



NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
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International Relations News

Official Newsletter of the Department of International Relations



2020

Internationalisation in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic



Academic, social and cultural activities of the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), as it was the case with other educational institutions, have been severely affected by the unprecedented and disruptive nature and impact of COVID-19.

Against this background, the University in general and the Department of International Relations in particular has to devise response strategies and actions to respond to the immediate challenges posed by COVID-19. One of the immediate challenges was how to continue with the University mandate of teaching, learning, research and community engagements or services in unpredictable and uncertain times. In a nutshell, it was about how to save the Academic Year.

When His Excellency Dr Hage Geingob declared on 18 March 2020, that a State of Emergency exists in Namibia following the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, the Department of International Relations had to deal with the safe return of NUST students who were at international partner universities mostly in Europe. The Department was also facilitating the departure of international short-term visiting academics and other experts who were on campus. In March 2020, the University had six (6) students outside Namibia doing internship or a semester abroad, 15 international exchange students, and three short-term visiting academics and other experts who were on campus.

The immediate responses regarding the safe return of students included finding financial resources within a resource-constrained environment to purchase their return flight tickets and booking chartered flights when international borders were closed. The University has also experienced challenges with repatriated students who had to be quarantined upon their return.

The Department had to find quarantine and accommodation facilities, an activity that we could not have foreseen, and thus had not budgeted for.

The Department further has to deal with renewals of expired visas as well as issuance of Student Permits when Immigration Offices in most instances were operating remotely. In the case of full degree international students, the majority did not have their Student Permits considered when the State of Emergency was declared. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security was in the process of considering the Student Permits. The above had serious implications, as these students could not open bank accounts to receive money from their home countries. They also could not travel home even if travelling was permitted, as there were risks involved in being allowed to enter Namibia upon their return. One of the consequences of COVID-19 was the social and emotional impact on international students who remained in Namibia and did not have access to family support systems. During the 2020 Academic Year, international students constitute six percent of the NUST student population.

Against the background of COVID-19, the Department had to reconsider and think outside the box in developing and implementing strategies and modalities for mobility programmes, activities, and international training programmes that were conceptualised in a context where physical mobility of staff and students was the norm. The immediate impact of COVID-19 on international partnerships

and internationalisation was the abrupt cancellation of international conferences and events resulting from restrictions on travel and public gatherings.

Despite the devastating effects of COVID-19 on universities, societies, communities and livelihoods, it has also offered discernment opportunities for humanity to rethink our reasons for existence, and our interdependency. COVID-19 has demonstrated that there are global challenges such as poverty, quest for social justice, inequality, exclusion and impact of climate change on the environment and livelihoods requiring solidarity and collective actions. In the case of higher education, COVID-19 has reconfirmed the value and relevance of internationalisation. The other lesson that we have learned is the need to continuously rethink and reflect on the fit for purpose of our institutions, systems and processes, and to make them innovative, non-bureaucratic, resilient, and effective and efficient to respond to immediate needs. The other lesson is for Universities to act in the best interests of students at all times and to put them at the centre of our interventions, to collaborate and communicate effectively, both internally and externally, and always to act in harmony.

It is our expectation that the University Strategic Plan (2021-2025) would be premised on some of the lessons that we have learned from COVID-19, especially the need for ICT infrastructure development to respond effectively to virtual teaching, learning and internationalisation.



Departmental Events

Women and Girls in Science Panel Discussion



The Acting Vice-Chancellor at the time [front centre], pictured with NUST staff, UNESCO and NATCOM Representatives and the panel members [back]

In February, the Department hosted a Panel Discussion to commemorate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. The event was sponsored by the Namibia National Commission for UNESCO, and focused mainly on profiling professional women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts/Design, and Mathematics (STEAM) fields in Namibia.

The selected panellists were Dr Smita Francis (Engineering), Ms Loide Uushona (Science), Ms Johanna Amunyela (Technology), and Ms Una Ferreira (Arts/Design). They shared their personal experiences and encouraged girls, especially high school girls, to pursue studies and careers in STEAM. They highlighted in their experiences the unique challenges they are facing as professional women in male dominated fields.

