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22

WHAT'S YOUR TUTORING STYLE?

The regularly updated OUM Tutor's Handbook provides tutors with the big picture of what is expected of them when they take on OUM's tutorship. While it is a given that each tutor will need to personally translate the given guide to best practices into actual practice, it is not always adequately recognised that the act of translation is always filtered through the tutor's unique personality. This in turn will shape the tutor's tutoring style: happy, serious, joyless, fun, sleep-inducing, inspiring, intellectual, and so on. This issue takes a closer look at tutoring styles, the importance of self-examination, rapport-building, and balancing learners' needs and preferences.

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ABOUT TCX

TCX (Tutor Connexions) is an OUM e-newsletter that provides a dedicated link between the University and its tutors. It serves as a channel for news and updates on tutor-related events and as a platform for the sharing of views, experiences and tips on best practices in university teaching and learning.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The act of translating theory into practice is always fraught with complexities. You know, for instance, what is expected of you as a tutor. You have been guided through these expectations by the University.

In theory, you know you should be flexible in the approach you take to tutoring, taking on board the individual needs of your learners. But does that mean you need to give in to all your learners' demands? Where do you draw the line in real-life application between your expectations of the learners and the learners' expectations of you as a tutor?

Also, between the expectations of the University and your learners, where does that leave you as an individual with your own unique personality? Can you be your authentic self and still meet these expectations? And can you use your unique personality as the base on which to build rapport with your learners?

The articles in this issue on tutoring styles do not pretend to provide the last word on the subject. Rather, they are meant to provoke thought on the negotiations each tutor will need to make when interacting with learners. We hope you will enjoy this issue and that you will share with us your views.

Best

Dr David C.L. Lim

Chief Editor



EVALUATION OF TUTORS

As tutors, we are required to award marks for students' assignments and online participation (OLP). When some learners receive low marks for OLP, they accuse me of being cruel and very strict in awarding marks. They might channel their dissatisfaction into the Tutor Evaluation. The rationale is that, "You give me poor marks, I give you poor evaluation." I think I have done my very best to fulfil my responsibility. I would like to suggest that tutors to be given fair standing in the report. Give us the opportunity to justify ourselves.

*Janet Rose Tanakinjal
Labuan Learning Centre*

Dear Janet,

Thank you for sharing your views. I appreciate your effort to improve our learners. I am sure it is difficult, especially when they have different styles to suit their learning needs. Actually, OUM does not evaluate tutors solely based on the Online Learners Evaluation on Tutors. We practise a 360-degree evaluation involving:

- *Your participation in the myLMS forum;*
- *Class observation and monitoring by Administrator/ Lead Tutor/ Academic Staff;*
- *Feedback from faculty;*
- *Feedback from learning centres administrators;*
- *Punctuality in entering marks using OMES; and*
- *Feedback from learners during Dialogue with Learners sessions.*

I hope you will continue to support and motivate our learners in increasing their ownership of learning, as this can create self-directedness, independence and lifelong qualities among our learners.

Assoc Prof Dr Santhi Raghavan

We welcome letters from our readers on any issue that may be of concern to you. You may use a pseudonym if you wish but please mention which learning centre you are from. Please e-mail us at tcx@oum.edu.my.



IN APPRECIATION FOR DR SANTHI

I wrote a letter which was published in TCX 21 to share my thoughts on the need for assignments and the marking scheme to be uploaded at the same time. I must say that I did not expect a reply, what more a personal call from Dr Santhi herself. Well, that is exactly what I got! Hence, my appreciation and thanks to Dr Santhi for taking the time to personally share her thoughts and explain the matter. That is the way to go, OUM!

*Earnest Manuel
Perak Learning Centre*

Dear Earnest,

I am glad you appreciated my gesture. Thank you.

*Assoc Prof Dr Santhi Raghavan
Director
Centre for Tutor Management and Development*

EXAM FORMAT

In order to guide and prepare our learners to excel in their studies, I would like to suggest that a column on Examination Regulations be added to the myLMS forum. With this section, matters pertaining to examinations such as format and procedures can be easily accessed by both tutors and learners.

*Danny Chng Loi Peng
Faculty of Science and Technology*

Your suggestion has been noted. Thank you.

