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**(Setting the Scene) Address to the guests and staff of the NWU at the Future of Teaching and Learning Colloquium. Crisis and Continuity: From Covid-19 Contingency to Covid Continuity Consensus Planning for the Future of Teaching and Learning at NWU**

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Prof Dan Kgwadi, NWU Vice Chancellor, Prof Norbert Pachler, UCL Vice Provost Digital Education UCL, UCL and NWU colleagues: the University has always possessed a high level of capacity in terms of planning for a crisis. Since 2007 when load-shedding shifted from being an occasional emergency, to a normal experience, the NWU had to develop plans for disruptions relating to the shortages of power and water supplies for its campuses (South Africa's Energy Crisis, 2021; Hartleb, 2008). The power outages and their associated costs have become a part of our budgets since then. Properly considered these instances, routine as they may have become, can be considered as disruptions rather than emergencies: they moved from being a short term crisis to become manageable occurrences thanks to the application of the University's technical (and human) expertise. By mid-2015, another crisis affected both the sector and the University, this time in relation to student funding (#FeesMustFall; Jansen, 2017) and the experience of students feeling isolated from and marginal to, university culture and the curriculum. This crisis took the form of an extended disruption to university campuses across the country, and was underpinned by unsustainable fee increases, and abnormally high levels of student-debt. Property was damaged, face-to-face lectures and tutorials were suspended on many campuses including ours. #FeesMustFall initiated a new normal in terms of the role NFSAS has come to play in funding university students. This movement also brought calls to decolonise the curriculum to centre-stage of curriculum reform and transformation. From developing a sophisticated electricity supply capacity to deal with power and water supply issues, to shifting from being a University where at least a third of the students were self-funded, to an institution where most the students are state-funded through the NFSAS bursary scheme, we have had to plan for change as NWU. In relation to the decolonisation drive, this features prominently and with explicit programme references, within Faculty Integrated Teaching-Learning Plans. Throughout this period, and specifically in the last 7 years during such remarkable change, the University has improved year on year in terms of its international rankings. It has risen to no.5 status among South African universities with subjects areas featuring in world's top 100 institutions in 2021 (Staff Writer, Business Tech 2021) suggesting that we are remarkably well positioned to face a rapidly changing future.

In previous instances the purposes of contingency plans were to mitigate the risks associated with disruption, with a view to maintaining the University's ability to deliver on its core-business, even in the context of "business-unusual". Notwithstanding the intention of plans, crisis, it must be acknowledged, has a powerful way of upending the old-normal and in so-doing, changing the core business and how we perceive and further conceive of it. In terms of crises then, the development of Covid-19 is both similar, but different to what we have experienced in the past: Covid-19 began as a disruptive emergency, but has not been a singular or repetitive series of crises: its longevity makes it unlike anything experienced in the past and this presents a conundrum in terms of how the University (indeed the sector as well as State) responds to it. Put simply: how we define the crisis in large measure determines the strategies, resources and energies that need to developed, organised and focused in order to address it. These elements: strategies, resources and energies are a normal part of how institutions plan and thus shifting our conceptualisation from crisis-oriented planning towards (a redefined) plan for normalisation, is potentially enabling (rather than only threatening) for the University. This perspective may be more generative in terms of developing longer-term resilience, assisting us to refocus our efforts as regards wellness, and redefine the whole range of face-to-face interactions typical of a university. Resilience, wellness and interaction are core also to teaching learning support (of staff as well as of students) towards a better quality of engagement in which face-to-face presence, online-presence as well as asynchronous engagement, feature.

As suggested earlier, the very definition of crisis is its unpredictability, and capacity to refute the best made plans in ways that potentially, within the teaching-learning area at least, shake-up classroom practices for better and worse. For example: on the one hand, remote teaching-learning can easily lead to an over-reliance on lecture-talk whilst simultaneously making more precarious the opportunities and facilities for online student group work. On the other hand, many students have really benefitted the flexibility and dynamism of effective digital teaching. Crisis during #FeesMustFall and during Covid, has also changed the basis for the conceptualisation of key drivers within the Teaching-Learning Strategy; for example, Covid-19 compels us to re-think what self-direction means in our Teaching Learning Strategy: that is, within a context where social isolation can undermine the motivation and self-discipline needed for effective self-directed learning.

As Covid-19 has endured we have had perforce to move from Contingency Planning, to Consensus Continuity Planning in the face of a prolonged crisis and this latter aspect is what I would identify as the most critical challenge going forward. In relation to the Canadian environment Regerhr and McCahan noted, with Covid, that initially, "In the absence of definitive direction, staff have been forced to plan and offer academic programmes without a clear vision of what will happen next" (Regerhr & McCahan, 2020, 111). Thus the re-articulation or further refinement of the University's direction (the NWU Strategy), and the approaches (ie plans) to support Covid-19 sensitive realisation, in a period of crisis, are necessary both for now and the future. Thereafter, though by no means a secondary consideration, we need be engaged with defining and providing the support needed to make the transition from the pre-crisis Strategy and plans, for our staff and students.

I am aware that we are a deeply unequal and fragile society in South Africa (inequalities which reflect in our online as well as physical classrooms). We have seen over the last eighteen months a gradual awakening to, and perhaps even dismay with, the realisation that what was perceived as an immediate crisis has given way to a period of prolonged uncertainty, in relation to Covid-19, with devastating consequences for employment, household survival, political stability and basics freedoms (such as the freedom of movement). Regerhr and McCahan (2020) have described the Canadian experience in ways that resonate with our experience also at NWU, when they detailed how the University of Toronto dealt with Covid-19: shifting from expanding the expertise around the table, to creating and expanding communications routines and the like. I would suggest that our focus in terms on Continuity Planning has become consensus driven (hence the term: Continuity Consensus) through the informal, but widely participative structures, we have had to create. These frequent and routine engagements by the academic and support leadership have come to focus more carefully in 2021 on the creation of a better quality of online delivery characterised by support for student-connectedness and engagement, exploration of credible approaches to, and software for assessment, and expanding the availability to accessible teaching learning support, teaching resources and learning support.

