



OU Students
Association

OUSA in Southern Europe

November 2010

Dear Student,

If you need this newsletter in another format please contact
Sonia Thuéry, Communications Officer

Welcome to OUSA

The Open University Students Association

Whether this is the first time you've heard of OUSA or whether you're already involved with the Association, we hope this newsletter will provide some interesting and useful information on what the Association is doing on your behalf and the latest developments in both the Open University (O U) and OUSA. There's loads of information about the organisation itself that you can access online at <http://www.ousanearyou.org.uk/seurope.htm>

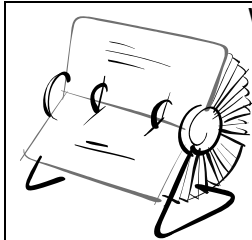


For those new to OUSA, when you sign up for a course with the O U, you are automatically a member of OUSA. OUSA is an organisation run by voluntary students, just like you, with the aim of improving all aspects of student life for O U students, from pointing you in the right direction for information, to increasing the social life often lacking in distance learning, to representing student views to the University and the Government. Every student is allocated to a local Branch of OUSA that aims to help students meet others studying locally and ensure local student voices and issues are heard by the rest of the Association and the University.

Every week there is something new happening within OUSA and/or the O U. We can't report every single detail to you in this newsletter as we only have a set amount of pages we can use but we've picked out the highlights we think will be most of interest to our local students. In this issue of the newsletter we've got:

Local events and meetings
N U S Extra Card discounts

FirstClass Forums Visit our Web Shop
Student Support from OUSA... and much more!



Who do I contact locally??

Chair: Jane Harvey (Barcelona Br) Jane Harvey - Server One

Communications Officer: Sonia Thuéry (France Br) - Sonia A. Thuéry -Server One

Executive Committee Member: Amanda Marlowe (Barcelona Br) - Amanda Marlowe – Server One

Visit our Web Shop

www.open.ac.uk/ousa/

...and click on OUSA shopping for our full range of merchandise and past examination papers for a wide range of courses.

24/7 access, simple, easy to use navigation allows you to order your gifts and exam papers online wherever and whenever it suits you.

Don't delay...visit today!

Donations from the profit of sales are made to OUSET (the Open University Students Educational Trust), OUSA's students charity.

FirstClass – a world at your fingertips!

If you haven't already accessed FirstClass, the O U's online conferencing system, you don't know what you're missing out on! Not only can you find students in the local area through our branch conference, but there are also hundreds of conferences dedicated to a wide variety of things from courses to cats.

If you've no experience of FirstClass, don't worry, we have ways and means of getting even the most inexperienced technophobe whizzing round conferences like they'd been there for years. Just get in contact with one of the Forum Officers and we can send you out some step by step guides to accessing and using FirstClass, or could even arrange for someone to pop round to show you how it's done if you feel you need it!

If you're already fairly confident using a computer, there is some basic information that should help to get you started with FirstClass available from the

OUSA website: <http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/forums.php>

OUSA Southern Europe Changes

This issue brings you news about how OUSA is changing in Southern Europe and how YOU can be part of a new student assembly to represent the interests of students in this region, without having your arm twisted so that you agree to be a Chair, Secretary - or anything else that you don't want to be!

O K – so what's the big deal – what is an Assembly?

In the past, OUSA has had a formal structure of branches, operating in what many see as a rather bureaucratic structure, the structure itself has appeared to be a major turn off for many students, who may have feared that if they stuck their head above the

parapet, they would risk being collared to be something or other - when all they really wanted was to meet up with a few other students and have a coffee, a beer, or a moan.

If you have found the OUSA FirstClass forums from your online student desktop or the FirstClass client software, and lurked on these forums, you may have found references to OUSA Futures. OUSA Futures is a major reorganisation of OUSA and the way it goes about collecting and representing student opinion. The general direction of the change and principles involved were formally agreed at Conference in Nottingham earlier this year. However, there is still much work to be done and the process will not be complete until a new Constitution has been produced (and agreed) – hopefully next year.

Nevertheless whilst the development continues, regions/nations have permission to trial the principles of the new structure, which

- i. Eliminates most of the bureaucracy
- ii. Enables students to group together in (almost) any (legal) manner that they wish to.
- iii. Enables all (yes **all**) students to have a say in voting for those who represent them regionally and nationally.

OUSA in Scotland has already taken advantage of the new principles, OUSA in Wales, in the East of England and the South are the first English regions to adopt the new pattern, in order that we can identify any apparent snags – so that what is eventually agreed at Conference 2011 will be tried and tested – and, hopefully, found to be preferable to what has gone before.

The new OUSA in the Southern Europe Assembly will enable the representation of O U students at a regional and national level in its own organisation (OUSA), at the O U regionally and also at national level to the wider higher education sector.

It will also be responsible for providing an OUSA presence at O U events and for supporting all registered OUSA groups within the region. It is envisaged that the tacit “odour of sanctity” or disapproval implied by the terms “active” and “dormant” (previously applied to branches) will vanish – informal groups (local groups or groups of students in the region who have other common interests – see later) will exist and, we hope, flourish, without a need to prepare agendas or minutes or a need to have the panoply of chairs, secretaries, treasurers, delegates for this and that, etc. etc. All students will be **equally** eligible to express a view and to take part in the proceedings and discussions of the Assembly.

