

Statement

Together we are safer

November 2024

Stellenbosch University (SU) is deeply concerned by the recent safety incidents affecting our university community, including the tragic loss of one of our students who was murdered off-campus. The safety and well-being of our students and staff thus remains one of the highest priorities for the University.

For the Stellenbosch community, it cannot just be another incident in a crime-ridden country. As with any report of potential harm or threats, it should and has indeed been treated with seriousness and urgency. It spurs us on to leave no stone unturned in our commitment to ensuring the safety of our students and staff – and to determine where we can improve on these aspects.

Immediate steps

In response to the recent concerning incidents, SU has stepped up its awareness campaigns through direct interaction, social media messaging and WhatsApp channels to inform students of the services that are freely available to ensure their safety on campus.

This is over and above our ongoing awareness and action initiatives that include regular reminders about best practices and crime prevention tips on the University's Facebook page and Instagram, as well as the frequent promotion of the University's **Walk-With service** that is available every evening from 18:00 onwards. Students can request to be accompanied by a security officer at night, when walking between buildings or on parking areas **on campus**. This free service is available throughout the year. This is apart from the University's shuttle services daily which can be booked up to 15 minutes prior to intended departure.

An additional **"walk-together-express"** is available during exam times. The service is available during exams on the hour starting from 19.00 daily.

The University is also reviewing its existing safety processes to ensure the best possible response to safety concerns on campus.

Furthermore, a student indaba is being planned to engage directly with students about security issues and safety measures. Additional plans include to survey students and parents to ascertain their perceptions about safety on campus and identify options, such as the use of cellphone apps, to make it easier to report incidents or seek help.

The University also endeavours to amplify its communication about safety measures to students and parents and is appealing to all students to immediately report incidents to the University as support is available.

Safety measures

Even before students set foot on campus for the first time, SU prioritises crime prevention and safety awareness as an essential part of their experience. During Welcoming Week, Campus Security leads information sessions with student leaders and groups of newcomers, educating them on personal safety practices, self-defence training, and safety tools such as the Buzzer or Namola apps.

Students are constantly reminded – via posters, social media posts or information distributed in their residences and faculties - to take preferred routes on campus which have a security presence 24 hours a day, seven days a week; to walk in groups during quiet times, especially in the evenings; to not have valuables on display; to keep belongings close; to not walk and talk on a cell phone; to refrain from leaving valuable items visible in a car or in the boot; and to ensure that cars are properly locked.

Furthermore, they are urged to report all incidents to the South African Polics Services (SAPS) and to Campus Security who will follow up on leads and conduct thorough investigations. This is extremely important as it assists in planning processes and to take preventative measures.

SU will help students report incidents to the relevant authorities even if they did not take place on campus. The University will also direct students to the appropriate support structures irrespective of where an incident occurred. Students should also report any suspicious activity even if a crime has not taken place.

A dedicated, highly trained security team patrols the grounds of the University. This team is supported by a 24/7 operational centre that handles all emergency calls, monitors alarm activations and CCTV systems. Any reports of potential harm or threats are treated with the highest level of seriousness and urgency.

Ensuring a safe environment

These ongoing efforts underscore our commitment to fostering a secure environment with our partners in town and equipping students with the resources and knowledge needed to stay safe throughout their time at the university.

Although crime is indeed a universal concern in our country and Stellenbosch is not exempted from this, SU will mobilise whatever resources it has at its disposal towards supporting law enforcement in this battle as we believe success lies in collaboration.

In this regard the University has over the years established a strong partnership with local law enforcement and security agencies to ensure comprehensive coverage and safety throughout the greater Stellenbosch area.

While this collaboration with other security role players in town is critical, ultimate success however lies in students, staff and the public taking hand in becoming active partners in this process. We all need to remain watchful and vigilant.

We want to assure parents and students that every step possible is being taken to maintain a safe environment where students can pursue their studies without fear.

Together we are safer.

