

INSPIRING UFS STAFF

# dumela

*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives  
through quality, impact, and care.*

UNIVERSITY OF THE  
FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE  
VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA  
FREISTATA



JULY 2025 – ISSUE ONE



## FROM THE EDITOR

## Embracing accountability together

Welcome to the first issue of *Dumela* for 2025, themed around a value that underpins every successful institution: **accountability**. The University of the Free State believes that being accountable is more than just a principle – it is a daily practice that reflects and continues to shape the institution's culture and future.

In this issue, we highlight the role of Internal Auditing in promoting integrity, and staff voices bring the theme to life as they reflect on personal and professional accountability.

We also celebrate milestones: the historic installation of Prof Hester C. Klopper as our 15th – and first woman – Vice-Chancellor and Principal, and Werner Stander's international achievements with our choirs. Furthermore, we take pride in the tangible progress reflected in new and up-graded campus facilities: the renovated Health and Wellness Centre, phase two of the Qwaqwa Student Centre, and the technology-rich one-room classrooms. These developments stand as a testament to our collective accountability to provide a supportive, inclusive, and future-ready environment for our students and staff.

Mental health is another focus, as we acknowledge the pressures our staff face – from burnout to balancing multiple responsibilities. We explore how being accountable includes taking care of ourselves and each other.

In addition, we recognise and celebrate the outstanding achievements of our staff, whose dedication exemplifies accountable leadership in action. Among them are Dr Claudia Ntsapi, who has been recognised as one of Africa's top 20 emerging physiologists, while Prof Tameshnie Deane was appointed to the Council on Higher Education.

**Let this issue inspire us to lead with accountability in every sphere of life. ■**

EDITOR  
LUNGA LUTHULI



## VAN DIE REDAKTEUR

## Om saam aanspreeklikheid te aanvaar

Welkom by die eerste uitgawe van *Dumela* vir 2025, met 'n tema wat handel oor 'n waarde wat elke suksesvolle instelling ondersteun: **aanspreeklikheid**. Die Universiteit van die Vrystaat glo om aanspreeklik te wees is meer as 'n blote beginsel – dit is 'n daaglikse praktyk wat die instelling se kultuur en toekoms weerspieël en deurlopend vorm.

In hierdie uitgawe beklemtoon ons die rol van Interne Ouditering in die bevordering van integriteit, terwyl personeelstemme lewe gee aan die tema deur te besin oor persoonlike en professionele aanspreeklikheid.

Ons vier ook mylpale: die historiese inhuldiging van prof Hester C. Klopper as ons 15de – en eerste vroulike – Visekanselier en Prinsipaal, asook Werner Stander se internasionale prestasies met ons kore. Verder is ons trots op die tasbare vordering wat weerspieël word in nuwe en opgegradeerde kampusgeriewe: die opgeknapte Gesondheids- en Welstandsentrum, fase twee van die Qwaqwa-studentesentrum, en die tegnologiese eenvertrekkaskamers. Hierdie ontwikkelings dien as 'n bewys van ons gesamentlike aanspreeklikheid om 'n ondersteunende, inklusiewe en toekomsgeraad omgewing vir ons studente en personeel te bied.

Geestesgesondheid is nog 'n fokuspunt, aangesien ons die druk erken wat ons personeel in die gesig staar – van uitbranding tot die balansering van talle verantwoordelikhede. Ons kyk na hoe aanspreeklikheid die versorging van onself en van mekaar insluit.

Daarbenewens erken en vier ons die uitnemende prestasies van ons personeel, wie se toewyding 'n voorbeeld is van aanspreeklike leierskap in die praktyk. Onder hulle is dr Claudia Ntsapi, wat erken is as een van Afrika se top 20 opkomende fisioloë, terwyl prof Tameshnie Deane in die Raad op Hoër Onderwys aangestel is.

**Laat hierdie uitgawe ons inspireer om op elke gebied van die lewe met aanspreeklikheid te lei. ■**

REDAKTEUR  
LUNGA LUTHULI

## HO TSWA HO MOQOLOTSI

## Ho amohela maikarabelo mmoho

Reya o amohela ho kgatiso ya pele *Dumela* ya 2025, e nang le sehlooho se reng “Ho **boikarabelo** ke taba ya Free State”. Ho ikarabella ha hona moedi wa hoba le molao-theo fela empa ke mokgwa wa letsatsi le letsatsi o bontshang leho tswela pele ho nafatsa setso sa moetlo wa rona le bokamoso ba rona.

Kgatisong ena, re shebana le karolo ya tlhabollo ya kahare ho kgothaletsa botshepeho, leho utlwa mantswe a ba bang ba ntseng ba qala, leba ba ditsibi tsa mesebetsi ya rona.

Re fihletse diketsahalo tsa bohlokwa tsa nalane ya mothei eleng Prof C. Klopper eo eleng mosadi wa pele, ya bileng motlatsi le mookamedi, le Werner Stander eo ebileng mookamedi wa pele wa morabe o fapaneng ho tloha ka 15th, ho feta moo, re ikutlwa rele motlotlo ka tswelopele e entsweng ke baithuti ba rona ba batjha ba tswang setsing sa qwaqwa lesa boithuto le tekgenoloji e tswetseng pele, ha mmoho le ditsi tse ntjha tsa Qwaqwa student centre, le ditsi tse ntjha tsa mahlale a tekgenoloji e tswetseng pele ya ditsi tsa rona tsa thuto, tsena kaofela di tla bohlokwa haholo ho baithuti le basebetsi ba rona, leho ba le tikoloho e tshwarellang, e loketseng le e tsitsitseng bakeng sa baithuti le basebetsi ba rona.

Bophelo bo botle ba hlabollo ya kelello ke taba enngwe eo re e hlokomelang, hare ntse re hlokomela mathata ao basebetsi ba rona ba tobaneng le ona, ho tloha ho sithabela ho fihlela ho hloka botsitso dipakeng tsa mosebetsi le bophelo ba botho, re hlaloba hore na ho ikarabella hoka kenyetsetsa ho hlokomela ba bang leba bang.

Ho feta, moo re ananela leho keteka katleho ya basebetsi ba eona, ba bontshitseng ho ikarabella hoba bang Afrika ka bophara, hara bona ke Dr Claudia Ntshapi eo e bileng e mong wa dingaka tse 20 tse hodimo tsa dingaka tsa kelello Afrika le Prof Tameshnie Deane ya ileng a kgethwa hoba lehlakoreng la lekgotla la Thuto e phahameng.

**Kgatiso ena ere isitse ho etella pele kaho ikarebella dinthong tsena. ■**

MOHLOPHISI  
LUNGA LUTHULI

## KUSUKA KUMHLELI

## Ukutuswa kokuzibambela mathupha sindawonye

Siyakwamukela kwingosi yokuqala ye-*Dumela* yonyaka wezi-2025 nesekelwe ingqikithi yamava ahlomisa impumelelo yesikhungo nesikhungo: **ukuzibambela mathupha**. INyuvesi yase-Free State ikholelwa ukuthi ukuzibambela mathupha kuyinto edlula ngisho izimiso – iyisenzo semihla ngemihla esiqhakambisa futhi esiveza isithombe sesikompilo nekusasa lesikhungo.

Kule ngosi siveza indima yoCwaningo-Mabhuku lweNyuvesi ekuqhakambiseni isidima kanye nezwi labasebenzi ekwenzeni ukuzibambela mathupha kwayinto ebonakalayo njengoba bexoxa ngakho ngokomsebenzi nangokwabo ngqo.

Okunye, ukubungaza igxathu elivelele: lokho-ke ingqophamlando yokugcotshwa kukaSlwz. Hester C. Klopper njengoSekela-Shansela aphinde abe nguThishanhloko we-15 nongowokuqala wesifazane, kanye namagalelo ka-Werner Stander ezingeni lomhlaba ehamba nekhwaya yenyuvesi. Asigcini lapho, siphinde sizigqaje ngempumelelo ebonakalayo egqame kwingqalasizinda entsha nevuselelwe kwenye yamakhempasi; ukuvuselelwa kweSikhungo Sezempilo neMpilonhle, isigaba sesibili sokuvuselelwa kweNdawo eButhanela Abafundi eQwaqwa, kanye namagumbi ahamba ngawodwa okufundela anobuchwepheshe beqophelo. Lezi zinguqoko ziwubufakazi obubonakalayo obufakazela ukuzibambela mathupha ekwakheni indawo eseka izimo, engakhethi bala, futhi elungele ikusasa eliqhakazile labafundi nabasebenzi.

Okunye esikufakele amehlo okhozi ukunakekelwa komqondo (mental health) njengoba sazi kahle kamhlophe ingcindezi abasebenzi ababhekana nayo masibuka ukuxakaniseka kwabo bezama ukuqhuba umsebenzi ngapha nangapha. Sizama ukuthola ukuthi ukuzibambela mathupha kungahlangana kanjani namasu okuzinakekela siphinde sinakekelane.

Ukunezelela kwesengikushilo, ngingasho ukuthi situsa siphinde sibungaze amagalelo eqophelo abasebenzi bethu nokuyiwo ayisibonelo sokuzibambela mathupha mangabe igeja liphezu komkhono. Kwabanye babo sibala uDkt. Claudia Ntsapi osetuswe njenge-phycologist edlondlobala ngamandla ebalwa namanye angama-20 ebalazweni lethu, kanye noSlwz. Tameshnie Deane oqokelwe kwisiGungu seMfundo Ephakeme.

**Asamukele le ngosi ukuthi isigqungquzele ekutheni sihole ngokuzibambela mathupha kunanoma yimuphi umunxa wempilo. ■**

KUBEKA UMHLELI  
LUNGA LUTHULI

## ABOUT THE COVER



The front cover captures a historic moment for the University of the Free State: the installation of Prof Hester C. Klopper as the university's 15th Vice-Chancellor and Principal. As the first woman to hold this position in the institution's 121-year history, Prof Klopper's inauguration marks the beginning of a new era.

In her inaugural address, *Walking Together with Purpose: Unlocking Excellence to Lead Change*, she set out a bold vision for an African-rooted, globally relevant university. With a focus on people, purpose, and partnership, Prof Klopper committed the university to a course of innovation, transformation, and meaningful societal impact.

Read the article on pages 24 and 25.



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# Is feeling overwhelmed the new normal?

By Leonie Bolleurs



Click to read the Sesotho version.

Staff from all spheres in the university space have been feeling increasingly overwhelmed and emotionally drained in recent years, reporting poor well-being and burnout," says Dr Munita Dunn-Coetzee, Director: Health and Wellness Centre.

According to her, the higher education space brings with it a unique combination of pressures. "Due to a variety of national factors, there is mounting pressure to achieve more with limited resources. The question can therefore be posed – is feeling overwhelmed the new normal?"

Staff are stretched thin, and it is not hard to see why. Heavy workloads, limited resources, low salaries, and poor work-life balance. It is no surprise that burnout is on the rise.

"Importantly, burnout is more than just feeling tired or stressed. It's a syndrome conceptualised as the result of chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed." Dr Dunn-Coetzee explains that it is what happens when your mental, emotional, and physical reserves are depleted. "You might dislike a job that you were passionate about," she says. Exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of ineffectiveness are common symptoms.

This shows up in the workplace in ways we might overlook – struggling to focus, skipping your self-care routine, or withdrawing from the things that once brought joy. "As everything feels overwhelming, this will start having an effect on your personal life too," she adds.

But here is the good news – support is available.

The UFS Department of Human Resources has an Organisational Development and Employee Well-Being team ready to walk the journey with you. Their programmes, workshops, and campaigns focus on employee health and well-being.

Dr Munita Dunn-Coetzee, Director: Health and Wellness Centre at the UFS, encourages staff to reach out and not journey their mental health struggles alone.

The Employee Assistance Programme (Careways) also offers confidential support at no cost. "Employees and their household members are entitled to four free face-to-face counselling sessions per issue, or unlimited telephonic counselling sessions," she notes.

Need to regain your footing? Dr Dunn-Coetzee offers this advice: "Self-care is very important – reflect on your work-life balance and set boundaries. Do you sleep enough? Do you exercise? (And no, it does not have to be the Comrades!)"

She encourages warm, transparent work environments where support is visible, and confidentiality is respected. "There is always help available, let me help to connect you. Mental health is after all a journey, not a destination. And I will share your journey with you. Because seemingly, being overwhelmed is the new normal."

Reach out to Dr Munita Dunn-Coetzee on +27 51 401 2853 or [DunnCoetzeeM@ufs.ac.za](mailto:DunnCoetzeeM@ufs.ac.za)





# Werner Stander represents SA on global choral stage

By Onthatile Tikoe

**W**erner Stander, conductor of the UFS Bloemfontein Campus and Institutional Choirs, proudly represented the university at two major choral conferences in March 2025. His involvement not only showcased his individual excellence but also positioned the UFS as a key player in the global choral landscape.

“Representing the UFS at these conferences was an immense honour,” said Stander. “It’s the institution that shaped me as a conductor, and now I can give back by carrying its name onto global stages.”

## Build bridges, not walls

In Cape Town, Stander presented two lectures at the Mzansi National Conductors Convention, hosted at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. His presentations focused on ‘building aural bridges in choirs’, a theme tied to his PhD research in aural musicianship and inspired by the event’s message: *build bridges, not walls*.

