

KE EO TABA!

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UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
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EDITOR
MOHLOPHISI
KUBEKA UMHLELI
Tshepo Tsotetsi

FROM THE *Editor*

At the University of the Free State, teaching, research, and engagement are increasingly being understood as work that should connect more directly with responsible societal futures. Not as a statement, but in practice, through what is happening in different parts of the institution.

On the Qwaqwa Campus, you do not have to look far to see this taking shape.

There are researchers involved in community development work. There are efforts focused on student success in practical ways. There is continuing work on mountain ecosystems that shape the landscape around us, even when it is easy to overlook. There are also conversations around local partnerships, and the ways the campus is connected to the region it forms part of.

The more stories gathered for this issue, the harder it becomes to separate them into neat categories.

Because here – teaching, research, and engagement are not separate tracks.

Research shows up in communities.

Teaching shows up in how students are supported beyond the classroom.

Engagement shows up in relationships that extend beyond the institution.

This is what stayed with me while putting this issue together – my first print publication.

Not a single defining moment, but the consistency of work that connects in practice.

This issue brings some of those stories together.

Some are about people. Some are about ideas. Some are about the communities connected to this campus.

Together, they offer a glimpse into what makes the Qwaqwa Campus a distinctive part of the University of the Free State.

And perhaps they also reflect what contributing meaningfully to responsible societal futures looks like when it is not only written into plans, but also visible in everyday work.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

Happy reading! 📖

HO TSWA HO *Moqolotsi*

Mona Yunivesithing ya Freistata, ho ruta, ho fuputsa le ho sebetsa ka boitelo, e se e batla e le ntho eo re e utlwisang hore e lokela ho ba mosebetsi o ikamahanyang le bokamoso bo botle ba setjhaba. Ha se feela puo, empa tshebetsong, ka sheba se etsahalang dikarolong tse fapaneng tsa yunivesithi.

Mona khemphaseng ya Qwaqwa, ha ho qeaqeo ho bona hore sena se a etsahala.

Ho na le bafuputsi ba itahletseng ka setotswana mosebetsing wa ntshetsopeleng ya baahi. Ho na le boiteko bo etswang mabapi le katleho ya baithuti ka mokgwa o bonahalang. Ho na le mosebetsi o tswelang pele dibakeng tsa tikoloho ya dithabeng tse bopang lefatshe le re potileng, le ha e le hore ho bonolo ho se di natse. Ho na le dipuisano ka dilekane tsa tshebedisano, le ka moo khemphase e hokahaneng ka teng le dibaka tse e potapotileng.

Ho na le dipale tse qoloditsweng bakeng sa tlhahiso ena, mme ha ho bobebe ho di arohanya ka mekga e iphotlileng.

Hobane mona – ho ruta, ho fuputsa, le ho sebetsa ka boitelo ha se ntho tse arohaneng.

Diphuputso di totobetse ka hara baahi.

Ho ruta ho iponahatsa ka moo baithuti ba tshebetswang ka teng le ka ntle ho diphapusitso borutelo.

Ho sebetsa ka boitelo ho iponahatsa ka dikamano tse teng tse fetetseng le ka ntle ho yunivesithi.

Sena ke seo ke se boneng ha ke ntse ke hlophisa tlhahiso ena ya makasene – kgatiso ya ka ya pele.

Ha ho le motsotswana feela o hlakileng, empa ho na le phehello ya mosebetsi o bonahalang le ka mahlo.

Tlhahiso ena ya makasene, e kgobokantse dipale tse jwalo mmoho.

Tse ding tsa dipale tsena di bua ka batho. Tse ding di ka mehopollo. Tse ding di bua ka baahi ba amanang le khemphase ena.

Kaofela, di re fa lesedinyana ka se etsang khemphase ya Qwaqwa jwalo ka karolo e ikgethang ya Yunivesithi ya Freistata.

Mohlomong ke ho pepesa ho re na ditho tsa bohlokwa tse etsweng bakeng sa bokamoso bo botle ba setjhaba di bonahala ka tsela e jwang, haele mona e se meralo feela e ngotsweng fatshe, empa e le mosebetsi e bonahalang ka mehla.

Ke a tshepa o tla natefelwa ke ho bala ditaba tsena jwalo ka ha ke natefetswe ke ho di hlophisa.

Bala ka nyakallo! ❌

KUSUKA *Kumhleli*

ENyuvesi yase-Free State, ukufundisa, ukucwaninga, kanye nokuxoxisana kuqondiswa kakhulu njengomsebenzi ekumele weyamaniswe ngqo nekusasa lomphakathi ozibambela mathupha. Kungabi nje umbhalo, kodwa kube nomsebenzi obonakalayo ngezinto ezenzeka eminxeni eyahlukahlukene yesikhungo.

EKhempasini yaseQwaqwa akudingi ukuthi ubheke le nale ukuze ubone le nto izenzakalela.

Kunabacwaningi abayingxenyane yomsebenzi wokufukulwa komphakathi. Kunemizamo okunjolozela yayo yeyame ekuphumeleleni kwabafundi ngezindlela eziphathekayo. Kunomsebenzi oqhubekayo wolwazi lwezintaba noluyisibuko sendawo esizungezile, noma-ke kuyinto okulula ukwibuka ingasho lutho. Kukhona nezingxoxo maqondana nobudlelwano bezomsebenzi kuyo le ndawo, kanye nezindlela isikhungo esixhumeke ngayo njengengxenyane yomphakathi.

Ukuba ningi kwezindatshana ezididiyelwe kule ngosi – ukuba nzima kokuzicaza ngononina ngendlela enobuyoninco.

Yingoba la, ukufundisa, ukucwaninga, kanye nokuxoxisana kuyizithupha ziya egwayini (akwehlukaniseki).

Ucwaningo luhamba luze lufinyelele emiphakathini.

Ukufundisa kuqhakamba ekutheni abafundi balekelelwa kanjani ngisho ngabe abekho emagumbini okufunda.

Ukuxoxisana kuhamba kuze kufike ebudlelwaneni obungapheleli nje ngaphakathi kwesikhungo kuphela, nangaphandle.

Yikho-ke lokhu obekuhlezi kungikitaza inhliziyi ngesikhathi ngididiyela le ngosi – newushicilelo lwami lokuqala.

Akukho nokugqamayo okungachaza lo muzwa, ukuhleleka nje ngobuyoninco komsebenzi owenzeka bukhoma.

Le ngosi iqukethe ezinye zalezo zindatshana endaweni eyodwa.

Ezinye zimayelana nabantu. Ezinye zimayelana namasu. Ezinye zimayelana nemiphakathi engamadlela-ndawonye alesi sikhungo.

Zizonke, ziletha umundla-kugabisa ekutheni kungani iKhempasi yaseQwaqwa iyingxenyane ekhethekile yeNyuvesi yase-Free State.

Ngakolunye uhlangothi, ziveza ukuthi ukufaka isandla ngendlela yokuzinikela ekusaseni lomphakathi ozibambela mathupha kubukeka kanjani uma kuyinto engekho ephepheni kuphela, kodwa kube yinto ephinde ibonakale emsebenzini wemihla-ngemihla.

Ngithemba uyakuthokozela ukufunda le ngosi njengoba nami ngikuthokozelile ukuyididiyela.

Uyifunde ngentakasi! ❌

There's plenty to look forward to in the months ahead. From well-being and mental health initiatives to sporting events and opportunities for meaningful connection, these upcoming activities are designed to support, engage, and inspire our university community. Be sure to mark your calendar and get involved.

NOTICE board

12 JUNE
MANAGING
PERSONAL FATIGUE



15 JULY
LET'S TALK IT OUT



JULY
SOCCER AND NETBALL
TOURNAMENT



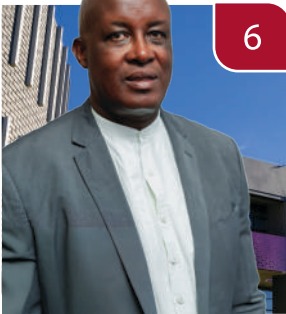
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Ke Eo Taba! editorial team

The articles in this newsletter were written by Tshepo Tsotetsi, from the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, unless otherwise stated.

