The openness of the University of the Philippines Open University: Issues and prospects

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Abstract

This paper is a self-reflection on the state of openness of the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU). An exploratory and descriptive study, it aims not only to define the elements of openness of UPOU, but also to unravel the causes and solutions to the issues and concerns that limit its options to becoming a truly open university. It is based on four parameters of openness, which are widely universal in the literature, e.g., open admissions, open curricula, distance education at scale, and the co-creation, sharing and use of open educational resources (OER). It draws from the perception survey among peers, which the author conducted in UPOU in July and August 2012. It also relies on relevant secondary materials on the subject.

Keywords: Openness; Open University; University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU)

Introduction

The University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) has been in existence for the past eighteen years. UPOU is envisioned to be a leader in open and distance *e-learning* (ODeL) in the Philippines and in the region. Its mission is to provide Filipinos and other lifelong learners everywhere access to quality higher education through innovative methods of teaching and learning that are responsive to their needs as well as to development priorities of the country and the global community. It upholds the values of scholarship, academic excellence, academic freedom, humanism, social responsibility, and service to the nation. As a graduate and research university, UPOU offers as of date, twenty-six graduate and three undergraduate programs in the fields of Education, Information and Communication Studies and Management and Development Studies. It has an average enrollment of 2,800 students per term.

UPOU is one of a handful of open universities in the region that have maximized the power of web-based technologies for teaching and learning. In recognition of its innovations in ODeL, the Information Technology and eCommerce Council has designated UPOU as the National eLearning Competency Center. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has also designated it the National Center of Excellence in Open and Distance Education. MyPortal or UPOU's learning management system (LMS) and virtual classroom, was also adjudged by the APEC Digital Opportunity Center as one of the top 10 best in *e-practice* in Asia.

Despite these achievements, what "openness" defines the UP Open University? Is UPOU really "open"?

Metrics of openness

Inspired by the inaugural speech of the first Chancellor of the UK Open University, Lord Crowther, in 1969, who defined the meaning of "open" in the UK Open University as "being open to people, places, methods, and ideas," the dimensions of "openness" have generally revolved around "open admissions; distance learning at scale, and open curricula" (Daniel, 2011). Recently, a new

component has been added to include open access (OA) and open educational resources (OER), which include the "freedom to run programs, to study how programs work and change it, to distribute copies, especially those that have been modified." (Dhanarajan, 2012). The latter updates the rhetoric of "openness" to the new movement called OER, which McAndrew *et al*. (2010), Rossini (2010), Villamejor-Mendoza (2010) and others predict as the likely wave of the future.

Open admissions generally require no specific requirements for entry into a programme of study. It also implies recognition and accreditation of prior learning (APL) and work experience as relevant antecedents to the prospective student's end goals. *Open curricula* may include a sense of studying in one's own pace and place, selecting the modules one wants to study, and stacking those to a bachelor and graduate programs. It also implies entry and exit points in the curriculum and the possibility of constructing one's own curriculum, using stand-alone courses or other courses that can be combined to a full degree (Distance Learning Portal, n.d.).

Open educational resources meanwhile are "digitized materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research" (OECD, 2007). They are "technology-enabled, open provision of educational resources for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for *non-commercial purposes*" (UNESCO, 2002, under-scoring mine). They include learning objects such as lecture materials, references and readings, simulations, experiments and demonstrations, as well as syllabi, curricula and teacher's guides (UNESCO, 2002).

OERs are generally spoken in the same breath as open access (OA) and open education (OE) movement. Open Access has grown into a movement advocating the bringing of knowledge to as many people as possible for free and in the end, improving the quality of education worldwide. OA is a "knowledge-distribution model by which scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles and other resources are made freely available to anyone, anywhere over the Internet" (Rossini, 2010).

It has grown simultaneously with the OE movement, which is based on a set of core values shared by a remarkably wide range of academics: that knowledge should be free and open to use and reuse; that collaboration should be easier, not harder; that people should receive credit and kudos for contributing to education and research; and that concepts and ideas are linked in unusual and surprising ways and not in the simple linear forms that today's textbooks present (Baranuik, 2007).

OE promises to fundamentally change the way that authors, instructors, and students interact worldwide. The OE movement takes the inspiration of the open source software movement (GNU Linux, for example, [Raymond, 2001 as cited in Baranuik, 2007]), mixes in the powerful communication abilities of the Internet and the World Wide Web, and applies the result to teaching and learning materials like course notes, curricula, and textbooks.

Objectives and methodology

This paper is an exploration into the openness of the UPOU. It describes the state and the varied dimensions in the meanings and practice of "openness" at UPOU. Likewise, based on the four main parameters of openness above, it unravels the causes and solutions to the issues and concerns that limit its options to becoming a truly Open University.

As a self-reflection of UPOU as an Open University, it is based on the results of the perception survey among peers conducted by the author in July and August 2012. The survey aims to get the viewpoints of UPOU academic personnel on four general topics: a) the general notion of openness; b) specific measures or parameters of openness; c) gradations of openness in UPOU; and d) major challenges and constraints and solutions to making UPOU more truly an open university.

