

An overview of the modes of provision at Stellenbosch University

Purpose of document

This document has been created as a practical guideline to clarify the different modes of provision¹ of learning and teaching used at Stellenbosch University (SU) and highlights aspects to be considered during the curriculum design of a credit-bearing module or programme. Since SU is a registered contact institution, all of our credit-bearing offerings have to adhere to the minimum requirements for contact time as prescribed by the Department of Higher Education (DHET). Additionally, the document highlights how blended learning (as an umbrella term) can enrich or mediate any module offering, irrespective of the identified mode of provision for the module.

Introduction

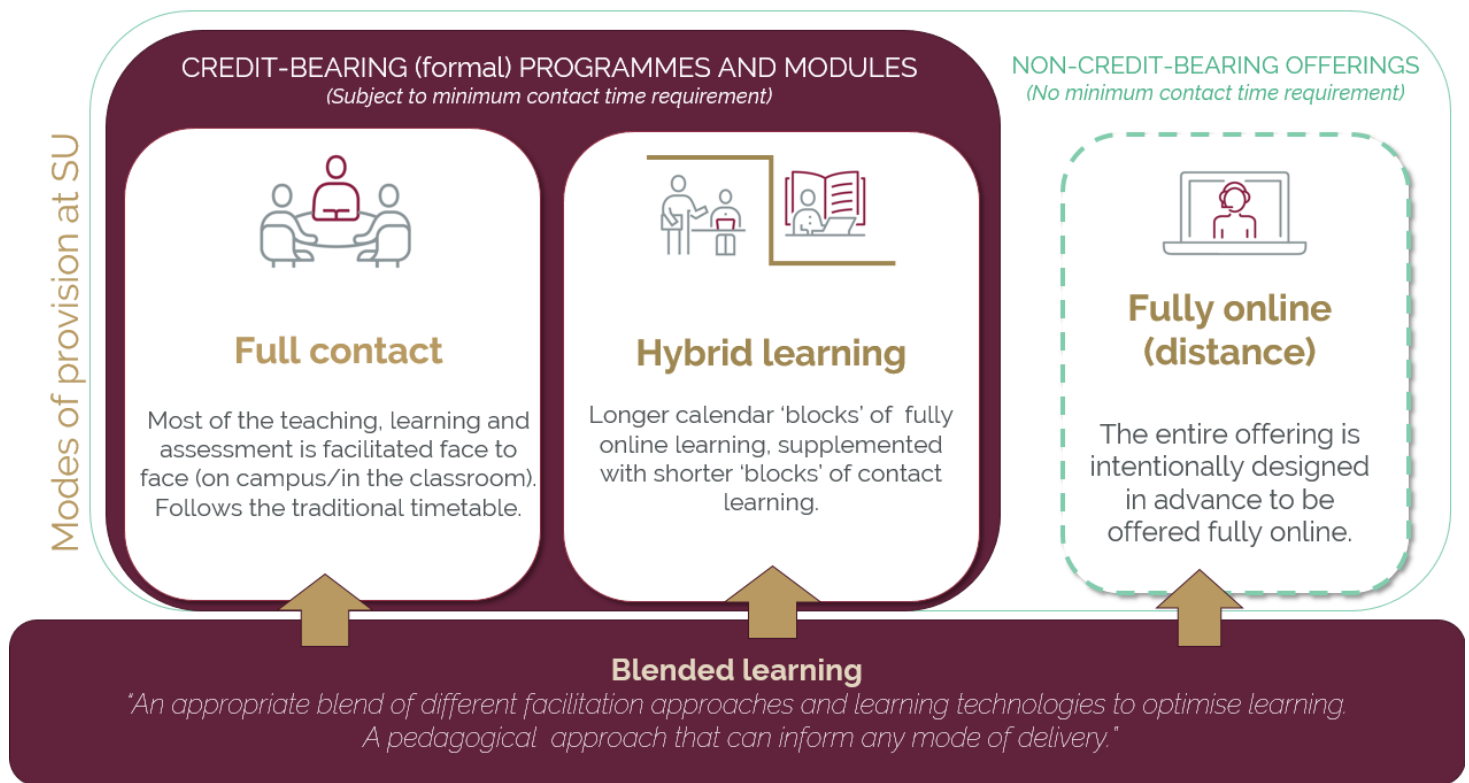
Higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa are registered to offer either full-contact or fully online (distance) learning programmes. However, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has recognised that there is a growing convergence of how institutions are presenting their academic offerings and utilising information and communication technologies (ICT). Since Stellenbosch University (SU) is registered as a **contact** institution, SU cannot offer any formal (credit-bearing) programmes or modules in a fully online (distance) format only. Therefore, when designing a programme or module, the teaching, learning and assessment strategies for each programme and module must reflect that SU adheres to the expected contact time required by the DHET for contact and/or hybrid learning programmes.

