

KE EO TABA!

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

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



Qwaqwa Campus Newsletter

November 2024





FROM THE

EDITOR

As we reflect on the past year, it is evident that the UFS Qwaqwa Campus has weathered various storms – both literal and figurative. The unprecedented snowfall that blanketed our region in September 2024 was a stark reminder of the unpredictable nature of our climate. However, it also served as a catalyst for resilience and adaptability.

This edition of the *KE EO TABA* celebrates the remarkable achievements of our staff and students. From groundbreaking research and community engagement initiatives to personal triumphs and professional milestones, our campus community continues to inspire.

We delve into the importance of mental health, exploring strategies to support our well-being in challenging times. We also highlight the significance of physical health and the role of sport in promoting a balanced lifestyle.

Our commitment to academic excellence remains steadfast. This issue features stories of successful conference presentations, groundbreaking research, and academic awards.

As we look to the future, we remain dedicated to fostering a supportive and inclusive campus environment. We encourage you to contribute your own stories and perspectives, shaping the chronicle of our community.

Let us continue to strive for excellence, embrace innovation, and make a positive impact on our campus and beyond. As we embark on a new year, let us seize the opportunity to reinvent ourselves. Whether it is adopting new habits, pursuing new passions, or simply reconnecting with loved ones, the possibilities are endless. May this holiday season be filled with joy, peace, and renewed hope. As we reflect on the past year and look forward to the future, let us embrace change and create a brighter tomorrow.

Until next time, take care of yourselves and enjoy a well-deserved break.

Precious Shamase

EDITOR

MOLAETSA WA

MOHLOPHISI

Ha re hetla morao re sheba selemo se fetileng, ho hlakile hore yunivesithi ya Freistata Qwaqwa, e bile le difefo tse mmalwa – re shebile tse etsahetseng le tse akantsweng. Ho kgetheha ha lehlwa le neng le sa lebellwa ka kgwedi ya Loetse selenong sa 2024, ke sehopotso sa ho se tshepahale ha maemo a lehodimo.

Mokgahlelo ona wa KE EO TABA, o keteka dikatleho tse babatsehang tsa basebetsi le baithuti. Ho tloha ka diphuputso tse tswileng matsoho ekasita le boikitlaetso mesebetsing ya batho yuniveisthi, ho ya fihla ho dikatleho tsa motho ka mong le tsona tsa profeshenale, batho ba rona mona khemphseng se tswela pele ho re kgothatsa.

Re kenya letsoho haholo ho bohlokwa ba mahloko a kellelo, ho tadimana le maano a tshehetsang bophelo bo botle dinakong tsa mathata. Re boela re totobatsa bohlokwa ba mmele o phetseng hantle ekasitana le seabo sa dipapadi mabapi le ho kgothaletsa tsela e ntle ya bophelo.

Maikemisetso a rona thutong e tswile matsoho e tla dula e le seikokotlelo sa rona. Mokgahlelo ona o kenyeleditse dinehelano tsa khonferense, diphuputso tse tswileng matsoho le dikgau tsa barupedi.

Ha re shebela pele ditabeng tsa bokamoso, re tsitlallela ho bopa tikoloho e kenyeletsang le hona ho tshehetsa bohle. Re o kgothaletsa hore o romele dipale tsa hao, le mehopolong ya hao, hore re tsebe ho bopa nalane setjhaba sa rona.

Ha re tsweleng pele ho tsitlallela botle, re ananele boqapi, mme re be le seabo se seholo khemphaseng ya rona le nakong e tlang. Jwalo ka ha re ya re shebile selemo se setjha, ha re nkeng monyetla ona ho ikaha botjha. E ka ba ka ho amohela mekgwa e metjha, ho latela ditabatabelo tse ntjha, kapa mohlomong ka ho ba haufi le ba lelapa la hao, menyetla yona e mengata. Ha matsatsi ana a phomolo e be a monate, a tletseng kgotso le tshepo e tiileng. Ha re lekola tsa selemo se fetileng mme re sheba pele bokamosong ba rona, ha re amoheleng diphetoho mme re bopeng bokamoso bo tjhatsi.

Ho fihlela nakong e tlang, itlhokomeleng mme le natefelwe ke matsatsi a lona a phomolo.

Precious Shamase

MOQOLOTSI

UMBHALO

WOMHLELI

Njengoba sijejeza emuva kunyaka odlulile, kuyagqama ukuthi iKhempasi yaseQwaqwa isibhekane nezivunguvungu ezinhlobonhlobo – ezesimo sezulu zangampela nezokuqhubeka kwempilo makuxoxwa. Ukukhithika kweqhwa okwagubuzela indawo yethu ngoMandulo wezi-2024 kwaba yenye yezinto ezisikhumbuzayo maqondana nesimo sezulu esingenamandla okusilawula. Noma kunjalo, kodwa lesi simo saphinde saba intuba yethemba lokubekezela nokuzijwayeza nendawo esikuyo.

Le ngosi ye-KE EO TABA ibungaza impumelelo eyingqayizivele ehlonzulwe abafundi kanye nabaqashwe inyuvesi. Kusukela ocwaningweni oluhlabahlosile kanye nezinhlelo ezibandakanya umphakathi kuya emisebenzini yomuntu ngamuye kanye nempumelelo yesikhungo sisonke, ikhempasi yethu iyaqhubeka nengququzelo.

Sibe nezinhlelo lapho sibuka khona ukubaluleka kokunakekela umqondo, nokuyilapho ebesibheka khona amasu okwelekelela impilo yethu ezikhathini ezinzima. Asigcinanga lapho, siphinde sabheka ukubaluleka kokuphila komzimba ngqo kanye neqhaza lezemidlalo ekuqhakambiseni impilo-nhle esesimweni esifanele.

Ukuzinikela kwethu ekuqhakambiseni impumelelo ngemfundo ephakeme akukakaguquki namanje. Le ngosi iqukethe izindaba zezethulo ezihambe kahle ezinkomfeni, ucwaningo oluhlabahlosile, kanye nezilokotho ezizuzwe izingcitha-buchopho.

Njengoba sibheke phambili, sizokuqhubeka nokuzinikela ekuvamiseni ikhempasi elekelelanayo futhi esiza uwonkewonke. Siyakugququzela ukuthi uphose esivivaneni ngokuthi uxoxe olwakho udaba nemibono ejwayelekile, nokuzothunga imbenge enhle ngale khempasi.

Asiqhubeke siyibambe ishisa ze sizuze impumelelo, siqhakambise ukukhula ngokwempucuzeko, bese siba nomthelela othela izithelo ezinhle ekhempasini yethu nangaphandle kwamagceke ayo nokungaba umphakathi, njalonjalo. Njengoba sibheke onyakeni omusha, ake sizame ukuzipha ithuba lokuzivuselela futhi. Hleze ungase uqale into entsha obungakaze wayenze phambilini, noma mhlampe uthi ukuzinza nezihlobo nabathandiweyo bakho, amathuba okuzivuselela maningi, awabaleki. Kungathi lamaholidi angachichima injabulo, ukuthula, kanye nethemba elisha. Njengoba sijejeza kunyaka odlulile futhi sibheke nakozayo, asizame ukuzamazamisa ushintsho siphinde sakhe ikusasa eliqhakazile.

Kuze kube ngokuzayo, uzinakekele, ulithokozele leli khefu ngoba liyadingeka.

Precious Shamase

KUMHLELI

NOTICE BOARD

Upcoming events



UFS GRADUATION CEREMONIES

Bloemfontein Campus – 9–10 December 2024



UFS REOPENS

2 January 2025



ACADEMICS RETURN

13 January 2025



REGISTRATION AND ORIENTATION

FTENS – First-time entering students
20 January–7 February 2025

Returning students/seniors
13 January–7 February 2025

LATE REGISTRATION 10–14 February 2025

SECOND SOUTHERN AFRICAN MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE



(SAMC 2025)

17–20 March 2025



GRADUATION SCHEDULE

Friday, 04 April 2025

09:00
14:00

Saturday, 05 April 2025

09:00
14:00

Faculty of The Humanities
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences
Faculty of Education
Faculty of Education

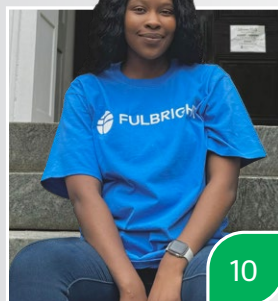
In this issue



4



8



10



13



14



18



20



22

Ke Eo Taba! editorial team

All articles in this newsletter were written by Precious Shamase, from the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, unless otherwise stated.

