

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live Induction for the Open University Law School and the Open University Business School. In this session, we're going to talk about online tutorials, one of the best things about being an OU student. We've talked today about how tutorials are a really helpful source of support. They give you a chance to interact with your tutor, with other students, to sound out your knowledge, and really do enhance your student experience.

So how do you get to them, and why is it important? Now, we've got some widgets that we'd often like you to fill in as we're going through our programme. And in this session, we'd like to know how you communicate, so which sorts of ways you communicate, text based, video, audio, or asynchronous chat? And also about your confidence, this is a scale.

So just indicate on the scale how confident you feel being online, so from very confident to not confident at all. And do you plan to communicate online during your studies? Now, being online could mean lots and lots of different things. Take that as well.

You can put your comments and thoughts in the chat. But we've got a lot to get through in this session. So I would like to welcome Fenella Galpin who is a student Experience Manager on the Law Programme, and you've got a background in online learning and online communities. And Rob Moore, who has been a teacher in the business school for 15 years. And you're part of the team who are introducing the new Adobe Connect system, and you also run two education focus companies when you're not doing that.

So Fenella, I wondered if you could talk us through the sorts of activities that take place online. When we say this "online environment," what do we mean?

FENELLA GALPIN: Yes, so a whole range of activities are offered online for students to help them feel part of that community and give them ways to communicate with fellow students, the network, and so on. So some of those activities are what we call asynchronous, which means that students come to them when it suits them in their own time. So those would be things like forums and chat rooms and areas where they can talk to fellow students and the tutor, and they come to that when they want to do them, when it's convenient for them. And then they come back and they see what other people have written and contribute some more.

And then we also have what we call online rooms, and those are real-time activities with audio,

whiteboard, video, chat rooms, all kinds of things going on in real time. And in those areas you will find many things where tutors are supporting students, but also some activities not specifically geared just to a tutor group, but perhaps to the whole range of students studying on a module or the whole group of students studying on a qualification or even the whole group of students in the Open University. So there's a real range of different activities going on.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, we're going through this process right now, this highly complex process of allocating every tutor with a student and allocating that student with their tutorials. And so students will start to see the tutorials popping up, and they can book onto those, and then they can attend those links. How does it all work?

FENELLA GALPIN: Absolutely, yes. So on the Student Home, which is where most student things are sitting, as you know, they have an opportunity to see all their tutorial options there. And often there is more than one choice that they can attend, if they want to. And so they look on the Student Home, and they will see the opportunities for them on their module.

They can also find them by looking at the module website and seeing the activities available there. And so they have a range of dates. And then they click to book for the one they would like to attend.

KAREN FOLEY: Do I have to take part? Is it compulsory?

FENELLA GALPIN: No, it's not compulsory that they take part. But we would say the tutor who's running the activity is running it for the benefit of the students who are taking part in real time. And so if you don't take part in real time, but you watch a recording, then you will still get some of that experience but not the whole experience.

KAREN FOLEY: Do you find many students do take part online, Rob?

ROB MOORE: Well, for some courses, the actual taking part will earn you marks in your assignment. So for example, one course that I tutor on B100, you get 10 per cent of your marks are given for your interaction with the students in the forum. So we have a discussion, and you talk to the students. You explore the ideas. And you answer some questions that the tutor sets. And you get 10 per cent of your marks for that.

KAREN FOLEY: Easy.

ROB MOORE: You don't have to. You can still pass the assignments in the course without doing that. But if you don't do that, your chances of getting the top marks are limited. And then there are other courses where there are collaborative activities that you must do. And if you don't do those, you won't pass the course.

Now, you won't accidentally miss those. Those are very clearly set out, and we make it absolutely obvious what you must do in order to pass. So, for example, that there may be a month-long collaboration. A course I studied myself, we had to produce a website.

So a group of five of us had to produce a website that we then actually published on the web. And without that, we wouldn't have passed the course. But, as I say, you wouldn't accidentally miss that. So yes, so it's part of your assessment in some courses, not all.

