

University closures September/October 2016: FAQ FOR HUMANITIES STUDENTS (11/10/16)

How long will the University be closed? Is everything closed?

- At present university management has announced the closure of the university for a period up to and including Wednesday 12th October. The date for lectures to resume will be announced by the VC's office. Please monitor the UCT website for further updates in this regard (www.uct.ac.za)
- A full closure of the University means that staff have been sent home, so university operations are currently suspended completely; the library, departmental and faculty offices will not be available until further notice. Some faculty and academic staff may be answering email from home.
- Some essential student services (residences, Student Wellness Service, the Disability Service, the Refugee Rights Unit, student financial aid services, student treasury services, the Campus Protection Services and critical services in the Bremner building) remain open.
- While the University is closed, all teaching and learning activities should be considered suspended.
- While activities aimed at supporting learning during the closures are of course welcomed (e.g. online learning, off-campus meetings, email supervision of postgrad dissertations), it is recognised that not all students have access to online learning materials or activities arranged off-campus. Students able to participate in teaching and learning activities off-campus may find them helpful if and where they are offered but no student will be disadvantaged by their inability to attend such activities: you will not be assessed on any material covered exclusively in ad hoc off-campus sessions in recognition that not all students are able to take advantage of such sessions.

When will lectures be resumed? How will we catch up the several weeks of closures during the protests?

- The re-shaping of the schedule for the rest of the year must be agreed upon by Senate.
- As we have now lost more than three weeks of teaching, it's difficult to say how the rest of the year will be shaped; we will have to wait for official notification from university management. Various possibilities are under discussion; we will update you as soon as we know what is planned.
- It is confirmed that graduation ceremonies will not be happening this year, in parallel with last year's process.
- Any solution devised by university management will have to take into account students having travel plans, work commitments and other conflicting obligations over the usual vacation period; alternative arrangements for lectures and/or exams will be made for those students.

Will I be penalised for not attending tutorials during the weeks of partial opening?

- While lectures were technically running in the first half of the week of 3rd to 7th October, and for some days in the previous week, these have been extremely disrupted by protests, and many students have felt unsafe coming to campus at all. Departments and lecturers will be instructed not to count attendance during these weeks for DP purposes.

What will happen with work submission deadlines or tests that were scheduled during the closures?

- Clearly we cannot expect students to submit work or attend tests when lectures are not happening and campus is being disrupted. Nor can we expect students to continue working during university closures, as the library is not available and many do not have access to internet.
- Humanities academics have been instructed to re-set deadlines falling during closures, and to do so only once campus is open so that announcements can reach all students equally.
- They have also been instructed to allow work time between campus opening and the new submission deadline, i.e. we cannot expect you to submit work the instant campus re-opens.
- Postgraduate students should be advised that the examination process for research examinations will be delayed owing to the closures. Staff have been unable to access systems during the closures, so cannot engage with intentions to submit and/or examiners' reports. Once the university is again open, research examination will be prioritised.

If the semester is delayed, what happens if I've booked plane or bus tickets home after the official exam times and they're too expensive to change?

What happens if I have commitments over the December vacation and can't write exams or attend lectures?

- We do not yet know the shape the rest of the semester will take, although it's likely that exams and/or lectures may extend into January.
- Any solution devised by university management will have to take into account students having travel plans, work commitments and other conflicting obligations over the usual vacation period; alternative arrangements for lectures and/or exams will be made for those students.
- The university is also likely to make use of remote or online proctoring solutions for international students, so that you can write at home rather than having to re-book tickets.
- Residences will obviously remain open during the extended semester.

Will Summer Term courses be running?

- We have not had an official indication regarding the status of Summer Term courses, which usually run from mid-November to mid-December. As delays extend, it is increasingly unlikely that we will be able to fit in a Summer Term session. Please be assured that we will announce the status of Summer Term courses the moment we have an official ruling.

Will it be safe to return to campus when it's officially open?

- The University management is trying to balance safety concerns against the possible huge damage of closures and a delayed semester. We are very aware that students may be feeling threatened and insecure about being on campus, and that both the security presence and the ongoing protest action may cause anxiety. The University has a responsibility to ensure the safety of students, and the VC will not re-open campus until he feels that he can meet that responsibility.
- In response to the numerous complaints about the conduct of the security firm on campus, security operations are currently suspended and all complaints are being investigated as a matter of urgency. The VC has undertaken to find an alternative security firm to the current unsatisfactory provider if it proves unavoidable to reopen campus with security present.
- Negotiations between university leadership and the protesters are ongoing, and we remain hopeful that an agreement can be reached which will allow lectures to resume without further interruptions or mass action on campus.

I have found the protests extremely stressful, what kind of support is available for me?

During this week when the University is closed you can contact the following resources:

- Bhavani Krishna, Humanities Student Development Officer via email: bhavani.krishna@uct.ac.za (she will respond during office hours only)
- SADAG UCT Student Care line: 0800242526 (24 hours), free from a Telkom line.
- General SMS Help-line: 31393 (for a call me back)
- Life-Line: 086 132 2322 (Toll free-24 hours)
- South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG): 0800567567 (Toll free 8am-8pm)
- Suicide Crisis Help-Line: 0800567567 (Toll free 8am-8pm)
- Substance Abuse Helpline: 0800121314 (Toll free 24 hours)
- Government ambulance - 10177
- Groote Schuur Hospital psychiatric emergency C23 - 021 404 2175
- Groote Schuur Hospital trauma unit - 021 404 4112/4473

Once the University re-opens:

- Student Wellness: Lerushda Cheddie for bookings on 021 650 1017 (office hours)
- Student Wellness- for Medical consults with G.P: Faranaz on 650 1020 (office hours)
- Discrimination and Harassment office (DISCHO): Rashieda Khan 021 650 3530 (office hours)
- Campus Protection Services (CPS) – 021 6502222

Some helpful tips for dealing with stress:

- Given the current situation on campus, it is not uncommon if you are feeling anxious, stressed and under pressure. You might be feeling conflicted, ambivalent and a little helpless as well. What do you imagine you can do to relieve the anxiety? Any ideas?
- Have you considered exercising, meditation and deep breathing exercises? If that doesn't work for you, how about journaling, recording your feelings and thoughts within a stress journal.
- Learning healthier ways to cope with the current stressors are vital; all your efforts count as it offers you important opportunities to take your control back, to provide structure and care of the mind. Connect to others, reach out to a friend or family member you trust.

Most importantly, keep in mind and practice the 4 A's:

- **Avoid** unnecessary stress: it might not be possible to avoid a stressful situation that needs to be addressed, but you can try to reduce other additional stressors in your life. Learn to say No". Avoid people and places that stress you out.
- **Alter** the situation: If you cannot avoid a stressful situation, try to alter how you think and respond to it. Express your feelings rather than bottling them up. Be willing to consider a compromise. Be assertive, remember, you are as important as the next person.
- **Adapt** to the stressor: try to view the stressful situation from a more positive perspective. Look at the bigger picture. Adjust where you can and set reasonable boundaries and standards for yourself. Always examine your expectations and adjust again, if necessary.
- **Accept** what you cannot change: Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You may not be in a position to prevent or change it. Focus your energy and effort on what is within your control. Managing negative energies and processing feelings are important. Set aside time for relaxation and self-care.