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Teaching-Learning Policy



forward together
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saam vorentoe

1 January 2025

Teaching-Learning Policy¹

Type of document:	Policy
Purpose:	To regulate the implementation of learning-centred teaching-learning-assessment (TLA) across all credit-bearing undergraduate and postgraduate offerings, and across all modes of provision.
Approved by:	SU Council
Date of approval:	2 December 2024
Date of implementation:	1 January 2025
Date of next revision/frequency of 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 deems it necessary.
Previous revisions:	Strategy for Learning and Teaching (2002-2004) Learning and Teaching Policy (2007) Teaching and Learning Policy (2018)
Owner:²	Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Learning and Teaching
Curator:³	Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement
Keywords:	policy; teaching; learning; curriculum; professionalisation of all academics in their teaching-learning-assessment role; scholarship of teaching and learning, and of assessment; learning technologies
Validity:	In case of differences in interpretation, the English version of this policy will be deemed the operative version.

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

² Owner: Head(s) of the responsibility centre(s) in which the policy functions.

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

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1. Introduction

The Stellenbosch University (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 and are driven by the core values of compassion, accountability, respect, equity and excellence.

This policy gives effect to SU's vision in all credit-bearing teaching-learning-assessment (TLA)⁴ endeavours at the University, acknowledging the dynamic higher education context within which the institution operates.

The policy is informed by the need for systemic transformation at SU (SU draft Transformation Policy, 2023). This requires the active participation of academic staff, students and professional support services in developing a shared understanding of what it means to serve society. Conceptually, the policy is learning-centred. In particular, it focuses on student engagement in learning, and students' responsibility in this regard, as well as on academic renewal as a tool for providing a transformative student experience. The policy upholds the SU graduate attributes⁵ as overall outcomes of TLA at SU, which need to be embedded in the curriculum. Equally, the policy asserts the importance of academics' professional learning for TLA in support of student learning and equity of success.

2. Implementation of the policy

2.1 The implementation of the TLA principles and provisions apply to:

- 2.1.1 all registered and affiliated students;
- 2.1.2 all permanent and contract academics in their TLA role, and all other staff involved in TLA;
- 2.1.3 all credit-bearing offerings that form part of the curriculum and co-curriculum;⁶ and
- 2.1.4 all modes of provision.

2.2 All other SU policies and guidelines in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment should be informed by, and read in conjunction with, this policy.

3. Definitions

3.1 **Academics in their TLA role:** All SU staff involved in undergraduate and postgraduate TLA and supervision at the institution.

3.2 Curriculum:

3.2.1 The *formal curriculum* refers to the planned and structured modules, learning experiences and academic activities that comprise a particular academic programme. It outlines the specific subject content, learning outcomes, including the knowledge, skills and attributes that students are expected to achieve by the end of the learning period, and the TLA strategies that enable students' learning in a single discipline and across disciplinary contexts.

3.2.2 The *non-formal curriculum* consists of the co-curriculum and the extra-curriculum. The *co-curriculum* refers to educational activities and experiences that complement and enhance the formal academic curriculum. The *extra-curriculum* refers to optional, out-of-classroom activities that are neither tied to the formal curriculum, nor explicitly connected to academic learning.

3.3 **Graduate attributes:** These are aspirational behaviours and roles chosen by the University that inform the development of students towards becoming graduates. At SU, the selected graduate attributes are an engaged citizen, a dynamic professional, an enquiring learner, a caring individual

⁴ [TLA position paper: Review of the SU T&L Policy: Reconceptualisation of key concepts and practices.](#)

⁵ [SU profile of a graduate](#) (draft).

⁶ Including all credit-bearing undergraduate and postgraduate qualification types offered by the institution, as well as co-curricular short courses, certificates and other learning opportunities.

and a digital knower.

