

**BLENDED LEARNING POLICY FOR BUGEMA
UNIVERSITY**

POLICY NO. BU/BLP/1.0

**Approved at the meeting of the University Senate
August 2020**

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1. Introduction

The Bugema University (BU) Strategic Plan 2019-2029, highlights the characteristics of the Bugema University learning environment as that offers excellent and distinctive holistic Christian education. The plan also articulated the intent to increase access to higher education, and to promote excellence in teaching and research.

Bugema University also recognises the global trend towards flexibility of access to learning materials by students. Harnessing the opportunities offered by the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to give students flexible, anytime, anywhere access to courses and programs, and to extend their reach in the global market is among the key strategic goal of the university.

Against this background, initiatives outlined in the strategic plan 2019-2029 intend to enhance teaching and learning included a comprehensive curriculum renewal agenda, the search for innovative ways of developing the key 21st century skills in students, and the promotion of the use of ICTs to extend access, enhance flexibility, and create stimulating environments for learning.

The intent is to identify and define the philosophy, scope, principles and procedures for the use of blended learning environments for students and staff at BU in order to enhance student learning, success and engagement and to impact positively on the student experience.

1.1 International Context

Blended approaches to teaching and learning have emerged over the last decade as a successful and increasingly popular delivery model for higher education institutions. Twigg (1999, 2003) pointed out that the issue of containing costs in higher education, and in particular, using technology to do so, required a fundamental shift in thinking.

“It requires one to challenge the fundamental assumption of the current instructional model: that faculty members meeting with groups of students at regularly scheduled times and places is the only way to achieve effective student learning. Rather than focus on how to provide more effective and efficient teaching, colleges and universities must focus on how to produce more effective student learning. Faculty are only one of many resources that are important to student learning. Once learning becomes the central focus, the important question is how best to use all available resources – including faculty time and technology – to achieve certain learning objectives.” (Twigg 1999, pg 4)

It is in this context that blended learning has emerged over the past decade as a viable strategic response to the multi-pronged challenges of expanding access and flexibility, enhancing quality in teaching and learning and reducing costs in higher education.

1.2 Local context

Over the years, Bugema University has made a significant investment in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for learning and teaching in support of its mission to provide a wholistic and supportive learning environment for its students. This policy seeks to support the institutional learning and teaching priorities, while building on and advancing the achievements and supporting growing interest across schools in harnessing technology to enhance and facilitate learning.

It is in this local and international context that BU proposes to launch a formal initiative to support blended learning. This policy provides the framework within which Schools and Departments can make decisions with respect to blended learning at BU, defines the scope and spheres of adoption and the processes and institutional infrastructure required to support it.

The policy contributes to the actualization of this initiative by establishing the following as imperatives:

- Blended learning will be a feature of program delivery in all schools, as deemed appropriate, by 2022;
- A robust ICT infrastructure plan designed, established and maintained to support blended learning; and
- The University operational policies and processes, quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms will be adjusted to support a blended learning initiative.

The implementation strategy to actualize these goals is outlined in the Blended Learning Policy Implementation Strategy 2020-2022.

1.3 Scope

This policy applies to all staff and students, and relates to aspects of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy, and the BU strategic plan.

1.4 Definitions:

1.4.1 Blended Learning

Bugema University adopts the term 'blended learning' to represent broadly the use of ICTs for the enhancement of learning, teaching and student engagement, and uses the following definition as the framework for policy and practice:

“Blended learning is realised in teaching and learning environments where there is an effective integration of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning as a result of adopting a strategic and systematic approach to the use of technology combined with the best features of face-to-face interaction.” (Krause, 2007)

1.4.2 Flexible delivery

Refers to how the timing, pace, content, assessment and location (in both virtual and physical environments) of learning can be varied, personalised and chosen by the student to suit their needs, whilst still meeting the desired learning outcomes. The extent of variability will be determined by course and/or subject requirements.

1.4.3 Digital literacy

Refers to the ability to locate, evaluate, choose, use and create technologies effectively, critically and safely for lifelong learning. Students require digital literacy to locate, engage, interact, create, share and communicate with a range of learning technologies in order to access subject information, participate in learning activities, collaborate with peers and complete assessment tasks. Staff requires digital literacy to communicate, support, motivate and inspire learning for students in contemporary learning environments.

