PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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1 Introduction

‘Teaching and learning’ is the core set of processes that universities use to educate students who will become graduates, diplomates and holders of national certificates. Some of these processes are also in play when students engage with Wits teaching through short courses or for the purposes of occasional study only.

The “Academic Aims and Values” of the University make explicit the overarching principles which inform all academic work at the University. The Research Plan makes these explicit for one of the two core functions of the University. The Principles of Teaching and Learning (this document) makes these principles explicit for this second core function. Both core functions include community engagement.

Both of these documents (and the Strategic Plan) provide the framework for academic planning as it relates to teaching and learning at Wits. The aim of planning is simply to provide direction to implementation and to provide the framework for monitoring and re-planning. The function of it all is to move ever closer to the best quality we can deliver – to the overall project of quality improvement.

2 Scope of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning together represent the space in which interactions between academic staff, students and the discipline take place – sometimes directly, sometimes mediated with information or other technologies and sometimes independently. The University offers qualifications (degrees, diplomas and certificates which need to be nationally approved) at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Doctoral degrees, and Masters Degrees by dissertation, are research degrees which, by definition, do not have specifically designed curricula. Such qualifications, obtained entirely by research, differ from the other qualifications Wits offers because they straddle research and teaching and learning, and are therefore also the subject of some of the planning provisions in the Research Plan. However, research degrees cannot be disregarded in a document about teaching and learning, because supervision of postgraduate research students is a form of ‘teaching’, and it is self-evident that research degrees are a form of student learning. Besides offering qualifications,
less often, Wits offers its mainstream courses for occasional study, or offers specially developed short courses, which may include assessment of competence or may be attendance courses only. The offering of such courses for ‘non-degree’ purposes is complex to manage and will be the subject of a separate document; but for the purposes of this document the teaching and learning associated with certificates is included as it is clear that these courses should be subject to the same quality arrangements as provided for other certified products of teaching and learning.

This document therefore encompasses all forms of teaching and learning although the emphasis is on teaching and learning in non-research qualifications at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

3 Nature of a Wits Education and thus the nature of a Wits graduate

The core skills, knowledge and values of Wits graduates\(\text{ii}\) reflect the way in which teaching and learning takes place at Wits. Clearly there are important faculty and discipline differentiators but there should be equally important key attributes which the teaching and learning process at Wits aims to ensure all graduates have.

Wits graduates should leave the University with a commitment to the following principles as outlined in the Academic Aims and Values of the University:

- Academic Freedom
- Independent enquiry and trust
- Depth of knowledge and the value of critical thinking
- Breadth of knowledge (range / diversity of knowledge)
- Academic community (Collegiality)
- National and international comparability\(\text{iii}\)
- Community engagement and social responsiveness\(\text{iv}\)
- Inclusivity and responsiveness\(\text{v}\)
- Intellectual Integrity

A Wits graduate should have the following attributes and thus the curricula and teaching and learning processes at Wits must promote:

- a high regard for the value of knowledge in the context of respect for academic freedom, independent enquiry and intellectual integrity
- a demonstrated capacity and skill to use information and information resources effectively to solve problems and to access and develop knowledge
- mastery of a body of knowledge with which he or she can engage critically and can use to form the foundation for a life long engagement with learning
- capacity and skill in critical thinking and the ability to apply knowledge and skills to socially relevant problems and challenges
- an ability to engage with research (and where appropriate to independently carry out research) so as to use the knowledge generated by research
- a commitment to apply her/his knowledge in action and to understand the responsibility of contributing as a citizen
- the capacity to be creative and innovative – to use knowledge to generate new understandings or solutions
- an ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing making use of appropriate language, technology and concepts to demonstrate the value of reason, engagement and intellectually driven argument
familiarity with communication and information technologies that will enable participation in the modern world beyond the University

- compassionate commitment to democracy, the general good, to serving their communities, and to being active transnational citizens of a globalised world\textsuperscript{[9]} along with an ability to understand and manage the inherent tensions between this and the pursuit of personal success in a capitalist economy

- ethical awareness

4 \textbf{Aspects of teaching and learning}

Linked to the development of the key attributes in Wits graduates are all the processes associated with access to Wits, teaching and learning at Wits and life long learning. Each is driven by different, but related, principles. Some are described in existing policy documents and some of these are in turn supported by standing orders or other procedural documents. It is difficult to describe the key features when all are of necessity interconnected so it is important to note that the demarcations in this document are for the purposes of explanation and discussion only.