The Panel Discussion was well received and appreciated by amongst others, the 60 female learners in attendance from A. Shipena, Immanuel Shifidi and Hage Geingob Secondary Schools. In addition to the learners, invited guests, including the Director and



Panellists Dr Smita Francis, Una Ferreira, Loide Uushona, and Johanna Amunyela

UNESCO Representative to Namibia, the Acting Vice-Chancellor of NUST, representatives from the National Commission for Research, Science and Technology (NCRST), and the Secretary-General of the Namibia National Commission for UNESCO. Other attendees were representatives of the Namibian Society for Engineers (NASE), Namibia Association for Women in Science (NAAWIS), the University of Namibia, Django Girls Windhoek, Deans of NUST faculties, and teachers representing the invited schools.

Ms Paulina Haikola, International Relations Officer, organised the Panel Discussion as part of a series of internationalisation on campus activities implemented under a DAAD funded training course called, "Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES)". The professional development course is an 18-month project-oriented undertaking by professionals involved in the Management of Internationalisation at their universities. Ms Haikola's training began in March 2019 with a workshop in Hannover, Germany, and concluded in July 2020 after a COVID-19 induced virtual workshop. The DAAD DIES Programme also offers three other training courses for Deans, university leaders in quality assurance, human resources and operations management, and proposal and grant writing for researchers.



A learner from Hage Geingob High School contributing to the discussion



Students listening attentively to the panellists



Department Hosts first Virtual 2020 IEW Public Dialogue

The Department of International Relations hosted its annual International Education Week (IEW) from 07 to 09 September 2020. The objective of IEW is to promote the values of internationalisation on campus through various activities. The 2020 IEW theme was “International partnerships in the context of COVID-19 and beyond.”

Whereas previous years’ activities included public dialogues, debates, luncheons, movie nights, study abroad fairs and international food stalls, this year, all the activities were virtual and fewer in number. They included radio interviews with the Department staff and international students, a televised Panel Discussion through the NBC COVID-19 Communication Centre that focused on the 2020 IEW theme, and a Virtual Public Dialogue through MS Teams with a prominent international education expert, Dr Samia Chasi, Strategic Advisor at the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA).

In her address, Dr Chasi highlighted the complexity and multitude of challenges faced by universities in terms of student services and teaching and learning activities during COVID-19.

“Not all international students were able

to travel home. Whether they remained on campus or were moved to alternative accommodation off campuses, their host institutions were required to address issues of continued care and service provision for them”, she emphasised. Highlighting the complexity of challenges, she indicated that, “universities often had to accommodate international students on a case-by-case basis, requiring ad-hoc and tailor-made solutions.”

Dr Chasi noted that COVID-19 has led to innovations not only in service delivery, but also in teaching and learning, where many universities opted for blended methods. She concluded that in order for universities to meet their internationalisation mandates in the post COVID-19 era, it is necessary to embrace technology and to rely less on traditional approaches. She emphasised that universities will need to focus on the pursuit of knowledge exchange rather

than mobility of people, and strengthen internationalisation at home activities, and internationalise the curriculum through approaches such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL).

The Virtual Public Dialogue was well attended by NUST Senior Management, University of Namibia counterparts, and partner universities in Europe as well as NUST students who listened in and contributed to the lively discussions.



Dr Samia Chasi

Partnership Engagement

Conference for Research Managers

More than 400 international delegates representing various countries, attended the Annual Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) Conference in August. It was held virtually due to COVID-19. The Conference is an annual opportunity for Research Management and Innovation Professionals to network, share experiences, and keep abreast with developments in their field. Attendants represented countries in Asia, North America, Europe, and different regions of Africa. This year’s theme was

“From Support to Strategy to Impact – Broadening the Scope of Research and Innovation Management.”

“The conference provided interesting and exciting insights and lessons that could be used to further develop the field. The conference had one integrated track covering a range of topics, which allowed for knowledge sharing throughout the entire continuum of research, innovation and technology transfer,” recalls Dr Matros-Goreses, Director of the Project Services

Unit, who was the chair of the Organising Committee.

NUST staff members from the Projects Services Unit and the Library Services hosted various sessions. Conference topics included Research Capacity Development, Leadership and Professionalisation in Research Management, Research Data Management Systems, Core Skills for a Research Support Office, Research Grant Administration, Community Impact of Research, and Open Access Publishing.



Strengthening Ties with North-West University

Despite challenges due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, NUST has managed to stay engaged with international partnerships. One such fruitful partnership has been with North-West University in South Africa.

The partnership deepened with the visit of a 12-member delegation to NUST in March. The visit amongst others, focused on liaising with counterparts within various faculties to discuss collaboration in interdisciplinary research projects that address social issues prevalent in Namibia and South Africa. The visit culminated into a presentation about multidisciplinary projects, collaboration and funding opportunities for joint interests between the two universities and other international partners.

