



Legal eagle ponders relevance of universities in today's society

NALEDI HLEFANE

INSTITUTIONS of higher learning need to be cognisant of the critical role they play in shaping society and take their rightful position in order to produce leaders who will help improve the state of the country.

This was the sentiment of Advocate Tseliso Thipanyane, a human rights activist and chief executive officer of the South African Human Rights Commission, during his public lecture at the University of Zululand's (UNIZULU) KwaDlangezwa Campus recently.

Organised by the institution's Office for Transformation and Social Inclusion, the lecture was held in celebration of World Day of Social Justice observed on February 20. The purpose of World Day of Social Justice is to promote efforts to tackle human rights issues such as poverty, exclusion, employment, gender equity and access to social well-being and justice for all.

Thipanyane's presentation was titled *Upholding good citizenship and promoting a culture of human rights in a university space*. In his talk, he unpacked the correlation between the state, universities and civil society, and how the roles of each of them impact on human rights issues.

He highlighted that the core reason for the existence of universities is "to function as props in society". The graduates produced by institutions should be concerned about tackling societal issues such as poverty and the current Eskom power crisis. He said: "If everything falls apart in a society, the pillars have failed. The foundation, the pillars of society – this is the role one expects universities to play. Therefore, if chaos happens in our society, we must ask: 'What has happened to our props, what has happened to our foundation?'"

According to the activist, the efficacy of universities relies on how solid their foundation is. This, he elaborated,



Advocate Tseliso Thipanyane, the chief executive officer of the South African Human Rights Commission, during his lecture at the University of Zululand's KwaDlangezwa Campus spoke in observation of a World Day of Social Justice.

Photo: Nhlakanipho Nxumalo

entails the quality and impact of the education they provide. He believes that the education provided by institutions of higher learning should enhance the developmental needs of society and its

members to enable members to play meaningful roles in the social, economic, political and developmental affairs of that society. It should also help maximise the potential and ability

of the recipients.

Looking at the current state of institutions and the country, Thipanyane feels that the core function of universities is somewhat misunderstood. "If you look at the challenges in our society in the past five years, what does it say about those who run institutions internally? But also what about those at a political level, who set policies and fund universities. What is their perception and understanding? What about those who are consumers of the product – the students and staff. What is their understanding of the role of (the) institutions? If we don't have a proper understanding, it might explain then why, on one level, we burn our institutions and on the other level, we steal from institutions. We do all sorts of things that are not in line with what is expected."

Another part of the problem, he noted, is the fact that the design of our academic institutions was modelled on colonial approaches towards educating an African, therefore, their initial intent was never meant to advance and develop our societies. They were just designed to "fit and meet the needs of colonisers". The big question though is whether our institutions have transformed to play their roles as props of society.

Looking at the continent, Thipanyane said it continues to be a mere producer of raw materials that are processed by overseas companies that yield large profits. In his opinion, university education should prompt students to think critically about finding solutions for such issues.

He concluded by saying that there would be no rest nor peace until our institutions of higher learning played a meaningful role in advancing social justice and contributed towards the building of our societies and all its institutions into the South Africa we want; a South Africa where there will be dignity for all.

UNIZULU scholar honoured by United States university

SAMKELE SOKHELA

DR Makhosazana Vezi-Magigaba, a lecturer and Head of the Department of Business Management at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), is still ecstatic about being recognised by the Appalachian State University (APP), United States (US), to join its academic corps for a six-month term.

Dr Magigaba jetted off to North Carolina on August 4, 2019, after accepting an offer to lecture Social Entrepreneurship in APP and strengthen the Enactus chapter she helped establish for the institution in 2018.

She was discovered by APP delegates during their visit to UNIZULU in 2017. What stood out for them was Dr Magigaba's dedication towards her students and entrepreneurship. The academic had taken the delegates to the different UNIZULU Enactus chapter project sites that she was instrumental in co-running.

Impressed, the delegates wanted her to replicate the projects in the US. They were keen to gain a better understanding of social entrepreneurship.

Before her departure, the academic said she was nervous but excited about the challenges that lay ahead. "I was excited and nervous because I was about to go to a completely different environment. I was a little bit nervous (about) how I would be welcomed when I arrived. However, I was also excited that I was 'the chosen one' representing not only my institution, but my country as well," she said.

Her nervousness proved unfounded because as soon as she arrived, the academic hit the ground running, proving worthy of APP's choice. While also focusing on the APP Enactus chapter, she worked for the Centre for Entrepreneurship, where she helped aspiring entrepreneurs and the local community with their businesses.

