Editorial

Access at What Cost to the Student ?

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This issue continues our celebration of seven years' publishing this Asian Journal for the benefit of all researchers in open and distance learning inside and outside Asia. We occasionally include outstanding Papers from Europe, Africa or the Americas that are deemed relevant to Asia. In this issue we also continue this policy with a Paper from Saudi Arabia. Open and distance education universities in many parts of the arab world are still in the early stages of developing. As a result, many of our readers in Asia will find some useful and interesting aspects to take away and adapt for their own contexts.

As we mentioned in the past Editorial of volume 7 issue 1, the editorial board of this Asian Journal of Distance Education remains committed to providing access and equity.

At the CNED Conference in Poitiers, France, in mid-December we laid out our commitment to free and open access. The conference was organized by Martine Vidal, of the French journal Distances et savoirs http://ds.revuesonline.com/. At the time, participants presented their views and the audience engaged in quite a heated debate on why some academic journals were at high cost. Readers here should be interested to learn that we could attend that conference at no cost – through our using live real-time audiovisual conference. Although a first-time trial of the technology publically, the conference afforded us a platform to clearly

demonstrate again our commitment to zero costs. It is good that those in authority demonstrate and are seen to demonstrate that audio-visual conferencing has practical use beyond the test laboratories.

At that conference we presented our proposal for a new business model for academic publishing. We recognized that different business models should be offered at every level of publishing for cost-recovery or for-profit, as well as culturally sensitive support services to authors. We suggested that twenty or more universities should form a consortium for publishing academic journals. Libraries at most universities cannot afford to keep up the very high subscriptions to thousands of serial journals. One issue costing $50 for three articles in the issue is very expensive – amounting to one quarter the annual salary for a professor in Vietnam or more in other countries.

A brief review of costs for leading journals reveals that single articles of about 6 pages sells at about US$30 each. In open and distance education, costs are in the range of $100 per issue of 3 articles, (or US$300 for 3 issues per year). Personal subscriptions are generally one-third the cost of institutional costs. And there is a further division of institutional subscription into online-and-print versions, or online-only version. We should consider the carbon footprints in terms of the trees needed plus those costs of the paper-making

process and inks, and brick-and-mortar buildings to manufacture the journal, followed by wrapping and postage, air fuel and so on. The amount of water needed to make paper is surprisingly high – about 400-times more water than paper, kg for kg, http://www.paperonweb.com/A1015.htm. A single issue - in other words - of one journal weighing 500gm would need 200 kg of water to make the paper. This does not include other chemicals such as bleaching agents, or the ink manufacturing processes. The cash cost of journals varies. One journal for teachers in Asia costs up to $800 per issue of 8 articles, although some articles are for sale online at $30 each.

Choosing the online-only version not only saves carbon costs but generally saves you about 5-10% in cash ;- eg $350 for both print-and-online versions, or $325 for the online-only version. A search on poverty found a journal on Africa at $359 for print-and-online versions and at $342 for the online-only version – thus saving you $17 and no doubt help saving the poor in Africa into the bargain. Journals on business sometimes cost more than journals on poverty ; one was $788 for online-and-print and $748 for the online-only, saving $40 or about the same saving rate 5% as the poverty journal. A journal for social workers has 7 articles per issue and 8 issues per year for only $1353 one thousand three hundred and fifty-three dollars, which might suggest social work is very well funded these days A journal on ethnicities (the often poor minority people) with 6 issues per year sells for online-and-print at $1112, or for online-only at $1056. This means for every $1000 you spend then you can save yourself $50 if you want to save the trees.

It is no wonder therefore that the publishing industry is concerned about the financial crisis in its squeeze on university and library budgets. The business model must evolve. Certainly pay-per-view would mean that unused journals can lead to saved costs. But how would this impact scholarship? It is well recognized that young researchers browse journals in the library which are not of immediate use to them, yet they develop their interests and reflect deeply on what they read.

