1910 - 2010
Celebrating 100 years of public distance education in NSW
OTEN centenary e-book

1910 - 2010: Celebrating 100 years of public distance education in New South Wales

Message from the Institute Director
TAFE NSW - Western Sydney Institute

Susan Hartigan

I am pleased to introduce this e-book commemorating the centenary of public sector vocational distance education in New South Wales. It reflects some of the more recent technological advances that have revolutionised distance education delivery.

I trust that you will find this collection of photographs, historical information, anecdotes and reflections from past and present staff and students entertaining and informative.

My own connection to distance education began in 1987 and has continued through a variety of roles to the present. It has given me personal experience of how distance education can change the lives of so many people by opening up educational opportunities they might have previously thought were beyond their reach.

I hope you enjoy reading and viewing the contributions and, through them, gain a unique insight into the importance and proud tradition of service provided by public sector vocational education and training. We look forward to continuing this service in the next 100 years, aided by technological innovations still to be imagined.

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Introduction to the OTEN centenary e-book

To celebrate our centenary year at the Open Training and Education Network (OTEN), we asked staff and students to share their memories and reflections for this e-book. It features stories about OTEN in the form of anecdotes, letters, photographs, poems, testimonials and choral lyrics. This story is about OTEN people and our experiences and feelings, as we continue on this exciting journey of distance education.

The great pride and collegiality that we have in OTEN, a leader in distance education, is reflected in these pages. OTEN is part of the award-winning TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute, national winner of the 2010 Australian Training Awards, Large Training Provider of the Year.

Located in Strathfield, Sydney, OTEN is the largest provider of distance education and flexibly-delivered programs in Australia. It offers world-class distance education services and products to more than 60,000 students in over 250 TAFE NSW courses.

This e-book provides some insights into the distinctive ‘OTEN culture’ that shapes our educational experiences.

Specialists in distance education

Distance education is a specialised field, requiring a highly skilled, specialised form of teaching. OTEN staff have a wealth of knowledge about how to deliver this mode of education in diverse courses and to a diverse community of students. There are a number of important factors contributing to our success.

Collaboration and teamwork

A high level of collaboration and teamwork is one of the keys to OTEN’s success and one of Western Sydney Institute’s key organisational values. Working together at OTEN, our staff members are able to pool resources and ideas to meet the challenges of teaching by distance education.

We work closely in teams of distance education specialists, based on our subject and vocational areas. The open and flexible work spaces at OTEN allow strong interaction and collaboration.

Here are some of our collaborating OTEN teams!
Staff interactions, both in day-to-day work and beyond, are important to maintaining the collegiality that we value at OTEN. It is these chances to grab a moment in our busy schedules and compare notes about our teaching and students or reflect upon the milestones we have achieved that are an important part of working at OTEN.

And while the setting has changed over the years, from Redfern to Strathfield, the regular staff barbecue has remained a constant fixture. You can see that we’ve shifted from a fry-up on the roof at Redfern (left), to a sausage sizzle down in the courtyard at Strathfield (right).

The OTEN courtyard is also an excellent setting for the broad range of charity and fundraising events supported by OTEN staff and for commemorating important occasions. Here you can see OTEN’s female staff members being photographed to celebrate International Women’s Day in 2010.
Flexibility

Flexibility is very important at OTEN. Distance education students need easy and regular access to their teachers, due to the flexible nature of their learning program. OTEN teachers are available for our students every business day of the week, for 50 weeks a year. Students don’t just interact with one teacher, but with a team of teachers, ensuring that there is always someone at OTEN to answer their calls or emails.

Reminder calls aside, students are encouraged to learn independently, but with strong support, as the OTEN catchphrase goes:

‘Study @ your own pace @ your own place’

We provide students with teaching support by telephone, email and such educational internet platforms as the specialist Online Learning Support (OLS) website and online Wiki discussion boards. There has also been an increase in the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter by OTEN and its teaching sections. Wherever our students are, OTEN is there also!

Understanding a different way of doing things

At OTEN, teaching often assumes a little twist on the ‘norm’, reflecting our different way of doing things. Our increasing engagement with online assignments means that our students are less likely to ring up complaining that ‘the dog ate my homework’, but rather that ‘the dog ate my computer cord’.

