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MEMO 19.2021

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: 29 October 2021

Re: Teaching Learning in 2022: the NWU Approach to Contact and Distance Education

Dear Colleagues,

Greetings on this Friday morning of Spring 2021. In the context of a seasonal renewal it is perhaps also a fitting time to consider NWU's overall approach to teaching and learning for the next year so as to give time to Faculties and related support units to plan and reflect on the directions provided below by way of establishing our Continuity Consensus, as the approach we have used, successfully, to managing the support needed for the core business since 2020. Arising from the recent Future of Teaching & Learning at the NWU Colloquium on 23-24 August 2021, the T-L leadership meeting of 15 Sept 2021, our annual T-L Conference held 19-21 October and the Vice-Chancellor's communique dated 25 October 2021, we have attempted to distil and convey in terms that are hopefully clear as well as succinct, the broad directions to be taken with teaching and learning in 2022. These have also been adopted at the Senate meeting of 18 October, 2021 and are aligned to the VCs communique in this week on this subject.

Background to the matter:

Teaching and Learning has had to be managed in 2020 and 2021 on the basis of Contingency Planning arising from our experiences of past disruptions and emergencies. That noted, as time has passed, Senate and the appropriate Faculty governing bodies and committees, have come to develop a routine of refining and adjusting the Faculty Assessment Plans in such a way that our responsiveness to changing Lockdown Levels, and the associated waves relating to Covid-19, has become more normalised (though this is not to downplay the gravity of our situation as a nation, or the loss and pain experienced as a result of the impact that Covid-19 has had on lives, families, communities and workplaces). This normalisation has made reflection (rather than reaction) possible and has thus improved the responsiveness of learning from past experience. Past experience from 2021 and 2020 is available to us in the form of shared institutional, sectoral and international experience, whether in the form of the activities associated with teaching and learning, or in the form of seminars/ webinars, colloquia or scholarship, and our academics and leadership have drawn visible from this. As the end of academic year approaches, the University is able to thus take forward the insights gained, and is able to transform these into future directions to shape the new academic year. Planning is based on a number of assumptions are themselves contingent upon the changing nature of our circumstances and our capacity to identify and deal with new waves, as well as new variants,

of Covid-19. For 2022 the academic leadership proposes that there be a new **student value proposition in relation to teaching and learning** which may be summarised as follows:

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 small group 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.

This memorandum thus articulates the assumptions that contextualise teaching learning, and then defines directions to enable planning in all units of the University in which the teaching-learning project, is entailed.

1) Assumptions for 2022:

- 1.1 The majority of our staff (academic as well as support) and students will have been vaccinated by the end of 2021. Vaccination requirements and possibilities in relation to presence on campus are subject to policy within the People and Culture and the University's position on such.
- 1.2 Covid-19 should become more manageable if no new and more threatening variants are detected, and as a result:
 - 1.2.1 Students will all be required to return to campuses for 2022 and
 - 1.2.2 Staff are all required to return to campuses from 1 November 2021 and be present on campuses for 2022.
 - 1.2.3 Support staff: Unless otherwise agreed upon concerning particular circumstances caused by the national situation, support staff have to return to campuses.
 - 1.2.4 Academic staff: Unless otherwise agreed upon concerning particular circumstances caused by the national situation, academic staff have to return to campuses. It will be expected from academic staff to be present on campus for teaching, meetings or other functions as required by managers. The preferred option will be to return to pre-Covid-19 working status, if the pandemic allows it. Working from home (as in the past) might be considered if all processes and challenges are addressed, but this will be based on the understanding that presence on campus for purposeful contact teaching, meetings or other functions as required by managers, may be required.
- 1.3 **For Contact and Distance programmes**, space utilisation planning will be based on the physical distance regulation of 1,5m. This impacts the available capacity in all spaces, but will be managed in accordance with the relevant government regulations and lockdown levels as the pandemic plays out. Were it to be the case that the physical distancing requirements are relaxed, this will increase the in-person contact teaching-learning opportunities available to the University. We thus undertake to monitor this and adapt as the need arises.

