

ACADEMIC PLANNING - 2021
Rhodes University

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Preamble

In mid-March, 2020, Rhodes University, like all other Higher Education Institutions, was faced with a growing pandemic (COVID-19) that necessitated an unprecedented reaction. Located in a rural area offering a high-quality face-to-face educational experience, Rhodes University was required to change its offerings to a fully-online experience; it was required to offer online education to students regardless of their personal circumstances including access to technology, access to Internet connectivity, data and home circumstances.

All staff and students were required to re-skill, re-tool and embrace new models of teaching and learning within a strikingly short period of time. All students were provided with data while laptops were made available through a sale agreement. Online teaching started in April 2020 and continued until final assessments for courses were undertaken. Some difficulties arose, which threatened the credibility, integrity and validity of summative assessment in particular, but these were tackled as they occurred. Additionally, as the pandemic unfolded, a number of exceptions and concessions in teaching and learning, assessment, rules and regulations and other ad hoc arrangements which were deemed necessary, were put in place.

Whilst time will be the final judge, we believe that the University coped well given the context within which it was required to operate.

As the 2021 academic year fast approaches, it is far from clear that the University will revert to face-to-face teaching and learning any time soon. The so-called second wave of COVID-19 being experienced in many parts of the world seems to be looming on our country. The small city of Makhanda is no exception and is currently grappling with a spike in COVID-19 positive cases, which is largely due to social behaviour of its communities.

Having experienced online teaching and learning for almost a full academic year, the 2021 academic year can be approached with greater wisdom, experience, care and confidence. That said, students might also approach the 2021 academic year with greater expectations from the University. The challenges of the school sector during this unusual year will without doubt have serious implications for our first time entering students and their transition to the University. If online teaching and learning is the order of the day or part of a blended offering in 2021, increased academic and psychosocial support will be expected.

Additionally, rather than the University being required to accept any and all circumstances, for example, admit a student without access to technology and Internet connectivity to any programme, it will be in a position to require certain conditions, for example, students must have access to technology and Internet connectivity. These new requirements will, however take cognisance of the deep social lines that separate those who have and those who have not, and will not be used to exclude academically deserving students.

1. The Road Travelled: South Africa, Makhanda and Rhodes University

When the first suspected case of COVID-19 was reported on Thursday, 5 March 2020 in South Africa, the seriousness of the pandemic triggered emergency alarms with most universities understandably caught off guard. On the same day, the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, established a COVID-19 Response Task Team led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and Student Affairs, Dr 'Mabokang Monnapula-Mapesela. The unprecedented public health crisis left institutions with no palpable options and students were given few days' notice to go home whilst the Country, the health system and all universities prepared themselves to embrace COVID-19. For many individuals, the threat of the virus was compounded by the sudden changes in plans for the first term. Discussions started at the University on how online teaching and learning in the digital space was going to be implemented. At the beginning, it was fairly difficult because everyone was accustomed to face-to-face teaching in the classroom, laboratory and community settings. Faculties were required to be creative as they anticipated and responded to change. Many staff were reminded of the broader social justice considerations of a shift to online and remote teaching and learning. Distribution of study packs to remote areas in South Africa and distribution of laptops were some of the key features of the time that followed.

Since instruction was required to be adapted new protocols and systems had to be developed to ensure continuity of teaching and learning. The University found itself at a precipice and all decisions that were taken had to be aligned to our academic continuity plan. This shift resulted in innovative teaching and learning.

The University's geographical interrelations with local business and communities challenged the local struggling economy as many students and staff had left Makhanda. Students and staff were empowered through online orientation programmes to understand the emerging context of the moment. There was no turning back. The pandemic highlighted the glaring digital divide. The disparities in access among students (and staff) had to be navigated and different ways of about teaching and learning and supporting students had to be adopted. Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams were adopted for teaching and learning and institutional communication; each platform provided its own affordances and challenges.

Academic and support staff were juggling different roles including caring for family members and working remotely. We acknowledged that whilst systems were implemented, the approach was also less ideal for disciplines where students had to develop practical knowledge and skills in laboratories or studios. Development of clinical skills were also an issue, as these competencies are difficult to develop remotely. Alternative ways had to be put together and new platforms and applications, which were useful and fit for purpose, were introduced.

Despite national measures to counter COVID-19, cases continued to rise and the numbers started to overwhelm the health system. Hospitals in the district ran short of beds and oxygen. South Africans experienced one of the world's strictest lockdowns in April and May.

Following announcement of Alert Level 1, extensive breach of the COVID-19 regulations occurred, specifically observed at night at entertainment venues in the city. The surge in

reported cases among students and staff threaten the planned face-to-face end of year examinations and the 2021 academic year.

Advice Alert

All University, district, provincial and national COVID-19 Protocols must be adhered to strictly and uncompromisingly. The University and the COVID Response Task Team will continue working together with the Provincial COVID-19 Command Council, the Local community and Businesses to control the spread of COVID-19 in and around Makhanda as COVID-19 threatens the existence of the University and the City. Communications and Advancement will raise awareness amongst new students and continue with regular communication and information sharing among all staff and returning students. Division of Student Affairs and HR will also continue to enforce health and safety protocols among students and staff respectively. Facilities will ensure that all campus access points function accordingly and all venues comply with Health and Safety protocols (space utilisation and ventilation).

2. Scenarios

Given the uncertainty of the COVID-19 trajectory in 2021 and beyond, three risk scenarios have been identified, and these informed planning for teaching and learning:

- High Risk: COVID-19 at its peak; fully online; no students on campus (**Plan A**)
- Medium Risk: Face-to-face/online and all/some on campus. Current permutation under consideration is for:
 - *all first-time entering students to be on campus and all other students to study online with the exception of a) students registered for selected courses where laboratory and practical work is imperative or specialised equipment is used or subject to requirements imposed on them by their respective professional bodies, and b) students invited to return for social justice reasons (Plan B)*
- Low Risk: COVID-19 subsided and a close to normal situation achieved; face-to-face, with blended learning and all students on campus.

