

Stellenbosch University Teaching-Learning Policy¹

Purpose:	To promote a learning-centred institutional environment where teaching-learning-assessment interactions and curriculum can thrive across all credit bearing and non-credit-bearing offerings, the undergraduate and postgraduate student body, the academic staff cohort, professional academic support services (PASS) divisions and management bodies across all modes of provision.
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Date of Next Revision:	The Policy must be reviewed during its fifth year of operation. It may be reviewed earlier, or more than once during its period of operation, if the owner of the Policy considers it necessary.
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Policy Owner²:	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching
Policy Curator³:	Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement
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Validity:	In case of differences in interpretation the English version of this policy will be regarded as the valid version.

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¹ This policy relates to the process of teaching-learning-assessment at SU and should be read in conjunction with the SU Assessment policy (2021).

² Policy Owner: Head(s) of Responsibility Centre(s) in which the policy functions.

³ Policy Curator: Administrative head of the division responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the policy.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The SU vision 2040 positions the University as Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society. In order for SU to be a leading research-intensive university, teaching-learning-assessment (T-L-A) is of the utmost importance. Stellenbosch University (SU) strives to contribute to society at large through all its endeavours, including the facilitation of student learning.

This policy gives effect to SU's vision in all accredited and non-accredited teaching-learning-assessment endeavours at the University, acknowledging the dynamic higher education context within which the institution must function. SU thus places a high premium on the recognition and reward of scholarly teaching-learning-assessment towards the professionalisation of the teaching role.

This policy promotes quality inclusive teaching-learning-assessment that embraces the rich potential of an increasingly diverse student body and the need for graduates who have had the opportunity to develop the SU Graduate Attributes while at the institution and can contribute to a complex society.

Teaching-learning-assessment are simultaneously held to be the key way in which higher education can address the inequalities of society; the solution to the country's dire need for skills; an essential means to economic growth; and the path that holds out the most hope for individual social mobility and financial security ([SA HE Review, 2016:143](#)).

The notion of the 'knowledge economy' has significant implications for teaching-learning-assessment. If universities understand knowledge to be a market-responsive product with currency, then their job would be to ensure that their graduates have cutting-edge workplace skills and problem-solving abilities. But, by and large, universities resist this simplification and seek to attend equally to notions of critical citizenship and public good (Ibid 2016:170).

In terms of teaching, learning, and assessment, Ashwin (2012:2) argues that there should be a movement away from viewing these constructs as independent activities but rather that they represent different facets of an integrated process where academics in their teaching role and students are simultaneously involved. Such a perspective furthermore challenges the assumption that teaching is only embodied by a 'teaching academic' (i.e., someone who teaches) and learning is only embodied in a 'student' (i.e., someone that learns). Other aspects of students as well as academics lives all contribute to the learning process within and beyond higher education. Learning is therefore personified during the whole lifespan of individuals (i.e., lifelong learning) that represents a range of different types of learning opportunities (i.e., life-wide learning) and represents different levels of learning (i.e., life-deep learning). The purpose is not to "distinguish between teaching-learning processes and assessment processes in higher education, but rather [to] view that assessment processes [are] an essential part of teaching-learning processes" (Ashwin, 2012:3). As Dann (2014:151) argues, teaching-learning-assessment (T-L-A) is a single activity that involves academics in their teaching role, students and disciplinary content that calls for an interactive interplay of minds in real-life contexts.

1.2 Theoretical perspectives

With social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) as a theoretical underpinning, learning is seen as a collaborative, social and cultural process of knowledge building that occurs in the context of human relationships and

activity and is not only a cognitive activity of individual students. Learning as a social process also does not merely refer to the location of learning (i.e., physical spaces), it affects how people learn (through interaction and participation in social and cultural activities), what is learned (social practices including the curriculum) (Prestley and Philippou, 2018), and becoming an integral part of their own and others' learning processes (Dudley-Marling, 2012). The individual and/or psychological learning processes are therefore not independent of the sociocultural context but are constituted by the context of which they are a part (Cole 1996; Gee 2008 cited in Dudley-Marling, 2012).

