

Open University of Mauritius - a University for the 21st century



Video Presentation

Open University of Mauritius Inauguration, 22 April 2013, Open University of Mauritius: a University for the 21st century

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Transcript

Honourable Minister Rajeshwar Jeetah, Members of Parliament and the diplomatic corps, Madam Chair, Director General, COL Focal Point, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be ‘virtually’ present on this historic occasion and to bring you warm greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning or COL in Vancouver. I must congratulate Honourable Minister Jeetah for his vision and dynamic leadership and his team for making this vision into a reality.

Created by Commonwealth Heads of Government, we are the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation located outside London. Our mission is to help Commonwealth Member States and institutions to harness the potential of distance education and Information and Communication Technologies for expanding access to education and training. So it is appropriate that I use this distance education technology to reach you.

COL has had a long association with Mauritius, which has been a pioneer in opening up educational opportunities for its people. When the University of London introduced External Degrees and the notion of higher education without boundaries in 1858 – its first external exams were held in Mauritius. Over a century later in 1989, COL commissioned a report to advise the government on how it might use distance education for human resource development in Mauritius – a report prepared by our former President, Sir John Daniel, whom many of you know. COL is very grateful to the government of Mauritius for its continued financial and intellectual support.

Mauritius has been a key player in the development of distance education. It started out with the Mauritius College of the Air, followed by the Centre for Professional Development and Lifelong Learning and more recently, the Virtual Centre for Innovation and Learning Technologies at the Open University of Mauritius, which received the COL award for excellence in distance and online learning in 2010. We can see that Mauritius has taken a gradual and evolutionary approach to the development of open and distance learning and the University of Mauritius model that has emerged is specific and

relevant to its needs. The technologies used to offer distance education have changed from print, radio and TV to virtual and online learning.

It is significant that the Open University of Mauritius is being launched in the 21st century to cater to the needs of the new learner, who Marc Prensky has described as a ‘digital native’. The digital native is the young technology savvy learner who has the mindset and motivation to learn in diverse circumstances and environments. What do these learners want? Prensky interviewed 1000 American students and came to the conclusion that these learners did not want to be lectured to. They wanted to work with their peers, cooperate as well as compete with them and preferred learning that was relevant (Prensky, 2010, p.16). The use of various technologies, especially mobile devices can help us cater to the preferences of the twenty first century learners.

The 21st century university also needs to cater to skills development. Unemployment is a global challenge. About 45% of the world’s young people, many of them girls and women, are without work. What are the skills required for employability? A recent study interviewed employers in five cities in South Asia. Two clear themes emerged from this study. The first is the importance of non-cognitive skills such as leadership, communication, honesty/ethics, teamwork and flexibility, which we sometimes also refer to as 21st century skills. The second is the importance of being able to learn and the need for critical thinking and analytical skills (Burnett, p. 9). This is a very important finding — our educational system has always laid a greater emphasis on cognitive skills. We can see that employers in the 21st century are increasingly stressing the need for non-cognitive skills.

Finally, the 21st century university must be able to offer a diverse range of courses to address the needs of the lifelong learner. It would be impossible for any single institution to develop all such courses single-handedly and they would need to collaborate with others. The Open University of Mauritius has licensed the Commonwealth Executive MBA/MPA programme from COL to offer world class professional education to its students. Mauritius is an active member of the COL-led Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth and the Lifelong Learning Programme for entrepreneurship development for women. COL will continue to further strengthen such collaborations and partnership.

The Open University of Mauritius is all set to become a world class institution of the 21st century. COL will be ready to accompany it on this journey. Let me wish you every success as you go forward.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.