PLAN FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING IN 2023

PREAMBLE

Twenty twenty-three is the penultimate year of implementation of the *Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2020-2024*. It is also the first year of implementation of the *Wits 2033 Strategic Framework*, in which academic excellence is identified as one of four focus areas. The Strategic Framework states:

> The academic project is at the core of the University. Wits is known for excellence in both teaching and learning, and research. The shift for Wits 2033 is not in what we do, but in how we do it by placing our people at the centre, enabling a space for collaboration across disciplines, and encouraging innovative ways of approaching our curriculum and knowledge production.

In the *Plan for Learning and Teaching in 2023,* we will build on what we have learnt in the past three years, while seeking to link to the future of Wits envisioned in the Wits 2033 Strategic Framework. In addition, as a research-intensive university, our approach to university teaching and student learning is scholarly, both drawing on, and contributing to, research and reflective practice in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

In late 2019 Senate and Council approved the *Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2020-2024* (click here to view). This plan has the following focus areas:

1. Increasing flexible and life-long learning opportunities
2. Enhancing academics as university teachers
3. Strengthening institutional capacity for curriculum development and renewal
4. Diversifying assessment methods
5. Expanding post-graduate education
6. Expanding innovative formal and informal learning spaces
7. Using data analytics to promote student success

The 2020-2024 plan provides the broad framework within which annual learning and teaching plans are developed, both at institutional and at faculty levels.

Some aspects of our learning and teaching plan are supported by a University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) grant from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). For the 2021-2023 period, Wits is receiving funding for the following projects:

1. Nurturing emerging academic scholars
   provides professional learning opportunities for tutors, postgraduate students working as "academic interns", and new academic staff

2. Blended and online teaching
   provides support to academic staff to design and implement quality blended and online teaching

3. Teaching development and research grants for staff

provides grants for staff who wish to explore or develop teaching innovations or undertake research related to their teaching

4. Student academic support
   provides several different forms of support for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, including advising, tutoring, academic skills and academic writing

5. Data analytics for student success
   provides central university resources to enable us to monitor students' progress, identify barriers to success, and continue to do Artificial Intelligence persistence modelling

6. Student development and support initiatives
   provides support for transition to university, mentoring, digital skills and psycho-social student support.

THE ROAD WE TRAVELLED FROM 2020 TO 2022

In the first three years of implementing our learning and teaching plan a great deal of our attention and efforts related to the first focus area. We had to increase flexible learning opportunities at a scale and within a timespan we could not have imagined when the plan was approved. In 2020 we did this by implementing Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) in an online mode when we went into lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 we implemented a new Learning Management System (LMS), ulwazi, institution-wide and started to move from ERTL to good online educational provision.

In 2022, as lockdown regulations were eased and eventually lifted, we implemented blended learning, in which some activities take place on-site and others are done online. Every course continues to have an ulwazi site, which serves as the go-to place for all course announcements and digital resources, supports communication with and among students and offers opportunities for innovative educational activities, including various forms of assessment.

From 2020 to 2022 we increased the number of academic support staff, based both in Faculty Teaching and Learning Units and at the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD). These staff have been helping academics design and implement courses that capitalise on the affordances of educational technology, ulwazi included, combined with the benefits of in-person educational activities in well thought-out ways.

In 2021 we constituted an Educational Technology Committee (ETC) as a sub-committee of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee. This committee, which is chaired by an ICT General Manager and includes representatives from every faculty, identifies, considers and recommends new educational technology for use across the University.

In implementing ERTL and then blended learning, we also made progress in strengthening curriculum development capacity and diversifying assessment. The UCDP grant, together with a COVID-19 Relief Grant in 2020, has helped us enhance academics as university teachers, including the ability to integrate and develop digital educational resources. The UCDP grant is also helping us enhance the support and development of postgraduate students and of our data analytics capability. An area in which we made limited progress between 2020 and 2022 is

expanding innovative formal and informal learning spaces, but that is now a priority area for the DVC: Systems and Operations, who was appointed in 2021.

