



# UFS Blended Learning and Teaching Policy

*Approved at UFS Council, 25 November 2022*

<b>POLICY STATEMENT</b>	
<b>1. Preamble/ background</b>	<p>1.1. The UFS Blended Learning and Teaching Policy is developed to ensure that the Institution is responsive to technology changes that will influence the development of graduates and subsequent impact on how the core functions of learning and teaching, research and engaged scholarship take place. This implies creating a more resilient pedagogical approach that will enable learning and teaching that meets 21<sup>st</sup> century demands. The UFS has embarked on a comprehensive institutional Digitalization Plan that will transform the way the Institution performs its key functions, including learning and teaching. The UFS Blended Learning and Teaching Policy builds on existing institutional policies and strategies that guide learning and teaching, as well as aligning policy statements with the broader national context that the UFS is positioned in to convey the position and commitment of the UFS toward building a more resilient institution through the use of technology in learning and teaching.</p> <p>1.2 Beyond leveraging technology, the UFS is committed to developing employable, socially conscious and desirable graduates who will contribute to national priorities. The South African society needs graduates with attributes that enable them to engage thoughtfully with societal challenges, global issues, such as those targeted through the Sustainable Development Goals, and graduates who can compete in the global and local labour markets. The UFS Blended Learning and Teaching Policy therefore stresses the employability of graduates as a chosen graduate attribute. Quality learning and teaching develops knowledgeable and skilled graduates, who, in turn, contribute to a skilled and competent workforce that will advance the economy. Well prepared graduates further have more opportunities for personal development and growth as employees or employers, which also contribute to the reputational growth of the UFS. Enabling these goals require learning and teaching environments that are flexible, learning-centred, and evidence-based, as well as nurturing academic experts who are empowered with the knowledge and capabilities to facilitate deep learning through relevant curricula and pedagogical practices.</p>
<b>2. Purpose</b>	<p>2.1 The aim of this policy is to provide principled guidance to all internal and external UFS stakeholders as to how the institution is striving for excellence in blended learning and teaching.</p>
<b>3. Scope</b>	<p>3.1 The UFS Blended Learning and Teaching Policy applies to all UFS employees, registered students, and external role players who are either directly or indirectly involved in blended learning and teaching processes or practices. It further relates directly or indirectly to the national and international policy and legislative documents noted earlier.</p>
<b>4. Definitions and abbreviations (as</b>	<p><b>Academic Advisement:</b> An ongoing and intentional learning and teaching process to support and encourage advisees in aligning and fulfilling their</p>

aligned with national and institutional definitions where relevant)

personal, academic and career goals. It is a high-impact practice directed at connecting, empowering, and supporting students to achieve academic success. As a shared responsibility between central advisors, faculty advisors and the advisee, advising aims to maximise students' potential by facilitating a conceptual understanding, sharing relevant information, and developing a relationship focused on promoting academic success. The envisaged result is that students have a meaningful academic experience while at the UFS and feel a sense of belonging to the UFS.

**Backward course design:** A method to design educational curriculum by setting goals before choosing instructional and assessment methods. The design process typically involves three stages, including identifying desired results, determining acceptable levels of evidence that will support the attainment of desired results, and lastly designing the activities that will contribute to the attainment of desired results.

**Blended Learning and Teaching:** “Blended learning is the provision of structured learning opportunities using a combination of contact, distance, and/or information and communication technology supported opportunities to suit different purposes, audiences, and contexts” (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014, p.20). “Blended learning provides the student with some control of the time, place and/or pace of learning and should create an integrated learning experience of face- to-face and online activities” (Christensen, Horn, & Staker, 2013, p.7).

**CTL:** Centre for Teaching and Learning.

**CHE:** Council on Higher Education.

**Course/Module:** An instructional, credit-bearing component attached to a qualification, or an instructional non-credit-bearing offering used for the purpose of continuing education and professional development. All courses/modules are identified by a unique code.

**Credit:** The volume of learning required for a qualification can be specified in terms of the total minimum number of credits required and in terms of the minimum number of credits required at its specified exit level on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework.

**Curriculum:** A curriculum is planned educational experiences prescribed or outlined by an institution for completion of a programme of study leading to a qualification.

