



GUIDELINES FOR CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

Approved by STLC: 22 August 2016

Introduction

In line with UJ's Strategic Plan 2025, Strategic Objective 2 states:

Excellence in Teaching and Learning and furthermore that UJ will have:

“Intellectually rigorous curricula which respond innovatively to the challenges of the 21st century” grounded in the wider positioning of the University as “The Pan-African” Centre for Critical Intellectual Inquiry, with the primary goal of achieving global excellence and stature.

The #FeesMustFall campaign of 2015 has prompted universities to reflect on curriculum not solely in terms of transformation but in terms of decolonisation. This requires and necessitates an interrogation of both the constructs of knowledge and disciplines and how they have been constituted as forms of knowledge. There is an acknowledgement that universities package knowledge in ways and forms which are legacies of our colonial past. The HE Summit concluded that universities have a responsibility to review university curricula and forms of knowledge production that are not sufficiently situated within African and the global South contexts, and are dominated by western worldviews¹. UJ Senate in 2016 agreed that ‘decolonisation should be conceptualized in terms of teaching and learning and research’ and

¹ 2015 Higher Education Transformation Summit Statement, 17 October 2015

that while there is much contestation around the term decolonisation, discussions and engagements must be held within the broader academic community of UJ.

Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide academics with an initial set of ‘tools’ required to review curricula as well as teaching and learning practices, in line with the call to decolonize our curriculum. It is understood that the envisaged transformation of the curriculum should be accompanied by reflection on the teaching and learning strategies used. There are various interpretations of what is intended by decolonisation of knowledge, teaching and learning. However, there is consensus that decolonisation demands interrogation of the underlying assumptions, values, principles, absolute truths, epistemologies and pedagogies across all disciplines. Questioning, reflecting and reviewing is therefore at the core of the decolonisation and transformation agenda.

Standards

The following standards should guide the review of curriculum at UJ:

- Academic Leadership: Faculties and academics must own the project of decolonising the curriculum;
- Transparency: Being open to interrogation of the curriculum and how it is constructed;
- Access: Recognising the need of epistemological access for students;
- Context: Movement away from monolithic perspectives and locating curriculum, teaching and learning in the context of Africa;
- Critical review: Using peer and other forms of review and student inputs to facilitate curriculum changes;
- Curriculum reform: Initiate and reflect on the existing curricula with a view to locating and acknowledging knowledge from marginalized knowledge systems
- Process: Recognizing that decolonising the curriculum is not a destination but an ongoing process.

Broad Guidelines

These guidelines are to serve as possible transformative triggers for academics who are reviewing modules/courses or qualifications. There is a recognition by the University that the debate on decolonisation of the curriculum necessitates a review of our curricula, teaching and learning approaches and an interrogation of the assumptions that underpin our prioritization of Eurocentric knowledge systems. The two approaches that have been offered to academics are as follows: “In your own discipline, you may first want to adopt a content-driven additive approach and expand the curriculum already in place. Or you may want to adopt the different approach of considering how the object of study itself is constituted, what tools are used to study it, and what concepts are used to frame it.”² The *Ad Hoc Task Team of Senate on Decolonisation of Knowledge and Curriculum Reform* argued that the exercise should not be merely additive or seen as a technical exercise. Decolonisation requires that we interrogate the assumptions, values, principles, absolute truths, epistemologies and pedagogies of all disciplines – questioning is at the core of decolonisation and transformation³.

Processes that can be undertaken as an initial start:

1. Reviewing the discipline to examine the extent to which the traditional boundaries of the discipline can be expanded beyond the existing parameters to incorporate the context and knowledge of Africa and more broadly, the South;
2. Reviewing textbooks, reading resources and other learning material for a greater diversity of content;
3. Reviewing pedagogical approaches in the teaching and learning environment;
4. Reviewing assessment criteria and tasks;
5. Reviewing the knowledge production and research agenda pursued;
6. Review the assumptions of knowledge and the theoretical content of the course;

² Professor Harry Garuba, ‘What is an African curriculum’, published in the Mail & Guardian on 17 April 2015.

³ Ad Hoc Task Team Report to Senate, 22 January 2016

7. Does the content of the course speak to a diverse student population in a developing democracy in Africa?

Critical Questions to be considered

1. Is the curriculum that we offer at undergraduate and postgraduate level fit for purpose in terms of the context we live in?
2. Are we including problem-solving skills that equip our students for the real world?
3. To what extent do we consider the diversity of our student population and their experiences when developing curricula, teaching and learning and assessment criteria?
4. How do we radically rethink our discipline and how it is taught?
5. What are the key debates in relation to postcolonial theory that are specific to your discipline?
6. Have you formally engaged with alumni and current students on their views on your course and content?

Actions to be taken

1. Discussions should be held within Faculties on the broader issues emanating from the decolonisation debate;
2. Deans to provide DVC Academic with progress reports at MECA on initiatives undertaken within their faculties and a plan of action that includes milestones and timelines. Feedback on these reports to the Task Team.