Module 8: Developing a Student Guide

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Students often need guidance and support during the learning process. As a tutor you are probably familiar with the process of creating various types of student materials for the courses you deliver. Some of these materials include handouts, course outlines, questions, assignments and activities to name a few. These materials assist both tutors and learners. They assist you the tutor in the delivery of the course and they assist the learner in the process of understanding the course content and developing the skills and competencies relevant to the course.

Creating a student guide for online and distance learning is similar to the process of creating the materials discussed above. In this module you will learn about the principles and process involved in developing a student guide. You will also be given the opportunity to engage in the practical application of the principles and ideas covered in this module.

Objectives

At the end of this module you will be able to:

- Identify the characteristics of an effective student guide
- Distinguish between the types of student guides
- Discuss the principles for developing a student guide

- Develop an effective student guide

Instruction: Identify four types of learner support materials that you have previously produced for one of your courses. Explain the purpose these materials serve in aiding the learner.

What is a Student Guide?

There are various general definitions for the term *Student Guide*. However in the context of open and distance learning (ODL), a student guide is a tool that promotes independent learning, learner interactivity and deep learning in the student/learner.

A student guide is a resource that provides academic and administrative learner support throughout the course. It generally includes information about the topics or areas being covered in a course, self-study activities, examples and exercises that promote independent learning and assist the learner in further understanding of course materials.

Purpose of a Student Guide

The purpose of the student guide is to assist the student in interactive, self-directed learning. In ODL the tutor must provide support for the learner however, creating a situation of learned dependency is undesirable. Therefore, the Student Guide offers the learner an opportunity for independent learning and teaches them the invaluable skill of how to learn. The learner also develops a unique set of technical, research and critical thinking skills that will enable him/her to continue a high level of thinking and learning following the conclusion of the course.

Types of Student Guides

From the units above, we have come to see how important a student guide is in ODL. It almost plays the role of a tutor who is not there in any distance learning programme. However we must consider that programmes meet varying needs and are delivered in various modes and contexts. This has implications on the type(s) of student guide(s) that will be selected for use. In ODL we can prepare student guides in an electronic or print format

There are two (2) types of student guides:

1. Academic Guides

> This is a guide used to support the learning process directly. Typically, this type of guide includes information related to the following areas:

> 1.   Learning Strategies

2. Outcomes

3. Assessment

4. Content

5. Learning tools

2. Administrative Guides

This type of guide includes information related to the general principles and policies of the institution. The content of this type of guide will vary from institution to institution. However, critical aspects that should be included are:

1. Testing and examination regulations

2. How to obtain technical assistance

3. Means of obtaining financial assistance

4. Policies related to assignments

5. Policies related to absenteeism/dropout

Principles in Developing ODL Student Guides

We are now aware that as instructors we have prepared materials to guide students' work all the time, only they were not structured in the way that the ODL students guides should follow. The student guides in the ODL environment should follow special principles that are designed to communicate to the learners in a clear and interactive manner the information that the learners need.

Indeed, as well as being informative, a student guide should be enjoyable to learners. A student guide is not the material itself, but a tool to ensure that the learner navigates his/her way through the learning process in an effective and user-friendly manner.

Reflection

Remember, learners should ENJOY reading and using the course materials!

Rowntree(2000) highlights the importance of thinking about learners' needs when developing ODL materials. He makes critical reference to fostering learners' autonomy in order to promote their self-actualisation.

Further information about the views of Derek Rowntree can be sourced at the following website:

http://iet.open.ac.uk/pp/D.G.F.Rowntree/DL_course_develpt.html

Important Guidelines

- Write materials in a way that nurtures learning
- Use the active voice
  - The active voice creates a different tone and makes writing more lively, more dynamic and more readable. For example: 'Write sentences in the active voice' is more engaging than 'Sentences should be written in the active voice'.
- Write in a reader-friendly style
  - Use a 'tutor's voice' rather than a 'lecturer's voice' – be friendly and conversational.
  - Find a tone that is inclusive and personal, without losing academic rigour.
  - Ask questions and create a sense of interaction between you and your learners.
- Write simple rather than complex sentences. We can still communicate complex ideas in simple sentences. Generally it is easier to read and understand short sentences that flow smoothly and develop logically.
- Consider your language – If we use technical terms or jargon which students don't understand we are not writing with inclusivity in mind. If technical terms are necessary and you think that students may not understand them, re-introduce them as often as appropriate.
- Write in a way that is gender-balanced and racially sensitive.
- Make use of access devices in order to direct learners to additional information.

