

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

26 March 2020

Dear Colleagues

National lockdown due to Covid-19

Our country and our entire planet is facing an unprecedented challenge in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst these remain uncertain times for the global family, the rapid spread of the virus has resulted in dramatic and traumatic impacts worldwide.

Earlier this week, the President of the Republic of South Africa, announced a national lockdown that will come into effect at 23H59 tonight, Thursday, 26 March 2020. This decision will have an impact on the DUT community. It requires enormous sacrifices from us, individually and collectively.

Yesterday, members of the Executive Management Committee (EMC), the Executive Committee of Senate (Senex) and the DUT Covid-19 Response Team, met to discuss important matters related to the extended recess and the national lockdown.

1. Business Continuity Plan during the national lockdown

All Divisions at the University have either developed or are developing/revising business continuity plans (BCP) to support the functioning of operations during the lockdown period. It must be noted that BCPs relate, mainly, to “essential services” as identified in the Government Gazette. A category of “critical tasks” that need to be performed remotely will also be incorporated in the BCPs. Sector Executives, Senior Directors, Directors and Managers will be working with their teams to ensure that “critical tasks”, when required, can be remotely managed.

The campus protection team will be on duty during the lockdown period. All gates will be closed and locked and we urge all staff to kindly ensure that they close their office windows, lock their office doors, switch-off the lights and air conditioners in their offices, before you leave campus; so that we are not wasting valuable resources during the national lockdown.

With regards to the laboratories and other key facilities, please follow normal protocols that pertain to that specific area whenever staff is away from the university. As much as Universities South Africa (USAf) will engage further with government, with regard to essential research activities and laboratories, there might not be any special dispensation in this regard. For this reason, your approach to laboratories must assume that the 21-day lockdown period is with no special dispensation. Please consult with your line manager before switching off equipment.

Unless there is an emergency and the situation then requires it, no person will be allowed access to our University campuses and residences during the lockdown period. Security is considered an essential service and we thank our colleagues from campus protection for ensuring the safety of our University during the national lockdown.

2. Alternative delivery of the academic programme – online learning and assessments

The Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, together with the Director of CELT and the Chief Information Officer, will write to all students and staff with details that relate to online learning and assessments that will be implemented from the second term onwards. Please monitor DUT PinBoard for the statement, which will be released in due course.

3. Updated leave protocol and work from home guidelines in relation to business continuity during the national lockdown

Staff are urged to understand that the forced lockdown, as announced by the President, is an attempt to protect lives and to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The assumption of the lockdown is that staff must be home-bound, with the exception of essential services and companies providing essential goods. This was made clear by the President when he addressed the nation on Tuesday evening. The legal advice obtained, indicates that staff are not entitled to be paid for this period. While taking cognisance of leave regulations, business continuity, the disrupted academic calendar and the long-term dire economic impact, the university has made every attempt to consider staff, with the firm realisation of the emotional, psychological and financial difficulty that staff would face as a result of the obligatory lockdown.

So, with this in mind, the Executive Committee of Council (Exco) has made a compassionate determination to ensure that employees' earnings are not compromised. In this respect, Exco has allowed the use of paid annual leave, to offset employee absence, which would otherwise be unpaid.

It should be noted that failure to fill in leave applications for the lockdown paid leave concessions, may impact salary payments, insurance and group life benefits, associated with this period. As a rule of thumb, all staff, except those who work in the "essential services" categories as listed in the Government Gazette, are deemed to be on lockdown and thus, not working over this period.

However, knowing that some "critical tasks" could still be performed remotely, there are staff members who will be granted permission to perform these. We would consider this category to be a relatively small percentage of the total staff complement. Senior and executive managers will make decisions on which staff members will work remotely. These staff members will not make an application for this.

The three categories of staff that have been identified during this period include:

Category 1: Staff who will be identified and be granted permission to work remotely to fulfil "critical tasks" that cannot be deferred:

The critical work required relating to business continuity, would be agreed to by the relevant Line Manager and then, approved by the Executive in the Division, after determining, amongst others, the nature of the task, how critical it is, and the time necessary to fulfil these responsibilities and tasks. Once agreed on the time required, such staff must complete the indemnity form related to off-campus health and safety issues whilst remote-working. For days not utilised for work purposes, staff are required to lodge their vacation leave applications. Here is the link to the online indemnity form:

<https://bit.ly/2wug07U>

Category 2: Staff who cannot work from home due to the nature of their jobs or non-critical activity required:

For this category, the affected days for the lockdown period is 13 days. Staff are required to lodge their vacation leave applications for the 13 days.

Category 3: Essential Services:

The university gates will be closed and no access allowed by the security team who will be on duty during the national lockdown. Special arrangement will be made in the case of emergency responses, which may be necessary during this period. Such emergencies fall under the category of "critical tasks" as defined above.

