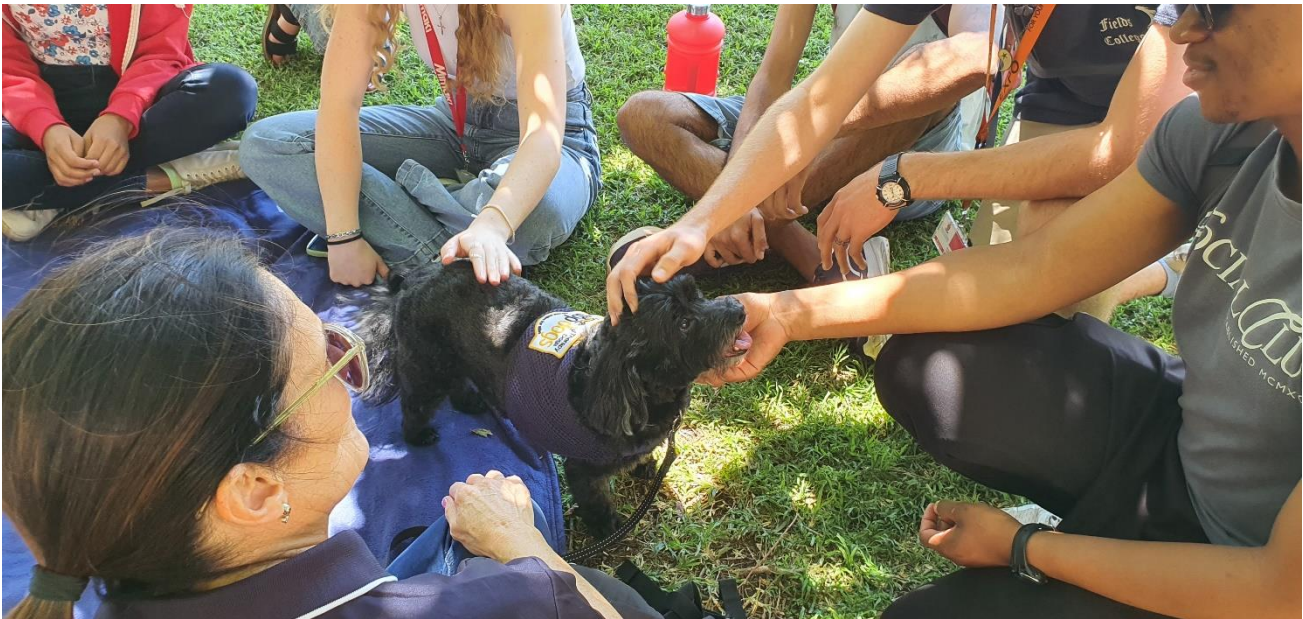


## NEWS RELEASE

### **‘Pawsitive’ energy – dogs offer relaxing solution for UP students under exam stress**



*UP students interacting with the therapy dogs*

PRETORIA - Studies show that a mere five minutes of interaction with therapy dogs can reduce stress and induce relaxation. With the final exam season approaching, the University of Pretoria’s Department of Library Services (DLS) has teamed up with Touch Our Pets Therapy Dogs (TOP Dogs), to embark on a furry adventure, bringing students animal-assisted therapy to help them de-stress.

“The Department of Library Services has the well-being of UP students at heart,” said Elsabe Olivier, Assistant Director of Marketing and Quality Assurance at the DLS. “We know how stressful exams can be and we want to support them, not only with library resources, spaces and knowledgeable staff members, but also with initiatives such as this that offer them an opportunity to relax.”

The mission of TOP Dogs is to spread comfort and companionship to those in need, including those at hospitals, care facilities and schools. The therapy dogs are carefully chosen and impeccably trained to offer emotional support.

This initiative, launched in 2019, has garnered significant popularity among students as they prepare for their exams. It has witnessed enthusiastic participation from a wide array of students, who eagerly embraced the “pawsitive” energy infusion in anticipation of the semester’s final leg. The event primarily drew undergraduate students, comprising 57% of the attendees, with notable representation from postgraduate students, and academic faculty and professional staff members.

According to a short survey run by the DLS, students felt that interacting with the dogs reduced their stress levels, calmed them down and improved their emotional well-being.

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Psychology honours student Katya Patterson is completing her proposal for a master's in Psychology. Her research explores the well-being of students through interaction with animals.

"This is such a positive initiative," Patterson said. "Many students cannot afford to get access to mental support, so this bridges the gap for those who are unable to get the help they need, especially now with the year-end fatigue and exam pressure."

"I enjoyed this so much," said Khono Mbaki, a BSc Biochemistry student majoring in Human Physiology. "I even forgot that I was a student for a little while. I felt so relaxed and enjoyed all the cuddles with the dogs."

"We will definitely continue hosting more of these sessions, especially during mid-year and end-of-year exam periods," Olivier said.

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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 its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers 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 the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2023 QS World University Rankings by Subject ranked UP first in South Africa in Accounting and Finance, Law, Economics and Econometrics, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Mathematics, and Veterinary Science.

For more information, please go to [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)