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Lockdown: UCT experts advise how to survive studying from home

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has led countries around the world to respond in unprecedented ways – self-isolation, social distancing, travel bans and, in South Africa, a 21-day lockdown – to curb the spread of the virus. For tertiary students the world over, studying is no different. Traditional lectures have stopped, leaving students with no option but to study from home too.

University of Cape Town (UCT) experts give their take on how best to navigate this “new normal”, which is being defined by studying from home.

Dr Memory Muturiki, director of Student Wellness at UCT, believes studying from home could be both “challenging and rewarding” for undergraduates. She suggested students put together a study schedule and establish a routine to accommodate the new normal as much as possible, while also incorporating elements of a traditional campus schedule.

“Having a routine can eliminate the risk of procrastination, and students should be setting clear boundaries for study time and free time,” she said.

Muturiki noted that it may be difficult for students who don’t live alone. In this case, she advised that they discuss their study needs and requirements openly with housemates. While she encouraged students to keep their campus study groups active online via Skype, WhatsApp and other social networking channels, she also reminded them to take regular breaks in between.

“Read a book, stream a movie or binge watch a series. Group video chats are also a great way of keeping in touch with friends in a different city,” she said.

A healthy eating plan forms a fundamental part of holistic health, and with a bit of flexibility in your new work-from-home routine, Muturiki suggested learning to cook healthy meals to enjoy at home.

According to Associate Professor Kevin GF Thomas, head of UCT's Department of Psychology, stress and anxiety levels escalate during unpredictable times. He also agrees that healthy eating is essential, as is maintaining a regular exercise timetable and getting enough sleep. He said don't allow for family time and conversations with loved ones to be dominated by negative news or social media reports.

"Find comfort in the fact that you are a resilient human being who has survived many challenges and you will survive this one," Thomas said.

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