

MEMO 10.2022

To: Executive Deans, FMCs, Chief Director Business School, Deputy Deans T-L, School and Programme Directors, Subject and Programme Leaders and Deputy-Leaders, DVC T-L Leadership, Strategic Intelligence, IT Chief Director & Director, FIP Directors, The Registrar's Office and Directors SALA

From: Prof Robert J. Balfour (DVC Teaching-Learning)

Date: 27 May 2022

Re: Concluding Semester 1, 2022 for Teaching-Learning and planning for Teaching-Learning for Semester 2, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

At its meeting held on 26 May 2022, Senate approved the guidelines and directives contained in this memo.

In the context of the conclusion of the first quarter and first assessment period of the academic year, it is a fitting time to take stock and plan ahead for the second semester of the year. At present, the State of Disaster has been lifted, yet we are operating amidst regulatory uncertainty as the envisaged regulations in terms of health legislation are yet to be published. However, all indications are that the NWU's Teaching-Learning (TL) planning has anticipated the trajectory of the pandemic and has reached a level of agility that will enable us to adapt to any regulatory amendments on relatively short notice.

This would not have been possible without the continued efforts of each and every lecturer and academic manager over the past two years. The NWU is privileged to boast such an exceptional team and on behalf of the governance and management structures of the NWU, I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to yourselves and all members of staff in the TL environment.

The fact that the NWU is coping well, does not mean that we have solved all challenges. A frank assessment of our experiences so far this year, coupled with a readjustment of direction if required, is warranted. This is particularly apposite, given our Institutional Audit this year and especially the site visits by the CHE panel during the week 22-26 August 2022. There are six broad sections to this document that were tabled at FMC, Faculty Teaching Learning Committees and Faculty Board meetings, as well as the UMC. The first three sections draw together teaching and learning guidance on the remainder of Semester 1, 2022, whilst the second three sections concern teaching and learning planning for Semester 2, 2022 and 2023.

1) Background to planning guidance for Teaching and Learning in 2022

In Memo 19.2021 we defined our student adjusted value proposition:

*NWU offers a contact (contact by students with academics in the contact as well as distance modalities) teaching-learning experience in which is entailed face-to-face teaching-learning for small groups (to anticipate the continued threat of Covid-19 and the need for physical distancing) in balance with the need for online (synchronous) teaching and learning, together with the possibility of a shift from large-group teaching (in favour of the flipped classroom whereby large-group lecturers are available online) in which large groups are replaced by purposeful smaller-group teaching and learning. Within **this hybrid approach**, technology is used to enable better self-pacing, self-direction, and collaborative learning in (asynchronous and synchronous) online and face-to-face contact teaching and learning. These dimensions also allow for adjustment in relation to further fluctuations in Lockdown levels.*

The next definition might assist us in understanding our Hybrid approach within our HyFlex model and venues:

Hybrid teaching facilitates learning that integrates synchronous in-person, synchronous online and asynchronous online experiences to accomplish specific learning objectives. Students in such courses are expected to engage in a combination of in-person and online activities.

Hybrid teaching offers students greater flexibility than the traditional classroom model, but the required elements and the way these synchronous and asynchronous activities combine is what separates hybrid from the HyFlex model.

HyFlex emphasises flexibility. Students can choose how they'll participate in the course on a session-by-session basis, engaging with the course material via whatever format works best for them at any given time.

At the end of 2021, our IT team expedited their project to convert suitable venues to **HyFlex academic spaces**, from where contact sessions can be live streamed and recorded. When lectures commenced, a total of 80 venues were already equipped.

Faculties were supplied with a list of venues that could be used for contact, according to the faculty's internal planning. Venue reservations had to be made as block bookings on the IWMS system. When social distancing regulations were relaxed, Facilities and Infrastructure (F&I) increased occupation numbers, enabling more students to attend each scheduled contact session.

Invgilated sit-down assessments could be scheduled for all modules that requested scheduling, during the mid-semester assessment period as well as the winter examination / assessment period.

2) Experiences during Semester 1, 2022

2.1) Contact programmes

Students and lecturers have reported that they enjoyed the increase in contact and being present on our campuses. The libraries indicated that occupation rates of study spaces are consistently high and that there has been a marked increase in usage of all facilities.

Students reported that the greatest challenge they faced was that face-to-face (F2F) contact would be rescheduled at short notice, sometimes even as little as an hour before a scheduled session, when they have already incurred expenses to travel to campus. Complaints from parents and students to management, indicate that students expected the traditional sermon-type lectures and not the focused, interactive problem-solving sessions that are offered.

