

Website Reviews

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Website Reviews

The following web sites provide an overview of many of the world-renown institutions and organizations that lead distance education and eLearning practices. These summaries should help the reader learn about key aspects of each entity and their importance in the development of open and distance education.

The Open University

www.open.ac.uk

Mission

The Open Universities' (OU) mission is part of its name, "open" to anyone, anywhere, any kind of instructional method and any idea. The OU is an institute for the people and supports and promotes the right for any person to higher education and discrimination of any kind. The OU also strives to be a leader in higher education providing top-quality programs and research. In addition, the university encourages students of all ages and educational backgrounds to attend. Certifications, skills for career advancement, change in career, or for personal gratification.

History

The university really began in the conceptions of people's minds as early as the 1920s when radio and television technologies were thought to be of use for educational instruction. The OU began with a committee of university vice-chancellors, pedagogues and television producers who began planning as early as 1965. Walter Peery was the first vice-chancellor in 1969 and the first foundation secretary was Anastasios Chirstodoulou. In the first years there was a staff of 70-80 people that met in Walton Hall, a small estate in the city of Milton Keynes. The policy from the very start was to accept anyone but to have the best of academic standards. In 1971, the OU enrolled its first students; 25,000 were admitted and 20,000 registered per course. The total student population was around 130,000. The OU grew steadily in the 1970s and 80s and saw the birth of residential schools, late night television broadcasts, and science home experiments. Postgraduate degrees were also introduced alongside career development programs, professional training and development courses.

Headquarters

Peter Horrocks became the present vice-chancellor in 2015. OU headquarters is located at Walton Hall, Kents Hill, Milton Keynes, England, United Kingdom.

Resources/Programs

The OU seems to offer every kind of subject a person might want to study. The university is known for its flexible learning programs that many employers in the United Kingdom recommend and not too costly. Approximately more than 170,000 students are taking advantage

of the OUs programs. The OU allows students to mix and combine majors and they allow an amount of ‘funding’ towards a second degree. There are also many postgraduate degrees offered such as law, MBA, art history, engineering, math and many more subjects. The OU is the largest university in the UK and touts itself as a world leader in ‘anytime, anywhere’ higher education.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

The OU is one of three UK higher education entities to obtain accreditation in the United States of America. The OU maintains partnerships with many institutes such as Calderdale College, Craven College, Havering College of Further and Higher Education, University of the Arts Utrecht, Netherlands, Hochschule für Internationales Management Heidelberg, Hull College Group, Leeds City College, and Leeds College of Art to name just a few. The OU has also established open access to its courses through OpenLearn, YouTube, iTunes University and Open Research Online. The Open University committed to international growth by delivering flexible and adjustable course offerings and programs in partnership with local governments to underserved populations and regions. Examples of these programs ranged from training for medical teams in sub-Saharan Africa, to English language education in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

www.uoc.edu

Mission and Purpose

The University of Catalonia is a world-class institution rooted in Catalonia. The university offers flexible learning to students of all ages, so they can continue their work and research. The institute prides itself in its personalized eLearning opportunities. The UOC feels that connections to global university partners is the face of the future for 21st century technological advances and research. The programs offered by the UOC are personalized to help students keep their competitive edge and contribute to the overall progression of society. Commitment to students, graduates and society; to service quality, and to constant innovation within the organization. UOC maintains five central values: R for respect of others, cultures, and ideas; T for transparency in their processes and data; P for professionalism, always ready to correct mistakes and learn from them but support all successes and transformation from within; S for Sustainability, systems that promote sustainability environmentally, economically and socially.

History

The UOC began in school year 1995-1996, with 200 students. Courses first offered were Educational Psychology and Business Studies in Catalan. Presently, there are over 200,000 students that attend the UOC. Gabriel A. Ferraté, born in 1932 was the founder of the UOC.

Headquarters

The headquarters for the UOC is found in Barcelona Spain, Catalonia. The campus is a virtual one that supports ‘anywhere, anytime’ higher and continuing education degrees. The present director is Josep A. Planell i Estany voted in on April 2013. He succeeded Imma Tubella i Casadevall as President of the UOC.

Resources/Programs

The UOC offers graduate and postgraduate programs in Catalan, Spanish and English. Students can pursue degrees in Psychology, Computer Science, Sciences of Education, Information and Knowledge Society and Economics. Recently an Information and Knowledge Society Doctoral Program that allows students to do research in subjects such as e-law, e-learning, network society, education, and online communities. There are a number of support centers found in Spain, Andorra, Mexico and Sardinia, Italy.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

The UOC maintains many global partnerships and joint efforts one which is notable is the following. An online master's program has been developed in international affairs and diplomacy as well as a post-graduate certificate in world studies and the post-graduate certificate in diplomatic practice through the efforts of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the UOC.

