TYPES OF TUTORING AND ASSESSMENT

WOU recognises that open distance education (ODL) learners need face-to-face (F2F) sessions for academic and social support. Our F2F sessions aim to help learners overcome difficulties related to matters such as course content and study skills, as well as provide them with greater opportunities to interact with their tutors and peers. In addition, certain courses will probably require learners to undertake some hands-on or laboratory work, for example, science and technology as well as language courses or weekend sessions of one or two days to provide learners with learning opportunities together with their peers and invited guests (e.g., Business dialogues).

Our sessions may take many different formats and courses may include more than one type. The most common types of contact are:

- Tutorials
- Day (or residential) sessions
- Laboratory sessions

Often the F2F sessions are optional particularly tutorials because it is recognised that students who are studying by ODL may have difficulties attending such sessions due to constraints imposed by work and/or family commitments or geographical locations. On the other hand, some courses will probably have compulsory day or residential sessions, and laboratory sessions. Certain laboratory sessions are deemed compulsory due to the nature of the course conduct and the need for sophisticated software or hardware that may not be readily available to the ODL student.

Apart from F2F sessions, tutors should be aware that student learning at WOU comes through a number of conduits. First the specifically designed course materials that are given to the students before the semester starts, and in it there will also be reference to tutor marked assignments (TMAs), library resources that the WOU library might provide, additional materials on the Learning Management System (or WawasanLearn) that provide for student-student forums, student-tutor sessions etc., and through the informal discussion groups that the students may have formed during the semester.

The F2F sessions or tutorials thus are only one of the many components to engender learning. Elaborations on the tutoring aspects are discussed here.
TUTORING

Tutorials
Tutorials will be the most common type of F2F meeting, designed to offer regular support to learners. There will be five (5) tutorials scheduled over an 18-week semester. These tutorials are held during the weekends as an effective way of providing support, bringing students together as a group and to encourage mutual support as well as overcoming isolation.

The Course Coordinator will provide a Tutor Guide that suggests various learning activities to be undertaken in tutorials. The tutorials will also be used as question-and-answer sessions, for group work, case studies and open discussions and debates. In some courses it may be appropriate for students to make individual or group presentations.

Day (or Residential) Sessions
Day sessions or day schools will be used to provide learners with opportunities to engage in learning activities which cannot normally be covered in tutorials and would usually take place over a longer period, for example, a day or a weekend session of one or two days to provide learners with learning opportunities together with their peers and invited guests (e.g., Business dialogues). Attendance may be compulsory.

Laboratories
Many science and technology courses require students to have access to equipment and software which is not readily available in either the home or the workplace. Arrangements will be made to provide such facilities in convenient locations for the learners. Attendance at such laboratories is usually compulsory.

Telephone Tutoring
The telephone offers a means of establishing greater contact with students. It has the advantage of being widely available, involves no travel on the part of either the student or the tutor and helps to overcome geographical isolation. This means that students who are unable to attend F2F sessions can still obtain human help. It also has the advantage of relative immediacy so that students can seek help without having to wait for the next F2F session. Effective telephone tutoring will require tutor training as the techniques involved differ from those used in F2F sessions. Tutors are to designate ‘call-in times’ that they will be available offer telephone tutoring and counseling.
Correspondence
Formal one-to-one correspondence will probably be limited to specific serious matters. It can be used for answering complicated queries and in situations where a record is needed. However, more informal written communication can also be effective in situations where the same information has to be communicated to a group of students. Examples of this include leaflets outlining study tips, lists of frequently asked questions (FAQs), general feedback on TMAs etc. As the availability of Internet technology becomes more widespread, many types of information can be included on Web pages for students to access online forums and for email correspondence on individual queries.

Tutoring Through Assignments
One of the important tasks of a WOU tutor is the good practice of marking and commenting on assignments. It is through the comprehensive feedback by the tutors on the learners’ assignments that learners are being “taught”.

The extensive range of comments and feedback that can be incorporated in the students’ assignments, amongst others, covers:

- Directing students to particular sections of learning materials.
- Recommending what constitutes a good answer.
- Explaining points not understood by students.
- Commenting on presentation skills such as layout, length, referencing, etc.
- Questioning students’ arguments or approach to assignments.
- Suggesting additional facts/points left out in the answers.
- Advising on student’s current performance compared to previous assignments.
- Identifying errors in written work.

Online Tutoring (through the Learning Management System)

Web-based technology can be used for many purposes. One area where there appears to be universal agreement concerning its efficacy is with regard to enhancing communication between tutors and students, students and students, students and the institution and tutors and the institution. WOU has an online Learning Management System (LMS) called WawasanLearn that provides course specific matters and support ‘public’ and ‘tutorial’ forum sessions to students and with the tutor. It is a very powerful tool with regard to making information available to students and has the added advantage of making it easier to keep information up to date.
ASSESSMENT

Assessment plays a vital role in the learner’s progress. In an ODL institution, continuous assessment plays an even greater role as it presents an opportunity for the student to receive guidance and feedback from the University. There are two main types of continuous assessments: tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and the final examination. These continuous assessments contribute between 40% and 50% of the final course mark. In order to ensure that all groups are treated fairly and that assessment is set at the correct level, all assessments will be set by the Course Coordinator (CC) in consultation with other academics and External Examiner for courses. The TMAs are marked and graded by the tutor of the class according to a marking schema prepared by the Course Coordinator, and students will get the grades for their TMA after they were being moderated by the CC concerned.

Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs)
Generally, tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) play a vital role in open distance education by:

- Tracking a student’s academic progress.
- Acting as a pacing mechanism to maintain progress through a course.
- Providing a vital opportunity for teaching via the tutor’s comments given on assignments.
- Providing the student with an opportunity to apply what they have learned from their courses and to evaluate on their progress in the course.

Through their comments, tutors have an opportunity to support each student individually and give them the feedback they need to succeed.

Computer-Marked Assignments (CMAs)
CMAs are marked by a computer programme rather than by the tutor. This can be a useful method of providing feedback to students for specific topics within a course unit. There are now intelligent programmes that not only mark answers as right or wrong but can also provide standard feedback depending on the choice of answer made by the student. WOU will progressively convert one or more TMAs into CMAs. But for the present time, there will be ‘trials’ using CMA for some courses using the WawasanLearn but with no marks or grades awarded. This will serve as a useful practice for students to sharpen their intellect with the trial tests.

Examinations
All courses will have an end-of-course examination that will contribute between 50% and 60% of each final course mark. All examinations will be set by the Course Coordinators (CC) and marking will be coordinated by the CC based upon the marking schemes. Anonymous marking will be deployed. In addition to preparing examination paper, CCs will also have responsibility for the production of a detailed marking guide for the examination.