

KovsieCAST Transcription

We're meeting with Lauren Oosthuizen, the head of the first-year skills module, UFSS.

Q - There were some changes made in the compulsory first year skills module this year, right? Last year it was called UFS101 - can you get us up to speed with some of the changes?

A - That is right. We changed the format of the module this year, to a summer school offering for mainstream students in the first semester, and extended programme students join us in the second semester (if they've passed SCLL or SCNS as part of the extended programme). So there's UFSS1504 which is a year module for mainstream first years, and UFSS1522, a second semester module for extended programme students.

Q - How has Covid affected the delivery of UFSS?

A - Well, we had different groupings of students attending the summer school, dependent on when they were registered. We wanted to make sure we caught everyone, so we would have run another group in March, but unfortunately we could not. We then got to work on redesigning the content which had been written to be presented in workshop settings, to a low-tech self-study guide which students could download from Blackboard or even send to each other via WhatsApp due to its small size.

Q - What has UFSS been doing to support students with their learning?

A - UFSS is a skills module. In the first semester, we focus on the academic skills you need to be successful, such as time management and goal setting, study skills, referencing and plagiarism, financial literacy, growth mindset, and leadership. The study guide was re-written to be relevant to the current learning environment, with relatable examples that students could draw from to apply these skills. We use our Teaching Assistants, who are senior and postgraduate students, as a soundboard and they help with reviewing the content to make sure that we hit the mark.

Q - Let's talk about the assessment. UFSS is assessed through continuous assessment. What happens if a student missed an assessment in UFSS?

A - We have been sending out emails and SMSes to students who missed assessments, letting them know that it is not too late to submit. Of course, in light of the pandemic, we are more flexible than usual with assessment deadlines, so we'd like to urge students who still have not submitted assessments to please send us an email and we'll see how we can assist you. The whole point of this module is to help students succeed in their studies, so reach out to us, talk to us, we are here to help. We invest a lot of time in our communication with students, taking care to respond to every one, referring students to the applicable support services, and following up with students who are not performing as well as they could in this module.

If I may throw in some logistics, we have been getting a few questions from students regarding their module mark. Remember, UFSS1504 is a year module, so the final mark for the module will only reflect at the end of the year, and there are second semester assignments that will also be included in your final mark. We have received some queries for students registered for UFSS1522 - remember this module will start in the second semester,

so assignment submission will only take place in the second semester. You will receive weekly updates from us on Blackboard and via email, so do not worry about missing out on information.

Q - What can students look forward to in the second semester?

A - We are so excited about the second semester content. The focus on the second semester is employability - so what can you do during your undergraduate studies to enhance your employability? We look at strategies for success - so first things first - you have to graduate. How do you make sure that happens? And then we move on to entrepreneurship, where this year we explore why, despite covid, this is a work stream that you should consider. We also work through IT skills, moving from the old paper-based CV to your online presence and preparing for the future world of work. And we end off the semester with career development - how you can build your future by understanding the way careers develop, and how you can capitalise on your skills by improving your self-knowledge and occupational knowledge. To put all of the content together, we work with various support services across campus, such as Academic Advising and the Career Services Office, and we also bring in experts in their fields - there are some neat interviews that students will be able to watch, listen and read in order to learn from the people who are making a success of their careers.

Q - If students want to make contact with the UFSS office, how do they do that?

A - You are welcome to send us an email. BFN campus students can reach us at ufs101@ufs.ac.za, and QQ campus students can reach us at ufs101qq@ufs.ac.za. We are also on Facebook if you want to inbox us. BFN campus students can like us at UFS101 Official, and QQ campus students can like us at