

# Bishop Stuart University



## Open, Distance e-Learning (ODeL) Policy

This Policy commencement became effective on .....upon approve by  
University Council and signed by .....

## A. Acronyms and Definitions

### i) List of Acronyms

AR	Academic Registrar
DAR	Deputy Academic Registrar
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ODeL	Open, Distance and eLearning
QAD	Quality Assurance Directorate
VLE	
LMS	Learning Management System
FQAC	Faculty Quality Assurance Committee (s)
DCLIT	Department of Computing, Library, and Information Technology

### ii) Definitions

Academic Unit	The Department / Faculty with An ODeL-Delivered Programmes
ODeL Unit	An Administrative and coordinating unit for ODeL at Bishop Stuart University under the office of the Academic Registrar headed by Deputy Academic Registrar
E-Learning	
Far Centre	An off-campus center created to support ODeL learners in and outside Uganda.
Open, Distance and eLearning (ODeL)	A formal learning method which employs flexible approaches to learning and teaching by enabling learners to be separated by time and space from their institution.
Online Learning	This is a form of eLearning, which uses electronic devices linked to a learning management system via the Internet.
Study Materials	Specially designed self-study, student-centered interactive learning resources for use in ODeL courses and programmes.
Student Support	The culture of care accorded to an ODeL student with the aim at ensuring that he/she accomplishes his/her study programme within the stipulated time.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Open Distance and E-learning (ODEL) is the new reality that universities and other Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) need to adopt to keep relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. It is the type of teaching and learning that gives students, who have to fulfil multiple roles and are affected by the barriers of distance, cost and time, an opportunity to pursue their studies online. Other names of ODeL are online education, cyber schooling, and distance learning, which are distinct from the traditional face to face education because students do not need to be in an actual lecture room and listen to an instructor talking to them. ODeL is possible with a classroom on the internet that engages and assists students to study on their own, in their free time. Bishop Stuart University aims at changing with the times in order to offer flexible and convenient teaching and learning, research and innovation, as well as community engagement. BSU will adopt a blended /hybrid ODeL model of teaching and learning that combines; online / internet – based teaching and learning, teleconferencing based teaching and learning and offline teaching and learning / Open and Distance. To offer ODeL effectively and efficiently, BSU found it essential to have a policy framework to guide planning and investments in digital communication technologies and infrastructure to support ODeL. This policy document presents a framework for implementation arrangements for blended /hybrid ODeL teaching and learning at BSU

## **2.0 Context and Situation Analysis**

Bishop Stuart University is a chartered, private and not for profit University. It was founded by Ankole Diocese of the Province of the Anglican Church of Uganda in 2002 and was chartered by the government of Uganda in 2014. The University has its campus at Kakoba, Mbarara City, Mbarara District, South Western Uganda. The Faculty of Nursing and Health sciences is located at Ruharo near St. James Cathedral, the headquarters of Ankole Diocese and the Faculty of Law is located Ultimate Hill in Rwentondo cell 2 KM from the Kakoba main campus.

The University has five faculties and these are: Faculty of Education, Arts and Media Studies, Faculty of Agriculture, Environmental Sciences and Technology, Faculty of Business, Economics and Governance, Faculty of Law and Faculty of Nursing and Health sciences. In addition, it has a Directorate of Graduate Studies, Research Grants and Publications and an

Innovations Incubation Hub. The University runs more than 80 accredited programs by National Council for Higher Education. These include Diplomas, Bachelors, Post graduate Diplomas, Masters and PhDs.

BSU seeks to contribute directly and indirectly to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 3, 5, 8, 12, 13 and 16 in Uganda and beyond. This is done through training high quality human resource in programmes offered in faculties and directorate of post graduate. As part of its core mandate, the university also conducts research, offers consultancy services, engages in knowledge transfer partnerships, contributing to the economic development of Uganda, East Africa and beyond.

