

---

## A LEARNER'S EXPERIENCE

---

D.S. WIJESKERA

My association with the Open University of Sri Lanka began in 1995 when I enrolled for the Certificate course in Journalism. The Open University at that point gave me the opportunity to resume my education which had come to a halt after meeting with an accident on the playing field whilst at school, which left me paralyzed and in a wheelchair.

The Open University being the pioneer in distance education in Sri Lanka, through this method enabled me to successfully complete the Certificate course in Journalism, the foundation programme in Social Sciences and finally the degree in Social Sciences. Unlike at conventional universities or other higher education institutions where students have to attend classes on a daily basis or regularly, at OUSL, students are given the course material in printed form and any additional reading is recommended. Most often this recommended reading is available at the OUSL library. In my case this was of great value on two counts: I did not have to attend classes on a daily basis (which in my case would not have been possible) and the fact that course material was in printed form meant that I had all the relevant material, which otherwise would have been difficult to obtain as I cannot take down notes.

Although the students of OUSL are given the course material in printed form, the students are not left to their own devices to figure out the subject matter. Day schools were held on weekends at which student could raise their questions and areas of concern. What was of great value for everyone

A Learner's Experience. *OUSL Journal*. Vol. 3. 2001  
Wijesekera

was the interactive nature of the day schools, which took the form of an open discussion guided by the lecturer where students were encouraged to express opinions, and ideas and raise questions. Especially when it comes to subjects such as Mass Communication, Sociology and Economics where rapid changes are taking place both locally and internationally, such discussions enabled us (the students) not only to come to know of the latest developments in these fields but also to expand our thinking.

However one of the main drawbacks of the distance education system is that, when a student needs to clarify a certain issue with regards to subject matter he/she has to wait until the day school. Although the opportunity to meet the OUSL lecturers by appointment and clarify matters was always there, it is not always practical considering that students are working or that they have to travel long distances or, as in my case, where getting about is not all that easy. Thus if students could contact their lecturers via e-mail to clarify subject matter it would be of great benefit to the students. The inability to clarify certain issues can prevent the student from progressing further in that particular lesson when studying.

It would also be helpful for the students to have a glossary of all technical terms either with the modules or separately, as many of the technical terms are not found in a standard dictionary. In addition, more examples in the modules to explain certain concepts would enable the students to comprehend the concepts easily. These points are important from a student's point of view as the students have to write the assignments before attending the day schools.

With regard to the day schools, students should be given prior notification of where the classes are going to be held (as has been done on occasions) as this will prevent students and sometimes lecturers too from wasting valuable time searching for classrooms.

A Learner's Experience. *OUSL Journal*. Vol. 3. 2001  
Wijsekera

As much as the distance learning method was of great value to me as well as others such as employed persons etc. who otherwise would not have been able to pursue higher studies, any system is only as good as those who implement it. It is here that staff were of great help, always willing to assist the student. In my case as I needed a computer to do my final examinations, the necessary steps were taken to provide me with this facility. The cordial atmosphere that prevailed between the students and staff enabled students to bring their problems and even complaints to our lecturers who took all steps within their means to help the students. Thus there was a student-friendly atmosphere, which in no uncertain terms helped students to achieve their successes as well as to make their time at the OUSL a pleasant experience.

A Learner's Experience. *OUSL Journal*. Vol. 3. 2001  
Wijsekera