Western Governors University

www.wgu.edu

Mission

The reason for the Western Governors University (WGU) was to allow access to higher education through online, competency-based degree programs for working adults. The founders decided that this brand of higher education had to be student-centered, flexible and inexpensive to serve a broad-base of incomes and backgrounds. Presently, WGU has over 86,000 students from all 50 states and has received many favorable reviews especially from potential employers.

History

The WGU is a nonprofit online university started and supported by 19 U.S. governors. This fact makes it unique amongst higher education institutes. Mike Leavitt, Utah governor in 1995 knew that distance learning technologies were available and could be used for serving the western states who were facing limited funding for educational purposes amidst fast population growth. The governors decided to share the burden of this distance education institute, and thus the WGU was founded.

Headquarters

WGU's headquarters is in Salt Lake City, Utah and the President is Scott D. Pulsipher.

Programs/Resources

There are fewer departments at the WGU than at other universities. There are basically four main branches including the colleges of Information Technology, Teaching, Business, and Health Professions. Graduate and bachelor's programs are available through all four colleges.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

In addition to being founded by governors, several states have created state-established alliances with WGU. Each affiliate school is self-sustaining through tuition, grants and donations but is administered by the WGU board along with local state advisors and an ancillary board.

The state-affiliated WGU branches provide basically the same programs and courses as the national WGU however, degrees are from the main WGU. The state branches give their respective state- added endorsements which in turn give recognition back to the state, allowing for a growing higher-education capacity. In spite of the state branches, WGU enrolls students in all U.S. states and on U.S. military bases found around the globe.

Michigan Virtual University

www.mivhs.org

Mission and Purpose

The Michigan Virtual University used to be known as the Michigan Virtual University and Michigan Virtual School. The MVU is led by an independent Board of Directors who represent business, industry, higher education, K-12 education and state government sectors. In 1998, the State of Michigan founded Michigan Virtual University to support the state's economic development plans. The MVU was created to provide 'anytime anywhere' education as well as an alternative high-priced higher education prospects. Michigan Online School is an online public Charter School funded by the Michigan Department of Education.

Mission

Michigan Virtual's (MV) mission is to create an online community for K-12 education that sustains lasting relationships in education through, creative programs and partnerships. MV also provides professional development opportunities for its educators. They also believe that every student is distinctive, so learning should be personalized, adaptable and cohesive. Not only are teachers and schools responsible for instruction but communities and parents. Various types of learning and assessments must be used to fit each students' personal style.

Headquarters

MV's headquarters are in Gobles, Michigan. There are six board members listed online: Steve Stoughton, Chris King, Steve Hessen, Mike Filary and Chris VanWinkle.

Programs offered

MV uses curriculum developed by Edmentum. Edmentum is an award winning source of online curriculum. The online courses are being used by over 200,000 students in the US and the world. Michigan Online School is also a part of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning. (iNACOL.org) and all coursework is located online. There are over 100 courses, with main subjects such as math, science, social studies, and English as well as electives, languages and Advanced Placement courses. MV is the only virtual middle school and high school program in Michigan that was produced by public school teachers for public school students.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

Amongst other lucrative partnerships, MV is partnering with Microsoft to offer, “Microsoft for Classrooms”. The Microsoft Innovative Educator (MIE) Teacher Academy is part of the program, “Microsoft for classrooms”. The MIE is an opportunity to learn more about Microsoft’s tools and resources that can expand the use of technology in an educator’s classroom. These professional development sessions are designed to help MV’s and partnering educators and schools to maximize their use of Windows and office 365.

UNESCO

www.unesco.org

History and Purpose

UNESCO’s main function has been to organize international education, science, culture and communication. In 1942, the Council of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME) met together. WWII was still going on, but European countries were looking forward to building mutual education systems once peace was restored. CAME proposed that an educational and cultural organization should be established that would promote peace. This conference was held at the end of WWII to start UNESCO. Most countries are part of UNESCO even if they withdraw for a time. Now UNESCO builds networks between nations based on shared values and mutual respect. UNESCO advocates for basic human rights and the elimination of poverty, sustainability and development goals. Presently, UNESCO has two priority goals: Africa and Gender equality.

In addition, there are overall objectives that UNESCO programs are dedicated to: the best possible education for all ages, sustainable scientific research, addressing pressing social and economic issues, diversity, world peace and creating communication and technological systems that all can use and access. UNESCO firmly believes that creativity contributes positively to building open-minded and forward/thinking societies.