While face-to-face interaction remains at the core of our approach to teaching and learning as a residential university, we have come to realise the growing importance of technology and the need for digital transformation.

3. Expectations of Staff

The success of the academic project depends on all staff of the institution working towards a common goal. Each member of staff has a critical role to play to ensure the continuation of the academic project.

It is a reality that COVID-19 significantly complicates a successful academic year. More so, COVID-19 impacts hugely on staff whose health and safety is paramount. A sizeable number of our staff live with comorbidities and may be immune-compromised. Whilst every effort must be made by all staff to contribute to academic success, the University encourages personal agency and calls upon all staff (both academic and support) to take responsibility for keeping themselves and others safe. It is everyone's duty to contribute to the continued existence of our University. A number of protocols have been developed to guide and assist staff and ensure a safe working environment:

- [National Institute for Communicable Diseases \(NICD Website\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Corona Virus: 4 Precautions to follow to avoid being infected- Translated in 9 of the 11 South African Official Languages](#)
- [HR Leave Protocol Related to Covid-19 in IsiXhosa](#)
- [HR Leave Protocol Related to Covid-19 \(English\)](#)
- [Lockdown Health and Safety Training](#)
- [COVID-19 Message from WHO- 23 July 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 Initial Risk Self-Assessment](#)
- [IsiXhosa- Initial Risk Self-Assessment](#)
- [COVID-19 Daily Self-Assessment Screening Questions](#)
- [IsiXhosa COVID-19 Daily Self-Assessment Screening Questions](#)
- [RU Access Control Protocol \(English\)](#)
- [Isixhosa- RU Access Control Protocol](#)
- [RU Health and Safety Protocol \(English\)](#)
- [Isixhosa- RU Health and Safety Protocol](#)
- [RU Institutional Plan for the Return of Staff to Campus](#)
- [RU Institutional Plan for the Return of Staff to Campus \(IsiXhosa\)](#)
- [Institutional Framework for COVID-19 \(English\)](#)
- [Institutional Framework for COVID-19 \(IsiXhosa\)](#)
- [RU Response to Confirmed COVID-19 Cases](#)
- [RU Response to Confirmed COVID-19 Cases- IsiXhosa](#)
- [COVID-19 Cases Confirmed](#)
- [COVID-19 Cases Confirmed- iSIXHOSA](#)
- [Framework for the Management of the Return of Students \(Health & Safety\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Offering Risk-Controlled Face-to-Face Academic Activities](#)
- [Declaration of Comorbidities and Reasonable Accommodation](#)
- [Flow Chart Rhodes University Protocol for the Declaration of Comorbidities in Relation to Covid-19](#)
- [IsiXhosa Flow Chart Rhodes University Protocol for the Declaration of Comorbidities in Relation to Covid-19](#)
- [IsiXhosa Protocol for the Declaration of Comorbidities and Reasonable Accommodation](#)
- [Protocol for the Use of Venues](#)

Resource Alert

COVID-19 Protocols:

<https://www.ru.ac.za/humanresources/>

Both staff and students should ensure that they are not only familiar with the various protocols, but that they adhere to and use them to guide their conduct both on and off campus.

4. Expectations of Students

The 2020 academic year was equally daunting for our students, especially the first-time entering students whose experience of being at university/studying at university/university life was limited when they had to go home and adapt to online learning. Many students had no internet-enabled devices, limited or no internet connectivity and data to support their online learning. Some lived in unsupportive environments, which threatened their success. However, we have seen the majority of our students persevere to the end of the year. The education of our students is a partnership between students, staff and parents/guardians. It requires agency from all parties. We have also learned that owning a laptop is no longer a luxury, but a necessity. All students must have the necessary tools for learning in this new-normal. We must always endeavour to be prepared for any eventualities and any form of disaster that could potentially prevent face-to-face activities. We expect students to exercise their agency and to act responsibly, and in a manner that does not place themselves and others at risk.

4.1 Access to Technology

It is expected that all students, including first-time entering students, will have an internet-enabled device, preferably a laptop. Appropriate arrangements will be made by I&TS Division and the Finance Division for NSFAS students to use part of their funding for the purchase of a laptop.

Depending on the spread of COVID-19, and whether students will continue studying from home or off-campus, data will be provided, the cost of which will be incorporated in tuition fees. Where students are required to return to campus residence and accommodation is available, and choose not to, data will not be provided.

4.2 On-/Off-campus Study

It is intended that the following students will study online within the University residence system:

- all first-time entering students provided they have confirmed residence and have Initial Fee (IF) and NSFAS clearance
- all students registered for courses requiring laboratory or practical work or specialised equipment or subject to requirements imposed on them by their respective professional bodies
- all students invited to return for social justice reasons

Depending on the COVID-19 context, all other students may have to continue studying remotely.

It should be noted that printed study packs will not be provided to students as all students should have the necessary devices and connectivity.

4.3 Student Behaviour

It is important that all students abide by all COVID-19 protocols to minimise the chances of them and others being infected.

A number of protocols have been developed to guide and assist students and ensure a safe studying environment:

- Framework for the Management of the Return of Students (Health & Safety)
- Amended Student Disciplinary Code
- Declaration agreement to adhere to COVID-19 measures and consequences for non-response

Resource Alert

Framework:

https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/deanofstudents/documents/Updated_Framework_for_the_management_of_the_return_of_students.pdf

5. Recruitment, Registration, Orientation and Curriculum Approval

Planning for the start of the academic year has been entrusted to the Recruitment, Registration, Orientation and Curriculum Approval (RROCA) Task Team under the leadership of the Registrar Prof. Adèle Moodly.

