

THE OPEN STANDARD

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THE OPEN STANDARD

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OPEN LEARNING

Open Learning Ad Campaign Yields Eggcellent Results

There is truth in the idea that consistency of brand identity builds recognition and credibility. The proof is in the pudding, or should we say the nest? Open Learning's latest "spotted egg" creative, launched in early January, had the phones ringing to the tune of 448 new course enrolments in one week. This is the highest number of enrolments Open Learning has had all year and 60 more than the same time last year.

Once again challenging people to "Do something different", the egg image was placed on print ads, transit ads, and household mailers across the country. "Six hundred and seventy-five thousand postcards were mailed out to hand-picked households in Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary. This was a new advertising medium for us and somewhat of a risk, but it certainly paid off" Jennifer Read, Marketing and Communications Manager for Open Learning said. Due to the success of the mailer, there are plans to use it again in September, a time when Open Learning traditionally sees a peaked interest, in hopes of bringing in new students.

Not only is the campaign working hard to drive enrolments, it is building awareness in provinces outside of British Columbia. Several calls have been received in response to subway ads in Toronto, one of which was described by a prospective student as divine intervention. The



Do something different

gentleman was thinking of returning to school for a degree and wasn't sure where to start but when he looked up and saw the Open Learning ad, he took it as a sign. Since then he has requested information on several courses and is on the path to starting an Open Learning program.

Post-secondary advertisements have left a lot to be desired in the past – if you've seen one, you've seen them all. Unique images, free of eager-looking students clicking away on laptops, has set Open Learning's latest campaign apart from other distance education providers. With several new images waiting to be unveiled, Open Learning is brimming with excitement over the prospects the future campaign holds.

Strategic Planning Consultation Sessions Help Pave Way for Future Success

In response to the Thompson Rivers University (TRU) 2007-2012 Strategic Plan, Open Learning launched a Strategic Planning Consultation Process this past January. TRU's vision for the five-year period includes seven distinct areas, one of which is Open Learning. The planning process was put in place to explore opportunities and set measurable objectives and strategies to help achieve the goals as set out by the Plan.

The consultation process, spearheaded by Jim Barmby, Director of Open Learning's Program Delivery, began on January 31 with a series of open forums for TRU Open Learning (TRU-OL) employees on the Kamloops campus. Unique to many strategic planning exercises, the three sessions gave all employees a chance to voice their ideas for the future of TRU-OL.

Each session followed a similar format and focused on five distinct questions:

1. How does Thompson Rivers University Open Learning become the institution of choice for open, online and distance learning in British Columbia and beyond.
2. What are some ways that we can ensure that we are providing exceptional services to students?
3. What innovations should we make in our courses and programs, or in the way we provide them?
4. What kinds of partnerships should we develop and with whom?
5. What should we start doing, stop doing and/or keep doing to help our students be successful in our courses?

"It's all about looking forward and focussing on opportunities to improve," Jim Barmby said. "We've done a good job so far, but we want to be better. We need everyone's input to make sure that happens."

The three sessions on campus were followed by a full day of consultation sessions with TRU-OL Tutors in New Westminster on February 9. With close to 70 tutors in attendance, along with many other TRU-OL staff, the sessions were vibrant and a wealth of ideas were brought forward.

Two more sessions are being planned, one for the campus academic community and one for the administrative departments on campus that work closely with Open Learning.

The momentum of the planning process will continue to build as the notes from each session are summarized and distributed to both Open Learning staff and management for review. Once all the feedback has been received, production of the inaugural Thompson Rivers University Open Learning Strategic Plan will begin.



To support TRU Open Learning's ambition to set the standard for excellence in customer service, new avenues of communication with its students are being utilized. Outbound calls to students have commenced, as well as the establishment of Student Advisory Committees.

Students are contacted by the Enrolment Services team three weeks and 20 weeks after enrolment. The three week calls are geared towards confirming that they have received their materials as well as ensuring that the students know they have a network of support available to them. The calls have been well received and students often state that they are surprised we called. "Wow, other universities don't do this", is a frequent comment.

