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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**WORLD-CLASS FACILITIES OPEN AT UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA'S**

**ONDERSTEPOORT CAMPUS**

The University of Pretoria (UP) recently opened its newly built veterinary facilities, the Lesedi Complex, at the University's Faculty of Veterinary Science in Onderstepoort.

This world-class Complex, a project made possible by a grant from the National Skills Fund, was completed late last year and is specifically aimed at creating facilities to allow the Faculty to increase the annual intake of veterinary students. The Complex includes a multi-disciplinary laboratory, a Veterinary Skills Laboratory, offices for Faculty Student Administration and Support Services, and a Student Study Centre.

Prof Darrell Abernethy, Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science, says veterinarians are crucial to the country’s economy and wellbeing for many reasons, including their contribution to national food security by ensuring the safety of food animal products, improving animal health and production, and nurturing emerging farmers.

"We have made significant progress in recent years to ensure that the Faculty meets the aspirations and needs of the country. Our six-year degree programme now places much greater emphasis on livestock production and experiential training and we offer a wide range of research programmes, many of which address pressing national needs of controlling dangerous diseases of animals and improving the incomes of smallholder farmers. The Lesedi Complex significantly enhances our training capacity of undergraduate students and allows the Faculty to increase the annual intake of veterinary students from 140 to its current 190 to meet the growing demand for veterinarians in the country," says Prof Abernethy.

UP is currently the only institution in South Africa that trains veterinarians and veterinary nurses and is the foremost veterinary faculty in Africa, internationally recognised for the quality of its training and research. The Faculty has approximately 1000 undergraduate students and more than 330 postgraduate students registered for a wide range of Honours, Masters and PhD degrees.

The Lesedi Complex has been designed to form the new gateway to the Onderstepoort Campus and has strong, modern South African architectural elements. The building complex consists of three blocks with open covered foyer areas in between, linking the three blocks, as well as the Sir Arnold Theiler Building and the Animal Hospital.

The Complex consists of:

* **A multi-disciplinary laboratory**, fully equipped with various types of microscopes (compound, stereo and phase-contrast). Used by both veterinary and veterinary nursing students for practical work, especially involving microscopes, including histology, parasitology, pathology and reproduction.
* **Offices for Faculty Student Administration and Support Services**
* **Veterinary Skills Laboratory**, a state-of-the-art facility that provides innovative ways for teaching practical skills through the use of various models. This reduces the need for performing practical procedures on live animals and at the same time allows for teaching under more controlled circumstances. In 2015, the laboratory manager received an international award in the USA for a project entitled: “Development, validation and implementation of in-house manufactured veterinary models for innovative teaching of clinical skills”.

Through a community engagement initiative, 20 young South Africans from the local community have been invited by the Faculty to take part in the process of model development and production by going through a 6-8 week training programme for model development. These learners completed a business course through BE@UP, including project management and financial management. They are currently busy with their training to manufacture teaching aids.

* **A Student Study Centre,** where students can study and hold group discussions whilst at the same time enjoying a snack or beverage.

As part of the same project, changes were made to existing lecture halls to facilitate accommodation of the larger number of students. Changes were also made to the southern area of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital, adjacent to the new Lesedi Complex.

Certain aspects of the project are still underway, including the establishment of a computer laboratory with sufficient seats to accommodate an entire year group at the same time. Satellite clinical facilities and improvements to animal teaching facilities aimed at accommodating the large student intake are also being undertaken for completion by the end 2016.

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