Preparing for your First Lecture of the Semester
Tips for a Smooth Start

As we approach the start of the new academic year, we wanted to share some good practices and reminders that may help you set a positive, productive tone during your initial meeting with students.

Before your first lecture…

Rudimentary practical issues:

▪ **Check the lecture time and venue** - If you have queries contact your faculty or departmental office. Remember to use the Study-Unit Notifications Facility in eSIMS to inform students of any lecture postponements.

▪ **Know your students** - Check the list of students registered to your study-unit on eSIMS or the VLE. Familiarising yourself with the students' names when starting a study-unit with a new cohort will help relational dynamics in the classroom.

▪ **Check the learning space** - Visit the lecture room/hall a few days before the first lecture. Check the technology available in the room and the connection ports/adapters required for your laptop. If you encounter issues or need assistance, contact the beadle available in the building.

Update online information and resources:

▪ **Prepare the study-unit area on the VLE**

Check that your study-unit is on the VLE. If you are missing any of your study-unit/s in the VLE, check that you are registered on eSIMS as a tutor for the missing study-unit. If the study-unit does not appear on eSIMS contact your faculty or departmental office so that they can register you as a tutor for the missing study-unit/s. Once data is entered in SIMS, the study-unit will appear in the VLE within 24 hours.

Populate your VLE area with content, or use the VLE CopyTool to copy material from the previous year. You can immediately start uploading study material directly on the VLE. Before you make the study-unit area available to students (see below), 'proof-read' your area. Click on the learning resources and external links to ensure that the correct content is displayed. Refer also to the recommended content for study-unit areas in the VLE.

If you will be delivering synchronous online sessions, set the Zoom meeting link on the VLE.

Read the study-unit description and revise any sections in the VLE that need updating e.g., lecture schedule, the due dates of assessments, student office hours etc. **Include a statement in the study-unit description if and how Generative AI tools may be used in your study-unit/assessment.** Include a link to the UM FAQs on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools for students.

Make your VLE area visible to students. By default, study-unit areas are not immediately visible to students.

The first lecture…

Suggested best practices going forward:

- **Use of VLE** - Inform your students how the VLE will be used during your study-unit. It is good practice to show the VLE study-unit area during the first lecture. Students who experience issues accessing the VLE should be directed to the IT Service Desk. Note that first-year and students who are re-taking the study-unit may not be able to access their study-unit areas immediately. Typically, these students will gain access around the third or fourth week of October. In such cases, try to facilitate/enable the sharing of VLE materials and ensure that such students receive important notifications.

- **Communication protocols** - Inform your students that you will use the VLE Annoucements forum to post important notifications related to the study-unit. These notifications are sent to the students' UM mailbox.

  Set up a Q&A forum on the VLE and direct students to post questions there. Encourage them to respond to posts in the Q&A forum if they know the answer.

  Email is best reserved for sensitive matters. If you receive an email from a student about non-sensitive issues, direct them to post their questions in the Q&A forum.

  Inform students about your weekly office hours and how they can book an appointment during these times.

  Consider including the communication protocols in the VLE.

- **Introduce the study-unit** - Consider giving an overview of the study-unit description, elaborating on various aspects that students should note. For example, covering your attendance policy, the assessment components of the study-unit, late assignment policy, academic integrity and the UM plagiarism policy etc. Encourage dynamic and participatory dynamics in the lecture room and clarify any queries.

- **Use of Generative AI tools - It is strongly recommended that, during the first lecture, you discuss with students what is and isn't allowed regarding the use of AI in study-unit and assessment activities.** Refer also to the UM FAQs on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools for students.

First lecture, a practical hint from a pedagogical perspective:

- **Present some initial content** - Introduce students to some interesting aspects of your study-unit to stimulate their interest. Avoid overwhelming them with too much content during the first lecture, as they will be starting several study-units at the beginning of the semester. Instead, focus on including a substantive activity to capture their interest. Your main goal is to give students a sense of the issues, questions, and skills the study-unit will address.

Best wishes for a smooth and successful start to the academic year!

Office for Professional Academic Development

September 2024