

# UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

## Teaching and Learning Strategy

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### **Introduction**

In both its Mission Statement and Strategic Plan 2010-2014, the University of Cape Town (UCT) appropriately recognizes teaching and learning as core priorities, alongside research and engagement with the community and society at large. What emerges from these documents is the interdependence of these three areas: teaching, research and engagement. Indeed it may be argued that UCT should secure its status as one of the premier universities on the continent not only because of its reputation for research but also for its contribution to research- informed teaching and social responsiveness -- all this in the context of a transforming and transformative environment, fully cognizant of its geopolitical role in South Africa, the African continent and beyond.

The University's Mission Statement and Strategic plan also indicate the kind of graduates we wish to produce. UCT graduates should not only embody the desirable attributes of critical thinking, technical and literary competence, but also be committed to life-long learning and global citizenship with a social consciousness. They should be appropriately prepared for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This requires a teaching and learning environment that can bring about the attainment of these goals and can stimulate both students and staff to be full participants in learning. It also requires ongoing attention to the structure and content of the curriculum, and to the ways that scholarship and research impact on and are infused *into* the curriculum. This attention would be incomplete without drawing attention to UCT's commitment to "afropolitanism", which emphasises the need for Africa's voices to be embedded in the curriculum, and in the learning spaces.

The university also needs to engage fully with and implement appropriate teaching and learning technologies, to provide the physical infrastructure and support which encourages innovation and assists teachers in the diversity of contexts in which learning takes place. The attraction and retention of a diverse student body is crucial to achieving these goals, and the university is committed to reviewing and revising admission requirements and providing appropriate support for its students.

It is against this backdrop that a strategy for teaching and learning at UCT has been developed.

### **Rationale: Why a Teaching and Learning Strategy now?**

There are four reasons why UCT needs an institutional strategy for teaching and learning. *The first reason is that it is strategic to have one.* Given the rapid changes in higher education – such as massification, advances in technology, the demands of a knowledge economy, growing inequality, growing competition and shrinking resources - higher education institutions around the world are re-thinking and re-positioning themselves with respect to their educational mission. In particular, many highly-ranked universities are seeing teaching and learning (and particularly curriculum) as a way of leveraging their competitive edge.

*The second reason is that a strategy is required in order to translate vision into operational plans.* As noted in the introduction UCT has a long-standing commitment to excellence in teaching that is manifested in a range of policies and practices. And yet we do not have a coherent institutional strategy and plan for how this vision will be realized. Significant progress has been made since the establishment of the Senate Teaching & Learning Committee in developing an enabling environment, in particular the strengthening of university and faculty governance structures for teaching and learning. A strategy is now required to inform the work of these structures – enabling the institution to set priorities. This is particularly important in an environment of shrinking resources.

*The third reason is that a strategy will strengthen our ability to face our challenges.* Our White Paper (1997) commits us to the dual challenges of addressing both growth and equity and yet our national system is characterized as one of low participation and high attrition. The challenges this raises for UCT are addressed in the document *Size and Shape 2010* and we have committed ourselves to increasing our undergraduate completion rates, as well as increasing our postgraduate enrolments and completion rates. While there is much work underway in the faculties to address these challenges, an institutional strategy will enable decisions to be made in a context of limited resources and pressing imperatives.

*The fourth reason is that there are a number of national policy initiatives that require a strategy.* The most pressing is the call for plans by the end of 2013 for the allocation of the 2014/15-2016/17 Teaching Development Grant (TDG). The proposed Flexible Curriculum policy also requires strategic engagement. In addition, the HEQC has decided to replace the institutional audit system with a national Quality Enhancement initiative, focusing on key aspects of Teaching and Learning, for a period of five years.

## **Goals & Objectives & Strategies**

We propose that with respect to our educational mission and the challenges noted above, there are three key goals. These are:

- Improving student learning and success by improving the effectiveness of the educational process.
- Enhancing the curriculum to meet the challenges of the contemporary world.
- Enhancing institutional capacity to develop effective and sustainable responses to UCT's educational challenges.

UCT recognizes that while the first two goals are potentially in tension with each other and may require tough choices in terms of prioritization of resources, the third goal is a necessary and enabling condition for the other two.

We propose ten objectives that will assist UCT to achieve these goals. The objectives signal the university's key priorities for the next 3-5 years. In relation to each objective we have listed areas of focus or pointers on how to operationalize the objectives. We anticipate that these will serve as key headings for the Teaching Development Grant plan. We note that there are currently a number of parallel, related processes under way at UCT, for example, a draft position statement on online education. There is also the work-in-progress of the curriculum task team. The strategy will need to both inform and be informed by developments in these areas. We thus see this strategy as a working document – while the goals are durable, the objectives, once agreed upon, need to be revisited regularly.

