

Stellenbosch University student support during the COVID-19 pandemic

As the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions have had to come up with innovative ways to ensure that students successfully complete their studies for 2020. Within the constraints of the total lockdown announced by the South African Government, Stellenbosch University (SU) has put the necessary measures in place and launched various initiatives to help support students during the pandemic. All the relevant information in this regard has been made available on a dedicated section of the SU website that is accessible via www.sun.ac.za/english/Pages/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Disease-2019.aspx.

Our institution's integrated COVID-19 response, including the various forms of **student support**, is managed by the Institutional Committee for Business Continuity (ICBC). This document provides an overview of SU's institutional response during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Revised 2020 academic calendar

We had to extend the recess period for our students because of the national lockdown. This meant, however, that we also had to adjust the 2020 academic year. To ensure teaching and learning programmes continue during the lockdown and students complete the academic year with as minimal disruptions as possible, the Executive Committee of Senate approved changes to the 2020 academic calendar. The Corporate Communication Division used all the appropriate channels to inform students of these changes. See the latest communication details here:

<https://stellenbosch.everlytic.net/public/messages/view-online/muKwCTkd84ckorcs/C6EjrNBYng5pPoRq>

The **test and examination** timetables for 2020 are also available on the web. [Click here](#) for your timetable.

(Note that students on the Tygerberg campus follow their own timetables.)

Online Learning Initiatives

One of SU's strategic goals is to offer its students the best possible chance to complete their studies successfully. It is, therefore, important to optimise their in-class and out-of-class experience to enhance our student success rate. The suspension of contact teaching and learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown meant that we had to move to online platforms to ensure we complete the 2020 academic year and our students do not lose an academic semester or the entire year.

Online learning was officially rolled out on Monday, 20 April, via our online learning and teaching platform, **SUNLearn**. A dedicated website was developed and populated with various information, guides and tools, to assist students with the transition from class-based learning to online learning.

See: <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/learning-teaching/student-affairs/cscd/Pages/Guidance-for-Student-Online-Learning.aspx>

Laptops

We procured 1 500 laptops for socio-economically disadvantaged students who have no connectivity to SU's online learning resources. An **email message** with a final offer was sent to all students on Tuesday 21 April 2020. Laptops have been already delivered to their respective residential addresses despite some challenges due to the service providers having to operate under lockdown constraints, and some incorrect addresses. Each student also received an email to confirm delivery arrangements, followed by an SMS message alerting them to the **email communiqué**.

From a fundraising perspective, we have focussed on digital access for our students to give them the tools to complete online learning and teaching. We appeal to all alumni, friends, donors and sponsors to lend a hand to address this challenge and stand with our students during this period and make a gift to support this urgent priority. Each laptop costs up to R8 000 per student. Click **here** to make a contribution.

Zero-rated academic platforms and data bundles

In addition to the loan laptop offer and negotiating zero-rating for access to SU's academic platforms (sun.ac.za websites), SU secured data bundle offers with various service providers. SU purchased data bundles from MTN, Vodacom, Telkom* and CellC in South Africa for students for May and June 2020 (excluding Faculty of Military Science students, students still in residences, short course students and postdoctoral fellows). The exact method of providing data to students will be re-evaluated on a month-to-month basis.

Updated information about zero-rating of websites and tips for containing mobile data costs, are available on the **Guidance for online learning page**. To assist our students we have compiled a set of zero-rating **FAQs** for easy reference.

Study fees

Under the lockdown regulations announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa, all students in university accommodation had to return home before midnight on 26 March 2020. The lockdown was subsequently extended until 30 April 2020 and from 1 May the risk adjustment moved the country to a level 4 lockdown, still prohibiting the return of students to university and college campuses.

At SU the payment cycle for study and accommodation fees determines that 75% of the total amount (minus the first instalment paid at registration) is due at the end of May every year. The final payment is due in September.

While implementing online learning and teaching, and continuing to provide support to our students who have remained behind in our residences and in private accommodation, the various work streams of the Institutional Committee for Business Continuity (ICBC) have been hard at work, planning for the possible scenarios that may play out over the coming months.

As SU is aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about wide-spread financial hardship, 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 **residence fees** payable at the end of May 2020. The reduced second instalment together with the final instalment due in September will ensure that SU students pay only for the weeks that they were actually in residence this year.

Student support: academic

We have ensured that students continue to have access to our wide range of academic support services during the national lockdown. Students have access to virtual platforms to **find tips** for learning online; to **access the library**; to find information about student connectivity, Computer User Areas and technical support; to contact the **Centre for Student Counselling and Development** for academic and emotional support and emergencies; and to find information on **student administration-related** matters. See all the latest communication details here:

<http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=7283>

Student support: health and wellbeing

The wellbeing of our students is important and we are continuing to offer dynamic and student-centred psychological developmental and support services during the national lockdown. The Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) is functioning virtually or telephonically – depending on a student’s choice. Any student who needs an appointment can send an email to supportus@sun.ac.za. ER 24 continues to be available for students in crisis. CSCD is also offering an online support series (#supportUS) on the Student Affairs’ [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) platforms. In the period 1-28 April 2020, these posts have reached 61 591 people on Facebook with 15 443 post engagements.

