TCX
TUTOR CONNEXXIONS

OCTOBER 2012/ISSUE 36

TECHNOLOGY DRIVEN EDUCATION

If in the previous issue of TCX we teased that OUM is working on multiple technology-driven projects to bring both its learners and academics a seamless e-learning experience, we now unveil, in this issue, three exciting projects – one of which has been put to work while two others will go online soon.

http://tcx.oum.edu.my

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ABOUT TCX

TCX (Tutor Connexxions) is a non-profit 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.

TCX is published electronically once every semester.

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR'S NOTE

If in the previous issue of TCX we teased that OUM is working on multiple technology-driven projects to bring both its learners and academics a seamless e-learning experience, we now unveil, in this issue, three exciting projects – one of which has been put to work while two others will go online soon.

The first is OUM's Education Portal for Internet Courses (EPiC), which features the inimitable specially-commissioned illustrations of Datuk Lat. Jimmy Teo from the Faculty of Education and Languages, who conceptualized EPiC, shares his perspective on how necessity became the mother of invention, which has since become a major support for the University's special programme, the Bachelor of Teaching. This programme caters to in-service teachers under the BPG scheme (Teacher Education Division or Bahagian Pendidikan Guru).

The second project is the QBank, an effort headed by AP Dr Siti Aishah Hashim Ali, Deputy Director of the Institute of Teaching and Learning Advancement (ITLA). Dr Aishah sets out what the QBank is about, how it will help to augment the University's provision of quality education, and how learners themselves will profit from the effort.

The third project is arguably the first of its kind in the university sector. OUM is currently developing a Virtual Store app for smartphones and tablets. Helmed by Myzatul Marina Kamar Azaly and Mazlan Zulkifly from the Centre for Instructional Design and Technology (CIDT), the project to be unveiled before the year is out will enable OUM learners and academics, as well the general public, to access the University's wealth of digital learning materials.

The projects highlighted in this issue of TCX are only three in a series which the University is developing in its mission to provide a seamless e-learning experience. If these three whet your appetite for more, be sure to catch the next issue, which will feature more exciting projects currently brewing in the background.

Have a productive semester ahead!

Best

Dr David CL Lim
Chief Editor

IMPORTANT DATES

Tutorial 1	Senior Learners: 21-23 September 2012 New Learners: 5-7 October 2012
Tutorial 2	Senior Learners: 5-7 October 2012 New Learners: 19-21 October 2012
Tutorial 3	Senior Learners: 19-21 October 2012 New Learners: 9-11 November 2012
Assignment Deadline	Senior Learners: 6-18 November 2012 New Learners: 19-22 November 2012 (Tutors should remind their learners to use the special assignment template and to submit their assignments online. This ONLY applies to courses that require learners to submit their assignments online.)
Mid-Term Exams	3-4 November 2012
Tutorial 4	Senior Learners: 9-11 November 2012 New Learners: 23-25 November 2012
Tutorial 5	Senior Learners: 23-25 November 2012
Final Exams	8-30 December 2012

CONTACT INFO

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F2F Tutor Issues and Concerns	Learning Centre Directors, OR ITLA Staff: 2773 2490/2493/2301, OR Email: sitifarina@oum.edu.my or aznam@oum.edu.my
Assignment Online Submission Queries	Email: assignment@oum.edu.my
myVLE Technical Issues	myVLE HelpdeskL 2772 2283, OR Email: mylms_admin@oum.edu.my or aznam@oum.edu.my

UPDATES

New Developments for e-Tutors

1. Email Notifications – When learners post in the forum, email notifications will be sent to your OUM mailbox. You can reply to the email, and your response will appear in the forum. Your responses via email will count towards your total number of postings and your number of logins into myVLE forum will be accounted for as well. Please do check your OUM mailbox often.

2. All e-tutors are required to use their respective OUM email accounts. Communication related to e-tutor matters will be made through your OUM email.

3. Online Training for e-Tutors (New & Senior e-Tutors)

    •   e-Tutor training is now conducted fully online.

    •   The objective of the online training course is to prepare participants to be online facilitators who are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage learning in an e-learning environment.

