

# Registrars' Imbizo focuses on Covid-19 impact on higher education

NALEDI HLEFANE

REGISTRARS and deputy registrars from higher education institutions around the country convened earlier this month for the 18th Registrars' Imbizo hosted by the University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

The Registrars' Imbizo is an annual event, funded and co-hosted by Universities South Africa (USAF), where registrars meet to tap into each other's wisdom by sharing and discussing ideas, experiences and challenges common to higher education. As this was the first seminar to be held since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, the focus in presentations over the two days was primarily on the impact of the pandemic on universities.

In her keynote address, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor Professor Xoliswa Mtose lauded registrars for their invaluable contribution in ensuring that a balance was struck between saving lives and seeing to it that the academic year was completed.

"You are a hugely valuable network that provides leadership, advice and support that demonstrates a plausible passion for high-level administrative management. We are called to grapple with and to navigate through the Covid-19 pandemic, and to do so successfully and innovatively. Times of crisis ought to inspire creativity, critical reflection, transformation and renewal. I realised that the registrars in our universities are our unsung heroes. At the centre of enrolment and employment pathways is the registrar, whose evolving role encompasses challenging and important work with transformational impact," Prof Mtose said.

Noting that the imbizo had come at an opportune time of the "new normal", she urged attendees use the two-day event as an opportunity to reflect on



Deochund Mthilal, UNIZULU Registrar.

the required solutions and to seriously interrogate the future role of registrars in universities.

After absorbing the information shared over the two days, Rose Masha, Deputy Registrar: Academic Administration at University of Fort Hare said she was glad she had physically attended the event. What she found most striking was how other universities had found innovative ways of grappling with the effects of the pandemic. "The other issue that was very important for me was the NSFAS presentation because that, as we all know, has been a big issue in the country. It was vital for me to make sure that I understand exactly what the process is, what the bottlenecks are and how we can deal with it as institutions. What I think should also be focused on

in the next imbizo is how we as leaders are supported, because we are there to support the institutions and everybody else, but are sort of left to cope with our own issues," Masha said.

Sello Mokoena, Registrar at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology said he found the presentations from this year's event enriching. According to him, they were well-prepared and researched. His highlight was the discussions on the coronavirus. He said it was refreshing to learn about the strides higher education has taken in only one year as a result of the advent of the pandemic. "We only had one year to make changes. Online learning on its own is a quick win. If it were not for Covid-19, it was going to take us a couple of years to implement it," he said.

Annie Viljoen, Acting Senior Manager: Matriculation Board at USAF said that based on the informative conversations that had taken place, there would be a number of issues to be presented in the next registrar's forum. Here, the matters would be formalised into decisions for later implementation.

Deochund Mthilal, Registrar at UNIZULU, indicated that the imbizo provided a platform for robust discussions in numerous areas including the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on operations, governance of processes, administration of the convocation, contracting with NSFAS, transitioning into the digital era, Popia compliance and readiness, and implementation of the new language policy framework.

He went on to add: "The 18th Annual Registrars' Imbizo was a resounding success. Not so because it was the first hybrid event in the digital pandemic era, but because real and deep-rooted issues affecting all universities were unpacked."

## Prolific academic driven by love for research

PRECIOUS SHAMASE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) commends its academic, Dr Innocent Moyo for constantly pushing the envelope. In 2021 alone, Dr Moyo has edited five books, published five journal articles and authored two books – and more is yet to come.

Dr Moyo is the head of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. He lectures and offers both undergraduate and postgraduate modules in Human Geography.

His book entitled Urban Informality in South Africa and Zimbabwe: On Growth, Trajectory and Aftermath (by Moyo, I and Gumbo, T) addresses the agency and the potential transformative capacity of the phenomenon of urban informality in connection with southern African cities and towns. It adopts a political economy approach to analyse the evolution of informality in cities and its implications for urban planning.

It brings to bear how the South African and Zimbabwean historical and/or ideological and contemporary political and economic trajectories have impacted on the ever-changing nature of urban informality, both spatially and structurally and/or compositionally. This has resulted in unique urban materialities, which are aspects that have scarcely been studied or discussed in the extant literature.