The facilitation of formal (credit-bearing) learning in higher education traditionally involved face-to-face lectures (at the same place at the same time) delivered to groups of students, accompanied by tutorials and workshops, with some independent study by the student. Owing to the emergence of digital technologies, modes of provision such as hybrid learning and fully online (distance) learning have become possible, potentially impacting teaching, learning and assessment practices. Several factors influence the choice of mode of provision, for example, the programme or purpose of the module, the intended learning outcomes, the pedagogical approach, and the student profile.

Currently, at SU, academic credit-bearing offerings can only be offered in a full-contact or hybrid learning mode. Non-credit-bearing and non-academic offerings, however, such as short courses or co-curricular activities, can be offered in any modality, including fully online (distance) learning. A [list](#) of useful and important terminology is available at the end of this document.

¹ Previously the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Council on Higher Education referred to a mode of delivery to describe the medium through which teaching and learning occur. However, focussing on delivery (or handing over knowledge) does not support a more engaged form of learning. Therefore, the terminology has been amended to indicate the *mode of provision* of a programme and/or module (Czerniewicz, 2022:7). A mode of provision refers to the mode through which the student interacts with aspects such as institutional lecturers, supervisors, peers and/or study material. It is the mode that determines the manner through which the teaching and learning happen (Czerniewicz, 2022).

As an interim response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all higher education institutions were allowed to offer their academic programmes in a fully online mode of provision. Still, these concessions are temporary based on further notice. Read more on Augmented Remote Teaching, Learning and Assessment (ARTLA) [here](#).



Blended learning as an overarching approach, applicable to different modes of provision

All modes of provision – whether face-to-face (F2F), hybrid learning (HL) or fully online learning (FOL) – can involve a blend of F2F teaching, learning and assessment methods and technologies to facilitate learning in a given context. At SU, blended learning (BL) is understood as the systematic, sensible and contextual-responsive blend of different pedagogical approaches, teaching methodologies and appropriate digital technologies combined with the best features of F2F interaction. Therefore, **blended learning** can be seen as a broad understanding of contemporary teaching, learning and assessment (Hrastinski, 2019), which can inform, enrich or mediate the curriculum design process for F2F, HL and FOL. Additionally, blended learning can also influence the *place* (in the classroom or an electronic space) and the *medium* of instruction (i.e. whether the technology used will be internet dependent or internet supported) (Czerniewicz, 2022).

Blended learning approaches could include the flipped classroom approach (where students are, for example, required to watch a podcast before attending class) or the augmented remote teaching, learning and assessment (ARTLA) approach used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further reading on blended learning is available [here](#).

Face-to-face learning (F2F) or full-contact learning

Suitable for: credit-bearing, non-credit-bearing, academic and non-academic offerings

When the mode of provision is F2F, the module or programme is offered in a physical classroom or facility with lecturers/facilitators and students mostly present in person. Most of the summative assessments happen on-campus (in brick-and-mortar facilities). Most of the teaching, learning and assessments are still facilitated on-campus or in the classroom, using the traditional timetable whereby students attend learning opportunities on-campus daily. Face-to-face learning and teaching programmes are presently the formats in which most SU modules are offered to **full-time students**. F2F learning allows for different teaching and learning methodologies to be used and can include a *blend* of traditional classroom methods and online interaction (Cronje, 2020; Hrastinski, 2019). Read more on a blended learning approach [here](#).