Dealing with such a diverse variety of students, we sometimes receive some extraordinary responses to assignment questions. For example, an assignment in the OTEN Communications section asked for a set of workplace instructions. One student responded with an elaborate technical description of the procedure for catching a saltwater crocodile! The instructions’ strong recommendation to keep the reptile’s mouth closed with a rope hinted at the student’s pragmatic streak.

‘G’day Derrick, Graham has already harassed me about this also. Sorry but I’ve been a bit slack lately with a new daughter, a new house and hunting a new job.

I’m coxing a 30 footer out of the Tweed and working odd days and I guess I just let the course “slip” a little bit. But I’m back on it now and you’ll be getting regular returns in future. My apologies for causing you problems and thanks for giving me the reminder calls. It is appreciated.

PS Another reminder call next month would be great.’
Knowing how to deal with the unexpected

Teachers at OTEN are very well-practised at responding to unexpected questions. As a distance education teacher you never know who is going to ring and when they are going to call.

Sometimes students feel so familiar with OTEN, that they contact us and just give their first name:

‘Hi, it’s Greg here’.

So how do we identify all of our students?

How do we perform the role of super sleuth at OTEN? To solve the mysteries that fall into our hands every day we are assisted by the Student Administration and Management (or SAM as it’s affectionately known by the OTEN staff) electronic support system developed at OTEN especially for distance education delivery.

From cards to computers

While once a card system was used to manually record student details, SAM enables us to identify students instantly with the click of a button (and preferably with more than just their first name!). SAM displays their complete OTEN record: subjects, results, contact details and much more. We can see a computerised record of every conversation that a student has had with their teachers and the date and result of every assignment submitted.

The all-powerful SAM

SAM really seems to be omniscient: it’s as though it can read our minds and see everything that we do. At his speech at the OTEN Centenary Celebrations, Dennis Macnamara, former Manager of the Open Learning Program at OTEN, described this feeling that SAM is ‘all powerful’, from the perspective of an imaginary student:

‘But what really did I do in was SAM. SAM was a monster. It could read my mind. It seemed to know exactly where I was up to. It sent me letters telling me how many assignments I had left to do. It warned me I only had so much time left to finish or else. Who was this SAM? Where would I find him or her? Where would I find this bug-eyed, all-seeing creature? And it started versioning me! It told me I was on Version 1.5 of the subject and 2.4 of the course with an assessment using 4.5 with a crossover factor equivalence of 3.

Where would this all end? I had to get to this SAM and convince him of the error of his ways. Why would he not accept the tried and tested 45% completion rate of old? What madman was he that he wanted to harass such poor students as me in order to reach some nirvana of high completion rates?’
Once an OTEN student has successfully navigated the journey of distance education (carefully monitored by SAM) they are able to commemorate their achievement with an online graduation ceremony at OTEN.

Our aim at OTEN is to ensure that our students are provided with as many aspects of the educational process as possible, despite their geographic dispersal and other time commitments. Our online graduation ceremonies have proved very popular and are an important way of celebrating the fantastic achievements of our students. Students are able to log-in to our graduation website http://oten-graduation.com.au and view their virtual graduation online, complete with speeches from staff and students and all the usual ceremonial features.

We do get out sometimes...

OTEN staff also venture out into the world beyond OTEN, to give a practical class to students or to promote OTEN courses. Our trips into the real world can present interesting and unusual challenges, yet we have a knack for finding solutions to these. The following anecdotes from the September 1999 issue of ‘Openline’ demonstrate the great resourcefulness of OTEN teachers in the face of extraordinary circumstances:

‘Ballad of the OTEN bees’

There was movement in the OTEN car, as the buzz was heard around That the bees from the beehive had escaped. And Rosie was concerned that the bees were in her hair Which they were, and making an awful sound.

Let’s go back a bit in time here, to paint a picture true So that you get the background to this scene Then you’ll understand how the bees caused a pretty awesome ‘blue’ And how talcum powder has more uses than it seems.

