
TUTORS' FORUM

PLATFORM FOR TUTORS' INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Nadja Dobnik and Jurij Jaklič
Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana

Introduction

The distance learning study programme of the Business School started off at the Faculty of Economics in 1995. The programme implementation involved study materials development, training of different categories of participants (tutors, course writers, administration staff, etc.) and also the setting up of a student information system based on the Internet.

In the first five years, the evaluation pointed out different problems related to tutors' inadequacy to efficiently carry out their tasks, especially with regard to group tutorials. One of the actions taken to improve the work of tutors is the creation of the web site »Tutorski forum« (Tutors' forum), designed as a platform for tutors' information and communication.

This paper presents different components of the Tutors forum and their purpose.

General outline

EF tutors' mission is to be in communication with the teachers at the Faculty responsible for different subjects and/or their assistants, with the administration staff (DL office) and with the local study centers where tutorials take place. Tutors have pointed out that they have few or no contacts between themselves and welcomed the idea of being able to communicate.

The tutors have actually found themselves in the same social isolation as the DE students. As a result, it has become absolutely necessary for them to be able to get in touch with each other, both on the level of study centers with all the tutors working on the different subjects but same students, and on the level of subjects, i.e. with all the tutors working within the same subject, such as mathematics, business law, microeconomics etc. but in different study centers.

The activities to support tutors have been carried out in three directions. First, a handbook »The Role of the Tutor« has been written to provide tutors with a relevant theoretical basis for their work. Secondly, workshops, focused on effective tutorial methods, have been conducted in different study centers to bring tutors together and give them some practical suggestions for their work. Finally, the web site »Tutors' forum« has been designed to enable tutors to communicate and exchange information about their work independently of their location and of the faculty or study centers services.

The access to the web site Tutors' forum is public - <http://www.ef.uni-lj.si/admin/snd/forum>. However, only tutors of the Faculty of Economics can publish their messages or create forum discussion groups. Tutors access the web site facilities with their user name and a password. The use of Tutors' forum is explained in detail in the above-mentioned manual.