Hybrid learning (HL)

Suitable for: credit-bearing offerings, non-credit-bearing, academic and non-academic offerings

Hybrid learning, also known as hybrid 'block mode' learning, involves the delivery of an academic programme or module through sustained periods of fully online learning, supplemented with fewer/shorter, yet highly engaging and interactive periods ('calendar blocks') of on-campus (F2F) contact sessions (Czerniewicz, 2022; McCluskey et al. 2019, Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021; Weissmann et al., 2021).

The calendar blocks² of online learning will likely consist of predominantly **asynchronous learning**, allowing students the flexibility to learn at their own pace using scaffolded and guided online learning opportunities. However, online learning should also ideally include **synchronous**, remote learning opportunities such as webinars and online assessments. These real-time sessions contribute to the **minimum required contact** time (Council for Higher Education, 2014) required by the DHET.

The 'block mode' timetable design of HL offerings is intended to provide students with an engaging yet flexible learning experience that does not require them to be on campus full time. This improves access for non-residential, occasional students, working professionals and other students who cannot regularly travel to (or stay on) our campus full time. As the HL model allows on-campus contact sessions to be scheduled during recess periods, it can also meet the needs of residential students who need to complete **further opportunity** modules.

When proposing a programme and module(s) that will use an HL mode of provision, programme or module, leaders are required to include a hybrid learning strategy in their module design (via the module specification document/Form B) to ensure that the programme/module design considers:

- The **minimum** prescribed synchronous hours for the qualification type
- How the programme will allow for **asynchronous learning** opportunities, and which learning opportunities would be best suited to enhance learning in the specific field/discipline

² A hybrid learning timetable typically consists of 1) longer calendar 'blocks' of sustained online learning and 2) shorter periods of on-campus lectures. Such a 'blocked' timetable format is intended to be especially suitable for working professionals or students who cannot afford to reside on or regularly commute to campus.

- Which **synchronous** learning opportunities can be facilitated online (and how)
- Which knowledge acquisition opportunities should ideally occur on-campus (for instance orientation and practical/lab work).

Read more on HL [here](#).

Fully online learning (FOL)

*Only suitable for: Non-credit-bearing offerings (including short courses and **learning units**)*

The entire offering is intentionally designed in advance to be offered fully online (FOL) via digital technology. It is also known as distance education or remote learning (Fresen, 2018). Teaching, learning and assessment activities are predominantly **asynchronous** (more than 30% of the **notional hours**) to allow students to engage with learning material at different times and locations. However, the learning design can include pedagogies to allow limited synchronous student engagement. These engagements are usually scheduled utilising an online platform.

As SU is not accredited to offer fully online credit-bearing modules or programmes, this mode of delivery is only suitable for non-academic or non-credit-bearing offerings, for instance **learning units** or short courses. The University's academic offerings will meet **minimum contact time requirements** as a residential institution and include on-campus engagement with facilitators.*

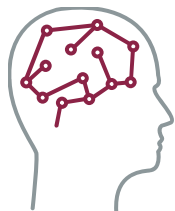
*An exception was made for all HEIs to offer programmes online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Read more about ARTLA [here](#).

Helpful considerations:

Additional resources are available from the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement.

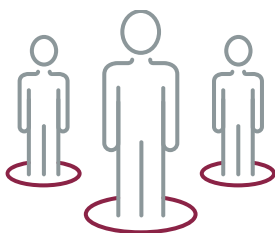
Choosing the appropriate mode of provision

When deciding on the appropriate mode of provision, we need to consider the following aspects that influence the design of the programme or module:



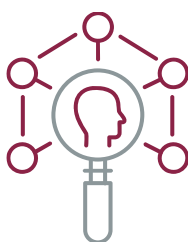
Programme/module purpose

- What has led to the need for this programme/module?
- What does the programme/module intend to achieve in the national/professional/institutional context?
- What will the qualifying student know, do and become upon completion of the programme/module?



The student profile

- For whom are we designing this programme/module, and what are their learning needs in terms of the programme structure?
- Which underpinning knowledge, skills and values do they need to complete this programme/module (admission requirements, prerequisites, etc.)?
- Will these students be able to attend classes on campus and full time, or would an approach using block contact sessions on campus be better suited?
- Suppose the programme is designed to allow for an extended **minimum duration** (i.e. part-time) and the programme will use block contact sessions. Will the students be able to attend block contact sessions for both (or more) years?