You see, Rosie and Keith were bound for Mudgee Field Days, As the teachers from Primary Industries are always on the stands, Every year in July, you see us amongst the haze Proclaiming the benefits of OTEN-DE to the people of the land.

Well Rosie being a person of imagination and flair, Decided a bee exhibit would attract the rural folk, From far and near to hear the OTEN message And increase the enrolment numbers and the OTEN coffers stoke.

So off went Keith and Rosie in the OTEN car that day Piled high with flyers, pamphlets, CILS and books. And somewhere on their journey, I’m told about halfway They collected the beehive which they were hoping would get more looks.

Now the hive was well constructed, but some screws they did come loose And the bees decide to have a better look around, So Keith and Rosie pulled up the car, fairly quickly, we hear, Whilst they were still Mudgee bound.

Keith, being a practiced man of the land, Had an idea and decided to smoke the bees away, So he grabbed up heaps of grasses, both dry and green and bland, With a purpose to shoe those bees the light of day.

This was the first big hurdle as neither Rosie nor Keith smoke, And to light the grasses they were to find The lighter in the Falcon wasn’t as good as it could have been And many new words sprung to mind.

But at last they got it smouldering and the car was filled with smoke, And the loose bees, they did buzz outside and away. So Keith took the beehive, a hammer and six-inch nails as well,
And fixed the hive so no more bees would go astray.
Then Rosie and Keith got back in the car, but now it was full of smoke, So Rosie opened the windows for the smoke to escape,
And just at that time, the bees that were outside
Decided that acquaintance with their queen they would make.
So the bees, about five hundred, decided to attend
To the business of getting back into the hive,
And flew in the open window, that Rosie had just provided,
And the OTEN car with buzzing bees was once more alive.
Keith, he chose some fine words, which we will not repeat,
And Rosie put her sharp mind to gear
On just how to get the bees out of the OTEN car,
And get the “bloody hell out of here!”
Rosie searched her baggage and some talcum powder found
Which she launched upon the bees with all her might.
It worked with such magic that the bees all went to ground
And Rosie and Keith were now all right.

So if you go to Mudgee on a visit or a trip,
Just about twenty k’s this side of town,
You’ll notice lots of homeless bees on the nature strip,
For the Mudgee Field Days they were bound.

They are flying around aimlessly, looking for their queen,
And Rosie and Keith, one day, will pay
For not checking the condition of the beehive they picked up
When they went to sell OTEN at the Mudgee Field Days.

Gunderbooka adventure
Another outing near Bourke by Bob Crombie (former Head Teacher, Environmental Science) saw a variety of things go wrong, but it all turned out well in the end:

‘On Bob’s recent trip to Gunderbooka National Park, 130km from Bourke, to conduct an Ecology Awareness Training Program for the NSW Rural Fire Service, the wrongs include: having the projector stand and slides stolen from his car at Nyngan; running off a treacherous road, hitting a tree, badly damaging his car and denting his pride; torrential rain which prevented his local expert assistants from getting to the training site; and finally a storm which brought gale force winds, hail and flooding. The rights?

Quick-thinking which replaced lack of local knowledge and planned practical exercises with a nature walk; replacement slides which arrived from Sydney just in the nick of time; the NRMA for getting Bob and his poor car safely home; appreciation from the 30 Fire Control Officers; and the congratulations from them to Bob and OTEN-DE for providing such an excellent training program.’

Adventures of an OTEN package
Even our OTEN packages have adventures in the outside world! Jenny Collins received the following ‘phone call:

‘Last week, Armidale Hospital emergency section rang to ask us what was in the white powders which we had sent to a student with the CGE Science units. When I informed her that it was only flour and sodium bicarbonate she burst into laughter, thanked us and hung up. What had the student done with the powders to be in casualty?’
Mudcrabs, the Governor General, OTEN and the Remote North

Some journeys reveal to teachers how far-reaching OTEN’s influence really is. OTEN Management Teacher Chris Pittaway had a very interesting encounter in the Northern Territory with the Governor General, an OTEN student and some mudcrabs!

