The PodMag

Karen Foley:
Hi and welcome to the PodMag, the audio news magazine for the Faculty of Social Sciences. I'm Karen Foley and in this October edition I'm going to tell you all about the fantastic online interactive conference we've just had. The faculty's Student Connections Event. I'll be asking Ian Friibance why it was so important in terms of building a community, Troy Cooper about how she felt both presenting and watching the conference and some of the participants in our Big Conversation and finally I'll be speaking to HJ who provided the link from our online audience via the Social Media Desk.

But first let's have some news.

In the headline news OU Psychologist, Andreas Vossler and Naomi Moller show that online affairs can be addictive. Students and OU staff are sharing their love for part-time education in a new campaign #loveparttime. And Gerry Mooney sums up the issues surrounding the housing market in the current political climate and the conversation arguing that London housing protests echo the Glasgow Rent Strikes of 100 years ago.

All of the links to the news are in this transcript. So please do access them from there and follow these stories up.

In other news there’s a great blog from the Criminology Department and most recently Johanna Motzkau and Nick Lee’s contribution entitled Historical Abuse: Witch-Hunt, Scapegoat, Moral Panic? provides a really interesting perspective on the way that language or discourse and social frameworks can impact on this very serious issue which of course has massive legal implications. So a must read if you’re interested in criminology or social policy.

But if you’re interested in International Development there are a range of seminars that are held at the OU in Milton Keynes but are also available as podcasts. These tend to be at least one event a month. It’s hosted by DPP and there are a range of internal and external speakers. Some of the topics are the Unsung Farmer-Inventor, Transformation after the Civil War, Informality as a Continuum. So if you are interested in this subscribe to the mailing list, ikd-enquiries@open.ac.uk to be kept to up to date.

We’ve been talking a lot about MOOCs, Massive Open Online Courses and Badged Open Courses, BOCs which tend to be more skills based. So if you or a friend are interested in doing one of these do check out FutureLearn.com and OpenLearn the home of free learning from the Open University respectively.
There’s a great MOOC from the faculty that’s just started, Inequalities and Personal Finance and of course our very popular Forensic Psychology MOOC which has also had great reviews.

And if you are interested in following up with the OU’s involvement in television and radio you can see what’s available on OpenLearn where there’s often additional material to accompany these, such as Hans Rosling’s How to End Poverty in 15 Years.

And don’t forget that on Radio 4 every Wednesday at 4.00pm there’s Thinking Allowed.

But now let’s review the Student Connections Conference and to begin with I’m going to speak to Ian Fribbance the Acting Dean for the Faculty.

Hi Ian, so you’re Acting Dean for the Faculty of Social Sciences and you’ve just presented at the Student Connections Conference 2015. How was it for you?

Ian Fribbance:
Hi! I thought it was great actually. I really enjoyed it. It was great to engage with the students in a lively atmosphere at the conference and I thought it went really well. All the feedback so far has been very good and lots of students engaging on the chat I gather. So all good.

Karen Foley:
Yeah, no they certainly seemed to enjoy chatting away. And of course there was such a varied programme as well from the faculty. How did you sort of envisage all of that? Were you surprised at the range of topics that colleagues talked about?

Ian Fribbance:
Well what I thought was nice was the bringing together of all those different aspects. So people were talking about their research, us talking about, you know, new qualifications, curriculum developments, people wanting to know what it was like to be an Open University student... There was just a great range and seeing it all come together from all those different angles was really nice too.

Karen Foley:
And Ian you’re also the Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning Enhancement. And of course building a community is really important within that portfolio. Can you tell us why the Student Connections Conference is a good part of that?

Ian Fribbance:
Well as students will have seen we are keen in a range of activities to support the academic community building. So, for example, we’ve got our Facebook page and the famous Friday Thinker. We’ve also got lots of activities around OpenLearn and
FutureLearn and so on and Student Connections is very much a part of that and connected to that.

