# A guide to teaching online for tutors in UCD

Andrew C. Parnell andrew.parnell@ucd.ie

This short guide is intended for those who are new to tutoring in online programmes. It gives a broad idea of the duties expected of you, though the exact details should be discussed in detail at the start of the semester with the module lecturer. As the tutor for an online module, you will have the most contact with the students of anyone at UCD. It is therefore vital to ensure that neither yourself nor the students are neglected or left with any doubt as to what is expected of them.

The main duties of the tutors in an online module may include:

**Discussion boards** Most online modules will contain a discussion board. The primary role of the tutor will be to monitor and answer the queries posted there. At the start of the module you should clearly state the likely hours you will be monitoring the discussions. For example, some assessments may be due in on a Sunday, but you may only be checking the discussion boards from Monday to Friday. A standard module would need to have the discussion board checked every weekday. Be aware that the discussion board at the start of a module may have low participation but this can quickly ramp up once homeworks begin. If there are inappropriate comments, or questions that you cannot answer, you should point these out to the module lecturer.

**Email** In an online module, it is unavoidable that some contact with students will be via email. It is usually best if they post most queries to the discussion boards. When you need to give feedback to students (and individual feedback is encouraged) you can do this via email or through the Blackboard system.

**Marking** The amount and type of marking will depend on the structure of the module. Some modules will consist of only Blackboard-based online assessments which will be marked automatically. In these cases you should be dealing with queries about answers and offering feedback (possibly in the discussion boards or over email). Treat these interactions as you would a normal tutorial; try not to give the answer away but lead them towards it. Other modules may require amounts of hand-marked projects or other weekly submitted assignments. If required, you should input the marks for these, and appropriate feedback, through the Blackboard Grade Centre.

**Monitoring attendance** The drop out rate for students in online modules is usually higher than those taking a more traditional format. Early in the module, you should be looking to see if the students are not submitting the early assessments and watching the initial lecture videos. As the module progresses you should be watching to see if certain students are falling behind or failing assessments. You should check the performance of students once every week and report any worrisome students to the module lecturer. If the module lecturer has turned on the 'Statistics Tracking' options on Blackboard, you can see which students have watched the videos by clicking on the arrow next to the item in question and choosing 'View Statistics Report'.

**Invigilating exams** Because the online students do not attend UCD, they are often unfamiliar with exam protocol and, especially in computing modules, run into unexpected difficulties. We have found that the exams run most smoothly when the tutor for the module also invigilates the final exam. The tutor often has familiarity with the material and the students' issues, and can usually solve basic problems with the exam without further recourse. The module lecturer should always be available by phone in case of emergencies.

If you have any further queries, or wish to add anything to this document, please email me.