In the hope that there may eventually be students who wish to be involved, a form of election is built in – in which **you** personally will have a vote – provided that, as in general and local elections, you actually register to vote!

So, if I take part, what commitment will be required?

We intend to trial the new Assembly from November 2010 until April 2011 (with an option to continue after April if we like it, even if the “new deal” is not rolled out nationally – or to revert to the previous arrangement if the new deal is not accepted and we don’t like the way that it has worked).

Student representatives will be able to join in at least 3 meetings during that time – you will be able to take part equally well online or at a face to face meeting. There will be no distinction between



being online or physically present at a face to face meeting.

It is also likely that, even between face to face meetings, discussion will continue online.

What's in it for me?

- Being part of the O U in the Southern Europe student community.
- An opportunity to have a say in the policy of OUSA in this region and contribute to the student viewpoint that we represent to the O U. It seems more probable than not that we can “look forward” to stringent financial changes in the next few years and getting the view about how it may affect you becomes even more important than in “happier” times.
- The opportunity to network with other O U students from all walks of life – distance learning can be a very lonely activity.
- The chance to meet new people and make new friends.
- Experience for your CV.

How do I become one of the members of the Assembly?

All O U students in Southern Europe (Austria, Cyprus, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland) will be entitled to stand for direct election to the Assembly. This includes **you!**

Previously, in OUSA it has generally been necessary to have been part of your local OUSA branch (if there **was** an active branch in your area) and to be voted by that branch as a delegate to the Region/Nation Forum. Branches will in future generally be “deformalised” and will continue as “local groups” (unless they specifically wish to retain their constitutional requirement for named officers, agendas and minutes).

All local groups will be able to focus on providing social activities and mutual support between their members, whilst the National Forum mutates into the Assembly and concentrates on co-ordinating policy and representing the student viewpoint in Southern Europe.

Local groups can emerge wherever there are a number of O U students who want to meet together (whether face to face or online) and “local” does not confine you to a specific catchment or former branch. The Scots have already had calls for groups for “remotely placed” students, Scottish Islands students, Postgraduate students, Disabled students, a photographic group, a Mac Users group and a Scottish Theatres Group as well as the predictable faculty based groups and area based groups. So gather together the members with similar interests to your own by setting up a thread in the main Southern Europe forum - and away you go!

In addition to the Assembly Representatives there will also be positions available for Executive Members. These students will take the responsibility for the day to day running of the Assembly, so that the level of commitment for these posts will be a bit higher. Voting in respect of Executive members will take place at the same time as the vote for Assembly members.

Candidates for the Assembly may simply “self nominate”, setting out brief information on a form (confirming that they live in the region and indicating their current study area) and without seeking supporting nomination by other students. They must be currently registered O U students or have **recently** completed an O U course and have a postal address within the region.

Candidates for the Executive posts will be required to provide slightly more information in their personal statement (max 300 words) and to provide the names of two supporting

currently registered O U students from the region. These similarly must be currently registered O U students or have **recently** completed an O U course.

To obtain an election pack, including a nomination form please contact Alison Ryan and Jacqueline Billson c.c. Tracey Philemon – if you use FirstClass they are all on server one. If you use other email, their addresses are a.d.ryan@open.ac.uk j.l.billson@open.ac.uk and t.k.philemon@open.ac.uk

To obtain a pack by post please call 01908 652026. The closing date for receipt of nominations will be 3rd December. Voting will take place (mainly online) from 22nd December until the close of voting on 6th January 2011.

When elected, the Executive Members will determine between themselves what function each of them takes (there will be a need for functions as a Chair, a Secretary, a Finance Officer – and, maybe, a Communicator who can take over responsibility for the preparation of future newsletters! If there is someone with web skills, we will be keen to harness their abilities to maintain, and even develop, our website).

In line with OUSA policy, all representative students are unpaid volunteers, but travel expenses (and approved essential accommodation costs) are reimbursed for attending face to face meetings.

Next Elections

The **Executive and Assembly Elections** are organised as follows (votes are sent electronically not by snail mail!):

Electoral Register Opens – 5/11/10

Nominations Close – 3/12/10

Electoral Register Closes – 7/12/10

Ballot papers/Voting Instructions circulated – 22/12/10

Ballot Closes – 6/1/11

Results Issued – 10/1/11

And The Future?

Hopefully, after Conference in April 2011, we will be able to continue with the new Assembly, although this will in part depend upon decisions taken at OUSA Conference in April.

Voting in the Elections

The “OUSA Futures” project introduces the principle of one member one vote for regional level elections.

All O U registered students in the region will now be able to register to vote in the elections (as at parliamentary and local council elections you don't get a vote unless you register as an elector!). Accordingly, it will be necessary to “sign up” to the electoral register in order to vote. Even if you do not want to become a representative yourself, please do consider making use of your opportunity to vote in the elections. This is new – and a victory for democracy in the organisation.