The 20 week calls aim to address any concerns students may have about making arrangements for their final exams. We also want to see if we can help students who are not in programs decide on another course they might want to take from OL. We are finding that students were not as far along in their courses as we anticipated. We are listening to their feedback and have decided that a better time to call would be about 11 weeks after enrolment. A call at 11 weeks helps nudge students to engage in coursework before panic sets in about completion deadlines. Another benefit to making a call at 11 weeks is that students are still able to drop their course if it is not what they were looking for. Students said they love the flexibility of the independent study but need a little prodding from time to time to help them stay on track. We hope that calls at 11 weeks after enrolment may be exactly what our students are looking for.

Two Student Advisory Committees have been established. An invitation to participate was posted on the student portal, myTRU, and the volunteers lined up. We are sure the offer of free tuition for their next OL course helped a bit, but we received more volunteers than we needed!

The committees' objectives are to solicit comments on the operations of OL. One committee focuses on front end service providers which include Enrolment Services functions as well as our Marketing, Web and Partnership operations. The second committee focuses on the delivery services which include Program Advising, Exams, Tutor interaction, materials and WebCT as well as soliciting comments on our course offerings.

These committees have just gotten off the ground but everyone involved, staff and students alike, are enjoying the process and the discussions that are taking place.

Future issues of The Open Standard will have an update on "Connecting with OL Students".



Under Construction: The BCCOL Building Update

Yes it's true, we have been in our new BC Centre for Open Learning (BCCOL) building for only seven months and the retrofitting has already begun. It didn't take long to realize that several design features of the newly constructed BCCOL building were not working for the newly restructured division. Some of the issues we've had to address include: no formal reception area, not enough space for staff, underutilized meeting rooms and lack of natural light to many work stations. By eliminating one meeting room, shrinking another, shrinking our storage room, converting some workspaces into offices, adding inside windows to existing offices, and reconfiguring our fourth floor entrance, we are well on our way to providing a happy, bright and comfortable work environment and a welcoming space for visitors. The retrofitting is taking place during operating hours so we ask that you bear with us if there is drilling, hammering, or other background noises during your call to OL. The scheduled date of completion is mid-March.

Distance Education Catching on at Public Universities

The Chronicle of Higher Education, the leading weekly publication in the U.S. dedicated to post-secondary education, reported last year that virtual campuses offered by public universities are re-emerging, buoyed by the fact that name recognition and lower tuition give public universities a competitive edge over the private, for-profit distance universities such as the University of Phoenix and DeVry University.

Public universities have not always been enamoured by distance education. In the late 1990s, several major U.S. universities attempted to develop commercial online degree programs, but they were not successful in attracting the students needed. Many initiatives, such as Columbia University's Fathom, were simply shut down.

In Canada, Athabasca University has enjoyed great success in delivering Master degree programs in recent years; however Athabasca University Bachelor degree programs have not enjoyed the same level of success. The situation has been similar with TRU-OL predecessors; the Open Learning Agency and British Columbia Open University have not had great success with students completing degrees.

The successful distance education student has a different profile than the traditional campus student, who tends to be a recent high school graduate. Distance students completing their programs tend to be older, more organized, motivated and self-reliant, and have already enjoyed some success in taking post-secondary courses. In recent years, providers of online education have learned that older, more disciplined students respond well to short intensive courses, often six to eight weeks in length, a format which most recent high school graduates are not prepared for. Also, shorter programs, such as Certificate, Diploma and Master programs, have higher completion rates than Baccalaureate degree programs.

Armed with these new insights into distance education, and with more efficient and effective technology readily available to students, public universities are re-entering the distance education field. The University of Maryland, the University of North Carolina and the University of Illinois are leading the way, and plan on competing head to head with the University of Phoenix and DeVry University. Although the University of Phoenix's enrolments are expected to continue to increase, its share of online learners is

decreasing due to the entry of public institutions into the online education marketplace.

