



Online and Blended Learning Policy

(Version 1)

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Table of Contents

Our Reason for Being.....	ii
Definition of Terms.....	iii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Online and Blended Learning at RU.....	1
1.3 Purpose of the Policy	1
1.4 Scope of the Policy	1
1.5 Legal Framework and Resources	2
2. Policy Details	2
2.1 Copyright and Intellectual Property.....	2
2.2 Curriculum Design and Development.....	3
2.3 Learning Management System.....	3
2.4 Accessibility of Library Resources.....	3
2.5 Course Quality.....	3
2.6 Academic Calendar.....	3
2.7 Course Durations	4
2.8 Institutional, Technical and ICT Support Infrastructure.....	4
2.9 Management Structure	4
2.10 Faculty Guidelines	4
2.10.1 Faculty Appointment	4
2.10.2 Faculty/Instructor Development.....	4
2.10.3 Consultation Hours.....	5
2.10.4 Faculty Compensation.....	5
2.10.5 Ownership of Educational Materials.....	5
2.11 Students Guidelines	6
2.11.1 Student Services	6
2.11.2 Student Admission and Orientation.....	6
2.11.3 Class Attendance.....	6
2.11.4 Adding, Dropping, and Withdrawing from Courses	6
2.11.5 Online Student Feedback and Raising of Complaints.....	7
2.11.6 Student Assessment and Grading.....	7
2.11.7 Student Authentication.....	8
2.11.8 Student Grades Approvals, Release and Enquiries	8
2.12 Privacy Policy	9
2.13 Quality Assurance, Monitoring, and Review of Online and Blended Learning Courses.....	10
2.14 Equal Opportunities for All	10
3. Parties Responsible for the Implementation of this Policy.....	10

Our Reason for Being

Vision

To be a centre of excellence in scholarship, research and human resource development.

Core Purpose

Empowering Lives; Impacting Communities

Value Statement

- Excellence - We Have Only One Standard, Excellence!
- Leading By Example - We Strive to Lead By Example
- Teamwork - We Cultivate the Spirit of Teamwork
- Integrity - We are Ethical and Professional in Our Conduct
- Innovation - We Encourage and Reward Innovation, especially Breakthrough Ideas.

Definition of Terms

The following are the Key terms used in this Policy:

Curriculum: This is the documented structure and content of the programme of study that a student needs to undertake and successfully complete in order to earn an academic award(s).

Online Teaching and Learning: Technology-mediated mode of delivery in teaching, learning and assessment with a mandatory involvement of a digital network that a learner needs in order to access at least part of the learning materials and services.

Face-to-face Learning: This refers to cases where students are taught in classroom or other similar settings in physical locations, where both the students and the instructors are physically present at the same time.

Blended Learning: This is a mode of teaching and learning that combines both online and face-to-face teaching and learning methods.

E-Learning: This is an umbrella term that refers to the use of any digital device for teaching and learning, especially for the delivery or accessing of content. Thus, e-Learning can take place without any reference to a common network or computer system that the digital device used by the learner to access materials needs to connect to.

Learning Management System (LMS): often also called a course management system or virtual learning environment, is a web-based software system that helps teachers manage courses and deliver lessons online. It allows asynchronous or synchronous learning and facilitates the administration, tracking and reporting of learning progress.

Asynchronous Learning: This is a type of online learning where students and faculty are not required to be online at the same time.

Synchronous Learning: This is where students and faculty are required to be present/live simultaneously using computer or video-based communication media, or such other arrangements.

Programme of Study: This is the prescribed syllabus that students need to pursue and be taught at each key stage.

Institution: means an organization founded for purposes of facilitating education and research.

Open Educational Resources (OER): as defined by the OER Paris Declaration 2012, means any: "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work."

