The Rhodes University Policy on Teaching and Learning

Policy Volume	Teaching and Learning
Policy Chapter	One
Responsible Committee/Unit/Division/Faculty	Teaching and Learning Committee
Responsible Chairperson/Director/Manager	DVC Academic and Student Affairs
Dates of First and Subsequent Council Approvals	June 2019
Revision History: Approved Reviews	2019
Review Cycle (e.g. every 2/5/7 years etc)	5 years
Next Review Date	2024

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

1.1. Policy Title	Rhodes University Policy on Teaching and Learning
1.2. Policy Statement (State in a single paragraph the policy mandate and how this relates to the University Mission and Vision)	The purpose of this policy is to guide all teaching and learning activities at Rhodes University in order to ensure that they: i) draw on the University's unique characteristics and niche in the higher education system and are thus 'fit for purpose', as well as on ii) theory and research on teaching and learning in order to contribute to an environment that will allow diverse groups of students to thrive as learners and which could be described as 'of quality'.
1.3. Reason for Policy (What this policy aims to achieve)	Debates regarding definitions of 'quality' have long preoccupied many of those involved in higher education. Harvey and Green's (1993) seminal paper on defining quality in higher education makes a strong argument for the idea that something is of quality if it is 'fit for the purpose' for which it is intended. This definition has since been taken up by quality assurance agencies across the world, including the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) the body responsible for quality assurance in South Africa under the auspices of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). An understanding of quality as fitness for purpose is particularly useful for teaching and learning. Teaching and learning always take place in a context. In the case of Rhodes University, teaching and learning take place in the context of its location in a small impoverished town in one of the poorest provinces of South Africa, in a country dealing with enormous inequity and on a continent which has long been side-lined socially, culturally, politically and economically. While it is possible to identify some aspects of teaching and learning that are common across contexts, 'quality' teaching and learning takes cognisance of the context and responds to it. This policy draws on this idea in order to guide understandings and actions in relation to what can be considered 'good' or 'quality' teaching and learning at Rhodes University. Related to the idea of fitness for purpose is that of the multiplicity of types of knowledge and of learning. There are many different kinds of knowledge and many different ways of knowing. Academic knowledge and knowing is one form of knowledge and one way of knowing that have been privileged in the university. Academic knowledge and knowing is not generic, however. Disciplines 'know' in different ways and this is reflected in the way that knowledge and knowing is communicated. This means

that development of and support for learning needs to take place in disciplinary contexts and cannot be generalised. As a result, Rhodes University has not instituted an adjunct student support programme. Rather, students are supported in relation to what they need to learn and do in the disciplines through curriculum-based initiatives. The flexible curriculum comprising a mix of 'regular', augmented and extended courses is one way of providing this support.

It is also important to acknowledge that powerful knowledge generated in areas other than the north and west or by marginalised groups is not sufficiently recognised. In considering what can be taught, it is therefore important to take into account knowledge and ways of knowing from across the globe and which has been produced from diverse experiences and ways of knowing.

The acknowledgement that academic knowledge and knowing are only one form of knowledge and one way of knowing that are socially privileged entails an understanding that some individuals will have been inducted into ways of knowing more akin to those valued in the academy by virtue of their previous experiences. This observation requires us to understand that, for some students, understanding the nature of academic knowledge and ways of knowing will be more difficult than for others and will require change at a profoundly personal level.

Acknowledging the multiplicity of knowledge forms and ways of knowing also involves recognising that schools are different to universities and do not necessarily fully prepare students for studying in higher education and, thus, that universities have a teaching role to play in making explicit the forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that are dominant in the different disciplines.

Language is a resource for making sense of the world around us and of our experiences within it. The ability to use language as a resource involves more than the mastery of its formal structures since much of the proficiency we need to do this is 'hidden' and has been developed from birth. Language development therefore needs to focus on supporting students' ability to use language as a resource to make meaning and sense of what is around them and what they experience as *academic knowers* rather than simply on the mastery of its formal structures. To this end, the value of students' home languages is acknowledged and needs to be drawn upon in teaching and learning.

