The Continuing Studies Instructor’s Welcome Message

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Continuing Studies instructors: Murray Cornish, Colleen Kawalilak, Mary Kennedy, Tracy Kirkham, Candace Matelic, Karen Lee, Laurie Phipps, Anna Marie White, and Julie Williams who shared their thoughts with us on this topic and to Murray, Candace, Laurie and Anna Marie for the examples from their courses.

The ‘Welcome Message’

A ‘welcome message’ is a great way to establish your online presence and it will help to reduce the psychological ‘distance’ between you and your students. In our Continuing Studies courses, it is one of the first documents that students read. Here are some suggestions, based on our instructors’ good practice, for constructing your welcome message:

▪ Introduce yourself using an informal, friendly tone
▪ Convey enthusiasm about teaching the course
▪ Provide an overview of the course topics
▪ Set out your expectations for the kinds of interaction you want to have with your students and the kinds of interactions you hope students will have with their classmates
▪ Remind students that if they require technical assistance during the course, they can contact the “DE Support Desk”

Examples of Welcome Messages

These messages, prepared by Continuing Studies instructors for recent course offerings, illustrate many of the good practices described above. Thanks to our instructors for sharing their approaches.

Murray Cornish, instructor, Business Administration Certificate

BMBA110 Business Writing > Messages from Instructor> Murray’s welcome and opening remarks

Hello everyone and welcome to Business Writing On line.

I have enjoyed preparing this 13-week course, and it is my hope that it will be a most productive learning experience for all of us. If this is your first encounter with distance learning, you are about to discover the challenges and rewards of this dynamic and uniquely diverse medium.
The nature of distance learning lends a new perspective to the “getting-to-know-you” process. As you may never meet your classmates face-to-face, the ideas, opinions, and feelings contained in your written messages will not only allow you to share your knowledge, experience, and perspective; they will also provide you with valuable opportunities to become acquainted with your fellow students. I think you will find it quite interesting to see everyone’s “cyber-personality” take shape. Truly, for the next 13 weeks, “you are what you write.”

**What to expect - roles and responsibilities**

Although students may be physically separated, this course places considerable emphasis on peer assistance and feedback. Frequent communication with the other students by e-mail and telephone (when practical) is encouraged, and it is essential for a number of the learning activities. I also encourage you to find additional ways to reinforce and enhance the social aspect that is so important in the peer learning process. For example, you might e-mail information about useful websites, reference books or pertinent newspaper or magazine articles that you to fellow students. Discussions between classmates concerning real workplace communication challenges are also very beneficial.

There will be group work learning activities in many of the units; the first such learning activity will be in Unit 3. You will be assigned to your learning activity group at the beginning of those units, and you will be required to keep pace with the other members and participate on a regular basis throughout. You will find the discussions for your group under a forum identified for that purpose (more directions on that later); this is where you and your group members will “meet” and post messages for one another. Your group or its members will not be graded for these activities, but your input will of course influence your overall participation grade.

Distance learning requires students to accept a higher level of personal responsibility than does a traditional classroom setting. For most this is a positive experience and one that leads to a greater sense of personal accomplishment. Please make certain that you keep track of learning activity and review question due dates as well as assignment deadlines. The course is, as is any successful scheduled instruction program, “a work in progress”. Accordingly, along the way we may make minor changes to scheduling and/or content in keeping with time constraints, student needs, and other variables. Such changes will be kept to a minimum, but it is the responsibility of each student to periodically review content and schedules to remain current.

As you will be interacting exclusively with each other throughout the term, certain aspects of the roles and responsibilities need to be emphasized. The peer learning approach that is critical to the success and enjoyment of this course will require you to be very active in providing the necessary feedback and support. Frequent concise comments and critiques are more helpful than sporadic, wordy responses (please note that a critique contains praise and encouragement as well as suggestions for improvement). Because of the peer approach, it is usually not possible to work ahead in the group activities. Try to keep yourself moving at a pace similar to that of
your partner(s) and other course participants, as it will make it a much more efficient and enjoyable experience.

**Guidelines and suggestions for communicating on Moodle**

Almost all of our communicating will occur in the Moodle environment. Because of the number of participants, we must keep in mind one of the most important characteristics of effective written communication: being concise. A part of your final grade will be based on an evaluation of your input to the discussions, and your ability to communicate clearly and concisely will be very important. Quality will definitely be more critical than quantity. Unless otherwise requested, please keep your entries to a maximum length of two to three concise paragraphs (i.e. three to four sentences per paragraph).

**Please note:** in the “Subject” line of each message posted include your first name in some way, for example, as I have for this message “Murray’s welcome and opening comments”. This will allow us to immediately identify the author of the message. Please remember to do this with every posting.

Although we will be concerned with the mechanics of the business documents we are learning how to write, please don’t hesitate to be comfortably informal and conversational in your postings. Try to be concise as we noted, but express your ideas freely. Don’t be too hard on yourself or edit your thoughts prematurely (i.e. “that’s a silly thing to say – they’ll think I’m nuts, crazy, silly, stupid, etc.”); as long as you are considerate and tasteful, we want to hear what you have to say.