He described the event as ‘electrifying’, with standout performances by the Drakensberg Boys’ Choir, Voces Cordis, and Mädchenchor from Germany. Stander also performed with Kalare – a professional vocal ensemble conducted by Dr Gerrit Scheepers. Being part of a line-up that included national and international talent, he noted, was a humbling and uplifting experience.

Later that month, Stander attended the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) National Conference in Dallas, Texas, which is one of the largest choral gatherings globally with more than 4 000 conductors in attendance.

Highlights included performances by elite international choirs such as the Thomanerchor (Germany), TUKS Camerata (South Africa), and the Santa Fe Desert Chorale (USA). A grand performance of Verdi’s *Requiem* and Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms* was a memorable highlight.

“The scale and standard were extraordinary,” Stander explained. “It reshaped my approach as a conductor and educator.”

## Bringing global insights home

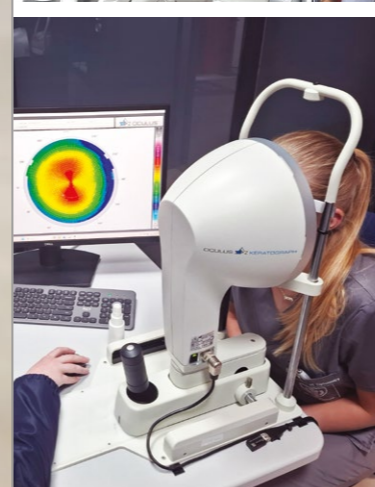
Stander returned to the UFS with new repertoire ideas, vocal techniques, and cultural insights. He has already begun to integrate these into rehearsals and hopes to foster international collaboration. Notably, several composers whose works are currently performed by the UFS Choir have expressed a keen interest in engaging directly with the ensemble.

“My goal is to make South African choral music more globally accessible,” he said, “and to continue building bridges through music,” he concluded. 🌍



Photo: Dr Gerrit Scheepers

Werner Stander, conductor of the University of the Free State's Bloemfontein Campus and Institutional Choirs.



Photos: Supplied

# Department of Optometry expands eye-care services

By Anthony Mthembu

**T**he Department of Optometry at the UFS recently announced the expansion of its optometry services. According to Carel Masemola, Lecturer in the Department of Optometry, the expansion – in collaboration with the Kingdom Vision Foundation – makes eye care services accessible to UFS staff and students and residents of Bloemfontein. “It is an opportunity for the department to increase our wider reach in terms of providing help to more people,” he said.

## Expansion of services

Of these additional services, some are offered at the UFS Health and Wellness Centre on the UFS Bloemfontein Campus, and some are offered off campus at the Anchor of Hope Eye Clinic. Services offered on campus include general optometry services such as comprehensive eye exams, which are available on Mondays and Tuesdays. In addition, assistance with fitting and managing various types of contact lenses is available on Wednesdays and Thursdays. When it comes to off-campus services, these include paediatric and binocular vision services, which are for children from the age of four and people with binocular vision problems. Lastly, ocular pathology services are available on and off campus. These include assistance with the diagnosis and management of advanced eye complications, including eye screening for people living with hypertension and diabetes.

Masemola said several reasons have prompted this expansion, one of which being a shortage of optometrists in public health facilities across the Free State. The implication is that the provision of eye care services in health-care facilities is

limited; therefore, this expansion attempts to address that problem. In addition, he indicated that the student intake within the department has increased, creating a need to capacitate even more students with clinical training.

## Eye care at no cost

These specialised services are provided to patients on and off campus at no charge. In fact, a service charge is only applied when one requires contact lenses or spectacles. According to Masemola, “Making the cost of these eye services affordable significantly increases the uptake or desire to actually consider using these important services.” He added that the eye clinics also welcome donations of second-hand spectacle frames that are still in good condition, as part of the efforts to make this service accessible and affordable.

In this regard, he highlighted that the acceptance of these new services by the UFS community and the public has been positive. In fact, he explained that the general optometry clinic on campus was fully booked until two weeks after the recess, underscoring the continuous need for these services. 🌍

*The recent expansion of services in collaboration with the Kingdom Vision Foundation aims to increase access to quality eye care for students, staff, and the broader Bloemfontein community.*

- Optometry services are available at the UFS Health and Wellness Centre and can be accessed by appointment.

For general enquiries, email: [Kovsiehealthyeclinic@gmail.com](mailto:Kovsiehealthyeclinic@gmail.com)  
To book an appointment, call: 051 401 3485 or 051 401 2603 (Mondays and Tuesdays, 08:00–16:00).





# Art historian takes media philosophy to the mountain at SAMC 2025

By Precious Shamase

Photos: André Damons

The Second Southern African Mountain Conference (SAMC-2025), which took place at the Champagne Sports Resort in the Drakensberg, saw academics and students from all disciplines in attendance. The SAMC proceedings were conceptualised by the UFS Afromontane Research Unit, the African Mountain Research Foundation, and Global Mountain Safeguard Research (GLOMOS) – a joint initiative between Eurac Research and the UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security. SAMC2025 was held under the patronage of UNESCO. This year's SAMC conference was a vibrant forum for scholars across the continent to engage with the latest developments and critical perspectives in mountain research.

## Mountains as media philosophy

Prof Martin Rossouw, Head of the Department of Art History and Image Studies at the UFS, presented his paper, *Mountains as a Means: Media Philosophy on the Ridge*, at the conference.

In his presentation, Prof Rossouw explored a fresh and unusual idea – that mountains can be seen as more than just beautiful or symbolic landscapes. He suggested that we should not only look at what we think or say about mountains, but also at how mountains themselves play an active role in shaping human experiences, stories, and meanings.



Prof Martin Rossouw (left), with his departmental colleagues: art historian, Prof Suzanne Human (centre), and research fellow, Dr Nikita Mathias (right), a senior concept developer at the Oslo-based Munch art museum.

In other words, mountains are not just backdrops for human activity – they can also influence how we think, feel, and make sense of the world.

His research challenges the common idea that media is only about screens, technology, or communication tools. Instead, he opens the door to thinking about natural elements such as mountains as powerful forms of 'media' in their own right – helping us to understand ourselves and the world around us in new ways.

Drawing inspiration from contemporary media philosophy, particularly the concept of 'elemental media', Prof Rossouw argued that mountains are not merely passive subjects of our media, but active 'infrastructures of being'. He posited that these colossal, near-timeless formations mediate distinct conditions of human existence.

## Mountains: scopic, spatial, ethical media

Prof Rossouw explored how we

relate to mountains in different ways. Looking from a mountain, he said, offers a powerful vantage point – an early form of technology that helps us see and understand the world. Looking towards a mountain, they serve as landmarks that guide us and connect communities across distances. And when we climb a mountain, the experience can be deeply personal – a journey that challenges us and invites reflection, making the mountain a medium for inner growth.

While acknowledging the inherent ambivalence and potential for mystification associated with mountainous environments, Prof Rossouw's work ultimately underlined the profound and multifaceted ways in which mountains serve as a fundamental medium in our lives. His presentation at SAMC 2025 offered a fresh and insightful perspective, pushing the boundaries of media philosophy and inviting attendees to consider the powerful communicative and existential role of the natural world around us. ■

# New research bites back at rodent problem in townships

By Precious Shamase

A collaborative research project is underway in South African townships to combat the pervasive rodent problem and its impact on human health. Led by Prof Peter Taylor, Professor-in-Residence in the UFS Afromontane Research Unit and affiliated with the UFS Department of Zoology and Entomology, the initiative brings together experts from the UK's Natural Resources Institute (NRI), including Prof Steven Belmain and Dr Hayley Thompson, and South African institutions such as the UFS and the University of Venda.

This 'One Health' approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental well-being. The team visited laboratory facilities on the UFS campuses in Bloemfontein and Qwaqwa, the latter being near Phuthaditjhaba township – a key research site alongside Lwamando in Limpopo.

The multidisciplinary project involves local farmers and university departments, integrating expertise in advanced techniques such as high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) and mass spectrometry, molecular virology and microbiology, genome sequencing, and parasitology. Social scientists, such as Dr Shingirayi Chamisa, a lecturer in the UFS Department of Industrial Psychology, are also involved to understand community perceptions and current rodent control methods, including the impact on mental health.

The research will investigate the health risks associated with rodent infestations, including food contamination with poison residues and fungal toxins, and the transmission of disease to humans and livestock through direct contact or parasites. Practical trials will evaluate methods to reduce food contamination.

Significantly, the project will

explore novel and humane rodent control strategies, such as contraceptive baits, offering a safer alternative to rodenticides. Recent concerns about rodenticide-related deaths in townships have increased pressure for safer, ecological solutions.

This research holds significant promise for developing sustainable and effective solutions to mitigate the negative impact of rodent pests on the health and livelihoods of township residents. The international and local collaboration, guided by a holistic 'One Health' perspective, marks a crucial step towards addressing this challenging issue. Prof Taylor expressed his appreciation for the enthusiastic engagement of all collaborators, highlighting the potential for a truly transdisciplinary project to find meaningful and ecologically sound solutions to rodent-borne pathogens and food contamination in South African townships. ■



Prof Steven Belmain, Dr Hayley Thompson, and Prof Lourens Swanepoel visited South Africa to launch a collaborative One Health research project focused on tackling rodent-related health risks in townships. Here they are pictured with other international and local collaborators.

The new Health and Wellness Centre brought together a wide array of stakeholders, including representatives from the centre, University Estates, and external architects and contractors.



# UFS unveils the ‘*passion project*’ – a student-centred health and wellness centre

By Lunga Luthuli

Setting a new benchmark in student health and wellness, the UFS has opened its doors to an innovative centre – a project described as a ‘passion project’ and a milestone in student-centred support. The facility, a flagship project that unites Kovsie Health and Student Counselling and Development under one roof, is the result of years of collaborative planning and a shared vision to enhance student success and well-being.

Dr Munita Dunn-Coetzee, Director of Student Counselling and Development, explained that the centre was inspired by the university’s commitment to being ‘student-centred’ and fostering a socially just environment. “An innovative and relevant space

was therefore created to respond to students’ learning and developmental needs,” she said. “The vision was to create a space that aligns a variety of student services in one building – communicating care, relevance, warmth, and quality.”

Key to the project’s success was the strategic integration of services. According to Dr Dunn-Coetzee, the Division of Student Affairs’ (DSA) Integrated Strategic Direction and Organisational Structure 2023–2028 aims to ‘eradicate silos’ and promote ‘collaboration, ownership, wholeness and a unique collective identity’. The Health and Wellness Centre, she added, “can assist in enhancing student well-being as a newly conceptualised collective identity”.

The project brought together a wide array of stakeholders, including University Estates, external architects and contractors, and representatives from the Health and Wellness Centre. Dr Dunn-Coetzee highlighted the challenges faced during construction – from heavy rain to continuing service delivery amid noise and dust. “Constant communication was vital, as well as being able to address challenges as they arose – and of course, having a sense of humour helped!” she remarked.

The new centre houses a comprehensive suite of services, including primary health care, HIV testing and counselling, mental health programmes, developmental workshops, and a medical practice with general practitioners and physiotherapists. “It provides students with greater access to a cluster of services and opportunities to enhance physical and mental well-being,” Dr Dunn-Coetzee said.

Looking ahead, the university plans to replicate the integrated, multidisciplinary model on its South and Qwaqwa campuses, with future expansions including a dedicated office for spiritual support. Dr Dunn-Coetzee hopes that the centre’s legacy will be one of “wholeness ... embedded in care, social justice, excellence, and sustainability,” setting a new standard for student wellness services in higher education. ■





# Accountability in action

By Gerda-Marié van Rooyen

## Eleanor Andrews

**Senior Assistant Officer: Chemistry**

Accountability means taking ownership of responsibilities, being transparent in decisions, and following through on commitments. In an administrative role, this ensures that students and staff receive the support they need through clear communication and effective time management. It creates a stable environment where others can focus and thrive. For support staff, demonstrating accountability sets a professional standard and models integrity. By encouraging responsibility, respect, and reliability – while welcoming diverse perspectives – we help students develop essential life and career skills rooted in accountability.

## Boemo Segoje

**Research Development**

Accountability in my role means ensuring that the UFS research community adheres to all key ethical norms and guidelines throughout the research process. We strive to foster a supportive and open environment where researchers feel welcome to visit our offices to seek assistance with their ethics application process. Through ethics training and constructive feedback, we help staff and students submit ethically sound applications. Over the years, the Research Information Management System (RIMS) team's consistent support has enabled many researchers to trust our support – they frequently recommend our services.

## Nomonde Mbadi

**Director: Directorate for Student Recruitment Services (SRS)**

At the university, accountability is more than a principle – it is a daily practice. Recognised as a core institutional value, it calls on staff to take responsibility for their actions and outcomes, including their obligations to students, colleagues, stakeholders, society, and the global knowledge community. At Student Recruitment Services, this means ethical engagement, collaboration, and sharing honest, accurate messages. A strong example is the 2023 Matriculant of the Year campaign, where delays upheld transparency and ultimately strengthened trust, attracted stronger applicants, and supported long-term institutional credibility.

Accountability is more than a principle – it is a daily practice. Recognised as a core institutional value, it calls on staff to take responsibility for their actions and outcomes. This commitment extends beyond campus walls, embracing obligations to students, colleagues, stakeholders, society at large, and the global knowledge community.