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Unveiling the Dark Side of Academia: The Sex for Marks Crisis

A Call for Change

In a recent talk in the Speaking for Change Talk Series hosted by the Centre for Global Change, a pressing issue was brought to light: the alarming prevalence of 'sex for marks' within higher education institutions. This insidious practice, characterised by power imbalances, coercion, and the exploitation of vulnerable students, has cast a dark shadow over the academic landscape.



Sivuyisiwe Magayana – fondly known as Siyanda among her colleagues – Senior Officer in the Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Office, led a thought-provoking discussion on this sensitive topic. She highlighted the critical need to address the underlying factors that contribute to this crisis.

Power Dynamics and Vulnerability

One of the core issues is the inherent power dynamic between lecturers and students. This imbalance can create a breeding ground for exploitation, as students may feel pressured to comply with sexual demands in exchange for academic favours.

The Complexities of Consent

Consent – a fundamental principle in any relationship – is often blurred in academic settings. Coercion can subtly mask itself as choice, making it difficult for students to recognise and resist such pressures. The dialogue emphasised the importance of redefining consent to empower students and protect them from exploitation.

Institutional Responsibility

Universities have a crucial role to play in addressing this crisis. By implementing robust policies, fostering a culture of respect, and providing adequate support systems, institutions can create safer and more equitable learning environments.

A Call to Action

The 'sex for marks' crisis demands immediate attention and collective action. By raising awareness, challenging societal norms, and advocating for systemic change, we can work towards a future where higher education is a space of learning, growth, and empowerment, free from exploitation and abuse.

Let us join hands and commit to creating a more just and equitable academic landscape. **K**



UFS Qwaqwa Campus and Royal Houses

Forge Strategic Partnership

The University of the Free State (UFS) Qwaqwa Campus and five prominent Royal Houses in the region have solidified their commitment to collaborative efforts through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

A momentous occasion occurred on the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus when the acting Vice-Chancellor, Prof Anthea Rhoda, and the Free State Royal houses signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

The historic event, held on 6 November 2024, marks a significant milestone in the university's journey towards fostering deeper engagement with the local community. In attendance at this historic event was the Executive Mayor, Her Excellency Malekula Melato, the Free State House of Traditional Leaders, and religious leaders, to mention but a few who witnessed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus and the Royal Houses.

A Shared Vision for the Future

Prof Prince Ngobeni, Campus Principal: Qwaqwa Campus, emphasised the strategic importance of the partnership,

stating that it aligns perfectly with the university's core values and mission. He said it also symbolises the beginning of an exciting partnership that will benefit both organisations. According to Prof Ngobeni, the signing of this MoU is not merely a symbolic gesture; it is a strategic imperative that aligns with the core values and mission of our university. As we embark on this new chapter, we reaffirm our commitment to the three pillars of higher education: teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.

"We recognise that a university is more than just a place of academic pursuit. It is a vibrant hub of intellectual discourse, a catalyst for innovation, and a force for social change. In keeping with this ethos, the UFS Qwaqwa Campus is dedicated to making a tangible impact on the communities we serve. Our geographical location compels us to forge strong bonds with our neighbours, to understand their needs, and to contribute to their development," said Prof Ngobeni.

The acting Vice-Chancellor of the UFS, Prof Anthea Rhoda, highlighted the university's dedication to making a tangible impact on the communities it serves. She stressed the importance of engaged scholarship, which involves connecting academic knowledge with real-world challenges.





“We believe in co-creating sustainable solutions for and with the communities around us,” she said. “This partnership with the Royal Houses exemplifies our commitment to social justice and equity.”

The UFS Qwaqwa Campus is renowned for its focus on indigenous knowledge systems. Through initiatives such as the African Medicines Innovation and Technology Development programme, the university is exploring the potential of traditional African herbs and medicinal plants to address health-care challenges.

The significance and impact

The *Barenas* expressed gratitude for the partnership, saying that the signing of the MoU was not for them, but for the community. “This event is the first of its kind. Let us work together with the university, let us make this MoU work for our communities. We are leading our communities, not ourselves. Thank you very much for allowing us to work with you. It is not a common cause

for a professor to visit and introduce himself to the royal houses,” said Morena Moloi from Makholokwe Royal House.

They also made mention of the fact that this does not only unite the *Morena* and the university, but also unites *Borena* with *Borena*. “It gives us a common identity – *Barena* from different tribes. We are partners in educating the community that we represent,” concluded Morena Tsolo from the Bakoena Royal House.

Objective of the MoU

The UFS and the Royal Houses will develop the following collaborative programmes and projects in areas of mutual interest:

- Exchange of information and knowledge, including indigenous knowledge systems and academic / research resources for research purposes
- Jointly work on community development programmes and community-based research
- Jointly develop relevant academic and short-term learning programmes
- Jointly organise symposia, seminars, and conferences
- Develop capacity development programmes for the staff of the parties involved (i.e. capacitating the emerging Royal communities, capacitating UFS staff with Royal counsel, history, and protocols)
- Other activities mutually agreed upon by the partner institutions.

The development and implementation of specific activities based on this MoU will be separately negotiated and agreed between the faculties/institutes and Royal Houses, which will carry out the specific projects. All parties agreed to carry out these activities in accordance with the laws and regulations of South Africa.

The signing of the MoU signifies a promising future for the UFS Qwaqwa Campus and the surrounding communities. By working together, the university and the Royal Houses aim to create a positive impact on the region through education, research, and community engagement. **K**



'It's Okay to Not Be Okay'

Initiating a Mental Health Paradigm Shift at the UFS

Article by Aubrey Moloto – UFS Registered Counsellor:
Student Counselling and Development

Life at the University of the Free State (UFS) represents a vibrant journey, one filled with excitement, growth, and knowledge. However, with these attributes also come pressures and challenges. Whether it is managing academic deadlines, planning, or balancing personal life, mental health can be adversely affected. Imagine a campus – a place where mental well-being is prioritised (alongside academics) – where seeking help feels as natural as grabbing a coffee and where every student and staff member feels supported. Together, we can create this reality. Although the journey may be arduous, as the saying goes: 'When 'I' is replaced by 'We,' even illness becomes wellness.' This profound insight underscores the necessity for communal support systems to foster resilience.

The Ascendancy of Mental Health Awareness: Statistics Regarding Mental Health in the Workplace

Globally, mental health awareness in workplaces has witnessed a notable escalation. In 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, studies conducted worldwide indicated a pronounced surge in mental health challenges among employees. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), anxiety and depression experienced an increase of 25% globally during the pandemic's initial year. A survey (conducted by the American Psychological Association in 2021) revealed that 59% of employees encountered work-related stress; furthermore, 87% asserted that mental health ought to be prioritised in the workplace. South Africa is no exception: the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) reports that approximately 30% of employees in South Africa confront stress, anxiety, or depression on a regular basis, thus impacting productivity and quality of life. Because mental health challenges impose a staggering cost of

\$1 trillion annually on the global economy (in terms of lost productivity), the necessity for mental health programmes within workplaces and institutions – such as the UFS – is irrefutable. Supporting mental health is not merely an option; it is imperative for both individual well-being and sustainable productivity.

Mental Health for All: A Collective Effort

Mental health concerns permeate every facet of society (not exclusively those encountering major challenges). Each individual grapples with distinct stresses and pressures; however, in our collective struggles, there exists no shame – only fortitude. As Ernest Hemingway articulated: "We're all broken; that's how the light gets in." Mental health at the UFS constitutes a collective priority (because by comprehending it more profoundly, we empower ourselves and each other to navigate life's vicissitudes). Through open conversations and education, we can foster support for one another and cultivate a campus community where mental health is neither concealed nor regarded as a weakness, but rather as a shared foundation for a more promising future.

