



The International Academic Relations Division (IRD) The Open University of Sri Lanka



Quarterly Newsletter
October – December 2014

Message from the Director



The International Academic Relations Division (IRD) acts as the interface between OUSL and the global academic community. The primary purpose of the IRD is to enrich the academic, economic and cultural aspects of OUSL staff and students by establishing international collaborations with likeminded individuals and institutions.

The IRD was established in October of 2013. At that point, the University had recognized the importance of establishing collaborative relationships to increase its international standing, build its global profile, increase the recognition of its academic offerings and conduct high impact research. This vision also aligns with the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) position for strengthening the education sector of the country through international collaboration.

The University aims to ensure that it has sufficient faculty and institution level agreements in place to meet the growing needs of Sri Lanka's student population and that of the

broader international community. The IRD provides expert advice and guidance to the University on the development of international relations strategies and the establishment of formal relationships and partnerships with universities and other entities around the world.

Another recent development of the IRD is its role in the National Online Distance Education Service (NODES). NODES is an initiative of the Ministry of Higher Education and was setup as an entrepreneurial, self-sustaining, national agency to coordinate delivery of online distance education programs. The NODES technology infrastructure includes the "NODES Network Operation Center" (NOC) and 23 "NODES Access Centers" (NAC) distributed island wide to provide a robust platform for the deployment of modern e-Learning technologies locally and internationally.

Further to a directive by the Ministry of Higher Education, the NODES operation was officially handed over to OUSL on the 30th of September 2014. Since then, OUSL has temporarily placed the operations of NODES under the IRD; appointed a dedicated datacenter manager for NODES; initiated upgrades of the NOC and NACs to suit the latest eLearning requirements;

and revamp the disaster recovery (DR) site. Furthermore, the entire NODES operation, including the NOC, will be relocated early 2015 to the brand new IT building being purpose built at OUSL.

By fully utilizing the online learning delivery capabilities of NODES, OUSL intends to establish some national level eLearning platforms and services which will benefit all the key stakeholders in Sri Lanka. The initiatives planned for 2015 are as follows:

OUSL Distinguished Lecture Series – A monthly lecture delivered by a renowned foreign professor to the Sri Lankan community on the latest research topics. This is streamed live via the OUSL website to the whole of Sri Lanka and the world. The inaugural lecture was delivered on the 19th of December 2014 by Dr Som Naidu of Australia on the topic “Getting Published in High Impact Journals”.

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform - MOOC has the ability to deliver education freely to the masses. A national level MOOC platform will be setup for the offering of free courses by OUSL to the wider Sri Lankan community. One of the first courses to be offered will be ICT Literacy. Students can follow the free online course from their homes, computer labs in schools (Mahindodaya labs) or Nanasala facilities. Ultimately, they can sit for an OUSL exam to earn a qualification.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) - A Virtual Synchronous Classroom platform will be implemented. This platform will allow the broadcasting of lectures, seminars and talks in a real-time manner to a national, regional and even global level. Users who have access to an internet connection can participate in these classrooms from anywhere.

National Research Repository - Federation of educational and research metadata increases

visibility of an institution within the global academic community. In this light, a national research repository will be established to host all the research publications of Sri Lankan academics under an open access policy. The educational metadata from this repository will be federated and made available to global scholarly networks such as Google Scholar and GLOBE.

Open Educational Resources (OER) Repository - An OER repository will be setup for hosting homegrown open content made available to a global community under a free license. Academics from OUSL and other national institutions can contribute their original academic works into this repository to be made available as OER. These resources can be reused, revised, remixed and redistributed freely, without any copyright concerns. This will increase access and equity in education for Sri Lankan students.

In addition to the activities planned under NODES, the IRD will continue to establish new collaborative ties with International partners to benefit the faculty and students of OUSL. Among the activities planned are staff exchange programs, free technical workshops and guest lectures.

More information on the events and the IRD events calendar can be accessed using the following URL:

<http://www.ou.ac.lk/home/index.php/international-academic-relations-division>

We look forward to your continued cooperation and support in serving the best interests of the OUSL staff and students.

Ishan Abeywardena MSc, MSc (Brunel), BSc (Bangalore), MIET, MBCS, MIEEE, MCP

Director
International Academic Relations Division

Contents

- The OUSL Distinguished Lecture Series: Inaugural Lecture..... 3
- Agreement Signing on the Establishment of the Sri Lanka – China Open Education Center between OUSL and Yunnan Open University, China..... 4
- OUSL Staff Professional Development Attachment at Wawasan Open University..... 5
- Professional Development Workshop Conducted for the Staff of Maldives National University..... 6
- Android App Development Using Visual Programming: Hong Kong SAR..... 6
- High-Level Executive Workshop on MOOCs..... 7
- Meeting with Japanese Counterparts on Establishing a National Research Repository.... 8
- Visit by Delegation from Hanbat National University of Korea..... 8
- Meeting with Microsoft on Providing Free Tablet Computers to OUSL Students..... 8
- Visit by the Myanmar Garment Manufacturer Association to OUSL..... 9
- Visit by Delegation from Korea University of Media Arts..... 9

The inaugural lecture of the series was delivered on the 19th of December from 11am to 12.30pm by Dr Som Naidu who is affiliated to Monash University, Australia. The topic of the lecture was “Getting Published in High Impact Journals” which is immensely beneficial for early and mid-career academics. Around 50 academics representing many Higher Education Institutions in Sri Lanka participated in the lecture. The lecture was streamed live to the global academic community via the OUSL corporate website.