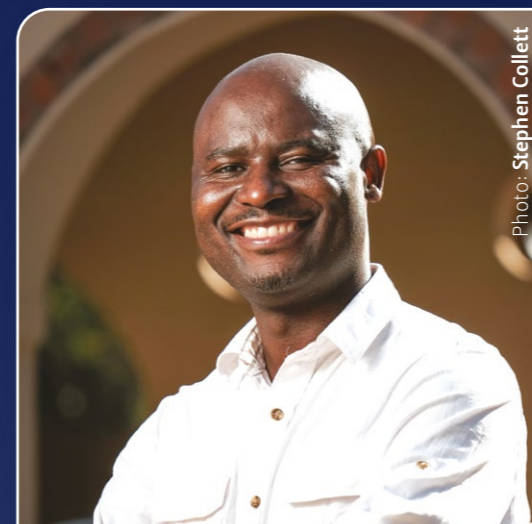
Eleanor Andrews.



Boemo Segoje.



Nomonde Mbadi.



Dr Bernard Humbe.



Dr Innocent Dande.



Amanda Smith.

## Dr Bernard Humbe

**Facilitator in Biblical and Religious Studies**

As a facilitator in Biblical and Religious Studies, I view accountability as living ethically before both a higher power and our community. It involves taking full responsibility for our actions, thoughts, and emotions, and constantly evaluating ourselves to improve. In teaching and research, this means applying ethical principles, showing empathy, understanding students' needs, setting clear expectations, and providing feedback. Sacred texts such as the Bible, Torah, and Qur'an emphasise responsibility, mutual accountability, and conscience, which remind us that our conduct should reflect integrity in all aspects of life.

## Dr Innocent Dande

**International Studies Group**

Accountability in research means obtaining informed consent, handling data responsibly, and being transparent with funders, institutions, collaborators, and professional bodies. At the International Studies Group, we follow UFS policies and ethical guidelines, and those of the countries where we conduct research, to the letter. I regularly engage with global research to understand diverse methodologies and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. A recent partnership with Dr Admire Phiri on the Tjwa San people of Zimbabwe achieved its intended outcomes and uncovered new research opportunities. This experience reflects ethical responsibility and the value of meaningful academic collaboration.

## Amanda Smith

**Assistant Officer: Experimental Farm**

I practise accountability by prioritising transparency, fairness, and adherence to UFS policies and relevant guidelines. This builds trust, protects the university's reputation, and ensures high-quality service. By being consistent and supportive while holding myself to the same standards as others, I contribute to lawful, ethical, and efficient operations. A clear structure, continuous engagement, and a culture of responsibility are key. Recognising contributions fosters pride and positive behaviour. Our electronic systems support efficient and secure record-keeping and ensure that all documents are safely stored for auditing and accountability, helping to maintain oversight and organisational integrity across all functions. 📄





Promoted UFS staff members were celebrated during a special event on the Bloemfontein Campus, recognising their contributions to the university's growth and academic excellence. The evening reflected a shared spirit of innovation, connection, and pride.



Photos: Stephen Collett



# Staff honoured for promotions at heartfelt celebration

By Tshepo Tsotetsi

A sense of pride and purpose filled the Centenary Complex on the Bloemfontein Campus on 26 March 2025, as the UFS celebrated the 64 staff members who received promotions during 2024. The evening was about recognising hard work, resilience, and the people who help shape the heartbeat of the university.

Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Hester C. Klopper, congratulated those who were promoted, noting their critical role in the institution's growth. "Each of you contributes to the beating heart that gives life to our university," she said, reminding attendees that it is not buildings or infrastructure that define the UFS, but the people who make it thrive.

Encouraging staff to 'rediscover our institutional heart', Prof Klopper highlighted the importance of connecting research with teaching and building stronger ties with the wider community. "Together, we are not just maintaining our institutional heart – we are strengthening it, expanding its network of connections, and ensuring that its beat resonates throughout our community and beyond," she affirmed.

Among those promoted was Dr Lucas Erasmus, who is recognised for his research in the Department of Physics within the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. "For me personally, it means quite a lot, because it feels like the university is acknowledging the work that I am doing," he shared. "From a professional point of view, it gives the impression that one is highly regarded in one's field."

Reflecting on his journey at the university, Dr Erasmus added, "I have learned to try and focus my mind and energy to address one problem at a time. Go slow to go fast."

As the UFS moves forward in its Vision 130 journey, celebrations such as this serve not only to honour individual achievements, but also to reinforce a collective culture of excellence, innovation, and connected growth.



# The train has left the station!

By Dr Cindé Grey

**A**t the start of this year, our award-winning Division of Organisational Development (OD) invited all UFS employees to join in an unforgettable train journey. All 2025 events are tailored and packaged according to this theme, prompting employees to participate in our expedition towards Vision 130. The route will have ups and downs, delays and detours, days you want to forget, and days you will remember forever – like the kick-off event on 5 March 2025 with Robin Banks, a motivational speaker and expert on personal mastery. He reminded attendees that we have control over our attitude, beliefs, and choices – and if we really take control, we have so much power to live a great life.

“It was a delight to start the year with such positivity,” says Burneline Kaars, Head of Organisational Development. “But as Robin said, motivation is a daily job – he gave you the tools, you have to use them. Because we realise how hard staying consistent can be, we offer year-round support and interventions as stations along the way where you can stop to refuel, reboot, and regroup.” As we enter the second half of 2025, OD extends a renewed invitation to you to jump on board and finish the year strong.

Right, people – it is time to pull your finger out! (*Disclaimer – this is an inside joke that only Robin Banks attendees will get ... don't be left in the dark, attend our next event!*). ■

Attendees learning and having fun with Robin Banks at Organisational Development's kick-off event earlier this year.



Click here for an overview of 2025 events

## Stopping at the Health and Wealth station

**F**ollowing the kick-off stop with motivational speaker Robin Banks, the next destination was all about staff setting their health and wealth on the right track. On the Division of Organisational Development's metaphorical train journey, each event throughout the year is represented as a station, allowing you to 'hop off' whenever the train reaches a stop that resonates with you.

According to Kaars, their Wellness and Financial Fair (hosted 18–20 March 2025) was about equipping staff with practical tools to make informed decisions, reduce stress, and take control of their future. Staff

could visit several booths for health and wealth checks, advice, and fun games such as Financial Jeopardy, Spin-the-Wheel, and Match & Win, where prizes were up for grabs. This playful approach made difficult topics more accessible, and staff members embraced discovering the gaps in their physical and financial well-being. Fortunately, guidance and solutions were also provided by experts in their respective fields. ■

*UFS staff actively engaged in the Wellness and Financial Fair, exploring practical tools, health checks, and interactive games designed to support their personal well-being and financial confidence.*



## A new heartbeat for Qwaqwa: the Student Administration Building unveiled

By Igno van Niekerk



Click to read the isiZulu version.

The Qwaqwa Campus is buzzing with excitement, and for good reason! The newly completed Student Administration Building, marking Phase 2 of the Student Centre development, is more than just bricks and mortar – it is a vibrant addition that is already transforming the academic and social atmosphere.

### Room for growth

Location, location, location!

The Student Administration Building sits just south of the bustling walkway connecting the main gate to the student residences, perfectly positioned for accessibility. It is part of the campus' broader South-to-North development plan, complementing the recently completed Student Centre. The building leaves room on the eastern side for future growth, ensuring that the campus can evolve with the needs of its community.

What makes this spot truly special? The design team preserved a stunning lane of trees that now frames the building, offering cooling shade in summer and a touch of natural beauty year-round.

### Comfort and connection

Inside, you will find a space that is as functional as it is inviting. The central foyer and waiting area serve

as the heart of the building, flanked by a reception desk and a sleek boardroom. The perfect spot for students to pop in with questions or for staff to collaborate on ideas. The layout neatly splits into two zones: service areas (think kitchen, ablution, and cleaner facilities) on one end, and 10 well-appointed offices on the other.

The offices are arranged along a central hallway that widens every four rooms, breaking up the space and giving it an open, airy feel. The slightly varied office sizes create a stepped facade, adding visual flair to the building's north-facing front. Each office is equipped with air conditioning, with outdoor units discreetly tucked away on the south side to keep the main walkway's view uncluttered. In addition, the building's clean, cost-effective design aligns with nearby structures such as the KovieGear Building and the Student Centre extension.

### A bright future ahead

The Qwaqwa Student Administration Building reflects the campus' commitment to thoughtful growth, balancing practicality with beauty. As students stroll past the shady trees and step into the bright foyer, they are not just entering a building; they are stepping into a space that is designed to empower their academic journey. 🌱



*Capturing the vibrant essence of the new Qwaqwa Student Administration Building, inside and out. Photos showcasing the welcoming foyer, modern spaces, and tree-lined exterior of Phase 2.*



## One-room magic: UFS' immersive classrooms redefine learning

By Igno van Niekerk

The university is transforming education across its Bloemfontein, Qwaqwa, and South campuses with its pioneering one-room spaces, mirrored across all three locations to deliver cutting-edge, immersive learning. Research for these innovative spaces began in 2023, sparked by a photo from the University of Leuven in Belgium, which the university identified as showcasing Leuven's advanced classroom setup. Prof Philippe Burger, Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, leveraging a connection there, led a team to explore this technology globally, collaborating with Canada's X20 OneRoom to make the UFS the first in South Africa – and one of (as far as we know) two in Africa, alongside Kenya – to offer such immersive classrooms.

Unlike Zoom or Blackboard, where online students were often overlooked as small icons, one-room spaces ensure that everyone feels included. Designed for postgraduate training and PhD interactions, these rooms accommodate up to 40 in-person and 40 online participants, with large video camera feeds on screens, reminiscent of the TV programme *Small Talk*, where children's faces lined the wall for engagement. Directional audio and personal cameras create a sensory experience, with sound coming from the speaker's direction and eye contact feeling natural. Angelique Carson-Porter from the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics shared her excitement about a postgraduate session led by Prof Aletta Olivier, Lecturer in the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies: "It feels like you're right there, even from Pretoria or Ghana. You see everyone, interact, and never miss a beat."

Gavin Coetzer from ICT Services, a key project leader, highlighted how lecturers struggled with older platforms' limitations, often only addressing online questions at the end, disrupting the flow. The UFS' one-room spaces, implemented in the UFS Business School, the Clinical Skills Unit, South Campus teacher training, and Qwaqwa, solve this with breakout sessions and global conference support. While other universities rely on Teams, the UFS' user-friendly tech, with around 24 screens and ceiling microphones, allows lecturers to focus on teaching.

Staying ahead of tech trends is challenging, but the university is excelling, making education inclusive, engaging, and truly global. 🌍



Photos: Stephen Collett

*The UFS' one-room spaces are designed to connect students and lecturers seamlessly across locations and borders.*



# Coffee, connection, and campus care: new social spaces at the UFS

By Michelle Nöthling

Coffee and conversation – a ritual treasured by students and staff alike. Now, you can enjoy this simple pleasure in one of three newly developed social spaces on the Bloemfontein Campus, thanks to an initiative led by University Estates.

In response to the need for more inclusive and inviting areas beyond the Thakaneng Bridge, University Estates designed spaces that merge functionality with the UFS Vision 130 value of care. “Care was at the centre of this project,” says Nico Janse van Rensburg, Senior Director: University Estates. The goal was clear: create areas that promote social interaction and reflect the diverse needs of campus life. Judging by the growing popularity, the team has achieved just that.

The three sites were strategically placed for accessibility. The first is located behind the James Maroka Building, near the cafeteria in the Francois Retief Building. The second, outside the Agriculture Building, is serviced by the coffee shop just inside the

1. One of the social spaces is behind the James Maroka Building, near the cafeteria in the Francois Retief Building.
2. The Agriculture Building site incorporates helix shapes and honeycomb-inspired forms as a subtle nod to Natural Sciences.
3. There is also a site outside the Examination Rooms (EXR) where a new coffee shop has been constructed.



Click here to watch the video.

building. The third sits outside the Examination Rooms (EXR), where a new coffee shop has been constructed using a repurposed shipping container.

Designed with both aesthetics and practicality in mind, the seating and layout of each space reflect their surroundings. Architect Henry Pretorius of Priemo Consulting explains that the Agriculture Building site incorporates helix shapes and honeycomb-inspired forms as a subtle nod to Natural Sciences. The EXR site curves around trees in flowing half-moons and circles, while the James Maroka space features a more structured, linear design.

All three locations include solar-powered outlets for laptops and phones and are fully accessible for people with disabilities. Similar seating areas have also been introduced on the South and Qwaqwa campuses.

Adding a poetic touch, the Faculty of The Humanities will display multilingual poems installed in steel frames at each site, further enriching the spaces with cultural meaning.

“The biggest reward for me is seeing how these areas fill up,” reflects Janse van Rensburg. “Then I know: these social spaces are succeeding in their purpose.”

So, whether you are after a good chat, a quiet coffee, or just a moment to breathe – there is a new space waiting for you. ■

While it is relatively uncommon for support services staff at South African universities to pursue National Research Foundation (NRF) ratings, their contributions to academic research and institutional development are increasingly being recognised. Dr WP Wahl, Director of Student Life in the Division of Student Affairs at the university, recently achieved his first NRF rating, marking a milestone in his career. This accomplishment not only highlights his dedication to advancing research in student affairs but also sets a precedent for the valuable role that support services staff can play in shaping the academic landscape.

## Supporting student success

Dr Wahl’s research focuses on creating environments that best support student learning, development, and success for students from marginalised backgrounds.