It surveyed all 30 regular faculty members and academic personnel of UPOU (or 20% of some 150 total faculty in charge (FIC) per term, most of whom are affiliate faculty members from other constituent units (CUs) of the University of the Philippines System). Being its organic and full-time members, they have more stakes and say in the present and future directions of UPOU. Of the 30, only 15 or 50% responded.

As a perception survey, it is limited to the views articulated (some generally; some sketchy) in the survey. Thus, this was complemented or triangulated with a review of relevant secondary materials related to the topics at hand, e.g., laws, regulations, UPOU Reports, Catalogues, website, others; as well as with the author's insider insights, being a participant herself in the workings of the UPOU.

Concept of openness and open university

UPOU, open learning, open university and distance education

UPOU is an integral part of the University of the Philippines (UP) System. Not a stand-alone University, it is the fifth constituent university of the UP System[1]. Established in 1995, it is the only CU of UP that offers quality higher education through open learning and distance education. The rest are residential, traditional brick and mortar universities offering programs on natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, arts and humanities, fine arts and liberal education, law and medicine, health sciences, agricultural sciences, fisheries, cultural studies and the like.

Open learning refers to a philosophy of learning that is quality-assured, open to people, methods, places and ideas and is highly flexible and learner-centered, enabling the latter to learn at a time, place and pace which satisfy the person's circumstances and requirements (Angara *et al.,* 2010). It also seeks to remove all unnecessary barriers to learning, while aiming to provide students with a reasonable chance of success in an education and training system centered on their specific needs and located in multiple arenas of learning[2].

Distance education (sometimes referred to as "distributed learning" or "distance learning"), meanwhile, is any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone geographically removed from the learner, with all or most of the communication between teachers and learners being conducted through electronic or print mediums (UNESCO, 2006).

As an autonomous CU, UPOU adheres to the highest standards of academic excellence, guarantees academic freedom and encourages social responsibility and nationalistic commitment among its faculty, students and staff (UP Board of Regents (BOR) 1995). As an integral part of the UP System, however, it is subject to the academic and other standards, budget allocation, processes and guidelines of the UP System. Thus, it is not completely autonomous as it hopes to.

UPOU nevertheless is the only Open University in the Philippines, as opposed to a Distance Education (DE) institution. An OU is legally defined as "a higher education institution (HEI) that is a separate, autonomous and degree-granting academic entity which employs operational procedures and strategies of an open learning institution." A DE institution, meanwhile, is "a subsidiary of an HEI which offers DE programs, but is not qualified to be an Open University, and whose degrees are awarded by the HEI (Angara *et al.,* 2010).

At present, there are 18 DE and only 1 OU in the Philippines, e.g., UPOU (CHED 2012). The UPOU is more accurately an open university offering academic programs and granting degrees through open and distance education (ODE), and recently, through open and distance e-learning (ODeL).

General notion on the "openness" concept

Openness as a concept has crept up on our educational systems. UNESCO (2006) defines openness in learning as one that "frees learners from constraints of time and place while offering flexible learning opportunities. For many students, open and distance learning (ODL) is a way of combining work and family responsibilities with educational opportunities." Likewise, as earlier mentioned, Crowther (1969) defines the meaning of "open" in the UK Open University as "being open to people, places, methods, and ideas." Dhanarajan (2012) adds the movement called OER, which implies "the freedom to run programs, to study how programs work and change it, to distribute copies especially those that have been modified," to these dimensions of openness.

The results of the 2012 survey among peers reveal conformity with these basic parameters and more. To wit:

1. Openness as "a *mindset and concrete action* made evident through systems and processes in a) levels of decision-making, programs, pedagogies and methodologies; b) use of technology and innovative solutions in the way we work—teaching-wise and administrative-wise; and c) institutional linkages. This openness is not incidental nor coincidental—it must be explicit, planned and done systematically because its aim is to transform traditional and residential based mindsets and ways of working. Openness to happen requires strategic planning, innovative methods of work and solid investment (plus choice) in technology usage and infrastructure."

   This perception is instructive in so many ways. Coming from a system dominated by conventional residential setting, openness is construed here as an alternative to established mindsets and ways of doing things. This view expects open universities to not only be at par with traditional paradigms but also to influence and redefine mainstream standards with innovations and developments present in alternative learning environments like OUs. This not only recognizes the inherent higher expectations on OUs. This also calls for a more programmatic and progressive approach to doing things and laying the foundation of newer, better, more innovative systems. This builds on old systems and recreates new standards, which do not exist before.

