



9th October 2019

SUSTAINABILITY

Building a sustainable future for Wits - with thanks to Shirona Patel

The University of the Witwatersrand is a research-intensive institution committed to academic and research excellence that impacts on society and advances the public good. In order to fulfil its mandate, the sustainability of the University is a priority, be it financial, infrastructural or environmental. Wits has to remain sustainable and well-resourced, as articulated in the University's 2022 strategic vision, must develop the necessary physical and digital infrastructure to remain sustainable and must empower the Wits community to prioritize sustainability in context of the environment in which it exists.

Wits obtains its funding from the state, student fees and third stream income – the latter primarily comprising of funds committed to contract research and specific projects. Cognizant the factors in the funding environment and the higher education sector, Wits has crafted two major projects to ensure that it remains financially sustainable and able to fulfil its mandate. To this end, funds from the development of land (Frankenwald) owned by the University will be placed into an endowment fund to support talented students who may be financially disadvantaged. The second project, the Wits Centenary Campaign aims to raise funds for student support, research and infrastructural development.

The University of the future seeks to be 45% postgraduate by 2025 and will enjoy a significant digital teaching footprint that includes blended learning options, which in turn will create access for more students. At the same time Wits will empower students and scholars to think locally and to act globally around sustainability. Technology will be intrinsically infused in research development and new knowledge creation on a campus that is geared to serve curious, innovative scholars who are both problem-posers and problem-solvers. Project Quantum, a University-wide networking project was implemented to ensure that Wits is an ICT-savvy university and that the Wits community enjoys high-speed access to the Internet and data access. Wits is also reimagining both its physical and digital infrastructure to reduce its environmental impact, for example through adopting an energy efficiency strategy that includes the use of renewable energy options.

The international context for a sustainability strategy in higher education is embedded in the Taillores Declaration (1990) which raises the concern “about the unprecedented scale and speed of environmental pollution and degradation, and the depletion of natural resources”. It states further that universities “have a major role to play in education, research, policy information, and information exchange” to achieve sustainability-focused outcomes. As complex organizations themselves, universities can model for the community how an organisation committed to sustainability should operate. In addition, universities have the opportunity to provide their communities with graduates who have the necessary knowledge and skills to help transform their workplaces and to live as responsible local and global citizens.

Wits is committed to building a sustainable University through prioritizing sustainability and cross-cutting teaching and research; through thought leadership; and through building a green campus. To this end, Wits is in the process of building capacity and a coalition of like-minded people and teams to curate the numerous activities that are being undertaken in this area. This includes academic and research activities related to sustainability-linked teaching; existing campus and facilities initiatives; Wits' new energy strategy and efficiency programmes including rooftop solar PV installations; green buildings; building management systems; indoor lighting retrofits; sustainable hot water systems for residences; water, storm water and waste water assessments; food security programmes; transport systems; green procurement policies; land and waste management and the overall and health and wellbeing of the Wits community.



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Transformation is a core element of the University of the Witwatersrand's institutional mandate, is central to all aspects of the University's operations, and flows into all the performance indicators of Wits' institutional scorecard.

Wits is committed to creating an environment conducive to teaching, learning and research at the highest levels. To this end, the University adopted a transformation agenda framed by the national development goals, equity legislation, the United Nations Millennium Declaration and Wits' location on the African continent. At the heart of the process of transformation are the values enshrined in the South African Bill of Rights and the Constitution and a Wits experience driven by a culture of human rights and inclusivity.

Wits adopted an accelerated transformation programme in 2015 which outlines the commitment of the University to eight transformation priority areas including transforming the academy; reforming curricula through integrating diverse sources of the best forms of knowledge from within South Africa, Africa and across the world; implementing a new language policy; insourcing vulnerable workers; developing a supportive, inclusive institutional culture; adopting an inclusive naming policy to rename Wits' places and spaces; facilitating access to higher education and promoting a diverse and cosmopolitan residence experience. In addition, the transformation committees at the school, faculty and divisional levels have been established.

The University has made significant strides in mainstreaming some of the transformation priority areas and a revised plan is under discussion for implementation over the next five years.

With thanks to Shirona Patel