And one of the main drivers behind that is to create a sense of community amongst our distance learning students. If students study at a conventional bricks and mortar university they’ll have cafes and common rooms to get together in and I’m keen on trying to create alternative spaces in a virtual world or a social world for students to build that sense of community. That’s both with each other establishing friendships and connections that will support them through study but also feeling more connected to the academics at the university and their research and what they’re doing and feeling a sense of belonging to the faculty.

Karen Foley:
Well thank you Ian Fribbance, it certainly seems to be something our students value.

Ian Fribbance:
It was great, thanks.

Karen Foley:
Now Ian opened the conference with Troy Cooper and Alison Green and I wanted to find out how Troy experienced participating in the conference as a presenter and also how she found watching it as a viewer.

Hi Troy, so you’ve just been presenting at the Student Connections Conference. Now you did the opening talk with Alison Green and Ian Fribbance. How was that for you?

Troy Cooper:
Yeah, that was great Karen. I mean one of the great things about doing the conference is that so often we work away in our little offices at Walton Hall and of course we don’t have people on, students on campus. And sometimes we can feel quite disconnected from students.

So it was wonderful to be able to just to sit down and talk about what we’re doing and get some feedback from people who were listening in about, you know, what we’re doing and how things are going for them and how they’re doing starting their studies. It takes us back to where we should be, you know, with that first experience.

Karen Foley:
And you also did a session didn’t you on Managing Expectations. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Troy Cooper:
Yeah that was a really fantastic session because there were so many students listening to that who were right at the beginning of their studies. And talking about how to
manage your expectations really reminded me, as we were talking, about how it is if you’re absolutely new to this. Because, you know, with anything that you’re experienced in you tend to forget how it is when you’re just starting out in something and what it’s like when you’re new. So it was really interesting to explore some of those issues and then to get the feedback on it.

Karen Foley:
And you also watched some of the conference. So as well as participating you were watching some of your colleagues presenting. Can you tell us what was most memorable about any of those talks that you may have watched?

Troy Cooper:
I think one of the most memorable parts of the talk that I watched was the discussion in the evening with Naomi and Andreas. And that obviously generated quite a lot of interest. And I must admit I was actually quite nervous listening to it because it covers an area, doesn’t it, that all of us are deeply interested and invested in. But at the same time it seemed quite dangerous to be talking about some of that with actual interacting going on and feedback coming back from students.

So I thought they were quite brave doing that and I think they probably deserve a medal.

Karen Foley:
No, absolutely, no. That was the research on Online and Internet Infidelity wasn’t it?

Troy Cooper:
Infidelity, yes.

Karen Foley:
Yeah, they certainly were. And also I found it very interesting that whilst there was something that everybody could relate to in some sense of or another they were able to draw back to that theoretical basis as well and talk about their research that they’re doing here.

Troy Cooper:
Yeah which is obviously the beauty of having academics talking about that area is that they can talk about the concepts and taking forward certain themes, the things that people are interested in but then draw it back to actually what has been investigated in the findings that there have been and so on.

Karen Foley:
Troy Cooper, thank you very much.
At the conference the Friday night discussion was led by Jonquil Lowe who asked, Is Public Spending the Mark of an Advanced Society? She was joined in this discussion by Matt Staples and Dave Humphreys all of whom had very different takes on the subject. I asked them about this.

Jonquil Lowe you’ve just had a Big Conversation at the Student Connections Conference entitled Is Government Spending a Drain on the Economy or the Mark of a Civilised Society? What was that all about then?

Jonquil Lowe:
Well it was about the austerity measures since the global financial crisis and whether they’re really needed or whether it’s just an opportunity for governments of a right wing persuasion to push the neoliberal agenda.

Karen Foley:
Now you’ve selected a couple of colleagues to come along and debate this issue and we had Dave Humphreys and Matt Staples as well. Dave what were you talking about?