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Riara University (RU) is a modern, private and popular university in the heart of Nairobi City, Kenya. The University, which was initially sponsored by The Riara Group of Schools, has been a hallmark of a remarkable journey of holistic education, started in 1974 by celebrated educationists Mr. Daniel Gachukia and Prof. Eddah Gachukia. Founded in 2012, the University continues to deliver on its brand promise of *Nurturing Innovators* in all its programmes. Through pace-setting research, teaching and community service, RU produces empowered graduates who are in turn released to impact communities. RU enjoys excellent facilities, highly trained staff, and a very cosmopolitan student community, providing a wealth of opportunities for true empowerment of her learners.

1.2 Online and Blended Learning at RU

Technology has altered the ways in which university instructors teach or may teach, and the way students learn or may learn. As Barone (2003) puts it, with the increasing use of technology, it has become necessary to establish policies to provide guidelines for technologically-mediated teaching and learning activities. Riara University, consistent to its mission and purpose, runs its academic programmes face to face, blended and online as foreseen in the RU Strategic Plan and as resolved by Council and Senate. It is for this reason that the University has established this Policy to reflect the norms and values of the institution and articulate the responsibilities of all actors.

1.3 Purpose of the Policy

This policy is designed to give general guidelines towards Online and Blended Learning at the University, with adherence to regulatory requirements and commitment to provision of high quality online education based on standards, guidelines and globally accepted good practices.

1.4 Scope of the Policy

The policy applies to all aspects of Online and Blended Teaching and Learning at the University, all programmes offered through online and blended learning modes, and all students and faculty members/instructors involved in online and blended learning programmes, whether full-time or part-time.

1.5 Legal Framework and Resources

This Policy shall be administered in compliance with the Constitution of Kenya, the Universities Act, the Universities Regulations, the Universities Standards and Guidelines, and Riara University's Statutes and other applicable policies. The following resources have been identified as primary documents in developing and implementation of this policy: RU Academic Integrity Policy, Riara University Students Code of Conduct, Riara University Students Academic Handbook, University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), Commonwealth of Learning (CoL), Riara University Honor Code, and the Kenya National Qualifications Framework Act Regulations, among others.

2. Policy Details

2.1. Copyright and Intellectual Property

The University operates under the law and thus is guided by the copyright guidelines. The stakeholders are made aware of the copyright requirements specifically that course content may be subject to copyright laws and protections. This includes ownership of copyright to online course materials. However, all copyright for works produced during the course of employment resides with the University. RU faculty and stakeholders are expected to operate morally and ethically when working as individuals and in association with others.

The University educates the staff and students on intellectual property, respectful learning environment and appropriate acknowledgement of others' work. Additionally, the students will be provided with information literacy skills on the same. The University's academic rules, regulations and handbooks are other resources which will be utilised in enhancing the culture of honesty and responsibility among the students and faculty.

2.2. Curriculum Design and Development

Faculty members will ensure that curriculum and content for online courses are designed appropriately for the medium to be used for teaching and learning, and that the quality and rigor of an online course is no less than that of its face-to-face equivalent. The University will continuously utilise students and other stakeholders in the design, development and review of curriculum and other learning resources to ensure that our programmes meet the expectations of stakeholders and remain

competitive. All online course materials are to be developed well in advance (four months in advance for new courses), and taken through the relevant Departmental and University committees as legally stipulated for compliance with quality standards. The University will continuously develop the capacity of faculty, students and support staff to deliver the Online and Blended Learning effectively.

2.3. Learning Management System

All online and blended learning courses shall be delivered via the University's prescribed Learning Management System (LMS). To ensure integrity of the courses, at least 90% of the course content must reside within the LMS and be accessible only via secure login and password unique to each RU student and employee. However, follow up interactions between faculty and students and students to students' interactions can be conducted via other appropriate means as may be approved by Senate from time to time.

2.4. Accessibility of Library Resources

The RU Digital Library has adequate resources to support online students from their various locations. The Librarian will ensure that students receive Digital Library Services and are given the necessary support to easily access and navigate around the e-resources of the Library.

