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## **AOU** Tutor handbook

## Preface

Welcome to Arab Open University!

You are now part of one of the most distinguished Open Universities in the Arab region. Established in the year 2001 under the leadership of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, Arab Open University has grown into an institution of repute offering education through its blended learning model. It is at par with the international standards offering graduate and undergraduate programmes in partnership with Open University –UK. AOU is spread across eight different countries and currently has a student strength exceeding almost 30,000.

This booklet is an effort to guide you in adapting to the unique Open Learning teaching and learning environment. It also provides you the necessary information of what is expected of you as an academic staff member. The booklet is written in a simple FAQ (frequently asked questions) format for your easy reference.

Hope you find it useful and informative.

Wishing you the very best as we welcome you on board at AOU.

Best Wishes,

Quality Assurance & Accreditation Department

## General introduction

### What is Open Learning?

'Open Learning' is a collective term used to describe institutional practices and programmatic initiatives that broaden access to the learning and training, traditionally offered through formal education systems. These include, but is not limited to distance learning, electronic learning and blended learning, the approach AOU adopts. Open learning system is a flexible system that offers a number of advantages to both learners and to providers of opportunities for learning. Problems such as distance and time, which are barriers to conventional learning, are overcome in open learning.

### What is blended learning?

Blended learning' at AOU is a fit for purpose approach, wherein student learning needs are met through a combination of:

#### 1 Self-study package

the study material provided at AOU enables students' self-studying to a large extent. They are designed in a manner that students are able to integrate information on their own.

#### 2 Tutorials

tutorials are used to facilitate student learning at AOU. As opposed to the conventional learning wherein students are taught. The tutorials at AOU facilitate and assist student learning thus encouraging independent learning skills.

### 3 Office Hours

Office hours provide students the direct opportunity to communicate physically with tutors before or after the tutorial. Students use office hours to seek help related to their course matters.

### 4 Electronic learning resources and systems

Electronic learning resources as Learning Management Systems (LMS), E-library and Student Information Systems (SIS) form a part of the teaching and learning process.

## What is the philosophy of AOU on which it operates?

AOU is primarily based on the philosophy of 'access to education for all' which it meets through its wider access arrangements and these include widening access to education across the Arab region, flexible learning years and hours, and blended learning approach.

## Who can study at AOU?

AOU was established with a mission of making education possible for all those in the region who aspire to continue their education irrespective of the age, nationality gender or creed. AOU is currently spread across nine different countries namely Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Palestine.

## What are the various programmes offered at Arab Open University?

The Arab Open University offers programmes at both Undergraduate and Post-graduate levels:

Undergraduate level – OU- UK Validated Programmes:

### B.A in Business Studies

- Management
- Systems
- Economics
- Marketing
- Accounting
- Finance/Microfinance
- Human Resources

### B.A in English Language & Literature Studies

- Language and Literature Studies
- English language and Literature – Translation

### B.Sc in Information Technology and Computing

- Information Technology and Computing
- Information and Communications Technology
- Computing
- Computing with Business Development
- Networking and Security

Post Graduate level – OU –UK Validated Programmes:

### Master's in Business Administration (MBA)

- MBA
- MBA –Finance
- MBA – HRM

## M.A in English Literature

## MA in TEFL

## M.Sc Computing

- M.Sc Software Development pathway
- M.Sc Information Security and Forensics Pathway

## M.Ed in Education Technology

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### Undergraduate AOU Programmes

- BA in Media Programme
  - Bachelor's in Graphic, Multimedia and Design
  - Bachelor's in Finance/ Microfinance
  - Bachelor's in Accounting
  - B.A in Education.
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## What is the medium of instruction in which the programmes are offered?

The medium of instruction for all Open University – UK validated Programmes is in English. However, a few of the AOU programmes that are taught in Arabic may use Arabic as the medium of instruction. Tutors teaching any of the OU Validated courses are required to tutor ONLY in English. Use of any other native language to tutor must be avoided at all times.

## What is the duration of study for the degree to be awarded?

Unlike the conventional Universities, students can earn their undergraduate degree within twenty-four semesters or twelve years for undergraduate programmes. The period of study for the Master degree programmes is three years.