- 3.4 **Learning:** Learning is the process of acquiring and building knowledge, competencies and skills that takes place through formal and non-formal curricula. Learning is understood as a collaborative, social and cultural process of knowledge-building (as opposed to only a cognitive activity by individual students) that occurs in the context of human relationships and activity.
- 3.5 **Learning-centred approach:** A learning-centred approach is focused on learning as a partnership, where students are seen as co-creators of knowledge and of learning environments. The emphasis is on learning and knowledge-building by the student rather than on the transmission of knowledge by academics in their TLA role. This approach to learning includes a focus that is life-long (throughout the student life cycle at university and beyond), life-wide (curriculum, co-curriculum and extra-curriculum) and life-deep (in terms of the quality of the experience). In addition, SU, as a learning organisation, promotes academic staff members' professional learning for their TLA role.
- 3.6 **Research supervision:** Research supervision is a complex, multidimensional 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 related skills.
- 3.7 **Scholarship:** Scholarship is considered as linking practice and theory, and encapsulates the dimensions of discovery, integration, application and teaching.
- 3.8 **Student responsibility:** In a learning-centred approach, students take responsibility for their learning and are actively engaged, as all learning requires an investment of their time and effort. Students judge their own possible learning gaps and take responsibility for devising strategies to close those gaps.
- 3.9 **Student success:** Student success is viewed holistically as part of a journey where students are guided and supported on a transformative student experience, from their first contact with the University as prospective students, until they graduate and embrace the role of alumni.
- 3.10 **Teaching:** Teaching is the facilitation of the process of knowledge-building through the design and delivery of appropriate learning opportunities. This allows students to understand, apply and co-create knowledge in an active and engaged learning environment.
- 3.11 **Transformation:** In TLA, transformation is based on the power of education to undo social inequality. This is done through the critical review of the curriculum in terms of the knowledge it prioritises, and the engagement with, and making visible the social underpinnings of, the relationships between students and academics in TLA practices. It demands attention to universal design and inclusivity in the mode of provision and the use of digital technologies.
- 3.12 **Transformative student experience:** A transformative student experience refers to the opportunities provided by the University for students to engage critically with themselves, their communities and their disciplinary fields and professions. It is predicated on the provision of cutting-edge formal programmatic offerings as well as co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students to develop as individuals within a community of peers and as citizens in a democratic society. In the formal academic environment, TLA opportunities serve as a catalyst for transformational change that aims to prepare graduates to lead and excel in a diverse world and enable their success. In a transformative student experience, students are actively engaged in their learning, encouraged to question assumptions, and challenged to think critically. They are exposed to diverse perspectives, experiences and ideas to foster open-mindedness and empathy.

4. Purpose of the policy

To regulate the implementation of learning-centred TLA across all credit-bearing undergraduate and postgraduate offerings, and across all modes of provision.

5. Objectives of the policy

- 5.1 To inform consistent decision-making regarding TLA across faculties in support of the implementation of SU's vision, values and the Strategy for Teaching and Learning (2017-2021, under review).
- 5.2 To give effect to a strong symbiotic relationship between TLA across all credit-bearing academic offerings at SU.
- 5.3 To enhance institutional capacity to address TLA challenges, including monitoring and evaluation of TLA outcomes.
- 5.4 To contribute to the development of fit-for-purpose curricula based on SU's identity as a research-intensive university.
- 5.5 To promote academics' continuous professional learning as reflective practitioners and scholarly academics in their TLA role, and encourage the development of the scholarship of teaching and learning.
- 5.6 To enhance student success through a focus on student learning, increased retention and throughput rates as part of the transformation of TLA practices.
- 5.7 To clarify the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in TLA.

6. Principles underpinning quality TLA at SU

- 6.1 Teaching, learning and assessment are seen as distinct but symbiotic aspects of the same pedagogic process that forms part of all SU's credit-bearing academic offerings.
- 6.2 Students' engagement with, and responsibility for, their own learning is a fundamental aspect of the learning-centred approach to TLA.
- 6.3 All SU programmatic offerings contribute to transformative learning experiences aimed at students' holistic growth through the integration of the University's graduate attributes.
- 6.4 Teaching, learning and assessment are professional activities that require professional learning⁷ by academics to be equipped for their TLA role, and are supported by the scholarship of teaching and learning, and of assessment.
- 6.5 The University has a responsibility to provide equitable opportunities to all students to complete their studies and achieve the required learning outcomes.
- 6.6 All undergraduate curricula introduce students to relevant research skills and cutting-edge disciplinary knowledge.
- 6.7 Where feasible, all credit-bearing offerings at SU should be digitally enabled and presented on a continuum from a blended in-person to a hybrid mode of provision for all students.