5.1 Recruitment

Recruitment has arranged various communications to be sent to parents including sharing of Plan A and Plan B information and the necessary requirements under each plan. A question and answer document has been developed and translated into isiXhosa and Afrikaans for use

by students, parents/guardians and the Rhodes University community. A document on Rhodes University's value-proposition in the COVID-19 context has also been developed to showcase how the University has adapted to the challenges.

The first Virtual Purple talks with Parents were held via the Zoom platform where stakeholders such as the VC, DVC: Academic and Student Affairs, the Registrar, the Director of Student Affairs and the Recruitment team shared important information with parents/guardians regarding the Institution, and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other important information regarding Registration and general aspects of student life for 2021.

A series on Purple talks with the Deans was launched where information regarding each Faculty was shared. Videos have been posted on the RU Website, all RU social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, twitter, Instagram) and also sent to teachers at schools to share with learners. The link to the YouTube platform of the videos has also been sent via email to all learners who have received an offer from the University for 2021 in order to provide them with more information of what to expect in 2021 in the respective faculties.

The Recruitment team in collaboration with the Communications and Advancement division are busy with setting up a Virtual Campus tour. This will assist us in providing learners/parents/guardians and other stakeholders with some insight into our campus if a "normal face-to-face" Open Day will not be possible in 2021. It will also provide a tour to people who will not be able to attend a "normal" Open Day.

Where possible and where schools allowed, the recruitment team have also continued to deliver posters with requirements of each faculty; a memory stick with videos of faculties and the University. We also delivered hardcopy booklets (Grade 9 and RU Ready); especially to Schools where the majority learners do not have access to watch the videos or access the booklets electronically or where schools could play the videos on the memory sticks.

5.2 Registration

All registration is remote and online for first-time entering and returning students. This is possible as students apply online on the ROSS system. Registration for FTEN students is planned for 5 March 2021 and for returning students from 27 January 2021. However, depending on the extent of the spread of the virus and the impact on Makhanda and the university, Plan A (remote activities) will kick in, or alternatively first-time entering students will come onto campus accompanied by two persons only (Plan B).

Provision of laptops:

In terms of Plan A, laptop distribution will be via courier to registered students who have signed the contract. This may impact on the start of the academic activities (possibly by a week or two, and the year calendar would have to be accordingly adjusted). In terms of Plan B, laptop distribution will be on-campus to registered students who have signed the contract.

5.3 Orientation

The Orientation Committee Being Well and Aware task team will prepare/use online videos/webinars/Zoom packages irrespective at which COVID-19 alert level we are. This will

also serve as resources for first time entering students who may arrive after the registration period.

During the medium risk and low risk COVID-19, alert levels, student leaders will arrive 14 days before the arrival and the registration of First Time Entering students. The projected date of their arrival is Sunday, 21 February 2021. Student leaders will undergo the 10-day mandatory self-quarantine period and during this period, the DSA will run student leadership-training programme online. The days out of self-quarantine, each Hall will prepare for the safe arrival and welcome of First Time Entering students in the residences and off campus living, if we are at the level this will be allowed. All the necessary health and safety protocols will be strictly followed.

The First Time Entering students' orientation will be an extended programme, running over the first semester. During the Orientation week, we will run a structured programme remotely during the mandatory self-quarantine period. In the instance where face-to-face / social events activities are required, the residence, Sports Administration and the SRC, /activities will run this over the extended Orientation programme.

5.4 Curriculum Approval

Given the uncertainty of the pandemic, it is important that Curriculum Approval can be facilitated regardless of the level of risk (High, Medium or Low).

Hitherto, Curriculum Approval has been undertaken face-to-face in large venues, for example, Eden Grove lecture theatres and seminar rooms. The Pre-registration System has also been used to approve curricula of students prior to formal Curriculum Approval. The Pre-registration System is an online system, but has limitations (only available for use by returning students to propose a curriculum; only available for use by Deans to consider proposed curricula; limited outcomes, that it, "curriculum approved" or "curriculum not approved – attend face-to-face Curriculum Approval").

In the event that a Low risk scenario prevails, the University's existing face-to-face Curriculum Approval practices will be used.

In the event that either a High or Medium risk scenario prevails, it is the intention to use an enhanced Pre-registration System (the I&TS Division has committed to enhance the system to remove limitations, but on a best effort basis):