On Wednesday the 15th of July 2009 I was fortunate enough to meet Her Excellency the Governor General, Ms Quentin Bryce AC. At the time I was enjoying the tropical climate of the Northern Territory in a remote coastal Aboriginal Community called Maningrida. Despite the isolation I found myself ‘back at work’ when the Governor General demonstrated a deep knowledge and pro-active interest in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Both the Governor General, the security detail and her support team also demonstrated a deep and focused interest in the consumption of the local mud crabs, provided by the local women. In the interests of good community relations and promoting TAFE, I joined them at the table. They were fantastic!”

Despite some of the challenges in social conditions that Maningrida faces, Chris found that OTEN and others are providing important educational opportunities in Maningrida, as he continues:

‘Educational opportunity can now include schooling up to year 12. Both the Batchelor Aboriginal College and Western Sydney Institute of TAFE (through OTEN), provide services for the local residents. I was able to visit with an OTEN Aboriginal student in town during my stay and found that their Internet connection is first class, enabling active participation in distance education.

Remaining in my memory will be the smiling faces of all the locals and the bountiful supply of barramundi and mud-crabs. This won’t be my last visit to the deep north and this fascinating and resilient community.’

Back at OTEN

Back at OTEN, we’re more likely to be dealing with computers, telephones and paperwork than beehives and mud-crabs. Yet even when seated at our desks and computers, OTEN teachers are able to generate a sense of real-life drama into the educational process. For example, a video produced by OTEN’s fire-fighting section reflects the way that OTEN uses simulation to engage students with real-life scenarios. Below you can see how it communicates all the action and excitement of a real fire station call-out! Apparently it was stipulated that the annoyingly piercing bells and screaming sirens needed to be emphasised to ensure that the students experienced a realistic scenario!

And just because OTEN teachers are physically removed from the face-to-face classroom world, this certainly doesn’t mean that we don’t keep up with the latest fashions, or exhibit a snazzy sense of style in the office. In fact some OTEN staff members have achieved impressive results in this area:

Governor General Quentin Bryce and OTEN Management Teacher Chris Pittaway

The following extracts are from Chris’ article ‘Mudcrabs, Governor General, OTEN and the Remote North’ in the OTEN blog http://otende.wordpress.com/:

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As you can see, distance education is a specialist field, with its own specialised customs and behaviours. Whether responding to student needs, developing learning resources or effortlessly displaying millinery panache, it’s all part of a day’s work at OTEN.

Innovation and changing times

OTEN has always been at the forefront of innovation and adaptation in response to change. Two of the key values of the Institute are innovative thinking and solutions, and excellence in teaching. These are reflected strongly in OTEN’s educational practices.

In distance education, which engages very closely with contemporary technologies, change is a constant influence. OTEN has needed to respond to rapid changes continually as it has developed as an organisation.

History of OTEN

You can see how far we’ve come as an organisation in the following video. In this video you can see aspects of the intriguing and rich history of distance education in NSW, forming the foundations of OTEN, the complex and innovative organisation that it is today.

Changes in how we communicate with students

So much has changed in the way that we do things: we now use computer systems for everything that we do. We can contact our tens of thousands of students by email and our students can submit their assignments online. We also deliver online learning materials and facilitate student discussion boards on web-based wiki platforms. This is a big change from the days of handwritten records and paper-based communication.

Carol Solomons reminisces:

Former Humanities teacher Carol Solomons, who worked at OTEN for 35 years, remembers the days at Redfern when there was one computer on the floor. Teachers had to book a time slot to work on it and they were all very unsure about how to use it.

Fast forward to today: every teacher has a computer on their desk and spends most of their day glued to it, often while talking on the telephone at the same time!
Changes in our specialised computer systems

Our specialised distance education computer systems at OTEN have changed significantly, in appearance and format. However the one thing that stays the same is their focus on managing large numbers of distance students in the most effective way. OTEN is a leader and innovator in developing software for distance education delivery: with the ‘omniscient’ SAM system for staff and the OLS (Online Learning Support) website for students and staff. The OTEN website is also a crucial component of OTEN’s online information sources for new and continuing students.