He says he is particularly excited about the insights gained about how an ecosystemic approach to student development could advance higher education environments in developing countries. He combined Feuerstein’s theory on cognitive development with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory to explore how to create ecologies of learning for marginalised students. “My colleagues and I have applied this ecosystemic approach to various projects over the past 10 years,” he notes.

Through his research, Dr Wahl aims to continue

making a contribution to the strategic objectives of the Division of Student Affairs. He explains that the division places a strong emphasis on evidence-based praxis. “This means that collecting and analysing data, guided by well-established theories, is important for creating and running programmes that effectively support student growth and success.”

## Serving other people in a practical way

Dr Wahl is grateful for this NRF rating. “I consider this milestone sheer grace. Over the years, many people have contributed in many ways to make this possible. This NRF rating would not have materialised without each of their unique contributions,” he says.

Viewing his career as a ‘vehicle’ to serve other people in a practical way, Dr Wahl believes that the most significant value the NRF rating adds to his career is the fact that it encourages him to continue using data and data analytics to critically assess how theoretical models can be applied in real-world contexts. “I hope this will assist in positively impacting students’ lives and making an evidence-based contribution to the field of student development,” he comments.

Beyond its impact on students, he also sees this achievement as an opportunity to inspire others. “All my postgraduate studies and postdoctoral research were done while serving in a non-academic position. I trust that my unique journey will inspire others to persevere in their unique journeys,” he adds.

## Dr WP Wahl’s NRF rating – recognising the research impact of support services staff

By Leonie Bolleurs

Dr Wahl also hopes that his NRF rating will encourage his colleagues in support services, especially in Student Affairs, to use research to improve the impact of the excellent work they are already doing.

Looking to the future, he plans to continue his research. “There is very little empirical evidence on the intersection between Feuerstein’s theory on cognitive development and Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory. I want to further explore how this ecosystemic approach can improve student development, especially in the context of developing countries,” says Dr Wahl. ■

Dr WP Wahl, Director of Student Life at the UFS, has earned his first NRF rating, showing the important role support services staff can play in research.

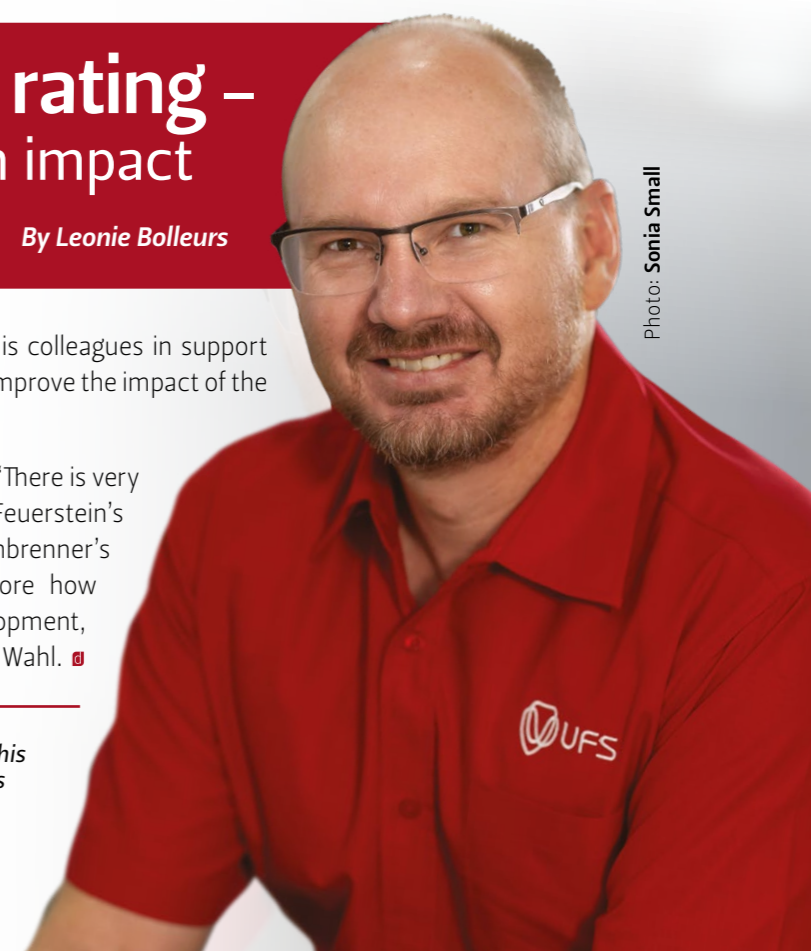


Photo: Sonia Small





Attending the UFS Senate Conference 2025 were, from the left: Prof Anthea Rhoda, UFS Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic; Prof Henk de Jager, CEO, THENSA; Prof Joyce Nduna, ETD P SETA Chair, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT); Prof Hester C. Klopper, UFS Vice-Chancellor and Principal; and Prof Vasu Reddy, UFS Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation.



# Senate Conference 2025

## unites in reimagining work-integrated learning

By Tshepo Tsotetsi



The university hosted its second Senate Conference on 19 and 20 May 2025 on the Bloemfontein Campus. Held under the theme *A Call for Innovation: Reimagining Work-Integrated Learning at the UFS*, the event brought together university leadership, senior academics, and key stakeholders to reflect on how work-integrated learning (WIL) can be more intentionally embedded in teaching, learning, and curriculum design.

WIL stood at the centre of all discussions, not as an academic add-on, but as a meaningful, human-centred approach to preparing students for a changing world. Senators reflected on how WIL allows students to apply theory in real-world contexts,

develop practical skills, and engage in socially responsive learning that benefits both communities and industry.

In her address, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Hester C. Klopper, described WIL as a strategic priority for the UFS. “WIL is not additive, it is integral and must be integrated into our teaching, learning, research, and engaged scholarship,” she said. “This reimagining of WIL connects deeply with the three pillars of our Vision 130: academic excellence with quality and impact; maximum societal impact through sustainable relationships; and being a diverse, inclusive, and equitable university.”

Prof Anthea Rhoda, Deputy Vice-Chancellor:



Photos: Stephen Collett

Participants engage during the 2025 UFS Senate Conference on the Bloemfontein Campus, where university leaders and academic staff reflected on embedding work-integrated learning in teaching, learning, and curriculum design.

Academic, echoed this commitment. “We have the human capital, the academic acumen, and the vast potential to take it to a new level, and to tangibly improve the quality and work-readiness of the graduates we produce.”

Over the two days, faculties showcased WIL practices through case studies, while structured group discussions gave participants the space to explore shared challenges and propose practical solutions. The screening of *Work Shoes*, a documentary produced by UFS alumna and award-winning television producer Charlene Stanley, offered an intimate look at the experiences of four UFS students navigating WIL across different disciplines.

Guest speakers added depth to the conversation. Advocate Navilla Somaru shared insights from the *In the Shadow of the Prosecutor* programme with the NPA and the Faculty of Law. Prof Nothemba Joyce Nduna (CPUT) spoke about WIL in transdisciplinary settings. Prof Per Assmo (University West, Sweden) introduced formal academic models, including a Master of Work-Integrated Political Studies. Prof Henk de Jager (THENSA) reflected on stakeholder engagement and industry collaboration.

As the UFS moves forward on its Vision 130 journey, the Senate Conference reaffirmed that WIL must become a shared institutional commitment that values integration, relevance, and impact. ■





# Walking with PURPOSE: a new era for the UFS under the leadership of Prof Hester C. Klopper

By Lunga Luthuli and Lacea Loader

The university entered a bold new chapter on Monday 9 June 2025, as Prof Hester C. Klopper was officially installed as the institution's 15th Vice-Chancellor and Principal – the first woman in the institution's 121-year history.

During her inaugural address – titled *Walking Together with Purpose: Unlocking Excellence to Lead Change* – in the Odeion Auditorium on the Bloemfontein Campus, Prof Klopper outlined a visionary roadmap for transforming the UFS into a globally relevant, African-rooted institution that is deeply committed to staff well-being and student development.

“Our journey must be one of walking with purpose,” she said, “towards a future where this institution stands as a beacon of innovation and hope – for the Free State, our country, and for all of Africa.” She indicated that the UFS’ purpose is embedded in five intersecting and interconnected strategic pillars, four guardrails, and a concise action plan.

## The five strategic pillars for the future

1. Academic excellence and AI-enhanced research impact.
2. Institutional agility in the age of exponential change that addresses the bureaucratic bottlenecks plaguing modern universities.
3. Transformational culture for a new generation that goes beyond compliance to create an environment where emotional intelligence, creativity, and adaptability are valued alongside technical knowledge.
4. Systemic sustainability and strategic responsible investment that tackles the financial realities facing higher education. Two new initiatives demonstrate this commitment: the *VC-ISRC Imbewu Legacy Fund* for student support (already seeded with R2,6 million) and the *Talent Magnet Fund* to attract world-class academics.
5. Collaborative innovation and global integration that breaks down artificial barriers between disciplines, institutions, and sectors.

## Four guardrails for success

1. The irreplaceable heart of the UFS is its people, especially as human connection

becomes more precious in the age of artificial intelligence.

2. Leading through partnership in the age of collaboration will require ‘unified leadership with a unified purpose’.
3. ‘From vision to innovative reality’ will keep the university focused on the execution and transformative impact of its actions.
4. **Responsible societal futures** will be the institution's North Star, ensuring that knowledge serves justice, sustainability, and humanity.

Prof Klopper's leadership promises bold action, “Success is not measured by plans, but by the transformative impact of our actions,” she declared. She announced concrete steps that are already in motion.

## Prof Klopper's seven-point action plan

1. Establishing a transdisciplinary innovation hub on the South Campus in Bloemfontein to drive research, commercialisation, industry partnership, and student entrepreneurship.
2. Transdisciplinary research within thematic research areas.
3. Optimisation of professional and support services through the alignment and streamlining of functions.
4. Systematically reviewing the academic programme portfolio.
5. A strategic people development strategy driven by the soon-to-be-launched *UFS Training Academy*.
6. Implementing a comprehensive transformation scorecard.
7. Creating the *UFS Knowledge Enterprise* and *UFS Commercial entities* for income diversification.

With **responsible societal futures** as its North Star, the UFS is moving forward with purpose. Under Prof Klopper's leadership, the UFS is aligning its people, priorities, and partnerships to create meaningful impact – not just in academia, but in society at large. 📌

*Prof Hester C. Klopper was officially installed as the 15th Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the UFS on 9 June 2025 on the Bloemfontein Campus.*





**1.** Representatives of royal houses and traditional leaders from across the Free State and the Kingdom of Lesotho, together with the Barolong Boo Seleka traditional community, welcomed a visit from Prof Hester C. Klopper. The visit focused on honouring cultural traditions and strengthening ties with the local community.

**2.** Student safety, accommodation, and youth development were central to discussions during a strategic engagement between the UFS and Councillor Gregory Nthatsi, Executive Mayor of Mangaung.

**3.** Prof Hester C. Klopper met with key donors in Cape Town who continue to invest in the future of the UFS.

**4.** Prof Hester C. Klopper with the Premier of the Free State, MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae, and Prof Pamela Dube, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the Central University of Technology.



# Prof Klopper's first 100 days: a journey of connection and vision

By Charlene Stanley

The corporate world often speaks of the crucial first hundred days of new leaders. For Prof Hester C. Klopper, this has been a period of deep listening, meaningful connections, and strategic visioning that reflects the very essence of what makes the UFS special.

Since taking up her role as the 15th Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Prof Klopper has been engaging with a wide variety of individuals, communities, and institutions. This included crisscrossing the country, engaging with stakeholders who form the backbone of our university. Her journey took her from the bustling corridors of power in Cape Town, where she met with key donors who continue to invest in the UFS' future, to intimate alumni gatherings where former students shared their experiences and aspirations for their alma mater.

In the Qwaqwa region, she spent time with representatives from Royal Houses, municipal leadership, and local school principals – reinforcing the importance of understanding and honouring the voices that shape the university's broader family.

On the Bloemfontein Campus, a ceremonial gathering brought together royal leaders from across the Free State and the Kingdom of Lesotho. During this meaningful occasion, Prof Klopper was presented with a Seanamarena (Basotho blanket) – a symbolic gesture of welcome, respect, and recognition of her leadership.

In another landmark visit, she met with the Barolong Boo Seleka traditional community. Here, a spirit of partnership emerged, with an agreement in principle to collaborate on projects that will ensure meaningful community impact. These meetings were not only protocol visits – they represented a genuine effort to build bridges and strengthen the cultural fabric that enriches our campuses.

A recent meeting with Councillor Gregory Nthatsi, Executive Mayor of Mangaung Metropolitan


Municipality, exemplified Prof Klopper's vision of universities moving beyond their traditional 'ivory tower' status. Together with senior municipal leadership, they discussed pressing issues such as student safety, youth unemployment, and accommodation challenges – problems that require collaborative solutions. Her proposal for a regular VC-Mayor Forum reflects her belief that structured partnerships can drive meaningful change for both our students and the broader community.

Her calendar continued with a strategic meeting hosted by the Premier of the Free State, MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae. The Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the Central University of Technology (CUT), Prof Pamela Dube, also attended. Together, they explored ways to expand service delivery partnerships, empower young people, promote entrepreneurship, and respond to key social issues—underscoring the university's role as a key driver of provincial development.

