

bult

news magazine 2021 #1



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

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





Prof Bonang Mohale, was inaugurated as the eighth Chancellor of the University of the Free State on 4 November 2021.

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Bult editor's note

The past year has been good for the University of the Free State (UFS) and things are on course for an even better 2022.

Prof Francis Petersen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor, hints at things to come, offering a look at a more inclusive, diverse and engaged university, driven by impact and visibility in the next five years (see pages 4 and 5).

Visibility and impact is what we have endeavoured to attain this year – producing research that matters, improving our international footprint and contributing to our communities – changing lives. With outstanding success stories of staff, students and alumni featured locally and abroad, our visible presence will continue for many years to come.

In a year full of highlights, the UFS inaugurated Prof Bonang Mohale as its eighth Chancellor, signalling a new era of leadership at the institution. The UFS also boasts a new chairperson of Council in Mr David Noko, who previously served as Deputy Chairperson of the Council. There have been several other senior appointments, such as the UFS Vice-Rector: Institutional Change, Strategic Partnerships and Societal Impact; Senior Director: Institutional Advancement, Executive Director: Student Affairs and Director of the UFS Business School (see inside pages for more information).

It has been a memorable year for the UFS on the sports field with students, staff and alumni excelling on local and international stages. Louzanne Coetzee, an alumnus

and staff member, made the university and country proud, winning a silver and bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games earlier this year. Proving that the UFS is the home of champions, our netball team lifted the 2021 Varsity Netball Cup, winning the competition for a record fourth time. Our men soccer team has also proved their mettle reaching the finals of the Varsity Football competition.

It is hoped that these stories of excellence highlighted in this edition of *Bult* will inspire and make you excited about developments at the UFS over the last few years – specifically during the COVID-19 period.

Soon we will welcome students and staff back to the university, and I can't wait for the return of campus life and community. Several measures have been put in place to ensure the health and safety of our students and staff and hopefully things will be somewhat normal.

Stay safe wherever you are and enjoy the holiday period.

Until next year.
Amanda Tongha

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Visibility and for

BY CHARLENE STANLEY

In June this year, the UFS Council made a unanimous decision to re-appoint Prof Francis Petersen as Rector and Vice-Chancellor for another five-year term.

There is general consensus that Prof Petersen's calm, systematic, collaborative, and forward-thinking leadership has been a true asset to the UFS and has played an invaluable role in guiding the institution through the tumultuous waters of moving to an emergency online teaching and learning environment, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

His dedication to the institution, his societal and industry-focused approach, and his unscrupulous work ethic continue to inspire those who work with him.

Blueprint of his vision

Soon after his appointment in 2017, and after careful and wide consultation, Prof Petersen produced the blueprint of his vision for the UFS in the form of a strategic framework for the period 2018 to 2022. Its key performance areas have since been implemented in most cases or are now nearing completion.

Prof Petersen's vision encapsulates a commitment to excellence, integrity, inclusivity, innovation, and academic freedom. This has found expression in the *Integrated Transformation Plan* or *ITP* (towards social justice), the *UFS Strategic Plan* (towards expanding the scope of transformation), the *Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Projects*

(towards a high-performance institution), the *Institutional Risk Committee* (towards risk management and a risk philosophy), and the *Institutional Multi-Stakeholder Group* (towards an inclusive institutional culture).

Collaboration with industry partners to ensure the delivery of quality graduates who fit the requirements of the new world of work is of high importance to him. "I believe in co-creating solutions with the private sector, with projects ranging from human rights and social justice, cutting-edge research in agriculture, integrating technology, science and human capital development, indigenous knowledge applications in medicine, energy-efficiency systems, and various entrepreneurial projects," says Prof Petersen.

Speaking out against injustice

He also believes in using discourse platforms such as webinars and regular opinion pieces in the mainstream media to speak out against injustice and to offer solutions to societal challenges.

He believes that universities have a society-focused role, as well as a responsibility to produce graduates who are not solely good *workers*, but also good *citizens* with sound ethics and value systems, and who will ultimately become good *leaders*.

"The university is on track to develop an ecosystem where the institution, the private sector, industry, commerce,

impact

the next five years

Prof Francis Petersen.

government, and communities co-create and collaborate to provide human-centred solutions, which are digitally supported to respond to the challenges of society,” he says.

A new strategic plan for the next five years is currently being developed, with a strong focus on making the UFS *a more inclusive, diverse, and engaged university, driven by impact and visibility*. Prof Petersen’s vision for his second term includes the continuation of the ITP, with a primary focus on the social justice imperative. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals will be used as a yardstick for measuring the university’s impact on society.

Digitisation a key focus area

Digitisation will be a key focus area for his new term, determining how the Academic Project will be delivered and supported, and how it will interface with the external environment.

He plans to realise his vision of *Visibility and Impact* by raising the external profile of the UFS through alumni, foundations, donors, and strategic communication as critical drivers. He will also continue participating in and further advancing national and global discourses.

“At 117 years, the UFS is one of the oldest universities in South Africa. I want to build on the rich legacy of our former associates and alumni,” says Prof Petersen. **b**

PHOTO: SONIA SMALL

Multilingualism initiatives



PHOTO: ANJA AUCAMP

Dr Peet van Aardt, Letsela Motaung, and Prof Francois Strydom.

BY CHARLENE STANLEY

The UFS is playing a leading role in South Africa when it comes to implementing multilingualism in teaching and learning and has been one of the first tertiary institutions to establish an Academy for Multilingualism.

The university has been working on multilingualism in various formats since 2016, when a new Language Policy was approved by the UFS Council. At a recent Universities of South Africa (USAf) colloquium, UFS representatives could share outcomes and lessons derived from the institution's journey towards an inclusive multilingual environment.

The state of language diversity

A key starting point was to establish the state of language diversity at the UFS. A biographic survey among 17 000

students revealed that around 27% of them had Sesotho as home language, followed closely by isiZulu at around 25%. Around 13% cited isiXhosa, just under 9% Afrikaans, and 8,5% Setswana. A total of 70% of these students had English as their language of instruction in their final school year.

Translanguage Tutorials in different academic departments were among the projects introduced this year. During these tutorials students can discuss questions in any language, but give feedback to the lecturer in English. This allows students to develop a better understanding of the work while enhancing their confidence to interact in English.

"There are numerous scholars who have published on the value of shuttling between two languages – the phenomenon known as translanguaging – in order to promote a deeper and fluent understanding of the subject matter," says

gaining momentum

Letsela Motaung, a researcher at the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). “We follow a rigorous recruitment process to identify tutors among our senior and postgraduate students, who then get intensive training in peer-to-peer learning and collaboration before going on to design translanguaging activities that they put into practice.”

“We are creating a space where students can make sense of the work in their own language. In this way, we take away the stress that some students associate with language, creating

a relaxed atmosphere that facilitates learning,” explains Prof Francois Strydom, Senior Director at CTL.

Improving academic competency

Another initiative is to provide voice-overs in Sesotho, isiZulu, and Afrikaans for module lessons in English. These are made available as video files on the Blackboard online learning platform, and has so far involved the Faculties of the Humanities, Theology and Religion, and Natural and Agricultural Sciences.

“We want to establish a scenario where languages are deeply respected, creating a rich environment for common understanding.”

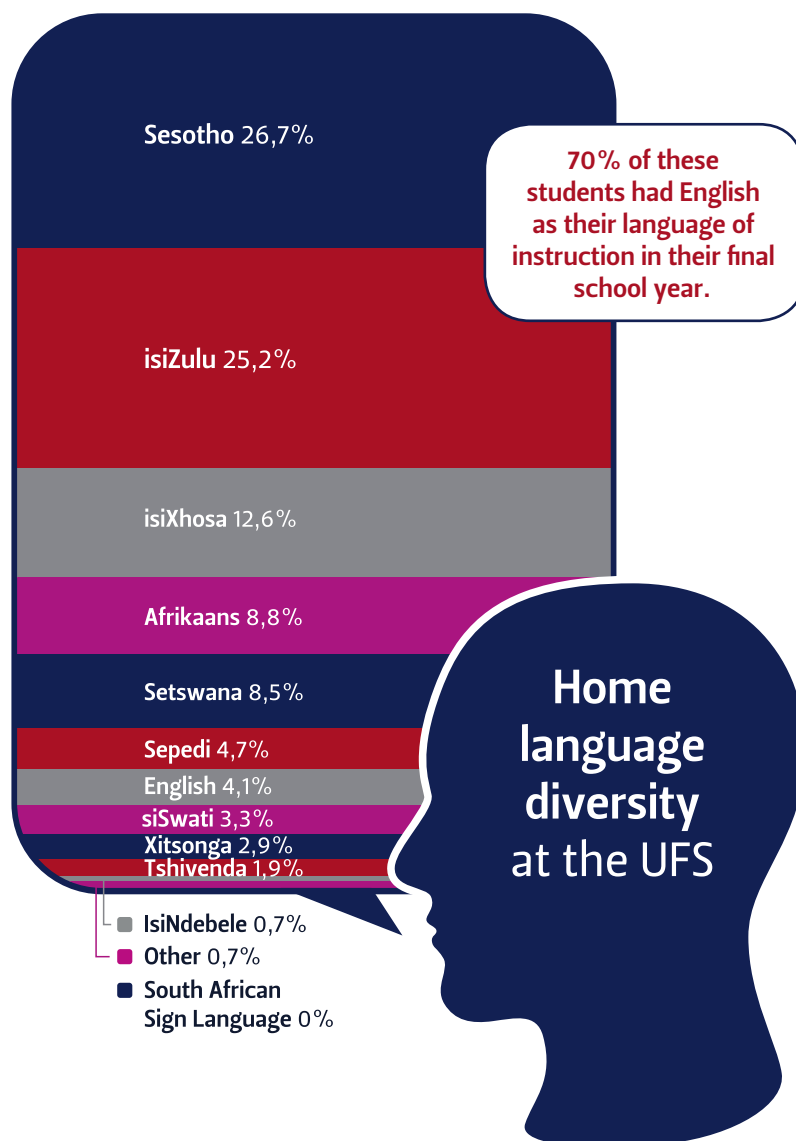
– Prof Francois Strydom

“The goal with creating these voice-overs is to improve, first and foremost, academic competency. It’s almost like providing students with an electronic tutor that’s always available,” says Dr Peet van Aardt, Custodian of the Academy for Multilingualism.

The feedback from lecturers and students on both these programmes has been overwhelmingly positive, and plans are in place for incorporating more modules next year.

A programme also gaining momentum is the Initiative for Creative African Narratives (iCAN), where students contribute stories written in different languages to facilitate learning from and about one another.

“We want to establish a scenario where languages are deeply respected, creating a rich environment for common understanding,” explains Prof Strydom. **b**



David Noko – New UFS Council Chair, delivering long-term value through collective leadership

BY ILSE SMALBERGER

Knowledge, experience, leadership. These are but a few qualities the University of the Free State's (UFS) newest Chairperson of the Council (elected on 17 September 2021) brings to the table. Mr David Noko was first appointed to the UFS Council in 2019. It was also his first interaction with the university.

“Joining the UFS Council was my first experience in serving as a Member of Council, even though I have always served on corporate boards as director and executive. Since then, my thoughts and perceptions about the UFS have changed, but for the better! I have fallen in love with the university; I feel I have grown personally and I have found the role very satisfying and fulfilling – serving my country in the true sense of the term,” he says.

About collective leadership

Mr Noko has a long and distinguished corporate career, retiring in 2019 from his position of Executive Vice-President at AngloGold Ashanti, one of the largest gold mining companies in Africa. His corporate experience has taught him the fundamental value of collaboration and engagement with all stakeholders.

“As Chairperson, I will of course first have to understand the strategic direction and the needs and priorities of the UFS. I want to work with all Council Members and University Management to deliver long-term value for the university. It's going to be all about collective leadership.”

Raising the UFS profile

When asked where he sees the university in future, he is wary of making sweeping statements that will only fulfil a public relations function. “The direction of the UFS is the subject of strategic planning as a collective,” he says, “but the focus

must be on delivering on the core purpose of the university and raising its profile.”

In his free time, he enjoys reading business literature and books on eradicating poverty. He is also an avid music fan, listing Afro Jazz, South African music, and South American music as his favourites. **b**

Mr David Noko, the new Chairperson of the UFS Council, brings with him knowledge, experience, and leadership to the table.



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Dr Snowy Khoza – serving society through strategic leadership

BY ILSE SMALBERGER

Dr Snowy Khoza, seasoned executive and acknowledged strategist, has recently been appointed to the University of the Free State's (UFS) Council, bringing with her a strong understanding of African cultures and markets.

“My role is one small contribution amidst the greater contribution of all other formidable colleagues in the Council.” – Dr Snowy Khoza

She was Group Executive at the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) for 10 years, before joining Bigen as Group CEO in 2010. As business strategist, she has earned numerous international and national business awards and served on the boards of many companies and institutions.

Growth and development

With regard to her appointment to Council, Dr Khoza says she feels honoured to serve and work alongside the formidable and high-calibre group of professionals currently in Council. “My role is one small contribution amidst the greater contribution of all other formidable colleagues in the Council, who have been driving the university for so many years to where it is today,” she says.

She believes her knowledge and experience of working on the African continent, and the fact that the UFS is a researched and regionally engaged university, will contribute towards unravelling the broad spectrum of socio-economic, environmental and political issues countries on the continent

are grappling with. “I believe by focusing on these issues through well-researched and innovative solutions, the university can make a huge contribution towards the growth and development of our continent.”

Solving societal issues

Her passion for the youth also extends to the university's students. “As a Member of Council, I would also like to ensure that our graduates are supported to be engaged, creative, innovative, competitive, and excellent in solving real societal issues – standing shoulder to shoulder, or even above other excellent universities across the globe.”

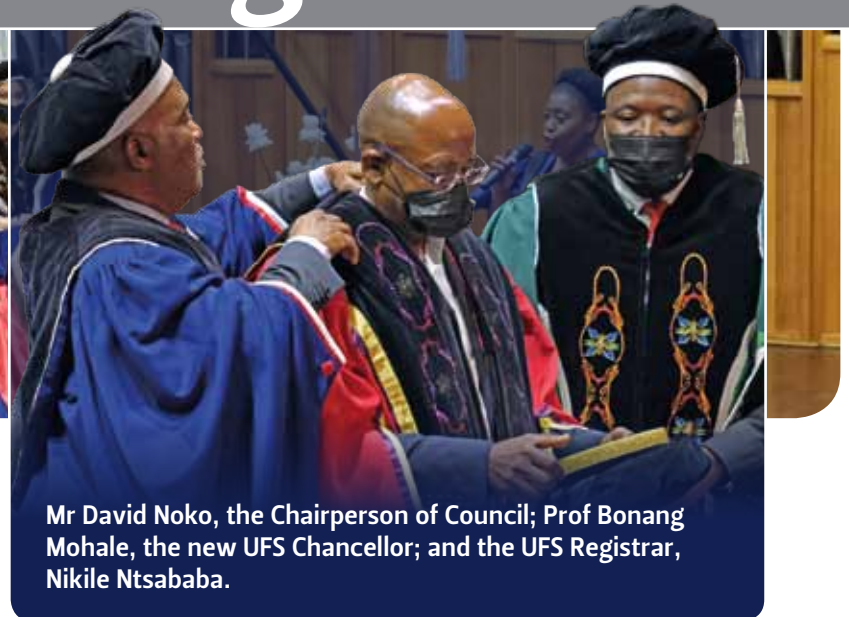
In her free time, Dr Khoza seeks to contribute to the development of the youth and women entrepreneurs in poverty-stricken communities. She also does a lot of Christian-based public speaking, mentorship, and counselling during weekends. **b**

Dr Snowy Khoza has recently been appointed to the UFS Council.





