



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

Office of the Rector and Vice-Chancellor  
Kantoor van die Rektor en Visekanselier  
Ofisi ya Morekoto le Motlatsa Mokanseliri  
IHhovisi loMphathi neSekelashansela

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14 March 2021

Dear First-Year Students

### UPDATE ON THE 2021 ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

I am delighted to welcome you as a first-year student at the University of the Free State (UFS). Thank you for making the UFS your university of choice – we look forward to guiding you through this exciting journey. May you enjoy being a Kowsie as much as I do!

This communication aims to provide you with information and some clarity on how the university is approaching the start of its academic programme – especially relating to our first-years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed many challenges to universities across the country; for instance, to find innovative ways of completing the 2020 academic year without leaving any student behind and, at the same time, keeping safety, health, and well-being a top priority.

During the first semester of 2021, the university follows a minimalistic approach to the return of students and staff to all of our campuses. We will continue with an online/blended learning and teaching approach for first-year and senior undergraduate students – similar to how our academic programme was managed and successfully completed in 2020. This means that certain classes are presented online, some face to face, and others in a blended mode – a combination of contact and online.

Although our country is currently on Level 1 of the national lockdown, the percentage of students who will have face-to-face classes on campus is not linked to the lockdown level, but to the university's teaching and learning approach and the capacity to adhere to physical distancing protocols.

I would have enjoyed seeing all of our first-year students face to face on one of our three campuses this semester, but your safety and the safety of our staff is a priority. I sincerely hope that the opportunity to welcome you in person will be possible in the second semester of this year. I invite you to watch my [welcoming message](#) to our first-years.

It is important for you to take note of the following:

1. The online registration process for first-year students has been extended to **Friday, 19 March 2021**. This is in line with the announcement made by Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, on 8 March 2021. [Information on the 2021 registration process](#) can be found on the university's website.
2. The academic programme for first-year students will start on **Tuesday, 23 March 2021**. Detailed information about your academic programme will be shared with you by the respective faculties according to their online/blended learning programmes.

3. During the first semester, most of our first-year students will study online; you will also attend **orientation sessions online**.
4. **Only a small number of first-year students will receive orientation on the campuses** during specific pre-determined periods.
5. **Only a small number of first-year students will attend face-to-face classes on campus** during the first semester.

**Please note that you will be informed by your faculty if you are required to be on any of our campuses during the first semester. If you have NOT been contacted, you will be studying online and supported through remote multimodal teaching, learning, academic advising, and assessment.**

If you are required to be on any of our campuses during the semester, you will be contacted by the faculty and provided with a campus access permit. **Permits are being issued centrally and are valid for the period you are expected to be on campus.** You will be required to undergo a screening process every time you enter the campuses. Information on the screening process will be provided upon receipt of your campus access permit.

The online orientation sessions comprise general information about the university, [digital skills training](#), academic advising, and faculty-specific orientation. I encourage you to attend the sessions and to visit the [Virtual Student Orientation](#) webpage, as you will receive valuable information and guidance. For example, the material of the Gateway Orientation Programme will be available on Blackboard (the university's learning management system) for the remainder of the first semester. **You are welcome to contact us on +27 51 401 9666 or on WhatsApp at 087 240 6370 for registration/orientation information.**

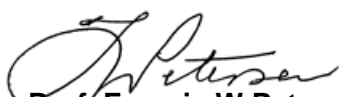
I am fully aware that your Grade 12 year was challenging and that so many things around you have changed due to COVID-19. However, this has also prepared you for a new higher education landscape that has been irrevocably changed. I want to assure you that our dedicated staff will support you with your studies wherever possible this year. In the end, our collective goal is to ensure that you succeed, and that no student is left behind.

Remember that the pandemic continues to test every aspect of society. Although the infection rate is slowly decreasing and the vaccine is being rolled out across the country, we must not underestimate the impact of the pandemic on local and global communities. Take care of yourselves and those around you and comply with the national guidelines and regulations.

I want to encourage you to stay in touch with the university. Visit the UFS website and social media platforms for regular updates and consult your ufs4life email for communication from the university.

I wish you all the best with your studies during the first term and hope to see you on our campuses soon.

Best regards



**Prof. Francis W Petersen**

Rector and Vice-Chancellor, University of the Free State  
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