

South Africa - IP Bulletin 2011

General

In recent years, the academic institutions in South Africa have undergone a restructuring process. Many institutions have merged together to form new universities as part of a government plan for the further development and sustainability of South Africa's higher education system.

The International Program is affiliated with the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

Opened on January 1, 2005, NMMU was the result of a merger of three academic institutions and offers a range of academic, professional and technical programs. NMMU enrolls approximately 20,000 students. Their website is: < <http://www.nmmu.ac.za> >. Students attend the Summerstand (South) Campus.

Academic Calendar

The academic year in South Africa is divided into two semesters. As the seasons are reversed from those in the Northern Hemisphere, the first term begins in February and runs until mid or late June. The second term begins late July and ends in late November or early December.

At NMMU, each semester consists of at least 14 weeks of teaching, and has two terms which make up the semester as follows:

- Semester 1 classes run from February to June
- Semester 2 classes run from July to November
- Semester 1 = Term 1 + Term 2
- Semester 2 = Term 3 + Term 4

Students may take a combination of full semester and term courses.

Academic Culture

Academic expectations are high, particularly at the upper levels, at the South African universities. Instruction takes a more independent approach and academic expectations are less well defined than what students usually experience at CSU. Assigned readings and other class requirements may appear deceptively light. Lectures may be less structured than is usual at CSU; normally lectures do not repeat or review the reading material. Students are expected to set their own pace of mastering the subject matter and to incorporate readings and lectures into their schedule without detailed syllabi from instructors. Science courses include strong practical lab requirements and an advanced level of research technique skills.

Students should have good reading, note-taking, and creative-thinking habits. Written work is expected to demonstrate strong writing skills, critical interpretation of oral and written sources, and the clear and cogent expression of understanding of the subject matter. Students should not make assumptions about a lack of academic rigor based on the seeming lack of English language skills by some students in lower-level courses. Former students have reported that some classes require more homework and considerably more reading than their CSU courses. Top grades require evidence of independent learning, originality of insight, familiarity with additional reading, and exceptional formulation and expression of ideas.

Students must make a special effort to find out the requirements and adapt to the pedagogy of their classes and not assume that they will be the same as they are at CSU. Fourth-year courses ("Honours" courses) are taught at a substantially higher level than second- and third-year courses; consequently, the standard of student work is expected to be much higher and students are expected to have mastered academic research and writing skills.

The schedule for class meetings at universities in South Africa is somewhat different than at CSU. Most courses involve four 45-minute lectures each week for the duration of the semester, with additional 45-minute discussion classes ("tutorials") held on a weekly or biweekly basis. Given the British background of higher education in South Africa, students may find that the relationship between students and instructors is more formal than what they have been accustomed to at CSU. IP participants are encouraged to introduce themselves to their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Advising

The South African system of higher education is similar to the British model in that undergraduate students enroll in a program of study that is relatively fixed and highly focused within the particular subject. Most degree programs take three years to complete. CSU students will enroll in courses within the approved field of study in which they are placed, following the same general plan as their South African counterparts.

Students should be aware that there is a distinction between first, second and third year courses (called "modules"). First year courses are usually introductory courses and taken by students in their first year of university study. Depending on course content, these are generally considered lower division courses. Second and third year courses are more advanced and considered equivalent to upper division courses. American students will find that second and third year courses can require more prerequisites and students are expected to have met prerequisites if they wish to take the course. If in doubt about whether the course is a first, second or third year course, students should look at the course description or ask their advisor at their host university during their academic advising sessions after arrival.

Course Codes, Course Levels and Unit Conversions

At NMMU, each course is given a unique code course number. The numbers represent the following levels (although there will be some exceptions depending on course content):

100 - 1999	first level (lower division)
200 - 2999	second level (upper division)
300 - 3999	third level (upper division)
400 - 4999	fourth level / honors (advanced upper division)
500 - 5999	fifth level / Masters (graduate)

Below is a table of how NMMU credits convert to CSU units

Unit Conversion Guidelines	
NMMU Credits	CSU Semester Units
4 - 5	1
6 - 9	2
10 - 14	3
15 - 19	4
20 - 25	5

To calculate the CSU semester unit value for year-long courses, divide the NMMU credit value by 2 and use the unit conversion table above. For example, if a year-long course has a total of 36 units, the course would be worth 4 CSU semester units EACH semester.

