MYLMS – A TUTOR'S BEST BUDDY

By Aw Yoke Cheng

This is my sixth year as a tutor with OUM since August 2003. Since I became a tutor, I have taught a few courses related to business management and management information systems which include Information Technology for Management, E-Commerce, Principles of Management, and Merchandising. I have also taught two OUM common courses – Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learners, and Entrepreneurship.

As a tutor, I realise that I shoulder the responsibility of supporting and optimising learning for open and distance learners. In order to meet their expectations, I need to imagine the experience of ODL from their perspective. I have to "think like a learner, then act like a teacher." Throughout these years with OUM, I realised that ICT is a very powerful source, especially myLMS which has helped me a lot in playing my role.

My involvement is the same as that of other tutors. A semester is divided into three stages: pre-tutoring, tutoring, and post-tutoring. All these stages require me to fully make use of the ICT resources available to meet the expectations of the learners, OUM and myself.

The pre-tutoring stage is the beginning phase where I will be contacted by the administrator from the learning centre to assign me a particular course. The course will be activated on the myLMS portal.

The tutoring stage begins when I meet the learners to provide a total of 10 hours of tutorials, which are divided into three sessions for a short semester and five sessions for a normal semester. The post-tutorial stage commences after the last face-to-face tutorial session up to the final examination.

Pre-Tutoring Stage

ICT skills are very important for me in order to support my learners and the institution. Among these skills are handling basic office applications i.e. Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint, surfing the Internet and retrieving information.

I usually begin a semester by surfing the myLMS portal to activate the online interaction on the myLMS discussion forum. I will post a welcome message and provide my contact information for the purpose of academic

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consultation. The welcome message could also "warm-up" the learners to a course.

I also need to know who the Subject Matter Expert (SME) for the course is so that I could use the tutor-SME platform in myLMS.

Tutoring Stage

In this stage, I use the myLMS, myGMail and myLibrary. Before the face-to-face tutorials, I will surf for useful weblinks related to the course and provide these URLs to the learners during the tutorials. I will encourage the learners to browse the URLs to acquire up-to-date information. The e-books and e-journals provided by the Digital Library are also a very good resource.

I use myGmail to communicate with my learners. Some learners also e-mail me via myGMail for assistance.

I consider the myLMS discussion forum as my virtual workstation where I could meet my clients – the learners – virtually. Other than answering questions posted by learners, I also post certain topics or current issues related to the areas taught during tutorials to stimulate

collaborative online learning. The topics may not require definite answers. Instead, these could be industry-relevant questions with open-ended answers. This is also a good avenue to clarify doubts about assignments.

MyLMS provides a useful tool to track the number of postings by learners. This allows me to closely monitor the participation of the learners. I could then encourage the less active learners during tutorials to participate more. The five marks allocated for online participation could serve as a motivator. I will inform the learners of the expectations on both quantity (frequency) and quality (creativity, contribution and maturity of thinking) of the messages they post.

At times, I discovered that some learners who were passive in tutorials were active in myLMS.

Post-Tutoring Stage

Things are not over although the tutorials have ended. Work needs to be done to provide marks on the learners' formative assessments and to prepare them for their final examination. The myLMS forum could still be an active platform at this critical moment for me to clarify any doubts on the subject matter and minimise examination anxiety among learners.

Timely marking is necessary on the learners' formative assessments, which consist of quizzes, online participation and written assignment. For this, I need to be familiar with the web-based tools provided by OUM, namely, the Online Marks Entry System (OMES). Other than providing

grades for assessment, the marking process also generates comments in order to provide feedback. So, for the written assignment, I have to highlight the weaknesses or mistakes to enable learners to improve themselves.

When the final examination has ended and the claim form has been submitted to the administrator, I could say that is the end of a semester for me as a tutor.

There are a lot of ODL collaborations between learners and me which take place through the use of ICT. Learners could engage other learners and me in ways that are simply not possible without ICT. Effective tutoring could only be possible if every one of us is committed to utilising the ICT resources available. **TCX**