

[FINAL DRAFT: Embargoed until delivery; Subject to change; Compare against delivery]

Opening van SciMathUS 2020
Endler Hall, Conservatory, 10:55, Mo 3 Feb 2020
Verwelkoming deur Prof Wim de Villiers,
Rektor en Visekanselier, Universiteit Stellenbosch

Thank you, Prof Madiba. Goeie more, almal. Molweni. Wamkelekile. Good morning, and from my side, welcome to everyone:

- SciMathUS and SUNCEP staff
- Other colleagues from within the University
- Funders, donors, supporters and friends of SciMathUS;
- And a special word of welcome to our VIPs -- the SciMathUS intake of 2020 – both students and their parents

First of all, congratulations! You have been selected from many applicants to participate in this program – so you’ve definitely got potential. And, most importantly, you had the vision and the will, the motivation, to sign up for this program. Today is a big day, the start of a big opportunity for all of you. The fact that you are here shows that you want make the most of your opportunities.

I want to assure you that you made the right decision. SciMathUS has been around for 20 years! So, there is a lot of experience and great expertise here to guide you to success.

Let me tell you about the first time that I heard about SciMathUS. It was in December 2014. At that stage I was still at the University of Cape Town, where I was Dean of Medicine and Health Sciences. I had not yet joined Stellenbosch University.

It was at the end-of-year graduation ceremony at UCT. There were a number of students receiving their PhD – not a lot, because it is the highest degree you can achieve, so only the best students make it that far. And one of the students receiving his PhD was a young man called Gerald Maarman.

After the ceremony, two staff members of SciMathUS came up to me – I see one of them here today, Dr Elza Lourens. And they asked me whether I realised that Gerald Maarman, to whom I had just awarded a doctoral degree, had started his academic journey at SciMathUS.

At the time, I did not know this. So I asked them to tell me more. They said Gerald had dreamed of becoming a doctor, but his Grade 12 results were not good enough to get him into university. But then he heard that there was a bridging programme at Stellenbosch University that would give him a second chance to achieve his dreams.

Does that sound familiar?

So, Gerald applied, got in, worked hard, improved his marks, and got in to university ... on merit. And slowly but surely he climbed the ladder, first getting his BSc, then honours, then his master’s degree – all at Stellenbosch – and finally, his PhD, at UCT. It wasn’t long before he got rated by the National Research Foundation as an up-and-coming researcher. Then he came back to Maties, and today he is a lecturer in Medical Physiology at our Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences in Tygerberg.

That is only one story. I can keep you busy all day! Because through the years there have been no fewer than 1 509 Gerald Maarmans ... students with great potential, but who did not get into university the first time around – mostly because they faced challenging circumstances at school.

But they persevered, made the most of the second chance they got through SciMathUS, and completed the programme. And many of them would live their dream and enrol at university.

Let me ask you again, does this journey sound familiar? Do you also have a dream? I think so. That’s why you are here. To improve your matric marks, as a first step towards getting a sought-after university degree, so that you can go on to have a great career.

Let me say again, you are at the right place to make that dream come true. But ... there's always a "but", isn't there?

YOU have to take control of your own destiny. The SciMathUS staff – and their colleagues in SUNCEP and elsewhere at the University – are there to teach you and mentor you and help and support you – but you have to do the work. I have no doubt you will do your best.

Let me speak to the parents and guardians here for a moment. And I do so as a parent who has seen three children through university. Stay involved with your child. Ask them how they are doing. Keep abreast of their progress. They are becoming young adults. And we respect them as such. They must take full responsibility for their progress and development. But we must continue to be interested in their development, keep asking how things are, continue to provide support – as University staff and as parents. Again, I have no doubt you will do so.

This program would not have been possible without the support of our funders. Thank you to everyone who contributes helps these young people realize their dreams.

All of the best to all the students. You are a special group – the 20th intake of SciMathUS, in its 20th year, in the year 2020, the year of clear vision. Make the most of it! I certainly hope to see all of you here next year as first-years at the University, in your chosen fields of study.