CHAPTER 3

THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Many institutions of higher education use an online system for teaching, learning and communication. As a distance education institution, OUM uses a Learning Management System (LMS) referred to as myLMS to guide all forms of virtual interaction for this purpose. Essentially, myLMS is an e-learning platform that supports and enhances the teaching and learning endeavours of OUM tutors, students, administrators and full-time faculty. More importantly, online learning through myLMS bridges the gap between fortnightly face-to-face tutorials and module-based independent study. This tool also functions as a bulletin board for all notices, announcements and samples of tests or examinations, and provides a forum for tutor-learner and learner-learner collaborative online interaction. A team of qualified personnel under the purview of the Learning Management System Unit manage myLMS at OUM.

OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you to do the following:

- use essential online tutoring skills to help learners achieve learning outcomes; and
- use the various tools in the Learning Management System to communicate effectively with distance learners.
This chapter presents details on the effective use of myLMS in two parts: Part 1 presents strategies for effective online tutoring and interaction with learners while Part 2 outlines several technical features of myLMS that you should be familiar with in order to make effective use of this application.

PART 1: ONLINE TUTORING AND INTERACTION

3.1 The Role of Online Tutoring in Distance Education

As a tutor, you play a significant role in determining the extent to which online interaction can be beneficial to learners. For this to occur, there are a number of points that must be considered, as describe below.

3.1.1 Continuity

First, it is important to be aware that the primary purposes of online tutoring are to provide consultation for and to encourage discussion about course content within the forum in myLMS. As time for face-to-face sessions is limited, online tutoring in the virtual classroom takes over from the point where face-to-face tutorials end. This means that discussions and conversations begun in a face-to-face session do not end there; they may be continued in the virtual classroom that is offered in myLMS. The role of online tutoring and learning within an online system may therefore be seen as complementary to – and not secondary to – face-to-face sessions.
3.1.2 Discussion

Second, online interaction provides an opportunity for collaboration, discussion and debate among learners. As opposed to e-mail and other unidirectional forms of online communication, online tutoring is not intended to function primarily on a one-to-one basis. Instead, tutors must encourage learners to present multiple views and multiple perspectives on a given subject, and to collectively seek ways of solving problems, addressing issues and helping one another with course content. Thus, while the tutor is an expert on a given subject and is an informed practitioner in the field, s/he is expected to provide space for peer sharing and peer coaching. As the adage goes, tutors are encouraged to play the role of a ‘guide on the side’ rather than being a ‘sage on the stage.’ For this reason, OUM espouses the value of collaborative online learning (COL) which embraces teamwork, critical thinking skills and task-directed online activity.

3.1.3 Frequency and Asynchronicity

Third, the success of online tutoring is not based on a specific number of interactions between a tutor and his/her learners. Rather, it is based on consistent and timely feedback given to students’ queries, and on the quality of the interaction that takes place within a group. At OUM, online tutoring and learning is expected to occur at all times, without the constraints of time and space that characterises face-to-face tutorials. Therefore, asynchronous online discussions are used instead of synchronous or same-time discussions to allow for anytime-anywhere access to myLMS for both the tutor and the learner. As part of your responsibilities as a tutor, you are encouraged to participate in online discussions at least three times a week during the course of a semester.
3.1.4 Learning Support

Finally, the success of online discussions and tutoring depends in large part on two aspects of distance learning: (a) the consultative needs of learners and (b) the motivational bearing of your tutelage. Needless to say, one aspect influences the other. As distance learners are required to carry out self-regulated learning, it is incumbent upon them to seek consultation when required. However, learners may not be forthcoming to forward queries, ideas, understandings and interpretations at will. Thus, while learners need consultation for course content, they may be reticent about participation in the forum. Hence there is a need for tutors to employ various motivational strategies to inculcate a participative culture in the online forum.