Innovative educational delivery methods

OTEN’s innovation in educational delivery is a key part of its success. As our materials are provided upfront to students in the form of either online or printed, we need to prepare these well in advance, far earlier than in face-to-face class teaching. Our materials are comprehensive, in-depth and take time to carefully produce and revise before being published. Increasingly, these materials are being downloaded by students online and we have developed innovative multimedia methods to engage learners, such as podcasts, vodcasts and interactive websites, as well as online text-based materials.

Singing through the changes

So much has changed: the way that we contact our students, our computer systems and our methods of delivery. Yet one thing that has remained constant (we hope!) is our sense of humour.

Sometimes the best thing to do when the ‘times are a-changing’ is just to sing! This is how the infamous ‘12 Days of OTEN Christmas Carols’ came into being.
Christmas carols were a feature of OTEN in December each year dating back to about 1989 when it is said that the new Deputy Principal of ESCOTAFE, Dennis Macnamara initiated OTEN’s choral performances.

Carols were often incorporated into staff events and after Dennis became the Manager Open Learning Program at OTEN the emphasis on choral activities increased even further.

When Dennis Macnamara left OTEN in 1998, staff used the well-known format of the ‘Twelve Days of Christmas’ song to itemise his catalogue of activities at OTEN. ‘The Twelve Days of OTEN’ was sung at various farewell functions, not least on the stairs of the Museum of Sydney. With these carols, staff sang through the cathartic process of responding to the many changes in the workplace that they had experienced over the years.

The Twelve Days of OTEN

1. On my first day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me: A MEMO NO-ONE COULD READ.

2. On my second day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me: TWO ACTION PLANS, and a memo no-one could read.

3. On my third day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me: THREE SEMINARS, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.

4. On my fourth day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me: FOUR FLEXI-LEARNs three seminars, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.

5. On my fifth day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me: FIVE TAFE RESTRUCTURES! Four FLEXI LEARNS, three seminars, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.

6. On my sixth day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me SIX STUDENTS SCREAMING, Five TAFE restructures!! Four FLEXI LEARNS, three seminars, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.
7. On my seventh day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me:  
SEVEN MINISTERIALS,  
Six students screaming,  
Five TAFE restructures !!  
Four FLEXI LEARNS,  
three seminars, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.

8. On my eighth day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me:  
EIGHT UNPLANNED MEETINGS,  
Seven Ministerials,  
Six students screaming,  
Five TAFE restructures !!  
Four FLEXI LEARNS,  
three seminars, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.

9. On my ninth day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me:  
NINE VISION STATEMENTS,  
Eight unplanned meetings,  
Seven Ministerials,  
Six students screaming,  
Five TAFE restructures !!  
Four FLEXI LEARNS,  
three seminars, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.

10. On my tenth day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me:  
TEN AUDITS PENDING,  
Nine vision statements,  
Eight unplanned meetings,  
Seven Ministerials,  
Six students screaming,  
Five TAFE restructures !!  
Four FLEXI LEARNS,  
three seminars, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.

11. On my eleventh day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me:  
ELEVEN PARKING SPACES  
Ten audits pending,  
Nine vision statements,  
Eight unplanned meetings,  
Seven Ministerials,  
Six students screaming,  
Five TAFE restructures !!  
Four FLEXI LEARNS,  
three seminars, two action plans and a memo no-one could read.

12. (START SLOWLY)  
On my twelfth day at OTEN, Dennis gave to me:  
TWELVE CHRISTMAS CAROLS!!  
Eleven parking spaces,  
Ten audits pending,  
Nine vision statements,  
Eight unplanned meetings,  
Seven Ministerials,  
Six students screaming,  
Five TAFE restructures !!  
Four FLEXI LEARNS,  
three seminars, two action plans AND A MEMO NO-ONE COULD READ.
Transformative experiences

Distance education allows for educational possibilities not otherwise available to many of our students. As we know, study can transform our students’ lives and we are proud to be able to deliver our Institute values of empowerment and cultural diversity and an actively inclusive culture through our educational programs.

OTEN students have quite a different profile compared to those who study face-to-face. They are generally older, more are female, more are in full-time employment, more are shift workers and more are isolated and in rural areas. Some students are in hospital or incarcerated and many are in targeted equity groups, including Indigenous people, people with disabilities, young people at risk, single parent families and people from language backgrounds other than English. OTEN offers educational opportunities to a diverse range of people who would otherwise not be able to access these.

