



07 April 2020

Dear Chair and Members of Council and Board of Governors

We hope that you and your loved ones remain safe and healthy in this unprecedented global health crisis.

We would like to share with you some of the contributions of our University to support the national efforts to respond to, and fight, the scourge of the COVID-19.

Rhodes University is using its human skills sets and its teaching and research facilities to facilitate academic continuity measures, as well as to actively support targeted volunteer programs which are aimed at responding to the global Coronavirus COVID-19 crisis and the national state of disaster declared by the President. All staff and students involved are participating for no personal gain, but to save lives and minimise the effects of COVID-19 on the people and economy of our country.

<p>1. National Task Teams drawing on RU Research Expertise</p>	<p>While many colleagues and students are making significant contributions at a local and provincial levels, some have been called to serve at a national level. Professors Justin Jonas of our Department of Physics & Electronics, and Professor Michael Rogan of the Department of Economics and researcher in the Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit, have been called upon in this way, Professor Jonas as technical adviser to the National Task Team to produce ventilators for the country, and Prof Rogan as a member of the Presidential Task Team looking into social policy measures to assist informal workers affected by the COVID-19 crisis.</p>
<p>2. Sanitiser Manufacture</p>	<p>The Faculty of Pharmacy is hard at work manufacturing sanitiser using the World Health Organisation procedure, and has to date distributed thousands of litres of sanitiser to hospitals and district clinics across the Eastern Cape to be used by health workers and patients. The work is being undertaken under the personal supervision of Prof Roderick Walker, a senior Professor of Pharmaceutics and registered pharmacist. Strict batch records are being kept, and the sanitiser product is being distributed at no cost to</p>

	<p>recipients on a no liability basis, under the direction of the East Cape Provincial Disaster and Security Task Team.</p> <p>A key partner in this effort is the SA Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (SAIAB), an associated institute of Rhodes University, which has sourced many thousands of litres of Ethanol to resource this effort.</p>
3. Protective Masks	<p>The University's Housekeeping Services Unit has manufactured several hundred protective masks which were distributed to community and essential healthcare workers. These are not intended to be medical grade personal protection equipment, but first line community care materials.</p>
4. Community Engagement	<p>The Rhodes University Community Engagement Division has been hard at work daily, distributing food parcels to the vulnerable, and posters, pamphlets, and related materials in English and isiXhosa, and using loudhailers to raise awareness and promote healthy practices everywhere where people gather, as well as working through the suburbs. Their impact has been huge.</p> <p>The SARChI Chair in Biotechnology Innovation & Engagement is working with the Community Engagement programme, as well as producing public understanding materials about the science behind the pandemic and how to understand one's body and keep healthy.</p> <p>These colleagues are ensuring that factual messages on responsible and hygienic practices during this period go out regularly and repeatedly.</p>
5. Mathematical modelling of the pandemic	<p>Prof Denis Pollney of the Department of Mathematics (Pure & Applied) is working with the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC) to develop mathematical modelling of the pandemic in the Eastern Cape and its implications in a variety of other areas.</p>
6. Communications	<p>The university's Communications and Advancement Division coordinates the University's work with the East Cape Provincial Disaster and Security Task Team. It is also coordinating the various communication and public engagement initiatives of different parts of the university, and is running a social media campaign related to COVID-19 issues in the town and its surrounds.</p> <p>Grocott's Mail is an award-winning community newspaper, run by the School of Journalism and Media Studies, which has continued</p>