3.2 Effective Online Tutoring Skills

Online tutoring at OUM is conducted through the LMS in a web-based facility called the forum. The forum may be viewed as a virtual classroom or a virtual space for interaction among tutors and learners to discuss course content, to contribute ideas related to a task and to deliberate on issues raised in the print module. Often the forum functions as an extension of the face-to-face tutorial and the discussion may be student-led or tutor-led. Pedagogically speaking, the forum is a place for engaging in meaningful academic discourse encompasses elements of collaborative learning, peer coaching and peer support.

The forum is organised according to tutorial groups, with the SME acting as the monitor of all discussion for a single course. Each tutorial group has one virtual ‘room’ for discussion with the group tutor as a discussion moderator. While learners and tutors have access to the discussions in all the other groups in the course,
contributions to the discussion are limited to one’s own tutorial group.

Let us now look at the many interactive skills you will need for the discussion forum in myLMS. Although there are many strategies that may be used for effective online interaction and communication with your learners, we will deal with three essential categories, as follows:

(i) Initiating contact and establishing guidelines
(ii) Promoting interactive learning
(iii) Focusing the discussion

Each of these aspects of online communication is covered in greater detail below, with relevant examples to help you understand its role and function in online discourse.

3.2.1 Initiating Contact and Establishing Guidelines

At the beginning of the semester, you can start online discussions by drawing learners’ attention to the broad
goals of the course. One place to begin would be the contents of the print module; another would be to outline your expectations of the students. This is also an opportunity for you to introduce yourself to the group members, and/or to suggest an activity that can serve as a springboard for the first face-to-face tutorial. Needless to say, you would first have to read the print module, draw up a course outline and a teaching plan for the semester, as well as consider the use of an appropriate teaching approach before you begin online discussions with your group.

Essentially, you will have to use some or all of the following strategies for online participation at the beginning of the semester.

(i) Introduce yourself as the group tutor, e. g. I am Chee Seng, your tutor for SBMA1303 Trigonometry and Calculus.

(ii) Encourage communication by way of invitation, e. g. Please use this forum to raise your concerns about the course.

(iii) Give a sense of structure for online activity, e. g. We will discuss a new topic each week.

(iv) Communicate your decisions on topics that should be discussed online, e. g. All discussion related to the assignment will be carried out in the forum.

(v) Establish a connection between online and face-to-face activity, e. g. Please answer the following questions before the first tutorial. We will discuss the answers in class. As a reference, read Chapters 1-3 in your module or you can access aleph0.clarku.edu/~dj Joyce (Chapter 2).
An important consideration with regards to your own involvement in the forum is the nature of the course you are teaching. Courses which are offered to first semester or first year students would undoubtedly be different from final year courses. Often, learning support provided for new students would not only entail pointers on assessment structure as well as content, but also online or technological aspects of the use of the LMS. The dependency on the tutor for technology support is often less after the first year, leaving tutors to concentrate on content-related matters thereafter.

In the example below, a tutor draws first semester students’ attention to particular aspects of the course, and details what is expected of learners in the course OUMH1103 Learning skills for Open and Distance Learners. Although the tutor’s message may appear somewhat lengthy, it is an example of a posting that is both motivating and encouraging of participation. Note too the conversational style used and the motivational language that may draw learners to participate in the forum.
Example 1

Welcome to OUMH1103 - Learning skills for Open and Distance Learners. I am Sulaiman bin Johar - your tutor for this particular subject. Let me start by saying, "selamat datang and salam perkenalan" to all my students who are joining the OUMH1103 course for this semester.

OUMH1103 is a core subject, compulsory for all students registered at OUM. As an Open and Distance learner, you need to know how to learn independently and optimize the learning modes and environment available to you. At the same time, you are expected to have mastered some of the basic knowledge and skills. You must have some basic skills on the Personal Computer and internet. Besides that, you should have at least used the services of a library and a digital library before. But the most important things is that you must have some basic command of English.

However, some of you might panic, when you know that this course will be conducted in English. For those who are not comfortable with the English language, I would say "don't worry, be happy". This is because what ever we do, it starts from the first step. So, let's start our first step in sharpening our English and see the results. That is the reason why I am here. I am here to help you to develop your skill in learning and sharpen up your study skills, ITC skills and information skills, as well as to guide you to become an independent lifelong learner.