2. Implementation of the policy

2.1 As a learning-centered organisation, the implementation of teaching-learning-assessment processes apply to:

- a) all registered and affiliated students;
- b) all accredited and non-accredited offerings;⁴
- c) all modes of provision,
- d) all permanent SU employees as well as external, accredited and/or contract staff and students (e.g., peer-to-peer learning facilitators).

2.2 The implementation of this policy is a collective responsibility, which rests with all the parties listed in 2.1 above.

2.3 All other SU policies, rules and strategies in the area of teaching, learning and assessment should be informed by, and read in conjunction with, this policy.

3. Definitions

3.1 **Academics in their teaching role:** All SU staff involved in T-L-A and supervision at the institution.

3.2 **Learning:** With social constructivism as a theoretical underpinning, learning is seen as a collaborative, social and cultural process of knowledge building that occurs in the context of human relationships and activity and is not only a cognitive activity of individual students (adapted from Vygotsky 1978).

3.3 **Learning-centred approach:** A learning-centred approach is focused on learning as a partnership, where students are seen as co-creators of knowledge and learning environments. The emphasis is placed on the process of learning and knowledge building [by the student] rather than on the transmission of knowledge [by the teaching academic] (Von der Heidt and Quazi, 2013), including a focus on life long, life-wide and life-deep learning. In addition, SU as a learning organisation, promotes the professional learning of staff members for their T-L-A role.

3.4 **Scholarship:** Scholarship is considered as linking practice to theory, and theory to practice, encapsulated by the dimensions of discovery, integration, application and teaching. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) refers to a broad body of knowledge originally arising from seminal work by Boyer (1990), which draws on the notion of scholarship to bridge the false dichotomy

⁴ Including all accredited undergraduate and postgraduate qualification types offered by the institution as well as all non-accredited offerings, including for example co-curriculum short courses, certificates and other learning opportunities.

between teaching and research.

- 3.5 **Student responsibility:** In a learning-centred approach, students exercise their own learning rights (Romi, Lewis and Katz, 2009) by taking responsibility for their learning by being actively involved in the learning process (Slunt and Giancario, 2004) as all learning requires an investment of time and effort by students (Davis and Murrell, 1993). Students self-judge possible learning gaps and take the responsibility to devise strategies to close those gaps (Fritz, 2017).
- 3.6 **Student success⁵:** Student success is viewed holistically as part of a journey (from our first contact with prospective students until they graduate and embrace the role of alumni) where students are guided and supported on a transformative student experience (CHE 2014:ii).
- 3.7 **Supervision:** Research supervision is a complex, multi-dimensional form of teaching. It requires the supervisor to have research expertise to grow their students' knowledge, skills, and independence as researchers. It entails a supportive student-supervisor relationship with the supervisor leading, mentoring, advising, training, and educating their students in research and other related skills (Motshoane and McKenna, 2021; Van Rensburg, Mayers and Roets, 2016; McApline, Castello and Pyhaltö, 2020).
- 3.8 **Teaching:** Teaching is the "engagement with [and involvement of] [students] to [facilitate] the understanding, application and co-creation of knowledge, concepts and processes.
- 3.9 **Teaching-Learning-Assessment:** Based on learning being the central construct, teaching-learning-assessment is regarded as an integrated, symbiotic relationship positioned within the disciplinary and SU curriculum context.

4. Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to promote a learning-centred institutional environment where teaching-learning-assessment interactions and curriculum can thrive across all credit bearing and non-credit bearing offerings, the undergraduate and post graduate student body, the academic staff cohort, professional academic support services (PASS) divisions and management bodies across all modes of provision.

5. Aims of the policy

- a) To contribute to achieving SU's Vision 2040 and Institutional Strategic Framework 2019-2024 to enable inclusivity and equitable access for all prospective and current students to SU aimed at achieving a transformative T-L-A experience with staff and students as co-creators of knowledge.
- b) To facilitate student success.
- c) To provide definitions and theoretical perspectives relating to teaching-learning-assessment interactions, as well as subsequent underpinning principles.
- d) To promote the professionalisation of all academics in their teaching-learning-assessment role, and the scholarship of their teaching-learning-assessment practice.
- e) To provide for the inclusive and pedagogically sound use of learning technologies in T-L-A practices as supported by a robust and responsive infrastructure.
- f) To promote continuous academic programme planning, design and renewal in support of quality enhancement and assurance.

