mean I think it's important to say that distance learning doesn't have to be lonely. There are various ways in which students can make connections with others. For example, there are a variety of face-to-face tutorials and day schools. And also online tutorials via OU Live for those that find it more difficult to get to the face-to-face events.

And of course there are other forums where students can connect with each other and their tutors. And of course we have things like the Social Science Facebook page where we have the Friday Thinkers. And you can then sort of post your messages to academics who are asking and posing questions on that date.

I guess I would say to students that it's really important to try and go to at least one face-to-face event. I know it's hard for some students but if you can make that effort it really then helps the other forms of communication. It makes it easier to speak to students on the forum when you've already met them face-to-face, I think. And that's the same for your tutor as well, I think.

Karen Foley:

And finally, I'm just going to ask a really quick question for students doing their TMAs right now. What is the one top piece of advice that you would give students who are struggling through their TMA?

Georgina Blakeley:

I think I've probably got three top tips of advice. But I'll give you one.

Karen Foley:

That's fine. No three is fine.

Georgina Blakeley:

Three golden rules then. The first one is read the student notes and read them again and again and again because they really are the clue to what the TMA's requiring.

Second rule. Then speak to your tutor if you're unsure about anything or post a query, a question, on the forum because you can be sure that other students are also struggling too.

And third golden rule. Avoid Facebook for TMAs. Facebook's great for socialising and speaking to other students but it can be a minefield in terms of assessment. So avoid Facebook for that.

Karen Foley:

Excellent Georgina. Thank you very much for that.

And if you're studying DD102 and haven't heard Georgina's Mini Guide then do check it out on the module website. And also remember that you can also contact your tutor and your student support team if you need any help.

And finally, I'm going to talk to Andreas Vossler from the Psychology Department.

Hi Andreas.

Andreas Vossler:

Hello.

Karen Foley:

Can you tell us a bit about the research that you and Naomi Moller are doing about Internet infidelity?

Andreas Vossler:

Yeah sure. Internet infidelity is an issue, a topic that becomes increasingly important. So whilst the Internet of course offers a lot of opportunities for couples to connect with each other it kind of also offers opportunities to engage in behaviour and activities that can be considered as infidelity. And only because it's done on the Internet, so it's virtual, that doesn't mean that it doesn't have the same devastating impact on the partners. They still feel the same kind of in terms of feeling betrayed and distressed about it.

So therefore it is an important topic but surprisingly there is not much research done in the UK to look in to how people do infidelity on the Internet and how people perceive and experience that form of infidelity.

So we've got kind of interested because of that into that area. And we've set up an online survey and study to explore exactly that. How people feel and how they perceive Internet infidelity and how they feel about it.

Karen Foley:

And you're looking for participants for this survey aren't you? So can you tell our listeners a bit about how they could participate and who you're looking for?

Andreas Vossler:

Yeah of course. I mean we are interested to get a full picture of the experiences and perceptions of Internet infidelity. So therefore we invite people who have any kind of experience with what they feel was Internet infidelity. Either as someone who has engaged in an affair or as someone whose partner has engaged in some activities or behaviour that can be considered as infidelity.

It's a 15 to 20 minute online survey. It can be done – or is done – anonymously and it will help the results and the findings through the study, will hopefully help to inform practitioners, couple therapists in their work with people, these couples who have an issue with Internet infidelity.

So yeah, it would be really great if as many people as possible could participate.

Karen Foley:

And you've already emailed all the students who are in the participant pool and if you haven't heard already about this, this is something that the Psychology Department run. Where you can add your name to the participant pool and then you can be informed about studies that you might want to take part in. And as Andreas says, it's a great way to sort of see how other people are doing research and, you know, get ideas for your own projects as well as you're going through.

Well thank you Andreas. We'll include the link for this on the transcript. So if you are interested in the doing the survey check out the transcript and we'll have that link there that will take you directly to Andreas' survey.

Andreas Vossler thank you for coming and talking to me today.

Andreas Vossler:

You're welcome.

Karen Foley:

Well that has been a fun packed programme. So check out your qualifications website for more information about Student Connections. And also do get in touch and let us know your news or again what Activate sessions you'd like to run.

Email me at PodMag@open.ac.uk You can also follow the faculty @OUSocSci and like the Social Sciences Faculty Facebook page to take part in the Friday Thinker each Friday. And if you like this you may also like the Social Sciences audio drama This Student Life.

Well that's all from me, Karen Foley. Bye for now and thanks for listening.

Internet Infidelity survey - https://openss.eu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9uDMYb8TD4UVGxD