Inauguration of Chancellor a long-awaited



BY AMANDA TONGHA

The University of the Free State formally welcomed Prof Bonang Mohale as its eighth Chancellor at a celebratory event on the Bloemfontein Campus on 4 November 2021.

Postponed from 2020, the UFS community, invited guests and dignitaries came together to celebrate the official inauguration of Prof Mohale, who has been serving in the position since June 2020.

The ceremony started with the official installation in the Odeion Theatre, with, among others, Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe, Chancellor of the University of Cape Town; Justice Edwin Cameron, Chancellor of Stellenbosch University; Prof Njabulo Ndebele, Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg; Dr Gwen Ramokgopa, Chancellor of the Tshwane University of Technology; Justice Mahube Molemela, Chancellor of the Central University of Technology and Judge of the Constitutional Court in attendance. This was followed by a Chancellor's dinner where representatives of the three UFS Campuses, including members of Senate, student leadership and unions, gave their reflection of Prof Mohale and the new era his leadership rings in.

Hailed as an academic, business leader, a visionary, and humanitarian, speaker after speaker lauded Prof Mohale for his devotion to the country, his graceful nature, love for writing, and the optimism he provokes.

“The UFS Council appointed the right person for the job, the right person for this university, in this country, at this particular time. The values that Prof Mohale embodies, which he is known to advocate from various platforms – in written media and virtual spaces – and which he actively lives out, are the values that the UFS cherish and embrace. Values such as respect, empathy, equality, solidarity, diversity, and caring,” said Mr David Noko, Chairperson of the UFS Council.

His daughter Maneo Mohale, a well-known editor, writer, and poet, painted a picture of “the man behind the suit and now behind the robes”, telling guests in the Centenary Complex, the venue of the Chancellor's Dinner, that her father is a “stubbornly well-spoken man” known for his “dangerous optimism”. She

Bonang Mohale, celebration



Prof Bonang, in the front (middle) with Prof Francis Petersen, Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the UFS, to his left and Mr David Noko, Chairperson of the UFS Council, to his right. With them are members of the Chancellor's Forum, a forum of Chancellors of all 26 public universities in South Africa.



Prof Bonang Mohale and his family at his inauguration as Chancellor of the UFS. From the left: Prof Mohale's daughter Thepiso Mohale, Prof Bonang Mohale, wife Susan Mohale, and daughter Maneo Mohale.

PHOTOS: STEPHEN COLLET

gave a glimpse of a family man who adores stories and who instilled in them the gift of asking dangerous questions in dangerous times, dangerously.

The dinner event included performances by artists like Thabo Hlongwane, Sibongile Mngoma, Ilse Fourie, Beverley Rantso, and the UFS Choir. **b**



Creating learning spaces for academic excellence

BY LUNGA LUTHULI AND DR CINDÉ GREYLING

Much development has taken place at the University of the Free State (UFS) in recent years, with various infrastructure projects creating new spaces for learning and teaching, living, and unlocking creativity.

The Modular Lecturing Space and Assessment Centres at the Bloemfontein and Qwaqwa Campuses are two such examples of the university's commitment to create inclusive learning spaces where students can thrive in their academics.

Effective use of online assessment

Highlighting the special and unique features of the Modular Lecturing Space and Assessment Centre on the Bloemfontein Campus, Prof Francois Strydom, Senior Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning, says it creates a space where innovative learning and teaching approaches can be combined with technology to create quality blended learning experiences.

The centre consists of multi-functional spaces that can be used for large- and small-scale lectures or groupwork. The largest venue, which can accommodate up to 980 students, can also be converted into five acoustically separate venues with a variety of table configurations, depending on the educational

needs. The building integrates into its environment with waterwise gardens and numerous indigenous trees planted around the permanent outdoor seating, which can also be used as informal learning spaces. The landscaping is seamlessly accessible, with ramps and tactile paving.

The Modular Lecturing Space and Assessment Centre on the Qwaqwa Centre boasts a computer laboratory that can accommodate 200 students.

Overcoming language barrier to learning

Showing its commitment to multilingualism, the university also erected new buildings for the Academy for Multilingualism on both the Qwaqwa and Bloemfontein Campuses. From the start, the architect's brief was to mirror the two buildings for both campuses to provide the same level of service, research, and training. Each building comprises a 100-seater multipurpose lecture hall, four 30-seater lecture halls, an office and reception areas. The centre also provides accessible toilet facilities for psychically disabled staff, students, and visitors.


The academy aims to promote Sesotho, isiZulu, and Afrikaans on institutional and social levels through various academic and community-based projects and initiatives and improving English as the language of instruction.





A clear objective, enhancing education

Another infrastructure highlight for the university was renovations to the Odeion as well as to the offices of Protection Services on the Bloemfontein Campus. The renovations, completed in November 2020, include a new façade to the main entrance, paving, ablution facilities on the south side of the building, new floor finishes, social spaces, and a new reception area.

“On the South Campus, a doctor’s consulting room was added to the existing clinic and refurbishments were made to the Administration Building. Following the UFS Master Plan of ensuring all three campuses have similar facilities, the university has also refurbished libraries on all three campuses and built new 24/7 study centres. Maureen Khati of the Project Management Office (PMO) at University Estates says, “The university’s objective is very clear and that is to enhance education.” 

1. The Academy for Multilingualism on the Qwaqwa Campus.
2. The new 24/7 Study Centre on the Qwaqwa Campus. The centre boasts 360 seats on the ground level and 47 on the mezzanine, as well as a security area, ablution facilities and a printing station.
3. The Modular Lecturing Space and Assessment Centre on the Bloemfontein Campus creates a space where innovative learning and teaching approaches can be combined with technology to create quality blended-learning experiences.
4. The newly remodelled offices for Protection Services on the Bloemfontein Campus.
5. A consulting room for the doctors was installed at the clinic on the South Campus.
6. The building for the Academy for Multilingualism on the Bloemfontein Campus.
7. The new façade to the Odeion on the Bloemfontein Campus.

Dr Molapo Qhobela

building strategic partnerships

BY CHARLENE STANLEY

He has extensive experience in higher education and strong governance credentials. But there's another aspect of his life that Dr Molapo Qhobela singles out as having equipped him to add value in a creative way in his new position at the UFS. The fact that he has been an eclectic traveller, living in over half a dozen African countries led to an appreciation for different cultures and ways of doing things, as well as precious interactions with a vast array of people.

Dr Qhobela assumed duty as UFS Vice-Rector: Institutional Change, Strategic Partnerships and Societal Impact in August 2021. He was Chief Executive Officer of the National Research Foundation (NRF) before joining the UFS. Prior to that, he was Vice-Principal: Institutional Development at the University of South Africa (UNISA). He has served on and chaired several programmes and boards, is the previous Chairperson of the board of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), and current Chairperson of the Tertiary Education and Research Network (TENET).


He describes himself as “quiet and down to earth, who likes the simple things in life,” and sees human relations as the “foundation of everything”. He believes in not only filling young people's heads with facts and figures, but opening their minds to possibilities. “There is nothing more pleasing than to see how people have grown from input you have given. That is the beauty of being in higher education.”

UFS a valuable asset

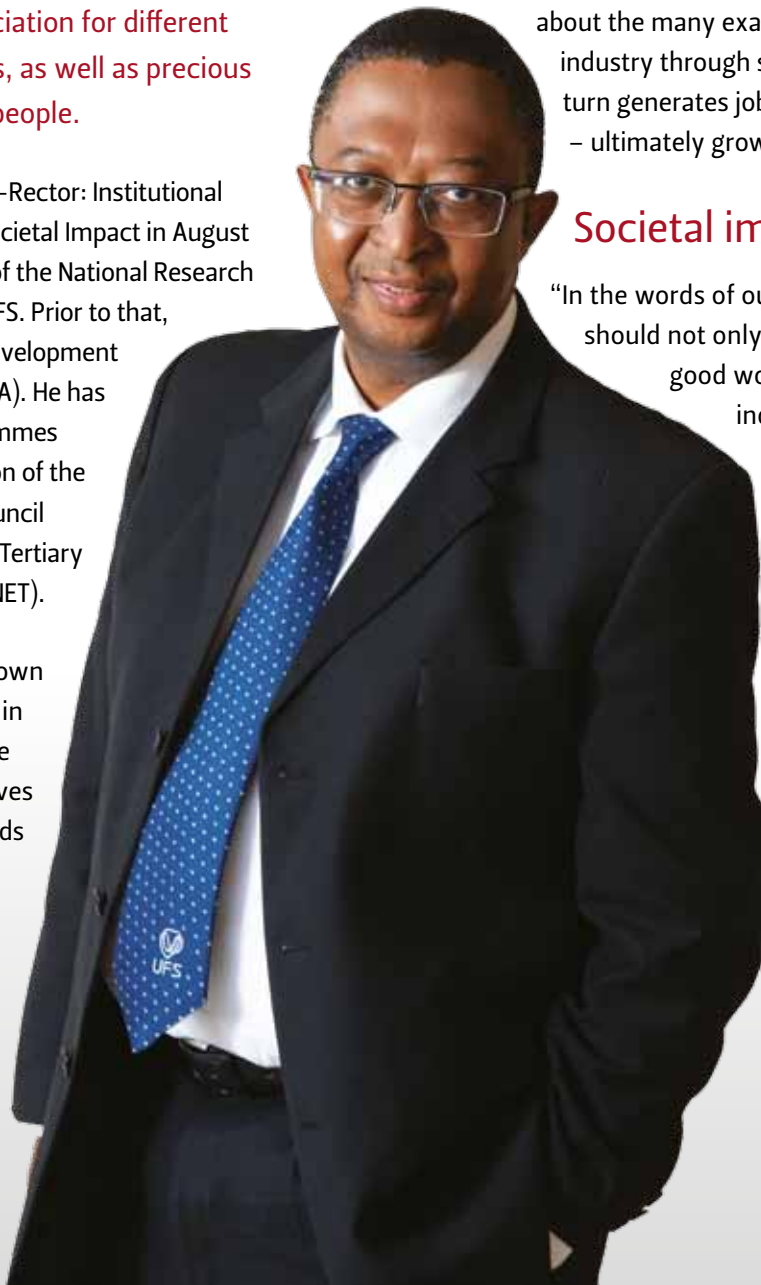
When it comes to societal impact, Dr Qhobela recognises the UFS as a valuable asset to the province, the country, and the continent as a whole.

As far as strategic partnerships go, he is excited about the many examples of the UFS advancing industry through scientific knowledge, which in turn generates jobs and income through taxes – ultimately growing the economy.

Societal impact

“In the words of our Vice-Chancellor, we should not only deliver graduates that are good workers and thinkers, but individuals who will be good citizens with ethics and values. Similarly, our research should not just advance knowledge, but also have societal impact by being the source of solutions to the challenges of our country and continent,” he says. 

Dr Molapo Qhobela says there is nothing more pleasing than to see how people have grown from input you have given.



Making internationalisation everyone's business

BY JÓHANN THORMÄHLEN



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

A delegation from the UFS visited the University of Ibadan in Nigeria in 2019 to strengthen collaboration, specifically with the Faculty of the Humanities. It resulted in the establishment of a formal collaboration between the institutions.

One of the many services of the Office for International Affairs (OIA) is to coordinate partnerships. It is at the forefront with a European Union (EU) Erasmus+ project.

The OIA coordinates the iKudu Project, while the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) methodologies used make it even more relevant during pandemic times. According to Cornelius Hagenmeier, Director: Office for International Affairs, EU-funded projects are normally coordinated by a European and co-coordinated by a South African partner.

Enabling internationalisation

However, with iKudu, the UFS is the first South African university to coordinate an Erasmus+ project, doing it with the University of Antwerp as co-coordinator. This is just one example how the OIA is enabling internationalisation at the UFS. It renders strategic advice on internationalisation and supports the international activities of internal UFS stakeholders. Among these are support for international partnerships, research internationalisation, internationalisation at home activities, and student exchanges. The UFS collaborates with more than 1 600 institutions across Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America worldwide. Hagenmeier says it has “70 formal and a rich array of informal partnerships”.

The iKudu Project is a Capacity Building in Higher Education programme and was conceptualised to develop a contextualised South African concept of Internationalisation of the Curriculum, which integrates COIL virtual exchanges. “Using COIL teaching methodologies is a smart way to internationalise the curriculum and internationalise at home,” says Hagenmeier. “It is also a way to advance inclusive internationalisation and works towards the vision that all students should have an international experience.”

Although it was conceptualised before COVID-19, the use of COIL has become even more applicable to enhance mobility.

Advancing academic collaboration

The UFS is also helping develop 30 academically excellent doctoral staff members, 15 from the UFS and 15 from the University of Venda (Univen), through three University Capacity Development Programmes with international partners.

The OIA is coordinating the University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP), one of the programmes that focus on collaboration with Univen on Global Health. “The candidates are in addition highly interculturally competent and capacitated to advance academic collaboration between South Africa and international higher education institutions.” **b**

Unmasking the Shadow Pandemic

BY MICHELLE NOTHLING

A total of 10 006 rape cases were reported between April and June 2021. This is according to the latest SA crime statistics for the first quarter of 2021/2022. From a sample of 5 439 of these rape cases, 3 766 of incidents took place in the victim's home or that of the rapist. A shadow pandemic of gender-based violence against our women and children is raging in South Africa.

It is within this global and local context that the Gender and Anti-Discrimination Office (GEADO) at the university is making inroads into supporting survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and changing gender stereotypes.

GEADO in focus

The Gender and Anti-Discrimination Office (GEADO) is situated within the Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice on the Bloemfontein Campus. It is mandated to deal with incidents of unfair discrimination and GBV as it relates to the UFS community, and to conduct advocacy and training in these areas. Deputy Director of GEADO, Dr Ntheno Nchabeleng, explains that “through high-impact practices and interventions, the Office works to systematically reduce case

“With our country wracked by sexual violence and femicide, it has become a nightmare to be a woman in South Africa.”

– Dr Ntheno Nchabeleng

attrition to ensure that all reports and cases follow procedurally just processes”.

GEADO has been established at all the UFS campuses with well-trained and fully-equipped Senior Gender Officers leading each. Geraldine Langau—supported by research assistant Delisile Mngadi—is managing the office at the Bloemfontein Campus, Chelepe Mocwana the Qwaqwa Campus, and Sivuyisiwe Magayana oversees the South Campus office.

Addressing gender-based violence

Prevention and response to GBV are at the core of GEADO’s work. With our country wracked by sexual violence and femicide, “it has become a nightmare to be a woman in South Africa”, Dr Nchabeleng says.

Its preventative efforts focus on the underlying causes of GBV to transform patriarchal notions, misogynistic norms, power imbalances, and toxic gender stereotypes. Fostering collaboration with various strategic partners to strengthen its impact, GEADO recently started working with Amnesty International Sub-Saharan Africa and Amnesty International Latin America to spread awareness on various forms of violence experienced by vulnerable populations. GEADO has also partnered with other local stakeholders in an effort to eradicate GBV through programming that includes awareness campaigns, online mobilisation, training, and webinars.