Dave Humphreys:
I was talking about the need for public expenditure to deal with environmental problems, in particular climate change. I think it’s the biggest public welfare challenge that we face this century and how that problem will not be sorted out by market efficiency but it needs intervention from governments.

Karen Foley:
And Matt what was your take on it all?

Matt Staples:
Well I was coming at it from a political angle. And I was asking the key question what is the State for and what is its duty to protect its citizens and is governing in equality protecting citizens from inequality one of its key roles?

Karen Foley:
And Jonquil how did you wrap all of this up then?

Jonquil Lowe:
Well I’m not sure we came to a consensus but I think we felt that for a society to work everyone has to buy in to it. And that without the government intervention you end up with an economy, a society that’s so unequal that it just leads to social unrest.

Karen Foley:
Well it was a fascinating discussion and you can watch it on the catch up on the connections.kmi.open.ac.uk website. And meanwhile at home our studio audience were
making Harley-Jack the President of a small island and discussing the infrastructure there. It was a great conversation, thank you all very much.

And finally, last but by no means least we wouldn’t have a connection with our online audience without the Social Media Desk. HJ and Rachel did an amazing job representing the audience’s voice and I asked HJ how he found it all.

Hello HJ, you’ve been on the Social Media Desk. So how’s it all gone?

HJ:
Oh it’s been an absolutely fantastic event. We had our fancy new social media board where loads of people had sent in their awesome selfies, study buddies - which were mainly cats - but we also had a lot of neat and tidy study spaces sent in. But we didn’t get any messy ones so it might just be me on that front.

But I a lot of people also shared their OU stories, how they started and how they were doing. And there was a lot of encourage for new students who came to join us.

Karen Foley:
Ah there certainly was.

HJ:
It was fantastic. But we also had loads of great ideas and tips from everyone which we pinned to the board. My favourite ones were just the notes of encouragement which I think showed what a fantastic community we had on the chat.

Karen Foley:
And so what was the best bit for you?

HJ:
Oh dear. Well there was loads of good stuff but I have to say I did especially enjoy Richard Heffernan’s talk. And I never thought to apply the analogy about boiling a frog in exams before. But I’m also not too sure where the Prime Minister ending up under a bus or a meteorite hitting Earth came in.

Karen Foley:
Now I’m certainly watching that on the catch up. And it doesn’t help that I know for a fact that the Ex Dean of Social Sciences, Kevin Hetherington, has access to a meteorite that he’s been threatening to send to the studio.

HJ:
Oh dear that is a bit worrying. But overall I think the absolutely best part was the chat. It was so fantastic to talk to Ben, Natasha, Rachel, Davin, Georgina, Eleanor, Adjita, Lydia, Catlin, Laura...
Karen Foley:
Well unfortunately that is all we have time for in this edition. The catch-up for the conference is available now if you missed it: connections.kmi.open.ac.uk

And don’t forget that each Friday on the Faculty of Social Sciences Facebook page we have a Friday Thinker.
In October we have Alan Shipman, Meg-John Barker and Steve Pile lined up to chat with you about some topical issues that relate to their disciplines.

You can also stay in touch on Twitter @OUSocSci and there are also Twitter accounts for the nations.

So until the next PodMag I hope you enjoy your studies if you’re just starting them this October and if you’re finishing a February module I hope you have the time to take a well-deserved break.

Bye for now.

Links:

New Criminology blogs: https://oucriminology.wordpress.com/

IKD seminars (podcasts available): http://www.open.ac.uk/ikd/seminar-series/

MOOCS: https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/inequalities-in-personal-finance

MOOCS: https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/forensic-psychology

New research: Online affairs can be addictive (research by our psychologists): http://www3.open.ac.uk/media/fullstory.aspx?id=29430

"London housing protests echo Glasgow rent strikes of 100 years ago"
https://theconversation.com/london-housing-protests-echo-glasgow-rent-strikes-of-100-years-ago-48274

What’s on Open Learn http://www.open.edu/openlearn/whats-on?seeall=1