

PodMag 06 04 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 welcome to this April episode.

Well Spring is finally here at the OU. The gardens are looking truly fantastic. I think that many students often forget that we are also a brick university in that sense.

And you're always welcome on campus. The library is a really big hit and it's open to everyone. So if you are in travelling distance you're very welcome to pop in.

But before we move to the interviews let me update you with the news from the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I hear that Joe Smith and Kim Hammond have been out interviewing David Attenborough. Now that's the kind of guest that I'd like to get on the PodMag and I've invited Joe to come along next month and tell us all about how that went.

There's also lots of commentary going on around the General Election. Jonquil Lowe and Alan Shipman have been providing feedback on the Budget. So check that out on the Conversation and Open Democracy with published pieces by SocSci academics running up to the General Election.

The Centre for Citizenship Identities and Governance is an OU designated centre of research excellence within the Faculty of Social Sciences. And you can find the link to Open Democracy which is in the transcript.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/unearthing-europe-at-ccig>

And of course there are other issues in UK politics like the Scottish Independence Debate. Gerry Mooney has created a really helpful article about the main issues here and this is available to all on OpenLearn. So check that out if you'd like to catch up on some of the issues especially in terms of how this will impact on the General Election. And there are links to lots of other relevant articles too.

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/people-politics-law/the-2014-scottish-independence-referendum-introduction>

In the last episode I spoke about the various MOOCs you can join. And I'd like to plug the 'Inequality and Personal Finance, the Baby Boom Legacy' MOOC which has just started. Research by the Open University has revealed that austerity measures and

benefit cuts imposed in the last few years have had the greatest impact on women and low income households. Dr Jerome de Henau says that those hardest hit are women on low incomes and have suffered benefit cuts greater than their weekly food bills.

In this new MOOC Dr Henau examines these inequalities in everyday personal finance and asks, why the gap between the baby boomers and those of us beset by austerity measures in the noughties seems to be growing even larger.

Now you don't need a financial background to enjoy this course just an interest in how we might come out of the financial crisis with a fair deal for everyone. I asked Jonquil Lowe, another member of the course team, why she'd recommend this MOOC and here's what she had to say.

Jonquil Lowe:

As part of the team who produce the Inequalities MOOC we are delighted with the way it's going. We're in the first week, we've got learners from across the UK and further afield. So Spain, Venezuela, Romania and it's brilliant to see the debates that are going on. We've got all age groups and so there's a really lively discussion there.

Karen Foley:

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

In other news. On 24th March there was an online event that's open to everyone called The Digital Geographies Conference. Look out for their Psychology and Counselling careers forum running from 27th April to 8th May. I asked Siobhan Flint from the Careers Service what this was all about and here's what she said.

Siobhan Flinch:

It's really a great opportunity to put forward any careers related questions that you have. It's moderated by the Career Service staff who respond to your queries and signpost you to appropriate resources and give guidance on your questions. And it's also a really good chance to exchange information and ideas with other students who are studying the same qualification as you.

Karen Foley:

We also have a couple of new joint law qualifications, Q92 which is a BA Honours in Criminology in Law and also Q93 which is a BSc Honours in Psychology in Law. These qualifications are open now for registration. So check out the prospectus, perhaps with our new App if you're interested in finding out more.

And for the psychologists sat there or anyone interested in psychology there's a great new interactive online tool that's been developed by several people in the Psychology Department headed up by Rose Capdevila and include a link in the transcript. But broadly this covers narratives, people, contexts, perspectives and methods and what's

so useful about it is the way that it links people, places, methods, etc. so that you could build up a pattern of the various complex movements in psychology as well as just quickly refreshing up some of the top names. It's on OpenLearn and as we all know that's accessible for everyone, so do have a look.

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/psychology/investigating-psychology>

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 but more importantly we started our Activate sessions again and these are online workshops where we have a chat with guest academics.

Last month we had one with Meg Barker which was fantastic and that was about blogging. The next Activate session is on 13th April in the evening. And we have Jonquil Lowe and Non Scantlebury at that one. So do come along. It's all online and the link to the room is on the transcript.

I'm hoping that many of you will have seen the latest OU TV ad. But if you haven't do check it out. It's something that really captures all of that hard work, blood, sweat and tears that I think only OU students really understand. I'm going to ask some of my guests what resonates with them about the ad. And first today we have Jacqui Gabb, our Associate Dean for Research.

Oh Jacqui thanks for coming in and talking to me today.

Jacqui Gabb:

My pleasure.

Karen Foley:

So, have you seen the latest OU TV ad?

Jacqui Gabb:

Of course.

Karen Foley:

And what did you think?

Jacqui Gabb:

I thought it was wonderful and the reason it's wonderful is because a lot of universities they put themselves out there, they're a very important brand, they do fantastic work, great teaching research. And I think what the OU ad does it show how much we emphasise students. It's the student journey. It's the student experience. It's each

student as an individual with their own particular circumstances and you had that real sense that each and every one of them matters to us and they really do.

Karen Foley:

And you see so much diversity as well with people really cramming that study in don't you. But you are Associate Dean for Research so can you tell our listeners a little bit about broadly what that role covers?

Jacqui Gabb:

It covers everything to do with research and scholarship in the Faculty of Social Sciences. So that might be postgraduate research students. That might be scholarship projects which relate to teaching and learning and it covers research. And by research we mean in this instance research which is looking at social problems, looking at the questions that we might want to answer about society or about the way we live our lives. So it's looking at how we can support that research. How we can get funding to support it in terms of the payment of how we fund it.

And it's also about saying, how can we then turn that research in to excellent teaching? So it's feeding that back in to the curriculum for students.