In the context of prolonged uncertainty, adaptability as a disposition and professional practice, needs to be facilitated better for University staff, as well as students, in relation to technology adoption and confident-use as a point of priority for the University. Such adaptability includes access to resources, support as already mentioned; it also entails a willingness to move away from conventional formalised decision-making and consulting processes, to more open-ended, less formal, wisdom-seeking meetings involving a cross-section of stakeholders in meetings in which the core-business (T&L and R&I) is discussed as well as planned for.

From the crisis there emerges for teaching-learning, themes that have an unanticipated longevity, and which invoke a radical re-think of teaching-learning in the form of particular themes: one such theme is staff-resilience (and this is associated with both professional competencies of skills development support, as well as wellness), together with a focus on teaching-learning that develops also student-resilience. Another theme emerges around the prominence accorded to teaching-learning support, and in particular the need not only for accessible and useful teaching-learning technology, but also for adequate education technologists to support academics in relation to curriculum design for online environments. Uses and conceptualisations of use of space (whether offices in terms of dedicated personalised or shared spaces in terms of remote working) form a third theme. How has face-to-face interaction changed for us, and how might our spaces enable teaching online as well face-to-face teaching, or block teaching? In a technology paradox which is also an educational irony we see the following risk: almost all theoretical development and philosophical thinking about education, the long-held beliefs in the efficacy of student-centred teaching, and self-direction in learning development, face-to-face teaching has become at once more personalised and paradoxically also teacher-oriented: along a continuum there are extremes of live zoom sessions in which face-to-face let alone eye contact is almost

impossible, to off-line learning in which the LMS risks becoming a kind of upload-download learning "simulation", where the teacher almost entirely absent or disembodied, and features only in a pre-recorded power-point, pod-cast or study guide notes. Critically, the nature of social relationships between academics and students also thus needs reconceptualization and affirmation in the context of new conceptualisations of (online and physical) space. A fourth theme emerges around the future of assessments: upended is conventional wisdom on assessment with its focus on formative and summative assessment-types; all of which had to come to grips with the Covid-19 experience and "morph" or transition to the NWU's approach to continuous assessment. Coupled to this theme are serious anxieties: academics' anxieties about large scale academic dishonesty, the development and uses of proctoring software and students' anxieties experienced with connectivity and data issues, whether on, or at a distance from the campus. Such experiences are not unique to NWU; they are confirmed in the global scholarship on the impact of Covid-19 on teaching-learning and student life in higher education. Studies undertaken by the Council of Europe on Higher Education demonstrate that whilst education technology is familiar to students, having to use such technology in unexpected contexts (the home, the remote location) which are not set up for teaching-learning, has proved challenging (Napier, 2021, 277).

These four themes do not exist in isolation, but rather accentuate existing inequalities in South Africa and affect higher education institutions differently: in acknowledging this the issue of access for success remains critical given that our education system in South Africa remains uneven and unequal. We have thus to take seriously the risk of managing and supporting the teaching-learning of the University in ways which mitigate the risk within the institution, of a very differentiated teaching-learning experience for students depending on their class, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds. It is through the creation of spaces for interaction, reflection and proposed action that colloquia such as the one organised by our CTL for 23 and 23 August, make such a valuable contribution. Between our contingency and continuous-consensus planning meetings, our Risk Register reports and progress updates on the NWU's Annual Performance Plan, we must afford for our academics, academic leadership and students and support staff alike, an opportunity to come together to listen and talk through ideas about how to move forward and in which directions to place particular energy and collective wisdom and resources. I am particularly pleased that in this colloquium we have also with us colleagues from University College London with whom I have engaged over a period of time, with a view to enriching our reflection, and sharpening our critique of past and even current practices, in the context of the approach our peers at another university to determine how we might yet further add value to the efforts of the NWU to offer a unique valued proposition to students and staff, going forward. We have deliberately sought to engage the voices of the leadership also of a wide range of teaching-learning support units, as well student leadership. Often in the confines of an "in-group", the criticality of approaches and assumptions comes from voices from the outside: student and support staff leadership are hardly outside to the teaching-learning project and so it is appropriate that these voices feature here centrally to the discussion, and critical to the success of any initiative that emanates from the two days of engagement. What we hear much about from students (and also staff) in the Covid-19 period is the overflow of communication, not always consistent about expectations in terms of teaching-learning, the congestion of assessment due dates and the multiplicity of assessments in a period where the conventional summative assessment has become the affordance of mostly those programmes regulated through statutory and regulatory bodies. Beyond Covid-19, what is evident is that in our reflections we must come to a point where we derive clarity of thinking about not only the "what of knowledge and the curriculum", but also the "how much" in terms of assessment and types of assessment in relation to the "why is this appropriate" for this level of study (modalities; the first year and final year transitions being an additional foci of the NWU T-L Strategy). Our energies arising from Covid-19 need thus to be distilled further in the form of a plan for digitalisation of education at the NWU which define the time spent with students in terms of modalities appropriate to the pedagogic approach and curriculum outcomes of our programmes. Finally, to our Centre for Teaching and Learning together with all the contributors to the programme for the two days, I want to extend my gratitude for your willingness to share insights and to assist the University community in providing and defining direction, in this our next phase of development. Thank you.

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