

Frequently Asked Questions

GENERAL

Why do we need a new Student Information System?

Our current Adabas Natural in-house-designed Student Information System (SIS), which had been developed continuously since 1989, reached the end of its lifecycle. The system technology is out of date, programming skills are scarce, and key development and support staff are due to retire.

Strategically, we must broaden access through increased flexibility in our operations. This includes also being able to administer non-traditional courses and programmes, semesters and quarters, hybrid learning, etc. In addition, we require accurate, real-time data presented via user-friendly analytics and dashboards to make better-informed, effective institutional decisions.

This project is not limited to one organisational environment only but is an institution-wide initiative.

How does this project align with the University's overall strategy?

The project supports five of SU's six core strategic themes that will take the University forward into the next century. These are as follows:

- **A thriving Stellenbosch University**
During the external evaluation of the Registrar's Division (RD) in 2017, the review panel observed that the Student Information System project (as it was called at the time) was probably one of the most critical factors in achieving the strategic priorities of not only the RD, but of the institution as a whole. The SUNStudent project (as it has since been named) will ensure the delivery of a fit-for-purpose system, which will bring about profound and sustainable change and regeneration in all facets of the administration of the student lifecycle - from recruitment to graduation and beyond. The system will also enable improved reporting on student data. A student administration and information system that is agile, adaptive and responsive will go a long way towards seeing SU thrive.
- **A transformative student experience**
The system will provide a unique, personalised student experience by delivering comprehensive, premium-quality support services and guidance to our student community, and enabling accurate, timely and appropriate communication to targeted student cohorts.
- **Purposeful partnerships and inclusive networks**
The system will help enhance and expand engagement opportunities for, and strengthen SU's ties with, our substantial alumni communities.
- **Networked and collaborative teaching and learning**
The project will support the digital strategy as a basis for digital fluency. It will also ensure the continuous renewal of the University's academic programmes through a systematic process with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities for the various role-players.

- **Employer of choice**

The system will help enhance the well-being of our staff by creating an enabling environment for greater efficiency and increased productivity. This will add to their sense of purpose and value in the institution, as they contribute to SU's value of excellence.

Who is involved in this project?

All personnel in supporting and academic functions who interact with students, utilise student information and/or perform academic administrative tasks or processes.

What is the scope of this project?

It covers the following student information capabilities:

Admissions - Curriculum management - Catalogue - Residence management - Prospective students - Financial aid -

Student accounts/fees - Student loan repayments - Registration - Academic record maintenance -

Co-curricular information - Exam concessions (e.g. additional writing time) - Postgraduate

management - Programme progression of students -

Readmissions (assessment of students to continue studies) - Student assessment/marks capturing -

Thesis management - HEMIS - SUNi - Mentoring/academic support - Elections - Scheduling of venues and allocation of classes -

Society and sport club management - Textbook orders - Exam management - Summer/winter

schools - Degree audits and graduation - Dining-hall meal booking management - Official reporting -

Disciplinary action

What is the timeline for this project?

Although the systems renewal project originally started in 2013, implementation of SUNStudent started in May 2018, with a planned completion date of the end of 2021. [View the timeline here.](#)

Where can I view the project plan?

Please refer to the "[Project management](#)" tab on the SUNStudent website.

How are the project milestones aligned with SU's academic calendar?

Project capabilities will go live as and when the activity is required to start in the course of an academic year.

What is expected of me with regard to the project?

For the blueprint phase of the project, we need you to attend workshops and provide input as and when required. Please make use of this opportunity to ask questions, voice any concerns and provide feedback.

How and when will SU communicate about the project?

Various channels will be used to communicate. These include the SUNStudent website, the e-newsletters to personnel, and focused messages on the institutional website.

What if I have questions about the project?

Please send an e-mail to sunstudent@sun.ac.za. Your request will be referred to the Project Management Committee (PMC) for attention, and escalation if required.

What does "cloud services" mean?

It means that the SUNStudent software application or system is not hosted on-campus in SU's data centres, but in so-called "cloud" data centres, which are operated by companies such as Microsoft. Furthermore, Serosoft provides the SUNStudent system as a service, meaning they are responsible for its reliable operation, backups, continuity of operations, and responsiveness. SU pays for this service instead of depending on SU's IT Division to run and operate the system.

Will my role be affected by the SUNStudent implementation?

At this stage, it is not clear whether and in what way roles will be affected. It is envisaged that the system will bring efficiencies that will enable staff to work smarter, not harder. The real impact of this will only become visible after implementation and will not be the same across the institution. It will be up to the specific environment to assess the impact of new functionalities in the system on existing job descriptions, and to make the necessary adjustments accordingly.

What is a "super-user"?

A "super-user" is the SU person who must be contacted first should you encounter any problem, want to suggest new or optimised ways of working, or need training.

How many super-users will there be?

This is not known at this stage, as it is too early in the process.

What will the impact be if the internet is down?

The risk of downtime is mitigated by having redundant network routes to and from the (primary and secondary) data centres where SUNStudent is hosted, and by eliminating single points of failure between the data centres and the campuses.

What functionalities will students be able to access on their mobile phones?

The application is device-agnostic, which means the system can be accessed from any device with internet access. Each user's access to capabilities and data (whether on a desktop, laptop, tablet or phone) will be managed by their assigned role.