2. Openness as conforming with universal definitions, and which include the following:

   a) Openness as espousing an open philosophy specifically in terms of what courses to take, when to take it, how to take it. Openness in terms of a more open admission policy, more open exit policy. Openness is manifest in terms of open access to learning resources

   b) It is open to all who would like to study, regardless of age, ability, sex, race, religion, etc. Students are provided with very comfortable learning environment and conditions such that they could study at their most convenient time and place. It is open to available teaching methods and tools while open to students' views and ideas. It is distance education at its best

   c) It is also characterized by a free and mutual exchange of knowledge unhampered by traditions, paradigms, structures, distance, hierarchy, class, age, gender and economic barriers

   d) Openness also refers to openness in the length of time to complete a certain course or program and in the venue within which education will take place. This is because those who consider getting education in an OU have unique characteristics, such as working people, home-based workers, differently abled, or aged, requiring a set up that does not limit time and space

    e)   It is anchored on the mode of learning (freedom of the students to choose a learning style that works for them), use of educational resources (freedom of faculty to use materials they think would best achieve the goals of the course), and continuous adoption of new strategies to address the needs of distance learners

    f)   It is ubiquitous: anytime; anywhere; any machine; anyone; any connection (individual's place, pace and time)

    g)   Openness is one without walls, and therefore there are no geographical constraints on admissions. It also means being open to new ideas and new ways of doing things in response to accelerated change that characterizes the world we live in today.

3.   A third sense of openness is anchored on a perceived value added of open universities, e.g., a "swim or sink principle" where we let those who are interested to pursue quality education be admitted in a degree program without an admission test requirement (open admission); but of course, the operation and delivery of contents should be guided with policies, rules and regulations. It is here "where the contribution of the Open University can be measured especially if there are students who at the start do not know how to swim but because of the training or learning they got from the university, will in the end be winning in swimming competitions" (Villamejor-Mendoza, 2012).

These general notions articulate not only the standard characteristics of openness found in the literature but also an aspiration to be different from the mainstream residential conventional systems of education in order to capacitate and empower learners regardless of their basic qualifications. This springs from an alternative paradigm in UPOU that wishes to influence mainstream conventions and transform the latter's mindset of its seeming monopoly of contributions in shaping minds and educating all for development. It is serving notice that the UPOU is also a valuable resource to contend with, having hurdled the same standard of academic excellence as the rest of the CUs of the University.

Openness: Specific parameters

The "open" nature of distance learning might be formally institutionalized in such policies as open admissions, and freedom of selection of what, when and where to learn. This openness is also seen in relatively flexible organizational structures, delivery and communication patterns as well as the use of various technologies to support learning (UNESCO, 2006).

The 2012 survey results are not tangential to these general ideas, to wit (Table 1):

These articulations mean that ideally, in open admissions OU students should get in without any entrance and admission exams. There should be no entrance hurdles, academic pre-requisites and barriers that would hamper one's capacity to study in the University. Prior learning and equivalency of learning, competence and expertise should be recognized and accredited using credible validation mechanisms and processes. Age, ability, sex, race, religion, and other personal attributes should not hinder anyone from being admitted. There should also be open registration where there are no deadlines; the student can register anytime and can be assessed for her/his performance anytime.

The ideal of open curricula is manifested in student-constructed curricula and individual learning plans. Students have a freehand to choose which subjects to enroll and they are allowed to negotiate, design, and propose tailor made or customized curricula in the form of Independent Learning Plans. The University, meanwhile, should offer courses that provide a wide range of competencies in varying disciplines that can cover different interests and can respond to varying realities and issues of the society at a given time. It should also consider Open Assessment where it credits

Table 1: Parameters of Openness in Open Universities

• Openness to learners from all backgrounds, ages, sex, origins, education; Easing access to learning through distance education; Openness to the use of OER and sharing of resources; Openness to the development of new curricula to meet emerging demands
• No barriers and limitations when it comes to admission, curriculum, manner of offering, methods and materials used in teaching and learning, and practically in all aspects. It should be open to people, places, methods, and ideas
• Students are free to enroll in any programs without satisfying specific program requirements such as entrance exams or general weighted average
• Open curricula where students can choose when and what courses to take within the program; Distance learning at scale or using effective and relevant ICTs in course delivery, hence teaching and learning are not limited by time, space, and geographical locations; OER use where OUs are not only expected to be OER users, but also as developers of OERs that can be freely shared through open licenses which facilitate use, revision, translation, improvement and sharing by anyone
• Open admissions. Open-ended timeframes and schedules. Open-ended pedagogies, i.e., decisions on when, where, how and what to learn are open to the learners based on curricula and resources developed or complied by a faculty member. Open educational resources • Open exit. Open access to learning resources. Flexible courses.

Source: Villamejor-Mendoza, 2012.

competencies achieved elsewhere. Likewise, it allows the publication of open badges as alternative to credits that are reflected in the transcripts of records.

Distance learning is related to open curricula and is perceived by the respondents as a deviation from the traditional mode wherein learners and teachers meet in the confines of a classroom. It makes use of effective and relevant technologies in course delivery, hence teaching and learning are not limited by time, space, and geographical locations. It uses various forms and mediums of instruction and learning such as print, media, computers and Internet, video and audio conference equipment, and learning management platforms such as Moodle to enable online discussion, more interaction and participation. Here, there may also be Open Instruction and "live teachers" in the form of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

In terms of content, pedagogy and management, there should be flexibility in content delivery (but not in the quality as a very high UP standard of academic excellence should be maintained). Students should be given the opportunity to choose the best way to receive the content: whether online, face-to-face or blended.