2.5. Course Quality

In accordance with Commission for University Education (CUE) and Kenya National Qualification Authority (KNQA) requirements, among others, the Academic Department / School delivering blended and online courses and programmes holds the primary responsibility for assuring pedagogical and other quality mechanisms as approved by the University Senate, and maintained and controlled by the Quality Assurance Directorate.

2.6. Academic Calendar

Online courses will run for **13-17 weeks** in a Semester depending on programme of study. The academic calendar / schedule of classes will typically be communicated by the Registrar at least **3 weeks** ahead of beginning of classes.

2.7. Course Durations

The duration of online classes remains 3 hours, or as stipulated in the curriculum document. However, live online lectures should not exceed one (1) consecutive hour at a time, and should be combined with other forms of learning such as individual / group assignments, discussion forums, among others.

2.8. Institutional, Technical and ICT Support Infrastructure

RU has available and adequate technical, and ICT infrastructure, as well as appropriate technical staff to support online and blended learning, and will continue to enhance them. On the other hand, and whereas the University will endeavor to provide appropriate infrastructure on campus, the staff and students are expected to invest in their own functional electronic devices e.g. laptops, desktops or other smart devices to participate in online and blended learning.

2.9. Management Structure

RU will set up and maintain a Centre for Learning Innovation to spearhead online and blended learning, and will always put in place internal and external organizational structures as appropriate, to facilitate the development, coordination, support, and management of programmes offered under this policy. The Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs shall have the primary responsibility of executing this Policy.

2.10. Faculty Guidelines

2.10.1. Faculty Appointment

All faculty who teach online courses shall be vetted, shortlisted, and presented to the Human Resource Department by the relevant Departments/Schools, after which they will be approved for teaching by the Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs, who may liaise with other officers of the University as appropriate. The appointed online instructors will be required to possess the right skills set to teach effectively in the online campus.

2.10.2. Faculty/Instructor Development

In order to be engaged in teaching in blended and online programmes, the University will require that all faculty/instructors, whether full time or adjunct possess the appropriate skills and competences.

For full time and adjunct faculty members / instructors who may not have adequate skills on various aspects of online and blended teaching and learning, continuous training will be provided either free of charge or at cost, for skill enhancement in instructional design, pedagogy, course management strategies, effective assessments of hybrid and online courses, online course management system tools, policies and guidelines, among others. Appropriate certificates / credentials will be issued to persons who complete prescribed training, and only upon evidence of such credentialing will faculty / instructors be allowed to continue teaching at the University.

Faculty / instructors who have been credentialed to teach online through other recognized institutions will be required to provide appropriate documentary evidence to the respective Head of Department/ Dean, and a copy provided to the Human Resources Department. Besides the training offered by the University, any person wishing to teach at the University is encouraged to continue to invest in their own lifelong learning.

2.10.3. Consultation Hours

Online instructors will be required to be available for a reasonable amount of time, on a known and posted time slot(s) for consultation by students, just like in traditional teaching and learning. The consultation hours shall be posted/shared via the LMS under the Class page, and any other appropriate means.

2.10.4. Faculty Compensation

Full-time faculty teaching online courses will receive no additional compensation for courses taught as part of regular loading. Faculty teaching on a part-time basis will be compensated at the same rate as face-to-face classes, unless expressly stated otherwise. Faculty developing courses or other resources for fully-online programmes may be eligible for additional compensation upon completion and approval of the content by the Programme Leader. However, this shall be provided for expressly before commencement of such work.

2.10.5. Ownership of Educational Materials

All materials and intellectual property developed using University funds and/or resources for purposes of facilitating online and blended teaching and learning activities at the University shall belong to the University, except where expressly provided for.

2.11. Students Guidelines

2.11.1. Student Services

Students enrolled in online courses and programmes shall be provided access to relevant student support services, including but not limited to: electronic library resources, psychosocial support, and appropriate administrative services. The University will also provide students with guidelines containing additional information, as well as email addresses and other contacts that students may utilise to seek assistance or support.

