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13 March 2020

COVID-19: Update on mass gatherings, graduation and travel

In line with national and international information, the University of Cape Town executive is taking the threat of the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) very seriously.

The university leadership has:

- taken the decision to postpone the chancellor's installation on Monday, 16 March, and to suspend the March graduation ceremonies, which were scheduled to start on Thursday, 19 March.
- agreed to cancel or postpone any UCT-related conferences and events until the end of June 2020. The leadership is also engaging with external service providers and event organisers about scheduled events for our campus and considering alternative options.
- made the decision to suspend the approval of any university-related international travel until the end of June 2020.

The university's COVID-19 Coordinating Committee and the executive are meeting frequently to discuss how UCT can best respond to the pandemic while continuing with the academic programme.

See the full communication by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, below.



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
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COVID-19: Update on mass gatherings, graduation and travel

13 March 2020

Dear students and colleagues

In line with national and international information, the University of Cape Town (UCT) executive is taking the threat of the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) very seriously. UCT's COVID-19 Coordinating Committee (CCC) in particular has been monitoring reports from health agencies such as the [National Institute for Communicable Diseases](#) (NICD) about the need for social distancing and limiting mass gatherings. With these reports in mind, we have been:

- reviewing plans for all large events and mass gatherings, whether hosted by UCT or by external service providers
- reassessing travel and events, such as conferences and symposiums

- considering different ways to continue teaching and learning at UCT while limiting the risk of spreading infection.

With this in mind, the university leadership has taken the decision to postpone the installation of our chancellor on Monday, 16 March, and to suspend the March graduation ceremonies, which were scheduled to start on Thursday, 19 March. Meanwhile, the Registrar's Office will send details to graduands about how they can receive their graduation certificates.

As deeply important as these events are for the campus community, it is much more important that we take responsible decisions that will help to avoid the spread of COVID-19. We have not taken this decision lightly. We understand the disappointment this will create, and that it disrupts the plans of many people who were looking forward to celebrating these important occasions.

In making this decision, we considered not only the risk of bringing thousands of people into close contact in Sarah Baartman Hall, but also the risk faced by those travelling to Cape Town for these events. We believe it is the responsible decision to protect the campus community and to limit the possibility of the spread of the virus into the general population.

The university leadership has also agreed to cancel or postpone any UCT-related conferences and events until the end of June 2020. We will review this decision if necessary. We are also engaging with external service providers and event organisers about scheduled events for our campus and considering alternative options.

In line with a number of other organisations, we have made the decision to suspend the approval of any university-related international travel until the end of June 2020.

The CCC and the executive are meeting frequently to discuss how UCT can best respond to the pandemic while we continue with the academic programme. We are committed to the success of our students as well as to the

health and well-being of all community members. We are considering different ways that we can continue teaching and learning at UCT while limiting the risk of spreading infection. We expect to make an announcement next week about how we will proceed with the academic project during this vulnerable time for our nation's health.

We are very aware of the concerns of many of you about the possibility of infection through contact with other people in residences, libraries, lecture halls and other places on campus. I urge each of you to continue to follow the hygiene precautions that have been provided in previous communications:

- wash your hands regularly with soap and water
- regularly use an alcohol-based ($\geq 60\%$ alcohol) hand sanitiser
- cover your mouth (using a tissue or your elbow) when coughing or sneezing
- place used tissues directly into the bin, and wash your hands immediately afterwards
- increasingly clean all surfaces that are frequently touched using normal cleaning products
- avoid close contact with people who are sick
- stay at home if you feel sick and contact your doctor or the Student Wellness Service.

Please regularly check the UCT [Coronavirus Disease 2019 web page](#), which is being updated on a daily basis. Please also note these important telephone numbers:

- NICD hotline **0800 029 999**

- Independent Counselling and Advisory Services ([ICAS](#)) **0800 111 3945** (a toll-free line available to UCT staff and their family members 24 hours a day)
- UCT Student Wellness Service **021 650 5620** or **021 650 1271** (after hours)
- UCT staff help line **021 650 5685**.

One of the most important phrases used by the [World Health Organization](#) in advising the public on how to respond to the pandemic is: “Be Kind.” There have been some reports about discriminatory behaviour, including fake news on social media about individuals being infected with the virus and cruel jokes directed at various groups identified as potential carriers of COVID-19. The fact is, we are all potential carriers if we come into contact with the virus.

Compassion and kindness are as essential as good hygiene in this global crisis.

I encourage you to make UCT a place where these three practices all thrive.

Sincerely

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng
Vice-Chancellor

Updates will be posted on UCT’s [Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) feature page on the UCT News website.

ENDS

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