The vision of the university is “To be a university for recreating a society with Academic Excellence, Entrepreneurship and Christian values” The Mission of the university is “Producing multi-sectoral leaders and operators who know the way, show the way and go the way.” Key strategic priorities of the university include; Research and Innovations, Teaching and Learning, Human Resource Development, increased use of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning, adoption of flexible modes of learning and ensuring cost effectiveness of courses offered by the university.

Since its inception in 2002, BSU has delivered its teaching and learning mainly through face-to-face teaching and learning model. However, its strategic plan 2020- 2030 aims to introduce Open Distance and E-Learning (ODEL) in order to make it possible for more students who may be far away from the university and/or are unable to travel to the university to access their education. For this purpose, the university is establishing a policy on Open Distance and eLearning to increase access to flexible education for current and future students.

### **3.0 Policy Statement**

This policy aims to mainstream and integrate Open, Distance and eLearning (ODEL) into academic programmes at BSU so as to increase access to flexible and quality technology supported teaching and learning as emphasized in the Bishop Stuart University Strategic Plan 2020-2030 which recognizes ODeL as number one strategy for increasing access to flexible education for prospective students.

#### **4.0 Rationale for ODeL at BSU University**

ODeL at BSU will comprise a blended /hybrid model of learning that combines; online / internet – based teaching and learning, teleconferencing based teaching and learning and offline teaching and learning / open and distance. It is the type of teaching and learning that gives students, who have to fulfil multiple roles and are affected by the barriers of distance, cost and time, an opportunity to pursue their studies online. The information and communication systems, whether networked learning or not, serve as specific media to implement the learning process.

ODeL education system focuses on open access to education and training to make the learners free from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners. e-learning is essentially the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. e-learning applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CDROM. It can be self-paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of text, image, animation, streaming video and audio.

ODeL is one of the most rapidly growing fields of education in present days and it has substantial impact on all education delivery systems. ODeL system is growing fast because of the development of Internet-based information technologies, and in particular the World Wide Web. The concept of ODeL education came from idea where the learners and the teachers cannot be in a class room and they should be separated by some geographical distance or maybe they cannot come close to each other to make the entire education system flexible. In the present days we have audio and computer teleconferencing which have influenced the delivery of instruction in college schools, higher education, business, and industry.

BSU has a policy on ICT enshrined within the broader Policy on Information and Communication Technology (ICT). However, given the outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that led to closure of all educational institutions, including universities, the need for ODeL teaching and learning has been made even more

urgent in a bid to ensure social distancing while at the same time achieving the learning objectives. ODeL teaching and learning encourages independent learning since students are able to explore and read more than what was taught in class. It provides attractive approaches to learning, including gamification, video, audio, pictorials and other modes. It enables students to study at their pace and to go back at their pace to review content provided by the teachers in class, without fear of being ashamed or being perceived by peers as slow learners. Given that most students and staff already have e-enabled devices, the personal cost of commencement will be low. It enables students and staff to access and use open resources from other settings that are available online. ODeL reduces the expenses and risks that may be experienced during travel and accommodation.

In regard to the above context, management has found it necessary to develop this policy to enable planning and investments in open, distance and eLearning and teaching since it has now become the “new normal” for most academic institutions. This policy highlights the commitment of BSU management to adopt ODeL so as to restore teaching and learning during this period of covid-19 lockdown and beyond.

### **5.0 Objectives of ODeL Policy**

The main objective of this policy is to enable and facilitate ODeL at BSU through a blended / hybrid model of teaching and learning that includes online, teleconferencing based and off line. Specifically, it aims to provide a framework in which e-Learning can take place as a legitimate form of learning at the university, to guide the university’s investments to establish and use e-learning resources, and to provide for the training of instructors and learners in the use of appropriate technologies and resources to achieve the expected course outcomes

The specific objectives of the policy are:

- i. To provide a framework for mainstreaming ODeL into all academic programmes at Bishop Stuart University.
- ii. To increase access to higher education in Uganda through multiple modes of delivery.
- iii. To provide a framework for ensuring quality of ODeL-delivered programmes.
- iv. To enhance access to information growth for research and innovation at BSU and beyond.