Students are required to take a minimum of 15 CSU units EACH semester.

Academic Program

All students, regardless of the curriculum they are following, are required to take:

- the equivalent of 15-16 CSU units each semester (but no more than 18 units per semester);
- regional language courses both semesters;
- the equivalent of least eight CSU semester units (usually two to three courses depending on the unit value of each course) in the study area for which they were selected EACH semester.

Students attending NMMU have the option of taking a Community Service Learning course for academic credit. See additional information under Course Planning and Registration.

Assessment and Grading

Grading systems used in South Africa differ from the system used at CSU, so students should not be shocked by the numerical marks that they receive on their papers and exams. Assignments and exams are given a percentage grade that in most cases is much lower than what would be expected according to the usual CSU scale for comparable work

done at home. For example, excellent work, which would earn an A at CSU, may be given a grade of 75 percent. It is quite normal for average work to be marked 60-65, and marks in the 60s are considered indicative of good, solid work.

The numerical grades are converted into CSU equivalent letter grades by the OIP before being reported to student's home campus registrar.

Exams

Most South African universities place considerable emphasis on the final written exam given at the end of each semester course. Permission to take the final exam may require a certain percentage of class attendance and a certain level of achievement on assignments and classroom performance. Final exams are held in designated locations, not in the rooms where classes are held.

The university sets the exam schedule and the faculty offices publish individual schedules. Students must take the initiative to check the draft and especially the final schedule of exams; students cannot expect anyone to tell them to do so. **The exam schedule is not flexible.** Exam dates cannot be changed to accommodate travel plans, so students should not make travel plans until they are sure of the date of their last exams. Arrangements for early exams are not permissible for any reason. **All exams must be taken at the host university.**

In humanities and social science courses, final exams typically take the form of a three-hour exam in which students are given a set of questions and are required to write essay answers to three or four of them. Some courses use multiple-choice questions for at least part of the exam. The grade obtained on such an exam typically counts for about 67 percent of the final grade for the course; assignments and tests during the semester make up the remaining 33 percent. In other courses, continuous assessment is conducted throughout the semester and takes the place of final examinations.

IP participants are required to meet all academic requirements as determined by the host university departments. They must take all examinations, meet all course requirements, and carry out all laboratory/field work. It is also important that students become familiar with the test-taking policies by reading these policies after arrival at their host university and again, before taking exams. CSU students are expected to comply with the policies implemented by their host university.

Grading

Grading is done through a percentage system. Students can get a general idea of the grading scale and grade conversion by viewing the table below.

S. Africa	CSU Grade
75-100	A
70-74	A-
67-69	B+
63-66	B
60-62	B-
57-59	C+
54-56	C
51-53	C-
50	D
00-49	F

Academic Reporting

In addition to units and grades, the OIP reports each course attempted to the student's campus by reporting the title of the course taken and the CSU home campus department in which the course is closely related. This method of reporting means that students will need to furnish course descriptions, syllabi, and other course materials to their advisors in order to apply for credit towards specific major, minor, or general education requirements. Students should expect to complete campus-based forms (petitions or course substitution requests) with the assistance of their advisor(s). If courses are not needed for specific degree requirements, then it is usually not necessary to complete any other forms.

Academic Reports for students attending the South African universities can take a minimum of six months to finalize, and sometimes longer. Graduating seniors should take this into account when planning for their graduation and submitting their graduation forms at their home campus.

Course Planning and Registration

Students will concentrate their studies in the approved area of study in which they are placed, following the same general plan as their South African counterparts.

IP participants are also required to take language courses at their host university as follows:

- At NMMU, students are required to take two Xhosa (isiXhosa) language courses each semester. If offered, students may take Akrikaans each semester instead of Xhosa.

Below is an example of the academic schedule for the year in South Africa.

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

<u>Semester 1</u>	<u>CSU Units</u>
LXP 111 - Xhosa for Beginners (Term 1)	2
LXP 112 - Xhosa for Beginners (Term 2)	2
Courses in approved area of study	8
Elective course outside approved area of study:	3
Minimum number of units required:	15

<u>Semester 2</u>	<u>CSU Units</u>
LXP 113 - Xhosa for Beginners (Term 3)	2
LXP 114 - Xhosa for Beginners (Term 4)	2
Courses in approved area of study	8
Elective course outside approved area of study:	3
Minimum number of units required:	15

Note that units above may vary depending on unit values of courses.