Deconstructing Stigma: Kindness as Our Fundamental Value

At the UFS, there exists no tolerance for mental health stigma. A culture (which is) deeply entrenched in kindness, empathy, and understanding allows us to engage with one another, treating mental health with the same reverence as physical health. We have the capacity to effect change simply through attentive listening and the provision of kindness. As the adage articulates, 'be kind, for everyone you encounter is waging a battle you are unaware of.' By extending support to each other compassionately, we metamorphose our campus into a community in which no individual experiences isolation during their mental health odyssey.

Recognising When to Seek Help

Recognising when to solicit assistance can prove to be a formidable task. However, if one experiences a persistent state of anxiety, sadness, or a sense of disconnection (often described as being 'not oneself') for a duration exceeding two weeks, it is entirely appropriate to seek help. Struggling to concentrate, losing interest in previously enjoyed activities, or observing alterations in sleep or dietary habits are indicative signs that support may be necessary. Seeking assistance does not denote a lack of strength; rather, it constitutes a courageous endeavour aimed at safeguarding one's overall well-being. It is vital to remember this: "Your mind is a garden; your thoughts are the seeds. You can grow flowers, or you can grow weeds." Therefore, let us prioritise the cultivation of wellness.

Early Intervention: Our Strongest Tool

Early support can have a profound impact on mental health. Recognising when something feels 'off' allows us to intervene before a crisis develops; however, just as we would not wait for a car to break down before servicing it, we should not wait to take care of our mental health until we are in crisis. If you notice a friend or colleague withdrawing or feeling overwhelmed, take it seriously. Remember, 'the best way out is always through,' and together (this), we can support one another through life's challenges.

Creating a Safe Space: Your Space, Our Space

The UFS is committed to creating an environment where everyone feels they belong. 'Mind your mind' reminds all of us to take care of ourselves; knowing that support is always available. This mental health space belongs to every student, staff and faculty member – a safe haven, where reaching out for help is celebrated. Here at the UFS (however), we are not just offering assistance but fostering a culture where everyone feels valued and accepted. Although challenges may arise, the commitment remains unwavering – because it is essential to a thriving community.

Seeking Help: A Courageous Step

The strongest individuals (not merely those who exhibit strength outwardly) are, however, those who triumph in battles (of which we are often unaware). Seeking support represents an act of courage; it is, in fact, a reflection of genuine strength. Whether one is confronting a substantial challenge or merely requires a listening ear, reaching out constitutes a pivotal step towards well-being. Let us normalise discussions surrounding mental health at the UFS, encouraging each other to seek assistance when necessary. Together (because this is essential), we can cultivate a community where vulnerability is esteemed, and support is generously offered.

Resources for Immediate Support

The University of the Free State (UFS) provides a plethora of resources for both students and staff in pursuit of immediate

assistance and continuous mental health support: Life EHS Employee Health Solution offers staff members access to confidential support by dialling the toll-free number 0800 004 770. The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) is available for students who require urgent mental health support, reachable at 0800 006 363. Moreover, Student Counselling and Development enables UFS students to connect with professionals who specialise in a variety of services aimed at enhancing emotional well-being and facilitating personal growth. This service (indeed) offers safe spaces and expert guidance to bolster students' mental health; however, the availability of such resources is pivotal, because it addresses the pressing need for support in today's challenging environments. Although these options exist, individuals must be proactive in seeking help.

Let's Walk Together

Herein lies the challenge: we shall construct a UFS community in which no individual traverse life in solitude. By elevating one another, dismantling stigma, and reiterating that 'strength flourishes in those instances when one perceives an inability to persist, however one forges ahead regardless,' we can guarantee that the illumination of mental health remains steadfast for all at the UFS. **K**



UFS Qwaqwa Campus Hosts Conference on Science, Social Innovation, and the Future

The University of the Free State (UFS) Qwaqwa Campus recently hosted a dynamic two-day conference that highlighted the crucial intersection of science, social innovation, and the future of local societies.

Titled *Science, Social Innovation, and the Future of Local Societies: Keeping Pace in a Changing Knowledge and Political Landscape*, the conference served as a transformative platform where intellectual debate fueled innovative solutions to pressing societal issues. The event drew together a diverse array of academics, researchers, and practitioners to discuss and explore ways to bridge scientific knowledge with real-world community needs, all while navigating the complexities of a shifting knowledge and political landscape.

In his opening remarks, Prof. Prince Ngobeni, Campus Principal of the Qwaqwa Campus, emphasised the vital role of research in addressing contemporary societal challenges, describing the conference as a testament to the campus's dedication to fostering an environment of inquiry and innovation. "The Qwaqwa Campus has a

strong track record of conducting research that is both relevant and impactful," said Prof. Ngobeni. "By hosting this conference, we are reaffirming our commitment to a culture of enquiry that translates into real-world solutions." He also underscored the importance of publishing in high-impact journals, urging attendees to submit their work to Q1-Q4 publications to elevate both the visibility of their research and the reputation of the campus itself.

The conference agenda was structured to encourage dialogue and collaboration around science and social innovation's potential to drive transformative change, especially within the context of local communities. Amid rapid technological advancements, evolving political landscapes, and shifting social priorities, participants were called to consider how their research could help address both current and emerging challenges. The event showcased the research capabilities of the Qwaqwa Campus and served as a stage for a series of critical discussions around:

- The role of science in tackling societal challenges: Participants explored how scientific research can address critical issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, highlighting case studies





where science had directly influenced community development.

- **Empowering communities through social innovation:** This segment examined the potential of grassroots innovation to enable communities to meet their needs independently, fostering resilience and local solutions.
- **Emerging technologies and their societal impact:** Researchers discussed the dual nature of technological advancements—both the opportunities they create for community development and the risks they pose to vulnerable populations, especially in rural areas.
- **Policy and governance for sustainable innovation:** Discussions focused on the importance of effective policies to support sustainable development and promote social innovation, emphasising the role of governance in ensuring that technological and scientific advancements benefit all members of society.

Prof. Aliza le Roux, acting Campus Vice-Principal for Academic and Research, also delivered a compelling keynote address on the often-overlooked risk of zoonotic

diseases, which are diseases transmitted from animals to humans. With reference to diseases like COVID-19 and rabies, Prof. Le Roux discussed the global lack of focus on understanding disease transmission within wildlife populations. She stressed that most research targets human responses to these diseases, leaving critical gaps in understanding how they circulate within natural ecosystems, which hinders effective prediction of future outbreaks. “I noted that small carnivores can also be carriers of zoonotic pathogens, but we tend to ignore them. As they are also important for pest management (they eat rodents, for example), it’s not just ‘bad’ to have them around, but we certainly need to study them better if we want to prevent future epidemics,” she remarked, emphasising the need for a proactive approach in zoonotic disease research.

Prof. Le Roux expressed admiration for the diversity of research presented, noting that contributions came from a broad spectrum of scholars, from honors students to seasoned professors. She highlighted how this inclusive approach enriched the discussions, bringing together varied perspectives and fostering a unique blend of academic insight and practical expertise.

The conference concluded on a positive note with closing remarks by Dr. Puseletso Mofokeng, Deputy Chair of the Qwaqwa Research Management Forum Committee, who extended heartfelt thanks to all participants, organisers, and speakers. Dr. Mofokeng commended the event’s success in cultivating an environment of critical thinking, knowledge sharing, and collaborative spirit. “The impact of this conference will extend beyond these two days,” he remarked, “as participants return to their institutions and communities equipped with new insights and partnerships, prepared to contribute to the collective goal of sustainable development and social transformation.”

