

UKZN COMMENCES EARLY MID-TERM BREAK AS COVID-19 CASES GROW

In a bid to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and protect its staff and students from the deadly virus, the University of KwaZulu-Natal has commenced an early midterm break, effective yesterday afternoon (Tuesday, 17 March 2020).

In a nutshell, this means that staff - save for those deemed as "essential" - will work remotely; events, such as the annual Graduation Ceremonies, have been put on ice and students have been sent home, with residences closed to prevent any spreading of the virus within these spaces.

This decision comes in the wake of the University cancelling its autumn Graduation Ceremonies in line with the President's declaration of a national state of disaster.

‘As you are aware, UKZN has already begun implementing measures to ensure that UKZN’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic is in line with the President’s declaration of a national state of disaster in terms of the Disaster Management Act,’ said Professor Nana Poku, UKZN Vice-Chancellor and Principal. ‘The situation continues to change rapidly, and in this regard, the health and safety as well as well-being of the UKZN community - on and off campus - remain a top priority. At this point, UKZN is not aware of any COVID-19 incidents that would require any staff or students to be concerned about exposure on campus or student residence spaces,’ he said.

After consulting with key stakeholders, including the Department of Health; National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD); World Health Organization Africa Region Office (WHO AFRO); as well as the University’s in-house COVID-19 experts, UKZN moved to immediately implement the following additional measures to protect its community from possible COVID-19 exposure:

EARLY COMMENCEMENT OF MID-TERM BREAK

The University’s mid-term break commenced immediately yesterday (17 March 2020). All academic programmes will be rescheduled accordingly. The second term will commence on Tuesday, 14 April 2020 as per the sessional dates.

VACATING STUDENT RESIDENCES

Because student residences are large communal living spaces which poses a significant risk of large scale exposure and spread of viruses in general, all students from leased and University owned residences were vacated with immediate effect. Students have no later than Friday, 20 March 2020 to vacate.

The UKZN International Office is in contact with various embassies to assist in repatriating those international students living in residences who require assistance to return home.

ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

The implementation of online teaching and learning platforms is already afoot. The goal is to ensure that all teaching and learning content is available online before the commencement of the second term.

CONTINUITY OF UNIVERSITY OPERATIONS

Over the next few days, executives and senior managers will consult with their staff to put in place measures to ensure business continuity and for critical and essential staff to be on duty to provide necessary support.

SECURING THE UNIVERSITY

During this period, the University will employ various security restrictions aimed at ensuring that campuses remain safe, secure and healthy. The main goal is to lower the number of physical interactions on campus, thus slowing the rate of transmission and protect the University community.

Said Poku: ‘Together, we can overcome this pandemic. We are in a time of rapid and unprecedented change and given this dynamic and evolving environment, any actions we take or do not take have far-reaching implications for how we get through this period with minimum impact on our University community and the academic programme. We therefore appeal to all staff and students to take extreme care during this time and to adhere to the various safety and other measures that have been instituted by our President and his cabinet. We will continue to update the UKZN website as additional information becomes available from the various official stakeholders,’ he said.