The teaching and learning position at Wits answers questions such as \textit{why} we do the things they way we do them at Wits. This is best captured in an understanding of \textit{what} we are and should be offering, \textit{to whom} we do and should offer it, \textit{how} it is and should be offered, \textit{when} we do and should offer it, \textit{where} we do and should offer it and \textit{who} does and should teach. Teaching and learning plans are the means by which schools and faculties plan to ensure that teaching and learning at Wits is in line with these principles and should thus be based on an assessment of the extent to which these principles are embodied in the teaching and learning environment.

The path\textsuperscript{[vii]} a student takes from recruitment to graduation to a commitment to lifelong learning is best understood as a series of mutually reinforcing and mutually dependent processes. The responsibility for the quality of these processes lies with the academic staff. Although the perspective of students is important they are not in a position to fully assess the quality of the construction, implementation, monitoring and review of teaching and learning. It is unrealistic to expect that a participant in the teaching and learning process (especially for first time undergraduates) can be an equal partner in the evaluation of the extent to which course content, pedagogy and assessment are aligned and pedagogically sound.

4.1 \textbf{Who teaches at Wits}

Without academic staff the teaching and learning experience cannot happen and thus attention must first be given to them. Wits seeks to employ academic staff with expertise and a research-active profile along with a demonstrated commitment to quality teaching to teach its students. The interplay between research and teaching supports the development of research driven curricula and this is why research activity is valued. Where an individual academic needs mentoring or support in developing their teaching or research this needs to be provided as both are essential for the provision of quality teaching and learning experiences for students. The attainment of a (higher education) teaching qualification is encouraged and the University aims to have at least 50\% of its teaching staff with doctorates within the next five years.

Staff equity is actively pursued.

The staff who teach Wits students are full-time or part-time staff, whose contracts of employment dissuade them from teaching at ‘competitor’ institutions. Honorary staff and guest lecturers play an
important role in enabling the University to access a wide range of skills and to give students access to existing practitioners of disciplines. These staff however must work under the oversight of permanently employed staff that will ensure the quality and alignment of the teaching and learning process.

Similarly, permanently employed members of staff are responsible for the training, supervision and development of the postgraduate and senior students they employ to assist with tutoring and teaching. Normally, students would not assess the work of other students but where this does happen it must be demonstrably appropriate and quality assured. Quality assurance is supported by the use of a range of peer and student evaluations of teaching and by the provision of specific training opportunities (through CLTD) for teaching and assessment staff.

Research activity and achievement is unequally recognised for promotion at Wits but this does not negate the need to reward exceptional teaching as there is a real commitment to improving the teaching and learning environment. Staff development in the area of teaching and learning is a priority.

4.2 What Wits teaches

Academic offerings at Wits are organised in qualifications (as well as in 'non-degree' short courses) which need to meet the following general requirements:

- The qualification must reflect the values and principles of the Mission Statement (or any subsequent position statement on the values that underpin Wits) and relevant principles and values of the Academic Aims and Values. Where this is not the case it needs to be clear why these principles are in fact not appropriate.
- The intention of the qualification (in terms of outcomes related to knowledge, skills and values) needs to be made explicit and needs to reflect the path by which a student engaged in the qualification will achieve the attributes essential to a self definition as a “Wits graduate” and to the general intention (explicitly stated) of the qualification.
- The elements of a qualification must demonstrably add to the attainment of the general purpose for which the qualification exists – taken individually and together they should enable attainment of the overall goal of the qualification. It should also be apparent that there is coherence in the progression of competencies developed through participation in successive elements of a qualification.
- Qualifications should be developed with cognisance being given to progression. The development of a qualification should take into account the preceding qualifications that a student would be expected to have completed.
- The development of a qualification should explicitly take into account the knowledge, skills and values it is assumed students will have on entry and what will be done to assess, and support, any gaps in this base. These assessment and support interventions must be responsive to the different educational backgrounds that students have.
- Qualifications (and support interventions) should demonstrate a coherent progression in knowledge, skill/competency and engagement over time.
- Many qualifications (professional and some other fixed curricula qualifications) have elements grouped in a single set or order which enables a faculty or qualification controlled coherent progression to the development of the overall attributes of a Wits graduate. Where this is not the case (where elements can be selected flexibly by students) special attention needs to be given to the capacity of each element to contribute to the overall attributes of a Wits graduate.
- The offering of a qualification must be demonstrably effective and efficient – it must be shown to be affordable and sustainable within the overall offerings of a faculty and the University as a
whole. Generally, this is best achieved when individual courses are sustainable but there are often compelling academic arguments for parts of qualifications (courses and even disciplines) to be cross-subsidised and thus not fully self-sustaining.