The OUSL Distinguished Lecture Series: Inaugural Lecture

One of the latest initiatives by the International Academic Relations Division (IRD) is the “*Distinguished Lecture Series*” which is designed to foster rich academic discourse among Sri Lankan academics. The lecture series further intends to build capacities among Sri Lankan academics in good academic practices; technology-assisted teaching; sound research methodologies; and high impact publications.

Among his many portfolios, Dr Naidu is the executive editor (Since 1997) of the journal *Distance Education* which is the oldest journal in the field; assistant editor (Since 2008) of the journal *Interactive Learning Environments*; member of the inaugural Routledge *Education Arena* Panel of Editors; and co-series editor of the *Open, Flexible and Distance Learning* book series published by Routledge of the Taylor and Francis Group. Dr Som Naidu is also the recipient of a Doctor of Letters Honoris Causa from the OUSL in 2014.



During the lecture which was chaired by the Vice Chancellor of OUSL Dr Vijitha Nanayakkara, Dr Naidu covered a wide spectrum of topics related to academic publishing such as what is high impact, and how it is determined; what are the critical factors that influence the determination of a journal's *impact factor and reputation*, including implications for the inclusion of journals in *citation indexes* such as *ISI (Institute for Scientific Information, SCI (Science Citation Index), SSCI (Social Sciences Citation Index), and AHCI (Arts and Humanities Citation Index)*; what are the implications for a journal's impact factor of the *open access* movement including options and implications for authors for *'green' and 'gold' open access publishing*; and more importantly, how does one get published in high impact journals. Dr Naidu further explored how to target and prepare publications for high impact publication outlets including issues such as paying attention to the contribution and relevance of your research to the field; clarity of its goals and intentions and methodological rigor; use of language and expression/writing style; its technical merit, and also negotiating the peer-review and publication process.

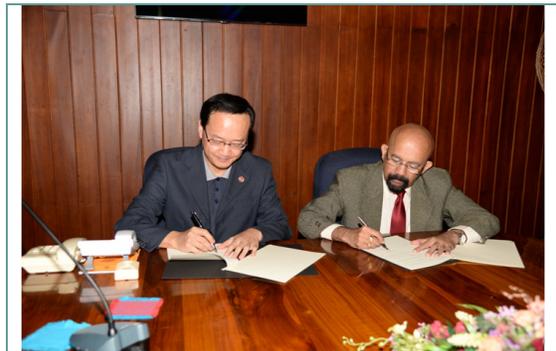


Five more Distinguished Lectures are already scheduled to be delivered monthly starting from January 2015. The speakers include eminent research professors from USA, Japan, India and Canada in diverse fields ranging from Open Education to Computer Science. The lecture series will be conducted in the Center for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe) at the OUSL. All the lectures will be professionally captured in HD format, edited and made

available as OER on the OUSL website and YouTube. The complete lecture series will be streamed live via the OUSL website to the whole world. This is one of the major contributions by OUSL to the global community in terms of increasing access and equity to knowledge. Anyone with an internet connection can follow the lectures and discussions live from home, schools, universities and offices. The Nanasala facilities can also be used to follow the lectures. Furthermore, the live stream is viewable on smart phones, tablets and mobile devices with an internet connection.

Agreement Signing on the Establishment of the Sri Lanka – China Open Education Center between OUSL and Yunnan Open University, China

Further to the MoU signed between OUSL and Yunnan Open University (YOU), China, the two institutions entered in to a formal agreement to establish a “Sri Lanka – China Open Education Center”.



A delegation of four representatives including the Vice President of YOU arrived in Sri Lanka to attend the agreement signing ceremony on the 22nd of December 2014.



The center will be located at the OUSL main campus in Nawala and will be jointly operated by OUSL and YOU staff. The first initiative of the center is to offer language courses in Mandarin to OUSL students starting middle of 2015.



This event marks a historic moment for OUSL in terms of establishing foreign collaboration.

OUSL Staff Professional Development Attachment at Wawasan Open University

As an outcome of the MOU signed in 2013 between the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) and Wawasan Open University (WOU) of Penang, Malaysia, a group of eight senior academics; two from each faculty returned after an stimulating 10 day Professional Development Program. The main aim of the program was to identify the best practices of WOU in areas relevant to OUSL and the faculties represented by the participants.