But the main thing is it's that ability to work with other people. It's that opportunity to explore the ideas and discuss and see whether you've got the same take on something that somebody else has got or whether you're different. And for me, that's where the real learning comes. It's not discussion that says, I think this. You think that. Well, what is the truth?

It also helps you to stop feeling so lonely, because distance learning- I love distance learning. But if you seal yourself away and don't engage with other people, you can feel very lonely. And our [? asynchronicity, ?] the chat that you do when you've got time or the live chat that you do with the other people helps to remove that feeling that you can sometimes get that you're on your own.

KAREN FOLEY: So we're talking very much about both the synchronous, which is the real time, sort of, you talk, I talk, et cetera. And that could happen in an online [INAUDIBLE] the Student Hub Live, like this. Or there's the asynchronous, which is not the real time. That's often the forums and various other things that are going on.

So there's two sorts of things happening for students, and this session is all about being online. But Rob, I mean, you've listed the benefits of improved course results, efficient use of time, being part of a group and sharing experiences, and learning from others, all amazing, all things that students would definitely want. But sometimes, I know for my students, they can sometimes say, I'm a bit anxious about going online.

I don't really know who's on the forum. I'm not sure where to put my reference on the forum. Or I'm not sure if I've put the wrong spelling. Am I allowed emoticons? There's all this sort of

anxiety.

Because I think sometimes when you can't see what the community is and see how many people you're talking to, it can be really difficult to know what's appropriate. It's like walking into a sort of room and going, surprise, and not knowing then when it's fancy dress or what. How do you encourage students to sort of make sense of this space and maybe ask those questions?

ROB MOORE:

Well if you go into an online room, the chances are you'll be in one of two rooms. It'll either be the course broad room, which is where the tutorials happen. It could be anybody from any tutor group. They will be on your course, but you might not necessarily know them. And that's where you get the opportunity to find some different ideas. They will be very well presented and prepared in advance, and those are there to help you specifically with your coursework.

Then you'll have your study room with your own group, and groups are typically 20 people, so 20 students. And if you're in that study room, that will only be your group. So you will get to know the people in that room quite well. And we do encourage students to come and have their own, what we call, self-help groups, the little study sessions. And it's an opportunity for students to set up their own times to get together and talk about issues, talk about ideas.

So in the two rooms, you might have different things. You might feel a bit more relaxed with your own group. And as we say, well, those sessions tend to be a bit more informal, a bit more relaxed, where you can talk and ask questions that you want. In the more formal setting, we still encourage questions, and we often get you to work in small groups again. Because it's no good being in a room with 60 people trying to get your question out, because you're just not going to get heard.

So we do a lot of breaking people into smaller groups. And plenty of time for you to say, hi, find out who it is. Just as you would in any environment where you're learning, you want to get to know who you're learning with and get to know the rich ideas. So my advice is get stuck in.

It's there. It's not meant to be threatening. It's very relaxing, lots of emoticons, as you say. We've got a limited number. We haven't got the entire range you can use on your phone, thank goodness. But plenty of opportunity to say hi, give a clap, thumbs up. And if you're feeling really brave, the videos are there. And the opportunity to actually see who you're talking to is great, again, but we don't force any of this.

One thing I will say, and my props for today are the headsets. If you're using the live sessions, we do like you to use a headset, mainly because it cuts all the background noise out. So if you are joining any sessions, then either a purpose purchased headset, USB headset, is great. But my computer works perfectly well with my phone headphones as well. It just cuts down any extra noise. So the thing we really like is people being able to talk, because nobody can type fast enough to get the questions out.

KAREN FOLEY: No, there's no spelling mistakes or any sort of misconstrued ideas and things. It's a lot easier to talk, isn't it?

ROB MOORE: Yes. We accept the fact that when you're trying to type 70 words a minute, you're going to make mistakes.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, absolutely.

ROB MOORE: Just look at the tutors when they're typing. We make more mistakes than the students.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, it's the Freudian slips I don't like quite so much. [LAUGHS] So we asked people what they communicate using, and a lot of people, 72 per cent, say that they're using text-based chat, followed by asynchronous forms of communication, like email. I thought video chat might have been a bit higher because a lot of people are FaceTiming and Skypeing these days, but not so much for people today.