In late 2019 the *Wits Institutional Framework for Student Success* was approved by Senate and Council. As part of the implementation of the framework, an expanded and strengthened institutional Student Success Committee was established in early 2020, chaired by the SDVC: Academic. In 2020 the committee approved eight student success indicators, namely,

1. Increased completion rate
   Number and percentage of students from each cohort who complete in N, N+1, N+2 years (where N is the minimum time)

2. Decreased time to completion
   Comparative number and percentage of students from each cohort who complete in N years

3. Decreased disparities in completion rate by race and gender
   Percentage completion rates per cohort by race and gender

4. Increased retention
   Number and percentage of students by cohort who remain registered from semester to semester, year to year

5. Increased progression
   Number and percentage of students by cohort who progress from one YOS to the next one

6. Sufficient Credit Points
   Number and percentage of students by cohort who have achieved the required number of credits per YOS

7. Decreased bottlenecks
   Number of courses with high number or percentage of students who fail

8. Uptake of advising
   Number of students identified as at risk by BQ and/or BIS "at-risk" reports who consult an advisor

Business Intelligence Services (BIS) has developed dashboards to monitor and track each indicator at institutional and faculty levels.

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN 2023

Blended learning

We made a commitment to implement blended learning in our 2015-2019 Learning and Teaching Plan. In 2022 we had the resources and opportunity to start to do this at scale. In

common with many universities globally, we plan to continue to implement blended learning. According to Joosten et al[1],

> Blended learning is instruction that blends technological, temporal, spatial, and pedagogical dimensions to create actualized learning.

In the first semester of 2022, academic staff's ability to design their courses to achieve an optimal blend of these four dimensions was constrained by lockdown regulations which, among other things, placed limits on venue capacity. Staff also had limited time to devote to course design in what was, for many, a new way, especially given the late ending of the 2021 academic year.

In 2023 some people might wish they could go back to old ways of teaching, to revert to what was once familiar. But we cannot turn the clock back. The world has changed, our students have changed and we have changed. Also, to revert uncritically to old, familiar ways would be to miss an opportunity for us to learn. We have a wonderful and unusual opportunity to think critically and imaginatively about how we can best facilitate our students' learning given what we have learnt in the past three years, and to align our learning with global trends in higher education, adapted for our context, towards more flexible and student-centred educational provision.

Our plan for 2023, therefore, is to promote and support the further development of blended learning. As in 2021 and 2022, in 2023 every course needs to have a well-designed ulwazi site and educational activities that promote active learning and student engagement. Beyond that, the particular blend of the four dimensions mentioned above that is appropriate for a particular course will vary according to a number of parameters, including the characteristics of the students for whom the course is designed, the purpose of the course, the nature of the discipline and the resources required. The important point is that the particular blend of the dimensions – synchronous or asynchronous, remote or in the same place, no or low or high tech, teacher-centred or student-centred, some or most or all of the time – is a design issue.

In some forms of blended learning, synchronous classes are held online. This practice was sometimes adopted during the pandemic when in-person classes could not take place and the delivery of lectures was the dominant pedagogical approach in many courses. In 2023, extensive use of synchronous lectures, whether on-site or online, predominantly as a vehicle for providing information to students, should be discouraged. In the case of presentations of information, lecturers are encouraged to provide the information, which could include video recordings, on their ulwazi course sites, where students can access it asynchronously. This will obviate the need for large-class lecturing or repeating lectures to multiple groups of students. In-person classes should, as far as possible, be interactive and/or experiential, and engage students in active learning that encourages interaction with peers, staff and, where appropriate, relevant sites, facilities, equipment, technologies, resources and people from outside Wits.

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[1] Joosten, T., Weber, N., Baker, M., Schletzbaum, A., & McGuire, A. (2021). *Planning for a Blended Future: A Research-Driven Guide for Educators.* [Report] Every Learner Everywhere Network. Retrieved from: https://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/resources/

In the process of conceptualising innovative blending of the different dimensions and elements of courses, we may wish to rethink the structure of the University timetable, and the limitations it currently imposes.

> In 2023, Wits courses will be offered in a blended mode, with both in-person and online educational activities that encourage active student learning and engagement. All courses will have a well-designed ulwazi site.

Fully online courses

For the past few years, Wits has partnered with Higher Education Partners Africa (HEPA) to develop several fully online programmes. The CLTD Learning Experience team is working with HEPA and Wits academic staff to design the courses that form part of these programmes. In addition, Wits has an institutional membership of Quality Matters (QM), a US-based organisation that provides standards, rubrics and training for quality assurance of online courses. A number of Wits academic development staff have been trained on using these standards, which further strengthens our ability to develop good quality fully online courses.

With the increasing support for fully online quality course development, we will have the capability to design selected courses that can be offered in both blended and fully online modes. It is important to note that delivering a course in an online mode, as we did during ERTL, is not the same as using research-based principles to design and implement a fully online course using "true" online pedagogy. In 2023, several courses will be selected as pilots for developing fully online versions, in consultation with course lectures and course and programme coordinators. Candidate courses for fully online development might include "bottleneck courses", courses which impede progress for a significant number of students. Discussions will be held with relevant stakeholders about the most suitable and feasible periods when the fully online courses might be offered.