OERs, meanwhile is ideally believed to mean a culture of sharing in a global community of learners and include the publication of print, multimedia, software, under open licenses like the Creative Commons and the maintenance of or participation in a repository system for OER. It may also mean creation of open software projects.

To a greater extent, these specific attributes of openness are standards from where the academic personnel hope to benchmark UPOU's actual practice. These should guide UPOU on how close or far its policies and practices are in being and becoming a truly open university.

The gradations of openness in UP open university

Having been asked on their general notion and specific parameters of openness, the respondents were then asked if UPOU exhibit these parameters and how. Their answers were validated with what seems to exist on the ground based on secondary and other materials.
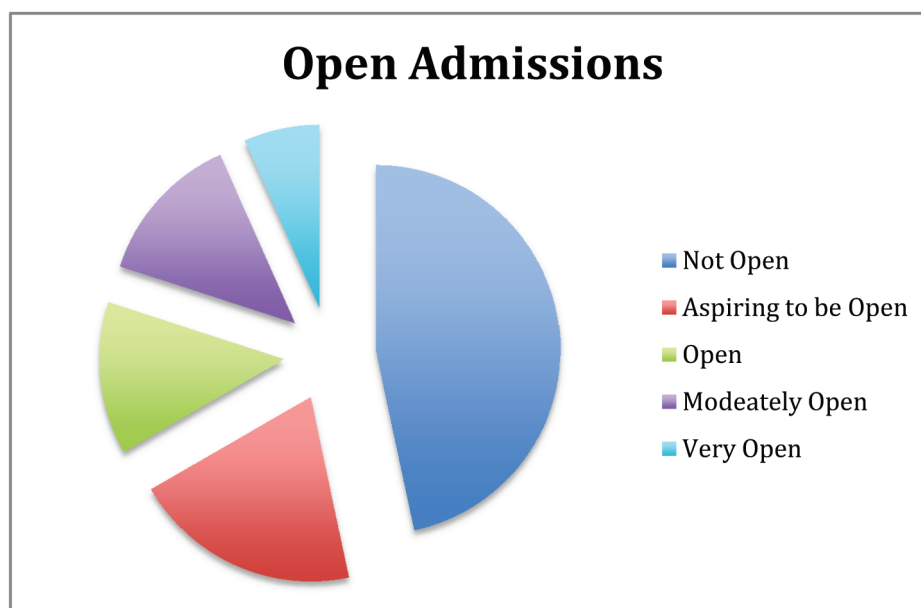
Open Admissions

Figure 1: Openness of Admissions in UPOU

Source: Villamejor-Mendoza, 2012.

Open admissions

Open admission appears as an ideal UPOU has to aspire for intensely in the future. As shown in Fig.1, some 47% of the peers believe UPOU is not open at all in this aspect; and 20% believes it is only aspiring to be open. This can be explained by the following:

a) *UPOU requires a number of admission requirements before applicants are admitted*.
UPOU has 29 academic programs, 26 of which are graduate degrees. Of the 29, five programs have admission exams: 1) a Graduate Admission Test (GAT) for the Master of Public Management (MPM); 2) the Doctoral Admission Test for Education (DATE) for the PhD Education; 3) the UP College Admission Test (UPCAT) for all fresh high school graduate-applicants of UPOU's Bachelor of Arts in Multimedia Studies (BAMMS) and Bachelor of Education Studies (BES); and 4) an Undergraduate Admission Test (UgAT) for the Associate in Arts (AA) program.
The rest have other admission requirements screened by Admissions Committees across programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Table 2):
Many of these are patterned after the residential program requirements.

b) Accreditation of prior learning (APL) is a principle subscribed to by UPOU. However, it is not yet widely practiced.
Except for the ALS accreditation and equivalency scheme, which is recognized for admission to a bachelor's program, APL's implementation is not yet systematically programmed nor operationalized in the University. Another scheme at the tertiary level, e.g., the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program or ETEEAP[3] has possibilities of being incorporated in the accreditation practice. However, the mechanisms are not yet in place.

However, UPOU is also construed as "open as practically possible," i.e. for programs without admission tests, its admissions policies may be considered liberal. It is also open to all potential learners, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or political affiliation. Uniquely UPOU, it has

**Table 2: General Admission Requirements of UPOU Programs**

Criteria	Undergraduate Programs	Graduate Programs
Educational Attainment	High School Graduate or certified passer of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Accreditation and Equivalency Test for the secondary level	Baccalaureate degree (in related field) for Graduate Certificate, Diploma or Master's; Master's degree (in related field) for PhD
Work Experience	None	Preferably with relevant work experience
Admission Exam	Pass the UPCAT or the UgAT	Pass the GAT for the MPM or the DATE for PhD in Education
Others	Complete an online DE Readiness Module	Have a GPA of 2.0–1.75 or better May be required to undergo a bridge program or enroll in prerequisite courses before enrolling in the program Conditional admission allowed

Source: UPOU Catalogue 2011.

been accessible to many (political) prisoners in the past, to those working in far-flung areas and are overseas, and to more women and the elderly.