The UFS Qwaqwa Campus’s commitment to academic excellence and community engagement was clearly evident through its organisation of this impactful conference. By fostering meaningful conversations around the challenges facing local societies, the campus continues to solidify its role as a leader in research and innovation dedicated to building resilient, informed communities for the future. **K**



Buhle Hlatshwayo's Fulbright Experience

A young academic's journey of growth and discovery

Buhle Hlatshwayo, a recent Fulbright scholar, has returned to South Africa with a wealth of experiences and insights gained from her time in the United States. Her journey, marked by academic pursuits, cultural immersion, and personal growth, left an indelible mark on her life.

A Glimpse into American Culture

One of the most memorable experiences for Buhle was attending a thrilling American football game at a packed stadium. This iconic sport, deeply embedded in American culture, captivated her and provided a first-hand glimpse into the passion and fervour surrounding it.

Thanksgiving was another significant American holiday that offered Buhle a chance to celebrate with friends and family. Indulging in traditional dishes such as roast turkey and pumpkin pie, she gained a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of this holiday and the importance of gratitude and togetherness.

Teaching isiZulu in the American South

Teaching isiZulu at the University of Georgia presented both challenges and rewards. While the language barrier and unfamiliarity with the language posed initial hurdles, Buhle adapted and found innovative ways to engage her students. The curiosity and enthusiasm of the students, coupled with the opportunity to collaborate with other Fulbright scholars on a quadrilingual book project, made the experience truly enriching.

Personal and Academic Growth

The Fulbright experience not only broadened Buhle's academic horizons, but also shaped her as an individual. By volunteering at a local shelter and engaging in various academic activities, she developed a strong sense of service and a desire to make a positive impact on the world.

Buhle believes that the Fulbright programme has significantly influenced her career goals. The exposure to diverse perspectives and the opportunity to network with other scholars inspired her to pursue a second master's degree in international relations or African studies.

A Call to Cultural Understanding

Going down memory lane, this is what Hlatshwayo had to say about her journey, "My time in the United States was a pivotal moment in my academic journey. Immersing myself in a new academic environment, I had the privilege of attending and presenting at conferences, participating in stimulating round-table discussions, and enrolling in two non-degree courses at the University of Georgia. These experiences exposed me to diverse perspectives and challenged me to think critically. The constructive feedback and encouragement from renowned scholars have significantly shaped my academic trajectory."

Beyond academic growth, the Fulbright experience profoundly transformed her as an individual. She discovered a newfound passion for service and a deeper understanding of humility. Volunteering at her host institution and within the community was incredibly fulfilling, as she had the opportunity to make a tangible impact on the lives of others. The monthly visits to the homeless shelter were particularly rewarding, igniting a desire to give back and contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Inspired by this transformative experience, Hlatshwayo aspires to establish an NGO in the future. While she cannot disclose the specific details yet, she shared that it will be a personal endeavour, rooted in her own experiences and aimed at addressing a pressing social issue.

Hlatshwayo encourages students and educators to promote cultural awareness and understanding through initiatives such as language clubs, cultural events, and diverse curricula. By embracing cultural differences and fostering intercultural dialogue, we can build a more connected and compassionate world.

As the Fulbright scholar looks to the future, she aspires to continue engaging in international exchange programmes and initiatives. With a passion for learning and a commitment to global citizenship, she wishes to make a lasting impact on the world. **K**



Protection Services Staff Level Up: A Commitment to Professionalism

The University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus Department of Protection Services is proud to announce significant strides in its continued commitment to professionalisation. Several staff members have recently obtained qualifications that will enhance their skills and knowledge, ultimately benefiting the entire campus community.


A Focus on Expertise

Eric Duma, Assistant Director: Protection Services – a seasoned member of the team – furthered his expertise by completing a Postgraduate Diploma in Forensic Investigations and Criminal Justice at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and a Senior Management Development Programme at the university of the Free State (UFS). This advanced qualification has equipped him with the latest techniques and methodologies in forensic investigations, ensuring that the department remains at the forefront of security practices.

Several other staff members have also undertaken professional development programmes to enhance their security management skills. Tshokelo Molefe, Lerato Makhokolo, Boichoko Mokgadi, John Chaka, Kostina Mahlangu, Ntaku Ramasilo, and Tshepo Motaung have successfully completed one-year programmes in Security Management and Security Practice at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

A Safer Campus for All

These achievements emphasise the department's dedication to providing a safe and secure environment for the entire campus community. By investing in the professional development of its staff, Protection Services ensures that it can effectively address emerging security challenges and maintain the highest standards of service delivery.

The university commends these staff members for their commitment to lifelong learning and their dedication to enhancing security on the campus. 



30 Years of Democracy:

A Dialogue on Qwaqwa's Future

Three decades since the dawn of democracy, South Africa is on a journey marked by both triumph and challenges. In commemoration of Heritage Month, the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies (CGAS) hosted a significant dialogue that brought together key stakeholders from local organisations in Qwaqwa and surrounding areas.

The event aimed to reflect on the 30 years of democracy in South Africa, while envisioning the next 30 years for the region. The dialogue is titled *Democracy@30: towards a reimagination of the Qwaqwa we collectively desire*. This dialogue aimed to reflect on the past 30 years of democracy, identify enablers for a prosperous future, and develop actionable plans to shape Qwaqwa's destiny.

The dialogue served as a platform for organisations, where CGAS Community Development students were placed to share their experiences and perspectives. Participants discussed the challenges and successes faced over the past three decades and explored potential pathways to a more equitable and prosperous future for Qwaqwa.

A key partner in the dialogue was the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The HSRC conducted a parallel study on the 30 years of democracy in Qwaqwa, focusing on both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The dialogue provided an opportunity for the HSRC to share its findings and gather additional insights from the participating organisations.

By combining the perspectives of community development practitioners, students, and researchers, the dialogue offered a comprehensive understanding of the current state of Qwaqwa and the aspirations for its future. The event highlighted the importance of collaboration and collective action in shaping a more inclusive and just society.

Participants expressed a sense of disillusionment with the past 30 years, contrasting the promises of democracy with the realities of broken promises, corruption, poor governance, and socio-economic challenges. They reminisced about a pre-democracy Qwaqwa characterised by self-reliance, community cohesion, and economic prosperity.

Envisioning a Brighter Future


To build the Qwaqwa we collectively desire, participants identified several key enablers:

Socio-Economic Enablers:

Self-sufficiency and livelihood generation: Emphasis on water and natural resource management, agriculture, and tourism to stimulate economic activity.

Economic diversification: Investing in manufacturing and supporting youth-run businesses to create employment opportunities.

Strong community structures: Fostering community cohesion and leadership to drive development initiatives.

The community dialogue served as a platform for critical reflection and collective visioning. By identifying key enablers and developing actionable plans, participants demonstrated a commitment to shaping Qwaqwa's future. Through continued dialogue, collaboration, and implementation of these strategies, Qwaqwa can aspire for a future of prosperity, equity, and sustainable development. 



Pop-Up Market Promotes Heritage and Community in Qwaqwa

In celebration of Heritage Month, the Centre for Graduate Studies (CGAS) at the University of the Free State (UFS) hosted a successful pop-up market that showcased the rich cultural heritage of the Qwaqwa community. The event aimed to promote entrepreneurship, foster community engagement, and preserve indigenous traditions.

The pop-up market, themed 'Livelihoods and Entrepreneurship in the Decade of Indigenous Languages', featured a diverse range of local exhibitors showcasing their products and services. From handcrafted jewellery and paintings to traditional clothing and delicious food, the market offered something for everyone.

One of the primary goals of the event was to support local entrepreneurs and provide them with a platform to showcase their talents. Many of the exhibitors expressed gratitude for the opportunity to connect with potential customers and gain exposure for their businesses.

In addition to the market, the event also featured cultural performances, including traditional dancing, singing, and poetry. These performances helped to create a vibrant and festive atmosphere and further pointed out the importance of preserving indigenous heritage.

The CGAS collaborated with several key stakeholders to make the pop-up market a success, including the Human Sciences Research Council, the Office for International Affairs, Student Affairs, Communication and Marketing, University Estates, ER 24, internal catering vendors, the Department of Arts and Culture, Standard Bank, and external media outlets.

