



**VC Virtual Welcoming Ceremony Address  
Pre-recorded (on 25 January) for 29 January 2022  
YouTube Premiere Launch at 9am**

**Welcome**

Molweni, Goeie Môre, Good morning, Sanibonani, Dumelang

It is my great honour and privilege to welcome you all to Nelson Mandela University, at what is officially the start of the 2022 academic year.

We, as the Nelson Mandela University family, greet you all – parents, guardians, friends and other family members, and especially, our new students - with warmth, enthusiasm and a deep sense of commitment at the start of this academic year. Thank you for choosing Nelson Mandela University as your path to an exciting future.

The last two years have been a very difficult moment nationally and globally. The world as we knew it was thrust into turmoil by the coronavirus pandemic. This has not only been a health crisis, but a socio-economic one, which has deepened inequality and social injustice. It has impacted on everything we do. It challenges us not only to find ways to adapt to how we deliver our academic programmes, but also to reflect on the broader societal impact of the pandemic.

Much as the last two years have been very difficult, we also have a lot for which we can be grateful. Staff, students and the broader University community,

working together, found ways of ensuring our University delivers on its core business, and maintains the integrity of our academic programmes.

In the process we have deepened solidarity, and developed new ways of doing things - all of which stand us in good stead for the future. Now, as our country emerges from the fourth COVID wave in 2022, I am cautiously optimistic that we have turned the corner.

As you would have read in the communication we shared with prospective and returning students, we are striving to ensure that in 2022 we will be able to steadily and safely return to our campuses, as the severity of the pandemic continues to wane. We hope that as our students, you will be able to enjoy the full experience and benefits of university life, to engage more closely with lecturers and tutors, and to have an opportunity to make lifelong acquaintances and friendships.

If you participated in this week's virtual Faculty Welcome sessions, you will know whether you will be studying in a physical mask-to-mask classroom environment, or you will be learning online, or doing both. If you missed your session, do not worry, as everything is accessible online.

There will be a slide at the end of this short welcome address providing details on how to access these presentations, and the many other services we offer students at Mandela University.

### Pause

Let me assure you from the outset, that we are here to guide and support you and to make your transition to University life as seamless and enjoyable as possible.

### Pause

## **Our University**

We are very excited that you have chosen to join us - the only University in the world to be named after Nelson Mandela, an internationally renowned statesman, whose values and example continue to inspire us. We sincerely hope that as a potential Nelson Mandela University graduate, you will work with us in sharpening your capacity to serve the cause larger than yourself.

With our seven campuses, seven faculties, 3 000 staff members and 29 000 students, we are committed to deploy our scholarly missions of learning and teaching, research and innovation, and engagement, in the service of society.

We are a values-driven university, inspired by our iconic namesake's call to change the world. As a University whose paradigm and practices are underpinned by a social justice ethos, we hope that becoming a member of the Mandela University family will inspire you to work towards contributing to a more just and equal world.

### **Our Support in Times of COVID-19**

As Mandela University, we consistently strive to improve our facilities, processes and services. In these past two years, we have adapted to new ways of working, studying and living; and believe we are better placed to support you than ever before.

### **Pause**

### **COVID-19 compliance measures**

Much as we are striving to move towards normalising our situation, we need to be aware that the pandemic is still with us. From time to time you will receive updates and new information on COVID-19 regulations. I urge you all to take these seriously.

### **Safety and vaccination**

Your health and safety is our priority, which is why Nelson Mandela University is strongly advocating that *all* its staff and students be vaccinated. Vaccination remains our strongest defence against the severe effects of COVID-19.

We were the first university in South Africa to become an accredited public vaccination centre. We have dispensed more than 17 000 vaccinations to date to staff, students and members of the public. More than 70 percent of our staff are already fully vaccinated.

We are offering vaccinations at registration points, and at the clinics on each of our campuses. All our students are being asked to share their vaccination details so that we can monitor our numbers, because the greater our vaccination numbers, the sooner we can return to normal campus life again. And so I urge you to please make use of the opportunity as soon as possible, if you are not already vaccinated.

### **Virtual support**

Last year we provided an additional 1 939 laptops, 30Gig data bundles every month, and improved the quality of WiFi for students living both on campus and in accredited off-campus residences, to enable our students to complete their academic year.

Similar efforts will be ongoing this year. Mandela University's unequivocal commitment to ensure that none of our students is digitally excluded, will be given impetus through our student laptop initiative. Students are encouraged to look out for more information on this initiative.

Our shift to online platforms comes with new challenges. At Mandela University, we believe that cyber discernment is everyone's responsibility. To this end, I urge all students to take a moment and familiarise themselves with our cybersecurity guidelines.

### **Orientation**

Please do not feel daunted if this all sounds a little overwhelming! We are here to help, which is why from next week you will have the opportunity to participate in the orientation, or what is also known as the First Year Success programme. These interactions are aimed at helping you transition to university life. They will include sessions on how to use online tools like Moodle, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. You will receive information as to which programmes will be on line, and which will be mask-to-mask, and which ones will be a combination of this.

### **Psycho-Social Support and Coaching**

Our University offers a range of psycho-social support – from how to manage your time, through to counselling. The impact of the pandemic has led to world-wide concerns with mental wellbeing.

If you experience challenges in this regard, please do not suffer in silence. We can, and we want to, help anyone who feels overwhelmed, anxious or distressed in any way.

### **Conclusion**

As you embark on what is arguably the most exciting journey of your life to date, I would like to emphasise that you have been afforded a rare opportunity to obtain a tertiary qualification – *an opportunity that you should embrace and enjoy.*

Take advantage of all Mandela University has to offer. Get fully involved in both curricular and extra-curricular activities. And work hard. There is no substitute for that.

### **Pause**

Learn from those who have gone before you – those Mandela graduates who successfully completed their studies and have gone on to live the legacy of Madiba.

We have alumni from all walks of life, serving society in their own selfless ways, giving back and changing what they can where they can, in line with our values of social justice and equality, ubuntu, excellence, diversity, integrity and environmental stewardship.

Let them be your role models.

As you journey with us, I encourage you:

- To think and dream big
- To think beyond yourself and to always consider others
- To work hard
- To persevere,
- To liberate your own agency

Nelson Mandela University is an institution committed to giving every deserving student a chance to change the world.

We look forward to watching the story you are beginning here today unfold, and develop to eventually culminate in the completion of your studies and to you taking your place as a proud Mandela University alumnus.

**Thank you, baie dankie, enkosi.**

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