**Decolonisation:** A political and epistemological liberatory project that underscores the struggles for (re-) existence of other bodies, cultures, histories, knowledges, languages, spiritualities, sensibilities and ways of being in the world. In pedagogical practice, this might manifest as i) relational accountability – indicating that curriculums should be connected, where applicable, to the South African context; ii) respectful representation - implying that the curriculum needs to acknowledge and create a space for the voices and knowledge of Indigenous peoples; iii) reciprocal appropriation – a commitment from institutions and academics to ensure that learning, teaching, and research further the development of communities and society; and iv) rights and regulation – ensuring that

	<p>academics observe ethical protocols that enable that the ownership of knowledge (where appropriate) is attributed to the Indigenous peoples of the world (Chilisa, 2012; Le Grange, 2016<sup>1</sup>).</p> <p><b>DHET:</b> Department of Higher Education and Training.</p> <p><b>Digital Literacy or Digital Competency:</b> In the higher education context, digital literacy can refer to the ability to engage effectively with technology to facilitate learning and teaching processes. This includes competencies that will allow students and staff to identify and use hardware, locate and evaluate information, safely and ethically using information, and so forth.</p> <p><b>DIRAP:</b> Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning</p> <p><b>Distance education:</b> Is both a collection of teaching and learning methods as well as a mode of provision/delivery. As a collection of methods, distance education transfers and mediates the curriculum without requiring lecturers and students to be in the same place at the same time. Learning is delivered through different techniques, such as written correspondence, telematics and/or the Internet. Distance education methods include structured learning resources and activities for independent study. As a mode of provision, distance education uses the design of a programme to bridge the separation between lecturers and students. The options include a single mode of provision in which all provision takes place in distance mode; a dual mode of provision in which some modules are offered in distance mode, or a mixed mode in which the same modules are offered in both contact and distance modes. In addition, the term 'distance education' refers to provision in which students spend 30% or less of the stated notional learning hours in undergraduate courses at NQF levels 5 and 6, and 25% or less in courses at NQF Level 7 and initial postgraduate courses at NQF Level 8, in face-to-face, campus-based structured learning activities<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p><b>E-Learning:</b> Structured learning events mediated by the utilisation of digital resources and technologies. E- learning can be offered online and simultaneously, or online and synchronously or asynchronously, or offline. E-learning can be utilised in both contact and distance programmes.</p> <p><b>Engaged Learning and Teaching:</b> Includes but is not limited to learning and teaching activities that proactively and positively impact on society and enhance student graduate attributes. The design and delivery of learning and teaching programmes and modules ideally need to be informed and responsive to needs of society. Examples can include service-learning that is integrated into curriculum as well as credit bearing and non-credit bearing community-based learning.</p> <p><b>Engaged Scholarship:</b> Refers to the utilisation of our academic scholarly and/or professional expertise, with an intentional public purpose and mutual benefit that has direct or indirect impact on society.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> Chilisa, B. 2012. Indigenous Research Methodologies. Los Angeles: SAGE; Le Grange, L. 2016. Decolonising the university curriculum. South African Journal of Higher Education, 30(2).

<sup>2</sup> Republic of South Africa, Government Gazette. 2014. Policy for the provision of distance education in south african universities in the context of an integrated postschool system. <https://www.gov.za/ss/documents/higher-education-act-policy-provision-distance-education-south-african-universities>

**Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC):** is a sub-committee of the CHE responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes leading to qualifications as set out in the standards developed by the CHE.

**Learning:** The process of transforming information and experience into knowledge, skills, behaviours, values and attitudes.

**Learning Environment:** The environment where learning occurs. This includes physical or virtual platforms and different physical, social and psychological variables that influence learning in these platforms.

**Learning Management System (LMS):** A software application or web-based technology used to facilitate learning and teaching processes.

**Learning Outcomes:** A description of what a student is expected to know, understand or be able to demonstrate to successfully complete a module, course, or short learning programme. An exit-level outcome is the learning outcome that the qualifying student has to achieve at the point when they exit the programme to acquire the qualification. Specific learning outcomes refer to the contextually demonstrated knowledge, skills and values that support one or more critical outcomes and represent detailing of exit-level outcomes.

**Learning/Educational Technologies:** A broad range of information and communication technologies that can be used to support all aspects of learning and teaching.

**Mode of delivery:** The ways in which the curriculum is delivered. This might include traditional lectures, experiential learning, and so forth. Blended learning can be integrated into any subject regardless of mode of delivery.