Further information can be obtained at the:

http://www.scu.edu.au/services/tl/pathways/pathways06/developing/developing3.html

Creating Content for ODL Student Guides

The same principles that were covered in Module 5 of the course must again be applied when creating a student guide for ODL. In developing an effective ODL student guide careful structuring and designing is required considering the varying needs and learning styles of learners. After a guide is developed and piloted, get the feedback of students and teachers to modify and refine it.

Activity 3

- You are developing a student guide. Provide examples of two ways that you would gain attention and present stimuli to support student learning in an ODL environment.

- Examine the sample guide and template provided in your *Seminar package* and evaluate it using the principles learned and the toolkit below.

Student Guide Toolkit

You should by now know the principles and steps you need to take to develop a student's guide. These principles will give you some ideas on what a toolkit for developing a student should contain. In this section we will be looking at developing a toolkit that we need to develop and use it as our checklist or toolkit. You can use this toolkit to ensure consistency and clarity of the student guide. Your toolkit is a checklist that you can refer and adhere to when developing a student guide.

Checklist/Toolkit Items

The following toolkit is organized into three stages namely:

1. Planning stage
2. Content Development stage
3. Finalising and Distribution stage

Note that each stage is a pre-requisite for the stage that follows.

Now let's take a look at what is contained in each stage. Examine the **Student Guide Checklist** given in your seminar package.

The above checklist is not exhaustive but it can help give you an idea on what to do when you are given the responsibility to develop student guides. It is very helpful to always make the learner a priority in the process. Be flexible. You can upgrade or modify your checklist from time to time depending on the context issues and requirements your institution impose. Also be reminded that this toolkit should be consistent with the principles for developing ODL study guides as mentioned earlier in this module.

Test Your Knowledge!

Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. A student guide is a resource that provides only academic learner support.
2. Opportunities for independent learning are characteristic of a student guide
3. There are two types of guides: assessment guides and administrative guides
4. In the ODL environment student guides play the role of the tutor.
5. Friendly, conversational language should be used in preparing a student guide.
6. Learners' needs are examined during the content development stage.
7. Motivational tips should be included in a student guide.
8. Visuals are a necessary criteria for developing ODL student guides

Assignment

Instructions: Develop or adapt your own student guide for a course you teach. You may use the sample guide and checklist given above. You may modify the checklist as needed.

Summary

In this module we looked at what a student guide is, its purpose and types of study guides that can be used for teaching and learning purposes in ODL. This module has also introduced you to the guiding principles that ODL educators could use in the process of developing a student guide. The section on steps in developing a guide provided some practical logical action steps (which should be in line with the set principles) that are useful in ensuring you are on the right path in the process. The content and characteristics of a study guide showed you what a guide looks like and what needs to be included in it while at the same time satisfying the related principles and purposes. The toolkit in this module is your regular reference point. It is also your checklist and measuring tool. Overall you need to remember the fact that a student

guide assists the learner in his/her journey to success in a course or program of study. Remember the information in this module is not exhaustive. You can add and modify the information in this module to suit your own context.

Links to Useful Resources

http://www.studygs.net/

http://www.british-learning.com/PDF/learnersupportguide.pdf

http://www.scu.edu.au/services/tl/pathways/pathways06/developing/developing3.html

http://www.academicresourcecenter.net/curriculum/glossary.aspx

http://www.wikieducator.org/Training_Educators_to_Design_and_Develop_ODL_Materials/Developing_a_Student_Guide

Solutions to the self-test:
1. F
2. T
3. F
4. T
5. T
6. F
7. T
8. F

References:

Rowntree, Derek (2000). Teaching for self instruction a practical guide. Nichols Pub. Co.:Michigan