

AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK

1.0	INTRODUCTION	1
2.0	AKU TEACHING AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK	1
2.1	Guided by AKU’s Core Themes	2
2.2	Driven by the Attributes We Expect of AKU Graduate.....	2
2.3	Setting Faculty Development Priorities at AKU – Responsive to Faculty Needs	3
2.4	A Shared Understanding of Excellent Teaching	3
2.5	Efficacy and Accountability of Faculty Development Services	5
2.6	Learning Technologies.....	6
2.7	Outreach and Partnerships.....	6
3.0	IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK	6
4.0	REFERENCES	7
5.0	GLOSSARY OF TERMS	9

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Teaching and Learning Framework is one of a number of plans underway at Aga Khan University (AKU) to reinforce through action its commitment to excellence in its academic programmes and to providing the best possible learning experience for its students. The Framework follows the AKU vision to be an autonomous, international institution of distinction, primarily serving the developing world and Muslim societies in innovative and enduring ways. It is also guided by AKU’s four core themes of quality, access, relevance and impact.

In line with the AKU vision and the stated AKU programme learning outcomes and graduate attributes, the AKU Teaching and Learning Framework aims to promote excellence in the student learning experience by supporting faculty to enhance engaged teaching and learning.

2.0 AKU TEACHING AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK

The Teaching and Learning Framework establishes a shared understanding of what AKU considers to be excellent teaching and engaged pedagogy and replaces the AKU Policy on Teaching and Learning (2004). It also sets out how teaching and learning will:

- Be guided by AKU core themes
- Be aligned with AKU academic priorities
- Be driven by AKU graduate attributes
- Heed identified faculty development priorities
- Use evidence-based principles of excellent teaching
- Ensure efficacy and accountability of faculty development activities
- Ensure relevance through the use of technology and outreach.

The Framework provides an explicit reference against which AKU judges the effectiveness of learning and teaching within all of our programmes and the support provided to our faculty

by the AKU Network of Teaching and Learning.

2.1 Guided by AKU's Core Themes

The Teaching and Learning Framework is guided by AKU's core themes of quality, access, relevance and impact.

Quality: Literature on effective university teaching to advance quality learning provides unequivocal evidence in support of pedagogies that facilitate student engagement (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Ramsden, 2003). The traditional lecture often does not engage students and, therefore, to achieve quality teaching and learning, university teachers need support to enhance student engagement.

Quality assessment processes must be in place and practiced to ensure that the quality of the student learning experience is improved and maintained. The AKU Academic Quality Framework stresses that programmes must be assessed if they are to improve.

Access: Providing equitable access to faculty development services, programmes and support across all entities, will help to ensure that all students in turn will have access to high quality engaged learning. The implementation of inclusive learning and teaching practices enhances the opportunities and quality of education for all students (QAA, 2012, p. 11).

Relevance: Teaching and learning practice at AKU contributes to capacity building for quality higher education that is of and for the developing world, with an internationalized curriculum and pedagogy to ensure that students gain a truly international education. Engaged pedagogies are a necessity for achieving relevant programme learning outcomes and AKU graduate attributes.

Impact: AKU can diversify and enhance its educational, community outreach and research impact through partnerships with existing partner universities in the developed world and, increasingly, through partnerships with other universities in the developing world. "Although our international partnerships are invaluable, they must never tempt us to uncritically transplant programmes from other parts of the world, no matter how great the status or reputation of their sources" (Moran, 2014).

2.2 Driven by the Attributes We Expect of AKU Graduates

The Framework is driven by a set of attributes that we seek to see in the graduates of all graduate and undergraduate AKU degree programmes:

1. Ethical, global leadership	Positively influence others, applying professional ethics, accountability, equity, and global thinking and responsibilities, with an awareness of how personal strengths and limitations might influence analyses and interpretations.
2. Critical and creative thinking	Critically evaluate qualitative and quantitative information to develop lines of argument, make sound judgments, and use innovative and creative thinking to solve complex problems

3. Evidence-based decision-making	Ability to apply qualitative and quantitative reasoning, including integration of data and analysis to evidence building and decision-making.
4. Effective communication	Communicate complex concepts, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing, within interdisciplinary groups.
5. Socially- and environmentally-aware citizenship	Analyse social and environmental aspects of a discipline, including interactions among the economic, social, and cultural realms, and the uncertainties in the prediction of such interactions.
6. Specialist knowledge to bring about change	Apply a critical understanding of the key concepts, methodologies, current advances and theoretical approaches in a specialism to bring about change.
7. Lifelong learning	Commitment to personal and professional growth, within and outside of the discipline, sufficient to maintain competence and contribute to the advancement of knowledge.
In addition, particularly in graduate programmes:	
G1. Create knowledge	Design and conduct research to create evidence and knowledge in disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts.
G2. Solve multi-faceted complex problems	Facilitate innovative practical solutions to solve multi-faceted, multi-sectorial complex problems.

