

MEDIA RELEASE

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Governments should help universities recover from COVID-19 pandemic – UP Vice-Chancellor at Alliance for African Partnership webinar

Governments should provide financial assistance to those universities that are experiencing loss from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was one of the issues raised by Professor Tawana Kupe, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria (UP), at a webinar titled “Educational access at higher education institutions in the age of COVID-19”.

The event was organised by the Alliance for African Partnership (AAP) in partnership with the African Studies Center of Michigan State University (MSU) and *University World News*. The AAP was formed in 2016 after MSU consulted with 14 African leaders to create a partnership for more sustainable and mutually beneficial forms of collaboration. AAP member institutions include MSU, Egerton University, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Makerere University, Universite des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Bamako, United States International University-Africa, Unoversite Cheikh Anta Diop, University of Dar es Salaam, University of Nigeria, and UP.

During the webinar, Prof Kupe reminded participants that in the United States the government bailed out banks and major companies during the global financial crisis of 2008 when they were in financial dire straits, and the same should apply to universities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. “It is universities that produce economists and accountants.”

Dr Samuel Stanley, President of MSU, said some of the small private colleges “are already in trouble” due to the effects of COVID-19 and his university is experiencing a \$60 million loss this fiscal year. It is expecting a \$130 - \$300 million reduction in its revenue in the next fiscal year, which starts in July. This is related in part to the decline in the number of international students who cannot get visas. “This reduction is a significant loss,” he said.

Prof Kupe said UP was not caught off guard in the rush to move to online learning when the South African government announced a lockdown due to the pandemic. “We were better prepared for the crisis as during the #FeesMustFall protests we had to resort to something similar.”

The University was able to create its UP Connect portal because it had invested R100m in its IT infrastructure last year. This portal enables students to access learning resources at no data cost. Furthermore, the University has a hybrid teaching and learning model that entails complementary contact and online learning, and 96% of its undergraduate modules were already online.

“We will be prioritising future spend in this area to sustain and expand our hybrid teaching and learning platform.” From donor funding the University has received recently, it will be employing tutors and student advisors to take some load off the academics, Prof Kupe said. “The COVID-19 pandemic is a game changer for how universities deliver education. Hybrid learning is the way of the future. “

He said universities could follow the MBA model: people attend contact lectures then go home and access online learning. “However, this model is not a one-size-fits-all one. Not everything has to be totally online. Education is a social activity which connects people and binds humanity.”

Dr Stanley, an infectious diseases expert, said 350 academics at his university will be trained on how to teach better and more effectively online. “There was a group that had never considered online teaching. Instead of dipping a toe in the water they jumped into the pool.” Many of MSU’s research projects were stopped, but some are being restarted. New research projects are being devoted to COVID-19 in terms of better therapies, diagnostic tools and Personal Protection Equipment. “Never before have we been more helpful to the state of Michigan than now.”

He said there is collaboration worldwide with countries including Uganda, Senegal and Botswana on the production of mechanical ventilators, using commonly available parts that are relatively inexpensive. “This is a great example of how the AAP has brought researchers together.” Dr Stanley said the pandemic has “highlighted [the fact that] we are globally connected”.

Professor Mpine Makoe, Commonwealth of Learning Chair in Open Education Resources at UNISA, stressed the importance of students having access to connectivity and that “online learning requires structure, systems and resources” to support it. Unisa has trained 300 out-of-school teachers on how to engage in online teaching after the lockdown.

Dr Amy Jamison, Co-Director of the AAP, said, “We hope that out of these dialogues will come new opportunities to partner across institutions on programmes and research that are mutually beneficial. We will continue to work to build connections that lead to shared resources and shared successes, and the University of Pretoria is critical to this mission.”

Watch the full discussion [here](#).

Ends.

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 112-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 that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 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. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In June 2019, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

As one of South Africa's research-intensive universities, UP launched the *Future Africa Campus* in March 2019 as a hub for inter- and transdisciplinary research networks within UP and the global research community to maximise 4IR innovation and address the challenges and stresses our continent and world is facing. In addition, UP also launched the Javett Art Centre in September 2019 as a driver of transdisciplinary research development between the Humanities and other faculties. In 2020 UP will launch Engineering 4.0. as a hub not only for Smart Cities and Transport, but also to link the vast resources in technology and data sciences to other faculties via Future Africa. These initiatives are stimulating new thinking at the frontier of 'science for transformation'.

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