> In 2023, selected courses will be developed for provision in a fully online mode, with support from learning designers and according to recognised quality standards.

Strengthening capacity for curriculum development and renewal

Courses need to be thoughtfully, carefully, appropriately, intelligently designed. This requires knowledge, understanding, insight, skill and time. In 2023 there will be a strong focus on enhancing course design.

For the past three years Wits has increased the number of staff who provide support and learning opportunities that assist academic staff, who are experts in their disciplines, with course design. These staff are spread across the CLTD, Faculty Teaching and Learning units and the QAPO. Between them, they are able to offer support with a number of aspects of course design, including ensuring alignment among learning outcomes, educational activities, pedagogical approaches and assessment.

In addition to strengthening capacity for individual course design, in 2023 we will work on strengthening programme design and renewal. A well-designed programme will, among other things, be coherent in terms of the structure, number and sequence of courses, as well as content and learning outcomes, in order to enable students to achieve programme-level learning

outcomes. In the past, Wits has not had an institutional process for quality review of programmes. In 2023 we will develop such a process.

An important skill that every university graduate needs is the ability to write well. The Wits Writing Programme comprises courses that employ writing intensive (WI) pedagogy, in which writing tasks are embedded within a course in a discipline, and writing is conceptualised as thinking. In 2022 there were over 40 WI courses, supported by trained Writing Fellows paid from the UCDP grant. Wits will continue to run WI courses in 2023.

> In 2023, increased support will be available at faculty and institutional levels to enhance course design. Quality assurance of programmes will be strengthened.

Diversifying assessment

Assessment is a mechanism for promoting, monitoring and measuring student learning. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in many Wits courses assessment was used more for measuring than for promoting and monitoring student learning, often with a heavy reliance on written, invigilated, end of semester or end of year examinations. By limiting assessment in these ways, both the possible benefits of assessment as a tool for learning and the student learning that can be measured are limited.

When the pandemic struck, the Senate Standing Orders on Assessment of Student Learning (SSOASL) constrained how assessment could be done because, among other things, they did not allow for digital or remote administration, completion or submission of assessments. In 2020, when all assessments had to be done remotely, a procedures document for remote assessment had to be quickly written and approved by the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee.

In 2021, the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee established a task team to develop new SSOASL that would facilitate the implementation of the Wits Learning and Teaching Plan 2020-2024, as well as take cognisance of increased digital capabilities. In 2022, Senate approved the new SSOASL. The new standing orders will be implemented in 2023. The Preamble states:

> The Senate Standing Orders on Assessment of Student Learning (SSOASL) provide principles for assessment that are educationally sound, widely applicable and useful in assuring quality. They indicate requirements, but not detailed procedures. The latter is done in a number of accompanying procedures documents, which will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis according to need and circumstances.

There are seven accompanying procedures documents, which can be modified with the approval of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee as needs and circumstances change.

There are several aspects of the new SSOASL worth highlighting. In the previous sections, the importance of course design was discussed. The SSOASL indicate that identifying how and when students' progress towards achieving, and achievement of, learning outcomes will be assessed is an important component of course design. They distinguish among diagnostic assessment for identifying students' prior knowledge, formative assessment for monitoring and promoting students' learning during the course and summative assessment for measuring students' achievement of learning outcomes. The standing orders also introduce a new term,

cumulative assessment, which is a combination of formative and summative assessment used to monitor and measure students' growth over time in component knowledge and skills, culminating in a product or performance. In most courses it is unlikely that all learning outcomes can be reliably assessed using the same method or at the same time. Diverse forms and timing of assessments are therefore needed.

The new standing orders also indicate that the measurement of students' achievement of one or more learning outcomes through summative assessment can and should be done at appropriate points in a course, as opposed to conducting all summative assessments at the end. Final assessments conducted at the end of a course are useful for measuring students' ability to integrate and demonstrate achievement of one or more learning outcomes over the entire course. However, when such integration is not appropriate or necessary, a final assessment does not need to be conducted.

"Diversity and inclusivity" is a new section in the standing orders. It begins as follows:

> Diversity in assessment forms and practices is important in promoting and measuring diverse learning outcomes for diverse students. The design and implementation of assessment tasks should consider the needs of students who come with a variety of cultural, language and educational backgrounds, as well as those of students with disabilities, in order to promote inclusivity.