During the second semester, NWU's Faculties of Humanities, and Natural & Agricultural Science, and NUST's Faculty of Human Sciences, hosted a six-part research webinar under the theme of "COVID-19 and Insights from the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Perspectives from the Global South." The webinars consisted of presenters from NWU, NUST and IUM, and have covered various topics such as Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Intellectual Property Social and Linguistic shifts during COVID-19, Gender Dynamics, and Therapeutics and Aetiology.

Feedback from the participants indicated that the series were well organised and enlightening.

NUST and NWU have a long standing partnership that includes program benchmarking, joint research projects, mobility schemes, and joint degrees.



NUST Acting Vice-Chancellor, Dr Niikondo (front middle), with the NWU delegation and other NUST staff members

Online Wastewater Management Training

Five staff members from the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (DCEE) undertook a short training online course on wastewater management.

The four-day course was presented by Drs Fabio Polesel and Enrico Remigi, who are Wastewater Process Modellers at DHI Denmark, an international software development consulting firm, and was sponsored by The Windhoek Goreangab Operating Company (WINGOC). The training was facilitated using MIKE powered by DHI's WEST simulation modelling software. The wastewater treatment software is widely used for the treatment plant operation management and performance assessment.

The DCEE offers various programmes in Water Engineering, and the software will be incorporated into programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is essential to ensure wastewater is treated sufficiently prior to disposal into the environment in order

to prevent the pollution of scarce water resources and negative public health outcomes. "The aim of the training is to equip staff members with the knowledge to use the software for academic and research purposes in the wastewater treatment field," noted Dr Chris Reynders, a Senior Lecturer in the Department who has organised, and also took part in the training.

Ms Truddy Theron-Beukes, also a Lecturer in the Department, agreed that "wastewater treatment entails complicated processes with various bacteria species doing the work and learning to model these processes was an enlightening experience. It improved my skill levels and can be used to make teaching easier."



NUST and B360 Implement Virtual Volunteering

NUST and B360 Education Partnerships have adapted to the challenges and restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic by moving their activities to online platforms.

The declaration of the State of Emergency in Namibia in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 called to an abrupt and premature end to the B360 expert assignments that were underway at NUST earlier this year. All B360 expert assignments for 2020 were subsequently also cancelled. Despite these cancellations, B360 was eager to continue supporting academic activities at NUST as well as to find means to continue activities that were planned to take place on the NUST campus.

Career Starter Week Workshop Moved Online

The first of these was the Career Starter Week (CSW) Workshops, which were initially planned for June and July 2020. In April, the Department of International Relations and B360 began planning to move the CSW workshop from face-to-face to an online mode of delivery. The outcome was the six-week Online Career Starter Programme (CSP), which was piloted in June and July. Course materials were posted and accessed online by the participants. Mentors met with their CSP groups in live online sessions twice a week to discuss the materials.

The aim of the Online CSP is similar to that of the CSW workshops, namely, to improve the employability and marketability of Namibian university graduates by focusing on the development of employment application materials such as CVs and Cover Letters as well as job interview training. The Online CSP programme also includes modules on organisational structure, time and project management, entrepreneurship and finance fundamentals, amongst others.

The Online CSP involved Switzerland-based mentors working closely with small groups of young Namibian graduates and undergraduate students. Namibian professionals from industry also provided inputs by way of recorded videos addressing topics covered in the different CSP modules. During the CSP Pilot, 5 Swiss mentors worked with 12 young Namibians over the twelve-week period. Bank Windhoek sponsored mobile data for the participants, thereby ensuring effective participation by all in the CSP.

Following the successful hosting of the CSP Pilot, NUST and B360 have decided to run the Online CSP again during October and November 2020. During this cycle, eligibility was extended to any unemployed Namibian university graduate. Thirty young Namibians graduates were accepted to work with 12 Switzerland-based mentors.

"COVID-19 forced us to cancel the in-person CSW workshops, and we were able to respond to this in a dynamic manner by adapting the programme to come up with the online Career Starter Programme. The most important thing is that we can continue to assist unemployed university graduates in their search for meaningful employment," emphasises International Relations Officer, Nico Smit.

Virtual Public Engagement Activities Become a Reality

As discussions with B360 regarding moving the CSW online were ongoing, the Department of International Relations engaged B360 Expert, Dr Eva Bilhuber Galli, in talks to facilitate a virtual learning Research Fellow Talk. Dr Bilhuber Galli was one of the B360 experts whose assignment to NUST was cut short in March, and consequently, a Research Fellow Talk was cancelled.