⁵ CHE 2014. Framework for institutional quality enhancement in the second period of quality assurance.

6. Policy principles

6.1 Fundamental theoretical principles

- 6.1.1 This policy is premised on the understanding that teaching-learning-assessment is a **shared endeavour** with reciprocal responsibilities between students, academic staff, the professional academic support services (PASS) divisions and management bodies.
- 6.1.2 The approach to teaching-learning-assessment contained in this policy is aligned with the repositioning of SU, from seeing itself as being the best in the world, to re-envisioning itself as being the best for the world, **foregrounding context and responsiveness**. This policy therefore supports the development of SU graduate attributes as aspirational statements informing T-L-A practice.
- 6.1.3 This policy adopts a **holistic** stance of teaching-learning-assessment, which includes personal, professional and social understandings.
- 6.1.4 All T-L-A practice should be underpinned by the **scholarship of teaching, learning and assessment**.

6.2 Institutional, operational and professional learning principles

- 6.2.1 The vision, mission and values of SU guide all T-L-A interactions.
- 6.2.2 SU recognises that the mutually enriching interplay between teaching-learning-assessment, social impact and research is of key importance at the University.
- 6.2.3 The policy is comprehensive in that it relates to students, academic staff, the professional academic support services (PASS) divisions and management bodies.
- 6.2.4 The integration of the formal curriculum, co-curriculum and extra-curriculum contributes to the holistic development of students by foregrounding the SU graduate attributes.
- 6.2.5 In the SU context, teaching-learning-assessment practice comprises of various modes of provision⁶, ranging from face-to-face to fully online.
- 6.2.6 SU promotes the flexible context-appropriate consideration of inclusive digitally mediated pedagogical approaches.
- 6.2.7 The SU Language Policy cultivates a multilingual approach towards comprehensive and inclusive T-L-A-practices.
- 6.2.8 The policy recognises that robust and appropriate, context-specific resources and infrastructure support student learning. (e.g., libraries, laboratories, learning spaces and learning technologies in T-L-A practices).
- 6.2.9 SU places a high premium on the quality of its offerings, including teaching-learning-assessment practices through regular self-evaluation of academic departments, external and internal moderation of formal offerings and continuous academic, programme and module review, re-design and renewal in keeping with national policy frameworks.
- 6.2.10 SU promotes continuous academic and curriculum responsiveness to the needs of its stakeholders, including statutory and non-statutory professional bodies, students, staff and other role players within a systemic process with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities for the various role-players (e.g., programme committee chairs, programme leaders, academics in their teaching role, professional academic support services, peer-to-peer facilitators and students).
- 6.2.11 Different forms of feedback are collected from students early and regularly to promote a formative approach to T-L-A.
- 6.2.12 The professionalisation of all academics in their T-L-A role is linked to the notion of a professional teaching academic. This professionalization occurs through a range of professional learning

⁶ Sit skakels na modes of provision dokument & categories of offerings.

opportunities, which provide both formal programmes and informal spaces as well as accredited and non-accredited courses. Academics in their teaching role draw on the scholarship of teaching and learning to professionalise their T-L-A practice.

- 6.2.13 SU enables the holistic career progression of all academics in their teaching role along a pathway that integrates the three academic roles of research, TLA and social impact, while recognising professional requirements, where applicable.
- 6.2.14 The professional learning T-L-A pathway progresses from reflective practitioners to scholarly teachers, teaching scholars and leaderly teaching scholars. Reflective practitioners think deliberately and critically about their T-L-A practice and systematically review and document their professional growth. Additionally, teachers draw on educational literature to reflect on their T-L-A practice and professional growth and move beyond personal reflection to observation and peer review of their T-L-A. Teaching scholars research their T-L-A practice and document their professional growth with a view to publish their findings publicly and contribute to the body of teaching and learning and assessment knowledge. Leaderly teaching scholars contribute to the body of T-L-A knowledge through publication and provide leadership in the field of T-L-A practice institutionally, nationally, and internationally.
- 6.2.15 SU is building the notion of teaching-learning-assessment excellence into the systems and criteria for the performance appraisal and promotion of academics in their teaching role, and into the institutional reward systems, by introducing the teaching-learning-assessment portfolio as a vehicle by which teaching-learning-assessment excellence is judged.