The Editors



A MEETING OF MINDS

Recently, we held a Dialogue with Lead Tutors together with a National Colloquium for Tutors. These two events took place at the Legend Hotel in Kuala Lumpur from 10 to 12 April. Quite a number of tutors turned up for these events and the feedback we received was mostly positive. We hope more of you will be able to join us in future dialogues and colloquiums so that we can acquire and exchange diverse but enriching ideas and views besides sharing experiences. To find out more about what took place during the two events, please have a look at what one tutor, Margaret Lok Lai Sung, has to say in her article in this issue.

Centre for Tutor Management and Development

IMPORTANT DATES

OMES Deadlines

PROGRAMME	ACTIVITY	DATE (2009)
Undergraduate	Key in marks for assignment and quizzes	12 – 26 July
	Key in marks for online participation	3 – 9 August
Postgraduate	Key in marks for Assignment 1	15 – 28 June
	Key in marks for Assignment 2	13 – 26 July
	Key in marks for online participation	1 – 15 August

Upcoming Activities

ACTIVITY	DATE (2009)	REMARKS
Teaching Permit Application	Tutorial 4 *Extended	Submit your application form to the Administrator at your learning centre.
Regional Colloquium for Tutors (East Coast)	To be scheduled during the May semester	Selected tutors and facilitators from the East Coast (Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang), subject matter experts, learning centre administrators, academicians, management and administrative staff.
Regional Colloquium for Tutors (Northern)	To be scheduled during the May semester	Selected tutors and facilitators from the Northern Region (Perlis, Penang, Kedah and Perak), subject matter experts, learning centre administrators, academicians, management and administrative staff.
Monitoring of New/ Senior Tutors and Facilitators	Tutorials/ Seminars 1-5	Observation during tutorials/ seminars will be conducted by Lead Tutors and academic staff.
Training for Facilitators	16 May	For those newly appointed for the Kuala Lumpur Learning Centre

ENHANCING QUALITY OF MODULES

By Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil
Senior Vice President, OUM

OUM has been operating since 2001. Over the last seven years or so, we have grown from just four programmes to 61. From just 753, our learner population has increased to more than 80,000 today. Our tutor pool, which began with just a handful of tutors, now has almost 9,000. As I look back at these figures and what we have achieved as an educational institution, I feel honoured to have been a part of the journey.

That said, I believe now is the time for some retrospection. Now is the time for us to change what needs changing and make the necessary improvements to our operations. It is with this in mind that I would like to discuss the topic of modules and what needs to be done to make them, and ultimately OUM, better.

With 61 programmes currently on offer, the number of courses has grown to almost 400, with one module for each course. Modules are commissioned to and written by academics and professionals from various backgrounds and institutions throughout the country.

They are then returned to OUM to be moderated, edited and enhanced before finally going into print. This is not an easy task, particularly for a young institution like OUM.

Every step of the way requires some form of monitoring; experience has taught us that it is easy to overlook details that might yield severe consequences. With such a large number of modules that must be produced every cycle, the room for improvement is always ample.

Based on the feedback we have received from both learners and tutors, there is a certain percentage of modules which are of questionable quality in terms of content, language, accuracy, currency and et cetera. Now that we are in our eighth year, I believe that it is high time for OUM to properly address these issues. We need the modules to be up to date, relevant and error-free. After all, modules are the cornerstone of the teaching and learning process at OUM.


Working adults, who make up the majority of OUM learners, rely greatly on modules when they study on their own and at their own pace. After excellent tutors and a conducive learning environment, modules are the third component which make the most impact on learners.

“Working adults, who make up the majority of OUM learners, rely greatly on modules when they study on their own and at their own pace”

We have made it a point to put in place specific strategies that are designed to improve and enhance the modules. Using the feedback we receive as a backbone, these strategies include:

1. Leveraging on lead tutors and experienced tutors to provide their expertise in module writing and moderation. We will also seek input from tutors regarding errors and other concerns regarding content. As such, we will implement a mechanism (via a designated e-mail or website) whereby tutors can submit their opinions and make suggestions regarding module quality. A selected team will look into the feedback and implement the suggestions where appropriate.
2. Setting up a proper editorial unit with adequate manpower to edit and proofread all modules to ensure that they are grammatically sound and error-free.

With the current number of modules, I would like to reiterate that this is a gradual process. We will be giving careful attention to each and every module and hope to make this a continuous and steady exercise. Throughout the entire process, we appreciate and encourage the involvement of our tutors.