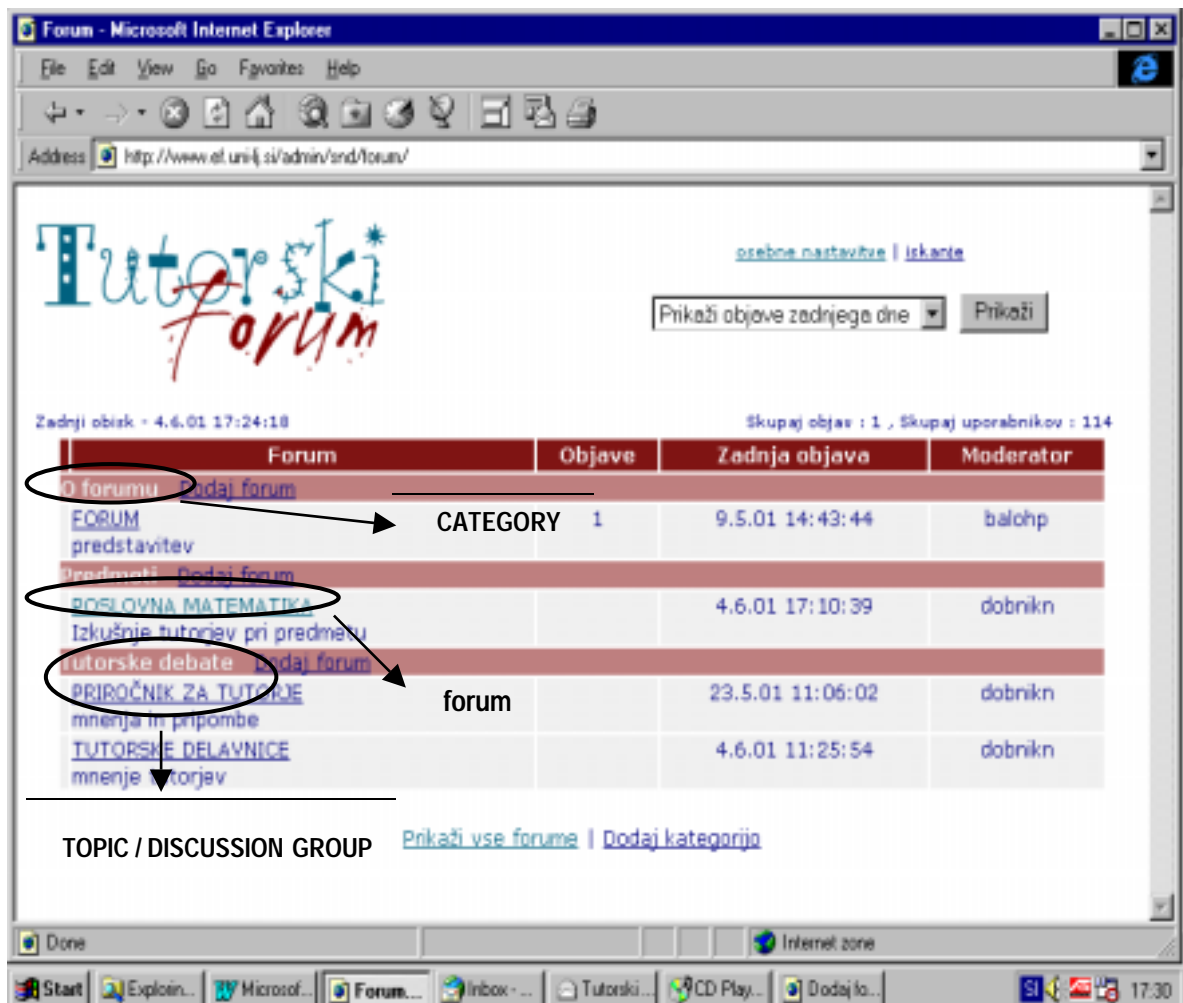
Components of the Tutors' forum

Tutors' forum offers the following:

- The possibility to participate in existing discussion groups (within existing "categories" and "forums")
- The possibility to create a new topic and animate a discussion group (within existing "categories" and "forums")
- The possibility to create a new forum within an existing "category"

The site home page presents basic information about the forum, such as when the site was last visited, number of publications, and a number of registered users. Categories are presented in the middle, with forums created within categories and discussion groups created within existing forums.

On the home page, it is possible to enter personal settings, search options, and choose the view of messages and publications on the Forum by the period (last day, last 2, 5, 10 days).



Tutors can review discussions going on within existing topics/discussion groups and participate in them. To participate in a discussion group with their own message, they have to register by keying in their user name and a password.

Tutors can also create a new topic for a discussion by choosing the option “Dodaj novo temo” (Add new topic) within an existing forum.

For example: the tutor would like to create a new topic within the existing forum “Poslovna matematika” (Business Mathematics) to be able to exchange exercises. To do so, he enters the forum “Poslovna matematika”, chooses the option “Dodaj novo temo” (Add new topic), defines a title of the topic and provides a short description of the topic, so that the other tutors can understand the purpose of the topic.

The same procedure is to be followed to create a new forum (for example for a new subject or a new discussion forum).

Implementation of the Tutors' forum

Tutors' forum became operational in June 2001. At the same time tutors received the handbook "The Role of the Tutor" with instructions for the use of the web site and the first three workshops took place. In the workshops, tutors were genuinely interested in the Forum. Since then, several forums have been created to facilitate and encourage their access.

Much to our regret however, we have realized that the forum is still not used to exchange tutors' opinions and messages. It is therefore our intention to find appropriate ways of encouraging and supporting tutors to do so. At the same time, the implementation of the Tutors' forum makes us reconsider seriously the whole organization of our distance learning study programme.

Author

prof. Nadja Dobnik
University of Ljubljana
Faculty of Economics
Teacher Development Centre
Kardeljeva pl. 17
1000 Ljubljana – Slovenia
nadja.dobnik@uni-lj.si