

WHAT OUR GRADUATES SAY

By AP Dr Santhi Raghavan

The number of adult learners in Malaysia is on the rise, which is good news to providers of higher education in the country. Now, more of these institutions are introducing programmes for adult learners.

In this regard, OUM has proven that it could deliver quality yet affordable programmes. Its delivery of open and distance learning (ODL) through a blended pedagogy which also involves tutor-led sessions and technology-based learning, has received positive response. The University's total enrolment of almost 70,000 learners is testament to this. In fact, other providers of higher education are emulating OUM's strategies and offering ODL programmes as well.

Tutors play an important role in OUM as they lead our face-to-face tutorials, which are an integral part of our blended pedagogy. Apart from engaging in self-managed learning and participating in the myLMS online discussion forums, the University's adult learners look forward to attending tutorials.

So, why is a tutor very important? Are the tutors at OUM able to meet the expectations of their learners? What do the learners really want from them? We decided to seek the answers from three of our own staff who received their scrolls at the Sixth Convocation of OUM recently.

Kavitha Raman, who obtained a Bachelor in Multimedia Communication with Honours degree, said that her tutors were passionate and professional in helping their learners. A Senior Desktop Publisher at the Centre for Instructional Design & Technology (CiDT), Kavitha said the tutors not only shared their knowledge but also continuously guided and supported their learners. They gave insightful comments and helpful suggestions which helped to enhance their learners' thinking skills.

However, Kavitha did not totally rely on her tutors. She sought out learning materials on her own as well, in order to supplement what was provided by her tutors. According to her, learners must realise that OUM is an ODL institution so they must make the effort to understand a subject matter instead of waiting to be spoon-fed by their tutors.

Tutors must understand that the learners come from diverse fields, so their experience and nature of work would vary. They should use the appropriate teaching tools, such as slides, visual forms and notes, she said.

Sazrin Mohd Mohtar, a staff in the Vice President's Office (Learner Management & Campus Development), had high expectations of his tutors while he was pursuing his Bachelor of Business Administration with Honours degree.

He said OUM tutors must possess wide knowledge and experience in the subjects they taught because most OUM learners are working adults who have diverse backgrounds and experiences.

According to Sazrin, tutors need to create an interesting and interactive class by encouraging discussions and debates instead of merely giving lectures. This approach would indirectly motivate the learners to prepare for tutorials and engage in meaningful discussions, he explained.



Kavitha Raman



Sazrin Mohd Mohtar

When asked if he was satisfied with his tutors, he replied, “On the overall, I am satisfied with the tutors who taught me. There were a few tutors who even gave extra classes for free.”

He said some of his tutors provided interesting slide presentations and brief notes which were helpful. But there were a few tutors whose lack of commitment dampened their learners’ motivation.

In addition, said Sazrin, a tutor was not just a teacher but also a guide and a coach. In addition, they acted as a link between the learners and the University. He felt that OUM should strive to cultivate quality tutors because most of the tutors were part-timers and hence, their level of commitment was lesser than that of full-time tutors. He said a sense of belonging needed to be instilled in the tutors so that they would feel more appreciated and a part of the OUM community.

Therefore, OUM should encourage the part-time tutors to participate in university-level activities such as learning skills workshops and also the convocation so that they would appreciate their learners better.

They managed tutorials and the myLMS forum with enthusiasm and sought to include all of their learners.



Mohamad Sulaiman

Organised, up to date and helpful. These are some of the words Mohamad Sulaiman, who graduated with a Bachelor in Business Administration with Honours, used to describe his tutors. Mohamad, who is an Executive at the Centre for Tutor Management and Development, said his tutors even assisted him after tutorial classes. They managed tutorials and the myLMS forum with enthusiasm and sought to include all of their learners.

He added that since the tutors came from different backgrounds, whereby some were attached to other higher learning institutions while others were from the sphere of industry, they provided a wider view of the subjects, thereby helping to open his mind. They also presented the learners with useful pointers on how to tackle assignments, he said.

Ideally, said Mohamad, a tutor should be creative by using different teaching techniques. As OUM learners were relatively more mature than those in most conventional universities in Malaysia, he said tutors needed to cover not only the topics in the modules but also those that go beyond them.

There are lessons to be learnt from the experiences of these graduates. Contained in their comments are various suggestions on how tutors could upgrade their level of performance. If carried out, these would, in turn, help to enhance the performance of our learners. When this is achieved, OUM’s aspiration to be well-known for producing quality graduates of world-class standard would come true.



ONLINE POLL

From my lived or vicarious teaching experience, I believe that adult learners should be ...

1. guided actively by the tutor in every aspect of learning.
2. allowed to direct their own learning with moderate tutor intervention.
3. independent enough to find ways to master their studies without depending on anyone.

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