- Qualifications and the elements within them (disciplines or courses) should be explicitly subject to a process of review and renewal. To that extent, elements within a qualification and the qualification as a whole will reflect current theory and practice in the discipline(s) concerned.
- For a discipline or course to be taught it should be evident that the capacity exists at Wits to contribute to the development of knowledge in that discipline. In this way teaching remains research driven and the role of the University in knowledge production is protected.
- A qualification and therefore its associated curricula and courses must accord with nationally prescribed minimum standards and any standards that are set by appropriate professional or other bodies. Meeting such minimum standards is insufficient if the University requirements exceed such minima.

The implications of these principles are that the design and review of all courses must take into account the qualification, discipline and knowledge context in which the course is to taken. This is in effect a curriculum view which needs to be evident in course design and approval processes.

For current purposes until a firm decision to the contrary is taken, the following terms will be used:

Qualification: the formal certification of learning achievement e.g. B Sc. This is represented by the certificate a student gets.

Programme: the planned path a student takes which leads to the award of a qualification.

Usually a programme is a qualification specialisation e.g. BSc (Biological Science), where BSc is the qualification and the specialisation is ‘biological science’, but in some instances there is no difference between the qualification and the programme, e.g. both may be e.g. ‘BSc’.

4.3 Who is taught

Access and equity are key issues that go beyond simply gaining admission to a particular programme of teaching and learning. The accessibility of the curriculum and other aspects of teaching and learning will determine the extent to which it is possible for students with different abilities and from different educational backgrounds to succeed at Wits. Given the socio-economic status of a significant number of students financial assistance and access are inextricably linked as under-resourced students often do not succeed. While the right to select its students is enshrined in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 and is a key principle of academic freedom this is not an absolute right. There are legal, social and educational principles which circumscribe that right. Access decisions at Wits take into account the following, and ensure that there are sound and defensible, equitably implemented procedures for ensuring these things.

- Wits is committed to equity of access. This means ensuring that access to the University is not restricted unfairly or by arbitrary mechanisms or strategies but that it is based on the assessed or demonstrated potential or current demonstration of capacity/performance of a person to become a Wits graduate.
- Wits is committed to ensuring that as many students as possible who are granted access to the University are able to succeed.
- Wits is committed to ensuring that there is a racially representative student body and that this equity of access is supported by equity of opportunities for success.
- By aspiring to admit a diverse student body, we acknowledge the educational value of diversity and undertake to create a campus environment which facilitates teaching and learning free of discrimination on grounds such as race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, or socio-economic status.
The University has an Admissions Policy, and Standing Orders which support it.

Processes and procedures which impact on admission are planning of student numbers, the determining of minimum and automatic entry requirements, the changes to all admission requirements e.g. the points rating system which the FETC will bring about when it replaces the Matric, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and how it impacts on access, etc. However, access cannot be viewed in isolation from success, and hence must link to efforts to improve throughput.

4.4 How Wits teaches

Teaching and learning at Wits serve the primary aim of ensuring that our students are able to take individual responsibility for their learning. Teaching is thus done in such a way that the skills and core knowledge base for independent learning are provided. Wits emphasises research (in all its dimensions including information literacy) as a key component of its degrees. As a consequence, there are minimum standards for qualification types to which the University needs to adhere.

Any degree registered, with the University and the national educational authorities, as having a “research component” will comply with the understanding of research, for credit in a qualification, as a sustained piece of research work conducted unaided except for supervision. In some instances the research work may be built into aspects of coursework but where this is the case the onus is on the developers, presenters and reviewers of the course to demonstrate how students gain competence in unaided research work. In the short to medium term Wits considers any qualification at the Masters Degree level or above to be a higher research degree if it has at least a 30% research component which complies with the above definition.

In order to promote the development of understanding of the responsibility inherent in citizenship, teaching and learning opportunities will promote civic/community engagement (through mechanisms such as service learning) wherever this is feasible. Whether or not actual participation external to the University forms part of any curriculum all curricula will support the development of an understanding of the rights and responsibilities associated with being a citizen.