2.3 Setting Faculty Development Priorities at AKU – Responsive to Faculty Needs

In late 2013, a needs analysis was conducted to determine faculty development priorities at AKU (Khamis, 2014). Through surveys and focus groups, faculty identified three areas in which they would like support: how to engage students more effectively in the learning process; assessing students more effectively; and participating in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Therefore, the services, programmes and supports provided by the Network of Teaching and Learning will focus on these areas (see Strategic Plan 2015-2019 for the Network of Teaching and Learning, available on the TL_net website). Teaching scholarship suggests that AKU should develop a culture of teaching and learning scholarship whereby teaching and learning becomes a natural and visible part of everyday work, conversations and decision-making across the institution.

2.4 A Shared Understanding of Excellent Teaching

Teaching and learning at AKU should:

- Be guided by principles of good quality teaching
- Aspire to engage students in transformative learner-centered teaching
- Be a reflective, evidence-based process
- Encourage collaborative learning among students
- Be informed by the scholarship of teaching and learning

2.4.1. Principles of good quality teaching

The AKU teaching and learning community must have a shared understanding of what defines excellent teaching and engaged learning. Educational research provides considerable evidence about what constitutes good teaching at university. Notable is a seminal work that synthesizes an extensive body of literature to identify “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987),” which are equally relevant to the liberal arts and to technical or professional programmes, and which have been extended to postgraduate education. They specifically address pedagogy and student learning - that is, how students are taught and how students learn.

These principles are that good teaching:

1. *Encourages contacts between students and faculty* – student-faculty contact enhances students’ ability to process ideas and situate knowledge within the broader discipline.
2. *Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students* – learning collaboratively, especially through peer discussion and group work, enhances deeper understanding.
3. *Uses active learning techniques* – through engaging with material by talking, writing, doing projects, designing experiments, as opposed to sitting, listening and memorizing, students can integrate new ideas into their current knowledge and relate it to their past experiences.
4. *Gives prompt feedback* – frequent timely feedback allows students to reflect on and assess their knowledge and what they still need to learn, promoting both effective learning and self-improvement/development skills.
5. *Emphasizes time on task* – “time plus energy equals learning” (Ibid.). The amount of learning is related to the amount of time spent, but also how well that time is spent. To learn, students need to be engaged in the learning process. For example, if students are expected to apply theory to practice, they must devote time to actually doing this, rather than, for example, simply memorizing the material.
6. *Communicates high expectations* – setting high expectations for all students, regardless of their level of motivation and former achievement levels, results in better performance for all students.
7. *Respects diverse talents and ways of learning* – different students are more comfortable or familiar with learning in specific ways. When offered options to learn subject matter in different ways, students can then choose to work in the way they work best. They will subsequently be more capable of learning in less familiar ways.

These seven principles are consistent with more recent research on student engagement (Barkley, 2010); reflective teaching practice (Ramsden, 2003; Christensen Hughes & Mighty, 2009); the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) (Biggs & Tang, 2011; McKinney, 2007); and best practices in faculty development (Dawson et al, 2014; Gibbs, 2010, 2012, 2013; Macpherson, 2011; Randall et al, 2013; Scott & Scott, 2013). These principles will also guide student evaluations of teaching (SET).

2.4.2 Student engagement

Student engagement results from the intentional design of learning activities to enable the learner to work more deeply, and in a personal way, with the material to be learned.

“Student engagement is a process and a product that... results from the synergistic interaction between motivation and active learning” (Barkley, 2010, p. 8). Barkley suggests that understanding, motivation and active learning will uncover the key to the kinds of activities that result in deep engagement (Ibid.). Examples of engaged pedagogies and assessment include critical discussion, formal debate, small group tutorial, case-based and problem-based learning, triad listening, , contemporary issues journal, autobiographical reflective journal, critical incident questionnaire, scavenger hunt, formative quiz, group projects, role play, and individual or group concept mapping. Other examples, such as field trips, field placements, service learning, internships, and community collaborations, can be integrated with AKDN for mutual benefit.