## What is the degree that students earn on completion of these programmes?

On completion of these programmes at AOU, the student gets a Bachelor's or a Master's degree based on the course being pursued, with a dual certificate one that is validated by the Open University- UK and the other by Arab Open University and accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education of the host country.

## Students

### Who are going to be my students?

It is important to understand your students before embarking on the tutoring process as students at AOU come from diverse backgrounds. At AOU, admission is open to all students irrespective of age, nationality, gender, marital status or religion. AOU believes in providing 'equal opportunities and respect for diversity' and hence in your class you may find a heterogeneous group of students ranging from an age group of 60 – 18 yrs. All students must be treated equally with no judgments placed upon them.

### How often will I meet my students during the course of one semester?

For each course being offered at AOU, there are specific number of tutorial hours as per the credit hour requirements. This could vary from being weekly to biweekly tutorials, depending on the course credit hour requirements, branch arrangements and local accreditation specifications you would be asked to tutor wherein you would meet with your students face to face. You would also meet with students during office hours and more if need be.

### How does a student decide on studying a particular course?

On procuring an admission to AOU, the student in the first semester is required to take language courses in Arabic and English that are mandatory. The student is offered various levels in these courses depending on the scores in the language placement tests. Specific courses pertaining to the programme that the student is enrolled to study are offered based on the academic advising and the pre-requisite completion. The courses a student takes are tailored to meet the demands of the programme at different levels of completion.

### What should I do if I find a student completely unready for a course?

As a tutor, it is your primary responsibility to identify students' strength and weaknesses in facilitating the learning process. You may do so in the course of the tutorial, office hours or based on the student performance in assessment. If you deem a student unfit to take the course, you may refer the student to his/her academic advisor and to the Student Affairs Department for academic guidance. You may also bring the student case to the notice of your Branch Course Coordinator (BCC) and Student Affairs Department.

### Who are academic advisors?

Academic advisors are full time faculty members whose responsibilities include but not limited to academic advising. If you are a full time academic staff, you will be entrusted with this responsibility of academic advising. The academic advisor serves as a counselor of the student's educational experience and provides timely and accurate advising on academic and career matters (refer to 'Academic Advising Policy and Procedure')

### After having registered for a course, can a student decide to drop the course at any time of the year?

After having registered for the course, the student is allowed to drop the course only within the specific period allocated to do so. If the student has not commenced taking the course then the student is allowed to drop the case within the time specified in the academic calendar but if the student has already taken the course for the semester but yet needs to drop, then he/she may do so one week before the commencement of the final exam period. This may be done as per the university regulations and documentations required.

## How does a student get registered in a certain section?

Registering into a certain section is completely the prerogative of the student, depending on the convenience of time, section and preference.

## Is the student allowed to change the section at any point of time during the semester?

Once the student has registered into a section the student may be able to transfer into another section citing adequate and justified reasons to do so within a specific time. The student may do so within the first month of the semester having begun, with full and complete knowledge of yourself and the section to which he/she is being transferred. There must be proper documentation of the same, a copy of which must be available with you too.

## How do I communicate with my students?

Effective communication to facilitate student learning is placed a great value and therefore it is closely monitored. You are expected to communicate with students not only during tutorials but also during office hours and virtually through Learning Management Systems (LMS). Please note that LMS is an interactive tool that you would use to enhance student learning and may use to post supplementary material, post announcements, post and access assessments and grades and to communicate with students.

## How should I handle student grievances?

At AOU, we have a well-organized platform to address student grievances. Student grievances are treated mainly in two categories that is: the student appeals and complaints system. Appeals are mainly academic and related to

course grades. Complaints are related to student dissatisfaction with teaching and learning facilities or University services and resources. All student appeals and complaints are to be filed online by the student using the appeals and complaints system. You may direct students to file any form of grievance electronically through the online system or refer the student-to-student affairs office for further assistance. Within your role as an academic advisor, too you would be addressing some of the student grievances at an informal level.

## What is my role related to safeguarding issues on campus?

You must know that AOU has a robust policy on 'safeguarding' and that of 'addressing harassment' that clearly defines the same. There are also designated teams on campus that address these issues. In case, a student approaches you with any of these issues you are requested to direct them accordingly. However, if you are a designated member of the safeguarding team then you are required to comply with the rules and appropriately respond.