**From me to you - instructor feedback**

As your instructor, I will be dropping into the “classroom” frequently to read your postings. I will not always make comments or provide immediate feedback, but when I do, you will usually find my input under the appropriate group discussion for that unit. We want to ensure that everyone benefits from the ongoing dialogue, so it is important that the majority of our communications occur in our Moodle environment. Only when you feel that your message to the instructor needs to be confidential will you be expected to use e-mail. Here again I would ask that you try to be as concise as possible. I will respond at the earliest opportunity. Please use the same practice with the subject line of your email communications – that is, include your name. For any technical questions or problems such as access difficulties or advice on how to work with the course formats and functions, please consult the Online Guide or contact the help desk.

**Important scheduling details (please read this carefully as it is different than you may be used to)**

With one or two exceptions we will be working through the study units from the Wednesday to the following Tuesday of each week (units 3 and 8 both span a two week period). Within the unit, you will find details as to when specific postings, such as exercises, unit review questions, and letter drafts
are due. The due dates for graded assignments are also listed; please note that these assignments are to be submitted via the submission uploading tool, an easy process explained at the end of each assignment.

What to bring to the party

Distance Learning is definitely one of those educational opportunities where, as they say, you get out what you put in. There are five key ingredients that you need to bring to the keyboard for the “put in” part of the process: an open mind, a willingness to share and participate, respect for your peers, a kind and supportive heart, and last but certainly not least, a good sense of humor.

Although the course “officially” starts on Wednesday, January 11, 2012, we’d like to get things underway with some introductions. To tell us a little about yourself, please proceed to the next instructor posting titled “Getting to know you”.

I will be posting an introduction to the first unit on either Tuesday evening, January 10, or early on Wednesday, January 10.

Enjoy!

Sincerely,
Murray

Anna Marie White, instructor, Public Relations Diploma

HPPR402 Effective Communication Tools > Instructor Messages > Welcome!

Hi everyone and welcome to Effective Communication Tools HPPR402. It's great to 'see' so many familiar faces again. I think just about half of you were just in HPRR407 with me so welcome back to Moodle (boy, that was a quick break, wasn't it!). Others of you I am meeting for the first time and I look forward to getting to know you as well.

This course is a bit like a PR boot camp: we attempt to cover all tactical aspects of PR and equip you with the tools you need to succeed in our field. It’s is a 'doing' course so expect to stay engaged and participating. There is ample opportunity for both emerging and well-seasoned PR practitioners to share of your expertise and also to gain more from our time together here.

If you haven’t taken a course with me before then you will soon learn that my expectations for your involvement- and eventual success- are high. But I also expect the same from my own involvement and endeavour to be 'present' to help you in whatever way you need during the course. Contrary to how an electronic medium may feel, I am a real human being who expects
to teach, learn from and communicate with other real human beings - so please feel very comfortable as you join us here in HPPR402. We are on a learning journey together.

In your first visit here, I hope you'll take some time to peruse the course site to get a feel for how the course unfolds. Based on past experiences of students, I would strongly suggest you go through the entire course at the outset so you know how to pace yourself and plan for success. Falling behind is the #1 reason students struggle so I would encourage you to keep that in mind. The work needed to succeed in HPPR402 is not 'hard', but it will require consistent, high-quality engagement from each of you.

Please check out the assignments and activities section and don't forget to pay close attention to the participation section. If you haven't yet, also take a few minutes to listen to my audio introduction for this course to get an idea of what lies ahead and what I hope to see from students.

I tend to do client work in the daytime so I'm usually online in the evenings Pacific time but there is no pressure to show up here when I do. Moodle provides a great platform for you to participate at your convenience and I hope you take advantage of that. However, to be successful in this course, I encourage you to set up a regular time to log in and make "Moodling" a part of your routine. It can be very difficult to maintain the course momentum if your participation is sporadic and you will likely find yourself inadvertently letting deadlines go by. Some people like to participate every day- and log into Moodle when they check their daily email- but that is not a requirement. The general time expected for the course is 6 to 8 hours per week so you can spread that out however best works for you in your situation.

I will do my best to be available and responsive to your needs as the course progresses. Without a doubt, the fastest way to reach me--and to get a response--is via the messaging function in Moodle. My computer is rarely ever away from me. (In the past, I have had employees ask if it is surgically attached to my knees. There are some days that I myself wonder if it will come off.) Telephone is a very, very distant second. If you have a question that you think other students might also have, please feel free to start a new discussion in the questions for instructor section. You'd be surprised how many times I get the same question in student emails- so don't be shy if you are the first to post.

Feel free to post your own introduction in Activity 1 as soon as you are ready. The sooner we get going, the sooner the fun begins. Yes, I am serious. PR is FUN. Learning is FUN. If you don't already believe that, then I hope to convince you.😊

Onwards!