I hope all OUM academic staff and tutors will acknowledge that the quality of our modules is a reflection of the quality of OUM as a whole. Surely we will want to produce the very best modules in order to reflect the very best within ourselves and what we do. Quality education must begin here and I hope with your support, this is not something that is out of reach for OUM. 

PROF DR YUSOFF ON TUTORING WITH COMPASSION

Interview by Lilian Kek Siew Yick

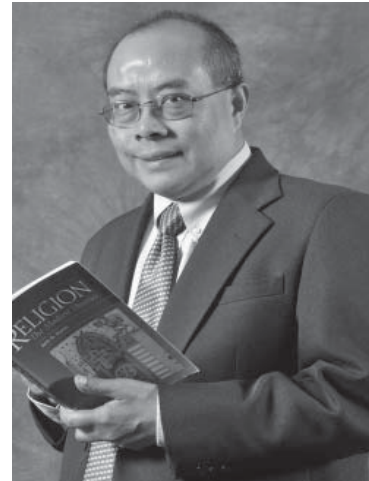
PROF DR MOHAMED YUSOFF ISMAIL is the Dean of Applied Social Sciences. In this interview, he lets us know what makes a great tutor, inserting wisdom gained from years of working in the field of comparative religion.

Lilian: Please tell us about yourself.

Prof Dr Yusoff: I am a social anthropologist by training. I studied at the Australian National University for a doctorate after pursuing my B.A. and M.A. at Monash University. My research interest has been on Theravada Buddhism for the last 20 years or so. I have always been interested in comparative religion and inter-religious dialogue. I am currently involved in interfaith activities led by the Amitabha Buddhist Society of Malaysia and Cheng Ho Multi-Cultural Trust. My philosophy in life is very simple – people should extend compassion towards others regardless of ethnicity and religion. Working relations would be more enjoyable and fruitful if one showed respect, compassion and care towards others. In fact, all religions have this basic tenet about loving kindness between human beings in society.

Lilian: In your opinion, what is the personality of an “A-star” tutor?

Prof Dr Yusoff: An “A-star” tutor should possess compassion towards students. Otherwise, the tutor’s commitment to delivering good teaching is questionable. Not much can be expected from those who become tutors simply for the sake of earning extra money during weekends. They might come to classes unprepared, be unfriendly to students and work according to the paid hours. They would not walk the extra mile. They might evade students who want to contact them during non-tutorial hours. They might even press the reject button when students call them up on their mobile phones. We cannot blame them as legally, they are not committing any crime. On the other hand, consider tutors who are dedicated and hardworking. They view their job as a calling even though it is on a part-time basis. They see it as a contribution towards manpower training and capacity building for the country. Our students are mature enough to differentiate “A-star” tutors from those who just pay lip service. We can gauge the quality of tutors not only from students’ evaluation but also from other sources. The bottom line is dedication. This is what



we need from tutors. If you have compassion for your students, dedication comes quite naturally. You will feel the joy of helping students in their learning process.

Lilian: What does religion say about teaching and education?

Prof Dr Yusoff: The basic premise of any religious teaching is to disseminate good values that will ensure an orderly way of life in the present world and the next. Prophets of any religion are great teachers. Prophet Muhammad was a great teacher. His lifestyle is to be emulated by Muslims. Buddha was a great teacher (achariya) and saviour (arahat) who taught people about the Noble Eightfold Path to salvation. His life is emulated by others. They renounce the world to find relief from suffering and to reach nirvana. Religious messengers are great teachers, whose task is to convey to others the teachings of the religion, including on moral conduct and ethical philosophy.

Lilian: What is the significance of tutoring styles towards learning?

Prof Dr Yusoff: Tutoring styles vary from person to person but the foundation of effective teaching is commitment to helping students understand their learning materials. We must bear in mind that tutorials are not lectures. Instead, tutorials are always interactive and tutors serve as

(Continued on next page)

facilitators. Secondly, some students learn very quickly with little coaching, while others take a little longer. Therefore, tutors should be able to gauge the reaction of students to the course content and look for telltale signs of whether they could comprehend and digest the ideas and concepts being taught. A tutor needs patience and a high level of tolerance. But if you are sincere and honest about teaching, tutorial classes can be enjoyable and lively. Students will interact and show a positive response. Teaching style is a personal choice but if tutors come to classes and start reading bits and pieces from modules, students might as well pack their bags and go home. Hence, preparation is important for tutors to guide students in discussions, prompt them to ask questions or argue on certain issues. Likewise, online tutorials are supposed to be interactive. It is definitely not a one-way traffic. The kind of answers given by tutors will eventually reveal their attitude, preparedness, level of knowledge and communication skills.

