

15 January 2021

Dear Students

## UPDATE ON THE 2021 ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

I hope that you are well, that you enjoyed the festive season, and that you spent some well-deserved time with your families. I wish you all the best for 2021; we may not know what lies ahead, but I am thankful that we are able to resume the year with the hope that it will be a good one for us all.

I am writing to provide you with information on how the University of the Free State (UFS) will approach the first semester of 2021. Due to the fact that our country is currently on an adjusted Level 3 of the national lockdown, the university is following a minimalistic approach to the return of staff and students to the campuses. **During the first semester of 2021, we will continue with an online/blended learning and teaching approach for first-year and senior undergraduate students.** This means that certain classes will be online, some in contact or face-to-face mode, and others a combination of contact and online.

**All our students will register online\*.** It is important that you take cognisance of the following dates for the first term of 2021:

### ► Online registration and orientation\*:

- 8 to 26 February 2021: Online registration and orientation for senior undergraduate and postgraduate students
- 1 to 13 March 2021: Online registration and orientation for first-year students

### ► Start of the first term\*:

- 1 March 2021: Start of the first term for senior undergraduate students
- 15 March 2021: Start of the first term for first-year students

*\*Excluding students in the Faculty of Health Sciences*

[Information on the 2021 registration process](#) can be found on the university's website. Detailed information about the online/blended learning and teaching approach will be shared with our students by the respective faculties according to their online/blended learning programmes.

Due to the national lockdown regulations and the capacity of the university's infrastructure in adhering to physical distancing protocols, a limited number of students will be returning to the campuses during the first semester. *In general, ALL students in the faculties of Health Sciences and Natural and Agricultural Sciences will return to the campuses (including first-year students) with the understanding that travelling across provincial borders will continue. Students in other faculties whose curriculums include service modules from these two faculties will also be required to attend the face-to-face practical and theoretical sessions. In some other faculties, only students in identified modules will return to the campuses. It is therefore important that you plan accordingly in terms of accommodation.*

**Please note that you will be informed by your faculty if you are required to return to campus during the first semester. If you have NOT been contacted, you will be supported through remote multimodal teaching, learning, academic advising, and assessment until you are informed by your faculty that you can return to campus.**

***If you are required to return to the campuses during the semester, you will be contacted by the faculty and provided with a campus access permit. You will be expected 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 COVID-19 pandemic has entered a new phase with a second wave of infections, together with the emergence of a new and more transmissible variant of SARS-CoV-2. Although some provinces have already had a spike in infections, the Free State province has not yet seen a significant increase. This means that the province's spike for the second wave of infections has yet to come, and we might be facing a challenging time ahead. It is therefore important that careful planning is done to ensure that our staff and students remain safe and that the [2021 academic programme](#) remains intact.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt by the UFS community in many ways. I am aware that some of our students and staff have lost family members and/or friends due to COVID-19, and hereby express our sincere condolences and wish them strength during this difficult time.

Although the 2021 academic programme has not started yet for the majority of our students, it is important to keep your mental health in check. Make use of the [#WellbeingWarriors](#) campaign from our Department of Student Counselling and Development, which is aimed at encouraging health and well-being among students.

It is critical to remain vigilant and to sharpen your focus on adhering to the health and safety protocols wherever you are. Remember that the COVID-19 pandemic is still testing every aspect of society; we must not underestimate the impact that the pandemic has on local and global communities. Take care of yourselves and those around you, wear your mask, sanitise, and comply with the national guidelines and regulations. Visit the [COVID-19 webpage](#) for information on the university's approach to the pandemic.

Lastly, I would like 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 as you prepare to continue your studies at the UFS this year and hope to see you on our campuses soon.

Best regards