



30 June 2020

Dear Law students

What extraordinary times we are experiencing since the suspension of lectures on 16 March. We know that this time has been difficult, uncertain, and frustrating. It is clear that the health (including mental wellness) and economic impact of this pandemic is far-reaching and that it will linger for quite some time. We write to you to assure you that during this time the safety and health of our staff and students remain our top priority.

Our other priorities are to complete this academic year successfully and to remain a sustainable and thriving Faculty of Law. The unexpected adjustment to online teaching and learning required a monumental effort from staff and students and the courage, grit and perseverance displayed by all have been remarkable. In the communication of 25 March we asked you to approach the rest of the semester in a spirit of cooperation and to take ownership of your own learning. You can be very proud of yourself that you have done just that and we wish to assure you that your efforts will pay off in the long run. We have all learned many lessons and improvements have already been made since the start of the second term.

At the start of the lockdown we reminded you that we are in a fluid situation and that arrangements may have to be changed as and when circumstances dictate. We have now reached the point where we know that uncertainty regarding the second semester, which commences on 27 July, is creating anxiety and that you are eager to know what the plans are for undergraduate programmes and modules going forward. We therefore have made decisions having regard of the current information and protocols in place for the higher education sector. This includes that at most one-third of students may return under Level 3, priority be given to certain categories of students (e.g. who need to complete practical or clinical work and to those students whose current living circumstances are not conducive to online learning), regulations pertaining to social distancing (e.g. SU may only accommodate a maximum of 50 students at a time, which means that they have to be accommodated in a 300-capacity lecture hall).

We considered whether we would be able to bring back our final year students. Over and above the social distancing measures, we also needed to have regard of the nature of our programmes and students (e.g. due to 5 different routes to obtain an LLB degree, it is difficult to identify final year students in modules across programmes as the mere fact that a student is registered for a final year module does not necessarily mean that the student is a final year student, the size of class groups, the presence of comorbidities amongst staff members and the registration of international students in modules). Based on this information and the current trajectory of the pandemic, the Faculty Management, after discussing the matter with the JV/S, has decided that all undergraduate law modules, including service modules, will continue to be taught online for the remainder of 2020. We are well aware that many of you will be disappointed to learn that you will not be able to enjoy the overall student experience that Stellenbosch and SU offer for the rest of the 2020 academic year.

This decision was a difficult one to reach but we feel certain that it is the only viable way going forward to complete the 2020 academic year in time whilst still safeguarding the health and safety of students and staff. This decision will hopefully assist you planning your personal decisions, including whether to remain in your current location.

As acknowledged in central communications, SU and the Faculty recognise that there are some of you who find it difficult to study from home due to personal circumstances at home, connectivity problems, etc. Students who are in this category could apply to return to their residence and/or campus to continue with online learning and make use of facilities like computer user areas on campus. Therefore, only those students who applied and are invited under the category of “living circumstances that are not conducive to online learning” will be returning in 2020.

To reiterate, the Faculty has taken the difficult decision to continue with online learning and assessments for our students for the whole of the second semester. It is with a heavy heart that we communicate this decision to you and we wish to assure you that we are looking forward to welcoming back our students on campus in 2021. To our final year students, we trust that we will have another opportunity to welcome you back on campus. We share your disappointment that your final year of studies has to end this way.

We hope that your first opportunity assessments have gone well and that those of you who are still writing a second opportunity assessment will also complete the exam on a good footing. We feel certain that you are looking forward to a short break from your studies and wish you a restful recess. Please keep safe, rest well and be ready for the second semester.

Regards

Prof Nicola Smit  
Dean

Prof Richard Stevens  
Vice Dean

*Afrikaans version to follow / Afrikaanse weergawe volg*

