

# SPECIAL REPORT

## Acceleration of Online Training Course Development at AQD

by SEAFDEC/AQD

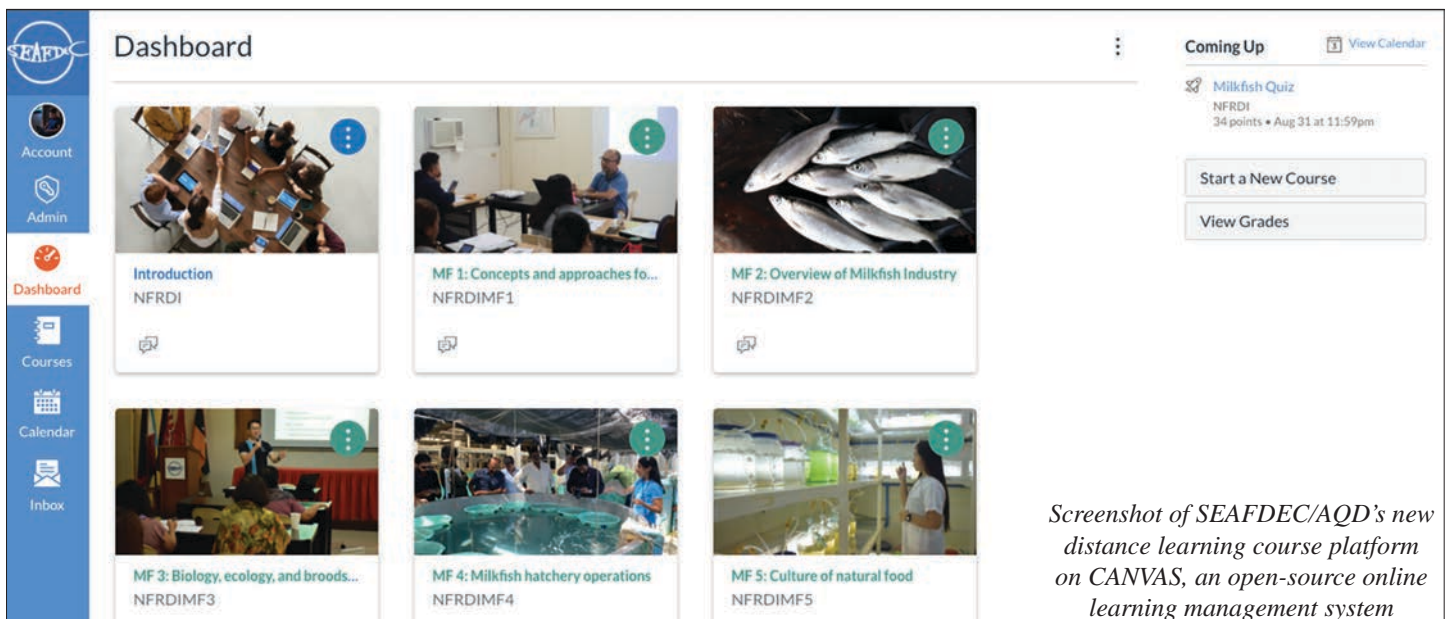
For the past 46 years, SEAFDEC/AQD has hosted over 12,000 trainees from all over the world who took part in hands-on training courses that the Department organized as part of AQD's mandate to promote human resource development in aquaculture through training. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 which was declared a pandemic in March 2020, led to widespread restrictions on travel and mass gatherings which abruptly called for the indefinite postponement of most of AQD's scheduled training courses. With disruptions brought about by COVID-19 and the growing demand for human resource development in food production sectors, the need to develop additional and better online training courses has been brought to light. Underscoring the advantage and potentials of leveraging on the Internet to deliver information and developing human resources, AQD's distance learning courses will proceed as scheduled.

The AquaHealth Online, AQD's first distance learning course, was offered in 2002 in response to shrinking fellowship and travel funds at the time. It was developed in collaboration with the University of the Philippines Open University to train a large pool of geographically dispersed participants at minimum cost. The first offering of AquaHealth Online had 25 enrollees from 10 countries who underwent 12 learning modules in four units. These were supplemented by online discussion boards that were presided by module specialists. Prior to this, from 1988 to 2002, AQD already conducted over 14 sessions of face-to-face training on Fish Health Management. The materials used during the face-to-face trainings were adapted, enhanced, and reformulated for online delivery. The development of AquaNutrition Online, the second online course, soon followed. To date, the two online courses were attended by over 300 participants from different parts of the world including Nigeria, Singapore, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States of America, Zimbabwe, and many others.



*A training course officer at AQD prepares modules and lecture notes on Canvas, a learning management platform for online training courses*

The AquaHealth Online and AquaNutrition Online courses are being hosted by the Department's computer servers and



*Screenshot of SEAFDEC/AQD's new distance learning course platform on CANVAS, an open-source online learning management system*

powered by the eFront online learning management system. While the eFront platform is straightforward, user-friendly, and customizable, AQD is currently developing the next courses using the Canvas platform, a cloud-based open-source learning management system. Using cloud servers are seen to improve accessibility to ensure that participants can access all information, materials, and resources on the platform at any time. Online discussion boards, an inbox system, and live chat are available to encourage interaction among participants. Online examinations may also be given to evaluate the knowledge gained by participants. The new platform can also host high-quality videos that will be essential in online training courses.

Furthermore, video production has become a major component of online training courses to complement the lack of demonstrations and hands-on exercises which are central to learning the details of farming fish, crabs, shrimp, seaweeds, and the like. Face-to-face training courses at AQD are known

to offer substantial hands-on experience, with practical exercises comprising 70 percent of the training schedule. To make up for this, AQD is currently producing video tours of its aquaculture facilities as well as instructional videos of certain procedures. These go alongside recorded lectures which feature AQD's experts presenting and discussing their slideshows.

AQD's first in-station course to transition to an online platform is scheduled to be held in August 2020. The online training, requested by the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI) would cover aquaculture technologies for milkfish and mangrove crab and would be participated in by the staff of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources from different regions of the Philippines. In this regard, AQD is also studying the possibility of subsequently developing online alternatives to other in-station courses even after the pandemic.



*Training staff at AQD set up a studio where recording of lecture videos are done*



*AQD mangrove crab expert narrates a video tour of the crab hatchery facilities*

Other SEAFDEC Departments are likewise considering to adopt AQD's strategy of online training courses to sustain and accelerate information sharing. In an Inter-Departmental Teleconference Meeting on Online Training Course organized on 5 May 2020, AQD staff shared their experience on how to develop modules, hardware and software requirements, and other processes needed to conduct a smooth and successful online training course.

By taking advantage of the available technologies, AQD is expanding its online training courses to ensure that the institution upholds its mandates of developing and strengthening the capacities of the aquaculture sector through training and information dissemination. Meanwhile, the Department is still hopeful to continue in-station and even on-site training courses when the situation improves for the benefit of fish farmers who do not have online access.