The event attracted a large crowd of attendees and generating significant interest in the local community. The CGAS has expressed a desire to continue hosting similar events in the future, as it believes that these initiatives can play a vital role in promoting entrepreneurship, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering a sense of community. **K**



A Green Future: Prof Ashafa's

Vision for a Healthier Planet

Among the 2024 highlights, Prof Anofi Ashafa's inaugural lecture was one of the treasured moments.

The UFS Qwaqwa Campus was abuzz with excitement as it hosted the inaugural lecture of Prof Anofi Ashafa from the department of plant Sciences. This momentous occasion marked a significant milestone in the academic journey of this distinguished scholar. The inaugural lecture – a lecture that signifies an academic's official promotion to full professorship.

Prof Ashafa, a prominent expert in phytomedicine phytopharmacology, delivered a captivating lecture, titled *Green Solutions: The Panacea to Global Disease Burdens*. In his address, he delved into the immense potential of plants to address pressing global health challenges. With his signature blend of scientific rigour and engaging storytelling, Prof Ashafa painted a compelling picture of a future where nature provides the key to a healthier planet.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation, Prof Vasu Reddy, lauded Prof Ashafa's groundbreaking research and his unwavering commitment to academic excellence. He stressed the importance of such inaugural lectures in fostering intellectual discourse and inspiring future generations of scholars.

Prof Aliza le Roux, the acting Vice-Principal: Academic and Research, highlighted Prof Ashafa's significant

contributions to the field of phytomedicine. She commended his innovative research, his dedication to mentoring students, and his unwavering passion for advancing scientific knowledge.

Prof Ashafa was recognised for his scientific achievement with a C2 rating from the NRF. He obtained his PhD in 2010 and has since been a leading figure on the Qwaqwa Campus, where he was Subject Head for Plant Sciences from 2011 to 2015. He was Assistant Dean from 2015 to 2019 and started the Phytomedicine and Phytopharmacology research programme in the Department of Plant Sciences. Since then, the department has grown in terms of new laboratories opening up and more postgraduate programmes being supervised in the department. This is what being a professor is all about – forging the path ahead so that others can follow. Prof Ashafa has published 134 peer-reviewed articles and 4 book chapters, which has led to a Scopus h-index of 16 and a Google Scholar h-index of 32. He has had 3128 citations of his work. He is doing work that is recognised globally, and we are extremely proud to be part of his journey. He has supervised thirteen MSc and seven PhD candidates and eleven postdoctoral fellows to completion and is continuing to do so.

As Prof Ashafa concluded his lecture, the audience was left inspired by his vision of a greener, healthier future. His groundbreaking research and unwavering commitment to academic excellence have positioned him as a leading figure in the field of phytomedicine. **K**





Faculty of Humanities Celebrates First-Ever African Languages Seminar

The Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State (UFS) Qwaqwa Campus recently hosted a groundbreaking seminar where African Languages Department members presented their research articles in their mother tongues. This marked a historic first for the campus, promoting the use and appreciation of African languages in academic discourse.


Dr Siphwe Alfred Ndebele, a participant in the seminar, expressed the significance of the event. “The presentations in African languages were of utmost importance,” he shared. “It gave us the opportunity to showcase the value of our languages and contribute our traditional knowledge to the academic space.”

The seminar, held on August 21st, 2024, at the Senate Hall, featured presentations by four faculty members. Ms. Mary Mensele presented on “Dikamano ho ya ka Matla ka hare ho Neanotaba ya Basotho: Ka Tshebediso ya Tshomo ya Sesotho ‘Dimo le Mmadiepetsane’ (Power Relations in Folklore: The Relevance of Basotho Folktales),” while Dr Maboahlokoa Khanyetsi’s presentation explored “Tlhahiso ea basali ’minong oa koriana: chalimo ea Sannere ka Lerato (The depiction of women in Basotho accordion music: Sannere’s perspective in Lerato).” Busane presented his research article entitled Ukwenganyelwa kwesiZulu nesisuthu

njengezilimi zemfundo ephakeme eNyuvesi yase-Free State: Kubukwa ngeso lokusingathwa kolimi (Managing isiZulu and Sesotho as languages of the academy at the University of the Free State: A language management approach. U kwenga and Dr. Ndebele presented his article entitled: Ukunukana, ubutha, nobuthakathi kwabesifazane abagane esithenjini emibhalweni yobuciko yesizulu (The smelling out, animosity, women and witchcraft as depicted in the polygamous sphere within isiZulu novels).

The presentations were well-received by the audience, who actively participated in discussions and asked questions, some in English and others directly in Sesotho. This highlighted the multilingual nature of the university community and the growing recognition of African languages as mediums for scholarly exchange.

While acknowledging the success of the seminar, Dr Ndebele emphasised the need for further improvements. “The absence of interpreters for all languages presented is an area for future consideration,” he noted. “This will ensure inclusivity for everyone attending such events.”

Looking ahead, the Faculty of Humanities is committed to furthering a more multilingual environment. The seminar on African languages serves as a significant evidence that UFS has made significant strides and step in this direction, paving the way for future presentations and publications in African languages. The faculty extends its gratitude to all participants and organisers who contributed to this historic event. 

Congratulations to our

Long Service awards recipients



A Journey of Dedication: Sophie Tlatsi Celebrates 34 Years of Exceptional Service

Sophie Tlatsi, Office Manager in the Office of the Qwaqwa Campus Principal, recently marked a significant milestone in her career: 34 years of dedicated service to the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus.

Reflecting on her journey, Tlatsi emphasised the importance of staying true to yourself. She shared, "Success is about embracing your unique qualities and letting them guide you towards a life of purpose. Challenges may arise, but it's essential to remain steadfast in your character."

Over the past three decades, Tlatsi has had the privilege of working alongside eight exceptional campus principals. This diverse exposure to various leadership styles and perspectives honed her adaptability, broadened her understanding, and fostered both professional and personal growth. Her ability to thrive in dynamic environments has been a hallmark of her career.



A 34-Year Legacy: Mampatene Vilakazi's Dedication to the Library

Mampatene Vilakazi, a dedicated library professional, celebrated 34 years of service on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus. Her journey has been marked by a willingness to adapt to the changing landscape of library services.

One of the most significant milestones in her career was the transition from traditional library practices to technology-driven systems. From manual processes to self-checkouts and the upcoming introduction of a self-service drop box – Vilakazi has embraced these changes with enthusiasm.

Her gratitude for the support of colleagues and the institution is evident. She emphasised the importance of lifelong learning and a passion for one's work, especially when working with different generations.

Vilakazi's 34-year legacy is proof of her commitment to providing excellent library services. Her adaptability and dedication have made a significant contribution to the academic community on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus.



