

Flexible Learning Policy

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) This Policy replaces Chapter 1.30 of the Academic Policy (December 2010).

Section 2 - Definitions

(2) For the purpose of this Policy refer to the Academic Board's Definitions Policy.

Section 3 - Introduction

(3) This Policy provides Southern Cross University with a framework for flexible learning, within which it can define, describe, plan, resource, implement, monitor and evaluate the range of flexible learning activities it offers students of the University. The Policy recognises that Southern Cross University demonstrates extensive flexibility in the design and delivery of its curriculum with large variations between fields of study in some dimensions of flexible learning.

(4) The Policy is situated within the University's strategic priority to:

- a. maintain a balance of on-campus and flexible learning programs, stimulate greater independence of learning for students as part of lifelong learning, and further develop flexible learning initiatives that are attuned to the needs of our students and strategic partners.

(5) The Policy gives further expression to the Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Policy, clause (7), which asserts:

"... the importance of good teaching based on scholarship, and of learning as a lifelong quest for knowledge, skills and wisdom. It also recognises the importance of flexibility as a set of learner-centred opportunities that can be operationalised by institutional systems, structures and processes that increase learner choice, in learner-centered pedagogies, curriculum designs and related teaching and learning activities, and in the mix of learning environments and media."

Section 4 - Objectives

(6) This Policy is designed to:

- a. establish a shared understanding of flexible learning in the context of Southern Cross University;
- b. articulate a framework within which the three domains of flexibility defined in the Definitions section of this Policy can be developed and managed within resource constraints, and with particular reference to University and School Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Management plans, together with related policies; and
- c. establish quality assurance structures and accountabilities in relation to flexible learning activities across all three domains of flexibility defined in the Definitions section of this Policy.

Section 5 - Content

Part A - Pedagogy

(7) The University recognises that the curriculum, at both the unit and course level, can be designed and developed to:

- a. respond to the diversity of flexible learning needs and experiences that characterise the University's student population;
- b. demonstrate a commitment to student centred learning and the development of lifelong learning skills; and
- c. encourage the development of learning communities within and between student groups and staff by maximising opportunities for interaction and communication.

(8) Within the flexible learning framework, the University therefore should aim to ensure that, at both the unit and course level, curriculum design and development processes:

- a. are demonstrably related to the identified learning needs of student cohorts;
- b. are developed in consultation with relevant curriculum experts, designers, e-learning experts and other people with acknowledged expertise in the design and development of flexible curricula;
- c. are equitable and inclusive to a diversity of enrolled student cohorts, irrespective of enrolment category;
- d. are designed to encourage opportunities for the development of learning communities through interaction and communication;
- e. have attendant accreditation documentation that makes explicit reference to the ways in which lifelong learning skills are progressively developed across the curriculum;
- f. embed flexible pathways through the curriculum (especially for new courses and courses under review) by: minimising prerequisite sub-structures and replacing them with 'assumed knowledge' consistent with the academic objectives of the course; offering students appropriate advanced standing and recognition of prior learning structures, and designing a range of entry and exit pathways;
- g. include costing of the range of resources required to provide flexible curricula; and
- h. include professional development for academic teaching staff in the design and development of flexible curricula.

Part B - Delivery

(9) Flexible delivery of the curriculum at both unit and course level will be provided:

- a. in an appropriate mix of delivery modes which is demonstrably related to the identified flexible learning needs of student cohorts;
- b. in a manner which is equitable and accessible to students;
- c. in a manner which is consistent with the University's mission, strategic plan and business management framework;
- d. in a manner that embeds monitoring and systematic review processes to ensure continuous improvement in the quality of all methods of delivery;
- e. within the capacity of the University to provide administrative and learning support to students and staff alike;
- f. in a manner which complies with the University's legal and licensee responsibilities;
- g. using a cooperative approach, and including curriculum designers, e-learning experts and other people with acknowledged expertise in the design and development of flexible learning materials and delivery modes; and
- h. by academic teaching staff who are proficient in the development of flexible learning materials and have

acquired the skills necessary to deliver units and courses in flexible modes of delivery; including technology mediated delivery.

(10) The University therefore encourages and supports the following measures:

- a. continuing research and development of a range of flexible delivery models;
- b. continuing research into student preferences for various flexible delivery models;
- c. the provision to students of explicit information on the methods of delivery of units and courses prior to their enrolment;
- d. the development of quality standards and procedures for the production and timely delivery to students of flexible learning materials;
- e. amendments to unit and course accreditation documentation such that they identify flexible learning activities and include a resource impact statement addressing administrative and learning support needs;
- f. the inclusion in School/College Management and Operational Plans and the University's learning teaching and curriculum plans the strategic development of flexible delivery in identified areas;
- g. the inclusion in Faculty and School/College budgets of the costs associated with methods of flexible delivery;
- h. the provision in School Teaching and Learning Management plans for appropriate training for students and staff in technology mediated environments; and
- i. the development and implementation of academic teaching workload models that reflect the work patterns associated with various flexible delivery models.

Part C - Administrative and Learning Support

(11) The University should ensure that the flexible learning activities of the University will be supported by:

- a. collaborative planning and implementation by administrative and learning support areas of their services to support the flexible learning activities of the University;
- b. the availability and accessibility of all administrative and learning support systems and services to ensure maximum 'ease of use' for both staff and students;
- c. continuous assessment of the nature of student markets, emerging technologies, administrative systems and pedagogies for flexible learning;
- d. support for students to develop academic and study skills, information literacy and skills for learning in technology mediated environments; and
- e. support for staff to develop information literacy and skills for teaching and learning in technology mediated environments.

(12) The University therefore should ensure that, in support of the flexible learning activities of the University:

- a. administrative and learning support areas collaborate to maximise efficiencies in planning and implementing infrastructure support;
- b. relevant Functional and Operational plans reflect integrated administrative and learning support systems;
- c. cost centres identify the most cost effective and appropriate systems and services;
- d. cost centre budgets reflect the costs associated with supporting flexible learning activities in the curriculum;
- e. market research is continuously conducted to establish the flexible learning needs of potential students; and
- f. administrative and learning support systems and services for staff and students are regularly reviewed for accessibility and availability.

Part D - Quality

(13) The University expects that the quality of all aspects of its flexible learning activities will be assured by:

- a. conforming to all quality-related requirements of the University's Academic Board;
- b. conforming to, and cohering with, all other related policies;
- c. supporting and developing staff to teach and deliver quality flexible learning to students;
- d. planning processes which integrate all three domains of flexibility defined within this Policy; and
- e. seeking regular feedback from students.

(14) The University therefore should ensure that the following quality assurance procedures are implemented:

- a. establishment of a flexible learning committee as a sub-committee of the Academic Board (AB) to guide Policy implementation;
- b. regular unit and course reviews, which are considered in the light of this Policy, and through peer review of learning materials; and
- c. regular review of administrative and learning support systems and services to ensure their effectiveness in supporting flexible learning across the University.

Status and Details

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Head of Work Unit	Erica Wilson Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Innovation) +61 2 66203151
Enquiries Contact	Governance Services