2. Principles

Blended learning at BU will be based on the following principles:

- Students are inspired, motivated and engaged to learn, through blended learning approaches that vary according to their appropriateness to the particular learning context.
- Staff are encouraged and supported to adopt fit-for-purpose and innovative blended learning approaches. These approaches are enabled by academic and professional partnerships and appropriate institutional investment in learning technologies.
- Digital literacy is recognised as an important graduate attribute and a core skill for academic staff.
- Flexible delivery options are offered to reflect the needs of students, the intended learning outcomes and the availability of resources.
- Blended learning and flexible delivery are chosen to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes and not just to reduce the costs of delivering teaching or to reduce teaching loads. In some circumstances, blended learning and flexible delivery may require increased investment of resources to ensure sustainable delivery of high quality learning and teaching.
- Technology is considered an opportunity to capture data regarding patterns of students' participation (learning analytics) to inform monitoring for at-risk students, to promote just-in-time learner support and to provide information to students.

3. Benefits of Blended Learning

- Enriches the student experience and learning outcomes
- Meets the expectations of students for utilizing technology and fosters the development of important new skills for work in the global networked environment
- Caters for individual needs, learning styles and schedules
- Encourages the development of independent learning skills
- Fosters among faculty the development of new skills and knowledge to transform teaching
- Supports flexibility and convenience of access to course resources and activities for persons with jobs, family or distance barriers
- Helps reduce the costs of delivering instruction and facilitates more efficient use of resources
- Makes optimal use of physical and virtual resources

4. Blended Learning Policy Framework

The blended learning policy for BU is intended to promote the use of ICTs to enhance teaching, learning and student engagement, achieve competitive advantage, increase opportunities for flexible access, and increase productivity and efficiency through optimum use of human, fiscal and physical resources as mandated in the BU Strategic Plan 2019-2029. The blended learning initiative at BU will have the following major goals:

- Strategic and systematic use of technology in a quality face-to-face environment to provide a more diverse and flexible learning experience, offering students flexibility with respect to time, place, pace and devices for learning
- Fostering of collaboration, reflection, problem solving and critical thinking in students
- Enhanced interaction among students and between students and instructors
- Supporting increased capacity for self-regulated learning
- Reducing costs through maximizing the use of human and physical resources

5. Quality Elements

This blended learning policy recognizes the following quality elements for blended and online learning: institutional support; course design; course development; teaching and learning; student support; faculty support; evaluation and assessment. This policy brings these major elements together under the five broad themes of **Institutional Supporting Framework, Academic Policy, Faculty Support and Recognition, Student Support and Preparation, and Quality Assurance and Evaluation**

6. Definitive Policy Statements

Policy	Procedure
<p>Institutional Supporting Framework</p>	<p>Vision for Blended Learning: BU to be an institution in which Schools, Departments and individuals are empowered to innovatively harness available and appropriate ICTs to create pedagogically sound, learning-centered and engaging teaching and learning environments that offer flexibility and facilitate the most efficient and effective use of human, technological and physical resources.</p> <p>Mission for blended Learning To offer an excellent and distinctive holistic Christian education through flexible modes of delivery and modern technology for productive lives, useful service to God and to the community with integrity</p> <p>Goal for Blended Learning: To systematically integrated blended learning in all School programs at BU by 2022.</p> <p>Blended learning Principles: The DVC-Academics, Quality Assurance Director and Heads of Departments (HODs) will ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective Blended learning is achieved through a process of systematic course design/redesign that takes account of the best features of the online and face-to-face learning environments ▪ Pedagogy represents the principal consideration in blended course design and development ▪ Effective blended learning thoughtfully integrates face-to-face and online learning ▪ Effective blended learning is achieved through a focus on constructive alignment of learning outcomes, assessments, content and learning activities ▪ Blended approaches are designed to improve the student learning experience, optimize student engagement, and lead to improved learning outcomes ▪ Students are adequately prepared to function in a blended learning environment ▪ Faculty are adequately trained and supported in the science and art of blended course design, development and delivery <p>Financing: The DVC -Finance will ensure adequate budgetary Support for a sustainable Blended Learning Initiative</p> <p>Accessibility: The Directorate of IT support and the library administration will provide adequate facilities and services to support students.</p> <p>Infrastructure ICT and Library: Directorate of IT support will establish and maintain a robust ICT infrastructure capable of efficiently supporting a Campus-wide blended learning initiative, and ensure the delivery of a 24/7 technical support service. The library administration will ensure that there are 24/7 accesses to electronic information resources to support teaching and learning.</p>

