

New postgrad diploma for agronomists launched at SU

A new postgraduate diploma in Agronomy at Stellenbosch University (SU) will now be on offer for those wishing to expand their knowledge of crops and fertilizer management, from 2017 at the SU Department of Agronomy. It specifically offers in-depth training to people who did not acquire their post-matric agronomy background at a university, but at an agricultural college or university of technology.



Dr PJ Pieterse

It was developed by experts at Stellenbosch University. Course coordinator Dr PJ Pieterse of the SU Department of Agronomy answered a few questions about the course:

Why was the diploma programme established?

Dr PJ Pieterse: There was a need among people who have spent a number of years in the industry to improve their knowledge about the latest developments, practical applications and research. The development of the course originated from requests from within the industry for further advanced and expanded support for people with an agricultural qualification in agronomy, but who do not necessarily have a BScAgric. This is because they studied at an agricultural college or university of technology (previously known as “technikons”).

Is the course presented full-time or part-time?

Dr Pieterse: The course can be done full-time over one year or part-time spread over two years, so that people who are already working can also benefit from it without giving up their jobs.

From which professions would prospective students come?

Dr Pieterse: Some of our prospective students work in the seed and fertilizer industry, while others are involved in chemical crop protection. Some of the people interested in doing the course are currently still busy with their training at an agricultural college or university of technology and wish to continue their studies at SU immediately after graduating, to further expand their knowledge with this diploma.

What background should students have who wish to enrol for this course?

Dr Pieterse: It is aimed at people in the industry or recent graduates who already have a background in agronomy thanks to the three years of training they have enjoyed at an agricultural college or university of technology. However, they do not have a BScAgric degree, but rather a BSc degree or BTech degree.

Which qualification must the person have to be admitted to the course?

Dr Pieterse: Any three-year degree with Agronomy as one of their final year modules. They must also have a minimum

mark of 60% in this subject. It is not for people who have already graduated with a BScAgric degree, and does not necessarily lead to further studies at master's degree level. The course thus offers those with a three-year agricultural qualification the opportunity to study further – an opportunity which is not generally readily available.



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Which specialist fields in agronomy are covered during the course?

Dr Pieterse: Regarding pasture management, both cultivated and natural veld will be studied. There will also be a focus on cool weather crops, alternative crops, weed management, hydroponic cultivation systems and how best to do crop rotation among others. Another field of focus is nutrition for vegetable crops which are cultivated intensively and extensively.

Which modules are covered?

Dr Pieterse: Modules are assessed on the basis of practical assignments, written assignments, tests and written exams in June and November. Students should be prepared for compulsory modules on:

- Crops for extensive production systems
- The physiological and ecological principles of pasture management
- Weed management
- Product physiology and technology suited to annual field crops
- Intensive crop production systems

How will students be able to apply their newly acquired knowledge in the workplace?

Dr Pieterse: The extensive knowledge they will acquire will enable participants to identify, address and optimally manage problems which arise in any of the abovementioned specialist fields. They will for instance be able to compile nutrition programmes for hydroponically cultivated crops, draft weed management programmes, and develop crop rotations for different environments.

Applications close on 14 September. For more enquiries about the course, contact Dr Pieterse of the SU Department of Agronomy on pjp@sun.ac.za/021 808 4805 or Rahkeenah Peters on rosman@sun.ac.za/021 808 4803.