7. Policy provisions

In addition to the abovementioned principles, this policy also distinguishes five interlinked dimensions to achieving quality teaching-learning-assessment and academic programmes:

- a. Facilitation of learning through context specific T-L-A opportunities and inclusive pedagogical approaches
- b. Continuous academic, programme and module review, re-design and renewal to enhance the quality of T-L-A interactions.
- c. The scholarship of teaching-learning-assessment practice conducive to a learning-centred approach
- d. The professionalisation of academics for their teaching-learning-assessment role
- e. Appropriate teaching-learning-assessment infrastructure and technologies.

The policy provides for these interlinked dimensions in the following ways, subject to the availability of financial and human resources from within and external to SU:

7.1 Facilitation of learning through context specific T-L-A opportunities and inclusive pedagogical approaches

- 7.1.1 That SU espouses towards a learning-centred approach in T-L-A for both staff and students.
- 7.1.2 That T-L-A is seen as activities of one symbiotic process.
- 7.1.3 That T-L-A is a shared endeavour between students, academics, PASS staff and management.
- 7.1.4 That the kind of T-L-A that SU aspires to is communicated to students.
- 7.1.5 That T-L-A takes place in formal and informal spaces of which one such space is the digital space.
- 7.1.6 That different modes of provision are in place for T-L-A.
- 7.1.7 That T-L-A opportunities are inclusive and transformative.
- 7.1.8 That, across the institution, there is a shared responsibility to pay attention to holistic student success and the development of the whole student across all levels and in the formal, co- and extra curriculum.

- 7.1.9 That T-L-A opportunities support the development of the SU Graduate Attributes for all students.
- 7.1.10 That academics design context specific and inclusive T-L-A opportunities.
- 7.1.11 That students take responsibility for their own learning.

7.2 Continuous academic, programme and module review, re-design and renewal

- 7.2.1 That in keeping with national legislative frameworks on higher education and the policies and requirements of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and SU, existing programmes and modules are reviewed, re-designed and renewed as part of a continuous cycle of quality assurance and enhancement.
- 7.2.2 That academic programmes and modules are renewed to be responsive to the changing context and that the SU graduate attributes prepare students to thrive within local, regional, national and global spheres through a multilingual and multicultural mindset.
- 7.2.3 That the roles and responsibilities of various role-players such as programme chairs, programme leaders, heads of departments, academics in their teaching role etc. are clearly defined and adequately contextualised within faculties to promote quality enhancement and improvement of teaching-learning-assessment practices within the broader context of academic and curriculum renewal at SU.
- 7.2.4 That the various role-players are recognised and rewarded for their respective contributions in leading, managing, participating and supporting academic, programme and module review, re-design and renewal activities.
- 7.2.5 That the necessary capacity, including financial and human resources, is available to faculties and PASS environments to support academic, programme and module review, re-design and renewal at SU.
- 7.2.6 That during the planning of programmes, modules, courses (including short courses), at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and in the formal and co-curriculum, academics in their teaching role pay attention to students' diverse academic needs.
- 7.2.7 That SU provides integrated systems for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of all students, particularly those most vulnerable⁷.

7.3 Scholarship of teaching-learning-assessment practices conducive to learning-centred teaching-learning-assessment

- 7.3.1 That all role-players at the university familiarise themselves with the reasons for and practical implications of SU's commitment to a learning-centred approach to teaching-learning-assessment.
- 7.3.2 That scholarly academics in their teaching role are distinguished from reflective practitioners by actively engaging in SoTL with a view to researching and subsequently publishing on teaching-learning-assessment practice.

⁷ Students who are at academic risk due to factors outside of their control.

