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## MEDIA RELEASE

### University of Pretoria shows strong adaptability to online teaching and learning – survey

**PRETORIA** – Data from a University of Pretoria (UP) survey shows that the vast majority of lecturers and students at the institution managed to move relatively seamlessly into remote (online) teaching and learning mode.

In response to the national COVID-19 lockdown and in keeping with the recommendations of the Department of Higher Education, UP continued its academic programme remotely as of 4 May 2020.

The transition was relatively smooth because in 2015 – under the leadership of the then newly appointed Vice-Principal: Academic, Professor Norman Duncan – UP transitioned to a hybrid approach to teaching and learning. The hybrid system requires all modules to have a predominantly contact teaching and learning component, as well as a significant online teaching and learning component.

Consequently, when the University had to pivot to largely online teaching and learning, it was anticipated that it would be relatively easy for lecturers and students (particularly those who have been at UP for more than a year) to adjust.

After three weeks of remote operations, UP's Department for Education Innovation evaluated the effectiveness of the strategy. The findings are shared in a report that brings together data from three sources: the Learning Management System (LMS) known as clickUP; Blackboard Analytics; and a student-lecturer survey on online teaching and learning. The newly implemented software platform, EvaluationKIT, was used to enable students and lecturers to provide feedback in clickUP.

A total of 639 lecturers completed the survey about their experience of remote teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown period, and 61 763 (35.9%) module surveys were completed by students.

The clickUP data for the first four weeks shows that lecturers uploaded 443GB of content to 3 158 online courses and that 34 818 out of 35 939 (96,8%) undergraduate students used the LMS actively. Students accessed their courses 5 100 000 times during May 2020.

Statistics from UP's Security Services for the first week of the second quarter of 2019 undergraduate and postgraduate students entering UP to attend on-campus classes show that, on average, 23 319 students visited the campus on a daily basis. The number of students attending virtual online lectures on a daily basis (21 791) compares well with lecture attendance prior to lockdown.

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UP's existing hybrid flipped-learning model – Teach & Learn THE UP WAY – continued to work successfully even when the face-to-face teaching component could not take place and all learning had to happen remotely. The model requires students to prepare for lectures, complete pre-lecture assessments, engage in class and consolidate after class. “This model articulates fairly well with online and other remote teaching and learning formats because it requires extensive non-classroom-based (including online) activities on the part of lecturers and students,” the survey indicated.

The survey found that 47,7% of lecturers found it ‘easy’ to adapt to remote teaching, while 43% found it ‘difficult’ and 7% found it ‘very difficult’. Also, 16,4% of lecturers surveyed indicated that it was very difficult to maintain the same standards of teaching and learning as with face-to-face/hybrid learning,

Lecturers were urged to be present and available in different modes during regular scheduled lecture periods to discuss difficult concepts and to answer questions. This included a 20-minute Blackboard Collaborate session, 20 minutes of online discussions in clickUP, and 20 minutes dedicated to email and telephonic engagement with students.

The data shows the importance of lecturers and students continuing with teaching and learning during regular, scheduled class times. The immediacy of lecturers and their classmates helps students feel safe. The discipline of online attendance of classes during regular, scheduled class times keeps students on track.

Data related to both lecturers and students show that their computer literacy skills were sufficient to adapt to online learning during lockdown:

- 87% of students indicated that they are fairly/mostly/fully able to navigate clickUP.
- 2,9% indicated that their limited clickUP knowledge made online learning very or extremely challenging.

The data confirms that most lecturers were able to convert effectively to remote teaching and learning:

- 2,8% of lecturers indicated that their limited computer literacy skills made online teaching very or extremely challenging.
- 2,5% of lecturers indicated that they were unprepared to use the clickUP tools and felt overwhelmed, and 12,2% of lecturers indicated that they needed time to get to know the tools.

In addition to computer and LMS literacy skills, participating in an online environment requires a device, connectivity, data and general computer skills. The University has secured free or cheap data for all students and has loaned laptops to 1 937 students. Connectivity and electricity supply remain a challenge for a small number of students. A total of 83 students who are unable to study online have been allocated a telephone tutor.

Two comments from students experiencing difficulty with power and online access read as follows:

- My area is consistently affected by load shedding; next week I have a test and it is scheduled that we won't have electricity for two whole days, so this will make me lose a lot of marks.
- Internet connection is a real problem; where it takes others only 10 minutes to watch a 10-minute video, it takes me twice as long because of buffering or connection loss. Tests are a challenge because while navigating between questions it takes long to load.

More than 6 000 positive comments about online teaching were extracted from the survey data. “It should be noted that the transition from largely contact to remote teaching has been greatly facilitated by the commendable commitment of our staff and students’ to the latter’s success,” says Prof Duncan.

It is clear that a remote learning environment has several advantages, notably flexibility, working at a suitable pace, and watching and re-watching video recordings after class. However, as is to be expected, in addition to the need for on-site practicals, students miss interacting with other students and lecturers, and face-to-face class discussions.

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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 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 May 2020, 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](http://www.up.ac.za)