**National Qualification Framework (NQF):** A framework representing a set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievement are registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages life-long learning.

**Online learning:** The use of educational technologies to mediate the teaching and learning process. It can include fully online arrangements as well as others making use of blended methodologies.

**Participant:** A person registered for a Short Learning Programme. For the purposes of this document, it will have the same meaning as Student, unless otherwise stated.

**Pedagogy:** The conceptual and practical elements that contribute to how teaching is perceived and the methods and practices in which it is approached.

**Programme:** A purposeful and structured set of core and elective modules or courses that leads to a qualification. Students may, on the strength of prior learning, enter a programme at different levels.

	<p><b>Qualification:</b> The certification of the achieved learning outcomes of a programme expressed in terms of an accumulation of credits at specific levels. A qualification represents a student’s demonstrated achievement in a planned and purposeful combination of learning outcomes that are aimed at equipping students with applied competence and a platform for further learning.</p> <p><b>Research:</b> The systematic processes involved in producing new knowledge.</p> <p><b>Service Learning:</b> Interactive learning and teaching processes where students learn by providing a service to communities and learn from those communities as a supplement to academic knowledge.</p> <p><b>Short Learning Programme (SLP):</b> Purposeful, flexible and just-in-time programmes designed for specific educational purposes such as enhancing and/or refreshing participants’ knowledge and skills in a specific professional area for purposes of personal or continuing professional development. SLPs are offered outside the jurisdiction of the formal Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), and may thus not necessarily lead to awarding of formal qualifications of the HEQSF.</p> <p><b>Teaching:</b> Engagement with learners to enable their understanding and application of knowledge, concepts and processes, including design, content selection, delivery, assessment and reflection.</p> <p><b>TLM:</b> Teaching and Learning Manager</p> <p><b>Tutor:</b> A registered student appointed and trained by the UFS to facilitate peer learning.</p> <p><b>Universal Design for Learning (UDL):</b> UDL offers an approach to designing curriculum that prioritises accessibility and inclusivity. It is a set of principles that provides a structure to design teaching to meet the diverse needs of all students.</p> <p><b>University teachers:</b> The appointment of full-time or contractual staff responsible for teaching students, among other responsibilities.</p>
<p><b>5. Guiding principles</b></p>	<p>The UFS Blended Learning and Teaching policy is underpinned by the following principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5.1. The UFS remains a contact learning institution and adheres to the guidelines provided by the DHET on differentiating between types of higher education institutions in South Africa.</li> <li>5.2. Learning is at the center of all learning and teaching processes, including curriculum design, assessment, students and lecturers’ roles and responsibilities, as well as pedagogical interactions.</li> <li>5.3. Reflecting a sense of care through being sensitive to socio-economic influences and creating a policy landscape that enables environments to facilitate ubuntu, dignity, respect and compassion.</li> <li>5.4. Embracing diversity and creating an inclusive sense of belonging through (UDL) principles, multilingualism and decoloniality. This</li> </ol>

	<p>allows all students to engage and express themselves in multiple ways.</p> <p>5.5. Enabling resilience and adaptability by using flexible approaches that empower students to become self- directed learners who can engage effectively with peers and staff.</p> <p>5.6. Focusing on quality by embracing evidence-based approaches that make innovative use of technology to promote excellence.</p> <p>5.7. Learning and teaching practices are effective when:</p> <p>5.7.1. Understanding students and their learning is placed at the center.</p> <p>5.7.2. Aims, outcomes and objectives are clearly designed.</p> <p>5.7.3. Assessment instructions are transparent and is aligned with outcomes.</p> <p>5.7.4. Learning activities are designed to facilitate active and collaborative learning with diverse peers.</p> <p>5.7.5. Students have opportunities to participate in engaged learning and teaching practices, particularly through experiential learning.</p> <p>5.7.6. Incorporating appropriate graduate attributes and aligning such attributes within broader qualification programmes.</p> <p>5.7.7. University teachers take a scholarly approach to learning and teaching arrangements.</p> <p>5.8. The UFS recognises that learning and teaching cannot be separated from other institutional priorities, such as research and engaged scholarship and promotes the interdependency of these priority areas.</p> <p>5.9. Effective blended learning design, in a South African higher education context, requires instructional approaches that are resilient in times of disruption.</p> <p>5.10. Ensure that the diversity of our students and the life circumstances that impact on students' engagement with learning inform the design and choice of blended learning and flexible delivery approaches.</p>
<p><b>6. Policy statements</b></p>	<p><b>6.1. Developing thoughtful and employable citizens is a key priority of blended learning and teaching at the UFS.</b></p> <p>6.1.1. Curriculum design, as well as learning and teaching processes must be intentional in developing graduate attributes.</p> <p>6.1.2. All students should have the opportunity to develop competencies gained through engaged learning and teaching practices as part of study programmes or cocurricular activities.</p> <p>6.1.3. The UFS will empower students to document their personal development through providing opportunities for students to compile e-portfolios.</p> <p>6.1.4. The UFS will be intentional in providing career development pathways for students to best support the employability of graduates.</p> <p><b>6.2. Technology should be leveraged to facilitate student learning and success.</b></p>