Some of the key areas examined during the program focused on the quality assurance system in operation which has both internal

and external quality assurance procedures in place to meet the demands of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). Other aspects focused on were program and course development, course delivery process, academic administration, evaluation and assessment in ODL, and cost effective program planning and budgeting.



One of the striking features observed by the visiting academics was the standardization procedures in operation which contributed greatly to the smooth running of activities both academically and administratively. The well-structured mechanisms related to teaching procedures, examinations, and assignments built into the system contributed greatly to ensure quality programs. The efficient Learning Management System (LMS) with learning resources and effective hierarchical monitoring mechanisms ensure efficient student support.



The academics had much to learn as well as share with those at WOU and were enriched following this development program. Some of the above mentioned aspects have potential to be replicated at OUSL and others can be adapted to enhance the

efficiency of mechanisms presently in place at OUSL.

Professional Development Workshop Conducted for the Staff of Maldives National University

A three day Professional Development Workshop was conducted for 17 academic staff from the Maldives National University (MNU). The workshop was held from 1st to 3rd December 2014 at the Staff Development Centre of the Open University of Sri Lanka. The event was organized by the International Academic Relations Division (IRD) in collaboration with the Faculty of Education and the Consultancy and External Resource Centre (CERC).



The workshop was tailored to MNU in the field of Inclusive Education. Among the topics covered were assessment and evaluation; concept, philosophy and policies and instructional processes. The resource persons for the workshop were Prof Jaufar, Prof Lekange, Dr Danapala, Dr Anoma Alwis and Mr Gonsalkorala.



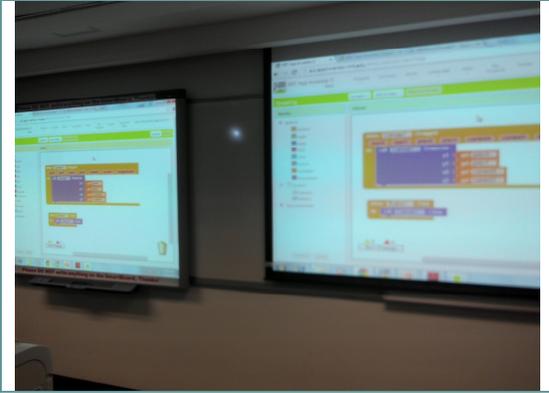
Android App Development Using Visual Programming: Second workshop, Hong Kong SAR

The second workshop on “Android App Development Using Visual Programming” was held at the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK), Hong Kong SAR on the 31st of November and 1st December 2014. The event was organized as a post-conference workshop of the 28th Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) Annual Conference by the International Academic Relations Division (IRD) of OUSL and the University Research Center of OUHK. The workshop was conducted by Mr. Ishan Abeywardena, Director of the IRD of OUSL. The objectives of the workshop were to (i) familiarize STOU staff with the AI2 platform; (ii) use the Designer and Blocks Editor; (iii) implement various components in applications; (iv) design rich user experiences (UX); and (v) practice packaging and distribution of applications.

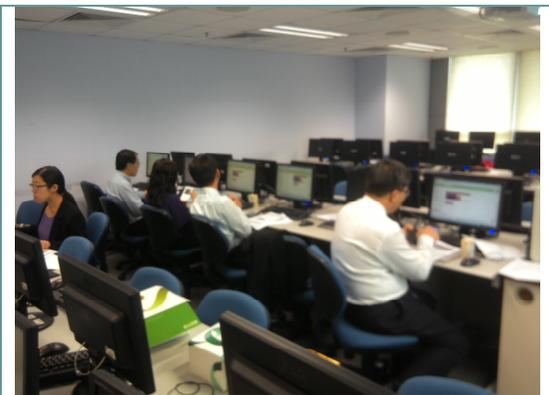


The participants of the workshop underwent basic and intermediate training on the AI2 platform. Among the topics covered were introduction to AI2 platform; device setup; debugging apps using physical phones and Android emulator; building apps using components such as text-to-speech,

accelerometer, speech recognition, canvas, sprite, camera, camcorder, video player, audio player etc.; packaging and distributing apps; and publishing apps on Google Play.



The participants developed approximately 13 apps which provided them a wide range of skills in user experience (UX) design and programming logic. The workshop also had four full length tutorial exercises where participants built three fully functional apps which concentrated on (i) designing user interfaces; (ii) designing user experiences; and (iii) fundamentals of animation and game design.



Ishan Abeywardena further demonstrated how a storyboard is created prior to designing and developing a functional Android App. The group consisted of around 20 participants each with varied professional backgrounds ranging from academic faculty, instructional designers to software engineers.

