

08 May 2020

Dear Parents, Sponsors and Guardians

LEARNING AND TEACHING GOES ONLINE



The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown has disrupted the start of the 2020 academic year and the continuation of the academic programme. This communication serves to provide you with a brief update on how we continue to support our students remotely so that they may keep up to date with their studies at home and join the thousands of other students who are learning online with our support!

Introduction

These are unprecedented times in the history of our society and whilst the nationwide lockdown remains in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our primary focus is the safety of our staff and students and to ensure the successful completion of the 2020 academic year. We are not alone as all education institutions throughout South Africa, the region and globally have been obliged to take the same action. Our duty of care for the health and wellbeing for all our students and staff and our local communities is part of our responsibilities as citizens. We must work together to stop the progress of this virus and flatten the curve if we are to successfully defeat this global pandemic. The most important public health message is the containment of the disease, including avoiding social gatherings and minimising groups of people gathering in one space.

The recent announcement from the Minister of Higher Education and Training has reaffirmed that physical campus spaces of education institutions remain closed at this time. At this stage, it is not clear when lectures will resume on campus. We will be guided by national pronouncements in this regard. We wish to assure all stakeholders that we have spent much time reworking the academic calendars for the 2020 academic year for a range of different scenarios and we are ready to implement rescheduled calendars for contact classes on campus once we are permitted to do so. In the meantime, we continue to support our students with an enriched learning experience online via the student portal. A summary of this is outlined below.

Student Information Survey

The Student Portal is the place to receive all communication and notifications which are sent to students via their institutional email. Where we have identified students who have not yet logged in or who require additional support to their queries, we have tried to call via their mobile number or contact them via their email address. Students are reminded to ensure that we have their latest contact details. We are also keen to get their feedback on online learning resources provided and ask that they complete this information survey by 15 May 2020. Here is the URL link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DWT2CJF>. Contact details can also be updated on this survey. Alternatively, students can contact their campus Academic Manager.

Students accessing online learning materials

Since the beginning of April, increasing numbers of students have been logging onto their institutional student portal to access the virtual classroom and learning platform, called **myClass**, where they have access to a range of additional content and learning activities for each of the modules they are studying. These online module spaces offer a variety of learning resources for the student and the opportunity to engage with each other and the module lecturer.

A select team of module lecturers and support staff are fully operational and working from home developing additional content and will be further supporting students online in their journey through live virtual classrooms, recorded lectures, podcasts, discussion boards, chatrooms and private instant messaging.

We recognise that the transition to remote learning online may be new or even daunting for some, so we have been phasing the implementation since early April 2020. We would also like to assure parents, sponsors and guardians that our support teams are available to guide students throughout this journey. We have also created an online user experience that is simple and seamlessly integrated with a wide variety of applications. It is also “data lite”, using less data to download the module study materials and engage with them offline. All students also have access to the Digital Library and the full Microsoft Office365 suite to supplement their learning and engagement with the study materials, study questions, discussion areas with the lecturer and other students.

Supporting our students learning remotely

The full first semester study materials and additional learning activities are available in weekly units to students in **myClass**. Students are encouraged to access their Student Portal daily for their academic study materials, other communications and to engage with module lecturers and classmates online. From Monday, 11 May 2020, we will be launching the virtual timetable of live video timetabled sessions with a module lecturer to further support students. We need the support of you, the parents, sponsors and guardians, to encourage students to access the relevant online platforms and materials available to them.

We remain committed to supporting our students to be successful in their studies during this period and consider our plans to overcome the pandemic an opportunity to revolutionise our education delivery practices. COVID-19 will have long lasting effects even after restrictions are lifted. We positively encourage the rapid digital transformation of education, of which we have already prepared and are ready for.

How do students get learning online and remotely?

At the heart of this online journey is the **Student Portal** which is a central online resource that enables students to view where to gain access to their learning material, communications, tools and critical information relating to their academic journey. It includes a digital Library and a virtual classroom for each module.



The Student Portal offers each student a wide range of digital resources and learning engagement opportunities:

1. myLibrary

- A wide range of open education digital resources and e-books,
- Writing and Research support material such as referencing guides,
- One-click access to the online plagiarism checker software,
- Journal Database Repositories – i.e EBSCO-Host,
- Online periodicals and subscription free webzines,
- Digital directories for larger online educational resources,
- Links to relative governmental repositories for gazettes, legislature and acts,
- Archives for Creative Commons licenced audio-visual material,
- Access to Open Education Resources for supplementary learning materials,
- Academic Utilities for supporting student assessment completion,

2. myClass the core online learning platform that contains the academic resources related to:

- **Coursework** – study guides, lecture notes, presentations and prescribed and reading material,
- **Supplementary Learning Materials** – supporting articles, videos and weblinks,
- **Learning activities** – chats, discussion forums, quizzes, surveys, assignments,
- **Student engagement** – peer-to-peer discussion boards, class-based chats and private messaging,

- **Administration support** – timetabling, assignment scheduling, deadline prompts, venues booking,
- **Virtual Classrooms** - online learning environment that allows for live interaction between the lecturer and students as they are participating in learning activities.

3. myNews

A community page that provides the latest notifications and communication to students.

4. Office 365

Each student has access to the full Microsoft Office Suite including applications like MS Office Word, PowerPoint and Excel, Teams and many more.

5. A Calendar

An institutional specific student academic calendar for time management and planning purposes.

6. Work Readiness Programme

Getting students ready for their next career with a specific training programme.

7. Easy Access to Zapper for Fee Payments

The portal supports students in a variety of ways that allow them easy, and uninterrupted access to the applications they access regularly.

Conclusion

Despite the unprecedented challenges now facing us, there is no justification for despondency: staff throughout the institution have responded with calm professionalism and with much enthusiasm to the digital literacies that both they and their students are now developing and which will stand them in good stead ahead. We understand that access to data is a further challenge and we are working with the Department of Higher Education and data providers to try to address this.

In this time of great uncertainty, decisions will be officially communicated via the institutional website. We will also send SMS and email communications, but please confirm on the institutional website to prevent the spread of fake information.

In the meantime, please actively work towards maintaining good health and flattening the curve.

Sincerely



Ms Anne Whaits

Chief Academic Officer