

## NEWS RELEASE

### The 'missing middle' - How UP's donors help more students access higher education



*Professor Francis Petersen addresses donors at the Javett-UP Art Centre.*

PRETORIA – Professor Francis Petersen, Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor Francis Petersen, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria (UP), urged donors to the University to continue to help ease the plight of students caught in the 'missing middle' in relation to paying their fees.

"One of the pressing issues we face, as a university, but also as an education sector, is what I call the student funding challenge. And this particular funding challenge is called the 'missing middle' funding challenge," Prof Petersen said at a UP event held on 27 November 2024 to honour the University's donors.

He explained that the missing middle "is a group of students who fall just above the income threshold for government financial aid, who cannot afford the full cost of university education. Their families earn too much to qualify for [government financial] assistance."

The missing middle, as described by Prof Petersen, consists of students from households that earn between R350 000 and R600 000 per annum. "They can't access NSFAS [the National Student Financial Aid Scheme], and we as institutions and companies are working together to be able to help those students."

He told the gathered donors that their contributions have helped ease the financial burdens of many academically exceptional students, who might not have been able to grow their academic talents without the donors' help.

In his address, Mr Setlogane Manchidi, Head of Corporate Social Investment at Investec, a prominent UP donor, said, "One of the key realisations is that potential is all over South Africa. But sadly, in a South African context, potential seldom leads to opportunity." He added that "what we are all thinking about, is what we do to facilitate and support opportunity that enables people to become active economic participants, because when you are active economically, your sense of purpose, aspiration, dignity, and your confidence, returns to you."

Gugu Khumalo, a student who received funding, also attended the event. "Getting financial aid really gave me an opportunity to pursue my studies even beyond undergraduate level," she said. "I was able to do my honours [degree], for which I was fully funded, and I was able to do my master's [degree], fully funded as well... It really opened doors for me. I am the first graduate at home [and] I am the first graduate to have a master's degree at home."

Speakers emphasised that, thanks to funding opportunities such as those provided by UP, its donors, and other partnering institutions, many UP students are being uplifted and enabled in ways that affect not just them, but their loved ones, as well as the economy and professional sector that they will eventually continue to pursue.

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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 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their

2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

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