Rhodes University is one of a small group of universities in the South higher education system identified as 'research-intensive' because of its particular role in research production. Although Rhodes University cannot compete with other larger universities in terms of the volume of research outputs, it is consistently at the top of the group when per capita outputs are measured. However, of this group, Rhodes University is the only institution located outside a major urban area. Even more specifically, the University is located in a town beset by poverty and unemployment in one of the most underdeveloped provinces in the country. These characteristics have implications for what we can consider as 'quality' teaching and learning.

As a research-intensive university, we need to appreciate that undergraduate teaching and learning is not only about the dissemination and acquisition of knowledge but rather teaching and learning about the nature of academic knowledge and how it is made. The research-teaching nexus in a research-intensive university moreover entails a particular focus on knowledge production from first year onwards evidenced, for example, in the use of authentic academic texts as learning materials. The status of Rhodes University as a research-intensive institution also entails the communication of its knowledge production to other academics, policy makers, the general public and research participants from various communities. This also has implications for teaching and learning and particularly for the involvement of students in teaching events such as seminars. It is only on the basis of such understandings of the nature of a university such as Rhodes University that students will be able to proceed to postgraduate study which is of importance.

The location of the University means that its relationship with the communities amongst which it exists has to be taken into account as teaching and learning takes place. The proximity of communities experiencing particular social and economic conditions means that opportunities for the academic knowledge we value to be tested in context. It also means that, as well as learning from communities, it is relatively easy for the University to use its knowledge for the benefit of the communities around it.

Another point related to context concerns the historical decision (taken in the early 2000s) to adhere to the format of the general formative degree when many other academic institutions in South Africa as well as globally were pursuing

vocational qualifications. Research produced in the time since then (see, for example, Wheelahan, 2010) shows that general formative degrees offer particular benefits as they aim to introduce students to broad knowledge structures of the two subject areas pursued as majors as well as an introduction to a range of other subjects. This means that students are not limited in their knowing to knowledge which can only meet the demands of specific work contexts. Given the rapid pace at which developments in the world of work are taking place, the ability to draw on a wider range of knowledge other than that which meets the need of a specific context can be seen to offer considerable advantages to students. It also means that students will be able to use the knowledge and theory in the broader knowledge structure to imagine worlds that do not yet exist. This is critical in a country in such need of transformation. Rhodes University is one of the few universities in the South African higher education system that continues to offer the general formative degree and is, arguably, the most flexible in the way it allows students to pursue study across faculties and departments.

Assessment is viewed as an integral part of teaching and learning because of its capacity to develop and not only measure learning. The use of valid, reliable and fair assessment which takes into account multiple ways of knowing is guided by a Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning which is linked to this Policy.

In recent years, the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has become increasingly prominent in teaching and learning. Young people now demonstrate a socially embedded disposition to engage with these technologies as they learn and this needs to be drawn upon. ICTs also provide enormous opportunities for engaging with students outside formal teaching spaces in a myriad ways. The use of ICTs in teaching and learning has to be planned, strategized and supported and resources needed for their use have to be provided.

It is important to acknowledge that the funding formula for public higher education (DoE, 2004) and earmarked funding all function as levers to improve success throughput and graduation rates in the higher education system. The availability of this funding means that it needs to be used in relation to the policy and to the teaching and learning strategy of the University.

	Finally, and to return to context, it is important to acknowledge that Rhodes University is a largely residential university. The residential system therefore has an important role to play in developing students' learning through the provision of living-learning spaces that make available academic role models as well as provide the facilities necessary for study.
	The role of the Library is also acknowledged in teaching and learning and the provision of Library services is seen as integral to this area of academic endeavour. Given the position on knowledge outlined earlier in this policy, it is important that information literacy is understood not as a set of generic skills but as related to understandings of the nature of academic knowledge and how it is produced.
	The development of teaching and learning requires specialist support. At Rhodes University this is provided by the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL). Activities of the Centre span both staff and student development and are informed by theory and research.
1.4. People affected by this Policy (e.g. All units of the University)	This policy applies to: • All faculties; • All teaching members of the academic staff; • Divisions providing support for teaching and learning.
1.5. Who should read this Policy (People who need to heed this policy to fulfil their duties)	• All Deans; • All Heads of Departments; • All teaching members of the academic staff; • Staff working with the recruitment of students; • Staff in divisions providing support for teaching and learning.
1.6. Website address/link for this Policy	https://www.ru.ac.za/institutionalresearchplanningqualitypromotion/policies/