While we could take a backseat and see what new business models the academic publishing houses bring out, perhaps universities should partner more actively with them to develop practical models valued by the universities. A two-way interaction and conversation will be fruitful for everyone : publishers can get cited and survive, universities can learn what journals their faculty want and save money on unnecessary journals, and publishing companies can help young researchers through providing publishing support, guidance and scaffolding to authors. Accordingly, publishing consortia should be inaugurated with ten or twenty universities to each one publishing house.

We continue our policy with seven full Papers in each issue, and without cost to readers. This current issue has papers which focus on information literacy skills of distance learners, student support services in ODL. Dimri & Chaturvedi analyse the perceptions of successful learners towards student support services, and then suggest ways to makes open and distance learning more popular. They also assert that student support will improve completion rates, and lead also to an increase in enrolment. They suggest more use of teleconferencing as a means of counselling and better access to print and electronic materials during the course of study by the learners.

Yoke Cheung Aw shares experiences of tutoring at the Open University Malaysia in how ICT can be useful to the tutors in enabling them to perform their multiple roles. This paper examines the use of ICT in pre-tutoring, tutoring and post-tutoring. Norfadilah Kamaruddin identifies the interface design as a key reason why many teachers do not use multimedia resources in their courses. Next Xiaobin Li reports the current status of higher distance education in China. Distance education is well known for in-service training and lifelong learning, so we should not forget the use by universities and colleges. Gani shares his experiences of the Arab Open University in how quality assurance mechanisms are implemented, and identifies technology-based student support services should be the priority areas for research. Killedar suggests

a 'total quality' model to measure the impact of web technology and asserts that when properly applied this model can optimize quality, access and cost in ODL. His study has an interesting finding that the virtual classroom was not more effective than the traditional classroom, on the parameters of economy in time and money utilisation. The final Paper here is on information literacy modules by Indira Koneru. In her paper she stresses the need and significance of information literacy for distance education students. She favours designing and developing web enabled modules (over print modules) due to their ability to increase access to learners in a flexible and cost effective manner. She proposes a model for information literacy instructions, and suggests aninstructional design model for designing and developing online information literacy modules.

We hope that you will find these articles interesting and useful to your teaching and learning. We look forward to your suggestions and constructive criticism. We are pleased to be busy, and we are also pleased we continue to offer you Papers from all across Asia.

To close, there is a Special Report on the AAOU 2009 Conference that was held in Tehran hosted by Payame Noor University. This was compiled at a distance. There were several concerns about the geopolitical area and we were unable sadly to attend in person. Nonetheless those few who did attend could learn a lot on the ground and listened to some interesting presentations.

This next year 2010, the AAOU Conference is hosted by Hanoi Open University – a long time good friend to so many in East Asia and also to others further afield. Hanoi is celebrating is 1000th Anniversary in October 2010. This then promises to be a remarkable time to visit Hanoi and all our friends in Vietnam.

This year will be the 24th annual conference. For visa and other information please contact Ms Ly Lan of the Conference Secretariat by email aaou2010@hou.edu.vn, telephone +84 4 3868 4859 or fax +84 4 3868 4859. The conference will be held on Tuesday 26th through Thursday 28th October 2010 at the prestigious Melia Hotel https://www.meliahanoi.com/ in the centre of Hanoi. The main theme for this conference is 'Building Sustainable Global Learning Communities through Open Distance Learning', with five sub-themes each with a KeyNote Speaker – including Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Asha Kanwar, Hari Priowirjanto, Jon Baggaley, Lam Quang Thiep, and Insung Jung. This conference promises to be an exciting and very dynamic time well spent interacting and learning through presentations, poster sessions, and most importantly through conversation.

As usual we the editorial board, directors and members of the Asian Society of Open and Distance Education ASODE also plan to hold our annual meeting either just before or just after the AAOU main meeting. Ideas for the agenda can be sent by email to the Journal Office.

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