2) Teaching-Learning Approach for 2022:

The approach to Teaching-Learning in 2022 as based on the Assumptions, is organised further into three themes designed to provide for optimal, and not congested, environments in which T-L can be offered.

Presence

- 2.1 To mitigate the risk of exacerbated infection rates, large scale lectures involving groups of 100 students or more, need to be offered in a hybrid mode (i.e. some students may elect, or be

selected - following communicated criteria as developed by the Faculty/ School/ Subject Group - to attend in person face-to-face up to a limitation on the venue capacity, while other students attend in-person and synchronously, online).

2.1.1 Lecturers may opt for pre-recorded lectures to be used for asynchronous T-L if there are limitations on space-capacity or if in-person face-to-face or in-person online attendance, is not required for lectures (it is assumed that even if lectures are recorded online, that there will still be in-person purposeful engagement as described in sections to follow). Pre-recorded lectures will not be timetabled, thus freeing-up timetable spaces for more in-person contact teaching-learning.

2.1.2 Coordination of the detail concerning the above: timetabling, communication to staff and to students, occurs through the Deanery in collaboration with Directors of Schools, with SALA.

2.2 **For Distance programmes**, our LSCs, situated on NWU campuses (hereafter named Campus-based LSCs) follow the same approach. At other LSCs to avoid congestion the LSC Coordinator will be required to avail more than one classroom to accommodate the students in order to comply with Covid 19 regulations.

Engagement

2.3 **For Contact programmes**, all modules offered, irrespective of whether the lecture components thereof are offered as per 2.1 & 2.2, will make provision for adequate small group teaching-learning in person, and face-to-face contact through the use of the IWMS and central lecturing timetable (please be in touch with Liesel van Wyk at FIP about IWMS use, and Lelanie van Zyl at SALA for timetable allocations).

2.3.1 Coordination of the detail concerning the above: timetabling, communication to staff and to students, occurs through the Directorates of School in collaboration with Subject Group Leaders and Programme Leaders.

2.3.2 Engagement is defined as the need for contact between academics and students (in-person and face-to-face online) so that connection between every academic and every student occurs. Engagement is not offline asynchronous work undertaken by students with occasional feedback to lecturers.

2.3.3 Engagement in the form special attention to particular year-cohorts has also to be considered in the planning for teaching-learning for 2022.

a) Prioritisation of Final Year students' studies will occur (in terms of additional teaching whether in the form of prac-work, lab-work or other such enrichment activities).

b) An enrichment and extended academic induction programme will be designed with CTL coordination thereof within each Faculty which increases the exposure of First Year students in terms of study skills, literacy development, and time management and related skills. It will be offered online with the possibility of contact consultations by academics such that we can be sure that the school-university transition will be focused on and supported for First Year students. This will dove-tail with the existing R&O programme and run on into the first semester. Prof Mgqwashu at CTL is coordinating this initiative – please be in touch with him for further detail.

2.4 **For Contact programmes**, participation in, and attendance at, small grouping teaching-learning in-person and face-to-face tutorials/ seminars/ lectures may be made mandatory by Directors of Schools to ensure quality engagement between students and between academic staff and students, and occurs such that academic risk is reduced, and students' experience an inclusive, but not congested, teaching-learning offering.

2.4.1 Criteria for and communication with students to make it clear who needs to attend what, and when, need to be planned so as to accommodate students who might not elect to vaccinate, for example (the attached FAQs provide some further illustration of this).

2.4.2 Monitoring of participation, as well as attendance, occurs as decided by each Faculty/School, but we advise that for the f2f engagement that attendance be monitored.

Inadequate participation by students may be sufficient grounds for an academic to require presence in-person, in a contact session (please see the FAQs attached also on this subject). Consequences for not attending in-person contact, may include exclusion from assessment opportunities.