In order to vote, you must be a full member of OUSA (i.e. a currently registered student or have recently finished a course) registered in Southern Europe. To sign up to the electoral register please submit your name, your PI number, your O U computer user name and a contact email address to Alison Ryan and Jacqueline Billson c.c. to Tracey Philemon who are all on FirstClass server one.

The information provided by you will then be held on the electoral register for Southern Europe. Voting will be online unless you do not have an online address and request specifically papers in hard copy.

The Inaugural Meeting of the new Assembly will take place on-line from Wednesday 19th January 2011 till Monday 31st January 2011. Please check our FirstClass Southern Europe Forum for further information.

NUS Extra Card

Demand Extra - Demand your new NUS card

The NUS Extra card is released 5th August and for 2010/2011 the price has increased by one pound to a cost of £11 for a year's subscription. You can obtain the International Student Identity card (I S I C) upgrade for an extra £1.99 which is a saving of £7 off the price of the I S I C Card. I S I C gives access to discounts in the U K as well as over 100 countries around the world. It also provides excellent savings on travel including international flights. This is a card already valued by the student population at large and a must have for travellers. For further details of why the I S I C is a must have, go to www.isiccard.com

And there's more!

The N U S Extra Card provides an instantly recognisable student identity when you're on your travels and will be accepted as valid student identification at your O U exams. You also get the opportunity to enter competitions, apply for special offers and receive discount updates all online. And if you need a reminder of the deals to be had here's a few to sample.

For more details on the amazing range of discounts on offer and to apply for your card go to www.nus.org.uk All you need is either a webcam or a photo to upload and your credit or debit card to hand for quick and secure online payment. Make sure you know your O U Student personal identity (P I) number as you will need to input this for verification.

NUS Extra Help/Advice

Please visit the NUS Extra help/advice section of nus.org.uk for any help or email enquiries@nusextra.co.uk

OUSA Membership Card

Although more and more students are taking advantage of the new N U S Extra Card, the regular OUSA Membership Card is still available and still highly regarded by students of the University. As all current students are automatically members of OUSA, (unless they exercise their right to opt out), they are all entitled to a regular OUSA Membership Card, and this is still available free on request. This card may not enjoy as wide an acceptance as the Extra Card does, but it is still nevertheless useful for gaining all sorts of concessions on goods and services. Like the Extra Card, the regular Membership Card is also recognised by the Open University as valid identification for examination purposes. Membership cards are valid for 12 months.

While we strongly recommend the Extra Card, if you would still prefer the regular OUSA Membership Card, please send a passport sized photograph (with your P I number written on the back) along with a second or first class stamp to the address below. Be sure to include a document from the O U confirming your P I number. Please send these details to the following address (see below):

Membership Cards
OUSA Office
P O Box 397
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6BE

Argh! Help!

Are you experiencing problems with your studies or having trouble finding your way around the O U systems? Could you benefit from having someone to talk to?

As OUSA is made up of fellow students, we know that sometimes there is no substitute for being able to talk things through with another student so we have volunteers to help you.

Disabled Student Link (D S L) – for advice and information on any issue relating to studying with a disability - Email: ousa-dsl@open.ac.uk

Student Support Link (S S L) – for advice and information on support through your study - Email: ousa-ssl@open.ac.uk

Student Academic Links (S A Ls) – for advice and information on any issues primarily to do with your course or programme of study - Email: ousa-sal@open.ac.uk

In order to obtain a speedy response please quote your region name and we will put you in touch with the correct support link as soon as possible.

Peer Support Online – an anonymous and confidential service provided solely through FirstClass – log in to FirstClass and send a message to PS Supporters to contact the team, or you can make initial contact via the Peer Support administrator by sending an email to OUSA-PS-ADMIN@open.ac.uk.

If you're unsure who is best to contact, do get in touch with the branch officers and they'll gently point you in the right direction.

OUSA Affiliated Societies

Societies are a feature of student life and the O U is no different. Through OUSA there are a number of societies in existence that range from Physics and Psychology to Music and Mountaineering! And if there's not a society for something you're interested in then you can always start one, with a little help and guidance from the OUSA office of course. Some provide newsletters, some hold outings and events, some have regular meetings and workshops but all are there for all O U students and some even encourage friends and family to join in!

For more information on all current societies and contact details for society representatives, pop along to: <http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/societies.php> or contact the Societies Desk at the OUSA Office by post, telephone or email: ousa-societies@open.ac.uk

Volunteering for Southern Europe

Helping your Student Association is a very rewarding experience, especially if you can spare a little time for us! The Association is composed of unpaid volunteers who, like you, have at heart the O U students' welfare and services. OUSA is a charity for students, run by students! You are encouraged to join in and help your forum in any way you can. Volunteers are always welcome! You are especially encouraged to participate in the debates on the online FirstClass **Southern Europe Forum**, since there are some activities and votes that can take place there. There may be positions available in the Southern Europe Assembly and you are most welcome to apply!

Jane Harvey, Southern Europe Forum Chair