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Nthabiseng Moloji

At 32, our democracy is still relatively young and is characterised by many competing voices, which is both its strength and its challenge. A sustainable future depends on guaranteeing the essentials of human dignity, universal access to a needs-focused and impactful education to empower citizens, affordable housing and health care to provide stability, and a hunger-free society to ensure equal opportunity. Just as important, freedom from violence builds trust in institutions and strengthens our civic culture. These foundations transform democracy from a mere political system into a lived reality of fairness and security. Without them, democratic promises risk collapsing into disillusionment and instability, undermining both legitimacy and sustainability.



Dipuo Mosea

My dream for the next decade is to see scientific innovation in South Africa successfully translated into sustainable, high-impact businesses that create jobs and drive inclusive growth. Just as Miles Davis expanded the boundaries of jazz through bebop, South Africa can transform its scientific creativity and research excellence into dynamic industries that shape new markets, solve local challenges, and generate lasting economic value.



Democracy and South Africa's future at 32: Freedom day voice of the people

By Teboho Mositi

As we celebrate 32 years of democracy, how can we contribute to building responsible and sustainable societal futures?

Thabiso Hlongwane

As South Africa celebrates 32 years of democracy, my dream for the next decade is to see young people become the driving force behind the country's development. I envision a nation where every young person has access to quality education, meaningful employment, and opportunities to innovate and lead. By investing in youth skills, entrepreneurship, and technology, South Africa can unlock the potential of its largest generation and reduce unemployment and poverty. Through ethical leadership, equal opportunities, and inclusive growth, the youth can help shape a more prosperous and sustainable future. The success of South Africa's democracy will ultimately depend on how well it empowers and supports its young people. ■



Itumeleng Matla

Thirty-two years into democracy, South Africa's progress remains uneven. Unemployment, inequality, and poor service delivery continue to shape daily life in places such as Qwaqwa. Yet this is not a story of hopelessness but a call for collective action. No single institution can solve these challenges alone. The University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus contributes by working alongside the community and sharing knowledge rooted in local realities. Ultimately, lasting solutions will come from local enterprise, stronger food systems, and the creativity of young people. Qwaqwa's greatest strength lies in its people. A sustainable future will be built from within by those who believe in their community's potential. That belief may be the most powerful resource of all.



What responsible societal futures look like on the Qwaqwa Campus

What does 'contributing to responsible societal futures' actually mean? For the University of the Free State (UFS), it is the idea that a university should not exist separately from society and its challenges. It means using teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement to help shape a better future for people and communities. It is about preparing graduates who are not only academically skilled, but also socially conscious, ethical, and able to respond to real-world problems.

On the Qwaqwa Campus, this idea feels less like a strategic phrase and more like a lived reality.

Located in a rural area where unemployment, poverty, and inequality continue to affect many households, the campus exists within close proximity to the social realities higher education is often called upon to respond to. For many students, obtaining a qualification is not only a personal achievement, but an opportunity to change the trajectory of their families and communities.

For Prof Prince Ngobeni, Campus Principal of the Qwaqwa Campus, this is exactly why the university's role in the region matters.

"Responsible societal futures are about ensuring that the university remains connected and responsive to the needs of society. On the Qwaqwa Campus, we see every day how education can create opportunities, restore dignity, and contribute towards long-term community development."

He says the responsibility of the campus extends beyond simply producing graduates.

"Our responsibility is not only to provide access to higher education, but to develop graduates who are critical thinkers, socially aware, and capable of making meaningful contributions within their communities and professions."

The University of the Free State's revised Strategic Plan 2023 to 2028 places responsible societal futures at the centre of the institution's direction, with strong emphasis on collaboration, innovation, and regional engagement.

On the Qwaqwa Campus, this is reflected not only through teaching and student support, but also through research and partnerships aimed at responding to real societal challenges.

Research that responds to society

On the Qwaqwa Campus, research is closely connected to the realities surrounding



the institution. Many of the research projects and academic initiatives taking place on campus are rooted in issues affecting communities directly, including economic development, education, social well-being, sustainability, governance, and community development.

Rather than existing only within academic spaces, much of this work focuses on producing knowledge that can contribute towards practical solutions and long-term development within society.

Prof Ngobeni says universities have a responsibility to ensure that research remains connected to the lived experiences of people.

“Research should speak to the realities people face every day. Whether we are looking at economic challenges, education, social development, environmental sustainability, or community well-being, our responsibility is to ensure that the knowledge produced by the university contributes meaningfully to society.”

He says the campus’ location within a rural community strengthens its ability to understand the challenges facing many South African communities.

“Being located in Qwaqwa allows us to engage closely with the realities affecting communities, and this influences the kind of research, partnerships, and engagement work we prioritise as a campus.”

This relationship between research and society is central to the idea of responsible societal futures, because it positions the university as an active contributor towards development rather than an institution operating separately from the communities around it.

Education rooted in community realities

For students on the Qwaqwa Campus, the connection between the university and the surrounding community is difficult to ignore. Many students come from the very communities the institution seeks to serve, shaping how they understand education, leadership, and social responsibility.

SRC President Mcebo Hlatsi believes that this environment encourages students to think differently about the purpose of higher education.

“On the Qwaqwa Campus, education feels personal because many of us understand the realities facing our communities. Responsible societal futures mean using the opportunities we receive through education to contribute positively to society and not becoming disconnected from the people and places we come from.”

Hlatsi says student leadership also carries a responsibility to encourage social awareness and active citizenship among students.

“As student leaders, we constantly encourage students to think beyond themselves and recognise the impact they can make in their communities. Leadership is not only about positions and representation, but about understanding people’s challenges and responding to them meaningfully.”

This strong connection to community realities also influences how the campus approaches teaching, research, and engagement. Across departments and units, there is a growing emphasis on ensuring that academic work remains relevant to the region and contributes towards addressing societal challenges.

Preparing graduates who can shape society

As higher education continues to adapt to social, economic, and technological change, universities are increasingly expected to prepare graduates who are not only employable, but also adaptable, ethical, and socially conscious.

The revised strategic plan speaks about creating environments where students are equipped to respond to complex societal challenges and contribute meaningfully within changing communities and industries.

For Prof Ngobeni, this means creating graduates who understand both academic excellence and human responsibility.

“The future requires graduates who can think critically, collaborate across different sectors, and remain conscious of the societies they serve. Academic success remains important, but universities must also help students develop empathy, leadership, and a sense of responsibility towards others.”

Hlatsi believes many students on the Qwaqwa Campus already understand this responsibility because of their lived experiences.

“For many students here, success is not only about personal achievement. It is also about being able to return home with knowledge, skills, and opportunities that can positively influence families and communities.”

While responsible societal futures may initially sound like a broad institutional concept, on the Qwaqwa Campus it becomes easier to recognise through the everyday realities of the campus: expanding access to education, producing research that matters, remaining connected to community needs, and preparing graduates who understand that education should ultimately contribute towards building a better society. ■

Pictured on the right is Prof Prince Ngobeni, UFS Campus Principal: Qwaqwa Campus. Pictured on the left is Mcebo Hlatsi, Qwaqwa CSRC President.

The numbers tell an important story. Institutional enrolment data shows that 74% of students enrolled on the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus come from Quintile 1 to 3 schools. These are schools that largely serve poorer and under-resourced communities across South Africa.

The data also shows that 41% of students come from KwaZulu-Natal and 26% from the Free State, highlighting the campus' role as an important access point for students from communities across the region.

But enrolment data can only tell us so much. It cannot tell us about the student arriving on campus having never used a laptop before. It cannot tell us about the first-generation university student carrying the hopes of an entire family. It cannot tell us about the pressure of managing finances, adapting to a new environment, and trying to build a future at the same time.

Those stories are much harder to capture in a spreadsheet. For Prof Prince Ngobeni, Campus Principal of the Qwaqwa Campus, the enrolment trends reflect something much bigger than student numbers.

“When we look at these figures, we are really looking at the communities we serve. Many of our students come from circumstances where access to higher education has not always been guaranteed. Their presence on this campus speaks to the important role that higher education continues to play in creating opportunities for individuals, families, and communities.”

He says the significance of the Qwaqwa Campus lies not only in providing access to higher education, but in what

happens after students arrive.

“The real measure of impact is not how many students we enrol. It is whether those students are supported, whether they succeed, and whether their education enables them to improve their own lives and contribute meaningfully to society.”