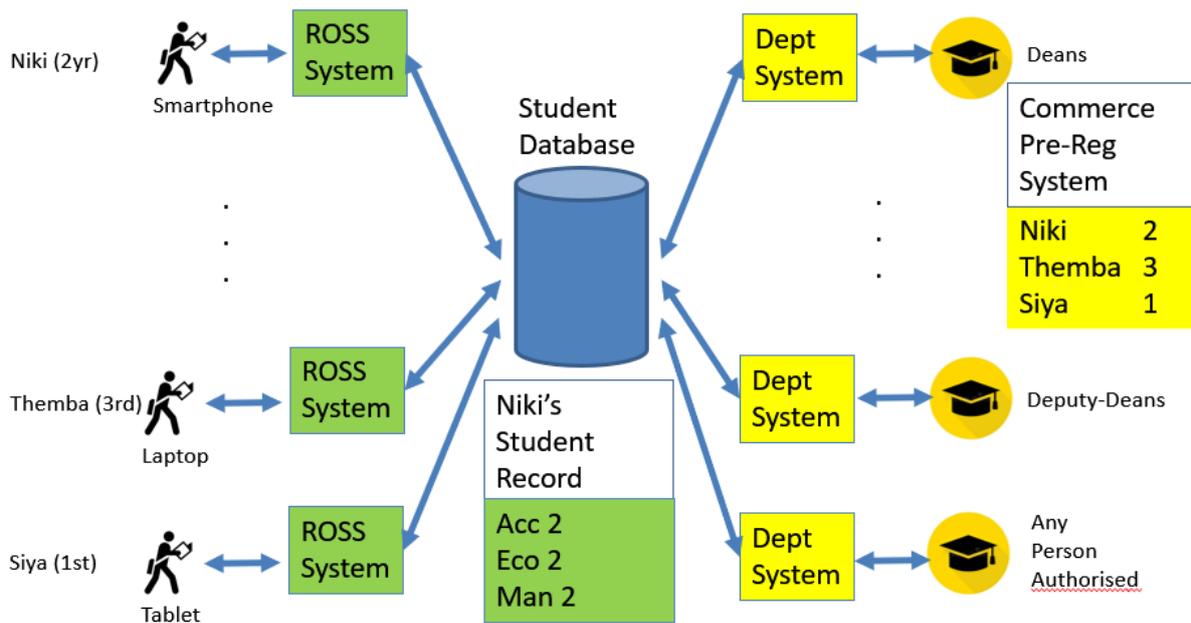


Figure 1: Curriculum Approval - 2021

The enhanced Pre-registration System will enable:

- all students (first-time entering and returners) to use any device, at any time to access the ROSS System to propose a curriculum.
- all authorised staff (inclusive of Deans, Deputy-Deans, HoDs) to use any device, at any time to access the Pre-registration System and to consider a student's proposed curriculum. The proposed curriculum may be approved, in which case the student is informed and the student proceeds with studies; or the proposed curriculum may not be approved, in which case the student is informed and requested to propose a revised curriculum using the same system.

Both students, especially first-time entering students, proposing curricula and staff approving curricula will need to be informed of how to use the Pre-registration System.

6. New Staff Orientation

At the start of every academic year, an Academic Orientation Programme (AOP) is offered to all academics new to Rhodes University. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a blended approach will be taken to AOP in 2021, with synchronous, as well as asynchronous sessions.

The purpose of AOP is to introduce new colleagues to key members of the Rhodes University leadership including the VC, DVCs, Deans and Directors of units. Invited speakers will discuss aspects of the roles of academics at Rhodes University related to teaching and learning, research, community engagement and academic citizenship. The presentations are designed to provide new academics with information about institutional culture and governance.

In addition, CHERTL staff will facilitate sessions on the “nuts and bolts” of teaching for brand new academics.

On 1 to 3 February, new staff will be invited to sign up for an introduction to using RUconnected, the Rhodes University Moodle-based learning management system. These introductory sessions will be a mix of asynchronous and synchronous, which will present an opportunity for question and answer sessions. These will be followed up with more in-depth presentations and workshops to prepare lecturers for online teaching.

Advice Alert

Diarise the dates and time for the New Staff Orientation Programme: 25 to 29 January 2021. CHERTL Team: Prof Jo-Anne Vorster and Ms Kelly Solomon (k.solomon@ru.ac.za) and Mr Neil Kramm (n.kramm@ru.ac.za).

7. Teaching and Learning

Rhodes University commits itself to continue providing students with quality education during 2021. Providing socially just higher education is a central focus at Rhodes University. This is particularly important in the context of COVID-19. It means that both lecturers and students have to do their part to ensure academic success for the majority of students. Lecturers will do their best to offer courses in ways that enable student learning and provide good academic support to students to facilitate academic success.

Other key principles that underpin our offerings during COVID-19 are all inter-linked and include, among others, ensuring the health and safety of staff and students, social justice, affordability, sustainability and preserving livelihoods. The principle of affordability means that we recognise that online provision requires extensive physical, financial and human resources, and also more time, effort and energy than face-to-face provision. We therefore all need to be aware of the resource implications of the choices we make about online teaching and learning.

In order to ensure the health and safety of the Rhodes University community, it is likely that our academic programmes will be offered online for the foreseeable future and in a blended format when necessary and possible.

Advice Alert

Teaching staff should be conscious of the real possibility of COVID-19 preventing the return to face-to-face interaction, and be prepared for online or blended learning in 2021. Lessons learnt in 2020 should inform improvements on curriculum choices, course design, pedagogy and assessment of student learning.

Academics who have not yet familiarised themselves with the resources produced by the Educational Technologies staff at CHERTL are encouraged to do so before they start to develop their courses for 2021. CHERTL will continue to offer workshops and seminars to introduce academics to suggested applications and technologies for course design and teaching and learning.

7.1 Orientating first time entering students and new staff to online learning

Most senior students would have had the opportunity to adapt to online learning in 2020. It is hoped that first-year students will have an opportunity to spend some time on campus at the start of the academic year in March 2021. RUconnected orientation for new users is being developed and will be ready to be offered in time for first year students, other new students and new academic staff.

Should COVID-19 allow, all first-time entering students will be on campus from 5 March 2021. This will enable us to ensure that all students have access to a device for online learning and to orientate students and assist them with transition to university. Given the COVID-19 context, academic orientation for first-years and the first few weeks of teaching and learning may need to take place via blended learning, that is, a combination of small face-to-face classes that adhere to strict safety protocols and online engagements. CHERTL has developed resources to prepare students for online learning:

Resource Alert

Resources to get students accustomed to online learning:

<https://ruconnected.ru.ac.za/course/view.php?id=7736>

7.1.1 Tutorial System

A cornerstone of a Rhodes University educational experience is the tutorial system and other forms of small-group engagements. Tutorials provide an opportunity for students to interact with senior students and lecturers in smaller groups. These will continue and tutors will continue to provide leadership, guidance and support for students in 2021.