⁷ Professional learning is defined as "the need for professionals to continue learning as they practice and advance in their careers". (Johnston, S. 1998. Women and professional development in higher education: A search for understanding. *International Journal for Academic Development* 3(1): 64-71)

7. Policy provisions

The policy provisions define the actions needed to achieve the principles of quality TLA and academic programmes at SU. The following five interlinked dimensions are distinguished:

- 7.1 Facilitation of learning through relevant context-specific TLA opportunities and inclusive pedagogical approaches
- 7.2 Continuous academic renewal, including programme and module review, redesign and evaluation
- 7.3 The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), and of assessment
- 7.4 The professionalisation of academics in their TLA role
- 7.5 Appropriate TLA 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 relevant context-specific TLA opportunities and inclusive pedagogical approaches

- 7.1.1 SU espouses a learning-centred approach to TLA for both staff and students.
- 7.1.2 TLA is a shared endeavour between students, academics, professional academic support services staff and management.
- 7.1.3 TLA takes place in formal and informal spaces.
- 7.1.4 Different modes of provision⁸ are in place for TLA.
- 7.1.5 TLA opportunities are inclusive and transformative.
- 7.1.6 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 and non-formal curricula.
- 7.1.7 TLA opportunities support the development of the SU graduate attributes for all students.
- 7.1.8 Academics design relevant TLA opportunities that are responsive to relevant local, national and international contexts.

7.2 Continuous academic renewal, including programme and module review, redesign and evaluation

- 7.2.1 In keeping with national legislative frameworks on higher education, and the policies and requirements of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), professional bodies and SU, existing programmes and modules are reviewed, redesigned and renewed as part of a continuous cycle of quality assurance and enhancement.
- 7.2.2 Academic programmes and modules are continuously renewed to be fit for purpose, considering decoloniality, indigenous knowledge systems and a multilingual and multicultural mindset, whilst also foregrounding the SU graduate attributes to prepare students to thrive in local, regional, national and global spheres.
- 7.2.3 The roles and responsibilities of various role-players, such as programme chairs, programme leaders, heads of department, academics in their TLA role, etc., are clearly defined and adequately contextualised in faculties to promote quality enhancement and improvement of TLA practices in the broader context of academic and curriculum renewal at SU.
- 7.2.4 During the planning of programmes, modules and short courses at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and in the formal and non-formal-curriculum, academics in their TLA role pay attention to students' diverse academic needs and equity of success for all.
- 7.2.5 SU provides integrated systems for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of all students' learning and success, particularly those most vulnerable.⁹

⁸ [An overview of the modes of provision at Stellenbosch University.](#)

⁹ Students who are at academic risk due to factors beyond their control.

7.3 The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), and of assessment

- 7.3.1 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 TLA.
- 7.3.2 Scholarly academics in their TLA role are distinguished from reflective practitioners by actively engaging in SoTL with a view to researching and subsequently publishing on TLA practice.

7.4 The professionalisation¹⁰ of academics in their TLA role

- 7.4.1 Sufficient, suitable opportunities exist for appropriate professional learning by academics to be equipped for their TLA role on all campuses and via all modes of provision.
- 7.4.2 Academics are required and supported to make use of the abovementioned opportunities, and such professional learning forms part of their professional development plans (PDPs) in their work agreements as well as of their TLA portfolio of evidence.
- 7.4.3 The scholarship of teaching and learning, and of assessment, as well as the body of knowledge underpinning it, informs the professionalisation of academics in their TLA role.
- 7.4.4 During the evaluation of TLA, which draws on appropriate criteria for quality assurance (aligned with the criteria for the SU Individual Teaching Awards), a variety of appropriate data sources¹¹ could be used.