Beyond admission

For many students, getting accepted into university is only the beginning of the journey.

According to Zoleka Dotwana, Director of the Division of Student Affairs, Sport, Arts and Culture on the Qwaqwa Campus, many students arrive at university facing challenges that extend well beyond academics.

“What these enrolment trends tell us is that many of our students require significant support as they transition to higher education. Some are using computers for the first time. Others come from schools that may not have had the resources to fully prepare them for university life. They often need support with study techniques, time management, note-taking, and adjusting to a completely new environment.”

The transition can be particularly challenging for first-generation students, many of whom are navigating university life without prior family experience to guide them.

“There is often tremendous pressure to succeed,” says Dotwana. “Many students are carrying expectations from their families and communities. They are learning



What the numbers don't tell you about Qwaqwa students

how to manage finances independently, adapting to life away from home, and balancing academic responsibilities with personal challenges. For some students, those pressures can become overwhelming.”

Recognising these realities, the university has developed a range of support services aimed at helping students thrive academically, socially, and personally.

From orientation and induction programmes to mentorship initiatives, counselling services, academic support, and the No Student Hungry programme, support structures are designed to ensure that students are not left to navigate university life alone.

“Student success requires more than academic support,” Dotwana explains. “Students need a sense of belonging. They need access to wellness services, mentorship, guidance, and communities that help them feel connected and supported throughout their university journey.”

Why place still matters

The Qwaqwa Campus occupies a unique position within the higher education landscape.

Located in a largely rural region and within reach of communities across the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal, the campus continues to provide opportunities for students who may otherwise face significant barriers to accessing higher education.

Prof Ngobeni believes that this connection to surrounding communities remains one of the campus’ greatest strengths.

“As a rural campus, we remain closely connected to the realities affecting many of our communities. Those realities shape how we think about teaching, student support, research, and community engagement. We cannot separate the work of the university from the needs and aspirations of the people we serve.”

That connection is reflected not only in who studies at Qwaqwa, but also in the work taking place beyond the lecture halls. Through research, community engagement initiatives, partnerships, and student development programmes, the campus continues to contribute to conversations and solutions around education, development, livelihoods, sustainability, and social well-being.

For Dotwana, the impact of higher education extends far beyond the individual student. “Education creates possibilities. It creates confidence, independence, and opportunities. For communities such as Qwaqwa and the surrounding areas, access to higher education remains one of the most powerful tools for social and economic development.”

The enrolment figures may begin with percentages and statistics. But behind every number is a student with ambitions, challenges, responsibilities, and hopes for the future.

And perhaps this is what the numbers do not tell us: that every year, thousands of young people arrive on the Qwaqwa Campus, not simply looking for a qualification, but searching for an opportunity to change the course of their lives. ■





Prof Sandy–Lynn Steenhuisen awarded first SARChI Chair on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus

On the slopes of South Africa's mountain systems, ecological life unfolds through interactions so small that they are often missed. A bird brushing against a flower. A beetle moving through pollen. A scent released into warm air and carried across uneven terrain. These exchanges, quiet as they seem, are the foundation of entire ecological systems.

It is within these kinds of relationships that the scientific curiosity of Prof Sandy-Lynn Steenhuisen, Associate Professor in the Department of Plant Sciences, has taken shape over the years. That curiosity has now been recognised at national level. Prof Steenhuisen has been awarded a South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Trophic Ecology by the National Research Foundation (NRF) during the launch of the Decadal Plan Aligned Research Chairs Programme in Pretoria.

The appointment carries institutional significance beyond the individual achievement. It is the first SARChI Chair to be awarded on the Qwaqwa Campus, marking a defining moment in the campus' research trajectory and its positioning within South Africa's broader knowledge production landscape.

For Prof Steenhuisen, however, the recognition is not an arrival point, but a continuation of a longer scientific journey.



"It is an academic dream come true," she says. "I am a product of a SARChI Chair in evolutionary biology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, so stepping into this space carries both a sense of responsibility and continuity."

That sense of continuity is central to her work, which is driven by a persistent question: how do ecological systems hold together, and what causes them to shift, weaken, or transform under pressure?

Listening to fragile ecosystems

Prof Steenhuisen's research is grounded in mountain ecosystems, landscapes that are often visually dramatic but ecologically delicate. These environments are shaped not only by climate and geography, but also by constant interaction between species that depend on one another in ways that are still being uncovered.

"Mountains are a fragile ecosystem," she says. "Each plant and animal has a story to tell, and when invasive species take root, those stories start to fade."

In these systems, change is rarely sudden. It accumulates slowly through shifts in temperature, the introduction of invasive plants, and human transformation of land use. Her work in trophic ecology focuses on how energy and interaction move through these systems, particularly through pollination networks that connect birds, insects, and mammals to plant survival.

Within South Africa's proteas, these relationships become especially intricate. Pollinators respond not only to colour and shape, but also to scent, nectar composition, and even microbial life within flowers.

These details, Prof Steenhuisen explains, are not peripheral. They are often where ecological change first becomes visible.

"There is still so much to explore," she says. "The



Prof Sandy-Lynn Steenhuisen, recipient of the NRF SARChI Chair in Trophic Ecology, conducts research focused on ecological interactions within South Africa's mountain systems.

mountains hold a treasure chest of natural history discoveries.”

Much of this research is rooted in the Qwaqwa region, where long-term ecological monitoring is helping scientists observe environmental change over time. The landscape itself becomes part of the research process, offering continuity that short-term studies cannot capture.

It is also a place where ecological science intersects directly with questions of human livelihood, land use, and environmental sustainability.

Place, knowledge, and scientific perspective

For Prof Steenhuisen, the significance of the work extends beyond ecological systems alone. It also raises questions about where knowledge is produced and whose perspectives shape global scientific understanding.

A key part of her focus is strengthening ecological research from the Global South, particularly in fields where scientific frameworks have historically been developed elsewhere.

“We are trying to strengthen the representation of ecological knowledge from the Global South,” she explains, “because so much of what we know has come from the Global North.”

This shift is not framed as replacement, but as expansion. It is about ensuring that ecological systems in African landscapes are understood through research that is grounded in their own environmental and social contexts.

The SARChI Chair will enable Prof Steenhuisen to expand collaborative research teams, strengthen scientific networks across South Africa and other African

countries, and support the development of emerging scientists, particularly young African women entering ecology.

It is a role that extends her influence beyond her own research questions towards the cultivation of future scientific capacity.

At an institutional level, the appointment adds to the University of the Free State's growing research profile, positioning the university more firmly within national and international ecological research networks.

For the Qwaqwa Campus, it also signals something more immediate: the emergence of high-level, globally relevant research capacity in a space where such recognition has not traditionally been concentrated.

It is this shift – from peripheral to recognised research space – that gives the appointment its broader significance.

The appointment positions Prof Steenhuisen among a growing cohort of researchers contributing to ecological understanding of South Africa's mountain systems. It also reflects a campus and a university increasingly engaged in research that connects biodiversity science with long-term environmental and societal questions, grounded in the realities of place. ■

Freedom day: Is this what liberation was meant to look like

By **Thabang Mokoena**

South Africa's democracy calls for reflection, not just celebration. More than 30 years into freedom, we must ask: Is this what liberation was meant to look like? For the 'born-free' generation – those who have never experienced apartheid – freedom is no longer defined by legal segregation, but by daily realities of inequality, unemployment, and failing public services.

Freedom, as it stands today, is fragmented. For those who fought under apartheid, freedom symbolised dignity, equality, and justice. For many young South Africans today, however, it is increasingly defined by unemployment, poor service delivery, and a persistent sense of exclusion. This gap between expectation and reality raises a troubling question: have we honoured the sacrifices of those who fought for liberation?

The answer is not simple, but it is uncomfortable. Corruption has become deeply embedded within the structures of governance. Public funds intended for development are misused, and basic services fail to reach those who need them most. When government fails to deliver water, electricity, health care, and safety, people's humanity is undermined. This is what can be understood as institutional violence: harm that is built into systems, policies, and everyday governance.

South Africa has witnessed numerous commissions of inquiry that have exposed deep-rooted dysfunction and ethical decay within state institutions. Yet accountability remains inconsistent. The persistence of corruption reveals a structural gap within government frameworks, one that allows injustice to continue largely unchecked.

