

19 May 2020

Dear Students, Parents, Guardians, Sponsors and Stakeholders

UPDATE: IMPACT OF COVID-19 VIRUS ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

For over 50 days we have been living in a time of national lockdown. These are extraordinary times as all South Africans, and other nations, confront the threat of the Covid-19 virus. The lockdown was extended to 30 April 2020 on Level 5. On 1 May 2020 we moved to lockdown Level 4. There are signals from government that we may soon be easing the lockdown further, but this is not certain. What we do know is that all sectors of society are required to continue to slow the spread of the virus to save lives and minimise the damage to our society and economy.

We recognise that we must provide to you regular information about how the academic year will be completed and we wish to clarify the availability of our communication on the institutional website. Since early in the lockdown, we have communicated weekly with our enrolled students either by email, SMS, WhatsApp or telephone to encourage them to be active in their studies and make use of the online learning system, called **myClass**, to remotely support their learning through the student portal. Please be assured that you can always access our latest communication in this regard on the institutional websites.

Online Learning Support in *myClass*

We have been legally compelled to act in the best interests of saving lives while continuing to ensure that we provide high quality education to our students. While on-campus classes remain suspended, we are focused on enabling our students to successfully complete their studies in a timely manner through *myClass*. We considered the impact of the lockdown on students, including their access to technology, data requirements, their ability to use technology for their learning; and the challenge they face to find quiet study places while at home.

To make best use of the semester time, we have been actively making the study materials, online discussions and live virtual class interactions with our academics available in *myClass*. We are pleased to inform you that more and more students are accessing their modules online, participating in discussions, and that we see a very large percentage of our enrolled students completing their modules by being active in *myClass* and actively engaging in the live virtual class timetables.

We wish to assure every student, including our parents, guardians and sponsors, that **we have spent much time reworking the academic calendar for the 2020 academic year for a range of different scenarios and we are ready to implement the rescheduled calendars for contact classes on campus once we are permitted to do so.**

In the meantime, our students are urged to be committed to time each day in self-directed study and online learning through the student portal, *myClass*, where we continue to support all students with an enriched online learning experience.

The current situation and the next steps in re-opening the campuses

It is understood that the lockdown has brought some uncertainty and cause for concern among some students who are rightly worried about finishing their semester studies and completing their qualification according to their original plans. We acknowledge our students' concerns about the personal health risks to their lives, to their future careers, and to their success in completing their studies.

It is also the responsibility of the College management to ensure that academic standards, the quality of the academic programmes and the assessment of students are not negatively impacted. We will take every step to see that our students are provided with a fair opportunity to succeed in their examinations.

Plans are in place and actions are underway to clean our campuses to make our campuses as safe as possible for students and staff. We must be sure that our students can safely attend classes, tutorials and write their exams. It is still unknown when students will be allowed to return to campus. We will not act in contravention of government's efforts to minimise the spread of the virus and curb the negative effects of the pandemic.

Once again, we would like to remind you that students must be protected from infection through practising physical distancing, the use of masks, regularly washing hands or using provided sanitisers and obeying lawful instructions of staff while at the campus. In all of this, all reasonable health and safety precautions need to be observed as required by government and the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

Following the lead of Government on when to re-open

The higher education sector is required to cooperate with the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology to ensure the rigour and reputation of the national higher education system in awarding its qualifications. Given all the uncertainties of the Covid-19's potential impact, we have listened to the advice of higher education and health experts regarding what should be done in these months. As of today, there is still no date as to when higher education institutions will be allowed to fully recommence with their operations.

It must be noted that there may be the possibility of a further extension of the lockdown in June, or that we may return to a higher level of lockdown in a province, city or district depending on Covid-19 infection rates. We note that government is increasingly allowing a limited number of businesses and industries to re-open. It is anticipated that our education institutions will be allowed to open, but in small steps, with initially a small number of staff allowed on campuses and followed by small groups of students.

Should students require assistance with respect to challenges they face, such as finances or study

materials, they are requested to contact us to enable proper counselling, assistance or support to be provided to them.

Conclusion

In summary, we will continue to monitor national developments and the pronouncements of the President of the Republic of South Africa on the lockdown timelines and of the Covid-19 pandemic's management thereafter. We will continue to earnestly act on any decisions made by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology in this regard.

When there is any further relevant information, we will communicate through the institutional website and by electronic communications to all students for them to plan their return to campus. These returns are likely to be based on a phased in approach and we will clarify those details when we can.

As fellow citizens let us not surrender to despair or discouragement but let us work together each day to ensure the success of our students and support our country to overcome and be victorious in our collective action to fight and end the pandemic.

Sincerely



Ms Anne Whaits
Chief Academic Officer