## What should I keep in mind while dealing with students?

Since we have a diverse group of students coming from different backgrounds and responsibilities in life, it is essential that as a tutor you:

- Need to come across as approachable and non-judgmental.
- Always be proactive in helping them with their academic challenges.
- Avoid any kind of confrontation with students at all times.
- Do not physically touch them in the event of any confrontation.
- Treat every student with respect.
- Do not use intimidating, racist, discriminatory or judgmental language.
- If a student does misbehave, report the case immediately to your BCC, PC or the Student Affairs Department.

- You may use your discretion and classify student information as confidential unless otherwise stated in regulations.

## Tutorials

### What does tutoring at AOU involve?

Tutoring at AOU would require you to:

**Facilitate student learning:** at AOU it is expected that students are self-reliant in their learning process and therefore spend a great deal of their time trying to understand and learn from the material provided. As a tutor, you would be required to facilitate their understanding and learning wherein a student encounters difficulty.

**Helping and encouraging student learning process:** as a tutor you may come across students who may be resuming studies after a considerable number of years and in such cases it is important that you motivate students to do their best towards realizing their ultimate academic objective.

**Assessing student learning through one on one interaction and formal assessment systems and providing constructive feedback:** assessment of student performance through various well-structured processes as the continuous assessments and final exams. You would facilitate student learning through constructive feedback on their assessments.

**Tracing student progress and providing academic guidance and counseling:** as a tutor you would also be required to provide academic guidance and counseling to students on the courses that they may opt for.

### What should I expect as a tutor in the first week after my appointment?

On appointment as a full time tutor you would be entitled to information about AOU, its policies and procedures, your roles and responsibilities and your entitlements as tutor. In the first week of your being part of AOU, you would be provided with a generic and specific induction workshop concerning teaching at AOU. You would also be given training on LMS and E-library.

### How are tutorials at AOU scheduled?

As a tutor, you would be allocated a certain number of sections well in advance that is mutually convenient to the students and you. Each tutorial hour is for one- two hours weekly or biweekly depending on the course credit hours.

### What shall I do if I am unable to attend a tutorial?

If you are unable to attend a tutorial due to an unforeseen circumstance, you are immediately required to intimate your BCC of your absence. You may also communicate the same to your students and announce with the knowledge of your BCC the date and time for make-up tutorial. All missed tutorials have to be compensated for with a make-up tutorial.

### How can I be an effective tutor at AOU?

While your subject knowledge and skills in delivering those are of primary importance, you must also bear in mind that you are now part of a non-conventional learning system that requires blended approach and therefore you would be facilitating student learning that is resulting from direct tutorials, e-learning resources, self-learning and the printed text available to them. t

You are also expected to mentor, advice and provide all necessary support to help your students It is therefore necessary that you bear the following in mind:

- Be enthusiastic.
- Be approachable, and accessible for consultation.
- Acknowledge students' as individuals, value students and creates a welcoming environment.
- Be confident, organized and prepared.
- Be positive about students and student learning, and not critical.
- Be knowledgeable about relevant course topics, course details and organizational issues (e.g. policies, resources and services).
- Give clear explanations (of learning material and assessment criteria and standards, and be willing to discuss them with individual students).
- Use a variety of teaching and learning methods
- Generate purposeful activity on the part of students (for learning that is important for the class).
- Demonstrate the relevance of the content
- Utilize the knowledge and experiences of individuals in the group
- Spend time in class listening
- Manage group dynamics well
- Treat students equitably and fairly
- Facilitate student interaction (and has appropriate resources/facilities prepared, such as the set- up of the room)
- Do not assume prior knowledge, and encourages students to ask questions without fear of ridicule
- Be supportive, take some interest in each student's progress, and give constructive feedback to individuals not just the whole class
- Set learning contracts with students and adhere to it.

- Maintain the highest form of academic integrity, which includes demonstrating complete compliance to university rules and regulations and projecting the institution in a positive manner.
- Give clear information and instructions to students learning material, assessment standards, expected standards, and assist them achieving them.
- Demonstrate awareness of knowledge of the latest developments related to the course topics, course details and of organizational policies.
- Be at ease with the use of technology in delivering tutorials.
- Adhere to the deadlines set towards receiving and returning corrected assessments.
- Be punctual to tutorials.
- Maintain a pleasant demeanor and be dressed appropriately.
- Reflect on your own performance as a teacher and seeks to continually improve.