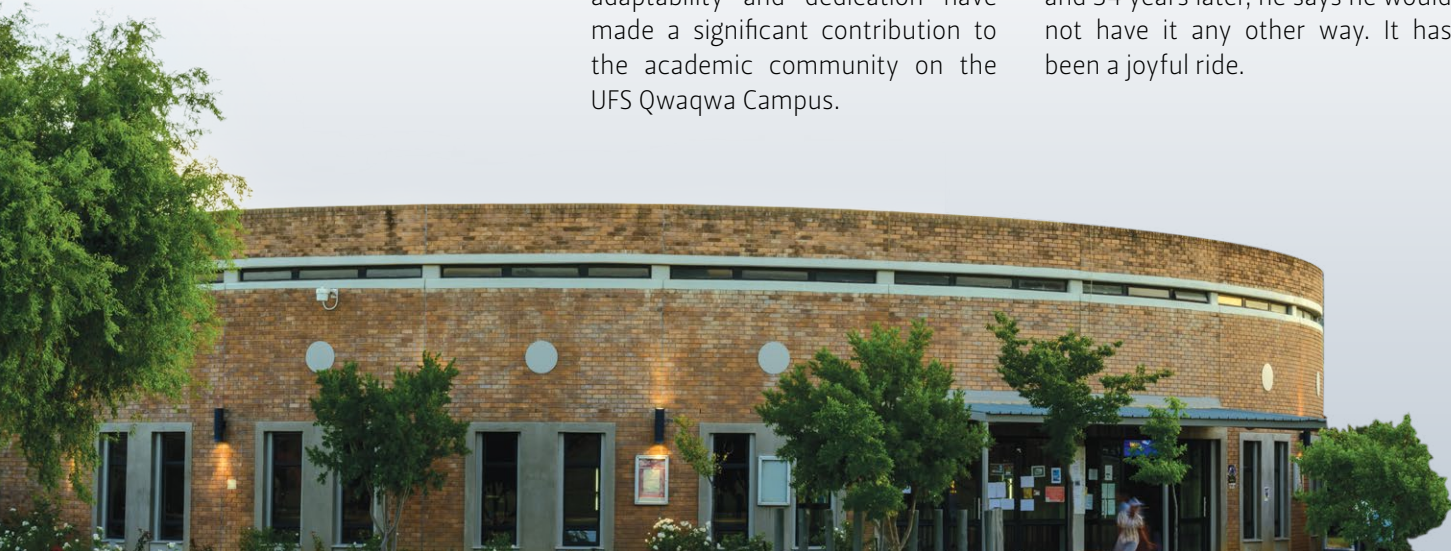
A 34-Year Legacy: Jack Vezi's Dedication to the UFS

Jack Vezi, Assistant Director of Human Resources, has marked a remarkable 34 years of service to the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus.

Vezi's journey at the university has been marked by continuous growth and professional development. From his early days to his current role, he has embraced the opportunities provided by the institution to further his education and career aspirations. The supportive environment fostered by the university has ignited a passion for learning and a drive to succeed.

A significant moment in Vezi's career was the transition from traditional filing systems to digital technology. This shift, coupled with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, required adaptability and a willingness to embrace new ways of working.

He has seen many changing faces of the Qwaqwa Campus since 1990, and 34 years later, he says he would not have it any other way. It has been a joyful ride.





From General Worker to Head of Transport: Mokitlane Manyarela's 42 Years at the UFS

Mokitlane Manyarela has dedicated 42 years to the UFS Qwaqwa Campus, a journey marked by growth and commitment. He began as a general worker, stepping into a role he describes as filled with “uncertainty.” Over the years, his adaptability allowed him to move through various departments, from reprographics (where he handled exam paper printing) to procurement, finance, and ultimately to his current position as Head of Transport.

Manyarela's connection to UFS goes beyond his own career; he is especially grateful for the opportunities the institution has given his family. Thanks to UFS, his wife and five children were able to pursue and achieve their degrees, a blessing he calls one of his most cherished achievements. Starting at the age of 18, the campus has truly become a second home to him, with its halls and surroundings holding years of memories and professional milestones. Now, as he nears retirement, he reflects on his time at UFS with a mixture of wonder and melancholy, acknowledging the deep bonds he's formed with the university community.

His journey stands as a testament to the value of perseverance, adaptability, and a strong sense of belonging, inspiring others and showcasing the positive impact of UFS on the lives of its staff and their families.



33 Years Strong: Moeketsi Moferefere's Journey at the UFS

Moeketsi Moferefere stands tall as a testament to commitment and resilience on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus, celebrating 33 years of service since 1991. His journey is a powerful example of overcoming challenges and thriving within the institution.

Moferefere's path began in Protection Services, and his commitment was rewarded with a promotion to the Department of Facilities and Maintenance. This experience provided him with invaluable opportunities to collaborate with academics, support staff, and various faculties. He plays a crucial role in promoting effective communication and organisational unity, particularly during venue bookings.

Reflecting on his time at the university, Moferefere expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the environment that fostered his growth, resilience, and commitment to hard work. He highlighted the positive impact that the UFS has had on his career, despite the inevitable challenges encountered along the way.

Moferefere serves as an inspiration to the next generation. His advice to young minds is clear: “Master your skills, exceed expectations, tackle challenges head on, and pour your heart into your work.” This message symbolises the spirit of dedication and perseverance that has defined his remarkable 33-year career at the UFS.



A 30-Year Legacy: Phelephe Dlamini's Journey of Growth and Compassion

Phelephe Dlamini's 30-year journey on the UFS Qwaqwa Campus is a testament to the power of hard work, dedication, and a compassionate heart. From humble beginnings as a cleaner, Dlamini's career has blossomed into a leadership role as a team leader.

Despite facing challenges along the way, Dlamini's unwavering commitment to her work has been a driving force. She emphasised the importance of not only respecting one's work, but also recognising the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by students. Dlamini believes that caregivers have a responsibility to support those in need, particularly the isolated, struggling, and vulnerable. By striving to understand their struggles, breaking down barriers, and fostering communication, they can make a significant impact on these lives.

One of Dlamini's greatest highlights was the strong sense of community that she found within the institution. Colleagues have become lifelong friends, creating a supportive environment where they can share experiences, grow together, and overcome challenges.

As Dlamini reflected on her career, she offered words of wisdom to future generations: respect your work and its impact on others, work tirelessly to provide exceptional service, and recognise the power of community and compassion. **K**

A Pioneering Spirit: **Dr Mahudi Mofokeng's** *Academic Triumph*

A Visionary Educator

Dr Mahudi Mofokeng, a seasoned Early Childhood Education (ECE) lecturer at the University of the Free State (UFS), recently achieved a significant milestone by completing her PhD. Her journey, marked by unwavering dedication and a passion for education, has not only enriched her academic career but also promises to reshape the landscape of early childhood education.



that even though it seems complicated, it is doable, and unfortunately you must do it alone.”

A Groundbreaking Discovery

Through her research, Dr Mofokeng uncovered a critical finding: the underrepresentation of male teachers in early childhood settings limits young children's exposure to diverse role models. She highlighted the need for increased recruitment of male educators to create a more balanced and inclusive learning environment.

A Call for Change

Dr Mofokeng advocates for a proactive approach to address this issue. She calls upon the departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training to develop frameworks that encourage and support male teachers to enter the field of early childhood education. By fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment, we can ensure that all children learn from a diverse range of educators.

A Gap in the Field

Having spent 20 years teaching in rural Qwaqwa, Dr Mofokeng observed a glaring disparity in the gender composition of early childhood educators. The predominance of female teachers in this field has raised pertinent questions about the potential benefits of male educators and the factors hindering their entry. Driven by this curiosity, she embarked on a research journey to delve deeper into the issue.

Overcoming Challenges

The path to her PhD was fraught with challenges. Dr Mofokeng had to navigate a vast body of academic literature, conduct extensive research, and seek guidance from experienced mentors. With the unwavering support of her supervisor, Dr BN Ndlovu, and Dr KR Mukuna, as well as the encouragement of her family, she persevered through countless hours of study and research. Reflecting on her journey, she recalls: “It was not easy, but Dr Tsotetsi encouraged me by saying

A Bright Future

As Dr Mofokeng embarks on the next chapter of her academic career, she aims to continue her research and contribute to the advancement of early childhood education. She plans to supervise postgraduate students, write scholarly articles, and conduct workshops to raise awareness about the importance of male educators.

In his congratulatory message, the Assistant Dean: Faculty of Education on the Qwaqwa Campus, Dr Cias Tsotetsi, said: “I have known Dr Mofokeng for a period of about 10 years. Her success signifies and stresses the importance of patience and persistence. Surely ‘patience is the mother of success,’” concluded Dr Tsotetsi. **K**

Dr Cias Tsotetsi and Team Recognised for Excellence in Teaching

Dr Cias Tsotetsi and his dedicated team were celebrated for their exceptional contributions to teaching and learning at the University of the Free State (UFS). The group recently received prestigious Learning and Teaching awards, a testament to their commitment to fostering academic excellence and student success.

Dr Tsotetsi – Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Education – and his team were instrumental in creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Their innovative teaching methods and passion for their subject matter have inspired countless students to reach their full potential. Under their guidance, the team implemented various initiatives to enhance student engagement.