To understand this condition, Frantz Fanon's work remains profoundly relevant. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that colonial and apartheid

violence does not end with political independence; it mutates and embeds itself within institutions, cultures, and the psyche of society. He describes a form of violence that is not always physical, but symbolic, institutional, and epistemic, where people are made to feel excluded and invisible within systems meant to serve them.

In contemporary South Africa, this insight resonates deeply. The violence that many citizens experience today is not always overt, but structural: it is found in failing schools, collapsing infrastructure, and the quiet erosion of dignity.

What is required now is not only reform, but transformation. A genuine commitment to the decolonisation of law, policy, and governance remains important. This means rethinking systems so that they centre human dignity, accountability, and equitable access to resources. It means confronting corruption not as isolated misconduct, but as a systemic crisis that undermines democracy itself.

Freedom must be more than a constitutional ideal; it must be a lived reality. Until then, the promise of liberation risks being overshadowed by institutional violence embedded within our societal norms. And unless we act decisively, freedom itself may remain a dream deferred. ✕



The inauguration of Prof Oliver Nyambi as the first full professor in the Faculty of The Humanities on the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus marks a significant milestone for both the faculty and the campus. It is also recognition of a scholarly journey that has spent more than 15 years examining one of the most enduring questions facing societies in crisis: what happens to our humanity when survival becomes the priority?

As a scholar in the Department of English, Prof Nyambi’s research has focused on literature emerging from periods of political upheaval, economic collapse, migration, and displacement. Drawing particularly on Zimbabwean literature, he has explored how stories help us understand the lived realities behind statistics, headlines, and historical accounts.

During his inaugural lecture, *Finding the Human(e): The Poethics of Literature*, Prof Nyambi reflected on how literature preserves memory, dignity, and identity in moments when these are most under threat. His work examines how people navigate fear, uncertainty, exile, and loss, while continuing to find ways to affirm their humanity.

For Prof Nyambi, literature serves as more than a record of events. It offers insight into the emotional and human dimensions of crisis, capturing experiences that often fall outside official histories and public discourse. Through stories of migration, political struggle, and everyday survival, his research highlights the resilience of individuals and communities confronting difficult circumstances.

The milestone of becoming the first full professor in the Faculty of The Humanities on the Qwaqwa Campus is therefore not only a personal achievement. It reflects a growing culture of scholarship and research excellence on the campus and serves as an inspiration for the next generation of academics. As the title suggests, it is a first, but hopefully not the last. ❏



The first of many: A milestone for humanities scholarship at Qwaqwa





Celebrating research excellence on the Qwaqwa Campus

Not all research begins with a breakthrough moment. Sometimes it starts with a question about why schools struggle, how ecosystems are changing, or what communities need to thrive. On the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, researchers asking those questions were recently recognised through the Research Management and Funding Committee Awards.

Held under the theme *En Route to Societal Futures*, the awards recognised researchers across disciplines whose work continues to contribute to scholarship while responding to challenges that affect people's lives.


The stories behind the awards are as diverse as the researchers themselves. Some are exploring how leadership can strengthen schools and improve learning environments. Others are advancing environmental

research that is positioning African mountain systems within global scientific conversations. Together, they reflect a research culture that is growing in depth, confidence, and relevance.

For Dr Lulama Mdozana-Zide from the Faculty of Education, the recognition was an opportunity to reflect on a journey shaped by persistence and purpose. "It is humbling to look at where I came from and how this work has grown," she said. Her research focuses on school leadership and management, with particular attention to creating environments where both teachers and learners can thrive.

The Afromontane Research Unit was among the standout recipients, continuing a decade of work that has elevated African mountain research on the global stage. According to Prof Ralph Clark, the recognition belongs to a collective effort built over many years of collaboration and commitment.

The awards also speak to a broader vision for the university. As the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies, Prof Vasu Reddy, noted, research gives meaning to the university's mission of contributing meaningfully to responsible societal futures. At its core, he said, research is about strengthening lives, informing policy, and improving the conditions of society.

As the Qwaqwa Campus continues to strengthen its research culture, the awards serve as a reminder that impactful research is not only measured by publications or funding secured. Its true value lies in the difference it makes beyond the university – in classrooms, communities, and the future that society is working to build. 



Qwaqwa Research Management and Funding Committee Awards 2026 – Winners

| CATEGORY | WINNERS |
|---|--|
| Top Achiever Researcher | Prof Oliver Nyambi – Faculty of The Humanities Dr Calvin Mudzingiri – Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences Dr Lulama Mgodana-Zide – Faculty of Education Prof Patrick Otomo – Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences |
| Most Promising Emerging Researcher | Dr Nonki Motahane – Faculty of The Humanities Dr Regret Sunge – Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences Dr Ijeoma Ogbonnaya – Faculty of Education Dr Nthatsi Nyembe – Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences |
| Interdisciplinary Research Excellence Award | First Place: Prof Ralph Clark – Afrimontane Research Unit Second Place: Prof Grey Magaiza – Centre for Gender and Africa Studies |
| Most Innovative Research Project | First Place: Prof Ralph Clark – Afrimontane Research Unit Second Place: Prof Richard Ocaya – Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences |
| Most Outstanding Research Support Staff Member | First Place: Dr Zandile Mcube – Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences Second Place: Dr Nozipho Kheswa – Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences |

Beyond a decade of discovery: ARU and the future of African mountain research

The Afromontane Research Unit (ARU) at the University of the Free State has spent the past decade building a strong foundation in African mountain research. Now, as it moves beyond its first ten years, the focus is shifting from establishment to expansion, with a clear emphasis on how research can better respond to environmental and societal change.

Located on the Qwaqwa Campus, the unit was established in 2015 to strengthen research capacity and has since grown into a recognised centre for interdisciplinary work on mountain systems. Its research is grounded in the understanding that African mountain environments are interconnected systems where biodiversity, water, climate, and human livelihoods cannot be separated.

As the unit enters its next phase, attention is turning to how research can become more responsive, applied, and future-orientated. This includes strengthening climate change adaptation work, improving how environmental data is collected and used, and deepening collaboration across disciplines and regions.

Prof Vasu Reddy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies and Chair of the ARU Advisory Board, says the unit's approach to collaboration remains central to its future direction. "Its governance model, rooted in collaboration with traditional leadership, international experts, and local communities, reflects a commitment to co-creation and shared stewardship."



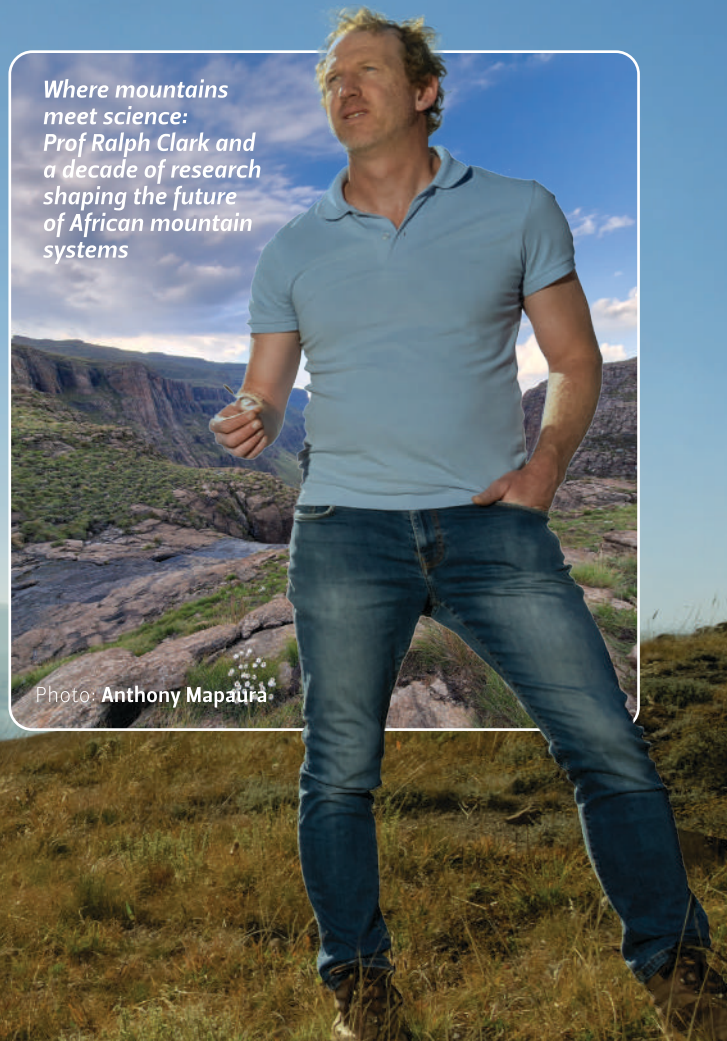
For Prof Ralph Clark, founding Director of the ARU, the next phase is about deepening impact through stronger science-policy-practitioner interaction for mountains. "Our vision is a future where mountain systems and their inhabitants thrive from a blend of robust science, reasonable policy, and impactful practitionership," he says.

The unit is also strengthening its focus on climate resilience, particularly for communities living in mountain regions that are increasingly affected by environmental change. At the same time, it continues to build partnerships across Africa, ensuring that knowledge production is not only scientifically strong, but also locally grounded and practically useful.

Rather than signalling an endpoint, the ARU's tenth year marks a transition. The emphasis is no longer only on what has been achieved, but on how research can actively shape more sustainable futures for Africa's mountain landscapes and the communities that depend on them. ▣

Where mountains meet science: Prof Ralph Clark and a decade of research shaping the future of African mountain systems

Photo: Anthony Mapaura



Trans- linguaging symposium

reimagines language
and learning in the
Global South

For many students across the Global South, the challenge in education is not ability, but language. Learning often takes place in environments where knowledge is delivered in languages that do not fully reflect the lived realities of students, turning understanding into translation rather than connection.

This reality shaped the Fifth International Translanguaging Symposium in the Global South, held in Clarens and hosted by the Academy for Multilingualism on the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus. The symposium brought together academics, linguists, and education practitioners to rethink language as a resource for inclusion, access, and transformation in education.

Language, meaning, and learning

The symposium featured two keynote speakers, Prof Angel Lin from the Education University of Hong Kong and Dr Robyn Tyler from the University of the Western Cape, who each focused on how language functions within learning, identity, and education systems.

Prof Lin explored translanguaging alongside multimodal learning, decoloniality, and artificial intelligence. Her focus was on how students already draw on multiple languages and ways of expression to construct meaning, and how education systems often fail to recognise this. She also raised concern that digital and AI-driven learning environments may deepen exclusion if African languages and knowledge systems remain underrepresented.

Dr Tyler focused on translanguaging in practice, particularly within mother-tongue-based bilingual education. She highlighted that multilingual communication is already part of everyday life in African homes and classrooms, even when formal education systems do not acknowledge it, and argued that recognising these practices can make learning



Front row, from the left: Prof Anthea Rhoda, Prof Angel Lin, and Prof Nomalungelo Ngubane
Back row, from the left: Prof Prince Ngobeni, Prof Cias Tsotetsi, Dr Robyn Tyler, and Dr Tholani Hlongwa

more accessible and grounded.

Within this broader conversation, Dr Tholani Hlongwa, Deputy Director of the academy, pointed to how language is often misunderstood in relation to knowledge production.

“No language as a tool should be given priority; what matters most is the knowledge it helps us produce,” she said. She added that translanguaging is already embedded in everyday communication across communities.

“Translanguaging is not new. We have been doing it without having a concept for it. If policymakers and language users understand that we are all striving towards the same goal of knowledge production and dissemination, then normalising translanguaging will provide equal access and success in education.”

What emerged in Clarens was less a debate about language itself and more a quiet reframing of learning, who it serves, and what it becomes when students are allowed to bring their full linguistic worlds into the classroom. **15**



Inside the Qwaqwa Campus *research story*



What does research look like on a campus located at the foot of the Maloti Mountains and surrounded by communities navigating complex social, economic, and environmental realities?

On the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, the answer can be found in the questions researchers choose to pursue. Some are exploring water quality, biodiversity conservation, and environmental sustainability. Others are examining social transformation, community development, education, identity, and the challenges facing contemporary African societies.

According to Prof Cias Tsotetsi, Campus Vice-Principal: Research and Academic, this direction has become a defining feature of the campus' research identity.

“Our research focuses on approaches that encourage us to think not only about ourselves as human beings, but also about future generations and the planet,” he says.

This work is supported by three key research centres on the campus: the Afromontane Research Unit (ARU), the Centre for Global Change (CGC), and the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies (CGAS).

Together, these centres create spaces where academics, students, communities, policymakers, traditional leaders, and international collaborators can engage with some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

“The strength of our research centres is that they work with communities and use transdisciplinary research to tackle contemporary challenges,” says Prof Tsotetsi.

From addressing rangeland degradation and water scarcity to exploring questions of social justice, development, and population change, research on the Qwaqwa Campus remains closely connected to both place and people.

This commitment to producing knowledge that responds to contemporary challenges is reflected in the work of two Qwaqwa academics recently featured in the University of the Free State's 2025 Impact Report.



Meet the Researchers

Prof Puseletso Mofokeng **Cleaning water, reducing waste**

Access to clean water remains one of the most pressing challenges facing communities across the world. At the same time, plastic pollution continues to place growing pressure on the environment.

Prof Puseletso Mofokeng, Associate Professor in the Department of Chemistry, is working at the intersection of these two challenges. Her research focuses on biodegradable polymers and advanced nanocomposite materials that can remove harmful contaminants from water while providing more sustainable alternatives to conventional plastics.

The long-term goal is to develop solutions that are not only scientifically effective, but also practical and accessible.

“My research seeks to bridge science and societal needs by creating practical, affordable technologies that can be implemented in resource-constrained communities,” she says.

Through her work, Prof Mofokeng hopes to contribute towards cleaner environments, improved public health, and more sustainable approaches to water treatment and environmental management.



Prof Sandy-Lynn Steenhuisen **Protecting mountain ecosystems**

The mountains surrounding Qwaqwa are home to complex ecological systems that support a rich diversity of plant and animal life. Understanding and protecting these systems is at the centre of Prof Sandy-Lynn Steenhuisen’s research.

Associate Professor and Subject Head in the Department of Plant Sciences, Prof Steenhuisen is a pollination ecologist whose work explores plant-animal interactions, biodiversity conservation, and the functioning of mountain ecosystems.

Her research has contributed to significant scientific discoveries and continues to shape understanding of how ecosystems respond to invasive species, climate change, and human activity.

Recently awarded the DSTI/NRF SARCHI Chair in Trophic Ecology, Prof Steenhuisen and her collaborators are expanding research and capacity-building initiatives across Southern Africa.

“We aim to build knowledge and capacity to guide conservation and policy as part of a vision for a Southern Africa where plants and animals thrive together in healthy, diverse mountain ecosystems,” she says.

Through research, postgraduate training, and international collaboration, her work is helping to strengthen both scientific knowledge and conservation practice across the region. 📖

What does financial management have to do with a royal house? Quite a lot, it turns out.

From overseeing community resources to managing trusts and supporting development initiatives, today's royal houses operate in an environment that demands more than tradition alone. It requires financial knowledge, sound decision making, and an understanding of increasingly complex governance responsibilities.

That reality recently brought members of the Bakoena ba Mopeli, Makholokoe, Batlokoa ba Mokgalong, and Batlokoa ba Mota royal houses to the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, where they participated in a financial management and cost accounting programme offered through the UFS Business School.

The programme forms part of a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2024 between the university and the Royal Houses in the Qwaqwa region. While the agreement focuses on collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity development, its impact is perhaps best seen in moments such as these, where academic knowledge is placed alongside the practical realities of community leadership.

For Prof Cias Tsotetsi, the engagement reflects how leadership and learning evolve alongside changing social realities. "Traditional leadership is something that is inherited from birth, unlike political leadership," he said. "Because communities and the socio-political space continue to evolve, it becomes important for royal houses to also engage with contemporary ways of thinking and practices from universities." He added that the exchange works in both directions.

"In the same way, universities also benefit from the perspectives of royal houses," Prof Tsotetsi said. "This ensures that our academic work remains relevant not

only to students, but also to those in leadership positions within communities."

From a community engagement perspective, Moodi Matsoso, Community Engagement Coordinator, said the partnership strengthens inclusion and trust between the university and surrounding communities.

"This partnership is really powerful. It bridges formal education with traditional leadership and cultural heritage," she said. "It allows community members to feel acknowledged and included in the university's initiatives, and it builds trust through knowledge that flows both ways."

For Morena Ernest Moloi of the Makholokoe Royal House, who represented the participating royal houses, the programme was not simply about acquiring knowledge, but about taking that knowledge back into the communities they serve.

"What we have learned here must be applied in our councils. It is important because it affects how we manage resources and how effectively we are able to serve our communities."

He added that leadership requires a willingness to keep learning. "Leaders must continue to build their knowledge so that they can adapt to changing circumstances. Without that, it becomes difficult to manage responsibilities in a way that truly benefits the people we serve."

At a university whose North Star is to contribute meaningfully to Responsible Societal Futures, the programme offers a practical example of what that vision can look like. It is not only about generating knowledge, but about sharing it in ways that strengthen institutions, communities, and the people entrusted with leading them. ■

Royal houses return to the classroom



Building responsible societal futures through *sustainable community organisations in Qwaqwa*

In Qwaqwa, many community-based organisations continue to carry the weight of social development with limited resources. These organisations respond daily to unemployment, youth development needs, access to information, and wider community challenges, often without stable funding to sustain their work. Yet their impact remains deeply embedded in the communities they serve.

It is within this context that the Department of Community Development under the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies on the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus hosted a fundraising workshop focused on capacitating community-based organisations in and around Qwaqwa. The workshop brought together NGOs, students, and development practitioners to explore practical approaches to sustainability, including grant writing, alternative funding strategies, and digital storytelling.

Strengthening the tools that sustain community work

For the department, the workshop was born from what students and lecturers observed during work-integrated learning placements, where Community Development students engage directly with local organisations as part of their training.

“Through our placements, we saw that many organisations were struggling with sustainability beyond service delivery,” said lecturer and organiser Nthatisi Nkoebele. “This is about ensuring that they are not only doing the work but are also able to sustain it.”

She added that many organisations in rural areas face structural barriers that go beyond funding alone. “Government cannot fund everyone,” she said. “That is why organisations must also be equipped to access private and international funding opportunities while building their own sustainability.”

Among the participating organisations was the Macro Informative Youth Agency, represented by Joss Letshedi, who described how her organisation was born out of personal experience after struggling to find employment after graduation.

“I realised that many young people in Qwaqwa are facing the same challenges of unemployment and limited access to opportunities,” she said. “That is what pushed me to start something that connects young people to information and skills that can help them navigate the real world.”

Workshop facilitator Samantha Davidson Green, a film director, media educator, and non-profit executive from the United States, encouraged organisations to rethink how they position themselves in competitive funding environments. She pointed to storytelling as a powerful tool for visibility and sustainability.

“Funders want to see impact, not just intention,” she said. “How you tell your story, how you show your work, and how you communicate your presence online really matters.”

The workshop also spoke directly to the theme of contributing meaningfully to responsible societal futures, where institutions are called to play an active role in shaping sustainable communities rather than working in isolation.

“This is about co-creating knowledge with communities,” said Nkoebele. “As a university, we have a responsibility not only to educate, but to contribute meaningfully to the spaces around us.”

She added that strengthening community-based organisations is not optional, but essential for long-term development in rural contexts such as Qwaqwa. “If these organisations are not sustainable, the communities they serve are also at risk,” she said. ■



From the left: Prof Jared McDonald, Assistant Dean of the Faculty of The Humanities; Prof Mogomme Masoga, Dean of the Faculty of The Humanities; Prof Vasu Reddy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies; Prof Nwando Achebe, Distinguished Professor at Michigan State University; Dr Demetrice Jordan, Instructor and Dean's Faculty Fellow in the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School; Prof Cias Tsoetsi, Campus Vice-Principal: Academic and Research; Prof Prince Ngobeni, Campus Principal: Qwaqwa Campus; and Prof Grey Magaiza, acting Director of the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies.



What does it mean to celebrate Africa in 2026?



What does liberation mean if the flag is free, but the people remain bound by colonial habits of power?" When Prof Nwando Achebe posed that question during the Africa Day Memorial Lecture on the Qwaqwa Campus, the room fell into the kind of silence that only follows a question people are still trying to answer.

The lecture marked the culmination of the campus' Africa Month celebrations, hosted by the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies in collaboration with the Directorate for International Partnerships and Relations from 18 to 20 May 2026. Yet the three-day programme was never only about marking a date on the calendar. It was about creating moments that invited people to think a little differently about Africa, and their place within it.

Between 18 and 20 May, the Qwaqwa Campus hosted a programme that ranged from an Amazing Race and fun walk to cultural showcases, performances, and the Africa Day Memorial Lecture. The celebrations brought together staff, students, members of various royal houses, university leadership, academics, and invited guests in recognition of Africa Month and Africa Day.

Staff and students arrived in attire representing different parts of the African continent, while cultural performances transformed gathering spaces into vibrant expressions of heritage, identity, and tradition. The programme also created opportunities for participation and interaction, with activities that encouraged staff and students to engage with one another beyond lecture halls, offices, and classrooms.

The celebrations culminated in the Africa Day Memorial Lecture, delivered by Prof Nwando Achebe – University Distinguished Professor and Jack and Margaret Sweet

Endowed Professor of History at Michigan State University in the United States of America. Addressing an audience that included university leaders, academics, students, traditional leaders, and visiting scholars such as Dr Demetrius D Jordan from Harvard Medical School, Prof Achebe challenged listeners to reconsider what Africa Day commemorates and what it leaves unexamined.

"Memory is never innocent. Every celebration remembers some things and forgets others," she said.

Drawing on themes of gender, authority, power, and belonging, Prof Achebe argued that Africa's political history cannot be understood solely through the story of independence and nation building. Through a series of historical case studies spanning more than a century, she explored how women's authority has been exercised, challenged, regulated, erased, and reclaimed across different periods of African history.

At the heart of the lecture was the argument that gender in African history was never simply a matter of identity. Rather, it was one of the ways through which power was organised, contested, and exercised. Through gender, she argued, authority was recognised or denied, wealth was negotiated, and personhood itself could be affirmed or withdrawn.

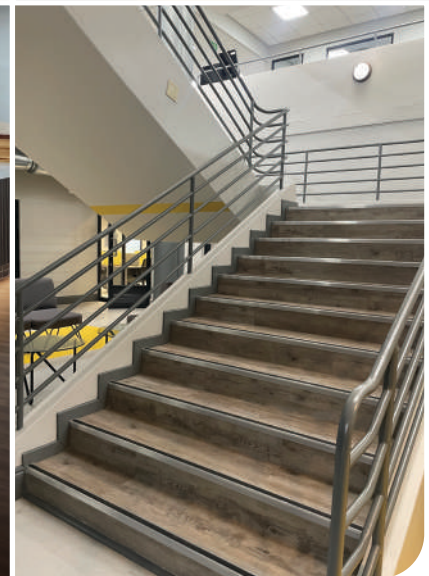
Prof Achebe also challenged audiences to think critically about the meaning of liberation in contemporary Africa.

"If we learn to read gender as archive, Africa Day begins to look very different," she said.

Returning to the central question of the lecture, she asked whether Africa is prepared to confront not only the legacies of colonialism, but also the structures of power that continue to shape whose lives, experiences, and histories are valued.

"What does liberation mean if the flag is free, but the people remain bound by colonial habits of power?"

The question framed much of the afternoon's discussion and offered a fitting conclusion to a programme that combined celebration, culture, scholarship, and reflection during Africa Month. While the activities showcased the diversity and richness of African cultures, the memorial lecture reminded audiences that Africa Day also presents an opportunity to engage with the histories, questions, and conversations that continue to shape the continent's future. ■



The TK Mopeli Library on the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus has reopened with a renewed layout that feels noticeably more open, more flexible, and more in step with how students actually use the space. It is still the same library, but the way it works and feels has shifted.

Walk through the doors and the changes are not about decoration, but about use. Spaces now move between group work, quiet study, and academic support with far more ease than before. For Assistant Director of Library and Information Services, Zukiswa Ketiwe, that shift was intentional. “The revitalisation of the TK Mopeli Library provides a dynamic and multifunctional learning environment that supports different

styles of studying,” she says. “The library has collaborative spaces that include group discussion rooms to encourage teamwork, peer learning, and problem solving.”

It is in these everyday choices of how students sit, meet, and study that the redesign becomes visible. Some spaces are built for conversation and shared work, others for focus and silence. “Quiet spaces support focused reading for tests and examination preparation,” Ketiwe explains. “Students can now choose spaces that match their learning preferences, increasing engagement, and productivity.”

For Campus Vice-Principal: Support Services, Teboho Manchu, the refurbishment speaks to something bigger than the building itself. It

is about how learning is shaped across the campus as a whole. “The library facilities were reimagined to accommodate the different needs of our learning communities and academics,” he says. “The aim was to turn it into a vital campus community hub of intellectual engagement, beyond just lending books and other study material.”

That idea extends outward to how the campus is experienced beyond the library walls. “The general objective is to turn every corner of the campus into a learning space,” he adds.

The TK Mopeli Library now feels less like a static academic building and more like a working part of campus life again – shaped by movement, conversation, focus, and the everyday rhythm of student learning. ■

UFS Qwaqwa Campus *in the world*

Internationalisation is often associated with travelling abroad, but it is equally about the exchange of ideas, cultures, knowledge, and experiences. During the first half of 2026, the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus strengthened its global connections through visiting scholars, student mobility opportunities, and international collaborations.

Africa Month: Global conversations, African perspectives

Africa Month celebrations brought internationally acclaimed historian Prof Nwando Achebe from Michigan State University in the United States to the Qwaqwa Campus, where she delivered the Africa Day Memorial Lecture. Her visit formed part of a broader programme that encouraged reflection on Africa's past, present, and future.

The celebrations also welcomed Dr Demetrice Jordan from Harvard Medical School, whose participation contributed to academic engagement and dialogue during Africa Month.

Language without borders

The Fifth International Translanguaging Symposium brought together scholars exploring multilingualism, language practices, and education in diverse contexts.

Among the featured guests were Prof Angel Lin from the Education University of Hong Kong and Dr Robyn Tyler from the University of the Western Cape. Their participation highlighted growing international networks supporting research and dialogue around multilingualism and language education.

Students beyond borders

Qwaqwa students are also taking their learning beyond South Africa's borders through international mobility opportunities.

Doctoral Sociology student Clementine Takob and master's Sociology student Galetlwaelwe Senoge are participating in exchange opportunities at the University of Freiburg in Germany, engaging in academic networking and scholarly exchange.

Meanwhile, master's students Nnana Mofokeng and Bongiwelwe Moloi are undertaking academic mobility



opportunities at the Ludwigsburg University of Education in Germany.

A global campus at home

Internationalisation is not only about sending students abroad. The Directorate for International Partnerships and Relations recently welcomed four students from the University of Virginia in the United States as part of the InterSciComm Internship Programme. Developed through partnerships between the University of Virginia, the University of Virginia Centre for Global Health Equity, and the University of the Free State, the initiative focuses on science communication, intercultural exchange, interdisciplinary learning, and socially responsive health-care education.

Strengthening internationalisation practice

Bulelwa Moikwathai, Assistant Director in the Directorate for International Partnerships and Relations, recently completed the Nelson Mandela University Leadership Short Learning Programme on Internationalisation of Higher Education: An African Approach. The programme explored how African universities can advance internationalisation through contextually grounded partnerships, knowledge diplomacy, and collaborative engagement.

The experience forms part of continuing efforts to strengthen internationalisation practice and partnership development on the Qwaqwa Campus. ▀

Dr Hadio Motaung

Dr Hadio Motaung, Lecturer in the Faculty of Education, graduated with a PhD while balancing academic work and programme coordination responsibilities at the University of the Free State.

She joined the institution in 2014 and progressed from administration into academia while continuing her studies.

“I was required to find my footing as a new academic, coordinate a programme outside my home department, and meet the demands of advanced postgraduate study simultaneously. Wearing these three demanding hats was both daunting and developmental,” she says.



Mojalefa Mthembu

Mojalefa Mthembu, Assistant Researcher in the Directorate for International Partnerships and Relations, completed his honours degree while working full time at the University of the Free State.

His work in international engagement and student interaction shaped his academic interests in African studies, governance, and social transformation, reinforcing his belief in education as a tool for broader societal impact.

He plans to pursue a master's degree in African Studies and continue contributing to conversations on African knowledge systems and higher education transformation.

UFS Qwaqwa Campus staff shine at April graduation ceremonies

By Teboho Mositi

Several staff members from the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus marked academic milestones at the April graduation ceremonies at the University of the Free State. Their achievements reflect determination in balancing professional responsibilities with further study, and a shared commitment to continuous growth within and beyond the institution.

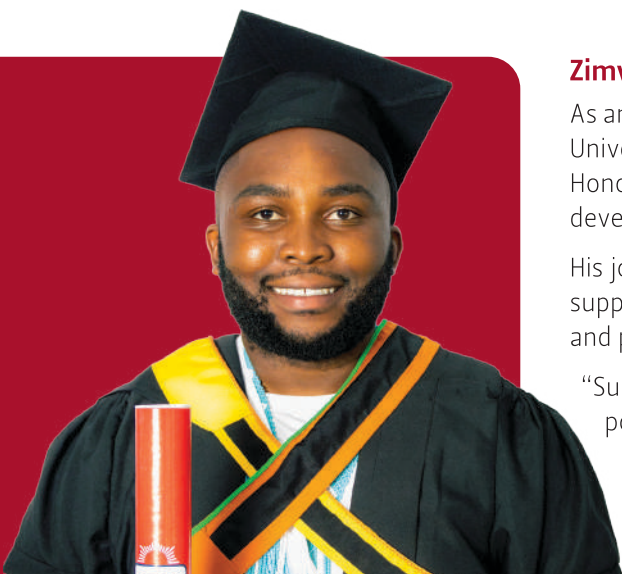
We celebrate some of the colleagues who crossed the graduation stage.

Zimvo Potelwa

As an intern in the Division of Student Affairs, Sport, Arts and Culture at the University of the Free State, Zimvo Potelwa completed his Bachelor of Arts Honours in Communication Science while working in student support and development spaces.

His journey is rooted in student leadership and a commitment to creating supportive campus environments where students can thrive academically and personally.

“Success is not only about personal achievement, but also about the positive difference we make in the lives of others,” he reflects.



Dr Thato Moloi

Dr Thato Moloi, Postdoctoral Fellow in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, completed her PhD in Botany, focusing on invasive Rosaceae species in South Africa's grassland biome.

Her research explored how these invasive shrubs spread and reshape ecological systems, with implications for biodiversity and climate resilience in high elevation grasslands.

Her journey was shaped by balancing academic work and motherhood, supported by a strong personal support system that sustained her through the demands of postgraduate study.

Her achievement reflects both scientific contribution and personal perseverance in a demanding research field.



Pulane Moyana

Pulane Moyana, Junior Lecturer in the Department of African Languages within the Faculty of The Humanities, completed her master's degree while balancing teaching responsibilities and personal recovery following a significant injury.

She describes the qualification as a deeply personal achievement, rooted in self-belief and perseverance.

"I did my master's degree because I always wanted to prove to myself that I could build something new."

Her milestone is both academic and symbolic, marking a major step in her professional and personal journey, with plans to pursue doctoral studies in 2027.

Lerato Mtshengu

Lerato Mtshengu, Literacy Assistant in the Centre for Teaching and Learning, completed a Master of Arts degree in History, building on a journey marked by persistence and academic curiosity.

Her research focused on recovering the histories of black women in former homelands, with a particular focus on Qwaqwa, contributing to the broader project of restoring overlooked narratives in South African history.

Her studies were shaped by limited archival records and the challenges of working within under documented historical spaces, but also by a strong commitment to telling silenced stories.