I hope to see you all very soon at the first meeting of Tutorial 1 on 30th. January 2005.

Warmest regards,
Sulaiman bin Johar.
3.2.2 Promoting Group Learning

As opposed to individual learning, group learning refers to students working interactively to achieve a common academic goal. Learning in groups requires active participation between two or more people to achieve learning outcomes, and may involve pairs or groups of learners, or single learners interacting with a peer or tutor. As a tutor, you would also fare well to provide the space learners to help each other – where possible – with course-related activities such as the assignment and the tutorial questions found in the print module. Further, instead of treating students’ contributions on an individual basis, it would be better to link ideas from several postings and deal to them all at once.

You could use some or all of the following strategies for encourage group learning for students in your class.

(i) Set up learning groups in the face-to-face class and assign a topic/activity which they will discuss in the online forum. For this purpose, you may wish to use folders (in the forum) labeled according to group or task (details on setting up folders are provided in the latter half of this chapter).

(ii) Read all the postings for a particular day/week and deal with the issues or topics that are central to all or most of the postings.

(iii) Encourage participation between two or more learners by inviting them to respond to each other’s postings. This is sometimes referred to as peer coaching or peer teaching.

(iv) Make an example of peer responses that are or which are well thought-out or which reflect critical thinking. Use words of encouragement or praise from time to time to motivate students to respond to each other.
(v) Use controversial issues in the print module to provoke debate and conversation on course content. Sometimes you would have to wait for a few days to get groups of learners to respond to your question(s). At other times you may have to ask follow-up or probing questions to encourage learners to work together on these issues or topics.

Here are two examples of tutors’ online postings that promote group learning activities. In Example 2 note how the tutor talks about setting up groups to the face-to-face session, and subsequently encourages students to work together on a task in the virtual classroom in myLMS.

Example 2

Semua Pelajar,
Kita telah bersetuju utk tidak membuat kumpulan semasa T1 tempoh hari. Perlaksanaan forum atas talian bagi membincangkan Assignment adalah berdasarkan kepada pendapat dan idea antara rakan-rakan di dalam kelas Tutorial yang sama.

Saya telah memulakan perbincangan kita bagi Task 1 iaitu soalan 1c) formula apakah yang sepatutnya digunakan? Serangga air mempunyai 6 kaki, apakah kaitan dengan daya?

Perbincangan sebegini dapat menjanakan idea dan seterusnya setiap ahli akan dapat menyelesaikan masalah yang dikesukan.

Harap saya dapat membantu.
In Example 3 below, several students respond online to the tutors call for group discussion a topic related to the assignment for a course.

Example 3

Student 1-- Hi friends, the short story entitled "Mariah", seems to conform to the conventional style of plot development. The story is engaging and the characters are easy to relate to as the setting has a profound local flavour. We are able to emphasise with alluring Mariah as well as admire the virtuous Cik Yam. I would appreciate some innovative ideas for student centred activities to teach plot apart from the suggestions we can glean from the module.

Student 2-- Hi There, I don' quite like this story. Eventhough the setting will be familiar to our students but I don't quite like the theme. To me the theme is about sacrificial love. Cik Yam agreed to the second marriage of her husband because she loved him so much and did not want him to be sad. I feel her husband was just thinking of himself. What more could he ask for, he already had a good wife yet he was not satisfied. Wonder if Mariah will bring him happiness or just more problems as it is mentioned that her first husband died at an early age. What do you think?

Student 3-- Hi there! I think the plot of this story is very simple and easy to understand. It is understood that the Imam wanted to marry Mariah because of his first love, the Sheikh’s daughter. On top of that he blamed Cik Yam for not being able to produce a heir for him.

Student 4-- Hai, I agree with you guys. The short story Mariah was the best of the rest. The plot was easy to understand because it's more to our own background knowledge. I feel that we should encourage our students & teachers to love lit. by introducing story that they are familiar with.