Open curricula

Some 74% of the UPOU peers believe that the UPOU curricula are not open at all (Fig. 2). This is because our academic offerings are mostly structured and institution-prescribed, which have gone through System-regulated processes of curriculum development, revision, redesign and approval. The opportunity for students to construct their own curricula and individual learning plans is not yet present. In addition, most programs still follow certain policies such as maximum residency rule, which does not observe openness as to the pacing of the learning process, e.g., "at a student's own time, pace and place."
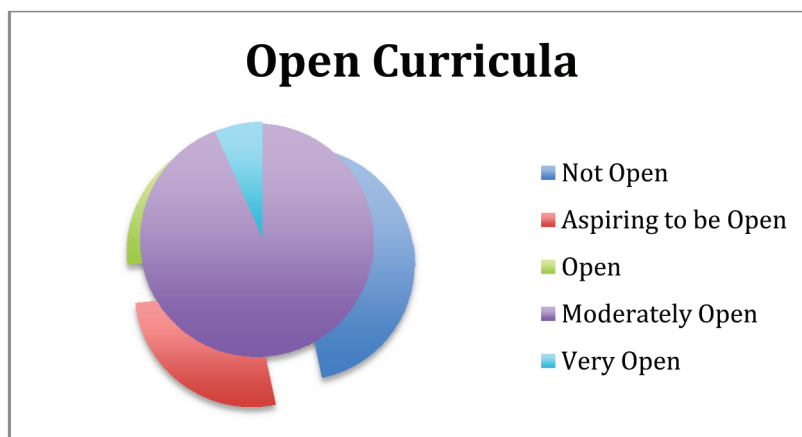
Figure 2: The Openness of UPOU Curricula
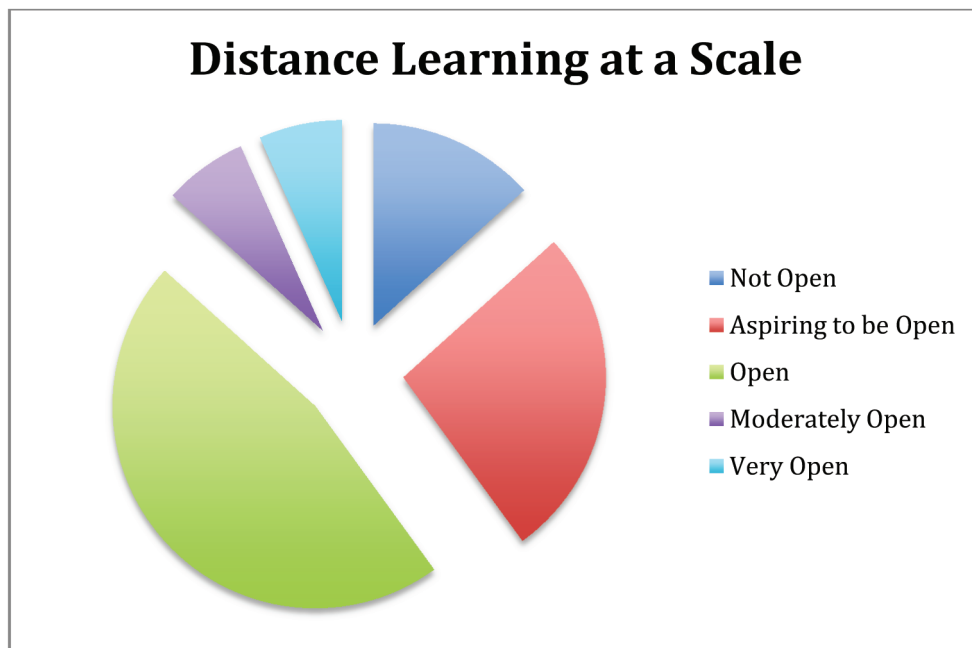
Source: Villamejor-Mendoza, 2012.

A respondent even thinks that in this respect, UPOU is close; in fact it appears that UPOU is just a residential CU with programs being offered online. This may partly be explained by the fact that the faculty and curriculum designers at UPOU are themselves products of traditional programs and would have more significantly anchored their notions of quality programs based on their own traditional experiences. Also, the standards that exist are mainly residential-based or oriented. Those for ODeL from where to benchmark UPOU offerings and operations are still evolving. If there will be one that is OU-centered, it may take long for the academic leaders of the UP System to embrace these standards as the System's own.

Nevertheless, others would find UPOU as still 'fairly open' as there is ample number of programs that adult learners can choose from. This menu includes disciplines from development and management studies, information and communication studies, and education and literacy. New fields (relative to the Philippines) are being pioneered, explored and trail-blazed. The latter include international health, land valuation and management, and education studies. In the near future, these may include ASEAN Studies, International Heritage Conservation Studies, the World Languages and Techno-entrepreneurship.

In the same vein, many of the UPOU curricula have options for multiple entries and exits using the ladderized and conjoint models. These would allow for more choices and freedoms for the students, e.g., when to exit, what to apply, whether non-degree stand alone courses, certificates, diploma, master's or doctoral programs, continuing professional education, non-formal courses and the like.

