

Dear Postgraduate Student,

Thank you for participating in the Postgraduate Office survey on the impact of Covid-19 on postgraduate studies at Stellenbosch University. We have reviewed the responses carefully. This communication aims to address some of the concerns raised by you and your fellow postgraduates in the survey responses.

We identified broad areas in the survey responses that indicated specific information needs. We have compiled feedback in this communication accordingly. In addition to the content of this communication, we urge you to make use of the following online sources of information and resources: [FAQs page](#) for postgraduates including important notifications on research contingencies, [postgraduate resources](#) and [research support services](#).

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Revised 2020 academic calendar

The 2020 academic year has been adapted to ensure teaching and learning programmes continue during lockdown and that SU students complete the academic year with as minimal disruptions as possible. Should you have missed the official SU communications, please see the latest communication details [here](#).

To ensure that you receive these important notifications via email, please check that your preferred contact details are correct on your student profile. Go to [MySUN](#) and click on the *Personal Information* and *Address and Contact Information* icons to amend your contact details yourself - the onus rests on you to update your details.

Student fees and rebates

Stellenbosch University is aware of the financial strain experienced by SU students and their families during this period. Therefore, the following payment relief measures have been implemented:

- For those unable to meet the May and September payment dates, a payment arrangement can be made for monthly instalments for the rest of 2020. This alternative payment arrangement will be applicable to 2020 only and all fees will be payable before 2020 graduation for final-year students or before further registration for 2021.
- Whereas interest at prime rate is normally levied on arrear accounts, no interest will be payable for the four-month period from 01 April until 31 July 2020.
- No levies will be charged currently for parking, societies, sport clubs, and residence and PSO activities as this will be determined and billed according to actual usage when there is more certainty about this.

Given the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the evacuation of students from campus, as well as the financial pressures on students and their sponsors, SU has determined an appropriate smaller payment for University residence fees payable at the end of May 2020. This reduced instalment together with the final instalment due in September will ensure that SU students pay only for the weeks that they were in residence this year.

Funding and scholarships during COVID-19

The data retrieved from this survey is assisting our Postgraduate Funding Office to make representation to our funders on the potential impact of the current disruptions to your studies. It is important to note that all students should continue to progress where possible. A motivation may be requested from each scholarship-holder outlining extenuating circumstances that resulted in non-completion or extension. Please discuss this with your supervisor and record (document) any attempts that you and your supervisor have made to ensure timely completion of your research/degree. Please email postgradfunding@sun.ac.za once you have determined that you will not be able to complete and would like to raise the issue with your bursar.

NOTE: The NRF has an Extension Support Programme for Master's and doctoral students who are receiving funding in 2020 but still need an additional period of funding support to complete. Please consult the Postgraduate Funding Office's website for more information [here](#).

Bursary applications for 2021

Bursary application information and procedures for Honours in 2021 is available [here](#). Find Master's and PhD bursary information for 2021 [here](#). Take care to apply in time, as late applications will not be considered. Find additional bursary information on our Postgraduate Funding Office webpage [here](#).

NOTE: the NRF Online Submission System website (nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za) is now zero-rated, which means that users will not pay for any data whilst using the system.

Accessing Library resources

Many postgraduates indicated that they have been struggling to access the Library's collections. The Library is working hard to address this challenge. Please see the Library's Covid-19 resources guide, which includes a recent recording of "Off-campus access to Library resources during the lockdown", the Library #SmartResearcher workshop schedule and other relevant resources.

For information on how to interact with the [Library](#) during this time, visit this [webpage](#) or contact the Library for assistance through their online reference service, [Ask a Librarian](#), via [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

Each SU faculty has one or more Faculty librarian who is there to assist you with discipline specific research related questions on the literature available to you. [Faculty Librarians](#) can be contacted directly for information services and research support. As far as possible, library telephone numbers have been forwarded to the Library staff's cell phone numbers.

Master's and doctoral students please note that you have additional support from the staff in the Carnegie Research Commons. Find details about their support [here](#) or contact Mr Kirchner van Deventer directly.

Access to e-resources is available remotely. You will be prompted to sign in with your campus username and password when you access the Library's e-resources. If you experience any problems with your password, consult this [library guide](#) and/or contact IT for assistance (help@sun.ac.za or via the [Service Desk portal](#)). Report any problems with electronic databases and journals to the [Manager: E-Resources](#).

NOTE: it is helpful to include a screenshot of the problematic database/site when you report a problem.

Writing and language support

Please consult the Language Centre's [website](#) for new and continuing online writing language support. This includes free writing consultations via Skype. Also find out how to join our virtual Shut Up and Write writing group [here](#).

Postgraduate online workshops and training opportunities

For those postgraduates who are seeking additional research related skills and support, note that our Postgraduate Office's Postgraduate Skills Development Programme has moved several of their workshops online. Find out more about this [here](#).

