



April 8, 2020

To: Dr Nikondo
DVC of Academics
CC: Mr Morne du Toit
Acting Vice Chancellor
Mr Garde
Registrar

NUST SRC Stance on Virtual learning

Following the robust discussions going on by professional bodies on the impact of Covid-19 on education, the Namibia University of Science and Technology Students Representative Council as the recognized voice of the nust students, has decided to come on board and air their stance on behalf of students.

Firstly, it is always important that students' views and cries are heard and put into consideration before decisions that affect them are made on their behalf.

The SRC recognizes the tireless efforts, ideas and contributions brought forth by different individuals to provide workable solutions amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on education.

These ideas include amongst other things, the shifting of academics to the online study mode.

As much as it may sound exciting and as a temporal solution to ensure the effect of Covid-19 is lessened on the academics. The SRC is concerned that populist resolutions are brought forth without giving honest thoughts to the impact this certain resolution will bring upon certain individuals. (This is a time of so much uncertainty and the SRC would not support decisions that seem to permanently bind everyone to one rule.)

The council does not mind having online studies as a temporary solution amidst the current situation caused by Covid-19, however it at least needs to satisfy the following concerns raised by the students which up to now, no answers have been received.

Following the announcement by H.E President Hage Geingob on measures to combat and contain the Covid-19 pandemic, it was observed that the university's leadership declared a lock down - which meant -

- the cancellation of all face to face classes including all assessments,
- the shifting of the mid-semester break and further extended it to allow time to properly plan on the way forward.
- a request for all boarding students to vacate the hostel premises with immediate effect - the students were sent back home and some to the villages.

Recently, the SRC learned that there are/ is robust discussion(s) on shifting courses to online mode of studies. It is worth pointing out that not all LECTURERS AND STUDENTS are computer-literate. Certain lecturers hardly use the already existing e-learning platform with excuse of not knowing how to navigate and use the platform

This again raises the very same questions we have been asking from the onset and in our view, have seem to fall on deaf ears. These questions revolve around the practicality of implementing this online mode of studies and ensuring that an equal learning platform is presented to all students.

The SRC's questions remain -

1. What is the Institution going to do for those students that were sent back to their villages to ensure that they are not disadvantaged with the online mode of studies?
2. A matter of fact is that not all modules/subjects can be offered on a virtual basis, as most courses are practical based. How will the Institution offer courses that are practical in nature online?
3. What would happen to students that are supposed to have done their work integrated learning?
4. The SRC holds a strong view that virtual learning could lead to a possible digital division and lead to an increase in failure rate due to disadvantageous circumstances and lack of online participation.

Already with face to face and distance mode of study that the institution offers, just in January 2020, about 12 000 students failed their second opportunity and supplementary exams. This speaks volume on the weaknesses and inability of the institution to deliver on the academics.

How then can the Institution assure us that online studies might be a success given that already some academics have a negative record on their delivery via the e-learning platform?

5. What would happen to first-year students including those that were sent back to their villages who never got an opportunity to do CUS or ICT, how will the institution convince us that this student will have a chance of passing their modules?
6. Another matter of fact is that not all students and learners have internet access and resources to cater for virtual learning. What would be the solution to ensure that these students do not miss out on classes? Especially that many do not have personal computers, tablets, internet connectivity and smartphones?
7. Will virtual learning be a feasible solution, as the whole country is looking into this transition?
8. Hence, will internet service providers be able to handle the masses and insure smooth internet accessibility for all?
9. How will the university compensate for the internet charges given that students were already charged for their modules and cannot add additional charges to students?
10. In the beginning of the year there were a vast number of students who had financial difficulties and couldn't afford registration fees. Also, some could not register due to the high tuition debts. Immediately after the lock down the institution sent out smses to students for them to settle their debts. Can the students be assured that this online study will not cause more financial pressure on students?

Our stance

Before we can excitedly declare resolutions, we need answers to the above questions.

It is very disheartening and disappointing that as an institution of higher learning is failing to conduct a proper survey that will provide an opportunity for all 12 000 + students or at least the majority to participate and thereafter draw proper stats.

A survey which seemed to have been constructed by certain students is being used as real stats from the institution. We protest against fairy tales of online studies that will disadvantage the already marginalized students from poor backgrounds and even for those who are technically advantaged we need assurance of them successfully passing without compromising the quality of their education.

Up until these concerns, as raised above are thoroughly considered and strategically approached and answered, we standing against a discriminating virtual learning mode, one that does not consider the less fortunate, one that does not consider the computer-illiterate community, one that does not consider that not all students and learners are academically strong to self-study.

Hence, we therefore propose that -

- online studies should be optional for students, and after all this is over those students who will not be opting for the online studies should be given the chance to continue their studies where they left off without any difficulties nor discrimination.
- the academic calendar be revisited and reconstructed to adapt to the current situation. Whereby 2020 academic year fuses with 2021 academic year and smoothly transitions in an uninterrupted 2022 academic year.
- shorter holiday days be considered to cater for the time lost during this period of uncertainty (2020 - 2022). This is not only feasible but also fair to all students with no preferential or privileged influence.
- should online studies be the solution- than lecturers and students are to go through a proper training on how to conduct or do online studies. Podcast, zoom, video conferencing reconstruction of proper study notes including referred study material and online books be uploaded on learning platforms accordingly.
- academic flexibility to be awarded to all students and students who might find it difficult to study online are to be given grace period and a chance to catch up.
- that the NUST webpage and the e-learning portal to be made freely accessible for NUST students who would be doing online studies as this is expected to eliminate the data connectivity issues.

The SRC proposes that the above be put into consideration and that management clears out the air and revert with resolutions that would not disadvantage any student, and ensure that the fair and equal learning opportunity for all students is not compromised.

The End

NUST SRC 2020