As far as possible, assessments should be designed to be inclusive of all students and their diverse needs and characteristics. The digital tools we have acquired in the past three years enable us to expand the means of assessing students and the forms that assessment can take beyond written text to include images, audio and video recordings, and interactive online sessions, in addition to in-person assessments. In some courses, it may be possible to allow students to choose the assessment format, or choose an assessment from a selection of options. As mentioned previously, the choice of assessments, including the format, timing and location, is an integral component of course design.

The new standing orders also have a section on academic integrity. When assessments were done remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in the reported incidence of cheating, including the use of contract cheating companies, collusion and plagiarism. In 2022 the Legal Office developed a new Academic Misconduct Policy, and conducted information sessions with Wits schools, including specifying steps that staff should take in dealing with academic misconduct. Students were also informed about the new policy. In addition, in 2021 and 2022 Academic Affairs worked with staff and students to raise awareness of the importance of academic integrity and the consequences of breaching it. In 2023 a document will be produced that provides a framework for promoting academic integrity across the University. Academic staff can help promote academic integrity by designing assessments that are authentic, not recycled or readily available on the internet, stipulating what student collaboration is allowed for which assessments, and modelling good referencing practices.

> In 2023, the new Senate Standing Orders on the Assessment of Student Learning and accompanying procedures documents will be implemented. This will support valid approaches to monitoring and measuring students' achievement of learning outcomes and the use of diverse forms of assessment.

Enhancing undergraduate and postgraduate teaching

In 2023 there will be an increase in structured learning opportunities for academic staff related to teaching that will be available in a variety of formats, including online learning resources, self-paced courses, workshops and webinars, short courses and formal courses.

In a collaboration between the Office of the DVC: Research and Innovation and the CLTD, in 2023 a number of learning opportunities will be developed and offered on postgraduate supervision to cater for staff with varying levels of supervision experience, as well as providing opportunities to explore a range of models of supervision.

In 2021 Wits became an institutional member of Advance HE, a UK-based organisation with extensive experience in professional learning for academics. In 2023, Wits will work with Advance HE to provide opportunities for interested academics to apply for one of their four categories of fellowship (https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/fellowship), which is an internationally accepted form of recognition for university teaching. Advance HE will also assist Wits with operationalising the *Wits Framework for Continuous Professional Learning for Academics as Teachers*, which was approved by Senate in 2019. This will help us with mapping professional learning opportunities to academics' career stages in order to provide career-stage, career-long learning opportunities.

Many postgraduate students contribute to teaching in important ways by working as tutors. The word "tutor" is an umbrella term that can encompass a wide variety of roles and activities, including being a demonstrator or assistant in a laboratory, supporting and guiding learning with individual students or small groups of students in-person or online, and marking assignments and providing useful feedback. As with any teaching role, tutors need to develop knowledge and skills to perform their role effectively. In 2023, staff who employ tutors will therefore be encouraged to ensure that all tutors undergo training offered by the CLTD and some faculties.

> In 2023, increased learning opportunities will be available for academic staff at different career stages. There will be a number of offerings on postgraduate supervision. Widespread participation of tutors in tutor development offerings will be encouraged.

Expanding postgraduate education

In 2022, the Office of the DVC: Research and Innovation has worked collaboratively with key stakeholders in the University, including Academic Affairs, to develop a new, five-year *Strategic Plan for Postgraduate Research Training.* This plan will be implemented in 2023. One of three main activities is designing curricula for postgraduate programmes. This work will involve collaboration among the Postgraduate Affairs Office, Faculty-based staff involved in postgraduate education, Academic Affairs and the CLTD.

In Project 4 of the UCDP grant, Student Academic Support, funding has been made available from 2021 to 2023 for several activities to support postgraduate students, involving collaborations among the Postgraduate Affairs Office, Student Affairs and one of the faculties. These activities include improving the postgraduate student experience, providing opportunities to showcase and celebrate postgraduate students' work, and providing student advising for postgraduate students.

In 2023, new postgraduate courses will be conceptualised, particularly for research masters and doctoral programmes. Collaborative efforts to improve the postgraduate student experience and showcase students' work will continue.

Learning and teaching spaces

As we moved to blended learning in 2022, we promoted the use of in-person educational activities in which students are actively engaged, such as laboratory, studio and clinical work and discussion classes and tutorials. As a university that values diversity and promotes critical thinking, we recognise the importance of providing students with opportunities to interact respectfully and robustly with divergent viewpoints and worldviews, in-person as well as remotely. For interactive, in-person classes with small to medium groups of students (typically less than 50), it is often helpful to have flat rooms with moveable furniture. In 2023, Wits will identify such rooms across the University and, where feasible and affordable, furnish them and equip them with mobile technology, such as small projectors or interactive boards.