2. RELATED DOCUMENTS FORMS AND TOOLS
(University Policies, Protocols and Documents (such as rules/policies/protocols/guidelines related to this policy)

Relevant Legislation (Legislation/Regulatory requirements/Organisational Reports – name these)
Higher Education Act (1997)
Policy on Curriculum Development and Review
Related Policies
The Rhodes University Policy on Teaching and Learning needs to be read in conjunction with the following:
Rhodes University Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Course Design
Rhodes University Policy on Curriculum Development and Review

Rhodes University Policy on the Assessment of Student Learning	
Rhodes University Policy on External Examining	
Rhodes University Policy on Academic Integrity (under development)	
Related Protocols	
Rhodes University Institutional Development Plan 2018 – 2022	
Rhodes University Institutional Transformation Plan 2019 2022	
Forms and Tools (documents to be completed in support of this policy implementation)	
E.g. Policy template for the policy itself. Documents pertaining to procedures for implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the policy. CHERTL Brief Guides	

3. POLICY DEFINITIONS
(Technical or Conceptual terms used in the policy)

TERM	DEFINITION
Teaching	Guiding and directing students' learning
Research	The production of new knowledge
Community Engagement	A range of activities through which a university learns from communities and makes its knowledge available to those communities in doing so.
General formative degree	Results from following a programme of learning which begins by introducing students to a broad range of subjects at first year level but which then requires them to follow two of these subjects through to a more advanced third year level as 'majors'.
Research-intensive university	An institution that, as a result of its focus on research makes a major contribution to research outputs at a national level.
Knowledge structure	A coherent body of knowledge in a disciplinary area.
Regular courses	Courses which do not provide additional tuition and time for learning.
Extended courses	Courses which provide additional tuition and support by extending the length of the course without reducing the number of contact periods per week. A semester course thus typically becomes a year-long course. Attendance at all timetabled sessions and the completion of all tasks is a DP requirement.
Augmented courses	Courses which provide additional tuition without extending the length of the course. A semester course thus continues to be offered over a semester although additional contact periods are timetabled each week. Attendance at all timetabled sessions and the completion of all tasks is a DP requirement.
Flexible Curriculum	The flexible curriculum provides a mix of regular, extended and augmented courses in order to provide appropriate learning opportunities for students. Deans and other academic advisors are able to use this mix of course

	opportunities to provide routes through the curriculum to best suit their students' needs.
Service Learning	Takes learning to the service of communities and, at the same time, brings learning from those communities to bear on academic knowledge and knowing through formally curriculated and assessed activities.

4. PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THIS POLICY

OVERVIEW
Rhodes University strives to carry out the following, as far as is reasonably practicable:
1. Ensure that teaching and learning within the institution is 'fit for purpose' in the sense that it is cognisant of and responds to the context in which it exists as a research intensive university in the Eastern Cape.
2. Ensure that academic knowledge and knowing are recognised as but one form of knowledge and one way of knowing and are acknowledged as having been socially privileged within the academy.
3. Ensure that the experiences of students as they engage with the nature of academic knowledge and ways of knowing are understood in relation to their previous learning experiences.
4. Ensure that some forms of knowledge and knowing, and especially knowledge from the global North, are not allowed to dominate but rather that all knowledge is considered for inclusion in the curriculum.
5. Ensure that teaching is understood not as a process of disseminating knowledge but rather of inducting students into understandings of the nature of academic knowledge and how it can be known.
6. Ensure that the general formative degree continues to be recognised as a powerful means of equipping students for the world of work and also to act as critical and socially responsive citizens.
7. Move towards the provision of a 'flexible curriculum' offering augmented and extended courses that ensure that support and development for students is embedded in mainstream learning.
8. Ensure that support for the development of language and language related activities such as reading and writing is embedded in the disciplines.
9. Ensure that, wherever possible, the indigenous African languages are used to support learning and teaching.
10. Perceive Community Engagement as integral to teaching and learning and to incorporate Community Engagement activities in the mainstream curriculum in the form of Service Learning courses wherever possible. The aim would be to ensure that all students have the opportunity to engage with Service Learning at some point in the undergraduate curriculum.
11. Ensure that all staff are supported and developed to fulfil their roles as academic teachers at Rhodes University.
12. Ensure that earmarked funding is used to drive the goals of this policy.
13. Ensure that planning and strategizing around the use of ICTs in teaching and learning takes place and that support and resources are available for this.
14. Ensure that the role of the Library in teaching and learning is acknowledged.