4. Residences

All DUT residences are closed. This is in keeping with the guidelines related to the national lockdown as part of the State of Disaster. Qualifying students have already received their allowances and the students in residence have vacated their rooms.

5. Amendments to the University calendar

The extended recess period and the national lockdown has had a major impact on our academic calendar. The Acting DVC: Teaching and Learning, together with the Registrar, will finalise the revised University calendar and distribute this to the University community once the second term has commenced.

Our 16 March 2020 announcement informed the University community that we would reopen for the 2nd term of 14 April 2020. Given the lockdown, we will reopen on 20 April 2020. Should circumstances change, EMC/Senex will make appropriate announcements.

The 16 March 2020 announcement also informed the University community that the April/May graduation ceremonies. This was due to the Covid-19 outbreak and the social distancing guidelines that recommended by the President. This decision will be reviewed, dependent on when the current Covid-19 outbreak has terminated - and the State of Disaster has ended.

6. DUT Covid-19 Response Team

The DUT Covid-19 Task Team has met on a regular basis throughout this period and they have been reviewing the international (WHO), national (USAF, DHET, NICD) and local Guidelines, Protocols and Recommendations - and developing implementation policies, plans and health education and promotion programmes, which have been extensively rolled out on the DUT communication platforms.

The Task Team has noted the different phases that the epidemic follows. In the early phase over the last few weeks the Task Team had undertaken an extensive campaign of awareness, preventive measures and health promotion/wellness. In addition the Task Team developed and shared clear Guidelines in respect of all categories affected by the Covid-19 epidemic; those at high risk, those exposed through travel or contact with international visitors, those returning from affected countries and those concerned with potential symptoms to reduce the transmission of the virus within the DUT environment.

The Task Team undertook measures to enable the University community to protect themselves through the provision of sanitizers, social distancing and the early detection, isolation and referral of persons through our Student Health Services.

Currently our country is at the beginning of the rapid community spread phase of the epidemic. This has serious negative consequences for the students; especially those in residences, to Staff and community members and parents visiting the campus – resulting in the decision to enforce the President's order for a national lockdown.

During this recess period the Task Team is liaising with the public and private health services to develop a Surveillance, Monitoring and Evaluation System; to develop appropriate responses for the return of staff and students to a safe, healthy and virus-free campus environment; to have isolation facilities to be able to treat and refer potentially infected members to the relevant health services and most importantly, to accelerate our Health Promotion and Wellness campaigns.

While the Task Team's primary focus is the management of the Covid-19 epidemic, the public health approach based on an understanding of the epidemiology, transmission and host-environment interactions of the disease; provides significant opportunities to modify health behaviors; promote health lifestyles to enhance the educational teaching and learning functions of our University.

7. Continuous University Management

Joint EMC/Senex team, under the leadership of Council and its Executive Committee, will continue to administer, manage and govern DUT during this period, albeit remotely. We will ensure that the best decisions are made, using the values and principles that we espouse and are in alignment with, our Envision 2030. Invariably, some decisions may appear irrational and unjustifiable, or they may be just unpalatable. Under these difficult circumstances, we hope that we will continue to work together, in the best interests of our country and DUT itself.

8. Conclusion

To reiterate, DUT will be in lockdown from Thursday 26 March 2020 and we are planning to start the second term on Monday morning, 20 April 2020. If there are any changes regarding the commencement of the second term, we will issue a statement via the official channels:

1. DUT PinBoard for staff.
2. DUT4life for students.
3. DUT Staff Portal.
4. DUT Student Portal.
5. Covid-19 webpage on the DUT website:

<https://www.dut.ac.za/coronavirus/>

Please ensure that you monitor the relevant, official, DUT platforms during the lockdown period, so that you are informed of any future University statements.

We are aware that this current Covid-19 outbreak is very concerning. Therefore, we urge you to please follow the recommended precautions:

1. Please do not shake hands with other people.
2. Wash your hands, for a minimum of 20 seconds, with soap and water or use a 70% alcohol-based waterless hand sanitiser.
3. Try to carry tissues with you and use them to catch your cough, sneeze or yawn. Then bin the tissue and wash your hands, or use a hand sanitiser. If you do not have a tissue, rather cough, sneeze or yawn into your forearm.
4. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands;
5. Avoid close contact with people who are unwell.
6. Please observe social distancing.

Here is a list of important telephone numbers that you could use, if required:

National Institute for Communicable Diseases: **0800 029 999**.

South African Police Services: **08600 10111**.

National Crisis Line: **0861 322 322**.

Gender-based violence command centre: **0800 428 428** or send a please call me on ***120*7867#**.

Reporting undue price increases: **0800 141 880**.

During this lockdown period, you are required to stay home and only venture out if you need to visit the doctor, go to a hospital, clinic or pharmacy, or if you are going to a supermarket or grocery store to purchase food and other essential supplies. The message is clear and we implore colleagues and students to **“Stay Home. Stay Safe. Save Lives...”**

Yours sincerely

DUT Management Team



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