- v. To ensure that all instructors and students are proficient in ICT in teaching and preparation for the future job market and life in the new normal.
- vi. To enhance teaching and learning experience at BSU using digital education technology
- vii. To provide an avenue for engaging students in the classroom and beyond.
- viii. To ensure students are equipped to use ICT in a safe and secure manner and to enable them to use ICT appropriately.
- ix. To establish a guiding framework for the harmonization of existing e-learning resources of the university
- x. To establish a framework for the university to continuously make appropriate investments in order to raise and maintain the standards of ODeL system
- xi. To facilitate access to University education to geographically - dispersed staff and students of the university by using ICTs in instruction, learning, and research through the University-wide implementation of E-learning platforms approved to facilitate learning process.
- xii. To enhance access to information globally by online communication with people and organizations in other settings

## **6.0 Guiding Principles**

Bishop Stuart University is committed to enhancing quality and flexibility in teaching and learning in order to be consistent with its strategic priorities. The guiding principles for the e-learning policy are:

- i. Flexibility in teaching and learning
- ii. Student independence
- iii. Affordability
- iv. Data and Information Security
- v. Equity in access to information and data

## **7.0 ODeL Target Clients**

In addition to existing admission policy in the University, Bishop Stuart University shall, while ensuring gender balance, employ an open admission policy for ODeL-delivered programmes.

## **8.0 The State of ODeL at Bishop Stuart University**

- i. Bishop Stuart University has an ODeL Unit under the Academic Registrar 's Office headed by the Deputy Academic Registrar (DAR) with the mandate to provide ODeL oversight.
- ii. The ODeL-Unit is a non-teaching academic unit.
- iii. The programmes on ODeL, are fully housed by the respective academic department and faculties.

## **9.0 Policy Implementation Strategies**

All the staff of BSU and those associated with the University have a responsibility to adhere to this policy and apply it in their day-to-day activities and in all dealings with, or on behalf of the university.

The overall responsibilities in relation to this policy are as follows:

### **a) The University Council**

The University Council, as a supreme governing body, the employer and the ultimate financial accounting authority of the University, is responsible for ensuring that the institution fulfils its legal and fiscal responsibilities for promoting ODeL system in the University. In order to fulfill this responsibility, Council shall receive an annual progress report on the implementation of the ODeL to enable its members ensure that the Policy is being operationalized. Council shall further monitor and evaluate progress on the implementation of the Policy. Council discharges this responsibility through the management structures of the University.

### **b) The University Senate**

The University Senate as a custodian of all academic programmes in the university is responsible for ensuring that all provisions of this policy are adhered to in order to ensure quality in all aspects related to the provision of ODeL at Bishop Stuart University.

### **c) The University Management**

This is the top management structure in the university; its responsibilities are:

- i. To monitor and oversee the progress of the University in delivering ODeL effectively
- ii. To ensure the University has the required resources for ODeL and that they effectively managed
- iii. To ensure appropriate policies are in place to safeguard students, staff and the entire University system involved in ODeL
- iv. To ensure all University priorities in the use of Digital Technology for ODeL are communicated to the University community.
- v. To ensure that students and staff have the necessary equipment for effective use of ICT and ODeL.
- vi. To establish an ODeL department / unit operating under the office of the Academic Registrar with the required staff.

**d) Directorate of Quality Assurance**

This Directorate is responsible for assuring quality in all academic programmes at BSU. The directorate will promote, monitor, evaluate and ensure quality teaching and learning through ODeL system. It will also provide continuous capacity building for ODeL system in the university.

**e) Faculty Deans and Heads of Departments**

The Deans and Heads and Department are responsible for the implementation of the ODeL Policy within their spheres of responsibility. This involves putting the policy and its strategies and procedures into practice; making sure all concerned members of staff are aware of their responsibilities and receive support and training in carrying out these responsibilities; and taking action against staff or students who default in their obligations to this Policy.

**f) The ODeL-Unit**

The ODeL-Unit shall be responsible for facilitating the development and growth of ODeL in the entire University in accordance with the provisions of this policy.