    •   During the first three weeks of the course, e-tutors will participate as learners and complete structured online activities and assignments.

    •   E-Tutors' forums will be monitored and evaluations will be done over four weeks.

    •   At the end of the course, e-Tutors will receive a certificate of completion that will help secure future appointments.

4. New OUM Expectations:

    •   Enter and check your forum at least every other day

    •   Make at least 8 postings a week

    •   Check OUM mailbox regularly for email notifications of forum postings

5. ESS – e-Tutor Scheduling System

    •   The new online e-Tutor Scheduling System will allow e-Tutors to confirm availability for appointment and selection of courses for the upcoming semester. An announcement will be made when the system is ready.

UPDATES

Reminders

1. All e-tutors must be visible in their respective forums.

2. Log in to your Forum at least 4 times a week.

3. Do not ignore requests for help from learners.

4. Respond to learners' postings regularly.

5. Post questions and redirect questions to learners to encourage and stimulate discussions.

6. Post additional resources (web links, videos, articles, etc) related to content to stimulate interest and spark discussion.

7. If there is an e-schedule for your course, please refer learners to the e-schedule to guide them with weekly activities for the course. The e-schedule appears within the course in myVLE, on the left sidebar menu.

8. Forums are monitored daily.

9. Regular reminders will be sent by ITLA staff, e-Tutor mentors and Head of e-Learning whenever necessary.

10. Please inform the Head of e-Learning at ITLA of any prolonged absence and inability to facilitate forum.

e-Tutor Community Area

Please continue to visit the e-Tutor Community forum for continued support and development. The forums also give tutors and e-tutors the opportunity to exchange and share experiences with other tutors/ e-tutors. E-tutors may also communicate with the e-Tutor Mentors in the e-Tutors Community forum.

UPDATES

Assignments

For courses with assignments:

1. Assignments, Assignment Rubrics and Assignment Templates for Learners have been uploaded to myVLE.

2. On online submission of assignments, do note that there are different deadlines for existing learners, new learners and the new BPG intake (please refer to important dates above).

3. No late submission of assignments will be accepted.

4. Do remind learners to start working on their assignments early and not wait until the last day to submit their assignments online.

5. A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on assignments is available on the left sidebar menu on myVLE.

6. F2F tutors and e-tutors can only provide guidance on completing the assignments based on the rubrics given. Please do not give any confirmation of marks for the assignments as the assignments will be graded by the e-graders.

TIPS

## All face-to-face (F2F) tutors are reminded NOT to:

1. Attend tutorial session unprepared

2. Reschedule the allotted tutorials

3. Cancel tutorial sessions

4. Arrive late for tutorials

5. Arrive late but record an earlier sign-in time

6. Leave tutorials before designated time

7. Read from module directly instead of highlighting or discussing the subject matter

8. Discuss non-academic matters during tutorials

All e-Tutors are encouraged to:

- Always maintain visibility in your respective forums.
- Log in to your forum at least four times each week.
- Assist learners when they request for help, and regularly respond to their posts.
- Encourage and stimulate discussions by posting and redirecting questions to the learners.
- Post additional resources related to the subject matter. Relevant web links, videos, articles and other resources can stimulate interest and spark discussion amongst the learners.
- Direct your learners to the e-schedule of your course (if available). This is meant to guide them through the weekly activities for the course. The e-schedule appears within myVLE (under the course title, on the left sidebar menu).
- Monitor your respective forums on a daily basis.
- Keep yourself updated with the regular reminders that are sent by the ITLA staff, e-Tutor mentors and Head of e-Learning.