The second book (by Tshipipaka, LM, Nshimbi, CC and Moyo, I), titled Regional Economic Communities and Integration in Southern Africa: Networks of Civil Society Organizations and Alternative Regionalism examines regional integration in Africa, with a particular focus on



Dr Innocent Moyo.

the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It argues that SADC's pursuit of a rationalist and state-centric form of integration for southern Africa is limited, as it overlooks the contributory role and efficacy of non-state actors, who are relegated to the periphery.

According to the academic, writing and editing takes a tremendous commitment involving years of research, travel and endless editing. "The only way I manage to do it all is by simply planning and dividing my limited time against

all these demands. I draw my inspiration from the love I have for research and pushing the frontiers of knowledge, which is what pushes me beyond limits," he chuckled.

Recalling the stumbling blocks that could have deterred him from publishing, the academic said time was the biggest challenge. This is because some of the books and journal articles are based on empirical studies, in which he had to collect data, analyse and write, in addition to the fact that he also had to teach undergraduate courses and supervise postgraduate students.

"I sometimes wish I had 10 days in a week. The peer review process can be draining, but it's necessary that one's ideas are tested and passed. I like it when my ideas and perspectives are challenged, tested and then accepted into the body of knowledge," Dr Moyo admitted, adding that it is in surmounting such challenges that he grows as an academic.

"One cannot simply achieve if you do not have to conquer a challenge. Think of it this way: a maize seed must be buried underground for it to shoot through the soil so that it germinates, grows and bears fruit," he said.

Dr Moyo has written several books previously: two in 2020, one in 2019 and another two in 2017, one of which he edited and another he authored.

The academic also emerged as the supervisor with the highest number of graduates in the Faculty of Arts during this year's graduation. He had a total number of eight graduating students, comprising one PhD graduate and seven who obtained Master's qualifications. Currently, he is supervising 10 students: four PhD students and six Master's students.

## UNIZULU commemorates International Week of Deaf People with educational webinar

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE Disability Unit and the Faculty of Education at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently joined forces to organise the university's first-ever event aimed at raising awareness about disabilities, particularly issues of partial and permanent deafness.

Attended by staff and students, the event took the form of a webinar held on Wednesday, September 22, 2021 to coincide with International Week of Deaf People.

Giving context to the event, Prof Sithabile Ntombela, Dean of the Education Faculty, highlighted that "inclusion has been on the education agenda for some time", with the focus on human rights and the rights of people who have been discriminated against.

In her opinion, disability is one of the oldest sources of difference. Her conviction is that universities can and should promote an inclusive culture in which equality and diversity are celebrated. She emphasised that ensuring an equal, diverse university environment ought to be everyone's priority, as opposed to it being that of the Disability Unit.

"We are gathered here today because we want to start a conversation about how we as UNIZULU people can bring issues of disability to the centre. We want to see transformation taking place in this university as well as in other universities. The kind of transformation we want to see is not just a cosmetic change of addressing quotas, but it is the one that confronts deep-seated prejudices which make us oblivious to social injustices that take place right under our noses.

"So, in looking at inclusive education as a commitment to see education as fundamental to the development of both individuals and societies, we need to look

Theme for 2021:  
Celebrating Thriving Deaf Communities

20 to 26 September 2021



INTERNATIONAL WEEK OF DEAF PEOPLE

at education as a right for all, regardless of individual differences," Prof Ntombela said.

She added that UNIZULU is determined to ensure that every staff member and student living with a disability has the same rights, and feels welcomed, valued and supported to do what they are here for.

Speaking on behalf of the Student Services Department, Phiwayinkosi Mjadu, Disability Co-ordinator in the Disability Unit said there are measures in place to assist students with hearing impairments. The students are normally identified during the annual orientation period that is organised for first-time entering students. Mjadu acknowledged, however, that unlike students with physical challenges, recognising deaf students is difficult because their disability is invisible. Also, they are usually shy to disclose their condition due to the stigma associated with having a disability. Fortunately, lecturers and students have, in some instances, assisted with referring students with hearing impediments to the unit. Such students are referred to the nearby hospital where they receive medical attention and are provided with

the necessary assistive listening devices at no cost to them.

On an annual basis, the unit compiles data of deaf students and shares it with their lecturers. This is to make the lecturers aware of the students' issues in order for them to be provided with necessary accommodations. The unit also appeals to lecturers to note that students with disabilities are entitled to extra time during assessments or examinations to allow them to get individual attention in case anything is unclear during the exam.

Mzunawo Yimba, a fourth-year Bachelor of Education student, is among those who have benefited from the latter. Yimba is partially deaf and uses a hearing device which was provided to him by an audiologist at Ngwelezane Hospital in 2018.

"Partial deafness is a confusing and challenging condition because people think you are cheating. You hear some of the spoken words and miss others; sometimes you miss everything and the next day you hear and understand everything," Yimba shared.

Before receiving the device, he relied on notes shared in class by lecturers, slides posted on the online university study platform and the help of classmates who would repeat bits of what the lecturer would be teaching in class. Since owning the hearing device, Yimba's academic experience has improved. This, coupled with his optimism, has seen him performing much better in his studies.

Nhlanhla Nsele, Specialist: Learning and Development, also reminded attendees that staff with disabilities can also come forward and notify the Human Resources Department (HR) about their conditions. This would alert HR about the reasonable accommodations that the staff needs to enable them to perform optimally in their positions.

## Students fare well in ASA Cross-country Championships

NALEDI HLEFANE

STUDENT athletes Sinothile Mthiyane and Apendule Vusani have done the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) and the entire KwaZulu-Natal province proud after their commendable performance at the 2021 Athletics South Africa (ASA) Cross-country Championships.

This year's event was hosted by KZN at Hutchinson Park in Amanzimtoti from September 17 to 18. It saw cross-country greats from around the nation coming together to tackle various obstacles found along the 4km, 6km, 8km and 10km routes.

Mthiyane and Vusani qualified for the national competition following their success during the KZNA Cross-country Championships, where they both took fifth position in the 4km women's and men's races, respectively. In the national competition, the pair once again went head-to-head with their counterparts in the 4km races.

Mthiyane, a third-year public administration student, finished the race in 16 minutes and 59 seconds, securing second position in the province and 20th in the country.

"I am very happy and proud of my performance. I had told myself that I was going to participate just for the experience, since it was my first time qualifying for the championships. I thank coach Mnguni for all his efforts with me and my team members," said Mthiyane.

Alongside three woman athletes from KZN, she ran in the senior women's category and won bronze.

Vusani, a third-year Bachelor of Education student, took the third position in the province and 37th nationally. He completed the race in an impressive time



Apendule Vusani, Jabulani Mnguni and Sinothile Mthiyane.

of 13 minutes and 11 seconds. Participating in the national championships for the first time as well, Vusani expressed elation and pride in his achievement.

"I was competing with top national athletes who compete overseas and I was running with shoes that were not completely suitable for cross-country, yet I pushed and did myself proud," he said.

In hindsight, both students acknowledge that the routes came with various unexpected hurdles. For Mthiyane, it was the multiple uneven surfaces and curves that posed a challenge. To overcome this, she said she would do more speed training and drills, change her diet in the weeks preceding race days and drink more water in order to improve in the next championships.

Besides purchasing an appropriate pair of running shoes, Vusani said he will ensure to dedicate himself even more during training so as to surpass his current level of attainment. He further extended his gratitude to the university for the support it has given the athletics team, giving special thanks to their coach, Jabulani Mnguni.

News of the two athletes' superb performances did not come as a surprise to coach Mnguni, as he has seen great potential in the pair. And hearing that the duo had placed in the top three in the province made him beam with pride. His mission now is to ensure that the athletes get to participate in various races throughout the year so as to improve their finishing times and strength.

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