

# Coronavirus, a cataclysmic disruption to higher education

WITHIN a short period of its devastating discovery, the invisible Covid-19 has unleashed mayhem, anxiety, depression, and immense human suffering.

Governments around the world have responded in different ways to the advent of the pandemic. Mostly, countries have instituted some form of lockdown to reduce the rapid spread of the virus.

The virus is not going away any time soon, according to scientists. The story of TB is a case in point. We have been living with this bacterium since the first wave of TB deaths in the 1800s.

The higher education sector has not escaped the cataclysmic disruption unleashed by the virus. Universities have been forced to close, and teaching and learning has now moved online.

This unprecedented reality has forced

educational institutions to develop and implement multi-model remote-learning systems comprising the use of digital, analogue and physical delivery of learning materials.

At the same time, the pandemic has also exposed the hitherto unresolved historic socio-economic inequalities in the country.

In this context, it is appropriate to caution that the current crisis should not be a time for grandstanding. Rather, it should be a time to acknowledge the existence of both historical privileges and the systemic disadvantages that continue to blight the higher education sector. It is thus important that the national response to the pandemic should not deepen these inequalities.

The Higher Education Minister Dr Blade Nzimande has aptly underscored

this challenge thus, that “we are constrained by the very same challenges we seek to address, poverty, inequality and unemployment. The very problems we seek to solve are the obstacles standing in our way”.

As universities begin to settle into online learning, they are called on to resolve structural inequalities in the form of ensuring “access of students to laptops, data and connectivity to conducive spaces to study”. Fortunately, the government has committed itself to mobilise resources to ensure these resources are available to all students.

As the post-school sector transitions to remote teaching and learning, there are, however, some hurdles to negotiate.

For instance, students will find them-

selves vulnerable to stress as a result of being disconnected from other students, and thus lacking the sense of camaraderie that comes from being on campus. Students will need some training and be given emotional support to ensure a safe landing.

Learning remotely should not only be about the provision of gadgets, but must be understood to be a means to providing a quality learning experience for students. It is also about reinventing higher education.

It is worth noting that universities have not been bystanders amid the unfolding developments. For instance, the University of Zululand established a Covid-19 combat team that will serve as a think-tank to monitor the effects of, and to combat the spread of the coronavirus.



Professor Xoliswa Mtsoe, Vice-chancellor of the University of Zululand.

## Phd student selected to attend top economics event

NALEDI HLEFANE

BONGUMUSA Prince Makhoba, a doctor of economics student at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), has been selected to participate at the 7th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting on Economics – a prestigious international event aimed at strengthening the economics sector.

Makhoba, together with eight other South African economics students and many others from around the globe, will join over 30 Nobel Laureates in Lindau, Germany, where he will interact with the attendees. The annual meetings unfold in different sessions (lectures, discussions, master classes and panel discussions) which are designed to activate the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experience between and among Nobel Laureates and young scientists.

After what seemed to be a long process, Makhoba said he is ecstatic to have been selected.

“I was encouraged by my supervisors, Professor Lorraine Greyling and Professor Irrshad Kaseeram, to send the application last year. After my application, I was nominated by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAF). Thereafter, the application went through a multi-stage international selection process and I was fortunate to be selected as one of the young scientists to participate in the 7th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting on Economics.”

Apart from learning from his industry counterparts, Makhoba is eager to meet the renowned economists he only got to learn about in textbooks. He expects the experience in Lindau to boost his confidence and international competitiveness, while also helping him to forge international relations that may culminate in future collaborations.

The meeting was initially scheduled to take place in August 2020 but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been postponed to August 2021.



Bongumusa Makhoba, a Doctor of Economics student, is thrilled to have been selected to participate in the prestigious 7th Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting on Economics in August 2021.

## Erasmus + Success Project kick-started at UNIZULU

SIYANDA MNTAMBO

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) has recently partnered with the European Union on a project that is set to increase the employability of its graduates.

