

Maties strengthens support for students

Stellenbosch University (SU), commonly known as Maties, is providing additional support to undergraduate students to stay on track with their studies and better adapt within the changed context of virtual learning as South Africa continues to grapple with the Covid-19 pandemic.



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“The Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it many new challenges and risks that the University has been working hard to mitigate. When on-campus activities were suspended towards the end of March, we rapidly switched to online learning. Classes resumed online on 20 April, thanks to the tireless efforts of teaching and support staff,” SU Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof. Wim de Villiers said.

“We remain acutely aware of the challenges that our students face in adapting to this new and largely unfamiliar mode of learning during the lockdown period. So, we are doing everything we can to ensure that all of our students – and especially those who are vulnerable – can successfully complete the academic year.”

Laptops have been made available on a loan basis to socio-economically disadvantaged students and data bundles have been procured for all students to access the internet. Staff training to provide engaging content has also been a key priority.

Furthermore, the capacity of SUNLearn, the University’s study management system, has been boosted to handle the increased demand now that most activities are taking place online. Systems have been streamlined to make it easier for students to access the necessary resources and information.

In addition, the University's Centre for Student Counselling and Development is now providing online and telephonic services to those who need academic, emotional or emergency assistance during these times.

A grant provided by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, a US-based philanthropic non-profit organisation, will go towards tailored academic and psychosocial support for students who are vulnerable and at risk of not graduating or moving on to their next year of study. The grant will bolster academic support to ensure that every student stays on course, despite the challenges that they may experience.

"We are grateful to the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, whose support strengthens our interventions to help our students succeed," De Villiers said.

Dr Thashlin Govender, Programme Director at the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, said, "There is a need for organisations to come together, collaborate and invest in programmes that help university students succeed. The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation is committed to working with like-minded partners, such as SU, to provide students with the continuous support they need to overcome the challenges they may face along their journey."

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