Material for tutorials will be made available on RUconnected. Tutors will communicate with their tutor groups and provide support and feedback on any submissions. Students will be informed of specific details of individual tutorials in particular departments as the course progresses. Tutors will provide feedback on lectures to students who might be struggling.

Resource Alert

Tutorial manual:

<https://ruconnected.ru.ac.za/course/view.php?id=7749>

https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/chertl/document/2019_En_gage_booklet.pdf

7.1.2 Psychosocial Support

Counselling services will be available through tele- and virtual counselling for individual or groups of students who need assistance with psychological challenges. Students can also use the services provided by ER24.

7.1.3 Student Peer Mentoring

A new student peer mentoring programme planned for 2021 under the direction of the Director: Student Affairs and CHERTL seeks to offer a combination of academic, social and emotional support to first year students across all faculties. Underpinning this project is the premise that a focus on encouraging the *whole* student enables first years, who are encountering tertiary education and the University's institutional culture and practices for the first time, to navigate the new experience constructively. Through this individualised mentoring process first years are enabled to adjust to student life and more likely to achieve their academic potential.

In practical terms, experienced successful senior students will partner with small groups of first year mentees in the same faculty. Groups will meet online on a weekly basis throughout the first semester. Mentors will work to develop respectful yet relaxed peer spaces for discussion of whatever may be arising for first years, for example becoming certain of academic choices; developing a sense of belonging; general academic guidance; referral to professionals within the University as needed; and so on. In turn, mentors will be guided through regular online meetings with one another and their faculty facilitators, Rhodes staff, to discuss mentee development in a confidential environment.

7.2 Teaching and learning is a Partnership

Just as academics play their role of facilitating learning through the design of pedagogically sound courses, students have to play their part by engaging and participating in learning to ensure their success. We suggest that, as is the case with face-to-face teaching and learning, lecturers make their students aware of their responsibilities towards their own learning.

Advice Alert

Students must be made aware of the role they must play in the learning process. University studies by their nature demand independent learning. Learning online also requires students to exercise discipline and independence if they are to succeed.

The year 2020 has taught us that students need even more support during online engagement than they do in face-to-face teaching. There are several ways in which we can support students to stay on track. One is to ensure that student queries are responded to timeously. It may be necessary to employ a senior student or two to assist in this regard. WhatsApp groups have been found to be useful for ensuring that all students have access to departmental notices and messages from their lecturers. Smaller WhatsApp groups can be used to facilitate peer support. Students can assist each other via this tool and tutors should be assigned to a number of small groups to respond to questions that students themselves are unable to answer.

Advice Alert

Explore the use of WhatsApp as a communication medium and facilitation device.

7.3 Support for Online Teaching and Learning

Online courses should be designed to ensure that there is alignment between the purpose of the course, the course content, teaching and learning activities and assessment. Students gain access to knowledge through appropriately mediated courses. The Centre for Higher Education Research, Learning and Teaching (CHERTL) offers expert guidelines, advice and information on all aspects of teaching and learning, including course design, learning facilitation, assessment of student learning and the evaluation of teaching and courses. The Educational Technologies team (EdTech) in CHERTL has developed user-friendly resources to enable academics to make the best decisions to ensure that course materials are designed and presented in ways that best support student learning in the discipline. All lecturers are encouraged to make use of the resources, online courses and opportunities for consultation offered by CHERTL to facilitate the development of the kind of learning experiences that all Rhodes University students deserve:

Resource Alert

Facilities to promote the development of learning experiences that all students deserve:

<https://ruconnected.ru.ac.za/course/view.php?id=7681>

<https://www.ru.ac.za/teachingandlearning/academicstaffdevelopment/learningtechnologies/#d.en.173870>

CHERTL will continue to offer individual assistance and group workshops for support of online course design, facilitation and assessment.

7.4 Course Design

Our experience in 2020 has shown that online course design should be approached differently to course design for face-to-face teaching and learning. In most cases, it was necessary for lecturers to limit course content to what is essential. It is thus necessary to consider what course content is most important in the discipline, select this carefully and then develop teaching, learning and assessment activities so that students can engage in as much depth as possible with the course. Curriculum choices should ensure the quality of the qualification that students will eventually receive from Rhodes University is not compromised. The CHERTL Brief Guide for Designing a Curriculum and Constructing a Course provides useful guidelines for course design:

Resource Alert

CHERTL Brief Guide for Designing a Curriculum and Constructing a Course:

https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/chertl/document/2018_Brief_guide_for_designing_a_curriculum_and_constructing_a_course_document.pdf

7.5 Mediating Course Content Online

It is necessary to decide how best to mediate or teach the course material. Online teaching requires more than making material and lecture slides available to students via RUconnected.

Advice Alert

Online teaching requires more than making material and lecture slides available to students.

Mediating course material means creating opportunities for students to engage with course material in different ways. They may be required to read some material or do research on an aspect before a “lecture” to introduce them to aspects of the course, such as threshold concepts. Next, they could watch and listen to an explanation on a narrated PowerPoint slide show or a video. Alternatively, they could have a virtual class synchronously where possible. There may be one or two opportunities for students to stop the slideshow to think about an important idea, consider how a concept relates to other concepts or to something in the real world, attempt a problem, etc. After working through the slideshow, students could be required to do a task in small groups that needs to be submitted to tutors for assessment the next day. In some cases, a quiz might be useful to test students’ grasp of foundational knowledge. The benefits of a “Flipped Classroom” should be explored.