	<p>6.2.1. The UFS commits to leveraging educational technology to enhance access to, and engagement with learning materials, learning and teaching practices, high-impact practices, and other initiatives that support student success.</p> <p>6.2.2. Through data analytics, the UFS commits to being proactive in reaching out to students who might need additional support, instead of relying on students' own help-seeking behaviour.</p> <p>6.2.3. Data analytics play a central role in monitoring and tracking students' progress and ability to cope with learning. In addition, it allows for the implementation of innovative initiatives to scale practices, and to provide the institution with the necessary information to best support students.</p> <p>6.2.4. Students should be guided and supported in their learning by university teachers, tutors, and professional support staff, such as academic advisors.</p> <p>6.2.5. A primary focus of leveraging technology in learning and teaching processes is to widen flexible learning, empower students to use technology effectively, support digital literacy development, and access to resources, thereby narrowing the digital divide between diverse students.</p> <p>6.2.6. All students, staff and external stakeholders involved in learning and teaching practices will adhere to the Policy on Acceptable use of UFS information and Communication Technology Resources/Facilities and any other related policies, rules, guidelines or procedures developed to protect institutional infrastructure and its users, as well as the integrity of the educational experience.</p> <p><b>6.3. Continuous renewal of curricula and learning and teaching practices must take place to ensure the significance and relevance of learning experiences.</b></p> <p>6.3.1. Curricula need to be regularly reviewed in accordance with institutional quality assurance requirements and design principles that promote blended learning to keep abreast with technology changes, and to ensure the relevance of content, delivery methods, and assessment strategies.</p> <p>6.3.2. Collaborative efforts between faculties and support structures, such as the CTL, will provide professional development opportunities that promote technology integrated learning and teaching methods, decolonisation, UDL-informed designs, and employability through the integration of graduate attributes in all curricula.</p> <p>6.3.3. All assessment practices in a blended learning and teaching environment should adhere to the requirements of the Assessment Policy on the University of the Free State Coursework Learning Programmes.</p> <p><b>6.4. Flexible design and delivery</b></p> <p>6.4.1. The UFS is committed to develop flexible, differentiated learning and teaching approaches that provide students with greater</p>
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	<p>choice in relation to the pace at which they learn, where they learn from, and supporting the different ways in which they can learn.</p> <p>6.4.2. Flexibility in blended learning and teaching needs to be defined per faculty, taking into account campus-specific contextual considerations and aligning with relevant institutional policies, rules, and guidelines.</p> <p>6.4.3. The official learning management system should be used to facilitate blended learning at the UFS.</p> <p>6.4.4. Blended learning should support and enable outcomes- based learning through backward course design.</p> <p>6.4.5. Instructional methods should integrate face-to-face and technological approaches in a meaningful way that considers both the type of content and the pedagogical affordances of available educational technologies.</p> <p>6.4.6. Courses should be designed using a UDL framework as a guide that facilitates a flexible learning environment that can accommodate the learning needs of a diverse student population.</p> <p>6.4.7. Technological and face-to-face components should be integrated into a comprehensive whole, as opposed to standalone, disconnected segments.</p> <p>6.4.8. Academics should be adequately skilled to enable effective blended learning course design, while students should have the necessary skills to navigate both technological and face-to-face components of their courses successfully.</p> <p>6.4.9. To enable blended learning, students should be provided with basic infrastructure to access learning, such as ensuring data and network access that would allow students to connect with a range of devices. Computer and media laboratories on campuses also support access for those who do not have appropriate learning devices. This would not be applicable to participants registered for short learning programmes.</p> <p><b>6.5. The UFS commits to empower teaching staff to use evidence-based, technologically enhanced methods and pedagogies to create an exceptional learning experience</b></p> <p>6.5.1. All modules and programmes will be delivered by qualified subject experts.</p> <p>6.5.2. All learning and teaching practices should have a strong scholarly foundation.</p> <p>6.5.3. The UFS will ensure that university teachers have access to developmental opportunities, lead by the CTL, to enhance their own knowledge, skills and competencies in leveraging technology to facilitate learning and teaching, designing and delivering curricula, and other relevant opportunities to enhance learning and teaching processes.</p> <p>6.5.4. Excellence in learning and teaching will be recognised by the UFS through the annual UFS Learning and Teaching Awards, opportunities to develop the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and facilitating engagements with national efforts to recognise learning and teaching excellence.</p>
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	<p>6.5.5. The UFS recognises teaching excellence the academic performance framework based on the Learning and Teaching Portfolio.</p> <p><b>6.6. Blended learning and teaching must be quality focused, research-led, and evidence based</b></p> <p>6.6.1. A blended, differentiated learning and teaching approach must be research-led, and supported by data analytics and continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality, especially in the integrity of assessments and the enhancement of learning and teaching.</p> <p>6.6.2. Learning and teaching will take place through academic programmes of high quality, and all module content will be designed and delivered in accordance with institutional and national quality assurance requirements.</p> <p>6.6.3. All modules and programmes will align with the CHE criteria and standards for quality learning and teaching.</p> <p>6.6.4. The UFS will ensure that students develop appropriate skills, knowledge and competencies as aligned with the NQF levels for formal programmes and the approved learning level for short learning programmes.</p> <p>6.6.5. Standards and requirements of relevant professional bodies or industry councils will be included in module and programme planning and implementation.</p>
<b>7. Responsibility</b>	<p>7.1 Vice-Rector: Academic</p> <p>7.2 Senior Director: Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)</p>