Student 1-- Hi, you have actually given an idea. we could ask the students to rewrite the resolution if they vehemently disagree with Pak Imam's desire. Some might even emphasise with him for the yearning he had harboured in the recesses of his mind for his unfulfilled love all these years, although he was blissfully married to Cik Yam. It reminded me of how Miss Havisham defined love in “The Great Expectation” by Charles Dickens.
3.3.3 Moderating Online Participation

One of the most important aspects of online discussion is moderation of the deliberations that are carried out among students. The quality of a tutor’s moderation often can promote online discourse that is helpful in learning about difficult course content. It can also help learners focus on topics of significance, and can draw attention to ambiguity or erroneous comments by learners. Most importantly, the manner in which a tutor manages class discussions can determine the atmosphere in which learners participate, and can motivate learners to engage in open communication in the online discussion forum.

Here are some strategies for moderating online discourse that you can use for your tutorial group.

(i) Provide guidance on how students can do an assignment or an activity in the module. Use the student’s question or words to guide your response to the query. In Example 4 below, a student wishes to clarify a part of an assignment. The tutor responds by providing guidance on how a concept may be used in the assignment.

(ii) In responding to questions, elaborate on a concept or idea. Use a conversational style so that a learner is not intimidated when faced with new knowledge. This is illustrated in Example 5 below.

(iii) Provide a closure for a discussion that is lengthy, or one that where students just cannot arrive at an answer. For a situation like this, your professional judgment on a matter would be called for to settle an argument or
difference of opinion. This is shown in Example 6 below.

(iv) Sometimes learners repeat questions that have been asked by their classmates. To attend to this, draw attention to your responses to earlier questions, or discuss this during the face-to-face tutorial.

Example 4

Question from Student:
Morning sir, I am referring to the assignment Q2 does this question means 'keberkesan penggunaan teori penetapan matlamat utk mengurus prestasi'? Thank you.

Response from tutor:
Yes. Anda boleh memberi contoh yang kontemporer bagaimana seseorang pengurus menggunakan teori penetapan matlamat dalam menguruskan prestasi pekerja-pekerja mereka.

Example 5

Question from student:
Dear Sir, Please explain what the term 'generic conventions' is? Thank you.

Response from tutor:
Hi Nadine, Sorry for the late reply. Well, generic means the class origin - i.e belonging to a class, and conventions means the basic characteristics. Therefore generic conventions would be the basic features of a certain type of writing or style or language used etc. For example what are the generic conventions of shakespearean sonnet. So here you have to talk about the sonnet and what are the special conventions of the sonnets written by Shakespeare. Boleh faham kan? John
Example 6

Student 1-- i had read couple of pages about the complaint letter, in my understanding, COMPLAINT shouldn't and mustn't place in subject of letter, this because, to avoid negative feeling (pessimistic) about the sender and avoiding sender feels because she/he cause trouble. Help needed, thanks.

Student 2-- IMO, there's no hard rules as what to put in the subject of the letter & having the word 'complaint' in it is not rude at all. BUT, as malaysians, we were raised with the thinking of to always be humble & polite & to care for others' feelings, or what would they say abt us behind our backs for that matter, more often than not, others have been using this 'weakness' to their advantage.

Student 3-- it's good to be polite & maintain our humble culture but there are times that we have to be more straight forward in getting our points across. this is also to avoid confusions that might arise if a long & winding letters with 'flowery' words are used.

Response from Tutor-- Dear All, I think the word COMPLAINT need not be included in the subject or reference line of a letter. However, a client may write to you with this word in the subject line of his letter, and it may not be impolite to respond in the same way. You are right in saying that we should be polite in a letter and assume that the client is always right, but in business correspondence you would also have to be firm in order to get your message across.
PART 2: TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF MYLMS

3.3 Online Tools in myLMS

In order to perform your role as an online tutor effectively, you must first be familiar with the online forum in myLMS, a virtual space for collaboration, discussion and debate. This part of the chapter outlines the steps to be taken to use the various features of the Learning Management System at OUM.