Becoming part of the solution

“Become change agents,” Dr Nchabeleng urges. One way to start shifting attitudes and mindsets is to change the way we speak. Examples would be to refrain from sexist and discriminatory language and phrases that undermine and degrade our women. Gendered name-calling generally depicts women and girls as inferior and less than fully human. Another area of concern is the way young people — especially young men — engage in disparaging conversations about women on social media platforms. This behaviour needs to cease. As a society, we also need to stop victim blaming, stop normalising rape culture, and stop entertaining sexual violence jokes,” Dr Nchabeleng says.

These changes start with each of us. **b**



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Dr Nthendo Nchabeleng was appointed as the Deputy Director in the Gender and Anti-Discrimination Office within the Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice.

Incidents of GBV and discrimination can be reported to GEADO at:

Bloemfontein Campus: +27 51 401 3982

South Campus: +27 51 401 7544

Qwaqwa Campus: +27 58 718 5431

Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)

www.ufs.ac.za/sart

Toll-free number +27 80 020 4682

Matriculant of the Year competition celebrates 40 years

BY SISKI MARTIN

After four decades, the Matriculant of the Year competition of the University of the Free State (UFS), Netwerk24, and Volksblad still makes a difference in the lives of all finalists. They become committed Kovies and it gives them an often welcome financial kick-start with cash prizes and bursaries. They also become part of a large family consisting of participants, sponsors, judges, and organisers.

Not only do the winners of the competition become top achievers later in life, but all finalists bear testimony to the quality of the competition's adjudication. The fact that a competition such as this one continues to take place for 40 years shows it has depth and sustainability. Its system of evaluation, developed in conjunction with many knowledgeable people from the university, works.

Finalists excelling on all fronts

Finalists are balanced pupils who shine in academics, leadership, sport and cultural activities, as well as

community projects. These achievements only get the top 14 to the final round where their performance in personal interviews and group sessions determines the winner.

Through the years the competition has had many loyal sponsors who continued to believe in it and support it, despite the present economic circumstances. The judges in the final round are usually representatives of the sponsors Kovie Alumni Trust, Absa, Mazars (also the official auditors), and Pick n Pay Preller Walk. Judging in the final round is hard work – long hours and difficult decisions to make. Despite this, the judges thoroughly enjoy the interaction with the young people.

Eighty percent academic average

Due to COVID-19 the competition did not take place in 2020, but this year it is back and once again outstanding matriculants from all over the country entered. The academic average of the top 14 this year is 88% (2019 – 86%) and of all 67 entries it is 80% (2019 – 77%). **b**

The judges of this year's Matriculant of the Year competition, mostly representatives of the sponsors, are from left: Leandré Barlow, Rynhardt Smidt, both from UFS Student Recruitment Services; Esmé Aucamp from Kovie Alumni Trust; Thabiso Moletsane from Absa; Kathy Verwey from Kovie Alumni Trust; Thinus de Vries, a partner of Mazars (official auditors of the competition); and Barbara Nel, an independent judge.





Niël van der Walt (right), headboy of the Hoërskool Wesvalia in Klerksdorp, was crowned as the 40th Matriculant of the Year after the final judging in Bloemfontein from 5 to 7 October 2021. With him is Pieter Hoogenboezem, the 2019 winner who symbolically handed over a UFS blazer to the winner. Niël will follow in the footsteps of his father, Bennie, grandfather Danie, and uncle Chris, who all studied medicine at the UFS. Furthermore, his father's cousin, Freda du Plessis of Winburg, also won the former Matric Girl competition in 1989. She is now a radiologist in Australia.

Where are they now?

The Matriculant of the Year competition of the University of the Free State (UFS), Netwerk24 and *Volksblad*, which took place for the 40th time this year, started out as the Matric Girl (Matrieknooi) competition in 1981, but was opened up to all matriculants in 1997.

The winners of the competition over 40 years have excelled in their respective career choices. We spoke to them about what they are doing now and what the competition has meant for them.


Please scan the QR code and find out where they are now.



Nearly 30 years of involvement

Sobeth Jordaan (née Bester) has been involved in the competition for 28 years. Not only was she the first entry for the first competition in 1981 when it was still the Matric Girl competition; she was also one of the first ten finalists.

From 1995 to 2010 she has been involved as organiser as part of her duties at *Volksblad*. In 1997 she was part of the transition to Matriculant of the Year competition when boys were also allowed to enter.

Sobeth, whose involvement in the organisation comes to an end this year, says it was a privilege to experience the different growth phases of the competition – from humble beginnings where the finalists received little more than a Parker pen, to the prestige competition it has developed into. 



The organisers of the 40th Matriculant of the Year competition are, from left: Linda Greyling from UFS Student Recruitment Services, who has organised the competition for the 26th time this year; Sobeth Jordaan, who helped organise her last competition this year after 28 years of involvement; and Siska Martin, who has been involved since this year.

Matriculant of the Year competition



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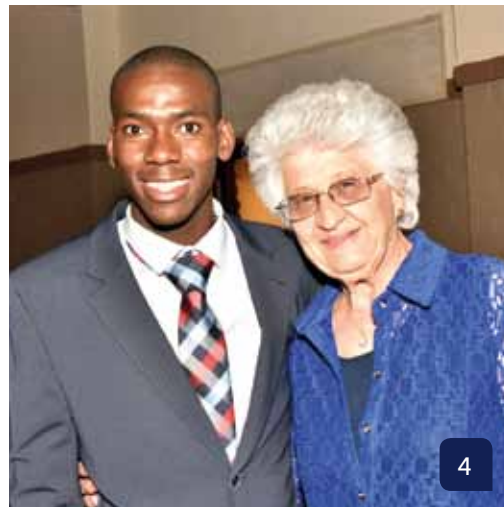
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1. Anchen Laubscher and Grace Booi were roommates during the final judging weekend of the Matriculant of the Year competition in 1998. In 2002 Anchen, who won in 1998, became the first female president of the university's student council. She is now the group medical director of Netcare.
2. Dr Lynette van der Merwe (left), winner of the Matric Girl competition in 1984, was the master of ceremonies during the gala dinner of the competition in 2017. With her are guest speakers Dr Nikita Blake (née Strydom - winner 2007) and Dr Rabeen Lutchman (winner 2000). Van der Merwe is Programme Director, Undergraduate Medical Programme, UFS School of Medicine, Blake recently qualified as plastic and reconstructive surgeon at the UFS, and Lutchman is a paediatrician in private practice at the Life Kingsbury Hospital in Cape Town. When Lutchman won

in 2000 he was the first male winner after the competition changed to allow matric boys to participate in 1997.

3. Finalists of 2016 Petro Coetzee (left) and Thandokuhle Gama (right) here with Likeleli Monyamane (née Mphutlane), a finalist of the competition in 2006 and the youngest member ever of the UFS Council when she was elected in 2015. After Monyamane qualified as chartered accountant in 2014, she worked for PriceWaterhouseCoopers and SAB until she started her own company, Inspire Innovation Business Consultants. Monyamane was the guest speaker at the 2016 Matriculant gala dinner.
4. Bongani Sithole, a finalist in 2017, with legendary athletics coach Mrs Ans Botha at the formal dinner of the competition in that year. Sithole, a top athlete, had a great admiration for Botha and dreamt of training with her the following year.

celebrates 40 years



5. Anél Kleingeld (right) was the winner of the Matriculant of the Year competition in 2018. With her are Ms Nomonde Mbadi, Director: Student Recruitment Services of the UFS, and Prof Francis Petersen, UFS Rector and Vice-Chancellor, during the formal dinner.
6. Previous finalists of the competition, who were guests of honour at the winners' function in 2019, were, from the left, Dr Pieter Rademan (winner 2009 and guest speaker), Rev Elmarie Dercksen (winner 1992 and master of ceremonies), and Baholo Mokhomo (finalist 2014).
7. Absa has been a sponsor of the competition for many years. Sne Mdletshe, a finalist in 2016 and a star player for the Free State and Protea netball teams, is flanked by Annetjie Heyman and Thomas September, both from Absa.

9. Irma Goosen (née Van Aswegen) was the first winner of the brand-new Matric Girl competition in 1981. She then studied home economics, but after nearly two decades as a teacher in this subject, she went back to university and became a chartered accountant and now works for the Auditor-General in Bloemfontein. She bought the sewing machine in the photograph with the prize money she received then.
10. In the 40th Matriculant of the Year competition this year, Marzanne van Heerden (left) and Kgosatsane Mabalane (right) won the two special awards sponsored by Kowsie Alumni Trust for outstanding personal achievement in sport and culture, respectively, while the finalists chose Zelmi Marx as the Sparkling Personality.

'We're All in this Together'

Rector's Concert shines the spotlight on togetherness

BY DR NITHA RAMNATH

Prof Francis Petersen,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor.

Star-studded performances by current and former students and staff dazzled the audience during the 2021 Rector's Concert.

The concert, dedicated to the UFS' first-year students, was a celebration of the many accomplishments of the year, despite the challenges everyone faced. Prof Francis Petersen, UFS Rector and Vice-Chancellor, who hosted the event, said: "The concert is an opportunity for us to connect, to celebrate and let you know that you are not alone."

Well-known artists such as Caroline-Grace Brüssow, an alumna of the UFS, together with the Odeion String Quartet, the Odeion School of Music Camerata (OSMC) and Corneil Muller, Thabo Pitse and HD El Classico, the BOSSa Quartet, Organized Chaos, Boitumelo Mohutsioa (aka Be), Dineo Bokala, Ilse Fourie, and students Sivuyisiwe Mbeka, Zama Zulu, and Hlubandile Zibula left all in awe. **b**



Please scan the QR code to view the
2021 Virtual Rector's Concert.

PHOTOS: SONIA SMALL





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1. Linda Mngoma (bass), member of the BOSSa Quartet.
2. Caroline-Grace Brüssow and Corneil Muller.
3. Thabo Pitse (middle) and HD El Classico during their performance of 'Neem my op Vlerke'.
4. Organized Chaos's, Naledi Mohapi and Joudie Pieterse with their performance of 'Stand by me'.
5. Dineo Bokala with a performance of 'My African Dream'.
6. Maritsa Barlow (flute) during the performance of 'My African Dream'.
7. Sivuyisiwe Mbeka performed 'Spirit' from Walt Disney's The Lion King.
8. The Odeion String Quartet with Samson Diamond (violin), Sharon de Kock (violin), Jeanne-Louise Moolman, and Anmari van der Westhuizen (cello), performing 'Libertango'.
9. Ilse Fourie performing 'Summertime' from Porgy and Bess.

9.



2021

The year that was

COMPILED BY AMANDA TONGHA

A year for re-imaging what is possible, and doing it, was the directive from Prof Francis Petersen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor during the official opening of the UFS on 5 March 2021. It has certainly been done, with the university making great strides in research, learning and teaching, community outreach, and student life. Here are some of our 2021 highlights.

Dr Matteo Grilli, a historian from the International Studies Group (ISG), received a P rating from the National Research Foundation (NRF). A P-rating is one of the most prestigious ratings for young researchers at all South African universities and across all disciplines. What makes this achievement even more significant, is that the ISG produced two P-rated scholars in the space of four years (Dr Daniel Spence in 2016).

Prof Philippe Burger, Professor of Economics and Pro-Vice-Chancellor: Poverty, Inequality and Economic Development, was selected to serve on the Fiscal Policy and Financial Markets task force of the Lancet COVID-19 Commission.

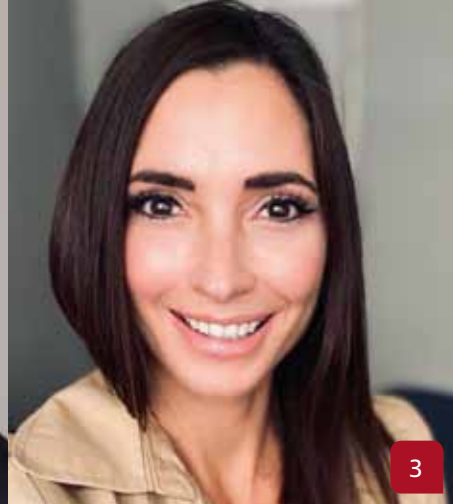
The eleven members of the task force include two Nobel prize laureates in economics, as well as academics and public-policy specialists from across the world, under the co-chairpersonship of Dr Vitor Gaspar (Director of the Department of Fiscal Affairs at the International Monetary Fund) and Prof Felipe Larraín (Professor of Economics, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile

and former Minister of Finance of Chile). The commission is an interdisciplinary initiative across the health sciences, business, finance, and public policy, and was created to help speed up global, equitable, and lasting solutions to the pandemic.

On 17 February 2021 Dr Samantha Potgieter, infectious disease expert at the Universitas Academic Hospital and Affiliated Lecturer in the UFS Department of Internal Medicine, became the first healthcare worker in the Free State to receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

A world leader in her field, Prof Melanie Walker, Distinguished Research Professor and NRF Chair in Higher Education and Human Development, was awarded the NRF's prestigious A1-rating for her research outputs. An A1-rating is only given after an extremely rigorous evaluation process by international peer reviewers. A researcher in this group is recognised by all reviewers as a leading scholar in his/her field internationally for the high quality and wide impact of his/her recent research outputs.

Prof Walker earned another accolade this year, being elected President of the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA). This is the first time that the HDCA president is from the Global South. She follows in the illustrious footsteps of previous HDCA presidents, including esteemed academics such as Prof Martha Nussbaum, who received an honorary doctorate from the UFS in 2012, and Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen.



Prof Mamello Sekhoacha, Associate Professor from the Department of Pharmacology in the Faculty of Health Sciences, was appointed by Dr Zweli Mkhize, Minister of Health, as the new chairperson of the National Health Research Ethics Council of South Africa.



Prof Maxim Finkelstein is the only researcher with an A1-rating in Probability, Statistics and Operations Research in South Africa, after being awarded this prestigious rating by the National Research Foundation . This is the second time that Prof Finkelstein, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Mathematical Statistics and Actuarial Science, has obtained an A-rating. The first was in 2015.



Dr Carmien Tolmie, Lecturer in the Department of Microbiology and Biochemistry, was one of 30 postdoctoral research assistants in the United Kingdom and Africa who have benefited from the £3,7 M Global Challenges Research Fund START grant over the past three years. The grant was made available by the Science

1. **Dr Matteo Grilli.**
2. **Prof Phillippe Burger.**
3. **Dr Samantha Potgieter.**
4. **Prof Melanie Walker.**
5. **Prof Mamello Sekhoacha.**
6. **Prof Maxim Finkelstein.**
7. **Dr Carmien Tolmie.**

and Technology Facilities Council in support of the Synchrotron Techniques for African Research and Technology programme. The grant seeks to build partnerships between world-leading scientists in Africa and the UK who are working on research using synchrotron science.

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It has been a great year for netball at the UFS. Not only is the UFS the reigning Varsity Netball champions – its players also represented the country in major competitions around the world. In March it was announced that four UFS students made the South African Under-21 netball team. In October, five other players, who started their senior netball careers at the UFS made the Protea netball team that travelled to Jamaica for a tri-nations series. The South African team touring Scotland and Wales in October also featured four former UFS netball players. See more information on page 62.



