



Vice-Chancellor's Welcoming Ceremony Address

Pre-recorded on 2 March for 06 March 2021

YouTube Premier 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 2021 academic year.

This is certainly not how I expected to meet you all. None of us could have anticipated the state of the world today, almost a year after South Africa recorded its first COVID-19 case on 05 March 2020.

Ideally, you, your parents, families and guardians would have been on one of our campuses in Gqeberha or George, meeting some of the other 6 000 or more new

students who are starting this year. You would see our facilities first-hand, and personally interact with us and your new lecturers.

But due to the pandemic we are here – on your screens and in your homes – on the brink of an exciting new time in your life, a life at university, a life that sets you up for a future filled with endless possibilities.

Hopefully, you were able to join the recent virtual Faculty Welcome sessions to give you a sense of what lies ahead in your new academic home. If you missed it, do not worry, as everything is online, and 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.

We are here to guide and support you and make your transition to University life – albeit in very different circumstances - as seamless and enjoyable as possible.

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 who inspired us, and whose values and principles continue to guide us.

As we know, Tat' uMadiba believed in the importance and intrinsic value of education. His famous statement “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” deeply resonates with us at Mandela University.

That is why we, with our seven campuses, our seven Faculties, 3 000 staff members and 29 000 students, are committed to living his legacy in the service of society.

Our Support in Times of COVID-19

As a University, we consistently strive to improve our facilities, processes and services. Last year, like the world over, we adapted to new ways of working, studying and living. We learnt a great deal, and are now far better placed to support you, the graduates of 2024 and 2025.

Learning and Teaching in Safety

With the health and safety of students and staff as our priority, we have introduced a new multifaceted learning model to enable all students to pursue their studies from their homes, residences or on campus. This will be dependent on, and will be guided by each student’s chosen programme, their particular circumstances, and the trajectory of the pandemic.

Last year we provided an additional 6 292 loan laptops, and 30Gig of data bundles per month, to support this approach to learning and teaching. We further

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 continue this year.

Our ICT Services team is also consistently developing new automated systems to improve efficiencies and alleviate the need for face-to-face, or what we now call, mask-to-mask interactions. This includes everything from transport to library bookings.

Orientation

All of this may sound very overwhelming to some of you. Please don't be daunted! We are here to help. From next week you will have the opportunity to participate in the orientation programme. These online interactions are aimed at enabling you transition into university life. They will include sessions on how to use the online tools, like Moodle, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype for Business.

(I hardly knew what these technologies were nine months ago, but we quickly learnt to navigate the virtual world - and you will too.)

Psycho-social Support

We are aware that studying, especially in the current circumstances, can be stressful. We also offer various psycho-social support interventions – from advice on how to manage your time, through to counselling.

The impact of the pandemic has led to a world-wide increase in mental wellness issues.

Please do not suffer in silence. We can, and want to, support anyone who feels overwhelmed, anxious or distressed in any way.

COVID-19 compliance measures

Mandela University has introduced COVID-19 prevention measures in line with government guidelines. Students will be expected to self-screen (we have our own self-screening surveillance tool), wear masks and practice both social distancing and good hand hygiene. You will be regularly updated on these as they evolve in response to the pandemic.

The safety of our students and staff at this University is paramount, which is why we take COVID-19 compliance seriously. All students living on campus or who need to be on campus, are required to comply with our COVID-19 regulations. We simply cannot risk one another's lives.

Values

Nelson Mandela University is a values-driven university.

Our values of Diversity, Excellence, Ubuntu, Social Justice and Equality, Integrity, and Environmental Stewardship inform our institutional posture and identity. We expect our students and our staff to live by these values and to reflect them in dealings with each other, and the broader society. Please take time to reflect on our values and what they mean for you.

The Mandela University Story

I would like to share a story with you all.

It's the story of a young man who grew up in KwaDwesi, right here in the townships of Gqeberha in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

He began his studies in textile design at your chosen University in 2007, after securing a NSFAS loan.

While studying his course within our Faculty of Humanities, he worked seven days a week, using the University facilities, including the computer labs, and learning as much as he could.

He said he wanted to get “his money’s worth” because his funds were very limited. He was living at home with his mother, who was a single parent, and also had to pay for buses and taxis to get to university.

In 2010, this hard-working young man graduated.

The University recognised both his talent and work ethic; and in 2011 our Innovation Office assisted him to register his textile designs. It also invited him to join the University’s business entrepreneurial hub to help develop his own fashion label.

Today, this Nelson Mandela University alumnus, our former student, is a highly sought-after, internationally-acclaimed designer. Fashion houses from Paris, London, Amsterdam, New York, Tokyo and Milan want to associate with him and his international African brand.

Yes, you have probably guessed it. He is Laduma Ngxokolo of MaXhosa fame, whose journey in re-imagining traditional Xhosa culture, into high-trend, sought-after knitwear, started right here at your University of choice.

Laduma is far from our only successful alumni. There are many, some better known than others, who are successful far beyond bank balances and social media presence.

They are the teachers, social workers, entrepreneurs, artists, researchers, nurses, biologists, engineers, parents, and almost 100 000 graduates who are our alumni.

They are engaged citizens who are serving society in their own selfless way, giving back and changing what they can, where they can, in line with our values.

I shared Laduma' s story to inspire you, because we would also like you:

- To think and dream big
- To think beyond your present circumstances and to always consider others
- To work hard
- To make full use of the opportunity to get a world class higher education
- To persevere
- To be solution-driven, and to
- Recognise and liberate your own agency.

I thank you once again for choosing Nelson Mandela University. The core mandate of public universities like ours is learning and teaching, research and innovation, and engagement.

We are called upon to not only provide you with a life-changing educational experience, but to also serve a higher purpose, in the service of society.

I like to believe the countless stories of our selfless alumni, the game-changers, the community activists, the social and business entrepreneurs, the writers and creatives, the scientists, will inspire your own dreams, and indeed cement our quest to be an institution that gives every deserving student a chance to change the world.

So, what will your story be? What will you contribute to advancing humanity?

We look forward to watching your story unfold and witnessing your success as you graduate and take your place as a proud Mandela graduate.

Welcome to Nelson Mandela University. We hope you enjoy your time here..

Thank you. Baie Dankie, Enkosi Kakhulu.
