



TRENDS BLENDED LEARNING AND #FEESMUSTFALL CASE STUDIES

Venue: Birchwood Conference Centre, Kempton Park

Date: 1 June 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Research Question: *How was educational technology, including 'blended/ hybrid learning', deployed during the #feesmustfall campus disruptions at the Universities of Pretoria, Cape Town, Free State and Johannesburg and what has been the impact from the perspectives of students, academic staff, instructional designers and other stakeholders, including the impact for socially just education?*

The over-arching **aim** is an effective blended/ hybrid model of teaching and learning that will enhance successful student learning in higher education in South Africa as well as in the collaborating universities.



Specifically, the **goals** are to

- Collaborate with other South African universities to share insights and make recommendations for the use of educational technology in higher education to further teaching and learning innovation on a national level.
- Gain a holistic understanding of students' and academics' understanding of blending learning.
- Gain an understanding of which strategies were employed by students and academics during the student protests and university shutdown (what worked and what didn't).
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the approaches adopted in 2016 by the four collaborating universities.
- Use what we learnt to establish effective strategies for the use of online educational technology at our universities.
- Share the knowledge with the higher education sector in South Africa to work towards systemic improvement of the use of e-learning to enhance student success.

In addition, UJ wishes to investigate social justice issues.

PROGRAMME

Time	Activity	Presenter
9:30	Registration and Tea/ Coffee	
9:55	Welcome	Wendy Kilfoil
10:00 – 11:00	Case Study 1: University of Cape Town	Laura Czerniewicz
11:00 – 12:00	Case Study 2: University of the Free State	Anneri Meintjes
12:00 – 12:15	Case Study: Nelson Mandela University Blended learning during and after #feesmustfall: the Faculty of Law approach	Lynn Biggs
12:15 – 13:00	Lunch	
13:00 – 14:00	Case Study 3: University of Johannesburg	Thea de Wet
14:00 – 15:00	Case Study 4: University of Pretoria	Detken Scheepers
15:00 – 15:15	Case Study: Cape Peninsula University of Technology To care or not to care – reflections on the ethics of blended learning in times of disruption	Daniela Gachago
15:15 – 15:30	Overall trends	Wendy Kilfoil

TRENDS

What do students, academics and other stakeholders understand by 'blended learning'?

- As a concept, 'blended' is not clearly understood.
- With no common understanding of blended learning, it is hard to operationalize and measure it.
- Sense among many that it was not blended that happened during #feesmustfall but online – distance only and not integrated.
- Quality of teaching was questioned as there was no pedagogy and design.
 - Analysis of use showed the online environment was used to provide additional resources that often led to cognitive overload for students.
- Quality of assessment was questioned.

We finished the academic year, but at what cost?

- Emotions (predominantly anger, frustration, anxiety) are still running high about issues such as campus closures, securitization, poor communication, limited if any contact sessions and exclusion of faculty agency in decision-making.
- The emotions that emerged in interviews with staff and students often made it hard for the interviewers to cope.
- Lecturers' attitudes to the students varied:
 - resentment, passive-aggressive – disruption of lecturer and student roles and relationships;
 - empathy, 'ethics of care' and the extra mile – but at a cost to lecturers in terms of fatigue;
 - 'othering': the rioting students 'weren't my students';
 - support for intentions of protestors creating internal conflict.
- Gaps in student knowledge where they had to work on their own: affected quality of examination results and ability to cope the following year.
- Dramatic and stressful workload increase for lecturers, students and e-learning staff.

Constraints

Lecturers

- Digital literacy of lecturers generally plus lack of familiarity with LMS makes working with educational technology daunting and creates resistance.
- Off campus access to devices and technology such as headphones for good recordings as well as internet connectivity off campus.
- Lack of awareness of the time it takes to develop learning and assessment material for online use.
- Wanting to help students complete the year but not wanting to use blended learning.

Students

- Digital literacy of students and their familiarity with the LMS.
- Student access to devices and connectivity off campus.
- Students not used to working independently.
- Stress and sometimes trauma inhibiting learning.
- Wanting to support the protestors but wanting to complete the year or the qualification.

Enablers

- Having a plan in place.
- Mature learning management systems which included assessment; other CBT platforms.
- Turnitin.
- Many lecturers and students used to working on the LMS.
- Many lecturers already trained in using the LMS.
- E-learning staff available to lecturers to assist with JIT learning about the system and implementation of online assessment particularly.
- Free Wi-Fi networks off-campus in many cases.
- Ethics of care on the part of lecturers and support staff for students.

Communication

- Poor communication from the university
 - didn't keep pace with the changes.
 - often last minute.
- LMS used for communication as well as teaching.
- Wide use of Whatsapp and social media for communication and teaching.
- Flood of e-mails from students blocking lecturers' in-boxes.
- Craving for personal, face-to-face contact from the side of lecturers and students to enhance teaching and learning.
- Sense that management did not listen, did not give everyone a voice.

The poor got poorer – a social justice issue.

- Some research shows that students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not initially thrive in online environments:
 - Unfamiliar with devices
 - Unfamiliar with working online
 - Unfamiliar with working in LMS
 - No typing skills
- The financially at-risk students
 - Did not have their own devices and/ or
 - Did not have money for extra data
- Already privileged students benefited most from blended learning.

What lessons can we learn from the experience to inform future blended/ hybrid strategies institutionally and nationally?

- Accustom lecturers and students to working online some of the time as part of a normal, 21st century approach to teaching and learning.
- Accustom students to more self-regulated learning.
- Blended learning, to be done well and to promote student engagement and success, must be designed on sound online teaching principles.
- Capitalize on and scale practices that students found useful (2nd year activity for participating universities).
- Be prepared and have an institutional policy structure to regulate blended learning to ensure standards are maintained.
- Communication channels must be inclusive and effective.