

READY TO SUPPORT THE SECOND GENERATION OF ONLINE STUDENTS

At the beginning of my term, seven years ago, I realized that the University would soon be receiving its first digital natives. Since then, we have seen how media-savvy young people have initiated many of their virtual classmates, most of whom were still recent immigrants to the world of the Internet, in the use of new information technologies, online collaboration, and using our campus to build a genuine social network.

Now that the time has come to pass the torch to the next governing team, we are witnessing another revolution, another sea change in our students' habits, caused by the tremendous mobility offered by electronic devices, the massive, shared and open use of knowledge, the emergence of collaborative networks, and the gamification of learning. The reason for this change is clear: young people in the digital age want to study the same way they live, shop, consume their news, interact and have fun.



The digital world moves at ten times the speed of the analogue one. Thus, a single term has sufficed to feel the effects of this generational turnover, requiring us to become even more flexible, to anticipate the needs of these new students and to reinvent ourselves in order to remain the natural first choice for those who are no longer content to listen passively to talks from the back of an auditorium, to watch lectures on YouTube or to download massive open online courses (MOOCs) from the latest new platform.

This phenomenon is to be welcomed: online education is unstoppable and, while it will not necessarily do away with traditional physical universities, it will force them to step up their efforts to hybridize faster. And that is exactly where the UOC's 18 years of experience must play a crucial role, because the members of this second wave of e-students are looking for more than just the ability to consume vast amounts of open knowledge. They seek recognition, support, mentoring, quality assurance, to acquire the skills they will need to excel in professions that have not yet even been invented, to meet and forge connections with other entrepreneurs, and to create with them jointly online.

More than 60,000 students do this at the UOC every day. This year, they will have even more tools to manage their learning however they see fit: My UOC, the personalized campus, has been optimized for smartphones and tablets; Open Apps allows students to collectively improve e-learning apps; and UOC Maps helps users around the world find each other and communicate instantly.

Our immediate challenge is to achieve full mobility, not just with regard to accessibility, devices, applications, faculty exchanges, cooperation with other institutions, businesses and universities, or the incorporation of new students from even more countries, but also because we must begin to create the opportunities that this second generation of online students and society at large are demanding. This we are doing, even as we build a glocal university network, NetUOC, with which to share our respective visions, methodologies, programmes and resources.

This year marks the UOC's coming of age. It thus has the necessary experience and maturity to take the helm in this storm of knowledge. We are ready and we know the path to follow. Now it is the new team's turn to take the ship's wheel and guide us safely into port and, in so doing, to complete the journey from the first online university (1995-2005) to the university network (2006-2012) and network university, tailored to the second generation of online students that is just now arriving.

Thank you to everyone who has accompanied me on this long and thrilling ride, and smooth sailing to the UOC!

Imma Tubella,
President of the UOC

Selection of articles by President Imma Tubella (2005-2012) on higher education, excellence and the Universities System, digital natives, markets of knowledge, governance of universities and country.



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