



18 December 2020

Dear colleagues in the CLM Faculty

As we head toward the end of the year that has probably been the most challenging in our lifetime, I want to send a final communique to all of you before the University officially closes next week.

Let me start by congratulating each one of you for making it through the unanticipated nightmare that was 2020.

All around the world educational institutions had to adapt to emergency onlineteaching. For some people this was a seamless transition, but for many without access to the internet, there were some serious hurdles to overcome. But we managed it. We adapted our materials to online delivery, negotiated deals with data providers and device manufacturers, and within the shortest time-frame all our students were equipped and our lessons moved to online platforms. While this emergency online teaching is no panacea, the feedback we have received from students, and preliminary results that I have seen, show that we succeeded in delivering, as best as we could, the high quality education that Wits is known for. Moreover, we were able to give our students the necessary support they needed to make this adjustment in learning. The numbers and awards speak for themselves. I am delighted to report that we have **graduated 2722 students** this year! The Faculty online team provided extensive support to academics and students. Agata MacGregor and Susan Benvenuti from the Wits Business School were winners of the VC's team Teaching Award. The duo was recognised for their student orientated assessment, which aided students with critical thinking.

The Faculty leadership has continued to meet throughout the year to attend to important Faculty matters. We are constantly assessing measures to support our students, and our academics. We appointed Dr Pia Lamberti as the Faculty writing manager in the second half of this year, and she has already held a number of writing workshops with plans for more in the new year. We have developed a research strategy which will be workshopped with all of the Schools in 2021. We are reviewing our licensing and subscription arrangements to ensure we save costs where possible, while still ensuring students have access to the best data and information available. This year we maintained our research output and we look forward to seeing what interesting research is produced in 2021.

This year we have worked closely with the Dean of Students and campus housing to ensure as many students falling under the social justice cohort as possible have been able to return to campus. We have asked that low-risk staff come back to campus – albeit on a rotational basis – to ensure we have some presence for students who may require support. This scenario is likely to continue for the first quarter of 2021 as we continue to teach online but still provide all the services needed to keep the university running.

We will continue with the excellent communications work done by many of our staff which kept the faculty staff in the news and playing an important role particularly in Covid-related conversations. We are working with our overseas offices to plan more short webinars that showcase the variety and depth of research in the Faculty. This will feed into the Centenary Campaign which will be a focus area for the entire Faculty from 2021.

Next year will see some staffing changes in our Schools. Professor Jannie Rossouw and Mitch Hughes both step down from their roles as acting Heads of Schools (HOS) in WBS and SBS. I would like to thank them for managing these Schools such a difficult year. Both Jannie and Mitch will stay on at Wits, so the new HOSs will be able to draw on their experiences as they start their new terms. Maurice Radebe will head WBS from 1 January 2021, and Professor Helen Duh is the new Head of SBS, also starting 1 February 2021. Professor Wesahl Domingo will, unfortunately, be leaving Wits at end of February 2021, and we have started the process to manage the interim transition and begun the search for a new Head of School.

We have started plans to develop a new Faculty building next year, which will be in the parking lot where the Tower of Light is. The current Faculty building will be used for SBS. The new building will house all the Faculty divisions and have a research section that will include the Mandela Institute. While these developments will be disruptive, the plans address the gaps in our existing physical resources and will leave the faculty with adequate infrastructure for our growth plans.

This year we have lost both staff and students in the Faculty: to Covid-19, to cancer, and horrifically to gender-based violence. I know many of you have been personally touched by Covid-19: some of you have had to take care of sick loved ones, some of you have yourselves been infected, and some have lost loved ones to this disease. And many people in this country (and around the world) have had to face terrible economic hardships because of the lockdown. This year has exposed the dreadful inequalities that characterize the world. In South Africa alone, around 2 million people have already lost their jobs. Many of these are women who earn the lowest salaries. Many of these are sole breadwinners and household heads who are responsible not just for children but often for extended families. Many of our own staff struggled with having to juggle Wits work, care and household work and home schooling. Hopefully the lockdown created was an opportunity for families to reassess the household division of labour and to create more equitable households. Ruth Bader Ginsburg said “Women will have achieved true equality when men share with them the responsibility of bringing up the next generation.” My hope

is that, notwithstanding the huge disruptions to our lives, the past nine months have been an eye opener for men in our society and that we will experience a little more equality in our lives.

For all of the disruptions we have experienced, it is important to bear in mind that, as a community, Wits staff have been protected : no one has lost their livelihoods as a result of the pandemic. This puts us into the most privileged bracket of South Africans, and more privileged than millions of people around the world who have had to take salary cuts, face retrenchment, or lost their livelihoods. In light of this, the Faculty leadership discussed various ways we could give back to those who have suffered most this year. We agreed request staff members to consider making a donation of whatever you can afford.

The Faculty Executive identified two charities to support:

1. the inner-city NPO **Mould Empower Serve (MES)**, operates in Hillbrow, Cape Town, Kempton Park and Port Elizabeth. They provide shelter and food to marginalized people – over 100 000 in Johannesburg alone. Many of the people who are fed through this scheme (the shelters have become oversubscribed since lockdowns started in March 2020) are foreign nationals. These people have fallen through the cracks since they are unable to access state support, and the vast majority work in the informal economy which was decimated by lockdown.
2. The second organization we identified is the **National Shelter Movement of South Africa (NSMSA)**, an NPO of 78 shelters across the country. The organization focuses on women who have been victims of GBV and recently launched a 24-hour hotline. In a country with outrageously high levels of GBV and *femicide*, shelters provide an important intervention that can prevent violence against women being fatal. All across the globe levels of gender-based violence have spiked as countries have locked down. South Africa is no exception.

In 2015 Advocate George Bizos, speaking about xenophobic violence – said “The people standing up and speaking out against the violence, in some instances at possible risk to their own safety, do so for no other reason than because that is what their ethical barometer tells them is the right thing to do”. Wits is proud to claim this great South African as one of our own. We believe he represented the values we try to instill in our students, and was an example of the what the Wits community stands for. Today the circumstances are different, but the call is the same – we need to listen to our ethical barometer and do the right thing. So as this virus continues to rage through the country and across the world, let us all find ways to do what we can, and to help others. In this regard, I would urge colleagues to consider making a contribution to the above charities – you can click here to find out more:

<https://www.wits.ac.za/clm/covid19---clm/donate/>

I wish each one of you a safe, restful and recharging break. Thank you once again for your service to the University. We look forward to reconnecting in 2021!

Imraan Valodia

Dean: Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management