A series of four successful virtual graduation ceremonies were presented from 19 to 22 April 2021. During the ceremonies, just over 7 900 qualifications were awarded to undergraduate and postgraduate students – the university's biggest virtual graduation ceremonies to date. Honorary doctorates were also awarded to Dr Dolf van Niekerk (DLitt [h.c.]), Dr Sipho Pityana (DPhil [h.c.]), and Dr Zak Yacoob (LLD [h.c.]) in recognition of their outstanding achievements in South Africa and abroad.



Working closely with the Free State Provincial Government, the UFS assisted the Free State Department of Health to equip the vaccination centre at the Universitas Academic Hospital to function optimally as one of the primary vaccination sites in Bloemfontein. The UFS provided computers, chairs, tables, and installed network cables at the vaccination centre which opened on 24 May. The recovery room where patients are

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monitored after being vaccinated was also equipped. The university's School of Nursing trained its students to help with the vaccination process.



Nthabiseng Kotsokoane, Assistant Director in Library and Information Services, was appointed as chairperson of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) new Regional Council and member of the IFLA Governing Board for the period 2021 to 2023.



Prof Serges Djoyou Kamga, Extraordinary Professor in the Free State Centre for Human Rights at the University of the Free was awarded the prestigious Ali Mazrui Award for Scholarship and Research Excellence for 2021. The Ali Mazrui Award is intended to encourage scholarly commitment to the development and propagation of knowledge that advances the cause of Africa. It recognises contributions to research on Africa and is awarded to an African scholar, whether at home or in the Diaspora, who has distinguished her/himself in this respect.



The UFS Business School was appointed as a service provider of the National School of Government (NSG) to provide education, training, and development programmes to the public sector for a period of five years. The university was one of ten South African higher education institutions selected to perform the functions, the objective being to expand the skills base of the public sector in line with government's commitment to create a



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capable, ethical, and developmental public service. The aim of this partnership is the professionalisation of the civil service through a number of activities. These include the UFS offering short learning programmes that will assist the NSG in its aim to create a capable state in line with the objectives of the National Development Plan.



The UFS, in cooperation with the South African Chamber of Commerce in the United Kingdom, presented a series, Courageous Conversations, in which 'The Global Citizen' was debated. The Chancellor, Prof Bonang Mohale, joined Prof Francis Petersen, the Rector and Vice-Chancellor on 17 June 2021 in a virtual discussion to unwrap the role that universities can play in creating a 'Global Citizen' mindset to effect material change in a constantly evolving and turbulent international world.



On 30 July 2021, the topic 'Global Citizenship and the Sustainable Development Goals' was discussed by the Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Francis Petersen, and Prof Jeff Sachs, eminent economist, professor at Columbia University, Director of its Earth Institute, and global leader on sustainability. Global citizenship and the SDGs in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including what an equitable recovery would mean for countries around the world, and the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights formed part of the discussion.



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8. The UFS netball team – 2021 Varsity Netball Champions.
9. Dr Dolf van Niekerk, Dr Sipho Pityana, and Dr Zak Yacoob.
10. Mr Godfrey Mahlatsi, Acting Head of the Free State Department of Health; Ms Montseng Tsiu, Free State MEC of Health; Ms Sisi Ntombela, Premier of the Free State; and Prof Francis Petersen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor, on a site visit to the vaccination centre at the Universitas Academic Hospital.
11. Nthabiseng Kotsokoane.
12. Prof Serges Djyouyou Kamga.
13. Prof Jeff Sachs.



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The UFS 2021 Thought-Leader Webinar Series brought top experts together reflecting on topics such 'Why Vaccinate'; 'Reimagining universities for student success'; 'Corruption in South Africa: The Endemic Pandemic'; 'South African politics and the local government elections'; 'Is South Africa falling apart'; and 'Looking through a crystal ball: predictions for 2022'. The series featured prominent South African academics, journalists, economists, politicians and other well-known figures, among others Nikiwe Bikitsh, CEO and co-founder of Amargi Media; Qaanitah Hunter, Political Editor: News24; Adv Ouma Rabaji-Rasethaba, Deputy National Director of Public Prosecutions; Justice Dennis Davis, former Judge at the High Court of Cape Town and Judge President of the Competition Appeal Court; Prof Ahmed Bawa, Chief Executive Officer: Universities South Africa and Dawie Roodt; Director and Chief Economist: Efficient Group. Prof Francis Petersen, Rector and Vice-Chancellor facilitated all sessions.



The Institute for Groundwater Studies (IGS) obtained ISO 17025 accreditation from the South African National Accreditation System (SANAS) for all methods used in the IGS. This accreditation indicates that the institute adheres to all the conditions and requirements as stipulated by this body via the international standard.



The Department of Physics acquired a PHI Quantes XPS system, the first in Africa and one of only 20 in the world. The Quantes XPS system uses X-rays to determine the chemical composition of molecules on the surface of a sample. The system is unique



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in the sense that it also has an extra X-ray source that can determine the chemical state below the surface, which was not possible in the past. This will help to dictate the position of defects in phosphor materials that will consequently enable the department to create better phosphor for solid-state lighting as well as solar cell applications.



Celebrating national Women's Month in August 2021, the UFS paid tribute to its women of quality, impact, and care. Read some of the featured profiles, on the UFS's website at www.ufs.ac.za/womens-month, of female staff (in support services as well as academia), and students who make an impact in their various environments.



In August Prof Hendri Kroukamp, Dean of the UFS Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, was announced



14. Qaanitah Hunter and Dawie Roodt.

15. IGS laboratory personnel are, from the left: Masego Letebele, Zanele Adoons, Bonolo Moruri, Dr Trevor Chiweshe, Dr Tania Hill, Vanessa Koagile, Dr Lore-Mari Deysel, and Wanda Geyer.

16. Prof Hendrik Swart played a key role in the Department of Physics acquiring the PHI Quantes XPS system.

17. Prof Maryke Labuschagne was one of the many women celebrated during national Women's Month.

18. Prof Hendri Kroukamp.

19. Prof Bonang Mohale.

20. Vincent Spera and Prof Corli Witthuhn.

21. Adelheid von Maltitz.

as the 2021 recipient of the Donald C Stone Award from the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA). The award pays tribute to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to IASIA through excellence in leadership and enhancing the image of the profession, as well as other distinguished service to the success of the organisation.



Prof Bonang Mohale, Chancellor of the UFS, was elected as President of Business Unity South Africa at the organisation's annual general meeting.

"Prof Mohale's extensive expertise and experience in leadership roles, contributions to the growth of many multinational companies, and involvement in education and the business

sector, will undoubtedly strengthen the ties between various sectors and civil society, and further contribute to the stabilisation and growth of South Africa," says Prof Francis Petersen, UFS Rector and Vice-Chancellor, in his congratulatory letter to Prof Mohale.



Vincent Spera, the new US Consul General, paid a courtesy visit to the UFS on 16 September 2021, where he was hosted by the Office for International Affairs on the Bloemfontein Campus. The aim of his visit was to strengthen relationships with the UFS.



Adelheid von Maltitz, Lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts, was named winner of Group A – which includes Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia – in the 2021 Absa L'Atelier art competition. **b**


Pontifical Academy concerned with making humanity better, says Prof Sithole

BY NONSINDISO QWABE

As a country, it is always important to gauge ourselves against other societies in terms of how we all wrestle with social issues. These were sentiments shared by Prof Pearl Sithole, Vice-Principal: Academic and Research on the Qwaqwa Campus, who was appointed by Pope Francis as a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in August for her stellar work in social sciences.

The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences was established by Pope John Paul II in 1994, with the aim of promoting the study and progress of the social sciences, primarily economics, sociology, law, and political science.

Prof Sithole claims to believe that South Africa would certainly benefit from representation in the academy and its activities, as the academy was concerned with discourse that makes humanity better – first by understanding in a scientific manner what the issues are about; and secondly, by seeking common values that make the world a better place. She further says that this was a wonderful way of reminding academicians of the importance of relating science to the real world. “There is also a fair balance between knowledge as instructive and knowledge as perceptive. This balance that even social science has lost over the years, restores rationality as a value that seeks a relationship with morality. You just need to surf the webpage of the academy to see how everything, from ethics in knowledge production and issue-based discussions, make it a vibrant knowledge space.”

Since her appointment, Prof Sithole says she has been inducting herself with the academy and its many activities. “My personal excitement in what I am seeing so far is that diversity, together with free scholarship in the academy, is a strength in that it empowers everyone to contribute analysis to issues, and not only provide data on their societies. I am sure that as I interact more with fellow scientists directly, I will learn about what they bring to the organisation. For now, I am satisfied that I am entering a space of rich experience in addition to depth of science.” 

Prof Pearl Sithole was appointed by Pope Francis as a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in August for her stellar work in social sciences.

Dr Udesch Pillay leading the way at UFS Business School

BY DR NITHA RAMNATH


Dr Udesch Pillay is deeply committed to the imperatives of sustainable economic development. He believes that the UFS Business School will be well purposed to the principles of innovation and entrepreneurship and subscribes to the framework of a just energy transition. Emphasis will also be placed on meeting the demands of the SME sector, a key contributor to the country's GDP. Financial sustainability of the Business School and ensuring a critical mass of top academics and scholars is also integral to Dr Pillay's vision.

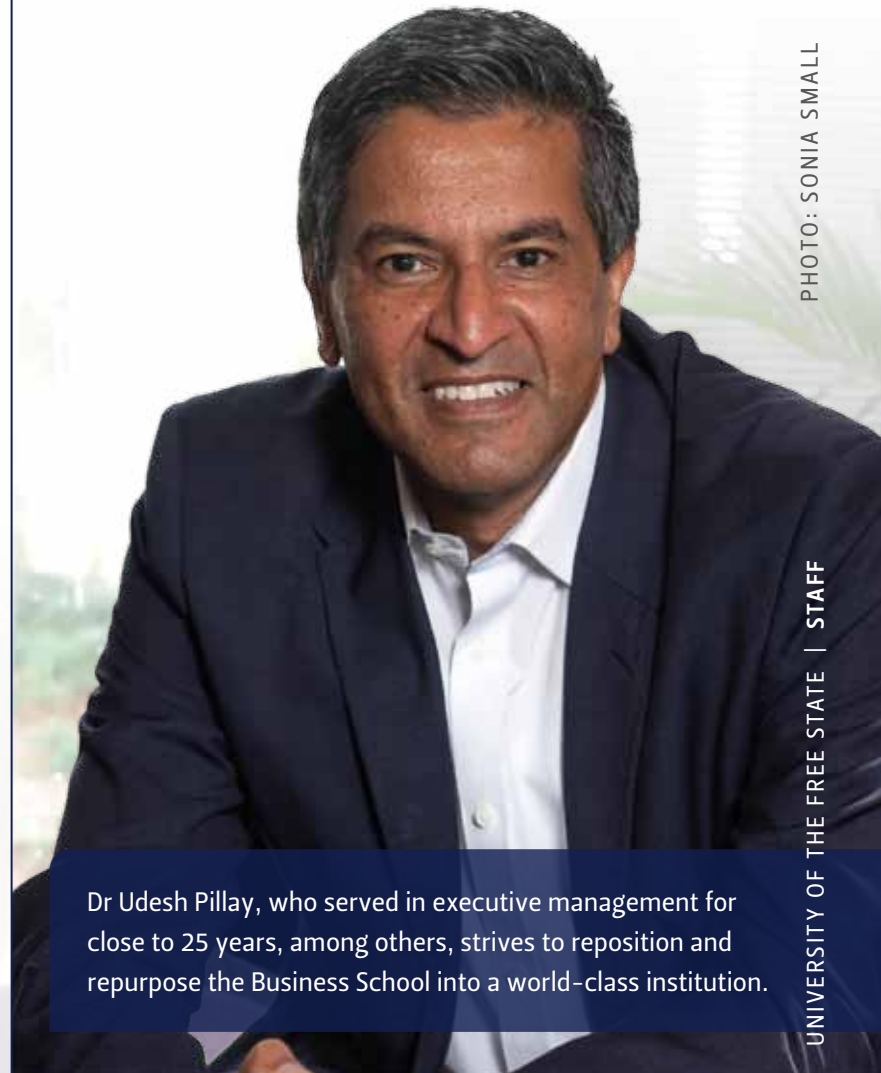
Dr Pillay was appointed as the Director of the UFS Business School in October of this year.

Acclaimed leader in the private and public sectors

He was formerly Group Executive and Portfolio Head: Research, Innovation, and Built Environment Studies at the South African Local Government Association. He previously served as senior adviser for the Department of Science and Technology and the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa on research, innovation, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and also as senior adviser for the Department of Public Works. Dr Pillay was also associate professor, lecturer, and supervisor at the Universities of Pretoria, Wits, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California Berkeley, and served as emeritus research fellow at the Harvard Business School and the London School of Economics.

UFS Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Prof Francis Petersen, says, "Dr Udesch Pillay brings a wealth of experience as

an acclaimed leader in the private and public sectors, coupled with expertise in the academic system, which is a perfect combination for the future of the Business School. I am confident that he will be able to turn the Business School into a competitive, leading entity within higher education." 



Dr Udesch Pillay, who served in executive management for close to 25 years, among others, strives to reposition and repurpose the Business School into a world-class institution.

PHOTO: SONIA SMALL

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE | STAFF

Mission: Possible

BY IGNO VAN NIEKERK

On the forefront of the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, two UFS doctors are leading a team of inspired healthcare workers in a superhuman effort to make a positive difference.

With the pandemic in its second year and the recurring challenges of new waves and strains consistently in the news, one would expect the doctors to be tired. However, quite the opposite is true. Upon entering the office where Dr Samantha Potgieter, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Internal Medicine, and Dr Nicholas Pearce, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Surgery, are in a meeting with colleagues, the debate is vibrant; an energetic sense of mission.

Miraculously succeeded

My brief is to collect stories and experiences they've had over the past 18 months at the Tumelo ward for general and high-care patients, where the team has miraculously succeeded in not running out of oxygen or ventilators, despite handling high volumes of patients from the Free State and Northern Cape. "We saw those pictures of piled-up bodies in Italy. We were committed to avoiding that at all costs. And we did."

Success stories? First mentioned are their team members' commitment and determination. The team had to stand in when families could not support dying patients. "They did not die alone. Our team was there."

Then came hope

Sad stories? The past year has had its share of sad stories. "Someone comes in during the morning, needs oxygen, in the afternoon they are in ICU, then ventilator – and then they die. We've never faced anything like this before."

Then came hope. Vaccines. Dr Pearce is in charge of the vaccination site at Universitas Hospital. "Really sad and frustrating are the deaths that could have been prevented. Unvaccinated patients. They arrive ill, wanting to know if they can get it. Too late ..." He opens his mobile phone – shares the stats. "We can handle 2 000 vaccinations a day. At the moment about 250 comes in." He shakes his head.

"We can beat this virus, but we need to stand together." **b**

Dr Samantha Potgieter, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Internal Medicine, and Dr Nicholas Pearce, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Surgery.

DR RUSSELL ALLY: Making the most of UFS's Centres of Excellence

BY CHARLENE STANLEY

Bloemfontein used to be just a quick stopover en route to East London (his hometown) for Dr Russell Ally. However, the passion and ambition of the UFS Rector and Vice-Chancellor – a former colleague of his – has been enough to convince him to make it his new home.

Dr Ally has been appointed as Senior Director: Institutional Advancement. Before joining the UFS, he was the Executive Director of the Development and Alumni Department at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Among his previous employers are the United Nations, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as the Ford and Mott international grant-making foundations. He has considerable experience in donor and alumni relations, fundraising, institutional advancement and philanthropy, and holds a BA and Higher Diploma in Education from the University of Cape Town, a BA (Hons) and master's from Rhodes University, and a doctorate from the University of Cambridge.