Whether attending the second UFS Senate Conference on work-integrated learning or celebrating with nearly 8 000 graduates across our Bloemfontein and Qwaqwa Campuses, she consistently highlighted the human capital that makes the UFS exceptional.

The warmth and goodwill she encountered clearly resonates with her own vision for the university – one built on renewal, innovation through connection, and creating responsible societal futures. Her emphasis on breaking down departmental silos and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration reflects her conviction that our greatest potential lies in working together.

Prof Klopper's first hundred days were not only about listening and learning – it was about laying the groundwork for a future where the UFS not only educates students, but also actively shapes the communities and society around it.

For an institution that thinks in generations rather than quarterly cycles, these first hundred days suggest that we are in very capable hands indeed. 



# From brainwaves to mountain trails

## Dr Neville Auths on neurology, nature, and the power of movement

By Tshepo Tsotetsi



Photo: Stephen Collett

**D**r Neville Auths, Senior Lecturer and Clinical Head of Neurology in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the UFS, spends his professional life decoding the complexities of the brain. But away from the lecture halls and hospital corridors, it is movement, especially on rugged trails, that brings him clarity.

“God created our bodies to move,” he says. “Knowing that I’m helping my brain to live longer and healthier motivates me to keep running.”

### Finding his footing

Though he first considered internal medicine, an early rotation changed everything. “It tickled my own brain,” he says. “Trying to understand the human nervous system more in depth.” That fascination quickly turned into a calling: “I was blessed to get the chance to understand our brains a little better.”

His first taste of trail running came as a curious schoolboy during a family trip to Golden Gate. “I snuck away to explore a trail called Echo Ravine ... in retrospect, this was my first trail running experience.”

Later, a serious back injury and surgery left him doubting whether he would be active again. “I always used my back as an excuse,” he says. But after regaining strength, a friend invited him on a short trail run at Seven Dams. “I was hooked. And the back pain I suffered for years? It’s never really been an issue since.”

### Movement as medicine

Running became not just exercise, but a mental reset. “After a crazy day or week at work, getting out there changes your thought patterns,” he says. “I also find it is a time when I can connect to God ... and this refreshes my mind.”

He recalls a memorable adventure on the Alexandria Trail with his son, Ryan. The two camped overnight just outside Tweespruit in freezing rain. Rain poured through the night and snow blanketed the mountain by morning, but they pressed on. “One of the joys of running is that my son also loves to run,” he says. “Needless to say, we had a great bonding time, stuck in our little spot.” He adds, “This was by far one of the biggest challenges I’ve faced yet, but such a beautiful (and cold) experience – running in this snow-laden mountain.”

### Leading by living it

One of his most inspiring moments came from a 60-year-old patient with multiple sclerosis who once thought she would never run again. “She eventually completed the Two Oceans half marathon,” he says. “When I saw the change in her demeanour ... it inspired me to move even more.”

His advice to others is simple: “Start small. Walk. Do a parkrun. You don’t have to run – just keep going.” On low energy days? “Run (or walk) for 10 minutes. If you’re really not in the mood after that, then go home. But I find that after 10 minutes, I’m enjoying the scenery and the exercise.”



Dr Neville Auths, neurologist and trail runner, advocates for movement as a key part of living well on and off the trail.



Click to read the Afrikaans version.

# Dr Claudia Ntsapi

## among Africa’s top 20 emerging physiologists

By Leonie Bolleurs

**S**enior Lecturer in the Department of Basic Medical Sciences at the UFS, Dr Claudia Ntsapi, has earned a spot among Africa’s top 20 emerging physiologists. This continental recognition, coordinated by the International Union of Physiological Sciences (IUPS), together with the African Association of Physiological Sciences (AAPS) and the Physiological Society of Southern Africa (PSSA), celebrates early-career researchers making strides in physiology.

### A personal milestone

Dr Ntsapi’s work focuses on the potential of indigenous medicinal plants to help treat neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and Huntington’s disease. Her approach combines modern neuroscience with African traditional knowledge to explore how plant-based compounds can interact with the body’s natural defences and signalling systems. “This recognition is both a personal milestone and a reflection of the support, mentorship, and research partnerships that have shaped my journey so far,” she says.

Through the NeuroPhyto Research Group, Dr Ntsapi investigates how the body responds to disease and aging at a cellular level. Her work focuses on identifying natural compounds that may help regulate inflammation and protect nerve cells from damage. She explains that understanding how physiological systems respond to challenges such as disease and brain aging helps her see how to guide the body back into balance using targeted, evidence-based approaches.

She adds that integrating indigenous knowledge with scientific methods not only makes the research more inclusive and culturally relevant but also opens new directions for drug discovery. “My research aims to translate African indigenous knowledge into scientifically validated, evidence-based interventions,” she states.

### Expanding knowledge, creating impact

Dr Ntsapi says that institutional visibility for researchers working in targeted drug discovery in African contexts is growing, and she is proud to contribute to this momentum. Her development as a biomedical researcher was strengthened by her participation in the UFS Emerging Scholars Accelerator Programme and later the Future Professors Programme. Among others, she also credits her colleagues and mentors – including Profs Chris Viljoen, Martin Nyaga, and Motlalepula Matsabisa from the Faculty of Health Sciences, for their guidance and encouragement.

As part of this continental honour, Dr Ntsapi has received a two-year membership with the American Physiological Society (APS), allowing her access to international teaching resources and networks. She has also been paired with two senior academic mentors from the College of Pharmacy at Qatar University and the University of Lagos, opening doors to new collaborations and deeper engagement with experts in her field.

“These opportunities extend far beyond my academic growth; they allow me to plough back valuable knowledge and skills into my students and research, further contributing to academic excellence and innovation within our institutional community.”



Dr Claudia Ntsapi has been recognised as one of the top 20 emerging physiologists in Africa, a testament to her research and commitment to advancing neurophysiology, particularly in the field of neurodegenerative diseases.



# Faculty of Health Sciences bids farewell to UFS Toy Library after 40 years

By Vuyelwa Mbebe

On 14 August 2025, the university will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Bloemfontein Child Information Centre (BCIC). This milestone marks four decades since the centre's inception in 1985.

The BCIC and the Toy Library were established by the former Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, the late Prof Muller Potgieter, on 14 August 1985, headed by Senior Occupational Therapist and Director, Dr Dorothy Russell. These are child development centres for neurodivergent children at the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the UFS. Dr Russell's official retirement date is 28 February 2026. The centre and the Toy Library will be closing upon her retirement.

## The centre's aims

Since its establishment, it has provided information and services related to child health and education, focusing on supporting the development of all children with developmental challenges. Core services included a Toy Library offering educational toys, parental guidance facilitated by an occupational therapist, and specialised support for children with Down syndrome (DS).

The centre developed the Developmental Resource Stimulation Programme (DRSP) for children

under 42 months with DS, reinforcing its commitment to early intervention and inclusive developmental support.

"My contingency plan was to train occupational therapists in the management of babies with Down syndrome, using the DRSP in their treatment sessions," Dr Russell reflects.

Over the years, shifts in how information is accessed, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have also influenced the centre's trajectory. "In the modern times of the internet, this kind of information service has become redundant," Dr Russell explains, adding that while the Toy Library was once a vibrant resource, "membership has dwindled, and it could not be revived to the former busy Toy Library."

## Benefitting communities

The centre positively impacted parent empowerment and understanding of neurodiverse children. The Toy Library was a key resource for UFS staff, offering cost-effective play stimulation. It also benefited the community, with mothers reporting improved

developmental outcomes through guided, purposeful play with their children.

Dr Russell ensured that the centre's impact would live on through the training of occupational therapists to support babies with DS. Her life-long commitment has empowered future professionals to carry its legacy beyond the closed doors.

"I believe I did promote parent participation over all the years, and the legacy will be carried through the younger occupational therapy generation. Over the years, I have assisted, trained, and motivated occupational therapists to be able to work especially with babies with Down syndrome," Dr Russell concludes.

The centre has provided accessible information, educational resources, and developmental support to families and children facing unique challenges. It leaves behind contributions in child development, early intervention, and community-based support as it prepares for its closure, marking the end of a significant chapter in the UFS' community health and education. ■



Dr Dorothy Russell.

Photos: Supplied

The university has earned national recognition for its commitment to disability inclusion, achieving a 'Disability Transformative' status with a score of 78% on the Disability Results Effectiveness Scale (DRES). This is the second-highest score among participating institutions, just 1% behind the top-ranking university, highlighting the UFS' leadership in implementing the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) Strategic Policy Framework on Disability in the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system.

## Strategic frameworks driving transformation

"In 2017, the UFS developed an Integrated Transformation Plan with a workstream specifically dedicated to Universal Access," says Martie Miranda, Head of the Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support (CUADS).

# UFS leads the way in disability inclusion in higher education

By Martinette Brits



Martie Miranda, Head of the UFS Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support (CUADS).

"The key deliverables identified for this workstream were based on the DHET's Strategic Policy Framework on Disability in the PSET system. The implementation of these deliverables fast-tracked the adoption of universal access and design as an approach to include persons with disabilities at the UFS."

This commitment is echoed in Vision 130, which outlines the UFS' aspiration to be a diverse, inclusive, and equitable university. Miranda adds that the UFS has policies promoting inclusion and anti-discrimination and aligns its practices with global and national guidelines such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2016 White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## Embedding inclusion in learning and beyond

CUADS plays an important role in fostering a culture of shared responsibility. "As far as possible, CUADS aims to prevent an understanding that support to students with disabilities is solely their responsibility," says Miranda. The centre promotes awareness and advocates for universal design across learning, infrastructure, and technology.

The UFS also champions universal design for learning – a proactive approach that encourages lecturers to plan for diverse learning needs from the outset. This includes presenting content in multiple formats (representation), allowing flexible ways for students to demonstrate understanding (action and expression), and using varied methods to encourage participation (engagement).

Support services include accessible materials, Sign Language interpreting, and alternative assessments. While disclosure of disability remains a personal choice, inclusive practices are built to reduce reliance on disclosure alone.

While progress is notable, gaps remain in areas such as research participation and transition to employment. "There are still barriers in accessing research opportunities," Miranda notes, adding that stigma and limited awareness among staff and employers can hamper inclusion. CUADS continues to identify these challenges and advocate for transformation.

"Until our institution is fully inclusive/transformed to accommodate persons with disabilities, CUADS will continue to advocate and raise awareness," she affirms. ■



# Pickleball and Padel: fast-paced fun for racquet sport lovers

By Leonie Bolleurs

Looking for a new way to break a sweat, socialise, and have fun? You might want to try your hand at two fast-growing racquet sports that are taking Bloemfontein by storm – pickleball and padel.

Frederich Brisley, a pickleball player at the UFS, says what makes the game exciting is its clever scoring system. “It’s designed to keep the game close, so even if you’re behind, a comeback is always possible. This keeps every point exciting,” he says. Brisley plays for Picklers Park in Bloemfontein and is a firm believer that anyone, from complete beginners to competitive players, can enjoy the sport. He also recommends Picklers Park as a great place to start playing and meet fellow enthusiasts.

“It’s easy to learn, and the smaller court means you don’t have to run yourself ragged. But once the rallies speed up, your reflexes get tested and that adrenaline rush kicks in.”

He also shares a tip for those just starting out: “The kitchen is your friend.” The ‘kitchen’ is the non-volley zone near the net, and mastering play from this area is important. “Many beginners are hesitant to approach it but learning how to control and play from the kitchen line is one of the most effective strategies in the game,” he says.

On the flip side, if you enjoy a faster-paced game, padel might be more your speed. Former Kopsie player Charl van Heerden, now involved with

padel in Gauteng, explains that padel is beginner friendly. According to him, the underhand serve, slower ball, and glass walls make it easier to keep the rally going. And because it is played in doubles, it is very social and a lot of fun.

“Compared to tennis or squash, padel is easier to play and learn, as the racket is solid with no strings, which is much easier to control,” he says.

Van Heerden recommends Net Set Padel, a club with outdoor courts right opposite the UFS Bloemfontein Campus main entrance. Another option is Ramblers, home to the first padel courts in Bloemfontein.

His quick tips for padel success? Focus on control over power, use the glass walls to your advantage, move in sync with your partner, and stay ready. “Most importantly, don’t get caught in no man’s land.”

“Padel is the best, funniest and most addictive sport in the world,” he says. “Once you get started, it’s impossible to stop.”

Whether it’s dinks at the kitchen line or strategic smashes off glass walls, there’s a racquet sport out there waiting for you. ■

Picklers Park gave Frederich Brisley the opportunity to attend a pickleball course with Alex Simon (right), a former world number two in pickleball.



Photos: Supplied

Charl van Heerden, now involved with padel in Gauteng, believes that padel is easier to play and learn compared to tennis or squash.

# Dr Frelét de Villiers and the art of seamless learning

By Michelle Nöthling

Are graduates ready for today’s workplace – and what role does technology play in that readiness? These are questions that Dr Frelét de Villiers, Senior Lecturer and Academic Head in the UFS Odeion School of Music, takes seriously.

## The SLED framework

For Dr De Villiers, the answer lies in seamless learning: a teaching approach that connects classroom learning with real-world practice through the smart use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI). Dr De Villiers recently presented two papers on the subject at the 21st International Conference on Mobile Learning in Funchal, Portugal.

“It’s amazing to see how engaged students become when we bring technology into their learning,” she says. That engagement is intentional. Together with Prof Helga Hambrock of Concordia University Chicago, Dr De Villiers developed the seamless learning experience design (SLED) framework. It is built on five key components: core, positive, practical, human, and design concepts.

