



THE MERCURY

# TERTIARY Ψ π TIMES

## Top matric learners make UNIZULU their choice institution



CHARACTERISED by much excitement and a huge turnout of students, registration for first-year students started in earnest on January 11.

Registration was smooth as the university has switched to an online system for all courses. This has improved efficiencies and exceeded expectations as the system operated with minimal glitches.

Over 9 000 students have registered, with offers to study at UNIZULU for first time-students extended to over 7 000 students in line with the enrolment targets set by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Registration of returning students is still under way until February 1.

UNIZULU is delighted that the 2019 registration attracted top achievers from various schools in the province. Fanelesibonge Bhengu, who is a top achiever from Welabasha High School, said that studying at UNIZULU was inevitable as her family were products of this university.

She said she was further motivated to

apply to the institution by a UNIZULU Communications and Marketing Division representative who undertook an information-sharing session with prospective learners at a careers exhibition.

UNIZULU's focus in niche areas, especially science and agriculture, is another drawcard for the rural-based institution.

The university is sending out a warning to people who rob students of their money by making false promises. It is a crime to give or take bribes for spaces, as this will lead to criminal prosecution against the one giving money for spaces and the one receiving the cash.

The university discourages walk-in applications because they can lead to unnecessary stampedes.

Late applicants are encouraged to apply through the Central Application Clearing House of the Department of Higher Education and Training.

The university wishes new and returning students a rewarding time at both our campuses in Richards Bay and KwaDlangezwa.

## New start for Pietermaritzburg high school top achiever



Mthunzi Thabethe, a Nyonithwele High School matriculant, is now registered for his first year in BCom Accounting Science at the University of Zululand.

UNLIKE the majority of first-year students for whom the university environment is foreign, Mthunzi Thabethe, a newly registered first-year BCom Accounting Science student at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), will be attempting to study towards a degree for the third time this year. However, come what may, he is determined to obtain his qualification this time.

This is a story of a broken dream, pain and tenacity. As a child, 19-year old Thabethe from Elandsfontein, on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg, had a clear plan for his future. He would complete his matric with outstanding academic results at 16, receive a bursary and set himself on a path to study towards becoming a medical doctor in 2017.

On completing his studies, he would secure employment and earn enough money to take care of his extended family.

It was a sound plan, until Thabethe started to believe the negative remarks some in society had towards admission to medical school. "Your marks might not be good enough and you won't get money to fund your studies," many kept telling him.

He obtained great mid-year matric results and was among a few learners from Nyonithwele High School selected to participate in a three-week winter school programme organised by the Msunduzi Municipality for top pupils in the city. There he regained the confidence to pursue medicine again, but unfortunately he had missed the application deadline.

He thus settled for a chemical engineering course at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Although he had seven distinctions, his search for a bursary was unsuccessful.

However, with the assistance of his high school teacher, a Mrs Zulu, he managed to receive funding from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

The events that followed were a true test of his resilience and faith in God. Half way through 2017, he started to feel despondent because he had enrolled in a course that he was not passionate about. His focus on his studies declined and as a result, he did not meet the minimum requirements to write his final exams.

Soon after he made up his mind to start afresh in medical school the following year, but was advised to continue with chemical engineering back at home.

In 2018, the feeling of resentment for chemical engineering overcame him

once again.

"I was very unhappy with the choice I had made because I had always wanted to be a doctor. As a result, I became very frustrated," he admitted.

By a cruel twist of fate, misfortune kept following him. One day, while on his way to campus, he was mugged and lost everything – his cellphone, laptop, textbooks and ID.

It took him over a month before he could replace some of the lost items.

Owing to some administrative glitches at the NSFAS offices, Thabethe found himself losing his only source of funding. The ripple effect was enormous, affecting him on the academic, emotional and home front. Unable to pay for fees and perform well, Thabethe was eventually expelled from the university.

Failing to cope with the pain of being a university dropout, Thabethe suffered depression. "I was my family's glimmer of hope."