**g) Roles of students in supporting ODeL**

- i. To develop an attitude favorable and receptive to ODeL
- ii. To secure personal devices that enable ODeL.
- iii. To abide by the university's regulations while using digital technologies for learning.
- iv. To ensure they bring their digital technology devices to the university for use in all sessions
- v. To ensure they only use their University Accounts when communicating with staff and other students in relation to teaching and learning activities
- vi. To keep all university digital technologies safe and secure when in the University
- vii. To abide by the University policies and regulations regarding ODeL

**10.0 Staffing ODeL at Bishop Stuart University**

- i. The University shall ensure that there is a staffing structure that recognizes the unique functions required to efficiently manage and deliver ODeL programmes
- ii. The University shall have two main categories of staff in the ODeL system namely; ODeL Academic staff and ii) ODeL Technical staff team.

**a) Academic staff roles and responsibilities**

- i. Provide continuous ODeL pedagogical training to all academic units of the university

- ii. Provide support to all the academic units in the university in ODeL-delivered programme development, delivery, management, and administration.
- iii. Sensitize all students in ODeL-delivered programmes about the ODeL mode of study.
- iv. Facilitate on ODeL modules and courses across the university.
- v. Undertake research and publication in the field of ODeL
- vi. Review, before approval, all programmes, to be delivered through ODeL.
- vii. Periodically review programmes and student support structures for ODeL delivered programme.
- viii. Conduct monitoring and evaluation of students' performance under ODeL.

**b) ODeL Technical staff /team**

- i. These shall include eLearning specialists, multimedia experts, graphic designers, instructional designers, VLE specialists, system developers among others.
- ii. Shall support academic units running ODeL-delivered programmes in the design, development and use of different educational technology tools.
- iii. Shall in liaison with Department of Computing, Library, and Information Technology (DCLIT) provide technical backstopping support for all technologies (hardware and software) that will be employed in delivering ODeL programmes
- iv. The University shall put in place a promotional criterion that recognizes ODeL activities as being part of the components for promoting ODeL academic and professional staff.
- v. Staff teaching on and/or coordinating ODeL programmes in the different academic units of the University shall be those who will have received training in the discipline of ODeL

**11.0 ODeL Study Materials and Programme Delivery**

- i. All programmes in the University shall be candidate programmes for running in the ODeL model
- ii. Prior to approval of any ODeL-delivered programme, appropriate technology mediated study materials shall be developed for it as is required by the National Council for Higher Education.
- iii. Study materials shall be developed so as to conform to the Bishop Stuart University ODeL model
- iv. All study materials developed for use on any ODeL-delivered programme shall be endorsed by ODeL-Unit and Directorate of quality assurance before use
- v. The University shall promote and support the efficient delivery of ODeL programmes using multiple media that meet learners' preferences and abilities.
- vi. The University shall permit modular study and multiple exit avenues on ODeL programmes.

- vii. The University shall continuously upgrade its distance education delivery and support modes
- viii. The University shall use eLearning to support both learners on ODeL and on campus delivered programmes.
- ix. The University shall permit student-centered and decentralized support systems and assessment methods on ODeL-delivered programmes.

### **12.0 Quality Assurance System for ODeL**

The University shall promote and support provision of quality ODeL programmes in line with the goals of the University's Quality Assurance Framework.

The Quality Assurance Directorate (QAD), ODeL-Unit and Faculty Quality Assurance teams shall monitor and ensure the provision of quality teaching and learning through the ODeL mode.