Student support: Extended Degree Programmes (EDP)

The Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) appointed an educational psychologist and a registered counsellor from 1 January 2020 to support students who are registered for Extended Degree Programmes (EDPs). These professionals provide free individual and group consultations aimed at academic skills development, psychotherapy and/or career counselling. Online support groups have been offered since the national lockdown started and are focussed on supporting the mentors of the EDP students. The following online work sessions will be presented during the second academic term, via online platforms:

- Faculty of Science: Anxiety and Stress Management, Study Methods, Resilience.
- Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences: Handling Failure, How to manage your time and energy.

Student Governance

The Student Governance Office has established a coordinated and responsive online strategy, ensuring that student structures are supported and can continue with work in their various portfolios. Student Governance has had consultation and detailed feedback with each structure executive around challenges and support required. This allows the Office to tailor offerings of development and support to directly target the context. Follow-up online workshops will be conducted to provide support to student leaders to continue with their portfolios.

Important meetings and consultations, such as the Student Representative Council (SRC) executive meeting with the Rectorate, continue in the virtual space, using the MS Teams platform to discuss and

plan work for the rest of the year. We have also included the SRC on the Institutional Committee for Business Continuity (ICBC) and its work streams. According to SRC Chairperson, Lewis Mboko, the process has been valuable:

“The ICBC has been a very useful and progressive committee. I learnt many things on disaster management. Mostly I got the chance to fully represent students on a daily basis in our meetings. It made us to be on the same page and aware of every decision taken by the university as I would participate in the engagements and give the perspective from the side of students as well. I feel that, thus far, the ICBC has done great in coming up with solutions that are inclusive.”

Supporting students remaining in SU residences

Following the measures announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa on March 15, the University requested students to vacate their residences and to return home for the recess period (see links below). A total of 720 students who were unable to do so remained in residences. They were asked to adhere to strict hygiene protocols and other lock-down regulations.

Students receive various support through the Centre for Student Communities and the Centre for Student Counselling and Development, within the Division of Student Affairs. On the Stellenbosch campus, food support includes purchasing and distribution of food products, including dry ingredient products to students via the residence heads, and the distribution of food parcels. Catering services have also made available products in the residence kitchens for students to use. Further to this, students have also been provided with cooking equipment that has been set up at dedicated points in residences.

At the Tygerberg campus, students who have challenges with food security are supported through the TygerMaties Cluster Office. Support includes food vouchers to purchase basics and/or a grocery option through the University’s suppliers. The Office of the Vice Dean for Social Impact and Clinical Training have also supported students through the existing pantry project and various other donations. In addition to SU’s support, the University is grateful for the food parcel donations from various faith based and community organisations.

With the implementation of the Level 4 lockdown, the provision of meals by food service providers resumed on Monday, 11 May 2020. This allowed students to book their meals on the FMS system. The food service providers operate from a limited number of kitchens on campus.

WhatsApp groups have been formed to keep students in contact with the Centres for Student Communities and Student Counselling and Development respectively.

bit.ly/3b7WvRj

bit.ly/2XyFs71

bit.ly/34uLpDI

<http://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=7268>

Masters' or PhD candidates

We have put in place an exceptional arrangement for Masters' or PhD candidates who were on a trajectory to graduate in December 2020 or March 2021, but who have lost time due to the COVID-19 nationwide lockdown (for example, being unable to access primary or secondary sources).

A special research assignment, thesis or dissertation submission deadline of 1 March 2021 has been approved. Candidates who choose to take up this option, after consultation with their supervisor or promotor, 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 candidates who submit their research assignment, thesis or dissertation by 1 March 2021 and for the relevant degree. Any outstanding fees from 2020 would remain payable. See all the latest communication details here:

<https://stellenbosch.everlytic.net/public/messages/view-online/muKwCTkd84ckorcs/1GfXxJVtKfWNtd2p>

International students

Through the Stellenbosch University International (SUI) office, we are providing support to international students and students who are currently participating in study abroad programmes. Support for international students commenced prior to the national lockdown and included logistical support to assist students with returning to their respective countries.

We are in contact with students who are based abroad and have implemented online check-in sessions as a support mechanism. We are also in contact with host institutions and have been providing students with relevant information on travel restrictions and assistance with returning to South Africa.

Since lockdown, we have been working closely with IEASA (International Education Association of South Africa) and government representatives to support the students.

For more information see: www0.sun.ac.za/international/news/international-student-updates-on-COVID-19.html

SU's first virtual conferral of degrees

The Registrar's and Corporate Communication divisions joined forces to arrange the University's first virtual conferring of qualifications in absentia for our March/April 2020 graduands by SU's new Chancellor, Justice Edwin Cameron on Friday 3 April at 14:00. The short video can be viewed [here](#).

Fundraising to support SU students: #Move4Food

We will be enhancing our support for our student-led #Move4Food campaign to curb student hunger. Not knowing where the next meal will come from is a reality for many South Africans, including our SU students. The bleak reality is that a lack of access to affordable and nutritious food on South African campuses is rife and Stellenbosch University is no exception. Alumni, Friends, donor and sponsor support of the #Move4Food campaign not only touches our students' lives every day, it is also a powerful and exemplary demonstration of your commitment to transforming the lives of young people.

Click [here](#) to make a contribution. For more info on the COVID-19 Relief Fund needs, visit matiesalumni.com

Making a Difference during the Covid-19 pandemic

Fundraising & Resource Mobilisation



1 **Digital Access for SU students**
computers · laptops · data · modems



2 **#Move4Food**
Food Security for our Students during and after Covid-19



3 **Support**
for SU Health Workers



4 **SU's Research & Innovation Response**
to the COVID-19 Pandemic



5 **#StellenboschUnite**

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