7.6 Assessment

7.6.1 On-line Assessment

Information on and guidelines for online assessment:

Resource Alert

Guidelines for online assessment:

<https://bit.ly/RUassessment>

7.6.2 Continuous Assessment

In 2020, continuous assessment was encouraged and used in many courses. It was important to ensure that the majority of students had access to online or paper-based materials before conducting assessment tasks for summative purposes (i.e. assessment that counted towards a formal grade). In 2021, it would be reasonable to expect that all students have access to a device from the start of the academic year. It would thus be possible to plan all assessments in advance and to ensure that students are prepared for different forms of (online) assessments. It is probably wise to have a continuous assessment plan so that most assessment tasks count towards a term mark.

7.6.3 Feedback

Feedback is essential for learning. Students should be given timely and good quality feedback on assignments. If tutors assist with assessing tasks and assignments, they should be properly trained for this task. The Engage guide for tutors provides guidelines for how to give good quality feedback on students' work:

Resource Alert

Guidelines for providing feedback to students:

https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/chertl/document/2019_Engage_booklet.pdf

Resource Alert

Guidelines for tutoring:

<https://ruconnected.ru.ac.za/course/search.php?search=RU+Tutoring+Online>

7.6.4 Integrity of Online Assessment

The integrity of online assessment is a big challenge. It requires innovative assessment design. One way of mitigating cheating, plagiarism and googling solutions is to limit those aspects of a task that can be googled to a minimum, and setting authentic higher order assessment tasks requiring students to apply principles. Timed assessments, while taking account of the possibility of connectivity challenges are possible by keeping an assessment “open” for, say 24 hours, but limiting the assessment time (for a two-hour test) to three hours from time of opening the assessment to submission. Departments must ensure that all students are taught about plagiarism and are conversant with the RU plagiarism policy and the consequences of academic dishonesty and plagiarism.

7.6.5 Proctoring Software

Currently, the Invigilator App is being piloted with one course in Law. The Educational Technologies specialists in CHERTL will explore how to deploy the App in 2021 if the process has value in ensuring academic integrity for assessment in online and physical assessments. The App works from a smartphone or a web browser and requires the students to authenticate via a selfie and creating random audio recordings. This can then be reviewed in a dashboard that flags attempts via an Artificial Intelligence (AI) that need to be reviewed by the lecturer.

Resource Alert

Proctoring software:

Proctoring software (Invigilator App) is being explored.

7.7 Evaluation of Teaching and Courses

All academics are expected to plan to elicit feedback on their courses and/or teaching. Rhodes University Quality Assurance Framework requires that every course should be evaluated at least once in a three-year cycle. Given that online teaching and learning is new to all of us, it may be necessary to generate data regularly to ascertain how students are experiencing our online offerings. There are many different ways in which data can be generated to contribute to course evaluation and teaching. Sources of data include students and peers (including external examiners); lecturers’ own honest reflections on their courses

and teaching are also important sources of data. Questions for formative evaluation have been shared by EdTech <https://bit.ly/RUeval> and lecturers have been encouraged to use these to improve on their online teaching in ways that are responsive and continuous. Lecturers can also consult literature on online teaching, learning and assessment and consider their practice and students' experiences of courses in relation to the literature. See the CHERTL Brief guide to the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses:

Resource Alert

CHERTL Brief guide to the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses:

https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/chertl/document/2018_Evaluation_of_Teaching_Courses_2018.pdf

7.8 Online Timetable

Online teaching and learning will be largely asynchronous, but this does not prevent staff from organising limited synchronous classes where the timetable and data permit.

Online and asynchronous study requires an enormous amount of self-discipline. For first-time entering students, this is likely to be a significant challenge.

To assist students with their time management, the timetable should be published/made available so that students can see the amount of time required per course per day per week for “lectures”, “tutorials”, “practicals” and self-study. For example, for a particular course, the student will be able to see, per week:

- 4 x 45 minute lectures
- 1 x 45 minute tutorial
- 1 x 3 hour practical
- 5 hours self-study

8. Learning Management System

Rhodes University uses a Moodle-based Learning Management System (LMS) known as RUconnected to support teaching and learning.

8.1 RUconnected

RUconnected is in need of important maintenance to ensure that it performs efficiently and effectively. This will require some downtime of approximately 1 week towards the end of February 2021 to facilitate the following:

- to back up RUconnected activity for the year(s) 2020 and earlier,
- to start a new instance, and

- to reset the current course pages and to transfer the old course that carries on into 2021 to the new page with the teachers, users and submissions.

This process is being discussed with the I&TS Division and the service provider currently to gain the approval of the budget required to complete the backup and launch of the new RUconnected instance. Downtime is planned for 22 to 26 February 2021 after the alternative supplementary examinations scheduled for 8 – 12 February 2021. Details of processes related to the planned maintenance will be re-sent to staff via Toplist in January 2021.

Advice Alert

Diarise the dates and times that RUconnected will be unavailable for use due to backup, a new instance and reset.

8.2 Learning Analytics

Learning Analytics is the “measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs” (<https://www.solaresearch.org/about/what-is-learning-analytics/>).

The upgrade to the new version of RUconnected has enabled some learning analytics in RUconnected. This is currently being explored and will be presented at the end of 2020 or early in 2021 to determine if it is viable to be activated across RUconnected to assist lecturers in potentially answering particular questions regarding student engagement with online course elements and activity on RUconnected.

Resource Alert

Learning Analytics:

Learning analytics available on RUconnected are being explored.

