The organic growth of the UOC is constant and sustained. In the 2003-2004 course, the number of enrolled students increased by 16%. Two milestones of this academic year also characterise a commitment to research – the new IN3 Building at the Parc Mediterrani de la Tecnologia, in Castelldefels (Barcelona), and the presentation and publication of the results of the first phase of the Catalonia Internet Project (Projecte Internet Catalunya, PIC).

Within the sphere of internationalisation, the first edition of the international seminar organised by the UNESCO Chair: Leading the University in the Knowledge Society, and the creation of a stable operational base in Mexico DF have marked the course of the academic year 2003-2004.
“Catalonia possesses a consolidated university system and everybody is aware that the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya is one of its pillars and that it helps to make this system truly complete, because it provides it with an effective capacity for attending to the growing social expectation of an offer of quality distance higher education”.

Carles Solà
President of the Board of Trustees of the FUOC, Catalan Minister of Universities, Research, and the Information Society

“The sphere of the social dissemination of knowledge also witnesses to our university identity. Lletra – the most prestigious area of Catalan literature on the Internet – is an example of how the resources and capacities generated at the university also come within the reach of society as a whole. This is our responsibility, and it is what we have done and will continue to do with Lletra and with the other initiatives of the UOC in the sphere of dissemination”.

Gabriel Ferraté
Rector of the UOC

“... the UOC is a pretext and model of what cultural and organisational change can be in university institutions in an environment marked by the irruption of the information and communications technologies and the emergence of a new dynamic of innovation, creativity, competence, know-how, competition, and doing things better”.

Josep Vilarasau
President of the Advisory Council of the UOC
Presentation

For some years now Catalonia has possessed a solid university system, and this is excellent news for the whole country. It needs to be said, however, that this system would not be complete if it were not for the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, whose existence allows an effective response to the growing social demand for an offer of distance higher education of outstanding quality. Nonetheless, we are not face-to-face with a novelty; the UOC has been fulfilling this requirement to a highly satisfactory degree over the last ten years.

The UOC's most recent commitment is to the sphere of research, and here it still has a long way to go. It is obvious that the academic identity of a university – its prestige, its international projection, its productivity within the framework of the society that it belongs to – must necessarily arise from research, as well as from teaching and the dissemination of knowledge throughout society. The research carried out by a university often determines the quality of its teaching and the use of the knowledge and products that it transfers to society. In this sphere, too, the UOC has been able to establish a characteristic profile of its own.

Two achievements in the 2003-2004 course show very clearly that research at the UOC is going in the right direction. On the one hand, the IN3 already possesses an appropriate and modern area on the Campus Mediterrani de la Tecnologia in Castelldefels, Barcelona. On the other, the Catalonia Internet Project (Projecte Internet Catalunya, PIC) has come to the end of its first phase with the presentation and publication of its results.

The PIC opens up a debate about the historical process of transition and transformation that has taken us from the industrialised to the network society, and about how this process is expressed and made concrete in the case of Catalan society. Consequently, it is more a starting point than a place of arrival. It is a first-rate scientific tool that makes available to researchers a study that, because of its results, establishes an initial reference framework that in the future will have to allow a bringing up to date – and with homogeneous criteria – of this cross-section of our society.

It is precisely for this reason that the government of Catalonia has decided to give it continuity by guaranteeing the funds necessary for the second phase of the project, due to be undertaken in the period 2004-2006.

Finally, and as this has represented a firm commitment on the part of the government of the Generalitat de Catalunya, it is appropriate to refer to the task carried out from the UOC in this course in the promotion of free software - an educational promotion expressed in the first international Master's in Free Software, as well as an dissemination promotion made concrete in the Document de Barcelona ("Challenges for the extension and consolidation of free software" presented in May, and a promotion and commitment to ensure the accessibility and availability of the Virtual Campus of the University in free software.

The annual challenge of the Academic Report provides a good occasion for reflection on what we have done and what still remains for us to do. Allow me to begin by expressing my satisfaction at the overall situation: the UOC is growing and this is due to all involved.

The organic growth of our University is constant and sustained. In the 2003-2004 course, the number of enrolled students increased by 16%. This fact demonstrates two things: on the one hand, that the kind of university that this is fits in well with what society requires of us, and on the other, that the academic and management team of the University is working well in offering a product of the quality expected of us.

One of the objectives of this effort and one of the reasons for this success is the increase in the educational offer: the training programmes of the UOC are continuing to increase, and at present there are seventeen recognised degree courses – twelve of which are also given on the Latin American campus – offered by the University, as well as one own degree course and more that a hundred Master’s and Postgraduate courses. Thus increase in the educational offer is one of our duties as a University, and even more so as we are still such a young university. It is worth stressing this growth, which is expressive of the consolidation of the UOC, and it is worthwhile to continue on this same pathway.

I would underline the importance of the launching in this last course of East Asian Studies, which lead to a Bachelor's degree and a Master’s of, the first international Master's degree in Free Software, and of the international Master's degree in E-learning.

The sphere of the social dissemination of knowledge also witnesses to our university identity. I would like to point to an especially illustrative case: the consolidation of the digital area Lletra, which has become the most complete resource centre for Catalan literature on the web that citizens and scholars can resort to. It is an example of how the resources and capacities generated at the university also come within the reach of society as a whole. This is our responsibility, and it is what we have done and will continue to do with Lletra and with the other initiatives of the UOC in the sphere of dissemination.

I would not wish to finish without referring to research. In this 2003-2004 course we made operative the new premises of the research institute of the UOC (the IN3) at the Parc Mediterrani de la Tecnologia in Castelldefels, Barcelona. These premises have appeared in an institute that, in the four years in which it has been functioning, has come to possess a solid network of researchers - many of them lecturers at the University itself - who have participated in more than two hundred IN3-led research projects. They have also collaborated with some one hundred educational, research, and business institutions in more than thirty countries. The new premises confirm, therefore, the vitality of a project for which we have high hopes.

My introductory remarks to this 2003-2004 Academic Report concern once more the role of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya as an international reference-point. In this course the international seminar of the UOC’s UNESCO Chair was held for the first time - an event that represents a commitment to co-operation and the interchange of experience with academics and university management from all around the world.

Under the motto Leading the University in the Knowledge Society, this seminar brought together thirty-one Rectors and Vice Rectors from ten countries and twenty-six different institutions that, from Barcelona and with the UOC as a pretext and model of cultural and organisational change, shared the challenges that university institutions have to confront in an environment marked by the irruption of the information and communications technologies and the emergence of a new dynamic of innovation, creativity, competence, know-how, competition, and doing things better.

Far from centring its discourse and debating sessions on a merely tactical or instrumental vision of ICTs applied to the university training and learning process, this international gathering made a strategic proposal for the introduction of e-learning into universities as an opportunity for setting in motion a process of institutional change toward organisational, academic, and managerial processes centred on the student: the client. Such a change would result in a capacity to respond in both a timely and efficacious way to the expectation of leadership that the worlds of economics, culture and science entertain of the universities that are going to be the element galvanising the transition from the society of the twentieth century to the knowledge and information society of the twenty-first century. The UOC is a point of reference among universities because of the singularity of its model, and is also a promoter of the information society. It is so on an international basis. The repercussions from this first holding of the seminar and the continuation of the strategy of implanting the UOC “locally” in the creation of a stable operations-base in Mexico DF – which joins the one in Brussels and the others that in the 2004-2005 course will be established in other countries – show us the vitality, the meaning, and the value of the UOC as anexample of the presence and presence of Catalonia in the world.

Josep Vilarasau
President of the FUOC Council