

Framework for Undergraduate Teaching and Learning in 2022

Introduction

Since 2020 planning at university level has taken place in the context of uncertainty. The first 18 months of teaching under COVID-19 conditions have taught us that we need to be ready for swift changes. In other words, we cannot plan only for one contingency, we need to make decisions that accommodate more than one scenario.

It is clear now that the world will live under pandemic conditions for several years. This means that we need to redefine our approach to teaching and learning at undergraduate level at the same time as we redefine the organisation of work at the university and the responsibilities this entails for all actors, students included. Moreover, planning for undergraduate teaching and learning has to take into account the modelling of the future waves of COVID-19, the predicted time of their occurrence, their length, the possible variation of lockdown levels and how these will affect the mode of delivery of different programmes.

This document is the outcome of a process of consultation with faculties, the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, the Teaching Online Task Team and focused conversations with the deans and deputy dean teaching and learning in all academic faculties and CHED.

From the outset it has to be said that Performing and Creative Arts programmes, the languages, and the programmes in the Faculty of Health Sciences are not included in the parameters presented here. The Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment has already implemented during 2021 an approach that complies with what is proposed in this document. Equally, this document refers **only** to undergraduate degrees.

The purpose of the document is to provide a foundation for planning for academics, students and fee payers as to manner in which UCT will manage undergraduate teaching under pandemic conditions in 2022.

Reflections on 18 months of teaching and learning under COVID-19

UCT did well in moving into emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the first wave of COVID-19 in 2020. We were quick to identify problems and to put in place interventions to manage them. The commitment not to leave anyone behind determined the characteristics of delivery under ERT: asynchronous, low-tech, online-based teaching, with adjusted curriculum load to adapt to the home circumstances of most disadvantaged students. To this UCT added the distribution of loan laptops, data, and the posting of printed materials to those students living in rural and urban areas without internet access. As soon as it was possible this was

supplemented by the returning students to residences starting with those students most affected by non-conducive socio-psychological environments for learning.

In managing the first wave of the pandemic, we allowed students to to deregister from courses without penalties, we eased pre-requisites and suspended academic exclusions for 2020. These decisions supported UCT's commitment not to leave anybody behind. The 2020 student cohort performed more or less as usual, or better than in pre-COVID-19 years. Like other universities in South Africa and in other higher education system we also experienced an increase in academic dishonesty. On the positive side, many academics assessed better and students obtained better results.

The second wave of COVID-19 was managed by delivering teaching and learning in a physically distanced in a low density campus. PDL was predicated on the return of all residence students to Cape Town, the creation of spaces on campus to study, and in some disciplines the reintroduction of contact time while still offering predominantly online learning. Faculties were free, within COVID-19 health and safety prescripts, to offer forms of contact teaching in order to improve the learning experience. This option was adopted only by some faculties. The experience of 2020 had already alerted faculties to the need to return to a full curricular load, re-instate progression rules and, in some programmes, to assess students in the context of invigilated exams, to curb collusion. One of the main concerns voiced by academics during 2021 was the extent to which students promoted into next level courses had actually met the necessary learning prerequisites and have acquired, especially in the case of first years, the necessary academic habits to succeed at university.

Since the beginning of 2021, students, especially in some faculties, have been complaining about load; academics have observed lack of engagement and a preliminary analysis of marks in the mid-year examinations show uneven performance (a full analysis of results is still to be done). The end of the first semester was marked by a third wave of COVID-19 and increased lockdown levels. This had an impact on the faculties providing blended learning and setting invigilated examinations.

All the problems identified so far are common across all higher education systems. A recent report from the Chronicle of Higher Education shows how the US system from the Ivy League to community colleges experience bears an uncanny similarity with what we have experienced. In the case of UCT, teaching and learning has taken over academics time with possible dire consequences for the research function. This situation is not tenable.

Reflections among UCT academics in the faculties and CHED staff suggest the following among the things that could have been done better:

- ERT meant the quick translation of existing teaching online; PDL created the opportunity to improve the design of those very courses, but UCT, like all other universities in the world, has not been able to design courses from the ground up as an online experience. There has simply not been the time to do this. UCT is not offering online education.