Lilian: Could you recall any of your teachers who have left a lasting impression on you?

Prof Dr Yusoff: Yes, a professor who first taught me anthropology. He was very humble despite being a great name in the field. I enjoyed his lectures and tutorials as he explained things in a very simple way, without using complicated terminology. He was very helpful. Once, he personally showed me where certain books were in the library although I could have used the cataloguing system to locate them. He was so approachable that we felt very much at home whenever we joined him for lunch and coffee break at the department. One advice that he gave me was that one should strive for the highest grade in one's academic subject. He said, "It is better for you to get an 'A,' even in Greek studies, than to get a 'D' in a choice discipline." With that advice, I do not regret at all doing anthropology.

Lilian: What is your opinion about the following statements?

- **Teachers are like hairdressers. They know the same style won't work for everybody.**

Prof Dr Yusoff: I agree with this statement. You need to be sensitive to the learning capability of various students. In OUM, our students are mature people who already have some preconceived ideas about certain knowledge. Not only that, they could be more experienced than the tutors, having been exposed to work and real-life situations more than half way through their life. So, the learning process could turn out to be the other way round too – we may learn something new from adult learners, something that is not written in modules or textbooks.

- **Teaching is like gardening – Though the growth is imperceptible at first, it rewards when the flowers bloom.**

Prof Dr Yusoff: Exactly. Sometimes, it takes time for knowledge and ideas to sink in. Education is a long-term nurturing process but we are now caught in the paper chase syndrome of getting degrees in the shortest possible time. Teaching and learning are part of socialisation. It is a continuous process that takes time.

- **Teaching is like marriage – It takes a few years to hit your stride.**

Prof Dr Yusoff: What I can perceive from this statement is that experience makes the teacher. The more often you meet your students, the more you can learn about them, especially their learning habits. So you can adjust yourself accordingly. Remember, good teachers also happen to be good listeners. If possible, take your students out for a teh tarik session or two. Who knows, you may end up learning something new from them.

Lilian: What is your advice to OUM tutors?

Prof Dr Yusoff: Begin with compassion as the basis for a meaningful relationship. Second, you must have passion for the responsibility you are entrusted with. Do not accept the job if you are going to do it half-heartedly. Third, when you are dealing with adult students, you need a lot of patience. Hence, good tutors possess three key qualities: compassion, passion and patience.

ONLINE POLL

I developed my tutoring style mostly through:

1. Observation of other tutors – I select tutors either from OUM or other universities and try to emulate them as much as possible.
2. Reading materials related to effective tutoring – I choose the styles recommended by experts and try them out.
3. Trial and error – I believe it is best to do it my way and continuously improve until I get it right.

Please cast your vote online!



ZOOMING IN WITH DR ZAINAL

Interview by Harvinder Kaur Dharam Singh

ASSOC PROF DR ZAINAL ABIDIN AHMAD obtained his PhD in Counselling Psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States. He worked as an academician at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia for 26 years before serving OUM for the past eight years. Currently, he is a consultant at the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences. He can be reached at zainalabidin@oum.edu.my.

Harvinder: You have vast experience teaching in public universities before joining OUM. Could you tell us what sets our learners apart from public university students?

Dr Zainal: There is a difference between students of public institutions of learning and OUM in terms of their levels of academic preparedness, aspirations and motivation. Indeed, even the nature of their respective challenges is different.

Most OUM students are mature working adults who voluntarily decided to pursue higher academic qualifications to improve their work opportunities. The rest are those who have been directed by their employers to upgrade their qualifications in specific areas to fill in projected vacancies. We are also seeing a trend whereby more senior citizens who missed going to college in their younger days are taking up the challenge to study for a degree for personal satisfaction. In fact, OUM is the first educational institution to prepare Malaysians for lifelong learning.

Harvinder: Based on your experience in dealing directly with learners at the Counselling Unit and Learner Services Centre, could you tell us what are OUM learners' learning styles and problems?