The greatest challenges reported by lecturers, related to the booking of venues, malfunctioning equipment and instability of the network (especially the NWU Wi-Fi network) that hampered the ideal of Hybrid TL in HyFlex learning spaces/venues. Some faculties report low participation rates by especially first year students.

2.2) Distance programmes

The 40 Learning Support Centres (LSCs) in the RSA and 4 in Namibia, facilitated contact sessions for the first time in two years, for paper-based Grade R diploma students only. Attendance of the sessions varied between 0% and 73%.

2.2.1) Measures are being developed and consulted to encourage student attendance and participation.

2.2.2) It is concerning that some lecturers did not arrive to present scheduled white board lectures. Deputy Deans (T&L) and Directors of Schools which offer distance education programmes, are requested to ensure that sessions are attended by staff to present on them.

3) Completing Semester 1, 2022

Our adjusted value proposition addresses three key issues – presence, engagement and assessment.

3.1) Presence

The University can offer better services to students, on our campuses where the infrastructure and staff are geared to support them and increase success.

3.1.1) Academic support units and lecturers are requested to continue being available to students and to each other, on campus and online if off-campus.

3.1.2) Physical and online presence and availability should please be clearly communicated to students and colleagues on all NWU platforms – during contact sessions, on eFundi, Teams, etc. Faculty and support department managers should clearly communicate expectations regarding availability and presence, within their respective teams.

3.1.3) Lecturers in the distance and contact programmes should please communicate any inability to present a contact session to their school directors, programme leaders and UDL Faculty Managers, in advance so that alternative arrangements can be conveyed to students.

3.2) Definitions of Engagement, our timetable for contact TL, and amended Sanitisation Measures of venues

The development of the various strains of Omicron and subsequent advice sought from the Covid-19 RT and FIP suggests that surface cleaning (as we had attempted to effect with prior variants of Covid) is not effective or necessary in relation to the latest version being airborne. In view of this we are able to advise as follows:

3.2.1) Teaching and Learning towards the wrap-up of Semester 1, 2022

The existing timetable will be used for the remainder of the first semester. F2F contact sessions will be conducted in the venues already booked at the beginning of the semester, with the higher occupancy numbers as reflected on the IWMS and in the document “Venue Allocations” available at <http://studies.nwu.ac.za/studies/class-timetables>.

3.2.2) Cleaning of venues

As the cleaning of venues will now take place once a day and no longer between every contact session, online and F2F contact sessions may continue an additional 15 minutes, should lecturers need the additional time. (The first period will then be from 8h00 until 9h15, the second 9h30 until 10h45 etc.)

3.2.3) Engagement: forms and characteristics

Engagement takes different forms and the totality of the various forms of engagement shapes the student's learning experience.

3.2.3.1 Record of Contact

Our guidance remains that lecturers please keep record of student attendance and participation during all forms of contact, including online lectures and interactive contact sessions presented by lecturers, consultations with smaller groups or individual students, engagement with tutors and facilitators, as well as unsupervised engagement with peers during group work and activities.

3.2.3.2 Consistent and Routine Communication

Explaining the combined experience and design to students, will go a long way in addressing the expectations they seem to have about one-way content delivery being the only form of university teaching.

3.2.3.3 Support and training for staff

- i) Lecturers will continue to be offered additional technical support in HyFlex venues, as the training and deployment of venue monitors will commence. Lecturers are welcome to attend the training sessions offered by CTL, on the functioning of equipment in these venues.
- ii) Lecturers should consider identifying students in their groups to assist them with online interaction, for example monitoring a chat box for questions on Teams or Zoom, during a Hybrid session in a HyFlex space.

3.2.3.4 Interpreting services

Faculties are requested to provide their requests for second semester interpreting services to the Language Directorate.

3.3) Assessment

The majority of our first, second- and third-year students will experience their first tertiary sit-down assessments this semester.

- 3.3.1) Students will require additional guidance, prior to the June assessment / examination period, on approaching the type of assessments that will be conducted.
- 3.3.2) Constructive feedback after the mid-term assessments and planned guidance sessions will go a long way in supporting our students who are reporting high levels of anxiety and uncertainty about the transition from online assessments.

4) Teaching and Learning for Semester 2, 2022

4.1) Presence

Our aim remains to be available and present for our students and each other, in line with the expectations set by line managers. The insights gained in terms of 1-3 above pertain for the planning of Semester 2, 2022. Clear communication from academic leadership in faculties, to students and colleagues on all NWU communication platforms, is vital.

4.2) Engagement

Definitions and guidance provided in 3.2 and 3.3 above continue to apply.