- Students were not introduced systematically to the skills of learning online and to the expectations in terms of self-management that learning online entails.
- The low-tech, inclusive parameters adopted to put courses online and communicated to faculties, precluded the introduction of more interactive synchronous experiences of teaching online. While there was not an explicit prohibition of the use of other approaches, the result was that most academics did not try synchronous teaching even when this might have been possible.
- Lack of interaction between academics and students and the restrictions of the online environment as used at UCT has resulted in the disengagement of students. This in turn has had an impact on the quality of their learning.
- Academics and course convenors have been drawn into the monitoring of their students' academic engagement and the provision of pastoral care in uncommonly high levels, exacerbating their sense of exhaustion.

Low density campus phase 2

Most universities in South Africa and internationally are not yet returning fully their students to campus. Low density campuses will be the norm for some time to come. Vaccination of students and staff plays a very important role in the decision to return to full contact. There is a slow movement in several American universities to make vaccination obligatory. In addition, adherence to non-pharmaceutical interventions will continue to contribute to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

It is anticipated that there will be subsequent waves of the COVID-19 pandemic and that there may be the need for government to declare higher levels of lockdown (4 and 5) during which students will not be able to come to campus. Under lockdown levels 1, 2 and 3, universities will still be obliged to comply with health and safety regulations that prevent us from having large classes on campus taking place according to the "normal" timetable and venue allocation. As much as academics, students and parents desire certainty about the full return to campuses in 2022, this certainty is not possible. However, we have the opportunity of planning more accurately, increasing contact time with students, and appropriately responding to the directives and prescripts as declared by government.

The rest of this document presents the constitutive elements to deliver undergraduate teaching and learning in 2022.

Physically Distanced Teaching 2.0

Basic elements

The academic year starts on 14 February. It has to be noted that this depends on the release of NSC results as planned. The commencement of the year is preceded by two weeks of first year registration and orientation with the residences opening in late January 1 February. Returners will be required to register remotely as from January 2022.

All undergraduate students residing in South Africa as well as international students are expected to be in Cape Town to attend campus as from the start of the academic year and to remain for the duration of the academic year unless prescripts and directives (as per lockdown levels) require otherwise.

All courses with large classes (more than 50 students) should be offered in a blended mode, that is in a combination of online and face to face experiences that will be decided by the departments and the faculties. On-campus learning experiences can be made obligatory, count for marks, and made part of the DP in those faculties that use DP. All faculties are required to provide a plan of activities across all courses offered including a breakdown of on campus activities, online offerings and tutorial support and the rationale for the chosen pedagogic approach, at the latest by the 1st of December 2021. These plans need to have been signed off by faculty boards. The Timetabling Committee will share with faculties a list of venues available by 27 September. Faculties are reminded of the importance of their representatives in the Timetabling Committee as the natural liaison between the faculties and this Committee.

All programmes must plan for their students to receive some form of contact instruction on campus on a rotation basis following COVID-19 prescripts about space and hygiene.

In the preparation of online engagements it is still recommended that academics take into account the need for all students to access online content (should you choose a synchronic delivery, it is recommended that sessions are also recorded). CILT will update its guidelines for the delivery online content.

The campus will be open to students to facilitate access to eduroam and to conducive spaces for studying. This will be done in designated spaces as in 2021. A list of these venues/spaces together with instructions about how to book them will be provided before the end of the year and again in 2022.

Health protocols in accordance with regulations are obligatory. These include daily health screening, wearing a mask, sanitising, social distancing etc and are required to enter

campus, use informal study spaces, access labs, studios etc., access group discussions, tutorials, lectures etc. Vaccination is strongly recommended, and in certain circumstances a pre-requisite.

Heads of Department (HoDs) need to ensure that all contact teaching and learning experiences are designed in such a way that they can be moved online seamlessly should we enter hard lockdown. (At this point in time, the predictions anticipate that there will be a new wave in November/December 2021; depending upon the length of time of this wave, it may affect orientation/registration in February 2022. A fifth wave predicted for May 2022, is likely to affect invigilated exams in 2022)

HoDs need to ensure that courses that require invigilated examinations must set exams that can also be also proctored online or explore alternative forms of assessment.