Headquarters

Director is Irina Bokova hails from Bulgaria. She is the first woman and Eastern European to lead this organization. She is an advocate for the safety of journalists and freedom of expression. The headquarters for UNESCO is in Paris, France.

Programs/Resources Offered

UNESCO spends resources in the following areas: education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information. Attempts to further educational programs by reinforcing native instructional leaders and their ability to offer better education for all people. In addition, Global Geoparks Network, biosphere reserves, preserving endangered languages, global virtual libraries, water resources management are also part of the resources and funding provided by UNESCO. Freedom of the press is important, and UNESCO supports journalists and the freedom of information legislation.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

UNESCO by nature, is a global organization. However, it has lately initiated \$57,000 to help countries fight extreme poverty. The project's goal is to expand youth involvement in social, cultural and economic issues. UNESCO hopes to ensure that contributions are used not only to fight poverty but also to provide sustainable growth. This particular project aimed at youth, is one of 982 national, 430 regional and 516 global projects that UNESCO has initiated since 1970.

UNISA

www.unisa.ac.za

History

UNISA is the largest open distance learning university in Africa and the oldest distance education university in the world. UNISA has approximately one-third of all South African students. Formerly called, The University of the Cape of Good Hope, UNISA was started in 1873. UNISA offered instruction via distance education as early as 1946. Over this time, Unisa was the only university in South Africa to allow access to education to regardless of race, color or beliefs.

Mission

UNISA strives to serve every nation in the African continent, allowing students access in spite of differences in language and cultures. Unisa is a all-inclusive, open distance learning organization that produces a quality higher education experience through scholarship and research, Students of any age and background are encouraged to enroll.

Headquarters

UNISA's chancellor, is former South African president Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki. The headquarters for UNISA is Pretoria, South Africa.

Programs offered

There are three main parts of UNISA: teaching, research and community engagement. Unisa provides an open distance learning (ODL) that is student-centered, personalized, 'anytime anywhere' learning, learner support and good use of universal design to promote access to all students. Research is one of the main focuses of UNISA. The university prides itself in being a catalyst for change in higher education and assumes a 'servant' leadership role in creating a better world.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

UNISA has created many strategic partnerships with various institutions to help facilitate grants and scholarships as well as enhance community involvement. One such important partnership is with the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF), which represents 24 public universities and one private university. SAHECEF's main mission is to create a forum for sustainable social and economic issues that can help

influence South African society and foster an understanding of social engagement and justice as part of a higher education experience.

Indira Gandhi National Open University

www.ignou.ac.in

History

IGNOU was created to help any, especially the disadvantaged Indian population through distance and open higher education. The Open University began with a seminar in 1970, organized by the Indian Ministry of Education, Social Welfare Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the UGC and the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO. A higher education institute was recommended by this group and it officially opened in 1974 with a council of eight members. The leader of the eight was G. Parthasarathi, Vice-Chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University also located in New Delhi, India.

Mission

The Indira Gandhi National Open University is there to provide a quality higher education to anyone, regardless of race, background or age. The IGNOU supports those in all parts of India regardless of income and provides a world-class education at affordable prices.

Headquarters

IGNOU's headquarters is Maidan Garhi, New Delhi, India. The Vice-Chancellor or Chief Executive since 2013 is Professor M. Aslam. He is also presently serves as the Chairman of the Distance Education Council of India.

Programs/Resources

Presently, IGNOU has provided at least 4 million students in India and 40 other countries abroad with quality higher education. There is a total of 21 schools and 67 regional centers, 2667 study centers, and 29 overseas centers. Twenty percent of college students attend IGNOU. The Open University has over 226 academic programs where students can receive either a certificate, diploma, or various degrees. In addition, there are over eleven departments that handle various aspects of student learning support such as the computer, international, regional services, student evaluation and student registration as examples. IGNOU was named in 1993, the first Center of Excellence for Distance Education, allowed to actively take part in Commonwealth procedures to expand open learning universities throughout the Commonwealth, and Third World.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

IGNOU has become recognized as a global leader in distance education and eLearning. To broaden its base, IGNOU has established many centers around the world. Countries that host one of these branch campuses include Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Mauritius,

Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nepal, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Papua New Guinea, Singapore and Afghanistan.