With respect to the first key goal - improving student learning and success - the objectives are to:

1) Provide a flexible and supportive curriculum framework that caters for a wide diversity of educational preparedness, through *inter alia*:

- Designing programmes with differential entry levels and progression tracks that meet the learning needs of talented students from a range of educational backgrounds
- Developing instruments and mechanisms for placing students on curriculum tracks that facilitate their learning and successful completion of the degree
- Ensuring that curricula have a coherent structure
- Designing curricula which support students through key transitions of their undergraduate and postgraduate experience as well as transitions between high school to university and the university into the workplace
- Addressing the problem of high risk courses in relation to curriculum progression

2) Promote course design, teaching approaches, teaching materials and assessment practices that are effective for a diverse student body and range of learning contexts:

- Articulating with prior learning, particularly at the first-year level
- Making explicit the methods of enquiry of the discipline
- Ensuring an alignment between learning outcomes, teaching and assessment
- Integrating language development and academic literacies, including digital, information, quantitative and visual literacies into disciplinary courses
- Addressing the issue of providing effective teaching in large classes
- Facilitating learning-centred teaching
- Facilitating early assessment and feedback
- Providing additional student learning support where appropriate
- Promoting good practice with respect to supervision and postgraduate thesis examination

3) Provide support, structure and promote the use of educational technology where it aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning:

- Enabling greater engagement particularly for large classes
- Promoting flexibility in catering for diversity
- Offering opportunities for elective courses and other forms of allowing for breadth in curricula
- Providing online preparation for potential postgraduate candidates

4) Support graduates with potential through the transition into and completion of postgraduate studies:

- Identifying, recruiting and preparing senior undergraduates for further study
- Developing the research capabilities of postgraduate students
- Supporting the needs of second language postgraduate learners
- Enhancing the employability of postgraduates by providing opportunities for the development of professional skills where appropriate
- Promoting opportunities for postgraduates to present at conferences and to publish
- Providing appropriate supervisor/staff development
- Piloting different models of supervision and research training responsive to changing contexts
- Strengthening a sense of postgraduate community and ensuring adequate opportunities for academic and professional enrichment

5) Create and sustain an enabling learning environment for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

- Strengthening First-Year Experience initiatives that integrate academic, affective, social and cultural support
- Strengthening the tutorial and practical learning experience
- Offering psycho-social and material support
- Support learning in the residences, particularly at the first-year level
- Consider means of providing a structure for extra-curricular support
- Ensuring physical infrastructure that supports formal and informal learning
- Extending the use of peer mentoring, particularly at the first-year level
- Taking into account the particular needs and circumstances of adult life-long learners

With respect to the second goal-- enhancing the curriculum to better meet the needs of the contemporary world -- the objectives are to:

6): Promoting appropriate research led teaching and strengthening the development of students' research capabilities at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels:

- Developing students' research capabilities in the undergraduate curriculum where appropriate
- Promoting research-led teaching, i.e. exposing students to research through their undergraduate curriculum
- Using capstone projects to develop research skills in senior undergraduates where appropriate
- Exploring shared postgraduate research training through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaborations

7) Support curriculum initiatives that enable students to achieve greater breadth in their learning without compromising core disciplinary knowledge:

- Enabling first-year students to study a wide range of subjects in sufficient depth to enable them to gain a basic understanding of their nature and key characteristics and hence make informed curriculum choices
- Enabling students to gain knowledge and competencies that are closely related to core curriculum goals but are traditionally not regarded as a part of core disciplinary knowledge, such the learning of additional languages
- Extending the provision of electives that give students exposure to subjects that enrich their core learning or intellectual lives
- Exploring the value and feasibility of exposing students to interdisciplinary study at appropriate stages of their curricula
- Promoting the opportunities for postgraduates to develop an extended network with academic and professional contacts

8) Provide curricular and co-curricular opportunities that develop graduate attributes consistent with the values of the university and the needs of society:

- Facilitating the development of critical thinking in relation to disciplinary and professional knowledge and to issues in society at large
- Promoting multilingual awareness and competence
- Developing global citizens who place a premium on social justice

- Develop versatile and adaptable graduates who have a capacity for life-long learning
- Formal recognition of extra-curricular activities that contribute to the development of graduate attributes
- Providing students with opportunities to attain a range of transferable and specialist attributes during their studies
- Developing skills in information and digital literacy
- Administer annually a survey of UCT graduates to record, monitor and evaluate their progress post graduation

As noted above achieving these goals will depend on our institutional capacity for responding to educational challenges. To achieve this goal the key objectives are to:

9) Ensure that academic staff at UCT are recognized and rewarded for efforts in improving the quality of teaching and learning:

- Recognising, rewarding and incentivizing effective teaching and supervision
- Recognising, rewarding and incentivizing staff participation in professional development opportunities
- Resourcing curriculum development initiatives
- Strengthening our mechanisms for evaluation of the quality of teaching
- Monitoring ad hominem promotion policy and practice in promoting excellence and effectiveness in teaching and supervision
- Recognising, rewarding and incentivizing the development of shareable teaching materials (for use as Open Educational Resources and/or in Massive Open Online Courses for example)

10) Increase opportunities for both formal and informal professional development of academics and tutors with respect to their role as teachers and educators:

- Provide orientation and on-going support for new academic staff in their role as teachers
- Providing training for novice supervisors
- Providing support for tutors in their role as facilitators of learning
- Providing opportunities to showcase scholarship in teaching
- Providing support for the leadership and management of teaching, learning and cycles.