Teaching and Learning Preconditions

- Residences will be fully occupied.
- Faculties will have access to the same extra tutorial support provided in 2021.
- Data for students on an opt in basis will be available under specific circumstances. The manner in which this will operate is still being discussed with ICTS.
- CILT will have extended capacity to support the faculties with course design.

Pedagogic Considerations

Increased contact:

One of the greatest pedagogic and social-cultural losses of teaching under COVID-19 has been presence and interaction. Academics and students have in different ways pointed out the pedagogic need to be able to interact in relation to curriculum and in relation to the creation of a community of learners that supports and encourages students engagement with learning, and, eventually, their performance. A particular loss has been the “enforced” discipline of the timetable.

Some faculties, like EBE, choose to start this in 2021 with the creation of homerooms, others had a much softer approach to this. In 2022 we cannot afford any longer not to have some form of face-to-face teaching and learning, which, in instilling obligation, will also help restore work discipline that many students have found difficult to maintain at home.

What UCT is recommending for 2022 is to flip the classroom with the majority of lectures being offered online and students coming to campus having completed lectures, readings and tasks prescribed in order to have practical experiences, tutorial discussions, and any number of appropriate learning experiences in small groups.

Faculties have different emphasis on the students they are most concerned about in terms of achieving the expected outcomes of learning. The reality is that many of our students have lost important elements of their university education students across all academic

years. All students need to have a minimum of contact with their teachers, but faculties and departments can agree to prioritise specific groups of students for more intense support. It is expected that the Teaching Plan to be submitted by faculties at the latest by 1 December 2021, will articulate the rationale of their pedagogic decisions.

First time entering students: the class of 2022

All available research locally and internationally points to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning losses at school level. In the case of South Africa, it is said that it will take until 2032 to recover pre-COVID learning levels at grade 12. This means that in the following years universities will have to rethink the management of admissions and, particularly, the manner in which first years are inducted into university learning. While some faculties will have the results of the NBTs to understand what their students will need, others will not. This increases the importance of the orientation period. The experience of 2021 suggests that much more systematic work needs to be done to induct students to computer literacy, the navigation of Vula and the discipline of learning online.

As in 2021 we are setting up a cross-functional team to deal with the reception of class 2022 with strong faculty representation.

Communications

The University will communicate, immediately after obtaining Senate approval, with students and fee payers to indicate the need for students to be in Cape Town during 2022 and the general modality of teaching adopted.

The University will communicate with the staff and students about the detail of the approach to undergraduate teaching and learning for 2022.

Further communication will be planned to keep all staff, students and parents informed at different critical stages between end of September and the beginning of the new academic year.

Improving teaching and learning into the future.

While the pandemic has shown what staff and students are capable of and much has been learnt during this period, we have also identified blind spots and gaps in the organisation of teaching and learning and the infrastructure that supports it.

Starting with the replacement of the Learning Management System, that has been endorsed by most academics and students, 2022 will be focused on creating better structures, services and systems to support staff and students.

CHED will be integrating its own internal capabilities to support faculties more directly with curriculum design.

More resources will be allocated to CHED in such a way that student data analytics and advising are coordinated centrally to alleviate staff load in this regard, and to make optimal use of existing capabilities. It is necessary that we are more on top of student performance than we currently are, and this cannot be passed on to course convenors.

It has been noted throughout this period that extended programmes have been undersubscribed despite the fact that many students would have benefitted from the extra support and slower pace offered in this type of curriculum. It is proposed that, together with the students representatives, we revise the role and importance of alternative curriculum and how it can be incorporated into academic rules.

COVID-19 has forced UCT to leap forward in teaching and learning. This has been done under emergency conditions and without real opportunities to reflect on the long-term meaning and consequences of the decisions we have made. We expect to create the space for such reflection towards the end of the year.

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