Confidence communicating online is a little bit varied. But we also asked about intentions. So 79 per cent say that they are planning to communicate online in their studies. And 21 per cent, which is quite a high percentage actually, are not sure about that. Nobody said no. So we've got to convince those 21 per cent it's a good idea.

So Fenella, what I want to know from you, then, is bearing in mind you can watch some of these things on Catch Up, and bearing in mind that I'm sure everyone is convinced that all the other students are a lot more ahead, a lot more eloquent than they are, why should people, then, engage in real time? And what is it like being in these rooms?

FENELLA GALPIN: Yes, so we say, well, if nobody engages in real time, then actually there won't be a recording for people.

KAREN FOLEY: [INAUDIBLE].

FENELLA
GALPIN: Exactly. So if a tutor is running that event for the group of students who are there in the room with them and the more students, within limits, then the more engaging and a valuable event that you get. As Rob said, just getting in there and having a go is really what it's all about. And we do understand a lot of students may be reticent about getting online and particularly in those online rooms in real time, where perhaps you feel more pressure than if you were in a forum, where you can kind of reflect and do it in your own time. The pressure is not quite on in the same way.

So we will always put in ice-breaking activities really early on. So the students join the room. It's all very straightforward at the beginning. There are ice-breaking activities to try to encourage everybody to speak and make sure that everybody is OK with the technology before we move on and so on. And so it is possible to listen to a recording after the event. But I would say absolutely that's not the best way to do it.

KAREN FOLEY: It's not as much fun, is it?

FENELLA
GALPIN: It's not as much fun. And you want that opportunity to be part of the community of your fellow students and be interacting with them.

ROB MOORE: Could I just say something on recordings as well? Because sometimes students get worried that the session is going to be recorded. So that makes them clam up. But we're very conscious of that. And we make sure that any work that you do in the small groups, any work that you're doing discussing things, we don't record those sections. So we don't want anybody to feel, I won't take part because I don't want to be recorded. Effectively, we're really recording the tutor and what the tutor's saying, rather than we're trying to catch out what the students are saying.

KAREN FOLEY: And we all know there's no such thing as a stupid question as well. Because if someone asks it, it's very likely other people are thinking about it. Now, Rob, after the session, you are going to have an online room. So if you haven't already found out how you can do that, on the next session, there's a link to the online room that you can join and talk to Rob and see what it's all about.

On the subject of videos and things, I mean, everyone, let's be honest, is having a pyjama party at home. So they're a bit concerned about the video and things, but that's fine because no one's going to see them or anything, unless you want to show off your pyjamas, of course. And then you can turn your webcam on. But Fenella, we have a little video to show people a

little bit about what the online room is like. So shall we have a quick look at that?

FENELLA Yes.

GALPIN:

KAREN FOLEY: And also you can see the whole video, which is on the Resources page of the Student Hub Live website, if you'd like to find out more. So let's take a quick sneak preview at what the online rooms look like.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

- Hosts can share PowerPoint presentations, PDF files, multimedia files, and other resources.
They can share the screen-

KAREN FOLEY: So this is showing the basics here of the Adobe Connect rooms and how students get online with those.

- Or they can open a whiteboard and invite participants to draw or type on it.

KAREN FOLEY: That is the Adobe Connect space.

- This is a whiteboard, with the drawing palette showing the drawing tools available.

KAREN FOLEY: And showing there the different tools that students can use.

- The small triangle on a Tools icon indicates that different tools are available. Double click to reveal them. Use the T tool to type. Use one of the four pens, the marker, highlighter, pen or pencil-

ROB MOORE: It's like in a flip chart, where you can actually get in there, and you can scribble on the board. And so you can see what other people are finding interesting maintenance links. So it's not a passive experience. It's very much an active experience. And the material that we've produced is- it's designed to help you get involved rather than effectively watch a demonstration.

So what you're seeing there is the drawing tool, which can sit over the top of a presentation or a video. And the student can actually start to annotate it themselves. Then the right-hand side, you can see everybody who's in the room, and you can see what their status. You can see if they're talking. And so when you log into the room later to talk to me, you'll see your name on

the right-hand side.