In Canada, Athabasca University has been the leader in undergraduate course delivery for more than 30 years by providing self-paced courses for transfer credit to students enrolled at other universities. Just as public universities in the U.S. are realizing, Thompson Rivers has a tremendous opportunity to meet the needs of non-traditional students, who are not recent high school graduates. The trick, of course, is in how TRU differentiates itself, not only in marketing, but in programming, from Athabasca.

By building on the successes of TRU's campus delivery, and reaching out to students for whom attending classes on campus is not an option, the future looks bright for all at TRU. The line between classroom and distance delivery is blurring and, in coming years, is likely to disappear. When that line disappears, TRU has a tremendous opportunity to be in a leadership position for all of Canada in undergraduate distance and blended education, by ensuring campus and distance education providers are working together.

Jim Barmby,
Director of Program Delivery,
Open Learning



DEPARTMENT FEATURE

Instructional Development and Research Group

TRU Open Learning courses are designed and developed by a highly skilled team of instructional designers, production staff, and media developers working with the best academic writers and reviewers available. Thinking always of learner choice, our courseware is available in print or online, in independent study mode or paced and interactive.

The Instructional Development and Research Group (IDRG), working with the academic faculties and schools at TRU, have produced an exciting array of new and unique programs. One benefit of combining Open Learning and Thompson Rivers University is the variety of academic, professional and trades areas that work together to develop unique programs. For example, the new Water Treatment and Wastewater Technology programs combine the expertise of the Faculty of Science and the School of Trades and Technology to provide much needed training in British Columbia, Canada and beyond.

A combination of the School of Trades and Technology with Business and Economics courses available through Open Learning has become the Bachelor of Technology (Technology Leadership), which provides a valuable and unique opportunity for tradespersons to enter the online program at a variety of levels, have their prior learning assessed and credited, and exit the program with a bachelor's degree.

Working with the School of Social Work, IDRG has developed a graduate level certificate in Child and Youth Mental Health, and is currently working with the School of Education to develop a graduate level certificate in Online Teaching and Learning for teachers, instructors, and university faculty interested in developing their skills as online course developers or instructors.

As much as possible, the Instructional Development and Media teams make use of the most current technologies and resources available, to make our courses up-to-date, relevant, and interactive.



Rose (*Rosa*)

The rose hip is another example of a structure that is commonly considered a fruit. The beautiful petals and stamen are showy, and important pollinator attractants. The pistils are not as obvious because they are found deep within the flower, surrounded by a hypanthium.

The rose hips you see here are not really fruits; they are hypanthia that surround the fruits (achenes) within.

Figure (top): Rose flower.

Figure (bottom): Rosehips.

Interactive online simulation of plant structures from BISC399: Plants and People

Interactive CD guides students through the use of the microscope.



“One of our employees who is taking his Bachelor of Commerce through your university has come and thanked me for everything - he only needs to take six courses to complete his degree. This is excellent.”

Training Coordinator,
Boeing Winnipeg

Year of the Rat Brings Success to Open Learning

Many cultures recently celebrated the coming of the Year of the Rat. According to Chinese folklore, a ‘rat’ year is a time of hard work, activity and renewal. In this spirit, the Strategic Partnerships team has kicked off 2008 with a series of road trips and meetings across British Columbia and Ontario, as well as Calgary and Winnipeg. The result has been a number of exciting opportunities to work with post secondary, industry and First Nation leaders and showcase Thompson Rivers University Open Learning (TRU-OL).

The Water Treatment Technology Diploma and the Bachelor of Technology: Trades and Technology Leadership programs continue to draw an abundance of interest from post-organizations such as the City of Calgary, City of Vancouver, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT), Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), to name a few. This will hopefully result in formal agreements in the near future. SAIT, for example, has expressed a strong interest in pursuing a Memorandum of Understanding with Open Learning that will formally allow us to present our Bachelor of Technology program directly to their students, graduates and alumni.

After months of contact and follow up, positive responses are finally coming from industry. Boeing (Winnipeg), for example, has been spreading the word of Open Learning amongst its workforce, which has resulted in an increase in enquiries from its employees. Interior Savings, Vancouver is interested in exploring our Credit Bank services and Safeway Canada Inc. is another industry leader that recognizes the need for proactive recruitment, retention and succession strategies and is pursuing formal talks with TRU-OL to complement their internal training initiatives.