2.11.2. Student Admission and Orientation

A student applying to study online may do so on the University's online application platform, or face-to-face where appropriate. Subsequently, the application will be processed in accordance with the requirements for the programme applied for, and the student shall be issued with an Admission Letter or an official response giving reasons as to why they did not qualify for admission. Upon successful admission, the student will be inducted to the online campus and to the online course(s) they are enrolled in.

2.11.3. Class Attendance

Students are expected to attend their online classes regularly by participating in activities such as virtual lectures, submitting assignments, engaging in discussion boards, completing exams, attending online chats, among others. Simply logging into the course does not count as attendance. Students enrolled in fully-online courses are expected to attend their classes fully online and not to attempt to attend physical classes unless with express written permission. Students in blended learning courses are expected to adhere to the requirements of their respective courses in terms of classes to be taken online, and those to be attended physically, among others.

2.11.4. Adding, Dropping, and Withdrawing from Courses

Online/blended courses follow the same regulations as face-to-face courses regarding faculty and student initiated course drops and withdrawals. Deadlines for both can be found on the University's Academic Calendar, and guidelines issued regularly by the Registrar - Academic Affairs.

2.11.5. Online Student Feedback and Raising of Complaints

RU has provided mechanisms for handling student academic and non-academic complaints. The first point of contact in addressing issues arising is the lecturer teaching the course. Where that does not result in resolution of the issue, the matter will be escalated to the Head of Department / Dean of School as appropriate, preferably through the Class Representative(s). If the matter is still unresolved, the issue(s) will be escalated to the Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs through the Class Representative(s). The above notwithstanding, students with complaints about any issue, shall be at liberty to contact the Quality Assurance Directorate at any time by writing an email to feedback@riarauniversity.ac.ke. Non-academic matters shall be directed to dos@riarauniversity.ac.ke or ict@riarauniversity.ac.ke as the case may be.

2.11.6. Student Assessment and Grading

RU Online Campus Examinations may be proctored or monitored using appropriate online proctoring tools, or may take other forms such as open book, take home, or project based assessments. Open book examinations shall ordinarily be open for a period not exceeding seven (7) calendar days unless a different time period is specified. Faculty are required to give continuous assignments for not less than four (4) times in a semester and to ensure adequate time and resources are available to support students while undertaking their assignments where applicable.

The RU standards for assessment of online and blended courses shall be 60% for Continuous Assessment Tests (CAT) and 40% for the final semester examination. This may however vary according to specific course requirements, or as the Senate may approve from time to time.

Students taking online assignments shall be provided with adequate notice periods for submission of assignments as well as information on when the faculty member / instructor will be available for consultation in case they need assistance in accessing or submitting their assignments or examinations. Students shall however not be allowed to blame last-minute technology glitches for failure to submit assignments or examinations on time and are therefore required to invest in resources that will ensure timely submission of assignments.

2.11.7. Student Authentication

In accordance with applicable policies, regulations, standards and guidelines, the University requires that the student who registers in an online or blended or such other distance learning course or programme is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit. In this regard, the University will use all available mechanisms to assure authenticity of online students, including but not limited to:

- Use of usernames and passwords to access examinations
- Use of Digital tools that force web-cameras to be on at all times
- Verification of approved photo ID through webcams or such other mechanisms
- Proctoring of exams through appropriate software that will be mandatory in all student devices
- Synchronous or asynchronous activities requiring an approved photo ID
- Field or clinical activities requiring a photo ID on arrival at the organization's premises
- Other appropriate means as the University may determine from time to time

Photo IDs may include Driver's licence, Military ID, Passport, National ID, or RU provided ID.

Students are strictly warned not to attempt any malpractices regarding the above, as the University will employ all applicable measures to deter and curtail such occurrences.