Student psycho-social support

We acknowledge the stress that the change in students' circumstances because of the pandemic is bringing to bear. Everything is different and this is impacting profoundly on many SU students' mental and emotional well-being. Please note that the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) is functioning virtually and telephonically and they are on hand to assist.

If you are in severe distress and need immediate psychological support, contact ER 24 (day and night) Tel: 010 205 3032

Emotional Support and Emergencies

Email: supportus@sun.ac.za

Tel: 021 808 4994

Academic Support and Development - Click [here](#) to access additional academic support resources.

Email: studysuccess@sun.ac.za

Tel: 021 808 4707

Visit the CSCD [website](#) for more information.

Supervisory support and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between student and supervisor

We recognise the overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the support that most respondents to the survey are receiving from their supervisors. Similarly, we recognise that this is a challenging time for everyone and that it might call for some improvement in relation to how we interact with one another as we adapt to the changing environment and modes of work. It therefore remains crucial to maintain regular and open communication channels with your supervisor. Should you have serious concerns about the level of supervision that you are receiving, please contact the Head of the Department where you are registered as it is important that you raise your concerns via the appropriate channels. If your supervisor is the Head of Department, please contact the Director of the Postgraduate Office, Dorothy Stevens (dstevens@sun.ac.za) for referral.

NOTE: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between supervisor and postgraduate student is compulsory at Stellenbosch University. It may be necessary to adapt or renegotiate the MoU between you and your supervisor due to the impact of COVID-19 on your research. See the link below for a template of an MoU. This template MoU can also be used as a guide to supplement an existing MoU. Your department may have a specific template they would prefer you to use so please check with your supervisor first. For the MoU templates click [here](#).

Research work plan

It is important to engage with your supervisor on your research work plan. It will not always be possible to fundamentally change aspects of your project or research, especially for those in the advanced stages of their research but if you are in the early stages and there are options open to you, then please discuss these with your supervisor as soon as possible. Refer to the Memorandum of Understanding information in the previous section of this communication.

Ethics clearance for research

Please contact the relevant helpdesk administrator below or email the Ethics Application Helpdesk applyethics@sun.ac.za to amend, follow-up or start your [ethics clearance](#) application. It is important that you act swiftly to avoid delay in your ethics approval:

1. Human Research (Humanities) - Mr Aden Williams (aden@sun.ac.za)
2. Animal Ethics and Biosafety – Mr Aden Williams (aden@sun.ac.za)
3. Health Research Ethics (FMHS) - Mrs Elvira Rohland (elr@sun.ac.za)

NOTE: New *Research Ethics and Integrity* explainer videos and podcasts recently developed by the Division for Research Development are available on SUNLearn. These resources explain important principles and information regarding research ethics and the ethics process. Please click [here](#) to access the videos and podcasts.

For further information on applying for ethics clearance at SU click [here](#). For Health Research Ethics, please view the following [video](#).

Special submission date for Master's and doctoral students

A concessionary arrangement is now in place for SU Master's and doctoral students who were on a trajectory to graduate in December 2020 or March 2021, but whose completion of the research component of their degree programme was delayed by the COVID-19 nationwide lockdown (for example, due to being unable to access primary or secondary research sources).

A special submission date of 1 March 2021 for all forms of research (dissertation, thesis, project report, essay, research project, research theme) work to be examined has been approved. The decision to submit the research output by 1 March 2021 must be taken with the approval of your study leader/promoter/supervisor.

Candidates approved for this option by their respective faculty will be required to re-register for the 2021 academic year but will not be expected to pay tuition fees for the degree under examination in 2021. The tuition waiver would only be applicable to approved candidates who submit their research output by 1 March 2021 and for the relevant degree. Any outstanding fees from 2020 remain payable and there may be no outstanding taught modules that the candidate is still required to complete in 2021.

Access to campus and preparing for the return of postgraduate students during level 3

We understand the need amongst many postgraduate students and note the impact of being unable to gain access to laboratories, analytical services and other campus facilities. With level 3 of the lockdown having commenced on 1 June and the anticipation of a maximum of 33% of the student body returning to campuses in a phased manner and subject to strict compliance with national regulations, our campuses will need time to prepare to ensure that staff and students can return safely.

As part of our planning, the University management is establishing which postgraduate students must conduct *essential practical work* on our campuses. The numbers of expected returning undergraduate and postgraduate students will inform the return of essential staff to manage/prepare the laboratories and other facilities and the academic staff required to teach and supervise the practical work. Once all these preparations are complete, postgraduate students who may return will be duly informed, and the relevant arrangements regarding travel permits, as required and other protocols will be communicated. No students should return to our campuses, including residences, before being specifically informed to do so.

Thank you once again for your engagement with the University. Please continue to check the SU [COVID-19 webpage](#) regularly for general information updates that are relevant to all students and staff.

With our very best wishes

The Postgraduate Office