Assisting those who empower others

Study through OTEN has not only transformed many individual lives, but when OTEN students also hold influential positions in society, their newly acquired knowledge has flow-on effects to a much broader range of people.

Two graduates of OTEN’s Diploma of Aboriginal Studies are examples of this: Dasha Newington, who is on a pathway to become a doctor focused on Indigenous health, and Father Chris Riley, Founder and CEO of the ‘Youth Off the Streets’ organisation in Sydney. Here are their stories:

Dasha Newington, 2009 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year

Dasha Newington is an OTEN graduate who has not only found her OTEN studies very beneficial for her own career direction, but is now on a pathway to assist empowering others. After completing a Diploma of Aboriginal Studies with OTEN, Dasha then gained entry to the University of Sydney’s Medical School. She was the only Aboriginal student from the 300 students selected in 2009 for the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery. As Dasha commented in the Koori Mail, “Indigenous people deserve the chance to achieve their educational and life goals, and to fulfil their potential individually, and as communities,”...”I hope I will be making medical care friendlier for Indigenous Australians and providing them with positive, collaborative experiences seeing a doctor.”

OTEN’s Diploma of Aboriginal Studies enabled her to explore her Indigenous culture and to take a ‘stepping stone’ approach to gaining entrance to university. Dasha was able to add subjects to convert her TAFE Diploma into an undergraduate degree, before sitting the Graduate Australian Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT) to gain entry to the Sydney Medical School at the University of Sydney. She praised her OTEN teachers for their friendly, caring and accommodating approach and appreciated being able to study through OTEN’s flexible mode. Dasha found that the flexible study provided by OTEN gave her the opportunity to balance all of her commitments.
Father Chris Riley, Founder and CEO of the ‘Youth Off the Streets’ organisation

As Founder and CEO of the ‘Youth Off the Streets’ organisation, Father Chris Riley enrolled in the Diploma of Aboriginal Studies at OTEN in 2008, to gain understanding of the Aboriginal communities with whom he works. ‘Youth off the Streets’ supports homeless and drug-addicted young Australians to build a better life, providing a high school education, living skills and employment guidance and support. It is inspiring to know that through individuals such as Father Riley, the flexibility and high educational quality of our OTEN courses have benefits that flow on to many other people.

Father Riley found the OTEN course to be ideal for his needs. Having a very busy work schedule, he was able to study at his own pace in the OTEN course, fitting this around his many other commitments. He found the course to be very beneficial and enjoyable and was full of praise for the teachers, who he said were very encouraging and knowledgeable. Following Father Riley’s very positive experience with the OTEN course, a number of staff and one of the Board members from ‘Youth off the Streets’ have also enrolled.

Certificate IV in Alcohol and Other Drugs Work

Another example of how OTEN courses have far-reaching benefits is our provision of training for those working in the community services and health industries. The Certificate IV in Alcohol and Other Drugs Work is targeted to those working autonomously with individuals or with clients and community groups and those in team leader or coordinator positions in a range of drug and alcohol services.

Four OTEN students from this course convey how OTEN’s flexible delivery methods are ideal for students who need to fit study around a busy work schedule, in the following audio presentations:

Matt Randell  
Gail Davies  
Stephen Lytton  
Troy Kitto
Role of Outreach Youth Equity at OTEN

The Outreach Youth Equity section at OTEN is focused on assisting those young members of society who are often marginalised from educational opportunities. The following extract from a report on the ‘Youth Encouragement Awards’ presented by Outreach demonstrates how OTEN courses can empower students:

‘The Outreach Youth programs team at OTEN works in partnership with youth service providers and youth centres to provide a flexible, supportive pathway for young people so that they can continue their education. For many of them, this is the first positive experience of education and recognition of achievement they have ever received. In the words of some students:

I felt very respected, supported, adult, mature, and ... it made me want to do the work even more.

I was excited and proud of my achievements. At some stages I didn’t think I would complete the courses but now I’m really glad I got through it.