Dr Zainal: It is difficult to detect or categorise what learning styles students have when they seek assistance at the Counselling Unit or Learner Services Centre. Everyone has a way of learning which works best for them. Most students have one style which is predominant but can accommodate other styles as well. But mostly, they come with study problems which have led to failure in their examinations. The most common problems are:



1. Difficulty in understanding modules in English
2. Poor study habits
3. Poor time management
4. Heavy workload
5. Inadequate prior learning in the subject matter chosen

When one has a poor grasp of English, one is handicapped in comprehending an entire module. Reading the module becomes an unbearable chore. No matter how helpful a tutor tries to be in facilitating a class discussion based on the module, the student will still not be able to understand the concepts being addressed, let alone participate in the discussion.

On the other hand, students who scored a four-flat CGPA reported that they read and understood their modules from cover to cover before sitting for examinations. In fact, some even said, "I'll never sit for my examinations until and unless I have read my modules at least three times."

Another characteristic of the successful students is that they often study in groups. By studying in small groups of two to five, they get to discuss the subject matter more realistically and meaningfully. I suspect even those who had problems in understanding modules in English would benefit. Those who are highly motivated will try this technique. Furthermore, the dynamics of the group will work for them because of the comradeship.

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“My advice to our tutors would be to respect our students, whether young or old, not because they pay us, but because they are humans and they have feelings, responsibilities, shortcomings and workloads”

Harvinder: Could you tell us what learners look for in their tutors?

Dr Zainal: They look for –

1. Patience and Understanding – Basically, all our students want to gain knowledge and pass all their examinations so that they may earn their degrees and diplomas.

It follows then that they would like tutors who could help them undergo their programmes meaningfully. As tutors, we cannot assume that all students have the same rate of understanding. We must give many examples when we see signs of non-comprehension in their faces.

2. Respect – Adult students could be fun to teach because they have a lot of work experience. They also have many preconceived ideas about things not related to their studies but are shared by their circle of friends.

When students’ responses to academic questions are not accepted by their tutors, the students should not be ridiculed. Some students have confided that there are tutors who show disrespect towards adult students.

3. Sincere in Helping – Students look for tutors who seem sincerely helpful and friendly. This does not mean the tutors are pushovers. Rather, it means they communicate to the students their desire to see their students succeed.

They could sense which part of a subject matter needs to be elaborated on and would spend time to explain it to the students patiently. This of course requires the tutors to be experts in the subjects they teach and to know the areas the students find difficult to understand.


Harvinder: In what aspect do you see room for improvement among our tutors?

Dr Zainal: Most of our tutors come from various public and private institutions of higher learning and have proper qualifications and experience. But many of them use the lecture mode. They conduct lectures from the beginning to the end of a tutorial. They need to realise that the module is the “lecture” and tutors need to elaborate on the difficult portions of the “lecture.” From my tutoring experience, I found the online discussion forums extremely helpful. I would post in the forum the topics and difficult concepts to be discussed during the next tutorial. The students would then prepare before coming to class. This usually triggers a lively discussion in class and enhances understanding.

Harvinder: What advice would you like to share with our tutors?

Dr Zainal: My advice to our tutors would be to respect our students, whether young or old, not because they pay us, but because they are humans and they have feelings, responsibilities, shortcomings and workloads. Many of them have to divide time between family and studies.

Tutors need to have the patience to help students understand a subject matter as clearly as possible. In the process, we hope to humanise the classroom without making our students feel silly.

Our tutors also should be sincere in wanting our students to succeed in their studies. It is a big decision for our students to change course from being totally full-time breadwinners and family persons to being students again. Empathising with that would make us realise that a little bit of tutoring help could change the lives of many aspiring adults. 

MY STYLE, YOUR STYLE

Compiled by Assoc Prof Dr Santhi Raghavan

SPOONFEEDING IS OUT

We should understand that we conduct tutorials, not lectures. Tutorials are meant for learners to discuss problems that they face. Usually, I will tell my students what topics to cover before a tutorial and give them questions to discuss. I do not want to spoonfeed students like in a conventional university. I advise my students to do their assignments as though they are doing their thesis. They need to follow the stipulated format and cite references using the APA system. I will tell students during the first tutorial about my style of teaching so that they will get used to it.

*Abdul Hamid Tan
IP Teknik, Kuala Lumpur*

RELATING TO THE REAL WORLD

I conduct my tutorials by relating and linking them to what happens in the real world. Often, I put forward situations and ask students how to handle them. Once, we were discussing about students sleeping in class. A learner, who was a discipline teacher in his school, told me that he would allow his students to sleep if they had finished their work. I asked the learners how they would feel if that was done to their own children. There was pin-drop silence. I said if there were interesting activities, nobody would ever sleep. I believe in sharing views, ideas and creating awareness. Ultimately, more learning will take place.