Distance education at a scale

The only feature of openness that UPOU "strongly" exhibits is distance education. It is perceived as open in this respect to the extent of 71% (see Fig. 3) because by its very nature, it has been able to deviate from the traditional mode where teachers and learners meet in the confines of a physical classroom.

Figure 3: UPOU's Openness in DE

Source: Villamejor-Mendoza, 2012.

Various forms and mediums of instructions are now being used such as print, media, computer and Internet, video, and audio conferences. All our courses are now being offered online, using the IVLE (integrated Virtual Learning Environment) in 2004–2007 and the MyPortal LMS from 2007 to present. The latter is based on open source software called Moodle (Modular object-oriented distance learning environment), which has since been enhanced and reconfigured to meet the demands of 21st century education and learners. Courses are in what we call "walled garden" LMS.

Distance education content, pedagogy, and management in UPOU have successfully followed the latest trends and are not far behind other leading open universities. UPOU has evolved from generation 1 (face-to-face) DE to the generation 3 (virtual University). It has learning and testing centers all over the country and in 56 locations in 45 countries around the world.

The content, pedagogy and management are more updated with the application of the resource-based (RB) course package (RBCP), use of web applications (e.g. WizIQ, E-Portfolio, Blogging), use of media sharing sites (e.g., Facebook, YouTube) and use of RB learning and integration of OER and other content from external sources.

However, DE management still follows the UP System's academic and administrative policies in aspects such as, among others, grading, graduation, residency, course credits and faculty load policies.

In addition, since UPOU is largely a graduate university with enrollment of only 2,800–3,000/term as of date, it offers DE at a smaller scale compared to other (mega) DE universities in Asia. As many are aware, not many would need advanced degrees compared to a basic tertiary or bachelor's degree.

OER

UPOU advocates knowledge sharing and co-creation through OER. Its existing copyright policies on instructional materials though are still proprietary. It does not have an equivalent to MIT's Open CourseWare (OCW), or UK Open University's OpenLearn program. It does not have a book distribution policy like Athabasca's dual publication under Creative Commons Non-Commercial free digital copy and sale of printed materials. Neither does it contribute to opensource software development despite its being a beneficiary of some of these software projects. It is still weak in implementing the vision of OER advocacy: Make instructional packages accessible to various publics through collaborative arrangements, institutional agreements, and other appropriate mechanisms.

UPOU nevertheless, has a culture of sharing its knowledge products, despite its Intellectual Property (IPR) regime. This is manifest, through research dissemination in conferences, seminars and colloquia, and in the publication of monographs and working papers accessible at its webpage and free online. It also has a UPOU Networks, a web-based TV station hosting video and other multi-media materials for the general public.

In addition, its virtual classrooms are venues for co-creation of knowledge. Its learners, both faculty and students, contribute in knowledge building and management through the discussion forums, chat rooms, wikis and other collaborative mechanisms in its LMS, e.g., glossary-building, games, conferencing, etc. These are also venues for the use and sharing of OER materials as complementary reference materials to enhance and update online teaching and learning.

Its use of the Resource-based approach to course development is also a step towards OER sharing and distribution. It is slowly inculcating among its stakeholders the culture of mining and populating the Web for academic purposes. It has also encouraged research sharing online, in order that the proportion of scholarly materials in the Web may increase.

Also, UPOU has a culture of collaboration and partnership for the creation, use and sharing of resources and exchange of ideas, e.g., a master's program (MA ASEAN Studies) developed by

OU5, a consortium of five member-OUs in the ASEAN, e.g., Open University of Malaysia, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University of Thailand, Hanoi Open University of Vietnam, Universitas Terbuka of Indonesia and the UP Open University, and a number of inter-OU collaboration with STOU, Open University of Kaohsiung and other universities around the globe.

Recently, through the initiative of its Chancellor, a Committee on Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), OOCs, and OER as an Extension Program of the University has been constituted to draft guidelines and plans to contribute to the OER Movement.

Thus, at UPOU, many are optimistic that a more informed and committed culture for OER use, creation, and sharing will happen in the near future. Many are of the opinion that UPOU is "getting there," and leading the advocacy for OER among academic institutions in the country.

Fig. 4 provides a breakdown of this positive note, with 66% believing UPOU has made more strides in this direction.

The state of openness of UPOU

The UP Open University is at the threshold of positioning itself as a truly open university in order to serve its global community of learners and the development needs of the nation. In terms of the metrics of openness, UPOU has made strides in the dimensions DE at a scale and OER. However, it has still a long way to go in the open admission and curricula dimensions (Table 3).

