



Education Digest 03

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Student Organisations on the COVID-19 Lockdown

While many South Africans welcomed the government's swift response aimed at trying to slow down the spread of the coronavirus, many others, especially young South Africans, worried about how it would affect their learning and future.

<http://www.dut.ac.za/the-dut-community-shared-its-views-on-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-the-lockdown.period/>

Financial woes

With the pandemic forcing students to resort to online learning from home, a number of students and parents are wondering whether or not they will be reimbursed for their residence fees as campuses remain closed. The SA Students' Congress (SASCO) has argued that it would be unfair to expect students to continue paying the same amount for residences that they are currently not occupying. The SA Union of Students concurs, its position being that all students be refunded for the time they spend outside residences during lockdown. At least one institution, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, responded by saying that residence fees were set for the year, "and no rebate had been discussed".

Stellenbosch University's Prof Stan du Plessis stated that the university was considering the full impact of Covid-19 on tuition and residence fees, while UCT spokesperson Elijah Moholola stated that it was too early to make pronouncements that would have far-reaching implications on the entire university community and country.

<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/covid-19-lockdown-call-for-refund-of-students-residence-fees-47136130>

<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/relief-fund-set-up-for-vulnerable-cput-students-48244353>

Other concerns

SASCO, along with a number of student organisations and student representative councils (SRCs), has threatened to boycott online classes unless universities can ensure that all students are able to participate in online learning. These bodies have stated that the department's measures to save the year were at the expense of poor and vulnerable students. According to SASCO's deputy president, Buyile Matiwane, twelve universities had indicated that they were ready for e-learning, ten were not ready, and four needed to be 'capacitated'. "There is no need to rush. We're saying, let's prepare

infrastructure, have a blended approach with mixed methodology and let's assure students of no exclusion next year."

Thousands of students have signed an online petition asking the Department of Higher Education to allow them to return to their campus residences and accommodations. SASCO says that students want to go back to residences in order to have access to Wi-Fi and other amenities that will enable them to participate meaningfully in the continuing academic program. However, the need to resume studies should not come at the risk of COVID-19 infection.

The Congress of South African Students' (COSAS) has written to the Basic Education Department and the Presidency, suggesting interventions for schools during the COVID-19 period. COSAS says it engaged with scholars to get their input, and the consultation resulted in a number of proposals to deal with the disruption in schooling caused by the pandemic. COSAS has also raised concerns over schools that lack proper infrastructure, that are overcrowded, that meet under trees and which lack the basic necessities to ensure that social distancing is a realistic possibility.

<https://www.msn.com/en-za/news/other/varsity-students-sign-petition-to-return-to-residences-amid-lockdown/ar-BB13H3j5>

<https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/sasco-rejects-nzimandes-bid-to-save-academic-year-says-poor-students-will-suffer-the-most-47511779>

<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/covid-19-student-boycott-threatened-over-online-teaching/>

<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/parents-cosas-join-forces-to-stop-govts-irrational-reopening-of-schools-20200523>

Positive contribution

More than 100 students from UCT's Health Sciences Faculty have volunteered to staff the COVID-19 hotline at the Disaster Management Centre based at Tygerberg Hospital. UCT Surgical Society president Savannah Verhage said the response from students offering their services had been overwhelming. The UCT Surgical Society is a student-driven society affiliated with the surgery department at the Groote Schuur Hospital, and has more than 400 members.

Another UCT student organisation that has lent a helping hand is the Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation (Shawco), which raised R300 000 as part of its #BeKindOnline campaign. Shawco teamed up with a group of social media influencers to raise money for food relief in Manenberg and sanitation kits in Imizamo Yethu and Hangberg. After food-related protests on the Cape Flats, Shawco responded by working with the Manenberg People's Centre (MPC) to provide food to the community.

<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/over-100-uct-students-volunteer-to-assist-with-manning-coronavirus-hotline-45975643>

<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/shawco-raises-r300-000-to-feed-the-vulnerable-in-manenberg-imizamo-yethu-hangberg-47815503>

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