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Free online maths tutoring service helps matrics during lockdown

University of Cape Town (UCT) medical student, Ilyaas Amien started his free, online maths tuition service – [Tutonic](#) – in 2017. It has now become a vital resource for many high school learners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tutonic was started with the aim of supporting high school students around the country and bridging the gap between access and quality education.

It began with 50 students and now has 500 (a huge jump from last year's 300 students) and 15 student tutors, most of whom are volunteers from UCT. The organisation is endorsed by the Western Cape Education Department.

"I wanted a platform to address the chronic lack of maths support for high school students," shared Amien. The resources provided by Tutonic include concept videos that cover all the maths content from grades 8 to 12, quizzes and previous questions Tutonic has received from other pupils over the years, personalised support from a university student (pupils can submit questions they're struggling with), and weekly live sessions with a tutor for matrics.

"Tutonic has created over 1 000 maths videos (concept videos and tutor responses), now curated in the Tutonic Bank," said Amien. "We also encourage teachers to use these as a teaching tool, to 'flip the classroom'. Our aim is to make the teaching experience less didactic and more engaging."

This year Tutonic introduced live sessions where pupils can engage with a tutor via Zoom once a week. Pupils can also ask specific questions via the site and get quick answers from tutors. They have also formed a group for maths teachers to connect and share resources. As for the tutors, managing their time and resources in lockdown has been an added challenge – physically, emotionally and academically, said Amien.

"We're all being tested in various ways, some more than others. As one who has readily engaged with online learning through Tutonic, my own academic transition was perhaps much smoother than it was for other students. I also have an amazing support structure in terms of family, friends and the incredible team I work with at Tutonic."

Tutoring is made easier by Tutonic's asynchronous system; tutors provide direct support when it is convenient for them to prevent any clash with their university work.

"And because Tutonic has an extensive library of concept videos and past responses, tutors don't necessarily have to create new content for each question we receive.

"In many cases, our tutors refer the student to a previous video that explains the concept or question they're struggling with. This eases the burden on our volunteers and allows us to support many more students compared to conventional tuition systems."

Amien is appealing to university students who enjoy teaching maths (and have the means) to consider joining their platform as tutors.

"From your own home, you will be able to support hundreds of students across South Africa with mathematics."

Amien recently returned to the MBChB programme after completing an honours degree in neuroscience. He hopes to tackle a concurrent master's programme in neuroscience in 2021.

"My goal is to one day become a clinician scientist who connects the brain to the bedside," he said.

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Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Aamirah Sunday

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5427
Cell: (076) 947 6071

Email: aamirah.sunday@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za