	<p>Course Development & Delivery Support – The BU administration will establish and equip the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to provide quality services in instructional design for blended learning, faculty training for blended course development and delivery, and multimedia materials development. The CETL shall also coordinate Blended Learning Instructional Design Teams (BLIDT) in collaboration with stakeholder units, to include subject matter experts, curriculum specialists, instructional designers, librarians, multimedia specialists and instructional and information technologists</p> <p>Oversight and Planning: The DVC-Academics shall establish a Blended Learning Implementation Team (BLIT) to oversee the implementation of the Blended Learning Initiative, and ensure alignment between the Blended Learning Initiative and the strategic plans of Schools and Departments as well as support units</p>
<p>Academic</p>	<p>Scope of Blended Learning and Approval Processes: The QA Directorate must ensure that all courses at BU are in harmony with the stipulated minimum standards for use of the e-learning course management system as outlined in the <i>Minimum Standards for use of the Virtual Learning Environment</i></p> <p>Minimum Requirements for a Lecturer to Teach Using BU LMS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must be an approved worker of the university (Teaching category) 2. Should have a load for teaching the coming semester 3. Should have the course content ready for the courses 4. Must be computer literate 5. Must have undergone training on use of BU LMS 6. Must be conversant with BU ODeL Policy 7. Must be conversant with BU ODeL strategy 8. Must be conversant with BU online examination/Assessment policy 9. Should always be smart when presenting a lecture 10. Should have a profile photo and qualification uploaded <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Courses/ course units in which less than 30% of face-to-face meeting time is replaced by online activity will not require approval under this policy but will be designed, developed and delivered in accordance with established policies for face-to-face courses. ▪ Courses/ course units with above 30% and below 80% of face-to-face meeting time is replaced by online activity will require approval under this policy. ▪ Courses/ course unit in which 80% or more of face-to-face meeting time is replaced by online activity will be recognised as online courses and will be governed by the BU Policy for Online, Distance and Multimodal Learning.

	<p>Course Design, Development and Delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The QA Directorate through the CETL shall provide specific quality standards for blended courses. ▪ Course design, development and delivery will be in accordance with the BU general Principles for Teaching and Learning, and the specific Principles for Blended Learning. The DVC-Academic, through the CETL, shall provide, on an ongoing and systematic basis, appropriate training in course design for blended learning for faculty and relevant staff. ▪ Any faculty member scheduled to teach a blended course shall be required to complete a stipulated programme of training prior to the start of the course. ▪ Each School will appoint a blended learning support specialist/instructional designer to provide support in the development and delivery of blended courses. ▪ The HOD's will ensure that Blended course design, development and delivery, including the preparation of learning materials take account of the needs of students with disabilities. <p>Students Assessment: The BU's assessment policies will support the use of assessments and examinations appropriate to blended learning.</p>
<p>Faculty Support and Recognition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The BU administration will offer incentives to faculty for the development of blended courses that meet identified institutional or departmental needs and priorities. Such incentives might include money allowances, or time off/special leave for course development. <p>BU HR policies will make provision for recognition of faculty's work in designing and developing blended courses, for assessment and promotion.</p>
<p>Student Support and Preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HOD's must ensure that students are made aware of the technological and other special requirements of a blended learning environment. ▪ The Directorates Virtual Learning shall provide timely and effective technical support for students via email, telephone, FAQ archives and other appropriate channels. ▪ The Directorate of Virtual Learning shall make available to students online tutorials on the use of e-learning tools and strategies for success in a blended learning environment.

Quality Assurance and Evaluation	Course Approval and Review: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The BU's QA policies, systems and processes shall take account of any special requirements with respect to blended courses.▪ The instruments used for student evaluation of teaching shall take account of elements unique to blended learning.▪ The DVC Academic, through the Quality Assurance Office shall routinely conduct student, faculty evaluations of blended courses and assess the impact on learning outcomes, performance and the student experience
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7. Indicators of success

BU administration shall know that it has succeeded in fulfilling its vision*, mission and strategic goals for blended learning based on the following indicators:

- Blended learning integrated in the programmes of all Schools and Departments by 2022
- The majority of courses delivered utilizing at least the minimum stipulated standards for use of the VLE (eLearning course management system)
- Academic staff confidently integrate ICTs into curricula in a manner consistent with course and program learning outcomes and in accordance with set standards and protocols
- Student evaluations consistently rate their blended learning experiences positively and will indicate wide exposure to blended learning.
- Students report high levels of confidence in using ICTs for life-long learning
- Course and programme reviews indicate improved levels of student performance in blended courses
- Infrastructure and services support easy access to blended learning courses and programmes

8. Review Policy

The Blended Learning Policy and Minimum Standards for the use of the Virtual Learning Environment shall be subjected to review as per the lifetime of the current academic bulletin

9. Blended learning Policy Administration

Policy sponsor	Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academics)
Approval Authority	BU Senate
Approval date	
Implementation date	
Date of review	

10. REFERENCES

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