## Student assessments

### What is the assessment system at AOU?

At AOU assessments are formative and summative and are conducted through the continuous course assessment and course final exam assessments. The assessments comprise two continuous assessments; one Mid Term Assessment (MTA) and one Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) that comprise 50% of the total assessment mark and 50% are allocated to the final exam. The student is assessed out of a total of 100 marks distributed equally on both components of the assessment. The assignments have a prescheduled date and time, which is announced to students through the formal means of communication used at AOU. At the time of admission, a student is well informed about the commitment required towards studying and assessment processes.

### What is an MTA?

Midterm assessment (MTA) is a test administered in class. The MTA is standardized and centralized assessment system duly approved by the Deanship in consultation with the External Examiners. The MTA is a test formatted and designed to test the knowledge of students similar to that of the final exam. It comprises 30% of the students' continuous assessment grades. Each course has single MTA every semester.

MTAs have well weighed questions with corresponding marking guidelines that tutors use to make impartial judgments in grading student's work.

### What is a TMA?

TMA or tutor marked assignments are an important learning and assessment tool in the Open Learning System and are take home assignments. TMAs test and help build students skills in academic writing, critical thinking, and problem solving, analyzing, and researching. TMAs vary in format depending

on the nature of the course. TMAs like MTAs are centralized and standardized and are designed at the Deanship level with due approval of the External examiner.

### What do I do if I find a student has plagiarized?

There are clearly stated plagiarism policies and regulations at AOU. Plagiarism is stringently and fairly dealt with at AOU and to do so there is a clear policy that states the penalty for students at different levels and degrees of plagiarism. You may find the concerned information at the university website, which is [www.aou.edu.kw](http://www.aou.edu.kw). As a tutor, you need to make your students aware of the plagiarism policy and its penalties and dissuade them from doing so in any form.

### What is the process of assessment and grading?

At AOU, we follow stringent assessment and grading practices that essentially entail the process of group/double marking. Each examination script is group marked by you and other tutors teaching the course. Before embarking on the group marking exercise, the marking guidelines are exhaustively discussed by the Branch Course Coordinator (BCC) and course tutors and samples of the scripts would be group marked. The BCC for the course would be responsible for monitoring the process. Your feedback on the scripts is extremely important to student learning and hence is used as an important evaluation tool of your performance. As a tutor, you would be provided with adequate training on assessment feedback process.

## How are student grades recorded and communicated?

Student grades are recorded and communicated differently for the continuous and final assessments. After having graded the TMAs, you are required to post the marked TMAs (as it is submitted online) along with the grades and exhaustive feedback on the LMS for the students to be able to view it. This is done within a specific time of having received the TMA. Similarly, for the MTA, grades are posted on the LMS within two weeks of having administered the MTA. The final grades are however posted on the Student Information System (SIS) directly and are announced on a specific day and date by the examinations department after being duly approved by the Central Examination Committee.

## How is the quality of grading and assessment ensured at AOU given the large number of students and tutoring approaches that may take place?

In order to maintain the uniformity of standards in assessment across the University branches, AOU has a well- designed assessment monitoring system. All tutors are subject to close monitoring of their grading practices.

All OU validated courses have External Examiners supervising and overseeing course compliance to assessment and evaluation process as per expected standards. The external examiners are third party members with no subjective affiliation to AOU or OU-UK and are responsible for ensuring that of assessment and grading ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes and meet standard benchmarks. The external examiners scrutinize samples of scripts graded by tutors and feedback is given to ensure fair and objective practice. At the University level, for every assessment you would receive a marking guideline that would be discussed in detail with your Branch Course

Coordinator before embarking on grading. The BCC would closely examine your scripts for marking before endorsing it for grades to be posted.

## What is my role in executing these to the best of my ability?

As a tutor, it is important that you clearly communicate to the students the importance of assignments as a summative and formative learning tool. You are also expected to inform the students on policies concerning the same on compliance to the deadline, grades and results and plagiarism penalties.

## Tutor responsibilities and duties

## What is the academic staff structure of a programme ?

The academic staff structure of a programme at the branch level is in the order of Programme Coordinators (PC), Branch Course Coordinators (BCC) and tutors (full and part time) with the PC as the head of the Department.