To some extent, this state of seeming (un-)openness of UPOU is a function of its legal character and attribute as a graduate university. These attributes are both a challenge and an asset to address and capitalize on. Being a UP institution, it has the standards of academic excellence embedded in its academic offerings; it has no baggage as a poor cousin or an inferior university to UP. It can even claim equality and parity as a legitimate institution of higher learning and influence mindsets about monopoly of contribution to education and development.
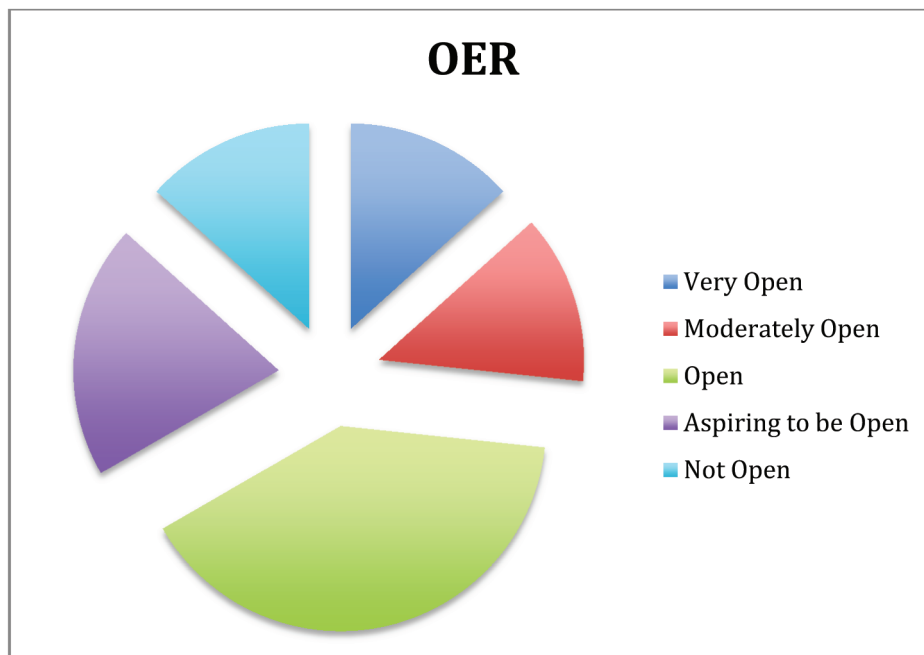
Figure 4: Openness of UPOU in OER Use, Creation and Sharing

Source: Villamejor-Mendoza, 2012.

Table 3: The State of Openness of UPOU

Parameter/Dimension	Status of UPOU	Remarks vis-à-vis Other Universities (within the UP System and other Open Universities)
1. Profile		
Legal Character	Open University but not a stand-alone University with its own academic and other policies and systems	A constituent university of the UP System subject to the same standards, policies and guidelines of the System
Nature of Programs	90% graduate programs	Around 20% is the proportion of graduate programs in the UP System
Nature of Instruction & Learning	Open and distance e-Learning with fully online learning management system	Conventional classroom instruction & learning in the other CUs of UP; other OUs are in the generation 1 (face to face) to generation 2 (blended)
Enrollment/Term	2,800/term (of 3 trimesters and 2 semesters in an academic year)	Varies from 1,000–100,000
2. (Traditional) Dimensions of Openness		
Open Admissions	67% Not Open	Practice based on System-defined policies on curriculum development and other academic matters
Open Curricula	74% Not Open	-do-
DE at a Scale	71% Open	Largely because it was instituted as the only CU with ODeL as the mode of delivery/pedagogy
OER	66% Open	The virtual university is positioned to lead in the OER movement

Being part of the national university of the country, however, it has elitism tucked in its character, as it is accessible only to those who are qualified. Its accessibility to those who need higher qualifications is constrained; wiping out gains it has built in terms of being ubiquitous, flexible, virtual and technology-enhanced in its academic and other offerings.

Major challenges in making UPOU more open

In addition, UPOU is still beset with the following major challenges:

1. *Bound by Residential-based Teaching and Learning Culture, Mindset, Policies and Standards*

UPOU is an open university operating within the framework of a conventional university (Librero, 2006). Thus, its major challenge is itself and the system in which it was born to, which to a certain extent may not be nurturing openness.

Being an integral part of UP System, its financial and other resources are tied with the System's. Its plans and programs, particularly its academic programs, are expected to be consistent with UP policies and processes, and subject to the regulations of higher authorities and its Board of Regents.[4] It may enjoy delegated authority in some aspects of governance, but in general, with "One UP" as the overarching thrust of the present administration, its autonomy as an open university may only be partial.

Being situated in a system that is crafted in the context of residential teaching, its innovative spirit may be thwarted by mainstream culture anchored on the long tradition of UP as the premier (conventional) University in the country.

In addition, reading through its creation in 1995, its mandate is "to be closely articulated with those of the other (residential) autonomous units of the University. . . it *shall derive* the substance, vitality and quality of its degree program offerings from the academic programs of the residential universities of the System. . ." (UP BOR 1995, underscoring mine).

Likewise, the foundational reason for its creation appears the potential contribution of distance education "to increase the capacity of UP to respond to the growing needs for quality UP education, even in areas where there are no UP campus." (3rd Whereas, BOR 1995). Thus, UPOU was more a strategic tool for democratization (or "massification") of access to higher education than an appreciation of the philosophical underpinnings of an OU and what the culture, technology and innovation of openness may deliver, revolutionize and change in the society.