A Virtual Research Fellow Talk was organised and took place on 08 July 2020 through MS Teams with Dr Bilhuber Galli presenting, and Nico Smit moderating. More than sixty participants have registered for the Virtual Research Fellow Talk. The use of the online platform facilitated the inclusion and participation of participants from South Africa and Botswana, thereby making the Virtual Research Fellow Talk a truly international event.

A third Virtual Volunteering activity involved Dr Thomas Schneider, who was scheduled to visit NUST for a guest lecturing assignment in July and August 2020. In the wake of the cancellations of all B360 expert assignments for 2020, the Department of International Relations began working with Dr Schneider to plan a virtual public lecture addressing "Business Management in the Digital Age", which took place on 17 September 2020. Seventy-two individuals registered for the Virtual Public Lecture. Majority of the participants were from private sector organisations and national industries.

Both the Virtual Research Fellow Talk and the Virtual Public Lecture received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the respective participants, as both events were deemed extremely insightful and beneficial.

"We are incredibly happy to have been able to successfully host these two virtual events, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. We have been able to adapt and continue to plan and host activities that allow us to engage with, and serve our stakeholders," said Nico Smit.



NUST and UNDP Host Hackathon for Public Service Delivery



UNDP Resident Representative Ms Alka Bhatia [second from left] and Special Advisor to the Prime Minister, Advocate Nangula Mbako [centre], hand over prize to the winning team

In July, about seventy teams of young innovators registered to take part in a Virtual Hackathon aimed at improving public service delivery. The hackathon was initiated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Namibia in partnership with NUST's ICTechHub and Green Enterprise Solutions, a national company.

The ten-day event called on young innovators, tech experts, solution designers, and service delivery experts to compete in developing innovations and ideas that will address challenges experienced by the Government in service delivery.

"This is our way of contributing to public service improvement through citizen-driven innovation. It allows the country to benefit from the creative energies of its young people," explained Ms Josephina Muntuumo, a Computer Science Lecturer.

Women led all the winning teams. The first prize of USD 5,000 went to a team that made a multi-stakeholder e-commerce platform. A team that showcased an e-Passport Service for the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security won USD 3,000. The third prize winner, who has received USD 2,000, created a Traffic

Management System for the same Ministry. Their innovations will be incubated at a local IT company before handing them over to the custodian Government offices.

"Through the hackathon, we showcased the talent amidst our young Namibians in improving and digitalising services. Providing such multi-stakeholder platforms between innovators, NGOs, government agencies and the private sector allows innovation to benefit all citizens," remarked Ms Marly Samuel, Tech Innovation Coordinator at the ICTechHub.

New DAAD Lecturer in Namibia

Ms Barbara Liebel, who was the DAAD Lecturer in Namibia since May 2017, has returned to Germany earlier than planned due to COVID-19. She was able to continue her work remotely until the end of August. Ms Liebel had a fruitful and productive term, teaching at the German Section at the University of Namibia, holding consultation hours at NUST, and hosting and participating in various educational and cultural activities.

A key accomplishment and cornerstone of her legacy, was driving the founding of the Association of Namibian-German Alumni (ANGA), a voluntary and independent organisation for individuals whose studies were funded by the German Government, and who have studied in Germany for three months or more. The Organisation aims to strengthen academic, professional, and cultural cooperation among Namibian, Namibian-based and German Alumni. Since its founding, the Association has organised two meetings in November

2018 and June 2019, as well as a conference in December 2019 under the theme "The Fourth Industrial Revolution: Opportunities and Challenges for Namibia."

Unable to bid farewell to NUST colleagues in person, Ms Liebel sent a farewell email message expressing gratitude for the support and collaboration over the years.

She sums up her experience in Namibia as follows: "Working as a DAAD Lecturer in Namibia was a very enriching, exciting and inspiring experience for me and I am genuinely grateful that I had the chance to meet so many interesting and wonderful people."

As of September 2020, Ms Julia Gambadatoun, took over the reigns as the new DAAD Lecturer in Namibia, working remotely due to the Pandemic.



Student Experiences

Surviving the Pandemic

Kuda Mushayavanhu, *International student enrolled in the Masters in Journalism programme.*

“We will be implementing a state of emergency.” These words by President Hage Geingob on 17 March 2020 had a chilling effect upon my spine.

Confused, thoughts crossed my mind as I felt a growing heaviness and discomfort in my stomach. Was I going to complete my studies or would it be a wasted year?