2.11.8. Student Grades Approvals, Release and Enquiries

The University Senate shall meet at least once every semester to approve academic grades and calendar of release of such grades. The University Registrar shall accordingly communicate the release and access details to the students. Where Senate is unable to meet to approve grades for a preceding semester, the Secretary to the Senate shall ensure that students are notified accordingly and in a timely manner. Enquiries regarding grades for CATs and such other assessments undertaken before the final exam shall be forwarded to respective lecturer, or Dean of School. However, all enquiries after Senate has approved and released results of a particular semester shall be referred to the Registrar - Academic Affairs via RU's official emails, or physically during stipulated enquiry hours.

2.12. Privacy Policy

The University will endeavour to maintain the privacy and integrity of the data of online and blended learning students at all times and to secure such data in University-owned or operated systems. To this end, and whereas the University does not have the capacity to fully guarantee against potential future threats to its systems, the University will deploy any and all reasonable technology and human resources to ensure privacy and protection of its students and their data. As a guide, students' bio data shall not be disclosed to third parties by any individual working for the University under this Policy, without the express authority of the Vice Chancellor, or any person designated by the Vice Chancellor for purposes of legally disclosing such information. Students' examination grades shall be stored in University owned/operated information-management systems and shall not be disclosed/viewable to/by persons outside of the authorised line of work of processing such grades, or made public or posted outside of secured systems at any time during or after the semester.

Staff (whether full-time or part-time) shall not require students to reveal their private information to the class or such other persons, except where such consent is granted by the respective student(s), and anyone requiring such disclosure shall respect students' requests to not post such private information for class viewing.

Any person disclosing any private information of a student without prior written permission of the Vice Chancellor or his/her designate (or that of the affected student(s) for purposes of information relating to ordinary classwork) commits an offence and shall be liable for disciplinary action under the University's processes, or indeed applicable external legal processes. The University however reserves the right to disclose the information on examination grades or academic progress of students to legal regulatory bodies, and/or parents, guardians or sponsors as the case may require from time to time.

2.13. Quality Assurance, Monitoring, and Review of Online and Blended Learning Courses

The Quality Assurance Directorate shall be responsible for the monitoring, evaluation and review of all courses and instructors under this Policy. All students, faculty, instructors, and other relevant stakeholders are required and encouraged to provide appropriate and objective feedback to ensure continued quality improvements of all online and blended learning courses at RU. The evaluation process will have appropriate safeguards to ensure that obtained feedback remains anonymous where anonymity is required.

The Quality Assurance Directorate shall generate appropriate Quality Assurance, and Institutional Learning Reports, among others and monitor implementation of any recommendations in those reports on a regular basis. The University Senate shall fully support implementation of any recommendations arising out of such and it shall be the responsibility of each individual member of Senate to ensure timely and effective implementation of recommendations under their control, or those assigned to them.

2.14. Equal Opportunities for All

The University treats all students, staff and stakeholders equally and hence no student wishing to study online shall be discriminated on the basis of sex, religion, age, disability or any other recognised form of discrimination. Whereas the University will endeavour to provide resources and facilities for persons with disabilities, it is to be appreciated that it may not be possible for the institution to guarantee provision for all forms of disabilities.

3. Parties Responsible for the Implementation of this Policy

Those responsible for implementation of this Policy include, but are not limited to:

- University Senate and its individual members
- Vice Chancellor
- Deputy Vice Chancellors
- Director Quality Assurance
- Deans and Heads of Departments
- Director / Dean, Center for Learning Innovation
- Department / School Boards
- Registrar - Academic Affairs
- Head of ICT
- All Faculty members / Course Instructors (full-time and part-time)
- Riara University Students Association
- The Riara University Students Council
- All Riara University Students
- Any other adopted person/party based on need

4.0. Policy Adoption and Approvals

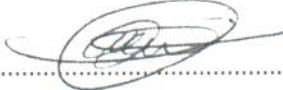
Prepared by and Verified for Quality Control by:

Director, Quality Assurance

Signature 

Recommended for Approval by:

Deputy Vice Chancellor - Academics Affairs

Signature..... 

Senate Approval

Adopted by the Riara University Senate on:

Day: 01 Month: July Year: 2020

Approved by:

Vice Chancellor

Signature 