At its core, the framework encourages teaching methods that are flexible, relevant, and connected to life beyond university. Students work with experts, build networks, and take on global perspectives – all while developing practical skills and learning to effectively manage their time, mindset, and digital tools.

This model helps students build confidence and learn to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways. It is about preparing them for the world they will step into – not just passing exams.



Read more about the Seamless Learning Experience Design (SLED) framework



Listen to the SLED framework podcast

## Using technology with purpose

A key part of Dr De Villiers’ work focuses on how AI tools are currently being used at universities, both in South Africa and abroad. She is interested in how these tools can support learning – but also in how they should be used responsibly. “Not all apps and AI tools are equal, and one should be discerning. But the potential to enhance teaching and learning is dazzling,” she says.

Another essential feature of seamless learning is work-integrated learning. Dr De Villiers encourages her students to work across departments, collaborate with support services, and engage with external partners. Students often participate in real-world projects – such as teaching or community upliftment – that take their academic learning beyond the classroom.

“Part of seamless learning is that our students can go out into the world and apply what they’ve learned,” she explains.

## An inquisitive start

Dr De Villiers knows that some lecturers are cautious about change. But her advice is simple: “Start with an inquisitive mind.” It is a small step that opens the door to a more connected and meaningful learning experience – for students and educators alike. ■

Photo: Stephen Collett





# Six decades on stage – countless standing ovations

By Barend Nagel

The spotlight is on the UFS Department of Drama and Theatre Arts, and after sixty years it is clear that this cast has no intention of exiting stage left. With roots that stretch back to 1965, this department has grown from a modest script to a theatrical tour de force, bringing drama, design, direction, and deep community commitment to centre stage.

While past productions deserve their applause, it is the department's standing ovation-worthy role in the Free State community that truly brings down the house. UFS Drama does not just stage plays – it stages purpose. From puppet shows in preschools to youth festivals packed with potential, this department has turned community engagement into an art form.

The annual ATKV *Tienertoneel* festival is a masterclass in mentorship, drawing high schoolers from across the province. These young performers take to the Wynand Mouton Theatre, with guidance from UFS alumni and lecturers, proving that the next generation of thespians is already rehearsing their lines.

And if you have ever wandered through the Free State Arts Festival, chances are you have stumbled upon a UFS production bursting with energy, relevance, and flair. The department's presence at the festival is no cameo; it is a recurring role that blends academic excellence with theatrical flair. It is where community meets creativity, and where the curtain never really closes.

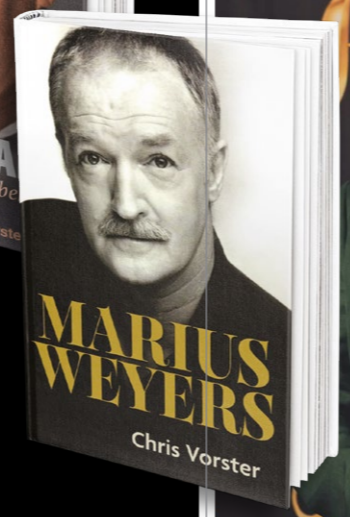
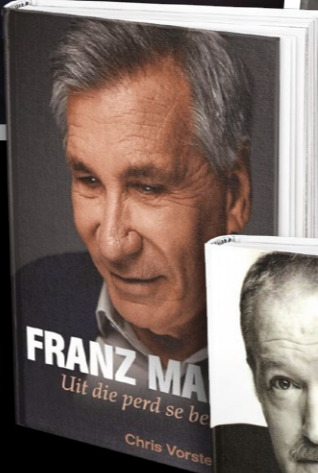
Whether it is an experimental piece in a black box theatre or a vibrant musical in front of hundreds, UFS Drama plays its part with passion. Their outreach programmes take theatre beyond the fourth wall, directly into schools and underserved communities – reminding us that performance is not just entertainment; it is education, empowerment, and empathy.

Now led by the dynamic Prof Anthea van Jaarsveld and the most versatile and talented teams under the spotlight, the department's next act promises even more flair. With eyes set on international collaborations and inclusive storytelling, UFS Drama is ready for its global close-up. And let's be honest – if life is a stage, this department is not just ready; it is already mid-monologue.

So, here's to six decades of laughter, tears, thunderous applause, and the occasional forgotten line. UFS Drama and Theatre Arts is not just part of the show, it is the show. And as the lights dim on this milestone anniversary, one thing is for sure: the encore has only just begun. 🎭

1. Over the years, the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts has been led by renowned heads of department (HoD): Jo Gevers (1965–1970), seen here with the first class of students in 1965; Prof Nico Luwes (1990–2019); and Prof Anthea van Jaarsveld, who has headed the department since 2019.
2. Since the opening of the Wynand Mouton Theatre with *Hamlet* – directed by Prof Ben de Koker (HoD 1970–1990) – in 1983, numerous productions and publications have followed; among them *Return of the Ancestors* (2024), and Chris Vorster's books *Franz Marx: Uit die perd se bek* and *Marius Weyers*.
3. At the *Fiësta Awards* on 27 February 2025, UFS drama lecturer Dion van Niekerk won the Best Direction award for *Ons wag vir Godot*, a UFS production translated by Naömi Morgan and staged at the 2024 Vrystaat Arts Festival.

Photos: Supplied



## mamela!

### Kovsies in Bloom (and Beanies)

Mela has been doing some deep listening lately – to the shuffling of sneakers on campus tiles, the quiet sighs in the library, and the not-so-quiet laughter echoing from the Student Centre. And somewhere between the deadlines and deep breaths, 'Mela realises: the UFS is changing. Not in a billboard-on-Senaatstraat kind of way, but in those soft, blink-and-you-miss-it moments.

The leaves fall while exam papers pile up – and spirits? They rise and dip, ebb and flow, like the campus Wi-Fi signal. Tjoooo! Academic regalia was fitted, cameras flashed, and Kovsie graduates crossed the stage like stars at a red-carpet premiere. Winter jerseys are pulled closer, and somehow – just somehow – there is always that one student still wearing shorts. Bold, as always, *Ho bata haholo!*

This term, 'Mela sees first-years guiding tours (yes, those same ones who got lost in February), final-years applying for jobs with brave hearts, and lecturers quietly praying that the Turnitin servers hold firm. The rhythm of Kovsies pulses as always – hopeful, humorous, human.

There's also a buzz about mental health campaigns, student-led outreach projects, and even whispers of a new campus coffee spot that may challenge the supremacy of Starbucks. ('Mela did thorough research. Multiple

cup. Purely scientific, of course.)

What stands out most, though, is the kindness. A stranger who holds the door. A study group that adds one more. A tired staff member who still manages a smile and remembers a name. This is the UFS that 'Mela loves – where excellence starts with lectures, but lives in the little things.

And, of course, there was that momentous day when Prof Hester C. Kloppe was officially installed as Vice-Chancellor and Principal. A new chapter turned – with warmth, wisdom, and a little ceremonial sparkle.

Now, as the semester winds down and winter tiptoes closer, may we all take a moment to breathe, reflect, and remember the season that is – filled with effort, energy, and just enough chaos to call it sustainable growth.

Love,  
'Mela





**D**r Temba Hlasho, Executive Director of the UFS Division of Student Affairs, recently celebrated a significant milestone in his academic and professional journey, graduating with a PhD from the University of Zululand (UNIZULU). Graduating on 9 May, Dr Hlasho's achievement not only marks a personal triumph but also signals a renewed commitment to research-driven leadership within higher education.

His doctoral research focused on *Barriers and Enablers to Participation in Judo in South Africa*. Despite judo's global popularity, Dr Hlasho observed, "In South Africa, participation in the sport, both locally and internationally, is low." His study identified financial constraints, inadequate facilities, limited awareness, and cultural perceptions as key barriers hindering wider involvement in judo. "The study not only advances academic understanding of judo's accessibility challenges but also offers actionable strategies to foster sustainable growth and inclusivity in the sport across South Africa," he explained.

In 2024, Dr Hlasho was appointed Referee Director for the Common-wealth Judo Association, bringing with him 48 years of IJF-A referee experience.

## Student Affairs ED graduates with PhD, champions research-informed leadership

By Lunga Luthuli

Encouraging colleagues to further their studies, Dr Hlasho advised, "The University of the Free State provides staff with opportunities to develop themselves – make use of this opportunity. Self-development is key to one's personal and career development."

On a personal level, Dr Hlasho described the milestone as 'humbling', emphasising that it means 'being more humble than before'.

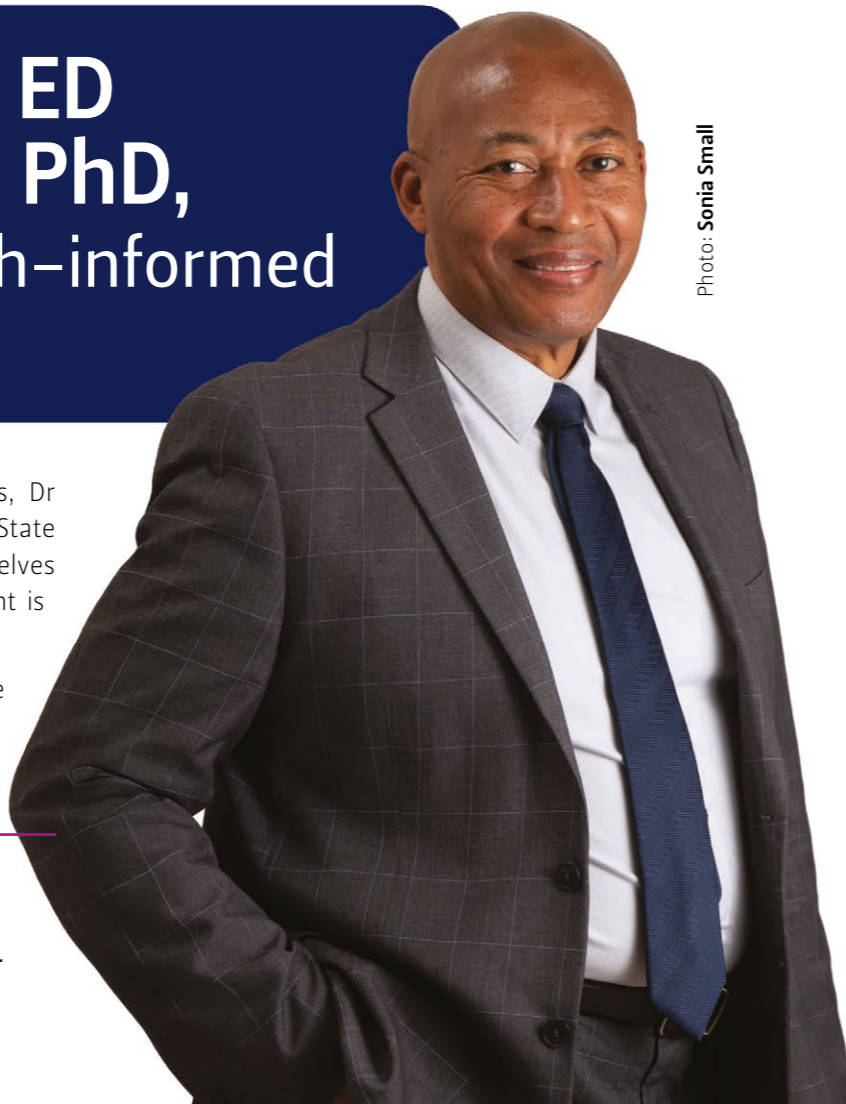
*Dr Temba Hlasho, Executive Director of the Division of Student Affairs, believes that climbing the ladder academically and professionally should bring humility.*

Balancing the demands of a senior leadership role with rigorous academic commitments was no small feat. Dr Hlasho described the experience as "the normal stuff: congested diary, external factors such as journal feedback turnaround time, competing commitments and resources". Yet, he remained steadfast, motivated by a desire for self-development and a commitment to contributing to the body of knowledge in his field.

Reflecting on memorable moments during his PhD journey, Dr Hlasho recounted a period of uncertainty in 2021 when two of his supervisors relocated to a UK university shortly after his proposal was approved. "This created uncertainty and during the same year I also had to leave to join the UFS. However, when they indicated that they were remaining as supervisors, everything went back to normal," he recalled. He takes particular pride in having produced five academic articles from his thesis.

For Dr Hlasho, the academic achievement is not just a personal accolade but a tool to enhance his work at the UFS. "At the DSA, we have always advocated evidence-based praxis in developing Student Affairs programmes. My academic development will only strengthen what we already believe in actions that are research-informed," he said.

Photo: Sonia Small



## Contributing to excellence in higher education: Prof Tameshnie Deane appointed to CHE Accreditation Committee

By Charlene Stanley



Photo: Stephen Collett

*Prof Tameshnie Deane, newly appointed to the CHE Accreditation Committee, continues to make strides in shaping higher education policy and quality assurance in South Africa.*

**T**he past few months have been a whirlwind of emerging opportunities and responsibilities for Prof Tameshnie Deane, Vice-Dean: Research, Postgraduate Studies, and Internationalisation in the Faculty of Law. Shortly after being appointed as acting Judge in the Free State High Court, she received the news that she had been appointed to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) Accreditation Committee.