I arrived in Namibia with big dreams and expecting to get to know the land of the brave. Instead, I was faced with a year I never anticipated. To say the least, it is unnerving to be new in a foreign country during a global pandemic. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, it disrupted campus life with the “Stay Home” mantra being strictly enforced causing the cancellation of lectures. I knew that what lay ahead was not only challenging, but frightening. Soon I was to be shocked beyond my imagination.

Lockdown Stage 1 of the State of Emergency was trying, characterised by overwhelming social distancing, mask wearing, alarm and despondency. There was no choice but to be confined to my neighbourhood in Havana. My finances were overstretched with constant need to pay rent as well as break bread. This situation became worse when I lost support from my parents, due to closure of borders and economic activities in Zimbabwe.

When I heard NUST would resume teaching, learning and assessment activities, it was music to my ears. I could not have known more problems lay ahead. The migration to remote teaching, learning and assessment, which commenced in May, spelled catastrophe for me. The new normal required bandwidth and data as Microsoft Teams and Zoom became our lecture halls. My laptop was constantly malfunctioning, the landlord was cutting electricity during the day for use only at night, and yet my classes were from 8:00 to 17:00. I felt I was between a rock and a hard place. Finding a new place was not an option, as my finances were already overstretched.

As they say, every dark cloud has a silver lining. One of the significant things I realised from the pandemic is the importance of family, friends and a night out. The importance of a handshake, a visit to loved ones, and a night out with friends is valuable. With the commencement of the Stage 5 and the reduced restrictions, I am embracing these things once more, although with the requisite precautions.

Happily Stranded in Romania

Elia Neshiko, a Bachelor of Tourism Management student regards himself lucky to have travelled and studied in Romania amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and its subsequent challenges. Mr Neshiko spent a semester at the University of Oradea. His exchange was funded through an Erasmus+ inter-institutional agreement between the two Universities. When the COVID-19 lockdowns were implemented and universities closed, Mr Neshiko chose to remain in Oradea, where he took his classes online for the remainder of the semester.

“In Oradea, every student has a laptop or tablet and access to internet, so it was not difficult to switch from face-to-face instruction to online learning,” he explained.

As part of his academic project, Mr Neshiko had to travel to different places in Romania. He was delighted to discover students travel at no cost with the trains. Apart from his academic worries, Neshiko also spoke of the cultural interactions he had while in Romania. “I initiated conversations with other students in order to learn about European cultures. I did many activities with them to become part of

the community. As a result, I was able to adapt to the environment and made many friends,” he explained.

Naturally, his friends were curious about Namibia and asked many questions. A true tourism student, Neshiko showed them pictures of Namibian cultures, of the big five animals in Etosha National Park, and encouraged them to visit the Namib Desert.

Neshiko emphasised that his exchange experience has opened his mind, and has improved his communication and leadership skills. “I believe exchange experience is a powerful way to grow a person and promote human beings. I am a different person now. I have more confidence in myself.” His experience as an exchange student in Romania, has reinforced one of his core beliefs. “The lessons I have learned will stay with me forever, and my belief in cultural exchange will never leave me,” he said.

Upon completion of his studies, Elia Neshiko plans to start a business in the tourism industry.

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Elia Neshiko with friends in downtown Oradea



Elia Neshiko with a friend



Elia Neshiko in front of the Black Eagle Palace in Oradea

Study Abroad Interrupted

Silvia Bollweg and Jacky Dürkop, Exchange Students from the University of Hamburg, Germany

Silvia Bollweg and Jacky Dürkop are students at the University of Hamburg. Through an MOU, they were supposed to enrol in the Bachelor of Natural Resource Management Honours at NUST for one year, a mandatory part of the International Bachelor in Geography at Hamburg.

It was 06H00 and our class was sitting excitedly in the truck. We were heading for a game drive through Etosha National Park. This event was not part of the original timetable. Thanks to COVID-19, the presentations, which we were to carry out during the excursion, were cancelled. This granted us a bit of free time. The game drive was a total success. We had seen many different animals, and have experienced one of the best days of our lives. The described situation is the only positive thing COVID-19 has brought to us.

We arrived in Windhoek at the end of January 2020 and have started classes, only to leave Namibia shortly after. On the 14th of March, the first day of our excursion, the

first cases were recorded in Namibia. Safety measures from the Namibian Government and news from different countries indicated that our original departure date would not be possible. One of us decided to leave on the last commercial flights via Johannesburg and Istanbul to Hannover. While the other decided to stay and see what happens. After the implementation of the nationwide lockdown, the German Embassy recommended repatriation back to Germany.