<b>8. Accountability and Authority: Centre for Teaching and Learning</b>	
<b>8.1 Implementation:</b>	<p>8.1.1 CTL</p> <p>8.1.2 Faculties (through TLMs).</p> <p>8.1.3 Academic staff (to align learning and teaching practices with the policy).</p> <p>8.1.4 DIRAP, in collaboration with the CTL, will be responsible for internal and external quality assurance.</p>
<b>8.2 Compliance:</b>	<p>8.2.1 Faculties will implement the policy and show compliance.</p> <p>8.2.2 The Vice-Rector Academic, as represented by the Senior Director of the CTL will ensure compliance by supporting faculties.</p>
<b>8.3 Monitoring and evaluation:</b>	<p>8.3.1 Monitoring and evaluation of the policy implementation will take place in annual reporting of the state of learning and teaching at the UFS.</p>
<b>8.4 Development/review:</b>	<p>8.4.1 The CTL is responsible for the development and review of the policy.</p>
<b>8.5 Approval authority:</b>	<p>8.5.1 The final approval body for the UFS Blended Learning and Teaching Policy is the UFS Council.</p>
<b>8.6 Interpretation and advice:</b>	<p>8.6.1 The Academic Committee of Senate is responsible for the interpretation and advice on the policy.</p>

**9. Who should know this policy?**

- 9.1 All staff employed in the CTL
- 9.2 TLM'S
- 9.3 Deans and Heads of Departments
- 9.4 Academic staff/University teachers
- 9.5 Students
- 9.6 Other relevant support staff

**10. Policy/procedure implementation plan**

10.1 The faculties, CTL, and other support structures will be responsible for implementing the policy. The implementation plan accompanies this document and is recorded on the official template.

**11. Resources required**

- 11.1. Implementation of this policy requires dedication and time from relevant UFS staff, students and stakeholders.
- 11.2. Promoting a more blended learning and teaching environment requires investment in physical resources, as well as providing appropriate training and development opportunities for staff and students alike.

**12. Answers to FAQs****EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLICY****Performance Indicator(s):**

To be completed on review by the person responsible for implementation, monitoring and evaluation.