8.3 Professional development of academic staff

Early in 2021, staff development opportunities will be provided to academic staff to further develop their online teaching skills. In addition to the Academic Orientation Programme and CATALyst course, such opportunities will include some training on using RUconnected, some guidelines on how to structure an online course, guidelines on what constitutes good online teaching practice, opportunities to develop online teaching and learning facilitation. Academics are encouraged to make use of guidelines that have been developed and to participate in webinar offerings to refine online teaching. Please also see recordings of webinars held in 2020 where colleagues shared good online course design and teaching

practices.

Advice Alert

Explore the professional development courses available via CHERTL.

9. Courses Requiring Laboratory-Based Practicals and/or Community-Based Work/Work-Integrated Learning

A number of courses require students to undertake laboratory-based practicals and/or use specialised equipment:

- a) Most courses in the Faculty of Pharmacy.
- b) Most courses in the Faculty of Science.
- c) Some courses in the Faculty of Humanities, for example, Journalism, Drama, Music.
- d) Some courses in the Faculty of Commerce, for example, Information Systems.

Some courses/degree programmes have requirements imposed on them by their respective professional bodies:

- a) Pharmacy
- b) Law
- c) Commerce (Accounting)

In such cases, students will come back to campus in order to do practical work or use specialised equipment or satisfy requirements of professional bodies and/or receive risk-controlled face-to-face tuition. All these courses must be identified well ahead of time and risk-controlled plans should be developed. Small classes that might be offered face-to-face may also be identified and risk-controlled plans developed.

10. Staff: Student Interaction/Communication

A key feature of online study is the need for mechanisms to be developed for interaction between staff and students.

It is important that students are appraised of appropriate communication behaviour:

Resource Alert

Student Guidelines for Communicating in Online, Professional Contexts:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/teaching-tips-learning-activities/student-guidelines-communicating-online-professional>

Anecdotal evidence suggests that staff have experienced the levels of interaction demanded by online study to be onerous and, in some cases, debilitating.

It is equally important that members of staff establish when and how they will be available for consultations with students. Online teaching and learning does not only require innovation and creativity, but must be carefully planned. This includes communication and engagement with students.

In terms of availability, members of staff should indicate clearly the following:

- In-person office hours
- Online office hours
- Office telephone number (cell phone/home phone should remain private)
- Video chat options
- Email (include turnaround times)

Members of staff should also be circumspect about making their personal telephone numbers and/or cell numbers available, as well as becoming active (as participants or as friends) on social media.

Advice Alert

The mechanisms used for communication between staff and students and the policies/ground rules surrounding such use should be carefully considered and made explicit and clear to all students at the start of a course.

11. Rules and Regulations

Students operate in an environment governed by a number of rules and regulations. During 2020, a moratorium was placed on a number of these rules and regulations due to COVID-19 disruptions.

In 2021, all rules and regulations as contained in the University Calendar and other official documents will apply. Some exceptions will be made for first-year students whose Matric year was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

11.1 Duly Performed (DP) Certificates

Students must achieve a minimum level of performance in a course to be permitted to sit the final assessments. All students are given a Duly Performed (DP) certificate at the start of a course during which, if they do not perform to a specific level, they lose the DP. To retain a DP, levels of performance in regard to attendance (lectures, tutorial, laboratory practicals), submission of work (essays, assignments, projects) and minimum performance in assessments (tests) are measured.

It is incumbent on departments, with oversight by the Dean/Faculty, to set the requirements for the award of a DP Certificate. In setting levels of performance, departments should take cognisance of the importance, number and weighting of various course requirements. The level (first, second, third year and honours) at which the course is presented should also be considered. For first year courses taken mostly, but not exclusively, by first-time entering students in 2021 who have experienced a disrupted Grade 12, DP Certificate requirements should not be onerous and unrealistic, but fair and reasonable.

Advice Alert

The conditions for the retention of a DP Certificate should be carefully considered and made explicit and clear to all students at the start of a course.

DP Certificates also serve as a useful mechanism to ensure that students engage with course material throughout the duration of the course. It is an academic lever.

Advice Alert

Departments should not dispense with DP Certificates without good reason.

11.2 Academic Probation

Students who do not meet the minimum academic performance requirements of Rule G.7 will be placed on academic probation. It is the responsibility of the Dean (with approval of Faculty) to place a student on academic probation and to communicate such to the student.

11.3 Academic Exclusion

Students who do not meet the minimum performance requirements of Rule G.7 to continue to study at the University will be academically excluded. It is the responsibility of the Dean (with approval of Faculty) to academically exclude a student and to communicate such to the student.

Appendix A: SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Orientation (Staff)

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Orientation (Staff)			
Area	Activity/Output	Timeline	Responsible
New Staff Orientation Programme	Production of video clips inclusive of details of the Faculty, introductions to Deans, Deputy Deans and Faculty Officers	Nov/Dec/Jan	CHERTL (K Solomon); Deans
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce new colleagues to key members of the Rhodes University leadership including the VC, DVCs, Deans and Directors of units - Share information on institutional culture and governance 	25 – 29 January 2021	CHERTL, VC, DVC's, Registrar, Directors, etc.
	Orientation of new academic staff to online learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (a mix of asynchronous and synchronous sessions with question and answer session) 	1-3 February 2021	CHERTL

Appendix B: SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Registration

The Registrar has developed a comprehensive schedule.