We did not know how to continue with our NUST studies in Germany. Eventually, online classes were introduced. We managed to complete our lectures at the end of the semester. Despite this, it was still unclear

how the University of Hamburg would acknowledge our NUST courses. Since we were unable to enrol in two semesters abroad, we could not meet the requirement to earn an international bachelor.

The process of returning, countless insecurities and anxieties of how our studies would continue led to a huge burden, which was both emotional and psychological. COVID-19 not only interrupted our year abroad, it also forced us to change our subject of study. Furthermore, it destroyed a once in a lifetime opportunity with unique experiences and deep friendships. Simply put, COVID-19 ended our dream of spending a year in Namibia.



Sylvia and Jacky's game drive in Etosha



Boarding a flight back to Germany

B360 Internships Cut Short

Tawanda Dzinomwa, *Swiss Re: Financial Accounting*

Upon arrival at Zurich International, a friendly group of families with Sabina and the B360 team welcomed us with an air of enthusiasm that calmed the nerves. The excitement of getting to experience Switzerland was evident amongst everyone.

I had the privilege of working at Swiss Re under the tutelage of Bruno Gallo, Swiss Re Zurich's Financial Accounting Technical Project Lead. Bruno was quick to give me an expansive overview of the group structure of the company and the business units in the organisation.

My role was to function as a member of the Life and Health Insurance project team, communicating updates to key stakeholders, identifying the impact of the roll-out of IFRS 17 on the financial statements of the group, as well as gaining an understanding of the Swiss Re business model. My learning included the basis of derivations of estimated cash flows of an insurance contract, how estimated insurance losses are calculated using a combination of probabilistic models and deterministic as well as the required reserves for each contract which all form vital components of pricing an insurance contract.

After a month, beautiful sightseeing of Mount Rigi, visits to the almost medieval Lucerne Bridge and my favourite spot in

Switzerland, Lake Cauma, had just wet my appetite for more. Unfortunately, our time was cut short by complications of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The call from the B360 team to get us home as soon as possible came abruptly and sadly. We have to say goodbye to our colleagues with great regret after just half of the scheduled stay. Saying our final goodbyes to our host families at the airport was emotional. In six weeks, we had all created bonds with each other and the abruptness of our departure made it difficult. The manner in which the B360 team reacted in light of the travel risks caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic was characteristic of their efficiency and quickness of thought.



Tawanda and Mr Bruno Gallo



"I had a wonderful experience, the best so far. I enjoyed my time in Switzerland with the other interns, host family, and at work. I got to see a bit of beautiful Switzerland. My host family were so fantastic, they supported us, meals were always there, we got to play games after dinner as well."

Rosalie Kahambundu
Credit Suisse, AM&EMEA Balanced Solutions

"During my time at Credit Suisse, I managed to obtain a lot of skills and knowledge. Through the presentations and introduction sessions, we got to know what the bank is really about, and how it operates, especially the Asset Management Division."

Ronnie Philander, Credit Suisse,
Investment Accounting COO/Operations Asset Management



"I worked at Credit Suisse (Asset Management) with the Execution team as a Junior Business Supporter under the mentorship of Angela Tatransky. I did so many excel tasks, and I must say, I have improved. I was introduced to Asset and Bond Trading, Forex Trading and Equity Trading. I was more interested in Forex Trading. So, one of the team members decided, he will give me more insight on it."

Halley Ndimulunde,
Credit Suisse COO/Business Management



"My mentor, Tobias, ensured I had constant interactions and continuous learning sessions that gave me an insight into the various processes and teams within Investment Management and IS&P. From coffee breaks with my team members to coffee sessions with people from other teams, it all enabled me to build trusting and constructive relationships."

Rakkel Teofilus,
Credit Suisse, IS&P, Performance and Risk

"When we got to Switzerland, many people told us that it was an unusual winter, and it was not snowing as usual, until one Friday morning. I was so excited to finally catch some snowflakes and have some snowfall on my head! It was such a beautiful view that I will never forget."

Immanuel Shilongo,
Credit Suisse, Insurance Linked



The Effect of COVID-19 on International Students' Academic Performance

Yamikani Bodole, *International Student enrolled in Bachelor of Computer Science in Cyber Security*



On 14 March 2020, Namibia confirmed its first two coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases. Shortly thereafter, all public and private learning institutions were closed, and as a result, students were advised to return to their respective countries hometowns.

