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UCT welcomes R5 million from Motsepe Foundation for COVID-19 response

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) chancellor, Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe, has announced a R5 million donation by the Motsepe Foundation to help the university manage its multi-faceted response to the [global COVID-19 pandemic](#).

To combat the disease, UCT ended the first term early on 16 March. To date five members of the university have tested positive for COVID-19. All are in self-isolation under the supervision of the National Department of Health.

Following the president's announcement of the national disaster and the ensuing countrywide lockdown, thousands of UCT students have vacated their residences, necessitating extra measures to ensure they reach their homes safely. These measures have included hiring buses to transport students to central metros in the various provinces, paying National Student Financial Aid Scheme allowances early and providing laptops to identified undergraduate students. The lockdown has also required changes to planning for teaching and learning at UCT.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng said she welcomed the timely and generous donation from the Motsepe Foundation – crucial support when UCT's resources were being stretched in unimaginable ways.

"UCT has weathered many storms in recent years but little could have prepared us for COVID-19. However, our leadership team is putting measures in place to continue our core business – which will not be business as usual – of teaching and learning and research. For this we need additional resources to assist our students wherever possible," she said.

"Barely one term into the year, they and our community face innumerable challenges. The donation from the Motsepe Foundation, secured through our chancellor, Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe, will help to smooth the way. I thank everyone for pulling together at this time."

Unexpected pandemic

Moloi-Motsepe said she had approached the foundation after hearing that students would be asked to leave campus because of the coronavirus outbreak.

“Due to the unexpected nature of the pandemic, staff and students were in a precarious position. Understanding that many of our students come from very impoverished backgrounds, making the arrangements for everyone to leave campus was a difficult and stressful period,” she said.

“I watched with sadness a student from a rural community interviewed on TV mention that she relied on computers at the university library to do her work as she doesn’t have a laptop. Now that the university was closed, she was expected to do her work online, which was just not possible.”

With these challenges in mind, the trustees of the Motsepe Foundation had committed R5 million for UCT to assist its students and staff and its coronavirus crisis management. In times of crisis it’s vital that leaders lead by example, she said.

“The intention behind the donation is to evoke collective action in our efforts to overcome this crisis. The sustainability of our systems and strategies are being tested. We must find ways to work together, pooling our resources, knowledge and capabilities to create an effective path forward.

“As leaders we have to instil hope in the institution’s ability to re-imagine our systems, as well as collective accountability for implementing the strategies required during times of disruption.”

Well-being of people

With scant time to settle in as UCT’s new chancellor (her term began on 1 January this year) before the pandemic struck, Moloi-Motsepe said that the social, political and economic well-being of people had always been the focus of her philanthropy.

For example, during the Ebola pandemic, the Motsepe Foundation assisted Guinea with clinical management. And recently, the foundation assisted Mozambique in the aftermath of the devastating cyclones of 2019.

“In the case of the COVID-19 outbreak, my sentiments are aligned to my philanthropy,” she said. “What we see at UCT is a crisis of education where the academic year for students and faculties is being interrupted. Through the foundation, I have been an advocate of preparing South Africa for the fourth industrial revolution. While we believed that we still had time to prepare the necessary resources and infrastructure for the transition, this time is being cut short.

“As a tertiary institution, and as a country, we must ensure that the lives of all people are disrupted with overall positive outcomes, and this requires the continuation of education and research outputs. Equipping staff and students with the resources they require during this tumultuous time is the immediate plan of action.”

Message to UCT community

To UCT staff and students, Moloi-Motsepe said, “We live in the most challenging of times. The coronavirus will have an impact on our education systems, our economy, our health – and mental health especially – as we try to cope with the increased stress caused by anxiety, uncertainty and the total upheaval of our lives.

“The university is dedicated to facilitating a learning environment that is conducive to all students. The executive staff remain well informed around the challenges facing both students and faculty members and is working hard to implement measures that will curb the

negative externalities in the short and long term. Most importantly during this time, we need to care for one another.”

Moloi-Mostepe thanked Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, the executive staff and all other staff members for their hard work and for the support to students during an uncertain and difficult time.

“UCT, as the leading university in Africa, has the responsibility to guide other institutions in their strategies, which include transformation, knowledge creation and crisis management. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to all UCT staff who are tasked with coping with the coronavirus outbreak in both their professional and personal capacity.

“To instil a sense of calm within the institution requires us, as leaders, to forge ahead with vision and strategy, which can only be formulated with the assistance of all stakeholders.

“I wish everyone and their families good health and God’s blessings. As human beings, we have overcome many challenges before. We will overcome this crisis if we remain vigilant, follow health protocols and work together.”

Alumni support students

UCT’s alumni, too, have rallied to help, with donations from many alumni abroad.

After a call to alumni on 19 March, the Development and Alumni Department (DAD) has received donations totalling R335 453, from 92 UCT alumni including a R100 000 donation from a Canadian alumnus.

The latter donation came from the Daniel Samuel Maseko Memorial [Scholarship](#).

The funds were to be distributed among 24 students from the Southern African Development Community countries of Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe who were most in need of financial assistance to get back home.

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