2.4.3 Reflective practice

Reflective teaching practice has the ultimate aim of guiding students in engaged learning activities. AKU faculty should be reflective evidence-based teaching practitioners who are role models of critical innovative thinking and problem solving. Expert university teachers actively work on their teaching through various forms of professional development and participation in research-informed and research-active professional learning communities of peers (Ramsden, 2003; Christensen Hughes & Mighty, 2009; Blackwell & Blackmore 2003). As part of good teaching practice, AKU faculty should:

- Provide an inclusive learning environment for all students
- Capitalize on the international nature of AKU
- Facilitate engaged experiential learning
- Enhance students’ experience with technology

2.4.4. Scholarship of teaching and learning

The scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) is often understood to involve, “a synthesis of teaching, learning, and research in higher education that aims to bring a scholarly lens - the curiosity, the inquiry, the rigor, the disciplinary variety - to what happens in the classroom” (Vanderbilt University, n.d.). SOTL offers a rigorous theoretical framework to help guide faculty toward quality teaching and engaged learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Ramsden, 2003), including providing an avenue to inform disciplinary instructional practices and venues to share and disseminate good practice (McKinney, 2007).

2.5 Efficacy and Accountability of Faculty Development Services

A considerable body of literature evidences the efficacy of faculty development in good teaching practice which results in, for example, an increase in teaching confidence, better course design skills and improved professionalism (Blackwell & Blackmore 2003; Dawson et al, 2014; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Rodgers, Christie & Wideman, 2014).

“Effective learning and teaching activities and practices are enabled through, and depend on, staff who are appropriately qualified for their role and who engage throughout their career in continuing professional development, in the evaluation of their practice, and in developing their understanding of their subject and the learning process as it relates to their subject”(QAA, 2012, p. 5).

AKU’s faculty development practices – like our learning and teaching activity itself - must

be evidence-based, with regular monitoring and assessment of progress made in fulfillment of the goals and impact of the actions set out in this document.

Also, acknowledgement of effective teaching can have a significant influence on institutional culture and raises the status of teaching and learning, the most influential component of which is the promotions and confirmation of appointments (HEA & GENIE CETL, 2009; Olsson & Roxå, 2008; Parker, 2008). Good teaching must also be acknowledged through awards, with accompanying public recognition. Finally, earmarking time for faculty to participate in development activities acknowledges the importance of learning about good teaching.

2.6 Learning Technologies

Computing technology is ubiquitous in many parts of the world and computer literacy is necessary to work as a professional in both developing and developed countries. Moreover, for geographically dispersed students and instructors, computers afford engaging learning opportunities and interactive activities and discussion. Used well, technology enables students to engage in rich learning experiences that promote higher level thinking skills. The Network of Blended and Digital Learning will enable and support AKU faculty to use technology in teaching.

2.7 Outreach and Partnerships

Faculty development is further enhanced through regional and international collaboration and partnerships that support teaching and learning in higher education and the scholarship of teaching and learning, including, for example, Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa, International Consortium for Educational Development, and many others. As such, sharing our practice through research and networking with colleagues outside of AKU, locally, regionally, across the AKDN and internationally, will help maintain quality teaching and quality faculty development. The dearth of research on teaching and learning in higher education in the developing world is but one indicator of the vital need for these outreach activities.

3.0 IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

The Network of Teaching and Learning and, within it, the Network of Blended and Digital Learning, will work synergistically with the Network of Quality Assurance and Improvement and the Network of Student Experience to promote excellence of academic programmes and the student experience at AKU. It will do so by supporting entities and faculty with services, programmes and resources to enhance engaged teaching and learning. This is outlined in the Strategic Plan 2015-2019 for the Network of Teaching and Learning.

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5.0 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Digital learning: Educational approaches to teaching and learning that involve computing technology, including, face-to-face, online and blended.

Faculty development: Activities that enhance teaching and learning, including, for example, support for and the provision of learning and networking opportunities, for faculty to learn about good teaching practice and engaged student learning. *Educational Development* and *Academic Development* are often used to mean the same.

Good practice: A process or way of working that, in the view of the international faculty development community, makes a particularly positive contribution to the quality of an higher education provider's educational provision.

Peer review: An external validation of the self-assessment conducted by peers external to the programme under review, always from outside of AKU but often also involving peers from other AKU units.

Scholarship of teaching and learning: The study and application of teaching, learning, and research in higher education to bring the rigor of a scholarly lens to the classroom experience. It involves the inquiry into teaching practice, publically sharing and inviting review of the results of teaching inquiry, and the application and dissemination of evidence-based teaching.