Use is made of appropriate technologies to ensure that the learning experience enables meaningful participation in a technology rich knowledge environment but is constrained by the availability of resources. ‘Appropriate technologies’ include information and communication technology and use of knowledge resources as managed by the library. Wits is not a distance education provider and thus the main method of teaching involves contact between students and academic staff which takes place on a teaching and learning site belonging to, or associated with, the University. However, in recognising that technology and modern understandings of effective learning necessitate a use of a range of methodologies, disciplines will seek to ensure that the blend of methods used best meets the needs of students preparing for participation beyond the University.

All curricula will take into consideration the information literacy skills of students and will enable them to access, process and develop knowledge beyond that which is presented to them in their interactions with academic staff.

All methodologies are reviewed continuously in terms of available evidence, understanding and experience with respect to teaching and learning effectiveness and theoretical advances in the discipline and in teaching and learning in the discipline. It is the responsibility of academic staff to ensure that they are informed about the developments and research into tertiary education and that
they employ these developments in innovative and creative ways in their teaching. Wits welcomes research into its own teaching practises.

Assessment is a driver of learning and is thus used in the Wits teaching and learning process to assist students to develop their competency. It is thus both formative and summative and is also often integrative. Assessment is carried out in line with standing orders which aim to promote continual assessment and the use of a range of assessment strategies as the most effective way to genuinely measure student command of disciplines and to promote student learning. An external examining system enables peer review and the promotion of comparability for teaching and for curricula. Thus the feedback from external examiners as peers (and from students) is deployed to ensure that curricula and teaching methodologies are appropriate. Some teaching and assessment take place in field situations where students are required to carry out what they have learnt.

It is a priority that the low rates of retention, success and progression, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, be addressed. This means focus on the extent to which students pass courses, remain registered, make progress in their qualifications and finally graduate. It is understood that this is a complex set of issues and Wits takes an evidence led, research driven process for understanding its success and retention experiences.

Both staff and students are responsible for improving retention and success and academic progression. Students are responsible through greater commitment to study. Academic staff members act out this responsibility through improving teaching, assessment and supervision practices, and support staff through improving the support of teaching and learning. It is recognised that some staff have specialised in teaching and learning at tertiary level (e.g. Educational Development Officers and Teaching and Learning Advisors). This expertise is used to benefit all teaching and learning and not just the teaching and learning in foundation programmes.

Mandatory lecturer evaluation is one of the methods Wits uses to monitor and improve teaching quality.

4.5 When Wits teaches

Wits is primarily focused on the provision of full time contact teaching in full recognition that much learning takes place independently, in self directed activities or on-site or practical experiences. The defining principle is that Wits students have the right to directly access the expertise of academic staff. Part time (postgraduate) learning is readily accommodated within this model. In recognition of the need to promote access and life long learning some provision is also made for after hours teaching (which enables undergraduate part time study) and for limited block release education.

In exceptional cases, the University may consider obtaining permission for distance-type education (as defined by the Department of Education as anything other than contact teaching) but these proposals will only be pursued if it is evident that the curricula can still be presented in line with all the principles in this document and those in the Academic Aims and Values document. All teaching – including block release, part time, or information technology enabled -- must be of a standard equivalent to that offered in full time contact courses.

Short courses are also offered, largely in order to accommodate flexible learning or to meet specific focused needs. It is a priority that non-core teaching activities (such as teaching short
courses) should not detract from the core function of teaching towards qualifications and from research.

4.6 Where Wits teaches

Legislation defining the seat of the University governs where we teach our qualifications. In exceptional cases, the University may consider obtaining permission from the Minister of Education for teaching outside of the ‘seat’ of the University (as defined in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997).

Most teaching is on-site but the provision of off-site experiences for field trips, service learning and different forms of skills development is promoted and is in fact required in some disciplines and qualifications and frequently these take place beyond the seat of the University. Every qualification either has implicit or explicit residency requirements. Implicit ones include that the majority of courses are only taught on campus or within the academic complex of the University (teaching hospitals fall into this) while explicit ones concern instances where for instance a doctoral student is conducting research at a field site but must nevertheless spend a minimum number of weeks on-campus, as determined by the General Rules.

Computer-aided learning, where used, enables the on-site teaching to be supplemented with flexible learning experiences where this is needed and enables self directed study at a pace appropriate to the learning needs of the student concerned. It is also a powerful method for enabling especially postgraduate students to remain in contact with the University if located for research purposes elsewhere.

The seat of the University and the implicit and explicit requirements for on-campus teaching cannot be disregarded for the teaching of short courses which can carry credit into qualifications offered by the University as these are subject to the same legislation as formal qualifications.

