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ONLINE FORWARD

TCX40 continues with a focus on online learning, spotlighting Tourism Studies, which is among the first OUM programmes to be delivered almost entirely in online mode. This issue also features an interview with Dr Nantha Kumar, the new Acting Dean of the Faculty of Information Technology and Multimedia Communication, who shares his insights on the use of technology in teaching technology. As well, TCX40 presents OUM's strategic thrusts for 2014.

- Editor's Note ... p. 2
- Tutor Info ... p. 3
- Quality Thrust 2014 ... p. 7
- Tourism Studies at the Fingertips ... p. 8
- Using Technology to Teach Technology ... p. 10

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ABOUT TCX

TCX (Tutor Connexions) 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.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Happy new year and welcome back to a new semester! I trust, by the time you read this, you would have gotten into the thick of things, sorting out your tutorial slots, preparing for your classes, and getting acquainted with your new learners.

2014 will prove to be an exciting year for OUM. As Prof Mansor Fadzil, Senior Vice President of OUM, shares in the first feature of this issue, the University is all geared up to enhance the four areas it has identified in its annual strategic plan: curriculum design, learner assessment, assessment processing, and online learning. Future issues of TCX for this year will report on progress.

Meanwhile, on behalf of OUM, I wish you a productive semester ahead.

Best

Dr David CL Lim
Chief Editor

TUTOR INFO

IMPORTANT DATES	TUTORIAL 1	Existing Learners: 17-19 Jan 2014 New Learners: 7-9 Feb 2014
	TUTORIAL 2	Existing Learners: 7-9 Feb 2014 New Learners: 21-23 Feb 2014
	TUTORIAL 3	Existing Learners: 21-23 Feb 2014 New Learners: 7-9 Mar 2014
	ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES	Existing Learners: 3-16 Mar 2014 New Learners: 17-20 Mar 2014 (Tutors should remind their learners to use the special assignment template and to submit their assignments online. This applies only to courses that require learners to submit their assignments online.)
	TUTORIAL 4	Existing Learners: 7-9 Mar 2014 New Learners: 21-23 Mar 2014
	TUTORIAL 5	Existing Learners: 21-23 Mar 2014
	FINAL EXAMS	5-24 Apr 2014

CONTACT INFO	E-TUTOR ISSUES & CONCERNS	ITLA Staff: 2773 2490/2493/2301, OR Email: safiah_mdyusof@oum.edu.my or aznam@oum.edu.my
	F2F TUTOR ISSUES & CONCERNS	Learning Centre Directors, OR ITLA Staff: 2773 2490/2493/2301, OR Email: aznam@oum.edu.my
	ASSIGNMENT ONLINE SUBMISSION QUERIES	Email: assignment@oum.edu.my
	MYVLE TECHNICAL ISSUES	myVLE Helpdesk: 2772 2283, OR Email: mylms_admin@oum.edu.my or aznam@oum.edu.my

FOR E-TUTORS

REMINDERS

1. All e-tutors must be visible in their respective forums.
2. Log in to the Forum at least 4 times a week.
3. Respond to learners' postings regularly. Do not ignore requests for help from learners.
4. Post questions and redirect questions to learners to encourage and stimulate discussions.
5. Post additional content-related resources (web links, videos, articles, etc.) to stimulate interest and spark discussion.
6. If there is an e-schedule for your course, please refer learners to the e-schedule to help guide them with weekly activities for the course. The e-schedule appears within the course on the left sidebar menu of myVLE.
7. Forums are monitored daily. Regular reminders will be sent by ITLA staff, e-tutor mentors and the Head of e-Learning whenever necessary.
8. Please inform the Head of e-Learning at ITLA of any prolonged absence and inability to facilitate forum.
9. All e-tutors are required to use their OUM email account. Communication related to e-tutor matters will be made through your OUM email.
10. 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.
11. OUM Expectations:
 - Enter myVLE and check the forum every other day at the minimum
 - Put up at least 8 postings a week
 - Check OUM mailbox regularly for email notifications of forum postings

FOR F2F TUTORS

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.

ON E-TUTOR FB GROUP

If you have an FB account, do request to join the e-tutor group on FB. Please email AP Dr Safiah at safiah_mdyusof@oum.edu.my.

ON 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 and new learners.
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.

ON iFEED

1. iFEED – Please note that selected courses have an iFEED link on myVLE. Learners can use iFEED to pose questions on content related to the module. The iFEED robot will respond to simple knowledge-based questions.

One of the main functions of iFEED is to help e-Tutors to focus more on initiating and responding to higher-level questions following Bloom's Taxonomy.

iFEED postings do not count towards e-tutor logins and postings, and subsequently e-tutor payments. Your claims are still based on your own postings and responses to learners.

2. LESSON-PLAN LINK – Some courses have a lesson-plan link which allows learners to access tutorial lesson plans. Learners and tutors may use these lesson plans as reference and guide for tutorials and forum discussions.
3. ONLINE TRAINING FOR E-TUTORS – e-tutor training is now being conducted fully online for existing and new e-tutors. The objective of the online training is to upskill e-tutors in online facilitation. Participants who successfully complete the training will receive a certificate of completion to help them secure future e-tutor appointments.