For international students, this meant returning to their home countries. Online classes commenced in the midst of the full lockdown allowing students who could, to resume their first semester studies remotely. Although the entire student body struggled to transition to online classes, international students experienced many problems that stemmed from the fact that they were outside Namibia.

Learning online was effective for some international students, particularly those who had access to the appropriate technology while at home. As for those who did not have the necessary resources, online learning was nothing short of unproductive. Regardless of whether or not students had the right technology, many struggled to carry out their practical assessments while being far away from fellow classmates and lecturers. Additionally, while Namibia based students could try to find ways of meeting to discuss challenges they were facing, students outside Namibia were

at a disadvantage. This made students feel even more isolated.

Students from countries with unreliable sources of electricity and internet connectivity had difficulties accessing learning materials and staying connected to online lectures. Furthermore, mobile data charges are exorbitantly high in some countries. According to research, countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and eSwatini, can charge an average of 10 USD or more for 1GB of mobile data. Consequently, students had difficulties staying motivated, because they had to watch recorded lectures and could not communicate directly with their lecturers or participate in live discussions.

Given that the pandemic is not over, our academic lives are still evolving. Things may never return to what they were before, and this affects the mental health of many students. Presently, the main concerns for international students outside Namibia are whether they will be able to return to campus and complete their studies.

Staff Experiences

Dr Frans Goes to Wisconsin

Dr Thulha Frans, a Lecturer in the Department of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, was selected to be a Fulbright Scholar from August 2019 until May 2020. Dr Frans was studying Teaching and Learning of English as a Second Language in the Curriculum Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) in the USA. She attributes her successful selection into the competitive programme to a post-doctoral research project with English teachers in Omusati Region that she has carried out with assistance from a team of NUST English lecturers. During her time as a Fulbright Scholar, she attended postgraduate modules, conferences, and enjoyed some cultural activities before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was implemented.

During the first semester, Dr Frans enrolled in "Learning Second Language and Literacies". In this course, she became familiar with major theories of second language acquisition (SLA), and has learned to conduct research in SLA, and performed inquiry into the implications of SLA research and theories for school-based teaching and learning. The Course allowed her to "understand part of the English language challenges in schools and tertiary level in Namibia."

"Some additional factors associated with SLA are age, motivation, attitude, environmental factors, school factors, home/family, and early literacy of a child. These amongst others, are considered factors that greatly influence someone in their SLA," she explained.

During the second semester, she has enrolled in a course titled "Assessment Strategies for Advanced Foreign Language Teaching", which she said helped her identify the "similarities in teaching a foreign language (TFL) and teaching English as a second language (TESL). Many theories in TFL can be applied in TESL."

Dr Frans also participated in two major conferences. The first one was in Boston, Massachusetts in November 2019 where all African Fulbright Scholars converged to share knowledge for four days. There, she has delivered an oral presentation on English second language teaching and learning in Namibia. The second conference was in Kansas City, Missouri in March 2020, and has focused on the "The Future of Work: Bridging the Skills Gap."

"This Conference was one of a series of activities that created a forum for Fulbright scholars to explore aspects of American society and culture. We engaged with local organisations, residents of Kansas City, and Fulbright scholars from around the globe," said Dr Frans. Before being selected as a Fulbright Scholar, Dr Frans had never visited the USA. Naturally, she experienced culture shocks with her surroundings, including the sprawling UW-Madison campus, the cold climate of Madison, new racial dynamics with other minorities, and transport systems.

"The people in Madison are very helpful. I had a great host, Prof Margaret Hawkins, who allowed me to stay with her while I have secured a flat. She would often

invite me for lunch or coffee to discuss my programme progress," said Dr Frans. In addition, Dr Frans also made friends, many of whom invited her to their homes for dinner, holiday celebrations, and lunch dates. It was a wonderful experience until the COVID-19 Pandemic brought activities to a near standstill. Face-to-face classes were cancelled, but Dr Frans managed to finish her research. As it is the case with many, she experienced physical and mental health challenges due to isolation and homesickness during the lockdown.

Having returned to Namibia and restored her health, Dr Frans is excited about continuing her work. She plans to continue her Teachers' Development Programme in Omusati Region, and engage the education ministries on the subject of her research. Dr Frans is currently writing a book on English language acquisition in Namibia.