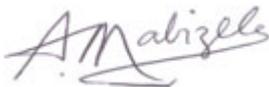
	<p>to operate throughout the national lockdown, for distribution across the community.</p> <p>Rhodes Music Radio (RMR) has similarly continued to operate throughout the lockdown, and is the only local community radio station which has done so. It has switched its programming to focus on promoting the government’s message around COVID-19, and debunking false news. It broadcasts over a 50km radius from the university campus in English and isiXhosa.</p> <p>The focus of all of these efforts is to inform, educate and raise awareness in our surrounding community, and to keep the message straight and correct false news.</p>
<p>7. Supporting the community during the national lockdown</p>	<p>The Psychology Department has produced guidelines to help us all keep track of our emotional and mental health during the lockdown. The Centre for Social Development and the SA Numeracy Chair have produced entertaining materials for parents to home school their children.</p> <p>Several individual members of the University are providing online video enrichment material for people at home during the lockdown, such as fitness classes and group support sessions.</p> <p>Many other individuals are volunteering in a range of diverse and worthy initiatives and projects in our Municipality, including providing meals and shelter to the homeless, destitute and vulnerable.</p>
<p>8. Corona Virus Response Task Team – CVRTT</p>	<p>An institutional Task Team was established by the Vice-Chancellor on 5 March 2020 to lead the University’s efforts to address challenges that might arise should there be a suspected or confirmed case at Rhodes University. The CVRTT put plans in place to raise awareness and implement preventative actions to mitigate the potential impact of the disease on the campus. They worked with stake holders across the university to develop and implement action and business continuity plans to respond to the risks of COVID-19 and mitigate the impact of social distancing and the national shutdown response to the COVID-19 crisis on our academic project and the institution in general.</p> <p>The Task Team has established COVID-19 related relationships and collaborations with the Grahamstown Business Forum, Local Municipality, and the Provincial Disaster Management Committee (PDMC) for purposes of establishing mutual awareness of each</p>

	<p>other's plans, identifying cross-cutting challenges, building synergies between the respective plans and agreeing on/formalising collaborative arrangements in the immediate, medium and long-term.</p>
<p>9. Academic continuity</p>	<p>All academic staff, heads of department, deans, education technology specialists, and academic support divisions are involved in a huge round-the-clock effort to move teaching and learning material into the digital domain.</p> <p>Given the deep levels of inequality and poverty in our society, we are fully cognisant of the challenges of implementing an online teaching and learning system, and that remote access to online learning materials might exacerbate already unequal opportunities. We do not want any student to be disadvantaged by our migration to digital platforms of course delivery. We are working together with Universities SA (USAf) to find nuanced ways of resourcing students who are not privileged to have the best connectivity and appropriate devices at their disposal.</p> <p>Members of the university are also involved in the national effort through TENET and USAf to ensure cost-free data access to learning and library resources at Rhodes University and other institutions in the sector.</p> <p>An online orientation programme aimed at introducing students to remote and online learning is being developed by staff of the Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL), and this will be ready when we resume our academic activities.</p> <p>All graduation ceremonies have been indefinitely postponed. The Registrar's Division has distributed digital parchments to students who would have graduated in April 2020 before these ceremonies were postponed. These students have been informed that they have graduated in absentia, and they will be invited back to a celebratory ceremony when circumstances allow.</p> <p>Postgraduate students continue to be supervised remotely by their supervisors over the Internet, using video conferencing and document sharing platforms. New postgraduate students, who are eligible to be registered at this time of the academic year, are being provisionally registered online provided that their supervisors are able to work productively with them while they remain offsite for the foreseeable future. All postgraduate students have full online</p>

	<p>support to library resources and the University's other networked resources.</p> <p>The Centre for Postgraduate Studies is mounting daily interactive online workshops to keep postgraduates motivated and make productive use of the time that people have away from their regular commitments.</p> <p>Many university staff members are working in the background to keep our technical network, servers and information resources available during this time.</p> <p>Others have remained on duty to see to essential campus protection, wellness, critical services, and to keep fragile research material alive.</p> <p>The university communicates regularly with students and staff to provide updates and information from the COVID-19 National Command Council, Science and health experts and USAf on the collective sectoral approach to salvage the 2020 academic year.</p> <p>Our Division of Student Affairs sends daily wellness tips and motivational SMS messages to students during this national lockdown period.</p>
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The weeks ahead will be challenging for all of us as this pandemic worsens and many more of our fellow compatriots succumb to the COVID-19. We hope that our efforts, combined with those of other institutions, and the appropriate personal behaviour of all of us, such as adherence to physical distancing and good hygiene, can do much to slow the spread of the virus and avert a human catastrophe.

Yours sincerely,



Sizwe Mabizela,

Vice-Chancellor & Principal.