AN EPiC SOLUTION TO EDUCATIONAL DEMANDS

BY JIMMY TEO HUI THIAN (jteo@oum.edu.my)
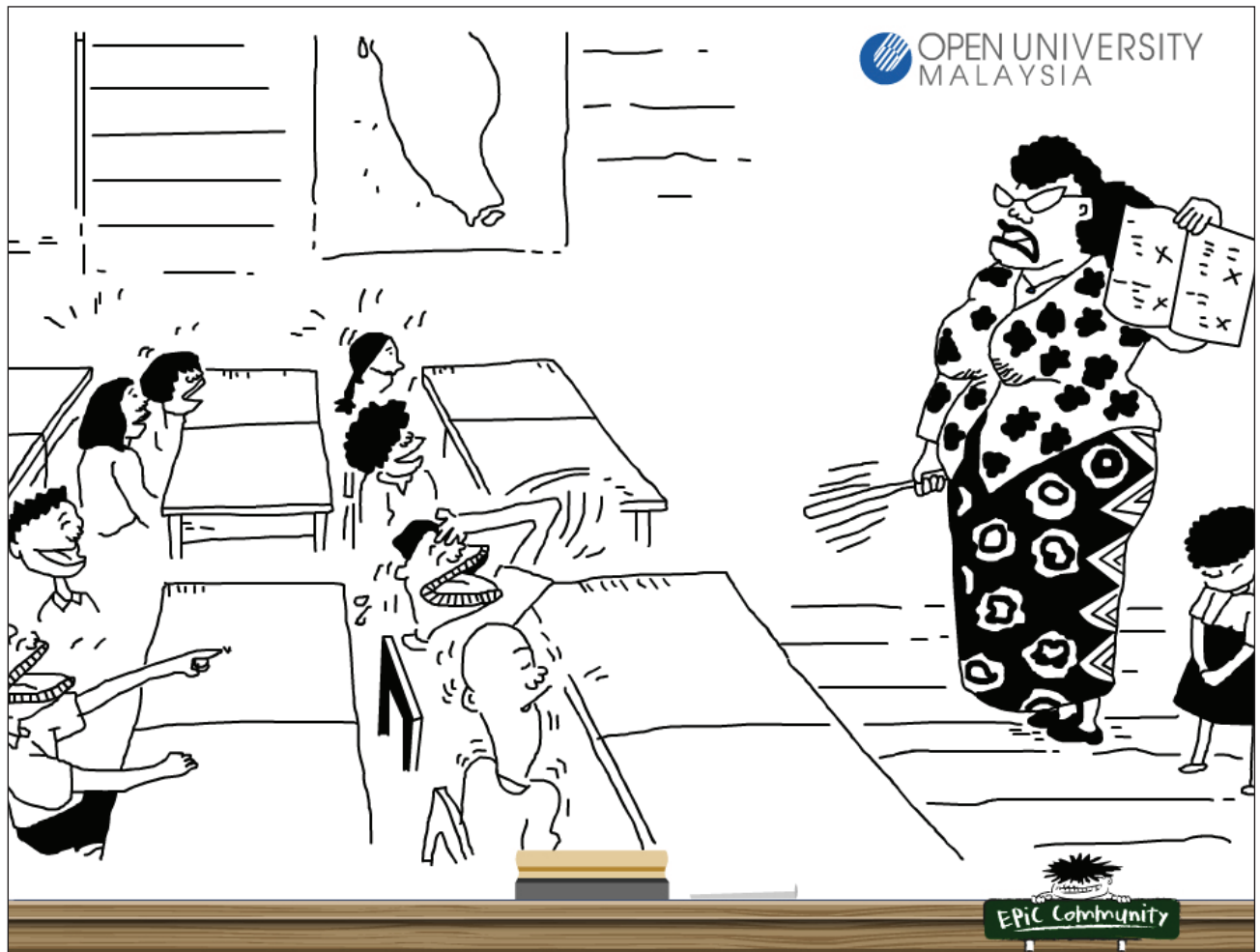
Here's a little academic puzzle: how do you fit an additional four courses (12 credits) into an existing programme of 120 credits without exceeding 10 credit hours per semester within 12 semesters?

This was the puzzle that the Faculty of Education and Languages (FEL) had to solve when Bahagian Pendidikan Guru (BPG; Teacher Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia) asked us to incorporate four additional courses into the Bachelor of Teaching programme we run for BPG

The solution, as the Faculty worked out, was to offer the four courses online instead of in the usual blended environment.

Based on this principle, a team of us from FEL started working on a new OUM learning portal.

Our challenge was to design a suitable conceptual framework, restructure content delivery, rebuild learning support, and rethink assessment.

After tackling these challenges one by one, the Education Portal for Internet Courses (EPiC) began to take shape.