ON F2F & E-TUTOR COMMUNITY AREAS

Tutors are encouraged to log in to the F2F Tutor Community and e-tutor Community forums 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.

QUALITY THRUST FOR 2014

By Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil, Senior Vice President, OUM



Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil

Over the past decade, we have built the university from scratch into a strong brand that it is today, thanks to the unceasing support of all our staff and tutors across the country. Undoubtedly there is much more to do and it is with pleasure that I share with you OUM's quality thrust for 2014 which focuses on four areas: curriculum design, learner assessment, assessment processing, and online learning.

Having recently completed the strategic relocation of most faculties from the headquarters to the learning centres in the Klang Valley, we now want to continue to raise the bar in our delivery of higher education. 2014 will see all faculties rigorously reviewing their programme curricula. Areas for improvement will be identified. Courses will be updated or replaced as necessitated by changing times and knowledge shifts.

Whole programmes might even be phased out if demand for them underwhelms. The faculties have also been tasked to look into introducing new programmes that meet public demand, bearing in mind all the time that interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies are becoming increasingly necessary to meet the complex demands of the new century.

As well, the faculties will be beefing up the quality of the university's assessment instruments. We want to look at creative ways of setting assignment tasks that promote active learning and foreclose any attempt at plagiarism.

“OUM's quality thrust for 2014 focuses on four areas: curriculum design, learner assessment, assessment processing, and online learning.”

Another key area that OUM will be prioritising for improvement this year concerns the pace at which the university grades learners' assignments and final exam scripts. We want to expedite the turnaround time. The new benchmark is to process learners' assignments and release the results within seven days from the final submission date. Final exam scripts will be marked and the results will be announced to learners before the subsequent semester commences.

Lastly, and just as importantly, the university will press on with more offerings of fully online courses. In keeping with learner demand, these fully online courses will run on an upgraded version of myVLE with a full array of e-learning materials including e-modules or e-textbooks, iLectures, and other online resources.

The year ahead is filled with exciting opportunities and I am confident that all tutors will continue to firmly support the university's effort to add value to our delivery of higher education. I thank you for your commitment and I wish you a rewarding year ahead. TCX

Prof Dr Mansor Fadzil can be contacted at mansor@oum.edu.my

TOURISM STUDIES AT THE FINGERTIPS

Interview with ZULAIKA ZAKARIAH, OUM Business School
By AP Dr David CL Lim (david@oum.edu.my)



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Dr David Lim: OUM's Bachelor of Tourism Management (BTRM) is among the first OUM programmes to be delivered almost entirely online. As the Coordinator of the Programme, tell us why BTRM is especially suitable for online delivery.

Zulaika Zakariah: The travel and tourism industry has undergone a sea change, particularly

in the past decade. Globally, more and more travellers are eschewing reliance on the traditional travel agency for travel information and bookings. In substantial ways, they have been 'liberated' by the Internet and are now using it for ideas and inspiration for travel destinations and vacation activities. They book hotel rooms and air-tickets online on their own, too, entirely bypassing the traditional travel agency.

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“In travel and tourism, as in higher education, the Internet has empowered end-users, opening up new worlds and new ways of doing things.”

In the face of these changing trends, higher education, particularly the field tourism studies, cannot not change in tandem. The power of the Internet, which has radically disrupted and transformed the travel and tourism industry, has also done the same to higher education. In travel and tourism, as in higher education, the Internet has empowered end-users, opening up new worlds and new ways of doing things.

That OUM is delivering BTRM almost entirely online can only be a step in the right direction, I feel. Learners in the BTRM programme are like the travellers of the Internet generation. They are digital natives who comfortably use the Internet as a platform to learn and share. And they do so at their own time and pace, flexibly, without the traditional strictures. That’s the beauty of it.

“Learners in the BTRM programme are like the travellers of the Internet generation. They are digital natives who comfortably use the Internet as a platform to learn and share.”

The only time BTRM learners need to physically attend a full-day class is when they learn ABACUS, which is an airline ticketing and reservation system. This is a requirement set by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). And, of course, there’s practical training at the tail-end of the programme.

Dr David: How have BTRM learners responded to the online mode of their programme?

Zulaika: So far they are enjoying it. A majority of our BTRM learners are full-time workers in the travel and tourism industry. Some are airline stewards and stewardesses. Many do shift work and travel great distances as part of their work. For these reasons, they were not always able to

attend face-to-face tutorials on weekends. Now that the programme has gone mostly online, they don’t have to fret over having to miss tutorials. All they need to do is to access their learning materials online, be they e-modules, references, video lectures, and so on, via myVLE, OUM’s online learning platform. Discussions and peer collaborations take place online too. Now, that’s what I call convenience at one’s fingertips!

Dr David: This makes OUM’s BTRM unique, then?

