

WELCOMING ADDRESS 2026 FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

by

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Indoor Sport Centre, South Campus

Molweni! Goeie môre! Good morning! Sanibonani! Dumelang!

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to Nelson Mandela University at the start of the 2026 academic year. I greet our dynamic Programme Director, Iman Mciteka, a dynamic Radio Broadcaster, MC, Facilitator, Sportscaster, and Law student at Nelson Mandela University.

In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela says:

“Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that the child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make of what we have not what we are given, that separates one person from another”

Welcome and opening

Warm greetings to all of you present here today, both in person as well as those who are joining us through the online platforms from our six other campuses in Gqeberha and George. We extend our warmest welcome, particularly to our first year students, and to their parents and guardians. I also want to recognise

the President of the Student Representative Council for 2026, Ms Somila Komani, and other members of the SRC.

I acknowledge the members of our executive and senior management team who have joined us this morning, including our Deputy Vice-Chancellors and the Executive Deans of the various faculties and the entire Deanery, and our University Registrar.

Our first-year students here today worked hard to qualify to access higher education, and for this we applaud them. Congratulations! You were selected as part of a cohort of approximately 8 500 first-time entering students for 2026 from more than 272 000 applications.

I will focus on three key aspects in this welcoming address this morning:

- a) firstly, who we are as Nelson Mandela University
- b) secondly, an overview of the support infrastructure that is in place to enable your success as our new students, and
- c) thirdly, our expectations of you as you start your learning journey with us.

(On the question of): Who we are as Nelson Mandela University

Nelson Mandela University is one of 26 public universities in South Africa. We are named after the global icon, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. Since our name change in 2017, we have been asking ourselves fundamental questions about the role of the public university in society, and the implications of carrying a name that sets us apart from other universities. We strive to be a socially embedded, responsive University, in the service of society, promoting social justice.

We are a values-driven university, and we are intentional about cultivating a transformative institutional culture where all students and staff are expected to

embody our core values: excellence, integrity, ubuntu, respect for diversity, social justice and equality, and sustainable stewardship.

Our vision is to be a dynamic African university recognised for its leadership in generating cutting edge knowledge for a sustainable future. We recognise the responsibility we have as an African university to make sure our education carries the aspirations of our continent.

This vision propels us towards aspirations beyond ourselves. We are committed to educate students who will be compassionate, courageous ambassadors of a better and compelling continent, and champions of an equitable world order.

(Now let me turn my attention on) Support infrastructure for students

As a first year student, you are part of a student body of than 34 000 students. Considerable progress has been made in transforming the University over the past two decades. Our student population currently broadly reflects the diversity of our nation.

We understand that transitioning to University can sometimes be bewildering and that students experience different kinds of challenges. Supported by our University governing Council, and buoyed by our Senate, we have put in place a wide range of support services.

As a student-centric university, we embrace an inclusive, humanising educational philosophy, which seeks to create a nurturing and supportive learning environment that unleashes the full potential of all our students.

Our University has a viable Learning and Teaching student support ecosystem that will enable a smooth start to your studies here. A detailed *First Year Guide*, which you would have received has valuable information to assist you in finding

your feet at Mandela University. This, and a lot of additional information, is also available on the FYS webpage.

Other support that has been put in place includes supplemental instruction, learning development tutors and mentors, the academic literacies writing programme, student success coaching, early detections system to identify students at risk with studies.

The physical and mental wellbeing of our students is of great importance to us. We recognise that throughout the Higher Education sector, students face enormous pressures that lead to anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts - at times with dire consequences. I would appeal to any of you that should you feel you are in need of support to reach out to someone for help, and make use of the services provided.

Student Health Services, and the Emthonjeni Student Wellness Centre offer free, confidential, professional individual and group counselling services, which are supplemented by self-help programmes and workshops. These are available to Nelson Mandela University students at all our campuses.

Nelson Mandela University has high quality infrastructure and facilities across all our campuses, equipped with state-of-the-art technologies.

As part of our ongoing efforts to foster digital inclusion we have invested significantly in broadening Wi-Fi connectivity, both on and off campuses for students. In addition, our student mobile device initiative is designed to ensure all students possess a laptop as a tool for optimal academic participation.

True to our enduring commitment to inclusion and student success, we have invested significantly in building a digitally enabled institution - one where

high-quality connectivity and access to technology are not privileges, but fundamental enablers of achievement. Today, our expanded Wi-Fi networks stretch across campuses, residences, libraries, and open learning spaces, ensuring that every student can engage confidently in their academic journey. Through our Student Device Initiative, more than 22 000 students have been supplied with affordable laptops since 2019, opening doors for those who might otherwise have been left behind.

It is important on a day like this that I devote a bit of time talking about the scourge of Gender Based Violence and Harm (GBVH) in our society. Indeed, the government has classified gender-based violence and femicide as a national disaster. Universities, as a microcosm of society, are not free from this evil.

Our University has put in place a number of initiatives to combat GBVH, including acculturating students and staff with values of mutual respect, an ethos of humanity and ways of navigating mutual co-existence. Through advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives, we have created a supportive, safe and caring environment for survivors of GBV. We urge you to join with the University to combat all forms of discrimination, sexual harassment, and GBV from our campuses.

If you experience acts of GBV and harm in whatever form – whether from staff, other students, or external parties – please use the mechanisms we have put in place to report such incidents so that they can be addressed.

In summary: Remember, you are never alone on the journey you have embarked upon. Engage with your lecturers, collaborate with your peers and make full use of the support ecosystem the University has put in place to help make your studies successful, and your time here at Mandela University a memorable one in your life.

What we expect of you

As I move to conclude, I would like to shift my focus to what we expect from our students. As you start your learning journey with us today, I encourage you to dream big, to work hard, and persevere.

I urge you to recognise and liberate your own agency in overcoming challenges. Always be respectful and considerate of others, and be adaptable as you embrace the inevitability of change. These qualities will set you apart, and ensure that you succeed.

Furthermore, be intentional about consistently pursuing academic excellence, while also making use of the wide variety of co-curricular activities such as student societies, sport, arts and culture, entrepreneurship development, and community engagement opportunities.

Embrace the spirit of Nelson Mandela and use your time here to make a meaningful impact. Challenge yourself to grow academically, personally, and socially. Universities provide spaces for deepening awareness and social consciousness; for developing a sense of positive activism. I invite to become conscientious activists for worthy causes.

A word of appreciation

In conclusion, I wish to thank all our parents, guardians, and family members for being here today, and for choosing Nelson Mandela University as your preferred study destination. We look forward to witnessing how all our first-year students develop and mature as worthy ambassadors of Nelson Mandela University, and as champions for social justice and humanity, as our namesake would have expected of us.

On our part we commit, without hesitation, our intention to provide a generative, caring environment for all our students to thrive. We invite Mandela University parents, guardians and all people of goodwill to partner with us.

I wish you everything of the best as you embark on this exciting journey with us.

I thank you! Baie dankie! Ndiyabulela!