## How are each of these positions different?

While all of the above (PCs, BCCs and Tutors) are all academic staff members and their prime responsibility is to teach and tutor students, the roles and responsibilities vary between the amount of academic and administrative duties dispersed to those holding these positions.

## Who is a PC and what do the responsibilities entail?

A PC is normally a position given to a tutor who has had considerable years of experience at AOU handling various courses and course coordinating some of them. Ideally, a PC is someone with an academic qualification of Ph.D. or more but in exceptional cases wherein a tutor has demonstrated excellent tutoring and administrative skills or has contributed to programme development and research can be considered for the position without a Ph.D.

The PC is the head of the department and is responsible for:

- Providing tutorial support to students as prescribed in the load.
- Closely working with the Deanship in all matters related to student data, assessment, examinations and external examiners reports.
- Delivering reports on all aspects of programme delivery and progress towards quality assurance as the Annual Programme Evaluation, Internal Review, SWOT analysis and any other reports requested for.
- Projection of departmental budget.
- Projection of new sections and books every semester
- Ensure new staff induction before the beginning of first Tutorial.
- Ensure fair distribution of workload and teaching hours.
- Be well informed of any policy changes that affect students directly or indirectly.
- To ensure dissemination of all pertaining information to tutors as course calendar, meeting schedule, standby tutorial arrangement in case of absence, appraisal form etc.
- Ensuring fair implementation of tutorial assessment procedures as tutorial monitoring, TMA monitoring and tutor appraisal.
- Regular meetings with BCCs and tutors.
- Ensure and encourage academic integrity amongst staff and students.

## What responsibilities does it entail to be a Branch Course Coordinator (BCC)?

If you are appointed as the branch course coordinator, then you would be the first reference point for the course tutors. The BCC too like the PC has both administrative and academic responsibilities. The BCC is appointed at the branch level in consultation with the Deanship.

**Duties and Responsibilities:**

- Tutorial/peer monitoring and reporting of all tutors teaching the course.
- Ensuring compliance to marking procedures and systems – group marking, compliance to marking guideline, completing the course review (CR2 and CR 3) forms.
- Ensuring the availability of course calendar and TMA on time.
- Conducting periodic meeting with tutors on student progress, tutorial challenges, compliance to attendance, plagiarism policy etc.
- Contributing to the question bank towards TMA, MTA and Final exam.
- Liaising with the GCC and PC on all matters related to the course delivery, student learning, and external examiners feedback.
- Ensure and encourage academic integrity amongst staff and students.

## What would be my responsibilities as a tutor at AOU?

Tutors at Arab Open University are the direct contact point with the beneficiaries; the students and hence they have one of the most important responsibilities in the University. It is important that a tutor has a clear and definite understanding of his/ her roles and responsibilities that come along being a tutor in a blended learning system at AOU. Your roles and responsibilities include:

- Primary responsibility is to facilitate student learning process
- Maintain academic integrity (information divulgence, commitment, statement on Univ./colleague, abuse of student trust)
- Compliance to AOU policies on teaching and assessment

Maintaining office hours

Contribute to the preparation of MTA and final exam questions

Compliance to use of LMS

Compliance to maintaining student attendance

Compliance to the University code of professional conduct

## Is tutoring my only responsibility?

You need to know that besides your regular allocated tutorial hours you are also expected to be part of the following:

### Office hours

for every tutorial offered to a group of students there is an hour of office hours allocated. This is generally scheduled before or after the tutorial, wherein students can see you for any concerns regarding their course.

### Departmental Meetings

You are required to participate in every departmental meeting that is called for during the semester and these could be called for either by the PC or by the BCC. Departmental meetings would also include pre-marking meetings, group-marking exercise meetings etc.

### Academic Advising

As a full time tutor, you are required to act as academic advisors to students guiding them with their course work and study plan. You are required to track the student progression and appropriately advise the student on the registration for courses according to the programme study plans.

## Workshops and trainings

AOU is in the constant pursuit of enhancing tutor skills towards effective learning environment and staff development. In this regard, workshops and training programmes are organized for. It is expected of you to proactively participate in these workshops.