Enhancing the UFS's national profile

Dr Russell has experienced the UFS as a "warm and welcoming place". He says he was struck by the modesty he found amongst his UFS colleagues, albeit coupled with ambition and pride in the university.

He enthuses about the potential he has already seen in many UFS entities, from the Odeion String Quartet to the robotic laparoscopic surgery undertaken by the Faculty of Health Sciences.

He is also excited about the fact that the UFS is currently one of the national leaders when it comes to the throughput rates of undergraduate students, enabled by the use of data analytics and dedicated student support interventions, which is regarded



Dr Russell Ally, newly appointed Senior Director: Institutional Advancement, has experienced the UFS as a "warm and welcoming place".

as a model for our higher education sector marked by low graduation rates.

"A rising tide lifts all boats. And by drawing attention to our various centres of excellence we will continue to attract funding and alumni engagement," he says. **b**

STAFF

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

Dr Osayande Evbuomwan – treatment of patients with

BY ANDRÉ DAMONS

Dr Osayande Evbuomwan, Senior Lecturer and Medical Specialist in the UFS Department of Nuclear Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, always wanted to specialise in an area of medicine that was novel, innovative, intriguing, and involved many opportunities for groundbreaking research.

This passionate medical man, who joined the UFS in 2019, is behind his department using Lutetium 177 PSMA (Lu-177 PSMA) therapy to treat metastatic castrate-resistant prostate cancer (MCRPC) – an advanced-stage prostate cancer.

Built for this job

Dr Evbuomwan explains that nuclear medicine is a medical specialty that involves the use of unsealed sources of radiation in the form of radioisotopes for the diagnosis and treatment of various disease conditions, including cancers.

“It’s novelty and opportunity for research and ability to diagnose and treat disease conditions in one specialty attracted me to this field. I always wanted to be a doctor. I see it as a calling. It was also something my mum discovered while I was growing up as a child. In my next life, I would choose to be a medical doctor again,” he says.

“I was built for this job and it is always my joy to have the opportunity to carry out my work. We have been well-trained for this; we support all our skills with prayers. We try to give our patients the very best,” says Dr Evbuomwan, who is originally from Benin City, Edo state, Nigeria.

After graduating as a nuclear medicine specialist from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Dr Evbuomwan moved to the City of Roses after a work opportunity opened. He saw it as an opportunity to showcase his talents. **b**

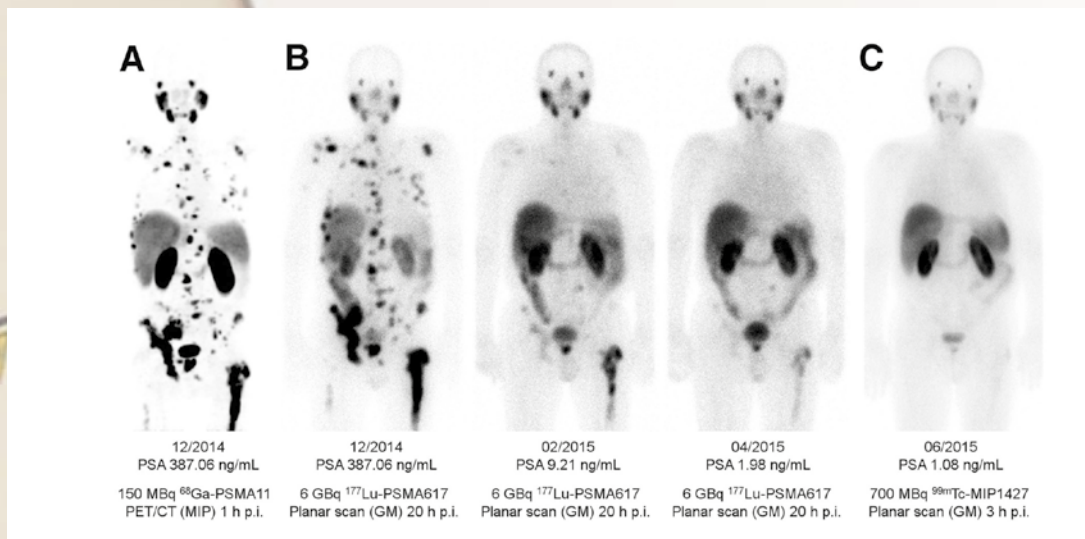
Dr Osayande Evbuomwan, a Senior Lecturer and Medical Specialist in the Department of Nuclear Medicine, always wanted to specialise in an area of medicine that was novel, innovative, intriguing and involved a lot of opportunities for groundbreaking research.

the man behind the UFS's advanced stage prostate cancer

Amazing results

"I have been privileged to receive training in this treatment during my residency training at Wits. I treated a few of these patients during my training and the results were amazing. The University of Pretoria has also been involved with this treatment, with some amazing results that are recognised worldwide.

"This was enough to convince me to push for our department to also join the powerhouses and offer this treatment to patients who need it. With the influence of a very understanding head of department, Dr Gerrit Engelbrecht, we have been successful in pushing for the commencement of this treatment at our facility," says Dr Evbuomwan.



Please scan the QR code to view the video about Dr Evbuomwan's research.



Dr Evbuomwan says they have started treating their first MCRP patient (first cycle) with peptide receptor radionuclide therapy (PRRT) on 15 July. It is the first time that Lutetium 177 PSMA – a type of PRRT used for treating patients with MCRPC – has been used in the Free State. This method is used on MCRPC patients who are not eligible for chemotherapy or have failed first- or second-line chemotherapy.

PRRT is a targeted nuclear medicine therapy that offers the opportunity to deliver very high levels of radiation

specifically to cancer cells, because these cancer cells express specific receptors to which certain peptides can bind. This specificity to cancer cells offers the advantage of providing lower doses of radiation and damage to normal organs and tissues, a characteristic that conventional therapies do not offer, explains Dr Evbuomwan.

Dr Evbuomwan says the ability to administer this treatment puts the department, the UFS, and the hospital on the map, alongside other top universities within and outside the country.

Magic mushrooms, a first formal study

BY LEONIE BOLLEURS

For the uninformed, mushrooms are mysterious little toadstools that appears on one's lawn after the rains, or that white or brown button-like vegetable that one buys with one's produce to use in a stir fry. But for mushroom lovers and the fungi-obsessed, the mysteries of mushrooms are there to be investigated. It is part of a scavenger hunt, as one does not always know where and how to find them.

Dr Marieka Gryzenhout, Senior Lecturer and researcher in the Department of Genetics at the university, recognised that much is still to be learned about mushrooms and decided to team up with other researchers with the same appreciation for fungi. Although their research focuses on different aspects of mushrooms, all three researchers, with a team of postgraduate students, are doing work on magic mushrooms, including our own local species, *Psilocybe natalensis*.

Finding the magic

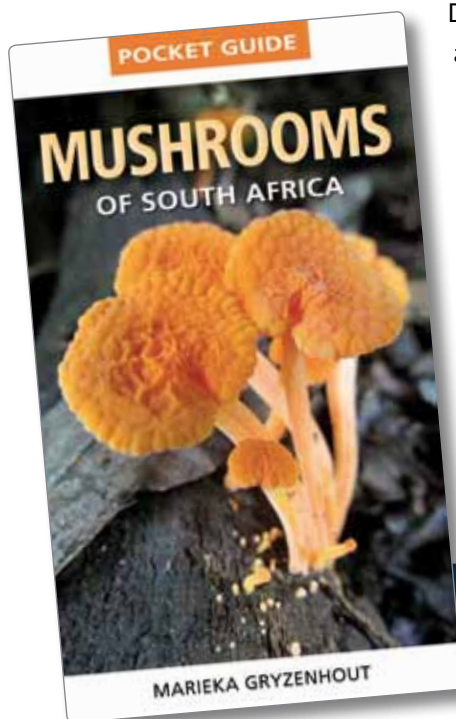
Zurika Murray, a Lecturer and Researcher, also from the Department of Genetics, is linking her work to the serotonin system of animals – where the compounds produced by these mushrooms have been shown to be able to aid its function or even mimic it. Bennie Viljoen, a professor in the Department of Microbiology and Biochemistry, looks at their cultivation, the compounds they produce, and also the applications of these mushrooms.

Psilocybe cubensis, the teacher, the best-known of all magic mushrooms.



PHOTO: JON MACGILLIFRAY

This work supports some of his earlier research such as the nutritional properties of edible exotic mushrooms and using medicinal mushrooms for improved human health.



Dr Gryzenhout, who describes herself as passionate about mushrooms and other fungi, is author of the *Pocket Guide to Mushrooms of South Africa*, of which a new version with 10 more species has just been published, which includes these magic mushrooms. About 18 months ago she also co-published the *Field guide to mushrooms & other fungi of South Africa*. Currently she is working on the first-ever formal study on magic mushrooms in South Africa. “Never has there been a study published identifying these species, including the local species *Psilocybe natalensis*, and where they are to be found in South Africa,” she says.

Dr Gryzenhout is the author of the Pocket Guide to *Mushrooms of South Africa*.



PHOTO: ANJA AUCAMP

Dr Marieka Gryzenhout's study group in the Department of Genetics is helping amateur mycologists to verify identities of the various psychedelic mushroom species, and others found throughout the country. From the left, are: Zurika Murray, Lecturer; Onalerona Maloka, MSc student; Dr Gryzenhout; and Dr Soumya Ghosh, Postdoctoral Researcher.

Her study group is helping amateur mycologists to verify identities of the various psychedelic mushroom species, and others found throughout the country, and to build the biodiversity knowledge regarding magic mushrooms for South Africa, based on scientific evidence. She believes that in the future these fungi will be further characterised to study the compounds they produce for possible pharmacological use.

She is also very excited about the help they received from a large network of enthusiastic amateur mycologists across South Africa, who provided them with their first samples to typify. "In the process, two possible new species have already been discovered that awaits description. We learn what these fungi look like, what their unique DNA sequence is, and we name the new ones," she says.

Studying the magic

Dr Gryzenhout and her co-workers decided to study magic mushrooms because of their potential to treat neurological disorders and other health problems. Possible uses are for conditions such as depression, addictions therapy, and migraine treatment. They also believe that the effects they produce in the brain have tremendous probability to treat psychological disorders and other physiological problems.

The use that these fungi may have for the man on the street is still hampered, because mechanisms are in place

to disallow their overuse. "Magic mushrooms or tinctures from mushrooms cannot be subscribed, despite indications that the contained compounds could be very effective treatments. That is because, unlike marijuana, no form of usage has yet been legalised in most parts of the world. With magic mushrooms being considered illegal, research to explore their treatment potential have been greatly hampered," explains Dr Gryzenhout.

For example, it is only a legal drug in 'coffee shops' or mushroom shops in the Netherlands, and more recently in one state in the United States after the legalisation of marijuana gave it some impetus.

Experiencing the magic

Although it is not quite known if one can get addicted, it is considered to be less addictive than other drugs. Many people use it because of the feeling of spiritual awakening, including experiences of hallucinations, visual patterns, euphoria, and a sense of wellbeing.

"Prolonged use of large doses can, however, lead to ill effects, such as psychosis and personality disorders. Other adverse effects upon using these mushrooms may include severe negative emotions, enhanced psychological problems, physical symptoms such as vomiting, and uncontrolled behaviour," she says. **b**

ARU joins forces with Maloti-Drakensberg

BY NONSINDISO QWABE

The Afromontane Research Unit (ARU) has joined forces with the University of Helsinki in Finland and the National University of Lesotho for a National Research Foundation award to the University of Pretoria on using fine-scale functional and compositional variation in alpine plants to predict the impact of climate change. Alpine plants are likely to be affected differently than lower elevation species, due to their small climatic envelope; in other words, they need certain minimum temperatures to grow and reproduce.

Space to explore

Dr Ralph Clark, Director of the ARU, says alpine species are unique in their composite, in that they have limited opportunity in the Maloti-Drakensberg area to expand their distribution ranges upwards, given that the alpine zone in the Maloti-Drakensberg is already level with the summit plateau. What this means in essence, is that there is nowhere higher for alpine species to migrate to under global warming.

“This is a concern, because high mountains and polar regions are warming faster than other parts of the planet. We may see mass alpine species extinction in the next 50 years in the Maloti-Drakensberg.”

Dr Clark says little is yet known about the long-term monitoring of species distribution and the effects of

According to Dr Ralph Clark high mountains and polar regions are warming faster than other parts of the planet and we may see mass alpine species extinction in the next 50 years in the Maloti-Drakensberg.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

other institutions for alpine research

global change. The elevational gradient in the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains provides space to explore underlying variations in the elevation of species with climate change. The Drakensberg Mountains contain unique montane and sub-alpine ecosystems with unique habitats and high levels of endemism.

Research-based solutions

According to him, research on alpine systems was vital, as Southern African mountain research lags behind that of other regions in Africa and the rest of the world by about 50 years. “The Maloti-Drakensberg (MD) is a vast area, and there are many understudied areas and under-represented disciplines needing research attention if we are to begin understanding the larger MD social-ecological picture and provide research-based solutions informing a sustainable future for the MD and its communities.”

On collaborations, Dr Clark says the ARU was in a privileged position to learn from collaborating institutions’ long-term activities and to pioneer new niches and areas of emphasis that have not been geographically and conceptually considered before.

“We are very proud to be partnering with highly prestigious institutions and organisations in furthering next-generation MD research. The MD is common property from a research perspective, making multiple relationships and partner projects possible. We would prefer to bring people together and collaborate for the benefit of growing a robust multi-disciplinary mountain research community in Southern Africa, rather than compete.” **b**





Grant will help the UFS Indigenous platform to

BY ANDRÉ DAMONS

The university's Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) platform will now compete favourably with other institutions globally and become the international IKS research hub thanks to an annual grant of R17 million from the Technology and Innovation Agency Platform (TIA) over the next five years.

The UFS declared the IKS for Health in the Department of Pharmacology in the Faculty of Health Sciences as its flagship initiative and would like to advance IK-based innovation by transforming informal sectors into formal secondary economies that will be translated into actual decent job creation.

Prof Motlalepula Matsabisa, Professor and Director of Pharmacology, says the research and teaching programme in the School of Clinical Medicine will now be rebranded and be known as the African Medicines Innovations and Technology Development Platform (AMITD) and will strive to respond to community health needs and address industry research challenges.

Commercialise research output

"I am excited and honoured. We see this as a boost. We believe we have been given this because of the work that we do. We are the leaders in traditional medicine research and IKS – not just for the country, but hopefully on the continent," says Prof Matsabisa.

According to him, the recognition to be a platform will help the department to begin to move into the commercial space. They have done a lot of research and have a number of prototype products and products that need to go onto the market. "The

function of the platform will help us to begin to commercialise some of the research output and research work that we do. It is a good plus for the UFS."

The AMITD will aim to stimulate economic growth directly and indirectly by providing science-based solutions and developing technologies that utilise indigenous knowledge (IK) and South African iconic biodiversity to produce high-quality proprietary and commercial IKS/African Traditional Medicine (ATM) products, focusing on priority diseases.

According to Prof Matsabisa, who is the chairperson of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Regional Expert Advisory Committee on Traditional Medicines for COVID-19, the overall benefits of this grant will be skills development, job and wealth creation at community level, high-level training at higher-education level, and industrial and business developments around IKS/ATM production activities.