The appointment was preceded by a stringent nomination and selection process, with her expertise and track record of quality contributions to higher education eventually earning her the nod from the CHE Council. The CHE is an independent statutory body and functions as the quality council for higher education in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act. Her role within the Accreditation Committee will involve ensuring that higher education institutions meet the necessary standards for accreditation, advising on policy matters, and contributing to the development of frameworks that enhance the quality of education in South Africa.

"I was honoured and humbled by the appointment. It is a privilege to serve in a capacity that directly impacts the quality and credibility of higher education in South Africa," says Prof Deane. Although the responsibility is immense, she is excited about the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution.

"This appointment is not just a personal milestone but an opportunity to contribute to a system that shapes future generations. I look forward to working with colleagues across the sector to uphold the integrity and excellence of higher education."

The appointment provides her with the opportunity to engage with national higher education policies at a strategic level, ensuring that accreditation processes align with global best practices. It also strengthens the position of the UFS as a key player in shaping higher education policy and quality assurance in South Africa, allowing for greater collaboration with other institutions in advancing academic excellence.

Prof Deane says she thrives in environments that challenge her intellectually and professionally, and she sees her expanding roles as complementary rather than conflicting. She has some words of advice for UFS colleagues who are similarly juggling multiple responsibilities: "Balancing a demanding schedule requires discipline, strategic planning, and self-care. I encourage colleagues to set clear priorities, delegate where possible, and ensure they make time for personal well-being. It's also important to cultivate a strong support network – whether through mentorship, collaboration, or simply engaging with peers who understand the challenges of academia."



# Celebrating an 'umami' moment: iKudu project receives final EU accolade

By Charlene Stanley

One year after the groundbreaking iKudu project was formally concluded, the small, dedicated team of UFS staff members behind it received the good news that the project received a VERY GOOD assessment from the European Commission.

The iKudu project was a five-year capacity-building initiative, funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) framework, which brought together ten partner institutions – five from South Africa and five from Europe. At its core, iKudu aimed to transform higher education curricula through internationalisation and virtual collaboration, using Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) as its main approach.

For Chevon Slambee, Chief Officer in the UFS Office for International Affairs and iKudu Project Manager, what made iKudu truly special was its commitment to equity and co-creation, as it challenged traditional North-South dynamics by creating a space for shared knowledge production and mutual learning.

She describes her reaction to receiving the assessment feedback as an 'umami moment'. (*Umami* is Japanese for *delicious savoury taste*.)

"It truly felt like the perfect bite of good news," she expands. "There were definitely bitter moments in the journey of putting together the final report, some salty and sour ones too. But in the end, it was sweet."

The final report covered the entire implementation period from 14 November 2019 to 14 May 2025. It consisted of three components: a narrative report, a financial report, and a comprehensive website.

Chevon explains the far-reaching consequences that this excellent assessment has for the UFS: "This was the first time that the university had taken on the role of coordinating an Erasmus+ CBHE project. As an institution from a non-EU country, this feedback speaks volumes

about the UFS' credibility and capability on the international stage, as well as its sound project management capabilities and robust administrative systems."

The enduring legacy of iKudu is emphasised by Prof Lynette Jacobs, who formed part of its leadership: "Virtual collaboration of staff and students within the formal qualification programmes without requiring joint registration between institutions and without additional funding is an inclusive way to provide our students with international collaboration opportunities. The lasting effect of the project can be seen throughout the institution, with more and more academics introducing COIL into their modules."

She points out that the project also allowed for a deeper understanding of other ways to internationalise curricula – not only through COIL. ■



Photo: Sonia Small

Chevon Slambee celebrates the European Commission's top-tier evaluation of the iKudu project – a proud 'umami' moment for the UFS.

Top tier."  
"Out-of-the-box."  
"Classy, tasteful and reflective."

"This campaign stands out for its creativity, innovation, and inclusivity, reflecting a thoughtful strategy."

These were just some of the comments from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Gold Quill Awards judges. This is the second time in a row that the UFS Division of Organisational Development (OD) has won the IABC Gold Quill Award of Excellence for their annual Women's Breakfast. Winning elevates the UFS' global reputation, showcasing strategic creativity and measurable success in engaging employees. This year's award is even more remarkable because we were one of only three South-African winners across all categories. And in the special and experiential events, our Women's Breakfast was the only event to qualify for an Award of Excellence. It is safe to say that the hotel-themed Women's Breakfast was the best event in 2024! The official awards ceremony will take place in Vancouver during June, followed by a local award presentation in Johannesburg.

Every year, Burneline Kaars – Head of Organisational Development – and her team take on the responsibility of entertaining and inspiring 900 guests. They dipped their toes in the world of awards with the 2023 event, winning locally (Marketing, Advancement and Communication in Education Excellence Award) and

internationally (IABC Gold Quill), and repeating both victories with the 2024 event. "It puts a lot of pressure on the team – the expectations increase every year, and we want to impress." But, she emphasises, the primary goal of the event is to serve and positively impact employees, not to win awards. This goal clearly transpired as one of the judges commented: "The event showcases the UFS' dedication to its employees by offering valuable resources, encouraging engagement, and creating a positive work atmosphere. It highlights the university's commitment to staff well-being and their professional development."

The team is already planning the 2025 event and cannot wait to host you. "Back in 2014, when we held our first Women's Breakfast, I could never have guessed how popular it would become. We maximise our capacity each year, but we are also careful not to compromise on quality for the sake of quantity." The event will be live-streamed, and departments are encouraged to rotate attendees annually to allow everyone to attend. ■

## We did it again!

## UFS Women's Breakfast wins IABC Gold Quill Award of Excellence

By Dr Cindé Grey

This is the second time in a row that the Division of Organisational Development has won the IABC Gold Quill Award of Excellence for their annual Women's Breakfast. Pictured here are Burneline Kaars and Susan van Jaarsveld.



Watch an overview of the 2024 Women's Breakfast here.



Photo: Stephen Collett



# From lecturers to learners: UFS staff achievements

By Igno van Niekerk

At the UFS, our commitment to lifelong learning is exemplified by our dedicated staff members who have recently achieved academic milestones. This graduation spread honours their hard work and perseverance, showcasing the diverse qualifications attained across various disciplines. Their accomplishments not only reflect personal growth but also enrich our academic community, inspiring both colleagues and students. Below, we celebrate these remarkable individuals through their stories, pictures, and quotes, highlighting the personal and professional triumphs that mark their graduation journey.

**Dr Johan Coetzee** from Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Technology Education received a PhD in Higher Education. "Receiving my doctoral degree – *A Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) Perspective on Integrating Educational Technology (EdTech) for Student Teachers* – alongside my daughter, **Rian-Marie Coetzee**, who graduated with distinction in BAccounting, was an incredibly proud and emotional moment. It symbolised the culmination of years of dedication, perseverance, and passion for education."



**Dr Matheko Thabo Thamae** from Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Technology Education received a doctoral degree with specialisation in Mathematics Education. "I explored how universal design for learning (UDL) principles can transform intermediate phase mathematics into a more inclusive and meaningful learning experience. UDL can make mathematics accessible and engaging for intermediate phase learners with diverse learning preferences and styles."



**Dr Zaynab Mobara** from the Department of Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Technology Education received a Doctor of Philosophy degree with specialisation in Science and Technology. "For my son, whose existence motivated me to complete this degree."



**Dr Gale Esmé Davids** from Education Foundations received a Doctor of Philosophy with specialisation in Policy Studies in Education. "My PhD focused on restorative justice practices that can replace traditional, punitive disciplinary systems in schools to build nonviolent schools."



**Dr Ndhivhuwo Ndou** from the Department of English received a Doctor of Philosophy with specialisation in English. "My PhD represents a commitment to educational equity and advocacy for underrepresented learners in South Africa's English language classrooms."



**Dr Hanta Henning** from the Department of English received a PhD in English and Cultural Studies (Doctor Philosophiae [English]). "I learned a great deal about myself and academia during my completion of this degree – I became intently aware of how, firstly, a culture of supervision needs to be fostered to protect even postgraduate students from often toxic situations in academia, and, secondly, of how research has become commodified in this era of massified, profit-driven tertiary education."



**Dr Nontombi Velelo**, Lecturer and Social Science Programme Director, received a PhD with specialisation in Sociology. "Working on and completing my PhD reminded me of the idiom: 'morena o tswalwa maroleng'." (Translates to 'A king is born from the dust', meaning great people/greatness come from humble beginnings and communities.)



**Dr Ashwill Ramon Phillips** from the Department of Criminology received a Doctor of Philosophy with specialisation in Criminology. "My PhD aimed to critically unpack contemporary South African developments in gang culture by mapping socio-criminogenic drivers, exploring initiation rites, symbolism, hierarchy and occult influences, as well as developing a novel, evidence-based typology for occult gangs. This work advances both national and international scholarship on gang dynamics and underpins targeted-intervention and reduction strategies."



**Dr Justine Magson** from the Department of Geology received a Doctor of Philosophy majoring in Geology. "My study focused on constraining parental magma compositions and magma dynamics in the Bushveld Complex through high-resolution, multi-isotope analysis across major compositional and mineralogical discontinuities."



**Dr Elbie Christie** from the Department of Communication Science received a Doctor of Philosophy with specialisation in Communication Science. "A dream that was born when I was nine years old came true when I completed my PhD. I investigated what (supposedly conservative) white Afrikaner women who opted to get tattooed had to say about what motivates them and how they negotiate their tattooed identity with being a white Afrikaner woman."



**Dr Mojaki Mojaki** from the Department of Languages in Education received a PhD in Curriculum Studies. "My PhD journey led me on a path of curiosity, resilience, and discovery, where questions evolve into contributions to knowledge."





# At the UFS, accountability is a shared responsibility

By Dr Nitha Ramnath

At the UFS, accountability is more than a policy term – it is a foundational value that shapes how we work, how we serve, and how we contribute to the broader mission of the institution. And importantly, it is not limited to finance officers or senior managers. Every staff member, regardless of role, has a part to play in creating a culture of accountability.



Dr Nitha Ramnath.

Photo: Stephen Collett

In the finance environment, accountability involves compliance with regulations, ethical management of budgets, and responsible use of institutional funds. It is about being transparent, adhering to procedures, and making decisions that reflect integrity and sound judgement. But finance does not operate in isolation – these principles only succeed when everyone understands their role in supporting financial systems. Submitting claims accurately, following procurement rules, or managing project budgets responsibly are just a few examples of how each department supports financial accountability.

But what if your role has nothing to do with finance? Accountability still matters – deeply. For general staff, it means showing up, following through on tasks, treating others with respect, and working with care and professionalism. It is about being reliable, owning up to mistakes, and contributing positively to your team and the university community.

Accountability also influences how we manage our time, how we communicate, how we support students and colleagues, and how we uphold the values of the university in our everyday decisions. It builds trust across teams and departments, encourages collaboration, and helps us maintain a work environment grounded in integrity.

Importantly, accountability is not about blame – it is about ownership. It is about each of us recognising that our individual contributions, however big or small, matter to the success of the university. It is a call to act with intention, deliver with pride, and make decisions with ethics and care.

By embracing a shared sense of accountability together, we strengthen our institution and reinforce our collective purpose. Let us continue to work in ways that reflect excellence, responsibility, and mutual respect – because accountability is everyone's business. ■

# Strengthening accountability through intentional spending

By Perle du Plessis

In 2024, the Department of Finance at the UFS embarked on a reflective journey to ensure that we are fit-for-purpose in enabling **Vision 130**. This process redefined our identity – not just as financial managers, but as strategic partners who elevate solutions, entrust collaboration, empower growth, and uphold ethical standards. Through the Stewardship project, we established a renewed team identity rooted in purpose and service.

A key outcome of this reflection was the need to **fortify accountability**. Trust is built through transparency and responsible action, especially in managing public funds. Accountability supports sound decision-making and

# Internal Auditing safeguards ethics and strengthens accountability

By Onthatile Tikoe

At the UFS, Internal Auditing plays a critical role in supporting integrity, sound decision-making, and operational excellence. As an independent assurance and advisory function, it helps ensure that the university remains ethical, compliant, and transparent.

“Our primary role is to evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes,” says Hangalakani Nkanyane, Director of Internal Auditing. We are here to add value and support institutional improvement, not to police or punish.”

Working closely with departments across campus, Internal Auditing identifies risks and inefficiencies, providing practical recommendations that strengthen university operations and uphold public trust.

One of the department's key tools in promoting ethical behaviour is the UFS' confidential whistleblowing platform, which allows staff, students, and stakeholders to report fraud, corruption, and misconduct safely and anonymously.

“This platform is managed by an independent third party to ensure objectivity and confidentiality. Reports can be made 24/7 via phone, SMS, email, or online. It is important to note that protections are in place to safeguard those who come forward. We ensure that no retaliatory action is taken against whistleblowers. All



Hangalakani Nkanyane.

Photo: Stephen Collett

If you witness any unethical behaviour or irregularities, speak up. You can report confidentially through the following channels:

- Toll-free number: +27 0 800 122 337 (available 24/7) ▪ SMS: 33490
- Email: [ufs@whistleblowing.co.za](mailto:ufs@whistleblowing.co.za)
- Online: [www.whistleblowing.co.za](http://www.whistleblowing.co.za)

reports are treated with the utmost seriousness,” he adds.

At a time when accountability is more important than ever, Nkanyane encourages staff to lead by example. “Take ownership of your responsibilities, follow university policies, and be transparent in your decisions. Accountability is not about perfection; it is about integrity and consistency.”