Dr Frans with Fulbright Representative, Jenny Parham



Dr Frans with other African Fulbright Scholars at a conference in Boston



Dr Frans in front of the UW-Madison Memorial Library



The Fulbright Scholar Who Stayed

The Faculty of Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences has hosted Prof Amy Treonis, Associate Professor of Biology from the University of Richmond in Virginia, USA. Prof Treonis is a visiting researcher under the Fulbright Scholar Program whose research focuses on the ecology of desert soils. When many international visitors boarded the last commercial flights and others have booked chartered flights, she chose to remain in Namibia. Below she responds to some questions about her experience.

IR: Prof Treonis, briefly tell us about yourself.

I am an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Richmond where I teach Microbiology and Astrobiology, and mentor undergraduate student researchers. When I am not working at university, I keep busy with crafts, gardening, astronomy, cooking, books, home renovation, spending time with friends, and bicycling.

IR: Why did you choose to come to NUST for your Fulbright experience?

I have wanted to study soils in the unusual fog-fed Namib Desert for my whole career. NUST has a strong reputation for research in Namibia, and in particular, I find the scholarship in Natural Resources to be comprehensive. NUST also values international relationships, and I felt, I would be well supported as a visiting scholar.

IR: What have you been doing during your stay at NUST?

Since coming to Namibia, I have been studying desert soil nematodes, which are microscopic worms that can be found in soils around the world. In many habitats, they are the most abundant and diverse type of animals present, although they remain unseen to most people. The focus of my work in Namibia has been Namib Desert nematode communities, which are not well known. Fortunately, I was able to carry out my research despite the COVID-19 pandemic. I collected over 300 samples from three habitat types within the Namib. This involved several field expeditions around the Western part of Namibia. During the lockdown and the work from home period, I used my flat in Poly Heights as a Nematology Lab. My results show that the soils contain rich communities of bacterial and fungal-feeding nematodes. The data can be informative for monitoring the impacts of soil disturbance or climate change in these sensitive habitats.

IR: How would you sum up your experience in Namibia?

I have seen many amazing places, including Namib Rand, Gobabeb, Twyfelfontein and Giribes plains. Although I felt like the only foreign tourist in Namibia in these unusual times, I felt welcomed in every place I visited. I am grateful to the NUST community and various individuals who assisted with my research, befriended me, and taught me about Namibia. I never felt alone here even during the extended lockdowns. I love Namibia and I hope to return one day.



Prof Treonis at work in the laboratory



Prof Treonis conducting fieldwork in the Namib Desert

Did you know?

Namibians can apply for the Fulbright African Research Scholar Program?

For more information contact the American Cultural Centre.

George Beukes
E: BeukesGM@state.gov

Pinias Oscar
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Important Notices

Academic Calendar Changes

The University Senate approved the revised Academic Calendar with the following extract of crucial dates for ease of reference:

DATE	ACTIVITY
Friday, 27 November 2020	Graduation Ceremony
Thursday, 18 December 2020	End of Academic Activities for 2020 - 2 nd Semester Break (all faculties)
Friday, 18 December 2020	End of Administrative Activities 2020
Tuesday, 12 January 2021	Administrative Staff resume
Thursday, 28 January 2021	Academic Staff resume - Lectures resume (second term of 2 nd semester 2020 - all faculties)
Wednesday, 10 February 2021	Lectures end (end of 2020 academic year - all faculties except Engineering)
Friday, 19 February 2021	Release of 2 nd semester results the 2020 academic year (all faculties except Engineering)
Friday, 26 February 2021	Lectures end for Faculty of Engineering (end of 2020 academic year)
Friday, 05 March 2021	Release of 2 nd semester results the 2020 academic year for Faculty of Engineering
Monday, 08 March 2021	Online Registration for Senior Students commence (1 st Semester 2021, all faculties except Engineering)
Friday, 12 March 2021	Online Registration for Senior Students end (1 st Semester 2021, all faculties except Engineering)
Monday, 15 March 2021	Lectures begin - 1 st Semester 2021 Academic year (all faculties except Engineering)
Wednesday, 17 March 2021	Lectures begin for Faculty of Engineering

2021 INCOMING EXCHANGE STUDENT DEADLINES/PROTOCOLS

During the 2021 Academic Year, teaching and learning at the University will be mainly through Remote Teaching, Learning and Assessment (RTLA). Only students who have practical/laboratory courses might be required to come to campus from time to time.

Exchange students willing to study at NUST through RTLA are welcome to apply. The first Semester will commence on the 15 March 2021. The deadlines are as follow:

NUST Application and Enquiries Open	01 October 2020
Application Deadline	30 November 2020

All queries and applications can be sent to the following International Relations staff:

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NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

International Relations Newsletter

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