The departmental Learning and Teaching awards recognise individuals and teams who have made significant contributions to the teaching and learning process.

The criteria for selection include:

- **Innovative teaching methods:** The use of creative and effective approaches to engage students.
- **Student engagement:** The ability to foster a positive and inclusive learning environment.
- **Curriculum development:** Contributions to the design and improvement of course materials.
- **Assessment practices:** The development and implementation of fair and effective assessment methods.

In addition to their academic achievements, Dr Tsotetsi and his team are also known for their dedication to mentoring and supporting students. They provide guidance and encouragement, helping students overcome challenges and achieve their goals.

The award is a well-deserved recognition of Dr Tsotetsi and his team's hard work and dedication. Their contributions to the UFS community have had a lasting impact on the lives of countless students. K



UFS Qwaqwa Volleyball Team Makes a *Splash on the National Stage*

The University of the Free State (UFS) Qwaqwa Campus volleyball team burst onto the national scene in September 2024, making a remarkable debut at the University Sport South Africa (USSA) tournament hosted by the University of Limpopo.

This was exceptional, considering the fact that they have only been active since September 2024. As it stands, the volleyball team is newbies on the block, therefore there is no prior history of their participation in the regional or national competition.

Despite its limited experience, the team displayed exceptional skill, determination, and sportsmanship. Coach Matseliso Lesenyeho attributes their success to a player-centred approach, emphasising the importance of confidence, continuous improvement, and teamwork.

A standout moment for the team was their thrilling match against the University of the Western Cape (UWC), which propelled them into the semi-finals.

Although they ultimately secured the silver medal, the experience ignited a passion for volleyball within the team and the institution. “Since it was our very first USSA tournament, the team went into the competition with great enthusiasm and positivity. The motto going there was to have fun while learning from our first experience,” explained Lesenyeho.

The team’s achievement is an indication of the dedication and hard work of both the players and the coaching staff. As they look to the future, the team aims to build on their success, improve their skills, and strive for gold medals in upcoming USSA tournaments.

Lesenyeho envisions a future where volleyball becomes a thriving sport at UFS Qwaqwa, attracting more participants and fostering a vibrant volleyball culture. By investing in coaching, training, and team-building activities, the team hopes to inspire the next generation of volleyball stars. She concluded by expressing her excitement, “I am excited to see our team grow and progress in upcoming competitions. Our goal is to create a thriving volleyball community. We are dedicated to building a group that makes a lasting impact.” **K**



Academic Administration and Systems Renewal (AASR)

Project Gains Momentum

The University of the Free State (UFS) is committed to enhancing its academic administration processes and empowering its staff through innovative training initiatives. The Academic Administration Systems Renewal (AASR) project, a key driver of this transformation, is making significant strides.

A New Era of Training and Development

To align with the evolving needs of the higher education landscape, the Registrar's office has established a dedicated Training and Development function within the Systems and Project Management Directorate (SPMD). This strategic move aims to streamline and unify training activities, ensuring that staff members involved in academic administration processes are equipped with the necessary skills to excel in their roles.

The training programme is designed to cater for both entry-level and experienced staff, offering a diverse range of options, including:

- **Train-the-Trainer:** Empowering staff to share knowledge and expertise within the organisation.
- **Train-the-Tester:** Equipping staff to rigorously evaluate new systems and identify potential issues before deployment.
- **Functional Training:** Staff is equipped with skills to utilise functionalities commonly used in the student administration domain.
- **Process Training:** Providing in-depth training on specific academic administration processes.

AASR Project: A Focus on User-Centric Transformation

The AASR project is central to the UFS' modernisation efforts. By implementing cutting-edge technology and streamlining processes, the project aims to improve efficiency, accuracy, and accessibility for both staff and students.


A recent milestone in the project was the successful completion of the 'Train-the-Tester' pilot programme. This initiative empowered a select group of testers to assess the functionality of the 2025 online registration system. Through rigorous testing and user acceptance testing, the

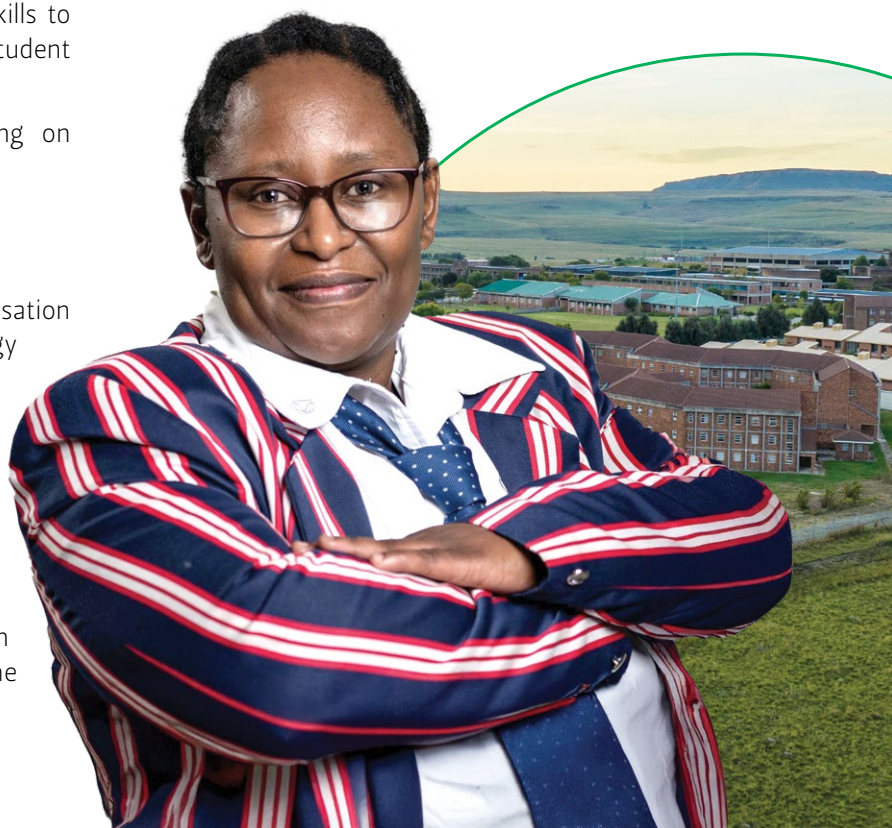
system is being refined to ensure optimal performance and user satisfaction.

Looking ahead, the AASR project team is focused on the launch of the 2025 online application for the upcoming academic cycle. Additionally, nine focus groups comprising key stakeholders are actively working to refine requirements and shape the system's design to meet the evolving needs of prospective students and academic administrators.

A Collaborative Approach to Change Management

To facilitate a smooth transition to the new systems and processes, the AASR project is implementing a robust change management framework. Roadshow events and workshops are being organised to engage with staff and address any concerns or questions. By fostering open communication and collaboration, the project aims to minimise disruption and maximise the benefits of the new systems.

As the AASR project progresses, the UFS remains committed to investing in its staff and embracing technological advancements. By empowering its workforce and modernising its systems, the university is poised to enhance its academic administration processes and deliver exceptional services to its students. 



ARU Secures Two Norwegian–South African Grants for Mountain Research

The Afromontane Research Unit (ARU) at the University of the Free State (UFS) has achieved another milestone by securing two Norwegian–South African grants.

The latest funding, awarded through a combined Norway–South African bilateral programme (NatuRA) and through Norway’s NORPART programme (INTEREST), will support capacity development and knowledge exchange in the field of mountain research in both South Africa and Norway.

NatuRA: A Foundation for Sustainable Resource Use

The NatuRA programme, titled ‘*Sustainable use of natural resources in alpine and mountain grassland ecosystems under global change*’, focuses on bringing together complex ecological data and traditional knowledge in alpine areas in South Africa (Qwaqwa Maloti) and Norway (Fjordlands) within communally managed mountain rangelands. NatuRA was proposed by the University of Bergen, and was co-developed with the ARU (UFS), the University of Pretoria, and the University of Venda, in partnership with local rangeland custodians (including the Royal Houses in Qwaqwa, and Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge).