I did something good!
I can achieve stuff.
Thanks to the OTEN teachers who got me started, where others told me I’d never achieve anything.
It meant a lot to me because it’s the first award I have ever got. My family were proud of me because I have finally got an award for something.
I have learnt about a sense of achievement and enjoyment from doing this course with OTEN. It’s also relaxing too. I’ve got a lot of satisfaction out of doing this again. I’ve never felt so good about myself and the things I’ve done.

Many of these students have returned to school or have gone on to complete Year 10 (Certificate in General and Vocational Education CGVE) at TAFE. Others have gone on to do further education and training or have entered the workforce.’

It is very encouraging for OTEN teachers to see these positive outcomes of their teaching.
**Assisting students to develop self-confidence and interact with others**

It is always inspiring to hear accounts of how OTEN has assisted our students, especially when we are able to support students who face additional challenges in society. The following passage is an extract from a letter received from Adam Clarke, Case Manager with Wise Employment in Tasmania, in December 2009.

Where I have found the OTEN Programme to be particularly effective is with the results shown by clients with social phobias. These clients have fear of direct interaction with others, and have proven in the past to be unable to function within a classroom environment. I have enrolled a number of these clients into the OTEN Programme, and have seen amazing results. Not only have these clients been able, without exception, to achieve the desired academic results, but they have all demonstrated a profound improvement in their self-confidence. This has lead to a corresponding improvement in their condition. All of these clients have thus discovered the ability to interact with others both appropriately and confidently.

**SMIPA – Skilled Migration Internship Program - Accounting**

We also take great pride in assisting new migrants to Australia to gain skills that allow them to enter the workforce quickly and easily. SMIPA is an innovative commercial course offered by OTEN by the Multicultural Education Unit. Its objectives and outcomes are summed up very well in the following extract from the graduation speech of SMIPA student Astha Shah:

‘I arrived from Nepal 2½ years ago in order to do a Masters degree in Accounting. I already had a Bachelor’s degree in Business Studies from Nepal, but I believed there would be more opportunities for my career development in Australia.

SMIPA, for those who don’t know, is the Skilled Migration Internship Program for Accountants. The reason I chose this course with OTEN above all others is that OTEN offered me a flexible working program whereby I could study at a time and place that best suited my needs. Other than this it offers us a course which is highly recognised by industries and associated organisations within Australia and is tailored to the specific needs of the accounting industry.

During the course here at OTEN, the teachers were very considerate and helpful. And the classes were very interactive which improved my communication and English speaking skills as well. Furthermore this course has taught me how to work in a team, how to resolve conflict and has given me a deeper understanding of the Australian workplace culture, rights and responsibilities.

But I learned the real value of this program when I applied for my first internship with an accounting firm based in North Sydney, which has now turned into a job offer for me.’

Aida Tabet, Manager, SMIPA and two SMIPA students, Mithil Dilpbhai Patel and Harpreet Kaur
OTEN centenary celebrations
20 April 2010

It is inspiring stories such as these, and many more, that we celebrated in our 2010 centenary year.

It is exciting to have reached 100 years with such a high sense of our achievement as an organisation. The Centenary Celebration day on 20 April 2010 at OTEN was a special occasion, when OTEN staff, past and present, joined together for a celebratory lunch and speeches. Much fun was had by all and many amusing and interesting anecdotes were shared.

The celebrations featured a Welcome by Susan Hartigan, Institute Director TAFE NSW – Western Sydney Institute, an address from Cecelia Cilesio, Director Education, IT, Arts and Media and OTEN, and staff reflections from Denis Macnamara, former Manager of the Open Learning Program at OTEN and Sue Clilverd, former Educational Operations Manager, OTEN. The celebrations concluded with a closing speech by Ron Wright, Associate Director TAFE NSW – Western Sydney Institute. A giant cake was cut to celebrate the occasion, as we sat amongst the balloons and trees in the courtyard. You can see how much we enjoyed it all in the following photographs.

We are now looking forward to the next exciting 100 years of public distance education in NSW. May they be as innovative and empowering to our students and staff as the last 100 years!
Acknowledgements: A big thank you to all our wonderful staff, past and present, who have contributed to this e-book and to the author, Julia Jones and graphic designers, Tom Kitbumrung and Alita Tsang.
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