*Anna Mary Perumal
Sibu*

MAKING TUTORIALS MEANINGFUL

To motivate adult learners, a tutor must make tutorials meaningful and relevant for them. Before I start a tutorial, I usually try to get an idea of the students' profile, especially about their jobs. Then, I will try to convince them that the course will be useful for them. I try to build my credibility and their confidence in me by delivering the tutorial effectively. Once tutors have built their credibility, it will be much easier to sustain students' attention and interest in tutorials.

*Dr Chai Bui Khiun
Kuching*



LIVENING UP LESSONS

Be cheerful when you step into class and greet learners. Start a tutorial by outlining the learning objectives so that they know what are expected of them. Simplify concepts by providing examples from daily life. Translate concepts into graphics as a picture speaks a thousand words. Present ideas in humorous ways to capture their attention. Provide an avenue for questions and opinions. Acknowledge their contributions to encourage them to participate further.

*Wong Shin Voon Johnathan
Section 7, Shah Alam*

USING A LEARNING MOTIVATOR TOOL

I have teaching experience of more than seven years in distance learning. I practise the CARES concept as a learning motivator tool. CARES stands for the following:

CARING – Take care of students during their learning period.

APPLY – Apply current issues or case studies to match concepts so that they are easy to understand.

RESPONSIBILITY – Be responsible by responding quickly to any problems students face.

EMPATHY – Understand and share students' problems.

SYSTEMATIC – Teach, help and share systematically, following proper rules and procedures.

*Zulhairi Zakariah
Melaka*

NATIONAL COLLOQUIUM AND DIALOGUE

By Margaret Lok Lai Sung



I was honoured to be chosen to attend the National Colloquium for Tutors organised by the Centre for Tutor Management and Development (CTMD) at OUM from 10 to 12 April. I would be updated on OUM's aspiration to provide quality teaching in order to produce quality graduates. There was so much to learn from the panel speakers, lead and senior tutors as well as all those who prepared the sessions.

On the night of 10 April, we were shown a movie called "The Secret." It was about allowing oneself to transform weaknesses into strength, power, perfect peace, health and motivation. This movie gave me insight on how to deal more effectively with my strengths and weaknesses.

Earlier that same day, I listened to the opening address by OUM President, Prof Tan Sri Dr Anuwar Ali. He said the objective of the national colloquium was to enable OUM to tap into the experience of tutors in order to enhance the delivery systems.

He said the colloquium and dialogue aimed to help improve tutors' skills in providing open and distance education. This was to be achieved through the sharing of the latest developments in OUM. Lastly, he said he hoped the colloquium would strengthen ties between the University's tutors, learning centre directors/ administrators, faculties, management and staff.

While Friday was dedicated to the dialogue with lead tutors, Saturday was spent on the national colloquium. The colloquium began in the morning with a talk by the Senior Vice President, Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil, who touched on the latest developments and experience of OUM. He also spoke about the vision and values of OUM. His sharing hinged on the ultimate objective of producing quality graduates by leveraging on good learning materials, quality tutors and relevant IT and physical infrastructures.

This was followed by a talk entitled "OUM's Plan for Development" by the Vice President, Prof Dr Rosli Hamir. He presented financial figures to substantiate how serious OUM was in obtaining its own premises to provide a conducive learning environment for its learners. Having its own buildings would allow better control and cost management of the premises, he said.

The following are the seven sessions for the three days:

Session 1: New Assessment Method by Prof Dr Shaari Abd Hamid

He spoke about producing quality graduates based on three main contributions – a relevant curriculum, efficient delivery system and effective course assessment.

Session 2: Mobigogy and Mobile Learning at OUM by Prof Dr Zoraini Wati

She highlighted mobigogy, which was the art and science of producing learning through mobile devices to complement primary modes of learning. Benefits included enhancing OUM's blended learning method, reaching out to learners and making them feel connected.

Session 3: MCQ Item Development by Yap Yee Keong, Items and Assessment Formulation Consultant

He presented on how the development of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) had considered factors to enhance reliability of assessment results.