The next workshop will be held on the 13th and 14th of January 2015 at the OUSL main campus in Nawala, Nugegoda.

High-Level Executive Workshop on MOOCs

A high-level workshop on Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) was organized by UNESCO as a pre-conference event of the 28th Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) annual conference. The workshop, held on 27th October 2014 at the Open University of Hong Kong, was aimed at high-level executives and decision makers of Open Universities in Asia. Prof Fred Mulder and Mr Abel Cane were the facilitators of the event. Prof Mulder is the UNESCO/ICDE Chair in Open Educational Resources and former Rector of OUNL. Mr Cane is the UNESCO Programme Specialist on Open Educational Resources (OER). Dr Vijitha Nanayakkara, Vice Chancellor; and Mr Ishan Abeywardena, Director of International Academic Relations, were invited to attend the event representing OUSL.



The facilitators as well as some key guest speakers shared their experiences under the topics *MOOCs scenarios for OUs in a global context*; *OpenupEd MOOCs in Europe: Characteristics / state of play*; *Spotlight on MOOCs Initiatives of Asian OUs*; *Globalizing OpenupEd in Asia and a role for AAOU?*; and *From workshop to work plan?*.

As OUSL is planning to launch the first MOOC in Sri Lanka, this workshop shed light on some key concerns with respect to the practicalities of running a MOOC. OUSL will be working closely with AAOU and UNESCO to make its MOOC initiative a success story in Asia.

Meeting with Japanese Counterparts on Establishing a National Research Repository

A high-level meeting was held between OUSL, The Open University of Japan (OUJ) and the National Institute of Informatics (NII), Japan during the 28th Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) annual conference held in Hong Kong. OUSL was represented by the Vice Chancellor Dr Vijitha Nanayakkara; Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr Janaka Liyanagama; and the Director of the IRD Mr Ishan Abeywardena. Prof Tsuneo Yamada represented OUJ while Prof Kazu Yamaji represented NII.



The meeting, which took place in October 2014, explored the possibility of establishing a national research repository for Sri Lanka funded by NII and OUJ. As a result of the discussion, a team of Japanese experts will be arriving in Sri Lanka early February 2015 to setup the repository system, conduct a two-day capacity building workshop on how to use the repository and deliver two Distinguished Lectures on technology.

Visit by Delegation from Hanbat National University of Korea

A delegation from Hanbat National University of Korea visited OUSL on the 11th of November 2014. The purpose of this visit was to explore possible areas for collaboration between the two Institutions.



During the meeting with the top management of OUSL, it was decided that a potential area of collaboration would be to establish a Korean language center at OUSL. The International Academic Relations Division (IRD) is now in communication with Hanbat National University to see how this idea can be practically taken forward.



Meeting with Microsoft on Providing Free Tablet Computers to OUSL Students

A high-level meeting was held on the 18th of November 2014 between Microsoft and OUSL to explore the possibility of providing free tablet computers for OUSL students. Several high profile representatives from Microsoft USA, Singapore, India and Sri Lanka were present including the Worldwide Managing Director for Education Partners.



The delegation met the Vice Chancellor Dr Vijitha Nanayakkara, Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr Janaka Liyanagama and Director of the International Academic Relations Division Mr Ishan Abeywardena. Prof Udugama and Dr Madurapperuma represented the academics in the meeting. The IRD is currently in communication with Microsoft to finalize the details of the devices which will be loaded with OUSL study material to be given to the students.

Visit by the Myanmar Garment Manufacturer Association to OUSL

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) was pleased to welcome a delegation from the Myanmar Garment Manufacturer Association (MGMA) on 23rd October 2014. The delegation was comprised of 10 members of MGMA and 1 representative from the British Council. The visit was organized by the International Academic Relations Division (IRD) of OUSL.



The Vice Chancellor Dr. Vijitha Nanayakkara; Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr Janaka Liyanagama; Dean of the Faculty of

Engineering Technology Prof. S.A. Ariadurai; Head Department of Textile & Apparel Technology Dr. M.E.R. Perera; and the Director International Academic Relations Mr. Ishan Abeywardena participated in this meeting. The aim of the discussion was to explore research collaborations between MGMA and OUSL in the area of best practices in Garment Manufacturing. The meeting was followed by a site visit of the OUSL facilities including the laboratories of the Department of Textile Engineering.



Visit by Delegation from Korea University of Media Arts

A delegation from Korea University of Media Arts visited the Open University of Sri Lanka on the 5th of December 2014. They are a prestigious University in Broadcasting and Visual Arts in Korea which is seeking to open up avenues for collaboration with OUSL in common academic disciplines.



The initial discussions explored student exchange programs, reciprocal visits of faculty, and initiation of joint degree programs. The International Academic Relations Division (IRD) is currently in contact with the Korea University of Media Arts to explore training opportunities for CETMe staff.

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