**UNIVERSITY OF ESWATINI**

**SENATE**

**GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

**JULY 2021**

1. **Introduction**

The University of Eswatini adopted online teaching and learning in March 2020 as a matter of survival following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Before the outbreak, the university had adopted the Blended Learning and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment policies. These policies, where appropriate, have associated procedures for the implementation to help ensure consistency and compliance. There are also several Handbooks and Manuals, for example the Moodle Manual and the UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook (Draft C), and staff members have received considerable training on designing and delivering online courses. Further, the general academic regulations must be applicable to both online and face-to-face teaching and learning.

Based on the experience that has been gained so far, at its meeting of 19 July 2021, Senate resolved that guidelines be developed that will help in standardising online teaching and learning by bringing together, simplifying, and improving access to existing policies, procedures, supporting documentation, and training.

The guidelines will advise and inform both students and staff on what is expected from them when participating in online learning, by drawing upon the necessary documentation and Senate resolutions. In order to provide maximum awareness and flexibility of access, it is proposed to place on the University Website, in a prominent place, ten of the most frequently asked questions (FAQs for Teaching and Learning online – see appendix A) about teaching and learning online. The FAQ’s, including links to supporting documentation, will be available to staff and students.

1. **Defining online Teaching and Learning**
   1. Online Teaching and Learning (T&L) refers to delivery of content through various internet based platforms. The University of Eswatini Senate resolved that online Teaching and Learning should be done through the Moodle Learning Management System (Senate Resolution of 3 June 2020; Requirement 10 of the Blended Learning Policy). Only registered students can access their courses on the Moodle system. Communication applications like WhatsApp or email can only be used for communication and not teaching purposes (see Senate Resolution dated 3 June 2020). It should be noted that unofficial (i.e. not integrated on Moodle) platforms will not have access to student registration data. Further support on the use of the Moodle Learning Management system is available in the Moodle Manual. The following platforms are integrated on Moodle LMS:

* Zoom
* Big Blue Button

Others will be considered for Moodle integration on a case-by-case basis.

* 1. All courses, except fully online or practical courses, will be designed to have a mix of face-to-face to online teaching and learning sessions ranging from a minimum of 30% to a maximum of 70% of online teaching. (Blended Learning Policy; UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook).

1. **Lecturer-Student Engagement during online teaching**
   1. Online T&L can be done synchronously or asynchronously. Synchronous communications take place in real time and uses text, audio or video conferencing. They are useful for live presentations and situations where students are encouraged to engage spontaneously. On the other hand, asynchronous communications do not take place in real time: there can be a considerable delay between sending a message and receiving a reply. The delay is useful if students need time to reflect on their answers and to compose a more thoughtful response. Discussion groups, forums, and emails are examples of asynchronous communications. If the lecturer is using asynchronous communication, like a discussion group or forum, the topics to be discussed should be clearly articulated, the timescale for responses clearly stated, and the general etiquette for online communications should be observed (Chapter 8 in the UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook; Appendix B).
   2. Online teaching offers the opportunity to use a full range of media (text, pictures and moving images) to present the conceptual material. All these materials should be uploaded onto the Moodle system so that students can access them.
   3. Lecturers or course instructors are expected to provide study/learning materials to registered students through the Moodle LMS in the following ways:

* Hand-outs with relevant material;
* Power point presentations with voice overs (Recorded Lectures);
* Short videos, either prepared by staff (e.g. through the IDE multimedia unit) or obtained from other reputable sources. Recommended length of video session is 15-20 minutes. It has been found that concentration is lost with longer videos. However the length will also depend on the nature of material being presented and longer videos may be appropriate;
* Open Educational resources (chapters or articles). The soft copies should be uploaded onto Moodle. Links may limit the ability of students to access the material and should only be given as option;
* Journal articles;
* Other relevant material uploaded on the Moodle system.
  1. In addition to uploading the learning materials, lecturers/instructors should give regular and timely feedback or guidance through the chat system on the Moodle system or through group emails/chats agreed upon with students.
  2. Where the teaching synchronously, lecturers can use the ZOOM platform. The University has several licences that can be accessed through the Faculty Administrators or Director ICT. When live streaming is to be done, there should be sufficient prior notification of students. Arrangements to book a session should be done before the class commences.
  3. Technical issues such as power outages and poor internet coverage can create problems in accessing the internet. Therefore, all online sessions should be recorded so that they are available to students at a later date.

