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## From the Dean of Engineering and the Built Environment (FEBE)

### Communique 6: Faculty staff update 27 July 2020

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Dear faculty staff members

I trust that this communique finds you and your families safe during this very challenging time for everyone. Since my last communication with you we have seen staff and students return to campus as permitted under lockdown level 3. I want to use this opportunity to thank those staff members that have continued to do sterling work both on- and off- campus. My sincerest appreciation to all those staff members that have gone the extra mile to accommodate the various needs of students.

**Student community:** During this time, we have received emails from various students with different personal circumstances and it again just reemphasised that we continue to deal with a diverse community of students that each have to be considered. We have students that desperately want to return to campus due to their personal living and learning environments; access to devices and connectivity; we have students who do not want to return to campus who want to remain online for various reasons mostly due to health and safety concerns related to travelling; transport, communities, families; medical; etc.; and then we have students that can no longer continue to study whether on campus or online for various reasons. I am aware that many of you tried to balance the diverse needs of a non-homogenous student community the best way you could with limited available time and resources for all. It was as a department, faculty and institution not always possible to comply with all student demands and requests simultaneously. My request is that you continue to do everything you can to support all students through a multi-modal approach.

**Final assessments:** On 13 July we started with the final assessment period for semester 1 subjects both on-campus and online. Many of you were involved in the decisions whether the final assessment should be on-campus or online considering the academic integrity of the subject and programme (i.e. learning outcomes and what needs to be assessed; the subject level; and compliance with quality guidelines and accreditations requirements); while also considering the resources required and available to do either. The feedback received through your HODs to date is mixed with groups of students very positive to have had the opportunity to write their final assessments whether on-campus or online with very good attendance in many subjects. Simultaneously, some students could not take the opportunity on-campus or online for various reasons. I requested HODs to work with staff to determine how we can best accommodate those students that could not participate in their respective final assessments within the policies, procedures and guidelines of the institution. During this process maintaining the academic integrity of the programme is important while, affording everyone a fair opportunity to complete the academic year.

**Return to campus under lockdown level 2:** As a faculty through your HODs we are currently busy with the plans for the return of the second group of 33% when permitted to do so by government under lockdown level 2 focussing on and prioritising the categories as listed in the minister's risk-adjusted strategy. As with lockdown level 3 again we will be unable to accommodate all students within those categories due to the 66% restriction. International students currently outside the borders of South African will only be allowed to return to South Africa under lockdown level 1 as communicated from government.

**Staff wellness:** At this point I want to pause and acknowledge that this is all being done amidst the height of the pandemic and that we are mindful of staff, students, families, friends, colleagues that have been affected during this time. We have dealt with reported Covid-19 cases from staff and students who have been hospitalised and recovered and have sadly also as a faculty recently lost one of our staff members who was a dear colleague, lecturer and friend to many (may his soul rest in peace). I therefore plead with everyone to be more patient, considerate, flexible and caring to one another during this time as the wellbeing of everyone is important for us to move forward as a faculty community, institution and country.

### In conclusion

This week, 31 July, marks the end of the official term 2. I wish all staff members all the best with finalising outstanding practicals, assessments and marks until the end of term and those that will continue to do so up until the resumption of Term 3 on 17 August. Please enjoy your very short but well deserved break and stay safe. We will get through this together.

**Prof Marshall Sheldon**

**Dean of Engineering and the Built Environment**

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