7.3.3 That academics in their teaching role make a concerted attempt to acknowledge the diversity of student learning needs and offer appropriate guidance to students to utilise available academic development and learning support opportunities.

7.4 That the professionalisation⁸ of academics for their teaching-learning-assessment role is important, supported and recognised by the institution.

7.4.1 That the institutional processes at SU are explicitly geared towards attracting talented staff as well as the ongoing professional learning for their teaching-learning-assessment role taking cognizance of the specific context;

7.4.2 That there are sufficient, suitable opportunities for promoting the appropriate professional learning of academics, for their teaching-learning-assessment role on all campuses and via all modes of provision;

7.4.3 That the available professional learning opportunities are integral to curriculum responsiveness and academic renewal;

7.4.4 That the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and the body of knowledge underpinning it, inform the professionalisation of academics in their TLA role, and the scholarship of their teaching-learning-assessment practice;

7.4.5 That academics are enabled and encouraged to make use of the abovementioned opportunities and that such professional learning forms part of their Professional Development Plans (PDPs) in their work agreements and could form part of their teaching-learning-assessment portfolio;

7.4.6 That, especially regarding permanent appointments and promotion, the use of a teaching-learning-assessment portfolio is highly recommended during the evaluation of teaching-learning-assessment;

7.4.7 That attention is paid to the integration and synergy of the three academic roles, viz. research, teaching-learning-assessment and social impact, in the annual work agreement between the teaching academic and the departmental chairperson, and in the performance appraisal;

7.4.8 That the promotion pathway of academics for their teaching role take account of research (including research on teaching-learning-assessment), social impact, as well as the practice of teaching-learning-assessment (based on SoTL principles);

7.4.9 That a variety of perspectives and information sources (such as the Quality Assurance system; moderation; student feedback; programme committees; performance management and evidence) shall be used during the evaluation of teaching-learning-assessment, drawing on appropriate criteria for quality teaching-learning-assessment (aligned to the criteria for the SU Teaching Awards);

7.4.10 That SU manages the quest for increased success while adhering to set standards and is supportive of academics in their teaching role in this regard within the formal-, co- and extra curriculum.

⁸ As professionals, academics have a 'double professionalism' (Viskovic, 2009) as they have to function both within their discipline- specific and an educational context (Frick and Kapp, 2009).

7.5 Appropriate teaching-learning-assessment infrastructure and learning technologies

SU acknowledges that learning takes place in formal and informal spaces. SU creates and maintains enabling physical and virtual teaching-learning-assessment environments which support and encourage learning-centered teaching-learning-assessment for all registered students.

- 7.5.1 That academics who teach and students have access to multi-functional teaching-learning-assessment spaces to accommodate a variety of teaching-learning-assessment configurations.
- 7.5.2 That academics who teach and students have access to well-maintained supporting teaching-learning-assessment technologies, appropriate digital technology infrastructure and relevant professional learning opportunities and support to use this infrastructure and these technologies effectively in teaching-learning-assessment practices.
- 7.5.3 That academics who teach utilize learning technologies to expand both the reach and richness of the academic offering for both on- and off-campus students.
- 7.5.4 That both academics who teach and students have access to continuous support in effectively using learning technologies for teaching-learning-assessment practices.
- 7.5.5 That SU promotes opportunities for further development and innovation in the use of learning technologies and practices in teaching-learning-assessment.