1. **Assessments**
   1. The Moodle system allows for online assessments such as tests/quizzes and assignments to be written and submitted online. It is, however, currently unable to provide a reliable and safe method for undertaking written examinations in real time. These need to be done face-to-face.
   2. The lecturer must make it clear to students at the start of each semester what assessments will be required, how they will be assessed (whether online or face to face), and when they are due. If any legitimate changes are made to the assessment schedule these must be communicated to all students in a timely and reliable way.
   3. Assessments can also be done synchronously or asynchronously. There are however limitations on what can be done during synchronous assessment owing to limited bandwidth, poor internet connectivity for both students and lecturers and type of devices being used.
   4. When a synchronous assessment is to be used, adequate arrangements should be put in place to ensure that all students registered for the course are given adequate notice, and safeguards and contingencies to deal with technical limitation are put in place.
   5. In the event that asynchronous assessment is undertaken, i.e. assignments, take home tests and practical write ups, a reasonable deadline for online submission should be given. The deadline should provide sufficient time for students to prepare and submit as required.
   6. In the event that students experience challenges with online submission, they should notify the course instructor in time about the challenges experienced and an agreement worked out on how and when the work should be presented.
   7. As a general guide, formative assessments can be done online. However, all summative written examinations shall be done face-to-face. Further guidelines can be found in the Academic General Regulations and UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook.
2. **Timetabling**
   1. All programmes shall have an updated teaching timetable that shall be used for both online and face to face teaching.
   2. For synchronous online T&L, the instructor should adhere to the teaching timetable.
   3. For asynchronous T&L, consultation times and assessments should be scheduled according to the teaching timetable. Lecturers can, however, arrange to meet students outside the timetabled hours in their offices or online.
3. **Reporting procedures**
   1. Challenges may arise during online teaching and learning. These may be to do with internet connection or other technical reasons.
   2. If interruption with the internet connection interferes with the submission of work, then the student should promptly inform the lecturer who will note the problem and grant the student a reasonable extension. The Head of Department must be informed if such interruption occurs for future reference.
4. **Further help and support for students**
   1. If a student is unhappy with their online experience and wishes to make a formal complaint, they should follow the correct grievance procedures for students. Equally, if a lecturer is unhappy with a student’s behaviour (but not their performance) then they too must follow the appropriate grievance procedure.
   2. In the grievance procedure, the student’s first point of contact should be their lecturer/instructor for teaching and learning issues. When a student experiences problems with online learning that cannot be resolved by their lecturer/instructor, they should refer the matter in writing, to the Tutor, then Head of Department, and Dean of Faculty.
   3. In the event there is no satisfactory resolution at Faculty level, the student should direct their concerns to the Dean of Student Affairs. Similarly, the instructor should report in writing challenges encountered during online teaching initially to the Head of Department who will, if need be, escalate further through the normal reporting channel.
   4. The UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook provides deeper explanations about many pedagogical issues and practices, and contains some useful hints and tips for both students and staff to improve their learning and teaching, respectively.
5. **Implications of adopting Online Learning for the University’s Credit Scheme**
   1. Online learning, by design, is more learner-centric. It encourages students to become more autonomous learners and less dependent on learning from face-to-face instruction. Currently, the University’s credit scheme is based on contact hours. The scheme does not fully recognise the amount of learning that takes place outside of the classroom, often online.
   2. The use of contact hours is problematic for assigning credits to post-graduate degrees by research, where the only contact hours are between the student and the supervisor, and also online teaching and learning. Contact hours only reflect a small amount of the effort required by a student to achieve a qualification.
   3. To overcome this problem the concept of notional hours that specifies the numbers of hours of learning the average student requires to achieve a credit should be adopted. The system recognises both contact hours and non-contact learning hours. Until the concept is formally adopted by UNESWA, students and staff should recognise that all engagements contribute to learning outcomes.
6. **Quality Assurance of online teaching and learning material**
   1. The online teaching and learning activities should be quality-assured by being attendant to key standards and indicators. Appendix B provides a detailed checklist on how quality could be enhanced in online teaching and learning by adhering to high quality standards in the preparing the course learning materials, including the course outline, print module, and Moodle Learning Management System web page. While the checklist is developed for the Institute of Distance Education, it is usable for online teaching in the entire University. The summary on basic requirements on the Moodle web page on Appendix C is also useful for course instructors.

