



Kigali, 01/09/2020  
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**Students (All)**  
**University of Rwanda**

Dear Students

In the next few days I will be sending you another video message about your return to learning using online facilities.

This is new for many of us. While some people find it exciting, others are scared of connecting online to study.

We have a number of issues to iron out that relate to access for students such as laptops and airtime bundles. There will be many questions, and we are working closely with the Student Guild to anticipate these and working with other agencies to mitigate the effects of the issues of access.

What I want to communicate to you is that we are on this journey together. The world of higher education has been abruptly stopped and forced to think about the nature of being at university. We have a lot of readjustment to do and for many of us our first worry will be about the lack of social interaction and social support that we have been used to, and the lack of a learning environment with a library and desks and traditional classrooms and laboratories.

The pandemic is still having effects on the levels of uncertainty in being able to return to learning placements in schools, hospitals and industry. However, one of the key outcomes here is learning to deal with uncertainty. Oftentimes we can only reduce the level of uncertainty, and as those of you who are training in healthcare know, we cannot always bring certainty to people's lives. And so, we all have to learn to learn from each and every challenge.

We are working to reduce uncertainty for you by re-starting online. This is often called 'open and distance learning' and I want to give you some simple tips to face this transition.

You must exert 'openness' to manage the perceived 'distance' from friends and your lecturers. You will have to be purposeful and sometimes more forceful than you feel comfortable with. In traditional classroom teaching you can be anonymous as one person in a sea of faces. However, in the traditional physical mode of teaching you can be seen by your lecturer and friends. In online learning you are going to have to be open to reduce the distance, and you have to make sure that you are 'seen' by others. One tip is to go into the 'chat' facility as often as you can and make contributions – perhaps because you don't fully understand something, or because you have a fresh insight.

Your lecturers are having to do the same and will be purposeful and much more obvious about being present online.

Remember that in a classroom you can raise your hand and answer a question and you can stop by and speak to the lecturer. This has now changed and so you need to use the Moodle platform





and its functions such as a quiz in place of putting up your hand. If you don't interact, online learning can seem quite lonely.

Open learning means that we are going to be more 'open' with you. We will post up all past exam questions and some of these will be accompanied by the marking schemes and model answers. We want you to understand the construct of different types of questions, as students who understand how questions are written tend to do better.

Sometimes we will challenge you to write the questions that you would like us to ask you to test you on the resources you have just read. This exercise gives us insight into your level of understanding of the materials and is not a cheap way of writing exam questions.

You should be open with one another to reduce distance and keep your social media groups going to support your learning using Facebook, WhatsApp and others. From time to time your lecturers will engage with you in this way.

Your lecturers will interact with you at different times. When it is live interaction we call it 'synchronous' – as in 'of the time', and when it is a recorded lecture it is called 'asynchronous'. You should not be worried about these different forms. The good thing about recorded lectures is that you can go back and re-visit them.

To reduce the distance, you have to be more open with one another and become teachers to one another.

For those of you who are used to attending laboratories, we will be introducing you to virtual labs as well as giving you access to labs on campuses in due course.

As students of the University of Rwanda you are used to being on one campus but in the next few months, we may ask you to have a relationship with a campus nearest to your home. Do not worry about this, we are together in this. The academic year that you were anticipating may run more slowly than expected but the most important thing is that you are progressing and for the rest of your careers everyone will know that you were affected by the pandemic.

We will be issuing some advice for your families and friends too on how to support you. We are working on a series of policies to support your learning that commit us to shared success.

As you hear more and more through social media about restarting, I want you to check information by checking in with your Student Guild and Class Reps.

I will keep you updated as will your Principals and Deans.

With my best wishes

**Prof. Philip Cotton**  
**Vice Chancellor**