NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

UPDATED HIGH LEVEL ACADEMIC PLAN FOR THE 2021 ACADEMIC YEAR

1. Introduction

The Academic[1] Plan (AP) for the 2021 academic year (2021AY) has been informed by:

1.1. The trajectory of the coronavirus pandemic.

1.2. The differing needs of our diverse student body.

1.3. The lessons learned from the 2020 academic year which had to be completed amid various alert levels linked to managing the coronavirus pandemic.

2. Principles

The Academic Plan (AP) for the 2021 academic year (2021AY) is predicated on the following principles:

2.1. Prioritising the health and safety of students and staff. This includes being human-centred and prioritising care and kindness.

2.2. Remaining agile, adaptable, and flexible amid the fluidity and uncertainty of the pandemic.

2.3. Unwavering commitment to provide all our students with the academic opportunities and support required to progress through and complete the 2021AY.

2.4. Enabling our diverse student body to access the necessary resources and support that enable them to effectively engage in online learning. For some students this will mean accessing our resources and facilities on campus instead of learning from home remotely.

2.5. Where a module/programme requires on-campus mask-to-mask academic activities, ensure that the necessary health and safety protocols are in place and that venues are COVID-19 compliant.

2.6. Foregrounding our core values of excellence, social justice and equality, and integrity in the implementation of all our academic activities.

2. Overview of our flexible Hybrid Approach to Academic Activities

We will flexibly mix online and mask-to-mask academic activities and adjust the mix depending on the trajectory of the pandemic. To achieve this:

2.1. Online academic activities will be increased and on campus academic activities reduced to **prioritise #SaveLives** during the pandemic.

2.2. **Some programmes will be fully online, while others will be hybrid** with content teaching being online and experiential learning[2] being mask-to-mask on campus or in the workplace. The list of programmes per faculty along with whether they will be fully online or require

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[1] "Academic" includes learning, teaching, experiential learning, student-related research and assessment activities.

[2] "Experiential learning" includes lab and studio work, WIL, SBL and clinical training.

students to come onto campus[3] for academic activities has been published on all our platforms. Students must plan their accommodation accordingly.

2.3. To learn effectively online and participate in e-assessment:

2.3.1. Students need a laptop[4], a smartphone, reasonably stable connectivity[5], and a place to study to be able to effectively learn online from home (remotely). Otherwise, students must be in Port Elizabeth or George so that they can access our general and specialised computer labs and Wi-Fi on campus[3] and in on and off campus student residences, even if all their modules are online.

2.3.2. Students need the necessary programmes on their devices and need to know how to login and access their modules in Moodle as well as use MS Teams for virtual sessions. Virtual tutorials are available to assist in this regard.

2.3.3. Some virtual classes will be presented, mainly via MS Teams. Other online learning activities will be facilitated via our Moodle Learning Management System.

2.3.4. Students need to develop and follow a work schedule to ensure that they keep pace with the work in all their modules. Students should expect to spend 30 to 40 hours a week engaging in academic activities.

2.3.5. Support for online learning is available for students in various ways through tutorials, SI sessions, success coaching, academic advising and through a range of online learning resources. Library materials can be accessed online or by visiting a campus library. Furthermore, psychosocial and psychological support is provided by Emthonjeni Student Wellness online, telephonically and mask-to-mask.

2.3.6. Capacity building activities for academics along with the support of e-technologists and learning experience designers can assist to enrich and enhance the online learning experience for the student.

2.3.7. Lecturers will prepare students for e-assessment and provide guidance around appropriate and inappropriate/dishonest behaviours during e-assessments along with the consequences of such behaviours. Students are expected to ensure that they adhere to our value of integrity by not cheating during assessments or being guilty of plagiarising.

2.3.8. Capacity building activities will be provided for academics to enhance the integrity of e-assessments through assessment design as well as putting the necessary controls in place to deter and reduce cheating.