2. Resultant Pseudo-Openness and Lack of Policies on "Openness"

The resultant effect is a UPOU aspiring to be open and exhibiting only the DE and OER aspects of openness. As earlier alluded to, UPOU is "open to people" because anyone can be admitted for as long as s/he meets the admission requirements. It is also "open to places" and admits anyone in any place in the world, again subject to admission requirements and interconnectivity to our virtual classrooms. UPOU is "open to methods," especially those being practiced by other leading OUs, but its methods are fixed by existing ICT infrastructure at this time. The University is "open to ideas" but there are instances when UPOU is open to innovations but only to the extent allowed by existing policies, e.g. OER vs. IPR regimes.

UPOU does not have open admissions. Its content is not registered under the curricular commons and is very structured. Its pedagogy is characteristic of first and second-generation eLearning; the only open maybe is pedagogy due to the academic freedom of the faculty members. It also lacks policies on openness, e.g., will UPOU share its syllabi, research papers, and publications? How will it strategically collaborate for knowledge co-creation for all? Will UPOU subscribe to the Creative Commons? How shall it accredit prior learning? How shall it open the choices of its global learners? How will it enhance its pathways and bridges, multiple entries and exits?

3. Other Challenges and Constraints

The other serious obstacle is the young history of alternative learning systems (ALS) in the country, which affect the way our policy and decision makers and even ordinary learners view distance education and open universities. Although being UP has embedded in UPOU unquestioned or uncompromising quality and excellence in its programs and offerings[5], there exists a general suspicion on the quality of ALS. The wider arena is still oriented towards the mainstream conventional classroom learning, and anything alternative or not mainstream will have a long difficult battle to prove itself and its worth.

Meanwhile at UPOU, although its academic administrators and personnel are already indoctrinated into the culture and mindset of open education, the commitment, resolve and programmatic

actions to pursue and sustain an open movement towards a truly Open University, either within the present structure (as part of the UP System) or differently (as an independent and separate Open University of the Philippines), remain a challenge. Many policy pronouncements within UPOU and the UP System have remained calculated and cautious.

Conclusion: prospects in making UPOU a truly open university

This paper is a self-reflection on the state of openness of the UP Open University. This was done not only to explore the aspects and gradations of openness of UPOU, but also to unravel causes and solutions to the issues and concerns that limit UPOU's options to becoming a truly open university.

Although UPOU has gone a long way from the School on Air in the late 1980's to the Schools of Distance Education in the 1990s to *the* UP Open University at present, this paper has resonated the truth, which we all knew all along: that despite its revolutionary transformation into the pioneer and leader open and distance e-learning graduate university in the country, it is still far from being an OU in terms of being open in its admissions, curricular offerings, DE at a scale and OER policies and practice. UPOU, however, favorably exhibits openness in offering DE content, pedagogy and management, at a relatively smaller scale than its counterparts around the globe.

This state of affairs will continue as long as UPOU remains an OU within a conventional university system. This complicated existence may be incrementally addressed (Status Quo) or may require revolutionary approaches (Separate OU and more).

The latter would include gradually influencing the mindset of the wider public, the UP System and other residential CUs, and other authorities in the country, on the favorable contributions of ALS, distance education and open universities. This can also be through advocacy campaigns for new and equally higher standards for ODeL, based on international standards, best practices and accreditation processes, so that UPOU is benchmarked not among its residential counterparts but among its peers in ODeL.

UPOU may slowly influence the traditional conventional education system with international best practices already embedded in the best OUs all over the world, so that it may be able to remove barriers to decision-making and make education truly accessible and open, suited to context and needs of 21st century learners. UPOU must also commit and work towards an open movement and revolutionize the ways it operates as an open university. Or, it aspires to be totally autonomous and not subsumed within the UP system.

The path to true openness has taken ground. The UP Open University will get there in due time and as long as it continues to reflect on its circumstances and arm itself with resources, expertise, passion, commitment, resolve and vision to stay open and be among the best Open Universities in the world.

Notes

[1]   UP was designated as the National University in the country in 2008 (RA 9500) although it has been the de facto premier university since its creation in 1908. The UP Board of Regents or BOR is the highest policy making body of the University.

[2]   Retrieved from http://www.distancelearningportal.eu

[3]   The ETEEAP is a comprehensive educational assessment program at the tertiary level that recognizes, accredits and gives equivalencies to knowledge, skills, attitudes and values gained by individuals from relevant work. It is implemented through deputized higher education institutions that shall award the appropriate college degree.

Beneficiaries must be Filipinos who are at least high school graduates. They must have worked for at least five years in the field or industry related to the academic program they are obtaining an equivalency. They must also be able to show proof of proficiency, capability and thorough knowledge in the field applied for equivalency (CHED 2009).

4   Since its existence in 1908 until the present, the University of the Philippines System, being a standard by itself, is self-regulated. It is not subject to the regulation of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), except for reportorial matters, particularly its inclusion in reports as part of the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) for budget purposes.

5   This excellence is recognized not only within UP and the country, but also outside and in the Asian region, as legislators and other policy makers have been looking up to UPOU as the premier Open university. There are even moves in the Legislature to designate UPOU as the National Open University of the Philippines, vesting upon it the mandate of advancing the quality of higher education through open and distance e-Learning.

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