"The AMITD will move the country from the current resource-based thinking to more intensive knowledge-based thinking and development. An abundance of natural resources means nothing to the country if those resources cannot add value and develop commodities for industry development and job creation, including social impacts," says Prof Matsabisa.

The UFS, through the AMITD, will work with IK communities of practice in the field of health and traditional medical knowledge, together with the traditional health practitioners (THPs) in South Africa, encouraging them to participate meaningfully in the formal economy of the country by utilising the knowledge of South Africa's rich biodiversity.

Knowledge System (IKS) become an IKS research hub

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Why IKS TIA platform for UFS?

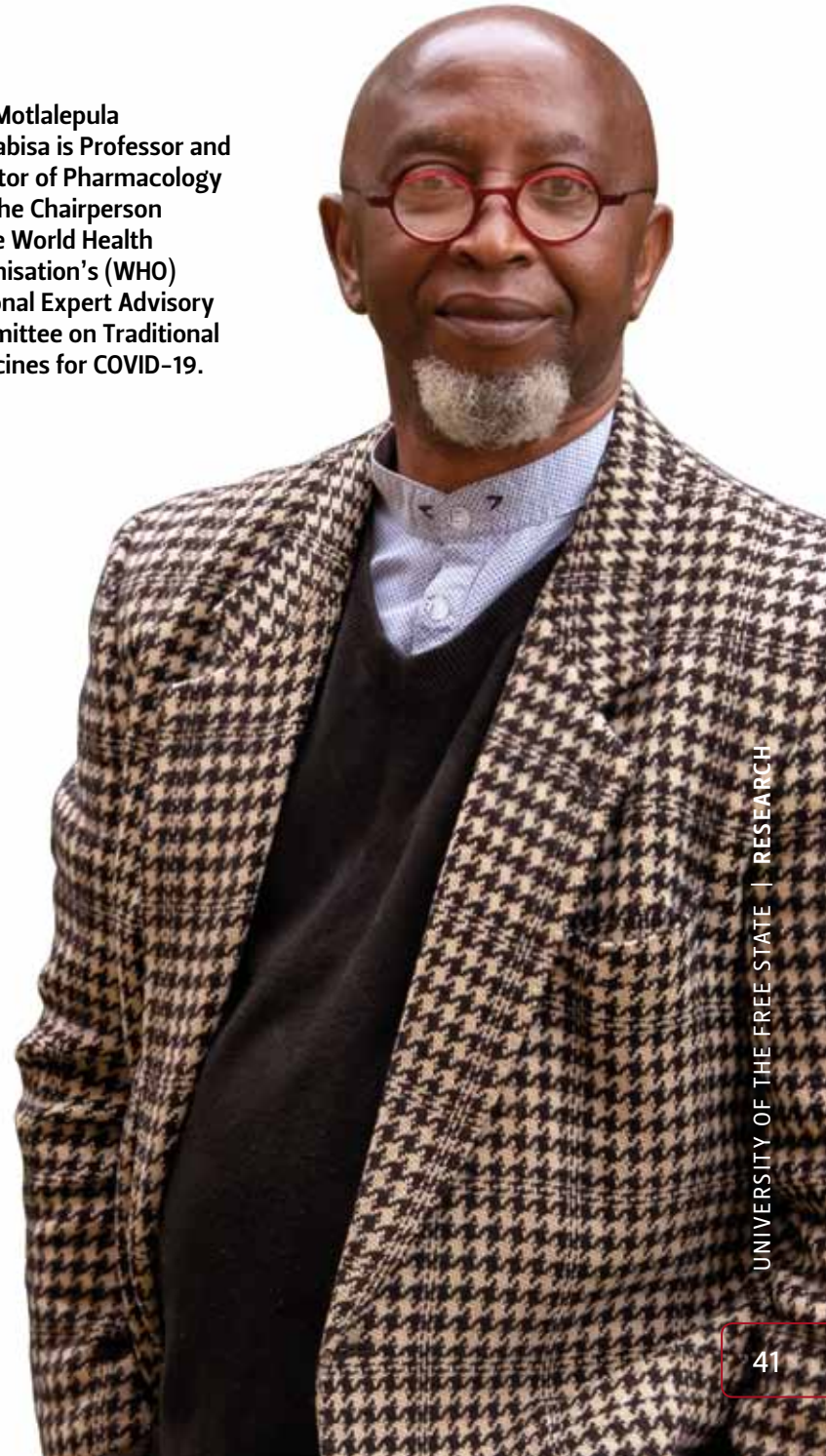
The UFS is recognised as a national leader in pharmacology as well as the research and development of IKS and traditional medicines. The university has developed and built infrastructure in this field of scientific research, and has the best modern equipment for the training, teaching, and development of prototypes and products for commercialisation based on IKS.

“UFS pharmacology research is also recognised internationally as the science force in South Africa and Africa on IKS and traditional medicines research. The appointment of Pharmacology IKS as a platform will further strengthen our current local, regional, and internationally active research collaborations,” says Prof Matsabisa. **b**

Prof Motlalepula Matsabisa is Professor and Director of Pharmacology and the Chairperson of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Regional Expert Advisory Committee on Traditional Medicines for COVID-19.

The Department of Pharmacology will establish one of the most advanced modern Pharmacology GLP-accredited research and development laboratories in the country, and possibly in the region, after receiving a grant of R58 million.

Prof Matsabisa has received a DSI high-end infrastructure (HEI) grant to build the laboratory, which will be a centre of excellence for the government, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the African Union's (AU) Commission for Social Development. The grant will also be used to build an herbal medicines production/manufacturing facility, as well as piloting a health facility for traditional medicines.





Prof Paul Oberholster is the Director of the Centre for Environmental Management and researches the use of freshwater algae to treat acid mine drainage or domestic wastewater.

New research and

BY ANDRÉ DAMONS

A new study by Prof Paul Oberholster, Director of the Centre for Environmental Management at the university, and his colleague at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Maronel Steyn, looks at the sustainable development and global move towards a more circular use of resources where wastewater is reduced and resources are recycled.

Prof Oberholster, who won the NSTF-Water Research Commission (WRC) Award for his contribution to water resource management in SA at this year's Science Oscars for the second year in a row, says this is driving a paradigm shift within the scientific community regarding wastewater solutions.

"Phycoremediation makes use of macro-or microalgae and could be used to treat wastewater. This technique has the potential to be used as an alternative biomass source for bioenergy production. The usefulness of biological wastewater treatment by microalgae, coupled with biofuel production, is even more attractive as a result of an increase in global warming, depletion of fossil fuels and the need to manage greenhouse gases," says Prof Oberholster.

Reuse of domestic wastewater

New research has been done at the phycoremediation pilot plant in Mossel Bay related to the reuse of domestic wastewater and the use of the algae biomass for biofuel and biofertiliser.

looks at reducing wastewater recycling water resources

The study looks at utilising a specific consortium of algal species (isolated and cultured in the laboratory) to reduce nutrients and create conditions suitable for reduction of E. coli in wastewater.

“The aim was firstly to implement a self-sustaining system that is independent of electricity or expensive chemicals and that can be operated effectively within the current financial and capacity constraints of Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries using existing infrastructure, i.e. wastewater stabilisation pond systems. Secondly, it was to establish the feasibility of algae biomass generated from maturation ponds as bio-energy,” explains Prof Oberholster.

“Although the low-cost green technology for wastewater treatment has already been rolled out with great success in Limpopo and the Western Cape, little is known about the feasibility of the algae biomass generated from the system as potential bio-energy source in the circular economy,” he says.

Rapid urbanisation poses major problems

According to him, there is an increased need for remediation with increased environmental pollution from untreated or partially treated wastewater and resultant eutrophication. It is foreseen that treatment of wastewater will form part of the production of goods in the near future.


Prof Oberholster’s research focus area is the use of freshwater algae to treat acid mine drainage or domestic wastewater and he says that rapid urbanisation poses major infrastructural,

economic, environmental, and social problems in South Africa. The demand for water is increasingly becoming more than the source can provide. South Africa will need to plan much better in the future, especially related to climate change.

“Rapid urbanisation poses major infrastructural, economic, environmental, and social problems in South Africa.”

– Prof Paul Oberholster

“Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity both of droughts and of storm events, while higher air temperatures necessitate greater water use. For these reasons, alternative water resources will become more vital, such as rainwater harvesting, wastewater reuse, groundwater recharge and desalination, as well as moving towards a more holistic, integrated approach to water management (IWRM) for meeting South Africa’s water needs that may not be satisfied by a single water source.

“Reuse of wastewater and groundwater will become more important in the future. Although water reuse is not a new concept, we still need to go a far way to apply this concept in the South African context. African countries, for instance Namibia, have already focused on alternative water resource from the 1960s.” 

International Studies Group,

BY IGNO VAN NIEKERK

The foyer of the International Studies group in the Benito Khotseng Building on the Bloemfontein Campus is a silent witness to pride, excellence, and incredibly hard work. Prof Ian Phimister, Senior Professor, Centre for Africa Studies, points at the notice board with photocopies of internationally published articles next to a showcase of newly published books that have stemmed from the group's recent research initiatives.


The relevance of the research topics is striking. It covers challenges faced by society today – but also touches on past events like pandemics and politicians as springboards for new thinking and suggesting solutions. Prof Phimister,

an internationally recognised authority when it comes to academia, has taught at universities like Oxford, University of Cape Town, and Sheffield, where he occupied the Chair of International History. At the UFS he leads the International Studies Group where students are doing PhDs and Postdocs. The students have been carefully selected, “If they enter the door to this programme, they are already *pretty good*; there is a rigorous selection process to become part of the programme.”

The International Studies Group supports students in many ways. These students are often appointed into full-time positions by other universities across the globe. To assist them, mock interviews are held before they go for their ‘real’ interviews. “We like to hear that the mock interview was harder than the real interview.”



a passion for excellence

Although it takes on average seven years to complete a PhD in South Africa, the International Studies Group students have been completing it in three years. “We started in 2013 and at the beginning of 2022 we will have 31 PhDs and six MAs completed.” The standard of research is high and Prof Phimister attributes it to the students being competitive, “They compete to be the best, but they appreciate and enjoy one another’s successes – proud of who we are and what we do.” 

The relevance of the research topics is striking. It covers challenges faced by society today – but also touches on past events like pandemics and politicians as springboards for new thinking and suggesting solutions.

PHOTO: IGNO VAN NIEKERK

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE | RESEARCH

Students from the International Studies Group, standing proud at the noticeboard with photocopies of international published articles and newly published books.

Temba Hlasho: Leading change in a reimagined Student Affairs

BY JÓHANN THORMÄHLEN

Temba Hlasho admits the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we operate, but says his department has embraced the 'new normal' to still steer the Student Affairs ship successfully.

Although the Executive Director: Student Affairs only started a few months ago during strange times, it didn't prevent him from building fruitful relationships.

Some of his immediate goals are "consolidation and integration of the newly re-imagined Student Affairs" and the Department of Student Affairs (DSA) has already set this in motion.

Productive engagements

Hlasho, who joined after being the Dean of Students at the University of Zululand, took up his new UFS role on 1 July 2021.

He has previously been the Director: Student Affairs on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus. He says his first few months have been exciting. "I am used to the university culture, blended in easily, know the majority of staff and have been part of the DSA Head of Department team."

A highlight for him has been keeping staff morale and energy positive and building a mature working relationship with the Institutional Student Representative Council (ISRC). Building these relationships can, however, be a challenge during COVID-19. He says most ISRC members are on campus and engagement has been possible.

"COVID-19 might have created limitations in terms of face-to-face engagements with the broader student bodies, but engaging with the ISRC and student leaders virtually has been useful and productive.

Not backing down

"Having regular scheduled meetings has worked for me to ensure I listen to issues raised and provide guidance and support."

All Student Affairs units are optimally using online platforms to reach students. Hlasho says that there are, however, limitations, as connectivity challenges for students in rural spaces may limit their participation in some cases. But the DSA is not backing down, "With the new normal things will not be same, but we have assimilated and adopted the new normal." **b**

Temba Hlasho says a highlight for him has been keeping staff morale and energy positive and building a mature working relationship with the ISRC.

Traditional co-curricular activities a core component of Student Governance

BY XOLISA MNUKWA

It has been argued that universities will never be the same after the plight of the coronavirus, with some of the resulting changes leading to permanent operational shifts at higher education institutions.

Amid this, an important question to address is how university governance and student leadership structures plan to reinforce co-curricular engagement to harness growth amongst their students.

UFS before the pandemic

Student leadership structures such as the Institutional Student Representative Council (ISRC), Faculty Student Council (FSC), and student organisations and associations have always been key role-players in addressing student needs. According to the Head of the University of the Free State (UFS) Student Governance Office: Motlogelwa Moema, UFS student structures have been actively involved in facilitating the development of leadership development programmes to inspire societal and economic growth amongst the student cohort.

Previously, student leadership structures at the UFS helped to implement programmes that were developed to improve the overall experience of students at the university. Many of those programmes were disrupted as a result of the migration to online learning, as they required face-to-face engagement.

Dzulani Munzhele, Senior Officer at the UFS Division of Student Affairs (DSA) Student Governance Office, notes that it was difficult for them to adjust to virtual learning. “Addressing student queries was one of the main challenges faced by student leaders, who received a bulk of complaints relating to the challenges students experienced with the shortage of academic support within their faculties. Many student leadership structures were crippled by the migration to online learning and struggled to address the concerns

of students proactively and as effectively as they did in the traditional learning environment,” Munzhelele notes.

Student leadership now and in future

According to Moema, the scenarios given by Prof Francis Petersen, UFS Rector and Vice-Chancellor, in his address to staff recently, indicate that the university will be welcoming many students back to campuses in 2022. As frequently stated by Temba Hlasho: UFS Executive Director of Student Affairs, co-curricular programmes form an integral part of developing balanced and well-rounded graduates who are empowered to critically engage with and contribute to the social landscape of their communities and beyond.

With this in mind, UFS student leadership structures anticipate resuming leadership development programmes that previously required face-to-face engagement such as the leadership training sessions. They look forward to strengthening student participation in SRC initiatives, gatherings and events that encourage awareness around current societal matters. They further plan to address mental health, social support, gender and sexuality, safety, and many other matters experienced by students of the university. **b**

Motlogelwa Moema believes UFS student structures have always been actively involved in facilitating the development of leadership development programmes to inspire societal and economic growth amongst the student cohort.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

Qwaqwa Campus Student promoting student success

BY NONSINDISO QWABE

What does student success look like for an institution? Identifying the need to tackle this question and to personalise it for its own campus, the Qwaqwa Campus Student Success Work Group was established on the Qwaqwa Campus to constantly reflect on the success of students' academic journeys.

Established in 2019, the team of staff members from different corners of the campus – faculties, Student Academic Services, the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), and Campus Management – came together to create a community that completes projects in order to determine what is going well, and what still needs to be improved when considering Qwaqwa Campus students and their success.

Evidence-based approach

Speaking to us about the team, Dr Eleanor Bernard, Assistant Director of CTL on the Qwaqwa Campus and coordinator of the group, says the team meets at the beginning of each year to decide on projects for the year, which follow an evidence-based approach as a way of using data to identify and gauge the issue at hand, to come up with necessary interventions, and use data to also measure the success of the project.

“In 2020, we completed three projects. Firstly, the CLASSE (classroom survey of student engagement) was

implemented with two lecturers and their modules, where data were collected and analysed on student engagement and how lecturers can improve in certain modules. Qualitatively, as part of the larger institutional journey mapping project, we added a Qwaqwa-specific component, where focus-group interviews were held with more than 50 students to understand their experiences, starting from applying to study at the UFS, registration, and all the way to graduation, and what we as a campus community can do to support them. This data was included in the Journey Mapping report. We also create one or two infographics per year to share – for example Blackboard access data and success rates – in an accessible way with academics, so as to empower them with knowledge around their students' struggles,” she says.

Student learning on a higher level

The CLASSE project was carried into 2021, and a new project related to the creation of multiple-choice question banks for student learning on a higher level was implemented this year. Two modules were involved, and data around the lecturers' and students' experiences to adjust the project will be used to deliver the project to more modules in 2022.

“We are also in the process of creating an evidence-based workshop for academics and academic leaders to help them explore and use data to guide their learning and teaching and decision-making. This will take place in November,” Dr Bernard says. **b**

Success Work Group

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



With the classroom survey of student engagement (CLASSE) data were collected and analysed on student engagement and how lecturers can improve in certain modules. Pictured here is Dr Eleanor Bernard.



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE | STUDENTS



Reaching out to save young lives in rural areas

BY ANDRÉ DAMONS

Paediatric heart specialists hope that an outreach initiative, started back in 2016, allowing them to travel to rural areas in the Free State to diagnose heart defects in babies early, would grow and expand to other rural areas and provinces.

Every year, more than 40 babies in the rural areas of South Africa may die as a result of an undiagnosed heart lesion, because everyone assumes that they have respiratory problems when they actually have critical congenital heart disease – up to 85% of which is curable, says Prof Stephen Brown, Principal Specialist and Head of the Division of Paediatric Cardiology in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State (UFS).

Prof Brown, who is also a paediatric cardiologist at the Universitas Academic Hospital, says a life-saving collaborative

initiative between the UFS, the Mother and Child Academic Hospital (MACAH) Foundation, and the Discovery Fund started five years ago to help curb the death of young patients due to congenital heart disease, and to make services more accessible to rural communities.

Hundreds of patients seen annually

“We initiated an outreach programme due to the fact that some patients found it difficult to get transport to our central hospital. Since the Free State is considered rural, there are long distances to travel. Our concept was that we should take the service to grass-roots level to make it more convenient for the parents and caretakers.

“We partnered with MACAH, and since early detection of congenital heart disease makes a big difference, it fits in nicely with MACAH’s first 1 000 days’ drive. Due to the hard work of Tertia de Bruin, we were given the opportunity to come



Prof Stephen Brown, Principal Specialist in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Free State (UFS), and his team are taking life-saving medical care to young patients in the rural parts of the Free State.

into contact with Discovery. Dr Daniel Buys (UFS Department of Paediatrics and Child Health) and Rudolph Pretorius (echocardiography technician) did a lot of the initial paperwork and motivation,” says Prof Brown.

According to him, a mobile echocardiography apparatus was donated by the Discovery Foundation via MACAH, which is crucial for doing this outreach work. The machine looks like a laptop and can be transported in a carry case. “We see between 170 and 250 patients on an annual basis. The service is obviously confined to secondary hospitals, and we started doing the Mofumahadi Manapo Mopeli Hospital in Qwaqwa and the Bongani Regional Hospital in Welkom. It has since expanded to the Dihlabeng Regional Hospital in Bethlehem and the Pelonomi Secondary Hospital in Bloemfontein. Since initiation in 2020, Pelonomi has seen on average 40 children per month receiving a heart sonar. COVID-19 has had a major impact on our work,” says Prof Brown.

First 1 000 days in a child’s life

Prof André Venter, Chairperson of the MACAH Foundation, says one of the main commitments of the MACAH Foundation in central South Africa is their passionate belief that the first 1 000

days in any child’s life determine their trajectory for life. Says Prof Venter, “We should do everything in our power to ensure that this 1 000-day journey is optimal for each child, including conception, pregnancy, birth, and health during the first two years of life.”

“As Chairperson of the MACAH Foundation, I am sincerely grateful to pioneers such as Prof Brown and his team in Paediatric Cardiology for their excellent outreach initiative, but also to the Discovery Fund who shared our vision and that of Prof Brown’s team and was willing to make this very generous donation. I am so proud of and so grateful to all of you,” says Prof Venter.

According to him, this has not only helped to make infant cardiac screening in the rural areas a reality, but also to make it a world-class service.

Direct interaction with cardiologist

Prof Brown says, in his experience, this initiative is greatly appreciated, as he and Dr Buys do the clinics and heart sonars personally. “The families find this fantastic, since they can have direct interaction with their cardiologist, which allows for better communication and adds a personal touch. When they come to Bloemfontein for further assessment, their faces light up when seeing a familiar face.”

“It also helps with treatment and management at their local institution. I also find that the doctors in the hospitals appreciate it tremendously – they find it easier to phone and ask for advice. It brings the ‘fancy tertiary physicians’ to a human level with whom they can interact. It also alleviates a lot of stress for the physicians, and they can show/ask advice regarding difficult cases,” says Prof Brown.

By doing outreach, Prof Brown concludes, they have learned so much about the communities and the importance of being accessible, as patients appreciate having direct interaction with the professor. The doctors and staff have also been enthusiastic and supported them tremendously at all the hospitals. The students from Cuba have joined Prof Brown and his team when visiting their hospitals, and they can spend some dedicated clinical teaching time together. **b**

Transforming a

BY LEONIE BOLLEURS

This process, from planning to logistical arrangements, and the recruitment and training of farmers and community members, is managed by staff and students in the Department of Sustainable Food Systems and Development.

Learning how to fish

Carien Denner Vorster, also from the Department of Sustainable Food Systems and Development and project manager, explains that training initiatives include various parts of the wool value chain, e.g. wool sheep information days, wool marketing workshops, and wool value chain technology transfer days. During the knowledge transfer for small wool farmers, aspects such as sheep handling, wool classing, herd management, herd health, and pasture management are covered.

Community members, mostly women, are taught to process the wool and to make products they can sell. They were presented with, amongst others, knitting and wool felting workshops. Through the knowledge and skills they acquire, participants are also taught to add value to 'the lesser-valued wool'. According to Denner Vorster, these pieces of wool are washed, combed, and cleaned, whereafter felt and subsequently felt products are made. Tshepi Matlhoko, a master's student who is busy with her research in wool washing, is helping to train the women to make felt and to dye the wool.

From these self-produced wool materials, the women then make quite a variety of products, including felt pencil cases, laptop bags, hand/book bags, tray cloths, and soft toys. They also loom-knit beautiful hats, adds Denner Vorster.



The Department of Sustainable Food Systems and Development at the university is doing their part in promoting quality life in the agricultural sector. Two years ago, they did not only start training small-scale farmers and community members on the wool value chain; they also helped them with the whole process, including the production and marketing of products.

In 2020, the department received a US\$300 000 grant from the Regional Universities Forum (RUFORUM) for their project: Building competitiveness for communal farmers through developing the wool value chain in the Free State Province of South Africa. Dr Jan W. Swanepoel, project leader and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sustainable Agriculture, says the grant gave them the opportunity to be part of something bigger and to uplift the community around them.

"We believe that by developing the whole value chain and capacitating small-scale farmers and members from the community with knowledge and skills, we can do our part in creating better livelihoods for people that so desperately need it," he states.

piece of wool into a livelihood

In addition, Doretha Jacobs, Clothing and Textile Lecturer in the Department of Sustainable Food Systems and Development, visits the experimental farm on a weekly basis to assist with training. She also does designs and helps with production.

Motivation is a fire from within

Members of the community are invited to participate in the training opportunities. "During the workshops people who show aptitude and are interested in the trade are identified. Hence, they are asked to return for more advanced training. Those who show further potential are invited to become part of the production line to manufacture products for the market. They consequently receive payment for the work they do," explains Dr Swanepoel.

While sufficient stock is produced and the brand development process is finalised, sales are mostly by means of word of mouth. If you are interested in supporting this wonderful initiative and ordering some of the handmade wool products, send an e-mail to dennerc@ufs.ac.za and ask to receive a catalogue.

Dr Swanepoel says more than 200 community members and farmers attended the different training initiatives that took place on the Paradys Experimental Farm. "The farm is used as a piloting hub, and we are discussing the possibility to expand and duplicate certain parts of the project to the Western Cape," he says.

Part of this initiative are plans to develop, manufacture, and sell a whole range of wool products. More people from the community will be employed to assist with the production of these products. The department also intend to partner with relevant role-players to present entrepreneurship training in support of members of the community who want to establish their own micro-businesses. **b**

Members from the community, mostly women, are making a variety of products, including felt pencil cases, laptop bags, hand/book bags, tray cloths, and soft toys from their self-produced wool materials. They also loom knit beautiful hats.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE | COMMUNITY



Sizo Vena: a dynamic with a

BY RULANZEN MARTIN

In the years since graduating from the UFS with a bachelor's degree in Drama and Theatre Arts, Sizo Vena has not only produced/co-produced popular award-winning television shows, including *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, *Clash of the Choirs* (Season 2), and *Date my Family* (Seasons 4 and 5).

Sizo Vena has also made a name for himself in the entertainment industry as both an on-screen enigma and a creative force behind the scenes as a reality TV content director, moulded during his four years in Bloemfontein. He also starred in the hit TV dramas *Generations* and *Scandal* on eTV. His work on *Clash of the Choirs* earned him a South African Film and Television Award (SAFTA) in 2015 for Best International Format show.

Having a story to tell is important

As interesting as his job as content creator is, it is always good to remember that the most important thing of this job is 'having a story'. "Everyone has one, and taking that journey with someone else always brings me to a closer understanding of myself – each and every time," Vena says. Telling human stories is the evolutionary construct in content creation, because creating content means dealing with real humans – "You always need to be alert and ahead so that when your character decides to do something you didn't expect, you don't miss the shot or that honest and organic moment".

As a content creator, Sizo tells real human stories, unravels misconceptions, and makes television inspirational by using people who "are as real as my audience". As an actor, he wants to fall in love with his characters, rooting for them to win, and having them trust him with their (characters') journeys, their stories, and their vulnerability.



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Sizo Vena, content creator, producer, and actor – an alumnus keeping the UFS flag flying high.

content creator story to tell

'Have a love for story'

Apart from his Drama degree, Vena also pursued various other courses such as journalism, audiovisual communication, advertising, and public relations – “this was to appease my mother, whom I tricked into letting me pursue acting,” he says.

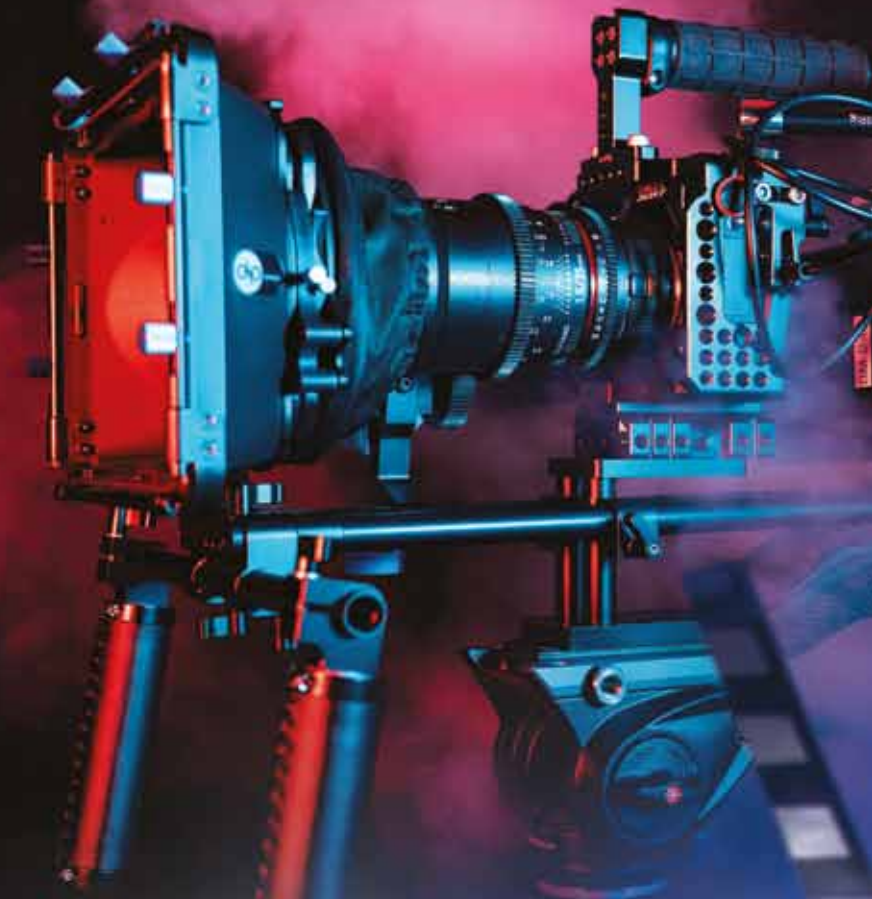
He is currently focusing on writing and producing/co-producing original shows and formats. “I am also opening a content production hub that will supply the industry across all its disciplines, but my passion will always be television, specifically reality television. I also want to try my hand at documentaries,” Vena says.

During his study years at the UFS, Vena was actively involved in the university's theatre community. He appeared in 21 stage productions, seven student films, and was a budding master of ceremonies for campus functions. “I also hosted a couple of popular radio shows on Kowsie FM with Metro FM's very own Marian Nyako-Lartey.”

For upcoming content producers, actors and students in the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts, his words of advice are, “Have a love for story. Trust your instincts, and ... ‘find the true intention behind your urge to be in service’ – Maryam Hasnaa.” **b**

Please scan the QR code
to watch some of Sizo's work:

Conceptualised, scripted, and
performed for the Channel O
campaign, 'So You Think You
Can DJ'.



Mercia from rural Namibia

BY LUNGA LUTHULI

Her father belonged to a "book club, used to order books and encyclopaedias, and would at times order special gifts for her mother". The daughter of a school principal, Mercia Geises, developed a love for reading at a young age. A trip to the Post Office "provided a connection to the rest of the world".

Growing up in Kalkfeld, a small village in central Namibia, Mercia, her father's "most trusted child", saw herself fulfilling messenger duties, sending money to siblings at boarding schools. When the youngest of seven children herself enrolled at a boarding school, the love relationship with the world outside and what it offers continued; more so with "heart-warming letters and a R2 note" from her father every now and then.

Mercia, an alumna of the University of the Free State and current Chief Executive Officer of Standard Bank Namibia, says her runs to the Post Office and bank made her believe there must be a big world out there; one where Post Office deliveries are made, and money is printed. With dreams to see life outside her village, opportunity beckoned with studies at the UFS.

In "matric, with all her peers destined for varsities in South Africa, an aspiration she too had, Mercia found a career guide in a Life Skills classroom. She "scanned through it, jotted down details", and made her way to the Post Office only this time to "carve her own path ignoring everyone's limited view of the world".

She got accepted at the University of the Free, an institution which became a home away from home getting mentored by among others Professor Johan Henning, Professor Voet du Plessis, Professor Elizabeth Snyman-

Merceline Mercia Geises, Chief Executive: Standard Bank Namibia.



to leading corporates

Van Deventer, Professor Johan van Schalkwyk and Professor Gerhard Fjik to completing her LLB Degree (cum laude) and LLM in Mercantile Law.

Her biggest dream, Mercia says: “I always wanted to work for Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr Attorneys in Cape Town, but because I was sponsored for my studies by the Namibia Power Corporation I had to go back and work in Namibia.

“I got an opportunity to work for one of the biggest law firms, M. Slabbert Attorneys and completed my articles, an opportunity I am forever grateful for,” she says.

After completing her articles, Mercia fell pregnant and the biggest motivation for applying for a corporate job was driven by the “need to deliver her baby at a private hospital and having a medical aid”.

Seeing a job advert at Old Mutual Namibia in a local newspaper and knowing that she did not meet the requirements, Mercia was called for a junior role, leading her to discover corporate finance and asset management.

Working for Old Mutual for 12 years and obtaining an MBA from Stellenbosch University, Mercia credits the leadership for investing significantly in her growth and development.

Whilst at Old Mutual Investment Group in Namibia as the Chief Executive, Mercia saw a growth opportunity at Standard Bank, Namibia’s leading retail banking franchise and she took a “leap of faith”.

With many barriers for women development and holding high positions in corporates during her tenure Mercia believes ‘Old Mutual Namibia was the best incubation centre

for many young women and the organisational culture was conducive to thrive.’

She says, “We were exposed to leadership that believed in increasing women roles in leadership and business strategy which meant that we were entrusted with big and bold mandates and were provided with necessary mentorship.”

Mercia believes that “working in an environment like this is extremely beneficial, but like all things in life, the other side of it is that it comes with sacrifices, some of which can be costly if one does not have the right support”.

“Tertiary institutions also play the biggest role in upliftment and how we think about things. It has surely taken me from rural Namibia to the world stage, where as a young executive I could engage in complex issues in boardrooms across the world. I still find my engagements in executive development programmes with institutions of higher learning to be ones that provide me with the edge to lead effectively,” she says.

On challenges facing the banking industry in the continent, Mercia says, “Traditional banks are finding it hard to penetrate the unbanked population who leapfrogs the banking step and participates in the mainstream economy through mobile operators. Accelerating digital capabilities has become a top strategic priority for the banking sector, more so during the pandemic.” She says, “Regulatory authorities have a critical role to play in making this happen, as they are needed to continue to promote innovation while keeping their checks and balances.”

In her leisure time, Mercia puts her focus on her three children, the youngest of which is two months old. She has an interest in agricultural technology and has a small piece of land where she experiments with various intensive farming concepts. **b**

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Alumnus wants to help make Springboks world leaders

Qumbu holds prominent role at SA Rugby

BY RUAN BRUWER

Just six years after graduating, a former student of the UFS now finds himself working with the Springboks and holds a prestigious position at the South African Rugby Union. Bongani Tim Qumbu is the strength and conditioning manager at SA Rugby. He was appointed in April 2019.

“The role entails managing and overseeing that all SA Rugby national teams are serviced from a conditioning point, including the SA Rugby referees.”

In high demand

“With the Springboks I am the strength and conditioning coach, making sure that our GPS data collection and analysis are done correctly and effectively. In this I am also part of the medical and performance team, which includes the doctor, physios, dietitian, and head of athletic performance,” Qumbu explains.

Qumbu has built up an impressive CV for himself and has been in high demand. Teams he has been involved with include the Junior Springboks, Springbok Women and Women’s Sevens teams, UFS Young Guns, and the Ixias. “The UFS played a significant role in that I studied with people that would become strength and conditioning coaches at the South African Football Association U20 team, Protea cricket team and guys that trained Wayde van Niekerk.

“The diversity on campus broadened my horizon in that I got to learn from other backgrounds and formed lifelong relationships.”

Making an impact

“The environment I currently work in is high-pressure, enjoyable, and high-performance driven and at the same time it’s service and people driven. Getting the best out of each player is important, but understanding their backgrounds is too.”

Qumbu wishes to create opportunities for aspiring strength and conditioning coaches to grow the industry, as he believes it is one of the key areas to unlocking the true potential of South African athletes. “I would like to make a long-lasting impact on the world and the South African strength and conditioning landscape, and to contribute in whatever capacity, making us the leading rugby country.” **b**

Bongani Tim Qumbu (right), strength and conditioning manager at SA Rugby, with Springbok Cheslin Kolbe after they had won the series against the British and Irish Lions.

Dr Pieter Taljaard

now CEO of Grain SA

BY LEONIE BOLLEURS

A known name in the agricultural industry, Dr Pieter Taljaard, was appointed as Chief Executive Officer of Grain SA in September this year. This former lecturer and alumnus from the UFS's Department of Agricultural Economics has a trained background in Agricultural and Applied Economics and specialised in Consumer and Production Economics, Econometrics as well as Mathematical Optimisation.

At Bayer Crop Science he was the Cereals and Industrial Crop go-to market strategy lead, giving him an opportunity to engage closely with farmers before he accepted the position at Grain SA. Besides his experience as regional sales manager at the seed company, Montsano, and the role that he played as production manager NWK Boerdery LTD, he also has 19 years' part-time experience as farmer. The latter he sees as a hobby that he thoroughly enjoys.

A winning strategy

Dr Taljaard, a business leader with an entrepreneurial mindset, says that he would like to contribute towards a sustainable and profitable agriculture industry. "Although food and hence food security are an important part of our economy and key for political stability, our farmers need to stay profitable to ensure the safe and affordable supply of high-quality food to our local population."

About his vision for his first year of CEO, he says he would like to ensure that he maintains and builds on the excellent relationships that Grain SA has with the agricultural value chain as well as with the government in particular. "The key thing about these relationships is that we need to instil trust so that we can work together in reaching the common goals we have." He is of the opinion that political trust and stability as well as technological innovation are paramount in the sector. "It is

important for foreign investors like multi-national firms to keep investing locally," he says.

Dr Taljaard believes it is necessary to stay globally competitive. He states that it is key to keep local research and development initiatives at a global standard to ensure we stay competitive on an international level.

Leading change

He is also a firm believer that Grain SA will have to be on the forefront and in many cases lead change. He sees this change in the profitability and growth of smaller grain farmers, i.e. ensuring that they keep on farming and growing their operations for commercial sustainability.

A second example of this change, he says, is to continue to support and improve the proper functioning of the free market, including market access for surplus products across the food and fibre value chain.

It is, however, not only the growth of smaller grain farmers that are top-of-mind for Dr Taljaard. Relevance and success of graduates are also important. **b**

Dr Pieter Taljaard, the new CEO of Grain SA.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE | ALUMNI

UK Chapter aims to reconnect with alumni

Serves as platform to celebrate their successes

BY RUAN BRUWER

UFS Alumni may be based all around the world, but the United Kingdom (UK) Alumni Chapter aims to reconnect with all those members.

The UK Chapter is a hub of a developing UFS international programme. “We want to provide an opportunity for alumni to share their university experiences with wider audiences,” explains Carmenita Redcliffe Paul, Assistant Director: Alumni Relations and Business Development at the UFS.

Platform to celebrate successes

“The programme aims to provide a platform to alumni to celebrate their successes and provide a window to the landscape of the life and times of the university and the people who shaped it.”

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



Francois van Schalkwyk.



Keenan Carelse.

“We also want to celebrate the diversity of our former students and the many touchpoints which unite them.”

Two key projects, Global Citizen and Voices from the Free State, came to life as a result of the collective collaboration of this chapter. The Global Citizen invites people in a series of “courageous conversations” to rethink their relationship with the world. Voices from the Free State is a series of personal podcast narratives by outstanding alumni wherein they reflect their experiences at the UFS. They tell their stories and explain how their university years shaped their future and paved the way to their respective successes.

Relevant association with the UFS

“Furthermore, they motivate why their ongoing association with the UFS is still relevant and important,” says Redcliffe Paul.

The UK Alumni Chapter is led by alumni Francois van Schalkwyk and Keenan Carelse, and supported by Adrienne Hall.

Redcliffe Paul says Carelse and Van Schalkwyk have been instrumental in the Voices from the Free State initiative as they are strategically and operationally invested. They create and co-host the podcast series.

Van Schalkwyk is an entrepreneur and innovator consulting with clients globally. Carelse is employed in the healthcare sector in the UK. **b**

FHS Annual Legacy Programme 2021:

Inspiring Health Sciences Alumni to keep making a difference

BY CHARLENE STANLEY

A promising but financially struggling medical student in 2021 getting a much-appreciated donation from a predecessor who graduated in 1991. A young medical graduate getting work experience at the practice of a fellow Kopsie alumni. A successful, established medical practitioner donating surplus medical equipment and consumables to be used in the training of future doctors. In the process, memories of academic trials and triumphs, anecdotes from study years and precious campus life encounters are exchanged and compared. No doubt their experiences will reflect different circumstances and evolving times, but also a whole lot of valuable common ground.

Platform of engagement for all stakeholders


It is these types of interactions that the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) hopes to inspire through their newly established legacy project.

“The purpose of the FHS Legacy Fund/Programme is to establish a platform of engagement for all our stakeholders,” explains Prof Joyce Tsoka-Gwegweni, Vice-Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences. “We want everyone to share in the legacy of 50 years of excellence, but furthermore we want all of our stakeholders to keep building this legacy with us. Together, with our alumni, staff, students, supporters, and donors, we can become the top faculty in the country.” There are different mechanisms to facilitate support, e.g. giving towards various activities, projects, bursaries, departments or initiatives, engaging in mentoring, supporting projects and other expert opportunities.



Prof Joyce Tsoka-Gwegweni says they would like to have everyone to share in the legacy of 50 years of excellence. “Furthermore, we want all of our stakeholders to keep building this legacy with us.”

Renewed and mutually beneficial collaboration

“The relationship between graduates and their faculty and wider tertiary institution is a very special and symbiotic one,” explains project coordinator Tertia de Bruin. “Their successes are our successes, and vice versa. There are so many examples of our Health Sciences alumni who have accomplished and are accomplishing wonderful things in the medical field, and we are extremely proud of them. With this project, we really hope to create renewed and mutually beneficial collaboration with our alumni. After all, they played a momentous part in the excellence that has typified our faculty over the past 50 years.” 

If you are a Faculty of Health Sciences alumnus and would like to get involved, please contact:
Tertia de Bruin 082 808 6099 DebruinTR@ufs.ac.za or
Reuben Maeko 051-4017793 MaekoR@ufs.ac.za.

Louzanne achieves much more

Stars at the

BY RUAN BRUWER

Louzanne Coetzee had hoped for two personal best (PB) times at the Paralympics, but to return with two medals, two PBs and a world record was a big surprise, the athlete admits.

The Residence Head of Akasia and a former UFS student set a world record in the marathon T11 category (totally blind athletes), finished third, and improved her PB by two and a half minutes.

In the 1 500 m Coetzee improved on her personal best by 10 seconds, earning a silver medal and recording an Africa record.

“My goal is always to run a PB. I knew I was in shape to be a medal contender, but you can never assume you are going to medal.”

“The medal in the marathon was a big surprise, because the focus was on the 1 500 m. I was unsure how my body would react, not having run many long distances leading up to Tokyo, but it responded well.”

It was only confirmed three months before the Paralympics that her new guide, Estean Badenhorst (another former UFS student), would accompany her. “When we got together we clicked immediately, as we have run together in the past. We have the same kind of personality, which helps,” Coetzee says.

She will be competing in the 400 m, 800 m, 1 500 m, 5 000 m and the marathon over the next couple of years.

PHOTOS: CHARL DEVENISH

Louzanne Coetzee set a world record in the marathon T11 category (totally blind athletes), finished third, and improved her PB by two and a half minutes.



than expected

Paralympic Games



Kovsies in team South Africa

Seven UFS students were members of team South Africa at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. They were Wayde van Niekerk (athletics), Nicole Erasmus (hockey), Carla Oberholzer (cycling), Chris Dry (rugby sevens), Gerda Steyn (marathon), Neil Powell (rugby sevens head coach), and Kate Murray (triathlon coach).

Steyn was one of only five female SA athletes at the Games. Van Niekerk reached the semi-finals in the 400 m in which he still holds the world and Olympic record.

Erasmus, who earned her 50th international cap, became a fourth-generation Olympic participant in her family.



PHOTO: SUPPLIED

The Games a first for Gerda Steyn

Gerda Steyn competed at her first Olympic Games where she finished 15th out of the 91 participants. Under trying conditions, a total of 18 females could not complete the 42,2 km.

The defending Comrades and Two Oceans champion broke the South African female marathon record in April. Steyn improved the record that had stood for 25 years by more than a minute to 2:25:28.

She is also the female record holder in the Comrades up run (starting in Durban), which she set in 2019.

Solid foundation vital in Varsity Netball wins trophy

BY RUAN BRUWER

Team unity, trusting one another and playing for one another and for their Creator are some of the contributing factors singled out by the university's netball team for their netball success in 2021. They won the Varsity Netball for a record fourth time out of eight attempts. The 55-39 triumph over the Maties in Stellenbosch is one of the biggest victory margins in a final.

Bringing their best

According to coach Burta de Kock, the players promised one another before the final they would bring their best to the court. And they did. "We are blessed to have such wonderful players taking the lead and guiding and mentoring the youngsters. It is a fortunate position to be in," De Kock says.

For Khanyisa Chawane, the Player of the Match in the final and semi-final, it was a fitting end to her netball career at the UFS spanning seven years. In 2018 she became a Protea and was named as the country's top student netballer. "It was a good journey and a great decision to come to the UFS. I am where I am today (a Protea first-choice player with 37 caps) thanks to the great support and the exposure I was given here," Chawane says. According to this centre court player, winning Varsity Netball in 2018 and 2021 were two highlights. "By 2018 we had reached many finals without winning one. So, it was wonderful to finally get rewarded."

Trusting one another

The other six players involved in the final reflect:

Claudia van den Berg (goal shooter), "We knew where our strength came from, we trusted one another to do the job, and

we never lost faith. I was part of something bigger than myself with a team that motivated me to do better."

Xandri Fourie (goal attack), "We were a unit of God's army and we fought for that trophy in His name. The win made me believe I'm good enough and that hard work does pay off. It made me set even more personal goals."

Bianca de Wee (wing attack), "The key ensuring our foundation was solid, giving glory to God. During all the hard work, sacrifices and times of doubt, God was building within me. Being part of this victory is something I'll never take for granted or forget."

Sikholiwe Mdletshe (wing defence and captain), "Our faith and the implementation of the game plan in every match all contributed. It was a reward for all the hard work we had put in. It feels great to win it again as a senior team member."

Jana Scholtz (goal defence), "What pulled us through was the spiritual level we were connected on. It was such a great honour representing the UFS badge because of what it stands for and its legacy. It was a privilege being on court and contributing to the win."

Ané Retief (goalkeeper), "It was a mixture of great championship character, our preparation and then mainly God creating, bringing and keeping it all together. For me personally it was a reward for hard work, commitment, and persistence." **b**

The UFS netball team won the Varsity Netball for a record fourth time out of eight attempts.



netball's success story for a record fourth time



PHOTOS: VARSITY SPORT, CHARL DEVENISH



The Protea Khanyisa Chawane played in her last Varsity Netball tournament. She won the tournament with the UFS team in 2018, when she was also named Player of the Tournament, and 2021.



The emotion was evident after the Varsity Netball final against Maties. Here Jana Scholtz hugs a teammate in celebration.



Burta de Kock, Head Coach of the UFS netball team.