He also advises extra vigilance in areas such as procurement, financial reporting, and compliance. “Maintaining proper documentation and following internal controls are essential.”

To foster a culture of ethics, Nkanyane says leadership is key: “When managers model ethical behaviour and support open communication, they empower staff to do the right thing.” ■

enhances our ability to serve stakeholders effectively.

The **2025 budget process** marked a turning point. It introduced value-driven cost management, stricter budget accountability, and the reallocation of underutilised resources. This shift was not just technical – it was strategic. By engaging stakeholders more meaningfully, we empowered them to ensure that every rand is spent where it matters most.

When we **#SpendWithIntent**, we do more than purchase – we take a stand. We align our spending with our values and strategy, support ethical businesses, and maximise impact. This intentional approach demands **continuous monitoring and evaluation**, ensuring that data drives our decisions and that outcomes remain measurable.

As we move forward, accountability and intentional spending will remain central pillars in delivering on Vision 130. ■

Perle du Plessis.



Photo: Supplied



# Breaking the HIV stigma, building compassion

By Gerda-Marié van Rooyen

One woman's dual passion – working with young people and nursing – has helped build a vital support network among students living with HIV. Sr Theresa de Vries joined the university as an HIV counsellor in 2010, completed a NIMART course, and started a support programme for students living with HIV in 2018. “We drafted an agreement with the Department of Health to provide HIV services on campus instead of referring students to clinics, ensuring easier and more confidential care,” says Kovsies’ own ‘Mother Theresa’, as she is lovingly referred to.

## A safe space for healing and hope

Once she saw the challenges students living with HIV were facing, she was determined to establish a strong, supportive programme. What began with one HIV-diagnosed student has grown into a safe, peer-supported circle of friends. Today, The Club offers students support and personal development opportunities within a safe, non-judgmental space where everyone is seen, heard, and understood. The programme also aims to ensure students’ access to proper nutrition and medication, which is crucial for effective treatment. Sr Theresa’s work bridges health care and emotional well-being, linking students in distress with mental health support at Student Counselling.

## Empowering students

“What drives me is knowing that one conversation or act of kindness can change a student’s life. Many arrive feeling scared or ashamed. Watching them gain confidence and take control of their health is incredibly fulfilling.” Although Sr Theresa’s calling is emotionally demanding, she remains motivated by making students aware that HIV is only a chronic disease that can be managed. “Once a student is newly diagnosed, the first thing I offer is a warm, confidential space. We discuss their diagnosis, what it means, and how to move forward.” This includes linking them with a treatment buddy, a peer who is living openly and healthily with HIV, and an invitation to join The Club support group. “That connection changes everything. It reminds them that they are not alone.” Peer conversations and education challenge stigma and myths and use the power to reach students in ways that staff cannot. Students are also part of campaigns such as ‘First Things First’, which encourages HIV testing and awareness. One of the highlights of Sr Theresa’s career to date is seeing a student who halted treatment out of fear and distress regain control and transform into an inspiring treatment ambassador after months of home visits, lay counselling, and support.

“After I retire in two years, my dream is that the programme will continue to run, that every student knows their HIV status without fear or shame, that stigma is significantly reduced, and that people understand that HIV is manageable.”

*Sr. Theresa de Vries, affectionately known as ‘Mother Theresa’ on campus, has dedicated almost two decades to supporting and empowering students living with HIV.*

Photo: Supplied



# Jerry Laka celebrates USSA talent during 2025 championships

By Anthony Mthembu

Jerry Laka, Director: KovsieSport in the Division of Student Affairs at the UFS, recently attended the 2025 University Sports South Africa (USSA) Athletics Track and Field Championships.

Laka attended the championships hosted by the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) from 1 to 3 May 2025 in his capacity as President of USSA. Describing the experience, he explained, “The atmosphere was electrifying, and I experienced the energetic and lively nature of the championships.”

## Celebrating UFS talent

While attending the championships, Laka was also able to witness the UFS athletics team secure a top five spot. He said it was inspiring to see the student-athletes perform with such dedication and perseverance. In fact, he said, “I am feeling proud of the UFS student-athletes doing well at the championships; this is a testament to the quality of talent we have on our campuses.”

However, he maintains that there were several other benefits to attending the championships, including meeting and connecting with coaches, student-athletes, officials, and other sports enthusiasts.

## Celebrating two years as USSA president

With continued celebrations for the success of the UFS athletics team, Laka will also soon celebrate two years as President of USSA. He described taking up the role as a positive step for several reasons. “It has been a positive experience and an opportunity to develop leadership, strategic thinking, and problem-solving skills. It has also been a chance to build strong relationships with student-athletes, coaches, administrators, and sponsors,” he said.

*Jerry Laka, President of University Sports South Africa (USSA), celebrates the accomplishments of student-athletes at the 2025 USSA Athletics Track and Field Championships.*

However, he explained that the role also came with its challenges. For instance, he mentioned that managing conflicts, disagreements, and making difficult decisions within the environment was challenging. This is accompanied by managing expectations and the pressure to succeed in competitions. Regardless of these struggles, Laka said that the position came with its lessons. “The key takeaways for me were being able to adapt and become flexible, which are necessary for navigating changing circumstances and unexpected challenges,” he said. In addition, he highlighted that he also learnt that passion and commitment are essential to driving success and making a positive impact on the university sports community.

Photo: Supplied



# New leadership stepping in at the UFS

By Dr Nitha Ramnath and Gerda-Marié van Rooyen

The university is proud to welcome several newly appointed leaders. These appointments mark a fresh chapter in the university's continuing journey of growth, collaboration, and academic excellence.



Photo: Supplied

## Ketlarang Polori – heads Executive Education in UFS Business School

The UFS Business School is proud to welcome Ketlarang Polori, a dynamic, multidisciplinary professional, to lead its Executive Education portfolio. With more than a decade of experience spanning business development, innovation management, and mentorship, Polori brings a wealth of insight to successfully bridge the gap between research and real-world impact. Currently pursuing a PhD in Public Health, Polori is uniquely positioned to integrate health, innovation, and leadership education.

Drawn to the UFS' commitment to transformative, inclusive learning, Polori is set to elevate executive education through programme innovation, strategic partnerships, and measurable impact. "Let us co-create, embrace diverse perspectives, and build programmes that turn knowledge into action. Together, we can redefine leadership and uplift communities," she shares.

Polori aims to expand blended learning, introduce programmes in sustainability leadership, township entrepreneurship, and public health innovation, and build strong partnerships with industry and NGOs.

## Pulane Malefane – appointed as Director of Housing and Residence Affairs

Pulane Malefane, the newly appointed Director of Housing and Residence Affairs (HRA), brings more than two decades of experience in higher education and a deep commitment to student success and well-being.

Motivated by her belief that student residences play a critical role in academic success and holistic development, Malefane plans to enhance both on- and off-campus housing systems, ensuring that all students – undergraduate and postgraduate – benefit from safe, inclusive, and supportive living-learning environments.

"I've seen the transformation of Kowsies over the years, and I believe that student housing is a powerful vehicle through which we can embed the university's values of care, excellence, innovation, and social justice," highlights Malefane.

Malefane's career spans student finance, financial aid, student housing, and student affairs, making her uniquely positioned to lead a department that lies at the heart of the student experience. Sustainability, student support, and strengthening partnerships will be among her key focus areas.



Photo: Sonia Small

## Glen Mkhasi – appointed as Chief Traffic Officer

Glen Mkhasi, the UFS' newly appointed Chief Traffic Officer in Protection Services, has an unwavering passion for road safety, and more than 15 years of experience in law enforcement. Mkhasi brings a deep commitment to maintaining order and safety across the UFS campuses. His vision for the UFS includes ensuring visible and effective road signage, educating stakeholders on traffic laws, and enforcing zero tolerance on non-compliance. He is committed to improving stakeholder communication and ensuring professional service delivery in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

Impressed by the UFS' high standards, professionalism, and cutting-edge technology, Mkhasi sees a perfect alignment between his experience and the university's goals. "Compliance is not optional – it's essential," he affirms. He urges all staff, students, and visitors to respect traffic rules, especially pedestrian safety and designated parking.

Mkhasi is determined to make a meaningful contribution, enhancing safety and transforming the Traffic Unit into a model of excellence and service.



Photo: Stephen Collett

## Taabo Mugume – appointed as Director: Monitoring and Institutional Research in DIRAP

Taabo Mugume has been appointed as the Director: Monitoring and Institutional Research in DIRAP, starting 1 June this year. This avid researcher loves analysing and understanding a university as a living organism and its impact on the community. "We must keep studying its evolution, because it's the best way to generate research evidence to make decisions for its sustainability." He wishes to continue taking DIRAP's scholarly approach, while promoting the publication of research outputs from institutional research projects. "This should contribute directly to the research outputs of the university and the impact of this research outside the institution." Mugume will use the Annual Performance Plan (APP) and the Vision 130 implementation plan to support departments in ensuring better integration of planning, monitoring, and reporting.

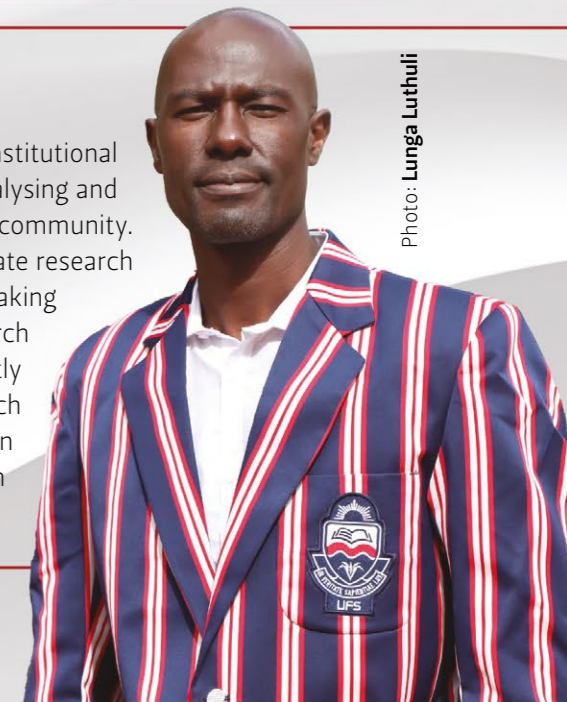


Photo: Lunga Luthuli

## Werner Nel – appointed as Director in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

The university is proud to welcome Werner Nel to the role of Director within the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (NAS).

A chartered accountant (CA(SA)) with nearly 20 years of experience, Nel's background is marked by a strong track record in financial strategy, governance, stakeholder engagement, and operational execution, all grounded in a deep understanding of the regulatory and innovation-driven nature of the academic environment.

"This role is a natural alignment with my experience. It's a privilege to apply private sector agility within a faculty known for its academic and interdisciplinary strength," explains Nel.

Nel is already laying the groundwork to bolster the faculty's financial sustainability and operational systems. A key part of the vision includes unlocking third-stream income, strengthening partnerships, and amplifying the faculty's impact through greater commercialisation and strategic positioning.

Having already contributed to the UFS' research and innovation strategies in the past, Nel sees this as an exciting next chapter.



Photo: Supplied



# Annual soccer championships:

## a celebration of team spirit and unity

By Onthatile Tikoe



Photos: Onthatile Tikoe

The university recently hosted its much-anticipated annual Soccer Championships, bringing together staff from various departments for an afternoon filled with camaraderie, competition, and celebration of team spirit. Held on 16 May 2025 at the UFS soccer fields on the Bloemfontein Campus, the event featured 33 teams competing across three divisions: Men's, Women's, and Mixed.

### A day of unity and competition

The championships aimed to create a fun and engaging environment that strengthened connections among colleagues. With 17 teams in the Men's division, 8 in the Mixed division, and 6 in the Women's division, the event showcased the diverse talent and enthusiasm of UFS staff.

In the Men's division, Merchants FC from the Department of Finance emerged as champions, with team captain Teboho Marumo leading the team to victory. Royal Estates from University Estates secured the runner-up position, captained by Jafta Letebe.

The Mixed division saw Money Getters, also representing the Department of Finance, clinch the championship title under the leadership of team captain Kekeletso Kwalane. Halogen FC, a multidepartmental team, finished as runners-up, captained by Itumeleng Kalane.

In the Women's division, Banyana Banyana from the Department of Human Resources triumphed as

champions, with team captain Yandiswa Fonjane guiding the team to success. Goal Getters from the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) secured the runner-up spot, led by team captain Nombulelo Towa.

### Player of the Tournament Award

This year, the championships introduced the Player of the Tournament award to recognise outstanding individual performances. In the Women's category, Aneen Church and Yandiswa Fonjane were honoured for their exceptional contributions to their team's success. Upon learning of her individual and team recognition, Fonjane expressed, "I was very excited! We played really well as a team, and I was proud of our performance." She added that winning Player of the Tournament was a bonus – they really had a great time.

In the Men's category, Masedi Kalane was celebrated for his remarkable performance throughout the tournament.

### Acknowledging our sponsors

"A special thank you to Old Mutual and MTN for sponsoring the medals and prizes, ensuring the success of this event. Their support continues to make the annual Soccer Championships a memorable occasion for all participants," Arina Engelbrecht expressed.

As we reflect on this year's event, we look forward to next year's championships, eager to build upon the spirit of unity and sportsmanship that defines the UFS community. 🏆