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Update on developments at UCT campuses

The University of Cape Town (UCT) classes started on Monday, 14 February 2022. The intention in 2022 is to return to more face-to-face teaching whilst continuing to adhere to public health requirements.

Overall, the majority of research and teaching at UCT is now taking place. We are concluding the registration of some 26 000 students and all faculties and departments are hard at work to ensure the academic project is delivered.

Since last week we have seen some intermittent protest actions led by the Students' Representative Council (SRC) on our campuses.

The principled approach from the UCT Executive is that protest action is a constitutional right. UCT respects activism and the right of students and staff to be active, engaged citizens fighting for social justice issues.

The SRC has since last week raised issues related to fee blocks that prevent students with debt over a certain amount from registering at UCT. They have since raised issues related to the registration process as well.

The UCT executive has worked extensively to engage the SRC and resolve concerns and to meet demands. In summary the following measures have been introduced:

- We have extended the deadline for students to apply for exemption as well as the grace period for outstanding fees to be paid.
- Giving students, who are awaiting the outcome of appeals, full access to Vula (student online learning platform) as well as to lectures and tutorials so that their academic programmes are not compromised.
- No student who has applied for exemption on the grounds of a fee debt will be excluded from participating in their academic programme until after the Special Meeting of Council, 21 February 2022 to allow them to benefit from any changes agreed by Council.
- All students benefitting from the concession above will be granted access to Vula from the beginning of term, to allow them full access to study materials.

- The circumstances of all students who have benefitted from the concession of the R10 000 threshold for fee debt, who are having difficulty registering, will be investigated as a matter of urgency.

In essence the UCT Executive has met all the SRC's demands.

In addition and importantly, the UCT Executive has called for a special Council meeting where a proposal to reconsider the fee block policy will be tabled. We urge the SRC to give this process an opportunity. The SRC will be fully represented at the Council meeting. Until Council has met on Monday, 21 February, there is no student that has been blocked from class or Vula services.

The protest in the last few days has taken the form of blocking access routes, interfering with services like the UCT shuttle, blocking entrances to some buildings and digital interference in some online classes. We reiterate the respect for the constitutional right to protest and recognise that the protest actions have been peaceful.

Disrupting the academic programme is however not acceptable. Interfering with another person's right to go to class or to teach is not acceptable. We urge the SRC to take the lead in refraining from such actions. This kind of action is counterproductive, preventing us from providing the quality of teaching, learning and research for which we are rightly recognised. It is also deeply damaging to the students whom the SRC represents, compromising the return to face-to-face teaching which so many of them have rightly demanded after two very difficult years during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yesterday there were false claims on social media platforms that indicated that the UCT Executive called the South African Police Services (SAPS) onto the UCT campus. These are false and irresponsible statements. We have appealed to users of social media to refrain from sharing false information and to be cautious of circulating unverified information.

We continue to communicate to students and staff on the unfolding circumstances on campus. Updates can be found on the [UCT website](#) We will certainly continue to engage the SRC and to work alongside them in the interest of our students.

PLEASE NOTE:

It is important to note that the fee block policy at UCT does NOT apply to any student from the lowest socioeconomic bands who qualifies for NSFAS funding; no NSFAS student is prevented from registering for 2022 because of their financial circumstances. The Council policy rather affects the so-called "missing middle"; students whose household income is above the threshold for NSFAS but whose circumstances make it difficult to meet the costs of higher education. We have long been aware of the challenges that these students and their families face, and we have invested heavily in bursary support for students in these circumstances.

These measures apply to all students, regardless of their nationality.

ENDS

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