CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to present key features of tutoring at Open University Malaysia (OUM). The many sections of this handbook describe in detail the various tasks and functions you will face as a tutor in an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environment such as OUM. In particular, the handbook serves as a guide for online and face-to-face tutoring, academic counselling, assessment and administrative responsibilities that you will undertake as a tutor.

OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that the contents and activities of this handbook will give you an understanding of the following:

- teaching and learning principles within an interactive learning environment at an ODL institution;
- core skills related to the tutor role of tutorial facilitator, online moderator and academic counselor;
- assessment procedures at OUM; and
- counselling adult distance learners.
A common feature of ODL environments is that students do not attend a programme of study for a fixed term where they have to attend classes every day or every week. Thus, the term distance learning is used to refer to environments where learners are physically separated from the main education provider. Communication usually occurs with the use of ICT resources, and tutoring may take place through pre-arranged face-to-face sessions or through a personalised mode.

At OUM, learners are exposed to a multifaceted interactive learning solution aimed at facilitating learning and attaining course goals. This system comprises:

- face-to-face tutorials;
- collaborative online learning; and
- print modules and a comprehensive digital collection.

The term ‘tutor’ is used at OUM to refer to the responsibilities an instructor undertakes as s/he guides and facilitates the learning experiences of adult learners.

You will find that as an ODL tutor, you will play the role of tutorial facilitator, informed colleague, online moderator, academic counselor, instructor, administrator, supervisor, and skilled practitioner (Figure 1.1). All of these responsibilities help to provide the total learning experience for a distance learner at OUM.
A unique feature of the OUM delivery and administrative system is the existence of a number of Regional and Learning Centres in different locations (Figure 1.2). These learning centres are used for face-to-face tutorials, for the conduct of local and regional administrative matters, for keeping records on students, for carrying out training for tutors and orientation for learners as well as for examinations. Each regional or learning centre is managed by an administrator and support staff.

As shown in the maps below, learners can choose from a large number of locations the primary learning centre they wish to attend. As a tutor, you too will be assigned to teach at one of these centres and will direct all administrative activity to the administrator at this location.
Figure 1.2: OUM regional/learning centres in West Malaysia and East Malaysia
1.1 TERMS COMMONLY USED AT OPEN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

As the concept of open and distance learning is rather new in Malaysia, there are many terms used in OUM that are unique to ODL institutions. In the following pages you will find a description of several terms that are commonly used at OUM.

Open and Distance Learning

A flexible education environment where multi-modal learning resources are used to deliver course content. At OUM, print modules, online interaction and a digital library provide useful resources for learning. Learners may access all of these resources at any time and from any place as a flexible way of achieving course goals.

Regional Centre or Learning Centre

A place where face-to-face sessions take place and where administration for local tutors and students is situated. A Regional Centre (RC) commonly caters to a larger number of students than does a Learning Centre (LC). An RC is headed by a Director/Manager while an LC is headed by an administrator.

Administrator

The individual responsible for the management of all activities in a particular Regional Centre or Learning Centre.
**Subject Matter Expert (SME)**

An experienced academian who may also be an OUM tutor but whose main responsibility is to provide academic support for a course. The SME writes the questions for assignments, examinations and tests as well as provides input on the module that is used for a particular course.

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**Lead Tutor**

The individual who supports tutors in enhancing the teaching-learning process at a particular Regional Centre or Learning Centre. Often Lead Tutors are experienced OUM tutors who are also full-time academicians at an educational institution. They are a common source of information for new tutors, and may be called upon to assist in tutor training and tutor monitoring activities.

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**Module**

A printed document that contains the baseline content for a single course belonging to a particular programme. The module is written by experienced academics and contains notes, activities and exercises for autonomous learning, as well as questions for deliberation during face-to-face sessions.
Digital Library

An extensive collection of e-Books, e-Journals and e-References covering more than 80,000 titles on various subjects. The digital collection may be accessed online through the internet, at any time and from any place with adequate communication resources.

Tutorial

A single face-to-face (F2F) session that is scheduled for each course. At OUM, tutorials are usually labelled sequentially, e.g. the first tutorial is referred to as T1, the second as T2 and so on. There may be three or five tutorials in a semester.

Forum

The online learning space or the virtual classroom that is used to deliberate on various aspects of course content, assignments and other tasks. The forum is an important part of the learning experience as it offers distance learners a virtual space for discussion and open communication. It may be accessed through the LMS and at any time of the day from home or the office.
Assignment

A task that is part of formative assessment for a course. It contributes 20 per cent of the marks for assessment in a single course. An assignment is given to students and tutors at the beginning of a semester and requires students to work on the task on their own. Students are also required to reference texts and/or conduct some research, as well as discuss related issues in the online forum. For the purpose of assessment, all students have to produce a hardcopy of the paper or assignment as an outcome of the assignment.

Test

A formative assessment procedure conducted under strict examination conditions. Two tests are conducted for each course per semester. The first test contributes 10 per cent of the marks for assessment in a single course, while the second Test contributes 10 or 15 per cent of the marks for assessment in a single course (depending on the programme of study).

Examination

A summative assessment procedure conducted under strict examination settings. There is one final examination for each course, and all examinations are held at the end of each academic semester. Examinations are usually administered by full time academic and administrative staff from OUM.
1.2 SUMMARY

This introductory chapter of the Tutor Handbook provides essential information on the key features of a tutor’s role and responsibilities at OUM. The salient features of OUM’s interactive learning solution aimed at facilitating learning and attaining course goals have been outlined, and the many Regional and Learning Centres have been mapped out for you. It is hoped that the presentation of the structure of this Handbook and explication of common OUM terminology will help you conduct of your responsibilities as a tutor at OUM.