Addressing Critical Challenges

By addressing the impact of various global change

drivers on mountain grassland ecosystems, NatuRA is directly relevant to the ‘areas under pressure’ theme of the NORPART call. The project’s unique feature is its focus on all five main global change drivers, emphasising challenges related to climate and the environment.

Strengthening Research Excellence and Capacity Development

The new grant, titled ‘*INTEREST: Integrating Ecological Research and Education to fill societal knowledge needs on the nature crisis*’, aligns closely with NatuRA.

INTEREST will contribute to increasing research excellence and capacity development between Norway and South Africa. By developing novel trans- and interdisciplinary research approaches – including young researchers – and working jointly on planning, execution, analysis, and dissemination of data and results, the project will strengthen both individual competence and institutional capacity.

Building on Previous Success

These new grants build on the success of the ARU’s EU Biodiversa ‘RangeX’ project, which has been implemented over the past four years as part of a global consortium, and which is locally a novel experiment in the alpine grasslands of the Maloti–Drakensberg. NatuRA will build on this complex open-top chamber experiment in the ARU’s alpine lease area at Witsieshoek, enabling a three-year extension of the infrastructure, combined




with new experiments. This all contributes to the intellectual standing of the Mont-aux-Sources Long-term Social-Ecological Research Site, of which the ARU alpine lease area forms a part.

Prof Vasu Reddy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation, commented: "This second wave of grants confirms the ARU's local and international standing. It is a great achievement ahead of other successes, including the looming second Southern African Mountain Conference scheduled from 17 to 20 March 2025. NatuRA is a bilateral project, with NOK4 000 000 (= ZAR6 464 440, valued on the date of the exchange rate). The UFS – via the ARU – is the lead South African partner. I am exceptionally proud of our leadership in the ARU, and even more so, our leadership in mountainscape research."

ARU's Position as a Leading Research Unit

The ARU's involvement in these projects – and as local lead for NatuRA – further solidifies its position as a leading African research unit in mountain research and international collaboration. This achievement also emphasises the university's commitment to addressing global environmental challenges and contributing to sustainable development.

The ARU's success in securing these grants reflect the university's strong partnerships with international institutions and its ability to attract funding for innovative research projects. As the ARU continues to make significant strides in the field of mountain research, it is poised to play a pivotal role in addressing the pressing environmental challenges facing both South Africa and the world. 



Understanding, Preventing, and Supporting Women with Breast Cancer

Article by Dr Pululu Sexton Mahasa –

UFS Lecturer: Geography / NAS Timetable Chairperson / Programme Director

One of the biggest causes of death among women worldwide and a serious threat to global health is breast cancer. The World Health Organisation's Global Breast Cancer Initiative (WHO – GBCI) has the goal of lowering the annual death rate from breast cancer by 2,5%, which would save 2,5 million lives by 2040.

The WHO – GBCI seeks to provide low- and middle-income nations with access to breast cancer care through sustainable health systems using tried-and-true approaches that are suited for the given nation and its available resources. According to Ong et al. (2024) and Barriontos-Toro et al. (2024), the framework suggests that nations concentrate their efforts on creating and enhancing initiatives that 1) identify at least 60% of breast cancer cases in the early stages of the illness; 2) identify cases of breast cancer within 60 days of initial presentation; and 3) successfully control the illness, such that 80% of patients finish their prescribed course of care as mentioned in the World Health Organisation's Global Breast Cancer Initiative.


Published data have shown that 5–10% of breast cancer is hereditary and mostly related to *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* gene mutations. Efforts to identify such mutations are extremely important, given the high penetrance rates among its carriers. In a meta-analysis of published studies, the estimated mean cumulative risk for breast and ovarian cancers by 70 years of age for *BRCA1* mutation carriers was 57% and 40%, respectively, while carriers of *BRCA2* mutation had a risk of 49% and 18%, respectively. Risk-reduction interventions, such as bilateral mastectomies and oophorectomies, are highly recommended in such patients. More recently, data have shown that specific breast cancer treatment may be informed by the *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* mutation status. Data on the cancer genetics/genomic are scarce in Africa. This rarity of the studies is due to a lack of cancer registries, capacity building, and equipped laboratories on cancer surveillance on the African continent. The reported data are not representative of all African population disparities, because many studies have reported the genetic diversities of African ancestries.

Breast cancer is a hetero-geneous disease, meaning that it manifests in different forms based on various factors, such as the type of cells involved, the presence of specific receptors, and other molecular characteristics. Numerous subtypes of breast cancer exist, and the disease is intricate and multidimensional. Genetic, environmental, and lifestyle variables, including climate change, all interact to shape each subtype. Changes in temperature, precipitation patterns, and extreme weather occurrences are signs of climate change, which is becoming more widely acknowledged as a serious worldwide issue with broad effects on human health, including breast cancer. The various forms of breast cancer are examined along with the direct and indirect effects on risk factors, preventative measures, and treatment outcomes. The following are seven forms of breast cancer:

- 1 Ductal carcinoma *in situ* (DCIS);
- 2 Invasive ductal carcinoma (IDC);
- 3 Invasive lobular carcinoma (ILC);
- 4 Inflammatory breast cancer (IBC);
- 5 Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC);
- 6 HER2-positive breast cancer (the human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2) protein) and
- 7 Hormone receptor-positive (HR+) breast cancer.

Summarily, from the seven subtypes of cancer prevalent in South Africa, it is evident that breast cancer encompasses various subtypes, each with unique characteristics and risk factors. While many risk factors associated with breast cancer receive more focus, the direct impact of climate change on breast cancer subtypes remains a topic of continuing research. Indirect effects such as alterations in environmental exposures, disruptions in health-care services, and exacerbation of social determinants of health may influence breast cancer incidence, progression, and treatment outcomes.



Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a time dedicated to educating the public, honouring survivors, and mobilising support for those affected. Let us make it a real opportunity to commit to greater awareness, personal wellness, and community support. Together, we can create a future where breast cancer is better understood, preventable, and more successfully treated for everyone. 




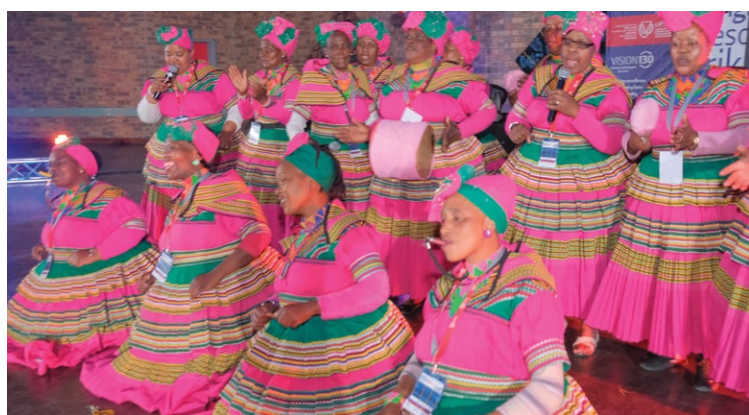
Reflecting on 2024: **Celebrating Diversity and Unity**

As we reflect on the year 2024, we recall some of the most remarkable moments that made us proud.

In September, the University of the Free State (UFS) Qwaqwa Campus hosted the annual Kovsies Multilingual Mokete, a vibrant celebration of diversity and cultural expression. Held on 13 September 2024, the event showcased the rich tapestry of languages, traditions, and talents within the UFS community.

The mokete, themed 'Our Diversity is Our Strength,' offered a platform for students and staff to share their unique cultural heritage. From traditional attire and cuisine to captivating performances of poetry, drama, music, and dance, the event was a feast for the senses.

The mokete aligns with the UFS' multilingual language policy, which aims to create a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment. By embracing diversity and promoting multilingualism, the university fosters a sense of belonging and understanding among its students and staff. 





The year is drawing to a close.

We hope that this holiday season brings you joy, peace, and relaxation. May the new year bring you happiness, health, and prosperity.

Happy holidays!

**Wishing you a
prosperous new year!**