The Erasmus+ Success Project is a European Union funded initiative aimed at strengthening the cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises in South Africa. It has its roots in an identified need to support the employability of graduates especially in tourism and business programmes by infusing new learning methods that have been tried and tested successfully in Europe.

The project has been kickstarted by the Department of Recreation and Tourism, in the Faculty of Arts, with the vision to over and above improve graduate employability; transform the university, the community and region; as well as support an inclusive and sustainable economy through good corporate and cooperative governance.

The UNIZULU team under the guidance of Professor Thandi Nzama, who is deputy dean: teaching and learning in the Faculty of Arts, recently visited the Haaga-Heila University, Finland, with the aim of having a kick-off meeting intended to outline the project, its timelines and implementation strategies.

“Most students in our department come from educationally disadvantaged communities. These students need sound development to compete better in the tourism industry. We have staff members, who are interested in merged learning and other innovative teaching and learning strategies. We are also involved in community engagement, hence the need for the institution to be part of this successful Erasmus+ Success Project.”

“This project will create opportunities for capacity building, knowledge sharing and best practices with the focus on the programme and national priorities. In South Africa, higher education institutions



prioritise the collaboration among universities or colleges, local communities, public and private organisations,” said Prof Nzama.

She added that the project will immeasurably benefit UNIZULU and will have an impact that will be measured through

improved teaching and learning (internal and external evaluation reports); 10 publications in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings; five articles published in professional journals and general media; and organised events, conferences and seminars.



# All hands on deck to prevent spread of Covid-19

NALEDI HLEFANE

SANITISATION, health screenings and barricading of pathways are some of the measures the University of Zululand is taking in order to ensure the safety of its staff on both the KwaDlangezwa and Richards Bay campuses.

In keeping with the general precautions of Covid-19, the university's Protective Services Department (PSD), together with the campus health clinic, are carrying out preventative measures at the main entrances.

According to PSD Director Charles Sehlogo, PSD staff members are the first point of contact at the main entrances and therefore sanitisation is critical.

“We must start the fight against the virus at the entrances. We have the campus clinic backing us up with its screening process as well. We sanitise and take the details of staff as they enter the campuses. To avoid the spread of the virus, we do not touch staff cards and only record the numbers on the cards and entry times. Individuals thereafter proceed to the next step which involves being screened, sanitised and offered masks,” he said.

Over and above this, Sehlogo said the department is in the process of acquiring equipment which will make their work even easier. He said: “We are going to install card readers in order to speed up the entry process by eliminating the contact between PSD staff and entrants. We have deployed units to patrol around and within the campuses to remind staff to keep their masks on at all times. We are putting up barricades which will limit movement to certain areas and these will continuously be sanitised. Other touch points such as tables and doors will also



To limit the spread of Covid-19, Protective Services Department staff members no longer handle staff cards but record the numbers on the cards and entry times as staff enter the institution.

be continuously sanitised.”

Siphosethu Ntombela, a BCom Accounting student believes that the installation of card readers is a great idea as it will limit person-to-person contact,

thus alleviating the spread of coronavirus.

Staff member Mfundo Magoso applauded the university for the measures that have been put into place to respond positively to the life-threatening

Covid-19 virus. “I had to physically come to the university premises during level five of the lockdown period and the measures were as strict then as they are now, in terms of wearing masks and being



Staff members are now sanitised prior to entering the university premises.

screened. I think enough is being done by the institution to fight the virus,” he added.

According to Sehlogo, the fight against coronavirus is a combined

process which requires all departments to execute various tasks. He thus urged everyone on the campuses to cooperate in order to tackle the virus and prevent its spread.

## DJ Facebuk gets ready to rock Miami

GCINA NHLEKO

IN addition to providing education that gives its students the competitive edge to succeed in their respective fields, the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) is also supportive of students exploring their entrepreneurship skills.

Twenty-eight-old Kwazi Zungu has long mastered the art of juggling academics and brand management. When he is not focusing on his studies, Zungu enjoys producing, mixing and playing tracks for house music fanatics. Zungu, who goes by the stage name DJ Facebuk, has two qualifications under his belt, a diploma in public relations and the highly sought-after LLB (law degree) which he recently completed.

His dedication to his craft has earned him weekly slots in regional and national radio stations including, among others, Ukhozi FM, Igagasi FM and Zululand FM, thus launching his career countrywide. It is this amazing track record that that saw him recently selected to perform in Miami, Florida in the United States in September 2020. He will be competing in a live performance with upcoming artists from America and Spain for a US \$50 000 (close to R900 000) prize.

DJ Facebuk has always been a driven individual and the entertainment scenery has always been his first love, amid understanding the value of good and relevant qualifications, hence his pursuance of studies in the legal and communications field.

“Being familiar with the entertainment landscape and assisting other fellow artists to better understand the contracts they enter into, motivated me to pursue a career (in the) legal (field), this after witnessing household names dying as paupers because of (their) lack of legal knowledge,” he said.

He is the brains behind the annual one-man show called the DJ Facebuk-Kwazi All White Event. It is aimed at celebrating top achievers at schools and to inspire students in institutions of higher learning. In addition, the event is a homecoming for former UNIZULU students who meet to reminisce about the good old times in a relaxed and jovial setting. Through his annual event, DJ Facebuk has also unearthed raw talent of up-and-coming DJs and music fanatics.



UNIZULU postgraduate student Kwazi Zungu is gearing for his performance in Miami, Florida, where he stands to win a \$50 000 cash prize.

On a personal front, he has shared the stage with renowned artists, including Zakes Bantwini, DJ Tira, and DJ Black Coffee.

In 2019, DJ Facebuk released his debut album titled “Tears of Pain” which includes a hit track titled “Zim’Zimu”. It is to this album that he owes being internationally recognised. To be selected as finalists, entrants received online votes from individuals who were keen to see them included in the Miami line-up. DJ Facebuk got the majority of votes and was originally scheduled to perform in June 2020 before the Covid-19 pandemic halted all events globally.

Over and above the actual competi-

tion, there are also ample sponsorship opportunities for the DJ as he will be performing at other overseas venues, thus ensuring a further boost to his profile.

A link is available for fans to view his performance in September. There is also a live website with updates of what promises to be a ground-breaking opportunity for the young DJ.

DJ Facebuk is currently registered for postgraduate studies at UNIZULU as he wants to specialise in other niche areas in the legal fraternity to ensure his competitiveness. The razzmatazz DJ also won the Go Bold award, courtesy of Hunters Dry and Metro FM in 2017. The world is definitely this inspired DJ's oyster.

PROFESSOR DEV TEWARI

Department of Economics, University of Zululand

WHEN president Trump called the novel coronavirus, the Chinese-virus, the libertarian and ultra-human-rightist questioned it as a racial slur which he denied and explained that it is a Chinese-virus because it has come from China.

This reply of president Donald Trump unsettled my mind and therefore, I looked through the pages of history and found some startling information. The current corona virus originated from the Wuhan city of China and there is no doubt it is in China. Calling it a Chinese-virus simply gives the location of the virus at its birthplace. However, one should know whether this birth is accidental or there are predisposing factors that give rise to such dangerous biological organisms which become a danger for the entire world.

Interestingly enough, China has given birth to many such biological organisms in world history, which have finally produced global pandemics and enormous damages to the global society. The first and foremost that comes to mind is the plague of the middle ages. Most Europeans knew it by the name of Black Death in the 14th century. This plague infestation occurred between the years, 1347 to 1350 and beyond, and wiped out about 50 to 60 percent of the population of Europe at that time and it became a recurring problem every ten years until scientists found the antibiotic cure of the disease in the 19th century.

The plague started following a famine in the Chinese provinces of Jiangxi and Zhejiang as early as 1330; it later spread to Beijing and other provinces of Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi, Henan, and Suiyuan (historically existed but now part of Inner Mongolia) by 1353-1354. That was also the time when the Mongols ruled China, parts of Russia and India, Korea, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. The Chinese therefore traded with Europe through silk routes and the plague also travelled together with trade. Another event when the plague was used as a biological weapon by Mongols, who ruled China at the time to

defeat Europeans in 1345 when Jani Beg, the Mongol King, attacked the Caffa port (modern name Feodosiya in the Crimean Peninsula) with the Black Death by throwing plague-infected bodies of his soldiers inside the port. From Caffa port, the plague was taken to Italy through sailors and then it spread to the rest of Europe. The second pandemic of plague also originated from the Yunnan province of China in 1855 and further spread to Hong Kong, India, and later to San Francisco in the United States through shipping routes. It killed some two million Chinese and 10 million Indians.

In recent times, a number of such virus-based diseases have emanated from China. The Asian flu pandemic was caused by a virus known as influenza A subtype H2N2 or Asian flu virus which spread in the Guizhou province of China in January 1957, and later travelled to the United States and other parts of the world. It killed nearly two million people.

In the same manner, the Hong Kong flu pandemic of 1968 was caused by a virus known as Influenza A subtype H3N2 (also called Hong Kong virus). Within a few months, it spread worldwide and killed about one million people, of which 50 percent were in Hong Kong. In 2009, the H1N1 Swine flu also emerged from China and impacted some 61 million people worldwide and about 575 000 died.

Similarly, the SARS outbreak in 2003 emanated from the Guangdong province of China. Now the corona scare and how it is killing people and economies of the world, one by one, is well known and we are trying to contain it.

The question that one would like to ask is, why these viruses generally originate in China; why not in India—the other populous country. Somehow it is not a well-researched area by scientists, but experts have now started exploring the development of viral diseases. It is now becoming obvious that these viruses are associated with the Chinese love for wildlife meat such as bats, snakes, pangolins, and so on. Both SARS and Covid-19, originated from wet markets where wild animal meat is mixed and sold

with other fresh produce. Most dangerous viruses of HIV and AIDS, Ebola, bird flu, swine flu have their birth in wild animals and are known as Zoonotic diseases.

Wildlife farming in China was promoted by the late Den Xiaoping in the late 1970s to allow peasants to provide sustenance. Over time, it grew into a strong industry and it has now become an integral part of the Chinese lifestyle. Since China became a trading nation in recent years, and supplies goods to the entire world, the risk of spread of local disease to worldwide destinations has also increased alarmingly in the modern era. The Covid-19 is the testimony of this. As the Corona scare is going on, we now hear about another Hanta virus causing deaths in China through social media. China, therefore, poses a great risk to the global community. However, the damage and the human cost of these diseases originating due to lifestyle consumption is unbearable, particularly in the population deficient countries of Europe and America; this is much more important for the west which is population scarce, unlike China.

The West values the human population as the most valuable wealth as the population growth is either zero or low. Somehow the western countries, when trading with China, have missed or have not considered at all this risk of enormous demographic loss for the long-range survival of their economies. Indeed, this is now an exogenous risk for many countries of the world to be developed or developing in today's time. Besides above, the economic loss to businesses, individuals and unemployment costs are certainly very large and cannot be written off as such.

The current Corona crisis has almost thrust the world into a recession and loss of human resources is enormous for the West. The West needs to rethink its trading strategy with China and history teaches us that trade with China involves the civilisation extinction risks and we need to design the strategies for compensation and civilisation-insurance policies. Perhaps the United Nations should develop a framework for handling such global community risks that arise due to increased trade worldwide.

*The author has written this article in his personal capacity and it does not represent the opinion of the University of Zululand.*