



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.