The idea of EPiC is to enable learners to control their own learning time by utilising the time pockets they have in their daily schedules.

A parallel analogy of rocks, pebbles and sand explains how learners can utilise time in this environment.

The rocks represent the learners' work and personal demands; the pebbles their existing course demands; and the sand their new, fully online course demands. The spaces between the rocks can be filled with pebbles and the spaces between the pebbles can be filled with sand.

Coming up with the portal concept and design was a big challenge that took up most of the EPiC's development time.

After toying with several ideas, we decided that simplicity and the fun factor should drive the design and learning environment. To achieve this, we thought of Datuk Lat, whose cartoons are not only renowned and much loved, they also represent Malaysia's multicultural identity which fits perfectly with EPiC's design concept.

We approached Datuk Lat to enquire if he could contribute to the design. After some convincing, he finally agreed to contribute fresh characters to adorn EPiC because he believed in the noble cause of training teachers who in turn will be educating generations of young Malaysians.

With the design direction set, we then considered the critical importance of scaffolding the learning process of our target audience, namely in-service teachers.

To put this into practice, we structured their learning material in such a way that learners are guided to progress from the simpler Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to the more complex Extended Learning Ecology (ELE).

To alleviate the potential loneliness of doing the courses online, two networking platforms
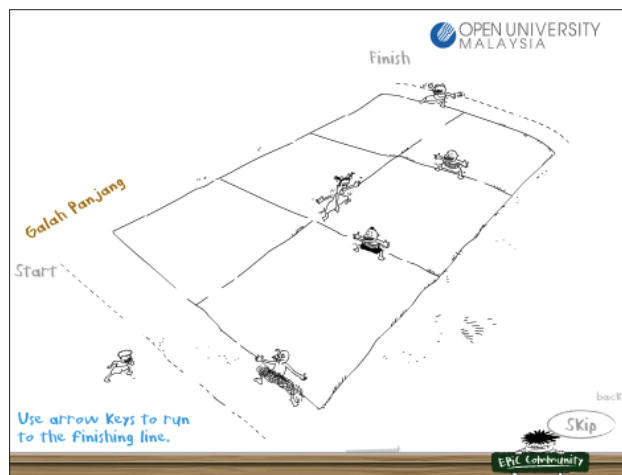
The idea of EPiC is to enable learners to control their own learning time by utilising the time pockets they have in their daily schedules.

was introduced. The first is a discussion forum that enables learners to interact with their peers and online supervisors. The other is called EPiC Community, which is a social networking site created on the Google+ platform. It is an informal avenue for learners to discuss non-academic matters, voice opinions, provide feedback, and so on.

EPiC also provides learners with an e-portfolio that collates all their work submitted online. Learners can download their e-portfolios at any time for their own records.

Our work on EPiC has been highly rewarding. It is still work-in-progress, which we aim to improve over the coming semesters. If anything, we have come to learn that technology can really do wonders when it is strategically employed to address educational demands. TCX
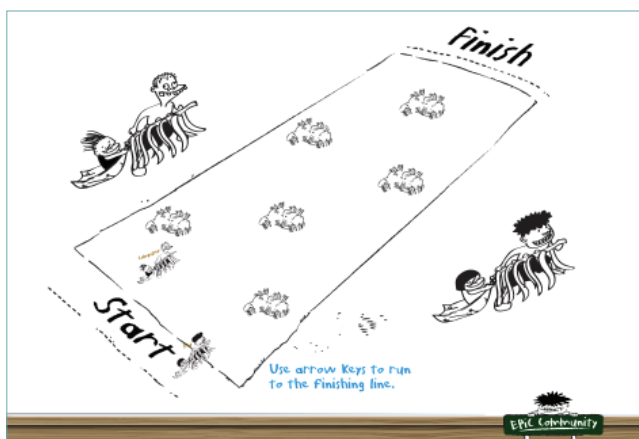
BANKING ON THE QBANK

By AP Dr Siti Aishah Hashim Ali (ct_aishah@oum.edu.my)

As part of its effort to leverage on technology to provide quality education, OUM is currently developing a comprehensive question bank known as QBank with the input of its team of in-house academics and programmers. The initiative will soon be evident to both the University's academics and learners. But first, what is a question bank?