5.   DIRECTIVES FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY
(Actions and processes by which the objectives of the policy will be achieved.)

Directive 1: The curriculum will be subject to ongoing review and development. This process needs to consider the origins of knowledge and the way course structures can be used to provide development and support to students as a 'flexible curriculum' is developed. It will also consider the way engagement with communities can be used to provide a service to those communities and as a means of learning from them.
Directive 2: Staff will be required to reflect on their roles as academic teachers and the extent to which they are providing access to academic knowledge and ways of knowing to the students they teach. Evidence of this reflection will be required at the completion of the probationary period and whenever an application for personal promotion is made.
Directive 3: Staff will be supported in this process of reflection through the provision of formal courses and advice offered at a more informal level.
Directive 4: Where possible, the indigenous African languages will be supported in order to allow their use as resources for making sense of the world and of experiences within it.
Directive 5: The use of ICTs in teaching and learning will be supported through strategy, planning and resourcing
Directive 6: Earmarked funding will be carefully directed towards supporting the principles of this policy.

6.   ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
(Roles and responsibilities of Key personal/Divisions/Faculties/Departments)

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
ROLE 1	CHERTL is responsible for supporting and developing members of the academic staff in their teaching roles so that they can meet the requirements of this policy.
ROLE 2	Academics are responsible for their own ongoing development as teachers and for engaging with a process of ongoing reflection on the curriculum and the pedagogy it comprises. Academics are also responsible for drawing on the range of initiatives that may be available to them to support their teaching and their students' learning. One such initiative would be the Writing Intensive Course project supported by the University Capacity Development Grant.
ROLE 3	Departments and Faculties are responsible for the quality of curricula and of the assessment it encompasses. They therefore need to adhere to procedures for reviewing both curricula and assessment practices and to ensure that significant changes are approved by faculties before being recommended to Senate. Faculties are also responsible for ensuring that policies on teaching and learning guide the work of the faculty.
ROLE 4	CHERTL is responsible for working in collaboration with the IT Division in order to strategize and plan for the use of ICTs in teaching and learning and in order to provide support for their use. CHERTL and the IT Division are responsible for

	budgeting for the use of ICTs.
ROLE 5	The Library is responsible for the provision of materials necessary for learning in the form of books and journal articles and for supporting staff and students in ways to access these resources.
ROLE 6	The Teaching and Learning Committee is responsible for the development and review of all policies related to teaching and learning and for providing guidance on teaching and learning matters to Faculties and to Senate. The Committee is also responsible for approving proposals for the use of earmarked funding and for monitoring its use.
ROLE 7	Faculties are responsible for paying due attention to matters related to teaching and learning by providing time at meetings for their discussion.
ROLE 8	The Division of Student Affairs is responsible for the development of the residence system as a living and learning space along with those who serve as wardens and hall fellows.

CONTACTS (Please see Appendix A)

Direct any questions about the policy to the relevant Office-bearers, designations and contact details are listed in Appendix A.

POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE

(Actions and processes by which the policy will be reviewed)

Policy approval and review will take the following route:
1. Teaching and Learning Committee
2. Faculty Boards
3. Senate
4. Council
The Policy will normally be reviewed every FIVE years.
Communication of the review process

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONTACTS

(Direct any questions about the policy to the relevant Office-bearers; designations and contact details are listed below)

Area of Concern	Division/Faculty/Department	Telephone	Email
Guidance on implementation	CHERTL	8171	Chertl-admin@ru.ac.za