## Would I be required to communicate with the Deanship?

No, as a tutor you do not directly communicate with the Deanship. For your respective course, the communication with the Deanship would happen through the BCC who would further communicate with the General Course Coordinator (GCC).

## Who is a General Course Coordinator (GCC)?

The GCC is appointed by the Deanship and is responsible towards coordinating all course presentation matters with the Dean and External Examiners directly. At the internal level the GCCs is responsible for designing the course calendar, course continuous and final assessments and overseeing all aspects of student performance and tutor delivery of the course across AOU branches. The GCC communicates with the External Examiners on matters of assessment and represents the course during the Course Assessment Committee Meetings at the end of each semester.

## What is my right to information to fulfill my duties and responsibilities effectively?

To fulfill your responsibilities effectively, you are entitled to the following information:

- Tutorial schedule
- E-library training
- Course calendar
- Course Material
- Induction to tutoring at AOU
- University Relevant bylaws
- LMS training

## Tutor monitoring and evaluation

### How would I be appraised or evaluated for my work?

You are holistically evaluated for your work using different systems of well-designed appraisal and evaluation systems that include the academic appraisal, your participation and contribution through the TMA/MTA monitoring, tutorial/peer monitoring, and student feedback.

### What is academic appraisal?

Academic appraisal is an appraisal system used to evaluate the soundness of your knowledge and skills in delivery. This appraisal system is crucial to deciding the efficacy of your services rendered to the University in terms of the continued need for your services or otherwise. This appraisal process also helps you and the university identify your training needs. The academic appraisal is conducted once a year.

## What is TMA/MTA monitoring?

To maintain uniformity of standards in student assessment TMA/MTA grading practices are evaluated by the BCC of the course. The BCC remarks on the criteria set to assess your TMA/MTA marking assessment standards. This process takes place every semester for the courses you teach.

## What is peer/tutorial monitoring?

TMA/peer monitoring is a collegiate approach to identifying your strengths and weaknesses in delivering the course content during tutorials.

## What is student feedback?

AOU recognizes the importance of student views and feedback. For this purpose an online student's views survey is posted on LMS during each semester wherein students are expected to give feedback rating on the tutorial, content, delivery style, clarity of learning outcomes, and helpfulness of the tutor towards the student. The student feedback is dealt with confidentially and after due analysis by the Quality Assurance Unit the feedback will duly be communicated to you.

## How do I know that the above systems being used are fair and transparent?

In order to ensure an objective and just process all of the above are conducted in a transparent manner, wherein your assessment results are discussed with you. A copy of your evaluation will be sent to you. You are entitled to justify or reject a certain point that you disagree with in your performance review. Your evaluation is thus based on a fair and holistic system of assessment.

## Tutor entitlements and benefits

### What are my benefits besides my salary as a tutor?

As a full time tutor besides the competitive salary benefits, you are entitled to full medical insurance for you and your family. You are also entitled to annual travel allowance for you and your family to your native country.

### What are my leave entitlements?

You are entitled up to eight weeks of paid leave during summer. Any leave availed over and above will amount to leave without pay provided that it is approved by the University as per the staff internal regulations and the respective bylaws.

### How would I be compensated for extra work?

Any teaching duty assigned over and above your designated mandatory teaching hours will be compensated for as per the University bylaws.

### How would the University support my personal professional growth?

The Arab Open University is keen on enhancing the quality of its staff and therefore encourages tutors academic and research activities that would meaningfully contribute to the quality of the teaching and learning environment. AOU supports all meriting research work that would contribute towards the staff development be it through offering scholarships to tutors towards attaining Ph.D in a joint endeavor with international Universities, funding projects or conferences.

## Am I entitled to a sabbatical leave?

Yes, all teaching staff are entitled to availing sabbatical on fulfilling of the criterion for the same. You may want to refer to the AOU sabbatical leave policy.

## For more information to refer to

- Rules and Regulations of Bachelor Award Requirements
- Language Placement tests
- Examination Rules and Regulations
- Internal Regulation for AOU Academic Staff members
- Faculty promotions
- Programme handbook
- Grade Entry into AOU's New SIS
- Appeal and Complaints Procedure
- Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures
- Plagiarism Policy
- Sabbatical Leave Policy
- Quality Assurance Guide
- Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy