**Student Financial Aid: The Impact of Giving** *By Gugu Ihenacho, Senior Assistant Director: Financial Aid at the University of Pretoria’s Department of Finance.*

Higher education in South Africa is not cheap. On average it costs R20 000 a month to put one student through an undergraduate degree at a contact university. Specialised degrees such as medicine cost much more.

Few households can afford that for one child, let alone more.

Total household income of R352 000 a year works out to a gross monthly income of around R29 000. After deductions like income tax and medical aid that household’s take-home pay would dwindle to approximately R15 000… and there goes the dream of higher education for one’s children – without which it is even more difficult to find employment.

**Between a rock and a hard place: Borrow or stay at home**

Some parents in ‘missing middle’ households borrow to fund their children’s university education by taking out loans or leveraging their home loans.

Others just give up.

Instead of going to university, their children go straight to work – if they can find a job. In the workplace, without a tertiary education, they are considered unskilled and paid accordingly. This means a family that used to be missing middle has now produced a financially needy family – and the vicious cycle continues.

As for missing middle youth who cannot afford to go to university and do not find work, they sit at home, powering the staggering unemployment figures.

At the University of Pretoria’s (UP) Financial Aid office, we receive many calls about family members who only have two courses to go and no hope of completing their degree. There are also many graduates who have walked the stage at their graduation ceremony but do not have their degree certificate because they owe the university money. Many prospective employers will not accept an application from a graduate unless they attach their degree certificate to their CV. Again, that severely limits the graduate’s career options.

Some might argue that universities themselves should do more to assist students who lack financial means. But, squeezed by inflation, shrinking state subsidies and donor constraints, universities simply do not have enough to go around.

This is why UP’s Giving Matters campaign – which culminates in the third annual UP Giving Day on 22 July 2024 – is so important, and such a good cause. It helps the university to restore hope for those who feel they have none.

**Give hope**

A once-off or monthly contribution of as little as R10 could end up making a key difference to a student in need. Many small contributions add up to a lot: Since the start of the Giving Campaign in 2022, organisations and hundreds of individual donors have donated more than R82 million. These funds have provided bursaries and scholarships to more than 407 students.

Giving takes only two minutes on the secure [UP Giving Day website](https://givingday.up.ac.za/coming-soon/).

Those who cannot afford to contribute financially can become Giving Day Ambassadors instead, spreading the word about how “a little goes a long way”.

And it really does – so please join us in making a difference on UP Giving Day!

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