Also, she was invited as a guest speaker



Dr Makhosazana Vezi-Magigaba, a UNIZULU lecturer and Head of the Department of Business Management, has returned from a six-month stint at the Appalachian State University in the US.

Photo: Samkele Sokhela

and presented a paper during a global symposium. She was also a guest speaker at an entrepreneurship summit.

Her dedication earned her a sweet reward at the end of her term. She was awarded the Multicultural Ambassador Award at the Global Entrepreneurship Symposium, organised by APP, for her impact, personality, diverse and outstanding skills in higher education.

She said going to the US not only benefited her academically, but it also helped her discover other talents and skills that she was unaware of.

"I did not know that I could sing very well. The University Choir director invited and emailed me a Zulu song titled Izwe lethu Leli. I had to teach them that song. We performed it together and it went very well," she said.

While in the US, she enrolled for a short course that taught her how to deal with students who are sexually harassed by academics and students who are sexually harassing academics. Upon successful completion of the course, she received a certificate.

Dr Magigaba is grateful to both the APP and UNIZULU for the opportunity.

Law student among three representing SA in United States student leadership programme

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

YANELISA Menzangabom, a final-year LLB student at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), was recently selected to participate in the prestigious Study of the United Institutes (SUSIs) for Student Leaders on Civic Engagement.

SUSIs for Student Leaders are five-to-six-week academic programmes that are designed for foreign undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25 to help improve their understanding of the United States (US) and develop their leadership skills. Institutes include a four-week academic residency of interactive classroom activities, discussions, lectures, readings, site visits and workshops; a one-week educational study tour to a different region of the US; leadership skills-building activities; community service and opportunities to interact with their American peers on a college campus.

The 2020 programme commenced on January 4 and ended on February 8 2020. Of more than 5 000 applications received, only three applicants were selected from South Africa. To be accepted in the programme, the law student had to first submit an essay outlining his reasons for wanting to go to the US and his academic record.

When he was called for the second phase, he sent a letter of recommendation from his mentor in the UNIZULU law clinic.

Grateful for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, Menzangabom said: "This is my highlight thus far as a UNIZULU student. (The six-week programme) was very educational. I had the time of my life, starting from the lectures to site visits. I learnt a lot."

The study of the US Institute promotes a better understanding of the people, institutions and culture of the US among students, as well as scholars.



Yanelisa Menzangabom, a fourth-year law student at the University of Zululand, was among three individuals representing South Africa in the Study of the United Institutes for Student Leaders programme. Photo: James Thwala

Upon their arrival in Washington DC, the candidates were hosted by the Meridian International Centre, where they spent three days with different diplomacy offices meeting international relations stakeholders.

It was followed by Memphis City, Tennessee State, where the candidates met different non-governmental organisations and local government stakeholders dealing with housing issues for the homeless and gentrification in the US.

The last leg was when they went to Seattle, Washington State. There, the candidates were hosted by the University of Washington in conjunction with the Foundation for International Understanding through Students, who were also the facilitators of the programmes in Washington.

While Menzangabom feels privileged to have gained this wealth of knowledge, he is appreciative of the smaller blessings as well, such as the fact that he got to fulfil his dream of flying for the first time.

UNIZULU welcomes over 3 000 first-year students

SIYANDA MNTAMBO

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) has successfully completed its registration process for the 2020 academic year.

More than 90 000 applications were received for this year's academic programmes, testament to UNIZULU's excellence in teaching and learning.

The online registration process began on January 13, 2020, with first-time entering undergraduate students (FTENS), the total enrolment of whom is 3 846.

Speaking during the official opening of the university, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Xoliswa Mtose, urged all the first-year students to use the opportunity and the privilege of being a student at UNIZULU to their advantage in the same way that alumni such as Higher Education Minister Dr Blade Nzimande, Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng and Deputy Chief Justice and UNIZULU Chancellor Judge Raymond Zondo did.

"We at UNIZULU build and develop great leaders; leaders equipped with skills, knowledge and attitude to make a difference. Let the university be a launch pad for your bright future. I wish you a wonderful stay at the University of Zululand," she said.

The Faculty of Education registered a total of 800 students, the Faculty of Arts registered 927, the Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law registered 914, while the Faculty of Science and Agriculture registered 830.

The number of returning students across all four faculties stands at 12 935, bringing the overall UNIZULU enrolment to 16 781.



The academic year has started in earnest at the University of Zululand after a successful registration process.

Photo: Sphamandla Gumedede

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