

**“NO STUDENT LEFT
BEHIND” TEACHING AND
LEARNING LAW DURING COVID-19:
THE VOICES OF LAW LECTURERS AND
STUDENTS IN THE ONLINE SPACE**

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General overview

Introduction and background

Covid-19 has caused serious disruptions in all the socio-economic activities and lives of people around the globe with devastating consequences. People suffered from anxiety and depression due to the various lockdowns imposed with the aim of preventing the spread of the virus from 2020 to date. The education sector, both basic and higher, was not spared from the devastating nature of the pandemic, with compromises made to save the academic year(s) from 2020 to date. This forced the universities working with regulatory and accreditation bodies such as the Council for Higher Education (CHE), Universities South Africa and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), to come up with a master plan to save the academic year since the start of the pandemic. The master plan was shared with all public universities, to implement and ensure continuity despite the disruptions the pandemic caused.

The CHE master plan shared with universities can be described as a “GPS” to help manoeuvre the Covid-19 storm because of the guiding principles it provides. “No student should be left behind”: this means that in all teaching and learning activities, students should be afforded an opportunity to learn irrespective of the pandemic and their socio-economic circumstances. A call was made to universities to ensure that this guiding principle of the master plan becomes a reality. Various universities devised plans and systems to save the academic year(s) and provide students with the necessary support and assistance as they learned remotely during the emergency period. Universities made provision for laptops, cell phones, data and delivery of study materials to the homes of students in order to equip them with the necessary resources to embark on emergency remote teaching (ERT). Despite these necessary and important interventions, it is still doubtful whether the aim of saving not only the academic year(s)

but also its guiding principle that “no student should be left behind” was realised. How effective were learning management systems in ERT? How effective are these in the current hybrid or mixed online and in person teaching and learning system? Have the quality and integrity of the qualifications been compromised and, if so, to what extent? In this particular case, the focus is on the discipline of law at the University of Pretoria (UP). How did students and staff cope mentally, psychologically and physically? Covid-19, despite its devastating consequences and loss of lives, also serves as a wake-up call to all of society that it is no longer business as usual but rather business unusual, requiring us to think outside the box. This means that society and universities broadly must learn and unlearn on a constant basis to address the changing needs of an evolving society, which is set to experience more pandemics in future.

We need to embrace innovation and technology, especially in the higher education sector and deal with the myth that technology is going to take away employment or jobs from human beings. This narrow view of technological innovation in the higher education space must be rejected, and in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), technology must be viewed as innovation to assist and enhance the pedagogy of teaching and learning that proved valuable during the pandemic and beyond. The voices of both students and staff are very important and must be considered as we take the teaching and learning agenda to the next level during and after Covid-19. This book affords all stakeholders an opportunity to engage on teaching and learning and – most importantly – to map a way forward that takes pedagogy and the practice of teaching and learning to the next level. The focus is the teaching and learning of law in the Faculty of Law at UP, and the book includes perspectives from other colleagues – from the universities of Johannesburg, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Free State among others – whom we invited to contribute to the lecture series on teaching and learning during and after Covid-19. The ultimate goal is for this book to help legal scholars and their students map a way forward for contemporary and future teaching and learning that make use of traditional teaching methods, introduces technology and maintains a balance between face-to-face and online environments, which can be described as a hybrid or mixed system.

Chapter layout

This book emerged from a lecture series the Faculty of Law at UP hosted in the 2021 academic year. Aiming to test the state of teaching and learning during the pandemic, the lecture series asked whether ERT and learning (ERTL) compromised or enhanced the teaching and learning of law. Among others, various academics from UP Law as well as from the

universities of KwaZulu-Natal, Johannesburg and Free State. as well as officials from the DHET, participated in the series. This collection comprises chapters written by some of the representatives who were involved in the lecture series. It comprises chapters from colleagues from UP Law as well as from UP support divisions such as Education Innovation. In total, the book comprises eight chapters outlining the experience of teaching and learning and how teaching practice and learning were enhanced or developed during the pandemic.

Conclusion

This book aims to set the tone for teaching and learning of law after the pandemic. The various chapters are detailed and comprehensive and include future perspectives or components. It is our hope that the lessons learnt during the pandemic will be adopted in the day-to-day teaching pedagogy of law in the future. Despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic, a possibly unseen benefit can be identified. As this book argues, law teaching and learning using technological innovations have been positive for both academics and students. Thanks to technological innovation, the discipline of law is arguably in a far better position after the pandemic than before.

