

# FEATURES AND CONSTRAINS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT UNAM.

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## FEATURES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

### *1 History of higher education in Namibia*

In 1980 the South African Government established the Academy for Tertiary Education. The Academy consisted of three components namely, a University, a Technikon and a College for Out of School Training. After Namibia became independent the Namibian Government established a special Commission on Higher Education, composed of local and international scholars. As a result of the government's vigorous efforts to implement many of the Commission's recommendations, there are a few institutions undergoing greater transformation in Namibia today than those of higher education.

The University of Namibia (UNAM) marked its official opening on August 31, 1992. UNAM will eventual house faculties of Social Sciences, Law, Arts and Humanities, Education, Natural Sciences, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Health Sciences. In addition there will be an Institute of Administration and Management, a Center for Media Studies, a Computer Center, a Language Center, a Multi-Disciplinary Research Center and a Center for External Studies.

The university bill affirmed "the autonomy of the University and its commitment to the spirit and letter of free academic inquiry." The bill stresses "the intention of the University of being ...responsive to the social, economic, cultural, scientific and academic needs of Namibia." Indeed the university's motto is "Education to Serve Development."

## ***2 Mission of the University of Namibia***

The mission of the University of Namibia (1993) can be stated as follows:

- To safeguard and promote the principals of University autonomy, with a view to providing the appropriate atmosphere and opportunities for scholars to pursue the development of their highest intellectual potential.
- To be a center of learning and to train high level specialists in all areas necessary for national development.
- To provide facilities appropriate to a university of the highest quality, for education that is responsive to the needs of Namibia, and to make these facilities available to such persons as are likely to benefit from them regardless of race, color, gender, ethnic origin, religion, creed, social and economic status, or physical condition.
- To serve as the repository for the preservation, development and articulation of autonomous Namibian values and culture.
- To undertake basic and applied research that would contribute to the social, economic, cultural and political development of Namibia.



- To encourage the endogenous development of science and technology.
- To serve both urban and rural, communities, and to provide extension services throughout the country with a view to contributing to the improved functioning of the education system as a whole.
- To promote and defend a culture of excellence in the academic community by encouraging constructive criticism, and subjecting the University to regular self evaluation and peer assessment.
- To promote African History, Culture and Languages.
- To promote national and international unity and understanding.

To reach the people in the rural areas the University pushes an active policy on distance education. It also promotes applied research, extension work and community service and encourages staff to apply their findings to the concrete situation within Namibia.

### ***3 Center for External Studies***

The Center for External Studies (CES) is responsible for the provision of extra-mural/extension/outreach programs of UNAM to the community outside the walls of UNAM. The CES consist of two departments namely, the Department of Distance Education and the Department of Continuous Education. A Board of Studies oversees the affairs of the CES. The administration of the CES is undertaken by one administrative set-up.

The function of the Department Distance Education (DDE) is the presentation of tertiary courses of UNAM to distance learners. The Department Continuous Education will be responsible for adult and continuing education. Presently the DDE serve 2000. students. The majority of students are enrolled for pre-tertiary courses in education. Students are also enrolled for tertiary courses in Education, Public Administration and Police Science.

The DDE operates in a dual-mode system whereby it functions as part of an existing university, and depends on its parent bodies for the following:

- courses offered by DDE are owned by UNAM or the Windhoek Polytechnic;
- curricula and syllabi for courses are approved by University faculties and the schools of the Polytechnic;
- examination and grading of students are done according to the rules and regulations set by the University and the Politechnic;
- certificates and diplomas obtained by distance education students are awarded by the University or Polytechnic.

### **CONSTRAINS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AT UNAM**

Because of the dependence of DDE on the University and Polytechnic, a view was held in the past and is still being held that DDE is no more than an administrative support service concerned with only the following functions:

- recruiting academic staff from the university/polytechnic and elsewhere to write courses and tutor distance students;
- getting the Printing Unit of the University to print study materials;
- distributing study materials to and from distance students across the country.

The work of the Department Distance Education entails a lot of administrative chores and technical duties. The DDE perform these administrative and technical duties because of the academic and pedagogic responsibilities they shoulder. The academic responsibilities of the staff of distance education are the following:

- writing instructional materials that teach rather than merely imparting information;
- tutoring students in such a way that they can understand and apply the information acquired from the written instructional materials. Distance education tutors are tutors-in-print rather than markers;
- providing academic guidance and counseling to distance students.

A less economically endowed distance education institution like the DDE have to rely on part-time staff to do some of the work. The DDE employed 45 part-time staff. The part-time staff are committed but work under severe pressure because all of them are full-time employed in the public or private sector. Most of the part-time staff lack training in distance education. Employment of part-time staff does not reduce the



academic responsibility of the institution. Full-time academic staff of the institution extend their academic responsibility to part-time staff by supervising and monitoring their work. They do this by:

- editing instructional materials written by part-time staff to make sure that they comply with the principles of distance education ;
- checking the marking and tutoring done by part-time staff to ensure that distance students are helped to understand the information presented;
- offer training to newly appointed part-time staff to orient them ~~x~~to the new way of teaching at a distance. Since most part-time writers and tutors are recruited from the conventional educational systems, there is always the danger of these academics applying the norms of conventional teaching to distance students. It is the responsibility of full-time distance education staff to avoid this possibility.

The DDE made limited use of technologies in distance education. Audiocassettes are used in a limited context. Cost, lack of technological knowledge, lack of appropriate "hardware" and poor telephone communication in some of the rural areas in Namibia are daunting constrains for not using technology. Retaining outmoded approaches could consign Namibians to a permanent education underclass.

# Final Program

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