**Appendix A: Ten most Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) about online Teaching and Learning.**

1. **Introduction**
   1. Teaching, Learning and Assessment at UNESWA, whether online or face-to-face (f2f) are guided by four major principles:

* Make your content **relevant**
* Use **authentic** teaching and assessment methods
* **Engage** your students.
* **Design and plan** your teaching
  1. Before becoming too concerned with the mode of delivery (online or f2f), make sure you are adhering to these principles. This will help to ensure the quality of the students’ learning experience (see Chapter 3 in the UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook for more details about the principles).
  2. In addition to these principles, both lecturers and students need to know what to expect when teaching or being taught online. These expectations have been addressed by a brief set of guidelines and through a Frequently Asked Questions (EAQ) approach. Both the guidelines and the FAQs reference the source documents that must be read for further details and to legitimise the guide and the answers provided in the FAQs.
  3. Below are ten frequently asked questions from lecturers and students about online teaching and learning. The answers and the resource links provided should help you create, deliver and experience a high-quality online teaching and learning.
  4. The FAQs are only available from UNESWA Website.

**Q1: Why use this Guide?**

The University has several policies, procedures, regulations and accepted practices that cover teaching and learning online. However, most of the information is not centrally located and accessing the relevant source to find an appropriate answer can be problematic. The FAQs not only provide quick and simple answers to many of the more important questions but also provide links to the more detailed explanations in the relevant document sources.

**Q2: Must all teaching and learning be online?**

Some teaching must be carried out online and some face-to-face (f2f). This is stated in the University’s Blended Learning Policy. However, deciding the mix of online and f2f within a given range (a minimum of 30%) is decided by the lecturer following guidance provided in the Blended Learning Policy and supported by Chapter 8 in the UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook).

**Q3: What should be taught online?**

Generally speaking, most conceptual material normally covered in f2f lectures can be taught online (see Chapters 4 and 8 in the UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook). However, lecturers should avoid simply posting notes or their PowerPoint presentations. Online teaching offers the opportunity to use a full range of media (text, pictures and moving images) to present the conceptual material.

Learning that takes place in seminars and tutorials can also be achieved online, although the tools required are different from those used to present conceptual material (see Q8 below).

On the other hand, providing online practicals is problematic. In most cases, practicals of all kinds will take place f2f. Some aspects of the practical work can be done online (e.g. preparation work or group discussion of results) but the ‘hands-on’ aspect is difficult to do online.

The lecturer will inform you at the beginning of each semester what sessions will be taught f2f and what sessions will be taught online.

**Q4: Are online or blended course equivalent to their f2f counterparts?**

Yes – the online components of a course must be of the equivalent academic standard and require the same teaching and learning effort as their f2f counterparts (see Requirement 8 of the Blend Learning Policy). A course is, therefore, worth the same number of credits regardless of the mode of delivery. However, although the total number of learning and teaching hours are equivalent, the proportion of contact hours compared to non-contact hours (autonomous learning) may vary within the same course according to Level of study and mode of teaching (online and f2f).

**Q5: How will I know when the online teaching will take place?**

There will be only one official timetable for both online and f2f teaching and learning. It will be at the lecturer’s discretion whether the timetabled session will be carried out online or f2f. Likewise lecturers will provide time for seeing students outside of the timetabled hours in their office (f2f) and online. It is also important to remember that traditional f2f teaching has an online component in this digital age. Students undertaking online, blended or f2f courses will be expected to use the internet, albeit guided and supported by their lecturers, to gather and analyse information outside of their formal contact hours.