There may be courses in which students will benefit if classes are offered in hybrid mode, i.e., with some students in the room and some students accessing the class online. There are a few venues on campus equipped with the technology for hybrid classes. Should there be increased demand, the possibility of equipping more venues for hybrid provision will be explored.

In addition to spaces for formal, scheduled classes, students need informal learning spaces where they can study on their own or in groups, connect to the internet and have access to food and beverages. Since the majority of Wits students do not live in University residences, it is important for them to have comfortable, safe places to study on their own and with their peers, socialise and relax when they are not attending scheduled classes. The Office of the DVC: Systems and Operations is in the process of identifying existing physical spaces on campus that could be turned into such informal learning spaces, and some have already been developed. In 2023, the number of such spaces will be expanded.

In 2023, a number of spaces for formal, interactive activities with small to medium size groups of students (20-50) will be identified, furnished and equipped. This will also be done with spaces for informal student learning, socialising and relaxing, individually and with peers.

Data analytics for student success

In 2023, BIS will continue to produce data and dashboards to monitor the Wits student success indicators identified by the institutional Student Success Committee. In addition to institution-level data, data are provided to each faculty. In 2023, faculties will continue to identify courses that contribute to bottlenecks in student progression and devise strategies to improve pass rates.

Since 2020 BIS has been developing Artificial Intelligence models to predict the likelihood of students persisting at Wits. So far it has three models, which it refines using machine learning techniques as more data becomes available. Some of this data has been made available as a dashboard for Faculty Student Advisors to flag students who are likely to be at academic risk and then to intervene proactively. It should be noted that the AI models provide additional information for staff in increasing student success and are not used to automatically trigger actions affecting students. This work will continue in 2023.

In 2023, data related to indicators of student success will be produced and analysed to provide evidence of progress and identify areas for improvement. AI models will continue to be developed to facilitate both proactive and responsive student support.

STUDENT SUPPORT

Since 2020 the Student Success Committee, a sub-committee of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee chaired by the Senior DVC: Academic, has been responsible for implementing the institutional student success framework. An important component of promoting student success is to help new first year students successfully navigate the transition from high school to university. In 2022, Academic Affairs and Student Affairs jointly spearheaded a three-week, integrated orientation to academic and student life called Gateway to Success (GTS) immediately before the start of the academic year. The programme was run using a blend of on-campus and online activities, comprising academic, academic development, faculty-specific and student life components. In 2023 GTS will be run again but shortened to two weeks in order to enable an earlier start to the academic year than was possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Digital Abilities course, which was run fully online on the ulwazi platform in 2022 as part of GTS, will continue to be developed in 2023. The Health Sciences Faculty has made the course compulsory for its students. Other faculties may wish to consider doing the same thing.

Helping You Learn Online (HYLO), an ulwazi site in which all students are enrolled, was originally created in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Since then, it has been expanded considerably. This site will continue to be developed in 2023, including providing support for blended learning. Lecturers are encouraged to include a link to it on their ulwazi course sites as it contains many useful resources, including information on academic integrity, correct referencing and how to use ulwazi.

In 2022, as part of the implementation of the Student Success Framework, AIRU collated a list of student supports offered at Wits, including information about who the support is for and who to contact to access it. ICT is in the process of creating a searchable online database that will be available to students who want support and staff who want to refer students for support. This database will be available on the Wits website in 2023.

A searchable online database for postgraduate funding opportunities is in development, and will also be available on the Wits website in 2023.

Faculty-specific academic support will continue to be offered by Faculty Teaching and Learning units, including Faculty Student Advisors. Student Affairs will continue to offer a wide range of supports for students. During 2023 a co-curricular transcript will be implemented for activities approved by a multi-stakeholder sub-committee of the Student Advisory Committee in order to officially recognise students' learning and achievements beyond their formal courses.

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN WITS' SECOND CENTURY

2023 will be the start of Wits' second century and the first year of implementation of the Wits 2033 Strategic Framework. All being well, it will also be the first time in three years that we will not be subjected to pandemic-related restrictions. The opportunities to be "Wits for Good", as our centennial campaign has stressed, in providing good quality teaching and enabling our students to learn effectively and to succeed, are enormous. As a research-intensive university, in 2023 we will use research-based principles to guide us in designing and implementing our courses and data to identify obstacles to student success; we will also demonstrate our commitment to social justice by considering the diversity of our students in how we construct educational activities, including assessment.

2023 will be a chance to be imaginative, innovative and intentional in providing education that will benefit all of our students and the communities and world they will enter and influence as graduates.