2.3.9. Online lectures and tutorials will normally follow the usual lecture timetable as drawn up by CTO.

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[3] All students who come onto campus must accept the conditions for being on campus so that their e-permit can be issued and must adhere to campus-entry and on campus health and safety requirements.

[4] There are a range of options to purchase or loan a laptop, especially through NSFAS. ICT Services and Student Financial Aid can advise students. Lecturers will advise if a specific academic programme requires hi-spec laptops.

[5] Consideration is being given to data provision so that students can work online remotely/off campus.

2.4. Mask-to-mask (M2M) academic activities:

2.4.1. Lecturers need to prepare students for the procedures needed to enter campus and engage safely in academic activities.

2.4.2. All venues used need to always be COVID-19 compliant and must be booked via the Central Timetabling Office.

2.4.3. M2M sessions will normally follow the usual lecture timetable as drawn up by CTO.

2.4.4. Much of the theoretical content will be facilitated online, but students may come onto campus for flipped class sessions, tutorials, and revision sessions.

2.4.5. Experiential learning, including lab and studio work, and clinical training will largely[6] be M2M and be undertaken in small groups in select programmes/modules. WIL could be simulated, M2M or both depending on the outcomes that must be met and the requirements of professional bodies.

2.4.6. A continuous assessment mode will largely be used for M2M models/programmes, with a blend of e-assessments and limited M2M exams. M2M exams[7] need to adhere to COVID-19 requirements. Guidelines are available in this regard.

2.4.7. Support for programmes/modules with M2M activities is available for students in various ways through tutorials, SI sessions, success coaching, academic advising and through a range of online learning resources. Library materials can be accessed online or by visiting a campus library. Furthermore, psychosocial and psychological support is provided by Emthonjeni Student Wellness online, telephonically and mask-to-mask.

2.4.8. PG Research work in laboratories will be arranged through the research supervisors, with each student being notified when they can work in the labs and what the COVID-19 requirements are for accessing campus and working safely in the labs.

2.5. Particular attention will be given to the following **year levels/groups of students**:

2.5.1. **First-year students:** Our traditional institutional and faculty Welcome ceremonies will be virtual. Our peer- and faculty-led orientation programme will include familiarising students with the health and safety protocols linked to staying safe during COVID-19 as well as procedures for accessing campus. In addition, attention will be given to prepare first year students to access our digital learning platforms and software as well as to prepare them to learn online. First-years also need to be prepared for a very different university experience during the pandemic. To assist first years to build social and learning networks, small group online activities will be facilitated via, for example, How2 Buddies, tutorial and SI leaders, and in our residences. Depending on the trajectory of the pandemic, consideration will be given to having more on-campus academic activities with first-year students during the second semester.

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[6] Some experiential learning will be simulated online.
[7] A few fully online programmes/modules will require students to take M2M exams, but there will also be an option to take these exams online under strict invigilation conditions.

2.5.2. **Final year students:** As this is their final year of study, consideration will be given to having more on campus academic activities for final year students during the second semester, depending on the trajectory of the pandemic.

2.5.3. **Students with special needs:** The Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS) and Emthonjeni Students Wellness will advise students with physical, learning, and psychological well-being needs about the value of being in and around PE and George so that they can access specialised resources on campus such as assistive devices (and training to use them), learning support, and counselling.

2.5.4. **Honours, Advanced Diploma and PG Diploma students:** Attention will be given to keep in touch with these students, track their progress, and creating a support and study group network for them.

2.5.5. **Masters and Doctoral students:** Many of these students will be supervised online remotely. A supportive network will be in place to ensure that students can connect with each other, have group supervision sessions, etc. M and D students who need to access labs and studios will work on campus according to a schedule determined by their supervisors and will also be in a supportive, networked environment.

Proposal meetings often take place virtually and supervisors respond electronically to drafts of proposals and chapters. Our research ethics committees are operating, and guidelines are in place for students who want to gather data in virtual ways (e.g., conduct an interview via Zoom).