One course outside of the approved area of study may be taken EACH semester, if desired.

Any exceptions to the above schedule (e.g. dropping below 15 units, taking more than one elective course in a given semester, taking more than 18 units, etc.), must be approved by the Office of International Programs. To request an exception, email the Office of International Programs at: < IPacademics@calstate.edu >.

While in South Africa, IP students are required to take a minimum of 15 CSU units each semester (comparable to the host university's normal load for its own students). Serious financial aid and academic consequences may result if fewer than the minimum required units are undertaken.

Students attending NMMU have the option of taking a Community Service Learning course each semester. Only students who have successfully completed all academic requirements for the course will be given two units of CSU academic credit and a grade for the course. If taken for academic credit, units for the course will count towards the courseload requirement of 15 CSU units per semester. Students may also choose to participate in the course as volunteers with no academic credit or units given towards the courseload requirement of 15 CSU units per semester.

All courses must be taken for a regular grade.

The catalog (called prospectus or handbook) for the individual faculties contain course descriptions. The individual departments publish schedules of classes. Most courses are offered during only one semester each year and some courses are not offered every year. Most departments issue or post syllabi, course outlines, reading lists, and assignments. Faculty members are generally available through open-door access and after-class consultation, and sometimes during posted office hours.

Students are required to complete and sign a Registration Study List, provide information for Course Approval Requests, and otherwise follow instructions regarding academic procedures. Failure to do so may result in dismissal from the program.

Course Offerings

Students are advised to consult the university's website for course offerings, keeping in mind that CSU students are limited to the disciplines indicated below, and sometimes to courses for international students.

Each semester, students are expected to take at least eight CSU semester units within the approved area of study in which they are placed, following the same general plan as their South African counterparts. The remaining elective units may be in an area outside of their approved area of study, as shown in the sample schedule preceding this section.

Admission to courses is subject to availability, approval of the host university and the particular department's prerequisites.

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

In order to search for courses to take at NMMU using their website, you will need to understand the academic terminology used by universities in South Africa, which will be used in the rest of this section.

CSU Terminology	S. African Terminology
bulletin or catalog	prospectus
course	module
degree	qualification
faculty	academic division
major or program of study	course
schedule of classes	timetable

For 2011, CSU students were admitted to study in one of the following areas listed in the left column of the table below. The right column shows the corresponding faculty at NMMU in which students can take modules in their area of study (subject to the conditions stated under "Course Offerings").

Areas of study	Relevant modules can be found in the following faculties (course prefix codes are also listed below)
Anthropology	Faculty of Arts (SA)
Biology	Faculty of Sciences (BC, BCH, BM, BOT, ZOO)
Business	Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences Faculty of Arts (EB, EBM, EZA, EZB, EZC, EZD, EZE, EZZ)
Economics	Faculty of Arts (EC, ECO)
Environmental Science	Faculty of Sciences (GEN, GEO, GGL, ZOO)
History	Faculty of Arts (SSH)
Mathematics	Faculty of Science (MAPM, MATH)
Philosophy	Faculty of Arts (SF)
Politics	Faculty of Arts (SLP)
Psychology	Faculty of Arts (SP)
Sociology	Faculty of Arts (SS, SSA, SSS)

Module information can be found in a booklet known as a "prospectus". Each academic division (or "faculty") publishes a prospectus which can be found in the NMMU website.

To find course description, go so < <http://www.nmmu.ac.za/default.asp?id=3644&bhcp=1> > and do the following:

- Under 'Prospectus 2010' click on the faculty in which you will take your modules (see above table).
- Scroll down the document until you find the section entitled "CORE SYLLABI OF MODULES OFFERED" which is located about one-third to one-half through the prospectus. Module information including prerequisites is listed in alphabetical order according to the two or three letter course prefix code as listed in the above table.
- Scroll down the document until you find the course prefix code with modules for your approved area of study,.

Business students: There are numerous codes in the prospectus for Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences so you will have to scroll through the entire section to search for appropriate modules for your business degree.

To find module description and timetables, go to < <http://www.nmmu.ac.za/default.asp?id=6963&bhcp=1> > and enter the module code in the field under 'Module Brower' or select the module from the comprehensive list provided. Students should select modules offered at the Summerstand (South) campus.

Note: Module information for 2011 (prospectus and timetables) was not available at the time this publication was printed. Students should check the NMMU website periodically for updates.