7.5 Appropriate TLA infrastructure and technologies

SU acknowledges that learning takes place in formal and informal spaces. SU creates and maintains enabling physical and virtual environments that support and encourage a learning-centred approach to TLA for all students and staff.

- 7.5.1 Academics in their TLA role as well as students have access to multifunctional and well-maintained TLA spaces, technologies and infrastructure to accommodate a variety of TLA configurations and students' special needs.
- 7.5.2 Academics in their TLA role as well as students have access to continuous support to effectively and responsibly use learning technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) applications for TLA practices.
- 7.5.3 SU promotes evidence-based, future-oriented development and innovation in the use of learning technologies and practices in TLA.

8. Roles and responsibilities regarding TLA at SU

This policy is premised on the understanding that TLA is a shared endeavour with reciprocal responsibilities between all institutional role-players, including academic staff, students, the professional academic support services (PASS) divisions and management bodies.

- 8.1 The *academic* in their TLA role is a knowledge expert who designs learning opportunities that enable all students to access disciplinary knowledge.¹² This role includes, among others:
 - 8.1.1 considering appropriate pedagogical approaches aligned with the institutional approach to TLA in the context of the academic's activities and disciplinary fields,
 - 8.1.2 informing all students about the SU T-L policy and learning-centred approach to TLA, as well as the

¹⁰ As professionals, academics have a 'double professionalism' (Viskovic, A.R. 2009. Survey of literature relating to tertiary teacher development and qualifications. Ako Aotearoa National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence. Unpublished PhD thesis. Whitireia Community Polytechnic, New Zealand), as they have to function in both their discipline-specific and an educational context (Frick, L. & Kapp, C. 2009. The Professional Developments of Academics: In Pursuit of Scholarship, in E. Bitzer (ed.). *Higher Education in South Africa: A Scholarly Look behind the Scenes*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA).

¹¹ Such as student feedback and surveys, graduate tracking and alumni feedback, peer review and external evaluations, curriculum documentation, student performance data, comparability studies, stakeholder engagement, financial data, and accreditation reports.

¹² This implies that academics need to be knowledge experts in their disciplines and fields of study, and as a minimum, also reflective practitioners in their TLA.

- TLA approach of their modules,
- 8.1.3 organising the TLA environment to create sufficient and purposeful opportunities for knowledge-building, active learning and assessment for all students,
 - 8.1.4 making all students aware of the various academic development and learning support initiatives available at the University,
 - 8.1.5 creating an environment conducive to students taking responsibility for their own learning and success,
 - 8.1.6 creating empathetic and caring TLA interactions that allow for transformative TLA experiences, and
 - 8.1.7 collecting and responding to feedback on TLA early and often, to enhance all students' learning and inform academics' professional learning in their TLA role.
- 8.2 *Students* accept responsibility for their own learning and actively engage in the development of their metacognitive abilities. This responsibility includes, among others:
- 8.2.1 familiarising themselves with their modules' as well as SU's learning-centred approach to TLA,
 - 8.2.2 taking responsibility for learning how to become a successful participant in the knowledge practices of their field of study, and familiarising themselves with the use of relevant technology,
 - 8.2.3 using and participating in the available TLA opportunities, academic development and support initiatives at the University, and
 - 8.2.4 providing comprehensive and constructive feedback on modules, programmes and lecturers with a view to inform their own learning, academics' professional learning for their TLA role, and the enhancement of the module, when requested (either for formative or summative purposes).
- 8.3 The role of *SU management* is to provide resources and strategic direction in support of the TLA function. This role includes, among others:
- 8.3.1 providing relevant policy and strategic initiatives,
 - 8.3.2 creating an enabling environment in which quality TLA can flourish,
 - 8.3.3 harnessing the potential of staff and students through an ethics of care,
 - 8.3.4 supporting and encouraging learning-centred TLA,
 - 8.3.5 providing opportunities for academics' professional learning for their TLA role, and
 - 8.3.6 providing, maintaining and upgrading appropriate, context-specific facilities for TLA.