Zulaika: Indeed. OUM’s BTRM is the first programme of its kind to be offered almost entirely online. Judiciously balancing theory and practice, it offers learners all the resources they require to learn while working so they can earn the certification they need to scale their respective career ladders in the industry. ^{TCX}

Zulaika Zakariah may be reached at
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USING TECHNOLOGY TO TEACH TECHNOLOGY

Interview with **DR NANTHA KUMAR SUBRAMANIAM**, Acting Dean of OUM's Faculty of Information Technology and Multimedia Communication
By AP Dr David CL Lim (david@oum.edu.my)

Dr David Lim: Tell us a bit about academic background, as well as your teaching and research interests.

Dr Nantha Kumar Subramaniam: I did a Bachelor of Computer Science at Universiti Putra Malaysia. I then completed my Master of Information Technology (Computer Science) and recently PhD in Computer Science, both at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. My teaching and research interests straddle programming, especially Java and agents, intelligent learning systems, and e-learning.

Dr David: Can you tell us about some of your recent research and how, specifically, that has fed into operations at OUM?

Dr Nantha: My research has focused on developing intelligent tools to foster learning on learning platforms such as OUM's myVLE. I've also investigated learner interactions on myVLE and how they influence learner performance in examinations.

Dr David: You were recently promoted to Acting Dean of the Faculty of Information Technology and Multimedia Communication (FITMC). How has it been?

Dr Nantha: Thus far, my experience as Acting Dean has been challenging but very interesting as I have a chance to make things happen. At this initial stage, proper planning and thinking outside the box should be sufficient impetus to get things moving. I believe in teamwork and innovation. Also, I believe that big success can be achieved with small but strategic changes.

Dr David: What are your immediate plans for the faculty?

Dr Nantha: My priorities are to improve the quality of our modules and to develop new programmes, especially those focusing on creative IT and



Dr Nantha Kumar Subramaniam

information systems. Other areas I'm looking into include introducing effective assessment instruments to address the high failure rates of some "killer" courses. I'm also working with my staff to develop more online learning materials.

"I believe that big success can be achieved with small but strategic changes."

Dr David: You have been with OUM for over twelve years and have grown with the university over the same period. What are your views on how OUM has developed and is developing as the first open and distance learning (ODL) university in Malaysia?

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Dr Nantha: OUM started with a vision of democratizing higher education. Thanks to OUM's visionary leaders, the university has created a niche for itself and has been very well received by the public. As the nation's first ODL university, OUM has pioneered and championed national agendas such as lifelong learning and accreditation of prior learning. OUM also has shown how technology can be best utilised for teaching, learning and administration.

Dr David: Concretely, in your view, what technologies are particularly suitable for OUM, given its particular local demographics?

Dr Nantha: We should focus on both synchronous and asynchronous technologies as the delivery model for myVLE. These must be well integrated and pedagogically sound. At the moment, our myVLE is strictly asynchronous-based. I hope to see the virtual classroom, which is a synchronous technology, integrated into myVLE. This will bring teaching closer to learners in the virtual space.

Dr David: IT is a fast evolving field, arguably more so than many other fields. What is the current trend in IT education? How do you see it evolving in future?

Dr Nantha: The current trend in IT education emphasises mobile development and software engineering. The theoretical part of IT hasn't changed much. Increasingly, IT learners are taking more non-IT electives to broaden their education base. In future, the number of specialisations offered in IT should grow significantly. Online and distance learning technologies, too, will become more effective. I foresee that more and more industry players such as IBM, Microsoft and Oracle will offer their own IT programmes. This might challenge the authority of IT faculties around the world.

“Using technology to teach technology is an ideal approach to take for FITMC courses.”

Dr David: How does the faculty ensure that it keeps abreast of changes in the field? How does it ensure that its curricula are always up to date?

Dr Nantha: Definitely, the faculty keeps abreast of changes in the field. We are consistently engaging with the industry and taking part in various IT seminars and

workshops. We have industry partners and experts advising us on the curricula. Our programmes are reviewed every three years to ensure they are current and meet industry standards.


Dr David: Like the rest of the faculties at OUM, FITMC offers programmes in blended mode, that is, a combination of face-to-face tutorials and online learning. Does FITMC intend to offer entire programmes in full online mode?

Dr Nantha: At the moment, we don't have fully online programmes. But we are moving towards that. We are gradually introducing fully online courses, especially for the Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT) programme. Thirty percent of the courses under the BIT programme will be fully online by the end of 2014. This will go a long way in helping our learners to maximise learning on the e-platform and to enjoy the flexibility of e-learning. It enables them to gain more control of their studies and to keep track of their progress. It seems to me that using technology to teach technology is an ideal approach to take for FITMC courses.

Dr David: Can you tell us more about FITMC's courses which are run entirely online? How has that been like?

Dr Nantha: We've just started offering the first batch of fully online courses in the January 2014 semester. We believe our learners will enjoy the experience.

Dr David: What advice would you offer FITMC tutors to spur them to perform even better at tutoring learners taking FITMC courses?

Dr Nantha: The two hours allocated for each face-to-face tutorial ought to be spent well. Where appropriate, tutors should employ indirect instruction. It's always useful to employ case studies and application-based questions as launch pads to learning. Group discussion and peer evaluation are useful too. Tutors should definitely avoid the stilted chapter-by-chapter teaching approach. 

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