There's lots of little pods that we can use. Now, this is a drawing pod, where it would be effectively a flip chart. But we can also show movies. We can put documents there for you to read. We can have music playing. And it'll flash animations as well.

So little programmes can run. So lots of things to get stuck into, which, to be honest, you don't get from the recordings when you watch them back, because you don't get to play. I'm a great believer in playing in the rooms because that's a lot of your education, you're learning is going to come through play.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. No, absolutely. So being there in real time is great, and you've shown us what the room looks like. And of course, the tutors are the people who are setting all of this up. I often find students are brilliant at drawing and sort of creating things on the clipboard, but everything is pretty intuitive. And the tutor sets all of the complicated things up and designs the space for that learning activity to take place.

So as you know, you can come and join in one of these rooms. What is the best way to join? And we've got a screenshot of the joining page. So we'd like to show you what that looks like so that you can access that.

This is the Tutorials, the booking system. So this shows you the calendar of the events that you can go to. And of course, if you add these to your calendar, then they should nicely sync into your study planner, if all goes according to plan. And then you could just click on those as and when you're about to go to your tutorial.

FENELLA GALPIN: Yes absolutely. Yes, and so you simply click on the booking that you've made, and it takes you, then, to the online room.

KAREN FOLEY: And this is the joining page here. So this is an online room, and it's got the instructions and how to enter the room. And then it says, Join Room. And then you just press that, isn't it?

FENELLA GALPIN: Yes.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. So couldn't it be simpler. Rob, what are you going to do in the online room? This is

the first time we've tried this live at a Student Hub event. So what's going to happen?

ROB MOORE: OK, well I'm going to get everybody who turns up, we'll say, hi, have a quick chat as a group. It depends how big the group is. If there's more than 350 of you, we might struggle. But we're going to have a little poll, see how people are feeling at the start of their studies, what they're worried about, what they're interested in. And then I'm going to take a step back and get the group to talk to each other.

So they're going to talk with other students live. And if we've got some really brave people, they might feel they want to put their video camera on and have a look. My video camera will be on, so you've seen me already. I've got nothing to hide. This is one of the few days where I'm not in my pyjamas on the camera.

KAREN FOLEY: [LAUGHING] Excellent. Well, thank you very much, Rob and Fenella. It's been a wonderful introduction. You've explained the rooms, and now we've got a chance for students to go through. HJ, I see you are all set up. Are you in the room?

HJ: Yes. I'm in the room. There's lots of other people here, which is really good to see that they made it. And I've got my headset because you guys said that was helpful. So I came prepared, although I did- we might have some trouble based on a session earlier, because I did borrow this headset of someone. So maybe they'll be OK for today. I won't get any phone calls about that.

But, yes, I'm in the room. And it's all new as well, because I use the old room. So it's nice to have a little practise and look around, and yes.

MYCHELLE: Lots of really good comments from students as well, excited about getting into the room, trying it out. We're encouraging them to, even in their PJs, put the video on, so really good discussions.

ROB MOORE: We won't be recording it.

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: Well Rob's got to get his skates on and go and join you guys in the online room. So I'd like to thank you both very much, once again, for coming on.

FENELLA Thank you.

GALPIN:

KAREN FOLEY: Rob's got to get his pyjamas on even to join you in a second.

ROB MOORE: Onesie, that's what it is.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, listen, if you're going to do that, go into the online room now, say hello to Rob, say hello to each other. Or you can stay here. We're going to show you a replay of a video we did earlier this week about online rooms and showing you how all that works. Or you can go get some lunch.

But whatever you choose to do, join us back live in half an hour, when we'll be starting this afternoon's activities. And I also must just tell you, if you like these online rooms, we have Student Hub Live events. We're having an essay writing workshop, where when you've got your assignments and things, you can bring them along. And we're going to talk to each other without plagiarising and share ideas and some useful tips and things to get you started thinking about unpacking your essays and watching them and getting them edited, et cetera.

So I shall leave you to go and have fun in your online rooms. I shall see very soon. Thank you for watching everything this morning that you've engaged with so willingly, so helpfully with each other. And I'll see you back in half an hour live.