The main skills, knowledge and attributes to be developed during the programme/module

- What main content (knowledge) should be covered by this programme/module?
- What are the main skills/values/attributes that students need to acquire/demonstrate and how will the programme/module enable them to develop these skills/values?
- How can learning technology mediate the learning opportunities (administration/communication/collaboration, etc.) or the development of skills/values/attributes?
- Does the content allow for more extended periods of self-sustained **asynchronous** online learning?

Changing the mode of provision of a programme/module from full contact to hybrid learning

The majority of SU's academic programmes are offered in full-contact mode of delivery. As a residential institution, this will not change.

Yet, it is possible to revise an existing elective module and redesign it to allow for an HL mode of delivery. This could allow for more flexibility within a programme.

This would generate a new HL module to be offered within a programme or several programmes. Typically, the goal would be two-fold:

- To allow more students to enrol for a module
- To ensure the availability of the module for occasional students (for instance lifelong learning module or holistic student development opportunity)

However, cognisance should be taken of the teaching and learning strategy and HL strategy for the programme, and how the HL offering of the module will influence (positively and negatively) the programme as a whole. It would be essential also to consider how block contact sessions could be accommodated in an existing full-contact programme (i.e. if students already attend classes on campus full time, when block contact sessions can be accommodated).

Additionally, these changes must be approved by Senate and reported to the DHET. For this purpose, a new module specification document (**Form B**) must be completed for each module and submitted with a motivation for approval. A new module code will be created to differentiate between the full-contact and the hybrid learning version of the module.

Some key practical considerations when using a hybrid learning mode of delivery:

- What is the duration of the programme/module?
- Does the content and assessment strategy lend itself to sustained periods of fully online learning?
- Apart from the online learning, can I identify ideal calendar blocks during which students will be able to attend classes on campus?
- Which knowledge acquisition opportunities of the programme/module should students ideally complete on-campus during face-to-face interaction?
- Will the students in my identified student profile have sufficient access to the internet, personal devices and a basic level of digital literacy?
- Do our staff have sufficient capacity and time to commit to the curriculum design and technical development process?

More considerations [here](#).

Support, resources and professional development for staff

- The **Centre for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance [website](#)** offers resources and guidelines on programme/module registration and so forth.
- The **Centre for Learning Technologies [website](#)** provides various resources and training opportunities relevant to blended learning, learning technologies (including SUNLearn) and advisory support.
- The **Centre for Teaching and Learning [website](#)** hosts relevant learning, teaching and assessment policies and guidelines and more information on the **DeLTA cycle**.
- The SU **Hybrid Learning** team [website](#) provides valuable resources to assist academics in designing online teaching and learning activities, shares examples of HL programmes and modules offered at SU, and offers additional information on applying for hybrid learning funding.

Useful terminology

asynchronous learning Students engage with learning material or activities at their own pace, from different locations and during different times. Such learning usually occurs via digitally mediated platforms. The lecturer provides the students with learning activities or units, which the students move through as their schedules permit (Fresen, 2018; Hrastinski, 2019; Czerniewicz, 2022).

full-time vs part-time duration A **full-time** student is enrolled for a full academic year for the minimum duration of the qualification type (DHET, 2021). Full-time programmes are designed to consist of a minimum of 120 credits (1 200 notional study hours) per year. At SU, our undergraduate students are almost all full-time students.

A **part-time** student is enrolled in a programme or qualification for less than 75% of the average full-time study load (DHET, 2021). The student, therefore, completes the programme in more time than the minimum duration of the full-time version of the programme. These students usually continue working full time while studying, i.e. learn-and-earn students. To accommodate them, the minimum duration of study time is usually increased, i.e. a 120-credit programme is typically offered over two years instead of one year. Ideally, the credit allocation should be split as equally as possible over the amended duration.

For example, an honours programme of 120 credits (1 200 notional hours) would usually be offered in one academic year. A part-time offering of the programme would allow students to complete the programme over two years, ideally completing 60 credits in the first year and 60 credits in the second year.