**Q6: What if I can’t access the internet?**

Unfortunately, technical issues (e.g. power outages, poor internet coverage) can create problems in accessing the internet. However, most online sessions will be recorded and be available to students to access later. If the interruption interferes with the submission of work, then the student must inform the lecturer who will then note the problem (cc’d to the Head of their Department) and grant the student a one-week extension.

**Q7: What about online assessment?**

The University policy on online assessment is that all written examination will take place f2f. Continuous Assessments will be submitted online. Assessment not for grading purposes, that is formative assessments, for example, quizzes or tests can be taken online or f2f at the lecturer’s discretion. The lecturer must, however, make it clear to students at the start of each semester what assessments are required, how they will assessed (f2f or online) and when they are due (see Principle 4 in Chapter 3 of the UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook). More information about assessments can be found in the General Academic Regulations and in Chapter 5 of the UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook.

**Q8: How do we communicate online?**

Online communications can take two main forms: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous communications take place in real time and uses text, audio or video conferencing. They are useful for live presentations and situations where students are encouraged to engage spontaneously. The former case, live presentations, is usually a one-to-many scenario and is more akin to live broadcasting because of the large numbers can inhibit dialogue. In the latter case, engaging students in discussion, conferencing is more interactive involving smaller groups and managed dialogue is encouraged.

In contrast, asynchronous communications do not take place in real time. There can be a considerable delay between sending a message and receiving a reply. The delay is useful if you want your students to have time to reflect on their answers and to compose a more thoughtful response. Discussion groups, forums, and emails are good examples of asynchronous communications. If the lecturer is using asynchronous communication, like a discussion group or forum, then it is important that the topics to be discussed are clearly articulated in advance, the timescale for responses are understood, and the general etiquette for online communications are observed. For further details concerning online communication see Chapter 8 in the UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook).

**Q9: What Platforms and Apps can be used for online teaching and learning?**

The University policy is to use only MOODLE as their online teaching and learning platform (see Requirement 10 of the Blended Learning Policy and Senate Resolution dated 3 June 2020). Other Apps can be used, but only if the application is accessed through Moodle (e.g. Zoom, Big Blue Button). Exceptionally communication applications like WhatsApp or Gmail can be used but only for communication and not teaching purposes (see Senate Resolution dated 3 June 2020).

**Q10: Where can I find further help and support?**

The student’s first point of contact should be their lecturer or instructor for teaching and learning issues. There is also an UNESWA Teaching and Learning Handbook that provides deeper explanations about many pedagogical issues and practices and contains some useful hints and tips for both students and staff to improve their learning and teaching respectively.

If students or lecturers are having difficulties using Moodle then they should read the online Moodle Manual. If you still feel your question has not been answered then you should contact CELT if it is a teaching and learning matter or ICTC if it’s a technical problem.

**Finally…**

If you are unhappy with your online experience and wish to make a formal complaint, then please follow the correct grievance procedure for students. Equally, if a lecture is unhappy with a student’s behaviour (but not their performance) then they too must follow the appropriate grievance procedure. In all cases, the Dean of Student Affairs must be alerted of any grievances that escalate beyond discussion with the appropriate lecturer and student.

**Appendix B: Blended Learning Course Quality Assurance Checklist**

This checklist is for use by course instructors as they prepare blended learning courses and course materials for the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) at the University of Eswatini. High quality standards should be adhered to in developing online courses and course materials for use through the Moodle Learning Management System.