Community Colleges both in British Columbia and Ontario have been quick to see the potential in working with TRU-OL. Discussions are underway with most colleges in British Columbia to provide laddering opportunities for their students in key programs such as the Bachelor of Commerce and the Bachelor of Health Sciences. There has also been interest in partnering with TRU-OL in the development of new programs. Like their west coast peers, Ontario colleges have had to come up with ways to proactively respond to demographic shifts and a changing economy. For colleges within the Greater Toronto Area, severe capacity issues have also become a point of concern. A number of discussions are underway to see where TRU-OL can help these institutions meet these challenges head on. Talks are currently underway with Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (Oakville, Ontario), for example, to outline a comprehensive laddering agreement for their students.

Arguably the most positive response to TRU-OL has been among the First Nation and Aboriginal communities. Geri Matthew, Strategic Partnership’s First Nation Consultant, along with Christine Lee, External Agreements Coordinator, have worked hard to engage these communities throughout the province and the results have been successful. A new Learning Centre agreement was signed with the Tl’atz’en Nation last autumn and interest was expressed from the Namgis Band and the Simpcw First Nation.

With more appointments being made and trips being planned, the Strategic Partnerships team at Open Learning is laying the foundation for a very successful Year of the Rat.



Another Partnership In The Works...

Valentine’s Day 2008 saw two kindred spirits come together to form a new relationship. TRU-OL signed a Memorandum of Agreement with TÉLUQ, the Open University of the University of Québec. The next issue of Open Standard will share more information about the opportunities being unlocked through this partnership, so be sure to keep your eyes open for it.

New Appointments

Cameron Beddome, Chief Recruitment Officer, Open Learning

It didn't take long for the new Chief Recruitment Officer of Open Learning to make his mark - and it wasn't his years of experience or friendly demeanour, it was his shirts.

Cameron Beddome, the man of many shirts, comes to us from Reno Nevada where he spent the last 10 years. Most recently Vice President and General Manager of the second largest manufacturer of food and beverage labels in North America, Cameron brings several years of experience in customer service strategies, sales and marketing, process improvement and strategic planning. He is a welcomed and important addition to our Open Learning staff.

With a BBA from Simon Fraser University and MBA from the University of British Columbia, he is, in his own words, "made in BC". Happy to move back home, Cameron, his wife and daughter have settled down on a half



acre in Rayleigh, just in time for the newest addition to their family, a baby boy born in mid-January.

With all he has going on in his life, you would wonder how he finds time to get

out on his Harley. He doesn't anymore. He traded it in for a convertible so the whole family can hit the road and feel the wind in their face. Aside from weekend road trips, Cameron is an avid skier, golfer and cyclist who made a 7,000km journey across Canada in 1992.

We welcome Cameron and look forward to seeing what shirt he'll be wearing tomorrow.

Adina Gray, Prior Learning and Assessment Advisor, Open Learning

We are pleased to welcome Adina Gray as the new Advisor for the PLAR Department. Adina has a TRU Bachelor of Business degree and has been with Open Learning for the past three



years, holding a variety of roles such as Customer Service Officer, Financial Aid Advisor and most currently Enrolment Services Officer.

As a PLAR Advisor, Adina will be responsible for providing educational guidance to individuals and organizations seeking academic recognition from TRU-OL for informal and

traditionally unendorsed learning. She will be the first point of contact for students interested in PLAR and will assist them with the preparation and submission of portfolios. Please continue to send student email inquiries to plar_ol@tru.ca but forward any phone calls to Adina's number, 250-582-6820.

Student Testimonial



Mike Massoom, Open Learning student and Student Advisory Committee member, comments on TRU Open Learning

"Having been to many universities, TRU is the best compared to all the rest. It's top notch and has exceeded all of my expectations," Massoom said at a January Student Advisory Committee meeting. "TRU Open Learning is better than anything (distance learning education) available in Ontario."