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MEDIA RELEASE

UP to host more than 30 in-person graduation ceremonies

PRETORIA – For the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions, the University of Pretoria (UP) will host more than 30 in-person graduation ceremonies this autumn.

During this time, the University will observe the government’s relevant COVID-19 regulations. UP will award more than 12 000 qualifications at graduation ceremonies that will be held on the Hillcrest Campus from 20 April to 20 May. Of these qualifications, 207 are doctorates, 1 399 are master’s degrees, 2 293 are honours degrees and 1 169 certificates.

At the first ceremony, Professor Tawana Kupe, UP’s Vice-Chancellor and Principal, congratulated the graduates and commended them for succeeding in such tumultuous times. “The soon-to-be graduates here today personify the triumph of the human spirit, endurance and commitment to getting over the finishing line,” he said. “Speaking on behalf of the entire University, we could not be prouder of you. You have come through the most difficult of times, including the pandemic and the turbulent state of our economy, society and world.”

Prof Kupe added that he is particularly pleased with the number of PhD and master’s graduates that UP continues to produce. “This contributes to generating knowledge and nurturing a new generation of academics and researchers as well as highly qualified professionals in the country,” he said.

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted how fortunate the graduates are to be among the 12% of students in South Africa who gained access to higher education over the past decade. “As a university, we hope that our influence will continue to shape policy reform, creating the conditions for peace and prosperity, and allowing people to thrive and reach their full potential. UP is one of the country’s largest producers of graduates, representing 13.7% of the highly skilled workforce in Gauteng and 7.7% of the highly skilled workforce in South Africa. We are looking at ways of strengthening this by increasing our student numbers through online-only and lifelong-learning programmes, which will benefit all of you throughout your careers and lives.”

Over the course of the 2022 autumn graduation season, honorary doctorates will be awarded to five academics, including Professor Jacobus Wynand Andries Coetzer – Head of UP’s Department of Veterinary Tropical Diseases and a former Head of the Veterinary Science Faculty – whose research is characterised by his transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, particularly in infectious diseases of livestock. Professor Mokubung Nkomo, an independent education academic and ombudsman at the University of South Africa (Unisa), will also receive an honorary doctorate. In addition, UP will confer an honorary doctorate on Professor Funmi Olonisakin, Vice-President and Vice-Principal International at King’s College London, who is a professor of security, leadership and development and the founding director of the African Leadership Centre.

Novelist, poet, short story writer and cultural activist Mandla Langa, who has won many awards, will also receive an honorary doctorate from the University. Since the country’s transition to democracy, he has held various prominent positions in the media industry. Professor Sijbren Cnossen who was an extraordinary professor in the African Tax Institute (ATI) in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at UP, will be awarded an honorary doctorate for his significant contribution to the University over almost 20 years, and also for his monumental scholarly contribution to the field of public finance and tax policy internationally.

UP alumnus Chris Griffith, a leading businessman and strategist, will receive the Chancellor's Medal from the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology. He was appointed CEO of Gold Fields in April 2021 and is the former CEO of Anglo American Platinum.

"This year, the University will embark on the last part of its five-year strategic plan that will lead us to 2025 and beyond," Prof Kupe said. "To achieve this, we need to collectively redouble our efforts to achieve our strategic goals: student access and success; high-quality research for greater societal impact; global recognition; diversity, equity and inclusion; and institutional sustainability. As we advance towards and beyond 2025, we will continue to strive to meet our goals for the greater good and benefit of society as a whole. Our well-educated, skilled graduates and relevant transformative research are key agents and drivers of sustainable inclusive development."

Providing educational opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds and undoing the regressive effects of socio-economic backgrounds on educational achievement are important national imperatives that UP will continue to address. Prof Kupe pointed out that access by previously excluded groups has progressively improved year-on-year, with the percentage of black undergraduate contact students increasing from 45.2% in 2012 to 61.5% in 2021. "Similarly, for the same period, the proportion of black postgraduate students increased from 53.1% to 65.6%," he said. "The percentage of black first-time entering undergraduate students increased from 44.8% in 2012 to 63.1% in 2021. Enrolments in science, engineering and technology study fields for black students increased from 48.1% to 59.0%. As such, we will continue to build stronger connections with schools that serve marginalised communities, strengthen mechanisms to recognise talent and potential, and enhance student success."

Prof Kupe also announced that the National Research Foundation will be partnering with the National Student Financial Aid Scheme to increase access to funding for postgraduate students, based on financial need and academic performance.

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About the University of Pretoria

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 114-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only University in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked top in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. The QS World University Rankings also placed UP among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and UP is in the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences), according to the Web of Science Essential Indicators.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za