**Course code and title: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria**  *(Score* ***[✓ ]*** *the following statements as applicable to the blended course under review)* | **Yes** | **To a large extent** | **To some extent** | **No** | **Not Applicable** | **Remarks** |
| **Section I: Course Overview & Introduction** | | | | | |  |
| 1. A short and clear description and/or video about the blended course are available online. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. The various components of the blended course are explained. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Prerequisite knowledge and skills are clearly stated. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Minimum technical skills expected of the student are clearly stated. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. A link is provided to the official current course outline. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. A clear course schedule with topics, assignments and due dates is posted. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Expectations about assignments and other assessments to be used in the blended courses are clearly explained. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Purpose and etiquette expectations (netiquette) for online discussions, chat, email, and other forms of communication are stated clearly. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. A link to course and/or institutional policies the student is expected to comply with is provided (or policies are clearly stated). | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. There is an online introduction or icebreaker activity for students and the instructor to develop an online community. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| **Comments** | | | | | | |
| **Section 2: Course Goals and Learning Outcomes** | | | | | |  |
| 1. There is clear alignment between course goals and learning objectives. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. The course learning outcomes are described in terms of what the student will be able to do upon completion. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. The various blends of the course are aligned to the learning objectives (follow Bloom’s taxonomy levels) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| **Comments** | | | | | | |
| **Section 3: Assessment** | | | | | |  |
| 1. The learning activities and assessments are consistent with the learning outcomes. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Opportunities for online self-assessment and practice are provided. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Learner assessment is conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the course. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. A structure exists to provide students with feedback throughout the course. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Clear instructions are provided on how to submit assignments. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Assessment covers a wide range of cognitive domains/levels. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. A variety of assessment strategies are used. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| **Comments** | | | | | | |
| **Section 4: Course Materials** | | | | | |  |
| 1. Supplementary materials for face-to-face lectures are provided in the LMS. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Copies of presentations made by the instructor in the face-to-face setting are made available in the LMS. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Learning activities are clearly integrated as pre-classroom and post-classroom activities with specific instructional materials and linked to learning objectives. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Course materials are presented in a consistent and logical structure and layout, suitable to the delivery mode. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. All course materials are presented without errors. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Content uses relevant examples. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Content is accurate and up-to-date. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Media elements used within the course materials adopt formats and standards that are accessible to all students. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Relevant open educational resources are used in developing the course and are attributed clearly. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Synchronous sessions are archived for later use by the learners. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| **Comments** | | | | | | |
| **Section 5: Learner Engagement** | | | | | |  |
| 1. Discussion forums are designed to promote interaction (instructor-student, content-student, student-student) that is appropriate to the course learning outcomes. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Clear standards are set for instructor responsiveness and availability (e.g., turn-around time for email, assignment marking). | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. The requirements for student interaction and progression through the course are clearly articulated. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Synchronous sessions, if any, are clearly indicated (especially when external experts are brought in to teach). | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Online and classroom activities are clearly distinguished. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Communication/activity tools (forums, wikis, blogs, etc.) are easy to locate. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| **Comments** | | | | | |  |
| **Section 6: Learner Support Resources** | | | | | |  |
| 1. The course instructions make it clear how students can access technical support. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. The course instructions make it clear how the institution’s or programme’s academic support systems can be accessed (e.g. library services, peer tutoring). | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. The course instructions make it clear how the institution’s student support services can be accessed. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. The course instructions answer basic questions related to research, writing, technology, etc., or give links to tutorials or other resources that provide this type of information. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. The course provides guidelines or links to resources on how to succeed as a student in online or blended environments. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| 1. Contact information for instructors and tutors is easy to find. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | N/A |  |
| **Comments** | | | | | | |
| **OVERALL TOTAL:** | | | | | | |

**General Comments:**

**Notes:** Sum the scores for all the items. ‘Not applicable’ is used if a course has not planned the specific aspect of the course in the blueprint. The percentage score is calculated based on the number of items used. The total score may be used as an indicator for blended course quality, and for improving the quality of the course in the subsequent offer of the course.

**APPENDIX C: BASIC REQUIREMENTS ON MOODLE WEB PAGE**

1. Course Instructor introduction and contact details
2. Detailed Course Outline
3. Teaching and learning approaches for the course
4. Assessments (clarity on nature of and dates for assessment)
5. Announcements
6. Soft copy of the course module (preferably in Moodle Book format so students cannot download or print.)
7. Relevant texts and videos for the different course units
8. Lecture Notes
9. Recorded lectures – audio or video formats
10. Lecture Slides (with voice over narration)
11. Communication tools (forums, wikis, blogs, etc.)
12. Engaging students in discussion forums, synchronous sessions (ZOOM /Moodle chat/Discussion forums/Big Blue Button)
13. Varied assessment tasks; multiple choice questions, short answer type of questions, essay type of questions; practical application questions, take-home, open book tests etc.