

UNISA RESPONSE TO UNFOUNDED AND UNINFORMED CLAIMS BY THE DAILY MAVERICK

DATE: 22 February 2023

The University of South Africa (Unisa) has taken note of an article published on the Daily Maverick online platform on 14 February 2023 titled “*Trying to register with Unisa is a nightmare, say many students*”. We have also noted with dismay that whilst the heading of the article suggests the existence of a pervasive problem, it went on to state only three examples to prove this narrative.

It is the considered view of the university that our stakeholders deserve to know the correct and informed perspective on the issues raised in the article, including a clear explanation of the university admissions processes.

As a point of departure, Unisa wishes to reaffirm its stance that our students are the most important stakeholders in the university and are at the centre of our mandate. ALL concerns and enquiries raised by our students are regarded as critical and worthy of immediate attention. To this end, we wish to highlight following areas:

Application and registration at Unisa

Unisa receives around a million applications for study every semester. Unfortunately, because of the limitations imposed by the enrolment plan approved by the Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation every academic year, the university can only register the maximum number specified in the enrolment plan for that specific year. Any deviation from this specified number carries with it penalties against the university.

To arrive at this number from the many applications received, a ranking system is used to determine the qualifying students, who are then admitted and given offers. Only the students who have been given offers are eligible to register and, where a student declines or fails to take up the offer within a specified period, it is then available to the next qualifying students. This may be in the current semester or the second semester, depending on when the offer becomes available. In other words, having applied at Unisa does not guarantee automatic admission. The university has specific standards and criteria to be met.

For the 2023 academic year, the maximum number allowed in terms of the enrolment plan is 376 000. In the current semester, 958 517 application choices were received, and, from these, 226 786 offers were made to qualifying students. We are currently sitting at 219 553 completed registrations and 159 741 temporary registrations (awaiting payment by 28 February 2023). This brings us to a total number of 376 083 registrations that have been processed, thus proving the narrative of students struggling to register to be less than candid.



Once a student has registered, he/she can access study material on the student portal (myUnisa). In the same portal, the student can also access proof of registration. Students are also encouraged to activate their myLife email facility as well as their myUnisa accounts. The university communicates with registered students only via the Unisa allocated email address.

The university constantly monitors its registration figures and systems and strives to improve the latter. The outcome of monitoring the registration figures as well as consideration of other external factors that might have collectively impacted our students negatively (from a registration point of view) would inform the university management to make a determination whether to extend registration or not. Such decision is also communicated to the student leadership and then to the general student population.

For the current semester, which closed on 10 February 2023, the university has already sent letters to all unsuccessful applicants for undergraduate qualifications. Unsuccessful applicants for honours and post graduate qualifications will be informed after the closing date for these qualifications on 31 March 2023.

Making payment for Unisa services

Unisa has several allocation codes for a variety of payments into its bank account and consistently communicates these codes to students, along with clearly defined payment instructions. This is to ensure that fees are paid into the right codes to avoid delays associated with the tedious back-office reallocation exercise. These communication campaigns are specifically intensified during peak periods such as application and registration periods.

Students are always encouraged to carefully choose the correct allocation codes so that their fees can reflect as quickly as possible, and their registrations complete without much delay. In the event that students mistakenly use a wrong allocation code (which is a common occurrence), they are encouraged to submit the requisite proof of payment to the university so that the funds are quickly allocated correctly; and they can complete their application and/or registration.

Visit the following site for payment methods:
<https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Register-to-study-through-Unisa/Web-registration/Unisa-payment-methods-and-banking-details>

If you pay online whilst you are at a regional service centre, there are university officials on the floor to take you through the process if required. Some of the regional service centres have on-site cashiers for students to make payment immediately.



The Student Communication and Support Centre (SCSC)

The university introduced the SCSC in 2019 to replace the call centre that was discontinued in 2011. The SCSC is currently manned by 50 consultants who look after all entry points (Calls, Emails, Webchats and Social Media Direct Messages). During the busiest times such as application and registration and as a result of the complex nature of many of the queries, the SCSC fields between 130 and 164 incoming calls (Registration and General Enquiries) per 30-minute interval from 08:00 – 17:00 daily. The higher the volumes of calls, the longer the turn-around time (taking into consideration that each query is unique)

In 2022 alone, the SCSC fielded some 675 927 enquiries. Of these, 670 766 were completed and resolved. In the current semester, some 115 649 enquiries have been fielded so far, with 53 911 completed and resolved.

The SCSC is committed to fielding and resolving every query received on its various platforms. It endeavours to resolve these queries in the quickest time possible. Some queries may take longer than others due to their complexity, whilst some callers may wait longer in the queue whilst queries in progress are being cleared. However, the intention is always to respond to all the calls, emails, Webchats and DMs as speedily as possible.

Students are also requested to direct their queries directly to the SCSC or to a contact point specifically provided by the university. Sending queries to multiple emails in the organisation is not helpful as it might have gone to a wrong person or the person might not have access to their emails for a long period of time (e.g., person is on leave, or has left the employ of the university). It is always better to send your enquiry to a designated contact point so that, when necessary, it can be tracked, and relevant officials can be held accountable.

The SCSC number is 0800 001 870. Specific contact details for student assistance and service can also be found on the following web page: <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Contact-us/Student-enquiries>

Student feedback and criticism

Unisa is renowned for its transparency and openness as well as allowing space for stakeholders, including students, to express themselves freely and without fear. Student centredness is one of the key pillars of our institutional strategy, with relevant platforms made available for students to express their concerns, suggestions and inputs to the university, either directly or through elected student representative structures. We have very strong policies that discourage and provide punitive measures against any form of harassment or victimisation.

We are equally very open to feedback and constructive criticism from our stakeholders, including our students, and we view this as a good mechanism to help us strengthen our systems and processes. For this reason, criticism and suggestions about our student communication, including the SCSC, is always welcomed and we believe that these may go a long way to help us improve our student communication and support services.



Service delivery at Unisa Service Centres

Whilst the university generally encourages students to conduct all or most of their transactions online, we do acknowledge the existence of a digital gap in our society and that some of our students still have a need to visit our respective campuses across the country for assistance. For this reason, the systems and personnel at these campuses are equipped to adequately address the queries raised by students with the necessary speed and efficiency. The system is designed in such a way that a student visiting a Unisa Service Centre should leave the centre with their query either having been fully resolved or, where it cannot be resolved immediately, with a clear indication of what the challenge is and when feedback is expected to be provided.

Where students are not satisfied with the service they are getting from the floor staff, they should report this to the regional centre managers in charge of the respective regional service centres. Walking away from a service centre when you are not satisfied with the service and without bringing this to the attention of the regional centre manager or even the regional director is not helpful to both the student and the university.

Reliability of ICT systems

Unisa has invested financial and technical resources to ensure that its ICT systems are up to standard and can handle the rigours of the huge traffic that we generally experience, especially during peak times such as registration periods. We also know that loadshedding has impacted our students in terms of limiting their access to the internet and therefore our systems. It does happen, as is the case with ICT systems everywhere, that there are challenges with the system now and then. Our ICT team is always on standby and monitoring the system continuously. Whenever a challenge is encountered with any aspect of the ICT system, the stakeholders are informed immediately via various communication platforms and the problem is attended to with the necessary urgency.

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