Unisa open

The University of South Africa (Unisa) has approved an OER

(Open Education Resources) strategy!

It's official! Unisa (University of South Africa) has approved its OER strategy. Unisa is a university in the midst of transformation at several levels. Many historic processes, including the development of teaching materials, are being disrupted by advances in ICT. The approval of the OER strategy demonstrates that Unisa has realised that the vast quantities of content and teaching materials, especially openly licensed content, have significant potential to contribute to the quality of the teaching and learning experience of its students. This signifies that Open Education Resources (OER) can no longer be considered as marginal, socially acceptable, "nice-to-have" materials. Their use needs to be integrated into mainstream institutional processes if their true potential is to be harnessed in the process of pedagogical transformation. As a response, **Unisa has approved an OER strategy that will guide the institution in terms of its use of OER, licensing of teaching and learning materials, and the management of its intellectual property**.

The approval of the OER strategy also demonstrates Unisa's commitment to align itself with the current educational landscape and to give attention to the imperatives of the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training in South Africa*. The White Paper sets out strategies to improve the capacity of the post-school education and training system to meet the country's needs. In terms of these policy objectives, OER are given a high priority for the future. In terms of the open learning imperatives laid out in the White Paper, the Department of Higher Education and Training "expects that providers will engage and collaborate in sharing infrastructure, learning resources and staff capacity, to contribute to improved access, quality and cost-effectiveness of provision" (Dr Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training). Unisa, through the strategic priorities included in the OER strategy, has initiated an engagement with the idea of harnessing existing resources as well as subsequently releasing materials under open licenses.

Unisa's approved OER strategy encompasses five priorities. The initial strategy focuses on

managing teaching and learning material, harnessing OER for teaching and learning, and the subsequent releasing of openly-licensed materials, as well as contributing towards global knowledge and the review of institutional policies to incorporate values of openness.

The strategic priorities are as follows:

1. **Development of an effective management system for intellectual property, including information about copyright status**

   In terms of this priority, we plan to locate all intellectual assets in the form of teaching and learning materials, audit the content for copyright infringements, rectify these and then centralise storage in line with an electronic content management system.

2. **Establishment of an open licensing framework**

   In line with a gap also identified in the aforementioned White Paper, we will develop a framework for the licensing of Unisa's intellectual assets, develop guidelines for choice and use of licenses, communicate with and train stakeholders. We aim to create a copyright office at Unisa to attend to copyright issues and queries.

3. **Systematic integration of high quality, available OER as appropriate into courses and their subsequent release for use by others.**

   Unisa can benefit by shifting from authoring and producing all its own materials to harnessing what already exists. In terms of this priority, change in practice will be stimulated and supported through changing perceptions, pedagogic approaches and practice.

4. **Contribution to the global OER repository of resources.**

   This priority makes provision for Unisa to continue contributing to OERu as well as considering the development of MOOCs. Unisa, as an ODL institution, is well placed to participate in open online learning from an African perspective, where there is a shortage of context-specific resources. This priority will enable Unisa to find a relevant and suitable space in the global open education community.

5. **Evaluation and review of institutional policies to incorporate OER values and processes.**

   Unisa has many policies and procedures that relate to teaching and learning that are outdated in terms of the new business model. When these policies (inter alia Curriculum Policy, ODL policy, Prescribing books, Tuition Policy and Framework for the implementation of a team approach to curriculum and learning development at Unisa) are revised, it will be imperative that they give support to the aspects of licensing of study materials and harnessing of OER as contemplated in the strategy and ensuing consultations.

For the full OER strategy click here.

You are welcome to contact Kerry de Hart (OER coordinator in the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor) on unisaopen@unisa.ac.za for more information or if you would like to be involved in the exciting developments around OERs at Unisa (www.unisa.ac.za/oer)