To begin, there are five tools that you should be familiar with for the effective use of myLMS. These are:

(i) First Time Login Menu
(ii) myCourse Menu
(iii) myUniversity Menu
(iv) myCommunity Menu
(v) myMail Menu

In the section that follows, a description of each of these tools is provided.

(i) First Time Login Menu

New User registration menu where you can register your Username and Password to access myLMS through the OUM Portal.
(ii) **myCourse Menu**

Content management centre where you can access the courses you are teaching and tools related to the course.

(iii) **myUniversity Menu**

A centre where you can get access to the information posted by the university.

(iv) **myCommunity Menu**

A centre that allows you to communicate and interact with your online community.

(v) **myMail Menu**

An e-mail system that provides you with e-mail facilities and tools.

Each item in the menu has its own set of tools. For a detailed explanation of how these tools may be used, refer to Appendix 1.
3.4 Using the myLMS

The myLMS platform and other e-learning applications such as Digital Library are accessible through the OUM portal, for which the URL is: http://www.oum.edu.my/v2/index.php.

To start using myLMS, you must first have a Username and Password to log into the OUM portal. Only registered OUM tutors can be given a Username and Password. Here is a step-by-step guide on how to use myLMS for online tutoring.

3.4.1 Registration in myLMS

You would first use your registered Username and Password to log on to the OUM portal.

Steps to follow:

(i) Open your internet browser and type the following address:

(ii) Click First Time Login
(iii) Enter your new IC number (without the hyphens, e.g. 750105046749) and Click Submit.

(iv) Fill in the Account Registration Information using the following:
- Username;
- Password;
- Confirm password; and
- Click Submit button.

A message indicating whether or not your registration has been successful will appear.

Note:
- You can only register at FIRST TIME LOGIN once.
- Due to security reasons, you are advised not to use your IC number or Username as a Password.
3.4.2 Log on to the OUM website

After you have successfully registered your Username and Password, you can log into the OUM Portal.

(i) Enter the registered Username
(ii) Enter the registered Password
(iii) Click Login

3.4.3 Accessing myLMS

To access myLMS, you have to login onto myOUM website (refer to 3.4.1 and 3.4.2). After this, click myLMS.
3.4.4 Accessing your course content

Once you have logged into myLMS, click on the course that you wish to access.

When you will get the course content page, click on the links under Tools to access the tool related to your course.
3.4.5 Communicating with your students

To communicate with your students, do the following:
(i) Click Forum under your Course Tools
(ii) Click Online Discussion

To conduct an online discussion, you can do the following:
(a) Post a new message
(b) Reply to a message
(c) Create a folder and add a Password to the folder

(a) To post a new message

(i) Select a forum folder
(ii) Click Compose Message

![Forum: SME-TUTOR interface with a highlighted Compose Message button]

(iii) Complete the required information and click Submit

![Message submission interface with a 'Submit' button]
(b) To reply to a message

(i) Select a forum folder

![Forum: SME-TUTOR]

(ii) Click on the required topic

![Forum: SME-TUTOR]
(iii) Click on Reply to this message

(iv) Complete the required information and click Submit
(c) To create a folder

(i) Click Add Title

(ii) Follow the steps shown on the screen.
3.4.6 Monitoring Student Participation

You can monitor your student’s participation in the forum by selecting the Online Discussion Monitoring tool. This will give you a list of a number of message(s) posted by the students in your group. Then follow these steps:

(i) Click on link in (a) to view messages posted by a specific User

(ii) Click on link in (b) to view the whole messages posted in your forum

For a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) on myLMS, refer to Appendix 2.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, the core aspects of online tutoring and the Learning Management System have been described. It is hoped that this information will help you carry out your work as a tutor of distance learners more effectively. More importantly, the various sections of this chapter have provided you with guidelines on the use of an electronic mode of instruction which is vital to the success of teaching and learning at OUM.