### **13.0 ODeL Management and Administration**

The University shall establish a Unit / Department of ODeL which will be a non-teaching academic unit,

Specifically, it shall be the mandate of the unit to:

- (a) Initiate continuous staff training for effective delivery and management of ODeL programmes in all academic units in the University.
- (b) Run training and development programmes and courses intended to build pedagogical capacity in the discipline of ODeL across the University.
- (c) Develop ODeL pedagogy and andragogy programmes
- (d) Carry out continuing capacity-building for ODeL managers, administrators, practitioners, tutors and study materials developers.
- (e) Provide oversight to academic units while developing/reviewing proposals and curricula for programmes to be offered through ODeL.
- (f) Approve programmes to be delivered through ODeL model
- (g) Provide oversight in the development and production of technology mediated study materials for ODeL programmes.
- (h) Approve technology mediated study materials before use in ODeL delivered programmes and before approval of any new ODeL-delivered programme.
- (i) Provide oversight in the implementation of curricula and student support services for ODeL-delivered programmes..
- (j) Initiate innovations in ODeL programme delivery across the University.
- (k) Undertake research and publication in ODeL.
- (l) Facilitate on ODeL disciplinary subjects and courses across the university.
- (m) Ensure that ODeL is appropriately represented on key planning organs of the University.
- (n) Represent the University on ODeL. Organs and activities outside Bishop Stuart University.
- (o) Forge links and partnerships with organizations involved in ODeL.

- (p) Carry out advocacy in ODeL at institutional and national level.
- (q) Market Bishop Stuart University ODeL expertise to various stakeholders.
- (r) Manage ODeL staff, infrastructure and resources,
- (s) Manage and coordinate study centers and activities.
- (t) Undertake appropriate planning, of both short and long term, strategic dimensions for ODeL programmes.
- (u) In collaboration with System Administration Staff, will provide educational technology support to all academic units.
- (v) Sensitize all students in ODeL-delivered programme about the ODeL mode of delivery
- (w) Fundraise for the development of ODeL technologies and techniques.
- (x) Initiate policies and regulations for the usage of Bishop Stuart University ODeL study materials and resources by third parties, in conformity with institutional regulations and national laws.

### **15.0 Roles of Academic Units**

#### **The academic Departments and faculties in the University shall;**

- (a) With oversight support from the ODeL-Unit, house their respective ODeL delivered programmes.
- (b) With oversight support from the ODeL-Unit, initiate the development of curricula for programmes to be offered using ODeL.
- (c) With oversight support from the ODeL-Unit, implement and review curricula for ODeL-delivered programmes.
- (d) Avail their faculty and other staff to the ODeL-Unit for ODeL pedagogy and study materials development trainings.
- (e) Provide only ODeL pedagogy trained faculty to facilitate/teach on ODeL-delivered programmes.
- (f) Provide only ODeL trained administrative and support staff to provide different ODeL administrative and support functions.
- (g) With oversight from the ODeL-Unit, develop and review appropriate technology-based study materials for ODeL-delivered programmes.
- (h) With oversight from the ODeL-Unit, provide academic and administrative support to students on ODeL-delivered programmes.
- (i) With oversight from the ODeL-Unit, provide necessary distance learning study materials to students on ODeL-delivered programmes before commencement of any course.
- (j) Provide formative and summative assessment of students on ODeL delivered programmes.
- (k) Present students for graduation.

#### **14.0 The academic Faculties in the University shall;**

- i. Have an ODeL Programmes Committee on which the ODeL-Unit shall be represented.
- ii. There shall be an ODeL Programme Coordinator for each ODeL-delivered programme in the academic units who shall serve as a link between the academic unit and the ODeL-Unit.
- iii. Bishop Stuart University shall establish, develop, manage and operate well-resourced ODeL learner support centres in and outside the country overseen and supervised by the ODeL-Unit.
- iv. The ODeL-Unit shall provide support for participation in, local and international ODeL associations, in order to promote the exchange of, and research in ODeL innovations within Uganda and beyond.

#### **15.0 Relationship between ODeL-Unit and Other Academic Units**

- i. The ODeL-Unit shall provide ODeL backstopping support services to academic units running ODeL delivered programmes and courses.
- ii. The ODeL-Unit shall be represented on each faculty's ODeL Programmes Committee.
- iii. Technological Support for ODeL
- iv. The University shall continuously equip academic units with appropriate educational technologies for delivering ODeL programmes.
- v. The University shall ensure that there is adequate bandwidth to support ODeL and eLearning programmes.
- vi. The System Administration Unit shall be in charge of all educational technologies and tools and shall ensure that they are up to date and in good and sound working conditions.