4.2.1) Centrally scheduled F2F contact for undergraduate TL in Semester 2, 2022

Our SALA colleagues have managed to schedule at least one F2F contact session per undergraduate module per week in a Covid-compliant venue, on all campuses. This is a major improvement to the process followed for the first semester, as all undergraduate modules will have F2F contact and venue allocations will be done centrally – faculties need not book venues for any undergraduate contact sessions. Venue allocations are available at <http://studies.nwu.ac.za/studies/class-timetables>.

SALA will allocate venues for the block-teaching pilot project in consultation with faculties.

4.2.2) Social distancing and the teaching of large groups

In some instances, depending on group size and availability of venues, two sessions could be in allocated venues. Lecturers should please ascertain in good time, which of their contact sessions are allocated venues and plan their semester's contact accordingly. Lecturers must alert SALA to the need if group size requires more than one session.

4.2.2.1 At this stage, all students cannot be accommodated simultaneously during each and every contact session. Lecturers will still have to plan for rotational attendance. It is vital to inform students in advance, how the rotational attendance will work and who must attend which session/s. Those who cannot be accommodated in the allocated venue to attend a contact session in person, must be informed what is expected of them during that time.

4.2.2.2 Students should be reminded that they are primarily responsible for their own learning and progress. To succeed, they must attend scheduled sessions and actively participate in academic activities. To this effect, Senate has resolved that attendance of scheduled face-to-face contact sessions is compulsory for semester 2, 2022.

4.2.2.3 Also check whether the allocated venues are equipped as HyFlex venues. If not, lecturers can arrange for portable streaming equipment (either faculty or CTL managed), in advance, should sessions need to be streamed. If streaming is not an option, please record the session and upload it for students who could not attend, afterwards.

4.2.2.4 CTL will continue supporting lecturers and students by offering workshops and training sessions. In addition, lecturers may find the following resources helpful in their planning:

- HyFlex - <https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/2675997>
- The modified tutorial – <https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/2675998>
(Chapters from Kim, Joshua, and Edward J. Maloney. The Low-Density University: 15 Scenarios for Higher Education. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020., doi:10.1353/book.77218.)

4.2.3) Postgraduate teaching and venues arrangements in Semester 2, 2022

4.2.3.1 Venues used for postgraduate groups up to March 2020, will again be available to faculties and schools for such use. SALA will communicate with faculties in this regard.

4.2.3.2 Scheduling of postgraduate contact sessions in these and other venues, should please be done by faculties and submitted to be captured on IWMS in block booking format, as soon as possible. Faculties should please note the need to make these bookings, so that they are ensured to have the venues available, and contact is recorded.

4.2.3.3 Venue bookings for formal academic purposes enjoy preference, but the system will be open for bookings of supplementary engagements like supplemental instruction, once the semester commences.

4.3) Assessment planning and modalities for Semester 2, 2022

4.3.1) Faculty Assessment Plans (FAPs)

4.3.1.1 Each Faculty must consider whether it will proceed with continuous assessment or return to the assessment particulars published in the faculty academic yearbook.

4.3.1.2 All assessments and module mark calculations that will deviate from the particulars published in the faculty academic yearbook, should be submitted to Senate for approval in a Faculty Assessment Plan (FAP).

4.3.1.3 Faculties may schedule large group sit-down assessments during the mid-semester assessment period as well as the examination period, even if they do follow a continuous assessment approach.

4.3.2) FAPs Approval routes and Dates

4.3.2.1 The FAP for assessments in modules that will deviate from the particulars published in the faculty academic yearbook, must be approved by the Faculty TLC and Faculty Board between May and mid-July.

4.3.2.2 The FAP must subsequently be submitted to SCTL by 25 July 2022, for consideration at the August meetings of SCTL and Senate.

5) Academic Planning for Teaching-Learning for 2023

Our environment and circumstances remain in flux. Variables like continuation of zero rating of university LMS sites and possible scrapping of social distancing regulations, will inform our planning for 2023, which is already in progress. The University is exploring planning as regards the possible cessation of zero-rating of our webpages, by providers and the possible knock-on effects for students and staff.

6) Way Forward

We are grateful for the increased contact with our students and each other so far in 2022 and look forward to the successful completion of this academic year. We trust that the provisions made for a centrally managed timetable for Semester 2 will go a long way to clearing up frustrations experienced by our staff, and also our students, but request please that you continue to make sure that messaging and communication to students about the contact required, be frequent and routine.

That said, we are far from a return to normal at this stage and the distancing and cleaning requirements mean still that caution and care have to be organised.

Should anything not seem clear enough above, please do not hesitate to be in touch with the Deputy Dean TL, Dean of your Faculty or with Rolien Roos in our Office, as the need arises.

Stay well and stay in touch colleagues.

Kind regards,
Robert