8. Roles and responsibilities regarding teaching-learning-assessment at SU

- 8.1 The academic's teaching role is multifaceted, including responsibilities relating to teaching-learning-assessment, research and social impact. All these responsibilities are interconnected.
- 8.2 A key function of the academic in their teaching role is that of knowledge expert who designs learning opportunities that enable students to access disciplinary knowledge. Knowledge is understood to be more than just disciplinary content. It also includes the principles, concepts, procedures and practices underpinning how knowledge is produced within and across disciplines. This implies that academics need to be knowledge experts in their disciplinary field, as well as reflective practitioners whose practice is informed by SoTL.
- 8.3 The academic, in their teaching role, is responsible for considering appropriate pedagogical approaches aligned to the institutional approach to teaching-learning-assessment within the context of his/her teaching-learning-assessment activities and the specific discipline. This includes, among others,
 - a) informing students about SU's approach to teaching-learning-assessment,
 - b) creating a teaching-learning-assessment environment that enables access to knowledge,
 - c) organising the teaching-learning-assessment environment to create sufficient and purposeful opportunities for knowledge-building, active learning and assessment by students, and
 - d) making students aware of the various academic development and learning support initiatives in the module and at the University
 - e) creating an environment conducive to students taking responsibility for their own learning and collecting feedback on T-L-A early and often for students' learning and for the professional learning of academics for their teaching role.

- 8.4 The students accept responsibility for their own learning. This responsibility includes, among others,
- a) familiarising themselves with SU's approach to teaching-learning-assessment,
 - b) taking responsibility for learning how to become a successful participant in the knowledge practices of their field of study,
 - c) using and participating in the available teaching-learning-assessment opportunities,
 - d) approaching the relevant departments or centres for appropriate academic development and learning support initiatives, and
 - e) providing comprehensive and constructive feedback on modules, programmes and courses with a view to inform their own learning, for the professional learning of the lecturer and the enhancement of the module when requested (either for formative or summative reasons).
- 8.5 In promoting an enabling institutional environment in which quality teaching-learning-assessment can flourish, it is the role of organisational units in charge of physical and virtual infrastructure to provide and maintain appropriate, context-specific facilities for teaching-learning-assessment, while it is the role of SU management to provide resources and strategic direction in support of the teaching-learning-assessment function.
- 8.6 Through the provision of relevant policy and strategic initiatives, SU aims to create an enabling environment where:
- a) the potential of staff and students is enhanced,
 - b) learning-centered teaching-learning-assessment is supported and encouraged, while
 - c) suitable provision is made for the support of SU's diverse student composition, and
 - d) suitable provision is made for the professional learning for the teaching-learning-assessment role of academics.

9. Policy control

9.1 Roles

9.1.1 The owner of this policy document is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching, whose role is to:

- a) oversee the development of the policy
- b) ensure that the necessary documents are drawn up
- c) appoint a curator for the policy
- d) ensure that the curator functions effectively
- e) appoint a task team for the periodic revision of the policy document, as required.

9.1.2 The curator of this policy document is the Senior Director: Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement, who is responsible for:

- a) the formulation, approval, revision, communication, release and monitoring of the implementation of this policy document
- b) the interpretation of and guidance regarding the implementation of the policy, and for convening a task team for revising the policy periodically as required.

9.2 Implementation

The Teaching-Learning policy provides the broad guidelines and institutional intent for teaching and learning at SU. Within this context, SU develops and continually updates its Strategy for Teaching and

Learning.

The implementation of the policy and strategy occurs via the Environmental Plan of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching, which stipulates the strategic focus areas and operational priorities in the field of teaching, learning and assessment. At faculty level, the implementation of the policy occurs by means of the specific faculty implementation plans, where reasonably practicable.

9.3 Monitoring and Reporting

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching is accountable for creating the necessary controls to monitor and report on this policy. The curator is responsible for carrying out such measures of control. The Senate monitors the implementation of the policy by means of an annual report on teaching-learning-assessment presented to Senate by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching.

9.4 Release

This policy is a public document, which is published on the SU website. The policy is approved by the Council of the University after consultation with all faculty boards, Senate, and the Institutional Forum. Sections 11 and 12 of this policy may be updated editorially as new policy documents arise, with approval given by the Committee for Learning and Teaching and reported for information to the Senate.

9.5 Revision

This policy is reviewed every five years, or sooner if deemed necessary.

10. Conflict settlement

Conflicts within this policy are to be resolved along the normal line management channels within the existing SU structures, such as the faculty teaching and learning committees, the Senate Sub-committee for Learning and Teaching, and Senate itself. The final decision authority for this policy resides with the SU Council.

11. Supporting documents [will finalise before final version]

12. Related documents [will finalise before final version]

13. Reference list [will be provided based on in-text citations]