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, and
- 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
- c) convening a task team to revise the policy periodically, as required.

9.2 Implementation

The Teaching-Learning Policy regulates the implementation of learning-centred TLA across all credit-bearing offerings, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level, and across all modes of provision. 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 for TLA. 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. Senate monitors the implementation of the policy by means of an annual report on TLA, which is 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 SU Council after consultation with all faculty boards, Senate, and the Institutional Forum. Paragraphs 11 and 12 of this policy may be updated editorially as new policy documents arise, with updates approved by the Committee for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (CTLA) and reported to Senate for information.

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 in the existing SU structures, such as the faculty teaching and learning committees, the Senate Committee for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (CTLA), and Senate itself. The final decision authority for this policy resides with the SU Council.

11. Supporting documents

Document name	Status (e.g. identified, in process or approved)
<u>Assessment Policy</u>	Approved September 2021
<u>Policy on Plagiarism (in Support of Academic Integrity)</u>	Approved November 2016
<u>Strategy for Teaching and Learning 2017-2021</u>	Approved March 2017 Currently under review
<u>Transformation Plan</u>	Updated May 2019 Transformation Policy currently under review
<u>Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework 2019-2024</u>	Approved 2019

12. Related documents

Document name	Status (e.g. identified, process or approved)
<u>Admissions Policy</u>	Approved 2017
<u>Code of Conduct Guiding the Relationship between the Supervisor and Student</u>	Approved Contained in SU Yearbook Part I
<u>Designing Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DeLTA) process</u>	Developed in 2020
<u>Disability Access Policy</u>	Approved March 2018
<u>Disciplinary Code for Students of Stellenbosch University</u>	Approved 2020
<u>Glossary of Governance and Management Document Types</u>	Approved August 2022
<u>Guideline Document for Academic Literacy at SU</u>	Currently under review
<u>Guidelines for Programme Committee Chairs and Programme Leaders</u>	Approved 2018 Currently under review
<u>Guidelines for the Implementation of Teaching Awards at Stellenbosch University</u>	Approved 2017
<u>Guidelines Relating to SU's Extended Degree Programme (EDP)</u>	Approved 2010 Currently under review
<u>Language Policy of Stellenbosch University</u>	Approved June 2021
<u>Information Literacy Training Framework</u>	Approved September 2014
<u>Modes of Provision</u>	August 2022
<u>Performance Management Policy and Strategy</u>	Approved 2018
<u>Policy with regard to Student Feedback on Modules, Lecturers and Programmes</u>	Approved 2008 Currently under review
<u>Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement at SU</u>	Approved September 2019
<u>Presentation of Short Courses at Stellenbosch University</u>	Approved 2014
<u>Procedure for Academic Appointments and Promotions</u>	Approved 2011
<u>Recognising Co-curricular Achievements</u>	Approved November 2018
<u>Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)</u>	Approved 2017 Currently under review

<u>Recommendations of the Task Team for the Promotion and Recognition of Teaching</u>	Currently under review
<u>Regulation for Internal and External Moderation and the Processing of Results</u>	Approved September 2024
<u>Regulations for Peer-to-Peer Learning Support</u>	Approved August 2020
<u>Mandate for the Committee for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment</u>	Approved April 2023
<u>Research @ SU - various policies</u>	Approved on various dates
<u>Revision of the Student Feedback System: Interim Report of the Task Team</u>	Task team report (Afrikaans and English) 28 April 2015
<u>Social Impact Strategic Plan 2017-2022</u>	Approved 2016
<u>Staff Development Policy</u>	Approved 2016
<u>Staff Wellness</u>	Approved 2012
<u>Strategy for the Use of ICT in Learning and Teaching at Stellenbosch University</u>	Task team output document, April 2013 Currently under review