Athabasca University

www.athabascau.ca

History

Athabasca University (AU), a relatively new higher learning institute was originally a campus-based university started in 1970 in the Commonwealth of Alberta. In 1972, the idea of an open university was tested out with one course, World Ecology. Athabasca University soon became Alberta's fourth public university in 1978. AU moved to the town of Athabasca in 1984. Satellite campuses were established in Calgary, Edmonton and Fort McMurray, Alberta, to enable students to receive first-hand educational support services and to write invigilated examinations. The Fort McMurray location closed in 2000.

During the 1980s, in keeping with its mandate to explore new ways of delivering post-secondary education to students anywhere, anytime, AU pioneered the use of computers to deliver online courses. AU's Executive MBA program, the world's first online EMBA, was introduced by AU's Centre for Innovative Management in 1994.

Today, AU is one of the world's foremost and fastest growing online and distance education institutions, serving over 40,000 students worldwide.

Headquarters: Athabasca, Alberta Canada; President is Neil Fassina. Dr. Fassina is the current was previously the Provost and Vice-President Academic at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

Mission

Athabasca's vision is to provide life-long learning to people for any ages and backgrounds. Presently, there are over 40,000 students with more than 850 courses being offered. In addition, there are over 1300 faculty serving with an annual \$130 million budget. The AU students not only come from Canada but from all over the world and 83 percent work while they go to school. AU believes in open access to education and distance learning.

Programs/Resources

AU has multiple research possibilities in many subject areas such as business, computer science, environment sustainability, globalization, indigenous studies, nursing, Canadian history, science and astronomy, and technology and online learning. Additionally, industry partnerships are available to students. These help students get real-world experience as hands-on training as they pursue higher education. The AU has a variety of departments in Health, Business, Humanities, Science and Technology, and Graduate Studies. Most offer undergraduate, master and doctoral studies.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

AU teamed up with the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada to create the RAIC Centre for Architecture at Athabasca University. The RAIC center is Canada's first online

program of architectural education. AU also hosts a partnership program with the The Synergia Institute of Italy to help students link global with local transformative ideas for progressive change in such areas as local and sustainable energy, agriculture, health care, governance and many others. Mobile learning is a focus of research hosted by Technology Enhanced Knowledge Research Institute (TEKRI) at AU. TEKRI researchers are also AU faculty with international reputations that develop and apply the latest technology. TEKRI maintains many global partnerships.

The Virtual University, Pakistan

www.vu.edu.pk

Mission

The Virtual University, Pakistan (VUP)'s main mission is to deliver high quality virtual open education and offer research opportunities to anyone regardless of age, gender, religion, and geographical location through virtual and distance education technology. In addition, the VUP will train students to think entrepreneurially with the highest moral and ethical standards to add to their local economies and become positive additions to a global society. The virtual environment allows for an affordable means to obtain higher education.

History

The VUP is Pakistan's first virtual university and was established by the Pakistani government as a public, not-for-profit higher-learning institute. The VUP uses satellite television broadcasts and the internet to allow students anywhere in Pakistan to have access. This virtual institute hopes to provide the gap between the overcrowded and limited access to a traditional university and faculty shortages. The VUP's world-class faculty comes from the best universities in Pakistan who have made their courses available in the online and distance education format. All degrees at the VUP are accepted world-wide. The university began in 2002 and has been able to give access to over ninety cities around Pakistan.

The University opened its virtual doors in 2002 and in a short period of time has been able to allow students abroad and around Pakistan access to high-quality open distance education.

Headquarters

VPU's headquarters are in Lahore, Pakistan. Dr. Naveed A Malik is Rector of the VUP presently. Professor Dr. Naveed A. Malik is also the founder of the Virtual University of Pakistan. Dr. Malik obtained his Master's degree in Physics from the University of the Punjab, Pakistan and later the Doctor of Science degree from M.I.T. in the field of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science specializing in Digital Signal Processing. He was also a principal developer for Punjab University's computerized assessment databases and was also in charge of the university's fiber-optic network.

Programs/Resources

The VUP offers undergraduate and post-graduate courses in business administration, economics, computer science, and information technology. The virtual university holds a federal charter from the Government of Pakistan and gets recognition from the Higher Education Commission, Pakistan for any degree obtained through its many programs. The VPU works with many associated institutions that provide various learner supports to students, whether technical or subject-oriented. In addition, there are over 100,000 students that are presently enrolled in the virtual university's online and distance education programs.

Description of Global Activities, Events, and Research/Joint Projects

The VUP partnered with the University of the Punjab and Technical University Kaiserslautern, Germany to launch B.Ed. in Technical Education in September of 2014. Additionally, the university offers its courses free of charge to other universities and helped to develop a learning management system (LMS) for Concordia colleges. As early as 2012, the VUP developed an open courseware system.