

Re: Communiqué 8: FEBE AY2020 close out and appreciation

20 Dec 2020

Dear staff of the Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment

I hope that this email finds you and your families well during this unprecedented times. This has indeed been one of the toughest, demanding, stressful and most challenging years for the faculty, CPUT, the higher education sector, South African as a county and the world at large. Starting 2020 no one could have imagined what the past year would require from all of us.

The institution had its own challenges that started with student protests in February and March followed by a national lockdown from 27 March 2020. As a result of this unpredictable year and a country in lockdown, the institution had to plan an emergency risk-adjusted response in a very short space of time with very limited resources.

Staff had to shift from a mostly contact, on-campus mode of delivery to a multi-modal off-campus delivery of the curriculum with continuous changes from lockdown levels 5 to 1 as the year progressed. Delivering a curriculum to a diverse group of students spread across South African, with some even international, all with their own challenges, ranging from access to appropriate devices, data, connectivity, conducive living and learning environments, personal and unique challenges and had to adjust the teaching, learning, assessment and communication strategies accordingly. Administrative and support staff had to perform duties in unexpected ways. Most staff heeding this call and rising to this challenge speedily attended a range of training and development sessions in response.

Starting term 2 on 1 June 2020 and semester 2 at different times, as the lockdown levels lowered from lockdown levels 5 to 1 for many staff and students the mode changed from predominantly off-campus to a combination of off- and on-campus activities. This in itself had a range of different challenges, ensuring that all on-campus activities posed the lowest risk, adhering to all Covid-19 health and safety protocols and regulations, while at the same time maintaining the quality and integrity of the academic project. This year has provided us with a unique opportunity to develop resilient graduates in whichever format that may have taken place.

The academic year 2020 with all its challenges is progressing and slowly moving forward day by day with everyone working diligently to close out the final assessment period that is almost in sight. The second wave has also started much earlier than expected and the number of positive staff and student Covid-19 cases also required changes to the planned final assessments. Nonetheless, this week the faculty will be closing out around 85% of the final assessments by 22 December with 15% of programmes concluding final assessments in January 2021. All departments will be closing out deferred and reassessments with the publication of marks between 29 Jan to mid-February 2021.

Management and coordination of the academic programmes required many unexpected, unplanned and multiple meetings using electronic platforms many times at short notice. I want to acknowledge that this multi-modal delivery and meetings required staff to spend long hours and in many cases late nights which extended into and impacted on personal family time. Personal family places and spaces turned into class rooms and offices, and I acknowledge this commitment.

This is final word of appreciation to all staff in the faculty, who each in your unique way, contributed to the academic project during this year. Please enjoy a well-deserved break with your family and use this time to rejuvenate and energise ready to conclude the year in January 2021. Please be kind to one another, please stay safe and while you enjoy this holiday period please adhere to the call from the President to comply with the health and safety protocols.

Prof Marshall Sheldon

Dean of the Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment