

Dear Students

Background

As you would have seen from a recent NMMU Communique, the court-mandated mediation process has unfortunately not resulted in the desired outcome. The university has accordingly decided to implement a range of varied teaching and learning approaches, across its faculties, in order to fulfil its obligations to all NMMU students.

In the current environment, the Faculty of Law is in favour of a blended-learning approach that will obviate the need for face-to-face class sessions. In doing this, the Faculty is acutely aware of some of the difficulties that students have encountered during the past few weeks. As we move towards making use of blended forms of learning, we realise and appreciate that there will be a number of students who, despite the best efforts of the NMMU and the Faculty, may nevertheless be unable to access suitable computer devices and / or wifi / data to enable them to participate during the coming weeks. It is hoped, however, that as many students as possible will actively attempt to participate, by making use of a range of Information Technology assistance being offered by NMMU ICT Services (including computer access and free access to NMMU websites and certain databases on- and off-campus). Our hope is that these interventions will encourage and allow the bulk of students to attempt to complete the academic year. The Faculty will do its best to reasonably accommodate students who experience challenges in this regard, as discussed below.

The Faculty is deeply committed to maintaining the quality and standards associated with its offerings. As we move to a guided self-study approach, with extensive use of our online platform (Moodle), the maintenance of academic integrity, balanced with due sensitivity in relation to the diversity of our student body and the exceptional circumstances in which we find ourselves, remains pivotal.

Teaching and learning

- All necessary learning material will be placed on Moodle during the coming days, supplemented by additional notes and study letters pertaining to critical content where applicable;
- For students that have not been trained in Moodle or who require additional support when making use of this platform, a document is attached including appropriate links, explanations and university resources (e.g. the NMMU Help Desk) designed to assist students to cope;
- Please also note the various initiatives, communicated by the university, that enhance access to online learning resources (e.g. through the “zero data cost” route or via municipal libraries for students off-campus).

Assessments / Class marks

- The Faculty continues to require a sub-minimum of 40% for a student to obtain examination entry in each module, and the weighting of class marks and examinations in law modules (typically 40% : 60%) remains unchanged;
- All students will typically be granted two assessment opportunities, as usual, as well as a supplementary / special assessment where necessary (for a student who has not had two opportunities because of incapacity or where the class mark remains below 40% after the two main opportunities);
- In a departure from the norm, the class attendance requirement is removed for this semester. The Faculty has also decided to give students the benefit of having their *best* assessment mark count as their DP for each module. As a result, in cases where one test has already been written in a module, the second assessment opportunity is not compulsory for this semester if a student is satisfied with their mark. The first assessment mark becomes the class mark for that module in this case. Similarly, in cases where two assessments have already been completed in a module, students will enjoy the benefit of the best mark out of the two counting as the class mark;

- Lecturers will, in the coming days, communicate regarding assignments and other appropriate forms of class assessment. Queries may be directed to academics and Heads of Department where necessary.

Timelines

In developing a set of workable timelines, the Faculty has again endeavoured to balance a flexible approach with practical challenges likely to be experienced by students and the significant need to ensure academic credibility at all times. The Faculty does not envisage the need for further face-to-face forms of lecturing in achieving this outcome. The following timeframes are applicable at this stage:

- 31 October – 6 November: Teaching and learning material uploaded and students arrange appropriate access to material electronically (or in hard copy where necessary); Assessments will be set and uploaded;
- 7 November – 21 November: Students work through the material and submit assessments as soon as possible;
- 21 November – 27 November: Marking, and student preparation for special submissions / examinations;
- 28 November – 2 December: Special submissions (e.g. for students who still do not have the 40% sub-minimum);
- 3 December – 9 December: Marking of special submissions.

In modules where no assessments have yet been written, this should be considered to be a guideline and lecturers may communicate more specific arrangements. Queries in this regard may also be addressed to lecturers / Heads of Department in due course.

Paper-based requirements

The Faculty reiterates its concern for those students who, despite the best efforts of the NMMU ICT services, will be unable to access computer devices, wifi / data and Moodle to enable them to participate meaningfully in the above-mentioned programme, and who may feel prejudiced by the approach being adopted. Students who experience such difficulties

are requested to contact their lecturers and to alert them of this immediately, so that hard copies of all material and assessments can be made available for collection.

Examinations, undergraduate assignments and treatises and post-graduate students

The Faculty understands that the forthcoming examinations are of concern to students, particularly final years hoping to complete their degrees. The Faculty will communicate again once information relating to the timing of law examinations is available. As you may have noticed, the Executive Committee of Senate of the NMMU encourages students to prepare to sit for examinations before the end of the year. We hope to provide further detailed information in this regard by 4 November.

Undergraduate students who are registered for research assignments and treatises should continue to work expeditiously towards completion of these electives. Further information relating to revised deadlines in this regard will be provided as soon as possible.

Post-graduate students are encouraged to continue to research and liaise with their supervisors and students hoping to submit their treatises / dissertations and theses for possible 2017 graduation are encouraged to finalise their work and submit as soon as possible. The original deadline of 2 December remains in place in this regard. Students unable to comply with this deadline will have until 30 January 2017 to submit, although there is no guarantee that the examination process will be completed in time for April 2017 graduation for students submitting after 2 December.

Questions?

For all general queries pertaining to this communication, please email lawhelp@nmmu.ac.za; For module-specific questions, kindly contact the lecturer concerned and, if necessary, the Head of Department in question.

Finally, we wish you well as you proceed with the next phase of your studies. Rest assured of our full commitment to provide whatever assistance is possible to enable you to successfully complete the academic year.

The Faculty of Law

NMMU