Karen Foley:

Because the recent results, well it wasn't that recent any more was it, it was in December, the REF, the Research Excellence Framework results came through and the OU did incredibly well in those. Can you tell people a little bit about what that meant for you because impact was one of the things that came out very, very strongly wasn't it.

Jacqui Gabb:

It was. I mean firstly just such an immense debt of gratitude to all of the staff, you know, everyone worked really hard on their individual research, on the collaborative dimensions of research in the impact cases that we put forward, as you said. And I suppose if we focus on the impact part of what we have at the OU is our social mission. It is to want to change the world in a way. Change the private world, the public world, the environment around us to actually make a difference.

And so having the impact of our research rated so highly was fantastic. Because it just underpins how much of what we want to do in terms of making a difference on an individual person's life phases, or in a sense of trying to change global politics or think about environment change. All of those things really matter. And our research is having that impact.

Karen Foley:

And of course in terms of CCIG, the Centre for Citizenship Identities and Governance, can you tell us what's happening now and may be a little bit about plans for the future in terms of that collaboration and social sciences?

Jacqui Gabb:

Well we've got a long history of doing some excellent work around citizenship and governance. And by that we mean both the way the individuals live in contemporary society and looking back and, you know, thinking about how we've lived in the past and how we're going to move forward and live in the future. And thinking about some of the ways that we're structured within those environments. So thinking about the way government works, politics works. The way the rules that just are out there in the sort of the general culture shape our lives.

And so what we're doing within CCIG as with the other research centres in the faculty is trying to think about how we can refine that research. Possibly be more responsive and adept at answering particular questions as and when they arrive. And so we might be thinking at the moment about things of migration and immigration. We're starting to think much more quickly about, well, you know, this is a really important thing that's happening around us. What can we do? How can we make a critical intervention? First to help governance to think about the way policy is created but also to have a positive social impact on the individuals who are involved in that.

So a lot of it is about trying to get people who are may be quite passive in the sense of they're just the participants. They are just the people, and I use that with lots of scare quotes around it, just the people who are experiencing these different changes. But it's actually saying, you know, let's get involved. How do we get those people involved in research to become part of the research so they're not just subjects of research? They're not just people we look at. They are actually part of who we work with to make collaborative research.

Karen Foley:

So again active participation throughout that in a variety of ways.

Jacqui Gabb:

Very much

Karen Foley:

Wonderful. Well Jacqui Gabb thank you so much for coming along and talking to me today. That's been really useful. Thank you.

Jacqui Gabb:

Thank you very much.

Karen Foley:

And finally, I'm going to talk to our Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning, Ian Fribbance.

So Ian so tell us what is happening right now in Teaching and Learning in the faculty?

Ian Fribbance:

Hi Karen. Well there's lots of things going on. We're currently working through the Teaching and Learning design of our new postgraduate programme that starts in October 2016. So that's a big thing for the faculty and for its students.

And then we've got lots of activities across a range of fronts. So we've got things happening on social media with Facebook. We've got some new informal learning activities including new MOOCs and some new TV programmes. And then some policies and strategies that are being implemented within the faculty on our modules and qualifications.

Karen Foley:

I know a lot of students are very interested in postgraduate studies and the idea about, you know, what they can do after they've graduated with the OU. Can you tell us a little bit about may be some of the areas that you're working on developing?

Ian Fribbance:

Yeah, well there's going to be three new qualifications broadly in the areas of forensic psychology, psychology and crime. What we're currently working on at the moment is the learning design for all of them. And they're all going to be connected together and very much designed as coherent qualifications.

And some of the things we're particularly looking at is making lots of use of existing resources that are specialist in each field. So, for example, we'll be asking students to look at journal articles, books, etc. government reports and other kind of contemporary out there materials that are pertinent for people studying and going to work in those areas.

Karen Foley:

So it's almost like, you know, doing a postgraduate qualification that's going to have a lot of an applied aspect to it and people are going to get, you know, very sort of similar experiences researching primary sources and things like that as well.

Ian Fribbance:

Exactly. There's a lot of engagement with resources that are already out there. A lot of use of the OU library. We're putting a lot of emphasis on the development of qualifications resources so that students will be able to work together, work with each other and engage with academics that are teaching the Masters programmes. I'm also putting a lot of emphasis on the development of skills, the development of employability so that students who take these Masters programmes would really kind of sharpen up their employability skills whether they're already in work or looking for a kind of new career.

Karen Foley:

That sounds really, really innovative. And you mentioned before that you're also looking after informal learning which is one of the aspects in your remit as well. And I've been talking about some of the new modules, in particular the Inequalities and Personal Finance, the Baby Boom Legacy.

Ian Fribbance:

That's right.

Karen Foley:

And I wanted to ask you what's the main reason why students could get a lot from doing a MOOC and particular may be if they're already studying, you know, a complete module with the OU? What would you say?

Ian Fribbance:

Sure. Well I think it's an interesting and short way of broadening your study of engaging perhaps with a slightly different subject area to the one you're used to. So may be students who, for example, might be studying say social policy or sociology or politics that will have connections with the idea of inequalities and distributions and so on. But may be taking the MOOC would may be enable them to sort of look at that same issue but from a slightly different perspective because that's really taking a kind of personal finance economics view of that kind of subject area.

So it will be about broadening studies. May be alternatively another use might be if you're a current OU student but not actually studying a module right now. It might fill in a gap between your modules or something like that. So I expect there'll be different ways that different people will be engaging with the MOOCs.

Karen Foley:

Wonderful. Thank you Ian.

Ian Fribbance:

OK, take care.

Karen Foley:

That's all the interviews we've got time for this month. Check out your qualifications website for more information about Student Connections. And get in touch with us and let us know your news. You can email PodMag@open.ac.uk You can also follow the faculty on Twitter @OUSocSci and like the Social Sciences Faculty Facebook page and take part in the Friday Thinker which is on 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.