2.5.6. **Research Support for PG students:** The Office of Research Development as well as Research Support and Management provides support through the processing of postgraduate bursaries and postdoctoral fellowships, both free-standing and where these are linked to research grant-holders in the case of NRF. In terms of Internal Research Bursaries, as well as external funders and Council funding, the Office of Research Development processes and releases funds and liaises with national and international funders. Resources for postgraduate students are available on the Research Development and faculty websites. The Unit for Statistical Consultation consults with students via email, virtual meetings and online workshops. Capacity-building webinars are offered.

2.5.7. **International students**: Given international travel restrictions, international students might not be able to come to SA. While some could learn online remotely, programmes that are M2M on campus will pose a challenge. The International Office will liaise closely with faculties to see if alternative arrangements are possible and explore solutions to the data and connectivity challenges that many international students face.

2.6. **Remain agile, adaptable, and flexible:** Decisions about the delivery modes of programmes will be re-assessed prior to semester 2 to see whether more students could return to campus for M2M sessions (e.g., first and final years). Furthermore, given that the pandemic comes in waves and that we could experience cluster outbreaks among students and staff, there may be times that we have to shift fully online.

2.7. Our approach also embeds **support for staff** to develop and enhance their:

   a. **Pedagogical and assessment** competencies - there are regular webinars and online resources on digital pedagogy, online teaching and assessment, as well as continuous assessment. LT specialists in the LT Collab, blended learning champions in faculties and ICT staff are available to support and capacitate academics where needed.

   b. **Learning experience design competencies** – through training sessions and support from learning designers and e-technologists, attention will be given to enhancing the quality of the learning experience provided online and M2M as well as to be more human-centred by intentionally enhancing social presence in the online learning space

   c. **Research and supervision** competencies – online resources are available on the Research Development website. Select workshops are provided in the form of webinars. The Unit for Statistical Consultations continues to operate and consults with staff via email and virtual meetings.

   d. **Well-being** – through wellness support and enhancement webinars, and specialist interventions that are available via HR.

3. Pedagogical and Assessment Approaches

3.1. A **flexible pedagogical approach** will be followed during the 2021 academic year. This approach is favoured in times of disruption and allows for innovations in terms of how students can achieve their learning outcomes, and with assignment design and exam/end-of-module-assessment formats. This approach further allows us to be flexible in delivering LT using different modes (online or hybrid) across our modules and programmes.

3.2. **Service modules:** Whether service modules are presented online or on a M2M basis will be determined by the Faculty in which the service module is housed. The faculty concerned must communicate this to the relevant other faculties and students.

3.3. Approval was obtained from APC and ECS that all **revisions to assessment modes and approaches** that were made for the 2020 academic year be extended to the 2021 AY. In many cases, a continuous assessment approach has been favoured over an exam at the end of the module as this approach is more appropriate to foster learning in an online context.

3.4. We have adopted a **blended approach to assessment** within a **continuous assessment framework** that includes:

   a. Short, **formative** assessments.
   b. An assignment or assessment activity that enables students to integrate their learning across the module.
   c. **Summative End-of-Module Assessment (EMA)**, which can include exams, where needed. EMA's may be conducted online and/or in a mask-to-mask session.
   d. **Preparing students** in terms of the nature of assessment tasks that they will be confronted with, especially where e-assessment is used, but also in terms of the additional COVID-19 requirements for mask-to-mask exams.

e. **Coordinating due dates for assignments** and **summative assessment and EMA dates** across modules in a programme. CTO is being asked to assist with this.

f. **Weighting** the range of formative and summative assessment activities in such a way that the weighting **promotes continuous engagement with learning** (as opposed to the summative EMA being *the* determining assessment).

g. Where possible, build **re-assessments** into the assessment design. Provision will also be made for a re-assessment period at the end of Semester 1 and Semester 2.