Additionally, a more flexible approach to the academic calendar could be considered, especially for postgraduate students, as interaction with students would not necessarily have to be scheduled according to the academic calendar. Therefore, a programme offered via hybrid learning (HL) could also accommodate block contact sessions on campus during the SU recess periods if that would be better suited to the specific group of targeted students.

gatekeeper module At SU, a gatekeeper module is a module that students need to complete to progress to a subsequent module.

HL further opportunity module At SU, a further opportunity module offers the same content as a gatekeeper or hurdle module. The key intended outcome of a separate hybrid learning (HL) 'version' of the module, offered within the same academic year, will allow students another flexible opportunity to complete their degree without registration for a next academic year.

HL learning unit Hybrid learning (HL) units can effectively share foundational knowledge or establish prior knowledge before commencing with the rest of the programme. This approach works well in an **asynchronous** mode. The learning units can be integrated into various modules or offered as supplementary material to students.

HL module implementation in an F2F programme

To allow more flexibility within a particular face-to-face (F2F) programme, it may be possible to change to hybrid learning (HL) the mode of delivery of one or more compulsory or elective modules offered within a specific programme. However, should this option be considered, it would require careful planning and consideration in terms of accommodating students who already attend learning activities on-campus as full-time students.

HL strategy

If a module will be offered using a hybrid learning (HL) mode of provision, this should be considered as part of the curriculum design and included in the learning and teaching strategy. To ensure that we adhere to the minimum contact time requirements, we have to outline how we intend to use combinations of asynchronous and synchronous learning and how we will use technology to facilitate learning.

An HL strategy should be included for each module using an HL mode of provision.

hurdle module

A hurdle module is a module with a low success rate. The terms hurdle and gatekeeper are often used interchangeably.

minimum contact time requirements for programmes

Undergraduate programme and modules at NQF levels 5 to 7: At least **30% of the notional hours** must be offered via synchronous activities (face to face or digitally assisted) (CHE, 2014)

Postgraduate programmes and modules at NQF level 8 (honours or PGDip): At least **25% of the notional hours** must be offered as synchronous activities (CHE, 2014)

Postgraduate programmes and modules at NQF levels 9 and 10 (masters and doctorate): No minimum synchronous contact time requirements

minimum duration of study

The minimum duration of study refers to the minimum time a student has to be enrolled in a programme to successfully complete a programme/specified curriculum. The minimum duration for each programme is formally registered at the Department of Higher Education and Training. Students will not be able to complete their qualification if they were not enrolled for the minimum duration.

The minimum full-time duration for study usually refers to the completion of 120 credits (1 200 notional hours) per academic year. Therefore, the minimum full-time duration for a bachelor's degree would be three (3) years (360 credits) and for an honours programme, one (1) year (120 credits).

notional hours

The agreed estimated learning time taken by the average student to achieve the specified learning outcomes of the module or programme (DHET, 2014; DHET, 2021). This is not a precise measure but indicates the amount of study time and degree of commitment expected. This includes consideration of contact time, research, completion of assignments, time spent in structured learning in the workplace, individual learning and assessments. Each credit represents ten notional hours, i.e., a ten-credit module is equal to 100 notional hours and would indicate that the average student would need 100 hours to achieve the identified outcomes and obtain the necessary knowledge and skills.

occasional student

A student who is registered for non-degree purposes but wants to pursue an academic interest in the form of a specific module/modules (DHET, 2021). These students register to complete only the identified module(s) and not for a qualification. Students will receive an academic transcript. These students must meet the prerequisites of the module(s) they would like to enrol. The academic record will indicate that the requirements have been met for the particular modules, further studies, or Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), for future qualifications.

synchronous learning

This implies that the students and lecturer(s)/tutor(s) engage with one another and the course content in a specific space at the same time, whether face to face or virtually, i.e. through live streaming of lectures or an online meeting in a virtual chatroom. Synchronous online activities are also regarded as 'contact time', as the interaction between student and lecturer/tutor occurs at the same time (Fresen, 2018; Hrastinski, 2019; Czerniewicz, 2022).

References:

The following sources were consulted for this document and may be used when designing programmes or modules in face-to-face (F2F) or hybrid (HL) mode or when including blended teaching and learning approaches:

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