



A legacy of care and compliance: Honouring Jeanne Niemann's service to international students at the UFS

After more than two decades of dedicated service, Jeanne Niemann's retirement from the University of the Free State (UFS) marks the close of a significant chapter in the university's internationalisation story. Known for her precision, integrity, and unwavering dedication to international students and staff, Jeanne leaves behind a legacy rooted in both compliance and compassion.

Her journey began at a single desk in the Registrar's Office and evolved into a central role within the Office for International Affairs, where she served as the university's lead immigration officer. Her impact was far-reaching – affecting institutional processes, national policy engagement and, most importantly, the lived experiences of thousands of international students.

Jeanne was not only a systems expert, but a mentor and builder of institutional capacity. She trained several staff members within the Office for International Affairs and beyond – many of whom now serve in critical roles at the UFS and other institutions. Her knowledge-sharing extended nationally, with professionals across South Africa regularly turning to her for advice on student visa protocols and compliance frameworks.

As the university's expert on international student immigration, Jeanne played a pivotal role in ensuring that every international student studying at the UFS was legally and securely supported. She liaised with DHA officials, providing institutional support letters and escalating unresolved cases to ensure that students remained academically and legally protected. She worked closely with students from pre-arrival stages through to graduation, assisting with the following:

- Study visa applications and renewals
- Medical and radiological certification requirements
- Appeals and change-of-condition requests



- Emergency interventions for students at risk of losing their legal status

Internally, Jeanne administered immigration records via the PeopleSoft system, overseeing accurate visa tracking, reporting, and data compliance. She was instrumental in aligning the UFS operations with evolving immigration legislation, safeguarding the university's reputation and ability to support international students. Her work extended to strategic relationships with key external stakeholders, including the Department of Home Affairs, the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA), registered medical aid providers, and immigration consultants and legal advisers.

These partnerships enabled the university to provide efficient, up-to-date services to students and ensured that the institution's voice was represented in national conversations around immigration and higher education.

Reflecting on Jeanne's career, Prof Vasu Reddy, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation, shared: "Jeanne has been central to the foundations and institutional memory of internationalisation efforts at the UFS. Her commitment, dedication, and unflinching passion for internationalisation in all its facets are demonstrated by the care and compassion with which she undertook her duties to students and staff. Her retirement is an important new chapter where she will spend more time with her family, gardening, and grandchildren. But we at the UFS know that Jeanne will continue to remain a loyal colleague and friend of our university. She has trained a young generation of capable and highly intelligent staff who remain with us and who will continue her legacy. Thank you, Jeanne, for being an inspirational staff member in our International Office."

As Jeanne embarks on her retirement, the University of the Free State celebrates not only the years she gave but the foundation she laid, one that will continue to support internationalisation at the UFS for generations to come. For continued immigration and international student administration support, the UFS community is encouraged to contact Matladi Tsoeu at TsoeuMR@ufs.ac.za or Letlela Tshabalala at TshabalalaL@ufs.ac.za. On the Qwaqwa Campus, Bulelwa Moikwatlhai at Malob@ufs.ac.za will continue to provide guidance and support.