#### **16.0 Institutional and Regulatory Frameworks**

The implementation of the Policy shall be operationalized through the existing University institutional structures. Council as the governing body of the University shall ensure that all its organs and officers abide by and implement all provisions of this Policy.

#### **17.0 Relationship with other Policy Documents**

ODeL model demand close working relationships between management, faculties and administrative departments. The implementation of this policy will be done alongside the following policies:

- i. Research and publication Policy
- ii. Procurement and Disposal Policy
- iii. Postgraduate Training policy

- iv. ICT Policy
- v. E-learning policy
- vi. Gender and Sexual Harassment policy
- vii. Examinations and Regulations Policy
- viii. Quality Assurance policy
- ix. Audit policy

### **18.0 Enhancing Organizational Capacity to Implement the ODeL Policy**

In order to enhance the organizational capacity to implement the ODeL Policy, Bishop Stuart University shall aim to maximize its own institutional capacity and marshal political goodwill to achieve the objectives of the ODeL Policy by providing adequate support, guidance and training to staff and students. In addition, organizational structures, working practices and management styles that reflect the principles of ODeL shall be promoted throughout the University.

### **19.0 Commitment to Proactive Implementation of the ODeL Policy**

Bishop Stuart University is set to proactively implement the ODeL Policy. To realize this commitment, an elaborate monitoring and implementation matrix shall be developed by the ODeL-Unit for every three years and presented to the senate for approval.

The QAD and ODeL-Unit shall develop a policy monitoring and implementation matrix outlining the steps the University shall take to operationalize the identified Policy resolutions. The University shall identify and make available appropriate resources to implement the monitoring and action matrix. The monitoring and implementation matrices shall constitute the University ODeL Strategic Action Plans which shall be the major tools for monitoring the implementation of the ODeL Policy and achieving its objectives.

These tools shall take into account both qualitative and quantitative measures of successful implementation of ODeL at Bishop Stuart University.

### **20.0 Financing of ODeL at Bishop Stuart University**

- i. The University shall finance ODeL-delivered programmes from internally generated resources.
- ii. The University shall source for Government and development partner support for ODeL-delivered programmes
- iii. The ODeL-Unit shall on its own, or in partnership with academic units, write grant winning proposals to support ODeL research and activities.
- iv. The University shall ensure that the ODeL-unit and academic units running ODeL delivered programmes share internally generated resources as per their mandated roles.



- v. The University shall allocate adequate human and financial resources to the ODeL-Unit so as to enable it carry out its mandate.
- vi. The University shall ensure continuous investment in capital development that supports the growth, development and decentralization of ODeL-delivered programmes and activities

### **21.0 Legal Aspects**

This policy has been approved by BSU Senate and Council and ODeL mode is a recognized mode of teaching and learning at BSU

### **22.0 Policy Dissemination**

This policy will be disseminated to all students and staff of the university. It shall be maintained on the university's website for easy access and reference by stakeholders.

### **23.0 ODeL Policy Review Process**

Commencing with the approval of this policy, after every three years the Quality Assurance Committee of the University Senate shall initiate and carry out a review process to ascertain the need for updates or modifications of this policy. The Quality Assurance Committee shall consult faculty quality assurance committees, Deans, Hods, ICT staff, university management, ODeL facilitators, graduates, students and community in the review process.

### **24.0 Monitoring and Evaluation**

Regular and timely monitoring of progress regarding this policy shall be carried out by the QAD, ODeL-Unit, Faculty Quality Assurance Committee (FQAC) and where appropriate, with the Human Resource officer and Finance Department

The ODeL-Unit management team shall annually produce a report on implementation and monitoring of the ODeL Policy. It shall also have the responsibility for tasking working groups to produce reviewed and updated versions of this policy as need arises

This Policy and annual progress reports shall be published on the University website. In addition to formal publicity, outcomes and continuing work shall be disseminated through publications, Internet and promotional materials.

## **20.0 References**

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