ASSOCIATED PROCEDURAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS

There are a range of documents which circumscribe how the above are carried out. Some are already approved and others are in development. They should be read as building on these principles. They include:

- Minimum requirements for qualifications
- Approval and review requirements at national, university, faculty, school, discipline, course and short course level.
- University formats for academic developments
- Admissions Policy (and Access Policy)
- Assessment Policy and Standing Orders
- Higher Degrees Standing Orders
- Academic Aims and Values

Associated documents: Strategic Plan, Academic Aims and Values, Admissions Policy, Assessment standing orders, Higher Degrees standing orders etc

While not technically correct, this document uses the term graduates for all who get any Wits qualification. It is recognised that the nature of the qualification determines the nature of the teaching and learning experience and of the graduate.
“A Wits to call our own” expands on the aim of Wits to be a national asset making real contributions to the intellectual leadership of the country. This is similar to the concept of an engaged university in “A Wits to call our own” which includes attention to the institutional culture and issues of equity. After Penny Enslin’s document on citizenship presented to Academic Freedom Committee, this is sometimes referred to as the ‘student career’ from recruitment to graduation to life long learning beyond graduation but this is too linear a concept for the purposes of this document. Academic staff in the employ of the University are the staff recognised as registered assessors by the CHE. Moderation, marking memoranda etc are some of the mechanisms that can be used to quality assure assessment. (Note that the South African Qualifications Authority has used its Education and Training Quality Assurance Regulations to insist on registration of assessors. The HEQC as the Band ETQA for HE has delegated this responsibility to Wits, subject to regular evaluation of our systems. In other words it is not required of our assessors to complete some formal qualification or to register through SAQA as long as we continue to demonstrate that our responsibilities in this regard are adequately carried out. If we fail to do this we could be in a position in which all people who assess students have to be trained and registered to do so. There are currently still confusions about the meaning and use of many of these terms from programme to field of study to course. Wits needs to develop a shared language/lexicon which is informed by definitions of ‘programme’ used by national authorities e.g. the HEQC in its new programme accreditation framework, and the Department of Education in its draft Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF). Note: the introduction of the new Oracle Student System will result in some changes to the standard terminology that we use. An Access position statement is being developed. Section 3 of the same act gives the Minister the right to define the scope and size of activity for instance. The HEQF is probably going to limit a Masters degree to 33.3% research at minimum; a PhD can only be completed by research, presented as a thesis (which does not preclude the concept of presenting the research as a compendium of published work). Note also that the HEQF expects ‘thesis defense’ to be included in the assessment mechanisms for research degrees. In some postgraduate qualifications this could be largely electronic but it is still individualised. This policy is currently being updated (February 2005). “Full time” in the sense that it is our intention that the majority of our students should be full time students. This is not an exclusive focus. “Contact” in the sense of not being distance education and not in the narrow sense that argues that all teaching and learning only takes place in the moments of contact between academic staff and students. It requires permission to be granted by the Department of Education and is subsidised at half the rate for contact teaching. It should be noted that we are currently not permitted to function as a distance provider and that includes provision of web based learning where such learning replaces (rather than enhances) the contact methodologies. It needs to be noted that it is now in the power of our ETQA, the HEQC, to grant self-accreditation status to institutions for short course development and review; however, if the HEQC regards our system as inadequate, we will NOT be allowed to offer any short courses. Seat refers to geographical area. There is also sometimes a restriction on sites of teaching. Some short courses are not taught on site and this is acceptable but academic staff should not footnote XXIV. Within South Africa, this requires permission to be granted by the public higher education providers in the region before the Minister will consider granting permission. The regulation of teaching outside South Africa is performed via the quality management framework of the Higher Education Quality Committee and permission for cross-border provision of qualifications will be via the programme accreditation process since a new programme is defined as one ‘which has not existed before, or a programme whose purpose, outcomes, field of study, mode or site of delivery has been considerably changed’. “On-site” at Wits means on any of the campuses owned by Wits or in any teaching and learning environment (such as a hospital or field study site) formally associated with teaching and learning for a Wits qualification. It is true that some short course teaching is done at other sites (such as companies) but on the whole the preference is for a site formally associated with the University. “Residency” refers to the fact that in order to meet the conditions under which we have registered our qualifications students have to spend certain minimum periods of time at the University. Recognising that some participants in these course classes will be wanting credit and others will not, it is the responsibility of teaching staff and Schools to work with the Faculty and central university structures to ensure that the offerings comply with legislation where necessary and that students are fully and appropriately informed.