To be included:

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Registration			
Area	Activity/Output	Timeline	Responsible
Recruitment and registration	Deans Talks to Parents Production of video presentations Purple talks	Nov 2020	Registrar’s Division; Deans VC, DVC: A&SA, DSA, Registrar

Appendix C: SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Orientation (Student)

The Director: SA has developed a comprehensive schedule

To be included:

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Orientation (Student)			
Area	Activity/Output	Timeline	Responsible
Orientation	Orientating first time entering students to learning at university - Production of video presentations - Deans Talks to Students Arrival and training of student leaders	See Appendix C	Registrar’s Division; Deans
	Arrival and training of student leaders	21 February 2021	DSA
	Orientation to university culture	See Appendix C	DSA
	Orientation of first time entering students to online learning	March 2021	CHERTL

Appendix D: SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Curriculum Approval

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Curriculum Approval			
Area	Activity/Output	Timeline	Responsible
Pre-registration System	Enhancement of the System	January	I&TS Division
Training	Students trained/informed on how to submit a proposed curriculum	Jan/Feb/Mar	Deans/DSA
	Staff trained/informed on how to approve a proposed curriculum	Jan/Feb/Mar	Deans

Appendix E: SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Academic Programme

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES – Academic Programme			
Area	Activity/Output	Timeline	Responsible
Teaching and learning environment in the context of COVID-19	<p>A conducive environment to ensure the health and safety of staff and students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Risk identification and development of a risk management plan - Health and safety protocols in place - Collaboration with the District and Province to raise awareness and share COVID-19 readiness plans - Regular communication and information sharing with various stakeholders - Regular reporting to DHET and other relevant structures as requested - Enforce health and safety protocols among students; implement consequences on non-compliance - Enforce health and safety protocols among staff ; implement consequences on non-compliance - Ensure all access points function accordingly, and all venues comply with Health and Safety protocols (space utilisation and ventilation). - Compliance with health and safety protocols on and off-campus - Plan and implement risk-controlled phased return of students <p>- Ensure that all venues, including residences and indoor areas where there is foot traffic have sanitiser stations and sanitiser; and are kept clean at all times</p>	Start of the year	<p>CFO; DVCs; Registrar, OHS Manager COVID-19 Response Task Team Advancement and Communication IRPQP; CRVTT Division of Student Affairs; Director; Wardens; Student leaders HR and all line managers</p> <p>CFO; Facilities</p> <p>All staff and students Phased Return of Students Task Team; Deans; Director Student Affairs Deputy Director: Residential Operations</p>
Access to Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide Laptops to NSFAS students - Provide data to students (if learning online) 	Start of the Semester/ March 2021	Finance and IT&S
Student academic support; Tutoring and peer mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tutoring: Organisation (identifying, setting ground rules and training tutors and mentors and implementation) - Mentoring for first-year students to provide academic and psycho-social support - Identify and train mentors 	Start of the semester and throughout the year February 2021	HoDs; CHERTL; DSA Tutors and mentors

Student psychosocial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Referrals - Counselling 	Start of the semester and throughout the year	Members of the teaching staff, Counselling Centre (DSA)
Evaluation of learning	Collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimising learning		Teaching staff
Credibility and quality of online assessment of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore a proctoring software - Piloting of AI invigilation tool - Support academics with development of authentic assessment tasks through workshops and individual meetings - Development of continuous assessment plans so that most assessment tasks count towards a term mark - Teach students about plagiarism and ensure they are conversant with the RU plagiarism policy and the consequences of academic dishonesty and plagiarism 	<p>Nov/Dec/January</p> <p>Jan/Feb/March</p>	<p>CHERTL (N Pallitt, N Kramm); HoDs</p> <p>Deans; HoDs</p> <p>HoDs; CHERTL</p>
Learning Analytics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore learning analytics/ predictive analytics and case management platform to provide ongoing data about student performance to staff and students - Proactively identify students-at-risk; and - Manage remedial interventions on a case-by-case basis. 	Jan/Feb	IRPQP (Dr Nnadozie), CHERTL (N Pallitt, N Kramm); HoDs
Online Timetable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online publication of lecture, tutorial and practical timetable and summative assessments - Identify and develop risk-controlled plans for all courses requiring Laboratory-Based Practicals and/or Community-Based Work/Work-Integrated Learning. - Identify small classes that might be offered face-to-face and develop risk-controlled plans - Evaluate risk-controlled plans for face-to-face teaching and learning 	<p>Start of the semester</p> <p>Dec/Jan</p>	<p>Registrar's Division (S Flanagan)</p> <p>Deans; HoDs</p> <p>Deans; CRVTT</p>
Staff: Student Interaction/Communication	Online notice of staff availability	Before a course begins	Members of the teaching staff
Rules and Regulations	<p>Determination of DP rules and award of DP Certificate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider the importance, number and weighting of various course requirements. - Consider level (first, second, third year and honours) at which the course is presented in setting DP rules. - First year courses taken mostly, but not exclusively, by first-time entering students in 2021 who have experienced a disrupted Grade 12, DP Certificate requirements should not be onerous and unrealistic, but fair and reasonable 	Before a course begins	HoDs; Deans; Registrar
Rules and Regulations	Notice regarding Rule G.7:	Start of the academic year	Deans;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of students-at-risk - Referral of at-risk students to relevant support - Place students on academic probation 		Registrar's Division
RUconnected	<p>Maintenance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - back up RUconnected activity for the year(s) 2020 and earlier, - start a new instance, and - reset the current course pages and to transfer the old course that carries on into 2021 to the new page with the teachers, users and submissions 	22-26 February 2020	CHERTL (N Pallitt, N Kramm); IT&S and Service provider

This Plan has been developed by the representation of the Teaching and Learning Continuity Task Team, comprising the DVC: Academic and Student Affairs, Deans, Registrar, Chair of HoD Forum, HoD of CHERTL, and has been consulted with the University Community at an *Imbizo* organised by the Vice Chancellor on 8 December 2020. The plan is subject to change depending on the COVID-19 trajectory.

'Mabokang Monnapula-Mapesela
DVC: Academic and Student Affairs
Updated on 8 January 2021