Online Facilitator

Roles and Responsibilities of an Online Facilitator

I. Key attributes of an Online Facilitator

- Competency in the subject matter, as a minimum, at the same level of the themes that are covered in the online course especially if he/she also acts as a tutor;
- Certain degree of familiarity with information technology and managing online communications in general;
- Openness to receiving additional training in relation to the particular Learning Management System being used for the online course that is to be facilitated;
- Being motivating, respectful and sympathetic towards participants;
- Willingness to adapt facilitation style depending on the course structure and/or participants' needs;
- Seeking and responding to external feedback on facilitation skills, and self-evaluating one's facilitation style, for improving the provision of online tutoring support.

II. Recommendations for an Online Facilitator to perform effectively

- Address participants by their names to overcome physical distance and create a convivial group environment;
- Communicate clearly and in simple language, omitting slang words that can be understood by a global audience;
- Ask direct and specific questions in forums to prompt a higher response rate;
- Provide responses to participants that are rich in content than length;
- Be approachable and have a regular online presence by logging in at frequent intervals.

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III.   Primary Tasks of an Online Facilitator

Pre-course:

- Become familiar with the technological aspects of the course environment in the Learning Management System;
- Review the course content and tasks involved, including taking note of deadlines for both participants and the facilitator.

Start of the course:

- Ease participants into the online environment with Icebreaker activities and/or initiating a round of introductions among the group;
- Set ground rules for online interaction, including tips on netiquette.

During the course:

- Foster learning among participants through open discourse and experience-sharing;
- Respond to forum postings regularly, and summarise postings in each discussion forum in a concise manner to provide a sense of the key elements surrounding a topic (bringing out both commonalities and differences in student views);
- Provide clarifications on course content, and refer participants to additional resources in the subject area when needed;
- Mediate as necessary to initiate discussions, or resolve disagreements, and to keep participants on track in relation to course objectives;
- Provide timely feedback on assessments whether these activities are graded or not;
- Remind participants of deadlines at required intervals;
- Support participants, especially those less familiar with technology, in their use of online communication methods when they face difficulties;
- Pay attention to participants' lack of engagement and follow-up with those who don't regularly participate to minimize the dropout rate.

After the course:

- Provide requested feedback to course administrators for course evaluation purposes;
- Remain accessible for clarifications required on any-course related issue like grading.

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IV.   How can Course Administrators support the Online Facilitator?

- Provide clear materials to familiarise the facilitator with the course content, the methodological approach and course deadlines;
- Invest time to train facilitators technically for using the Learning Management System prior to the start of the course;
- Share the burden of providing technical support to participants with the online facilitator;
- Remind participants, if and when needed, that the facilitator can be expected to have a regular online presence but will not be constantly monitoring online activities and that they should also take account of time zone differences;
- Set reasonable and realistic timeframes for the online facilitator to complete tasks such as grading assignments.

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