Laurie Phipps, instructor, Business Administration Certificate
Hi everyone,

I’m excited to be back teaching this course after being away for a couple of years. I wanted to begin this course by providing you with a sense of my approach and what you can expect to be engaged in over this term.

Economics is about “doing” rather than about “observing.” To that end, the design of this course is intended to encourage you to “do” economics. What I mean by that is to learn and to understand economics by using it as often as possible to analyze and recognize relationships in current events. Central to this course is discussion. Most weeks we will introduce a topic from economics and require discussion through the discussion forums that as often as possible will begin with something straight from the day’s news. We want to discuss how current events and policy discussions reflect economic ideas, concepts, and models. I will introduce many but I also encourage you to bring stories and events that you are interested in as well. I believe that through discussion you can refine your own understanding and perhaps challenge your own previous thinking about policy and events. It is precisely this process that we mean when we talk about learning.

A note about the textbook: the text is there to provide a foundation for many of the ideas, concepts, and models that we will want to use. The textbook provides examples and explanations of the technical aspects of economic theory. But it is not these technical details that we want to focus on. We want to use the theory to inform our “doing,” our analysis of current events and public policy choices at provincial, federal, and international levels. So, while the text is important — this course is not about learning the text but rather using the text to learn economics through thinking about current events.

The most important thing here is that we should have fun - yes, economics can be fun. We should indulge our curiosity about the world and about economics, and we should explore our own interests in a deeper and more thoughtful way - thinking like an economist. We should also challenge ourselves to question theories, policy decisions, and particularly our current thinking.

I’m looking forward to working with, and learning from, each and every one of you. Come Monday, the journey begins.

Laurie

Candace Matelic, instructor, Cultural Management Diploma
This is our virtual classroom for the next several months, and as such, should be a busy and dynamic place. So, let’s get started this week to establish a solid foundation for the course, by doing the following:

- introduce ourselves and get introduced to one another
- become familiar with using the Moodle classroom
- get an overview of the content and scope of the course
- get a sense of the pace of the course
- find our partner organization and introduce it to other participants

Where to start? I suggest reading over the Course Guide and this first unit—(I am assuming that you have ordered and received your packet of print materials—if not, contact the bookstore immediately). Then write a short introduction about yourself, and post it and a photograph of yourself on the introductions section (Introducing Yourself). If you add a photo to your profile, then it will appear whenever you contribute to the course. ...

Please read your Moodle Startup Kit to become familiar with the features of our classroom. ... We’ll be using a polling feature right away to communicate the time zone where we live, and also a wiki (collaborative learning environment) for a few assignments, so that should be fun.

For many of you, this is your first experience with a distance learning format, so it may take a bit of time before the cyber format feels comfortable. This is the week to experiment and test it out—so go ahead. Before this course is over, I assure you that every one of us (me included) will make mistakes as we post things to the forums. If you are nervous about this, then my suggestion is to first compose your message in your word processor, and then cut and paste it into the Forums. That way you can save it as you go, and won’t worry about losing anything if you inadvertently hit a wrong key. ...

In addition, let me offer some introductory comments on the structure of the course Forum and its discussions. You will see that each unit is set up as a separate series of threads or discussions, called forums. All messages to each of these discussions will be available to you throughout the course and you can add to them at any time. However, once we get into the course, you will see that the Forum activity progresses from each unit’s discussions to the next unit’s discussions. There is always a bit of lag because of time zone differences, and our busy schedules—balancing work, school, and family.

As you post to the forums, please give each of your messages a subject title (topic). If your message is in a continuation of a topic, post it as a reply. Since I am sure we will have lots and lots of messages, this will help in their organization so that we all can keep track of our conversations and find them again later. Sometimes you will hear me refer to these topic-focused conversations as “threads.” I will be monitoring the cyber classroom and will assist with moving messages if they are posted to the wrong place by mistake, and if folks begin to discuss a number of different topics within a discussion, I may reorganize and re-title them so that it is easier for you to find them.
You are reading this in the “Instructor Messages” forum. It is a good idea to check here regularly (every time you log into the site) just to check and see whether there are any important messages from me.

Please be thoughtful about your posts—keep your comments to the subject matter at hand, and please try to refrain from jumping ahead to topics that we will cover in subsequent units. If there is a burning thought on your mind, jot it down and save it in your computer documents until the appropriate unit—that way you won’t forget it. We are all looking for quality, not quantity. However, note that there is also a “Coffee Break” forum for you to communicate back and forth about anything, from current events, mutual contacts and support, or other subjects.

**IMPORTANT:** if you find that you are having any **technical problems**, PLEASE don’t panic. **Contact the online help folks at UVic** rather than Miranda or me. They are wonderful folks and know much more about the technical side of things (and how to solve your problems) than we do. ...

I’ll close for now, as I know you have a lot of other things to read and do as we begin the course. I’m looking forward to this journey with all of you.

Candace