Session 4: Mini Workshops conducted by faculties

This workshop focused on issues pertaining to tutorials, modules, programmes, assessment, administrative/ finance matters and myLMS. The participants gave feedback on the issues they encountered during their teaching. This was to allow constructive steps to be taken to close the gap between the teaching workforce and the management.

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Session 5: ICT Initiatives in OUM (Plagiarism Detection, myLMS) by Prof Dr Ahmad Hashem, General Manager of Meteor Technology and Consultancy Sdn Bhd

According to him, initiatives were being made to discourage plagiarism by learners and module writers to ensure originality of materials. This would safeguard OUM from copyright infringements and ensure students were provided with original resources.


Session 6: Evaluation of student's learning experience at OUM by Prof Dr Latifah Abdol Latif, Director, Centre for Student Management

The evaluation was based on the 2008 Important-Performance Survey and 2008 Graduate Tracer Study. The conclusions of the survey were encouraging but there was room for improvement in areas like creativity in teaching and delivery skills.

Session 7: Students' performance by Teoh Beng Kuan, Deputy General Manager (Examination)

Areas covered included coursework issues, assessment of tutor's participation and plagiarism. Students' performance charts and data were given for the January and September 2008 semesters to allow general observation and comments on issues that contributed to the need to revise the present assessment method.

On Sunday, we toured the main campus, visiting the Centre for Instructional Design and Technology, library and faculties. This tour allowed me to have an insight into the commitment OUM had towards achieving its vision to be the leading provider of flexible learning.

The whole three-day event was memorable. In his closing remarks, Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil said that teaching was a noble profession as it helped to improve the quality of life of others by improving their academic status. This would then have a positive impact on the nation as it would raise the standard of the people. 

Margaret Lok Lai Sung is a tutor at the Labuan Learning Centre. We are pleased to present her with RM50 as a token of appreciation for contributing this article.



WRITE FOR TCX AND WIN RM50!

Are you currently a tutor at OUM? Looking for an outlet to share your thoughts about any aspect of teaching and learning?

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THOUGHTS OF A WINNER

Interview by Majmin Hanum Abdul Samad

CHEAH CHEE KEONG is a tutor from the Faculty of IT and Multimedia Communication (FITMC). He is attached to the Kedah Learning Centre. During the National Colloquium from 11 to 12 April, three tutors from different faculties, the Centre for Graduate Studies and the School for Nursing and Allied Health Sciences (SONAHS) were presented with Best Online Tutor Awards. Cheah was one of the three winners.

Majmin: Congratulations for winning the Best Online Tutor Award. What does this award mean to you?

Cheah: Thank you to OUM for the appreciation. I take it as a reminder for me to further explore ways to enhance my students' learning experience at OUM.

Majmin: Could you tell us about your work at OUM?

Cheah: This is my fifth year as a tutor at OUM. Since 2005, I have been tutoring in various subjects such as Information Technology and Applications and Learning Skills for Open and Distance Learners. My experience as an off-campus student in USM helps me a lot in my work. I find the blended delivery mode helpful especially for students who study on their own. It has created a network for them to reach out to peers and tutors.

Majmin: How would you define "tutor" in the OUM context?

Cheah: OUM students are mostly working adults so their needs and priorities are different. We tutors need to guide them to focus on topics which will be discussed in tutorials. The learning process will be more interesting when there are a lot of contributions from the students themselves during the discussion.

Majmin: What do you feel is the role of OUM learners?

Cheah: They need to be active learners. Rather than wait for tutors to deliver information, they should also contribute ideas and information. They could also answer questions posted by their peers in the online forum. The tutor then acts as a facilitator.

Majmin: Are your tutoring styles based on your personality or situational factors in the classroom?

Cheah: Knowing students' learning environment does help. Most students are working adults with various commitments and demands on their time.

Majmin: How do you handle personality differences with your students?

Cheah: I see students as who they are – adults. They can accept decisions when these are clearly explained.

Majmin: What are the characteristics of a good tutor?

Cheah: A good tutor is prepared. Students will know if we are not prepared. Being prepared helps us to be confident and systematic in our lesson delivery.

Majmin: "The essence of effective adult tutoring is to set people on the road to confident learning." Do you agree with this statement?

Cheah: Yes, we learn better when we are actively involved in our learning process. As tutors, we should try to provide the necessary space for students to contribute ideas and knowledge, either in class or in the forum. Adult learners tend to have a shorter attention span, so it is vital for students to be encouraged to be more involved.

