

## Re: FEBE staff communique 1: Welcome to 2021

11 January 2021

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### Dear staff of the Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment

A warm welcome back to all of you. It is hard to believe that I am already welcoming you back for 2021; it feels like just last week that I wrote the 2020 academic year (AY2020) close out letter. I hope that you have spent some well-deserved and much needed time with your loved ones and that you are rejuvenated, excited to close out AY2020 and ready for whatever 2021 may hold.

A special welcome to any new staff members that are joining us in 2021 and congratulations to staff that have moved to new positions. We said good bye to some staff that has resigned and retired in 2020 and will also say good bye to those that will retire during 2021. We wish them all well and all the very best with the next phase of their lives.

AY2020 was undoubtedly one of the most demanding, toughest, stressful and challenging years for the Faculty, CPUT, the Higher Education sector, South African as a country, and the world at large. As the AY2021 commences under lockdown level 3 (LL3) and a worrying early second wave with an alarming number of Covid cases, all indications are that 2021 will be no different. However, and hopefully with the experiences and lessons learned from last year, we will be much better prepared and planning for this year will include improvements on what was done under emergency circumstances.

### Close out of AY2020

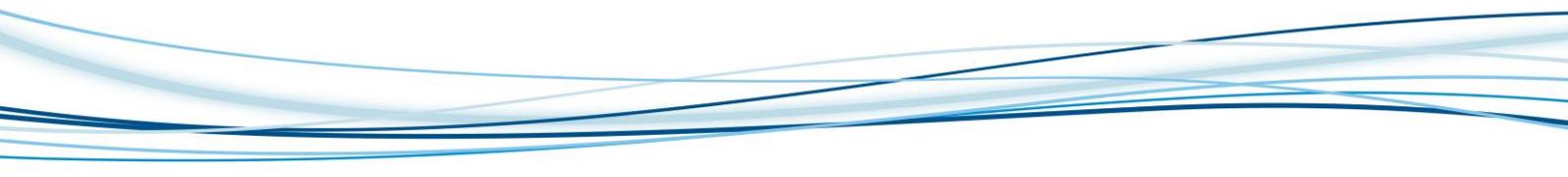
Despite all the challenges, AY2020 progressed well, with about 85% of programmes closing out final assessments by 22 December 2020, but also some final assessments planned for December required changes or date shifts due to the early Covid-19 second wave. Nonetheless, starting 11 January 2021, the Faculty will be closing out the last 15% of programmes by the end of January 2021. All departments will be closing out practicals, final, deferred and re-assessments as per the planned timetables, with the publication of marks due between 29 January to mid-February 2021. HODs will communicate specific departmental publication, reassessments and deferred assessments dates with students as these are different for each department.

I want to extend my appreciation to staff members who were involved in final assessments up to 22 December 2020 and who spent family time to mark these assessments during their recess period. I also acknowledge that many staff members will be frantically finalising marking and moderation over the next three weeks for publication of marks as planned; all while maintaining the academic standard and quality as expected.

### Planning for AY2021

This is indeed an unusual start to the year, and one never experienced before. As per the published CPUT academic calendar different student groups will register at different times with AY2021 officially kicking off much later in March. Therefore, we will again have a shorter AY2021, with the current plan to close out the year by December 2021, though this will depend on what the year holds.

As with 2020, depending on the state of the pandemic and the relevant lockdown level, staff will be expected to prepare for a flexible multi-modal on- and off-campus mode of delivery of the curriculum, with continuous changes expected due to shifts between different lockdown levels 5 to 1 as the year progresses. Delivering a curriculum to a diverse group of students comes with their unique challenges, ranging from access to appropriate devices, data, connectivity, conducive living and learning environments.



We will be welcoming a cohort of new and transfer students that were not part of our Faculty in 2020. Departments should therefore plan and prepare different forms and modes of appropriate student orientation for this year. The later March 2021 start of the academic year provides staff with some time to prepare flexible and risk-adjusted learner guides and learner packs (with physical and digital material) **ready for students on the first day of class** for all new and returning students. Staff are requested to familiarise themselves with the AY2021 teaching and learning plan that was shared with all HODs. As per the AY2021 document, staff are expected to improve on the 2020 risk-adjusted teaching, learning, assessment and communication strategies. I emphasise that the focus for this year should be on improvements on 2020 towards more interactive and inclusive multi-modal physical and online delivery of the curriculum, and specifically improvements related to the standard, quality and integrity of online assessments. Please be reminded that a range of training and development options are available and that the Centre for Innovative Educational Technology (CIET) and the Learning Development Unit (LDU) is ready to support and assist you.

This year in itself will bring additional challenges to our faculty specifically, as we prepare to have accreditation visits for almost all of our new HEQSF aligned programmes by the relevant professional bodies including the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA); South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP); SA Council for the Quantity Surveying Profession (SACQSP); South African Geomatics Council (SAGC); South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) (Nov 2020) who all have specific requirements to comply with. I will send a more detailed and specific communique regarding these visits later but for now request that all staff ensure that they are familiar with the professional body requirements for the specific subjects they are involved in, plan their curriculum and keep students informed accordingly.

While we wait for the President to update us on the review of the National State of Disaster by 15 January 2021, we must collectively ensure and plan that all on-campus activities pose the lowest risk, and that we adhere to all Covid-19 health and safety protocols and regulations, while at the same time maintaining the quality and integrity of the academic project. Management and coordination of the academic programmes will probably again require many unplanned and multiple meetings using electronic platforms and often times at short notice. If anything, 2020 taught us to expect the unexpected, to be agile, flexible and ready for change.

## Conclusion

AY2020 has provided us with a unique opportunity to develop resilient graduates. As we plan for the 2020 Autumn graduation in April 2021, the highlight of any academic year, I for one, look forward to congratulating all those graduants who succeeded no matter the academic and personal hurdles they faced.

Please be kind to one another, and remember everyone is going through something. Please stay safe and adhere to the call from the President to comply with all Covid-19 health and safety protocols and regulations.

**Prof Marshall Sheldon**

**Dean of the Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment**



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