- 2.5 **For Contact programmes**, participation in, and attendance at synchronous online classes, may also be a mandatory occurrence that should be coordinated, communicated and managed through the different Schools together with SALA's timetabling division.

Assessment

- 2.6 **For Distance and Contact programmes**, the NWU will retain its approach to assessment: Continuous Assessment, and will not revert to a formative/ summative assessment focus within its programmes, unless these are required by the relevant statutory or legislative body. A multimodal (i.e. combination of online synchronous, offline asynchronous, or sit-down in-person) assessment modality will thus be possible. Assessments will either be offered online or sit-down (with invigilation), in which case in-person attendance will be required (provision for exceptions can be motivated by students, supported by official documentation, with the relevant Dean/ Deputy Dean as the need arises). Faculties will not offer assessments in the hybrid modality simultaneously (in other words, we should avoid the risk of offering sit-down in person assessments at the same time as offering a synchronous online assessment for the same module) (the FAQs also offer some further advice on this matter).
- 2.6.1 Development of Faculty Assessment Plans (FAPS) will remain mandatory and essential for planning purposes.
- 2.6.2 Planning for the assessment-offering is coordinated by the Directors of Schools with the Deanery in communication with SALA.
- 2.6.3 **For Contact programmes**, in-person class tests where these involve large groups, will need to be scheduled and will enjoy prioritisation for 2022 (given that the NWU is still piloting its online assessment proctoring software).
- 2.6.4 **For Contact programmes**, criteria, as developed by the Schools, for the identification of modules in which in-person sit-down assessments are needed to be made explicit in the FAP, and communicated to students. Scheduled sit-down assessment opportunities should be used for meaningful and test-like assessments, with heavier weighting. The first priority for assessment scheduling will be examinations in programmes governed by professional and statutory bodies, the next priority will be exit level modules that are moderated.
- 2.6.5 **For Distance programmes**, assessments are managed as per the requirements previously communicated by the UODL.
- 2.6.6 In 2022 the University will continue to make available the Cirrus platform for the offering of online assessments. We will also explore the introduction of a proctoring package compatible with Cirrus so that a better quality of assessment experience and the monitoring thereof, can be provided to staff and students.

Inevitably Covid-19 remains unpredictable in terms of the onset and development of new waves, but what is emerging from the experience of the past two years is that the University does have the means to plan better for teaching and learning, as affected by the development of new vaccines (or boosters), and thus we can give expression to more confidence in our capacity as University to lay the foundations more firmly, and less contingently, for the continuity of the core business in general, and the teaching learning project, in particular.

Way Forward: From Value Proposition to Implementation

Although this memo enables implementation planning to move forward, it is important to note that this occurs within our commitment (as affirmed at the Future of Teaching Learning at the NWU Colloquium) to the continued and funded digital transformation of the NWU T&L (and other) systems,

and to improve on the momentum already gained on this in the form of programmes and modules prioritised and contracted/scheduled for hy-flex design and delivery over the next three years, the capacity development of academics to deliver such modules in a hy-flex fashion, addressing the e-assessment and proctoring needs. We know not all our venues, or even the majority at this stage, are equipped for a high-end hybrid offering, but we learned at the Annual NWU T-L Conference in October that a 'very basic' hybrid offering is possible with minimum technology use (this is explained in more detail in the FAQs). Attached to this memorandum are two documents of illustrative value to further tease-out our thinking about T-L in 2022: the first contains a table illustrating types of pedagogic shifts made that are characteristic of the pre-Covid to Covid period. Also attached are the FAQs designed to assist understanding the anticipated planning staff will need to do for T-L in 2022.

Should anything not seem clear enough above, please do not hesitate to be in touch with the relevant Dean of Faculty or our Office, as the need arises. We are excited about more contact with our students and each other in 2022 and look forward with a degree of optimism to the new normal, next year.

Stay well and stay in touch colleagues.

Kind regards, Robert