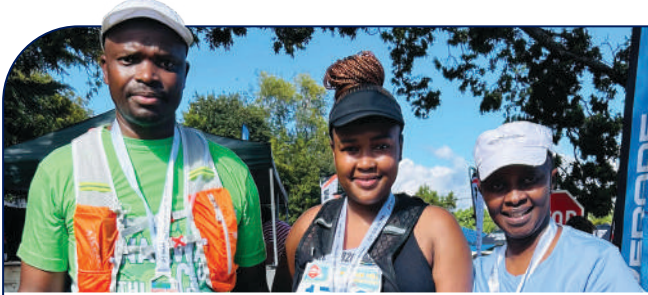
Her work highlights the importance of visibility, memory, and representation in historical scholarship. K



UFS staff conquer the 2026 Surrender Hill Marathon

By Teboho Mositi

From office desks to open roads, staff members from the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus embraced the 2026 Surrender Hill Marathon, showcasing endurance, discipline, and a shared commitment to wellness beyond the workplace.



Eric Duma

For Eric Duma, Assistant Director: Security Services on the Qwaqwa Campus, running is both discipline and mental release. A veteran runner, he recently completed the 21 km half marathon, balancing leadership in campus security with a consistent running routine.

He uses sport as a way to manage the pressures of security work and encourages his team to do the same. "I am always encouraging the Protection Services members to get involved in sports activities due to the stressful nature of our work," he says.

Nthabeleng Motsoeneng

After returning to running in 2024, Nthabeleng Motsoeneng from Housing and Residence Affairs completed the Surrender Hill Marathon (21,1 km) in a time of 2:34:16, marking a personal return to fitness and discipline.

Inspired by a local running club, she has set her sights on the Comrades Marathon. "Start now. Walk the distance until you are able to run it," she says. "You will be surprised at how much your mental and physical health can improve."



Prof Jared McDonald

What began with parkrun in 2019 has grown into a steady running journey for Prof Jared McDonald from the Faculty of The Humanities, who has now completed more than 200 parkruns and several long-distance races, including the Surrender Hill Marathon.

Running remains his way of maintaining balance amid academic leadership. "Start small and be consistent. You do not need to be fast or run long distances at first," he says.



Millicent Mofokeng

A newspaper advert led Millicent Mofokeng from Finance on the Qwaqwa Campus to her first official race – the 5 km Surrender Hill Marathon, where she earned a medal and a new sense of confidence in her fitness journey.

What started as casual jogging has become a personal wellness milestone. "Running this race was proof that small steps lead to big wins," she says.



Dr Eleanor Bernard

Dr Eleanor Bernard from the Centre for Teaching and Learning completed the 21 km half marathon, driven by a personal goal of staying healthy for her children and remaining active.

Though she only recently began training for longer distances, she draws motivation from community runners in Bethlehem. "Anyone can run, and if they do not want to run, they can walk," she says. ✎

For many students arriving on the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, the campus clinic becomes one of the first places they learn to trust. It is where they go when illness interrupts their studies, when anxiety feels overwhelming, or when life away from home becomes too heavy to carry alone. For a significant number of students without medical aid or access to private health care, it is not just a service point, but a place of care they depend on.

On 12 May, the campus marked International Nurses Day with a gathering led by management to honour the nurses working within the Department of Health and Wellness. The moment was not only ceremonial, but also reflective of the everyday role nurses play in shaping student life beyond the classroom. Campus Principal, Prof Prince Ngobeni, said their work carries a depth that is often unseen. "Our nurses provide a service that reaches far beyond health care. They support the dignity, well-being, and stability of our students and staff every day, often during moments when people need reassurance and compassion the most," he said.

Chief Nurse and Clinic Manager, Matebello Pitso, said the role of campus nurses often extends to emotional and social care because of the realities students face. "We care for students and staff holistically, mentally and physically, so that they are able to function well in their daily lives. Many students need to be in a healthy state to focus on their studies, and we make sure they are supported in that process," she said. She added that

many students arrive at the clinic carrying more than just physical symptoms, but also emotional strain that comes with being away from home.

"In many cases, we are not only caring for physical well-being. For many students, we also become a source of comfort and emotional support, because their families are far away from them while they are studying here," she said. It is within that space, she noted, that nurses often take on roles that feel less clinical and more human, offering guidance, calm, and consistency when students need it most.

Director of the Division of Student Affairs, Sport, Arts and Culture on the Qwaqwa Campus, Zoleka Dotwana, said the contribution of nurses is central to the university's broader commitment to student well-being. "What makes the UFS a workplace of choice is the importance we place on the well-being of our staff members. Our nurses provide an essential service and continue to support students with dedication despite the demanding nature of their work," she said.

Beyond the formal recognition, International Nurses Day served as a reminder of something quieter but more profound: that for many students, the clinic is not just a facility on campus. It is a space where they are looked after in moments when everything else feels uncertain, and where nurses, in their daily work, often become the closest thing to family when they walk through the campus gate. ▣

International nurses day: The quiet hands holding students together on UFS Qwaqwa

Campus nurses from the Department of Health and Wellness on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus were honoured on International Nurses Day for their dedication to student and staff well-being. From the left: Sr Masingwaneng Xaba, En Thabiso Mokgehle, Sr Siyabonga Mbanjwa, Sr Matebello Pitso, and Sr Thandiwe Mokoena.



Fun read

Things nobody warns you about

when you start working in Qwaqwa

By someone who has defrosted long enough to write this

Nobody really prepares you for the weather in Qwaqwa.

During your interview, they tell you about the campus.

They tell you about the beautiful scenery.

They tell you about the Maluti Mountains.

What they forget to mention is that the mountains are not merely part of the view. They become part of life in Qwaqwa.

You start paying attention to them without even realising it.

If they disappear behind clouds, carry an extra jacket.

If there is snow on the peaks, prepare yourself mentally.

The other thing nobody tells you is that every staff member becomes a weather expert between May and August.

You cannot walk ten metres without receiving a forecast.

“Tomorrow will be worse.”

“It was colder in 2018”

“Wait until July.”

Nobody knows whether these statements are scientifically accurate. They are simply part of life in Qwaqwa.

Then there was the morning someone mentioned there was snow on the mountain peaks.

For most people, it was just another winter morning.

For some of us, it was apparently an event.

Photographs were taken.

Messages were sent.

Family members were informed.

Meanwhile, colleagues who have lived here for years simply carried on with their day.

Which, judging by their reactions, was exactly what they were supposed to do.

And then there is Ntate Tumelo’s food. You start eating it more often than you realise and slowly start gaining weight without noticing.

The real surprise, though, is what happens after a while.

One day you hear yourself saying things like:

“Tomorrow will be worse.”

“It was colder in 2018.”

“Wait until July.”

And that is when you realise that Qwaqwa has finally claimed you.

Welcome to Qwaqwa. ■



The UFS celebrates *a few familiar faces, and a few new ones* By Teboho Mositi

The Qwaqwa Campus recently celebrated the promotion of several academics while also welcoming new colleagues to the university community. These milestones reflect not only the continued growth of the campus, but also the people whose expertise, dedication, and hard work shape its teaching, research, student support, and institutional success.

PROMOTIONS



Prof Bianca Naudé

Promoted from Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor, Department of Political Studies and Governance

Since completing her PhD in 2019, Prof Naudé has built a strong academic profile through research, teaching, leadership, and international collaboration. She says the promotion is less about individual achievement and more about creating opportunities for the next generation.



Prof Sekitla Makhasane

Promoted from Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor of Education Leadership and Management

Currently serving as Assistant Dean in the Faculty of Education, Prof Makhasane views the promotion as recognition of years of commitment to teaching, research, leadership, and service.



Prof Grey Magaiza

Promoted from Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor, Centre for Gender and Africa Studies

As acting Director of the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, Prof Magaiza has built a research profile focused on rural livelihoods, sustainability, and community development. He views his promotion as a shared achievement shaped by the many people who have contributed to his academic journey.



Dr Lulama Mmodana-Zide

Promoted from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer, Department of Education Management, Policy, and Comparative Education

Dr Mmodana-Zide's promotion recognises her contribution to teaching, research, postgraduate supervision, and community engagement since joining academia.

NEW APPOINTMENTS

Stella Mzobotshi

Senior Officer: Registered Counsellor, Student Counselling and Development

Balungile Mdluli

Lecturer: Curriculum Studies and Education Theory

Andile Buthelezi

Lecturer: Curriculum Studies and Education Theory

Tshidiso Motsoeneng

Assistant Officer: AV Technical Support Engineer, Department of Computer Science and Informatics

Priscilla Mphuthi

Senior Assistant Officer: Student Recruitment Services

Tshepo Manzini

Officer: Centre for Teaching and Learning

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