Majmin: You have been an OUM tutor for five years. What is your most memorable experience so far?

Cheah: Seeing graduates return to OUM to pursue their postgraduate degree. When I asked for the reason, they answered that it was because of the flexible learning schedule and the tutors.

Majmin: What can OUM do to further improve the quality of the education provided for its learners?

Cheah: OUM could use information and communications technology to improve the quality of the education it provides. More multimedia contents could be made available online.

Majmin: What advice would you give to new tutors?

Cheah: Tutoring at OUM requires tutors to see themselves in their students' shoes. They need to listen and be understanding yet firm at the same time.

CATERING TO LEARNERS' DIVERSE NEEDS

By Richard Ng

Most learners have left school for more than five years before entering OUM. So, they have a different level of readiness towards the open and distance learning mode.

For example, there are learners who have computers and Internet access but many go online at their office or at a cybercafé. Most learners have jobs and families to take care of. Some have a poor command of English while others are financially unstable. Quite a number commute long distance for tutorials. Thus, tutors should consider the profile of their learners so as to play an effective role.

Tutors are normally hired because they have the necessary qualifications and knowledge. However, some are ineffective because they fail to understand how adults learn. Adults have years of experience and a wealth of information. So, we must focus on the strengths they bring to class and tap into their experience. We must also respect their beliefs, religions, value systems and lifestyles.

It is vital for tutors to understand the profile of their learners and adjust their teaching strategies to suit them. Tutors must consider that in a class there are different types of learners and they need to use different approaches and styles to help them enjoy learning.

Adults have different learning styles and pace. Therefore, they require different teaching strategies such as small-group problem solving and discussion. The use of auditory, visual, tactile and participatory teaching methods may help. Though their reaction time and speed of learning may be slow, their ability to learn may not be impaired by age.

As adult learners usually relate new knowledge and information to previously learned information and experiences, tutors should present single concepts and focus on applying these to practical situations.

Tutors should strive to make adult learners comfortable. Learners will not ask questions or participate in learning if they are afraid of ridicule. So tutors need to treat all questions and comments with respect.



“It is vital for tutors to understand the profile of their learners and adjust their teaching strategies to suit them”

Adult learners have a deep need to be self-directing, so tutors must engage them in mutual inquiry. Avoid having one-way communication, merely transmitting knowledge or expecting total agreement. Adult learners like to have their say and share their experiences in class.

Tutors must also be mindful of the challenges faced by learners such as distance and family and work commitments. They could make full use of technology such as short message services or the Learning Management System to engage learners. Engaged learners are mostly satisfied learners and this will result in a better retention rate for the university.

Tutors are OUM's front-liners who need to help solve the problems faced by their learners. Therefore, OUM needs committed and dedicated tutors who could play their role effectively. TCX

CHOOSING TO BE POSITIVE

Jerry was a very positive person. He was always in a good mood and always had something nice to say.

One day, I said to him, “I don’t get it! You can’t be positive all of the time. How do you do it?”

Jerry replied, “Each morning, I wake up and say to myself, Jerry, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life.”

“It’s not that easy,” I protested.

“Yes, it is,” Jerry said. “Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. The bottom line is: It is your choice how you live your life.”

I reflected on what Jerry said. As the years went by, we lost touch until one day I heard that Jerry had been held up at gunpoint by three robbers at his workplace. While trying to open the company safe, his hand slipped off the combination. The robbers panicked and shot him. Luckily, Jerry was found quickly and rushed to the hospital.

After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Jerry was released from the hospital with fragments of the bullets still in his body. I saw him about six months after the accident.

I asked him what had gone through his mind as the robbery took place. Jerry replied, “I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live or I could choose to die. I chose to live.”

“Weren’t you scared?” I asked. Jerry answered, “The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the emergency room and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. I read, ‘He is a dead man.’ I knew I needed to take action.”



“It is your choice how you live your life”

“What did you do?” I asked.

“Well, there was a big, burly nurse shouting questions at me,” said Jerry. “She asked if I was allergic to anything.” “Yes,” I replied.

The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, “Bullets!”

Over their laughter, I told them, “I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.”

Jerry lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully.

Attitude, after all, is everything. **TCX**

Adapted from www.motivateus.com/stories/attitu.htm



Jalan Tun Ismail
50480 Kuala Lumpur
tcx@oum.edu.my

<http://tcx.oum.edu.my>