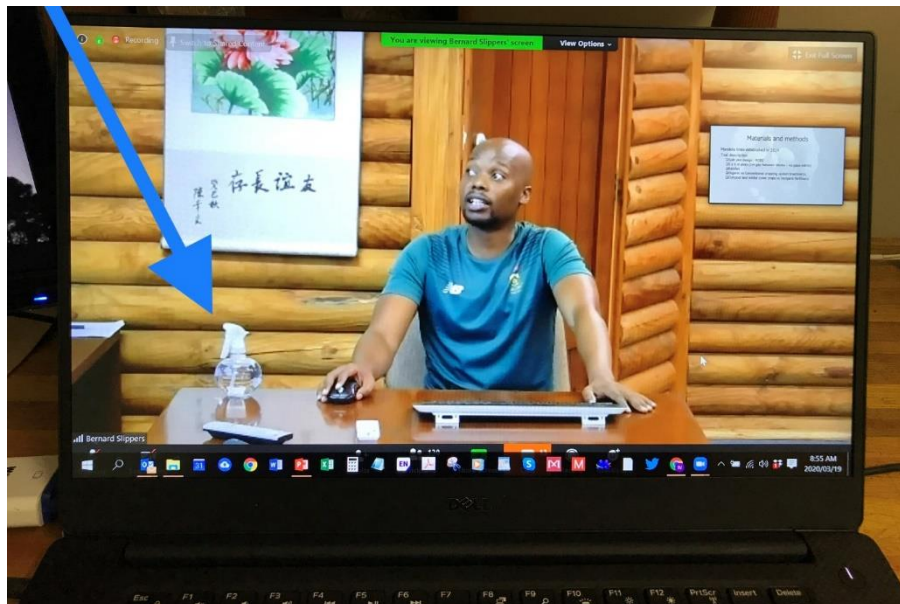


## FABI SEMINARS GO VIRTUAL FOR COVID-19 SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept the globe causing severe disruption to daily routines as people are quarantined or even barred from leaving their homes, much less attend work. Following the announcement of a National State of Disaster by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on 15 March, the University of Pretoria immediately stopped all contact classes and instructed all non-essential staff to work from home until further notice. The FABI MANCOM had already pre-empted this closure, being led by unfolding events in Europe and elsewhere, when it became obvious that similar restrictions would inevitably be put in place in South Africa.



Several immediate steps have already been implemented at the Institute to reduce the risk of infection to FABIans, including strict card-only door access, the ready availability of disinfectant sprays and paper towels at all entrances, offices, labs and toilets. Staff and students are also instructed to work from home wherever possible, while contingency plans were drafted to ensure critical work continues as far as possible.

Thursday morning seminars (TMS) continued without any interruption at all on 19 March, albeit now from the FABI boardroom and using video conferencing. This saw 135 participants login to watch the live presentations from the boardroom by Mathew Harris and Mandla Sibiyi. Participants could ask questions via typed messages, relayed via a meeting chair to interact with the speakers.

Participants included FABIans on a fieldtrip, at least one from China and numerous from home where even family members joined to listen. Professor Wilhelm de Beer joined from his home

office as he is in self-isolation having shown cold symptoms this weekend. FABlans were also invited to share photographs of themselves participating in the virtual TMS.

As a precaution, all surfaces and equipment such as keyboards in the Boardroom were also



sterilized before and after use (the bottle of sanitizer can be seen indicated by a blue arrow in the photos illustrating this news item).

Afterwards, Professor Bernard Slippers also gave FABlans an update of the current situation and how the Institute was tackling the challenges of the restricted work environment. The weekly FABI Monday

Morning Meeting will be similarly hosted via Zoom.

The FABI community is quickly adapting to the current situation and will continue to adapt to ensure safety and support of its community, and continuity of critical functions as far as possible. FABI is fortunate that it has a strong sense of community and strong systems and structures in place to deal with the challenges that COVID-19 present. This includes an up-to-date FABI list server, WhatsApp groups, website, social media and other communication channels that have been in place for some years. These channels of communication are critical for regular updates from both the Institute and University leadership to FABlans and our broader community.