Conceptualising Question Banking

A question bank is a large collection of test items from which a tester and other testing practitioners can draw high quality items that are matched to specific measurement needs or objectives.

When stored as an electronic database, the question bank greatly enhances the practice of academic measurement. In addition, question banking can cover all processes necessary to create, pilot, analyse, store, manage and select test items.

This allows different test types – for instance, multiple-choice questions, as well as short-answer and long-essay questions – to be created as multiple test forms from subsets of the total pool of items.

With a large question bank, various forms of tests can be created whenever they are needed, all based on given sets of criteria.

The advantages of OUM's QBank are substantial.

The traditional method of developing test items involves manual work, where an academic needs to follow a tedious process. This process is furthermore fraught with numerous possibilities of errors, where items can be misplaced, lost or misfiled.

Question banking eliminates many of these possibilities, which is one of the main reasons why OUM is exploring it.

The QBank Advantage

Developing an in-house system is advantageous in that the QBank can be tailored to follow specific characteristics of OUM's assessment format.

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The advantages of OUM's QBank are substantial. QBank enables the University to manage its valuable assessment resources in a way that cannot be achieved manually. It allows OUM academics to share content and moderate the bank items with external subject-matter experts. It facilitates reuse of assessment items. And it reduces the possibility of learners cheating in summative assessment by delivering different sets of test questions to different sets of candidates.

These are just some of the advantages that the QBank gives to the University.

The QBank is in development. Soon enough, it will be ready for deployment, at which time academics and learners of OUM will stand to reap its benefits. TCX

OUM VIRTUAL STORE OPENING SOON

BY MYZATUL MARINA KAMAR AZALY (myzatul@oum.edu.my)
& MAZLAN ZULKIFLY (mazlan@oum.edu.my)

Available on the iPad
App Store

COMING SOON

As an open and distance learning university, OUM has been developing the e-learning platform and e-learning materials since it was officially launched in 2001.

Over the past decade, as part of its e-learning initiative, OUM has successfully developed the myVLE platform and produced such varied materials as eModules, HTML interactive media, iLecture, iRadio Learning Segments, and MP3 Audiobooks.

The exciting news is that all these materials will be collated and soon be made available to learners, potential learners and the teaching staff through an "app" that connects to the forthcoming OUM Virtual Store. OUM expects its Virtual Store to be soft-launched in December 2012.

OUM's Virtual Store app will be made available first on Apple's App Store, which is built on the iOS platform. It will subsequently appear on the Android platform in the Google Play Store.

What is an App?

Many of us who have been using tablet PCs like the iPad and smartphones like the iPhone will be familiar with the term "app", which is an abbreviation of "application". An app is a piece of software that can be downloaded and run on tablet computers and smartphones.

OUM's Virtual Store app will enable anyone to browse through the University's extensive catalogue of learning materials, selections of which can be downloaded for free by registered OUM learners. The general public can also, for a fee, download the materials they want for their own use.

The OUM Virtual Store will streamline the University's distribution of learning materials to its learners.

In the initial round of offering, the Virtual Store will offer materials in a variety of formats: PDF, HTML, audio files, and video files, including the forthcoming iTutorials, which are live recordings of actual face-to-face tutorials.

The Advantages of OUM Virtual Store

The OUM Virtual Store will streamline the University's distribution of learning materials to its learners. Registered learners need only download the materials for the courses they register every semester, literally without having to leave home, as they once had to, in order to collect them at their respective learning centres.

Leveraging on the app technology, OUM's Virtual Store also offers such rich features as push notification, instant updates, and social networking. As well, it will provide useful general information about the University such as maps and contact information of its main campus and learning centres throughout the country, faculty programme offerings, and so on.

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The Future is App

When launched, the OUM Virtual Store will be the first of its kind in the world of higher education. The initiative is certainly in line with the University's mission to widen access to quality education and provide lifelong learning opportunities by leveraging on technology.

Rest assured, we will be featuring more on the OUM Virtual Store in the near future. We hope you are as excited about its forthcoming debut as we are in developing it! TCX

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