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And the Excellence in Tuition Award for 2005 goes to …
Law of Persons!

At a graduation ceremony held on 6 June 2006, the School of Law’s Excellence in Tuition Award for 2005 was awarded to the module PVL101-Q (Law of Persons). The award was accepted by Dr Hanneretha Kruger (the module coordinator), accompanied by Mr Douglas Mailula (who, sadly, left the University at the beginning of May 2006) and Mrs Sandra Ferreira. Unfortunately, Prof Jacqueline Heaton, another member of the team, could not attend the ceremony.

Law of Persons (PVL101-Q – linked to PRL1M1-Z since 2006) is one of the compulsory modules for the LLB degree. It deals with various aspects relating to the ‘person’ in the law, namely: What is legal personality? When does legal personality commence? When does legal personality end? What is status? What are the various factors that influence a person’s status? Owing to the many factors that may influence a person’s status - for example, domicile, extramarital birth, age, and other factors such as mental incapacity, Law of Persons in essence serves as an introductory module for many of the more advanced private-law modules. The effect of age on a person’s status, for example, is dealt with with reference to a minor’s capacity to contract, one of the capacities that form part of a person’s capacity to act. The module thus deals with law-of-contract principles. This part of the module is undoubtedly one of the most difficult parts, and learners historically have trouble grasping the advanced concepts.

For these reasons, designing a learner-friendly learning package for this module was a challenging exercise. More than ten years ago, in 1995, Law of Persons was the erstwhile Faculty of Law’s pilot project for the newly adopted ‘team approach’, a multidisciplinary approach in the design and development of courseware. The multidisciplinary team included the academics responsible for Law of Persons at the time, members of the Institute for Curriculum and Learning Development (ICLD), the Directorate: Language Services, the Department of Production and Unisa Press (for the cover design). In 1995, the newly designed learning package was used for the first time. It consisted of a study guide, tutorial letters, and a tutorial cassette. The study guide for Law of Persons is a ‘wrap-around’ study guide – that is, the study guide is meant to guide learners through their prescribed textbook (DSP Cronjé and J Heaton The South African Law of Persons 2 ed (2003)) and their prescribed casebook (DSP Cronjé and J Heaton Casebook on the South African Law of Persons 2 ed (2003)).

The study guide for Law of Persons is divided into study units. Each study unit
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consists of the following:

- A mind map of the module. This map shows learners exactly where in the module they are at that particular moment.
- An indication of the prescribed material for the study unit.
- An overview of the study unit, informing learners what to expect in that study unit.
- The learning outcomes for the study unit, in which learners are informed of the following: on which aspects of the study unit they should focus, and what will be required of them. Learners will thus be able to better prepare themselves for the examination.
- All study units contain activities and feedback on those activities.
- Marginal notes are used for emphasis, for explaining certain concepts, etcetera.
- Each study unit ends with a list of self-assessment questions.

The activities and the feedback on them were designed by academics with years of experience in teaching Law of Persons, assisted by Ms Hentie Wilson, formerly from the ICLD. In designing the activities, we kept in mind the lessons learned during the years of helping learners with their problems by telephone, by e-mail, during both individual and group discussions, or when discussing learners’ answers to examination questions with them.

In the activities we address different knowledge levels, gradually progressing from lower to higher levels. Thus, for example, we begin by expecting learners to read a certain section from the prescribed textbook, and then we ask them to list the requirements for a certain concept. Later in the study guide learners are expected to apply their knowledge to problem-type questions on a higher level. To further strengthen learners’ knowledge and prepare them for the examination we then adapt the facts of the questions slightly, and expect learners to reformulate their answers accordingly. We also use the activities to equip learners with certain learning skills. Activities are used, for example, to assist learners in reading and summarising court decisions, and in answering essay and problem-type questions in assignments and the examination. Appropriate feedback is given on all the activities. We believe that the activities constitute one of the strengths of the learning package. In these activities, learners are offered an opportunity to engage critically with the contents of Law of Persons.

Another strong point of the learning package is its linguistic design. In designing the learning package, care was taken to use accessible and appropriate language. We mostly use the active voice, in a welcoming, friendly and conversational tone.

As far as the visual design is concerned, we are very proud of the layout that the Department of Production, assisted by the ICLD, came up with. The intention is to
give the impression of an organised, open and caring learning-environment-in-print with enough resting space for the eye. Ample space is provided in the margin for the learner’s own notes. Appropriate icons are used throughout the study guide. The characteristic ‘face-of-a-person’ cover, the trademark of Law of Persons for a decade, made way for a more modern, fresher, just as striking, cover in 2005.

The tutorial cassette that forms part of the Law of Persons learning package helps learners develop the very important skill of reading and summarising court decisions, with reference to one of their prescribed cases, *Ex parte Pieters* 1993 (3) SA 379 (D). We are proud to announce that this tutorial cassette will, as from 2007, form part of the learning package of the exciting new Skills for Law Students module.

Since the Law of Persons learning package in its present form is a culmination of almost a decade of development, there have been many contributors over the years, some of whom have since left the service of Unisa. I should like to thank colleagues at the ICLD, the Directorate: Language Services, Unisa Press, and the Department of Production for their contributions. I should also like to thank my colleagues in the Law of Persons group, namely Mr Douglas Mailula (formerly from the Department of Private Law), Mrs Sandra Ferreira (Department of Private Law), and Prof Jacqueline Heaton (Department of Private Law). In her absence, I should also like to thank my former colleague, the late Prof Marie Blackbeard, who made a huge contribution to the original learning package.

Hanneretha Kruger