"I had also hoped to break the cycle of poverty, but little by little my hope was starting to diminish. I was angry at God for standing by while I was taking life's knocks."

"I was also disappointed with myself for having failed my family and everyone who believed in me. I turned into a hermit. I just couldn't bear to see the disappointment in my family's eyes, though they never really said anything to make me feel that way," he recalled.

The turning point for him came at the beginning of 2019. He had just come back from a consultation with a church elder when he received a short message from Mrs Zulu who expressed her disappointment in the fact that Thabethe had not reached his full potential.

Reading this, the he immediately felt motivated and decided to contact an old high school mate who was studying to be an accountant at UNIZULU.

Within a week of speaking to his friend, he was able to register for a BCom Accounting Science degree at UNIZULU.

"Two years ago, I had devised a plan for my future not considering that my future is not really in my hands, but God's. Part of the reason why I could not cope with the challenges I was faced with at UKZN was that I was trying to handle the load all by myself. I now realise that I should let God take control because he is almighty," said Thabethe, adding that he was looking forward to taking the first step towards becoming a chartered accountant.

## 2019 UNIZULU orientation period highlights

THE two-week 2019 UNIZULU orientation period began on Monday, 21 January with a fun-filled social development programme devised by the friendly blue-draped group of peer helpers.

During this period, various groups of

freshers, as newly registered UNIZULU students are affectionately known, gather daily for an introductory view of the Richards Bay and KwaDlangezwa campuses. They learn about the values and ethos of the UNIZULU community while also meeting and establishing

new relationships with their peers.

Various relevant departments as well as external bodies engage with students and provide useful information such as financial literacy. The list includes the Campus Health Clinic, The Department of Sports and Recreation, Protection Ser-

vice Department, the UNIZULU Library, Standard Bank, Absa Bank and Gender Transformation.

Peer helpers also share their personal experiences of tertiary life in order to give first-year students a better understanding of campus life.



A peer helper takes freshers on a tour where he unpacks what the function and structure of each department is.



Peer helpers motivate freshers to interact with each other through creative indigenous games in the hope of sparking friendships.

ELON Reeve Musk, a South African technology entrepreneur who is one of the world's recognised billionaires, once said: "When something is important enough, you do it even if the odds are not in your favour."

Musk's philosophy bears a striking similarity to that of Fanelesibonge Ayanda Mchunu, 18. One of the top achievers of the Class of 2018 at Welabasha High School, Mchunu is now a registered student at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) for BSc Agriculture (Animal Science).

Born and bred in Dondotha, Empanjeni, she was diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, a term used to describe a range of disorders that affect the heart. Despite dealing with this life-threatening health condition, Mchunu's perseverance and hard work towards her studies has seen her reap exceptional results throughout her primary and high school journey.

In matric, she obtained six distinctions in IsiZulu, English, Agricultural Science, Business Studies, Life Orientation and Life Sciences.

The apple of her father's eye grew up assisting him in the small family farm, which is where her love for animals developed. It is small wonder that she chose to pursue a career in agriculture.

Another reason for her choice is her passion to educate black South Africans about how to treat animals.

"Many things attracted me to animal

## Life-threatening condition doesn't stop top matriculant from realising her dream

science. One of them is that I want to change the culture of black South Africans (when it comes to how) they treat animals, for instance dogs and cats.

"Right now, we (black South Africans) see a dog as an animal that just barks and that's all. We tend to forget that dogs are also living on Earth just like us, and they need our protection just as much as we seek protection from the police, for example," said Mchunu.

She added that she hoped to see all South African households participating actively in the country's agricultural system, where the healthiest food can be obtained and consumed.

Mchunu is confident that UNIZULU is the best institution of higher learning that can provide her with quality education in Animal Science, since it is based in a rural area, where a lot of agricultural work takes place.

To high school learners, Mchunu said setting career goals and devising an execution plan early was crucial to their success.



Fanelesibonge Ayanda Mchunu, one of the top achievers at Welabasha High School, in Empanjeni, has registered for BSc Agriculture (Animal Science) at UNIZULU to change people's perceptions about animals.

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